

Syncretism of non-finite (participle, infinitive) and finite forms of the verb

Evidence: We consider verbal syncretisms in three languages with highly articulated inflectional systems, namely Italian, Albanian and Greek, where a verbal form coinciding with the verb stem (or with the verb stem for perfective in the case of Greek) lexicalizes non-finite contexts as well as a restricted set of finite contexts. In Italian, the verb base is the 3rd or 2nd sg present indicative (1a), the 2nd sg imperative (1b), and at least in the dialect of Florence, the infinitive (1c). In Geg varieties of Albanian, the verb base (with lengthened root vowel in the case of consonantal bases, cf. Beci 1984) lexicalizes the perfect participle (2a), the infinitive (2b) and the 3rd sg perfective past (2c) (in combination with middle-passive morphology) or the 2nd/ 3rd sg present indicative (2c'). In Modern Greek, the verb base of the perfective (formed with *-s* morphology, with raising of the stressed nucleus, etc.) lexicalizes participial contexts (3a) and the 3rd sg present (3b); in the Griko dialects of Southern Italy, it also lexicalizes the infinitive (3c) (see also Medieval Greek; Joseph 1993).

Theoretical background: On the basis of (1)-(3), we evaluate currently available generative theories of syncretism. In standard underspecification approaches, such as Distributed Morphology (DM), syncretic lexical items correspond to fully-specified syntactic nodes under which they are inserted because of their default status, of Impoverishment rules applying in Morphological Structure, etc. This type of approach has been challenged by different theories which argue against underspecification/ impoverishment, e.g. the 'silent' categories of Kayne (2006ff.) and the Superset principle of Starke (2006), Caha (2008). Such theories though share with DM at least a crucial assumption about the interfacing of syntax with the lexicon – whereby entire portions of the syntactic structure are not overtly matched to lexical terminals and thus remain abstract ('silent' for Kayne, lexicalized only as part of a larger non-terminal node for Starke or Caha).

Analysis: While we endorse the abandonment of underspecification, we further differ in avoiding reference to non-lexicalized, abstract material. Thus the verbal bases in (1)-(3) lack any specification beyond that of the predicative content (the verb root), the verb class (the thematic vowel, if present), aspect (perfective, in Greek only). Syncretism is then treated as a case of ambiguity where a single lexical item is compatible with a range of interpretations, resulting from closure operations at LF. For example, in the case of Italian/Florentine in (1), generic (universal) closure over possible worlds/situations can yield irrealis modality, hence imperative as in (1b), and infinitive as in (1c). Analogously, generic (universal) closure over events can yield an imperfective reading (Bonomi 1997), hence the present (both habitual and progressive) in the absence of tense properties, as in (1a). As for 2nd and 3rd person reference, the idea is that the core discourse referent (2nd sg) is contextually available, as is the so-called 3rd sg (traditionally the non-person) in the indicative in (1c). We further show how this approach extends to Albanian and Greek.

Discussion: Abandoning underspecification as the basis of syncretism does not imply the introduction of LF interpretive operations, since the closures described above are independently available. On the contrary, it could be argued that the markedness hierarchies supporting underspecification and impoverishment import into the autonomous morphological level primitives and relations that properly belong to LF. Similarly, the abstract functional hierarchies of Kayne or Starke/Caha import interpretive relations into constituent structures, potentially leading to new empirical problems. For example, the adjectival participle in Geg Albanian adds *-m/-n* to the base, as in (4) (also Greek (5)). Starke and Caha provide a hierarchy of verbal projections roughly schematized in (6) (top line). We take it that the inflected participle in (4), which includes the verb base in (2), cannot have fewer specifications than it. If so, given that string lexicalization under the Superset principle requires the maximal matching of existing terminals, the verb base should not override the inflected participle when inserting in higher positions, counter to fact. We therefore conclude that lexical items are not late fillers for a pre-existing independent abstract structure, but rather that structure is projected by the actual terminals, and eventually disambiguated at LF.

- (1) Italian (and dialects)
- | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----------------|--------------|--------|----|----|-----------------|-------------|
| a. | spieg-a | | | | | frigg-i | |
| | he.explains | | | | | you. fry | |
| b. | spieg-a! | | | | | frigg-i! | |
| | explain! | | | | | fry! | |
| c. | <i>Firenze</i> | | | | | | |
| va | a | 'spjeg-a-lli | he ... | l | ε | nnojoso | 'friddzi-le |
| go | to | explain-him | that | it | is | boring | to.fry-them |
- N.B. (c) is not the truncated form *spie'ga(re)*, *frigge(re)*

- (2) *Shkodër*
- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| a. | ε | kɒ | lɔ:/ | ve:f | | |
| | him | he.has | washed/ | dressed | | 'He has washed/ dressed him' |
| b. | ...mε | ε | lɔ:/ | ve:f | | |
| | to | him | wash/ | dress | | '(I told you) to wash/ dress him' |
| c. | u | lɔ: | | | | |
| | M-P | he.washed | | | | 'He washed/was washed' |
| c'. | ve:f | | | | | |
| | you.dress/he.dresses | | | | | 'You wash/he washes (somebody)' |

- (3) Greek (and dialects)
- | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|
| a. | exo | di-s-i | | | exo | plin-i |
| | I.have | dressed | | | I.have | washed |
| b. | | di-s-i | | | | plin-i |
| | | he.dress(perf.) | | | | he.wash(perf.) |
| c. | <i>Sternatia/ Calimera</i> | | | | | |
| | e | tto | sozo | rodi-s-i | | |
| | not | it | I.can | ask | | 'I cannot ask it' |

- (4) *Shkodër*
- | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|--------|---------------|-------|---------------|---------|
| a. | ɛʃt | ε | veʃ-un | (prɛi | s | ɒms) |
| | she.is | the | dress-ed | (by | the | mother) |
| | 'She is dressed (by her mother)' | | | | | |
| b. | i | kam | kmiʃa-t | ɛ/t | lɔ-m-ε | |
| | them | I.have | shirt-s | the | wash-ed-f | |
| | 'I have the shirts washed' | | | | | |

- (5) Afta ta pukamisa ine **pli-men-a**
 these the shirts are wash-ed-pl
 'These shirts are washed'

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
| (6) | [(Ir)realis | [Past/ Present | [Voice/Perfect | [State | [Root |
| <i>Shkodër -V</i> | base | base | base | base- <i>m</i> | |
| <i>Shkodër-C</i> | base | base | base | base- <i>n</i> | |