

## Taking a Complement ... Variably

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Variability in complementizer expression, as in (1), is a widely-attested feature of all varieties of English.

- (1) She said 0 she used to play in- in Sillery- in the Brewar swamp. (QC.003.164)  
She said THAT her father was the rector of St-Michael's-church. (QC.003.162)

The principal observation of traditional grammarians is the difference between written and oral language, with the use of *that* urged where it would be required to ensure clarity. Contemporary linguistic accounts privilege either structural or discourse considerations. Primary structural considerations are the co-occurrence of elements and the size/weight of constituents (e.g., Elsness 1984), while discourse factors follow from information flow parameters (Bolinger 1972) and the grammaticization of certain main clause subjects and verbs, in particular *I think* and *I guess*, as epistemic expressions, functioning more as pragmatic markers than as main clauses, similar to discourse markers *you know* and *I mean* (Thompson and Mulac 1991).

The question we address in this paper is, how much of *that* variation is a lexically-restricted phenomenon and how much of it is part of the grammar? If it is part of the grammar, how do we extricate structural from discourse factors? All previous quantitative studies have examined factors, such as main and subordinate clause subject, verb tense, and intervening material, one by one. Thompson & Mulac (1991:249-250) note the methodological problem of “whether each of the variables discussed...independently influences the occurrence of *that*”, and pose the dilemma: “...do we learn more about the phenomenon we are investigating if we report findings from a greatly diminished data base in which variables are considered strictly independently, or do we learn more if we report findings from a full data base with variables confounded such that it is indeterminate which one is responsible for the occurrence of *that*?”

This paper reports on a multivariate analysis of over 3,000 tokens of object *that* clauses from a corpus of English spoken in Quebec City (Poplack & Walker 2002). The results reveal that variability in *that* use is conditioned by a confluence of discourse and structural factors. In addition to *I think* (which alone accounts for 30% of the data) and *I guess*, we show evidence for (the emergence of) routinized 1<sup>st</sup>-person-Present-tense-verb collocations, including *I remember*, *I'm sure*, and *I find*. These collocations largely account for previously-reported first-person main-verb subject effects. *That* variation is also constrained by the type of subordinate clause subject, with non-referential “dummy” and pronominal subjects most favorable to zero and NPs least, a result consonant with both information-flow and structural-weight explanations. However, the presence of intervening material, clearly a structural factor, exercises an effect of equal magnitude. With respect to iconicity considerations, whereby closer semantic unity between the situations in the main and subordinate clause is reflected in greater syntactic integration (e.g., Givón 1993), we find neither independent subject coreferentiality (cf. Finegan & Biber 2001) nor verbal situation cotemporality effects. Thus, while a handful of collocations are lexicalizing, *that* variation remains an active, if relatively restricted, area of the grammar.

**References:**

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