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The roots of the analysis

Alongside analyses of subordinate clauses as NPs (and thus as analogous to objects), there are also analyses in early generative syntax which treat clauses as S, with no dominating NP. This is the analysis, for example, in Chomsky (1965: 107), where one possible expansion of VP is

(1) $VP \rightarrow V\ S$

No argument is given for a non-NP analysis of complement clauses.

The non-NP analysis gained popularity over time, for several reasons. One of them is $\bar{X}$ theory, under which it would be strange for NP to dominate S and not have a noun head. Another reason is that closer inspection showed that *that* clauses and infinitival clauses do not really share the distribution of NPs. (Gerunds, on the other hand, do.) Interestingly, although (as we have noted) Emonds (1976) takes the position that most subordinate clauses are NPs, the dissertation on which the book was based took the non-NP position. (Emonds notes this in several footnotes, refusing to compare the two analyses.) Jackendoff (1977) and many other studies from the mid-1970s onward take a clear non-NP position.

The analysis in RG/LFG

The Relational Grammar literature consistently treats clausal complements as OBJ.

On the other hand, in the "classical" LFG literature, the analysis of clausal complements as a distinct function COMP (occasionally called SCOMP in the earliest papers), and not as OBJ, is standard. For example, Bresnan (1982), the basic source of the LFG theory of control and clausal complementation, assumes without argument that clausal complements are COMP. What lies behind the LFG adoption of a non-OBJ analysis is probably observations that syntactic selection of complements distinguishes between NP complements and clausal complements. Note the following, based on observations in Grimshaw (1979; 1982).

Some verbs that take semantically propositional arguments allow these arguments to be either CP or NP:

(2) a. Bill asked [$_{CP}$ what time it was].
b. Bill asked [$_{DP}$ the time].

Others only allow CP and exclude NP.

(3) a. Bill inquired [$_{CP}$ what time it was].
b. *Bill inquired [$_{DP}$ the time].

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Still others only allow NP and exclude CP. Interestingly, when these verbs passivize the derived SUBJ can be either NP or CP.

(4) a. The theory expresses [$_{DP}$ the fact that grammatical functions are primitives].
b. *The theory expresses [$_{CP}$ that grammatical functions are primitives].

(5) a. [$_{DP}$ The fact that grammatical functions are primitives] is expressed by the theory.
b. [$_{CP}$ That grammatical functions are primitives] is expressed by the theory.

Since in LFG argument selection is based on grammatical functions, this shows that a distinction must be made functionally between nominal complements and clausal complements. (Subjects, on the other hand, can be either nominal or clausal, which is why the passive subject of *expressed* can be a clause, even though the active object of *express* cannot be.)

(6) a. 'ask ⟨SUBJ, OBJ/COMP⟩'
b. 'inquire ⟨SUBJ, COMP⟩'
c. 'express ⟨SUBJ, OBJ⟩'
d. 'express$_{Passive}$ ⟨Ø, SUBJ⟩'

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