

## The only truly universal core functional projection in the clause is little v

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In a true minimalist spirit, we are sceptical about the universal existence of any functional categories/projections. What we take for granted, on the other hand, is the universal existence of a small set of lexical categories and projections, at least including a verbal lexical category and a nominal lexical category (Schachter 1985: 6-7). Nevertheless, we will argue that – among the so-called core functional projections – C and T are not universal, whereas little v, as a disguise for a predicational functional head, is in fact a universal functional category in all clauses in any natural language.

We argue first that C is not universal, since, being the formal category connecting the clause to the discourse, it is irrelevant for embedded clauses, and in particular for complement small clauses. We will also adduce empirical evidence from properties of A-movement in Norwegian that small and (some) infinitival clauses do not have C-projections. Furthermore, we argue from properties of non-verbal small clauses in Norwegian that T cannot be a universal component of clauses either. Basically, our claim is that (non-verbal) small clauses in Norwegian provide firm evidence that C and T cannot be universal properties of clauses.

Next, there is an age-old insight that linguistic expressions are basically of two different kinds, namely, on the one hand, those that are terms, e.g. nouns, adjectives or verbs that stand for things, properties, or actions, and, on the other hand, those that can be true or false, namely clauses that express propositions. A clause results only when two terms of the appropriate kinds are joined together (in a nexus, according to Jespersen 1924: 114 ff). We argue that little v is a predicational functional head that is instrumental in forming propositions, and therefore it is a universal category of natural language. Every clause must express predication, and a predicational functional head is a necessary condition for forming a predicate, and by implication it is a necessary condition for forming a clause (Bowers 1993).

On the proposition formation view of predication, what the propositional function (= predicate) does, in semantic terms, is not, as is often taken for granted, to ascribe a property to a subject, but rather to form a proposition. However, it does so by opening up an argument position. This is essential in our analysis. The opening up of an argument position (i.e. the subject position) is the way language shows that it has formed a proposition. Whether or not the subject position is also a Theta-position, depends on the lexical-semantic content of the verb/predicate and has nothing to do with predication in the proposition formation sense. Therefore, “aboutness” has nothing to do with semantic predication in this sense, but bringing propositions into existence has everything to do with it.

We argue that the existence of little v as a universal component of clauses provides a basis for the explanation of what Lasnik (2001: 356) calls “a pervasive mystery,” namely the existence of EPP. Our tack here is to derive the obligatory existence of subjects from the proposition forming nature of the v head. Since the obligatory opening up of an argument position must take place every time a clause is formed, it must also take place in instances where the verb/predicate supplies no external Theta-subject, which means that a purely formal or expletive subject comes into existence. Our claim is then that the EPP is universal since little v is, which means that some languages have abstract expletive subjects.

We also argue that the existence of little v as a universal component of clauses explains the absence of expletive (big) PRO, another mystery of generative grammar. We show that clauses like English *\*It is nice to snow* are ungrammatical in a number of languages and by hypothesis in all languages. We explain this hypothesized fact by arguing that there is a universal subject requirement, dictated by the embedded little v, that cannot be fulfilled in the embedded subject position, since a subject cannot be licensed in this position in the absence of Theta-role and abstract Case. Hence the ungrammaticality.