

A possible explanation of the existence of doubling lies in the fact that contexts like (1) and (2) combine implicativity and irrealis. On the one hand, in constructions with implicative verbs like ‘begin’, the matrix and the embedded events form in a sense one event (the implicative verb denotes an interpretation of an event or a function of the event denoted by the embedded verb – e.g., in (1), the event ‘choose food’ is interpreted as the beginning of a complex situation). Thus, the identity of forms reflects a strong affinity between the two events.

On the other hand, a real form (for instance, a present tense form) cannot be used in contexts like (1) and (2), because it would bear a wrong meaning that the embedded event must obligatorily take place, which is not the case (in (1), the speaker only proposes the hearer to carry out an action).

However, the syntactic motivation is also relevant here. Combinations of *to* + complementizers differ from patterns without *to* in the choice of verb forms. For instance, the combination of *to* + the unreal complementizer *čtoby* allows for the use of infinitive ():

(7) *On* *nastaiva-l-Ø* *na* *tom* *čtoby*
 he.NOM insist-PST-SG.M on that.LOC COMP
vs-e *obsudi-t’*.
 all-SG.ACC discuss-INF

‘He insisted on discussing everything.’

At the same time, infinitive is usually incompatible with *čtoby* without *to*;

(8) **On* *xote-l-Ø* *čtoby* *vs-e* *obsudi-t’*.
 he.NOM want-PST-SG.M COMP all-SG.ACC discuss-INF
 Intended: ‘He wanted to discuss everything.’

I can propose that *to* introduces a clause which is more syntactically autonomous from the matrix one than an embedded clause introduced by a bare complementizer (see similar assumptions in Knjazev 2009). In a sense, an embedded clause in structures with *to* + complementizers are not strictly controlled / governed by the main clause and can choose different syntactic strategies, different from canonical complementation strategies (complementizers, infinitives and so on). In the case under analysis, they choose to copy the verb form from the main clause. Not surprisingly, without the marker *to*, the doubling strategy becomes ungrammatical.

References

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