

Subjectless Complement Sentences In Universal Grammar

Abstract

Our purpose in the present article is to provide an adequate description of one feature type of sentential complements: subjectless complement clauses, by looking at the grammar of a range of languages. Obviously, languages do differ as for the internal and external structures of their complement sentences. Our aim in this description is to analyse subjectless complements cross-linguistically in order to find out some common features among the languages under study or some features specific to a certain number of languages. The procedure we will be following is that starting from the structure or type of variation we are looking for, we'll end up with the language or the illustration in order to see how each language is different or similar to other languages and if it is so, we'll try to find out what different or similar features it has.

Dr. N. ABDELMOUMENE-HOCINE
Faculté des Lettres et
des Sciences Humaines
Université Mouloud Mammeri
Tizi-Ouzou, Algérie

ملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم ووصف ملائم لميزة الجمل المتممة ألا وهي الجمل المتممة المنعدمة الفاعل. غرضنا في هذا الوصف هو تحليل هذه الجمل في عدة لغات مختلفة من أجل اكتشاف ميزات مشتركة بين هذه اللغات أو ميزات خاصة بعدة لغات. و ذلك ابتداء من تركيب الجمل التي أخذناها بعين الاعتبار، نصل إلى اللغة أو المثال لنبين مدى اختلاف أو تشابه اللغات؛ و بالتالي نحاول اكتشاف الميزات المختلفة أو المتشابهة التي تتكون منها تلك اللغات.

The fact of having a subject or not needs some specification; that is whether this feature is only applicable to matrix sentences or not, because in some languages sentences don't require overt subjects.

Obviously languages do differ as far as their complement sentences are concerned, and our aim in this description is to analyse subjectless complements in order to find out some common features among languages or some features specific to a certain number of languages.

The Basic notion of complementation :

According to D. Kilby (1982) 'a sentence used in a noun phrase position is a complement sentence'. Complements can be noun phrases having the functions of objects such as in : 'he threw the ball', or prepositional phrases functioning as adverbial such as in, 'he was in the park', or clauses

such as in : ‘He said that he is going abroad’. For our present purposes, we’ll concentrate on the last type, i.e. ‘clauses’ since they are syntactically important. Syntactically speaking complement clauses are generally considered complex sentences because they are normally constituted by two clauses: an embedded or subordinate clause, which depends on another clause, called the main clause. So, the embedded clause is called the ‘complement clause’.

The syntax of complement sentences:

Some of the features of complement clauses which are applicable to English may or may not be applicable to other languages.

There is a number of features in terms of which complement sentences could be defined, but we will describe one feature : Subjectless complement type and show how it distributes across languages.

It’s worth pointing out that in order to define Subjectless complement clauses, both internal and external syntax of complement sentences which are specific to English should be taken into account.

Internal Syntax:

One of the important internal features of complement sentences is the finite and non-finite distinction [2].

In finite complement sentences, the verb is usually tensed such as indicated in: “she thought that Mary was clever”.

However, when the complement sentence is non finite its verb could be in the infinitive or the gerundive form, as in the following sentences:

She wanted to come to the party

He enjoys playing with children

Another feature of complement sentences is the question of whether they occur with subjects or whether they are Subjectless.

It’s important to note that this property is fully dependent on the previous one.

Consider the following sentences:

‘John said that he got a job in London’.

‘I prefer to go to the theatre instead of the cinema’.

Note that in the first sentence where the finite verb is used, the complement sentence is subjectful, whereas in the second sentence, where the non-finite verb is used the subject of the complement sentence has been deleted.

A third feature is whether complement sentences are introduced by a complementiser [4] when they occur in object or subject position such as in:

‘I know that he is coming tomorrow’.

‘That he failed his exams is obvious’.

External Syntax:

Complement sentences may occur in object, subject or prepositional object position [21] as in:

I think that he is going to town.

That she didn't come to the party amazed everyone.

I was amazed at her driving of the car.

The question of whether complement sentences take nominal morphology is important because in some languages the complement sentence plays the role of a noun which could be inflected for case, gender and number. In English however, these sentences can't take nominal morphology because they are usually introduced by the complementiser 'that' which can't be inflected.

The final external feature of complement sentences is the fact that they can be identical to main sentences in some circumstances, i.e. when they occur in the finite form but cannot be compared to main sentences when they are non-finite.

The question that could be asked is whether any of the features of external syntax correlate with those of internal syntax. For example, it might be the case where only finite complement clauses occur in subject position. Similarly, non-finite complements may occur without subject whereas finite ones require a subject in some languages. Finite complement sentences may be identical to main sentences while non-finite ones may not.

A brief account of some features:

The features stated previously could be applied to a number of languages, moreover a definite decision upon the features of complement sentences is sometimes questionable.

That complement sentences take nominal morphology is not very common among languages, although in few languages complement clauses do take nominal morphology where a whole sentence should be inflected, and therefore considered just like a noun which is liable to be inflected for case gender and number [5].

The question of having a subject or not seems to be obvious but two difficulties should be taken into account: it is necessary to consider whether the distinction is one which could only apply to matrix sentences or not; moreover, in some languages the occurrences of a subject in the main clause is not necessary. A second complication is that in some languages it is difficult to tell the difference between verbs where subjects are expressed by a clitic attached to them (i.e. to verbs), and verbs which do not have subject but the verb endings give some indication of what the subject is.

As far as complementisers are concerned in most languages they occur initially to introduce complement sentences, however, there are some languages which don't have complementisers at all and some other where the notion of complementisers is not altogether clear.

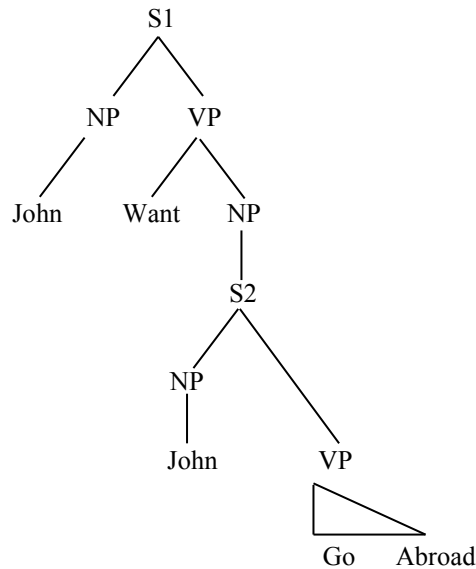
Complement sentences tend to occur in object position in a number of languages but this criterion may conflict with one of the features of external syntax, which is the subject position of complement sentences. We should mention, in this respect, that in some languages where the word order is relatively free, a sentence final complement can still be considered subject.

The Application of the feature "Subjectless Complement Sentences" Cross-Linguistically:

The feature of Subjectless complement sentences is usually common among languages which allow finite/ non-finite distinction. In English, Subjectless complement sentences could occur after the application of some transformational rules (4). Consider the following examples:

‘John wants to go abroad’

Syntactically speaking, the following diagram is a representation of the above sentence in standard transformational grammar, but there are many other proposed structures.



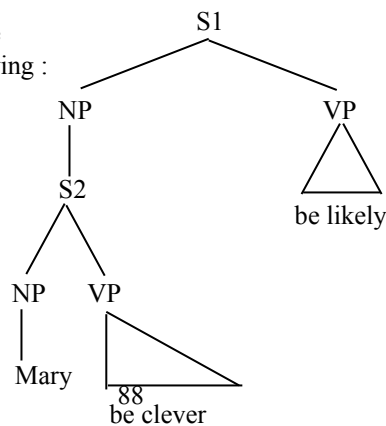
In this sentence, the subject of S1 – i.e. John is co referential with the subject of S2, so the subject of the second sentence is deleted by a rule that deletes the complement subject if it is coreferential with the subject of the matrix sentence. The rule is referred to as ‘Equi – NP’ deletion.

Subjectless complement sentences could be derived after the application of another transformational rule called ‘subject – to – subject raising’.

Again just like ‘Equi – NP’ deletion this rule is highly provisional – consider the sentence:

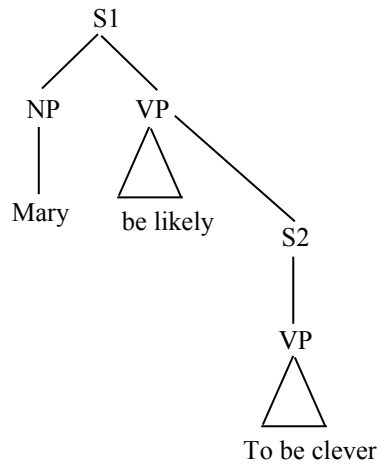
‘Mary is likely to be clever’.

The structure underlying the above sentence is the following :



The rule of ‘subject – to – subject raising’ is a movement rule, which takes the subject of the complement sentence S2 and makes it the subject of the matrix sentence S1; the rest of S2 is moved to the right and placed under the VP node in S1.

So, the derived construction produced by ‘subject – to – subject raising’ is:



An investigation of the complement sentences of different languages:

It is necessary to note that a distinction between language typology and language universals should be made because, at first sight, the study of language universals and the study of language typology might seem to be different or even opposite (5).

Furthermore, while language universals research deals with a set of properties that are common to all human languages, language typology assigns languages to different types and hence there should be differences among languages. The procedure we'll be following is that starting from the structure or type of variation we are looking for, we will end up with the language or the illustration in order to see how each language is different or similar to other languages and if it is so, we will try to find out what different or similar features it has and what cross language evidence we have for Subjectless complement sentences.

Subjectless complement sentences occur after the application of transformational rules of ‘Equi – NP’ – deletion or ‘subject – to – subject raising’, however, because of language variations these rules are not always applicable. So we will try to see whether Subjectless complement clauses are derived by rule; whether the derivation is associated with the finite/ non-finite distinction or whether there is any restriction as far as the verbs which allow Subjectless sentences are concerned.

Some examples from different languages :

Tagalog (Philippines)

1) – Nag – atubili Siya – ng hiramang – pera sa bang ko

At – hesitated (At)	T – he – comp – GT – borrow (of) money		Loc		bank
---------------------	--	--	-----	--	------

D

‘He hesitated to borrow the money from a/ the bank’.

- 2) – Nag – stubili siya – ng humiram ng – pera sa – bangko
 AT .. hasitated T – he comp AT – borrow – G – money D – bank
 ‘He hesitated to borrow money from a / the bank’.
 (AT = actor, GT = goal topic, T = Topic, G = Goal, D = Directional)

Tagalog [23] is one of the languages where the notion of subject is not prominent and, therefore, such a language should not be associated with a universal notion of ‘subject’. Consider the following sentential counterparts of the above mentioned sentences:

- 1) – Hiramín ang pera sa bangko
 GT – borrowed. A – he T – money D – bank
 ‘He borrowed the money from a / the bank’.
 2) – Humiram siya ng pera sa bangko
 At – borrowed T – he G – money D – bank.
 ‘He borrowed the money from a bank’.

If we compare the complement sentences of the previous sentences with their sentential counterparts, we’ll notice that in each case the clause may be formed by deleting the actor phrase from the sentence and changing the finite verb to a non-finite form.

Notice that in the complement sentences where deletion is involved, the topic [17] is not deleted because in sentence (1) where the goal – topic verb is used, the topic is not omitted. However, in sentence (2) where the complement sentence contains an actor - topic verb the topic is deleted. This stresses the fact that topics can’t function as subjects because it is the actor rather than the topic which manifests the properties usually associated with subjects. Furthermore, in Tagalog actors control ‘Equi – NP’ deletion such as indicated in the following examples:

- Nag balak siya – ng mang isda
 At – planned T – he – comp AT – go – fishing
 ‘He planned to go fishing’.
 Binalak niya – ng mangisda
 GT – planned A – he – comp AT – go – fishing
 ‘He planned to go fishing’.

As far as the process of ‘Equi - NP’ – deletion is concerned, Tagalog does not differ from other languages. However, it does differ from other languages in the sense that the deletion of the complement sentence subject depends entirely on the nature of the verb of the complement sentence. Moreover, Tagalog differs from other languages because the notion of subject is not at all prominent and therefore topics or actors are usually used instead of subjects. In other words, actors manifest the properties usually associated with subjects and therefore they do control ‘Equi – NP’ – deletion –

Welsh (celtic)

Consider the following sentences in welsh :
 - mi ddisgwiliodd John weld Mair

PT – expected John see Mary
'John expected to see Mary'

Note that this sentence would be acceptable even if the subject 'John' is deleted because in Welsh the verb agrees with the subject.

Jones and Thomas (1977) noted that infinitives in Welsh never contain information about the particle or auxiliary and can also involve deletion of subjects.

In Welsh the presence or absence of subjects in complement sentences is sometimes associated with the finite / non finite distinction. In other words, non-finite complement sentences are generally subjectless, and finite sentences on the other hand seem to include the subject as they do in English. However, in some circumstances, the subject could be omitted because of the subject – verb agreement. For instance, in the first mentioned sentence 'John expected to see Mary' the subject 'John' could be omitted and the sentence would be still acceptable. Moreover, in the case of non-finite sentences where the subject of the infinitival sentence is coreferential with that of the matrix sentence, it is found that the subject in the infinitival sentence is typically deleted. Furthermore, while in some languages the subject of the complement sentence is deleted only in non-finite sentences, in Welsh it is deleted in finite and non-finite sentences because of the subject – verb agreement.

French (Romance)

Consider the following sentences:

Je veux dormir.

'I want to sleep'.

Étudier est toujours profitable.

'To study is always profitable'.

J'entends les oiseaux chanter.

'I hear the birds sing (singing)'

In French, [11] complement sentences can be either finite or non-finite. Obviously, finite complement sentences always take subject NPS whereas non-finite ones don't. Moreover, non-finite complement clauses are restricted to infinitives which do not take subject NPS, tense/ aspect marking or modal verbs; also non-finite complement sentences may occur after the application of the transformational rule of 'Equi – NP' deletion such as in:

Je veux dormir.

'I want to sleep'.

Which could be derived from:

Je veux [je dors]

'I want [I sleep]

Where the complement sentence subject has been deleted because it is coreferential with the subject of the matrix sentence. It should be noted that in French complement sentences require a subject NP when they are finite, whereas non-finite ones don't usually require any overt subject.

Jacaltec (mayan)

Consider the following sentences in Jacaltec:

Xc – ach to Sajchoh
 Asp – A2 go to play
 ‘You want to play’.
 -Xwoche catt alwoj.
 I like to dance.
 ‘I like to dance’.
 - chin to catt alwojan.
 - I go to dance.
 ‘I am going to dance’.

Compared to other languages, Jacaltec [8] is quite different as far as the deletion of the complement sentence subject is concerned. The deletion of the subject of the complement clause depends on the nature of the embedded verbs. The special feature about Subjectless complement sentences in Jacaltec is that instances of ‘Equi – NP’ deletion rules are distinguished and all three have in common that they delete subjects but with restriction that the deleted subject should be the subject of an intransitive verb. Then after the deletion of the subject the intransitive embedded verb takes on an infinitival form. So, in the above mentioned sentences the complement sentence subject is always deleted because it is the subject of intransitive verbs. However, the rule of ‘Equi – NP’ deletion is not applicable in the following examples:

Xc – ach to him – aw – ila
 Asp – A2 go A1 – E2 – see
 ‘You went to see me’.

As shown in the last example no Equi – applies to subjects of transitive clauses, which appear as aspectless embedded clauses fully inflected for both subject and object.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned data, we could notice that Jacaltec differs from other languages as far as the deletion of the complement clause subject is concerned, because the complement clause subject is deleted on condition that it should be subject of an intransitive verb.

In other words, there is some restriction as far as the verb of the complement clause is concerned because a limited number of verbs allows deletion of the complement clause subject.

Portuguese (Italic)

Consider the following sentences in Portuguese:

Noca parece ignorar Gabriela.
 ‘Noca seems to ignore Gabriela’.
 Noca quer ignorar Gabriela.
 ‘Noca wants to ignore Gabriela’.

Since the two sentences have identical surface structures then the verbs ‘parecer’, ‘seem’ and ‘querer’, ‘want’ have identical deep structures.

It’s important to note that Portuguese is not different from other Indo – European languages such as French or English where Subjectless complement clauses occur as a result of the complement subject deletion rule. Furthermore, in Portuguese, the occurrence of the infinitival complementisers is entirely predictable, i.e. the infinitival complementisers appear only in clauses where the subject of the embedded clause is understood to be identical to the subject of the matrix sentence. Moreover, Portuguese,

like welsh, is a language where inflection on a finite verb can allow a subject to be deleted.

Icelandic (Germanic)

Consider the following sentences :

‘Eg Ski paoi henni ao fara

‘I ordered her to go’

‘Eg ley foi henni ao fara heim’

‘I allowed her to go home’.

Note that in Icelandic there is no plausible non-finite source for Equi complements, in other words, all the infinitives which are called ‘ao’ infinitives are subjectless [24]. Icelandic is one of the Germanic languages where all infinitival complements are subjectless. A special feature about Icelandic is that there’s no overt ‘Equi – NP’ deletion as is usually apparent in some languages, but there are infinitival markers which introduce infinitival Subjectless complements.

Berber Kabyle (Afro-Asiatic)

Consider the following Berber sentences:

t – dher blli t – frah waltma

She seemed that she happy sister my

‘My sister seemed to be happy’

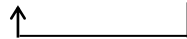
t – dher waltma blli t – frah

She seemed sister my that she happy

‘My sister seemed to be happy’.

According to the above sentences the following transformation, has taken place:

t – dher waltma [[blli t – frah]]



‘Waltma’ which originates as the subject of the complement clause in the first sentence seems to have been moved to the main clause position in the second sentence.

From a theoretical viewpoint, ‘Equi – NP’ deletion has been attributed to a number of languages, however, in Berber Kabyle, [1] Subjectless complement sentences could be derived by means of ‘raising’; which is a movement rule that extracts an NP from the subordinate clause and locates it in a specific position in the main clause. It is important to mention that in Berber Kabyle, there are only two verbs which trigger raising to subject : ‘dher’ and ‘bayn’ which both mean ‘seem’ and which take agreement clitics.

General conclusion:

Taking into consideration the previously mentioned data from the few stated languages, we could notice that there are some differences as far as the deletion of the complement sentence subject is concerned. Transformationally speaking, ‘Equi – NP’ deletion or ‘subject raising’ are sometimes used in the deletion of the complement sentence subject.

However, these rules are not necessarily applicable universally because they might be an aspect of transformational grammar and not an inherent feature of these languages. Furthermore, the way complement sentence subjects are deleted differs from

one language to another. In some languages, the deletion of the subject depends on the nature of the matrix sentence verb as in Tagalog, Berber... in some other languages, the deletion of the subject is mainly due to the verb agreement as in Welsh, Portuguese. Finally, in a language like Jacaltec, the deletion of the subject depends on the intransitivity of the embedded verb.

Bibliography

1. Applegate, J.R. (1963). *The Structure of Kabyle*, U.S. Office of Education.
2. Batstone, R. (1994). *Grammar*, Oxford University Press.
3. Cheng L, L.S. and R. Sybesma (1999). Bare and not so bare nouns and structure of NP: linguistic inquiry 30: 509-542.
4. Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on Government and Binding* Dordrecht: Foris.
5. Comri, B. (1981). *language Universals and Linguistic Typology*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
6. Cook, V.J. (1988). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction*. Oxford – Blackwell.
7. Davies, W.D. (1996). Morphological Uniformity and the null Subject Parameter in Adult SLA. "Studies in Second Language Acquisition 18, 475-493.
8. Graig, C.G. (1977). *The Structure of Jacaltec*, University of Texas Press, Austin and London.
9. Givon, T. (1980). The Binding Hierarchy and the Typology of Complements' in *Studies in Language*. Vol. 4, 333-377.
10. Hilles, S. (1991). Access to Universal Grammar in Second language Acquisition, in L. Eubank, *Point Counterpart: Universal Grammar in the Second language*. Amsterdam, Benjamins 305-38.
11. Jones, M.A. (1996). *Foundations of French Syntax*. Cambridge University Press.
12. Jones, M. and Thomas, A.R. (1977). *The Welsh Language*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff.
13. Kayne, R.S. (1998). Overt Vs Covert Movement Syntax 1: 128-191.
14. Kayne, R.S. (1975). *French Syntax*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
15. Kezesowski, T.P. (1990). *Contrasting Languages. The scope of Contrastive Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
16. Kilby, D. (1982). *Finite and Non-Finite Sentence Complements*. Unpublished paper, University of Essex.
17. Li, C.N. (1976). *Subject and Topic*. Academic Press, New York, San Francisco, London.
18. McCarthy, M. and O'Dell, F. (1994). *English Vocabulary in Use*. Cambridge University Press.
19. Paolillo, J.C. (1999). A symmetries in Universal Grammar: "The Role of method and Statistics". *Studies in Second language Acquisition* to Appear.
20. Quicoli, A.C. (1982). *The Structure of Complementation*. E. Story – Scientia, P.V.B.A., Scientific Publishers, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels.
21. Quirk, R and Greenbaum, S. (1973). *A University Grammar of English*. Longman, London.
22. Radford, Andrew (1997). *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: A Minimalist Approach*, Cambridge. C.U.P.
23. Shachter, P. and Otnes, Y. (1972). *Tagalog Reference Grammar*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
24. Thrainsson, H. (1979). *On Complementation in Icelandic*. Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
25. Tomlin, R.S. (1986). *Basic Word Order : Functional principles*, Londo : Groom Helm.
26. Williams Stephen, J. (1980). *A Welsh Grammar*. University of Wales Press, Cardiff. □