

CFCs and the lexicon: On parametrising C, T and v in Romance

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The aim of the talk is to provide an overview and some first results of a new research project (“Components of Romance Syntax”, run together with Eva Remberger, University of Konstanz). The project aims at an analysis of the basic syntactic properties of all Romance languages within a minimalist framework, including the formalisation of the underlying mechanisms. Our approach is based on Chomsky’s (2000 et seq.) proposal of a uniform syntactic component with the lexicon as the locus of parameters, responsible for syntactic variation. One of the leading hypotheses is that most of the properties that Romance languages have in common and those in which they diverge can be explained by parametrising and consistently formalising the Core Functional Categories (CFCs) C, T, and v. The talk will first exemplify our procedure and formalisation by examining the variation in word order, distribution of *pro* and *pro_{expl}* and some related phenomena in Italian, Spanish and French. In a diachronic perspective, the lexicon entries for C, T, and v in the modern stages of these languages will then be compared with the lexicon entries that we get when we analyse medieval stages of the same languages. Whereas it can thus be shown that purely syntactic properties can be formalized and compared (both cross-linguistically and from a perspective of variational linguistics) by a minimalist CFC approach, an important issue that emerged in our first project stage is how to accommodate information structure (IS) in such a framework. A discussion of basically three approaches (1 – cartography; 2 – IS assignment at LF; 3 – integration of IS into the lexicon entries for CFCs) will yield a proposal that will be presented as a final topic of the talk.