

Funny NPs

Dummies:

- *there* There is a unicorn in the garden.
I want there to be a unicorn in the garden.
* I told there to be a unicorn in the garden.
- *it*_{Ambient} It's raining. It's cold today. It's third down and twelve.
It seems to be raining/cold/third down and twelve.
* I ordered it to be raining/cold/third down and twelve.
- *it*_{Path} It's a long way to Tipperary.
It appears to be a long way to Tipperary.
* It tried to be a long way to Tipperary.
- *it*_{Extrapolation} It's too bad (that) she left. I like it *(that) he stayed.
* It's afraid (that) she left. *I tried it (that) he stayed.

Idiom Chunks:

- *headway* We've tried to make headway on the problem.
Headway seems to have been made on the problem.
* Headway wants to be made on the problem.
- *the beans* He's totally spilled the beans.
The beans appear to have been spilled.
* The beans tried to be spilled.
- *the cat* You let the cat out of the bag.
The cat is believed to have been let out of the bag.
* The cat claims to have been let out of the bag
- *the shit* The shit is about to hit the fan.
He believes the shit to be about to hit the fan.
* He told the shit to hit the fan.
- *X's leg* Watch out; she's pulling your leg.
Your leg is altogether too easy to pull.
* Your leg is altogether too eager to pull.
- *the bucket* The old man kicked the bucket last night.
* The bucket was kicked by the old man last night.

Conclusion: **Funny NPs*** (dummies, idiom chunks, various others) can provide arguments for various kinds of constituent structures, since they can occur only in very highly-constrained structures. When they can occur **grammatically** elsewhere, they are evidence that they have been 'moved'; i.e, some syntactic rule has applied to separate the funny NP from its originating construction. This is analogous to the practice in biology of staining slides to show the structure of the material under the microscope.

* This is a technical term. See McCawley's *The Syntactic Phenomena of English*, 2nd Ed, §3c.iii, pp.74-79.