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On the Structure of Present Subjunctive Complements in Present-Day English

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In this joint research, we examine the structure of the complement clause which takes the form of present subjunctive. For illustration, consider the following example:

(1) I demand that she tell him the truth.

What makes (1) special is that there is no apparent agreement between the third person subject and the verb. We propose the following in order to account for this fact (cf. Roberts (1985), Takezawa (1984)):

(2) *Null Modal Hypothesis*:
In Present-day English, present subjunctive complements contain a phonologically null modal auxiliary (henceforth, ϕ_M) in T(ense).

Given (2), the example in (1) is analyzed as follows, where irrelevant details are omitted:

(3) I demand $[_{CP}$ that $[_{TP}$ she $[_{T}$ $[_{T}$ $\phi_{M}]$ $[_{VP}$ tell him the truth]]]].

When T is occupied by a modal like *will*, *may*, or *must*, the verb does not agree with the subject. Likewise, by assuming that ϕ_M is qualified as an English modal, and thus occupies T in present subjunctive complements, it immediately follows that there is no subject-verb agreement.

Let us make a brief argument against two possible alternatives to our proposal. One is that present subjunctive complements are derived through deletion of *should*. At first glance, this proposal might appear to be plausible, since present subjunctive complements often alternate with complements with *should*. The following pair of examples shows, however, that this kind of alternation is not always possible:

(4) a. It is necessary that she know the answer.
b. ??It is necessary that she should know the answer.

This fact suggests that the class of predicates that selects present subjunctive and the one that selects complements with *should* should be distinguished, which would have advocates of the *should*-deletion analysis at bay. The other is to assume that present subjunctive complements lack T. This alternative does not seem valid either, in face of the difference in Case-marking between the subject of present subjunctive complements and that of what Akmajian (1984) calls mad-magazine sentences. In short, his conclusion is that mad-magazine sentences like *Him wear a tuxedo?!* lack T, and that sentences without T have the subject bearing accusative Case by 'default.' In the same vein, the subject of the present subjunctive complements should bear accusative Case if they, like mad-magazine sentences, do not have T. This prediction is not borne out, however, as the following example shows:

(5) *I demand that her tell him the truth.

Under the hypothesis in (2), the example in (5) does not matter: English modals are allowed to

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appear only in finite clauses, where the subject is always assigned nominative Case. If present subjunctive complements contain ϕ_M, then the subject must be assigned nominative Case. Thus, it is concluded that the hypothesis in (2) is more plausible than those alternatives.

In addition, several arguments can be made in support of the hypothesis in (2). One is that in present subjunctive complements, *do*-support gives rise to ungrammaticality:

(6) We demand that the Economic authority (*does) introduce price controls.

This is because ϕ_M occupies the position in which the supportive *do* would be inserted; as well as other modals, ϕ_M and the supportive *do* are mutually exclusive. Moreover, the presence of ϕ_M has another consequence. Consider the following sentence, which shows that sequence of tenses is not observed between the matrix and the embedded verb:

(7) I demanded that she ϕ_M tell him the truth.

Because of ϕ_M, the verb remains to be non-finite. As a result, the absence of sequence of tenses obtains. A third argument comes from contraction of an auxiliary to the preceding subject. Selkirk (1972: 105) points out that contraction of that kind is prohibited in present subjunctive complements:

(8) a. *I demanded that they've removed their shoes before entering.
b. I demanded that they ϕ_M have removed their shoes before entering.

Since ϕ_M is present in T and intervenes between *they* and *have*, as shown in (8b), it blocks contraction between them, giving rise to the ungrammaticality observed in (8a). Finally, subject-aux inversion is not observed in present subjunctive complements, as pointed out by Roberts (1993: 324):

(9) a. I require that under no circumstances should he do that.
b. ?*I require that under no circumstances he should do that.
c. I require that under no circumstances ϕ_M he do that.

We assume with Roberts that in (9c), though subject-aux inversion does not surface, ϕ_M undergoes the operation in the way that *should* does in (9a).

To summarize, we have argued that by postulating ϕ_M, we can give a coherent explanation for various syntactic phenomena associated with present subjunctive complements without any ad hoc stipulation. It has also been shown that the inventory of English modal auxiliaries includes ϕ_M in addition to such a lexical item as *will*, *may*, or *must*.

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