Emotive Factives and Object Pronominals

Keywords: emotive factives, state-of-affairs conditionals, object expletives, argument structure

Data: English experiencer emotive factives (EFs) (*hate, like, love*) often appear with an optional object pronoun in certain configurations (Postal and Pullum 1988) ((1)). These pronouns have been analyzed uniformly as expletives and uniformly as contentful in the past; I here claim that the analysis must be more nuanced.

(1) Milo hated (it) that the kitten scratched him.

The pronoun here is optional, indicating that it is not necessary for interpretation, and it is not associated with any known semantic or discourse effects. The pronoun may not refer to anything other than the propositional content of the CP; *it* may not refer to the kitten, for example. Finally, the theme of the verb is the propositional content of the CP.

The picture is complicated when we examine a wider range of clauses. The pronoun also appears with state-of-affairs conditionals and *when*-clauses. Again, it is optional and not associated with discourse effects. Under the state-of-affairs reading, it again may not refer to anything other than the propositional content of the CP.

(2) a. Milo would hate (it) if the kitten scratched him.
   b. Milo hates (it) when the kitten scratches him.

However, the distribution of the pronoun with the three types of clauses differs when the clauses appear pre-verbally:

(3) a. If the kitten scratched him, Milo would hate *(✓it).*
   b. When the kitten scratches him, Milo hates *(✓it).*
   c. That the kitten scratched him, Milo hates ✓(*it).*

Finally, the state-of-affairs conditional shows a licensing split often seen with EFs. NPIs are often licensed in the clausal complements of negative EFs, but degraded in the clausal complements of positive EFs:

(4) a. Milo hated that he ever bought a car.
   b. *Milo loved that he ever bought a car.

The same tendency is shown with post-verbal state-of-affairs conditionals (judgments from Pesetsky 1991). NPIs with negative EFs are always fine, but are sometimes degraded with positive EFs. The split disappears under a standard conditional reading (i.e., if *it* in (5-b) referred to attending recitals).

(5) a. I would hate it if he played the violin anymore.
   b. *I would like it if he played the violin anymore.

Analysis and Conclusions: The majority of the data point towards an expletive analysis of the pronoun. Its optionality and lack of known effects on meaning are striking. In addition, the fact that the pronoun cannot have free reference is suggestive of an expletive analysis. With finite clauses and with state-of-affairs conditionals/*when* clauses, only the propositional content of the clause can be the verb’s theme. This would normally be seen as indicative of a restricting relationship between the clause and the pronoun. However, finite CPs in particular are not usually held to be binding elements. This means that the pronoun should not be bound by the CP, and if it were contentful, it should be able to pick up a prior referent.
I contend that the pronoun occurring with *that* clauses is in fact an expletive pronoun. In these cases, the CP receives the theta role from the verb, but does not sit in spec,VP. This allows a pronoun to optionally appear in spec,VP, where it receives case from v.

(6) \[ v \[ V P (it) [V' V CP ] ] \]

It is tempting to propose that this analysis also accounts for the conditional/when cases, since what has been called identical NPI licensing occurs. However, the latter is untrue:

(7) a. *Milo loved that he ever got a winning lotto ticket.
    b. Milo would love it if he ever got a winning lotto ticket.

The data in (7) are also problematic for LF copying analyses (Pesetsky 1991), where the content of the conditional is copied as an object *that*-clause at LF (thereby producing ungrammaticalities, since the NPI in the finite clause is not licensed). However, this predicts (7-b) to be ungrammatical, since the corresponding finite clause is.

Instead, I suggest that the pronoun with if/when clauses is in fact a propositional anaphor. This anaphor may receive its reference from the conditional/when clause, producing the state-of-affairs reading. It may also refer to other objects, producing a regular conditional/when-clause reading. Since the structure is not copied within the scope of the EF, we predict freer variation of NPI licensing in finite and conditional clauses; however, since the propositional content is referred to within the scope of the EF, we do predict cases where NPI licensing may be degraded in the conditional.

References


