On the cross-linguistic presence/absence of TP: syntactic properties and temporal interpretations

Over the last couple of years, it has been argued that the category DP can be projected in a language only if articles are morphologically realized in the language. In a somewhat similar vein, the major claim of this talk is that there is a direct correspondence between the morphological inventory of a language and its syntactic structure. In other words, there are structural differences between languages with and without temporal morphology—the former involve a richer syntactic structure (specifically, the presence of a TP) than the latter. I demonstrate that temporal interpretations can be achieved through either Tense or Aspect, which means either traditional tense-dedicated or aspect morphology. Given my main proposal, absence of temporal morphology in a language leads to rich aspectual morphology, which is needed to express temporal relations. Given the tendency to minimize redundancy, I also claim that languages with rich aspectual morphology tend not to have pure temporal morphology. This talk shows that there is striking resemblance between a number of genetically unrelated languages, yet typologically similar regarding the morphological properties, such as Serbian, Chinese, Guarani, Hausa, Kalaallisut, and others.

Focusing on two seemingly unrelated phenomena, i.e. availability of VP-ellipsis under finiteness mismatches and aspectual distribution in aspectual tenses, i.e. Aorist and Imperfectum, I argue that parametric variations in the presence or absence of a TP layer can unify the two phenomena and account for the observed cross-linguistic differences.

I also show that temporal interpretations can be derived in the absence of TP by means of perfective and imperfective aspect, aspectual component Perfect and a modal component woll.