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ON THE MORPHOSYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF A NOMINAL PHRASE:

A CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDY OF CASE, NUMBER AND DEFINITENESS MARKING

In this talk, I will present cross-linguistically attested (and non-attested) patterns of the marking for case, number and definiteness within a nominal phrase. I will show that the constraints on the ordering of functional morphemes are strikingly similar to the word order constraints observed by Greenberg (1963) and Cinque (2005).

Greenberg's (1963) Universal 20 states that the order of demonstrative, numeral and adjective in a prenominal position always corresponds to the order Dem > Num > Adj > N, while in a postnominal position, the ordering is either the same or a mirror image of the prenominal word order, i.e. N > Adj > Num > Dem or N > Dem > Num > Adj.

(1) Greenberg's (1963: 87) left–right asymmetry: When any or all of the items (demonstrative, numeral, and descriptive adjective) precede the noun, they are always found in that order. If they follow, the order is either the same or its exact opposite.

Cinque (2005) revises this generalisation slightly, and observes more accurately that from all the 24 logically possible orderings of Dem, Num, Adj and N, there are actually 14 orders attested in the languages of the world, while the remaining 10 orderings are unattested. Cinque accounts for this fact by taking the rigid prenominal structure Dem > Num > Adj > N as a universal base structure from which all the other orderings are derived by a small set of well-defined principles, fundamentally, by leftward movement of a constituent containing the Noun.

The larger goal of my study is to see whether there exists a similar constraint on the ordering of morphemes, and by entailment, an analogous hierarchical structure also on the level of morphology. I have investigated the behaviour of case, number and definiteness marking in more than 50 genetically and geographically diverse languages. The data I will present show intriguing similarities with the results obtained by Greenberg and Cinque. Mainly, it is the fact that if the K, Def and Num marking is prenominal (i.e. prefixal and/or prepositional), the ordering of morphemes is unexceptionally K > Def > Num > N (in my sample, these languages are represented by Luganda and Gitksan). If the Def marking is not present, then the structure is, again, unexceptionally K > Num > N (as in Sulka, Niue, Anejom, and Krongo, see Table 1). Thus, I will argue that this ordering represents the basic universal structure and the rest of the possible orderings is derivable from this single structure by the leftward movement of N. Importantly, in the postnominal position, both the base order and the mirror image order are attested. The tables representing the data are on the second page of this abstract.

The hierarchy will be further supported by data showing the ways in which K, Def and Num fuse with each other. Specifically, in languages that have all K, Def and Num marking present, we can observe fusion of solely those categories that are adjacent in the suggested underlying

structure, i.e. K > Def > Num > N. (Although, some care needs to be taken here to distinguish affixal and word external marking, since we do find languages, like Ubykh†, with the order Def N Num/K, but here Num/K is a sufix, and Def is a separate specifier. Also Greek shows a similar problem with the order Def N Gen/Num/K, see Table 1.)

Ultimately, I will conclude in accordance with some recent linguistic approaches, namely Distributed Morphology, Nanosyntax or with the work by Koopman, Kayne and others, that the presented data suggest that behind building up words and larger syntactic structures, there is, in fact, a single generative mechanism.

Table 1: Language sample used in the talk

K DEF NUM	
K Def Num N	Gitksan, Luganda
K Def N Num	English, French
K/Def N Num	Modern Hebrew (K N Num)
Def N Num/K	Ubykh†, Greek
N Num Def K	Dime
N Num Def/K	Evenki
K NUM	
K Num N	Sulka, Niue, Anejom, Krongo (K N Num)
Num N K	Otoro
K N Num	Krongo (K Num N), Modern Hebrew (K/Def N Num)
N Num K	Burmese, Pomo, Yupik (N Num/K), Evenki (N Num Def/K) Malay, Tamil, Mikasuki, Basque, Korean, Yukaghir, Ngarla, Mochica† (N K Num), Cocama, Ik, Savosavo, Chukchi, Cavinena, Bantawa
N Num/K	Shipibo-Conibo (N Num K), Yupik (N Num K), Cl. Armenian† (N K Num), Hup (N Num K)
N K Num	Ashéninka, Mochica† (N Num K), Cl. Armenian† (N Num/K)

Note: The entries in parentheses represent alternative orderings found in given languages.

Literature:

Cinque, Guglielmo. 2005. Deriving Greenberg's universal 20 and its exceptions. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36: 315 – 332.

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