Naga Selvanathan   nagaselv@gmail.com

Subject Theta Roles and Tamil *tough* movement[1]

1. Introduction and background[2]

Tough constructions exhibit the alternation in (1) and the source of this alternation in

English has been difficult to pin down.[3] (1a) shows an expletive construction. (1b) shows

tough-movement (TM).[4]

    (1) a.   It is tough to please John.

       b.   John is tough to please.

One of the debates about this alternation pertains to where *John* receives a theta role in

both these constructions. In a movement approach to TM (Postal 1971, Brody 1993,

Hicks 2009, Hartman 2011, Brillman 2014 and Longenbough 2016), in (1b), *John* is

argued to move from the embedded position to the surface position. In this approach,

John receives a theta role from the embedded verb in both the sentences in (1).

        In the alternative base-generation analysis (eg. Chomsky 1977), *John* is argued to

be base generated outside the embedded clause in an argument position with null operator

(NO) movement in the embedded clause.[5]

    (2) John is tough [Op_i to please t_i].

Relatively contemporary advocates for this approach are Rezac (2006), Bruening (2014),

and Keine & Poole (2017) (K&P, henceforth). There are two attested ways in which *John*

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[1] I would like to thank Kamaladevi and Selvanathan for the Tamil data. All errors are solely mine.
[2] List of abbreviations: 1,2,3 – person, ACC – accusative, COMP – complementizer, F – feminine, INF – infinitival, NO – null operator, NOM – nominative, PASS- passive, PRS – present, PST – past tense, S – singular, M – masculine, N –neuter.
[3] *tough* constructions also allow the non-finite complement to occur as the subject, i.e. *To please John is tough*, but I will not be addressing this variant in this paper.
[4] I will continue referring to this as *movement* only in a descriptive sense and not as an analytical claim.
[5] Another type of base-generation analysis comes from Lasnik & Fiengo (1974) who propose deletion.

in (2) is argued to receive theta role in this approach. In Lasnik & Fiengo's (1974) (L&F, henceforth) approach, *John* receives a theta role from different positions in (1). In (1a), the embedded verb assigns *John* a theta role but in (1b) *tough* assigns a subject theta role to *John*. In this account, *tough* predicates are ambiguous as on one entry, *tough* assigns a subject theta role and on an another, it does not. Keine & Poole (2017) recently propose a base-generation analysis of TM without this type of ambiguity with the following.

(3) a. $\lambda p_{<s,t>}$TOUGH(p)   b. $\lambda P_{<e,\,t>}\lambda x_e$TOUGH(P(x))

(3a) shows the denotation of *tough* in (1a) which takes a propositional argument. Here, *John* receives a theta role as the embedded object. (3b) shows the denotation of *tough* which also takes a proposition as its argument, meaning that *John* still receives a theta role from the embedded verb. The difference lies in the order of composition. Keine & Poole (2017) thus are able to maintain a base-generation analysis without appealing to an ambiguous *tough*, as *tough* never assigns a subject theta role.

There is a third option in the literature which is often overlooked. This is the reanalysis approach to TM where different predication structures are posited for TM structures from their expletive counterparts. There are two general approaches to reanalysis. Nanni (1978), Chomsky (1981) and Zwart (2012) propose that *tough-to-please* in (1b) is reanalyzed as a word without internal structure, unlike its counterpart in (1a). A different type of reanalysis approach comes from Mulder & Den Dikken (1992) (M&D, henceforth) who propose the following variation of an NO analysis.

(4) John is [Op$_i$ tough [t$_i$ to please t$_i$].

In this analysis, the NO moves to the edge of the adjectival phrase, as opposed to the infinitival edge as in (2). Predicate abstraction (eg. Nissenbaum 2000) then forms a complex predicate *tough_to_please* which assigns a subject theta role.[6] In reanalysis, *John* in (1a) receives an object theta role from the embedded verb but in (1b), *John* receives a subject theta role from the complex predicate. The following table summarizes where each account posits *John* receives a theta role.

(5)

	Expletive Construction	TM Construction
Movement	Embedded verb	Embedded verb
Base-generation (L&F)	Embedded verb	Matrix predicate
Base-generation (K&P)	Embedded verb	Embedded verb
Reanalysis	Embedded verb	Matrix complex predicate

While all the analyses agree that *John* receives a theta role from the embedded verb in the expletive construction, the movement analysis and K&P's base-generation analysis differ from L&F's base generation analysis and the reanalysis account with respect to whether the matrix subject assigns a theta role in TM.

In this squib, my objective is to discuss novel Tamil (Dravidian, SOV) data and make two claims: 1) there is a subject theta role assigned in TM constructions which means that the movement analysis and K&P's base-generation account are wrong, and 2) a reanalysis account like that of M&D best accounts for all the Tamil facts. These conclusions are applicable to English TM as well. To achieve the first objective, I discuss two pieces of evidence which indicate that the TM subject has a theta role assigned to it in the matrix position. To achieve the second objective, I discuss Tamil *pretty* and *too/enough*

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[6] The term *complex predicate* here is commonly found in another context, for example with restructuring verbs (Wurmbrand 2001, Nash & Samvelian 2015 and papers therein). Whether TM and these can all be grouped under one category is a matter for future research. I will continue to use this term here agnostically.

predicates, which are often given a similar analysis with TM (eg. Lasnik & Fiengo 1974). I show that M&D's reanalysis account can explain the differences between *tough* predicates and *pretty/ too enough* predicates using the Theta Criterion, while the other accounts have to stipulate it.

2. Tamil *Tough* Movement

Tamil (NOM-ACC alignment) exhibits TM. The basic alternation is shown below.

(6) a.   [ba:lə-nə   palliku:dəʈɪ-lɪrɯnɖɯ ɑlɛɪkɛ]   kastəmaa irɯ-nd-**ɪccɪ**

            Balan-ACC   school-from   fetch.INF   hard   be-PST-**3SN**

            'It was difficult to fetch Balan from school.'

     b.   ba:lɛ̃   [palliku:dəʈɪ-lɪrɯnɖɯ ɑlɛɪkɛ]   kastəmaa irɯ-nd-**ã:**

            Balan.NOM   school-from   fetch.INF   hard   be-PST-**3SM**

            'Balan was difficult to fetch from school.'[7]

(6a) shows the construction that corresponds to the expletive construction in English. Here, the embedded clause is infinitive with an accusative marked object. The matrix copula verb has neuter agreement. (6b) shows the TM variant. Here, *Balan* is unmarked for case and notably, the matrix copula verb has 3rd person singular, masculine agreement, the features associated with *Balan*. As far as I am aware, the Dravidian literature does not document any instance of long-distance agreement in this language family similar to what has been documented for Tsez (Polinsky & Potsdam 2001) and Hindi-Urdu (Bhatt 2005).[8] This

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[7] The adjectival predicate in Tamil has a suffix *-aa*. This has been analyzed as an adverbalizer (Sarma 1999) or Pred head (Selvanathan 2016). In this squib, I ignore this detail as it is tangential to the main point.
[8] Subbarao (2012: 121) identifies what he calls long-distance agreement in Telugu (another Dravidian language), but these are limited to raising constructions such as the following.
     a) [vadu manci vadu la]   un-di
         he   good 3SM COMP be-3SN

Naga Selvanathan   nagaselv@gmail.com

means that in (6b), *Balan* is located in the matrix clause. Further evidence indicating that

Balan in (6b) is in the matrix clause unlike in (6a), comes from scrambling facts.

(7) a.   *[palliku:dəʈɪ-lɪrɯnɖɯ ɑlɛɪkɛ]   kastəmaa ba:lə-nə   irɯ-nd-**ɪccɪ**

school-from   fetch.INF hard   Balan-ACC be-PST-**3SN**

b.   [palliku:dəʈɪ-lɪrɯnɖɯ ɑlɛɪkɛ]   kastəmaa ba:l̃ɛ   irɯ-nd-**ã:**

school-from   fetch.INF hard   Balan.NOM be-PST-**3SM**

(7a) shows that the embedded object cannot be scrambled independent of the embedded

clause in the expletive construction. Since scrambling cannot separate constituents in Tamil

(eg. Sarma 1999), (7a) shows that *Balan* is part of the embedded clause. However, *Balan*

can scramble independently of the embedded clause in the TM variant in (7b), indicating

that *Balan* is outside the embedded clause here. Finally, since Tamil exhibits agreement

with the highest unmarked argument in an A-position (Asher 1982, Sundaresan 2012), and

in TM there is subject agreement, *Balan* must be in an A-position in (6b).

Non-intervening subjects indicate that Tamil TM also has an A'-movement

component.[9] Tamil, unlike English, allows overt subjects in infinitival clauses even without

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'It appears he is a nice fellow'
b) vadu manci vadu la   unna-du
he   good   3SM COMP be.PRS-3SM
'He appears to be a nice fellow.'

In (a), the copular verb has neuter agreement but in (b), the copular verb has masculine agreement. Alternations like (a) and (b) are also found in Tamil. (b) is not long distance agreement (LDA) because at least in Tamil, scrambling evidence indicates that in (b), the logical subject of the embedded clause has raised to the matrix position. See, for example, (7). This is unlike typical cases of LDA, for example, in Hindi-Urdu, where the phrase that triggers LDA remains embedded (Bhatt 2005: 766).

[9] Parasitic gaps and preposition stranding are common tests for A'-movement in English. These do not work in Tamil. In Tamil, even sentences without any apparent movement appear to license parasitic gaps. In such constructions, there is probably string vacuous scrambling. Tamil also does not allow preposition stranding. Regardless, the data discussed in this sub-section shows that Tamil TM does involve A'-movement.

any obvious case marker like English *for* (McFadden & Sunderesan 2010). This allows us to see that an intervening subject does not block TM in Tamil.

(8) a. [Ma:la: Ba:lə-nə   adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   irɯ-nd-**ɪccɪ**

        Mala   Balan-acc   beat.INF   easy   be-PST-**3SN**

        'It was easy for Mala to beat Balan.'

   b. [Ma:la: adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   ba:l̃ɛ̃   irɯ-nd- **ã:**

        Mala   beat.INF   easy   Balan be-PST-**3SM**

        'Balan was easy for Mala to beat.'

(8a) shows an expletive construction with an infinitival subject. (8b) shows that the presence of such a subject does not block TM. This indicates that movement in the infinitival clause must be an A'-movement type.[10] We can conclude that Tamil TM has a hybrid A/A'-nature exactly like English TM and as such should be analyzed similarly.[11]

3. A subject theta role in TM

In this section, we will look at two pieces of evidence, subject-oriented adverbials and the *koL* verbal suffix, which are possible in the TM variant but not in the expletive variant. These are used to argue against TM accounts that deny a matrix theta role assigner.

3.1 *Subject oriented adverbials*

There is a rich literature on the notion of subject-oriented and speaker-oriented adverbs and their semantic and syntactic representations (Jackendoff 1972, McConnell-Ginet 1982, Ernst 2002, Kubota 2015 a.o). In Tamil, I assume that subject-oriented adverbs are

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[10] This embedded subject can also be realized as a dative experiencer in the matrix clause, similar to English.
[11] Thus, Tamil and English TM is unlike TM in languages like French (Roberts 1993) and German (Wurmbrand 1994) which has been proposed to consist of only A-movement.

sensitive to the logical subject based on the following and other examples like it.

(9) a.   ve:no:nɯ   ba:lɛ̃   pa:nɛ-yɛ   wodɛcã:

on.purpose   Balan   pot-ACC   break-PST-3SM

'Balan the pot on purpose.'

b.   ve:no:nɯ   pa:nɛ   (ba:lɛna:lɛ)   wodɛkə-pa-tt-icci

on.purpose   Somu   Balan.by   beat.INF-PASS-PST-3SN

'The pot was broken (by Balan) on purpose.'

Thus, in the active (9a) and the passive (9b), *ve:no:nu* 'on purpose' targets the mental attitude behind the action of the logical subject. Now consider the following.

(10) a.   *ve:no:nɯ   [Ba:lə-nə   adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   irɯ-nd-**ɪccɪ**

on.purpose   Balan-ACC   beat.INF   easy   be-PST-**3SN**

For: 'It was easy to beat Balan on purpose.'

b.   ve:no:nɯ   [adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   ba:lɛ̃   irɯ-nd-**ã:**

on.purpose   beat.INF   easy   Balan   be-PST-**3SM**

'Balan was easy to beat on purpose.'

The expletive construction in (10a) is ungrammatical with this adverb but the TM variant in (10b) is perfectly grammatical. (10a) has the interpretation where *Balan* carried out some actions such that he would be easy to beat, for example, as in a case of match fixing. This interpretation is certainly not possible in (10a). Note that an adverbial phrase that is not subject oriented but rather speaker oriented is possible in both as seen in (11).[12]

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[12] Along the same lines, L&F: 546 show that *intentionally* in English is compatible with certain TM variants but never with their expletive counterparts.

(11) a.   jɛɖɪrpa:ʈʈədɛ po:lɛ   [Ba:lə-nə   adikɛ]   soləbəmaa iruɯ-nd-**ɪccɪ**

as.expected   Balan-ACC   beat.INF   easy   be-PST-**3SN**

'It was easy to beat Balan as expected.'

b.   jɛɖɪrpa:ʈʈədɛ po:lɛ   [adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   ba:lɛ̃   iruɯ-nd- **ã:**

as.expected   beat.INF   easy   Balan   be-PST-**3SM**

'Balan was easy to beat as expected.'

Other subject oriented adverbs like *pɪdɪva:ɖəma:* 'stubbornly', *madəʈʈanəma:* 'stupidly' also only occur in TM. If *Balan* receives a theta role only from the embedded verb in both the sentences in (10), this difference is unexplained. In contrast, the view that *Balan* receives a subject theta role in (10b) but not in (10a) is compatible with these facts.

3.2 The koL marker

Tamil *koL* is often discussed in the context of reflexives but it has well-known non-reflexive distributions as well (Lidz 2001, Sundaresan 2012). I will adopt here the observation from Sundaresan (2012: 156) that *koL* is only possible on a verb that has a thematic participant. According to her, this is why raising predicates and weather verbs do not allow *koL* as seen in the data below from Sundaresan (2012: 156).

(12)   a.   Vandi$_i$ [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ nagara]   aarambi-tt-adu

truck.NOM   move.INF   begin-PST-3SN

"[The truck]$_i$ began [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ to move]."

b.   * Vandi$_i$ [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ nagar-a]   aarambittu-ko-nd-adu.

truck.NOM   move.INF   begin-koL-PST-3SN

"[The truck]$_i$ began [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ to move]."

(13)   Maɻe   pen-ʤ-adu/ *pen-ʤu-ko-nd-adu

          rain.NOM   pour-PST-3SN/*pour-koL-PST-3SN

          "It rained." (Lit: The rain poured)

Thus, the raising verb in (12b) and the weather verb in (13) both do not allow *koL*.[13] In

contrast, almost all other types of verbs (even unaccusatives) which have a thematic

argument allow *koL*.[14] With this, consider the following expletive and TM sentences.

(14) a.   *[Ba:lə-nə   adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   irʉndʉ-**kʉ**-ccɪ

          Balan-ACC   beat.INF   easy   be-**koL**-PST-3SN

          'It was easy to beat Balan.'

     b.   [adikɛ]   soləbəmaa   ba:l̃ɛ̃   irʉndʉ-**kʉ**-tt-ã:

          beat.INF   easy   Balan   be-**koL**-PST-3SM

          'Balan was easy to beat.'

(14a) shows that the expletive variant does not allow *koL* on the verb. This is expected

given that we have already seen only a verb that has a thematic participant allows *koL*

and in these expletive constructions, there is only a propositional argument. However,

(14b), the TM variant, can have *koL*. If there is only a propositional argument in the TM

variant, this is not expected. This indicates, like the adverb data we saw earlier, that there

is subject theta role assigned in the TM variant unlike in the expletive variant.[15]

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[13] The status of *begin* as a raising verb is not uncontroversial (Perlmutter 1979). In Tamil, however, this verb patterns with unambiguous raising verbs like *edirpaakkapadu 'be expected'* in not allowing *koL*.
[14] There are some exceptions. For example, psych verbs do not allow *koL* suffixation either. According to Sundaresan, this is due to independent factors pertaining to perspective. I adopt her assumption here.
[15] Some have proposed that English TM subjects are causers (eg. Kim 1995). However, others have counter-argued that this is pragmatically induced causation and not a result of thematic differences (Goh 2000, Hicks 2009). Along the same lines, Pulman (1993) claims that the difference between an expletive and TM variant is only in "a focusing effect". This is why the *koL* data is especially important. *koL* is not sensitive to

3.3 Interim summary

So far, we have seen that Tamil TM has the same A/A'-properties as English and that there is a subject theta role assigned in TM that is different from the theta role that the embedded object in the expletive variant receives. Looking back at the table in (5), the Tamil facts rule out both the movement analysis of TM and K&P's variant of the base-generation analysis. Recall that in these analyses, there is no subject theta role in TM, a position that is incompatible with the empirical facts of Tamil.

4. Which of the remaining accounts is correct?

In this section, I argue for M&D's account of TM (see (4)), to be contrasted with Nanni (1978)'s lexical reanalysis approach and L&F's base-generation account.

One advantage M&D's analysis has over the lexical reanalysis account is the fact that this account preserves A'-movement in the infinitival clause. Given the A'-properties of TM in English and Tamil (i.e. parasitic gap formation, non-intervention of subjects, etc), this is desirable. It is not clear how these can be accounted for in the lexical reanalysis account. M&D's account also has an advantage over L&F's account as the latter posits obligatory ambiguity of *tough* predicates where on one meaning, *tough* predicates only take a propositional argument, but on another, they take a subject argument. In contrast, M&D's account does not posit ambiguity. Thus, M&D's account already fares better than the remaining alternatives.

In addition, I propose that M&D provides a natural explanation for the following.

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causation, or pragmatic factors. At the minimum, it can only occur on a verb with a thematic argument. (14) indicates that there is a difference in thematic structure between expletive constructions and their TM variant.

(15)   a.   Ma:la: pa:kə   aɭəga: iruɯ-nd-a:

                Mala   see.INF   pretty   be-PST-3SF

                'Mala is pretty to look at.'

         b.   pa:rɛ   ʈu:kə   rombɛ ganəma: iruɯ-nd-icci

                rock   lift.INF   too   heavy   be-PST-3SN

                'The rock is too heavy to carry.'

(15a) shows a *pretty* predicate and (15b) shows a gapped degree phrase (GPD, Brillman

2014). These constructions are superficially similar to TM and like TM allow an

infinitival subject as in (16), indicating A'-movement in the embedded clause.

(16)   a.   Ma:la: [ba:lɛ̃ pa:kə]   aɭəga: iruɯ-nd-a:

                Mala   Balan see.INF   pretty be-PST-3SF

                'Mala is pretty for John to look at.'

         b.   pa:rɛ   [ba:lɛ̃ ʈu:kə]   rombɛ ganəma: iruɯ-nd-icci

                rock   Balan lift.INF   too   heavy   be-PST-3SN

                'The rock is too heavy for John to carry.'

However, unlike TM, these predicates do not allow an expletive subject.

(17)   a.   *[Ma:la:-vɛ   pa:kə]   aɭəga: iruɯ-nd-icci

                Mala-ACC   see.INF   pretty   be-PST-3SN

         b.   *[pa:rɛ-yɛ   ʈu:kə]   rombɛ ganəma: iruɯ-nd-icci

                rock-ACC   lift.INF   too   heavy   be-PST-3SN

Thus, (17a) and (17b) are bad with the putative object having accusative case.

I claim that M&D's analysis provides a simple account of the difference between *tough* and these other two predicates. Specifically, I propose the following.

(18)   a.   XP   [Op$_i$ TOUGH   [t$_i$ t$_i$ V.INF]]

        b.   XP   PRETTY/ GDP   [Op$_i$ t$_i$ V.INF]

(18a) shows M&D's TM account. (18b) shows the proposed account of *pretty* and GDP predicates. Here, I propose a Chomsky (1977)-like analysis where NO movement takes place only up to the edge of the infinitival clause.

The question then is why the NO cannot move to the edge of the matrix predicate with *pretty* and GDP predicates. I propose that this is ruled out because this results in a Theta Criterion (Chomsky 1981) violation, specifically one where two predicates have to assign the same subject a theta role. To see why, consider the following.

(19)   XP   [Op$_i$ PRETTY/ GDP   [t$_i$ t$_i$ V.INF]]

In (19), the NO moves to the edge of the matrix predicate and forms a complex predicate which assigns a subject theta role. This is what happens with TM. However, unlike *tough*, *pretty* and GDP predicates already assign a subject theta role, given that they do not allow an expletive subject (see (17)). This means that both the *pretty/* GDP predicates and the complex predicate formed by NO movement have to assign a subject theta role. This is the source of the Theta Criterion violation. This problem does not arise in TM, because *tough* predicates do not assign a subject theta role (given that they allow expletive subjects) and as such the complex predicate is the only subject theta role assigner.[16] In

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[16] However, the NO *must* move to the adjectival edge and cannot stop at the infinitival edge with *tough* predicates as otherwise, there will be no subject theta role assigner.

M&D's account, the difference between TM and *pretty/* GDP predicates reduces to how far the NO moves. In contrast, the lexical account of reanalysis and L&F's base-generation analysis treat the difference between *tough* and *pretty/* GDP predicates with respect to expletives as an accident.

5. Conclusion

In this squib, I discuss novel TM data from Tamil and show that there is a subject theta role in TM. This was argued to rule out analyses of TM which deny such a role. I further argue for M&D's reanalysis account of TM on the basis that it can provide a unified account of *tough, pretty* and GDP predicates.

In so far as this account is right, this puts the so-called PP intervention effects of TM in new light. This phenomenon, was first discussed by Hartman (2011) and recently, Keine & Poole (2017) observe that *pretty/* GDP predicates exhibit the same PP-intervention effect.[17] The account of TM here indicates that this effect may have to do with NO licensing, as suggested by Bruening (2014), and not due to defective intervention or semantic mismatch as the others claim. Given that *tough, pretty* and GDP predicates are only different with respect to the landing site of the NO in the proposed analysis here, this also supports L&F's claim that the gap in all three predicate types is licensed the same way. Future research will have to uncover the details of this licensing.

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[17] This effect is present but weak in Tamil *tough*, *pretty* and GDP predicates. I will have to leave detailed investigation of this to future research, but the possibility of scrambling in Tamil may be the reason for this.

Naga Selvanathan   nagaselv@gmail.com

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