

5.7. I shall begin by examining loose containers, that is to say, containers primarily suited for imperfect nominals. Therefore I take the following battery of phrases:⁵

that John sings
 John's singing the Marseillaise
 John's having sung
 John's being able to sing
 John's singing well.

Then, following the plan outlined at the beginning of Section 5.4., I ask the question: what are the adjectives that fit them? Clearly not words like *yellow*, *round*, *fast*, *easy*, or *clever*. That is to say, not adjectives of the lower ranks, in terms of a classification I shall develop later.⁶ Thus we are left with such adjectives of the highest ranks as *possible*, *useful*, *necessary*, *likely*, *probable*, *certain*, *true*, with their opposites, and the omnipresent *good*. I do not claim that all of them go with all imperfect nominals. There are manifold restrictions here, but for our present enquiry I can omit these refinements. So instead of giving an elaborate table of possible co-occurrences, I shall resort, here and in the sequel, to the stratagem of selecting a few paradigm examples. In this case I pick *unlikely*, *probable*, and *certain*. It is easy to see that they go with all relevant forms:

That John sings is unlikely.
 It is unlikely that he sings.
 John's having sung the Marseillaise is unlikely.
 His being able to sing well is unlikely.

⁵ The notion of a "battery" of transformations is due to H. Hiz. See his "Congrammaticality, Batteries of Transformations, and Grammatical Categories," *Proceedings of the Symposia in Applied Mathematics*, American Mathematical Society, 12 (1960), 43-50.

⁶ See Chapter 7.

The same holds for *probable* and *certain*. It is interesting to realize that most, but not all, of these adjectives are unsuited for nouns that are not nominals. There are no probable dogs, certain trees, and unlikely cigars, or, if there are—well, then we have a little explaining to do.

Now we turn to verbs that take imperfect nominals for subjects. From a great variety I select *surprise* and *cause* as paradigms. Indeed we have the following:

That John sang the Marseillaise surprised me
 His being able to sing well surprised me

and also

John's singing the Marseillaise caused the riot
 His having sung the Marseillaise caused the commotion.

Here, again, most of these verbs are reserved for nominal subjects. (*Cause* even has the peculiarity of requiring a nominal in object position as well; tables and horses are not caused by anything. But this and related points I shall take up in the next chapter.)

A great number of verbs either require or tolerate imperfect nominals for object. *Mention*, *deny*, and *remember* may serve as paradigms:

He denied that John sang the Marseillaise.
 I mentioned his being able to sing.
 I remember his having sung.

Finally, some containers pair nominals with nouns. Here our paradigms will be *fact* and *result*:⁷

⁷ Interestingly enough, these nouns, as well as the container nouns to be given for perfect nominals, i.e., *event*, *process*, and *action*, are themselves nominals—of Latin ancestry.