

The meaning of ECM: what fuzzy data can reveal

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Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) constructions have been a central part of syntactic theorizing and are an example *par excellence* of a syntax-semantics mismatch. I nonetheless argue that ECM complements carry with them a semantic interpretation distinct from finite complements. To see this, we will look at what is revealed by the “fuzziness” in acceptability of ECM in English (Postal 1974, Borkin 1984, Pesetsky 1991). Verbs like *say* and *wager*, while marginal with ECM complements, attribute belief on the part of the subject (1). The implication of belief is not necessary when these verbs take finite complements (2).

- (1) a. I'd say him to be about 5 foot. #...but I know he's not.
b. I'd wager him to be about 5 foot. #...but I know he's not.
- (2) If I were you, I'd (just) say that he's about 5 feet ...even though we know he's not.

It is proposed that complements to attitude predicates are introduced by meaningful functional heads that express modal quantification (Kratzer 2006, Anand and Hacqaurd 2008, Moulton 2009). The head that introduces ECM complements requires the embedding verb to report a belief state. This decompositional approach predicts fuzziness in judgments because the compatibility of verbs in the ECM “frame” is subject to the vagaries of lexical variation (Borer 2005).