

Categories, features and overtiness in the CP-periphery

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My talk presents ongoing research as part of the DFG project “The syntax of functional left peripheries and its relation to information structure” (started in February 2015), with the aim of providing an alternative model to traditional cartographic approaches (see Rizzi 1997, 2004) concerning the various functional projections in the CP-periphery of the clause. Cartographic approaches essentially assume that separate functions are encoded on separate functional heads, while it is also assumed that the various projections may “collapse” into a single one if there are no multiple overt elements. An alternative approach is to treat the minimal CP as the default configuration (cf. Sobin 2002), whereby a single element may be associated with multiple cues regarding clause typing.

Examining primarily West-Germanic languages, I will concentrate on issues directly related to clause typing, and will hence not discuss movement driven by information structural properties. Clause typing may be overtly expressed by complementisers (C heads) and by operators: a feature inserted in the syntactic derivation may be checked off either by inserting a head element (on which the feature is interpretable), or by moving an operator, which may check off the uninterpretable feature of the null head. As far as their functions are concerned, then, C heads and operators are expected to share several properties, which raises the question how they can be categorically distinguished. A visibly phrase-sized constituent is naturally only allowed in a specifier: hence the co-presence of lexical material (including P elements, even lexical case suffixes) unambiguously signals that the given element is an operator. I will also argue that lexical-material in clause-typing projections is contingent upon the co-presence of an overt operator (while operators may generally be covert as well), due to the PF-uninterpretability of an unaligned feature (cf. an earlier analysis in Bacskai-Atkari 2014a).

Head-sized phrases, on the other hand, are likely to be reanalysed over time as heads base-generated in the CP-domain (transparency for the language learner). If reanalysis is completed, the new C head is not affected by morph phonological changes affecting operators of the same original type, as e.g. in the case of the comparative C head *mint* ‘as/than’ in Hungarian, as opposed to present-day comparative operators, which have a regular *a*-prefixed form as relative operators (e.g. *a-milyen* ‘REL-how’), cf. Bacskai-Atkari (2014b). An intermediate stage may involve a head-sized operator moving to a head position (due to their dual status), as shown for certain operators in Alemannic embedded interrogatives by Bayer and Brandner (2008), and the same is true for Czech *jak* ‘how’ in reduced comparative subclauses.

Finally, certain features are cross-linguistically associated with head elements only. Regarding the overtiness requirements and realisation patterns, I will concentrate on the following features: marking (finite) subordination, [sub], interrogative, [wh], relative [rel], comparative, [compr], and negative polarity in the absence of a negative operator [pol:neg]. There are considerable differences in their realisation: for instance, [sub] does not have to be marked overtly, but if so, it is marked by a C head. It may be incorporated by a more specific clause-typing C head (e.g. *if*), but it may also appear as a separate projection on top of clause-type markers, leading to a split CP (e.g. *hogy* in Old Hungarian relative clauses). General subordination markers may be underspecified for [\pm wh], and hence appear in embedded interrogatives: this leads to a Doubly Filled COMP effect in Germanic languages, where interrogative operators move to the CP-periphery (as in the co-occurrence of *that* with *wh*-phrases in non-Standard English, or the same for *dass* ‘that’ in Alemannic, see Bayer and Brandner 2008). In Hungarian, however, [sub] is again marked on a separate projection, since *wh*-operators move to the functional vP-periphery. A similar asymmetry may be observed in relative clauses, where relative C heads attract relative operators into their specifiers: this results

in Doubly Filled COMP effects in languages/dialects that have a relative complementiser (e.g. English, Alemannic, cf. Brandner and Bräuning 2013), but not in ones that lack a relative C head: if a general subordinator appears, it is predictably located higher than the relative C head (e.g. Old Hungarian). The size of the CP-domain may thus vary within a certain clause type (interrogative, relative). In equatives and comparatives, though, I will show that the CP is always split because the [compr] feature also has to be marked besides [rel], and in THAN-clauses an overt functional head (either a C head or a separate Pol head) is required to mark [pol:neg], THAN-clauses being negative polarity environments (Seuren 1973).

In this way, the size of the CP can be appropriately matched to the semantic properties of the individual constructions, and also to more general setting of the given language concerning on which left periphery (CP or vP) certain features are marked. The flexibility of the proposed model may also account for various grammaticalisation processes affecting the CP-periphery.

References

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