Really strange, that construction

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1. Introduction
- what is the structure of the following apparently sub-sentential examples? (Shopen 1972; Culicover and Jackendoff 2005)

(1) a. Smart woman, your mom.
   b. Always praising her kids, Mary.
   c. Really bright, those students over there.
   d. Always on time, that guy.

- are these sentences? (syntactically, semantically)
- is this a construction?

2. General characteristics
- first XP is a predicate phrase (NP/DP, VP, AP, PP)
- second XP is always a DP that corresponds to the subject of the predicate
- DP can’t be the object:

(2) *Sandy sure likes, your mom.

- in semantic terms, the first XP is of type <e,t>, the second is either <e> or <<e,t>, t>

2.1 Distributional restrictions
2.1.1 The predicate
- although all categories are possible predicates, the predicate must be stative (or individual-level?)

(3) a. * Praising her kids, Mary.
   b. * In the next room, that guy.

- as noted by Shopen, in the following the missing verb is ‘is’ not ‘is being’

(4) An ass, that guy at the next table.

- moreover the missing verb is usually some form of ‘be’, but ‘have’ is sometimes possible
Big nose, that politician.

• in certain cases, there is no missing verb at all

Might be a good linguist, your sister.

• sentential adverbs are ok

Definitely/probably a smart woman, your mom.

2.1.2 The subject

• cannot be a nonspecific indefinite

a. * Loves his mother, a good boy.
   b. * Always digging up my yard, a dog.
   c. * Great cook, some mom.

• quantificational DPs are also often bad

a. * Really bright, every math student.
   b. * Always talking, most students.

• if we modify these DPs, however, the result is grammatical.¹

Really bright, every math student over there.
Always talking, most of my students.

• the subject must be salient in the discourse (see section X.X)

2.1.3 Binding

• the subject appears to c-command elements in the predicate phrase for the purposes of binding theory

Always praising herself, your sister.
   * Very proud of him, John.

• looks like connectivity, but…

¹ Certain quantifiers, e.g. each, seem to be impossible, however.
2.1.4 Anti-connectivity
• a negative subject does not license an NPI in the predicate phrase.

(12) a. * Ever on time, no one in my class.

• an idiom chunk cannot be broken up between the predicate phrase and the subject (this might be because the subject has to be referential)

(13) a. * About to hit the fan, the shit.
    b. * Out of the bag, the cat.

• idioms are perfectly grammatical inside the predicate phrase itself

(14) a. Almost let the cat out of the bag, that guy.
    b. About to kick the bucket, my cat.

2.1.4 Other
• the predicate and the subject must appear in that order

(15) *Your mom, smart woman.

• can’t be embedded

(16) *I think [smart woman, your mom].

2.3 Intonation
• as noted by Shopen (1972), the predicate must receive the most prominent stress (“tag intonation”)

(17) a. A good TALKER, your friend Bill.
    b. * A good talker, your friend BILL.

2.4 Information structure
• the predicate phrase is new information (focus)
• the subject is old information (topic) and must be salient – this explains why indefinite nonspecific DPs are impossible
• the improving effect of adding a demonstrative or deictic is related to saliency – need to link the subject to context
2.5 Force/type

- note the similarity to exclamatives (Zanuttini and Portner 2003; Portner and Zanuttini to appear?)

(18) a. A good talker, your friend Bill.
    b. What a good talker, your friend Bill!

- similar use but different internal distribution: wh-exclamatives require a scale

(19) a. The best coffee in the world, that Maxwell House.
    b. * What the best coffee in the world, that Maxwell House!

- NB: we exclude examples such as (2): different intonation, different semantics (question-answer)

(20) Your best friend? Any dog.

3. Possible analyses

3.1 Two independent phrases

- speakers routinely produce sub-sentential utterances
- Stainton (forthcoming): sub-sentential utterances are in fact just that: phrases of categories other than TP
- PredNP utterances are two syntactically disconnected XPs

(21) 

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\text{a smart woman} \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{your mom}
\end{array}
$$

⇒ maximally simple structure

3.2 Movement plus deletion

- point of departure: Merchant’s (2004) analysis of fragments as involving fronting of the apparent fragment followed by deletion (ellipsis)
- in PredNP cases, the subject is right-adjoined to the TP (via topicalization) and the verb is deleted
or maybe both constituents have been fronted, followed by (TP) ellipsis

\[ \Rightarrow \text{maximally complex structure} \]

3.3 Small clause
- the predicate and the subject form a syntactic constituent: a small clause with a rightward subject

\[ \Rightarrow \text{mid-level structural complexity} \]
3.4 How do they rank?

- can these analyses account for the properties outlined in section 2?

1. **sentential adverbs** – can appear, but only on predicate
   i. two phrases: we expect sentential adverbs to be ok on both

(25) Definitely your mom.
   ii. movement + deletion: the presence of sentential adverbs is expected, but their position is unexpected under the double-fronting approach
   iii. small clause: presence of sentential adverbs is not expected

(26) *I consider definitely her a good friend.

2. **binding** – subject appears to c-command predicate
   i. two phrases: at first unexpected (no c-command), but the standard binding conditions are notoriously violated everywhere in English, including in sub-sentential speech

(27) Always looking at himself in the mirror.
   ii. movement + deletion: binding effects are expected
   iii. small clause: binding effects are expected

3. **anti-connectivity** – no NPI licensing
   i. two phrases: we don’t expect NPI licensing (NPIs really do require c-command)
   ii. movement + deletion: at first, we expect NPI licensing, but if the movement is topicalization, we can rule it out – nonreferential DPs can’t be topicalized

(28) ex
   iii. small clause: we expect NPI licensing
(29)  
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<th>small clause</th>
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<td>✓</td>
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• other points to consider:
• movement + deletion: strange deletion

(30)  Smart woman, your mom.

• not only the verb, but the determiner appear to be deleted

3.5  Divide and conquer
• a fourth logical option is that all three analyses are available in UG – some examples involve two phrases, some ellipsis, yet others a small clause

4.  Conclusion
• none of the proposed analyses are satisfactory – suggestions?
• what is the correct characterization of the restriction on the predicate? stativity? individual-level? something else?
• can we answer our initial questions?

(31)  
<table>
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<td>construction?</td>
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References

² But this could be a “discourse construction”.

BWTL.9

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