CamCoS 4: Null Arguments and Phi-features

After the success of the three previous CamCoS conferences (see: http://www-falcon.csx.cam.ac.uk/site/RECOS/conference), we are happy to announce that CamCoS 4 is going to take place on 7-9 May 2015.

The first half day will feature talks by Cambridge-based researchers, followed by a full-day general session on comparative generative syntax. The final day of the conference will feature a themed session with invited speakers on the topic of variation in null arguments and phi-features. Abstracts for the general session may, but need not, pick up on the conference theme (for details regarding abstract submission, see below). In relation to the themed session, the central questions we would like to address are (i) to what extent it is possible to provide a formal account of cross-linguistic variation in the domain of null arguments, and to what extent any such account rests on the formal distribution of phi-features, and (ii) what kinds of crosslinguistic variation the distribution of phi-features seems to play a role in.

7 May: presentations by Cambridge-based researchers
8 May: general session on comparative generative syntax
9 May: themed session with invited speakers

More specific potential research questions include, but are not restricted to:
• What is the typology of null arguments? How can this be captured formally? Is there any evidence that parameter hierarchies regulate variation in null arguments (see Roberts 2012, Biberauer & Roberts 2012, 2014, Biberauer, Roberts & Sheehan 2013, Sheehan 2013, Biberauer, Holmberg, Roberts & Sheehan in press on syntactic parameter hierarchies, Dresher & Kaye 1990, Dresher 2009 and Fikkert 2012 on phonological parameter hierarchies)?
• What is the status of the distinctions made in Biberauer, Holmberg, Roberts & Sheehan (2010) between consistent, partial and radical null-subject languages? Is there any morphological correlate, either in terms of the "classical" notion of 'rich agreement' or in terms of the forms of pronouns (on the latter, see in particular Neeleman & Szendrői 2007)? Is it possible to refine the existing typology further, identifying sub-types of consistent, partial and radical pro-drop systems (e.g. Walkden 2013, Biberauer & Cognola 2013, Kućerova 2014), or should we try to reduce the types of null argument to basic elements that also play a role elsewhere, as suggested by Duguine (2012, 2014), Barbosa (2013, 2014) and Simpson, Choudhury & Menon 2013)? Can the first approach lead to insights regarding the latter?
• Can we think of the null-argument phenomenon purely in terms of externalization in the sense of Chomsky & Berwick (2011)? Is deletion (Holmberg 2005, 2010, Roberts 2010) or ellipsis (Duguine 2012, 2014) or a mixture of the two (Simpson, Choudhury & Menon 2013) at work?
• Alternatively, do null arguments constitute a case illustrating that variation also needs to be understood in Narrow Syntax-internal and CI terms? Do languages differ in their formalization of phi-features and thus in the manner in which these are distributed (e.g. within the verbal system and its peripheries, within the nominal system and its peripheries; consider, for example, Saito 2007, 2013, Miyagawa 2010, Ritter & Wiltschko 2009, 2014, Wiltschko 2014), and does this affect the distribution of null-argument phenomena?
• What is the relationship between *pro* and PRO (Borer 1989, Huang 1989, Livitz

2013)? How, if at all, does the bound null subject in partial control languages such as Brazilian Portuguese and Finnish differ from PRO (Rodrigues 2004, Modesto 2004, Holmberg, Nayudu & Sheehan 2009)? Can the difference between PRO and *pro* be attributed to Case-licensing? What about evidence that PRO bears Case in some languages (Landau 2006, Sheehan 2014)?

• To what extent can we identify "clustering properties" as in the classic sense of Rizzi's original (1982) analysis, and how can these be accounted for? Can we make (parametric) sense of the "clustering failures" that are typically cited as evidence of the implausibility of parametric approaches (see i.a. Newmeyer 2005)?

• Are there any prospects for making connections between null-argument phenomena and phenomena assumed to be regulated by other parameters during the GB era, e.g. macroparameters like Baker's (1996) Polysynthesis Parameter, or word-order parameters (V2, V-to-T, N-to-D, etc.)?

• Are there fundamental formal differences between rich agreement and clitic systems of various kinds (Preminger 2009, Kramer 2012, 2014, Diercks, Ranero & Paster to appear, Ranero, Diercks & Paster 2013)? If so, how can these be diagnosed? Might it be possible to make progress with our understanding of clitic-elements and their crosslinguistic variation, and of the diachronic connection between clitics and agreement (Roberts & Roussou 2003, Fuss 2005).

• What are the formal similarities and differences between "traditional", essentially A-movement-related agreement systems, and the many systems crosslinguistically that appear to exhibit A'-sensitive agreement (e.g. languages with topic agreement, focus-agreement, wh-agreement; see i.a. Bresnan 1987, Chung 1994, Watanabe 1996, Miyagawa 2010, Cable 2010, van der Wal 2010, Yang 2013)? Can this be understood as a difference in the distribution of phi-features, and, if so, does it have further consequences?

• Can phi-agreement be genuinely optional, or is there always a formal (e.g. Etxepare & Uribe-Etxebarria 2012) or interpretive (e.g. Seidl & Dimitriadis 1997, Bax & Diercks 2012)

• Are some phi-features, e.g. [Person] (Longobardi 2008, Richards 2009, Longobardi, Guardiano, Silvestri, Boattini & Ceolin 2013) more important in determining the possibility of null arguments, agreement, and other syntactic phenomena than others? Are (some) phi-features dispensable (Harley & Ritter 2002, Wiltschko 2008, Ritter & Wiltschko 2009, 2014, Wiltschko 2014), and, if so, what consequences follow from the absence of a given formalized feature in a system? Can we identify "phi-equivalents" for languages that lack one or more of [Person], [Number] and [Gender] (Carstens 2011, Saito 2013, Ritter & Wiltschko 2009, 2014, Wiltschko 2014)?

• Do patterns of crosslinguistic variation allow us to make new progress on long-standing questions such as the relationship between phi-features and Case (cf. the so-called *George-Kornfilt Hypothesis*)?

• What light can the study of the morphology (both verbal and pronominal) associated with (null) pronominal arguments and agreement shed on the relations among phi-features (see i.a. Vikner 1997, Rohrbacher 1999, Dechaine & Witschko 2002, Harley & Ritter 2002, Cowper & Currie Hall 2002, 2009, Harbour 2011, Koeneman & Zeijlstra to appear)? What insights, specifically, might asymmetries in these domains (e.g. differential object and subject marking, alignment asymmetries, reflexes of the Person-Case Constraint) contribute to our understanding?

• Does variation regarding null arguments and "phi-behaviour" more generally give us clues as to the nature of the formal features that regulate the syntactic computation? Can we classify clues of this type in such a way that they might give us

insight into how children are able to employ them in language acquisition? Conversely, can acquisition give us additional clues as to the nature of the features from which syntactic systems are constructed? Similarly, what insights might we derive from diachronic investigations?

The invited speakers for CamCoS 4 are:

Pilar Barbosa (Minho)
Maia Duguine (Cambridge/University of the Basque Country)
Ruth Kramer (Georgetown)
Shigeru Miyagawa (MIT)
Mamoru Saito (Nanzan)
Martina Wiltschko (British Columbia)

Call for papers

For the general comparative syntax session, we invite abstracts for 30-minute presentations on any topic in comparative generative syntax as well as the topics outlined above. We particularly welcome papers explicitly addressing parametric issues and/or offering comparative analyses (synchronic or diachronic) of previously un(der)studied languages and/or phenomena, and papers concerned with "bigger picture" questions, such as what insights modern comparative generative syntax might offer in relation to linguistic typology and syntax-interface mappings. We also encourage papers concerned with methodologies for modern comparative generative syntax.

Anonymous abstracts should not exceed two pages (12-point Times New Roman font, with single spacing and margins of at least 2.54cm/1 inch), including examples and references. They should be uploaded in pdf format via EasyAbstracts (http://linguistlist.org/confservices/camcos4). The submission deadline is Friday, 16 January 2015.

Please see the conference and project website (http://www-falcon.csx.cam.ac.uk/site/RECOS/conference/camcos4) or contact Theresa Biberauer (mtb23@cam.ac.uk) for more information.