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Gapping of copular be and [Spec, CP]

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Compared to other verbs of English, copular be has a rich inflectional paradigm. This creates possible morphological “mismatches” in Gapping constructions. Note that (1), with morphologically identical Gapped verbs, improves on (2):

(1)  a. Kim is a syntactician, and Dana is a phonologist
    b. You1 are incredibly inconsiderate, and you2 are incredibly vain
    c. I was unhappy, and Terry was distraught

(2)  a. ?The teacher is stern, and the students are frightened
    b. ?I am a good syntactician, and Kim is a famous phonologist
    c. ?You were unhappy, and Sandy was distraught

The above contrast strengthens if the form of be undergoes I-to-C movement in question formation (apparently, for some speakers, the contrast is not equally strong in all the examples in (4)):

(3)  a. Is Kim a syntactician, and Dana a phonologist?
    b. Are you1 really so inconsiderate and you2 really so vain?
    c. Was I really so unhappy, and Sandy so distraught?

(4)  a. *Is the teacher so stern, and the students so frightened?
    b. *Am I a good syntactician, and Kim a famous phonologist?
    c. *Were you unhappy, and Sandy distraught?

Interestingly, though, (for many speakers) forms such as in (4) improve if a wh-phrase occupies the [Spec, CP] of the first clause:

(5)  a. Why is the teacher so stern, and the students so frightened?
    b. How/In what way am I a good syntactician, and Kim a famous phonologist?
    c. Where/why were you unhappy, and Sandy distraught?

I-to-C movement of a “mismatched” Gapped copular be also proves successful in constructions involving preposed negative adverbials (which we assume occupy [Spec, CP]):

(6)  a. Never is the teacher stern, (n)or the students frightened
    b. In no way am I a good syntactician, or Kim a famous phonologist
    c. Very rarely were you unhappy, or Sandy distraught

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In addition, presence of a phrase in [Spec, CP] in what Radford 1989 calls “resultative preposing” constructions seems to enable successful I-to-C movement of a mismatched Gapped copular *be*. So the following all sound better than the forms in (4) do:

(7)  
   a. So stern is the teacher, and so frightened the students, that the principal had to intervene  
   b. Such a good syntactician am I, and so good a phonologist Kim, that we will both be promoted  
   c. So unhappy were you, and so distraught Sandy, that no clown could brighten the day

So we have the following puzzle: a Gapped form of *be* that does not match its non-Gapped counterpart morphologically proves slightly degraded (as in (2)), and matters become worse if the non-Gapped instance of *be* undergoes I-to-C movement (as in (4)). However, the presence of an element – apparently any element – in [Spec, CP] ameliorates the problem of such I-to-C movement. Just why a filled [Spec, CP] position should have such an interaction with Gapping constructions merits further investigation.

References