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The *nice-of-you* construction and its fragments

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Abstract: This article argues that a usage-based construction (a conventional pairing of form and function) is required to account for a certain pattern of English exemplified by e.g., *it's nice of you to read this*. Contemporary corpus and survey data reveal that the construction is strongly associated with certain adjectives (e.g., *nice*, *good*) over others, while diachronic data demonstrate that the construction's overall frequency has systematically waxed and waned over the past century. The construction's unique function – namely to concisely convey a judgment regarding how an action reflects on the agent of the action – enables us to predict many observations about its distribution without stipulation. These include restrictions on the interpretation of adjectives that occur in the construction, its infinitive complement, the modal verbs that may appear in it and its ability to be embedded. We further observe that certain conventional fragments of the construction evoke the semantics of the entire construction. Finally, we situate the construction within a network of related constructions, as part of a speaker's “construct-i-con”.

Keywords: adjective; cognition; constructionist approaches; fragment of *nice-of-you* construction

1 Introduction

It's good of you to read this. Upon reading the previous sentence, you are likely to infer that it was either written by an elderly American or by a British English speaker. In recognizing this, you need to access a particular *construction* of English: a conventional combination of form and function that emerges from the

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dynamic clustering of witnessed exemplars in memory. We argue that this type of *usage-based* analysis is required in order to account for the association of the construction with certain adjectives (e.g., *nice*, *good*) and not others, as well as its systematic change in frequency over historical time. What we term the *nice-of-you* construction fills a special communicative niche that is motivated by our folk psychology. Most importantly, by recognizing the specific function of the construction, we demonstrate that a wide range of properties follow without stipulation.

More generally, constructionist approaches recognize that actual language is not generated by a small set of elegant principles. Instead, as Koenig and Michelson (2020) recently put it, paraphrasing Levi-Strauss, “Language is bricolage.” That is, just as artists such as Picasso combined a wide range of materials and entities in order to combine them in creative ways, speakers select and combine constructions from a wide and varied range of options for oftentimes creative acts of communication. For this reason, one key focus in the development of the constructionist approach has been on lower frequency patterns that sometimes fill rather idiosyncratic functional niches. A parade example of this focus was the ground-breaking analysis of *let alone* by Fillmore et al. (1988), and much work has followed in this tradition. A related emphasis on idioms, collocations, and the frame semantics associated with particular words (e.g., Fillmore 2006), echoes traditional (European) corpus linguistics, notably work by Sinclair (1991, 2004), Wray (2005), Herbst and Götz-Votteler (2007), and Pawley and Syder (1983). Not to take the bricolage metaphor too far, but just as the materials used in bricolage are not organized in a list before they are incorporated into a piece of art, constructions likewise do not comprise an unstructured list. Instead, our “construct-i-con,” or knowledge of language, is composed of a rich network of partially overlapping constructions, which are learned in order to convey the variety of messages that people choose to talk about (e.g., Goldberg 2019).

The present case study is used to illustrate several key aspects of the usage-based constructionist approach. First, recognizing the function of the construction is essential: it allows us to predict a number of key facts without stipulation. Secondly, the usage-based aspect of our analysis allows us to capture the skewed distribution of adjectives in the construction and its fragments as well as systematic diachronic changes.

With few exceptions (Herbst 1983; Oshima 2009), relatively little work has focused specifically on the pattern we consider here, although mentions have

been made in discussions of a more general adjective + infinitive construction (Barker 2002; Jackendoff 1972; Wilkinson 1970, 1976),¹ which we return to in Sections 7 and 8. Attested examples of the pattern of interest are provided in (1):²

- (1) a. *It's nice of you to be such a good sport.*
(COCA94F)
b. *... it's sweet of you to call ...*
(COCA12F)
c. *Really, it's silly of you to ask...*
(COCA93F)

Notice that the examples in (1) express how an action reflects on a sentient *agent* who had performed, or is performing, the action expressed in the infinitive clause. The judgment conveyed is evaluative, and can be either positive or negative, depending on the choice of adjective and whether the utterance is used sarcastically or not.

The construction must evaluate the agent, not the action nor the proposition, as the examples in (2a) and (2b), respectively, are decidedly odd:

- (2) a. ?? *It was quick of him to run the race in under 10 minutes.*
b. ?? *It was true of him to graduate.*

Furthermore, the construction can be used to evaluate someone positively without necessarily approving of the action itself:

- (3) *It's smart of Amazon to try anything it can to get people to associate Amazon with food shopping.*
(NOW 17-05-31 MY)

That is, as Barker (2002: 3) observed, this and the more general adjective + infinitive construction conveys a “relative” judgment without committing the speaker to the belief that the judgment holds in absolute terms (see also Oshima 2009 and Section 7.2). That is, the *nice-of-you* construction in (4a) entails (4b), but not (4c) (Barker 2002):

¹ Even the most comprehensive reference grammar of the English language (Quirk et al. 1985: 1230) acknowledges the construction only in three lines in the context of infinitival adjective complementation more generally.

² COCA refers to the 570-million-word Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies 2008), year (95=1995, 06=2006) and genre (A=Academic, F=Fiction, etc).

- (4) a. *It was stupid of Richard Feynman, Nobel Laureate, to dance like that.*
 b. *Richard Feynman, Nobel Laureate, was stupid to dance like that.*
 c. *#Richard Feynman, Nobel Laureate, was stupid.*

While the *relative* nature of the judgment holds in other cases of adjectival complementation, the *nice-of-you* construction requires a more specific interpretation in that it requires that the judgment hold of a sentient agent. In particular, the *nice-of-you* construction concisely conveys the sort of judgments people make on the basis of others' actions. The *agent* (referred to in PP_{of}) is the person being evaluated on the basis of their *action* (expressed by the infinitive clause). In particular, we generally believe that we can infer people's character on the basis of their actions. At the same time, we recognize that people often behave differently in different circumstances, and we understand that we can only draw limited inferences on the basis of any limited set of actions. In this way, the *nice-of-you* construction captures an aspect of our folk psychology. This understanding of the construction's function predicts that the construction cannot be used to evaluate non-agentive arguments (5a)–(5b) without a personification interpretation as in (5c):

- (5) a. *#³ It was good of the dishwasher to turn itself off at night.*
 b. *# It is lousy of the air-conditioning to break.*
 c. *How bountiful of nature to provide me with this nice sweet mouthful.*
 (COCA95S)

Unless otherwise indicated, it is the speaker who is understood to make the evaluation. However, when the construction is embedded, as in (6), it is the subject argument's judgment that is reported, ("some people's"), not the speaker's:

- (6) *Some have said it was indelicate of me to suggest that our top political priority over the next two years should be to deny President Obama a second term.*
 (COCA10S)

As is true of any utterance, the construction can thus be used as reported speech, conveyed, for example, by a change in posture or by a change in voice quality.

³ We use # to indicate a sentence is infelicitous due to its interpretation in a neutral context (here, without a personification interpretation).

2 A usage-based account is required

2.1 Skewed frequency toward *nice* in American English; *good* in British English

If asked to fill in the missing word in *It's ___ of you to say that*, American English speakers are likely to respond with *nice*. This was confirmed by an on-line survey using Mechanical Turk, in which 24 naïve native English speakers in the US were asked to supply the missing word in the open statement (or *It's ___ of you to go*, or one of 2 other randomly assigned variants). Sixteen participants (67%) suggested the same word, *nice*, while no other adjective was suggested by more than a single participant. The fact that a majority of participants supplied the word *nice* is not predicted by its overall frequency, as there are other adjectives that have higher overall frequency and may appear in the construction (e.g., *good, great, big, right, human, bad, strong, wrong, and old*). Why is it that the majority of Americans responded with the same adjective: *nice*?

A systematic search in the 570-million-word COCA corpus (Davies 2008-) reveals that *nice* accounts for more tokens of the construction than any other adjective ($P(\textit{nice} | \textit{construction}) = 0.182$). Of 782 instances of the construction (for the specific search queries see Appendix I), there were 166 different adjectives, the most frequent of which are represented in Figure 1. The y-axis shows the percentage of all tokens of the construction accounted for by each adjective.⁴ The distribution is Zipfian in that few adjectives account for the majority of the instances, while there are many low frequency examples. Thus the survey results indicate that speakers implicitly recognize that the construction strongly predicts the appearance of *nice*. On the other hand, a search of a British English corpus (the BNC: 100 million words), reveals that the most common adjective in that dialect is *good*: approximately 22% of all examples occurred with *good*, and only 7% with *nice*.

⁴ We focus here on the frequencies of types of items (adjectives), given the construction. As discussed in Herbst (2018, 2020), this value, referred to there as ITECX₁ (“item in construction”) is distinct from the frequency with which a construction occurs, given a particular item (ITECX₂). ITECX-values, unlike collocation analysis (Gries and Stefanowitsch 2004a, b; Stefanowitsch and Gries 2003), keep the two values distinct. These measures were first used by Schmid (2000: 53–55), who called them *reliance* and *attraction* (See discussion between Schmid and Küchenhoff [2013] and Gries [2015]; also Boyd and Goldberg [2009]).

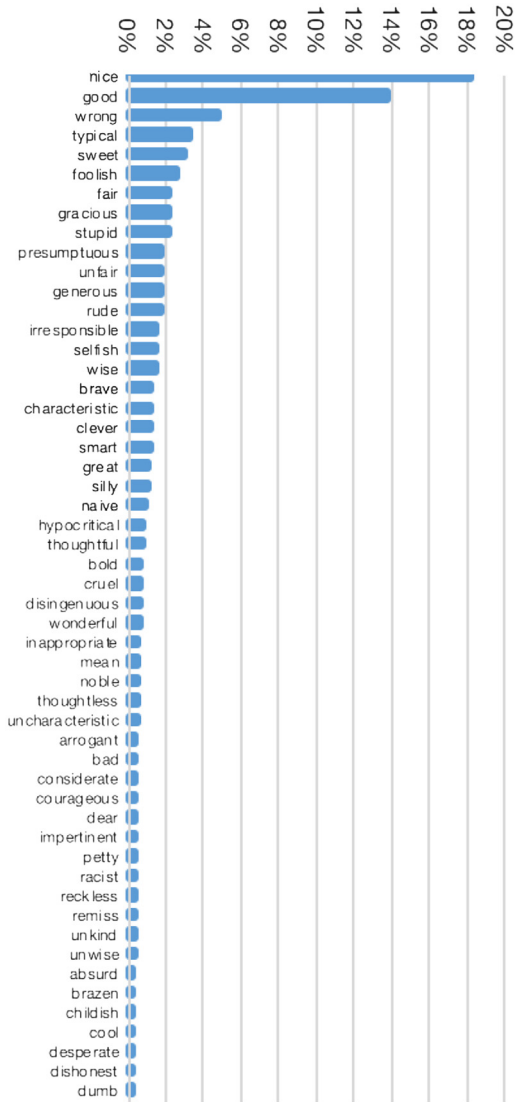


Figure 1: Adjectives occurring in the *nice-of-you* construction in its canonical form, ordered by percentages of tokens (sample from COCA-570).

Ninety-seven out of 166 of the adjectives found in COCA only appeared once (the long tail of the distribution is partially omitted from Figure 1). From the fact that there are so many distinct adjectives occurring only once (“hapaxes”), we can conclude that the construction is used *productively* (Baayen 1989; Baayen and Lieber 1991): speakers use the construction with adjectives that they have not necessarily witnessed being used in the construction previously.

The corpus search further revealed that positive adjectives such as *nice*, *good*, *clever*, *wise* appear in the construction along with a panoply of negative adjectives including *arrogant*, *bad*, *bovine*, *brash*, *cavalier*, *churlish*, *clumsy*, *cowardly*, *crass*, *creepy*, and *cruel*. This confirms that the adjectives used in the construction can express how an action reflects positively or negatively on the agent of the action.

2.2 Diachronic emergence and decline

Diachronic data from the 400 million words Corpus of Historical American English (COHA Davies 2010), shows that the overall token frequency of the *nice-of-you* construction peaked in the early 1900s and has been on the decline since the 1960s. Figure 2 plots the tokens per million words over time, and includes a polynomial trend line that captures the systematic rise and fall of the construction ($R^2 = 0.85$).

The changes in overall frequency of the construction support the need to recognize the pattern as a usage-based construction. That is, it is unlikely that its systematic rise and fall have been caused by general cultural or pragmatic changes in society, at least we know of no reason to believe that people's predilection to judge one another's actions have increased or decreased over time. Moreover, there are no obvious candidates for system-wide changes in the structure of English that would account for the increase and subsequent decrease in usage of the construction. We suspect that some other construction or constructions have varied inversely in frequency with the *nice-of-you* construction, although identifying them is beyond the scope of the current project. But just as individual words or idioms may wax or wane in frequency, depending on what other words or expressions are used in analogous contexts, so too, can the frequencies of constructions (Bybee 2015).

3 Motivating properties of the construction on the basis of its function

We have observed that the *nice-of-you* construction provides a concise way for English speakers to express an evaluative judgment about how an action reflects on

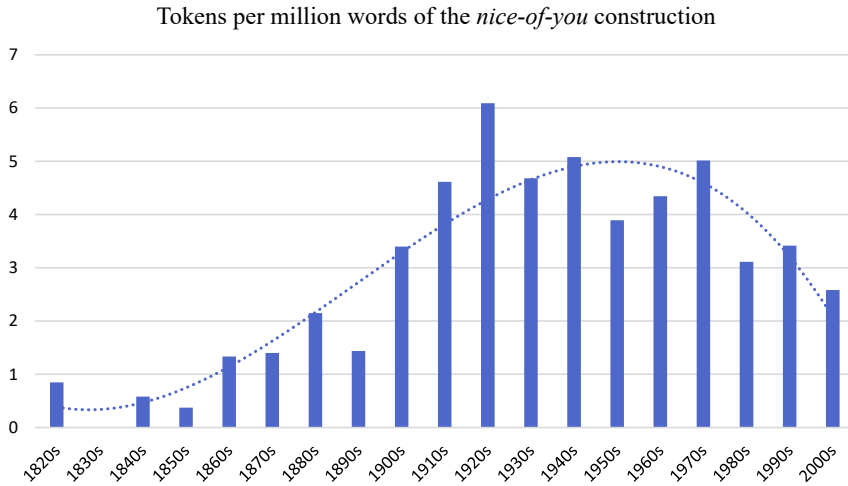


Figure 2: Diachronic change in token frequency of the *nice-of-you* construction (tokens per million words)⁵.

an agent, without committing the speaker to a judgment about the agent in general.⁶ Once its communicative function is recognized, all of the following observations are predicted without requiring stipulation, as detailed below in Sections 3.1–3.6.

- 1) Only certain semantically constrained adjectives may appear in the construction (Herbst 1983; Oshima 2009; Wilkinson 1976).
- 2) The infinitival complement resists being passive (*?? It is good of you to be sent to Oxford*) (Herbst 1983: 118–124).
- 3) The infinitival complement must be construed as an action, not a state (*?? It is good of you to resemble my brother*) (Wilkinson 1976: 169; Herbst 1983: 118–124).
- 4) The action expressed by the infinitival complement is presupposed as carried out by the referent of the PP_{of} (Barker 2002; Herbst 1983: 118–124; Karttunen et al. 2014; Wilkinson 1976).
- 5) The construction is incompatible with future reference: it does not occur with *will* (Herbst 1983: 118–124) or other modals (with the exception of *would*) (*?? It will be good of her not to smoke*).

⁵ Searches were carried out in COHA for “how _j* of * _{nn}* to _v?i*” and “it is|was _j* of * _{nn}* to _v?i*” with four specifications for the NP: “* _{nn}*”, “_{nn}*”, “_{np}*” and “_{pp}”.

⁶ Thus, the construction is ideal for conveying gossip. However, since it is commonly used to evaluate an action of the speaker’s or listener’s rather than a 3rd party, we refrain from labeling it the Gossip Construction.

- 6) The construction resists being embedded under verbs of intention or desire (Barker 2002; Oshima 2009; Wilkinson 1970, 1976) (?? *She wished it would be kind of them to invite her for dinner*).

3.1 Adjectives in the construction are construed to be evaluative

Because the construction must convey a positive or neutral evaluation, certain adjectives, including *big*, *sick*, *rich*, *American*, and *cold* require non-canonical interpretations when used in it. For instance, *big* cannot mean “large,”⁷ since size does not evaluate an agent. Instead, *big* must be interpreted to mean “of generous spirit” (or, if used sarcastically, the opposite), as in (7):

- (7) *And it’s big of him to apologize anyway.*
(COCA06S)

Similarly, *rich* cannot be used to simply mean “wealthy”, but is instead interpreted as “wrong in an ironic way”:

- (8) a. *“Steady, Andy. It’s a bit rich of you to attack others for their preoccupation with sex.”*
(NOW 12-04-13 GB)
b. *“Rich of you to talk about honor killing when you get planted news items issued by military.”*
(NOW 16-07-17P K)

Cold cannot be used to describe a person’s temperature, but must be interpreted in emotional terms:⁸

- (9) *“it was cold of him to then turn around and deny military members payment for days they spend on mandatory weekend drills.”*
(www.sentinelandenterprise.com/news/ci_24795216/ruling-correction-officers-should-get-paid-drills)

When adjectives denoting membership in a group occur in the construction, they refer to attitudes or behavior construed to be typical of that group, which then invites a negative (or positive) evaluation:

⁷ For discussion of this sense of *big* see Hunston and Francis (2000: 105) and Herbst (2009).

⁸ These cases illustrate that the meaning of the construction selects (or triggers) a certain interpretation of the adjectives (e.g., *sick*, *cold*). The same interpretation occurs when these adjectives modify *behavior* or *attitude*: e.g., *sick behavior* or *cold attitude*.

- (10) a. *I know it's so American of me to ask, but what's your budget?*
(COCA03M)
- b. *Although, perhaps it's not very Canadian of us to point that out.*
(NOW 17-06-30 CA)

Thus, adjectives in the *nice-of-you* construction are used to evaluate how an action reflects on the agent of the action. This predicts the observation made by Wilkinson (1976) that adjectives such as *lucky* and *unfortunate* do not appear in the construction: while these adjectives convey positive or negative evaluations, they are not appropriately used to evaluate how an agent's action reflects on the agent, since being lucky or unfortunate is attributable to external circumstances.

Only very rarely do instances fail to require an evaluative judgment. We found exactly 2 out of 166 adjectives from the search of the COCA corpus. These are provided in (11a)–(11b):

- (11) a. *... it was typical of us to keep the back sliders open.*
(COCA98S)
- b. *It's not characteristic of Americans to say, 'Well, this is a problem we can't solve.'*
(COCA95S)

If examples like (11) were common, it would call into question our claim that the construction conveys an evaluative judgment. Recall, however, from Figure 1, that when we consider the overall distribution of adjectives in the construction, there is overwhelming support for the semantic generalization. In fact, even the adjective in (11a), *typical*, can be used to imply an attitude of either disapproval or approval:

- (12) a. *... and it's typical of him to teach by example.*
(COCA13N)
- b. *It was typical of him to choose this pub. God knew, it was vulgar enough.*
(BNC C8T 1195-6)

Thus, extremely rare cases exist which are not strictly evaluative (particularly with *typical* and *characteristic*), but over 95% of instances express a positive or negative judgment. We turn now to other systematic properties of the construction.

3.2 The interpretation of agentivity predicts the rarity of passive infinitive phrases

The fact that the semantic agent in the construction controls the action designated by the infinitive predicts Herbst's (1983) observation that the infinitive

clause cannot be passive, because the subject of a passive normally does not control the action. At the same time, note that if the subject of a passive *can* be construed to have acted, then the passive *is* acceptable. That is, (13a) is interpreted to mean that she *did something bold* in order to get herself elected, and (13b) implies that the speaker *did something stupid* in order to get thrown out of the game.

- (13) a. *It was bold of her to get herself elected.*
 b. *I'd say it was pretty stupid of me to get thrown out of the game with him ...*
 (COCA95F)

That is, there is no syntactic constraint against the infinitive being a passive. Instead, we need only recognize that the construction's semantics require that the understood subject of the infinitive be construed as an agent and passive verb phrases are rarely agentive.

3.3 The interpretation of agentivity predicts the active interpretation of “stative” VPs

Relatedly, the infinitive verb phrase complement must be construed as an action, not a state (? *It is good of you to resemble my brother*). This is also due to the semantics of agentivity and is not a formal restriction, as is clear from the fact that stative verbs (e.g., *be*) may head the infinitive clause, as long as the complement can be construed as being under the agent's active control.

- (14) a. *It was nice of you to be well-behaved all day.*
 b. *It's nice of you to be worried about my health.*
 (COCA07F)

3.4 The action described by the infinitive is presupposed

The *nice-of-you* construction asserts the judgment and presupposes the action expressed by the infinitive (see also Herbst 1983; Karttunen et al. 2014; Oshima 2009; Wilkinson 1976). That is, both the sentence in (15a) and its negation (15b) imply the statement in (16) (Kiparsky and Kiparsky 1971):

- (15) a. *... it seemed presumptuous of her to take the car without asking.*
 (COCA99F)
 b. *It didn't seem presumptuous of her to take the car without asking.*

(16) *She took the car without asking.*

Other infinitive complements of adjectives are not necessarily presupposed (Karttunen et al. 2014, cf. ; Barker 2002). For instance, the positive assertion in (17) does not presuppose (nor entail) the statement in (18):

(17) *He was big enough to ride the roller-coaster.*

(18) *He rode the roller-coaster.*

We discuss the relationship between the *nice-of-you* construction and adjective + infinitive constructions more generally in Section 8.

3.5 *Would but not will*

The evaluation of the agent relative to a presupposed action describes an atemporal state. The tense in the main clause, then, applies to the action, not the evaluation. When the present tense is used, as in (19), the action is interpreted as occurring in the present. When the past tense is used, as in (20), the action is interpreted as having occurred in the past.

(19) *It is sweet of you to help me. → You are currently helping me.*

(20) *It was sweet of you to help me. → You did help me.*

Herbst (1983: 119–120) had observed that the construction does not occur with *will*, as illustrated in (21a):

- (21) a. *?It will be ungracious of me to say that.*
 b. *?It will seem ungracious of me to say that.*

Indeed, we did not find a single instance of the *nice-of-you* construction used with *will* in the entire COCA corpus, nor in the BNC. In fact, the construction does not seem to occur with any modal other than *would* or *might*. This too follows from the construction's semantics: it does not make sense to express a current stative evaluation of a person that is contingent on some action if that action is only scheduled to take place in the future, because the action may not in fact take place. Rather, in this case the evaluation must be stated as hypothetical – the evaluation holds *if* the action is performed (see also Oshima 2009). Therefore, since the main clause tense applies to the action, if the event is conditional, *would* or *might* are used as in (22a)–(22c):

- (22) a. *It would be ungracious of me to simply write off the horse as totally stupid ...*
(COCA95F)
- b. *... it would be selfish of her to keep him from Cindy ...*
(COCA91F)
- c. *... it might be unfair of me to say ...*
(COCA92N)

The idea that the restriction against the use of *will*, *can*, *may*, and *must* follows from the construction's semantics is supported by the fact that evaluations that are contingent on future events *generally* require the use of conditional *would*, *if*, or *might* (23a)–(23d). That is, we cannot express an evaluation about a future event or action using the present tense (24a, b):

- (23) a. *He would be good for visiting his grandparents.*
b. *He would be good to visit his grandparents.*
c. *He will be good if he visits his grandparents.*
d. *He might be good and visit his grandparents.*
- (24) a. *?He is nice in that he will visit his grandparents regularly.*
b. *?He is good because he will visit his grandparents.*

3.6 The “embedding puzzle” and a caveat follow from the nature of evaluative judgments

Wilkinson (1970) had observed an “embedding puzzle”, namely that the construction resists being embedded under predicates of intention or desire (see also Barker 2002; Oshima 2009).⁹

- (25) a. *??I expect it to be nice of John to go.*
b. *??I hope it to be nice of John to go.*
c. *??I want it to be nice of John to go.*

In fact, this constraint *as well as* a certain caveat to it, follows from the semantics we have posited for the construction.¹⁰ Recall that the *nice-of-you* construction

⁹ Wilkinson (1970) had characterized this class of verbs as control verbs, but the relevant class of verbs includes the “raising” verb “expect” as well.

¹⁰ Oshima (2009: 372) likewise suggests that the embeddability restriction follows from the semantics of the construction, but in a different way (see section 7.2).

asserts a subjective judgment made by the speaker (or subject argument). Because evaluations are understood to arise spontaneously and without regard to our intentions or desires, it does not make sense for a person to intend or desire to make a subjective evaluation. This explanation predicts a certain caveat to the “embedding puzzle”. First, notice that the construction *can* readily be embedded under verbs of cognition, since we can naturally cogitate about subjective evaluations:¹¹

(26) ... *he honestly believes that it is churlish of us not to regard him as an exception.*
(COCA12M)

(27) ... *he doesn't seem to think it was wrong of him to ensure that the least well off took a hit.*
(COCA15M)

In (26–27), the subjective judgment is understood to be that of the higher clause's subject argument. When the evaluation is made by someone other than the speaker, it is possible to embed the complex clause under verbs of intention, desire or command, because it *does* make sense for the speaker to intend, hope, or want *someone else* to form a certain judgment.

- (28) a. *I intended for him to believe that it was proper of us not to regard him as an exception.*
b. *I hope he honestly believes that it is churlish of us not to regard him as an exception.*
c. *I want her to find it nice of him to laugh.*

Tellingly, it is just as difficult to command someone else to form a subjective judgment as it is to command oneself to form one, and in fact, the construction resists being embedded under command verbs even when it is further embedded:

(29) *?I demand he honestly believe that it was proper of us not to regard him as an exception.*

Additional support for explaining the “embedding puzzle” by appeal to the construction's semantics comes from the following examples in which the *nice-of-you* construction is directly embedded under *hope*, despite the fact that *hope* is used as a verb of desire:

¹¹ See also the discussion of the *magic pill*-example by Martin (2015).

- (30) *I hope it's not presumptuous of me to call you my partner in this tangle of thorns.*
(COCA11M)

In (30), the speaker implicitly adopts the listener's perspective. That is, (30) is used to mean "I hope *you don't think* it is presumptuous of me." To summarize, by positing the *nice-of-you* construction with a quite specific function rooted in our folk psychology, we simultaneously capture what is unusual about the construction and we avoid unnecessary stipulation.

Aside from the usage-based facts related to frequencies of occurrence, we are left with only two non-predictable constraints on the general form and interpretation of the construction: a) the *agent* is evaluated relative to their action, and as discussed immediately below, b) the *agent* argument is expressed in a prepositional phrase headed by *of*. Beyond that, other general properties of the construction follow from the construction's semantics and require no stipulation.

4 Formal properties of the construction

After outlining the functional properties of the *nice-of-you* construction, we now turn to aspects of its formal characterization. The constructionist approach allows us to motivate certain formal properties of the construction by situating the construction within a rich network of other related constructions of English. There remains one formal aspect of the pattern that does not follow from independent facts. In particular, while English allows *agents* to be expressed in several different ways, only the *nice-of-you* construction expresses an *agent* argument in a prepositional phrase headed by *of* (Herbst 1983; Oshima 2009). That is, speakers must learn that this aspect of the construction is a possible way to express an *agent*.

Oshima (2009) had argued for a complex adjective constituent ([A [of NP]]), as represented in Figure 3 on the basis the examples in (31):

- (31) a. How stupid of him was it to put all our oil under Iran?
(Oshima 2009: 368)
- b. *I have been thinking about my last diary and how stupid of me it was to mail it from China.*
(Oshima 2009: 368)

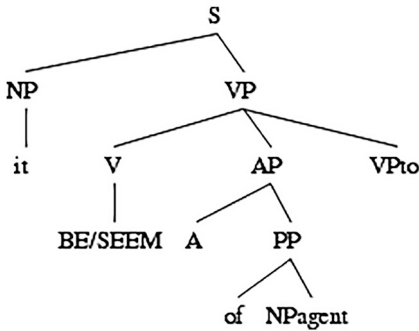


Figure 3: Possible constituent structure for the *nice-of-you* construction (Oshima 2009).

Relevantly similar attested examples are provided in (32) and (33)

- (32) *I was just saying how nice of him it was to offer us his house for a couple of weeks.*
(NOW)
- (33) *I'm almost in awe of the little girl dream I had and realized how bold of me it was.*
(NOW-NATIONALPOST)

At the same time, the structure in Figure 3 would seem to predict that the attested sentences in (34) should not occur, since these cases treat the AP as a constituent independently of the PP_{of}

- (34) a. *I thought how clever it was of him to stay silent*
(COCA93)
- b. *I told her how thoughtful it was of her to put my initials up in her entry*
(COCA06M)

The examples in (34) argue in favor of a flatter structure as in Figure 4, although paradoxically, this structure disallows Oshima's examples in (31), since Figure 4 does not contain a complex adjective constituent.

We take these seemingly contradictory facts to imply that speakers can flexibly combine the adjective and prepositional phrase into a constituent ([A [of NP]]) as in (32)–(33), but they do not necessarily do so (to allow for (34)).

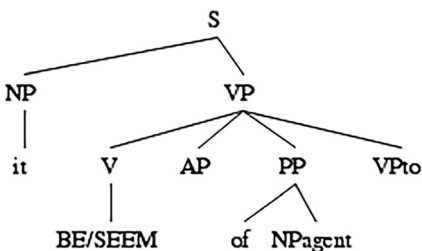


Figure 4: Alternative constituent analysis of the *nice-of-you* construction.

5 Representing the usage-based construction

The infinitive complement of the *nice-of-you* construction need not be expressed as long as it receives a definite interpretation. That is, the relevant action must be identifiable or inferable from the context. When the action is not explicitly expressed, the sentence's subject can be interpreted as a discourse anaphor, in which case deictic *that* can be used as subject (35c).

- (35) a. *It was wrong of me.*
(COCA99F)
- b. *No, it's sweet of you.*
(COCA98F)
- c. *That's very nice of you.*
(COCA13F)

The contextual optionality of the verb-phrase is a property of the construction, and it does not change the construction's overall interpretation. Based on the models developed for verbal argument structure constructions (Goldberg 1995, 2006, 2014) and adjective valency (Herbst 1983; Herbst et al. 2004), we can capture this, as well as the construction's other formal and functional properties, as in Figure 5 (cf. Herbst 2020). The analysis of the *nice-of-you* construction specifies that the ACTION-argument fills a semantic slot that is contextually determined if not overtly expressed, as indicated by the square brackets, following Fillmore (1986).¹²

6 Construction fragments

The *nice-of-you* construction provides an opportunity to discuss the idea of *constructional fragments*, which allow listeners to access the interpretation of a longer construction without the speaker needing to express the entire construction. In conversations, fragments are very common (Morgan 1973). In the case of the *nice-of-you* construction, we identify two distinct fragments which have become at least partially conventionalized as fragments, as they are associated with quite specific functions, which are sub-instances of the more general function of the *nice-of-you* construction.

In Figure 5, the construction is characterized as a full clause that includes a subject, copular verb, AP, PP_{of}, and infinitive. We already observed that the infinitive clause is optional if the action is recoverable in context. In addition, there exist certain expressions such as those in (36) and (37) which do not include a main

¹² Contextually optional slots in valency theory correspond to definite null instantiation as outlined by Fillmore (2007).

The NICE-OF-YOU construction				
Semantics: EVALUATION of how an ACTION reflects on its AGENT				
		EVALUATION	AGENT	ACTION
SUBJ	V	AdjP	PP(of)	to-infinitive
It	BE	nice		
this	would	good		
that	might	stupid wrong sweet typical		
		silly clever foolish thoughtful rude		
		generous fair gracious presumptuous brave		
		unfair wise selfish irresponsible smart		
		characteristic great noble cruel naive		
		hypocritical thoughtless wonderful		
		etc		

Figure 5: The form and meaning of the *nice-of-you* construction. The construction conveys that an action reflects positively or negatively upon the *agent* of the action. Square brackets indicate the possibility of being unexpressed with a definite interpretation. Frequency range is indicated by font size and color: < 0.5% | < 5% | <17.5% | > 17.5% | of the adjectives in this cx in COCA.

clause subject or verb, but otherwise appear to be instances of the *nice-of-you* construction, as they evoke the same constructional interpretation.

(36) *Good of you to come, even if you are late.*
(COCA08F)

(37) *Again, maybe very shallow of me, but I wasn't really thinking about my parents' patterns.*
(COCA14S)

Fragments of the construction are not uncommon. In COCA-570, in addition to the 782 canonical uses described earlier, we found 329 instances of fragments with an infinitive and 160 without (see Appendices II–IV) (1271 instances of the construction in total). The most commonly used adjectives used with fragments display a somewhat different distribution than those appearing in the full construction, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Adjectives that occur most frequently in two different fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction (based on data from COCA-570; search queries provided in Appendices II and III).

	Canonical		Fragment 1		Fragment 2	
	It BE [of NP] VP _{to}	VP _{to}	AP [of NP] VP _{to}	VP _{to}	AP [of NP]	
5 most frequent adjectives	nice	18.16%	good	50.52%	stupid	40.00%
	good	13.68%	nice	36.08%	nice	15.00%
	wrong	4.73%	stupid	3.09%	silly	15.00%
	typical	3.20%	silly	2.58%	clever	5.00%
	weat	2.56%	careless	0.52%	cruel	5.00%

Table 1 hints at functional differences between the two fragment types. In fact, their interpretations tend to be quite specific. The longer fragment in the middle panel of Table 1 (AP [of NP] VP_{to}) is strongly skewed toward one particular type of speech act: a greeting. Roughly 86% of these longer fragments in COCA included the pronoun *you*, and of these, at least half expressed the same basic message, namely: *Good/nice of you to* “be with us/join us/come.” These cases represent a family of “prefabricated” greetings, often used in more formal settings, such as TV or radio programs:

(38) *Good of you to join us today.*
(COCA03S)

(39) *Nice of you to be with us today.*
(COCA07S)

The shorter fragment on the right panel of Table 1 (AP [of NP]) is rarer in the COCA corpus, but its distribution is also skewed, in a different way: more than half of its instances are: *Stupid/silly of me*, and it tends to be used by speakers to criticize themselves.

Certain aspects of the distribution of the construction, including its fragments, follow from politeness considerations, which influence much of human behavior including language use. In particular, whether the adjective is positive or negative correlates strongly with whether the judgment is directed at oneself or at an addressee, allowing for the caveat that it is not easy to count how many tokens are *intended* to be positive or negative since, as with all language, the construction can be used sarcastically as in the examples below:

(40) *Nice of him to volunteer her aunt, who had already done so much for her.*
(COCA08F)

(41) *“I know I made some mistakes”, he allowed. Generous of him.*
(COCA03F)

Nonetheless, if we compare the most frequent adjectives occurring with first person pronouns (*me, us*) vs. second person pronoun (*you*) in fragments or in the full construction, we find a very clear reflection of the approbation maxim (“Maximize praise of *others*”) and the modesty maxim (“Maximize dispraise of self”) of Leech’s (1983: 132) politeness principle, as indicated in Table 2. When talking about someone who is not present (3rd person) we find a mixture of positive and negative adjectives.

To summarize, the two fragments of the full construction are strongly skewed toward particular interpretations. The longer fragment is conventionally used as a greeting directed at the addressee (*good/nice of you to <be here, join us, come>*). The

Table 2: Adjectives which are frequently used in the canonical version and in the short fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction (based on COCA 570, declarative present and past tense clauses only).

	canonical construction	short fragments
1st person	<i>wrong, stupid, typical, foolish, thoughtless</i>	<i>stupid, silly, presumptuous, careless, thoughtless, clumsy</i>
2nd person	<i>good, nice, gracious, sweet, thoughtful, clever</i>	<i>nice, sweet, thoughtful, clever, generous</i>
3rd person pronoun or noun	<i>nice, wrong, typical, sweet, good, characteristic, great, irresponsible</i>	<i>nice, stupid, thoughtful, clever, generous, typical</i>

shorter fragment is most commonly used to be self-critical (e.g., *silly/stupid of me*). While it would be possible to underspecify the syntactic properties of the *nice-of-you* construction to allow the subject and verb to be omitted – including parentheses in the canonical construction’s representation – doing so would not allow us to account for the circumscribed range of discourse-pragmatic meanings expressed by the sentence fragments: one being a greeting and the other to convey

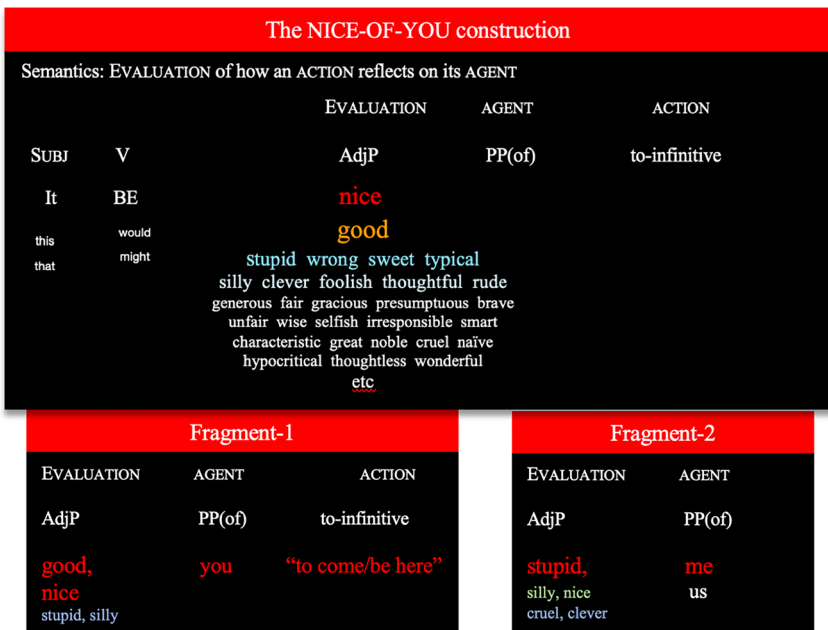


Figure 6: *Nice-of-you* construction along with two conventional fragments which are more limited.

self-criticism. Therefore, we capture the fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction with distinct but related, overlapping constructions of their own, as in in Figure 6.

7 Previous work

7.1 Wilkinson (1976)

Wilkinson (1976) had primarily focused on a construction in which certain adverbs (*enough, so, too*) license a VP complement as in (42):

- (42) *Sarah was too sick to eat.*
(Wilkinson 1976: 155)

From a data-rich but transformational perspective, he also observed that certain adjectives, which he dubbed “W” and “L” classes had overlapping but distinguishable distributions. W-class adjectives included *wise, smart, stupid* and *rude* and L-class adjectives included *lucky* and *fortunate*. Wilkinson observed that both classes could occur in several constructions including the *enough* + VP construction as in (43) and other constructions in (44) and (45):

- (43) *Sarah was lucky/wise enough to go.*

- (44) *Wisely/Luckily, John left early.*

- (45) *John was wise/lucky to leave early.*

He further noted that only the W-class adjectives can appear in what we are referring to as the *nice-of-you* construction. He attributed this to the idea that L-adjectives are predicated of propositions, while W-adjectives were said to be predicated of actions (Wilkinson 1976: 165). More specifically he offered the following paraphrase for the *nice-of-you* expression in (46):

- (46) *It was wise of John to leave early.* =
John left early and John’s act of leaving early was wise.

That is, the adjective in the *nice-of-you* construction was said to modify the agent’s action, not the agent. However, as we have seen, the modifier necessarily evaluates the agent, in a positive or negative way.¹³ Note that actions, but not people, for

¹³ See Wilkinson’s (1976: 170) analysis of adjectives such as *smart* in sentences such as *It was smart of Mary to come*: “Here they do not refer to the innate intellectual capacities of the persons ... but rather characterize a particular act as advantageous or disadvantageous and therefore something an intelligent (or stupid) person would do.”

example, can be described as overdue or illegal, and as predicted on the present account, the *nice-of-you* construction does not permit these modifiers:

- (47) a. *John finished the book and John's act of finishing the book was overdue.*
 b. *??It was overdue of John to finish the book.*
- (48) a. *John left early and John's act of leaving early was illegal.*
 b. *??It was illegal of John to leave early.*

The following section reviews Oshima's (2009) proposal, which, like the present account, argues that a construction is required.

7.2 Oshima (2009)'s embedded conditional hypothesis

Oshima (2009) analyzed the *nice-of-you* construction in relation to the other two constructions in (49): With Wilkinson (1970, 1976; also Jackendoff 1972; Tenny 2000), Oshima treats all three constructions as roughly synonymous. He describes the adjectives occurring in them as conveying “a mental/behavioral propensity of a sentient individual” (Oshima 2009: 365). However, the formal patterns in (49a) and (49b) are open to a much wider range of interpretations than the *nice-of-you* construction (49c). In the former two constructions, the event expressed by the infinitive clause need not be an action, and no sentient being is required (*it rained*). As Oshima and others acknowledge, the constructions in (49a) and (49b) allow a much wider range of adjectives (*lucky/happy/sad*); in fact, the verb can also express a state (*to be tall*).

- (49) a. *Wisely, John left early.* (so-adv-cxn)
 b. *John was wise to leave early.* (adj-to-inf-cxn)
 c. *It was wise of John to leave early.* (adj-of-np-cxn) (Oshima 2009: 363)
- (50) a. *< Luckily/Happily/Sadly > < John left early/It rained/John was tall >*
 b. *John was < lucky/happy/sad > < to leave early/to be tall >.*

At the same time, and foreshadowing the current proposal, Oshima (2009) argues that a conventional construction is required to specify the *nice-of-you* pattern's unique properties, including its semantics. For the utterance in (51a), he suggests the semantic representation in (51b):

- (51) a. *It was wise of John to leave early =*
 b. $\text{leave-early}(\text{john}) \wedge \text{e}[\text{leave-early}(\text{john}) \rightarrow \text{p}(\text{transitorily}(\text{wise}))(\text{john})]$
 (Oshima 2009: 372)

(51b) is intended to be interpreted roughly as, “John left early and one must conclude (if John left early, then John was transitorily wise).” The representation captures the fact that the action is generally presupposed. The representation in (51b) also explicitly captures the fact that the evaluation is transitory (it is in relation to the action).

Yet the notation in (51b) does not capture the fact that the evaluation must be positive or negative. Instead it seems to permit any adjective with a transitory interpretation yet many transitory adjectives are unacceptable in the *nice-of-you* construction (e.g., (52a)–(52c)):

- (52) a. ??It was happy of John to leave early.
 b. ??It was speedy of John to leave early.
 c. ??It was angry of John to leave early.

Moreover, the representation in (51b) does not capture the fact that the evaluation must concern an *agent*, as inanimates may only appear in the PP_{of} phrase if they receive a personified interpretation (recall example in (5c)).

8 A network of constructions

To summarize, our analysis benefits from the insights from earlier proposals. However, by immediately seeking generalizations across distinct formal patterns, the unique properties of the *nice-of-you* construction were obscured. In contrast, Herbst (1983) and Herbst et al. (2004) had treated <[it] *adj of NP to INF*> as a *valency pattern* associated with individual adjectives which allowed him to observe several of the distributional properties reviewed above. This account, however, had not provided an explicit discussion of the generalized meaning associated with the pattern.¹⁴

We advocate an approach that considers each surface pattern, first on its own terms. Only then do we attempt to situate the formal pattern within a network of related patterns (Goldberg 2002). Accordingly, the following section positions the *nice-of-you* construction within a larger network of constructions, as we recognize our knowledge of language forms a complex network of constructions: a construct-i-con. That is, the *nice-of-you* construction is not an isolated idiom, but is instead

¹⁴ Herbst (1983) accounted for semantic aspects of the pattern in terms of the semantic roles of the complements and assigned the adjectives occurring in each different valency pattern to one or more semantic groups. For a list of the 76 adjectives which the *Valency Dictionary of English* identifies as occurring in [it] *adj of NP to INF* see also the Erlangen Valency Patternbank (www.fau.patternbank.de) lists.

part of a richly inter-connected partially overlapping network of constructions. Our construct-i-con, just like the familiar lexicon, is not a list but a network (Diessel 2019; Langacker 1987). Certain constructions are compared with the *nice-of-you* construction in the following subsections.

8.1 *Hard-for* construction

The *nice-of-you* construction is related formally to another construction which similarly allows adjectives to occur with a prepositional phrase, infinitival complement, and impersonal subject (*it*). The most obvious formal difference is that the PP is headed by *for* and is only optionally expressed: IT [Vcop (PPfor) INF].

- (53) a. *But, clearly, it's important for us to be able to keep the roads open and clear*
(COCA04S)
- b. *So has it been nice for you to get all this praise?*
(COCA99S)
- c. *It has also been shown that it is pleasant for children to copy words or rules for different activities ...*
(COCA10A)

We refer to this as the *hard-for* construction, because *hard* is the most frequently occurring adjective in it, accounting for 28% of the tokens in COCA. The 10 of the most frequently used adjectives in the construction are provided in Table 3.

The adjectives that can occur in the *hard-for* construction are much broader than those available for the *nice-of-you* construction; of the adjectives in Table 3, only *good* and perhaps *okay* may appear in the latter. Correspondingly, unlike the

Table 3: Top 10 most frequent adjectives in the *hard-for* construction (based on COCA 2015 to 2017).

<i>hard(er)</i>	238	28.17%
<i>important</i>	116	13.73%
<i>easy</i>	80	9.47%
<i>difficult</i>	49	5.80%
<i>good/better/best</i>	40	4.73%
<i>impossible</i>	39	4.62%
<i>okay</i>	27	3.20%
<i>possible</i>	26	3.08%
<i>necessary</i>	14	1.66%
<i>tough</i>	12	1.42%

nice-of-you construction, the *hard-for* construction does not require an agentive interpretation nor is it necessarily evaluative.

- (54) a. ... *it is rare for it to occur this late.*
(COCA 1990 ACAD)
- b. ... *it was impossible for it to be both simultaneously technically correct but still in need of revision*
(COCA04A)

The PP_{for} and the infinitive can be treated as a single constituent (55).

- (55) a. *For it to make millions would be swell...*
(COCA90N)
- b. *For him to say I was the source is categorically untrue.*
(COCA08M)

In this case, the PP_{for} phrase expresses the subject of the infinitive and adds no semantic requirements of its own, as is evident in (56) which includes a “dummy” *it*:

- (56) a. ... *it was impossible for it to happen.*
(COCA97S)
- b. *For it to happen would be impossible.*

At the same time, when no PP_{for} is expressed and no definite interpretation is recoverable from the context, the semantic subject is interpreted as indefinite, generic and human (“people in general”). Since our main interest lies in distinguishing the *nice-of-you* construction from other adjective constructions, we do not go into the question of whether the pattern with PP_{for} should be subsumed under a single construction or whether it would be more appropriate to distinguish two different constructions and allow for overlap between them. However, it is clear that the *nice-of-you* construction must be distinguished, due to its unique formal and semantic properties.

8.2 General AP + infinitive (GAI) construction

Several previous analyses considered the *nice-of-you* construction together with a “General Adjective + Infinitive” (GAI) construction in which the subject argument is the logical subject of the infinitive, as in (57a), which can, in limited cases, serve as a paraphrase of a *nice-of-you* example as in (57b):¹⁵

¹⁵ Karttunen et al. (2014: Note 1) explicitly differentiate the GAI construction from the *nice-of-you* construction and focus on the former.

- (57) a. *But Hitchens is wrong to make fun of that opening ...*
(COCA15M)
b. *≈ It was wrong of Hitchens to make fun of that opening.*

The GAI construction shares with *nice-of-you* and the *hard-for* constructions an adjective phrase that is interpreted in a relative way with respect to the predicate expressed by the infinitive (recall [4] from Barker 2002). For this reason, these constructions can be said to partially overlap and motivate one another. However, unlike either the *nice-of-you* or *hard-for* constructions, the GAI construction is not impersonal.

Moreover, Karttunen et al. (2014: note 1) differentiates the GAI construction from the *nice-of-you* construction by noting that it is not as securely factive (see also Herbst 1983). They document that certain speakers use and accept negative sentences such as (58) to imply the negation of the infinitive. In fact, the lack of presupposition is particularly salient when *enough* is introduced, as in (58):

- (58) *Tom was not foolish [enough] to wear a clown costume to the interview.*
(Karttunen et al. 2014: 10)

In other ways, the GAI construction patterns more like the *hard-for* construction than the *nice-of-you* construction. Like the *hard-for* construction, the GAI construction does not require that the logical subject be intentional or even animate:

- (59) *The \$6 billion package was ready to be signed ...*
(COCA95N)

Also unlike the *nice-of-you* construction, the GAI construction does not require the infinitive to designate an action. Instead, it can convey a stative predicate as in (60):

- (60) *I'm happy to know my patients are in safe hands ...*
(COCA14N)

Adjectives in GAI may receive the evaluative interpretation required by the *nice-of-you* construction, but they are not required to. For example, as expected, when *responsible* is used in the *nice-of-you* construction it must be interpreted as an evaluation how the action reflects on the agent (61):

- (61) *... it is very responsible of you to explain it's not about timing ...*
(COCA09S)

In the GAI construction, however, *responsible* may alternatively be interpreted in a more neutral way as in (62).

- (62) *Assign groups of three, where students will be responsible to investigate, conduct research, and come up with solutions that lead to a healthier environment.*
(COCA16A)

In fact, the GAI, like the *hard-for* construction, allows a much broader range of adjectives than the *nice-of-you* construction, including *able*, *ready*, *willing*, *surprised*, *glad*, and *happy*. Therefore, even though certain expressions may serve as paraphrases in certain limited contexts, the *nice-of-you* construction is best analyzed on its own terms, with reference to other constructions that are formally and semantically related but clearly distinct.

8.3 *Important-that* construction

Another construction that speakers can use to assess or evaluate an action is the impersonal clause construction illustrated in (63)–(64):

(63) *Well, it's nice that things are changing.*
(COCA97S)

(64) *I think it's nice that you and Peter have each other.*
(COCA09F)

Again, while the impersonal *that*-construction can sometimes serve as a paraphrase for instances of the *nice-of-you*-construction, its meaning is quite different from that of the *nice-of-you*-construction: as the examples in (65) show, the subject of the *that*-clause need not be an *agent*, and the evaluation expressed by the construction refers to the entire proposition expressed by the *that*-clause.

- (65) a. *It's well-known that vitamin D is important for bone health.*
(COCA16M)
- b. *Is it possible that all of these events and reports are completely unrelated and nothing more than an entirely unhappy coincidence?*
(COCA17N)

The difference in meaning between the impersonal pattern with *that*-clause and the *nice-of-you* construction is also reflected in the adjectives that appear in the two patterns. A search of the most frequent adjectives appearing in a subset of COCA between 2015 and 2017 produced the items listed in Table 4:¹⁶

¹⁶ However, we would not necessarily claim that all occurrences of the pattern *it* + BE + adjective + *that*-clause can be subsumed under one construction. For differences with respect to negation (*it is not clear that/whether ...*) etc. see Herbst (1983). Search query for COCA 2015–2017: “it BE _j* that _pp*”.

Table 4: 10 most frequent adjectives in the *it is important that* construction (based on COCA 2015–2017).

<i>important</i>	159	11.35%
<i>clear</i>	146	10.42%
<i>true</i>	115	8.21%
<i>possible</i>	87	6.21%
<i>good/better/best</i>	72	5.14%
<i>obvious</i>	59	4.21%
<i>interesting</i>	54	3.85%
<i>imperative</i>	42	3.00%
<i>great</i>	39	2.78%
<i>likely</i>	36	2.57%

Only a few of these also occur in the *nice-of-you* construction, and when they do they express a different sort of assessment, as is clear in the difference between (66a) and (66b):¹⁷

- (66) a. ... *it's good that you called. I needed to talk to you.*
(COCA01F)
- b. *So good of you to call! How are you today?*
(COCA05F)

To summarize, the comparison of the *nice-of-you* construction with other impersonal adjective constructions confirms that the formal differences correspond to different interpretations. Therefore, the *nice-of-you* construction must be distinguished as a unique construction in English.

9 Conclusion

We have argued that a distinct usage-based *nice-of-you* construction is required to account for English speakers' knowledge of the pattern's interpretation, distribution, and formal properties. The construction's function serves an ecological niche that concisely conveys that a particular action reflects well or poorly on an agent. From this observation alone we can predict that only certain semantically constrained adjectives may appear in the construction; that the infinitival complement is rarely passive and must be construed as an action; that the complement

¹⁷ *Good* (rank 2; ITECX1: 13.69%), *great* (ITECX1: 1.02%) and *unfortunate* (ITECX1: 0.13%) in our data for the canonical *nice-of-you* construction (COCA-570). Search query in COCA 2015–2017: “it BE _j* for _pp* to _v?I*”.

is presupposed or hypothetical; that the construction neither combines with predicates of intention or desire nor with modal verbs with the exception of *would*. It thus cannot be used to refer to actions in the future, unless their hypothetical character is made explicit. That is, the fact that the formal pattern conveys semantic properties supports the constructionist approach which allows syntactic patterns to be meaningful.¹⁸

The usage-based aspect of the current account allows us to predict that speakers are implicitly aware of the most commonly used adjectives in the construction (*nice* for American English speakers; *good* for British English speakers). The usage-based approach also allows for a recognition that the frequencies of constructions, like the frequencies of words and idioms, can systematically wax and wane. By focusing on the nuances of this singular construction, we were able to recognize particular conventional constructional fragments which evoke more narrow interpretations of the construction. More generally, by recognizing that all constructions form an interrelated network of knowledge, we are able to relate the construction to other constructions without overlooking each construction's unique properties.

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Appendix I: COCA-570 searches for the canonical form of the *nice-of-you* construction

search command	hits	rejected	results
it BE _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	346	0	346
it BE _j* of _n* to _v?!*	43	-2	41
it BE _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	60	-14	46
it BE * _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	188	-1	187
it BE * _j* of _n* to _v?!*	19	-4	15
it BE * _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	51	-30	21
it * * BE _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	83	-1	82
it * BE _j* of _n* to _v?!*	3	0	3
it * BE _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	5	-1	4
it * have been _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	9	0	9
it * have been _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0

¹⁸ See also Goldberg (2011), Herbst (2014) and Stefanowitsch (2011).

(continued)

search command	hits	rejected	results
it * have been _j* of * _n* to	1	0	1
it * have been * _j* of _pp* to	1	0	1
it * have been * _j* of _n* to	0	0	0
it * have been * _j* of * _n*	2	-2	0
BE it _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	18	0	18
BE it _j* of _n* to _v?!*	2	0	2
BE it _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
would it be _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	4	0	4
would it be _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
would it be _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
it been _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	0	0	0
it been _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
it been _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
BE it * _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	1	0	1
BE it * _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
BE it * _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	1	-1	0
would it be * _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	1	0	1
would it be * _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
would it be * _j* of * _n* to	0	0	0
it been * _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	0	0	0
it been * _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
it been * _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
	838	-56	782

Appendix II: COCA-570 searches for fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction with an infinitival complement and premodifying *how*

search command	hits	rejected	results
how _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	102	0	102
how _j* of _n* to _v?!*	13	0	13
how _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	13	-1	12
how * _j* of _pp* to _v?!*	7	0	7
how * _j* of _n* to _v?!*	0	0	0
how * _j* of * _n* to _v?!*	1	0	1
	136	-1	135

Appendix III: COCA-570 searches for fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction with premodifying *how* without infinitive

search command	hits	rejected	results
_y how _j* of _pp* _y*	116	-2	114
_y how _j* of _n* _y*	9	-5	4
_y how _j* of * _n* _y*	15	-12	3
_y how * _j* of _pp* _y*	18	0	18
_y how * _j* of _n* _y*	0	0	0
_y how * _j* of * _n* _y*	1	0	1
	159	-19	0

Appendix IV: COCA-570 searches for fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction with an infinitival complement excluding introductory *how*

search command	hits	rejected	results
_y* _j* of _pp* to _v?i*	188	0	188
_y* _j* of _n* to _v?i*	17	-15	2
_y* _j* of * _n* to _v?i*	47	-43	4
	252	-58	194

Appendix V: COCA-570 searches for fragments of the *nice-of-you* construction with no infinitival complement excluding introductory *how*

search command	hits	rejected	results
. _j of _pp* _y*	68	-48	20
. _j of _n* _y*	251	-251	0
. _j of * _n* _y*	306	-306	0
	625	-605	20

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