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. Linguists 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) Magicians, 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. 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

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

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

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

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

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

References