

## Morphosyntax of indefinite markers

In the presentation I will address the topic of syncretism observed in the paradigm of three types of indefinite markers: non-specific, specific unknown and specific known indefinite markers (Haspelmath 1997: 41-50). In English, all three types of markers are represented by a single phonological exponent *some-*:

- 1)
- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| a. I want <b>some</b> -thing to eat. I don't care what you bring me.     | non-specific     |
| b. There is <b>some</b> -body in the bathroom. I have heard their steps. | specific unknown |
| c. I have <b>some</b> -thing to tell you. Guess what.                    | specific known   |

Therefore, indefinite markers of all three subtypes can be considered fully syncretic in English. However, there are a number of languages where the three indefinite markers are represented by distinct morphological forms, for example, in Russian:

- 2)
- |  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| a. Ona kupala što- <b>nibud</b> i shla domoj.<br>She bought something and went home. (usually)         | non-specific     |
| b. Ona kupila što- <b>to</b> i poshla domoj.<br>She bought something and went home.' (once)            | specific unknown |
| c. Ja nashla <b>koe</b> - što interesnoje v etoj knige.<br>I found something interesting in this book. | specific known   |

The proposal that I would like to argue for is that non-specific, specific unknown and specific known indefinite markers constitute syntactic structures based on a single, cross-linguistically universal sequence of syntactic features. Each of the three indefinite marker types lexicalizes a different ordered set of features (based on the sequence). This means that the three markers exist in a containment relation (simpler markers are contained within more complex ones):

- 3)
- a. [ F<sub>1</sub> ] - non-specific marker
  - b. [[F<sub>1</sub> ] F<sub>2</sub> ] - specific unknown marker
  - c. [[[F<sub>1</sub> ] F<sub>2</sub> ] F<sub>3</sub> ] - specific known marker

A study of 55 languages reveals that phonological exponents of the three indefinite marker types show different patterns of syncretism when arranged in a paradigm based on their semantic compositionality (non-specific < specific unknown < specific known):

Table 1.

	non-specific	specific unknown	specific known	pattern
English	some-	some-	some-	AAA
Russian	-nibud	-to	koe-	ABC
Yakut	-eme	-ere	-ere	ABB
Latin	ali-	ali-	-dam	AAB
unattested				ABA

Out of five possible patterns, only one is unattested, namely, the ABA pattern. This is in line with the \*ABA generalization (Bobaljik 2012), according to which, syncretism should always target adjacent cells in a paradigm. The question that follows from this data concerns the mechanics of language that allow syncretism to arise and disallow the AB pattern.

As I will show in my analysis, the observed regularities can be explained with the use of methodological tools provided by Nanosyntax (Caha 2009, Starke 2009, 2011):

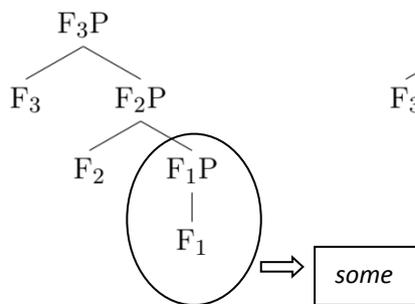
1. Phrasal spell-out – lexicalization is triggered cyclically with every feature merge
2. Superset principle – a lexical entry (a lexically stored ordered set of features matched with a phonological exponent) may spell out a matching syntactic structure or a subset of that structure.

In short, languages will differ with respect to the number of lexical entries that spell out the sequence (F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>2</sub>, F<sub>3</sub>). Languages where full syncretism is observed such as English will have only one lexical entry lexicalizing the structure derived on the basis of the sequence:

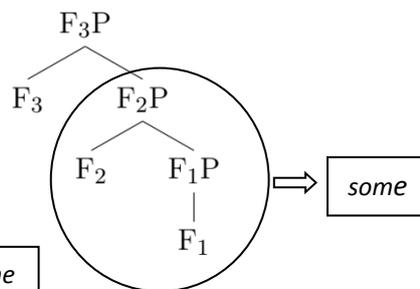
### 5) English

Lexical entry:  $[[[F_1] F_2] F_3] \Rightarrow some$

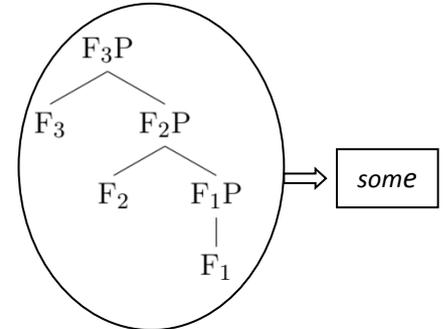
a. non-specific



b. specific unknown



c. specific familiar

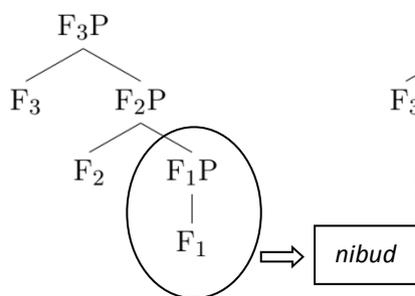


In contrast, three separate lexical entries will lexicalize the hierarchy in Russian and two entries in languages such as Latin or Yakut:

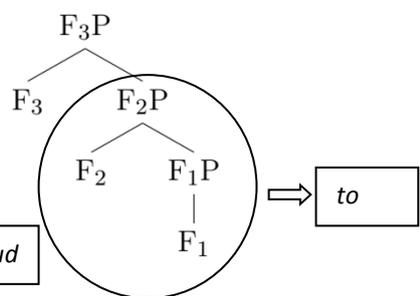
### 6) Russian

Lexical entries:  $[F_1] \Rightarrow nibud$ ,  $[[F_1] F_2] \Rightarrow to$ ,  $[[[F_1] F_2] F_3] \Rightarrow koe$

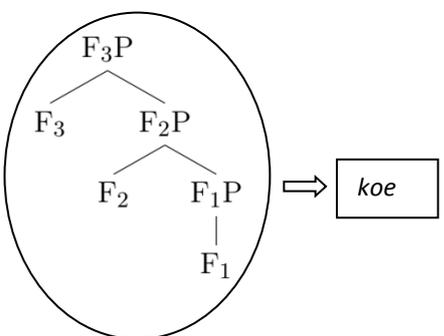
a. non-specific



b. specific unknown



c. specific familiar



### **Sample References**

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