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On the cross-linguistic distribution of same-subject and different-subject complement clauses: Economic vs. iconic motivation

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1. Subject omission in 'want' complements: economic motivation

'Can' complements: embedded subject need not be coded explicitly
because it is **necessarily** identical to matrix subject:

- (1) SS (same-subject): I_i can [\emptyset_i play]. (*I can I play.)
DS (different-subject): *I can [you play]. (makes no sense)

Hence: Possibility of subject omission and impossibility of overt coding
(*I can I play) is motivated **economically**.

'Want' complements: embedded subject may be different
from the matrix subject:

- (2) English
SS: I_i want [\emptyset_i to play].
DS: I want [the child to play]. (makes perfect sense)

Hence: Explanation in terms of economy is non-trivial.

Claim: In 'want' complements, too, subject omission is economically motivated .

alternative: **iconic motivation** (HAIMAN 1983, GIVÓN 1990, CRISTOFARO 1998):

“functional integration is iconically reflected in formal integration”

GIVÓN 1990: 560: “the degree of finiteness is an **iconic expression** of the degree of integration of the main and complement events”

"Given a hierarchy of **degree of finiteness** (or its converse, *degree of nominality*) of verb forms found in a language, the more integrated the two events are,

- (i) the more noun-like is the complement verb likely to be, and
- (ii) the less finite verbal morphology – such as tense-aspect-modality and **pronominal agreement** – is the verb likely to display." (1990:561)

CRISTOFARO 1998:248: "At this stage, an **iconic** effect is obtained: states of affairs which are semantically integrated, or conceptually close, are coded by morphosyntactically integrated structures."

2. 'Want'-constructions in 35 languages world-wide

35-language sample

NIGER-CONGO

Yoruba [E4]

Swahili [E2]

NILO-SAHARAN

Lango (Nilotic) [E2]

Krongo (Kadugli) [E2]

Koyra Chiini (Songhay) [no E]

AFRO-ASIATIC

Standard Arabic [no E]

Maltese [E1]

Coptic [E2]

Mupun (Chadic) [E3]

DAGHESTANIAN

Lezgian (Lezgitic) [E2]

Godoberi (Andic) [E0]

Basque [E2]

INDO-EUROPEAN

German [E2]

English [E0, E4]

Modern Greek [no E]

Hindi/Urdu [E2]

URALIC

Finnish [E2]

SINO-TIBETAN

Chinese [E0]

Manipuri [E0]

Japanese [E5]

Korean [E5]

AUSTRONESIAN

Tagalog [E0]

Indonesian [E2]

Boumaa Fijian [E5]

Samoan [E5]

PAMA-NYUNGAN

Martuthunira [E2]

ESKIMO-ALEUT

Labrador Inuttut [E5]

SALISHAN

Halkomelem Salish [no E]

UTO-AZTECAN

Hopi [E3]

Tümpisa Shoshone [E6]

OTO-MANGUEAN

Chalcatongo-Mixtec [E1]

TUCANOAN

Retuarã [E0]

ANDEAN

Huallaga Quechua [E3]

CREOLE LANGUAGES

Haitian Creole [E0]

Sranan [E0]

no E: no economy

E0: simple omission of embedded subject

E1-E6: additional frequency/economy effects, see §4

In 31 out of 35 languages of the sample the subject pronoun is omitted in same-subject constructions – this can be explained by the universal functional factor of **economy**.

But subject omission is not universal:

(SS = same subject, DS = different subjects)

(3) Modern Greek

(SS) *Thél-o na dhulév-o.*
want-1SG [SUBJV arbeit-1SG]
'I want to work.'

(DS) *Thél-o na dhulév-is.*
want-1SG [SUBJV work-2SG]
'I want you to work.'

(4) Standard Arabic

(SS) *ʔuriidu ʔan ʔ-takallam-a.*
1SG-want [that 1SG-talk-SUBJV]
'I want to talk.'

(DS) *ʔuriidu ʔan ta-takallam-a.*
1SG-want [that 2SG-talk-SUBJV]
'I want you to talk.'

These languages show explicit coding, motivated by the functional preference for **explicitness**.

3. Economy and frequency

Subject omission in same-subject constructions is economical because subject identity is significantly more likely than subject distinctness in #want# constructions.

Cause: human egoism

Our wishes concerning actions are egocentric: our own actions are much more important to us, so we talk more about wishes concerning these than about wishes concerning the action of others

reflection in text frequency:

text frequency:	forms of <i>volere</i> 'want'	509	100%
(Italian)	same-subject	444	87%
	different-subject	65	13%
Source:	Alessandro Manzoni, <i>I promessi sposi</i> , 1840-42. (Letteratura Italiana Zanichelli (LIZ) on CD-ROM)		

Table 1

This asymmetry in text frequency is most likely universal – in any case, it is not due to language structure (due to the shortness of infinitival constructions):

text frequency:	forms of <i>thélo</i> 'want'	43	100%
(M. Greek)	same-subject	38	88%
	different-subject	5	12%
Source:	Kóstas Tzamális, <i>Stin Athína tu Periklí</i> , Athen: Estía/Kollaru, 22-122.		

Table 2

4. Further arguments for economic motivation: Frequency effects

4.1. General constructional parsimony

(E1) The complementizer is omitted , although the subject is not omitted: Maltese, Chalcatongo Mixtec

(5) Maltese (Semitic) (SANDRO CARUANA, p.c.)

(SS) *It-tifel jrid jigi% d-dar kmieni.*
 ART-boy 3SG.want.IMPF 3SG.come.IMPF ART-house early
 'The boy wants to come home early.'

(DS) *It-tifel jrid li jigi% d-dar kmieni.*
 ART-boy 3SG.want.IMPF that 3SG.come.IMPF ART-house early
 'The boy wants him to come home early.'

(E2) The complementizer is omitted, completely different construction: German, Hindi/Urdu, Finnish, Indonesian, Lango, Martuthunira

(6) Lango (Nilotic) (NOONAN 1992:223-4)

(SS) á-m ~~á~~ bínô
1SG-want.PROGR come.INF
'I want to come.'

(DS) á-m ~~á~~ né¹ ò-bí~~á~~
1SG-want.PROGR COMP 3SG-come.SUBJV
'I want her to come.'

(E3) The complementizer is shorter in the same-subject construction: Hopi, Mupun

(7) Hopi (Uto-Aztecan) (KALECTACA 1978:170-71)

(SS) Pam as nös-ni-**qe** naawakna.
he PTCL eat-FUT-SS want
'He wants to eat.'

(DS) Pam as nu-y nös-ni-**qat** naawakna.
he PTCL I-AKK eat-FUT-DS want
'He wants me to eat.'

(E4) The complementizer is reduced and merges with the 'want' verb, but only in the same-subject construction: English, Yoruba

(8) English

(SS) I wanna do it. (< want to) (cf. What do you wanna do?)
(DS) I want her to do it. (cf. *Who do you wanna do it?)

(9) Yoruba (Niger-Congo) (ROWLANDS 1969:66, 71)

(SS) mo ~~fé~~**fé** rà á (< mo ~~fé~~**fé** rà á)
I want-SS buy it
'I want to buy it.'

(DS) nwó~~ó~~**fé** kí e **é** máa lo **é**
they want COMP you IMPF go
'They want you to go.'

(E5) The verb 'want' is a different one, a shorter one, in the same-subject construction: Japanese, Boumaa-Fijian, Samoan

(10) Samoan (Oceanic) (MOSEL & HOVDHAUGEN 1992:710, 714)

(SS) e fiá si'i e Leona Iosefa
GEN want carry ERG Leona Iosefa
'Leona wants to carry Iosefa.'

(DS) e le @ mana'o le teine e fasi ia le tama
GEN NEG want ART girl [GEN hit she ART boy
'The girl doesn't want the boy to hit her.'

4.2. A constructional gap

(E6) The different-subject construction **does not exist** in the language, and a pragmatic paraphrase has to be used.

(11) Tümpisa Shoshone (Uto-Aztecan) (DAYLEY 1989:384-5)

(SS) *hi-nna üü hipi-suwa-nna?*
 what-OBJ you drink-want-GEN
 ‘What do you want to drink?’

(‘Mother wants the child to drink the milk’ cannot be expressed)

rare construction does not exist: another example

(12) French

a. *Jeannette **la lui** a présentée.*

‘Jeannette presented her to him.’

b. **Jeannette **me lui** a présentée.*

‘Jeannette presented me to him.’

(paraphrase: *Jeannette m’a présentée **à lui**.)*

4.3. A methodological problem with iconicity explanations

“Conceptual closeness” and “morphosyntactic integration” are vague notions

Why should participant sharing (on the conceptual side) be iconically reflected by complementizer omission (on the morphosyntactic side)?

5. Explanation by functional adaptation and diachronic change

Just noting a correlation between linguistic structures and their functional usefulness is not sufficient – the correlation also needs to be explained (cf. HASPELMATH 1999):

Why do linguistic structures show useful properties? in other words:
How does functional adaptation come about?

Two attested diachronic paths:

(1) **Differential phonetic reduction**, e.g. English *wanna*, Yoruba *fe* ~~55~~cf. 8-9 above)

frequent combinations undergo greater phonetic reduction because the information is more predictable

(2) Differential selection of suitable constructions

tightly constrained patterns of grammar ultimately derive from looser constructions, cf. German:

- (13) a. *Ich will früh heimkehren.* (**Ich will, dass ich heimkehre.*)
 'I want to return home early.'
 b. *Ich will, dass du früh heimkehrst.* (**Ich will du früh heimkehren.*)
 'I want you to return home early.'

loose construction with finite *dass* clause:

- (14) a. *Ich wünsche mir, dass ich früh heimkehre.*
 'I desire that I return home early.'
 b. *Ich wünsche mir, dass du früh heimkehrst.*
 'I desire that I return home early.'

loose construction with nominalization:

- (15) a. *Ich wünsche mir eine frühe Heimkehr.* 'I desire an early return.'
 b. *Ich wünsche mir meine frühe Heimkehr.* 'I desire my early return.'
 c. *Ich wünsche mir deine frühe Heimkehr.* 'I desire your early return.'

diachronic change:

in the process of grammaticalization, the nominalization construction (later: infinitive) was selected for the same-subject case, the finite *dass* construction was selected for the different-subject case, reflecting the earlier frequency differences.

At the stage of pattern freedom, speakers must have preferred the infinitival pattern for the same-subject case because it allowed **more economical utterances**, whereas the finite *dass* pattern was used and survived only in the different-subject case.

Thus, **speakers' preferences in utterances** can give rise to functionally adaptive patterns in grammar.

6. Conclusion

(SAUSSURE 1972[1916]:36)

"[O]n peut comparer la langue à une symphonie, dont la réalité est indépendante de la manière dont on l'exécute; les fautes que peuvent commettre les musiciens qui la jouent ne compromettent nullement cette réalité."

But: In contrast to Saussure's metaphor, in language competence (=langue) is indeed influenced by performance (=parole), through the differential entrenchment of construction with different frequencies.

cf. SAUSSURE 1972[1916]:37:

"la langue est à la fois l'instrument et le produit de la parole"

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