

***ABA and the representation of features in syntax**

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This talk addresses the question what properties of lexicalization might tell us about the representation of features in syntax. Two views on features are contrasted: The mainstream view maintains that syntactic features are introduced as “bundles” (unordered sets) associated with the terminals of syntactic trees. In Distributed Morphology, for example, the terminals are abstract morphemes corresponding to feature bundles. The competing nanosyntactic view emerging from work by Starke claims that syntactic features and syntactic heads stand in a one-to-one relation, and bundling (many-to-one mapping between features and exponents) only results from phrasal lexicalization after syntax has done its work.

Much recent work in Nanosyntax has focused on syncretisms. In particular, Caha (2009) shows that systematic syncretisms resulting from lexicalization under the Superset Principle subject to an Elsewhere Condition cannot create ABA-patterns in one-dimensional paradigms. However, this result does not actually depend on features standing in a one-to-one relation with syntactic terminals.

Recent work by Caha and Pantcheva explores a particular way of accounting for syncretisms involving the embedded dimensions of multidimensional paradigms, e.g. case-syncretisms spanning the number and gender dimensions. The interest of this for our purposes is that at this point the nanosyntactic claim that exponents replace constituents becomes important. An examination of Caha & Pantcheva’s proposal reveals that a lexicalization algorithm based on this claim leads to highly specific predictions about the profile of productive syncretisms in multidimensional paradigms. For example, it surprisingly turns out that ABA-patterns and other configurations contradicting the contiguity hypothesis will arise under highly specific conditions in Caha & Pantcheva’s system based on “pointers”.

Since these predictions originate from the claim that exponents replace constituents, and since there is no reason why constituency should be important to the mapping from syntactic features to exponents, unless each syntactic feature is a syntactic head, the properties of syncretism patterns will now provide a strong argument for the basic tenet of Nanosyntax, if the predictions are actually borne out.

Conversely, lexicalization relating exponents to feature bundles associated with the syntactic terminals can be shown to extend Caha’s *ABA-result to syncretisms involving embedded dimensions of the paradigm and to yield predictions not shared by the “pointers” approach going beyond the contiguity hypothesis as long as the features are privative and cumulative. Thus, if it turns out that *ABA finds no exceptions in systematic syncretisms involving embedded dimensions, we are led back to the mainstream view on the representation of features in syntax.