Title: Epistemic complementizers – a cross-linguistic survey
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As they are most often thought of, complementizers may be defined as linguistic expressions that have a particular function: the function of identifying the clauses in which they occur as complements (Noonan 2007: 55). In addition to this function, however, complementizers may have a modal function (e.g. Frajzyngier 1995). In Jacaltec, for instance, the complementizers *chubil* and *tato* indicate different degrees of certainty about the propositions expressed by the complement clauses they introduce. According to Craig (1977: 267), "the use of *chubil* denotes a high degree of credibility or certainty, and the use of *tato* introduces a notion of disbelief or reservation about a hearsay". Thus, (1) indicates a higher degree of certainty than (2) about the proposition 'the president is going to come'.

Jacaltec (Craig 1977: 268; emphasis added)

(1) xal naj alcal *chubil* chuluj naj presidente.
   said cl/the alcalde that will.come cl/the president.
   'The alcalde said that the president is going to come'.

(2) xal naj *tato* chuluj naj presidente.
   said cl/he that will.come cl/the president.
   'He said that the president is going to come'.

This paper presents a cross-linguistic survey of epistemic complementizers: complementizers which like Jacaltec *chubil* and *tato* indicate degree of certainty about and/or type of information source of the proposition expressed by the complement clause at hand. Based on data from a genetically stratified sample of 100 languages, the paper has four main goals:

1. It attempts to show that complementizers constitute a cross-linguistically widespread means for expressing epistemic stance towards embedded propositions.
2. It gives a survey of the epistemic meanings expressed cross-linguistically by complementizers.
3. It gives a survey of the range of epistemic complementizer systems found in languages (like Jacaltec) with more than one epistemic complementizer.
4. It gives a survey of the interaction between epistemic complementizers and other means of expressing epistemic stance towards embedded propositions (including epistemic affixes, clitics, particles, adverbs and auxiliaries as well as epistemic embedding predicates).

The findings have important implications both for research on epistemic expressions and for research on complementizers. First, the paper introduces a new set of data into the debate on the relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality. The debate is currently intense, but complementizers have so far largely been ignored. Second, the paper throws new light on complementizer 'deletion' and more precisely on the fact that some complementizers can be 'deleted' (e.g. English *that*) while others cannot. Third, the paper provides a cross-linguistic background against which common views of the function of well-known complementizers like Danish *om*, English *if*, French *si* and German *ob* can be evaluated.

References