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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Syntactic and Semantic Interface of English Complementizers 'for' and 'that': Implications and Theory

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to investigate the function and use of English complementizers 'that and for' and to examine how these complementizers interact with(in) the semantic scope of complex sentences. The study argues that the transformational processes of English complementizers have the potential to change and manipulate the sentence/speaker's meaning. This manipulative change of meaning is firstly abode by the complementizer used within the matrix of (complex) sentence and secondly by the type that the propositional content of the sentence refers to (whether the information conveyed expresses objective knowledge, subjective mood, moral judgment, emotional state or open, uncertain question). The study concludes that the classification of verbs plays an essential role in selecting the complementizer to be properly used in covering the necessary cognitive status of the sentence at the syntactic and semantic levels. Thus, each complementizer has its own semantic restrictions, which differentiate it from other complementizers.

**KEYWORDS**

Complementizer, for, semantics, syntax, that

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### 1. Introduction

This study investigates the function and use of English complementizers 'that' and 'for'. It focuses on 'the syntactic function and semantic use' of English complementizers presupposing and entailing different interpretations of meanings at the phrase and clause level. Under this circumstance, the study investigates the syntactic-semantic interface generated/produced by the aforementioned English complementizers. The study claims that syntax manipulates the semantic scope of meaning through the multifaceted syntactic transformational processes that one needs to be fully aware of. Chomsky (1973) states that in most cases, any transformational process of complementizers produces some semantic change in the meaning of the sentence. That is, if the complementizer *that* is replaced with the complementizer *for*, the meaning of the sentence may change either slightly or dramatically. Furthermore, Mckoon & Ratcliff (2007: 273) acknowledge that "syntactic constructions carry meaning, different meanings for different constructions". Thus, any attempt of manipulating the syntactic transformational rules plays a role in changing the semantic scope of the sentence. Syntax and semantics interact and are thus impossibly detached (Mckoon & Ratcliff 2005). Whatever slight or dramatic the syntactic change is, the meaning would be changed either slightly or dramatically, so any syntactic change within the matrix of the complex sentence has an equivalent change in meaning and cognition.

This study tries to find out some solutions for the problem encountered due to the complexity and ambiguity of the use of the complementizers *that* and *for*. Many English users, particularly second language students, face difficulties in constructing complex sentences using complementation rules. This syntactic-based challenge affects students' realizations and recognition. In respect of the research problem, the significance of the study is drawn to both second language students and teachers who may benefit from the findings of this study by being aware of how the syntactic transformational rules are used in conveying different intended meanings, which in some cases presuppose a broad range of dissociative thoughts and blur interpretations. The findings of the

study also suggest some *essential criteria* that help students differentiate between English complementizers at the syntactic and semantic levels. This may thus improve their English language proficiency.

In order to examine the extent to which English complementizers affect the semantic scope of their complements, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do English complementizers *that* and *for* determine the choices of transformational syntactic processes in conveying the intended sentence meaning at the complex sentence level?
2. How does the lexico-semantic categorization of complex verbs dominate the semantic properties and features determining the proper choice of *complementizer* at the complex sentence level?

## **2. About Complementizers in English**

By and large, complementizers are seen as *function words* that introduce a clause complement, entailing that such a word is a complement of a lexical head. Normally, complementizers are selected by verbs, especially verbs of sayings such as *say*, *tell*, or cognitive verbs describing mental states such as *think* (Yeung 2006). Chomsky (1986) mentioned that sentences in English must be analyzed as CPs (complementizer phrases). According to Batson (2012), in modern linguistics, all normal clauses, whether they are main clauses or complement clauses, are deemed complementizer phrases. This indicates that clauses that are tense projections/TPs are always headed by a complementizer C. The notion of 'complementizer' was first conceived by Peter S. Rosenbaum in (1967), who tried to generate a transformational rule whose function was to insert the suitable complementizer in the complement clause. Since then, researchers have been debating the lexical items that can fill this syntactic category. Radford (2004), who adopted Chomsky's minimalist approach, narrowed complementizers into three lexical items: *that*, *for* and *if*. This position of Radford is supported by Newson et al. (2006) in their book "*Basic English Syntax with Exercises*". According to Radford (2004: 44-45), these complementizers maintain three grammatical functions: to mark an embedded clause, to show whether the clause is finite or non-finite, and to identify the clause they introduce as declarative, interrogative or irrealis.

In his treatment of complementizers, Radford (2004) does not include *whether* as a complementizer, although it was treated as a complementizer in earlier syntacticians' writings and discussions. He treats *whether* like *wh*/words and argues that it is a *wh*-phrase rather than a complementizer. This, in fact, is proven correct as to *whether* it has some properties that define it as a *wh*-phrase, although some, like Kim & Sells (2008), treat *whether* as a complementizer similar to *if*, which is a proved complementizer. For instance, *whether* can be sometimes coordinated with *wh*-phrase which must occupy Spec Force. On the other hand, *if* cannot. Furthermore, *whether* can be coordinated with the negation *or*, while *if* cannot; This study discusses *that* and *for* complementizers. Each of these complementizers has its specific syntactic features. To start with, *that* has different functions in the sense that it can be a complementizer, relativizer, demonstrative determiner and demonstrative pronoun. Being a complementizer, *that* introduces a finite clause. That is, it does not introduce a non-finite clause. The complementizer *that* can sometimes be omitted from the clause, but it is still understood. This is called a null complementizer. In this case, the null *that* and the overt *that* clauses have similar syntactic structures, where the COMP, whether over or null, represents a C head. By contrast, *for* is, in fact an infinitival complementizer. Thus, it "can be used to introduce a clause containing infinitival *to*, but not a finite clause containing a tensed auxiliary" (Radford 2004: 29). *If* as a complementizer is similar to *that* in the sense that it can only be used to introduce a finite clause.

## **3. Method**

In the analysis, the study adopts the inductive analytical research method that helps extract and analyze complex sentences with specific characteristics (nature). This method helps researchers to inductively formulate recommended criteria and rules that disambiguate the complex use of English complementizers at the syntactic and semantic levels.

## **4. Analysis and Discussion**

To answer the research questions, the study examines some important examples of how each of the aforementioned complementizer works with the matrix of a complex sentence. Let us consider the following examples and see how the syntactic choices of complementizers manipulatively affect the semantic scope of sentence meaning.

- (1) a. I am happy to talk to you.  
b. I am happy for me to talk to you.  
c. I am happy that I talk to you.  
d. \* I am happy whether I talk to you.

The sentences above, though understandable, are confusing at the lexico-semantic level. All sentences presuppose a common meaning; however, all sentences have a slightly different semantic meaning based on the complementizer used. In sentence (1a), complementizer (*to*) introducing the infinitive phrase refers to simultaneous greeting and initiation between two people having

just met. In this context, the interlocutors (did not/ might not) know each other(s) before, and they may not meet anymore- this may either happen in (in)formal meetings or coincidental situations or gatherings. Sentence (1b) functions the same as the sentence (1a) because there is an 'infinitival complement'; however, the complementizer (*for*) functions as CP and emphasizes the speaker's intended meaning that 'I am really happy to talk to you or this is a real pleasure talking to you'. In sentence (1c), the complementizer (*that*) strongly emphasizes the meaning as it entails the speaker's genuine state of mind that "I always feel happy to talk to you. (*That*) as a complementizer presupposes the fact that the interlocutors have a strong long relationship and mutual respect, interest and affection. In short, they may have mutual backgrounds and life circumstances. In sentence (1d), the semantic nature of the adjective 'happy' does not accept *whether* as a complementizer because *whether* refers to alternativity and possibility, which can never relativize the adjectival complement 'happy'. This then indicates that the adjective 'happy' does not accept (*wh*) complement except in a few cases when the (*wh*) is preceded by a preposition, e.g., 1e) I'm happy *about what* you have done". Let us consider the following examples:

- (2) a. Ali is scared that he fails the syntax course.  
 b. Ali is scared to fail the syntax exam.  
 c. \*Ali is scared whether he fails the syntax course.

Sentence (2a) and sentence (2b) are correct because the adjective 'scared' accepts *that* and *to* complementizers. Sentence (2c) is incorrect because the adjective 'scared' does not accept *whether*, which refers to an open, uncertain possibility.

Now, we shall analyze and discuss each of the complementizers *that* and *for* apart:

#### 4.1 *that*

Johnson (2007) states that "*that* is a complementizer being the head of the phrase". Hence, *that* functions to connect sentence components together and give a specific force to the intended meaning. Although *that* has many functions syntactically and semantically, this study narrows the scope on the syntactic and semantic role *that* plays at the phrase and clause level and on how this plays a part in manipulatively changing the sentence meaning. *That* has many syntactic functions such as (subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement, and object complement). As a subject *that* comes after abstract nouns and has a nominative function (Johnson 2007). Let us consider the following examples:

- (3) That Ali passed the exam pleased his parents.

The example above *that* has an important syntactic function without which the sentence is incorrect. The semantic function of *that* in the above sentence is to emphasize the meaning of the sentence. There is something important regarding *that* when coming as a subject. Syntactically speaking, if a sentence is introduced by a *that* clause as a subject, such as the sentence above, the sentence would be ambiguous and difficult to be understood because *that* clause is a long one, and there is a distance between the *that* clause and the main verb. For the sake of disambiguating the syntactic function of *that* clause, an important syntactic process called 'extraposition' is employed. Extraposition is a process through which the initial elements of the sentence are placed at the end of the sentence, and the final elements are put at the beginning of the sentence through the expletive pronoun '*it*'. According to Quirk et al. (cited in Kim and Sag, 2005: 193), "English allows a pattern where a finite or infinitival clause appears in sentence final (or 'extraposed') position". Based on this, the aforementioned sentence can be made as follows:

- (4) It pleased Ali's parents that he got high marks.

That introducing *that* clause introduces new information that readers are interested in. In sentence (3), *that* functions as a subject and thus cannot be deleted. In sentence (4), *that* comes in the middle, and so it could be deleted with some slight changes in the form and meaning. Syntactically, the use of *that* in the middle of the sentence, unlike in the beginning, makes it easy for readers to grasp its function, entailing the sentence's meaning. Semantically, *that* emphasizes the sentence's meaning and makes readers ready for the new coming information.

Having investigated *that* as a subject of the sentence coming in the beginning and in the middle through the *extraposition transformational process*, we shall investigate whether *that* can function as both a sentence subject and a complementizer and whether *that* with a subject position can accept any complementizer other than *that* in the middle of the sentence. To make the last point clear, let us consider the following examples syntactically and semantically.

- (5) a. That Ali loves Lila indicates that he will marry her.  
 b. \*That Ali loves Lila indicates whether he will marry her.  
 c. \*For Ali to love Lila indicates that he will marry her.

Syntactically, it is proved that the option of selecting *that* complements depends on the complement type that the object of the sentence implies; that is, if the object is *that* complement, the subject must be *that*. Based on this syntactic rule, we can point out the grammatically correct sentence. Sentence (5a) is correct syntactically and semantically. Sentence (5b) is not correct because the subject is different from the object complement. We shall investigate how accurate the aforementioned rule is and whether it fits the semantic scope of the sentence meaning. Consider these examples:

- (6) a. \*Whether Ali loves Lila indicates whether he will marry here.  
b. Whether Ali plays football proves whether he is active.

At the syntactic level, sentence (6a) is correct because the subject and the object are the same; at the semantic level, however, the sentence is ambiguous because the semantic scope of the verb "love" does not accept "whether" as a complement. "*Whether*" as a complementizer refers to possibility and uncertainty; that is, "love" is a stative verb that only accepts the absolute and definite state of mind. In other words, someone can either love or hate someone else, but he/she cannot love and hate at the same time. This shows again that choosing a proper complementizer is totally related to the type of the verb used. Sentence (6b) is correct syntactically and semantically because *whether* as a complement fits the semantic scope of (*play*). To conclude, verbs of *emotions and senses* such as (love, like, feel, and hear) only accept *that* complement, while verbs of actions, referring to physical exercise such as (play, swim, draw, and fight), accept *whether* complement.

One of the most remarkable functions of a complementizer *that* is asserting/confirming the meaning of its complement. Let us consider the examples below:

- (7) a. It is impolite that a man cheats his family.  
b. It is impolite for a man to cheat his family.

In (7a), *that* functions as a complementizer which is never deleted. Semantically, *that* emphasizes the meaning, that is, 'it is always impolite for a man to cheat his family' (impolite behavior everywhere and every time). On the other hand, *for* complementizer does not intensely assert the sentence's meaning; it conveys hypothetical or possible actions, i.e., in reference to (7a), 'a man may not always be honest with his family; he may sometimes tell lies to his family'. This shows that *that* complementizer strongly emphasizes the meaning with no room for prediction or misinterpretations.

At the pragmatic level of language, *that* shows a great deal of respect compared to *wh* complementizers. *That* carries the degree of refusal and imposition between speaker and hearer. Let's consider the following example:

- (8) I am not certain that I can help you.

*That* in (8) functions syntactically as an adjectival complement and pragmatically is used to mitigate the degree of imposition and make the hearer consider the speaker's position, refusal, or point of view.

Having analyzed the data, the study argues that predicates (verbs) that imply a physical relationship between subject and object take *that* complement; verbs presupposing and implying intentionality and directionality take *for* a complement. To emphasize what has been mentioned, we shall analyze the following examples:

- (9) a. I need a car to drive.  
b. \*I broke a car to drive.

*To* complementizer in the first sentence functions as an intentional desirable action that means 'I want to do', so *to* complement fits someone's purpose syntactically and semantically. What makes the complementizer *to* syntactically and semantically correct is that it fits the semantic scope of the predicate 'need'. On the other hand, the complementizer *to*, does not fit the semantic property of the predicate 'broke'. Thus, the semantic scope of the sentence is incorrect because the verb 'broke' implies definite semantic characteristics and features that determine the meaning of the sentence, which do not accept the semantic scope presupposed by directionality or purpose. The verb 'broke' refers to something which is definite and known by its predicate 'broke'. To conclude, *that* complementizer introduces and refers to determined objects, while *for* complementizer introduces and refers to undetermined objects.

It is claimed that *that* has no grammatical function when it comes within a nominal clause unless it functions as a subordinating conjunction at the clause level. *That, however,* has a function at the syntactic and semantic level when used into appositive clauses. Let's discuss the following example and investigate whether *that* has a syntactic and semantic function.

- (10) a. The fact that Ahmed lost the race is annoying.  
b. The fact Ahmed lost the race is annoying.

Sentence (10a) includes the noun phrase (the fact) and (that clause). *That* in the first sentence functions as a complementizer introducing the information which the nominal noun (the fact) refers. The syntactic function of *that* in the clause emphasizes the semantic scope, which helps the reader to follow a logical sequence of ideas. *That* makes readers ready to receive new information or make new coming ideas. Thus, the existence of *that* makes the parts of the sentence unpruned (not made into two parts, so the main clause is connected with the superordinate one) and helps readers have a consistent flow of ideas. Let's analyze the function and use of *that* in the sentence below:

c. The fact Ahmed lost the race is annoying.

Sentence (10c) is syntactically and semantically correct, but the absence of *that* complement may make the sentence understood as two sentences 'the fact', and 'Ahmed lost the race' or may make it interpreted as an incomplete sentence because the sentence would be expected to have another phrase or clause connected to it. To conclude, the existence of *that* can disambiguate the structure and meaning of the sentence and thus removes any misunderstanding.

#### 4.2 *for*

"*For* complementizer is one of the most interesting particles in English and its function as a complementizer is unique to the English language" (Jespersen 1969). Jespersen also states that the preposition *for* is "a true complementizer". *For* has very interesting syntactic and semantic functions. It can come after (as and then) to play the role of complementation and join elements together. It also comes after adjectives and wishes. The function of *for* in most sentences indicates possibility, prediction and imagination. Let us consider the examples below:

(11) Ali was scared for his teacher to see him cheat in the exam.

The semantic function of *for* in (11) refers to something possible in the past though not happening. Sentence (24) would be paraphrased syntactically as 'Ali was scared that his teacher would have seen him cheat in the exam'. The presence of the auxiliary 'would' makes the action possible in the past though not happening. *For* introduces a certain class of verbs, which express the subjective aspect of the propositional meaning of the sentence. *For* complements do not express the real knowledge of the sentence or its truth. This is why *for* complement cannot introduce some verbs of knowledge and perception such as (believe, thought, feel, consider, realize, recognize....). *That* complement cannot be used in the same domain of constructions that *for* complement occupy. Let's discuss the following examples:

(12) a. \*He is stupid that he did that.  
b. He is stupid for he did that.

In sentence (12a), the adjective 'stupid' does not accept *that* complement but accepts *for* complement. The utterance nature of whether it has just been announced or had been planned for before is a core factor in determining the proper complementizer conveying the syntactic-semantic interplay at the contextual discourse level. Sentence (12a) might be correct if *that* complement functions as a *causative particle* which can be replaced by 'because'. *For* complement in sentence (12b) refers to an instantaneous emotional reaction. Strickland et al. (2014) state that "syntax influences intentionality judgment" and based on that *for* complement influences the intentionality judgment in expressing personal reaction, emotions, feelings, moral judgment, directionality, intentionality, and willingness. All of these uses may be either used for past actions with hypothetical interpretations and occurrences or be used for spontaneous actions under possible interpretations and occurrences. Furthermore, *for* complement can express goal, use, and purpose under the domain of directionality and intentionality. The examples below illustrate what has been mentioned:

(13) I will do everything for you to be pleased.

*For* complement in (13) conveys willingness, which presupposes (in)sincere emotions and feelings. Thus, *that* complement cannot replace *for* complement at the semantic level; it can at the syntactic level by paraphrasing (13) to a new sentence (14):

(14) I will do everything that you be pleased.

At the syntactic level, sentence (14) should be correct in that it emphasizes the speaker's willingness to help the hearer. It, however, entails hypotheticality depending on context and participants' role in a conversation.

Based on the data analysis, the study figures out that verbs of commands, urgency, and desires are compatible with *for* complement as to all these verbs indicate someone's psycho-emotional and moral state. On the other hand, all predicates referring to objective knowledge of the propositional content are semantically incompatible with *for* complement compatible with intentionality, emotionality and subjectivity. Examples below explain what has been mentioned:

- (15) a. \*It is believed for God to exist.  
b. It is believed that God exists.  
c. It is true for God to punish liars.  
d. It is true that God punishes liars.

Sentence (15a) is syntactically and semantically incorrect. At the syntactic level, 'believe' does not accept *for* complement; at the semantic level, 'believe' does not accept the *subjective case* referring to self-judgment (Johnson 2007). The semantic scope of 'believe' prohibits *for* complement, that is, the semantic scope of some predicates determines the accurate choice of what complementizer ought to be used. Sentence (15b) is correct because *that* complement fits the semantic scope of 'believe'.

(15c) and (15d) are correct because the semantic scope of 'true' entails moral judgment accepting both *that* and *for* complements, though there is a slight difference. The lexico-semantic difference lies in the certainty degree that a complementizer emphasizes. *That* complement, helping avoid subjective judgment (mood), entails/presupposes and emphasizes real knowledge and objective judgment. Thus, (15c) might be told by a person who is lied to by one of his/her friends; that is, (15c) would express a quick emotional reaction reflecting moral judgment. However, (15d) could be said and known by all people since lies are prohibited, and God punishes liars.

It is important to know that *for* complement in specific contexts, especially when functioning as an adjectival complement, entails a real meaning requiring /referring/ to a real action. The objective function of *for* complement can be valid on the condition that the action indeed happened and so both complements, i.e., *that* and *for* can replace one another by the principle of '*transformational hypothesis*' that allows to change the syntactic structure of sentences without affecting the meaning (Chomsky 1973). The examples below demonstrates what has been mentioned:

- (16) a. It was crazy that he killed his friends.  
b. It was crazy for him to have killed his friend.

Both sentences (16a) and (16b) entail that the action indeed happened in the past and that both sentences can undergo some change at the syntactic level through 'transformational hypothesis'. By doing so, (16b) may entail the same meaning to that of (16a) at the semantic level. Thus, (16a) has to undergo a transformational syntactic process, namely 'infinitivization (a syntactic process where *that* complement is deleted and be replaced with *for* complement). Some verbs are 'problematic' for their multifaceted functions and complex nature of analysis at the morpho-syntactic and semantic levels, e.g., 'happen'. This verb can undergo several transformational syntactic processes resulting in generating a wide range of semantic interpretations. 'Happen' accepts *that* and *for* complements but does not accept *wh* complement. Example (17) illustrates how 'happen' can be used with both *that* and *for* complement:

- (17) It happens Ali once failed the syntax course.

The propositional content of the sentence refers to indicate mood presupposing a factual event that 'Ali failed the syntax course'. What the study is trying to figure out is of whether 'happen' accepts *that* and *for* complements in (17). Examples (18a) to (18d) investigate the applicability of whether 'happen' accepts *that* and *for* complement:

- (18) a. Ali happens to have once failed the syntax course.  
b. It happens Ali had once failed the syntax course.  
c. It happens that Ali has once failed the syntax course.  
d. \* It happens (whether) Ali have once failed the syntax course.

As seen in (18a, 18b, 18c & 18d), 'happen' accepts the main subject *Ali* to be placed at the beginning of the sentence, and so accepts *for* to complete the sentence. Also, 'happen' accepts the extraposition process in which the sentence is introduced with the expletive subject *it*. Besides, 'happen' accepts *that* complement under the indicative mood and rejects *whether* complement. Thus, we can conclude that 'happen' has multi syntactic and semantic functions. The meaning of 'happen', at the semantic level, usually denotes bad actions.

One of the restricted uses of *for* complement is that it does not accept/work with verbs of perception and recognition such as (perceive, believe, think, consider, suppose, and imagine). Also, *for* complement does not accept/work with nominals (nominal verbs) such as (deny, suppose, think, impose, prove, and understand). This restriction is due to the semantic scope that *for* complement covers. As mentioned earlier, *for* complement refers to *subjective mood* and *emotive personal state*. Although verbs of perception and recognition do not accept *for* complement, they accept *to* complement, which functions either as an accusative

case, when the complement is followed with a pronoun or with a purposive phrase or when the complement is followed with a reflexive pronoun, for example:

- (19) a. Ali considers his friends to be truthful.  
b. \*Ali considers for his friends to be truthful.

Based on the aforementioned analysis, verbs of perception and recognition do not accept *for* complement, but all accept *to* complement. The reason is that *for* functions as a CP functioning as *TP* which, unlike the CP, can work as a complement to 'verbs of consideration'. However, verbs of *desire*, *emotions*, *feelings*, *wishes* accept *for* complement, for instance:

- (20) a. I want him to be honest.  
b. I want for him to be honest.

Since the main verb refers to the psychological substantive state of the speaker, it accepts both complements *to* and *for*.

This study argues that verbs of perception, unlike verbs of emotions and desires, accept passivization unless they refer to non-human beings that the prohibition of the subjective case prohibits passivization for verbs of *desire*, *emotions*, and *self-judgment* and *wish*. For example:

- (21) a. They are believed to be innocent.  
b. \*They are wanted to be innocent.

The logical explanation of the truth of sentence (21a) and falsity of sentence (21b) is the semantic scope of verbs; that is, *believe* accepts passivization and generalization while *want-type verbs* do not accept passivization. Thus, verbs of *emotions* and *desire*, *wish*, and *feeling* are meaningless when functioning as passive.

## 5. Conclusion

Having discussed and analyzed the syntactic and semantic scope of English complementizers (*that*, *for*), the study concludes that *that* complement indicates more definiteness and assertiveness than *for* complement at the semantic-syntactic interface level. In reference to the data analysis, *that* complement is used with objective mood, verbs of knowledge and recognition demonstrating real occurrence of events. *For* complement, however, refers to actions reflecting someone's willingness, emotionality or self-judgment. Regardless of the syntactic and semantic differences distinguishing *that* from *for*, they both, in some cases, undergo transformational changes by applying *transformational hypothesis*, which thus produces slightly different meanings of current and past events. Finally, the study concludes that different syntactic transformations produce different interpretations; that is, any manipulation of the syntactic structure produces manipulation in the cognitive state of sentence meaning. This thus influences our syntactic choices for constructing sentences. The study concludes that the nature of the semantic scope of adjectives plays a very vital role in whether the adjective accepts different types of complementizers. The study recommends that future research should investigate how *that* and *for* complementizers interact at the syntactic-pragmatic level and how this interplay produces different meanings that may generate a wide range of interpretations and dissociative thoughts. The study also suggests for another research to investigate why verbs of perception and recognition accept *to* complement and prohibit *for* complement.

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