

The place of Slifting in the English complement system.

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Abstract:

In English main and subordinate clauses are reliably distinct. Declarative main clauses do not allow the complementizer *that*, must be finite, and are not selected. Interrogative clauses also are finite and unselected and require I-to-C. Complement clauses are quite different: they are selected and can be obligatorily required, they can be non-finite in form, allow *that* complementizers if propositional and disallow I-to-C if interrogative.

“Slifted” clauses (Ross 1973) like the one bolded in (1) and (2) contain a parenthetical in which there is a predicate which normally takes a clausal argument.

(1) **Mary is a talented singer**, they say / I’m sure / it’s clear / the teacher explained to me.

(2) **Mary**, they say / I’m sure / it’s clear / the teacher explained to me / **is a talented singer**.

Is the clause main or subordinate? The answer is that it shows split properties. I will show that it is an argument of the predicate in the parenthetical, so *Mary is a talented singer* is an argument of *say*, *sure*, *clear*, or *explain* above. The clause is selected by the predicate, and can be obligatory when the predicate requires it.

Nevertheless, the clause has the form of a main clause: it must be finite, it does not allow a complementizer, it requires inversion in interrogatives, and it does not allow extraction.

This investigation thus supports a theory of clausal complements which encompasses combinations of main and subordinate properties which have not been seen elsewhere. Sharp separation of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, (in)direct discourse status, and prosody make a systematic account of the split properties of Slifted clauses possible. They are main clauses, which are arguments in Free Indirect Discourse, selected by the predicate in the parenthetical.

In this view Slifting is due to flexibility in the way main clauses compose with other material, a flexibility which is not found with subordinate clauses, where all relationships are restricted by syntax.