

Syntax Driven (Crazy) By Morphology:

Morphological effects in the choice of relativization strategies in Zurich German¹

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1. Morphology Driven Syntax

One of the core features of minimalism² is the idea that syntax is driven by morphology. The idea originated, within generative grammar, with the analysis of passive-like constructions in terms of a noun phrase that has to move into a subject position in order to pick up nominative case. In the case of *wh*-movement constructions, this was slightly less straightforward, but since a *wh*-feature had always been assumed to be present in the complementizer of *wh*-clauses the obvious move was to say that the *wh*-feature of the *wh*-word (or phrase) had to be checked against the *wh*-feature in C? If we want to call the latter way of handling things “morphology driven syntax”, then we have to stretch the concept of morphology to a certain extent, though presumably *wh*-words have their name for a good reason. It is fair to say that in actual minimalist practice there is an abundance of cases in which movement is driven by features that have little or no morphological correlate.³ Such considerations do not necessarily militate against the approach as such, but they do suggest that the relationship between morphology-driven syntax and morphology proper is not, at this point, crystal clear.

2. Headed and Headless Relative Clauses in Swiss German

The purpose of the present note is to present two facts from the syntax of relative clauses in *Zürichdeutsch* (henceforth ZT⁴) which show that very minor morphological distinctions can have very far reaching effects on the syntax. More particularly, ZT has two major relativization strategies: the movement strategy, (MS), in which a *wh*-word functions as relative pronoun and is moved to the front of the clause, as in *wh*-questions, and the resumptive pronoun strategy, (RPS), in which the relative clause is introduced by an invariant relative complementizer *wo* while the relative element itself is a resumptive pronoun which remains *in situ* unless it can cliticize to *wo*, in

¹ I was stimulated by reading Manuela Schenberger's (1998) dissertation to look again at Swiss German relative clauses. Thanks are due to Hans Broekhuis, Norbert Corver, Marcel den Dikken and Riny Huijbregts for helpful discussion.

² See Chomsky (1995).

³ An extreme instance of this is the practice of some authors such as Koopman & Szabolcsi (1998) to define the desired landing site of a movement operation as L_i (L for Landing Site), a functional head projecting in the usual way to LP (Landing Site Phrase).

⁴ This is the variety of Swiss German spoken in the region of Zurich, Switzerland. See Van Riemsdijk (1989) for more extensive discussion of ZT relative clauses.

which case it gets deleted.⁵ Roughly speaking the RPS is used for headed relatives while the MS is used in free relative clauses.

Let me illustrate these two types:⁶

(1) RPS:

- a s huus wo-n-ich dr??jaar hinder *em* kwont han
the house that I three years behind it lived have
“the house that I lived behind for three years”
- b en voortraag wo-n-ich glaube das ich *en* n?d ganz verstande han
a lecture that I believe that I it not entirely understood have
“a lecture that I don’t believe I understood entirely”
- c de maa wo (-~~en~~) mer [] iiklade h?nd
the man that we invited have
“the man that we invited”

(2) MS:

- a Ich han *was* du miir kchochet h?sch nonig k?sse
I have what you me cooked have not-yet eaten
“I haven’t eaten yet what you cooked for me”
- b *Wem* mer n?d tr?ut git mer kch? g?d
whom one not trusts gives one no money
“To whom you don’t trust you give no money”

Before moving on to some problematic deviations from this general pattern, consider the way in which the pretheoretical notion “choice between two relativization strategies” can be interpreted given current ideas about the organization of syntax.

⁵ This only applies to the subject and object positions, and marginally to the indirect object position of the highest clause under the relative complementizer. See Van Riemsdijk (1989) for details.

⁶ The transcription is semi-phonetic and semi-derivative from Standard German. The resumptive pronoun in (1) and the *wh*-pronoun in (2) are italicized. For the absence of a resumptive pronoun in (1c), see footnote 4.

3. Choosing Your Strategy in Minimalism

The two strategies can be summarized as follows:

(3)

<p>RPS:</p> <p>?? insertion of “normal” personal pronoun (clitic when available) in source position</p> <p>?? insertion of lexical material in the head position</p> <p>?? adjunction and subsequent deletion of the clitic to the C? position next to the head of the relative clause</p>	<p>MS:</p> <p>?? insertion of <i>wh</i>-word in source position</p> <p>?? no insertion of any material in the head position</p> <p>?? movement of the <i>wh</i>-word to the Spec,C position next to the head</p>
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In the RPS, some version of the “aboutness condition” must be assumed to be responsible for the presence of a pronoun which shares the appropriate features with the head so that it can be coreferential with it. In this respect, headed relative clauses in ZT may be taken to be on a par with hanging topic left dislocation constructions.⁷ Furthermore, some updated version of my (1989) “global avoid pronoun strategy” may be held responsible for the deletion of the clitic when it is part of the relative clause complementizer. Finally, C? must be assumed to be devoid of any features that might require checking. In the case of the MS, on the other hand, some feature, call it WH, must be assumed to be present in C?. This will force the presence of the *wh*-word, and it will force that *wh*-word to move to the Spec,C next to the (empty) head.⁸ What is quite unclear, at this point, is how it is possible for properties of the head of the relative clause to be linked to properties of C?. But since ZT, like many other languages, has a specialized complementizer for relative clauses, it seems quite clear that such a relation has to exist anyway. Perhaps the most straightforward way to express such a relationship would be to say that the presence vs. absence of lexical material in the head position constitutes a contextual condition on the lexical insertion of the complementizer:⁹

(4)

$$[C?WO]_{[?]} / [DP [DP \text{lexical material}] [CP \text{Spec,C} \text{---}]]$$

$$[C??]_{[WH]} / [DP [DP ?] [CP \text{Spec,C} \text{---}]]$$

⁷ See Van Riemsdijk (1997) for some discussion.

⁸ Riny Huijbregts suggests that it may be possible to reduce the two strategies to a single one with movement being overt in one case and covert in the other. Note however that we would then expect the resumptive pronouns to be island sensitive. It is true, of course, that bounding theory effects are not on the minimalist agenda, but that makes constructive discussion of such a proposal impossible.

⁹ This is by no means unproblematic, from a minimalist point of view in that lexical insertion is, in a sense, strictly cyclic. However a notion of late lexicalization of grammatical formatives, as proposed in Emonds (1987, and later work) would probably work appropriately here. Along different lines, a conception of morphology such as that proposed in Halle & Marantz (1993).

This is still quite loose, but it will have to suffice. The main point is that an account along these lines yields a neat split between the two strategies at the constructional level: empty head \approx MS, lexical head \approx RPS.

While this is the overall pattern, it turns out, however, that there are two remarkable deviations from this pattern.

4. Headed Relatives with MS

There are two cases in which what is patently a headed relative clause can or must be constructed by means of the MS rather than by the RPS: (a) relatives headed by *das* (“that”) and *alles* (“everything”), and (b) relativization of locatives. Consider first case (a):

(5)

a *das was du mitgnoo hʔsch*
 that which you with-taken have
 “that which you took with you”

b *das wo (-ʔ) du mitgnoo hʔsch*

(6)

a *alles was mer hʔnd wele das er sʔt*
 everything which we have wanted that he says
 “everything we wanted him to say”

b *alles wo mer hʔnd wele das er sʔt*

With these *das/alles* cases, we see that both patterns are possible.¹⁰ And the a-examples have the regular *wh*-word which we would expect in this position under the MS. Note furthermore, that (6a) shows that long movement is possible, as expected under the MS, whereas the RPS in (6b) requires the pronoun to be present. *Das/alles* are semantically quite light, of course, so one might entertain the idea that these examples are, in some loose semantic sense, free relatives as well.¹¹ But that is misleading in that the nonneuter equivalents of *das/alles* do not tolerate the MS and can only be used in the RPS:

¹⁰ In fact, Dutch shows a related phenomenon here. Where normally one gets (*dat*) with headed relatives, the corresponding *wh*-word *wat* must be chosen when the head of the relative is *dat* or *alles*.

¹¹ *Alles* is an overt universal quantifier, but to a certain extent the overt expression of universal quantification can be taken to be redundant because truly headless free relatives receive a universally quantified interpretation as well, as in *was mer nʔd wʔss das biisst ʔn nʔd* (“what one does not know that does not bite one”).

- (7)
- a die *w??r / ^{OK}wo geschter gschoorbe-n-isch
the-one_{FEM} who/that yesterday died has
“the one who died yesterday”
- b d?? *w??r / (*wen) / wo mer h? troffe h?nd¹²
the-one_{MASC} who/whom/that we today met have
“the one we met today”
- c alli *w??r / ^{OK}wo moorn uf Z?ri ch?med
all_{PL} who/that tomorrow to Zurich come
“all who come to Zurich tomorrow”

It would appear then that on the one hand we have a true switch of strategy, not just a lexical substitution of *was* for *wo*, and on the other hand that the switch in strategy is limited to the neuter singular of exactly two pronominal head nouns, *das* and *alles*.¹³

Turning now to case (b) and the examples in (8), we see something similar.

- (8)
- a d stadt wo de Pieter gschaffet h?
the city where (the) Pieter worked has
“the city where Pieter used to work”
- b d stadt wo-n-ich gh?at han das de Pieter [] anegaat
the city that I heard have that (the) Pieter goes-to
“the city that I heard Pieter is going to”

The question word for “where” is homophonous with the relative complementizer: *wo*. Furthermore, there is no weak locative pronoun in ZT. To refer to a location with a pronoun, a demonstrative has to be used: *da* or *deet*. The former can only be used deictically to refer to the locus of the utterance. At any rate, demonstratives or *d*-words can never be used as resumptive pronouns. This implies that the only way to express a relativized location is by using the MS. Hence, the *wo* in the examples in (8) must be taken to be the locative *wh*-word, not the relative complementizer.¹⁴

¹² Swiss German is generally taken to lack and accusative form (here: *wen*). In my own speech, however, the accusative *wh*-word is marginally possible. This may be due to the tight contact between Swiss German and Standard German, in which the accusative is fully productive.

¹³ Further plausible candidates would be *?ppis* (“something”), *?pper* (“someone”), *n??* (nothing) and *niemer* (“nobody”). I find *was* quite bad with *?ppis* and totally excluded with the other forms. For an optimality theoretic discussion of related facts in Dutch, see Broekhuis & Dekkers (to appear).

¹⁴ Temporal relatives are like locatives in this respect: they are constructed with *wo* under the MS. And there is no weak temporal pronoun which could serve as a resumptive pronoun.

5. Crazy?

Interpreting these facts from a minimalist perspective, there are essentially two extreme positions that one could take. One would be to say that such phenomena strongly support the idea that syntax is driven by morphology. The reasoning would run like this. Syntax is driven by morphology, we know that morphology is erratic and exception-prone, hence it is expected that morphology can cause exceptional patterns in syntax, even to the extent that the choice of wildly divergent syntactic strategies can be triggered by specific morpho-lexical choices. The other line, on the contrary, would be to say that such extreme morpho-lexical dependency of syntactic processes was never intended by minimalism. In fact, if features are the only reflexes of morphology in the syntax, and if, furthermore, syntactically active features are assumed to be able to occupy their own functional positions in the syntactic structure, then extreme restraint in letting such features have access to syntax would seem to be advisable. Most syntacticians, I trust, would profess to adhere to such a more parsimonious school of thought.

Be that as it may, both approaches are faced with considerable problems. The latter because the facts reported above remain quite problematic. The former, on the other hand, seems to predict that the choice of specific morpho-lexical items or subclasses could have far-reaching syntactic effects, including the choice between radically different strategies, at a much larger scale than is suggested by the examples given here. But that seems wrong. While many syntacticians, myself included, undoubtedly have a tendency to overlook or ignore such smaller-scale facts, it nevertheless does not seem to be the case that languages do this all over the place. For example, we would be quite surprised to find a language in which the choice between over *wh*-movement vs. *wh-in-situ* was dependent on the specific verb which selects the question: ask ↗ move, wonder ↗ stay *in situ*, etc. As a corollary to this, note also that it may not be an accident that reading a text on language acquisition is what alerted me to such facts again.¹⁵ Similarly, it may not be an accident that the facts reported here come from Swiss German dialects, that is, from non-standardized languages which, furthermore, have coexisted for a long time with the standard language, German.

¹⁵ A final remarkable example along similar lines is that of Verb Second patterns in embedded contexts with specific matrix verb forms. Here too we have movement triggered by a highly complex and idiosyncratic cluster of lexical, morphological and syntactic conditions. This example comes out of Schenberger's (1998) dissertation. By and large, Swiss German is like German and Dutch in that embedded clauses are verb final. There are some exceptions, though. One occurs with the verb *wüsse* "know", but only when the following conditions are met: (a) the verb occurs in the second person singular, present tense indicative - *wüssch*; (b) it occurs in a yes/no question and hence is inverted with its (pronominal) subject - *wüssch (du)*; (c) it selects a *wh*-question:

- (i) *Wüssch (du) wänn chunt de Hans hätt aabig?* (know-you when comes Hans to night?)
- (ii) **Du wüssch wänn chunt de Hans hätt aabig.*
- (iii) **Fröggsch (du) wänn chunt de Hans hätt aabig?* (ask-you ...)
- (iv) **Wüssch (du) chunt de Hans hätt aabig?* (know-you whether ...)
- (v) *?*Wüstisch (du) wänn chunt de Hans hätt aabig?* (would-you know when ...)

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