Statement of Research Interest

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Overview

I am interested in linguistic theory as a model of human mental competence and performance. I seek to uncover some abstract principles and a number of parameters that account for linguistic variations. My research areas include: the lexicon and its relationship to syntax, the internal syntax of agreements (e.g. noun classes and agreement concord) within the DP, the syntax of TAM, the syntax and semantics of negation constructions, the syntax of left periphery in questions and focus constructions, the morphosyntax of body-part expressions and logophoric pronouns, language typology, and code-switching. I work primarily within the generative tradition, trying to develop a syntactic theory that expresses generalizations about the empirical domain of Grassfield Bantu syntax as explicit formal statements explaining X/XP movements as well as agreement configurations internal to the clause. My main research interests lie within the fields of formal syntax and morphology (with primary focus on the former), with a particular emphasis on the relevance of understudied languages. My research program thus far has focused on Grassfield Bantu languages from a typological/comparative perspective, both on a macro-level contrasting Grassfield Bantu properties with those of non-Bantu languages, and on a micro-parametric scale looking at small but significant contrasts between Grassfield Bantu languages. I work mainly within the frameworks of the Minimalist Program and Distributed Morphology, though I consider these theoretical frameworks as heuristic devices for linguistic discovery as much as I view them as theories of a universal human language faculty. I have been conducting fieldwork on Shupamem for 6 years, and spent the Sprint 2009 in New York University taking another field method class on Mudumba, a closely related language to Shupamem.

My specialization may more accurately be termed morphosyntax, given the preponderance of agreement morphology in Bantu languages and the focus of my work on the theoretical relevance of various agreement phenomena. My research addresses a broad range of theoretical issues, including word order alternations (particularly with respect to the internal structure of the DP in Shupamem), theories of agreement, verb movements and the syntax of negation (e.g, the syntax of bipartite negation, the study of subject agreement, the syntax of locative expresions, the syntactic properties of verbal agreement morphology, the intersection of morphosyntax and argument structure, extraction asymmetries between subjects and non-subjects (e.g, syntax of questions and focus), and agreement on complementizers, among other things.

My research program has two equally important priorities: a commitment to contributing to a theory of Universal Grammar, and a commitment to researching understudied languages. I have extensively researched on the syntax of DP and the syntax of negation in Shupamem. And the structures and constructions discussed in these aspects of the grammar of Shupamem challenge previous assumptions in the literature and speak poignantly to my academic commitments – if generative linguistics is seeking a theory of universal grammar, linguists must be sure that it covers every language (or, at least, is moving in that direction). Given the UG hypothesis, an architecture developed for English should theoretically be sufficient for any language, we know from experience, however, that linguists consistently find robust empirical generalizations in under-studied languages that cannot be accounted for by the current theory, which must in turn be modified. I consider myself among these linguists, seeking out empirical puzzles that challenge current theory, and revising the theory in order to sufficiently broaden its empirical coverage.

My main academic research goal is to make both theoretical and empirical contributions to the linguistic literature by bringing new syntactic and morphological puzzles into the theoretical discourse. This is what motivated my empirically-organized dissertation: rather than searching out an over-arching theoretical theme, I sought out a collection of distinct (though related) empirical puzzles in Shupamem which are both theoretically and typologically significant. Broadly speaking, my dissertation discusses the morphosyntax of Shupamem, with particular reference to a cluster of XP movement phenomena with respect to the distribution of lexical categories within the sentence. There are 6 main topics which the dissertation takes up: (1) the morphology of noun classes in Shupamem; (2) the internal syntax of DP, (3) Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) system; (4) the syntax of negation, (5) the syntax of the left periphery of questions and focus constructions, and (6) the syntax of pronoun and the binding theory.

Chapter Two provides an outline of the Grammar of Shupamem. It contains a cursory and basic discussion of some essential but crucial phonological, morphological aspects of Shupamem. Its main objective is to explain some general properties of Shupamem that may facilitate the understanding all complicated constructions investigated here, with respect to the indication of noun classes and the tonal morphology. Overall, this chapter offers a description and analysis of Shupamem noun class system and how it functions within the DP.

Chapter Three is devoted to the internal syntax of DP in Shupamem where I propose that a number of word order alternations attested within the DP can be accounted for by using Kayne (1994) and Cinque (1999, 2005) LCA-based approach. I also argue for the Agreement Trigger Hypothesis (Henceforth ATH) which basically assumes that NP movements are triggered by some agreement features within Shupamem DP in general. For instance, Shupamem distinguishes a [Adjective > Noun] versus [Noun>Adjective] word order alternation that can be accounted for

by movement. The canonical order is [Adjective > Noun]. When the noun moves pass the adjective, the DP is interpreted as definite. The definite article only spells out if and only if the head noun moves past through the agreement head. This approach also considers the *Freezing Effects* discussed in Rizzi (2004) as a crucial factor which explains some restrictions imposed on NP movement internal to the DP in general. The freezing effects also referred to as criterial freezing can be defined as a syntactic principle that required every fronted XP (phrase) to be frozen in place (e.g., their targeted specifier position) without moving further.

Chapter Four describes the TAM system of Shupamem to set the stage for an in-depth analysis of negative sentences. Building on a number of tense and aspectual markers attested in Shupamem, I propose an analysis of the interaction between tense, aspect, negation and focus that shows how the surface forms of tense markers are influenced by aspect and focus. I mainly focus on the distinction between perfective and imperfective and how they affect the tonal melody on the main verb.

Chapter Five considers the syntax of negation in Shupamem where two types of negation are distinguished, namely, a bipartite negation for finite sentences which always have a post-verbal pronoun, and non-finite negation constructions where the post-verbal pronoun does not show up. This chapter critically reviews some derivational approaches and arguments that have been proposed to account for bipartite negation in other languages (e.g. Bell 2004; Belletti 1990, Zanuttini 1991, Pollock 1989, Nkemnji 1995 among others) to show that an alternative approach which argues that post-verbal pronouns are instances of the second negative particle encoded by a low tone, can offer a better and straightforward analysis of Shupamem negation and various related phenomena. It is demonstrated that Shupamem is a negative concord language.

Chapter Six is concerned with the syntax of questions. In its first half, I provide a survey of the main features of focus strategies used in all question types in order to provide some descriptive generalizations that are crucial to the understanding of the internal structure of CP with respect to left peripheral and post-verbal focus. Using Rizzi (2004) cartographic approach and related works (e.g. Aboh 2004, Collins and Essizewa 2007, Zabel 2004 among others) I show that the argument structures in interrogative sentences can be better accounted for if we assume that both focus fields have strong features that trigger overt movement.

Chapter Seven is concerned with the description and interpretation of the syntactic properties of the *body-part* (BP) reflexive expressions attested in Shupamem within the framework of Chomsky's (1981) Binding Theory. I show the difference between body reflexives and head body reflexives in terms of how they pattern together with adjective modifiers and different types of predicates. I also show how only body reflexives in combination with a reciprocal yield the reciprocal reading of the sentence. Then I move on to the discussion of how the Binding Conditions are implemented in Shupamem.

The last chapter contains the concluding remarks for this study.

OTHER RESEARCH, IN PROGRESS AND FUTURE

One of my papers (under revision in Syntax) is on *Lexicalizing Structure Crosscategorically: The case of Shupamem Spatial Ps*. In this joined paper with Arhonto Terzi, we discuss the internal structure of the prepositional phrase with respect to the overt placement of locative expressions cross-linguistically. The theory of the distribution of some empty functional projections within the PP based on evidence from Shupamem and other Bantu languages suggest that the formal description of the prepositional phrase in many Indo-European languages such as English, French, Spanish or Itatian etc, can't be universal, and the paper

explores the hypothesis that some languages like Shupamem have evidence it is grammar of the existence of overt functional categories within the PP that implies a more complex structure cross-linguistically. An extension of this line of work might shares new light on the internal structures of PPs in general.

In addition, Anna Szabolcsi and I are currently working on the syntax and semantics of negation in Shupamem. At issue in this project is the understanding of the distribution of various negation morphemes and the syntax of post-verbal pronouns with respect to the syntax of negative clauses in general. In other words, we are trying to make sense of some negative markers with respect to the clausal structure of negative sentences cross-linguistically. For instance, it is not quite clear whether the negation type we are dealing with is similar to what Bell (2004) refer to as bipartite negation. If Bell (2004) is true, therefore the treatment he provides to account for Nweh (Nkemnj, 1995) and French will be adopted for Shupamem. Otherwise, we will explore an alternative analysis that seek to explain why Shupamem requires a post-verbal pronoun in standard negation but not in expletive negation and imperative negation.

Another project in collaboration with Chris Collins is concerned with the syntax of focus in Shupame. In its first half, we provide a survey of the main features of focus strategies used in all question types in order to provide some descriptive generalizations that are crucial to the understanding of the internal structure of CP with respect to left peripheral and post-verbal focus. Using Rizzi (2004) cartographic approach and related works (e.g. Aboh 2004, Collins and Essizewa 2007, Zabel 2004, among others). We show that the argument structures in interrogative sentences can be better accounted for if we assume that both focus fields have strong features that trigger overt movement.

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