

**On the Licensing of Present Subjunctives:
A Preliminary Remark
Hiroaki Konno**

In this study, I discuss the plausibility of a syntactic account of the mechanism for licensing present subjunctive clauses in present-day English (henceforth, subjunctives). Typical examples include the following:

- (1) Cathy demanded that Tom make a personal visit to Mary.

In view of (1), one might propose a structural account in which the head-complement relation between *demand* and the subjunctive plays a crucial role: subjunctives must be “governed” by their licensors. Truly, in (1), the licensor *demand* governs the subjunctive because they are in a head-complement relation. But this idea is too restrictive; there are many examples that this way of explanation fails to capture. First, as Chiba (1991) claims, there are cases where a subjunctive and its licensor are not in a head-complement relation:

- (2) a. *We add that the selection procedure be psychologically plausible.
b. We add to this requirement that the selection procedure be psychologically plausible.

In (2a), it is *add* that is in the head-complement relation with the subjunctive. However, *add* by itself does not license subjunctives, as the asterisk shows. Then why is (2b) possible? (2b) becomes acceptable since the PP *to this requirement* provides an appropriate context, as Chiba (1991) claims. More specifically, he claims that *to this requirement*, modifying *add*, “transfers” its licensing force to *add*. To put it differently, *add* inherits the licensing force of *requirement*. Hence the acceptability in (2b) obtains. Roughly speaking, what is crucial to his claim is that even if a head which governs a subjunctive has no ability to license that kind of complement, other elements can hand over their licensing force to the head if they are in the same sentence. If his account, which makes use of a kind of repair strategy, were on the right track, it might be possible to maintain the syntactic approach in terms of a local relation and to claim that (2) is not a real but an apparent counterexample.

However, there are real counterexamples to the approach in structural terms. First, there are cases where the licensors for subjunctives appear in preceding sentences/utterances:

- (3) The entrance condition, which I would like to call the entrance ‘burden,’ imposed by the university consists of two requirements. One is that every candidate turn in three papers by the end of January. The other is that the three papers be concerned with syntax, semantics and phonology, respectively.

In (3), what is responsible for licensing the two subjunctives is in the first sentence, and thus is not structurally local to them at all. What *one* and *the other* refer to cannot be determined since their referents are not present in the same sentences. Only when we go back to the first sentence can we

understand that the referents of *one* and *the other* are the two requirements imposed by the university. Thus, the structural account fails to capture this fact.

Let us observe another case. The following shows that *add* can take subjunctives given an appropriate context:

- (4) We established requirements for the Ph.D. candidacy. Afterwards, we added that candidacy be limited to those students who have completed papers in all three of the main areas---syntax, semantics and phonology.

As we have seen above, the verb *add* by itself cannot take subjunctives. In this case, too, the preceding sentence provides grounds for the subjunctive. In addition, the adverb *afterwards* signals a chronological relation of the events involved: the establishment of the requirements and the act of adding. It is thus understood that what is described by the subjunctive was added to the requirements and subsumed into them. In other words, what is described by the subjunctive is understood as another requirement. It is not possible to provide a structural account to (4), either, since the subjunctive and the trigger are not in any local relation.

The following is slightly different from (3) and (4) in that the licenser for the subjunctive is provided in the discourse which follows the sentence containing the subjunctive:

- (5) He added that the selection procedure be psychologically plausible. It was to the requirement he discussed a few days ago.

The trigger *requirement* for the subjunctive is in the second sentence. Of course, the speaker knows in advance where *he* added what is described by the subjunctive; namely, to the requirement *he* discussed a few days earlier. It is this information stored in the mind of the speaker that provides the grounds for the subjunctive. This example also shows that a kind of "backward" license of subjunctives is possible. The structural account fails again, since no local relation is observed.

From these observations, I conclude that the best way to account for the license of subjunctives does not lie in syntax, since it does not give a comprehensive account of the distribution of subjunctives. The only way to save the structural account would be to make a core/periphery distinction and keep examples like (3)-(5) out of consideration.

In conclusion, it has been shown through this research that the syntactic account of the mechanism for licensing subjunctives is not conclusive, which in turn suggests the necessity of a semantic/pragmatic analysis.

SELECTED REFERENCE

- Chiba, Shuji (1991) "Non-Localizable Contextual Features: Present Subjunctives in English," Nakajima Heizo (ed.), *Current English Linguistics in Japan*, 19-41, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.