

What (if anything) does Complementizer Agreement tell us about Feature Inheritance (and vice versa)?

Marc Richards, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt

Recent work has made it clear that a straightforward reduction of Complementizer Agreement (CA) to Feature Inheritance (FI), with CA taken to provide direct evidence for FI (cf. Chomsky 2008), is premature, facing substantial empirical and theoretical challenges. Empirically, dissociations between CA and T-related subject agreement (such as first-conjunct agreement; Haegeman & van Koppen 2012) speak against a simple correspondence; theoretically, the abiding presence and realization of a valued ϕ -set on C stands in defiance of the original motivation for FI (Richards 2007; cf. Fuß 2012). However, whilst it may be true that CA cannot be taken to support a mere duplication of ϕ -features on C and T under FI, nor can the problematic properties of CA be used to argue against FI (as originally motivated). At worst, CA and FI are simply unrelated – a negative and uninteresting result. This talk aims for a more positive outcome. In particular, I attempt to reconcile a syntactic, Agree-based account of CA with the workings of FI, extending the “double probe” account of CA (as per Carstens 2003, Haegeman & van Koppen 2012 and others) to coordinated subjects and showing how such an account conforms to the logic of the FI-based phase system after all. By revis(it)ing the original rationale for FI, I argue that the appearance of valued ϕ on C is conceptually and theoretically innocuous just in case (i) ϕ on C is a purely PF copy, and/or (ii) ϕ on C is interpretable (in which case, its interpretation is that of a clitic, in the sense and spirit of Roberts 2010). Insofar as (i) and (ii) provide an adequate characterization of the properties of CA (diachronic and synchronic), the optimistic conclusion is that this phenomenon may yet be amenable to principled explanation.