Multifunctionality and syncretism in non-finite forms

Pavel Rudnev, Ksenia Shagal & Anna Volkova
(NRU Higher School of Economics, Moscow;
University of Helsinki; & NRU Higher School of Economics, Moscow)

This workshop aims at discussing multifunctionality in the domain of non-finite verb forms. Crosslinguistically, it is common for non-finite forms to occur in a variety of dependent clauses performing different functions. For example, as can be seen from Cristofaro's (2003) data, in the majority of cases, non-finite forms used for adnominal modification are not specific to this function, but can be found in other subordinate constructions as well (see also Hendery 2012: 171). Van Lier (2009: 206–210) shows that in a genealogically and geographically balanced sample of 50 languages all logically possible combinations of functions are attested, i.e. reference function, adnominal modification, and adverbial modification. For instance, the nominalization in *-n-* in Kayardild (Tangkic), an example of the most flexible form, can function as a predicate of a relative clause, a complement clause, or an adverbial clause (Evans 1995: 474–476). Forms that combine the function of predicate of a relative clause with that of predicate of a complement clause are especially common (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1993: 42–44; Shibatani 2009, 2019).

Thus, we believe that these phenomena merit special attention. In particular, the workshop aims to investigate to what extent the internal syntax of non-finite clauses headed by these multifunctional forms is determined by their external syntax as realized in distinct grammatical functions, and vice versa. For example, in Kalmyk (Mongolic), participles show differences in argument marking depending on the type of dependent clause in which they occur: participial relative clauses have a genitive (or in some cases nominative) subject, while complement clauses headed by the same forms require a subject in the accusative. In Muna (Austronesian), nominalizations in *ka-* behave differently in reason clauses if compared to the argument function. In reason clauses, they take a specialized non-finite negator and combine with a future marker, while in the argument function they take a constituent negator and no TAM markers whatsoever (van den Berg 2013: 144, 211).

The existence of such multifunctional forms and patterns of syncretism implies a certain degree of categorial continuity which poses serious challenges to theories postulating an inventory of discrete lexical categories (see Baker 2011; Kiparsky 2017 for similar observations), especially the most restrictive ones appealing to just two basic lexical categories of, roughly, noun and verb. On the other hand, those formal theories which dispense with lexical categories altogether by viewing categorization as a byproduct of how functional elements and acategorial lexical elements are put together seem to predict a certain amount of variability and continuity (cf. Halle & Marantz 1993, Borer 2005, Caha 2007, among others), but require additional constraints to exclude rare or unattested patterns. In this regard, multifunctional non-finite forms present an ideal testing ground when choosing between lexicalist and non-lexicalist approaches. As regards the forms themselves, their identity is frequently taken — at least in non-lexicalist frameworks — to be the result of

underspecification, formalized in terms of Halle's (1997) Subset Principle or, conversely, the Superset Principle of nanosyntax (Caha 2007; see Lundquist 2008 for an analysis of multifunctional non-finite forms in Swedish along these lines). That way, a language can use the same building blocks for encoding relations that the grammatical system deems similar or at least similar enough, both synchronically and diachronically (Ramchand 2018).

The questions we want to address at the workshop include the following:

- What functions are typically combined in one non-finite form? Are there constraints on multifunctionality, and if so, then what are they?
- What kind of differences can multifunctional forms show depending on the function they perform (e.g. differences in TAM expression or argument encoding)? Is there a connection between the function of such form and the degree of finiteness it demonstrates?
- What sets multifunctional forms apart in comparison to dedicated (specialized) forms, that is, participles, infinitives, converbs or nominalizations? If not all of the non-finite forms in a language show multifunctionality, which are most likely to be multifunctional? Relatedly, what, if anything, stops the remaining forms from being multifunctional?
- Can any observations be made regarding the frequency distributions of different functions for specific forms? In other words, if a form can be used in several types of non-finite dependent clauses, do the frequencies tend to be evenly distributed across contexts, or is the distribution typically skewed in favour of one function?
- Do languages with multifunctional non-finite forms tend to have any particular properties in other domains of grammar?
- Is multifunctionality of non-finite forms more common in certain geographical areas than in others, and if so, where is it most commonly attested?

We invite contributions from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, both functional and formal. We particularly welcome submissions on understudied or underdocumented languages provided they offer an explicit and substantial theoretical contribution to the issue at hand. Possible topics for submissions may include (but are not restricted to) the following:

- In-depth case studies of multifunctional non-finite forms in individual languages;
- Typological studies of the distribution of multifunctional non-finite forms;
- Formal and functional approaches to the identity of form and diversity of function;
- Quantitative studies of multifunctionality within individual languages and crosslinguistically.

References

Baker, Mark. 2011. Degrees of nominalization: Clause-like constituents in Sakha. *Lingua* 121(7): 1164–1193.

Berg, René van den. 2013 [1989]. *A grammar of the Muna language* (Summer Institute of Linguistics e-Books 52). Summer Institute of Linguistics International.

Borer, Hagit. 2005. *Structuring sense*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Caha, Pavel. 2007. The superset principle. Unpublished ms, University of Tromsø.

Cristofaro, Sonia. 2003. *Subordination* (Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory). Ox-ford: Oxford University Press.

Evans, Nicholas. 1995. *A grammar of Kayardild: with historical-comparative notes on Tangkic* (Mouton Grammar Library 15). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Halle, Morris. 1997. Distributed morphology: Impoverishment and fission. In B. Bruening, Y. Kang & M. McGinnis (eds.), *Papers at the interface*. MITWPL 30: 425–449.

Halle, Morris & Alec Marantz. 1993. Distributed morphology and the pieces of inflection. In K. Hale & S.J. Keyser (eds.), *The view from Building 20*. 111–176. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hendery, Rachel. 2012. *Relative clauses in time and space: A case study in the methods of diachronic typology* (Typological Studies in Language 101). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kiparsky, Paul. 2017. Nominal verbs and transitive nouns: Vindicating lexicalism. In C. Bowern, Laurence Horn & Raffaella Zanuttini (eds.), *On looking into words (and beyond)*. 311–346. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Maria. 1993. *Nominalizations*. London: Routledge.

Lier, Eva van. 2009. *Parts of speech and dependent clauses: A typological study* (LOT Dissertation Series 221). Utrecht: LOT.

Lundquist, Björn. 2008. *Nominalizations and participles in Swedish*. University of Tromsø dissertation.

Ramchand, Gillian Catriona. 2018. *Situations and syntactic structures: Rethinking auxiliaries and order in English*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Shibatani, Masayoshi. 2009. Elements of complex structures, where recursion isn't: The case of relativization. In T. Givón & Masayoshi Shibatani (eds.), *Syntactic complexity: Diachrony, acquisition, neuro-cognition, evolution* (Typological Studies in Language 85), 163–198. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Shibatani, Masayoshi. 2019. What Is nominalization? Towards the theoretical foundations of nominalization. In Roberto Zariquiey & David Fleck (eds.), *Nominalization in languages of the Americas* (Typological Studies in Language 124). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.