

On certain crosslinguistic variations: Universal *fseq* vs. Gricean reasoning

Statement and motivation of the question

Do systematic interpretive contrasts across languages derive from the employment of distinct amounts of structure from universal hierarchies or functional sequences, or do they stem from differing semantic specifications on simplex formatives that feed into (Neo-Gricean) pragmatic reasoning? Is evidence for syntactic structure underlying a particular contrast in one language an argument for that structure being universal and thus present in another language where such evidence is lacking? In this Targeted Collaborative Debate, we propose to explore this complex of big-picture questions on the basis of so-called *ABA patterns, especially in the area of anaphoric expressions (where such patterns have been attested, cf. Middleton 2020). Take for example the English contrast between *her* and *herself*. For English and several other languages, there is clear morphological evidence that anaphors are structurally complex and built on top of pronouns. The question is what consequences this has for the analysis of languages like German, where the dedicated anaphoric form *sich* shows no evidence of being morphologically complex, and for languages like Mechelen Dutch, where there is no dedicated anaphoric form, and a single form *haar* can be used both anaphorically and pronominally. We consider two radically opposed perspectives.

Presentation of the A perspective

Syntactic structure, i.e. the hierarchical sequence of functional heads, is universal even at fine levels of detail. Structure for which there is overt morpho-syntactic evidence in one language should be assumed to be present (covertly) in all languages. Concretely, where language X shows evidence that a particular interpretive contrast is derived from a structural contrast, we should (*ceteris paribus*) assume that the same interpretive contrast in language Y is derived from the same structural contrast, even if Y provides no direct morpho-syntactic evidence for the latter. Hence German *sich* realizes the same complex structure -- containing the simpler structure of the non-anaphoric pronoun -- as English *herself*. And *haar* in Mechelen Dutch spells out these two distinct structures in its anaphoric and non-anaphoric uses. The literature on *ABA patterns (Caha 2009, Bobaljik 2012 etc.) provides a strong argument for this perspective, because the analysis of cross-linguistic regularities in patterns of syncretism and suppletion relies on cross-linguistically consistent (functional) structures in containment relationships. If languages were free to differ in the structural details underlying things like case, comparative/superlative formation and DP structure, we would expect the details of categorial mappings to *ABA patterns to differ more, and more arbitrarily, across languages.

Presentation of the B perspective

The syntactic structure underlying interpretively similar constructions can vary cross-linguistically. The only way that a language-learning child can postulate some instance of morpho-syntactic structure is if there is overt evidence for it in the language input. Since interpretational distinctions need not reflect structural differences, the former do not form evidence for the presence of morpho-syntactic structures underlying them. Concretely, this means that even though there is clear evidence for a morpho-syntactically complex make-up of English *herself*, this is not the case for German *sich* or Mechelen Dutch *haar*. The latter simply presupposes reference to a female referent, which can be bound or free. German *sich* just presupposes reference to a local antecedent (whereas *sie* ('she/her') means reference to a female

referent). Since the presupposition of *Sie liebt sich* (she loves herself) entails the presupposition of *Sie liebt sie* (she loves her), standard pragmatic factors (Maximize Presupposition) ensure that the latter can only be used if the meaning of the former sentence was not intended. Such principles clearly derive *ABA patterns. If stronger B stands in pragmatic competition with weaker A, there is no way that A can be the exponent of anything stronger than B (hence *ABA).

Relevance of the question for linguistic theory

A central debate in recent decades is how fine-grained and universal syntactic structures are. Work within ‘cartography’ e.g. has proposed quite elaborate, universal structures, and while there is considerable evidence for these structures, they raise important questions about how much detail could possibly be innate, and conversely how much cross-linguistically parallel detail could emerge in the normal course of acquisition (cf. Ramchand & Svenonius 2014). The question bears heavily on the nature of Universal Grammar but also has clear consequences for the analysis of individual languages. This fortunately allows us to empirically distinguish between different approaches. For instance, as anaphors generally block co-varying phi-agreement (Anaphor Agreement Effect, Rizzi 1990), position A predicts that in a language like Mechelen Dutch that also has gender object agreement, *haar* in its anaphoric usage cannot trigger gender agreement, whereas B predicts it can. Similarly, only A predicts anaphoric and non-anaphoric uses of such forms to show characteristic interpretive differences, e.g. in strict and sloppy readings under ellipsis. Finally, under the two perspectives we expect different notions of locality to be relevant for interpretive distinctions. With the advancement of empirical coverage, debates like this no longer have to be evaluated on conceptual grounds alone.

References

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