

The multifunctionality of Armenian complementizer *te*

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Overview. Complementizers are traditionally viewed as semantically vacuous conjunctive markers linking matrix and embedded clauses (Noonan 2007), such as English *that*. Recent studies, however, suggest that complementizers can have additional functions. This paper investigates Armenian *te*, offering novel evidence that challenges its categorization alongside semantically empty complementizers like English *that*. Our findings not only support recent arguments for the multifunctionality of complementizers (Staps & Rooryck 2023, Tollan & Palaz 2024) but also connect with insights on the semantic contributions of reportative and dubitative markers (Kaiser 2022). Building on Baker (2011) and Kornfilt & Borsley (2009), we argue that some complement clauses (CPs) are ‘more’ nominal and have a DP projection above them, while others, like those introduced by the Armenian *te*, do not. This work sheds light on the interaction between complementizers and broader semantico-syntactic phenomena, such as modal projection and dubitativity.

Puzzle. There are two complementizers in Armenian: *te* and *vor*. *Te* behaves differently from *vor* in both syntactic and semantic aspects. Firstly, *te* can introduce direct quotations whereas *vor* cannot (1).

- (1) pro asum e **te/*vor** duq ch.eq uzum [PRO indz ogn.el]
pro say AUX.3.PR.SG **TE/*VOR** you.PL not.AUX.2.PL.PR want [PRO me help.INF]

‘He/she says, “you do not want to help me.”’

Secondly, *vor* can be omitted without altering the meaning of the sentence, while *te* is not semantically neutral. This holds across various verb types, including speech report verbs (e.g. *say*) and doxastics (e.g. *think/know*). As we can see in (2b), *te* indicates the speaker’s lack of commitment to the embedded proposition.

- (2) a. Na asum e (**vor**) ir eghbajr hivand e
He say AUX.3.PR that his brother sick AUX.3.PR.SG
‘He says that his brother is sick.’
b. Na asum e **te** ir eghbajr hivand e
He say AUX.3.PR that his brother sick AUX.3.PR.SG.

‘He says that his brother is sick’ (that is what he says; I do not know whether it is true or not)

The data presented above suggest that Armenian *te* is not equivalent to English *that*. This paper aims to discern Armenian *te* from *vor*, the counterpart of English *that*, in their selectional differences, speaker-stance, etc., building upon semantic and syntactic perspectives.

Semantic Analysis. Following Kaiser (2022), we argue that Armenian *te*, when used as a linker between matrix and embedded clauses, indicates the speaker’s level of commitment to the embedded proposition. Differing from the semantically vacuous *that*, Armenian *te* has other additional functions: i. a reportative evidential marker as in (2b), which shows the speaker’s lack of commitment; ii. a dubitative marker as in (3), which indicates that the speaker is skeptical about the embedded proposition.

- (3) pro kartsum e **te** du ga.lu es
pro think AUX.3.SG.PR **TE** you come.FTR AUX.2.SG.PR.

‘He thinks you are coming’ (the speaker is skeptical about *p* and is inclined to think that *p* is false)

This dubitative meaning of *te* is also evidenced by other aspects. Firstly, *te* is incompatible with first person subject+stance-taking verbs in present tense but becomes okay if the tense is anchored to the past (4).

- (4) pro kartsum ei/*em **te** du chisht es
pro think AUX.1.SG.PST/*AUX.1.SG.PR **TE** you right AUX.2.SG.PR.

Past tense: ‘I thought you were right’ (but it turned out not to be the case)

*Present tense: ‘I think you’re right.’

Moreover, the dubitative meaning of *te* finds support in its interaction with first person subjects with perception verbs, see (5) where directly seeing something contradicts the speaker’s ignorance or doubt about the embedded proposition. This is further supported by the contrast between directly hearing with firsthand

evidence and overhearing information from others, as shown by the contrast in (6) and (7).

- (5) *jes tesa vor/*te* Aram gnats (6) *jes lsetsi vor/*te* Aram gnats
 I saw **VOR/*TE** Aram left I heard **VOR/*TE** Aram left
 ‘I saw that Aram left’ ‘I heard Aram leaving’(heard his footsteps)
- (7) *jes lsel em vor/te* Aram gnats /gnats.el e
 I hear.PRF AUX.1.PR **VOR/TE** Aram left /leave.PRF AUX.3.PR
 ‘I have heard that Aram left/has left.’(heard from someone)

The mirative use of *te* derives from its dubitative meaning. As (8) and (9) show, *te* is grammatical under factive predicates, despite the expectation that its dubitative meaning would render such contexts ungrammatical. This apparent anomaly reflects the use of dubitative *te* as a mirative, consistent with literature indicating that dubitative markers can convey surprise or unexpectedness (Aikhenvald 2012; Peterson 2013).

- (8) *Es git.em te jerkir klor e*
 I know.1st.SG.PR **TE** Earth round is
 ‘I know that the Earth is round’ (This was my knowledge, but I just found out that it is not the case)
- (9) *jes hishum em te vagh qo tsndjan orn e*
 I remember AUX.1.PST **TE** tomorrow your birth day is
 ‘I remember that it is your birthday tomorrow.’ (but I just found out that it is not true)

Syntactic Analysis. Following Baker (2011) and Kornfilt & Borsley (2009) a.m.o., we propose that some clauses exhibit greater nominality than others. This nominality may be attributed either to an index carried by the complementizer itself (Baker 2011) or to the DP projection that selects for the CP. Clauses headed by *VOR* have a DP layer on top of them, whereas CPs introduced by *TE* lack both a DP layer and a D head with a referential index (11). The modality is conveyed by the semantic content of the verb and that of the complementizer.

- (10) [_{CP}I know [_{DP}[_D[_{CP} *VOR* the Earth is round]]]]
 (11) [_{CP} I know [_{CP} *TE* the Earth is round]]

The claim that there is a *DP* layer above CPs introduced by *VOR* is supported by the facts that clauses introduced by *VOR* can be fronted, and it is possible for the demonstrative *ajn* (an overt D head) to precede *VOR*. By contrast, leftward movement of the clauses headed by *TE* is banned (12), and the insertion of an overt demonstrative is impossible (13). This does not mean that there is a DP projection on top of any embedded clause headed by *VOR*. There is no DP projection above *VOR* if selected by verbs that take only limited/ special kind of direct objects (e.g. think *what/a thought*, etc.). Such CPs, no matter introduced by *TE* or *VOR* cannot be fronted (14).

- (12) **Vor/*Te** jerkir klor e *jes git.em*
VOR/*TE Earth round is I know.1st.SG.PR
 ‘That the Earth is round I know’
- (13) *Jes git.em [ajn vor/*te jerkir klor e]*
 I know.1st.SG.PR [DEM **VOR/*TE** Earth round is]
 ‘I know that the Earth is round’
- (14) [***Te/*vor** du chisht es] pro kartsum em
***TE/*VOR** you right AUX.2.SG.PR pro think AUX.1.SG.PR.
 ‘Intended: That you are right, I think’

Implications. This work supports the growing literature on complementizers contributing to the modality of embedded clauses. Syntactically, it adds a solid support to the claims that only factive *that*-clauses display DP-like behavior in terms of saturating the complement position of the verb.

Selected references: [1] Kaiser, E 2022. Evidentiality in Finnish. *Journal of Uralic Linguistics*. [2] Noonan, M. 2007. Complementation. *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*. [3] Baker, M. 2011. Degrees of

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