Title	THE THAT-CLAUSE REVISITED
Author(s)	Nomura, Keizo
Citation	Osaka Literary Review. 20 P.54-P.63
Issue Date	1981-11-30
Text Version	publisher
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/25622
DOI	10.18910/25622
rights	
Note	

THE *THAT*-CLAUSE REVISITED

Keizo NOMURA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Preliminaries

A careful reader of English would be sure to notice the differences in meaning and implication in such a set of sentences as:

(1) a. He was not at all sure *that* his method would have been an improvement.　　　　(I. Murdoch, *The Bell*)
  b. He sat there dazed for a minute, not sure *if* he was really awake.　　　　(*Ibid.*)
  c. Michael was not sure at first *whether* Patchway was not under a misapprehension.　　　　(*Ibid.*)
  d. He was not sure *what* it was, here, that he was regretting.
　　　　(*Ibid.*)

The predicate '(be) sure', if negated, can be followed by any of the three complementizers: *that, if/whether*[1], *wh-*[2].

Some more instances may be called upon to clarify the point in question.

(2) a. An owner of an alsatian may have a radically different image of dogs from an owner of a miniature poodle, but it is not obvious *that* they thereby speak a different language.
　　　　(R. Kempson, *Semantic Theory*)
  b. It is not clear *whether* their interpretation can be analysed in terms of concepts.　　　　(*Ibid.*)

(2) exemplifies a variety of (extraposed) sentential subjects with respect to the complementizers which they take. The following examples show a lexical diversity of predicates. (These are not meant to be an exhaustive presentation of the types of complements which each predicate allows.)

---

1) *If* and *whether* will be treated as interchangeable in this paper.
2) *Wh-* represents such words as *who, which, what, when, where, why, how.*

(3) a. 'You know that he gave up his house at Loomouth?'
         'Ah, no, I did not know it. I am surprised.'
         'I don't know *that* I am.'   (A. Christie, *Murder in Three Acts*)
     b. He did not know *whether* he was glad or sorry.   (*The Bell*)

(4) a. He got dressed, intending to make a tour round the house to
         see *that* everything was all right.   (*Ibid.*)
     b. I don't see *that* I want to keep my mind off Jimmie.
                                          (M. Spark, *Robinson*)
     c. See *if* the postman has come. (*ISED*)

(5) a. 'Ever see anyone die quite like that before?'
         'No, I can't say *that* I have. But I haven't really seen as many
         deaths as you might suppose.' (*Murder in Three Acts*)
     b. 'Look upon the prisoner at the bar, and say *whether* she is
         guilty or not guilty.'   (A. Christie, *Sad Cypress*)

(6) a. 'Do you think it is possible, that?'
         'Do I think what is possible?'
         '*That* Elinor Carlisle was unable to bear the sight of her aunt's
         misery and helped her out of existence.'   (*Ibid.*)
     b. I must think *if* I cannot do something.
                              (T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*)

From the above it is clear that there is a subjective component in our
response to a *that*-clause that is not adequately explained by the syntactic
definitions. The *that*-clause suggests a complete situation to which the
speaker is responding, and allows us, the third party, to see the various
elements of complete interaction. It may be said to create a complete, if
small, world in one's mind, or perhaps to put up a finished picture in a
frame. It seems to denote some state of affairs in the factual world. It, in
short, constitutes a holistic whole.

Another comparison of *that*-clauses with those beginning with other
complementizers will illuminate the subtle but discernible difference
between them. Consider the following:

(7) He was not sure *that* he was awake.

(8) He was not sure *if* he was awake.

While (8) is quite neutral as to the question of his-being-awake, in (7)
his-being-awake is being put forward as established. And yet one would

have gone too far to infer, from (7), *i.e.* from the use of the *that*-complementizer, that he *was* really awake. (The predicate 'awake' may complicate the matter unnecessarily because of its implication of consciousness, but the point in question should be clear.) How, then, are we to characterise the nature of *that*-complements?

This paper aims at defining what makes *that*-clauses what they are, *i.e.* what flavours them with holistic overtones, by giving a formal characterisation to the heretofore inadequately explained features of *that*-clauses and exploring their source.

2. The Notion of Sententiality

Those characters of *that*-clauses delineated in the preceding section might be attributed to the fact that *that*-clauses are qualified as (full) sentences, in other words, possess qualifications for being a sentence. And this reminds us of the term *sententiality.*

Recently linguists have begun to speak with increasing frequency of sententiality,[3] or the S-likeness[4] of sentential complements. These terms could be defined as the transition from a full to a nominal clause with respect to the degree of saturatedness of complements. The vertical column in the figure indicates this scalar transition to sentential completeness.

main clause	*yes/no* question	*wh*-question
that-clause	*whether*-clause	*wh*-clause
for-to Accusative-*ing* Possessive-*ing* Action Nominal Derived Nominal		
noun		

Note that other than the main clause (henceforth, matrix sentence), the

---

3) *e.g.* Kageyama (1976)
4) *e.g.* Nakamura (1976)

that-clause is the most sentential of all the complements, and also that the scale has as the other extreme nominals or perhaps nouns.

Instead of dwelling on sententiality in its vertical transition, *i.e.* the transition from lesser to greater sentential completeness, our main concern will be the horizontal dimension, that is the *that*-clause in contrast to the equally but differently complete matrix sentence and indirect question (hereafter, embedded question). I am not suggesting, however, that the two dimensions entail separate notions of sententiality. They are, on the contrary, one and the same, despite their diverging implications. The two paths meet at *that*. Studies of both notions aim at answering the question, 'What is sententiality?'

But those scholars who are concerned with the degree of sententiality, *i.e.* the vertical column in the figure, are primarily concerned with the presence or absence of certain syntactic elements, and only demonstrate what is more, and what is less, sentential, without giving a full account of what it is to be fully sentential. My analysis will attempt to characterise full sententiality, and, by discriminating between some of the types of clauses at the upper end of the scale, will also supplement those studies which concentrate exclusively on the degree of sententiality.

II. THE *THAT*-CLAUSE REVISITED

1. Presupposition

One might quite casually or innocently identify the factuality of *that*-clauses with the notion of presupposition, by saying that the employment of *that*-clauses, when compared with other types of complements, implies, or to use a word immune from technical complexity, indicates, the speaker's commitment to, or involvement in, the truth of the complement clauses. Taken seriously, this seemingly plausible view would be tantamount to the treatment of the factivity of complements as presuppositional or entailmental. There has been a vast amount of studies on the subject of the presupposition of referring expressions and complement sentences, and the approach to the factivity of complements varies according to the viewpoint one adopts on the questions of whether

or not semantics should be operated within two-valued logic and where
one should draw the demarcation line between semantics and pragmatics.

Getting back to the question of identifying the factuality of *that*-
clauses with their factivity, it should be noted that the question of
whether those relations are ones of presupposition or merely of entailment
is irrelevant for our purpose, since there are sentences containing sentential
complements in which the entire sentence *neither* presupposes, *nor* entails,
(the truth of) their complements. One example will suffice:

(9) John thinks *that* Mary is ill.

There are, indeed, sentences in which (the truth of) the complement is
asserted rather than presupposed as in (10).

(10) He insisted *that* he saw a ghost.

We could even find sentences in which the falsity, not the truth, of the
complement is presupposed:

(11) Jane pretended *that* she was an acrobat.

Thus we are obliged to come to the conclusion that the holistic, factual
implication cannot be ascribed to the factivity of complements, for, in
asking what makes *that*-clauses sentential, we have in mind some property
which is common to all their occurrences, regardless of the main verbs to
which they are complemented.

2. The Bearer of Truth-Values

We shall discuss in this section the view that, granting that sentences
with *that*-clauses do not necessarily presuppose the truth of the com-
plement, the *that*-clause does at least bear a truth-value, true or false, from
which fact it derives its nature.

A detailed discussion of the problem of what bears the truth-value can
be set aside for the moment, because the analysis of the capability of
bearing a truth-value applies not just to *that*-clauses but universally to
(matrix) declarative sentences, a general discussion of which would be out
of place here.

Let us then tentatively adopt the Katzian view[5] on the matter:

5) See Katz (1972)

dismissing the other possible candidates for the bearer of truth-values as susceptible of variation in contextual elements, we are left with 'non-occasion propositions'[6] as the successful candidate for that logical entity which bears a fixed, unique truth-value. Applying this view to the case of the *that*-clause, it should be obvious first that the *that*-clause as it is is *not* a proposition, and thus not possessing the chief qualification, it utterly fails to bear truth-values. Even if we acknowledge that sentences (not necessarily matrix) rather than propositions could bear truth-values, so long as they expressed non-occasion propositions, the *that*-clause in all its occurrences could not be said to have a (fixed) truth-value, simply because the *that*-clause, as it stands, may express occasion as well as non-occasion propositions. Thus we are to relinquish the hope that we might explicate the nature of *that*-clauses solely on the basis of the capability of bearing truth-values.

3. Proposition

The *that*-clause is often spoken of as something which characteristically expresses a 'proposition'. The analysis of propositions has a long historical background behind it, and since their treatment varies according to the viewpoint one assumes, it would be beyond the scope of our study to make a thorough examination of the extensive literature on the subject. Here we shall define 'proposition' as that which is left when modality (whatever it is) is taken away from a sentence.

It is obvious enough that the *that*-clause characteristically expresses propositions, but it should be obvious also that, conversely, it is not the only form that expresses propositions. Declarative matrix sentences, to begin with, express propositions just as well, and are much more typically the way of expressing propositions, as in (12).

(12) Mary is a pretty girl.[7]

Secondly, we can observe, explicitly in transformational grammar and perhaps implicitly in traditional grammars, that a proposition does not necessarily require the linguistic or grammatical realisations of the form of

6) *i.e.* the union of the classes of eternal and standing propositions

7) Môri (1980)

clauses. Another thing to be noted is that not only statements but also questions involve propositions with no less frequency and significance.

In sum, to attribute the nature of *that*-clauses to the fact that they express propositions is in one respect tautological — one would have to ask why, then, propositions are holistic and factual — and in another respect erroneous since, as discussed just above, there are various forms other than *that*-clauses which express, or at least comprise, propositions just as well.

4. Predication

In the preceding section we observed that the *that*-clause is not the unique vehicle of propositions. One might then argue that since of the entities that could express propositions what sharply distinguishes *that*-clauses (and matrix sentences) from other complements of lower degrees of sententiality is the presence of a predicate, the nature of the *that*-clauses should be attributed to the predicates.

While it is not my intention to go into ontological detail, it can be safely maintained that there are things in the world, actual or imaginary, and that we have 'thoughts' concerning those things. We *predicate* something (or a linguistic expression) *of* those objects. What must be noted here is that at this stage, where a thought has been moulded into a proposition, everything is potential or still in the offing, to employ an apt metaphor. We should be well aware of the isolation or abstraction of this stage from a complete sentence. It would surely prove to be an abortive scheme to make predication somehow significant in terms of illocutionary force. To 'predicate' in this context does not only fail to assert that an object has the property which the predicate expression is ascribing, but also should not be taken to imply the *existence* of the object, or the state of affairs, for that matter. A crucial case would be existential propositions like (13):

(13) There are canals on Mars.[8]

One might claim that in an existential proposition a predicate does indeed assert that an object exists. But that he is mistaken can be easily seen, for

---

8),9) Geach (1972)

exactly the same proposition may occur unasserted without change of content, as in (14):

(14) If there are canals on Mars, then Mars is inhabited.[9]

Therefore predication should not be associated or confused with such illocutionary acts as asserting, stating, affirming, declaring, and so forth. This leads us to the discussion of the structure of utterances.

5. The Source of the Nature of *That*-Clauses

In the preceding sections we have reviewed several of the notions offered in the semantic literature, and have decided that those notions hardly provide accommodation, so to speak, for all the cases in which a *that*-clause occurs. Now we can finally get down to the examination of the logical structure of utterances.

Russell and Whitehead (1910), following Frege, introduce the so-called assertion-sign ' ⊢'. Hare (1950,70) differentiates two functions ascribed to the sign. That gives us a three-barrelled structure of utterances: to use his terms, the 'neustic', which is the sign of subscription to an assertion or other speech act; the 'tropic', which specifies the kind of speech-act that the sentence is characteristically used to perform, and corresponds to the 'mood' (in the sense in which indicative and imperative are moods); and the 'phrastic', that part of a sentence which is governed by the tropic and is common to sentences with different tropics. A sentence uttered, therefore, can be said to be normally provided with all three of the barrels.

Equipped with the requisite devices, we are now in a position to pin down the source of the unique character of *that*-clauses. Many properties are inherited intact when a declarative sentence is enclosed in a *that*-clause. In other words, we might say that a *that*-clause is an enclosed declarative sentence. But there ought to be a crucial difference between the two. From the facts that the function of expressing propositions is obviously common to matrix declarative sentences and *that*-clauses, and that a separate speech act could not possibly be performed in subordinate clauses, it follows that the difference between them lies somewhere in that part of an utterance which specifies speech acts. Hare (1970) suggests that

a sentence which occurs categorically has a sign of mood or tropic, but also a sign of subscription or neustic, and that when it is embedded, it takes its tropic with it, but loses its neustic.

So this is it. The fact that a *that*-clause has not just its phrastic but also its tropic explains the uniqueness of the *that*-clause. The tropic identifies the type of speech act that some illocutionary-force indicating-device is used to perform. The tropic which a *that*-clause has is an indicative tropic, indicating that it is standardly used to perform 'one of the genus of speech acts which we may call "assertions" '[10]. We might say, in short, that a *that*-clause is felt to give an expectation or promise that it will be used to perform the act of asserting. We may conclude that, owing to its tropic, a *that*-clause is felt to give promise of being normally used to perform the act of asserting, and hence comes the character of *that*-clauses, as opposed to matrix sentences, which do assert, and to unsaturated complements, which are deprived of their tropics; and also that full sententiality may be associated, or even identified, with (the presence of) the (indicative) tropic.

On the horizontal scale of sententiality the difference between *that*-clauses and embedded questions could be attributed to the difference in the kind of promise which is given to us: the former is that of asserting, and the latter, that of, perhaps, questioning.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

That-clauses are plain entities which have been much discussed. A lively concern has been entertained for the factivity and assertivity of complements, for sententiality accounts of derivationally related complements, for logical manipulations of propositions, and so on, and yet no serious thought has been bestowed on what is the inherent character of *that*-clauses that is revealed in all their occurrences. So I have taken the trouble of revisiting them, and have shown that the discriminating features of *that*-clauses can be best explained in terms of form and function in the structure of utterances. From this we could move on to an appreciation of the isolated *that*-clauses in (15):

---

10) Hare (1970)

(15) What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died? —
That she was beautiful. And brilliant. *That* she loved Mozart and
Bach. And the Beatles. And me.

(E. Segal, *Love Story*)

The observation of the interferences of negation and question with
complement constructions, and the proper incorporation of the act of
questioning into the logical structure of utterances are some of the
important matters which require further treatment.

Selected Bibliography

Cooper, D.E. (1973) *Philosophy and the Nature of Language,* Longman.

Geach, P.T. (1972) *Logic Matters*, Univ. of California.

Hare, R.M. (1950) Extract from 'Practical Reason', in *Practical Inferences*.

Hare, R.M. (1970) 'Meaning and Speech Acts', in *Practical Inferences*.

Hare, R.M. (1971) *Practical Inferences*, Macmillan.

Huddleston, R.D. (1971) *The Sentence in Written English,* CUP.

Kageyama, T. (1976) 'Sentence Accessibility', *Descriptive and Applied Linguistics*
vol. 9, ICU.

Katz, J.J. (1972) *Semantic Theory,* Harper.

Kempson, R. (1975) *Presupposition and the Delimitation of Semantics*, CUP.

Lyons, J. (1977) *Semantics I & II*, CUP.

Menzel, P. (1975) *Semantics and Syntax in Complementation*, Mouton.

Moore, G.E. (1959) 'Is Existence a Predicate? ', in A.G.N. Flew (ed.), *Logic and
Language*, Basil Blackwell.

Môri, Y. (1980) *Eigo no Goyôron*, Taishûkan.

Nakamura, M. (1976) 'The Degree of S-Likeness of Complement Sentence and its
Implications', in *Studies in English Literature*, 1976.

Russell, B. & A.N. Whithead (1910) *Principia Mathematica,* CUP.

Searle, J.R. (1969) *Speech Acts*, CUP.

Vendler, Z. (1967) *Linguistics in Philosophy*, Cornell UP.