THE COMPLEMENTATION OF PERCEPTION VERBS BY FINITE CLAUSES

Mihaela MANASIA
Junior Lecturer Ph.D
“Constantin Brâncusi” University of Targu Jiu

ABSTRACT
THIS PAPER DEALS WITH THE COMPLEMENTATION OF PERCEPTION VERBS BY FINITE CLAUSES. OUR MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO PRESENT CERTAIN ASPECTS OF ONE OF THE MOST COMMON COMPLEMENTS OF ENGLISH PERCEPTION VERBS. IT WILL BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE FORM OF COMPLEMENTS IS CONSTRAINED BY A SEMANTIC-TYPE COMBINATION (ENTITY, PROCESS, FACT, EVENTUALITY, ETC.) OF THE REFERENT THEY DENOTE AND THE SEMANTICS OF VERBS WHICH GOVERN THEM. FURTHERMORE, THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH, ROMANIAN AND FRENCH SHOWS A RATHER STRIKING CONVERGENCE OF THE PHENOMENA IN THESE LANGUAGES, BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES WE SHALL ALSO ATTEMPT TO HIGHLIGHT.

KEY WORDS: PERCEPTION VERBS, COMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS, FINITE CLAUSES.

The complementation by finite clauses is the pattern we shall analyse within our paper. English, Romanian and French present similarities as to this type of complementation. In each of these languages, the finite clause consists of a noun phrase occupying the position of the subject and a finite verb, either expressing time or following a modal. On the basis of their communicative function, finite clauses may be divided into declarative, interrogative, imperative and exclamatory. On the basis of their function within the main clause, finite clauses may be divided into nominal, adverbial and relative. Three types of finite clauses are relevant for perception verbs: declarative, interrogative and adverbial clauses.

Declarative finite clauses are also called that-clauses because they are usually introduced by the complementizer that. In English, that is optional while in the romance languages it is obligatory. Declarative finite clauses are introduced only by passive verbs as exemplified below:

(1) a. Engl. We saw that Mary won the race.
   Ro. Am văzut că Maria a câștigat cursa.
   Fr. Nous avons vu que Marie a gagné la course.

b. Engl. We heard that Mary won the race.
   Ro. Am auzit că Maria a câștigat cursa.
   Fr. Nous avons entendu que Marie a gagné la course.

c. Engl. She felt that somebody touched her.
   Ro. A simțit că cineva a atins-o.
Fr. Elle a senti que quelqu’un l’a touchée.
d. Engl. The man tasted that there was garlic in the food.
    Ro. Omul a simțit că mâncarea are gust de usturoi.
    Fr. L’homme a senti que la nourriture a goût d’ail.
e. Engl. The girl smelled that the cake was burning in the oven.
    Ro. Fata a simțit că prăjitura ardea în cuptor.
    Fr. La fille a senti que le gâteau brulait dans le four. [1]

With regard to the interrogative finite clauses, they can also be found in all three languages under investigation. In English, they are either introduced by a wh-word or preceded by the conjunction if while in the Romance languages, they are introduced by dacă/si or a relative pronoun.

They may be built both with active and passive perception verbs:

(2) a. Eng. They looked at what the children drew.
    Ro. S-au uitat la ce au desenat copii.
    Fr. Ils ont regardé ce que les enfants ont dessiné.
b. Eng. We heard what Mary had done.
    Ro. Am auzit ce a făcut Maria.
    Fr. Nous avons entendu ce que Marie a fait.
c. Eng. The mother touched what they brought her.
    Ro. Mama a atins ceea ce i-au adus.
    Fr. La mère a touché ce qu’ils ont lui amené.
d. Eng. The man tasted what the cook gave him.
    Ro. Omul a gustat ceea ce i-a dat bucătarul.
    Fr. L’homme a gouté ce que le cuisinier lui a donné.
e. Eng. The girl smelled if there was smoke in the room
    Ro. Fata a mirosit dacă era fum în cameră.
    Fr. La fille a senti s’il y avait de la fumée dans la chambre.

The last type of finite clause is the adverbial clause represented by adverbial clauses of unreal comparison which can occur in the three languages but not in the case of all sensory modalities. They are introduced by ‘as if, as though, like’ in English, ‘comme si’ in French, and the phrasal conjunction ‘de parcă, ca și cum’ in Romanian.

The adverbial clauses are only possible with copulative verbs:

(3) a. Engl. It looked as if she had won the race.
    Ro. Arăta de parcă ar fi caștigat cursa.
    Fr. -
b. Engl. It sounded as though somebody entered the room.
    Ro. A sunat ca și cum cineva ar fi intrat în cameră.
    Fr. Ca a sonné comme si quelqu’un est entré dans la chambre.
c. Engl. It felt as if somebody threw a bucket of cold water over me.
    Ro. -
    Fr. -
d. Engl. It tasted as if there was fish in the soup.
    Ro. -
    Fr: -
e. Engl. It smelled as if there was a cake in the oven.
    Ro. Mirosea ca și cum ar fi fost o prajitură în cuptor.
    Fr. Il sentait comme s’il y avait un gâteau dans le four.
The most salient trait of the complementation by finite clauses consists of the existence of two distinct sentences, referring to two independent processes namely the perceptual event and the perceived situation. The absence of a correlation between the subordinated complement and the main clause triggers a reduction of the syntactic constraints observed for the other types of complements. In addition, the semantic interpretation of the object clause varies more than that of other constructions. It generally denotes acts of indirect perception but it can also correspond to acts of direct perception. The object clause prototypically represents the result of the perceiver’s deductive reasoning and calculations following acts of indirect perception:

(4) a. Engl. I see (in your eyes) that you are lying.  
    Ro. Văd (în ochii tăi) că minţi.  
    Fr. Je vois (à tes yeux) que tu mens.  

b. Engl. I hear (in your voice) that you are eager to go on your summer holiday.  
    Ro. Aud (din vocea ta) că ești nerăbdător să pleci în vacanţa de vară.  
    Fr. J’entends (à ta voix) que tu es impatient d’aller en vacances.

Another emerging aspect is that of the object clause occurring after passive and not active perception verbs, always a mark of direct perception. Nevertheless, as the contrast between direct and indirect perception is not very clear, it is not always easy to determine the direct or indirect nature of the object clause. For instance, what is the difference between a finite clause (4a) and a direct object followed by a non-finite complement (4b)?

(5) a. I hear that the dog is barking.  
    b. I hear the dog barking.

In both situations, we deal with a process of direct perception, since the perceiver directly hears that the dog barks.

In most cases, the object clause is factual but it may as well indicate an eventuality though this is rarer. When it is factual, it may be a conclusion drawn from the perceptual data corresponding to the modality of the perception verb chosen:

(6) a. I see that the plane has landed.  
    Văd că avionul a aterizat.  
    Je vois que l’avion a atterri.  

b. I heard that your mother had an accident.  
    Am auzit că mama ta a avut un accident.  
    J’ai entendu que ta mère a eu un accident.

In (6a), the conclusion is represented by the visual perception of a recently landed plane while in (6b), we deal with the auditory indirect perception of some words. However, the fact may also be a conclusion not related to the specific perceptual modality expressed by the verb of perception. The example below clearly proves that it is impossible for data of visual perception to be the source of the conclusion reached by the man:

Engl. The man, seeing that the two women were beginning to argue about something, decided to ignore them and watched the children playing outside.  
Ro. Omul, văzând că cele două femei au început să se certe, decise să le ignore și privii copii cum se jucau afară.  
Fr. L’homme, voyant que les deux femmes commençaient à discuter fortement, décida de les ignorer et regarda les enfants jouer dehors.

The interpretation of these sentences is purely cognitive and the verb of perception can be paraphrased by ‘note, understand, learn or realize’. The perception verb ‘hear’ conveys
the idea that the conclusion must be drawn from auditory data. However, it may happen, in uses similar to (38b), that the news of the accident was read, and not heard. The cases where the object clause denotes an eventuality paraphrased, for instance, by a verb such as ‘imagine’, are less frequent:

(7) Engl. I can’t see how his arrival can change things.
    Ro. Nu văd cu ce ar putea schimba lucrurile sosirea lui.
    Fr. Je ne vois pas en quoi son arrivée pourrait changer les choses.

Apart from the transition from direct to indirect perception, the object clause also establishes a polysemous movement from the field of perception to that of cognition. Indeed, the properties of the object clauses associated to verbs of perception are very similar to the equivalent constructions with verbs of cognition such as ‘realize’ and ‘know’.[3]

In conclusion, some of the main points we highlight regarding the complementation by finite clauses are that the time reference of the object clause is independent of that of the main clause as a consequence of the existence of two separate processes and also the process denoted by the object clause is entirely independent. The complementation by declarative, interrogative and adverbial finite clauses occurs in the three languages under investigation with some exceptions in the case of the adverbial phrase in the target languages where the equivalent evidentials are missing. [3]

REFERENCES

[1]. The examples offered in this paper are personal, being extracted from what we have read and heard, and verified by native speakers.
[3]. For more on the complementation of perception verbs by finite clauses see: