Subject Obviation as a Semantic Failure: a Preliminary Account

Francesco Costantini
(Università degli Studi di Udine, Italia)

Abstract   Subject obviation in subjunctive clauses has drawn attention in the field of formal linguistics since the early eighties. Despite an abundant literature on the phenomenon, obviation still remains in many respects mysterious. This article explores a different approach to the phenomenon, whereby obviation can be accounted for by resorting to the notion of self-knowledge, as generally conceived in the field of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. Under the view proposed here, obviation is caused by a clash between the semantic characteristics of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. Particularly, it is suggested that obviation obtains if and only if an embedded clause expresses self-knowledge.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Problem. – 3 Obviation and Self-knowledge. – 3.1 Self-knowledge. – 3.2 Self-knowledge and Evidentiality. – 3.3 Self-knowledge and Clausal Implicature. – 4 Hypothesis. – 4.1 Analysis (I): Obviation. – 4.2 Analysis (ii): Obviation Weakening. – 5 Discussion. – 5.1 Competition. – 5.2 Mood. – 6 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research.

Keywords   Obviation. Self-knowledge. Subjunctive clauses. Linguistics.

> One says 'I know' where one can also say 'I believe'
> or 'I suspect'; where one can find out.
> (Wittgenstein 1953, 221)

1   Introduction

The phenomenon of subject obviation in subjunctive clauses (or 'subjunctive disjoint reference effect', as it has sometimes been dubbed, cf. Kempchinsky 1987, 1998, 2009) has drawn attention in the field of formal linguistics since the early eighties. The fact that a pronominal cannot be coreferent with a noun phrase that is *not* a coargument was at that time puzzling in view of the Binding Principle B, according to which a pronominal is free in its binding domain (which an embedded clause is, in principle).[1]

---

[1]   The topic discussed in this paper was presented a seminar held at the University of Venice, at the Cambridge Comparative Syntax 4 SinFonIJa 8 (Lubljana). For discussion and advice I would like to express my gratitude to the audience of these events, and particularly to Alessandra Giorgi, Roland Hinterhölzl, Francesco Pinzin, Guglielmo Cinque, Daniel Brüning and Marijana Marelj. I would also like to thank Vesselina Laskova for helpful talks on the topic of this paper and two anonymous reviewers for thoughtful suggestions.

A number of studies addressed the question. Some have discussed it in view of the Binding Theory (Picallo 1985; Raposo 1985; Everaert 1986; Suñer 1986; Kempchinsky 1987, 1997, 2009; Rizzi 1991; Progovac 1993, 1994; Avrutin 1994; Tsoulas 1996; Avrutin & Babyonyshev 1997; Manzini 2000). Some others have tried to account the phenomenon in terms of competition between subjunctive and infinitive clauses and principles such 'avoid pronoun' (Bouchard 1984), 'blocking', in the sense originally discussed in Aronoff (1976) (Farkas 1992, Schlenker 2005), or 'anti-control' (Hornstein & San Martin 2001).

Despite this abundant literature on the phenomenon, obviation still remains in many respects mysterious. Binding-based approaches have been shown to be unable to account for all of the data in a principled way (cf. Farkas's 1992, Schlenker's 2005 objections to these approaches). Competition theories, on the other hand, appear to be empirically more powerful, but require some undesired stipulations and call upon sentence-level competition, which is controversial, at least from a syntactic viewpoint (see Embick & Marantz 2008).

I explore here an alternative hypothesis, which resorts to the notion of self-knowledge, as generally understood in the field of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, that is knowledge of one's own mental state (Shoemaker 1968; Burge 1988, 1996, 2007; Recanati 2007; Gertler 2011). I build my proposal on data from Italian involving first person epistemic attitude predicates (e.g. 'think', 'believe', 'suppose', etc.); although this kind of predicates is not the prototypical verb type selecting for subjunctive clauses, I capitalize on the fact that epistemic predicates have a simpler semantics if compared to predicates that select for subjunctive clauses more robustly from a crosslinguistic viewpoint, such as volition verb (cf. Heim 1992, Giorgi & Pianesi 1997). To be sure, a more comprehensive data set is to be analysed to draw a thorough assessment on the proposal – including sentences involving the third person and different types of attitude predicates. Yet, the approach to obviation proposed here, while still sketchy, appears to be very promising.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 I discuss the open questions about obviation. In section 3 I illustrate the notions of self-knowledge and I formulate a hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, obviation is caused by a clash between the semantic characteristics of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. Particularly, I suggest that obviation obtains when an embedded clause expresses self-knowledge (that is, when the information conveyed in the argument clause is achieved through introspection), and the embedding predicate introduces the implicature that the source of the information expressed in the embedded clause is indirect. In section 4 I analyse the relevant data on obviation in view of the proposed hypothesis. In section 5 I discuss some consequences of the theory. Particularly, I point out that mood competition is not required

to account for obviation and that obviation is not restricted to subjunctive clauses (a generalization which was taken for granted in all previous accounts). In section 6 I draw some conclusions and I state some suggestions for further research on facets of the issue discussed which have not been tackled in the present paper, such as the extension of the analysis to third person predicates, to attitude verbs other than epistemic, and the interpretive properties of the subjunctive mood *vis-à-vis* the infinitive.

2   The Problem

It is a well-known fact that Romance subjunctive clauses trigger subject obviation, that is, the embedded subject cannot be *de se* (Schlenker 2005). Sentence (1), for instance, is infelicitous exactly because the matrix and embedded subject refer to the same individual, the speaker, as the bearer of the attitude, as the contrast with sentence (2) shows.

(1)   #   *Penso   che io parta   domani.*
          think-1SG that I   leave-SUBJ.1SG tomorrow
          Lit. 'I think that I leave tomorrow.'

(2)   *Penso   che Pietro parta   domani.*
          think.1SG that Pietro leave-SUBJ.1SG tomorrow
          'I think that Pietro is/is going to/will leaving tomorrow.'

The phenomenon appears to be particularly puzzling because not all subjunctive clauses have been shown to be obviative (cf. Ruwet 1984 and subsequent literature). For instance, the *de se* reading in the sentences in (3) and (4) is acceptable for most Italian native speakers.

(3)   ✓   *Penso   che io possa   aver fatto molti errori.*
          think.1SG that I may.SUBJ-1SG have made many mistakes
          'I think I might have made many mistakes.'

(4)   ✓   *Penso   che io sia stato   autorizzato a partire.*
          think.1SG that I is.SUBJ-1SG been authorized to leave
          'I think I have been authorized to leave.'

Moreover, tense/aspectual features of the embedded verb also appear to affect the interpretation of the subject (see example (5)).[2]

---

2   For some Italian native speaker, the sentence is marginal under the *de se* reading even to report situation that facilitate this reading (see § 4.2). These speakers acknowledge,

(5) ✓ *Penso   che io abbia   fatto molti errori.*
          think.1SG that I   have.SUBJ-1SG made many mistakes
          'I think I have made many mistakes.'

All in all, the typology of the embedded predicate (functional vs lexical) appears to affect the interpretation of the embedded subject.

How exactly this characteristic of the embedded predicate affects the interpretation of the embedded subject is still an open question, even though different attempts have been made to solve the issue (see Picallo 1984, Raposo 1985 for a proposal within the Binding-based approach to obviation;[3] Farkas 1992 and Schlenker 2005 for a competition-based proposal).

Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) point out that the different status of sentence (1) as opposed to sentences (3) and (4) (sentences like (5) are apparently a different matter) does not involve the embedded subject only, but may lay in the different semantic import conveyed by the embedded clause as a whole. Particularly, Farkas suggests that her notion of 'responsibility' ('RESP', Farkas 1988) may discriminate between sentence (1) on one hand and sentences (3) and (4) on the other.[4] On the other hand Schlenker proposes to capture the different status between sentence (1) vs (3) and (4) by hypothesizing that the distinction between the *de re* and *de se* reading can be extended to event arguments. His idea is however admittedly "extremely preliminary" (Schlenker 2005, 295) and the notion of *de se* as applied to event arguments should be refined.

These ideas appear to be promising but they do not fully answer the paradigm represented by sentences (1) to (5) – sentences like (5), (involving a temporal/aspectual auxiliary) are not included in the analyses (there is no obvious reason why sentence like (5) should be analysed as different from sentences like (1) with respect to criteria like Farkas's RESP or Schlenker's event *de se*.

Moreover, competition theories resort to the notion of 'blocking' (in

---

however, that the status of this sentence is different than that of sentence (1), which is much more degraded.

3 Schlenker (2005, 288) shows that Binding-based theories have critical shortcomings, such as the inability to explain data involving overlapping reference. Thus, I will not consider these theories in the present work.

4 Farkas (1988, 36) defines the responsibility relation as a "two place relation holding between an individual *i* and a situation *s* just in case *i* brings *s* about, i.e., just in case *s* is the result of some act performed by *i* with the intention of bringing *s* about". It follows from her theory of obviation that in obviative subjunctive clauses the subject is in a responsibility relation with the situation expressed in the embedded clause. In non-obviative subjunctive clauses, on the other hand, the responsibility relation does not hold between the embedded subject and the situation expressed in the embedded clause.

the sense discussed in Aronoff 1976) to get the desired interpretation of sentences (1) to (4). Both Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) claim that obviation results from competition between subjunctive and infinitive, so that the infinitive 'blocks' the subjunctive under the *de se* reading at some conditions, which are met in sentence (1), though not in (3) and (4).[5] This appears to involve sentence-level competition, which is controversial, at least from a syntactic viewpoint (Embick & Marantz 2008). I suppose that this drawback is perhaps not inexplicable and may perhaps be worked out by assuming that competition involves multiple *head-level* competition, which is a less questionable notion. Thus, for instance, the infinitive and the subjunctive morphology may compete for the T head, pro and PRO for the subject DP head, or there may be just a single head-level competition (for instance between infinitive and subjunctive for T), where the choice between pro and PRO follows by Agree. This is however costlier than a theory which explains obviation without resorting to competition on the whole. So I assume that one should pursue such a theory.

In what follows I claim that it is in fact possible to construct such a theory, which is what I show in the next section.

3   Obviation and Self-knowledge

In this section I reformulate a crucial notion concerning obviation brought about by Schlenker (2005) in terms of the notion of 'self-knowledge' as understood in philosophy of language and in philosophy of mind. I then link the notion of 'self-knowledge' with the grammatical category of evidentiality and to clausal implicatures. Finally, I claim that these steps let us hypothesize that subject obviation in subjunctive clauses derives from a clash between the semantic properties of the attitude predicate and that

---

5   In a nutshell, Farkas's theory builds on two notions: the 'canonical control case', that is, the case where "both the complement subject and the matrix argument it is referentially dependent on bear the RESP [responsibility] relation to s_c [the situation denoted by the complement]" (1992, 104); the idea that, simplifying someway, in the 'canonical control case' the infinitive 'blocks' (in the sense discussed in Aronoff 1976) the subjunctive. Thus, sentence (1) cannot be *de se* because it conforms to the 'canonical control case' and the infinitive (see (i)) is available to convey the *de se* reading.

    (i) *Penso   di PRO partire   domani*.
       think-1sg C PRO leave.inf tomorrow
       'I plan to leave tomorrow.'

Sentences (3) and (4) do not conform to the canonical control case, because the embedded subject does not bear the responsibility relation with the situation denoted by the complement. Hence, the infinitive does not block the subjunctive under the *de se* reading.

    As for Schlenker's theory, he claims that by the principle 'Maximize presupposition!' (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2003), the infinitive must be chosen if the situation to be reported is *de se* with respect to both the individual and the event argument. If the situation to be reported is not event *de se*, the subjunctive can be used as a default.

of the embedded clause.

3.1 Self-knowledge

Farkas (1992) and Schlenker (2005) have pointed out that obviation appears to involve not only the interpretation of the embedded subject but also the semantics of the embedded clauses as a whole. Schlenker formalizes this idea by stating that subjunctive clauses cannot be *de se* with respect to two parameters: the subject of the attitude ('individual *de se*' interpretation) and the event ('event *de se*' interpretation).

I take this intuition to be correct. Moreover, I take that the notion of 'event *de* se' can be formulated in terms of 'self-knowledge', in the sense used in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. In philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, that is, the knowledge of one's own mental states, such as beliefs, wishes, emotions, sensations, etc. (Shoemaker 1968; Burge 1988, 1996, 2007; Recanati 2007; cf. Gertler 2011 for an outlook on the main questions concerning self-knowledge from a philosophical viewpoint).

This view is in a way implicit in Schlenker's approach to obviation, because he builds the notion of 'event *de se*' interpretation on an idea originally discussed in Higginbotham (2003) concerning the semantics of gerundive arguments of verbs like 'remember' and 'imagine'. Comparing sentences like (6) and (7), Higginbotham points out that sentence (6) (which may be considered as having Schlenker's 'event *de se*' interpretation) would be appropriate only in a scenario where the speaker is remembering the event of going to school as being the agent of the event *and* the subject of the remembering state.

(6)   I am remembering PRO walking to school in the 5th grade.

(7)   I am remembering that I walked to school in the 5th grade.

Sentence (7), on the other hand does not convey this interpretation – it would be appropriate in a scenario where the speaker does not remember anymore the event in itself – she may recollect some specific circumstances of the event from which she may conclude that she used to walk to school, that is, by inferring.

Sentence (6) expresses a way of remembering 'from the inside', as Shoemaker (1968), Pryor (1999) put it, whereas sentence (7) does not. The idea of remembering 'from the inside', clearly concerns the notion of self-knowledge. Thus, the 'event *de se*' interpretation, with respect to which Schlenker refers to Higginbotham's remembering 'form the inside', may

be taken as involving self-knowledge as well.

Self-knowledge has been viewed as something different from knowledge about the world 'external' to oneself.

First, it relies on a unique method of knowledge, that is, introspection. Introspection lets one have a direct, non-inferential access to mental states and is highly epistemically secure. Because of this, if a speaker utters sentence (8A), it would be nonsensical to ask the question in (8B).

(8)   A: I feel pain.
        B: #How do you know that you feel pain?/Why do you think that?

By contrast, this question is not odd if the speaker utters sentence (9A), which does not involve introspection, since one may question the source of knowledge and the reliability of information about someone else.

(9)   A: He feels pain.
        B: How do you know that he feels pain?/Why do you think that?

Second, in self-ascribing a mental state, the subject is authoritative, that is, under normal circumstances self-knowledge is endowed with the presumption of truth. Thus, if the speaker utters sentence (10A), challenging the statement by saying (10B) is normally infelicitous.

(10)   A: I feel pain.
        B: # No, you don't.

By contrast, replying through (11B) to the sentence in (11A) may not be inappropriate.

(11)   A: He feels pain.
        B: No, he doesn't.

These facts have prompted different interpretations in philosophy of language, but I take the different epistemological views on self-knowledge immaterial for the present discussion, and I now turn to two relevant aspect concerning the morpho-syntactic encoding and the semantics of self-knowledge.

3.2   Self-knowledge and Evidentiality

I take that from a syntactic viewpoint it is possible to capture the notion of self-knowledge by resorting to the notion of evidentiality, that is, the

grammatical category indicating the source and the reliability of infor-
mation (Chafe & Nichols 1986, Willett 1988, Rooryck 2001).[6] Since the
philosophical notion of self-knowledge involves the way one gets some
information, evidentiality appears to be suitable to the purpose. As for self-
knowledge, the source of information is introspection, and the information
is completely reliable as directly accessible.[7]

It has been shown (Izvorski 1997, Rooryck 2001, Simons 2007) that
embedding predicates, like 'believe', 'think', etc. can function as indirect
or inferential evidentials. The sentence in (12), for instance, indicates that
the information expressed in the embedded clause is not completely reli-
able and the source of the information is not the speaker's own perceptual
experience.

(12)   I think it's raining.

This sentence would not be felicitous in a scenario where, for instance, the
speaker is seeing from her window that it is raining, or where she is walk-
ing in the rain (assuming she is not experiencing some sort of delusion).
In a scenario where a speaker perceives that it is raining, a sentence like
(13) might instead be uttered.

(13)   It's raining.

These observations suggest that clauses expressing self-knowledge cannot
be embedded under attitude predicates exactly because of a clash between
evidential sources: embedding predicates introduce the information ex-
pressed in the embedded clause either as not reliable (to different extents)
or as indirect or inferred; on the contrary, self-knowledge is introspective
and reliable.

3.3 Self-knowledge and clausal implicature

One may reach the same conclusion by calling on the notion of clausal
implicature as defined in Gazdar (1979) and Levinson (1983), who point
out that belief verbs introduce clausal implicatures as in (14).

---

6   I take evidentiality as a different category with respect to epistemic modality, in that
the latter only expresses the speaker's degree of certainty of the truth of the propositional
content, while the former also expresses the source of the propositional content.

7   The kind of evidential source involved here may be personal experience evidentiality
(Willett 1988; Davis, Potts & Speas 2007) or ego-evidentiality (Garrett 2001).

(14) *a*   believes φ

    a.   +> φ [*a* knows φ]

    b.   +> ◇ ¬ φ

By (14), sentence (12) implicates (a) that the speaker does not *know* that it is raining and (b) that it may be the case that it is not raining. Thus, the sentence would be infelicitous in a context where the speaker is aware that it is raining thanks to her own perception, exactly because she could assert the propositional content of the embedded clause as true as of the actual world (which is what sentence (13) does).

Turning now to obviation, these observations suggest that the status of sentences like (1) may derive from a clash between the evidential nature of attitude predicates and the expression of self-knowledge (that is, introspective, directly accessible, non-inferential knowledge) in the embedded clause. In the next section I develop this hypothesis.

4   Hypothesis

In the previous section the hypothesis has been suggested that subjunctive obviation derives from a semantic clash: If a clause expresses self-knowledge, then it cannot be embedded under a predicate that implicates that the propositional content of the embedded clause is indirect or inferential.

(15) Hypothesis:

    #   *a*   V φ, where

       (i)   V is an attitude predicate and

       (ii)   φ is a proposition accessible through introspection.

In the following subsections I implement this hypothesis. More specifically, in section 4.1, I show that the hypothesis pursued here correctly predicts the status of sentences like (1). In section 4.2 I show that the cases of obviation 'weakening' (examples (3) to (5)) also follow straightforwardly.

4.1   Analysis (I): Obviation

In this section I show that the hypothesis discussed here accounts for obviation in examples like (1), which I repeat here.

(1)   #   *Penso   che io parta   domani.*
          think.1SG that I leave.SUBJ-1SG tomorrow
          Lit. 'I think that I leave tomorrow.'

To do this, I proceed along the following steps:

i.   I show that in sentence (1) the embedded clause is futurate;
ii. futurate clauses can involve a plan the subject of a clause desires to carry out;
iii. one's own plans are object of self-knowledge;
iv. by (15), (ii) and (iii), in sentence (1) a semantic clash obtains.

In sentence (1), the embedded eventuality most naturally refers to a future time reference, although no future morphology occurs. This suggests that the embedded clause is futurate.[8]

Copley (2008) shows that futurates assert the existence of an entity (the 'director', as she dubs it) that has the desire for a plan to be realized and is committed to the plan being carried out. Moreover, futurates presuppose that the 'director' has the ability to act to the effect that the plan is realized.

Quite obviously, plans are mental state, which, as such, can be object of self-knowledge in the normal case – one is normally aware of one's own plans: it is pointless to question a sentence like *Prendo un caffè* 'I'll have a coffee' by asking 'how do you know that?'

Copley also points out that the director may be determined contextually or may be accommodated (2008, 270). In sentence (16), for instance, the presupposed director corresponds by default to the subject.

(16) #   *Parto   domani.*
          leave-1SG tomorrow
          'I'm leaving tomorrow.'

However, if sentence (16) comes to the end of a discourse like (17), the director does not correspond to the subject of the sentence.

---

8 Copley (2008) defines a 'futurate' as "a sentence with no obvious means of future reference, which nonetheless conveys that a future oriented eventuality is planned, scheduled, or otherwise determined".

(17)   *Il capo   ha   deciso   cosa dobbiamo fare.*
         The boss has decided what we have   to do.
         Tu parti   oggi,   io parto domani.
         You're leaving today, I'm leaving tomorrow
         'The boss has decided what we have to do. You're leaving today, I'm
         leaving tomorrow.'

The same holds true in embedded clauses, where the presupposed direc-
tor may correspond to the subject, it can be established contextually, or it
can be accommodated. Thus, in a sentence like (18), Pietro's leaving may
be planned by Pietro himself, by the speaker's colleague or by another
contextually relevant agent (say, Pietro's boss).

(18)   *Il mio collega   mi ha   detto che Pietro parte   domani.*
         The my colleague me has said that Pietro leaves tomorrow
         'My colleague told me Pietro is leaving tomorrow.'

Let us now turn to sentence (1). If, as it seems to be the case, the embed-
ded clause in (1) is futurate, it involves a plan and asserts the existence of
an individual, a 'director', conceiving a plan and having the desire for it to
be brought about. Now, let us suppose (by *reductio ad falsum*) that in sen-
tence (1) the director corresponds to the subject of the embedded clause,
so that the sentence expresses a self-ascription of a plan. It follows that:
   i.   since belief predicates function as indirect evidentials, sentence (1)
        indicates that the information conveyed in the embedded clause is
        not epistemically reliable from the point of view of the bearer of the
        attitude (the speaker);
   ii. because self-ascribing a plan involves self-knowledge, a semantic
        clash arises because of the indirect evidential nature implied by the
        matrix predicate and the introspective nature of the self-ascription
        of a mental state;
   iii. hence, the propositional attitude in (1) cannot be *de se*.
   The same conclusion can be reached by resorting to clausal implicature.
Let us stick again to the *reduction ad falsum* whereby the attitude report
in (1) is *de se*. By (14), (1) implicates that the subject of the attitude does
not know that she herself, *qua* the subject of the attitude, is committed to
a plan and that for all she knows, it may be the case that she has no plans
at all. But this is nonsensical, because the epistemic access to one's own
plans is direct, so that in the normal case one introspectively knows what
one's own plans are. Thus, again, the propositional attitude in (1) cannot
be *de se*.

Notice that the analysis does not require that the embedded clause be futurate. Obviation is predicted to obtain whenever self-knowledge is involved in the embedded clause. Progressive and habitual eventualities, for instance, can be shown to involve self-knowledge. In the normal case a speaker is aware about what she is doing and what her habits are. Thus, if sentences (19A) and (19A') are truthfully asserted, it would be nonsensical to question them, as in (19B).

(19) A: I'm reading a book.
      A':   I read the newspaper every day.
      B: #How do you know that?

As expected, obviation arises even when the embedded clause in the subjunctive refers to progressive and habitual eventualities:

(20) #   *Penso   che...*
            think-1sɢ that
      a.   *... io stia leggendo il giornale.*
            ... I am.sᴜʙᴊ reading the newspaper
      b.   *... io legga il giornale ogni mattina.*
            ... I read the newspaper every morning

4.2   Analysis (II): Obviation Weakening

The hypothesis pursued here predicts that obviation obtains if and only if the embedded clause expresses introspective knowledge. If the hypothesis is correct, we expect that examples (3) to (5) do not involve introspective knowledge. In this section I show that this prediction is correct.
    Let us first consider example (3), which I repeat here.

(3)   ✓   *Penso   che io possa   aver fatto molti errori.*
            think.1SG that I may.SUBJ-1SG have made many mistakes
            'I think I might have made many mistakes.'

The embedded clause includes an epistemic modal. The fact that one can reply as in (21B) to sentence (21A) shows that this type of modality does not express introspective knowledge.

(21) A: I may have made many mistakes.
      B: Why do you think that?

Thus, the fact that obviation does not occur in sentence (3) is expected.

The same reasoning can be applied to sentence (4), here repeated.

(4) ✓ *Penso   che io sia stato   autorizzato a partire.*
         think.1SG that I is.SUBJ-1SG been authorized to leave
         'I think I have been authorized to leave.'

One can reply as in (22B) to a sentence like (22A).

(22) A: I am allowed to leave tomorrow.
      B: How do you know that?

Hence, the embedded clause in (4) does not express introspective knowledge and the status of (4) is also predicted.
    As for example (5), which I repeat below, past eventualities can be recollected directly through one's own memory ('from the inside') or by inferring (see the contrast between (6) and (7)).

(5) ✓ *Penso   che io abbia   fatto molti errori.*
         think.1SG that I have.SUBJ-1SG made many mistakes
         'I think I have made many mistakes.'

Remembering 'from the inside' is clearly introspective and one would expect that an attitude towards a past eventuality cannot be *de se* in this case. This appears to be correct. Imagine that I have just eaten an ice-cream. I could not reasonably utter sentence (23) (unless I suffer from short term memory loss).

(23) #   I think I have just eaten an ice-cream.

However, if one remembers a past event involving oneself by recollecting some circumstances in one's own past, that is, *not* 'from the inside', but by inference, one expects that obviation will not occur. This also appears to be correct. Suppose that I am talking about my first school day. I do not remember how I went to school on that precise day, but I remember that I used to go to school by car during my years as a schoolboy. In this scenario answer B appears to be acceptable.

(24) a. *Come sei andato   a scuola il primo giorno?*
          How   are.2SG gone to school the first day
          'How did you go to school on the first day?'

b.   *Suppongo che ci sia andato in auto.*
suppose   that there is gone by car
'I suppose I went by car.

Sentence (5) can be derived in the same way and is felicitous under the *de se* reading only in a scenario where the speaker has not yet come to know that she has made mistakes.

5   Discussion

In this section I discuss some consequences following from the proposal discussed above. Particularly, two questions are tackled. The first concerns mood competition. We have seen (see § 2) that some theories of obviation had it that obviation occurs where an infinitival clause is *de se* and 'blocks' the *de se* reading of a subjunctive clause. The second concerns mood: all analyses on obviation have taken for granted that the phenomenon only obtains in subjunctive clauses.

If the analysis here proposed is correct, it is expected that (i) obviation occurs even in syntactic environments where no infinitival competitor is available, and that (ii) obviation is not limited to subjunctive clauses, but obtains wherever a semantic clash holds, no matter if the mood of the clause is subjunctive.

5.1 Competition

The analysis proposed in section 4 derives obviation simply from the semantic properties of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded eventuality. According to the hypothesis pursued here, competition between subjunctive and infinitive is not predicted to affect the interpretation of the embedded subject. In the next subsection I assess this prediction by means of two experiments designed so that a syntactic environment is built where a subjunctive clause, but not an infinitival clause, is available. The expected result is as follows: (a) if obviation is due to competition, in these environments subjunctive clauses are not obviative; (b) if obviation is due to a semantic clash, obviation is expected to obtain even though no competitor is available.

The two tests involve respectively epistemic modals and psych-verbs requiring an oblique experiencer.

5.1.1   Epistemic Modals

Epistemic modals have three properties. First, syntactically they cannot select for a control infinitival argument clause (Epstein 1984, Bhatt & Izvorski 1998).

(25) a.   * It is probable/likely to read the newspaper.
      b.   * *È probabile*   *leggere il giornale.*

Second, in Italian epistemic predicates select for subjunctive clauses.

(26)   *È probabile che piova.*
          Is probable that rains.SUBJ
          'It is probable that it will rain.'

Third, semantically, epistemic predicates are relative to a 'judge', i.e., the person in view of whose evidence an epistemic possibility or necessity is asserted (the speaker, if not differently specified; cf. Lasersohn 2005).

    Given these premises, it is now possible to build examples to test the hypothesis discussed in section 4. Epistemic modals are uttered in view of some evidence – that is, they cannot express introspective, direct knowledge (sentence (26) would be infelicitous if uttered by a speaker walking in the rain). Thus, according to the hypothesis (15), a proposition expressing self-knowledge cannot be embedded under an epistemic modal. Example (27) shows that this prediction is correct.

(27) #   *È probabile che io legga   il giornale.*
          is probable that I read-SUBJ the newspaper
          'It is probable that I am reading the newspaper.'

Since epistemic modals cannot select for infinitival clauses, the unavailability of the first person in example (27) remains unexplained under competition models. Because an infinitive competitor is not there (see sentence (25)b), no blocking effect should obtain and sentence (27) should not be infelicitous.

    Thus, competition theories are not able to account for the status of (27). By contrast, the status of example (27) follows straightforwardly from the hypothesis pursued here.

5.1.2   Oblique Experiencers

The second experiment builds on two characteristics. First, in Italian some psychological predicates, like *piacere* 'to please', select an oblique experiencer (cf. Belletti & Rizzi 1988).

(28)   *Mi piace   questo.*
            Me.DAT likes this
            'I like this.'

Second, in infinitival clauses PRO can only be a canonical subject (see example (29)b) and cannot be an oblique DP (see example (30)).

(29) a.   *Pietro teme   questo.*
            Pietro is.afraid this
            'Pietro is afraid of this.'
      b.   *Pietro ha detto   di   PRO temere questo.*
            Pietro has said   P/C PRO to-fear this
            'Pietro has said he's afraid of this.'

(30) a.   *A Pietro   piace questo.*
            To Pietro likes   this
            'Pietro likes this.'
      b.   * *Pietro ha   detto di   PRO piacere questo.*
              Pietro has said   P/C PRO to-like this

While PRO cannot be an oblique experiencer, it is possible to build examples where the embedded clause in the subjunctive contains a psych-verb selecting for an oblique experiencer. Example (31) shows this.

(31)   *Dubito che questa situazione gli piaccia.*
            Doubt that this   situation   him.DAT likes
            'I doubt that he likes this situation.'

Now, clauses including psych-verbs, like *piacere* 'to please', typically express mental states. Self-ascribing these predicates expresses self-knowledge, as example (32) shows – it is nonsensical to reply to sentence (32A) through sentence (32B), exactly because sentence (32A) builds on introspection.

(32) A: I like ice-cream.

B: # How do you know that?

Hence, the hypothesis explored here predicts that embedded clauses having a psych-verb with a quirky subject referring to the bearer of the attitude should be ungrammatical. To show this one can embed a sentence corresponding to (32A) under an attitude predicate. We can thus build a sentence like (33), where the oblique experiencer cannot take the same reference as the bearer of the attitude.

(33)   #   *Suppongo   che mi piaccia   il gelato.*
            suppose-1SG that me.DAT likes.SUBJ the ice-cream
            'I suppose I like ice-cream.'

Since sentence (33) does not have an infinitival competitor, its infelicity is completely unexpected under competition-based theories. On the other hand, this is expected under the hypothesis investigated here, because the matrix predicate implicates that the semantic content of the embedded clause is epistemologically indirect, whereas the embedded clause expresses a proposition accessible through introspection. Thus, a semantic clash arises between the implicatures introduced by the sentence and the semantics of the embedded clause.

5.2   Mood

Another consequence of the proposal discussed here is that obviation may occur no matter what the mood selected by the main predicate is, as long as a semantic clash occurs between the implicatures the sentence introduces (see § 3) and the semantic import of the embedded clause. In this section I test this prediction.

First, it can be noticed that in Italian semifactive verbs (*sapere* 'know', *scoprire* 'discover', etc.), select for indicative embedded clauses (excluding indirect questions), as the following example shows:

(34)   *Ho saputo   che Maria è partita.*
            have known that Maria is.IND left
            'I have come to know that Maria has left.'

In using these verbs, one implicates that the source of information is indirect. Sentence (34), for instance, is normally infelicitous in a context where the speaker has witnessed Maria's leaving.

Hence, if the embedded clause expresses a proposition whose source

can only be introspection, obviation is expected to occur under the hypothesis discussed here. Example (35) shows that this prediction is correct.[9]

(35) 　# 　*Ho saputo* 　　*che ho* 　　　*il mal di testa.*
　　　　　Have.1SG known that have-IND.1SG the headache
　　　　　'I've come to know that I've a headache.'

This contrasts with another traditional assumption concerning obviation, namely that it occurs only in subjunctive clauses, and could hardly be explained under previous theories on obviation.

6　Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

Subject obviation in subjunctive clauses has been a puzzling phenomenon in formal syntax since the eighties. Different approaches have been implemented to account for it, but they have not achieved a full explanation of the phenomenon. In this paper I hope to have shown that obviation in subjunctive clauses may derive from a semantic clash between the interpretative properties of the attitude predicate and those of the embedded clause. In particular, subject obviation appears to obtain when the embedded clause expresses self-knowledge, that is, a proposition that can only be achieved through introspection. The introspective source of the embedded clause is incompatible with attitude predicates that implicate an indirect epistemic access to a proposition. This allows us to account for crucial facts about obviation discussed in the literature, as well as other data that were not discussed in previous studies and were not predicted by other theories.

　The theory proposed here underlines the role of self-knowledge in syntactic and semantic computation even in languages, such as Italian, where no specific evidential morphology is present (cf. however Squartini 2008 for other means of expressing evidentiality in Italian). Moreover, it does not require notions such as competition and blocking to account for obviation. Previous studies on obviation have emphasized the complementarity of infinitival (non-obviative) and subjunctive (obviative) clauses in explaining

---

9　The sentence would not be infelicitous in scenarios where the speaker wonders whether the pain she is feeling is actually a headache or only a discomfort and is subsequently reassured that what she is feeling is actually a headache. However, in this scenario the information expressed in the embedded clause is not introspective. The appropriateness of the sentence is then expected under the hypothesis pursued here.

facts on obviation (Farkas 1992, Schlenker 2005, Costantini 2013).[10] The theory discussed here points out that mood complementarity appears to be misleading in handling obviation, because examples can be built where obviation obtains despite no competitor in the infinitive is available.

The analysis proposed here is restricted to epistemic predicates in the first person. This is in fact only a part of the entire picture of environments where obviation occurs: obviation obtains in all argument clauses in the subjunctive (including polarity subjunctive), namely argument clauses of volitional predicates and emotive-factive predicates (see examples (36) and (37)).

(36) #   *Voglio   che io parta   domani.*
           want-1SG that I leave.SUBJ tomorrow

(37) #   *Mi rammarico che io parta   domani.*
           regret-1SG   that I leave.SUBJ tomorrow

(38) #   Non so   se io parta   domani.
           Not know-1SG if I   leave.SUBJ tomorrow

Although further research is needed to spell out a formal semantic analysis which encompasses all these instances of obviation, I take it is reasonable to suppose that the theory discussed here can be extended to other contexts: volitional and emotive-factive predicates introduce doxastic alternatives (Heim 1992), that is, a set of worlds compatible with what the attitude holder believes to be possible, which is exactly what epistemic predicates like the ones considered in this paper do. Future investigations should demonstrate the feasibility of this line of research, which appears to be promising.

Further research should also target the question how to extend the analysis from first person predicates to third person predicates, which are in fact the most studied case concerning obviation in the literature. I assume the question involves the nature of *de se* attitudes and the question what ascribing a *de se* attitudes means.

Moreover, an extension of the proposal so as to account for obviation in other languages should be the subject of future investigation. Epistemic predicates like 'think', 'believe', etc., do not select for subjunctive clauses in Spanish and French, for instance, and obviation does not seem to occur in sentences corresponding to (1) in these languages – see for instance

---

10   In Costantini 2013 it is shown that in relative and adverbial clauses obviation arises only in the clause types where both subjunctive and infinitive moods are available, which was interpreted as evidence in favor of competition-based theories of obviation. However, these clause types (namely, 'volitional' relative clauses, *before-* and *until-*clauses having future orientation, purpose and result clauses, *without-*clauses) appear to involve futurate subjunctive clauses.

the following example from Spanish, which is felicitous even in a scenario where the 'director' is the speaker:[11]

(39)   *Creo   que me marcho   mañana.*
         think-1sg that me leave-subj.1sg tomorrow
         'I think that I'll leave tomorrow.'

I notice however that it cannot be taken for granted that the semantics of epistemic predicates like Spanish *creer* 'to believe', is equivalent to the semantics of Italian *pensare* 'to think, to believe', or that futurate have the same semantic import crosslinguistically.

Future research should also provide a consistent syntactic theory of the phenomenon, which should include a thorough treatment of evidentiality as a constituent of the phrase structure.

Finally, future research should address the question why embedded clauses in the infinitive do not trigger obviation – on the contrary, the subject in an infinitival clause *must* be *de se* (at least in obligatory control clauses). If the hypothesis pursued here is correct, this would suggest that infinitival clauses cannot express self-knowledge, so that the semantic failure obtaining when a subjunctive clause is there, does not arise when the embedded clause is in the infinitive. A reasonable solution may resort to the divide between finite and non-finite verb forms, where the former display a full-fledged set of semantic features – including evidential source, and the latter do not.

Although several questions remain open, I believe that the line of explanation proposed in this paper is certainly worth considering, and that the role of evidential sources should not be underestimated in the effort to explain obviation.

Bibliography

Aronoff, Mark (1976). *Word Formation in Generative Grammar.* Cambridge (MA): MIT.

Avrutin, Sergey (1994). *Psycholinguistics Investigations in the Theory of Reference* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Cambridge (MA): MIT.

Avrutin, Sergey; Babyonyshev, Maria (1997). "Obviation in Subjunctive Clauses and Agr: Evidence from Russian". *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 15, 229-67.

---

11 I am thankful to María Martínez-Atienza for pointing out this.

Belletti, Adriana; Rizzi, Luigi (1988). "Psych-Verbs and ⟩-Theory". *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 6, 291-352.

Bhatt, Rajesh; Roumyana, Izvorski (1998). "Genericity, Implicit Arguments and Control". *Proceedings of SCIL 7*. Cambridge (MA): MITWPL. URL `ftp://ling.upenn.edu/studentpapers/bhatt/PROarb.ps` (2016-04-12).

Bouchard, Denis (1984). *On the Content of Empty Categories*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Burge, Tyler (1988). "Individualism and Self-Knowledge". *The Journal of Philosophy*, 85, 649-63.

Burge, Tyler (1996). "Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge: I". *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 96, 91-116.

Burge, Tyler (2007). *Foundations of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castañeda, Hector-Neri (1966). "He*: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness". *Ratio,* 8, 130-57.

Chafe, Wallace; Nichols, Johanna (1986). *Evidentiality: the Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood (NJ): Ablex.

Copley, Bridget (2008). "The Plan's the Thing: Deconstructing Futurate Meaning". *Linguistic Inquiry,* 39, 261-74.

Costantini, Francesco (2013). "Evidence for the Competition-based Analysis of Subjunctive Obviation from Relative and Adverbial Clauses in Italian". Baauw, Frank et al. (eds.), *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory. Selected Papers from 'Going Romance'* (Utrecht). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 75-92.

Davis, Christopher; Potts, Christopher; Speas, Margaret (2007). "The Pragmatic Values of Evidential Sentences". Gibson, Masayuki; Friedman, Tova (eds.), *Proceedings of SALT 17*. Ithaca (NY): CLC Publications.

Embick, David; Marantz, Alec (2008). "Architecture and Blocking". *Linguistic Inquiry*, 39, 1-53.

Epstein, Samuel David (1984). "Quantifier-PRO and the LF representation of PRO$_{arb}$". *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20, 499-505.

Everaert, Martin (1986). "Long Reflexivization and Obviation in the Romance Languages". Coopmans, Peter; Bordelois, Ivonne; Dotson Smith, Bill (eds.), *Formal Parameters of Generative Grammar*. Dordrecht: Foris, 51-71.

Farkas, Donka (1988). "On Obligatory Control". *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 11, 27-58.

Farkas, Donka (1992). "On Obviation". Sag, Ivan A.; Szabolcsi, Anna (eds.), *Lexical Matters*. Standford (CA): Stanford University, CSLI, 85-109.

Gazdar, Gerald (1979). *Pragmatics: Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form.* New York: Academic Press.

Garrett, Edward J. (2001), *Evidentiality and Assertion in Tibetan* [Doctoral Dissertation]. UCLA.

Gertler, Brie (2011), *Self-knowledge*. London; New York: Routledge.

Giorgi, Alessandra; Pianesi, Fabio (1997). *Tense and Aspect. From Semantics to Morphosyntax*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heim, Irene (1991). "Artikel und Definitheit / Articles and definiteness". von Stechow, Arnim; Wunderlich, Dieter (Hrsgg.), *Semantik: Ein internationales Handbuch der zeitgenössischen Forschung*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 487-535.

Heim, Irene (1992). "Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs". *Journal of Semantics*, 9, 183-221.

Higginbotham, James (2003). "Remembering, Imagining; the First Person". Barber, Alex (ed.), *Epistemology of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 496-533.

Hornstein, Norbert; San Martin, Itziar (2001). "Obviation as Anti-control". *ASJU*, 35, 367-84.

Izvorski, Roumyana (1997). "The Present Perfect as an Epistemic Modal". Lawson, Aaron (ed.), *Proceedings of SALT 7.* Ithaca (NY): Cornell University, 222-39.

Kempchinsky, Paula (1987). "The Subjunctive Disjoint Reference Effect". Neidle, Carol; Nuñez Cedeño, Rafael (eds.), *Studies in Romance Linguistics*. Dordrecht: Foris, 123-40.

Kempchinsky, Paula (1998). "Mood Phrase, Case Checking and Obviation". Schwegler, Armin; Tranel, Bernard; Uribe-Etxebarria, Myriam (eds.), *Romance Linguistics: Theoretical Perspectives*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 143-54.

Kempchinsky, Paula (2009). "What can the Subjunctive Disjoint Reference Effect Tell Us About the Subjunctive?". *Lingua*, 119, 1788-810.

Lasersohn, Peter (2005). "Context dependence, disagreement, and predicates of personal taste". *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 26, 643-86.

Levinson, Stephen (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Manzini, Maria Rita (2000). "Sentential Complementation. The Subjunctive". Coopmans, Peter; Everaert, Martin; Grimshaw, Jane (eds.), *Lexical Specification and Insertion*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.

Picallo, Carme (1985). *Opaque domains* [Doctoral Dissertation]. New York: The City University of New York.

Progovac, Ljiljana (1993). "Subjunctive: the (Mis)behavior of Anaphora and Negative Polarity". *The Linguistic Review*, 10, 37-59.

Progovac, Ljiljana (1994). *Negative and Positive Polarity: a Binding Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pryor, James (1999). "Immunity to Error Through Misidentification". *Philosophical topics*, 26, 271-307.

Raposo, Eduardo (1985). "Some Asymmetries in the Binding Theory in Romance". *The Linguistic Review*, 5, 75-110.

Recanati, François (2007). *Perspectival Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rizzi, Luigi (1991). "On the Anaphor-agreement Effect". *Rivista di Linguistica*, 2, 27-42.

Rooryck, Johan (2001). "Evidentiality". *Glot International*, 5(4-5), 125-33, 161-68.

Ruwet, Nicolas (1984). "Je veux partir / *Je veux que je parte: on the Distribution of Finite Complements and Infinitival Complements in French". *Cahiers de Grammaire*, 7, 75-138. Repr.: Ruwet, Nicolas, *Syntax and Human Experience*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Sauerland, U. (2003). "A New Semantics for Number". Young, Robert B.; Zhou, Yuping (eds.), *Proceedings of SALT 13*. Ithaca (NY): CLC Publications.

Schlenker, Philippe (2005). "The Lazy Frenchman's Approach to the Subjunctive (Speculations on Reference to Worlds, Presuppositions, and Semantic Defaults in the Analysis of Mood)". Geerts, Twan; van Ginneken, Ivo; Jacobs, Haike (eds.), *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory. Selected Papers from 'Going Romance'* (Nijmegen, 20-22 November 2003). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 269-309.

Shoemaker, Sydney (1968). "Self-Reference and Self-Awareness". *Journal of Philosophy*, 65, 555-67.

Simons, Mandy (2007). "Observations on Embedding Verbs, Evidentiality, and Presupposition". *Lingua*, 117, 1034-56.

Squartini, Mario (2008). "Lexical vs Grammatical Evidentiality in French and Italian". *Linguistics*, 46, 917-47.

Suñer, Margarita (1986). "On the Referential Properties of Embedded Finite Clause Subjects". Bordelois, Ivonne; Contreras, Helas; Zagona, Karen (eds.), *Generative Studies in Spanish Syntax*. Dordrecht: Foris, 183-96.

Tsoulas, George (1996). "The Nature of the Subjunctive and the Formal Grammar of Obviation". Zagona, Karen (ed.), *Grammatical Theory and Romance Languages*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 293-306.

Willett, Thomas (1988). "A Cross-Linguistic Survey of the Grammaticization of Evidentiality". *Studies in Language*, 12, 51-97.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.