

Complementizers as probes

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Given the inventory of existing operations, a surface constituent can be the result of External Merge, as in phrase structure grammars, or the result of Internal Merge, that is, the output of a syntactic derivation. This talk focuses on clausal complementation and proposes that C and its surface complement, the TP, enter the derivation as discontinuous pieces of structure which ‘get together’ via Internal Merge. Under this view, C is merged in the matrix clause higher than the embedding verb. Moreover, C functions as a probe attracting its surface complement from its thematic position, instead of being directly merged with it.

The proposal that C is merged in the matrix clause finds support in new evidence I provide from Greek showing that Cs are licensed via aspectual properties of the embedding verb, which are determined in the matrix clause, structurally higher than the verbal projection. Furthermore, I show that the Internal Merge steps that are involved in the proposed analysis of clause formation directly capture previously unnoticed clausal extraposition effects found not only in Greek, but also cross-linguistically, without invoking extraposition rules or spurious rightward movement operations. Lastly, striking subject-object asymmetries in the distribution of embedded clauses, which remain puzzling for the standard analysis of clausal complementation, are shown to follow directly under the current proposal, from the relative height of Cs’ merge position and the thematic position where their surface complement enters the derivation