BELIEVE-TYPE AND WANT-TYPE MATRIX VERBS AND THEIR COMPLEMENTS

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The contrast between the sentential complements of verbs like want and believe has been the subject of much debate. P. Rosenbaum distinguished them as being obligatory / optional undergoers of a ‘pronoun replacement’ transformation [2].

The want class are often called emotive verbs, or subject Equi verbs, or subject control verbs. This class includes desiratives like want and wish as well as factive-emotives such as like, love, hate and fear.

The believe class are sometimes called (subject to object) raising verbs or Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) verbs [3]. Believe-type verbs are the members of the verbal lexicon that share:

a) the syntactic characteristic of displaying the alternation between a finite clausal complement and an NP+to-infinitival clause complement (accusative and infinitive) (sentences (1) and (2) below);

b) the semantic characteristic that their (active) subjects say, think, perceive or show something to be the case of the subject of the complement (such a semantic characterization often does not hold in cases like (2b) where there is no active subject).

(1) Jack believes that Ann is friendly.
(2) a. Jack believes Ann to be friendly.
   b. Ann is believed to be friendly.

A lot of scholars listed over a hundred verbs that answer both parts of this description. Among them are: accept, acknowledge, announce, argue, believe, consider, declare, expect, explain, find, fancy, fear, hope, know, suggest, report, suppose, suspect, understand, witness and others [1].
Although, both take nexal complements, the complement to a want-type verb is interpreted as a STATE OF AFFAIRS, while the complement to a believe-type verb is interpreted as a PROPOSITION, which must ultimately be translated into an information unit. As for J. Bresnan, she listed the major syntactic differences between the two classes as follows: want-type verbs allow the complementizer for, allow subject-controlled Equi (PRO), disallow passive, and disallow reflexivisation. The believe-type verbs are the opposite: they never appear with for, they disallow Equi, they allow passive, and they allow reflexivisation.

a. The cossacks {want/*believe} very much for the commissar to dance.
b. The commissar doesn’t {want/*believe} to dance.
c. The commissar is {*wanted/believed} to dance poorly.
d. The cossacks {*?want/believe} themselves to dance well.

When small clause complements are examined, some further differences emerge which distinguish emotive from propositional verbs. The want class behaves similarly with any nexal complement, whereas the believe class shows marked differences between infinitival and small clause complements.

For differentiation it is necessary to use the terms believe class and believe-type to refer to those propositional or epistemic verbs which appear with infinitival complements and the consider class or consider-type to propositional or epistemic verbs which appear with small clause complements.

In general, the believe class and the consider class are coextensive, and can be generally referred to as epistemic verbs, but there are a few verbs, such as regard, in the consider class which are not also in the believe class, and a few in the believe class which are not in the consider class, for example believe. This is a result of vagaries of c-selection. The semantic interpretation of consider is exactly the same in relevant respects as that of believe, and any differences have to do with differences in c-selection. Since want-type verbs have similarly whether they appear with infinitival or small clause complements, they can be referred to generally either as want-type verbs or as emotive verbs [3].
References