P-stranding diagnoses A'-movement in tough constructions

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“Tough movement” (TM) is exemplified by the pair in (1).

(1) a. It is tough to please linguists.
   b. Linguists₁ are tough to please t₁.

The literature on TM reports that it exhibits both A- and A’-properties, and some analyses (e.g. Hicks 2009) have proposed to account for this by decomposing TM derivations into two steps, where the first is A’-movement to the embedded Spec,CP and the second A-movement to Spec,TP. Here I provide a new argument for diagnosing the first step as A’-movement with data from preposition stranding (p-stranding) across languages.

P-stranding languages like English allow for p-stranding with TM:

(2)  Magicians₁ are difficult to talk to t₁.

As one might expect, non-p-stranding languages like Italian do not allow for TM with p-stranding:

(3) a. *I maghi sono difficili da parlare a
      the magicians are difficult DA talk.INF to
      ‘Magicians are difficult to talk to.’
   b. È difficile parlare ai maghi.
      is difficult talk.INF to the magicians.
      ‘It is difficult to talk to magicians.’

It is known that some languages, such as Danish and Icelandic, allow for p-stranding with A’-movement but not A-movement, while there are no known languages that allow for p-stranding in A-movement but not A’-movement. The Danish stranding data is in (4) and the Icelandic in (5) (from Truswell 2009):

(4) a. Hvem har Peter snakket med?
      Who has Peter talked with
      ‘Who has Peter talked with?’
   b. *Han blev grinet af
      He was laughed at
      ‘He was laughed at.’

(5) a. Hvað það er um í þann íða?
      What is there about in the thing
      ‘What is there about in the thing?’
   b. *Heimsóknin hefur skráð
      The invasion has written
      ‘The invasion has written.’
(5) a. Hvern hefur Pétur talað við?
   ‘Who has Peter talked with?’

b. ‘Ég tel Vigdísi vera oftast talað vel um.
   I believe Vigdis to be most often spoken well of.’

These languages can diagnose whether or not TM – specifically the step of movement from the base position – is A- or A’-movement: if p-stranding is possible in Icelandic and Danish TM, the first step must be A’-movement.

Danish (6) and Icelandic (7) show that these languages allow for p-stranding under TM:

(6) a. Tryllekunstnere er svære at tale med
   Magicians are tough to talk with
   ‘Magicians are tough to talk to.’

b. Det er svært at tale med tryllekunstnere
   Expl. is tough to talk with magicians.
   ‘It is tough to talk to magicians.’

(7) a. Töframenn eru erfðir að tala við
   Magicians are difficult to talk with.
   ‘Magicians are difficult to talk to.’

b. Pað er erfitt að tala við töframenn
   Expl. is tough to talk with magicians
   ‘It is tough to talk to magicians.’

c. Hinrik VIII var erfðir að búa með
   Henry VIII was difficult to live with (Thráinsson 2007: 431)

This indicates that the first move in TM dependencies must be A’-movement.

References

