How to identify, and how to deal with, emergent complementizers?

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Content

After it was recognized that complementizers are not just “flags” that mark the connection between some predicate and its clausal argument, but are often loaded with additional content (cf. Frajzyngier & Jasperson 1991; Frajzyngier 1995), the last 10-15 years have seen some progress in the classification and functional description of complementizers others than THAT, IF and HOW (cf., for instance, Boye & Kehayov (eds.) 2016). Several more specialized types of complementizers can be pointed out as clause-connecting devices that recur in language after language, although with different frequency and some of them showing areal biases. Thus, for instance, in different languages of Eastern Europe we encounter complementizers marked for epistemic and/or evidential values which derive from AS IF-units (irreal comparison), e.g. Pol. jakoby, Russ. budto (by) (cf. Zaitseva 1995; Wiemer 2008; forthcoming; Letuchiy 2010). There are other classes of complementizers related to various IRREALIS-domains, either volition- or knowledge-oriented ones. A specific subclass is complementizers that can be regarded as markers of apprehensional clauses (e.g., Russ. On bojalsja, kak by ne opozdal ‘He was afraid lest he be late’), which, in a sense, can be treated as polar equivalents of independent optative clauses. With such specific, and often marginal, types of complementizers we are facing the question how they arise, and we notice a general neglect of methodology when it comes to spelling out, and applying, diagnostic criteria to pinpoint complementation (and thus subordination) in the first place. I want to address the following issues: Which diagnostics can be formulated to distinguish (a) clausal complementation from juxtaposition and (b) complementizers from other kinds of connectives (particles, conjunctions)? (c) Which criteria should be used in diachronic studies and the study of oral and/or non-standard speech? I will illustrate my points on examples from Slavic and Lithuanian and show that problems in real (contemporary) discourse do not differ from those of diachronic corpora.

References


Wiemer, Björn (forthcoming). On triangulation in the domain of clause linkage and propositional marking. In: Grković-Major, Jasmina, Björn Hansen & Barbara Sonnenhauser (eds.): Diachronic

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