Ievgeniia Kybalchych, UQAM
What *i-f*?

Claim: The English interrogative complementizer *if* is traditionally taken to be atomic. I claim that *if* is actually bimorphemic, with *f* a *wh*-morpheme, and *i* a finite stem-allomorph of BE.

Background : Assuming that morphological structure is really syntactic "all the way down" (Halle&Marantz 1993), the question arises as to how far all the way is, in particular with regard to the internal structure of function words (Cardinaletti&Starke 1999, Déchaine&Wiltschko 2002, Kayne 2010, Szabolcsi 2010). Relevant to the present study is the proposal that complementizers, e.g., German *dass,* may really be composed of two separate syntactic heads, *d* and *ass* (Leu 2015).

Two special proprieties of *if*: First, note the *WH-generalization*: embedded interrogatives in English obligatorily feature a left-peripheral *wh*-morpheme, with the seeming exception of *if*-clauses. Wherein lies this exceptional character of *if*?

Secondly, *if* is restricted to finite clauses (1b) , unlike *whether* (and other *wh*-words) (1a).

      (1) a. I don't know whether to stay.   b. * I don't know if to stay.

Proposal: These two special proprieties of *if* find a natural resolution with *if* decomposed into two morphemes, each a separate syntactic head. This is partially analogical to the analysis of German *dass* in Leu (2015). Leu observes the negative correlation between the presence of *d-* in the complementizer and the availability of complementizer-V2 cooccurrence in Germanic languages. He proposes that *d-* competes with the finite verb movement to the V2 position (2a). *If* is similar: *i-* and *–f* are heads in the CP domain (akin to Fin and Force Rizzi 1997). *i-* is marked [+finite], *–f* is [+wh] (2b).

2(a)   (Leu, 2015)   2(b)
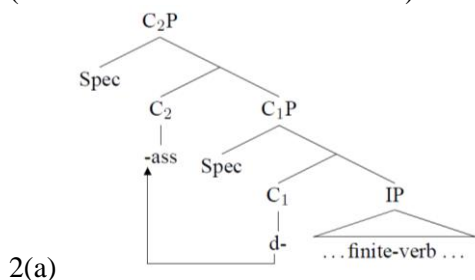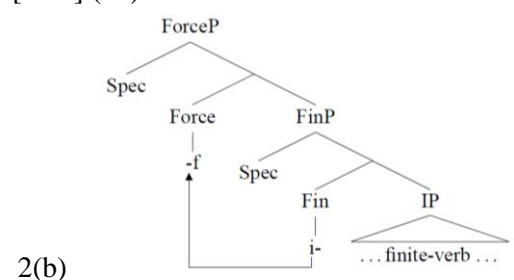
I claim that *-f* is an allomorph of the *wh*-morpheme, and *i* is the default finite stem-allomorph of BE, also present in 'is'. The argument is partially based on the complementizers' structure in Slavic languages. In particular, in Czech, embedded yes/no-interrogatives are introduced either by *jestli* (3) or by verb-fronting to *–li* (Franks 2010, Schwabe 2004). Note that *jest' (`is')* is a finite stem allomorph of *být* (BE) (Schwabe 2004), which is also a part of Russian conditional complementizer *jesli* (4), combined with *–li*, a question marker/a disjunction morpheme (Szabolcsi 2014).

(3) Nevím,   jestli Marie zůstane   "I don't know if Mary will stay." (Czech)
    NEG.know.1SG **jestli** Mary stay.3SG
(4) Ja ostanus' jesli ty   ujdjoš.   "I will stay if you leave."   (Russian)
    I stay.1SG **jesli** you leave.2SG

The analysis of *i-* in *if* as a finite allomorph of BE accounts immediately the fact that *if* does not accept infinitival complements.

Analyzing *i-* of *if* as morphemic strongly suggests morphemic status of *–f*. The English-internal expectation of a *wh*-morpheme in that position suggests a natural analysis of the labial coda fricative of *if* as a realization of [wh] considering that the presence of [w] segment after a front high vowel in coda position is not allowed in English.

Conclusion : V/T to C movement as a reflex of interrogative syntax is familiar. I claim that a variant of it also obtains in embedded questions introduced by *if*, in the guise of a finite stem of *BE*. Secondly, *wh* morphology in the left periphery is a general property of English embedded interrogatives, except in *if*-clauses. I claim that this generalization extends to *if*-clauses. One novel aspect of this proposal is that it relates the form of *if* to its property of being restricted to embedding finite clauses. The claim of the syntactic complexity of *if* echoes recent developments in morphosyntax that recognize the syntactic anchoring of morphological complexity in function words.

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