Syntax (part 7)

A-Movement

Subjects originate internally within the Verb Phrase as arguments of verbs, and are subsequently raised into the specifier position within TP.

The movement operation is triggered by an Extended Projection Principle [EPP] feature carried by T.

The EPP requirement (for a finite auxiliary in English to have a subject) would seem to be essentially syntactic.

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(1)
(a) It was alleged that he lied under oath
(b) There has been no trouble

- In structures like (1), the subject pronouns *it/there* seem to have no semantic content of their own.

- *it/there* function as expletive pronouns – i.e. pronouns with no meaning which are used to satisfy the syntactic requirement for a finite auxiliary like *was/has* to have a subject.

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(2) Belfast English
(a) There should *some students* get high grades
(b) There have *lots of students* missed the classes

(3) Standard English
(a) *Some students* should get high grades
(b) *Lots of students* have missed the classes

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(4)
(a) Should *there some students* get high grades?
(b) Have *there lots of students* missed the classes?

- But what position is occupied by the underlined quantified expressions *some students/lots of students* in (4)?

- *some students/lots of students* function as the subjects of the verbs *get/missed* and (since subjects are typically specifiers) occupy spec-V (i.e. specifier position within VP).

- The sentences in (4) contain two subjects/specifiers: *there* is the specifier (and subject) of *should*, and *some students* is the specifier (and subject) of *get.*
• The two subjects serve two different functions: the expression *some students* has the semantic function of denoting the recipients of high grades, and so could be said to be the semantic subject of the sentence.

• By contrast, the pronoun *there* satisfies the syntactic requirement of the [EPP] feature on T (requiring T to have a specifier which is a noun or pronoun expression), and so could be said to be the syntactic subject of the sentence.

• But what about the Standard English sentence (3a) *Some students should get high grades*?

• Since spec-T is an A-position which can only be occupied by an argument expression, the kind of movement operation illustrated by the dotted arrow in (3a) is called A-movement.

• The claim that subjects like *some students/lots of students* in sentences like (2a,b) originate within the VP containing the relevant verb (and from there move into spec-T in sentences like) is known as the VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis (= VPISH)