

Cross-categorical syncretism and the Slavic/Balkan containment puzzle

In (1) we see that indeclinable relative markers (or relativizers (Rvz)) in West Germanic are frequently identical in form with Comp(lementizers) and Wh-pronouns and sometimes with the 3rd person sg neuter demonstrative pronoun (see Roberts & Roussou 2003, Kayne 2008, Leu 2015). In (1) we also see that (emotive factive (EF)) Comp in Slavic and Balkan languages is often syncretic with the Rvz and with the Wh-pronoun ‘what’, but not with Dem.

Rather than analyzing these overlaps in terms of homophony we will consider them as cases of syncretism. A syncretism arises when two or more distinct grammatical functions are spelled out by a single morpheme (Caha 2009). In (1), note that all of the attested syncretisms are restricted to adjacent cells. Specifically, Bg (and some varieties of Pl) show that Comp and Rvz must be adjacent, Cz demands that Rvz and Wh be adjacent, and English shows that (at least) Dem and Comp must be adjacent. According to the nanosyntactic approach, syncretism reflects structural adjacency, that is, forms that are syncretic are taken to reflect a specific ordering of syntactic heads merged in a functional sequence (Caha 2009, Starke 2009). (2) is thus the only linear order which can capture these facts without any gap in the syncretism patterns. What syncretism patterns cannot tell us, though, is which *hierarchical order* in (3) is correct.

To solve this issue we adopt a strategy based on Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), who show that the less functional structure a grammatical item has, the more prosodically dependent it is. We propose that there is a *bound morpheme* which participates in most of the syncretism patterns identified in (1). If it is bound – that is, prosodically weak/dependent – then its structure should also be very small. We claim that there are bound morphemes which can be considered a kind of *nominal core* (*n*), namely a semantically bleached, non-referential functional element which can be found in certain nominal environments (e.g. combined with independently built operators like Fr. *cha-*, *quel-*, It. *cias-*, *qual-*, MG *ká-*, *-pota*, SC *sva-*, *ni-*, *ne-*, *bilo-*, etc.). Importantly the behavior of the nominal core with regard to syncretism is crucial for determining the hierarchical ordering of the functional sequence (fseq). We find that the nominal core is often syncretic with Wh, making this the ‘small’ end of the fseq and telling us that (3a) is correct.

According to nanosyntax, the structures built using (3a) are cumulative (Wh = A, Rvz = AB, Comp = ABC, Dem = ABCD). With this in mind, a closer look at Slavic (SC and Ru in particular) reveals that the structure proposed in (3a) raises a puzzle of morphological containment, since Comp, Rel, and Wh *š-to/c̣-to* overtly contain Dem *to*, even though according to our hierarchy we would expect to find the opposite (i.e. morphological containment of Comp and/or Rel and/or Wh within Dem). Our account of this morphological puzzle begins with the observation that it is crosslinguistically common for languages with grammaticalized definite articles (DP languages, Bošković 2005) to have demonstratives showing morphological containment of the definite article (cf. It. M.SG [_{Dem} *que-* [_{Def} (*l*)*lo*]]; F.SG [_{Dem} *que-* [_{Def} (*l*)*la*]]; M.PL [_{Dem} *que-* [_{Def} *gli*]]; F.PL [_{Dem} *que-* [_{Def} *le*]]). Now, with the exception of Macedonian and Bulgarian, Slavic languages lack definite articles (cf. the so-called NP/DP parameter, e.g. Bošković 2005). As such, they do not, for independent reasons, have definite articles available to participate in a containment relation. Thus the containment puzzle can be reduced to independent facts about lexical packaging of D features in NP languages.

(1)		DEM _{PRO}	COMP _{EF}	Rvz	WH _{PRO}
<i>English</i>		that	that	that % as	what
<i>Modern Greek</i>		ekíno	pu	pu	tí
<i>Romanian</i>		acel	că	ce	ce
West Slavic	<i>Polish</i>	to	że	co % że	co
	<i>Czech</i>	to	že	co	co
East Slavic	<i>Russian</i>	to	čto	čto	čto
South Slavic	<i>Serbo-Croatian</i>	to	što	što	što
	<i>Bulgarian</i>	tova ‘this’	deto	deto	kakvo
	<i>Macedonian</i>	toa ‘this/that’	što	što	što

(2) Dem | Comp | Rvz | Wh

- (3) a. Dem > Comp > Rvz > Wh
 b. Wh > Rvz > Comp > Dem

References

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