Complementizer agreement is clitic doubling: evidence from intervention effects

Astrid van Alem
(Leiden & Potsdam)

It is well known that many non-standard West-Germanic languages have Complementizer Agreement: not only the verb, but also the complementizer agrees with the subject. This phenomenon has led to a debate in the literature about whether CA is pure syntactic agreement (e.g. Van Koppen 2005) or a PF phenomenon (e.g. Ackema & Neeleman 2004, Weisser to appear). The battleground are cases where an element (usually a focus particle) intervenes between the complementizer and the subject, since this may lead to an anti-agreement effect. In this talk I will discuss variation in the anti-agreement effect under intervention in Frisian, Limburgian, and Bavarian. I argue, based on novel and under-studied data, that neither the syntactic nor the PF approach to CA is correct. Instead, I will argue that the CA morpheme is a doubled clitic, making use of diagnostics from the recent debate about the status of object agreement vs. object clitic doubling.

To account for the anti-agreement effect, I follow Van Craenenbroeck & van Koppen’s (2008) account of clitic doubling in Dutch dialects, combined with Dechaine & Wiltschko’s (2002) decomposition of pronouns. I show that the clitic is of varying structural size across the varieties under discussion. This allows us to account of much of the variation with respect to the anti-agreement effect.

The upshots are as follows: first, I show that the question whether something is agreement or clitic doubling is also relevant for cases of (non-canonical) subject agreement. Second, I show that the anti-agreement effect can be reduced to independent properties of the languages under discussion, contra e.g. Baier (2018).