

The Syntax of the ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’ Construction: A Functional-Head Analysis*

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Abstract

This article focuses upon the construction exemplified by *it is kind of her to treat me in such a way*, a construction that has been largely neglected in generative linguistics. We show that the *of* is not a preposition in its syntactic behaviour. The major argument of the present article is that the *of* in the construction is a lexicalisation of the functional head of the Relator Phrase in the nominal argued by den Dikken (2006). Toward this goal, we firstly aim to show that the *of* is a lexicalisation of the functional head in degree modification phrases argued by Kennedy & Merchant (2000) and on the basis of this argument, we ultimately argue that it is the lexicalisation of the Relator head.

Key Words & Phrases: Functional Head, Degree Modification, Lexicalisation

1. Introduction

The present article addresses the construction as shown in (1) below, a construction that has not been discussed in depth in generative linguistics.

(1) It is kind **of** her to help me.

The label of ‘construction’ is quite tentative as usual. It will be shown that this is not a genuine construction in the sense of the constructionist view (cf. Goldberg 2003) but is composed of functional projections and other syntactic and lexical properties. There are a number of variations of this construction such as the following:

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- (2) (a) That's very kind **of** her.¹
 (b) It would have been kind **of** her if she had helped me in such a way.
 (c) It is kind **of** her that she treats me in such a way.
 (d) He proofread my paper thoroughly, which was kind **of** him.

In (2a), *that* is used in lieu of *it*. In (2b), the finite clause led by *if* follows the nominal, instead of the *to*-infinitive clause. In (2c), the finite clause led by *that* replaces the infinite clause. (2d) has a non-restrictive relative clause which holds the structure under discussion.

A usual assumption on the meaning of the *of* may be that the adjectival phrase signifies the characteristics or property of a referent. For example, Shibata (1974: 78) claims that the *of* is close in meaning to *about* and *concerning*. Watanuki et al. (2000: 499) suggests that it describes a subjective evaluation of a person through his or her action. Similarly, Egawa (1991: 101) observes that the construction in consideration represents the description of both a person and an action by the person simultaneously. It follows that it is necessary to present a descriptively adequate analysis of the *of* that can be an alternative to the traditional view.

The organisation of this article is as follows. In section 2, we argue that the *of* of the 'it is ADJECTIVE of NP to VP' is a lexicalisation of Kennedy & Merchant's (2000) functional head, or the lexicalisation of the functional head of the Relator Phrase of den Dikken (2006).² In section 3, we summarise our arguments.

2. Syntactic Analysis

2.1. *Of*: Functional Head of Kenney & Merchant (2000)

The syntactic analysis of this article has two steps. Firstly, we show that the *of* under discussion is a lexicalisation of the functional projection that Kennedy & Merchant (2000) propose in their analysis of degree modification phrases.³ Secondly, we further revise this analysis via a Relator Phrase analysis by den Dikken (2006). We attempt to illustrate this argument with empirical support in order to make it more robust. Thus, below, let us review Kennedy & Merchant (2000).

Kennedy & Merchant (2000) argue that degree modification phrases led by *how*, *too*, *as*, *so*, *that* are located in Specifier positions of Functional Projections and that the

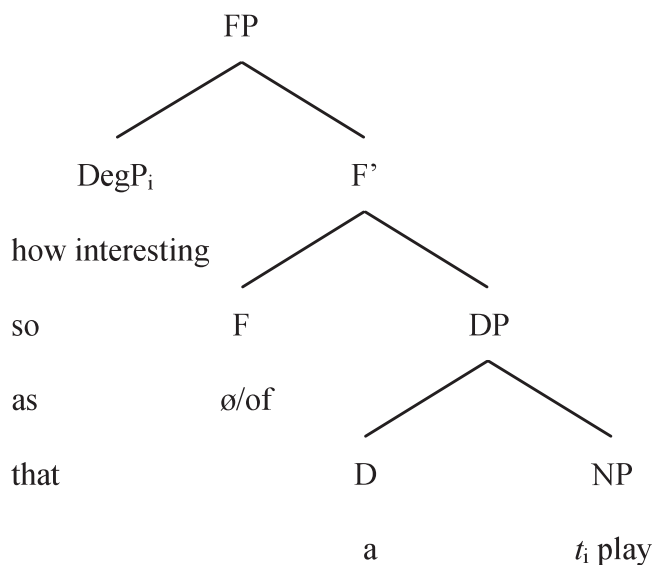
¹ See Namoto (1976).

² For the sake of expository convenience, I use the notation of a NP, instead of a DP in this paper throughout. See Abney (1987) for a DP hypothesis.

³ See Iwasaki (2011) for the similar analyses of *be worthy of...* and *he is difficult of access*.

head of such a Functional Projection can be lexicalised as *of*.⁴

(3)



(Kennedy & Merchant 2000: 125)

The central proposal of the present article, that the *of* is equivalent to the functional head in (3), is supported by the following data.

- (4) (a) It is so kind **of** her to help me.
 (b) How kind **of** her (it is) to help me!

Notice that *so kind* in (4a), *how kind* in (4b) occupies the specifier position of the functional projection in (3). Given the structural parallelism, it seems possible to argue that the *of* in (4a, b) is an overt counterpart of the functional head (cf. Kennedy & Merchant (2006)).

This is further rendered support from the following data.

- (5) (a) It was [brave **of** him] *and* [wise **of** him] to have helped us in such a situation.
 (b) *It was [brave **of** *and* wise **of** him] to have helped us in such a situation.
 (c) It was [brave *and* wise **of** him] to have helped us in such a situation.

⁴ See Iwasaki (2010) for a proposal that revises Kennedy & Merchant's (2000). See also Radford (1989), Tonoike (1993), and Wood (2000).

As shown in (5b), it is not possible to coordinate two Adj-*of* structures. This is predictable from the argument that the *of* is the lexicalisation of the functional head, in which there is only one functional head. Since there are posited two functional heads in (5b), the sentence is ungrammatical. The grammaticality of (5a) is also predictable, given that with the two functional heads (i.e., *of*), there are two functional projections.⁵ The grammaticality of (5c) is also predictable, as the two adjectives are coordinated in the specifier of the functional projection.

The argument that the *of* is a lexicalisation of the functional head is further corroborated by the following empirical data in (6a-c), which are from Bolinger (1977: 140-1).

- (6) (a) It was tiresome of the Commission to insist.
 (b) *Of the Commission, it was tiresome to insist.
 (c) *It was tiresome to insist, of the Commission.

(Bolinger 1977: 140-41)

The phrase led by the *of* cannot be fronted or shifted into the end of the sentence. The restriction on movement here is in sharp contrast with the following data as in (7a-c), which are from Lasnik & Fiengo (1974: 538).

- (7) (a) The problem is too abstract for Bill to solve.
 (b) For Bill, the problem is too abstract to solve.
 (c) The problem is too abstract to solve for Bill.

The phrase led by the preposition *for* can be moved to either the leftmost or the rightmost of the sentence. The contrast between the restriction observable in (6) and the free movement of the phrase in (7) may show that the phrase led by the *of* is not a usual prepositional phrase: the *of* is not an ordinary preposition. Moreover, the ban on the movement of the *of*-phrase can support the argument that the *of* is a functional

⁵ However, Marcel den Dikken (pc) kindly suggests that *of* can be stranded in a left conjunct as in the following case.

(i) He's fond of and crazy about ice cream.

Assuming an ellipsis via a Right Node Raising (cf. Boskovic 2004 and the cited literature there), Marcel den Dikken (pc) suggests that the *of* above can be stranded. However, as he points out, it may or may not be possible that the *of* above is not the instantiation of a functional head. He further suggests that it is possible for a copula to be stranded Right Node Raising constructions as follows.

(ii) John is and will always be a great linguist.

Quite valuable suggestions though these are, I put aside the theoretical configurations to future research, in consideration of the limited space.

head. Functional heads cannot move outside of the scope of the relevant projection, pied-piping their complement.⁶

Similar conclusions can be reached by the following data, too.

- (8) (a) *Of whom was it kind *t* to treat me in such a way?
 (b) For whom was it kind *t* to treat me in such a way?
 (9) (a) *It was kinder of her than of Bob to treat me in such a way.
 (b) It was more difficult for her than for Bob to finish the project.

In contrast with ordinary prepositional phrases, the *of*-phrase in (8a) cannot move to the leftmost position, pied-piping the *wh*-word (or phrase). The same explanation as in the preceding paragraph is appropriate here, so we do not repeat it here. Notice, however, that unlike an ordinary preposition, it is not possible for a functional head to move to the top sentential position, entailing its complement. In (9b), the *for*-phrase can be stacked via *than*, but this does not hold in (9a). This means that ‘ADJP + *of* + NP’ is a constituent and in particular the NP is a complement of the functional head *of*.

Moreover, the possibility that the *of* under discussion is not a complementiser but a lexicalisation of a functional head is further enhanced by eliminating the possibility that ‘*of* + NP + to VP’ forms a CP. This is exemplified by the following data.

- (10) It is kind of you (, for you) to do so.⁷

In (10) above, it is possible to have both the *of*-phrase and the CP led by the complementiser *for*. This eliminates the possibility that the *of* works as a complementiser, given that the *for* in (10) is a complementiser.⁸ Since the *of* is not a complementiser, it does not lead a clause, i.e., *of you (for you) to do*. This renders the possibility that *kind of you* is one constituent, whereas *(for you) to do so* is another constituent. This is also supported by the empirical observation noted by Namoto (1976: 47) that there is a pause immediately after *of you*.⁹ The generalisation drawn from here is that in the construction of ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’, *of* is NOT a complementiser linked ‘to VP’.

⁶ Bolinger (1977: 141) claims that ‘...the tightness of the *of* construction reflects the attachment of the adjective at one and the same time to both the noun and the action’ [italics in the original].

⁷ This is from Namoto (1976). The original, however, does not have the comma and the square brackets.

⁸ One might treat the *for* here as a preposition in another interpretation but we put aside such an interpretation here.

⁹ As a reviewer suggests, this does not necessarily mean that the *kind of you (for you) to do so* is not a constituent.

The discussion so far might be countered by the claim that that if ‘ADJP of NP’ forms a constituent, no element within the constituent can move further, so the data in (12) are pieces of counterevidence.

- (11) It was nice of you to have helped me.
 (12) (a) [How nice]_i it was t_i of you to have helped me!
 (b) [How nice of you]_i it was t_i to have helped me!

However, this potential claim is not tenable, given that a phrase in the specifier of the functional projection can move further. Radford (1989) illustrates the following degree modification cases as in (13a, b).

- (13) (a) ?*So delicate* was it a situation that the Prime Minister had to resign.
 (b) ?*How delicate* was it a situation?
 (Radford 1989) [italics in the original]

Given the arguments by Radford (1989) and Kennedy & Merchant (2000), it can be said that the phrases led by *so* and *how* in (13a, b) have undergone A’ movement from the trace positions. The following shows the sentences before such A’ movement.

- (14) (a) It was [so delicate a situation] that the Prime Minister had to resign
 (b) It was [so delicate a situation].¹⁰

If we assume that these degree modification phrases are in the specifier positions of functional projections, it follows that such positions can be an escape-hatch of A’ movement. As we will see later, the functional projection in sentences like (12) is a Small Clause argued by den Dikken (2006) and den Dikken (2008) further argues that Small Clauses are Phases. Thus, it is possible to argue here that *nice of you* in (11) is a functional projection, which is a Phase by virtue of being a Small Clause in the sense of den Dikken (ibid), and that *nice* can move when pied-piped by a *wh*-operator such as *how* from the position of the specifier of the functional projection, i.e. the Edge of a Phase here.

The same arguments hold in (13a, b) if we assume that there is a functional head in between degree-modifying expressions and indefinites. In fact, the functional head can be embodied as *of* in some varieties of English (e.g. *so/how delicate of a situation*;

¹⁰ In exclamatives, only the leftmost position can be allowed as a syntactic position of *wh*-phrases. Thus, in order to illustrate a simpler case, I replace *how* with *so* in (13b).

see Kennedy & Merchant (2000)). If we tentatively postulate that degree phrases here base-generate in between indefinites and nouns, we have the derivation schematised as follows.

- (15) (a) ?[*So delicate*]_i was it [_{FP} *t*_i [_{F'} F⁰(= *of*) a *t*_i situation]] that
 (b) ?[*How delicate*]_i was it [_{FP} *t*_i [_{F'} F⁰(= *of*) a *t*_i situation]]?

Notice that if the FP in (15a, b) is a Phase (on the basis of the reasoning drawn from the arguments thus far), *so delicate* and *how delicate* undergo successive cyclic movement via the Edge of Phase, i.e., Spec-FP.

The proposal that degree phrases are in the Specifier positions of functional projections is further supported by the following data as in (16), (17), which are from Hornby (1975: 144). (See also Ando (2005: 789), who cites Hornby (*ibid*)).

- (16) (a) It was ungrateful of you to ...
 (b) *It was grateful of you to ...
 (17) (a) It was careless of you to...
 (b) *It was careful of you to...

[the incompleteness of the sentences are due to the original]

Notice that, as Ando (2005: 789) suggests, only one of a pair of the antonymic words is possible in the relevant structure. Notice also that semantically negative adjectives are allowed. Negative adjectives, or more broadly negation expressions, are usually operator expressions (cf. Haegeman & Guéron (1999, section 4.3) and Radford (2009)). Moreover, operator expressions are eligible to move to the specifier positions of Focus Phrase projections (Radford, *ibid*). It seems then that the data in (16), (17) render a support to the proposal that adjectives in the relevant structure are specifier positions of functional heads embodied as *of*.

2.2. *Of*: Functional Head of den Dikken (2006)

We have so far argued that the *of* under discussion is the lexicalisation of the functional projection of (3) argued by Kenney & Merchant (2000). In this section, however, we revise our analysis by utilising the Small Clause analysis by den Dikken (2006). Den Dikken (2006) argues that Small Clauses are made up of Relator Phrases whose head is a Relator (R⁰ below). See den Dikken (2006) for convincing arguments on the grounds of rigorous empirical evidence as it is beyond the scope and the space limit of the present article to review all of his arguments here. Of particular rel-

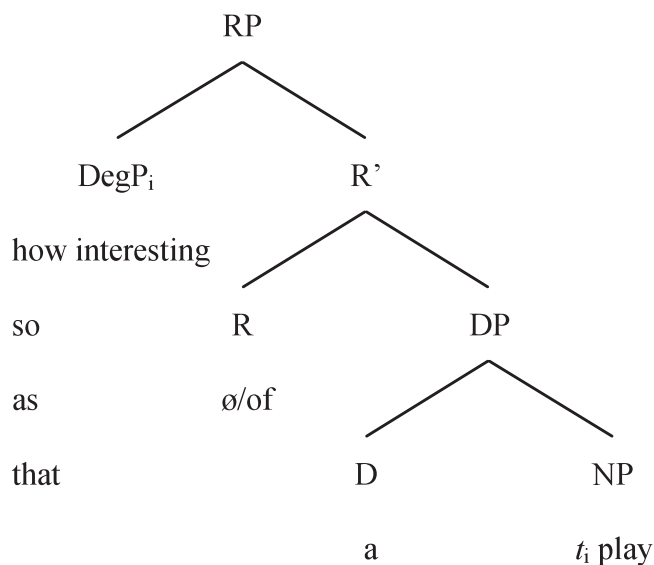
evance here, however, is that den Dikken (ibid) treats the *of* as in (18a) as a copula in a nominal (p. 164) and that he also shows that adjectival phrases can be located in the specifier of such a Relator as in (18b).

(18) (a) Doctor Slop is [_{RP} an idiot [_{R' R⁰} (=of) a doctor]] (ibid, p. 168)

(b) Imogen is [_{RP} beautiful [_{R' R⁰} (=as) a dancer]]. (ibid, p. 33)

Adopting this Relator Phrase projection, we argue that Kennedy & Merchant's analysis in (3) can be revised as in (19) below.

(19)



The revision of this analysis naturally has a ramification in the analysis of the structure under discussion. That is, (1) can be analysed within this analytic framework, as in (20) below.

(20) It is [_{RP} kind [_{R' R⁰} (=of) her]] to help me.

Let us look at some empirical support of this hypothesis. Firstly, the data in (5a-c), which are repeated as (21a-c), has a parallel with 'N of a N' constructions as in (22) below.¹¹

(21) (a) It was [**brave of him**] *and* [**wise of him**] to have helped us in such a situation.

- (b) *It was [brave **of** and wise **of** him] to have helped us in such a situation.
 (c) It was [brave and wise **of** him] to have helped us in such a situation.
 (22) (a) He is an asshole and an idiot of a doctor.
 (b) *He is an asshole of and an idiot of a doctor.
 (c) He is an asshole and idiot of a doctor.

As we have seen, this ‘N of N’ construction has a Relator Phrase argued by den Dikken (2006). Thus, the parallel between (21a-c) on the one hand and (22a-c) on the other renders empirical support to the argument that the *of* of ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’ is the head of the Relator Phrase.

Secondly, as suggested by Marcel den Dikken (pc), there is a parallel of the same nature between the data as in (6a, b) from Bolinger (1977: 140–41), repeated as (23a, b), and the data as in (24a, b).

- (23) (a) It was tiresome of the Commission to insist.
 (b) *Of the Commission, it was tiresome to insist.
 (24) (a) He is an idiot of a doctor.
 (b) *Of a doctor, he is an idiot.

Given that (24)’s ‘N of N’ construction comprises a Relator Phrase whose head is *of*, the parallel between (23a, b) and (24a, b) supports again the hypothesis that the *of* of ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’ is the head of Relator Phrase.

3. Concluding Remarks

We have argued that the *of* of the ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’ is a lexicalisation of the head of Kennedy & Merchant’s (2000) functional projection (in section 2.1.). This is schematised as follows.

- (25) It is [FP kind [F’ F⁰(=of) her]] to help me. (=3)

In section 2.2, we have revised this analysis and have argued that the *of* of the ‘it is ADJP of NP to VP’ is the lexicalisation of the functional head of the Relator Phrase of

¹¹ I am grateful to Marcel den Dikken (pc) for suggesting the parallelism and also the data in (22a-c). Sarah Morikawa (pc) suggests the replacement of *asshole* with *prat*. In this case, the examples in (22) are as follows.

- (i) He is a prat and an idiot of a doctor.
 (ii) *He is a prat of and an idiot of a doctor.
 (iii) He is a prat and idiot of a doctor.

den Dikken (2006), resulting in the following.

(26) It is $[_{RP} \text{ kind } [_{R'} R^0 (=of) \text{ her}]]$ to help me. ((=19))

Overall this paper has attempted to reveal the syntactic nature of the *of* under consideration. Yet any further scrutiny of the parallelism between the construction under discussion and the Relator Phrase would produce a further challenge for future work.

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Glossary

NP: Noun Phrase; VP: Verb Phrase; ADJP: Adjective Phrase; DP: Determiner Phrase;
CP: Complementiser Phrase; FP: Functional Projection; RP: Relator Phrase