

On interpretation of clausal complements

Factive verbs like ‘regret’ take sentential complements that must be true in order for the entire sentence to be felicitous, while the felicity of sentences with non-factive verbs like ‘believe’ does not rely on the truth of the embedded clause. Sentences (1) and (2) can be felicitous even if it did not rain yesterday, while (3) and (4) can only be felicitous if it did rain yesterday.

- (1) Jon believes that it rained yesterday.
- (2) Jon doesn’t believe that it rained yesterday.
- (3) Jon regrets that it rained yesterday.
- (4) Jon doesn’t regret that it rained yesterday.

In addition, sentences with non-factive verbs like (5) and (6) can be true despite the fact that (presumably) vampires do not walk the earth, while sentences with factive verbs like (7) and (8) can not be true if vampires do not exist. As seen from (4) and (8) negating the factive predicate does not change the requirement on the embedded clause to be true.

- (5) Jon believes that vampires walk the earth.
- (6) Jon doesn’t believe that vampires walk the earth.
- (7) #Jon regrets that vampires walk the earth.
- (8) #Jon doesn’t regret that vampires walk the earth.

There seems to be a special property associated with non-factive verbs that allows the speaker to truthfully utter a complement sentence that he believes to be false, as in (5) and (6), violating Gricean principles. However, at the same time the speaker must believe that the subject, ‘Jon’, would judge ‘vampires walk the earth’ to be a true statement in order to speak truthfully. The fact that (7) and (8) are ruled out is unexpected if one analyzes both factive and non-factive verbs as plain intensionals (Larson, 2002), because we would expect complements of intensional verbs to allow a non-denoting predicate. In this paper we propose an analysis of these facts in the sententialist spirit of Larson, but differing in that we propose a kind of pragmatic operator in non-factive contexts which allows the speaker to truthfully utter (embedded) sentences that he believes to be false. The operator in non-factive contexts allows someone other than the speaker to accept the truth of the whole sentence, while not needing to accept the truth of the embedded sentence. The speaker can still judge the whole sentence to be felicitous as long as the speaker believes that the subject of the matrix sentence would believe the embedded clause to be true. The lack of this operator in factive contexts rules out (7) and (8).

The operator has syntactic reality, as claimed by de Cuba & Ürögdi (2001) and de Cuba (2002), since clausal complements to non-factive predicates take an additional CP node (CP*), while clausal complements to factive predicates do not.

Additional evidence for the existence of this operator in the clausal complements comes from the factive predicates in the scope of negation. As shown in (8), negation on the factive predicate does not override the factive property of the predicate, namely the embedded clausal complement has to be true in order for the whole sentence to be acceptable. If negation is sentential, as in (9), the embedded clausal complement does not have to be true.

(9) It is not the case that Jon regrets that vampires walk the Earth.

Similar results are obtained in negations of a matrix predicate to a factive verb. If factive verbs are embedded, the requirement on truth of their clausal complements is not ruled out, as shown with infelicity of (10). Regardless of what John and Peter's beliefs about the shape of the Earth are, the sentence is infelicitous as long as we (or the speaker) think the lowest most clause is false.

(10) John thinks that Peter regrets that the Earth is flat.

However, when the matrix predicate of (10) is negated. The sentence becomes acceptable, regardless of the falsity of the lowest clause, as in (11).

(11) John does not think that Peter regrets that the Earth is flat.

The operator in the CP* of the clausal complement to the non-factive predicate is sensitive to the negation of the non-factive predicate, removing speaker responsibility for the truth of what follows. Since factives do not have the CP* operator, negation of the factive predicate does not influence the requirement of truth of what follows, as in (8).

In addition to sentential complement contexts, our proposed operator can be exploited to analyze cases of intensionality in adverb modification (12), adjectival modification (13), and with epistemic adverbs (14) and modal verbs (15). All of these cases create intensional environments.

(12) Peter allegedly diets.

(13) Peter is an alleged dieter.

(14) Mark probably eats fish.

(15) Mark may eat fish.

We argue that the adverbs and modals move up to the CP field in matrix clauses, and in conjunction with the operator, remove the speaker from responsibility of the felicity of the utterance. This allows us to avoid postulating an extra hidden clause to explain the intensional properties in these cases – for us intensionality is associated with the operator, not necessarily only sentential complementation. Intensional adjectives work similarly, with movement within the DP analogous to CP movement.

References:

- de Cuba, Carlos and Barbara Ürögdi. (2001). The Role of factivity in the syntax and semantics of embedded clauses. Paper presented at SUNY/CUNY/NYU Mini-conference: SUNY Stony Brook, Spring 2001.
- de Cuba, Carlos. (2002). CP-recursion revisited: Embedded V2 in Swedish. Paper presented at the Comparative Germanic Syntax Workshop 17. University of Iceland, August 9-10, 2002.
- Larson, Richard. (2002). The grammar of Intensionality. Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (eds.) *Logical form and Language*:228-262 Clarendon Press, Oxford.