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Syncretism

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Introduction

Syncretism is a term that describes a relationship between morphology and syntax, where the distinctions required by syntax are not realized by morphology for a subset of words. For instance, in Russian there is a syntactically relevant distinction between nominative and accusative, reflected in the different forms of the lexeme “book”: *kniga* (nominative) and *knigu* (accusative). Other nouns in Russian fail to make this distinction: the word for “letter” has the same form for both cases, namely *pis'mo*. In order to determine whether there is an instance of syncretism, it is essential that there is evidence that the distinction involved in the syncretism is to be found in the language. This is provided straightforwardly by the two different forms of the Russian noun for “book” in our example. Syncretism has often been associated with case, but in principle it can occur between values of any feature in different word classes, including—in addition to case—gender, number, person, tense, aspect, and mood. Some features are more prone to syncretism than others. In languages with gender systems, for instance, it is the norm for syncretism to occur between gender values. As well as features in isolation, scholars have researched the interaction between features, identifying differing tendencies to syncretize when they occur together. For instance, one is more likely to observe syncretism within agreement features, such as gender or person, in the presence of tense, aspect, or mood than the other way round. Although differing in their exact theoretical manifestations, there are essentially two possible interpretations of syncretism. Some scholars maintain that only one of these is tenable, while others accept that both interpretations may be valid, depending on the phenomenon being considered. Under one view, syncretism is the resort to the core meaning shared by different feature-values (meaning-based), while under the other, syncretism may be the result of systematic rules within the morphology (form-based). Evidence for the latter can be found where the feature-values involved in the syncretism do not form a natural class. (What constitutes a natural class can be contested, of course.) It is possible to identify three types of theoretical mechanism, or something similar to them, to account for syncretism: underspecification, (morphomic) indexing, referrals. These represent increasingly severe deviations from the ideal correspondence between syntactic distinctions and their realization: underspecification is uninformative but respects feature structure, morphomic indexing represents a separate structure which crosscuts syntax, while referrals are uninformative and also crosscut syntactic distinctions.

General Overviews

Baerman, et al. 2005 is an in-depth study of syncretism. The book defines the area, provides a typology, with data on its occurrence with different morphosyntactic features and in a wide variety of languages, and progresses to the theoretical issues which arise from it. Textbooks on morphology provide a more basic overview than that found in Baerman, et al. 2005. Haspelmath and Sims 2010 is a good one to start with and includes a section on syncretism.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

This book is a crosslinguistic investigation of syncretism. It is broad in its coverage of diverse language families and provides information on different morphosyntactic features and their interaction. It discusses different theoretical approaches to syncretism and presents formally implemented accounts of syncretism in the penultimate chapter.

Haspelmath, Martin, and Andrea D. Sims. 2010. *Understanding morphology*. 2d ed. London: Hodder Education.

An introductory textbook that contains a useful short section on syncretism (section 8.6, pp. 174–179).

Bibliography

Baerman 2002 is a useful resource for works published prior to that date.

Baerman, Matthew. 2002. *Syncretism: An Annotated Bibliography*.

As the date indicates, this is an annotated bibliography which covers one hundred items published up to 2002.

Online Datasets and Resources

Online data on syncretism has been created by members of the Surrey Morphology Group. Case Syncretism and Syncretism in Verbal Person/Number Marking are two datasets on case and person syncretism in the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS), freely available online from the Max Planck Digital Library. The Surrey Morphology Group also provides two online databases; the Surrey Syncretisms Database covers a wide range of morphosyntactic features, while the Surrey Person Syncretism Database covers person syncretism. The Surrey Person Syncretism Database covers fewer languages than Syncretism in Verbal Person/Number Marking, but gives more detail about the syncretisms. Bliss and Ritter 2009 provides a detailed discussion of the issues which arise when creating a database to investigate personal pronouns. Syncretism is one of the issues the database in question was designed to address, although it is not discussed in detail in the article. Brown, et al. 2009 relates the theoretical issues associated with syncretism to the practical ones which arose from creating the Surrey Syncretisms Database.

Bliss, Heather, and Elizabeth Ritter. 2009. A typological database of personal and demonstrative pronouns. In *The use of databases in cross-linguistic studies*. Edited by Martin Everaert, Simon Musgrave, and Alexis Dimitriadis, 77–116. *Empirical Approaches to Language Typology*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

This chapter discusses the issues involved in creating a database for personal and demonstrative pronouns. It does not discuss syncretism in great depth, but it was one of the questions that informed the design, as noted on p. 78. The database is currently not available online (p. 89).

Brown, Dunstan, Carole Tiberius, Marina Chumakina, Greville Corbett, and Alexander Krasovitsky. 2009. Databases designed for investigating specific phenomena. In *The use of databases in cross-linguistic studies*. Edited by Martin Everaert, Simon Musgrave, and Alexis Dimitriadis, 117–154. *Empirical Approaches to Language Typology*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Section 2 of this chapter discusses the issues involved in creating the Surrey Syncretisms Database.

Case Syncretism. In *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*.

A dataset of 198 languages, sampled according to genealogical affiliation. Languages are given the following features: no case marking; no syncretism; core and non-core (syncretism); core cases only. This is a useful tool for getting an overview of case syncretism across a broad sample of languages. As with all WALS online features, it provides an online map to plot the features.

Surrey Person Syncretism Database.

This database covers 111 languages, as opposed to the 198 of the WALS “Syncretism in Verbal Person/Number Marking” chapter,

but it provides information on the values of the person features involved.

Surrey Syncretisms Database.

This database provides detailed descriptions of syncretism in the inflectional paradigms of thirty genealogically and typologically diverse languages. It is particularly useful because it covers all of the relevant morphosyntactic features for each language. It contains 1,256 records.

Syncretism in Verbal Person/Number Marking. In *World Atlas of Language Structures Online*.

The title of this resource is slightly misleading. It is a database of syncretism of person marking in 198 languages. It says nothing about number, although given the prevalence of number as a feature, person marking on verbs will typically be accompanied by this. As with all WALS online features, it provides an online map to plot the features.

Different Interpretations of Syncretism

Syncretism can be interpreted as the resort to a shared common meaning or, in contrast, as a systematic product of the morphological system of rules (and therefore essentially form-based). Müller 2005 is a good example of an approach where syncretism can arise through varying degrees of underspecification, and in this sense can be interpreted in the tradition that makes appeal to a shared common meaning, although it also makes use of other mechanisms of Distributed Morphology. Zwicky 1991 in its discussion of systematic and accidental homophony puts syncretism in an interesting context. Its author sees identity of forms as the default state, with overt morphology overriding this situation. Identities (i.e., syncretism) can still come about because of the failure of rules to apply, differences in the range of form sets, rules of referral (see Directional Syncretism), or lexical listing. An important issue is the extent to which the resulting patterns of syncretism do or do not reflect the underlying feature structure they are supposed to express. Baerman, et al. 2005 outlines the three basic interpretations of syncretism: neutralization, uninflectedness, and canonical syncretism. Neutralization involves the loss of all distinctions in a particular morphosyntactic context. A familiar example is where in many languages all gender distinctions are lost in the plural. Given that the context can be defined in terms of morphosyntax, neutralization respects the underlying feature structure, and morphology merely reflects the fact that the feature is irrelevant for syntax. Uninflectedness, on the other hand, is the failure of morphology to make a distinction which is syntactically relevant. For instance, a typical Russian noun inflects for case and number, and these distinctions are syntactically relevant. For example, adjectives and verbs must agree in number. The noun *pal'to* “coat,” however, does not change its form, but can appear in different contexts requiring the full range of case and number values. Canonical syncretism is the hardest to account for, as some, but not all, values of a feature fail to be distinguished. This can be exemplified with Russian again. The lexeme *komnata* “room” has identical forms for the locative and dative cases, while the noun *koridor* “corridor” does not. The lexeme *komnata* does, however, distinguish other cases.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Section 2.4, pp. 27–25, provides explanations and illustrations of neutralization, uninflectedness, and canonical syncretism.

Müller, Gereon. 2005. Syncretism and iconicity in Icelandic noun declensions: A distributed morphology approach. In *Yearbook of Morphology 2004*. Edited by Geert Booij and Jaap van Marle, 229–271. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

A good example of underspecification where the features are decomposed, which means that it is possible to pick out natural classes. It also treats sharing between inflectional classes and syncretism proper as explainable by the same mechanism. In both cases, an underspecified representation may be involved.

Zwicky, Arnold. 1991. Systematic versus accidental phonological identity. In *Paradigms: The economy of inflection*

Edited by Frans Plank, 113–132. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

An important work which shows that there are a number of reasons why identity between forms can come about.

Frequency and Markedness

A number of researchers make a connection between the notion of markedness and syncretism. The basic idea is that multiple “marked” values, in the sense in which this is understood in markedness theory, will be avoided. One way to do this is to collapse distinctions, resulting in syncretism. Within markedness theory, the notion of a marked feature is tied up with a number of criteria, capturing in some sense the intuition that it is less basic. It should be borne in mind that the validity of markedness as a coherent theoretical construct is contested. Haspelmath 2006 argues that it is an unhelpful notion, used in twelve different senses. In the article, the author discusses what should account for syncretism, including frequency. Markedness has also been appealed to within formal frameworks such as Distributed Morphology in impoverishment rules. This mechanism has a similar effect as rules of referral (see Directional Syncretism). However, the claim is that there will be a resort to the unmarked. Noyer 1998 uses impoverishment to account for data from Nimboran. After features are deleted, they are replaced by the unmarked value. There are counterexamples to this idea of the resort to the unmarked. For instance, Spencer 2000 presents data from Koryak and Chukchi where the marked antipassive is resorted to.

Haspelmath, Martin. 2006. Against markedness (and what to replace it with). *Journal of Linguistics* 42:25–70.

Given its purpose of arguing against markedness as a useful notion within linguistics, it also provides a useful survey of the different ways in which markedness has been used. It includes some helpful discussion on how syncretism has been accounted for, itself making a case for the importance of frequency.

Noyer, Rolf. 1998. Impoverishment theory and morphosyntactic markedness. In *Morphology and its relation to phonology and syntax*. Edited by Steven G. Lapointe, Diane K. Brentari, and Patrick M. Farrell, 264–285. Stanford, CA: CSLI.

Explains impoverishment and illustrates with data from Nimboran, a non-Austronesian (Papuan) language of West Papua.

Spencer, Andrew. 2000. Agreement morphology in Chukotkan. In *Morphological analysis in comparison*. Edited by Wolfgang U. Dressler, Oskar E. Pfeiffer, Markus A. Pöchtrager, and John R. Rennison, 191–222. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Provides an example from Koryak and Chukchi, where it is not the “unmarked” which is resorted to.

Autonomous Morphology

Syncretism constitutes *prima facie* evidence for the autonomy of morphology. This is because the morphology does not honor the distinctions made within syntax. However, the evidence is stronger when the syncretism involves values of a feature which do not form a natural class, and therefore do not respect the feature structure defined by syntax. Aronoff 1994 is a major work within morphology that, among other things, argues for the notion of “morpheme” as a purely morphological function. Blevins 2003 demonstrates the importance of morphomic analysis in West Germanic. Maiden 2009 is of particular interest, because it argues that an identity which was originally due to sound change became morphologically systematic. Stump 2016 is an important work which shows how various phenomena associated with autonomous morphology, such as inflection classes, defectiveness, heteroclisis, stem allomorphy, deponency, etc., can be accounted for using the separation of form-paradigms from content-paradigms, an important distinction for autonomous morphology which is also relevant for syncretism. Baerman 2016 is a useful overview of deviations from one-to-one mapping between content and form in inflectional paradigms, including syncretism.

Aronoff, Mark. 1994. *Morphology by itself*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

One of the most influential works advancing the notion of morphemes and autonomous morphology. The morphomic level is important, as it suggests that syncretism need not reflect morphosyntactic feature structure directly but allows for patterns which crosscut syntax.

Baerman, Matthew. 2016. Paradigmatic deviations. In *The Oxford handbook of inflection*. Edited by Matthew Baerman, 141–159. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

A concise overview of deviations from one-to-one relation between content and form in inflectional paradigms, with a fairly detailed discussion of syncretism and ways of modeling it (pp. 141–147).

Blevins, James. 2003. Stems and paradigms. *Language* 79:737–767.

Demonstrates the advantages of analyzing the shared identities of verb stems in West Germanic along morphomic lines.

Maiden, Martin. 2009. On number syncretism in Romanian third person verb forms. In *Romanística sin complejos: Homenaje a Carmen Pensado*. Edited by Fernando Sánchez Miret, 381–407. Bern, Switzerland: Lang.

Argues, with data from several dialects, that syncretism between the third singular and third plural in the first conjugation in Romanian was originally the product of a phonological rule but has now become a systematic fact about the morphology.

Stump, Gregory T. 2016. *Inflectional paradigms: Content and form at the syntax-morphology interface*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

An important monograph offering a discussion of different inflectional phenomena, including syncretism (chapter 10) from the perspective of autonomous morphology, and developing an articulated theory of linkage between content paradigms and form paradigms.

Paradigms

Because syncretism involves identities between different paradigm cells, it suggests the importance of paradigms in morphology. This point is taken up in Williams 1981 and Williams 1994, but Bobaljik 2002 argues that paradigms are not required in order to account for inflectional syncretism. Stump 2016 (chapter 10) presents arguments in favor of a paradigmatic approach.

Bobaljik, Jonathan. 2002. Syncretism without paradigms: Remarks on Williams 1981, 1994. In *Yearbook of Morphology 2001*. Edited by Geert Booij and Jaap van Marle, 53–86. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

Argues that paradigms are not required in order to explain inflectional syncretism.

Stump, Gregory T. 2016. *Inflectional paradigms: Content and form at the syntax-morphology interface*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 10 discusses the typology of syncretisms, that is, natural-class syncretism, directional syncretism, and morphomic syncretism, and argues that the separation of content paradigms from form paradigms is a natural way to capture syncretisms, especially of the morphomic type.

Williams, Edwin. 1981. On the notions “lexically related” and “head of a word.” *Linguistic Inquiry* 12:245–274.

Develops a theory of paradigms which defines the organization of related forms. This is independent, however, of the particular forms participating in the paradigm (p. 266). Syncretism reflects this abstract organization.

Williams, Edwin. 1994. Remarks on lexical knowledge. *Lingua* 92:7–34.

Syncretism is interpreted as evidence for paradigms. Williams argues that the paradigm can be treated as an abstract tree structure in which the cells are the branches of the tree. Syncretism results where forms are inserted at higher nodes in the tree. Williams argues that there should always be one paradigm in which all the possible distinctions are made.

Directional Syncretism

It is possible to observe syncretisms where one of the feature combinations associated with the form appears to be the primary one. For instance, Russian nouns have nominative-accusative or genitive-accusative syncretism depending on the animacy (or gender) of the noun, but there is no form that is unique to the accusative. It therefore appears that the accusative “borrows” the form of either the nominative or the genitive. Directional syncretisms provide evidence for rules of referral. Zwicky 1985 first introduced the notion of referrals to account for nominative-accusative syncretism in his account of German nominals. Referrals refer one morphosyntactic bundle to another in order to obtain the realization. Stump 1993 develops the idea of rules of referral in a formalized theory of morphology, and Stump 2001 presents a typology of syncretism involving three basic types (unstipulated, symmetrical, and directional; cf. natural-class, morphomic, and directional syncretism in later work of the same author); it accounts for directional syncretism using rules of referral within the Paradigm Function Morphology framework. In an unpublished paper presented at the Berkeley Linguistics Society in 2000, Zwicky himself later rejects the notion of referral, arguing that all syncretism should be treated as symmetrical, with underspecification accounting for directionality. Wunderlich 2004 explicitly argues against the need for directional syncretism, presenting an optimality-theoretic (OT) analysis. Baerman 2004 is an important response to both of these. It demonstrates that there is a need for referral-like rules, because of the problems associated with what its author calls convergent and divergent bidirectional syncretism, with symmetrical rules unable to account for the latter. An example of divergent bidirectional syncretism can be found in the Latin second declension. The lexeme *bellum* “war” is syncretic between nominative and accusative, as is the lexeme *vulgus* “crowd,” but with one the form ends in *-um*, while with the other it ends in *-us*. The default pattern is for *-us* to be used in the nominative and *-um* in the accusative. Baerman 2004 shows that directional rules can capture this satisfactorily, while symmetrical rules must treat the identity for the *vulgus* type as accidental in order for them to work. Baerman 2004 also argues that the machinery Wunderlich 2004 employs can in fact produce directional rules. Hansson 2007 argues that rules of referral account for extension of a syncretic pattern in North Saami. Xu 2007 contains a useful discussion of directionality and argues for output-output constraints in OT to account for directional effects. Brown and Hippiisley 2012 shows how the combination of default inference and referral (termed “generalized referral”) allows whole paradigm cells to be picked out for syncretism.

Baerman, Matthew. 2004. Directionality and (un)natural classes in syncretism. *Language* 80:807–827.

Presents analysis and data which argue for directional rules, in particular because it is not possible to account for bidirectional divergent syncretism without rules of referral or something similar.

Brown, Dunstan, and Andrew Hippiisley. 2012. *Network Morphology: A defaults-based theory of word structure*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 4, especially pp. 170–175, discusses the role of generalized referrals in accounting for syncretism and argues that they do more than merely state things directly.

Hansson, Gunnar O. 2007. Productive syncretism in Saami inflectional morphology. In *Saami linguistics*. Edited by Ida Toivonen and Diane Nelson, 91–135. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Argues that the diachronic extension of the inflectional identity of comitative singular and locative plural in eastern Finnmark dialects of North Saami presents strong evidence for referrals.

Stump, Gregory T. 1993. On rules of referral. *Language* 69:449–479.

Develops a formalized account of syncretism using the notion of rules of referral proposed in Zwicky 1985 and introduces the notion of bidirectional syncretism.

Stump, Gregory T. 2001. *Inflectional morphology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

A major work within morphological theory which deals with syncretism in chapter 7, pp. 212–241, arguing for referrals to account for directional syncretism.

Wunderlich, Dieter. 2004. Is there any need for the concept of directional syncretism? In *Explorations in nominal inflection*. Edited by Lutz Gunke, Gereon Müller, and Gisela Zifonun, 373–395. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Uses OT constraint ranking to derive directional effects in syncretism.

Xu, Zheng. 2007. *Inflectional morphology in optimality theory*. PhD diss., Stony Brook University.

Contains useful discussion of directionality in chapter 5, pp. 106–119, and argues for output-output constraints.

Zwicky, Arnold. 1985. How to describe inflection. In *Proceedings of the eleventh annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*. Edited by M. Niepokuj, M. V. Clay, V. Nikiforidou, and D. Feder, 372–386. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society.

The first work to propose rules of referral.

Underspecification

Where syncretism is interpreted as the resort to a shared common meaning, or *Gesamtbedeutung* in the sense of Jakobson 1971 and Jakobson 1958, underspecification is a natural option, typically with the form being assumed to express information about a natural class. Bierwisch 1967 shows how this is applied to German inflection. Feature geometries are a variant on this theme, with morphosyntactic values structured in such a way that the syncretism is the resort to a meaning generalized over each value by a higher node in a tree representation. McCreight and Chvany 1991 is an important example of this; Johnston 1997 is also geometry-based, but allows an additional mechanism of “unmarking.” In contrast with these earlier approaches and ones which follow them, Müller 2011 shows how syncretism can be modeled by adopting an optimality theoretic approach in which there are primary exponents for particular feature combinations, but these can be used to realize other combinations in the last resort.

Bierwisch, Manfred. 1967. Syntactic features in morphology: General problems of so-called pronominal inflection in German. In *To honor Roman Jakobson: Essays on the occasion of his seventieth birthday*. Vol. 1. 239–270. The Hague: Mouton.

A classic work which illustrates the Jakobsonian approach as applied to German inflection.

Jakobson, Roman O. 1958. Morfoložičeskie nabljudenija nad slavjanskim sklonenijem. In *American contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists, Moscow*. 127–156. The Hague: Mouton.

In Russian. A revision of Jakobson's earlier work. The features used were refined, but the basic philosophy remained the same.

Jakobson, Roman O. 1971. Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre: Gesamtbedeutung der russischen Kasus. In *Selected writings*. Vol. 2, *Word and language*. By Roman O. Jakobson, 23–71. The Hague: Mouton.

In German. Reprint of a highly influential work which originally appeared in 1936. It breaks down the cases of Russian into a number of features and treats case syncretism as the result of the underspecification of some of these features, so that the syncretic form expresses a common meaning.

Johnston, Jason. 1997. Systematic homonymy and the structure of morphological categories: Some lessons from paradigm geometry. PhD diss., University of Sydney.

Extends the geometric model of McCreight and Chvany 1991 but allows for "unmarking," which enables it to account for overlapping syncretisms.

McCreight, Katherine, and Catherine V. Chvany. 1991. Geometric representation of paradigms in a modular theory of grammar. In *Paradigms: The economy of inflection*. Edited by Frans Plank, 91–112. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Presents a feature geometric approach to syncretism, where possible syncretisms indicate the relationship of morphosyntactic values in relation to each other.

Müller, Gereon. 2011. Syncretism without underspecification: The role of leading forms. *Word Structure* 4: 53–103.

An important OT account which eschews underspecification in favor of an approach in which syncretism arises where leading forms are selected to fill potential gaps in the paradigm. These forms are selected because they are minimally unfaithful to the feature specification required for the paradigm cells that they fill.

Syncretism and the Internal Structure of Words

The extent to which words are divided up into constituent parts (subanalysis) will influence how syncretism is analyzed. Pike 1965, for instance, concentrated on "formatives" rather than whole word forms in his analysis of German. Baerman, et al. 2005 argues that breaking down words into these smaller elements makes the resulting parts peculiar to a particular analysis and does not facilitate typological comparison. Müller 2008, in part of its author's discussion of Baerman, et al. 2005, takes issue with this stance and argues that in its formal analyses Baerman, et al. 2005 does rely on subanalysis. An important consideration is that where one looks for typological evidence for particular syncretisms, using whole words rather than much smaller elements reduces the chances of observing identities that have arisen by chance.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Presents the typological evidence for syncretisms using whole word forms rather than smaller units below the word level, justified in section 1.3, pp. 7–9. The data sources for the typological survey are based on the analysis of whole word forms (see Online Datasets and Resources).

Müller, Gereon. 2008. Review of *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*, by Matthew Baerman, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. *Word Structure* 4: 199–222

An in-depth review article in which a number of issues are addressed. Müller discusses subanalysis and syncretism in terms of the contrast between typology and theory.

Pike, Kenneth. 1965. Non-linear order and anti-redundancy in German morphological matrices. *Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung* 32:193–221.

Presents an account of German paradigms which breaks up words into super- and sub-morphemic units.

Features

As noted in the discussion in the Introduction, case is the feature most often associated with syncretism. In theory, however, it could occur between values of any feature, although there are differences in the prevalence of syncretism across different features. Baerman, et al. 2005 provides an overview of the occurrence of syncretism for different features.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 3, pp. 37–125, provides data and discussion of the occurrence of syncretism in the following features: case, gender, number, person, tense-aspect-mood.

Case

Case is the most widely discussed feature in relation to syncretism. Iggesen 2005a and Iggesen 2005b are typological studies of case syncretism dependent on nominal type. Baerman 2009 provides a good overview and discusses a four-way typology (from Baerman, et al. 2005, cited under Features): syncretism of core cases only, typically those involved in expressing subject and object (type 1); syncretism of core with non-core cases (type 2); syncretism between non-core cases (type 3); and case syncretism involving some other feature, such as number (type 4). Baerman 2009 notes that the type of patterns found for type 3 in Indo-European cannot be readily found outside of it. This suggests that the finer feature-based interpretations of syncretism in oblique cases, as seen for instance with approaches based on Underspecification or feature geometry, may not be universally tenable. Goddard 1982 is interesting, because it suggests that “split-ergative” systems, where pronouns or higher animates look as though they follow a nominative-accusative alignment system while other nouns follow an ergative-absolutive pattern, can be modeled as syncretism of the nominative and the accusative or the ergative. Zaliznjak 2002 is an important work, often overlooked because it is written in Russian. It discusses in detail how one decides on the case inventory of a language, which is of course relevant for deciding on instances of syncretism. Corbett 2012 is a recent major work on features and includes a discussion of the method employed by Zaliznjak. Arkadiev 2009 treats typologically nontrivial instances of case syncretism in the context of singular number. Plank 1991 discusses case syncretism from the perspective of paradigm geometry.

Arkadiev, Peter. 2009. Syncretisms and neutralizations involving morphological case: Challenges for markedness theory. In *New challenges in typology: Transcending the borders and refining the distinctions*. Edited by Alexandre Arkhipov and Patience Epps, 105–126. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Shows on the basis of a number of Indo-European languages that, contrary to claims by the proponents of markedness theory, case can sometimes be more prone to syncretism in the singular than in the plural, and suggests a diachronic explanation for this.

Baerman, Matthew. 2009. Case syncretism. In *The Oxford handbook of case*. Edited by Andrew Spencer and Andrej Malchukov, 219–230. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Presents a useful four-way typology of case syncretism, opposing core to non-core cases.

Corbett, Greville G. 2012. *Features*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press.

A comprehensive overview of feature systems in which syncretism is discussed at a number of points. It also provides a particularly insightful exposition in chapter 4 (pp. 73–79) of the approach employed by Zaliznjak.

Goddard, Cliff. 1982. Case systems and case marking in Australian languages: A new interpretation. *Australian Journal of linguistics* 2:167–196.

Suggests that split-ergativity can be treated as syncretism of the nominative and the accusative or the ergative.

Iggesen, Oliver A. 2005a. Asymmetrical case marking. In *World atlas of language structures online*. Edited by Matthew Dryer and Martin Haspelmath. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

Presents the results of Iggesen 2005b in a succinct and accessible form.

Iggesen, Oliver A. 2005b. *Case-asymmetry: A world-wide typological study on lexeme-class-dependent deviations in morphological case inventories*. Munich and Newcastle, UK: LINCOM Europa.

A whole-world typology of differences in the expression of case between different types of nominals, showing, among other things, a cross-linguistic prevalence for personal pronouns to either show syncretism of cases distinguished by nouns or vice versa.

Plank, Frans. 1991. Rasmus Rask's dilemma. In *Paradigms: The economy of inflection*. Edited by Frans Plank, 161–196. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

A detailed discussion of case syncretisms in various (mainly Indo-European) languages from the perspective of paradigm geometry, that is, linear arrangement of cases and deviations from it.

Zaliznjak, Andrej A. 2002. O ponimanii termina “padež” v lingvističeskix opisanijax. I. In *Russkoe imennoe slovoizmenenie s priloženiem izbrannyx rabot po sovremennomu russkomu jazyku i obščemu jazykoznaniju*. By Andrej A. Zaliznjak, 613–647. Moscow: Jazyki slavjanskoj kul'tury.

In Russian, this is a reprint of an important work which originally appeared in 1973 in Andrej A. Zaliznjak (ed.), *Problemy grammatičeskogo modelirovanija* (Moscow: Nauka), 53–87. It is important because it discusses the means for establishing case in a language. It introduces the notion of “non-autonomous” (Russian: *nesamostojatel'nyj*) case, a specific kind of syncretism where there is no identifiable form for the particular case but it can be established on the basis of overlapping distribution. See Corbett 2012, chapter 4 (pp. 73–79), for an exposition in English.

Gender

Gender is particularly susceptible to syncretism. Corbett 1991 is a major source for the study of gender systems, including discussion of patterns of syncretism. Greenberg 1963 is the source of the famous Universal 37, which states that there are never more genders in nonsingular numbers than in singular ones.

Corbett, Greville G. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Gender is particularly prone to syncretism, and this is discussed at a number of points in the book. The discussion in chapter 7, “Target genders: Syncretism and enforced gender forms” (pp. 189–224), gives a particularly useful overview of the types of pattern which may occur.

Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements. In *Universals of language*. Edited by Joseph H. Greenberg, 73–113. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Greenberg's Universal 37 states that there are never more genders in nonsingular numbers than in the singular (p. 112). While there are known counterexamples to this claim, including Biak and Fur, the tendency to converge gender distinctions in nonsingular numbers does appear to be crosslinguistically strong.

Person

Subject person syncretism is common, as can be determined by looking at the two online databases for person syncretism (see Online Datasets and Resources). Cysouw 2003 is a comprehensive survey of person marking, and Siewierska 2004 is a major typological work on person, which includes discussion of homophony (i.e., syncretism) and the structure of the person paradigm. Cysouw 2005 specifically discusses syncretisms in the domain of inclusive/exclusive person oppositions. Syncretism effects in one-place verbs differ significantly from those in two-place verbs, as explained in Baerman, et al. 2005. Lakämper and Wunderlich 1998 contains interesting discussion and analysis of the interaction of object and subject marking and syncretism in different varieties of Quechua. Aalberse and Don 2009 and Aalberse and Don 2011 investigate person syncretism across Dutch dialects.

Aalberse, Suzanne, and Jan Don. 2009. Syncretism in Dutch dialects. *Morphology* 19:3–14.

A survey of dialectal variation in person syncretism attested in varieties of Dutch.

Aalberse, Suzanne, and Jan Don. 2011. Person and number syncretisms in Dutch. *Morphology* 21:327–350.

A study of person and number syncretisms in standard Dutch and its dialects, with special consideration of the typologically nontrivial neutralization of person in plural subparadigms.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Provides two separate sections (3.2 and 3.3) on one-place (pp. 57–75) and two-place verbs (pp. 75–81) and discusses their different behaviors. It is important to distinguish one-place and two-place verbs, because subject and object interaction appears to favor person syncretism, and the two types differ in their syncretism patterns.

Cysouw, Michael. 2003. *The paradigmatic structure of person marking*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Provides comprehensive coverage of the morphological expression of person marking, including syncretism.

Cysouw, Michael. 2005. Syncretisms involving clusivity. In *Clusivity: Typology and case studies of the inclusive-exclusive distinction*. Edited by Elena Filimonova, 73–111. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Surveys the attested instances of syncretism involving first-person inclusive and first-person exclusive forms, showing that while the latter is often syncretic with the first-person singular, the former is involved in different syncretic patterns not amenable to a single generalization.

Lakämper, Renate, and Dieter Wunderlich. 1998. Person marking in Quechua—A constraint-based minimalist analysis. *Lingua* 105:113–148.

Shows the role of a person hierarchy in the realization of objects in different Quechua varieties, as well as the interaction with number.

Siewierska, Anna. 2004. *Person*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

A major work on the category of person. Provides an enlightening discussion of the paradigmatic structure of person, including homophony (i.e., syncretism).

Number

Number syncretism is more easily observed when there is more than a singular-plural distinction. It is useful to gain an understanding of the extent of number systems in order to place number syncretism in its broader context. Corbett 2000 is a good place to do this. Arkadiev 2009 presents typologically nontrivial data on number syncretism in the context of the nominative case, and Plank 1986 is a detailed discussion of such a pattern in Old English.

Arkadiev, Peter. 2009. Syncretisms and neutralizations involving morphological case: Challenges for markedness theory. In *New challenges in typology: Transcending the borders and refining the distinctions*. Edited by Alexandre Arkhipov and Patience Epps, 105–126. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Shows on the basis of a number of Indo-European languages that, contrary to claims by the proponents of markedness theory, syncretism of number can be found not only in the context of marked (oblique) case values, but also in the nominative case, and offers a diachronic scenario explaining such systems.

Corbett, Greville G. 2000. *Number*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Number is often implicated in syncretism. Among other examples, this authoritative book provides enlightening examples of syncretism in number's interactions with case and person in sections 9.2.2 and 9.2.3 (pp. 274–277).

Plank, Frans. 1986. Number neutralization in Old English: Failure of functionalism? In *Explanation and linguistic change*. Edited by Willem Koopman, Frederike van der Leek, Olga Fischer, and Roger Eaton, 177–238. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

A detailed discussion of number syncretism in Old English across different case values and different declensions from synchronic, diachronic, and dialectological perspectives, showing that this phenomenon cannot be amenable to a straightforward functional explanation.

Tense, Aspect, and Mood

The expectation is that tense, aspect, and mood are less likely to be syncretic than the features implicated in agreement (see Baerman, et al. 2005, p. 120). However, there are examples of syncretism involving tense, aspect, or mood.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Provides an overview of syncretism in tense-aspect-mood in section 3.6, pp. 95–103.

Features in Combination

Often, rather than features in isolation, a combination of features is implicated in syncretism in some way. This may be where one feature, say number, appears to be a context for syncretism of another feature, say case. (An alternative interpretation of this is not that one feature conditions the syncretism in the other, but that one is just more likely to syncretize than the other.) Aikhenvald and

Dixon 1998 uses syncretism, among other phenomena, as evidence for dependencies between different features. Polarity effects are particularly interesting, where the same form appears to express opposing values of a feature combination. This is discussed in Serzisko 1982, and Baerman, et al. 2005 dedicates a section to it. Arkadiev 2009 discusses data from a range of languages showing syncretism in the context of the unmarked rather than marked values of case or number. Evans 2016 is a description of a language where overlapping syncretisms of individual exponents serve to express a number of inflectional features.

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y., and Robert M. W. Dixon. 1998. Dependencies between grammatical systems. *Language* 74:56–80.

A dependency exists where one system (or feature) determines the choices in another. Syncretism (called “neutralization” by Aikhenvald and Dixon) is evidence of a dependency. For instance, a smaller number of case distinctions in the plural than the singular is taken as evidence for a dependency of case on number (p. 67).

Arkadiev, Peter. 2009. Syncretisms and neutralizations involving morphological case: Challenges for markedness theory. In *New challenges in typology: Transcending the borders and refining the distinctions*. Edited by Alexandre Arkhipov and Patience Epps, 105–126. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Discusses counterexamples to the claim that syncretism should only occur in the context of marked values of inflectional features on the basis of case and number syncretisms. In a number of languages, case syncretism or full neutralization of cases is attested in the singular rather than in the plural, and likewise, neutralization of number in the nominative rather than oblique cases is also found.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Discusses polarity effects in section 3.7, pp. 103–111, distinguishing different types of polarity and arguing that polarity effects cannot be accounted for as semantically natural classes.

Evans, Nicholas. 2016. Inflection in Nen. In *The Oxford handbook of inflection*. Edited by Matthew Baerman, 543–575. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

A description of inflection in Nen, a Morehead-Maró language of New Guinea, whose organizing principle is the unification of syncretic or underspecified exponents serving to express a considerable number of inflectional features.

Serzisko, Fritz. 1982. Numerus/Genus-Kongruenz und das Phänomen der Polarität am Beispiel einiger ostkuschitischer Sprachen. In *Apprehension: Das sprachliche Erfassen von Gegenständen. Vol. 2, Die Techniken und ihr Zusammenhang in Einzelsprachen*. Edited by Hansjakob Seiler and Franz Josef Stachowiak, 179–200. Tübingen, Germany: Narr.

In German. Explores polarity, where a particular combination of values of gender and number shares its form with the opposing values for those features. For instance, in the Somali article the masculine singular and feminine plural share the same form.

Syntactic Status of Syncretic Forms

Syncretism is the failure of morphology to make syntactically relevant distinctions. The featural information realized by syncretic forms may be resolved by the context. For instance, in Russian there is dative-locative syncretism in some nouns, but the syntactic context will determine which case is being used, because a particular preposition or other syntactic configuration requires only one. The syncretism is syntactically determinate. However, Groos and van Riemsdijk 1979 and Zaenen and Karttunen 1984 note that syncretisms can also be indeterminate. That is, a syncretic form can simultaneously satisfy constraints where different values of the feature are required. For instance, the German verb *finden* requires an accusative object, while the German verb *helfen* requires a dative object. In the plural, some German nouns distinguish the dative from other cases, but often there is case syncretism

throughout the plural. The plural of the noun *Frau* “woman,” for instance, is *Frauen*, and all of its case forms are syncretic in the plural. In the German sentence *Er findet und hilft Frauen* “He finds and helps women,” the conjoined verbs share an object, which must be both dative and accusative at the same time. This is syntactically indeterminate. Zwicky and Pullum 1986 argue that instances where identity of form resolves conflicts in agreement and government do not mean that phonology imposes conditions on syntactic rules. Instead, they can arise only where there is ambiguity in features which are imposed by syntax. Ingria 1990 sees such identities as challenging unification-based approaches. Ingria discusses several examples—German relative pronouns, Hungarian wh-movement and topicalization in relation to definiteness marking, objects of conjoined VPs and elided verbs in German—and argues that unification is best suited to build up semantic representations, while variable matching rather than unification should be used to effect syntactic agreement. Bayer 1996 is an important work which presents an account of unlike coordination in Lambek categorial grammar which can be extended to cover neutralization (i.e., syncretism). Dalrymple and Kaplan 2000 argues for an approach to indeterminacy in which features are sets of atomic values. Dalrymple, et al. 2009 refines this approach further. Levy and Pollard 2001 treats indeterminacy within HPSG, where features standardly are well typed and sort-resolved, by applying a lattice-theoretic approach. Sag 2003 tackles indeterminate phenomena, including syncretisms, by arguing for a suspension of the requirement in HPSG that feature structures be sort-resolved.

Bayer, Samuel. 1996. The coordination of unlike categories. *Language* 72:579–616.

Demonstrates that the tools provided by Lambek categorial grammar to deal with coordination of unlikes and nonconstituent coordination can be successfully applied in the analysis of “feature neutralization under phonological identity” (i.e., syntactically indeterminate syncretism).

Dalrymple, Mary, and Ronald M. Kaplan. 2000. Feature indeterminacy and feature resolution. *Language* 76:759–798.

Features are treated as set-valued in order to account for both resolution of features on conjuncts for agreement as well as examples where a syncretic form can appear in a syntactically indeterminate context.

Dalrymple, Mary, Tracy Holloway King, and Louisa Sadler. 2009. Indeterminacy by underspecification. *Journal of Linguistics* 45.1: 31–68.

Develops the approach of Dalrymple and Kaplan 2000, but addresses two key problems: transitivity of equality (e.g., a nominative-accusative syncretic noun incorrectly being allowed to occur with a uniquely accusative form of an adjective) and second-order indeterminacy (e.g., a predicate being indeterminate in its requirements for its complement, which is syncretic).

Groos, Anneke, and Henk van Riemsdijk. 1979. Matching effects in free relatives: A parameter of core grammar. In *Theory of markedness in generative grammar: 1979 GLOW Conference*. Edited by Adriana Belletti, Luciana Brandi and Luigi Rizzi, 171–216. Pisa, Italy: Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa.

An in-depth and influential investigation of free relative clauses. Free relative clauses in German are ungrammatical when the matrix clause and the subordinate clause require different cases (p. 178). Where there is syncretism of the relative pronoun, however, free relatives are grammatical (p. 212).

Ingria, Robert J. P. 1990. The limits of unification. In *Proceedings of the 28th annual meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics, 6–9 June, 1990, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA*. 194–204. Morristown, NJ: Association for Computational Linguistics.

An influential publication which uses syntactically indeterminate syncretisms, among other things, to argue against unification as the correct approach for syntax.

Levy, Roger, and Carl Pollard. 2001. Coordination and neutralization in HPSG. In *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Edited by Frank van Eynde, Lars Hellan and Dorothee Beermann, 221–234. Stanford, CA: CSLI.

Develops a lattice-based account which covers both syntactically indeterminate syncretisms and coordination of unlikes.

Sag, Ivan A. 2003. Coordination and underspecification. In *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Edited by Jong-Bok Kim and Stephen Wechsler, 267–291. Stanford, CA: CSLI.

An important work which uses underspecification to account for the syntactically indeterminate syncretisms and coordination. Dalrymple, et al. 2009 points out that their own approach is similar to Sag's, but Sag employs type subsumption, while theirs uses equality (p. 63 of Dalrymple, et al. 2009).

Zaenen, Annie, and Lauri Karttunen. 1984. Morphological non-distinctiveness and coordination. In *First Eastern States Conference on Linguistics (ESCOL)*. Edited by Gloria Alvarez, Belinda Brodie and Terry McCoy, 309–320. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla.

One of the earliest works to use syntactically indeterminate syncretisms to argue for lexical entries which are partially specified so that they can account for multiple forms.

Zwicky, Arnold, and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 1986. Phonological resolution of syntactic feature conflict. *Language* 62:751–773.

A classic which considers syntactically indeterminate syncretisms and the role of phonology in resolving syntactic conflicts. It is claimed that language-particular phonology cannot impinge on syntactic rules and that there is variation in how much featural difference can be overcome by resolution through phonological identity.

Syncretism in Computational Linguistics

As it leads to ambiguity between morphosyntactic features, syncretism is a practical problem in computational linguistics. There are also, however, computational approaches which approach the matter from a theoretical perspective. Bleiching, et al. 1996 treats syncretism in terms of inheritance hierarchies which describe a partial ordering of the classes that make up word forms. Hipsisley 2010 discusses paradigm relations in its discussion of lexical analysis for natural language processing, with syncretism referred to as the vertical distinction or relation between paradigm cells. Pertsova 2011 presents a machine learning approach to syncretism from a theoretical perspective.

Bleiching, Doris, Guido Drexel, and Dafydd Gibbon. 1996. Ein Synkretismusmodell für die deutsche Morphologie. In *Natural language processing and speech technology: Results of the 3rd KONVENS Conference, Bielefeld*. 237–248. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

In German. Syncretisms in German are used to establish hierarchies of paradigms which are partial orderings of affixal and stem classes.

Hipsisley, Andrew. 2010. Lexical analysis. In *Handbook of natural language processing*. 2d ed. Edited by Nitin Indurkha and Fred J. Damerau, 31–58. London: Chapman & Hall.

A useful survey for lexical analysis in natural language processes, it addresses the issue of paradigms. Syncretism falls under the vertical distinctions across cells.

Pertsova, Katya. 2011. Grounding systematic syncretism in learning. *Linguistic Inquiry* 42:225–266.

Treats patterns of syncretism in terms of constraints on language learning, relying on the notions of underspecification and blocking. Develops an algorithm and tests it using acquisition and typological data.

Suggested Constraints on Syncretism

There have been many attempts to ascertain the constraints on syncretism. Carstairs 1984 analyzed these in terms of the features which are “conditioning” and those which are affected or “neutralized.” Carstairs 1987 discusses, among other things, the specialized notions of “syncretism” and “take-over.” The former involves elimination of a feature contrast in the presence of a particular value of another feature, while the latter occurs where a marker realizes a morphosyntactic value *a* in one context and both values *a* and *b* in another context. Carstairs-McCarthy 1998 considers inflectional marking, in particular syncretism, from the perspective of constraints on lexical items and proposes four axioms in relation to this. Coleman 1991 predicts syncretism instability among different degrees of syncretism: the first degree involves “sporadic” occurrence among individual lexemes, and the highest degree is “total.” Baerman, et al. 2005 provides a discussion of formal representation and possible constraints on syncretism in chapter 4, pp. 126–170. Harley and Ritter 2002 tries to constrain person syncretism by using a branching tree structure which predicts syncretism of first and second person only or of all three persons, but does not allow other combinations. However, there are significant counterexamples to this. Stump 2001 divides syncretism into four types: (i) unstipulated syncretism (accounted for by underspecification); (ii) unidirectional syncretism (accounted for by referrals; see Directional Syncretism); (iii) bidirectional syncretism (where there are referrals in opposing directions for two different sets of words); and (iv) symmetrical syncretism (which is stipulated), with a feature ranking constraint which applies to stipulated syncretisms.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 4, pp. 126–170, describes various formal representations of syncretism and the possible constraints which follow from them, as well as discussing how well these match the crosslinguistic reality.

Carstairs, Andrew. 1984. Outlines of a constraint on syncretism. *Folia Linguistica* 18:73–85.

Talks of constraints on syncretism in terms of those properties which are “conditioning” and those which are “neutralised.”

Carstairs, Andrew. 1987. *Allomorphy in inflection*. London: Croom Helm.

This work is superseded in Carstairs-McCarthy 1998, but it is worth reading to gain an understanding of an important theme that underlies research on this topic, namely the interaction of different features to explain syncretism.

Carstairs-McCarthy, Andrew. 1998. How lexical semantics constrains inflectional allomorphy. In *Yearbook of Morphology 1997*. Edited by Geert Booij and Jaap van Marle, 1–24. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

Treats inflectional marking like lexical items and accounts for syncretism in terms of four axioms: (i) the principle of contrast (affixes must contrast in meaning); (ii) exclusive disjunction bar (an affix cannot have a disjunction of mutually exclusive properties as its meaning); (iii) complementarity bar (affixal meaning cannot contain the specification “not”); and (iv) unmarked property bar (an affix's specification should not refer to the least-marked value of a feature).

Coleman, Robert. 1991. The assessment of paradigm stability: Some Indo-European case studies. In *Paradigms: The economy of inflection*. Edited by Frans Plank, 197–211. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

A useful typology involving four degrees of syncretism. First and second degree syncretism are treated as instances of instability of syncretism. It is worth bearing in mind this useful typology when evaluating claims about systematicity based on the occurrence of syncretism in a small number of items.

Harley, Heidi, and Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Person and number in pronouns: A feature-geometric analysis. *Language* 78:482–526.

Attempts to constrain person syncretism by using a binary tree. Any syncretism other than of first and second person, or of all three

persons, is ruled out. But Baerman, et al. 2005 notes that pronouns with syncretism of second and third person appear to be more common than those with first and second person syncretism.

Stump, Gregory T. 2001. *Inflectional morphology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

A major work on morphological theory which deals with syncretism in detail in chapter 7, pp. 212–241. It divides syncretism into four types: (i) unstipulated syncretism (accounted for by underspecification); (ii) unidirectional syncretism (accounted for by referrals); (iii) bidirectional syncretism (where there are referrals in opposing directions for two different sets of words); and (iv) symmetrical syncretism (which is stipulated).

Related Terms and Concepts

Syncretism is typically understood as a property of synchronic systems, but it has also been used to describe diachronic change whereby inflectional forms and functions merge entirely. Complete merger of the forms would, of course, eliminate the evidence required for the distinction within the language; see Introduction for discussion of the evidence for syncretism. A recapitulation of this issue can be seen in models which assume that the underlying syntax for a given language has available to it the complete inventory of feature values, even where there is no overt evidence for them in the language. Baerman, et al. 2005 gives an overview of the discussion and related notions. Calabrese 2008 is a formal account with an expanded notion of syncretism which includes mapping from a universal inventory onto language-specific forms. The term “syncretism” within cognitive linguistic approaches may also be applied when two or more semantic roles are given the same linguistic realization, that is, when a given grammatical marker conveys two or more roles that could be treated as independent semantic categories, such as the identity between ergatives and instrumentals, between datives and accusatives, etc. This approach to identity is based on the study of polysemy patterns and attempts to explain the conceptual architecture that motivates them. This view seeks to account for the synchronic identity of forms in a given paradigm as resulting from a diachronic process, sometimes backed up with historical data when such data are available (Luraghi 2011). Palancar 2002 and Palancar 2011 provide discussion of agent marking and ergatives within this tradition. Malchukov and Narrog 2011 provides discussion of this general approach and further references. Corbett 2007 compares syncretism with deponency, where a form is used in a function which is the opposite from what one would normally expect. The author shows, using a Canonical Typology approach, that there is a space of possibilities which lie between these two extremes. Stump 2010 examines how syncretism can interact with defectiveness (paradigm gaps) in terms of three canonical interactions, and Sims 2015 (chapter 4) further develops this.

Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett. 2005. *The syntax-morphology interface: A study of syncretism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

A history of the notion and discussion of the terminology is provided in sections 1.1 and 1.2, pp. 3–7.

Calabrese, Andrea. 2008. On absolute and contextual syncretism. In *Inflectional identity*. Edited by Asaf Bachrach and Andrew Nevins, 156–202. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Concentrating on the case paradigms of Latin as well as Classical Greek, Old French, and Sanskrit, this chapter assumes a distinction between “absolute” and “contextual” syncretism. The former involves the failure of a language to realize a category from the universal inventory, while the latter involves collapse of a distinction which otherwise exists in the language.

Corbett, Greville G. 2007. Deponency, syncretism and what lies between. In *Deponency and morphological mismatches (Proceedings of the British Academy, 144)*. Edited by Matthew Baerman, Greville G. Corbett, Dunstan Brown, and Andrew Hippisley, 21–43. Oxford: British Academy and Oxford Univ. Press.

Charts the space between canonical syncretism and deponency, another kind of form-function mismatch.

Luraghi, Silvia. 2011. Case in coognitive grammar. In *The handbook of case*. Edited by Andrew Malchukov and Andrew

Spencer, 136–150. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Exposition of the cognitive grammar view of case. This is a related but different notion of identity between cases based on polysemy and historical development.

Malchukov, Andrej, and Heiko Narrog. 2011. Case polysemy. In *The Handbook of Case*. Edited by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 518–534. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Provides discussion of the approach to case identity as a diachronic process associated with related semantic categories, with further references.

Palancar, Enrique L. 2002. *The origin of agent markers*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Applies a cognitive linguistic approach in which identity is couched in terms of polysemy resulting from a diachronic process.

Palancar, Enrique L. 2011. Varieties of ergative. In *The handbook of case*. Edited by Andrej Malchukov and Andrew Spencer, 562–571. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Provides an informative overview of the different distinctions which can be collapsed together in the ergative case.

Sims, Andrea D. 2015. *Inflectional defectiveness*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

Chapter 4 offers a detailed discussion of the interactions between syncretism and defectiveness based on Stump 2010. A further type of interaction, that is, (partial) complementary distribution, is proposed on the basis of Latvian data.

Stump, Gregory T. 2010. Interactions between defectiveness and syncretism. In *Defective paradigms: Missing forms and what they tell us*. Edited by Matthew Baerman, Greville G. Corbett and Dunstan Brown, 181–210. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

A detailed analysis of the interaction of defectiveness (a gap in the inflectional paradigm) and syncretism. There are three canonical interactions: defectiveness overrides syncretism; syncretism overrides defectiveness; syncretism determines a domain for defectiveness.

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