

Selecting subjunctive clauses : same complementizer(s), different worlds

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Subjunctive clauses have an apparently heterogeneous distribution across languages. While French, and Romance languages in various degrees, exhibit subjunctive marking on the clausal complements of (some) emotive factive predicates, languages from other families, like Hungarian, have a more restricted use of subjunctive proper, limiting its occurrence to the complements of verbs expressing an order, a purpose or a wish (intensional predicates). Similarly, the so-called polarity subjunctives, which occur under negation in Romance languages, do not appear in Hungarian. Moreover, while Serbo-Croatian shares with Hungarian subjunctive embedding predicates of the intensional type, it also marks complements under implicative and aspectual predicates, extending the use of subjunctive to areas where other languages have infinitive complements. The picture which emerges is that of a core of subjunctive complements all languages seem to share, with peripheral variations.

This raises the question of the selection of these subjunctives. We examine the properties of the predicates selecting the ‘core’ subjunctive complements (see Kempichinsky 2009, Socanac 2016), and propose that their own internal composition includes the subjunctive selecting features. In other words, subjunctive selection is not (only) a matter of semantic matching but, literally, a syntactic process. In many languages, embedded subjunctive clauses exhibit a complementizer which is apparently identical to the indicative clause complementizer (e.g. *que* in French, *hogy* in Hungarian). We assume, in the spirit of Giorgi (2009), that the indicative and subjunctive complementisers are different elements. But departing from her analysis, we propose that they stand in a featural superset-subset relation. We show that intensional predicates select for the feature-set of the ‘subjunctive complementiser’, which, in turn, selects the relevant functional component(s) of an embedded subjunctive clause. The locality of the selection process confirms that syntactic mechanisms are at play. Extending the analysis to peripheral subjunctives, we show that what appears to be the ‘same’ complementizer will select subjunctives with different properties, corresponding to different interpretations of the subjunctive clause.