

THE COMPLEMENTATION OF PERCEPTION VERBS BY FINITE CLAUSES

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ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER DEALS WITH THE COMPLEMENTATION OF PERCEPTION VERBS BY FINITE CLAUSES. OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO PRESENT CERTAIN ASPECTS OF ONE OF THE MOST COMMON COMPLEMENTS OF ENGLISH PERCEPTION VERBS. IT WILL BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE FORM OF COMPLEMENTS IS CONSTRAINED BY A SEMANTIC-TYPE COMBINATION (ENTITY, PROCESS, FACT, EVENTUALITY, ETC.) OF THE REFERENT THEY DENOTE AND THE SEMANTICS OF VERBS WHICH GOVERN THEM. FURTHERMORE, THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH, ROMANIAN AND FRENCH SHOWS A RATHER STRIKING CONVERGENCE OF THE PHENOMENA IN THESE LANGUAGES, BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES WE SHALL ALSO ATTEMPT TO HIGHLIGHT.

KEY WORDS: PERCEPTION VERBS, COMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS, FINITE CLAUSES.

The complementation by finite clauses is the pattern we shall analyse within our paper. English, Romanian and French present similarities as to this type of complementation. In each of these languages, the finite clause consists of a noun phrase occupying the position of the subject and a finite verb, either expressing time or following a modal.

On the basis of their communicative function, finite clauses may be divided into declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory. On the basis of their function within the main clause, finite clauses may be divided into nominal, adverbial and relative. Three types of finite clauses are relevant for perception verbs: declarative, interrogative and adverbial clauses.

Declarative finite clauses are also called *that-clauses* because they are usually introduced by the complementizer *that*. In English, *that* is optional while in the romance languages it is obligatory. Declarative finite clauses are introduced only by passive verbs as exemplified below:

- (1) a. Engl. We *saw* that Mary won the race.
 Ro. Am *văzut* că Maria a câștigat cursa.
 Fr. Nous avons *vu* que Marie a gagné la course.
- b. Engl. We heard that Mary won the race.
 Ro. Am *auzit* că Maria a câștigat cursa.
 Fr. Nous avons *entendu* que Marie a gagné la course.
- c. Engl. She *felt* that somebody touched her.
 Ro. A *simțit* că cineva a atins-o.

- Fr. Elle *a senti* que quelqu'un l'a touchée.
d. Engl. The man *tasted* that there was garlic in the food.
Ro. Omul *a simțit* că mâncarea are gust de usturoi.
Fr: L'homme *a senti* que la nourriture a goût d'aille.
e. Engl. The girl *smelled* that the cake was burning in the oven.
Ro. Fata *a simțit* că prăjitura ardea în cuptor.
Fr. La fille a senti que le gâteau brûlait dans le four. [1]

With regard to the interrogative finite clauses, they can also be found in all three languages under investigation. In English, they are either introduced by a *wh-word* or preceded by the conjunction *if* while in the Romance languages, they are introduced by *dacă/si* or a relative pronoun.

They may be built both with active and passive perception verbs:

- (2) a. Eng. They *looked at* what the children drew.
Ro. S-au uitat la ce au desenat copii.
Fr. Ils *ont regardé* ce que les enfants ont dessiné.
b. Eng. We *heard* what Mary had done.
Ro. Am auzit ce a făcut Maria.
Fr. Nous avons *entendu* ce que Marie a fait.
c. Eng. The mother *touched* what they brought her.
Ro. Mama *a atins* ceea ce i-au adus.
Fr. La mère *a touché* ce qu'ils ont lui amené.
d. Eng. The man *tasted* what the cook gave him.
Ro. Omul *a gustat* ceea ce i-a dat bucătarul.
Fr: L'homme *a goûté* ce que le cuisinier lui a donné.
e. Eng. The girl *smelled* if there was smoke in the room
Ro. Fata *a mirosit* dacă era fum în cameră.
Fr. La fille a senti s'il y avait de la fumée dans la chambre.

The last type of finite clause is the adverbial clause represented by adverbial clauses of unreal comparison which can occur in the three languages but not in the case of all sensory modalities. They are introduced by '*as if, as though, like*' in English, '*comme si*' in French, and the phrasal conjunction '*de parcă, ca și cum*' in Romanian.

The adverbial clauses are only possible with copulative verbs:

- (3) a. Eng. It looked as if she had won the race.
Ro. Arăta de parcă ar fi caștigat cursa.
Fr. -
b. Engl. It sounded as though somebody entered the room.
Ro. A sunat ca și cum cineva ar fi intrat în cameră.
Fr. Ca a sonné comme si quelqu'un est entré dans la chambre.
c. Engl. It *felt* as if somebody threw a bucket of cold water over me.
Ro. -
Fr. -
d. Engl. It *tasted* as if there was fish in the soup.
Ro. -
Fr: -
e. Engl. It *smelled* as if there was a cake in the oven.
Ro. Mirosea ca și cum ar fi fost o prăjitură în cuptor.
Fr. Il sentait comme s'il y avait un gâteau dans le four.

The most salient trait of the complementation by finite clauses consists of the existence of two distinct sentences, referring to two independent processes namely the perceptual event and the perceived situation. The absence of a correlation between the subordinated complement and the main clause triggers a reduction of the syntactic constraints observed for the other types of complements. In addition, the semantic interpretation of the object clause varies more than that of other constructions. It generally denotes acts of indirect perception but it can also correspond to acts of direct perception.

The object clause prototypically represents the result of the perceiver's deductive reasoning and calculations following acts of indirect perception:

(4) a. Engl. *I see* (in your eyes) that you are lying.

Ro. Văd (în ochii tăi) că minți.

Fr. Je vois (à tes yeux) que tu mens.

b. Engl. *I hear* (in your voice) that you are eager to go on your summer holiday.

Ro. Aud (din vocea ta) că ești nerăbdător să pleci în vacanța de vară.

Fr. J'entends (à ta voix) que tu es impatient d'aller en vacances.

Another emerging aspect is that of the object clause occurring after passive and not active perception verbs, always a mark of direct perception. Nevertheless, as the contrast between direct and indirect perception is not very clear, it is not always easy to determine the direct or indirect nature of the object clause. 7[2] For instance, what is the difference between a finite clause (4a) and a direct object followed by a non-finite complement (4b)?

(5) a. *I hear* that the dog is barking.

b. *I hear* the dog barking.

In both situations, we deal with a process of direct perception, since the perceiver directly hears that the dog barks.

In most cases, the object clause is factual but it may as well indicate an eventuality though this is rarer. When it is factual, it may be a conclusion drawn from the perceptual data corresponding to the modality of the perception verb chosen:

(6) a. *I see* that the plane has landed.

Văd că avionul a aterizat.

Je vois que l'avion a atterri.

b. *I heard* that your mother had an accident.

Am auzit că mama ta a avut un accident.

J'ai entendu que ta mère a eu un accident.

In (6a), the conclusion is represented by the visual perception of a recently landed plane while in (6b), we deal with the auditory indirect perception of some words. However, the fact may also be a conclusion not related to the specific perceptual modality expressed by the verb of perception. The example below clearly proves that it is impossible for data of visual perception to be the source of the conclusion reached by the man:

Engl. The man, *seeing* that the two women were beginning to argue about something, decided to ignore them and watched the children playing outside.

Ro. Omul, văzând că cele două femei au început să se certe, decise să le ignore și privii copii cum se jucau afară.

Fr. L'homme, voyant que les deux femmes commençaient à discuter fortement, décida de les ignorer et regarda les enfants jouer dehors.

The interpretation of these sentences is purely cognitive and the verb of perception can be paraphrased by 'note, understand, learn or realize'. The perception verb 'hear' conveys

the idea that the conclusion must be drawn from auditory data. However, it may happen, in uses similar to (38b), that the news of the accident was read, and not heard.

The cases where the object clause denotes an eventuality paraphrased, for instance, by a verb such as ‘*imagine*’, are less frequent:

(7) Engl. I can’t *see* how his arrival can change things.

Ro. Nu *văd* cu ce ar putea schimba lucrurile sosirea lui.

Fr. Je ne *vois* pas en quoi son arrivée pourrait changer les choses.

Apart from the transition from direct to indirect perception, the object clause also establishes a polysemous movement from the field of perception to that of cognition. Indeed, the properties of the object clauses associated to verbs of perception are very similar to the equivalent constructions with verbs of cognition such as ‘*realize*’ and ‘*know*’.[3]

In conclusion, some of the main points we highlight regarding the complementation by finite clauses are that the time reference of the object clause is independent of that of the main clause as a consequence of the existence of two separate processes and also the process denoted by the object clause is entirely independent. The complementation by declarative, interrogative and adverbial finite clauses occurs in the three languages under investigation with some exceptions in the case of the adverbial phrase in the target languages where the equivalent evidentials are missing. [3]

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