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Revisiting complement and parenthetical constructions: Theory and description

An Van linden, Lieven Vandelanotte & Lieselotte Brems

Editorial for the Article Collection “Complement and parenthetical constructions: Theory and description” in *Language Sciences*

1. Introduction

This article collection focuses on the syntagmatic properties of complement constructions that allow for functional variation, and considers how best to conceive of the structural assembly of these complex constructions from their component units. It brings together seven articles that approach the topic of complement and parenthetical constructions from different but complementary theoretical angles, which all fall within a broadly functional approach to language.

Traditionally, complement clauses have been analysed as constituents of the main clause headed by the complement-taking predicate (CTP) (e.g. Noonan 1985: 42). In this line of approach, the *that*-clause (1) and the zero *that*-clause (2) are analysed as the direct object of the main verb (*regretted* and *think* respectively); in (3), the *that*-clause is analysed as an extraposed subject clause, anticipated by *it* in preverbal position (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1224–1225, 1391–1393; Biber et al. 1999: 672–674, 720–722, Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1252–1254).¹ Semantically, the complement clauses are viewed as only secondary, iconically reflecting their grammatical ranking.

- (1) *This was Rosie at her most Rosieish, and Liz only regretted that Pritch wasn't there to appreciate just what she was up against.* (WB)
- (2) *He spoke out after pro-Agreement parties were presented with the proposals. “I think it is clear that all of the issues have to be addressed,” he said.* (WB)
- (3) *With negligible interest on savings, falling share prices and falling shop prices, it is no wonder that thrifty Japanese consumers are saving still more.* (WB)

¹ Examples in this Introduction were extracted from the WordbanksOnline corpus (abbreviated as WB).

Focusing on patterns with finite indicative complements like (1) to (3) in conversational data, usage-based approaches proposed an alternative analysis, viewing the complement clauses as central, and the CTP-clauses as “epistemic/evidential/evaluative fragments” that are conversationally subordinate to the message conveyed by the complement clause (Thompson 2002: 136–141). In this approach, grammar is thought of in terms of combinations of reusable fragments (Thompson 2002: 141), but how we should conceive of these combinations (that is, the syntagmatic relations between fragments) is left underexplored.

More recently Boye and Harder’s (2007, 2012) functional approach to CTP-clauses containing attitude predicates like (1) and (2), in turn, attempted to strike a balance between the traditional and the usage-based approaches, arguing for a distinction between a usage-level and structure-level, and proposing tests to attribute instances showing the same surface structure to three different types of use, i.e. discourse-primary lexical uses, discourse-secondary lexical uses, and grammatical uses (invariably discourse secondary). Davidse and Van linden (2020) extended this analysis to complement constructions with impersonal CTP-clauses like (3) above and (4)–(5) below.

Syntagmatically, lexical uses of CTP-clauses like (1) and (4) are viewed as having complementizing status (Boye and Harder 2007: 568), while grammatical uses like (2), (3) and (5) are argued to show modifying status (Boye and Harder 2007: 568), as the CTP cannot impose its semantic profile on the complement clause (cf. Langacker 1987: 309; Vandelanotte 2006, 2008). The idea is that in lexical uses, what is discursively primary, i.e. presenting the most salient information, is the specific emotional state conveyed by the CTP-clause. The *that*-clauses represent the proposition presupposed in the emotion processes of regretting (1) and feeling wonder or amazement (4) (Van linden et al. 2016; Davidse and Van linden 2020).

- (4) *It’s a wonder that the Divertimento for small orchestra – based on original harpsichord pieces – is not performed more often. The Divertimento is a charming window on this corner of eighteenth-century music, as seen through Strauss’s eyes.* (WB)
- (5) *Alain Prost proved you can take time out and make a great comeback when he won his fourth world crown driving for Williams in 1993. There is no doubt the constant testing and pressure of racing takes a hell of a lot out of you and a year away could make Hakkinen even more determined. He has certainly not looked the part this season.* (WB)

In grammatical uses like (2), (3) and (5), by contrast, what is discursively primary is the propositional content of the complement. That is, (3) does not describe an act of not wondering, but is all about the fact that thrifty Japanese consumers are saving still more. Similarly, (2) does not describe an act of thinking, nor does (5) describe an act of not doubting. Conceptually, the semantic profiles of these sentences are determined by the content of the *that*-clauses, to which the CTP-clauses add speaker-related meanings. Davidse and Van linden (2020) propose that the syntagmatic relationship in such cases obtains between the (personal or impersonal) CTP-clause and the *that*-clause, with the CTP-clause qualifying as an interpersonal modifier (McGregor 1997: 236) of the proposition coded by the *that*-clause. In (3), the impersonal CTP-clause *it is no wonder* qualifies the proposition in the *that*-clause in terms of mirativity (Delancey 2001: 369), specifically, not as unexpected, but rather as ‘not surprising’ (cf. Simon-Vandenberg and Aijmer 2007: 37; Gentens et al. 2016). In (5), the impersonal CTP-clause *there’s no doubt* expresses the speaker’s epistemic stance towards the proposition coded by the *that*-clause; it signals a high degree of certainty (Davidse et al. 2015: 51). In (2), the personal CTP-clause *I think* does not convey the speaker’s epistemic stance (the speaker is in fact quite certain that it is clear that all of the issues have to be addressed), but rather functions as a speech act modifier, marking the claim in the complement clause as a strongly held opinion (cf. Nuyts

2009: 152). In any case, it is not part of what is asserted and hence cannot be challenged (Boye and Harder 2007: 573).

While the studies referred to above focus on constructions whose surface structure shows the formal hallmarks of complementation, a lot of attention has also been paid to structures in which the ‘CTP-clause’ has come to function as a parenthetical, as in (6). Strings like *I think* in (6) have been termed comment clauses in Brinton (2008), and theticals in the recently developed framework of Discourse Grammar (Kaltenböck et al. 2011; Heine et al. 2013). In (6), the speaker uses *I think* as a hedging device, to make their statement more tentative:

(6) *They beat every other nation in the world but the fact it took them so long to win the Grand Slam speaks volumes, I think.* (WB)

Although structurally parenthetical patterns as in (6) are quite widely given separate treatment compared to structures as in (1)–(5), how the two construction types relate to one another remains a moot point which this article collection also addresses.

Against the background of existing analyses and outstanding questions in the literature, the articles in this collection revisit a series of puzzles concerning complex sentences showing a type of internal re-calibration of the component clauses, like (2), (3) and (5), as well as about the relation between the latter ‘complement’ constructions and parenthetical constructions as in (6). Specifically, they address the following research questions, interacting with distinct theoretical frameworks such as Discourse Grammar, Semiotic Grammar and grammaticalization theory.

- (a) What makes CTP-clauses prone to shift from complementizing to modifying uses? Which semantic and/or formal types of complement relation do (not) allow for this shift?
- (b) Do complement constructions with impersonal or non-first person matrices manifest the same structural and functional parameters and shifts as first person CTP-clauses?
- (c) As grammatical uses of CTP-clauses typically show (i) a more limited range of morphological distinctions and syntactic combinations than lexical uses, and (ii) schematic, speaker-related meanings, can we expect the same for structurally parenthetical uses?
- (d) Do lexical uses of CTP-clauses always diachronically precede grammatical uses, as suggested by Boye and Harder (2007, 2012), and do grammatical uses of CTP-clauses always diachronically precede structurally parenthetical uses?
- (e) While belief and thought complement constructions easily allow the shift from complementizing to modifying and parenthetical uses in English, do they also do so cross-linguistically?

The next section will present the seven articles making up this collection, and will detail which answers they bring to the questions above.

2. Articles in this collection

The collection opens with Boye and Harder (2021), in which they revisit earlier work on the structure and use of complement-taking predicates (Boye and Harder 2007, 2012), as outlined above in Section 1.² Integrating distinct theoretical approaches (viz. Brinton 1996, Kaltenböck et al. 2011), their paper now casts the net wider and studies complement relations other than those expressed by attitude predicates, like utterance predicates and manipulative predicates, and hence also semantic complement

² The order in which we present the articles in this section does not match the chronological order in which they were first published online, but reflects a clustering of topics and approaches we want to highlight here.

types other than propositional complements, namely illocutions and States of Affairs respectively. They point out that all of these complement types allow for discourse-secondary uses under specific circumstances, thus addressing research question (a) above. In addition, they develop a new theoretical account that accommodates possible grammaticalization of parenthetical clauses (research question (d)), focusing on the notion of constructional slots. The point of departure is the observation that parenthetical clauses are always discourse-secondary, but not necessarily grammatical at the structure level. In some cases, they are highly idiosyncratic and can be adverbially modified – two characteristics that cannot be reconciled with grammatical status. For such cases, Boye and Harder (2021) do not posit any syntagmatic relation between parenthetical and host clause, and they do not posit any developmental relationship from complement constructions with CTP-clauses in canonical matrix position like (1) and (2). They thus revise their (2007, 2012) account and argue that parenthetical CTP-clauses are obligatorily discourse-secondary because they occur in specific constructional slots that are dedicated to secondary status and also allow lexical fillers. Grammaticalization then takes place when the secondary status associated with the constructional slot comes to be associated with its filler as well.

López-Couso and Méndez-Naya's (2021) paper presents a diachronic corpus study of third person CTP-clauses *chances are* and *odds are* as a testbed for Boye and Harder's (2007, 2012) account of grammaticalization of CTP-clauses. In present-day data, such clauses show the three uses illustrated in Section 1: lexical use of complement constructions, grammatical use of complement constructions and parenthetical use (cf. examples (4), (5) and (6) respectively). Their study shows that third person CTP-clauses manifest the same structural and functional parameters and shifts as first-person CTP-clauses (research question (b)), and that the three uses observed synchronically form stages on a diachronic pathway (research question (d)). The use of historical data allows the authors to trace formal evidence of grammaticalization, such as the loss of variability in the *chances-* and *odds-*NPs and TAM restrictions in the VP, as well as concomitant semantic changes in the parentheticals (cf. research question (c)), and can shed light on the explanatory value of so-called cooptation (Heine and Kaltneböck 2021; see also below).

Davidse, Van Linden and Brems's (2022) paper brings together earlier joint work on CTP-clauses containing *no* + noun (viz. *chance*, *doubt*, *question*, *need*, *way* and *wonder*), which display both lexical and grammatical uses of complement constructions (see (3) to (5) above), but do not show adverbial/parenthetical uses across the board. Crucially, the CTP-clauses studied establish different types of complement relations (e.g. factive for *it BE 'no' wonder*, propositional attitude for *there BE 'no' doubt*, and (root) modal for *there BE 'no' need/have 'no' need*). These are correlated with the different formal types of complement these patterns exhibit, all of which enables them to address research question (a). The CTP-clauses examined also include first-person subject clauses (*I have no doubt ...*) as well as third-person ones (*there was no chance ...*), which bears on research question (b). Their main conclusion is that the availability of adverbial/parenthetical uses – which invariably express speaker-related meanings – depends on the level of clause structure the qualificational meaning of the *no* + noun string applies to. While CTP-clauses whose qualificational meaning applies to theses or propositions (i.e. epistemic and mirative CTP-clauses respectively) do alternate with adverbial or parenthetical uses (e.g. *no doubt*, *no wonder*), CTP-clauses whose qualificational meaning applies to processes (i.e. deontic CTP-clauses) do not. However, what the authors believe to be the most important distinction at play is the difference between interpersonal (viz. mirative, epistemic and subjective deontic meanings) and representational qualificational meanings (viz. objective deontic and dynamic meanings), for which they posit distinct syntagmatic relations or structural assemblies. Specifically, building on McGregor's (1997) Semiotic Grammar and Langacker's (1987) Cognitive Grammar, they propose a scoping relation or an assembly of interpersonal modification for the former, in which “the interpersonal modifier qualitatively *changes* the representational meaning of the unit it relates to” (Davidse et al. 2022: 20; italics original), as opposed to a dependency relation of complementation for

the latter. Crucially, for representational meanings, the component units are *added* to each other to build more elaborate representations; they do not involve scoping relations.

Heine and Kaltenböck (2021) focus on the development of CTP-clauses used as parentheticals or comment clauses in the light of existing diachronic case-studies, and gauge the explanatory potential of a number of competing theoretical accounts, including Boye and Harder (2007, 2012) and Brinton (2008). Ultimately, they propose Discourse Grammar – which consists of sentence grammar and thetical grammar – as the framework that accommodates the observed developments best, assigning a central role to cooptation. Cooptation is a mechanism which lifts elements out of sentence grammar to deploy them in thetical grammar, where they will serve a discourse function. After this process of cooptation, grammaticalization can (but need not) take place (research question (d)). They also clarify the syntactic status of grammatical uses of complement constructions with overt complementizer (cf. (3)) within Discourse Grammar, a construction type that had not been discussed within that framework so far. They put forward a constructional account, positing multiple source constructions, some of which belong to sentence grammar and others to thetical grammar.

Gentens (2022) turns to a semantic type of CTP so far unaddressed in this article collection, viz. manner-of-speaking predicates (e.g. *babble*, *whisper*, *shout*). Specifically, her study presents a diachronic corpus study of *shriek*, which in addition to its original use as an intransitive predicate comes to function in parenthetical clauses as a direct speech reporting predicate (research questions (a) and (d)). This case is special in that it does not involve the ‘reduction’ of a CTP-clause to a zero-complement phrase (e.g. *I think* in (2) vs. (6)), but rather the augmentation of an intransitive predicate. In semantic terms, the parentheticals do not show schematic, speaker-related meanings, but instead retain a lexically specific component of manner of speaking (research question (c)). Thus, the development of *shriek* is very different from that of *odds are* and *chances are* discussed in López-Couso and Méndez-Naya (2021), or the verbo-nominal patterns like *there is no way* or *it’s no wonder* examined by Davidse, Van Linden and Brems (2022). That is, it does not fit the grammaticalization pathway proposed for the latter along the lines of Boye and Harder (2007, 2012). Instead, it presents evidence of cooptation at work, and thus adds to the diachronic validity of Discourse Grammar, advocated by Heine and Kaltenböck (2021).

Maekelberghe’s (2021) paper concentrates on CTP-clauses with *imagine*, whose grammatical uses show an unusually high degree of formal variability, both in terms of TAM values in the CTP-clause and in terms of formal types of complement (research question (c)). On the basis of a hierarchical cluster analysis applied to a synchronic dataset, Maekelberghe finds correlations between the formal type of complement and the possibility of grammatical uses (research question (a)). For example, CTP-clauses with gerund complements are restricted to lexical use, while those with zero *that*-clauses typically show grammatical use. In addition, grammatical variants of CTP-clauses – be it in complement structures or parenthetical use – are shown to often contain modal auxiliaries, and hence show more semantic variation than the formally constrained high-frequency parentheticals *I think* and *I guess* (research question (c)).

With the last article, this collection moves beyond English and thus addresses research question (e). McGregor (2021) presents a typological and theoretical investigation of belief and thought complements – as in *he believes/thinks that the turtle is dead* – in a sample of about sixty Australian Aboriginal languages. Interestingly, in a number of languages the distinct construction status of belief and thought complements is not straightforward, as they can hardly be differentiated from reported speech constructions. However, some languages do show evidence for a distinct complement construction type devoted to expressing mistaken beliefs. McGregor also homes in on the theoretical issue of the nature of the relation between the CTP-clause and the clause expressing the thought (the ‘complement’), irrespective of the type of use (lexical vs. grammatical) of the CTP-clause. He rejects the traditional complementation analysis (e.g. Noonan 1985) of the clause of thought serving an argument role in the

matrix clause, and argues instead that the syntagmatic relation at issue is one of framing, which belongs to the interpersonal semiotic (cf. McGregor 1997).

In conclusion, the answers to the research questions (a) to (e) provided by the articles in this collection largely go in the same direction. What stands out most is the converging evidence that parenthetical clauses do not always compare to grammatically used CTP-clauses in sentence-initial position like *I think* in (6) compares to *I think* in (2) above. Rather, parenthetical clauses may be diverse in terms of morpho-syntactic features, and they may not show schematic, speaker-related meanings (see Boye and Harder 2021; Gentens 2022; Maekelberghe 2021). This finding has a diachronic correlate: such formally variable and lexically full parentheticals may and often do emerge prior to grammatical uses of CTP-clauses (Gentens 2022). However, there also remains some divergence between the approaches adopted, for instance, with respect to the levels of clause structure to be distinguished and the level to which specific qualificational meanings like types of modal meanings apply. Boye and Harder (2021), for example, conflate dynamic and deontic modality into root modality, while Davidse et al. (2022) distinguish between subjective deontic modality, belonging to the layer of interpersonal meaning, and objective deontic modality, belonging to the layer of representational meaning. Dynamic modality likewise belongs to the latter layer. The articles also show a varying degree of detail in terms of their syntagmatic analyses. Davidse et al. (2022) appear to propose the most developed syntagmatic models, both for discourse-primary and discourse-secondary uses of CTP-clauses and parentheticals.

Finally, the articles have also opened up various avenues for further research, but here we single out just one. McGregor's (2021) finding that constructions with belief and thought complements are hard to discriminate from reported speech constructions in Australian languages cautions us against extrapolating what we have learned about English structures to other languages. In fact, recent research shows that even in closely related Dutch, parentheticals with limited formal variability and with schematic, speaker-related meanings (viz. counterparts to *I think*) most likely originated in structures of direct thought representation rather than through matrix clause reduction (Nuyts and Janssens 2019). The authors suggest that this pathway may even be extended to English in view of Old and Early Middle English showing the same range of word order variation in main and dependent clauses as Dutch throughout its history. We leave their question unanswered here, but we hope that the descriptions and solutions proposed in this article collection to get a better handle on the uses, structural assemblies and grammaticalization of complement and parenthetical constructions may inspire future work across a range of languages.

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