

***I'M AFRAID THERE'S NO SUBORDINATE CLAUSE
HERE – ON THE STATUS OF SOME
„ADJECTIVE COMPLEMENT“ CLAUSES FROM
DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVE***

Abstract: Elaborating on the accounts of „object clauses“ given in literature, the paper aims to explore the possibility of the *main clause + finite subordinate nominal clause functioning as adjective complement* construction, as in the example given in the above title itself, being more appropriately reanalyzed into a monoclausal structure, consisting of: 1) an epistemic parenthetical/formulaic stance marker, e.g. *I am afraid*, that manages discourse interaction and that consequently has a secondary function in the discourse, and 2) a main, rather than subordinate, clause, as exemplified by the rest of the above example, that presents the content that is more important from discourse perspective. In that sense, the paper presents and discusses some of the criteria that might warrant such a reanalysis, in addition to briefly addressing the ways the same phenomenon can be explored in Serbian and pointing to the pedagogical implications of the proposed reanalysis of the given structure.

Key words: syntactically superordinate / subordinate clauses, discourse superordinate / subordinate clauses, epistemic parentheticals, the interplay of syntax and discourse

1. Introduction

The paper deals with an aspect of the link between syntax □ dealing with the structure and functioning of phrases, clauses and sentences □ and discourse □ dealing with connected speech and writing □ as exemplified by a very specific organization of what is usually taken to be a *main clause (MCl) + subordinate nominal clause functioning as a adjective complement (NalCl/Ca)* construction in discourse setting.

In particular, it was inspired by the sentence *How he's managed to do that, I'm not sure* used in a broader discourse in a film. In other words, it was motivated by a quest to explore a specific use of what are usually considered to be MCl's □ *I'm not sure, I'm afraid*, and the like □ when they could be said not to have been used as MCl's followed by a subordinate NalCl/Ca at all, as in *I'm afraid there's no subordinate clause here* in the title above, but rather, when they occur *within* what can be considered to be a subordinate clause e.g. *There's, I'm afraid, no subordinate clause here*, or right *at the end* of it, e.g. *There's no subordinate clause here, I'm afraid*, thereby taking into account discourse considerations, as well.

In that sense, the basic aims of the given paper are as follows. Firstly, the paper aims to test the views put forward in the relevant literature on the issue, to

be addressed soon, dealing with the status of what are traditionally called finite subordinate NalCl/Ca and with the status of the accompanying clauses traditionally called main clauses. Secondly, it attempts to explore the possibility of the *MCl + finite subordinate NalCl/Ca* construction being more appropriately reanalysed into a *monoclausal* structure, consisting of the following: 1) *an epistemic parenthetical / formulaic stance marker / attention getter / marker of the illocutionary force of the utterance*, e.g. *I am afraid*, that manages discourse interaction and that consequently has a *secondary* function in the discourse, and 2) a *main* □ rather than subordinate □ *clause* the rest of the above example, that presents the content that is more important from a discourse perspective. Thirdly, it aims to briefly test the same views on a Serbian corpus. And fourthly, it attempts to briefly discuss the pedagogical implications of such an analysis.

Before the paper proceeds to doing so in section 2, and before it presents the details on the theoretical background, the corpus, and the method all of which will be dealt with in the remainder of this section, it will only be briefly stated here that by finite or *complement clauses* we will take to mean those traditionally considered „subordinate“ clauses functioning as the direct object (DO), the indirect object, the retained object, the subjective and the objective complement, the noun complement and, eventually, the adjective complement (Ca). For details on their internal structure, their external properties, and their presented functions, the reader is referred to Huddleston/Pullum (2002: 213–321) and Quirk *et al.* (1985: 987–991, 1045–1145).

When it comes to the types of finite NalCl/Ca clauses, which are of primary concern in this paper, they are usually classified as follows:

- 1) *that* clauses: *I am sure that he is here now*
- 2) *wh*-clauses: *I was unsure what I should say*
- 3) *if / whether* clauses: *She was no longer sure if he intended to come to her.*

For details on the given clause type in particular, as well as for the actual adjectives □ such as *sure*, *unsure*, *afraid*, etc. □ that those clauses combine with, for the non-finite types of NalCl/Ca, and similar related issues, please see: Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1220–1226, Huddleston / Pullum, 2002: 542–547.

1.1. Theoretical Background

The theoretical background of the given paper relies primarily on the works of several authors coming from the fields of Functional and Cognitive linguistics for delimiting the terms Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics and the relation between the two, see Nuyts (2007: 543–565).

As far as works of the linguists from Functional Linguistics are concerned, the paper will first address Thompson (2002) and Diessel & Tomasello (2001) (within the given approach, the given linguists were primarily involved in the domain of discourse studies and are said to have developed Rhetorical Structure Theory; for an overview of the bibliography in the given theory, the reader is referred to „<http://www.sfu.ca/rst/pdfs/rst-bib.pdf>“, and for additional details on the work of the given linguists to Nuyts, 2005: 547).

Both given sources (Thompson 2002 and Diessel & Tomasello 2001), while dealing with complementation in conversation and in children's acquisition of complementation structures respectively, challenge the traditional assumption that complement clauses should be viewed as instances of subordination of those clauses to the MCI. In that sense, they insist that the complement clause represents an „assessment of an object of attention“, whereas the MCI represents „an epistemic stance on that assessment, issue or claim“. For example, in a sentence such as *I believe that they are there already*, the complement clause *that they are there already* is taken to represent an assessment of an object of attention, in this case *they*, whereas the MCI *I believe* is considered to represent an epistemic stance on that assessment.

R. Langacker, a well-known representative of Cognitive Linguistics in general and Cognitive Grammar in particular¹, in Langacker (2008: 418–419), puts forward the view that, from a discourse perspective, „the content presented in subordinate clauses is often more important“, in which sense he gives this short discourse as an example: *There's something [you simply have to know]. It seems [that Gerald's trophy wife is really a transsexual]. I suppose [they'll get a divorce]. I am telling you because [he'll need a good lawyer]*. In other words, if one were to rely on the main, and syntactically superordinate, clauses only; for example, *There's something, It seems, I suppose, I am telling you*; one would be justified in saying that the discourse does not progress at all. On the other hand, if one relied on the dependent, syntactically subordinate clauses, functioning here as the DO, one would get what could count as a relatively coherent discourse: *You simply have to know – Gerald's trophy wife is really a transsexual. They'll get a divorce. He'll need a good lawyer*. In that sense, this author concludes that this questions whether the clauses traditionally labelled as subordinate actually deserve that label. Namely, he adds, when it comes to conveying essential content, „it is often the so-called subordinate clause that plays the leading role“. Conversely, it is common for a „main“ clause to have a secondary function, such as indicating the status of that content □ *it seems, I suppose...*, or managing discourse interaction □ *I am telling you because...*

A. Verhagen, in Verhagen 2005, starts from the presented theoretical perspectives and extends them to written discourse. In that sense, and as it will be seen, he also introduces the concept of „intersubjectivity“, which is also quite important for our purposes in this paper.

Namely, he says that language use is intimately tied to the fundamental human ability to „coordinate cognitively with others“ (*ibid.*, p. 8). That cognitive coordination for the speaker/writer means an attempt to influence somebody else's thoughts, attitudes and immediate behaviour, whereas for the addressee it means finding out what kind of influence it is that the speaker / writer is trying to exert and deciding to go with it or not (*ibid.*, p. 10). The default condition for ordinary expressions is that they provide an argument for some conclusion, and this argumentative orientation is constant in the function of the expression, while its information value is more variable (*ibid.*). In that sense, this author claims, „ordinary linguistic communication

¹ contrary to what he proposed in Langacker (1991: 66–70) *et passim*

is basically argumentative, not primarily informative“ (*ibid.*, 22/23), and human language is „fundamentally a matter of regulating and assessing others, of mutual influencing, and not of information exchange“; in addition, „grammatical elements and syntactic constructions in general, have systematic, conventional functions in the dimension of intersubjective coordination²“.

In that sense, the given author introduces what he terms „construal configuration“ and its basic elements (*ibid.* p. 7).

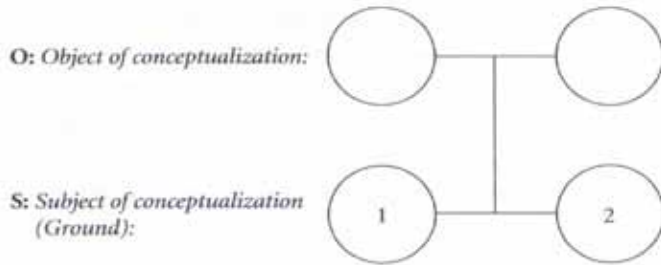


Diagram 1. The construal configuration and its basic elements

Even when an actual speaker/writer is absent, an addressee (numbered 2 in the diagram above) takes a linguistic utterance as having been intentionally produced as an instrument of communication by another human being, with the same basic cognitive capacities as the addressee, and thus always engages in „cognitive coordination“ with another subject of conceptualization (numbered 1 in the diagram above). Along the same lines, even when the addressee is absent, a speaker / writer assumes that his / her utterance is in principle interpretable by somebody else sharing the knowledge of certain conventions. It is in that sense, as already stated above, that language use is intimately tied to the fundamental human ability to coordinate cognitively with others (*ibid.*, p. 7 / 8). That is what the „S-level“, at which there are two circles representing two subjects of cognitive coordination in the lower part of the diagram above, refers to. On the other hand, the „O-level“ refers to an object of conceptualization that the speaker/writer and the addressee(s) actually cognitively coordinate about.

It can happen that certain utterances pertain primarily to the „O-level“, as in the sentence such as *John owns a horse*, whereas other utterances may focus entirely on the dimension of cognitive coordination between/among the subjects of conceptualization □ the „S-level“, as when people say *Hi, Sorry, Hey*, or use other phatic expressions, in well-known Malinowski’s terms. The former case is represented in the Diagram 2 below, in which the S-level, as the less important one, is given in dotted lines, whereas the latter case can be graphically represented as in the Diagram 3 below, in which case it is the O-level, as the one that plays a lesser role in such utterance types, is given in dotted lines.

² for details and illustrative examples please see *ibid.*, p. 9

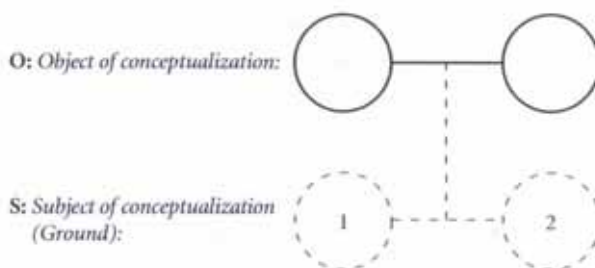


Diagram 2. The construal configuration in maximally „objective“ expressions, e.g. *John owns a horse* (*ibid.*, p. 17)

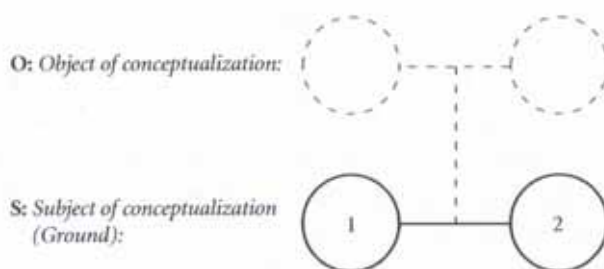


Diagram 3. The construal configuration in maximally „subjective“ expressions, e.g. *Hi, Sorry, Hey* (*ibid.*, p. 18)

In that sense, we now come to the point how the notions of cognitive coordination, the S-level and the O-level presented above connect to the topic of this paper in the first place.

Namely, according to the given author, the primary function of main, also referred to as complement-taking/CT, clauses of complementation construction is at the S-level – they operate in the domain of intersubjective coordination, provide specifications of perspectives rather than descriptions of events or situations, e.g. *I believe...*, *He thinks...*, and invite an addressee to identify with a particular perspective on an object of conceptualization presented in the embedded clause (*ibid.*, p. 79).

Most importantly for our purposes in this paper, such clauses are taken *not* to present the main line of discourse. Namely, a CT clause is said to specify how to engage in cognitive coordination with another subject of conceptualization, but on its own it does not constitute a complete, relevant contribution to a discourse.

In that sense, generally speaking, complementation constructions, those that consist of a main and a subordinate clause, are *not* structural devices to present one objectively construed event as subordinate to another, but „devices to invite an addressee to consider an object of conceptualization, presented in a complement clause, from a particular perspective in a particular way, as specified in the main / CT clause“. Along the same lines, they „instruct the addressee of an utterance to coordinate cognitively, in a way specified by the main clause, with another object of

conceptualization in construing the object of conceptualization, represented by the main clause, and not that of representing an object of conceptualization“ (*ibid.*, p. 109), and in that sense „pertain to intersubjective coordination of cognitive systems“ (*ibid.*, 97).

In section 2 of this paper, as stated above, one of the tasks of the paper will be to apply the views presented here regarding the *MCI + NalCI/DO* construction to the above-mentioned *MCI + NalCI/Ca* construction.

Before that, the corpus of the research will briefly be presented.

1.2. The Corpus

The English part of the corpus consists of short texts retrieved from the British National Corpus (BNC), from which a total of 1000 random examples containing the given structure were excerpted. Thereby, we made sure that the given structure, usually constituting a sentence *per se*, e.g. *I'm sure they've left*, or constituting a part of another sentence, *He is here but I'm sure they've left*, is excerpted together with a broader discourse it appears in, which in this case usually consisted of a sentence preceding and a sentence coming after the sentence or an utterance containing the given structure.

Similar was done when it comes to the Serbian corpus containing the given construction, which was excerpted from the *Corpus of Contemporary Serbian Language (Korpus savremenog srpskog jezika)*, (Retrieved from: <http://www.korpus.matf.bg.ac.rs/korpus/login.php>) from which also 1000 random examples containing the given structure were excerpted, also alongside a broader discourse such a construction appears in, as described above.

What follows are examples of two such discourses, coming from English and Serbian respectively, in which the entire construction in question is given in bold, with what is commonly considered to be the MCI given in capitals, and what is usually taken to be a subordinate clause being underlined.

*He was a salesman for something or other and must have been transferred. **I'M SURE it'll be in the files.** We usually run a social note when somebody gets transferred.*

*On je upozorio i da bi, ukoliko međunarodna zajednica pribegne nekim jednostranim merama, poput priznanja nezavisnosti Kosova, to moglo dovesti do krupne političke krize u Srbiji. „**NISAM SIGURAN kako bi se to odrazilo na opstanak vlade**”, izjavio je Ljajić. On je dodao da niko od zvaničnika, ni u Beogradu, ni u Prištini, ni u Briselu, ne govori o podeli Kosova kao rešenju.*

For limitation of space, in what follows later in section 2, only the examples of the given construction will be presented, but the broader context, the discourse, those examples belong to will always be kept in mind when drawing any conclusions.

1.3. The Method

For the analysis of the excerpted material, the paper relies on the one adopted in Verhagen, 2005: 94–97 and 149–151. Namely, the clauses commonly analysed

as subordinate were first separated from the MClS; in this case NaIClS/Ca from the MClS, whereas Verhagen did the same for some other types of what are considered to be complement clauses. Then the contribution of subordinate ones, on the one hand, and of the MClS, on the other hand, were analysed with respect to their role in providing coherence and the „overall progress“ of the discourse the given *MCl + NaICl/Ca* construction belongs to.

2. Analysis

The first observation regarding the excerpted material is that what is usually taken to be the MCl can indeed often behave like a parenthetical, i.e. „an expression of which it can be argued that, while in some sense hosted by another expression (H), [it] makes no contribution to the structure of H“ (Brown, 2005 [1993] – VIII: 179). What is more, they can be considered *epistemic adverbials* and can be said to constitute their own prosodic phrases – just like *I mean, You know*, the „discourse marker“ status of which is well-known (see *ibid.*). For example, compare the following pairs of sentences taken from both English and Serbian: ***I am sure you recall them / You recall them, I'm sure, Siguran sam da je to bilo kažnjavanje grada / Bilo je to, siguran sam, kažnjavanje grada.***

Secondly, just as it was shown to be the case with the *MCl + NaICl/DO* construction, the *MCl + NaICl/Ca* construction can also often be said to be characterized by the following □ namely by the fact that the NaICl/Ca, i.e. the complement clause, can be said to present the main line of discourse, whereas what are syntactically taken to be MClS can be said to present an epistemic stance towards what is being said. The examples for that, once again coming from both English and Serbian, are given below. As stated above, due to space limitations, only the examples of the given construction will be presented, but the broader context, the discourse, those examples belong to has been kept in mind in the given analysis.

MAIN CLAUSES	COMPLEMENT CLAUSES
<i>I am sure</i>	<i>very soon now you and your lord will be reunited.</i>
<i>He is sure</i>	<i>the roughness of his musical background has been fundamental to the development of his adult musical style.</i>
<i>I am afraid</i>	<i>that is the way of the world.</i>
<i>I am convinced</i>	<i>the stress and trauma of this past year contributed to their deaths.</i>
<i>I am certain</i>	<i>this is the case with regard to John</i>
<i>We are confident</i>	<i>these, together with the impact of the national curriculum, will encourage more young people to study science and technology post-16, whether on the academic or the vocational track.</i>
<i>Siguran sam</i>	<i>da naša pobjeda u meču protiv Rusa znači i plasman na Šampionat sveta.</i>
<i>Siguran sam</i>	<i>da nema u tome nikakve utehe.</i>

As it can be seen from the above examples, what are syntactically considered MCIs □ *I am convinced*, *We are confident*, *Siguran sam*, etc. □ can indeed in this construction type as well be said to specify how to engage in cognitive coordination with another subject of conceptualization. However, without some specification of an object of conceptualization with respect to which this should be done, they do *not* constitute a complete, relevant contribution to a discourse. On the contrary, it can be said that it is the content of the complement (syntactically subordinate) clauses, such as *very soon now you and your lord will be reunited*, *naša pobjeda u meču protiv Rusa znači i plasman na Šampionat sveta*, etc., provide the material without which the syntactically MCI cannot perform its role in the discourse. In that sense, the given examples seem to confirm the view that what are taken to be MCIs just guide the hearers / readers in their interpretation of the proposition expressed in what is considered the syntactically subordinate clause.

Thirdly, the traditionally considered complement (subordinate) clauses can be used by themselves, i.e. the prepositional content can be expressed without what are also traditionally considered to be „main clauses“, as in the examples repeated from above: *[T]he stress and trauma of this past year contributed to their deaths*, [...] *nema u tome nikakve utehe*. In other words, the given data seem to corroborate the

observation that in this construction type as well, the MCI seems to be demoted to a kind of a clausal operator (*cf.* Diessel & Tomasello, 2001: 106).

And fourthly, quite a few instances were identified in the corpus of the given construction in which the clause taken to be a nominal one, i.e. the *NalCI/Ca*, is not substitutable by a nominal at all. Compare, for example, the following groups of sentences: *I am sure very soon now you and your lord will be reunited*³ / *I am sure it / I am sure OF / ABOUT it*, *Siguran sam da nema u tome nikakve utehe* / **Siguran sam to / Siguran sam U to*. In other words, a nominal can indeed be inserted in the given construction type after what is usually taken to be the MCI, but only on condition some other word, prepositions in the given examples, are added after it, so that the newly added nominal no longer functions as the *Ca*, but rather as the object of the preposition.

This seems to be in line with an observation made in Verhagen (2005: 100) regarding the *MCI + NalCI/DO* construction, with relation to which the given author states that the *S V DO* (subject / predicator / direct object) is too high a level of abstraction for a proper characterization of complementation constructions. Namely, the given author says that whereas it is indeed plausible to analyze a syntactically simple sentence such as *John owns a house* as consisting of the given functional elements, each of which has been underlined in the given example, the same cannot and should not be applied to a sentence such as *I know that John owns a house*, which is also typically analyzed as *S V DO* functionally.

In that sense, the given author insists that using simplex clauses (such as *John owns a house*) as the structural model for the analysis of complementation constructions (as in *I know that John owns a house*) implies imposing the structure of an object of conceptualization on those constructions, which, in turn, obscures the fact that they (i.e. such syntactically complex constructions) serve to *link the intersubjective and objective dimensions* of linguistic communication. So, whereas simplex clauses (i.e. syntactically simple sentences) are primarily related to an *object* of conceptualization, the latter type of sentences do that as well (in the complement clause), *but also present an addressee as coordinating cognitively with an object of conceptualization* (in the MCI). In other words, the primary function of MCIs of complementation constructions is located at the S-level. They provide specifications of perspectives rather than descriptions of events or situations, and „the grammatical roles of subject, object, and predicate from simplex clauses have no straightforward application in these [complementation] constructions, which have a function sui generis“ (*ibid.*, p. 26, 27).

In other words, this paper suggests that the same might be valid for the *MCI + NalCI/Ca* construction as well.

³ For details on when the conjunction *that* can be omitted from the given clauses, the reader is referred to Thompson / Mullac, 1990.

3. Discussion and Conclusions

In conclusion, the paper advocates the view that the theoretical standpoint presented above, namely that the *MCI + NalCI/Ca construction*, at least sometimes (the formulation „at least sometimes“ to be explained shortly), can be more appropriately reanalysed into a monoclausal structure, consisting of the following: 1) an epistemic parenthetical / formulaic stance marker, that manages discourse interaction and that consequently has a secondary function in the discourse, and 2) a main, rather than subordinate, clause. In that sense, the paper has put forward some of the criteria that might warrant such a reanalysis, which might at least partly erode the distinction between main and subordinate clauses, namely the observations that: 1) what is usually taken to be the MCI can indeed often behave like a parenthetical, 2) the NalCI/Ca, i.e. the complement clause, can be said to present the main line of discourse, whereas what is syntactically taken to be MCI can be said to present an epistemic stance towards what is being said, 3) the complement subordinate clauses as traditionally considered can be used by themselves, i.e. the prepositional content can be expressed without what is also traditionally considered to be the „MCI“, and 4) the clause taken to be a nominal one □ i.e. the NalCI/Ca □ may not be substitutable by a nominal at all.

This is especially valid, as the above data taken both from English and Serbian show, in the cases when the syntactically MCI contains the 1st person singular and the Present or the Past Simple Tense, and when there are no auxiliaries, modals, as well as adverbs, prepositional phrases, and the like, in the syntactically MCI. In other words, whereas quite a few instances of examples such as *And that, I am afraid, is just about the most interesting thing you can say about it*, have been found in the corpus in no small degree, practically none were found of this sort: *?*And that, people have been afraid for quite some time, is just about the most interesting thing you can say about it*. On the other hand, the clause taken to be a syntactically subordinate one has proved in quite a lot of examples to be much longer and more diverse, and, very often, not to include a subordinating conjunction at all. This relates particularly to instances where such a clause is a *that* rather than a *wh-* or an *if / whether* one, as in *I am sure [that] very soon now you and your lord will be reunited, I am convinced [that] the stress and trauma of this past year contributed to their deaths*, etc. All of this, together with the above details on the use of the syntactically MCIs as parentheticals and the rest of the presented evidence, may once again testify to the conclusion that what are syntactically treated as subordinate clauses might actually not be either formally or conceptually embedded, that the distinction between the „main“ and „subordinate“ clauses is quite often a blurry one, and that, to cite Thompson & Mullač (1990: 241), complementation including the cases containing clausal complementation of *adjectives*, and not only of *verbs* that the given authors deal with, might not be „so much a grammatically recognizable complex sentence type [...] but rather a refined and normativized specialization of a general discourse use of [MCIs] as epistemic [...] frames for declarative and interrogative clauses“.

To sum up, and to briefly address the pedagogical implications of the given analysis, it is the opinion of the author of this paper that the distinction between main

and subordinate clauses is doubtlessly quite useful and appropriate *syntactically* speaking. However, in view of the *discourse* considerations presented above, these distinctions may actually be misleading, because, as it could be seen, the structures that are syntactically *superordinate* may be *discourse subordinate*, and structures that are syntactically *subordinate*, such as complement clauses, may be *discourse superordinate*. In short, the relation between the *syntactically* superordinate and subordinate clauses, in cases where that status is viewed against the background of the discourse they appear in, need not necessarily reflect their *discourse* status.

In that sense, this paper also puts forward the view that such considerations, i.e. such additional/alternative standpoints, that are usually not dealt with in syntax classes, should undoubtedly, and at least briefly, be presented to students, as such an approach could definitely enhance their knowledge of the given phenomena and make them more aware of the complex relations that can be found when one and the same linguistic material is viewed from two, or more, different linguistic disciplines, or, more generally speaking, from two or more different perspectives.

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Vladan Pavlović

I'M AFRAID THERE'S NO SUBORDINATE CLAUSE HERE – O STATUSU KLAUZA U FUNKCIJI „PRIDEVSKE DOPUNE“ IZ DISKURSNOG UGLA

Rezime

U radu se, na osnovu odgovarajuće literature koja se bavi uporedivim pitanjima, testira hipoteza da se konstrukcija tipa *upravna klauza + zavisna nominalna klauza u funkciji pridevske dopune* (kao u primeru iz naslova, ili u prevodu istog primera na srpski jezik – *Bojim se da ovde nema zavisne klauze*), može, pod uslovima u kojima se govori u radu, posmatrati i kao monoklauzalna struktura, koja bi se sastojala od: 1) epistemičke parenteze (npr. *I am afraid*), koja je značajna pre svega za diskursnu interakciju i shodno tome ima podređeni status iz diskursnog ugla, i 2) upravne (pre negoli zavisne) klauze (kao u ostatku primera iz naslova), kojom se iznosi sadržaj koji je značajniji iz diskursnog ugla. Za pomenuto se potom navode četiri grupe dokaza, ali se isto tako skreće pažnja i na ograničenja i potencijalne probleme ovakve analize, kao i na odgovarajuće pedagoške implikacije.

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