

When syncretism can (and can't) fix feature mismatches*

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1 Introduction

Syntax sometimes imposes **conflicting requirements** on a word or phrase, e.g.:

- NP required to be both **NOM** and **ACC**
- a finite verb required to be both singular and plural

Languages have various ways of resolving such conflicts:

- Realize the **last** / **highest** imposed case requirement:
 - (1) Niuean raising from **ergative** to **absolutive** (Bejar and Massam 1999: 72)
 - a. Teitei ke fakatau [e Sione] taha fale.
nearly SUBJ buy [ERG Sione] one house
“It nearly happened that Sione bought a house.”
 - b. Teitei [a Sione]₁ ke fakatau t₁ taha fale.
nearly [ABS Sione] SUBJ buy one house
“Sione nearly bought a house.”
- Agree with the **closest** argument:
 - (2) German agreement with disjointed subjects (Smith et al. 2018: 469)
 - a. Entweder [wir oder ihr] seid/*sind gekommen.
either we or you.PL be.2pl/*be.1pl come.PTCP
“Either we or you came.”
 - b. Entweder [ihr oder wir] sind/*seid gekommen.
either you.PL or we be.1pl/be.2pl come.PTCP
“Either you or we came.”

Sometimes, though, feature conflicts are simply **ungrammatical**.

*Thanks to the audience of the NYU Syntax Brown Bag and to Jim Wood for helpful feedback and discussion.

...except, surprisingly often, when the conflicting features can be realized by a single **syncretic** form!

- For example, in **French**, ATB extraction of a third-person object clitic is ungrammatical if the verbs in the two conjuncts require different cases (Kayne 1975: ch. 2; Zaenen and Karttunen 1984):

(3) French: conflict between ACC and DAT

*Je { l' / lui } ai serrée dans mes bras et donné un baiser.
I 3SG.ACC / 3SG.DAT have hugged in my arms and given a kiss
Intended: "I have hugged her and given her a kiss."

- But first and second person clitics don't distinguish case, and in such cases ATB extraction is suddenly possible, though the syntactic configuration is the same:

(4) French: ACC/ conflict resolved by case syncretism in 1 & 2 person clitics

Elle m' a serrée dans ses bras et donné un baiser.
She 1SG.ACC/DAT has hugged in her arms and given a kiss
"She hugged me and gave me a kiss."

Similar patterns have been described for many languages. A very partial selection:

- Finnish Right Node Raising (Zaenen and Karttunen, 1984)
- German free relatives (Groos and van Riemsdijk, 1981)
- Hungarian topicalization (Szamosi, 1976)
- Norwegian topicalization (Taraldsen, 1981)
- Polish ATB *Wh*-movement (Dyła, 1984; Citko, 2005)
- Russian Right Node Raising (Asarina, 2011).

Similar effects have also been argued to account for restrictions on agreement in some quasi-serial verb constructions (Bjorkman, 2016) and copular constructions (Coon and Keine, 2020).

Why is this a puzzle?

- The explanation of what's going on in these cases is easy to state, so what's the problem?
- While it's easy to state, it's a challenge to *implement* in mainstream generative theories.

Plan for the talk

§2: The puzzle

§3: A survey of conflict resolution via syncretism

§4: Towards a proposal

2 The theoretical puzzle, in context

Consider the English second person pronoun *you*, **neutral** for number (and case).

- How is this represented in morphology / syntax?

(feature representations oversimplified for expository efficiency)

1. The form [ju] is **ambiguous**: two distinct morphological entities

◦ *you*₁: NUM: SG

◦ *you*₂: NUM: PL¹



2. The form [ju] is **neutral**, and *underspecified*

◦ *you*: NUM: ∅

3. The form [ju] is **neutral**, and *overspecified*

◦ *you*: NUM: SG, PL

4. consistent → it has only **one** value for number

→ not *both* [+plural] and [-plural], or [NUM:PL] and [NUM:SG]

Aside: neutrality vs. ambiguity (Pullum and Zwicky, 1986)

- Neutral forms: A single morphological form that doesn't distinguish two feature values.
- Ambiguous forms: Accidentally similar surface forms

Claim: only truly **neutral** forms, not those that are simply ambiguous, can resolve feature conflicts. (see also Asarina 2011, chapter 4).

Zaenen and Karttunen (1984): If resolution is *sometimes* possible, but not *always* possible, it must be that syncretism at least sometimes involves true **neutrality**.

Ingria (1990): the existence of resolution via syncretism presents a problem if feature matching is done via **unification** (in constraint-based grammars)

→ proposed that feature matching involves not identity but a *non-distinctness check*.

Dalrymple and Kaplan (2000): propose instead that feature values in syntax are potentially *sets* → feature matching requires membership in the set.

- These questions have been most frequently addressed in constraint-based syntax (HPSG, LFG), which assume some version of **lexicalism**
- If anything, the situation is worse for lexicalist versions of classical Minimalism, which seem pushed towards **ambiguity** as the only representational option.

¹Or however we represent the distinction between singular and plural number in English.

In Minimalist syntax we typically assume that (interpretable) syntactic features are:

- **Fully specified:** Because features are input to semantic interpretation, they must be specified even when their presence is not reflected morphologically (e.g. in English: irregular verbs, bare plurals)
- **Consistent:** For the same reason, a syntactic head can't be specified for multiple values of a single feature—or at least cannot be specified for *conflicting* values.

Do we do any better if morphology is interpretive (post-syntactic)?

Not necessarily. . .

Consider as an example Distributed Morphology (DM):

(Halle and Marantz 1993; Harley and Noyer 1999; Siddiqi 2010):

How is a specific morphological realization chosen? The *Subset Principle*.

- The rule that is most highly specified, while nonetheless specifying a subset of the features on the position to be realized, will apply.
- But in that case, any well formed syntactic structure should have **some** possible morphological realization—no way for morphology to filter well-formed syntactic structures (or save ill-formed ones)
- Allowing morphological interpretation to **filter** syntactic outputs requires modifications to “off-the-shelf” DM.

If we're going to complicate—and strengthen—the morphological component in this way, we should first be confident it's truly merited.

3 A survey of resolution-via-syncretism

What is the cross-linguistic empirical profile of cases where syncretism appears to resolve a syntactic feature conflict?

Recall the example from French in the introduction:

- (3) *Je { l' / lui } ai serrée dans mes bras et donné un baiser.
I 3SG.ACC / 3SG.DAT have hugged in my arms and given a kiss
Intended: “I have hugged her and given her a kiss.”
- (4) Elle m' a serrée dans ses bras et donné un baiser.
She 1SG.ACC/DAT has hugged in her arms and given a kiss
“She hugged me and gave me a kiss.”

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in French:

- Structure: **VP coordination**

- Point of conflict: **ATB-fronted object clitic**
- Mismatching feature: **case** (ACC vs. DAT)
- Resolved by: **1 and 2 person clitics** (neutral for ACC/DAT)

Remainder of this section: review of similar cases across languages.

Some caveats:

- Avoiding examples involving agreement with conjoined / disjoined NPs
 - disagreement on structure, whether these involve syntactic Agree, etc.
- All examples so far come from 2 language families:
 - Uralic + Indo-European (Germanic, Romance, Slavic)
 - If you know of others, please tell me! (If you find them later, please email me!)

3.1 German Free Relatives

Perhaps the most widely discussed example of resolution-via-syncretism, first in Groos and van Riemsdijk (1981).

Groos and van Riemsdijk (1981) illustrate a **matching effect** in German free relatives.

- Involves a **case matching effect**.
- Original observation: in general, the case assigned to a relative pronoun *within* a free relative must be the same as the case assigned externally to the relative clause as a whole.
- Shown for *wer/wen* ('who/whom') in (5):

- (5) a. Ich nehme, wen du mir empfiehlst.
 I take who.ACC you me recommend.
 "I take whomever you recommend to me."
 b. *Ich nehme, wer / wen einen guten Eindruck macht.
 I take who.NOM / who.ACC a good impression makes.
 "I take whoever makes a good impression."

- Apparent case mismatches are rescued, however, if the relative pronoun is *was* ('what'), which is **syncretic** for nominative and accusative:

- (6) Ich habe gegessen was noch übrig war.
 I have eaten what.NOM/ACC still left was
 "I ate what was left." (Groos and van Riemsdijk, 1981)

... the facts are somewhat more complex than this, however.

- Vogel (2002): for some speakers, case mismatches are possible if the case *within* the relative clause is **more “complex”** than the case external to the relative clause, and the relative pronoun bears the more complex case.

- (7) a. Ich lade ein, wem auch Maria vertraut.
 I invite_{→ACC} who.DAT also Maria trusts_{→DAT}
 “I invite whoever Maria also trusts.”
- b. *Ich lade ein, wen auch Maria vertraut.
 I invite_{→ACC} who.ACC also Maria trusts_{→DAT}
 “I invite whoever Maria also trusts.”

(Vogel 2002: 344)

- However, Vogel notes that the resolution-via-syncretism in (6) is more stable across speakers than mismatches like the one in (7).

- Bergsma (2019) develops an analysis framed in terms of Caha (2009)’s case hierarchy → notably this will not extend to patterns in other languages

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in German:

- Structure: **Free relatives**
- Point of conflict: **relative pronoun**
- Mismatching features: **case** (NOM vs. ACC)
- Resolved by: **inanimate *was* (‘what’)**, neutral for NOM/ACC

3.2 Norwegian Topicalization

Taraldsen (1981) Norwegian shows a surface morphological restriction in certain topicalization structures.

- Subjects can be topicalized out of an embedded finite clause, as long as there is no overt complementizer:

- (8) Per hadde de trodd (*at) __ ville komme forsent.
 Peter had they.PL thought (*that) would arrive too late
 “It’s Peter that they (PL) thought would arrive too late.”

- And yet, ungrammatical to extract personal pronouns at least 1SG/PL and 2SG, even without an overt complementizer:

- (9) *{jeg/du/vi} hadde de trodd __ ville komme forsent.
 {I/you.SG/we} had they.PL thought would arrive too late.

- But other pronouns are fine—or comparatively fine, in (11)—to topicalize:

(10) { han/dere } hadde de trodd __ ville komme forsent.
 { he/you.PL } had they.PL thought would arrive too late.
 “It’s he/you (PL) that they thought would arrive too late.”

(11) ?{ hun/de } hadde de trodd __ ville komme forsent.
 { she/they.PL } had they.PL thought would arrive too late.
 “It’s her/them (PL) that they (PL) thought would arrive too late.”

Taraldsen (1981): the nominals that can topicalize are those that don’t distinguish NOM/ACC

→ ungrammatical examples arise because topicalization proceeds via a position associated with accusative case.

	NOM	ACC
1SG	jeg	meg
2SG	du	deg
3SG.M	han	han (ham)
3SG.F	hun	hun/ henne
1PL	vi	oss
2PL		dere
3PL	de	dem or de/dem

Table 1: Norwegian personal pronouns

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in Norwegian

- Structure: **Topicalization**
- Point of conflict: **Topicalized pronoun**
- Mismatching features: **case**
- Resolved by: **DPs and pronouns with no case distinction** *NOM/ACC*

3.3 Finnish Right Node Raising

Zaenen and Karttunen (1984) note that Right Node Raising in **Finnish** allows resolution via syncretism in cases like (12):

- (12) [He lukivat hänen uusimman ___] ja [me hänen parhaat ___]
 They(PL) read 3SG.GEN newest.GEN.SG and we 3SG.GEN best.NOM.PL
 kirjansa.
 book.3SG.GEN.SG/NOM.PL
 “They read their (SG) newest, and we their (SG) best, book/books.”²

Points to note:

- What is shared by the conjoined clauses is just the noun—modifying adjectives are stranded in both conjuncts.
- 3SG possessive suffix *-nsa* obscures single-consonant case/number suffixes:

<i>kirja</i>	book.NOM.SG	+ <i>-nsa</i>	}	= <i>kirja-nsa</i>	their.SG book(s)
<i>kirja-n</i>	book.GEN.SG	+ <i>-nsa</i>			
<i>kirja-t</i>	book.NOM.PL	+ <i>-nsa</i>			

- However, case/number of the noun is recoverable from the stranded adjectives:
 - *uusimman*: newest.GEN.SG / *parhaat*: best.NOM.PL

Zaenen and Karttunen (1984) review other configurations where syncretism *fails* to resolve a case mismatch in Finnish, but all plausibly involve different structural positions for the “shared” argument.

- For example: Syncretism of *vaimoni* ‘wife’ for NOM and GEN fails to resolve conflict when modals *can* and *must* are coordinated—but oblique subjects (or deontic subjects) plausibly in a different base position in any event.

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in Finnish:

- Structure: **RNR**
- Point of conflict: **shared N**
- Mismatching features: **number** and **case** (NOM.PL vs. GEN.SG)
- Resolved by: **possessed noun**

Points to note: the conflict-resolving syncretism in Finnish is plausibly not merely post-syntactic but **phonological!**

Cf. resolution of agreement with conjoined subjects in Xhosa, conflicts resolved by derived phonological identity (Voeltz 1971, Pullum and Zwicky 1986)

²All Finnish examples are drawn from Zaenen and Karttunen (1984). Glosses have been clarified in some cases, and modified to remove gender from translations of the third person singular pronoun *hän*. Free English translations disambiguate singular vs. plural *they* and *you*.

3.4 Hungarian: mismatches in definiteness agreement

Szamosi (1976) presents a case of resolution-via-syncretism in Hungarian as a “surface structure constraint” on wellformedness.

This pattern involves an interaction between (in)definite agreement and *Wh*-movement.

Profile of (in)definite agreement in Hungarian

- Subject agreement in Hungarian takes a different form depending on the “definiteness” of the object:

- (13) a. Lát-om / *lát-ok a fiút.
 see-1SG.DEF / see-1SG.INDF the boy.ACC
 “I see the boy.”
 b. Lát-ok / *lát-om egy fiút.
 see-1SG.INDF / see-1SG.DEF a boy.ACC
 “I see a boy.”

(Bartos 1997: 365)

- Among other reasons to doubt that definiteness simpliciter is what’s relevant, note that first- and second-person pronominal objects trigger “indefinite” agreement.³

- (14) a. Péter lát-∅ / *lát-ja [engem / téged / minket / titiket.]
 Peter see-3SG.INDF / see-3SG.DEF me / you.SG.ACC / us / you.PL.ACC
 “Peter sees me / you (SG) / us / you (PL).” (Bartos 1997: 368)

- CP complements, by contrast, take definite agreement:

- (15) János { akart-a / *akart-∅ } [hogy (el) hozz-ak egy könyvet.]
 John wanted-3SG.DEF / wanted-3SG.INDF that ASP bring-1SG.INDF a book.ACC
 “John wanted me to bring a book.”

- Accusative *Wh*-element *mit* and *amit* “what” trigger indefinite agreement in questions and relative clauses respectively (examples here illustrate with questions):

- (16) a. Mit akart-∅ / *akart-a János?
 What.ACC wanted-3SG.INDF / *wanted-3SG.DEF John
 “What did John want?”
 b. A könyv amit akart-∅ / *akart-a...
 The book which.ACC wanted-3SG.INDF / *wanted-3SG.DEF...
 “the book which they (SG) wanted”

³For various syntactic and semantic analyses of the basis of “definiteness” agreement see Szabolcsi (1994), Bartos (1997), Kiss (2002), Coppock (2013), among others.

For some speakers, extraction out of a CP complement requires that the extracted phrase **match** the (in)definiteness of the matrix verb:

- With *akar* “want”, which is definite because of its CP complement (17), extraction of *amit* (or *mit* in *Wh*-questions) is not possible for such speakers (18):

(17) Akart-a hogy elhozz-am a könyvet
 want-3SG.DEF that bring-1SG.DEF the book.ACC
 “They (SG) wanted me to bring the book.”

(18) *A/Egy könyv amit akart-a, hogy elhozz-ak...
 The/A book which.ACC wanted-3SG.DEF that bring-1SG.INDF
 “The/A book which they (SG) wanted me to bring.”

- Similarly, though Hungarian allows topicalization out of an embedded clause (19), such speakers prohibit topicalization of indefinite arguments if the matrix verb is definite (20):

(19) A könyvet akarta, hogy elhozzam
 the book.ACC want.3SG.DEF that bring.1SG.DEF
 “It was the book that they (SG) wanted me to bring.”

(20) *Egy könyvet akarta, hogy elhozzak
 a book.ACC want.3SG.DEF that bring.1SG.INDF
 “It was a book that they (SG) wanted me to bring.”

The exception: *Wh*-moving or topicalizing an indefinite argument into a definite clause is rescued for such speakers if the matrix verb is **first person singular past** or **first person plural conditional**!

(21) A könyv amit akar-nánk, hogy elhozz-on...
 the book.ACC which.ACC want-1PL.COND.{DEF/INDF} that bring-3SG.SUBJ.INDF
 “The book that we would want him to bring...”

(22) Egy könyvet akart-am hogy elhozzon.
 A book.ACC wanted-1SG.{DEF/INDF} that bring.3SG.INDF
 “It was a book that I wanted him to bring.”

Why?

- The first person singular past and the first person plural conditional are **coincidentally syncretic** for definite and indefinite agreement.
- With these verb forms, the verb can simultaneously reflect the definiteness required by its clausal complement, **and** the indefiniteness required by the fronted DP.

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in Hungarian:

- Structure: **WH-movement and topicalization**
- Point of conflict: **Finite agreement on V**
- Mismatching features: **“definiteness”**
- Resolved by: **verb agreement that is neutral for definiteness**

Points to note: pattern involves cross-clausal movement, but the locus of conflict is inflectional agreement with the moving element, not the moving XP itself.

3.5 Icelandic DAT-NOM agreement

- Sigurðsson (1996, et seq.): In DAT-NOM constructions, Icelandic verbs must agree in number with the NOM object (23), but the NOM object can't be first- or second-person.⁴

- (23) a. Henni höfðu líkað þeir.
her.DAT had.3PL liked they.NOM
“She had liked them.”
b. *Henni höfðum líkað við.
her.DAT had.1PL liked we.NOM
“She had liked us.”

(Sigurðsson 1996: 38)

- Schütze (2003): such cases are ungrammatical because the finite verb agrees with both the DAT subject (requiring 3SG agreement) and the NOM object, with no consistent way to spell out the result.
- Evidence: a first-person singular NOM object is better than first-person plural, or second person, for verbs whose first-person singular is syncretic with third-singular:

- (24) ??Henni líkaði ég.
her.DAT liked.1/3SG
“She liked me.”

(Sigurðsson 1996: 33)

- Wood (To Appear) notes that the ameliorative effect of syncretism is much stronger for ‘middle’ forms with the suffix *-st*, which are systematically syncretic for all persons in the singular⁵—these are the forms that Schütze (2003) notes resolve the feature conflict entirely:

- (25) bored.at.3SG= leiddist
a. *Henni leiddumst við.
her.DAT bored.at.1PL we.NOM
b. ?Henni leiddust þið.
her.DAT bored.at-2PL you-PL.NOM

⁴Icelandic examples that appear here are drawn from Schütze (2003), who cites Sigurðsson (1996) and Sigurðsson (2000).

⁵Wood proposes a syntactic account for this resolution, not a morphological account.

- c. (?)Henni leiddist ég.
her.DAT bored.at-1SG I.NOM
- d. (?)Henni leiddist þú.
her.DAT bored.at.2SG you-sg.NOM

(Schütze 2003: 300)

- Versions of the proposal that the ungrammaticality of first- and second-person nominatives in DAT-NOM constructions is due to a feature mismatch in agreement have been worked out in more syntactic detail in Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) and in Coon and Keine (2020).

Summary of resolution-via-syncretism in Icelandic

- Structure: **dative-nominative clauses**
- Point of conflict: **finite verb**
- Mismatching features: **person and number**
- Resolved by: φ -**agreement that is neutral for mismatched features**

3.6 Summary

What this (partial) survey tells us:

- Feature conflicts can be created...
 - ... in coordinate structures (ATB/RNR)
 - ... via A'-movement (*Wh*or topicalization)
 - ... vis agreement with more than one argument
- Feature conflicts can involve...
 - ... case (and number, in Finnish)
 - ... φ -agreement
 - ... non- φ -agreement

3.7 An aside: syncretism in the English *go get* construction

English has a construction where a motion verb is immediately followed by a second verb:

- (26) a. Every morning I go get a coffee.
b. They're going to have to come fix this tomorrow.

For most speakers this construction is restricted to infinitive and non-3rd-person present tenses.⁶ With overt inflection it's ungrammatical:

- (27) a. *Every morning she goes gets a coffee.
b. *They came fixed that yesterday.

This restriction is morphological, not syntactic:

- If the second verb is *be*, the construction is more restricted: only possible in nonfinite/imperative contexts.

- (28) a. I'll just go be high-energy while I teach my class.
b. *I always go {am/be} high energy when I teach.

- The *go get* construction isn't usually possible in the perfect... unless *come* is followed by another verb with a bare perfect participle:

- (29) They've come put a flyer in my mailbox.

Bjorkman (2016): the morphological restriction on *go get* arises because the verbs are required to meet two separate inflectional requirements.

- a construction-specific restriction to bare inflection (imposed by an imperative inflectional feature)
- the inflectional features imposed by the wider syntactic context

What does this tell us?

For the types of representations that (potentially) give rise to resolution-via-syncretism:

- not restricted to the types of features we typically see on DPs
- are created by the mechanism distributes inflectional features to verbs—whether that's Agree or not.⁷

4 Accounting for resolution-via-syncretism

In this section: what we need to account for the existence of resolution-via-syncretism.

→ Assuming an **interpretive** morphological component that applies at the end of the syntactic derivation, specifically DM (Halle and Marantz, 1993, 1994; Harley and Noyer, 1999; Siddiqi, 2010)

⁶There's some variation in these judgements, but most English speakers restrict the construction to bare inflected forms.

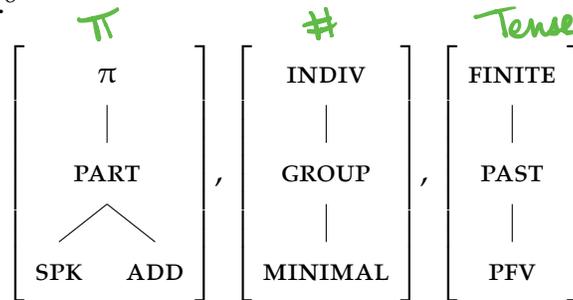
⁷Some parts of the debate on Standard vs. Upward Agree rest on whether verbal inflection is best accounted for using Agree—if it is, the relevant Agree relation needs to value downwards (Bjorkman, 2011; Bjorkman and Zeijlstra, 2019).

The existence of feature conflicts, and the possibility of resolving them morphologically in at least some languages, requires at least two components in our theory of grammar:

1. In the syntax: a (constrained) way to cause a head to bear multiple values for a single feature.
2. In the morphology: a way to impose the requirements of multiple values for a single feature (without accidentally making all languages agglutinative)

How are features represented on a head?

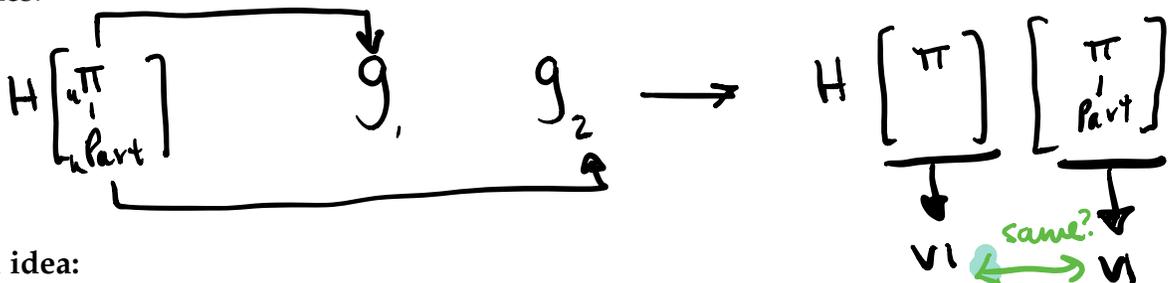
- Common assumption that features represented as **geometries** or **hierarchies**: particularly person and number (Harley and Ritter, 2002; Béjar, 2003); but also (occasionally) tense-aspect-mood.⁸



(Also true for Case, but much variation in specifics...)

Geometric representations are implicated in proposals about how multiple features get onto a head:

- Bjorkman (2016): if a head enters Agree relations that give it conflicting values for any node in a feature geometry, the result is the creation of a second geometry.
- Coon and Keine (2020): different levels in a geometry can be specified as probes; if two probes on a head find different targets, the result is two separate geometries / values.



Common idea:

- Syntax doesn't care about having multiple geometries / values on a single head—just as it doesn't care about failing to find any value for a probe (Preminger, 2009)
- But morphology **does** care: when Vocabulary Insertion occurs, it is computed **once per feature geometry**

⁸Cowper and Hall (2002); Cowper (2005) proposes a geometry for tense-aspect-mood features, but in a somewhat different sense: implicational dependencies among heads rather than representations within individual heads. See Hammerly (2020) for a recent argument against geometries and in favour of *set-based* feature representations.

- A single position can be realized only by a **single** VI rule, so conflicting feature geometries are grammatical only if they end up being realized by the same VI rule → true morphological neutrality, not accidental homophony.

So in Hungarian, for example (examples repeated):

(30) A konyv ämit akar-nánk, hogy elhozz-on...
 the book.ACC **which.ACC** want-1PL.COND.{DEF/INDF} that bring-3SG.SUBJ.**INDF**
 "The book that we would want him to bring..."

(31) Egy könyvet akart-am hogy elhozzon.
 A book.ACC wanted-1SG.{DEF/INDF} that bring.3SG.**INDF**
 "It was a book that I wanted him to bring."

- Grammatical because the *other* features on the head happen to be realized by a form that ignores DEF/INDF:

- [π - PART - SPK, INDIV - GROUP, INFL - FIN - COND, DEF]
 [π - PART - SPK, INDIV - GROUP, INFL - FIN - COND, **INDF**]

- [π - PART - SPK, INDIV, INFL - FIN - PAST, DEF]
 [π - PART - SPK, INDIV, INFL - FIN - PAST, **INDF**]

Great! So what's the problem?

Languages seem to have other ways of dealing with "conflicting" features:

4.1 Probably not a problem: "case stacking"

- Some have argued that examples like (32) exhibit **case stacking** due to a single DP being licensed for multiple case values:

(32) Korean case stacking (Gerdtts and Youn, 1999)

a. Chelswu-eykey/-ka/**-eykey-ka** ton-i philyoha-ta
 Chelswu-DAT/-NOM/-DAT-NOM money-NOM need-DECL
 "Chulsoo needs money."

b. Kim-sensayngnim-i Sewul-ey/-ul/**-ey-ul** ka-si-ess-ta
 Kim-teacher.HON-NOM Seoul-DAT/-NOM/-DAT-NOM go-HON-PAST-DECL
 "Prof. Kim went to Seoul."

- Also found in Australian languages: Lardil, Richards (2009):

(33) Ngada latha karnjin-i marun-**ngan-ku** maarn-ku
 I spear wallaby-ACC boy-GEN-INST spear-INST
 "I speared the wallaby with the boys spear"

- **However:** arguments that Korean case stacking is better analyzed in other ways (Schütze, 1996); other mysteries of case and inflection “spreading” in Lardil and its relatives (Richards, 2009; Sadler and Nordlinger, 2006).

4.2 More of a problem: Portmanteau realizations

- A potentially more serious challenge comes from languages that seem to have genuinely portmanteau morphology for certain combinations of inflection.
- Oxford (2019) develops a compelling account in these terms of Algonquian agreement, specifically Ojibwe (Anishinaabemowin).
- In **conjunct** agreement paradigms, there is a unique portmanteau realization for certain configurations where participants act on one another:

(34) waabaminagog
 waabam -in agogw
 see -2OBJ -1SG→2PL
 “I see you (PL).”

- Oxford argues convincingly that this portmanteau surfaces exactly where it does because a [$u\pi - u\text{PROX}$] probe on T/Infl in conjunct clauses can be valued by both the subject and the object when these are equidistant from T/Infl.⁹
- He suggests that this happens because Ojibwe and other Algonquian languages happen to have a VI that references two independent sets of ϕ -features, otherwise the independent sets are realized via less-specified rules.
 - but in this case, do we have to somehow parameterize when multiple feature sets trigger multiple VI, and when they don’t?

4.3 Towards an account...

Limited sample of cases where syncretism resolves feature conflicts.

Multiple paths towards resolution via syncretism?

- In **Syntax:** representations are syntactically identical, so no conflict in morphology or syntax.
- In **Morphology:** syntactically different, but inserted by the same VI so morphologically identical (and phonologically the same).
- In **Phonology:** syntactically and morphologically different, but phonology erases the difference.

⁹Crucially, Oxford argues that certain internal arguments move to Spec-VoiceP after agreeing with Voice.

We might expect **more** inter-speaker (and intra-speaker?) variation the **later** in the derivation resolution occurs.

In the **morphology**:

- Could we distinguish conflicting and portmanteau features in terms of **timing**?
- Can we move some of the variation into **linearization**, if linearization precedes VI (or they're parallel: Rolle 2020, among others)
- Just as you cannot simultaneously produce conflicting articulations in speech, constraints against conflicting feature representations in a single morphological position of realization.
- Possible resolutions: parallel representations (subject to separate VI), fusion (portmanteau)
 - but then we might indeed expect stacking, as the result of fission—contrary to fact?

5 Conclusions

There do appear to be genuine cases of resolution-via-syncretism in a number of languages.

→ too arbitrary to be plausibly syntactic

→ some systematically morphological, others perhaps phonological

To accommodate this in grammatical architecture:

- If you want to be syntactically lexicalist, more sophisticated representations and constraints on feature relations
- If realizational, morphology must be able to filter/rescue representations ← as can phonology?

Variability across speakers, and across cases of resolution *within* languages.

And finally, a repeated entreaty!

- If you know of an example of resolution-via-syncretism in a language not spoken in Europe (ideally not Indo-European either), please let me know!

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