

Factive verbs and island effects in Romanian

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Abstract

Factive verbs are generally said to induce weak island effects, allowing the extraction of arguments, but not that of adjuncts, from the post-verbal clause. However, a closer look at the data shows that not all factive verbs behave the same, which led some researchers to postulate at least two sub-types of factive verbs: strong/weak factives (Karttunen, 1977) or, in more recent studies, cognitive/emotive factives (Djarv, 2019). This difference can be seen in the case of Romanian factive verbs as well, with cognitive and emotive factives evincing distinct properties. The question this study raises is whether the two sub-types of factive verbs evince distinct behaviour with respect to island effects as well.

Keywords: factive verbs, cognitive factives, emotive factives, extraction, island effects

Starting point

Factive verbs have been a topic of much interest ever since Kiparsky and Kiparsky's seminal work (1971), where the authors argue that many of the differences between factive verbs (*know, regret, resent*) and non-factive verbs (*think, believe*) can be accounted for via a nominal layer that exists only in the structure of the former, but not in that of the latter.

However, a closer look at the data seems to indicate that there might be a further division between factive verbs themselves, previous studies in the field distinguishing between full factives and semi-factives (Karttunen, 1977), or, in more recent studies, between cognitive and emotive factives (Djarv, 2019). These two sub-types of factive verbs are said to differ not only semantically, but also syntactically, with the former even being argued to allow extraction in some contexts, contrary to the previous treatment of factive verbs as weak island inducers, as per Szabolcsi, den Dikken, 2003.

The aim of this paper is to test whether cognitive factives and emotive factives differ in Romanian, from the point of view of syntactic islandhood.

Cognitive and emotive factive verbs and island effects

Cognitive and emotive factive verbs are said to differ in a number of ways, both semantically (e.g. presupposition cancellation contexts) and syntactically (e.g. main clause phenomena or complementizer drop) (Djarv, 2019). These differences can be seen not only with respect to English factive verbs, but also in other languages, such as Greek (Roussou 2010) or Bulgarian (Krapova 2020).

In Romanian too there seems to be a split between the two sub-types of factive verbs: cognitive factives differ from emotive factives at least from the point of view of referentiality, the use of *wh*-complementizers, the acceptability of main clause phenomena. (Stoica, 2021).

With respect to extraction, Romanian factive verbs are said to induce weak island effects. However, in an experimental study (Stoica, 2019) where the sentence in (1) was used as a distractor, respondents accepted extraction out of the post-verbal clause of a cognitive factive verb.

- (1) În ce și-a amintit Ion că împachetau părinții lui cadourile?
In what did Ion remember that his parents used to wrap the presents?

Taking into account the distinct behaviour these sub-types of factive verbs evince, both in Romanian and in other languages, the question is whether this dichotomy is reflected into syntactic islandhood as well.

Factive verbs and island effects – an experimental study

Aim

The aim of the current study is two-fold: first of all, I wish to test whether factive verbs induce island effects in Romanian in the first place. Secondly, I am interested in seeing whether the distinction between cognitive factives and emotive factives is reflected into syntactic islandhood as well.

Materials and procedures

This experiment combined two designs: a question after story and a truth value judgement task. Respondents listened to the experimenter tell a story to a character, who, in turn, was asked a question at the end. Respondents were asked to say whether the response given by the character was true or false.

There were 8 test sentences in total, 4 of which targeted the island effects imposed by cognitive factive verbs: *a-și aduce aminte* (remember), *a-și da seama* (realize), *a uita* (forget) and *a afla* (find out) and 4 those induced by emotive factive verbs: *a regreta* (regret), *a se enerva* (be angry), *a se bucura* (be happy) and *a se întrista* (be sad).

Given that factive verbs in general are said to induce weak island effects, I only tested adjunct extraction with *când* (when) and *unde* (where):

- The test items were balanced for length and complexity.
- There were also 8 control sentences, where respondents saw variants of the same scenarios, but which targeted short distance movement, and 8 distractors.
- Respondents were split into two groups and saw mirroring variants of the questionnaire.

Examples of these scenarios are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Examples of test items and their English translations.

Cognitive factives	<p>Ema se uita la Tom și Jerry în sufragerie. După câteva scene, a exclamat “Dar eu am mai văzut episodul ăsta la grădiniță”, așa că i-a zis mamei ei: “Mami, poți să îmi pui altul?”</p> <p>Povestitor: Unde și-a adus aminte Ema că a văzut episodul?</p> <p>Personaj: - La grădiniță</p>	<p>Ema was watching Tom and Jerry in the living room. After a couple of scenes, she said: I’ve already seen this episode at the kindergarten”, so she told her Mom: „Mommy, can I have another one?”</p> <p>Storyteller: Where did Ema remember that she saw the episode?</p> <p>Character: at the kindergarten</p>
Emotive factives	<p>Filip avea un motan pe nume Pișcot. Într-o zi, Pișcot a fugit în grădină, în timp ce Filip nu era acasă. Părinții lui au venit la grădiniță și i-au zis: ”Scumpule, Pișcot a fugit...” . Filip a început să plângă și i-a întrebat pe părinți: “Credeți că o să-l mai găsim pe Pișcot?”</p> <p>Povestitor: Unde s-a întristat Filip că a fugit Pișcot?</p> <p>Personaj: În grădină.</p>	<p>Filip had a cat called Pișcot. One day, Pișcot ran in the garden, while Filip was not at home. His parents went to the kindergarten and told him: ”Honey, Pișcot ran away...”. Filip started crying and asked his parents: “Do you think we’ll ever find him again?”</p> <p>Storyteller: Paddington, where did Filip get sad that Pișcot had run away?</p> <p>Character: In the garden.</p>

Participants

74 native speakers of Romanian (mean age 36.6) took part in this task, all naïve to the aim of this experiment.

Results

The results show that, in line with previous findings, factive verbs impose (at least) weak island effects in Romanian. As can be seen in Table 2 below, extraction of adjuncts from the post-verbal clause of factive verbs in Romanian was rejected.

Table 2. Acceptability rates of adjunct extraction.

Cognitive factives		Emotive factives	
când-extraction	unde-extraction	când-extraction	unde-extraction
5.45%	39.39%	6.75%	28.04
20%		17.94%	
18.91%			

A Welch t-test at the $\alpha=.05$ level further shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the island effects imposed by cognitive factive verbs and emotive factive verbs ($t(7)=1.97$, $p=0.88$).

Conclusions and questions for further research

The results of the experiment above show that the distinction between cognitive and emotive factives does not reflect into syntactic islandhood, extraction of adjuncts being banned overall. However, there are several questions that stem from this observation: i) can the distinctions between cognitive factives and emotive factives be accounted for structurally? and if so ii) why do cognitive factives and emotive factives behave similarly from the point of view of extraction? and, last but not least, iii) are there some aspects that improve extraction even in these cases? (i.e. see the example in (1) above). I leave all of these questions for further research.

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