

Syntactic indeterminacy on either side of complementation – why can it be so persistent?

Abstract

Slavic languages like Polish and Russian provide ample evidence for the recategorization of evaluative adverbs (with scope over events or propositions) as complement-taking predicates (CTP). A symptom of this recategorization is finite clauses headed by default complementizers (COMP), e.g. Pol. *że* ‘that’ (see ex. 1-2; cf. Wiemer 2019: 128-150). Such ‘predicative adverbs’ form a productive class, many of them reveal high token frequency at least in Polish (Przepiórkowski/Patejuk 2021: 844), where this pattern (= P-I) extends to expressions of confirmation (or denial); see (3). On the other hand, we encounter structures with an unequivocal CTP followed by an apparent complementizer and a marker of directive-optative speech acts (DIR; Pol. *niech*, Russ. *pust’*); see (4). This pattern (= P-II) can be compared to cases in which only DIR follows on an unequivocal CTP in clause-initial position, so that it may itself behave like a complementizer; see (5). If P-II is interpreted as a quotative construction, Pol. *że* (Russ. *что*) can hardly be considered a complementizer. What is more, both patterns can be intertwined (see 6-7), so that, again, the evaluative lexemes may either be treated as sentence adverbs (i.e. propositional or illocutionary operators) or as CTPs on their own (as in 1-3), while COMP behaves like a quotative marker. While such different treatments (and possible reanalyses implied by them) are highly theory-dependent, and one wonders which positions in CP-areas would be assigned to them in formal frameworks (cf., for instance, Meyer 2007, Krapova 2021), they affect neither the scope relations between COMP, DIR and the evaluative lexeme, nor information structure. Probably, for this reason speakers do not have problems in (re)producing them.

In fact, all these patterns prove persistent over centuries in Polish, Russian and other Slavic languages, albeit with different frequency. Their comparison shows that clausal complementation can be indeterminate (and emergent) “on either side” of the juncture: sentence adverbs, on the “left side”, unanimously become CTPs only if, on the “right side”, a linking element acknowledged as complementizer (e.g., Pol. *że*) is used to flag the complement relation (= P-I); however the latter can also turn into a quotative marker (see P-II), while without this element DIR-morphemes acquire properties of complementizers, if the left context contains an expression that is suitable as a CTP.

In my talk, I will show that the persistence of such indeterminacy applies particularly to less frequent, “minor” patterns which evade clear-cut categorizations in syntactic theorizing. I will propose a usage-based explanation and take stance with theoretical approaches to the different interpretations mentioned above. The discussion will be based on a comprehensive analysis of patterns P-I and P-II, drawn on Polish and Russian corpus data of the 17th-21st centuries (see list under References). More specifically, I will pursue the following questions: (i) Can the quotative behavior of Pol. *że* in P-II (see 4, 6, 7) be identified with a stage before this morpheme “split” into different lexemes (*że*_{quot}, *że*_{comp} and possibly more) distinguished by their syntactic behavior (as shown in Guz 2019: §4)? And how, then, did P-II come about in Russian, whose complementizer (*что*) has a different history (as a WH-word)? (ii) How widespread has syntactic indeterminacy for sentence adverbs with clausal complements been? For this purpose, I will use random samples to compare their occurrence with and without COMP (compare 8a-8b); indeterminacy obtains in the latter case, since the sentence adverb may alternatively be understood as a parenthetical comment (see 8b). This will also allow to check preliminary observations, due to which structures without COMP are more common in Russian, while Polish reveals a stronger predilection for attaching clauses with the aid of COMP. I will substantiate whether this applies today, and whether, as for this property, both languages have been moving away from each other.

Examples

(1) Pol.	<i>Przykro [Niedobrze / Źle / Smutno], że nie udało się uratować sosen.</i> sorry [not_good / bad / sad] COMP NEG Vfin 'I'm sorry [It is bad / sad] that we did not manage to save the pines.' (PNC; Mazowieckie To i Owo; from Przepiórkowski/Patejuk 2021: 839, adapted)	'predicative adverb' (P-I)
(2) Pol.	<i>Smutna nasza rodzina... – Smutna, dlatego lepiej że nosisz inne nazwisko.</i> better COMP Vfin 'Our family is sad... – Sad, so better that you have a different surname.' (PNC; M. Nurowska: Panny i wdowy: zdrada. 1991)	
(3) Pol.	<i>Przyjdiesz dziś? – Oczywiście / Pewnie / Naturalnie, że przyjdę.</i> of course / certainly / naturally COMP Vfin 'Will you come today? – Of course / Sure, (that) I will come' (cf. Wiśniewski 1995)	
(4) Pol.	<i>Stary odpowiedział, że niech nawet w więzieniu zgnije.</i> CTP COMP DIR Vfin 'The old man <u>replied</u> that may he rot even in prison.' (PNC; T. Dołęga Mostowicz: Znachor. 1988 [1937])	COMP-DIR (P-II)
(5) Pol.	<i>Powiedz mu, niech jutro przyjdzie do kantor-u.</i> CTP DIR Vfin ' <u>Tell</u> him, may he come to the cantor tomorrow.' (PNC; Wł. St. Reymont: Ziemia Obiecana. 1898)	DIR = COMP ?
(6) Pol.	<i>doskonale zdawał sobie sprawę że lepiej niech pisze książki</i> CTP COMP better DIR Vfin 'he was well aware that he had better write books' (lit. '...that better may he write books') (PNC; Usenet – pl.soc.polityka. 2007)	P-I + P-II
(7) Pol.	<i>Tusk powiedział, że politycy najlepiej niech wrócą do stołu rozmów po wyborach.</i> CTP COMP politicians best DIR Vfin 'Tusk said that it is best for politicians to return to the negotiating table after the elections.' (lit. '... that the politicians best may they return...') (PNC; Usenet – pl.soc.polityka. 2005)	
(8a) Ru.	<i>Było vidno, što ona serditsja.</i> be.PST.N obvious COMP Vfin 'It was obvious that she was angry.' (RNC; Запись LiveJournal. 2004)	+ COMP
(8b) Ru.	<i>Vidno, Fomičeva wydaët želaemoe za dejstvitel'noe.</i> obvious Vfin ' Obviously , Fomičeva gives out wishful thinking.' (RNC; Izvestija. 2003)	no COMP

References

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Corpora

- Polish: Polish National Corpus (nkjp.pl), KorBa (https://korba.edu.pl/query_corpus/),
Beethoven (<http://diaspol.uw.edu.pl/polniem/#!/>),
Corpus of 19th century texts (<http://www.diaspol.uw.edu.pl/XIX/#!/>)
Russian: Russian National Corpus (<https://ruscorpora.ru/>)