

Really strange, that construction

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In this talk, we explore utterances of the type “Smart woman, your mother” and “Always late, that student”. As a first description, note that the first element is a predicate-like element followed by the notional subject. Moreover, this construction has a characteristic intonation pattern, where the notional subject is deaccented.

The notional subject appears to be highly restricted, as shown by the examples in (1a). Modifying this DP, however, improves the sentence (1b).

- (1) a. * Really bright, every math student.
- b. Really bright, every math student over there.

We suggest that there is a fixed information structure where the predicate introduces new information and the notional subject must be a contextually salient entity.

We discuss three possible structural analyses of this construction, each of which is associated with different levels of complexity. First, the predicate and the subject are two independent phrases, not syntactically connected (simple). Second, there is an entire sentence with subsequent movement and ellipsis (complex). Third, the predicate and the subject form a syntactic constituent of a new type – a kind of small clause (medium). We explore these solutions and their implications for theories of possible form-meaning relations in natural language.