Topics in Syntax

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Topic #1: Hyperraising in Mongolian and the A vs A-bar distinction

A commonly held assumption is that syntactic positions are inherently A or a A-bar, with Spec-CP being an instance of the latter type. We will first review the properties that distinguish these two types of syntactic positions (regarding e.g. weak crossover, the creation of new antecedents for binding, the crossing of clausal boundaries, etc). We then investigate a type of cross-clausal object shift/ECM that challenges this assumption. We will first examine in detail the general properties of this type of construction crosslinguistically and the analyses put forth to account for it. With this background in mind, we will focus on its instantation in Mongolian (Mongolic) and conclude that cross-clausal object shift in this language leads us to the conclusion that Spec-CP can be an A-position, contrary to the conventional wisdom. Finally, we will review alternatives to the definition of syntactic positions that can account for both the data that motivates the traditional A vs. A-bar distinction and also data of the Mongolian type (Obata & Epstein 2011; van Urk 2015; Safir 2019).

Topic #2: The syntax and semantics of bare nominals in Wolof (and cross-linguistically)

Several, often unrelated languages allow for their nominals to occur without any functional morphology, including determiners and number morphological. They are dubbed *bare nominals*. Bare nominals are often taken to be number-neutral, that is there is no commitment to either a singular or plural interpretation. For instance, the Brazilian Portuguese sentence *A Maria consertou carro no final de semana* ('the Maria fixed car in.the weekend'; where *carro* is a bare nominal) is true whether Maria fixed one or more cars in the weekend. The same holds of bare nominals in Mandarin, Amharic, and Malagasy, among many other languages. In Wolof (Niger-Congo), however, bare nominals are not number-neutral, but rather exclusively singular. We will examine a few properties in favor of this claim, including binding and collective predicates. We then review existing syntactic and semantic analyses for bare nominals (e.g. incorporation, pseudo-incorporation, deletion and null realization of the determiner). We will focus on Dayal's (2011) analysis for Hindi, as Dayal shows that number neutrality in Hindi is derivative. Specifically, the number interpretation of bare nominals in Hindi correlates with the telicity of the predicate. We will see that this analysis does not carry over to Wolof, which motivates a working analysis for the singular interpretation of bare nominals in this language. Lastly, we go back to pseudo-incorporation (Massam 2001) and examine the syntactic positions where bare nominals in Wolof can occur.