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Coordination of Unlike Categories in Serbo-Croatian

The long-established account for the well-formedness of coordination of unlike categories (Sag et al, 1985), which suggested that unlike conjuncts can coordinate as long as the inital conjunct conforms to the selectional features of the head component (1), was recently challenged by Bruening and Al Khalaf (2020) in two ways: (i) based on cases where coordinated conjuncts precede the selecting head Bruening and Al Khalaf infer it is not the initial but the closest conjunct that matters (2), and (ii) categorial diversity in coordination is rather limited to NPs and CPs, and APs and AdvPs.

Bruening and Al Khalaf (BA) suggested a universal approach for those cases. They proposed a null syntactic head to treat CPs as NPs and AdvPs as APs. This proposal goes against previous generalizations toward the initial conjunct agreement based on Sag et al., and suggests that coordination structure is determined by the closest conjunct. This is the proposal I consider. BA's account was proposed as universal, but was based only on English data. Therefore, in my talk, I will test the proposal against Serbo-Croatian data to see if the universality claim can be given some crosslinguistic support. I will model my S-C data closely on BA's English data and go through it systematically. I will show how argument conjuncts of unlike categories in S-C behave independently, as well as a whole, when coordinating. What I will argue is that the analysis supports BA's proposal, i.e., the claim that the well-formedness of the structures with coordination of unlike categories is determined by the closest conjunct. I will present syntactic variation in standard and colloquial S-C to account for the apparent mismatch. The unlike coordination will be shown to be only apparent (also in line with Progovac, 1997).

This is a work in progress, and while my investigation reveals support for BA, it has also brought up some questions for future work. Those include what is the nature of the closest conjunct and how can it support an asymmetric structure for coordination.

(1) a. We talked about [[$_{NP}$ the issues we had worked on as students] and [$_{CP}$ that our perspectives had changed over the years]].

[NP& CP]

b. *We talked about [[$_{CP}$ that our perspectives had changed over the years] and [$_{NP}$ the issues we had worked on as students]].

(Sag et al, 1985, (130a))

(2) a. [[$_{CP}$ That our perspectives had changed over the years] and [$_{NP}$ the issues we had worked on as students]] were the topics of discussion.

[CP&NP]

b. *[[$_{NP}$ The issues we had worked on as students] and [$_{CP}$ that our perspectives had changed over the years]] were the topics of discussion.