

Semantic Properties of Nouns with a THAT-Content Clause

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This joint research examines the semantic characterization of the nouns which can take a content clause, as exemplified in (1).

- (1) McGovern's accusation that Nixon is irresponsible is well known.

(McCawley 1979:143)

Grimshaw (1990) claims that the nouns which can take a content clause are result nominals, not process nominals, giving the following examples.

- (2) a. The assignment is to be avoided.
 b. *The constant assignment is to be avoided.
 c. The constant assignment of unsolvable problems is to be avoided.
 (3) *Their frequent/constant announcement that they were the greatest eventually became tiresome.

In (2a) assignment involves ambiguities between a "result" reading and a "process" reading, but such ambiguities are removed when an adjective like constant is added to it. As the contrast between (2b) and (2c) shows, constant can only appear with the noun in process reading. The fact that frequent/constant cannot appear in (3) suggests that announcement is a result nominal.

This claim has a problem, however. Nouns such as insistence, protest, and alarm can take a content clause, but are not understood in result reading.

- (4) His constant insistence/protest/alarm that I should be careful is annoying.

Nomura (1993) argues that the nouns which can take a content clause are classified into four types, "UTTERANCE," "COGNITION," "MENTAL MANIPULATION," and "EMOTION," with respect to the semantic relation between those nouns and their clauses. Examples of the four types are shown in this order in (5).

- (5) a. John's opinion that money changes everything
 b. The thought that we would soon reach home gave us courage.
 c. They issued a denial that their firm had been involved.
 d. John's anger that he was not chosen

The present research will basically follow this classification. But we will point out a problem with Nomura's claim that the first two types, UTTERANCE and COGNITION, which are, according to Nomura, "SOMETHING COMPOSED OF WORDS," differ from the other two in that the former can appear in the subject position of the "N be that S" construction, whereas the latter cannot.

- (6) John's opinion is that money changes everything.

(7) *John's anger is that he was not chosen.

Contrary to Nomura's claim, there are cases in which UTTERANCE nouns such as emphasis and alarm behave in the same way as anger.

(8) a. His emphasis that I should be careful was annoying.

b. The alarm that I should be careful was annoying.

(9) a. *His emphasis was that I should be careful.

b. *The alarm was that I should be careful.

Moreover, there are nouns which do not take a content clause but can appear in the NP be that S construction.

(10) a. *the upshot that we were not admitted

b. The upshot was that we were not admitted.

Considering these facts, we will claim that the UTTERANCE type is composed of two subtypes, as illustrated in (11).

(11) Type A: ACT OF SPEAKING + (MANNER) + PROPOSITION

Type B: ACT OF SPEAKING + MANNER + ϕ

Type A includes claim, opinion, and statement, and Type B alarm, emphasis, and insistence. Two tests will confirm our claim: The non-restrictive apposition construction and the with + N construction. Type A nouns can appear in the former, but not in the latter, while Type B nouns can only appear in the latter.

(12) a. That John is innocent, a claim which is constantly made, is in fact groundless.

b. *That John is innocent, an insistence which is constantly made, is in fact groundless.

(13) a. *I said with claim/opinion that I was innocent of the crime.

b. I said with insistence/emphasis/alarm that I was innocent of the crime.

We will argue that the fact that nouns in Type B cannot appear in the non-restrictive apposition construction is ascribed to their lack of propositions. Thus, the criterion proposed by Nomura, namely, SOMETHING COMPOSED OF WORDS, which distinguishes UTTERANCE and COGNITION from other types, is only relevant to the Type A of UTTERANCE, and COGNITION.

REFERENCES

- Grimshaw, J. (1990) Argument Structure. MIT Press.
 Nomura, M. (1993) "The Semantics of the Content Clause Construction in English." English Linguistics 10, 184-210.