

Workshop on Particles

University of Cambridge

30 – 31 October 2008

Invited speakers:

Edith Aldridge (University of Washington, Seattle)

Waltraud Paul (CRLAO, EHESS-CNRS, Paris)

The focus of this workshop is a neglected and not very well understood syntactic element, namely that commonly designated “particle” in the descriptive, typological and generative literature. Elements of this type are generally treated in one of two, mutually contradictory ways, either being excluded from consideration alongside functionally/semantically similar non-particle elements or being (largely uncritically) classified as categories no different from non-particles. Thus, for example, Greenberg (1963) famously excluded “uninflected auxiliaries” from his discussion of auxiliary placement relative to the verb and object, basing his Universal 16, regarding the tendency for V, O and Aux placement to be “harmonic” (i.e. either AuxVO or OVAux, or consistently head-initial or head-final), exclusively on the behaviour of inflected auxiliaries. By contrast, it is very common in the modern generative literature to find particles being described as heads of various more or less articulated types (consider, for example, the various C-(related)particles postulated for Celtic and Sinitic languages), heads which may also be realised by elements that are not generally viewed as particles (e.g. fully-fledged finite or non-finite complementisers). The aim of this conference, then, is to work towards a better understanding of the properties that particle and non-particle elements share and also of those which differentiate them.

The specific impetus for the conference is the observation that elements designated ‘particles’ in the literature very frequently violate a seemingly robust word-order constraint, namely the Final-Over-Final Constraint in (1):

- (1) Final-Over-Final Constraint (FOFC – cf. Biberauer, Holmberg & Roberts 2007)
If α is a head-initial phrase and β is a categorially non-distinct* phrase immediately dominating α , then β must be head-initial. If α is a categorially non-distinct head-final phrase, and β is a phrase immediately dominating α , then β can be head-initial or head-final.
[* ‘categorial non-distinctness’ being speculatively defined with reference to a head’s ‘verbal’ [+V] versus ‘nominal’ [+N] specification]

(1) highlights an asymmetry in the distribution of disharmonic word orders that is empirically attested in a range of domains. Consider, for example, the oft-noted VOAux gap in Germanic (cf. i.a. den Besten 1989, Kiparsky 1996), which contrasts with the ready attestation of AuxOV orders in this family (Holmberg 2000 shows that the same gap appears in Finnish and Haddican (2004) registers the corresponding gap in Basque). Similarly, it is well-established that VO languages do not feature final complementisers (cf. Hawkins 1990), whereas OV languages rather commonly have initial complementisers (cf. West Germanic, Turkish, etc.). The unattested pattern is once again ruled out by (1) since it requires a FOFC violation at some level between VP and CP. VOAux and VOC patterns do not seem to be universally ruled out, however: a range of VO languages with non-inflecting (particle?) auxiliaries permit the former pattern, while VO languages featuring clause-final discourse particles would seem to

instantiate the latter. That there may be something to Greenberg’s intuition that particles are in some crucial sense “different”, and therefore potentially not fatal to (1), is suggested by data like that presented in (2) and (3):

- (2) a. yə- ca dəyo lə
 1SG-see picture ASP
 “I am looking at a picture”
- b. ce-də mɪ jə-khəʔ phɪ má nə (*jə-khəʔ)
 3-say COMP 3-FUT take what
 “What did he say that he would take?” [Bwe Karen]
 i.e. auxiliary particles follow V (VOAUX); inflected auxiliaries precede it (AUXVO)
- (3) a. Tân mua gi the?
 Tân buy what PRT
 ‘What did Tân buy?’
- b. Anh đã nói (rằng) cô ta không tin
 PRN ANT say that PRN PRT believe
 ‘He said that she didn’t believe (him).’ [Vietnamese]
 i.e. clause-typing particles are final; complementisers are initial

As the examples show, particles occupy positions from which non-particle elements that are often thought of as being of the same category (here T and C respectively) are systematically barred.

Against this background, we welcome abstracts on topics including, but not limited to the following:

1. The nature of particles

- Do we need a syntactic category ‘particle’?
- Do all particles have common properties (e.g. inability to project, as proposed in Toivonen 2003, or a deficiency of some other kind – for example, morphological invariance)?
- What roles may they play in clausal and nominal contexts?
- What kinds of positions may they occupy?
- Do particles in languages tend to be consistently final or consistently initial or do languages just as commonly exhibit both initially and finally surfacing particles? Do we observe optionality in the placement of (certain) particles within a single language?
- Can particles be spellouts of the “sub-heads” of articulated projections such as the Rizian CP and its TP, DP, PP and other counterparts?
- Can particles be phase-heads (cf. Chomsky 2001 onwards)? If so, and if they can also spell out sub-heads as outlined above, can they give us any insight into which sub-heads are phasal and which are not?

2. The manner in which particles interact with other structural elements

- What is the nature of the relationship between elements such as those highlighted in (2) and (3) above?
- Do we find non-selection-related root-embedded asymmetries in respect of the distribution of particles (cf. i.a. Paul 2008 on the root nature of Chinese clause-typing

particles, and Cavalcante 2007 on the clause-final concord element in Brazilian Portuguese negation structures which is, likewise, restricted to root contexts)?

- Do we observe intervention effects between particles? Between particles and non-particle elements?
- How similar/different are particles and clitics? Do we observe intervention effects between these elements? Are they subject to the same sorts of positioning effects?
- Can particles readily be borrowed where languages are in contact or do we find languages where particle-borrowing has not taken place despite intensive contact which has resulted in large-scale borrowing in other domains?

3. The origins of particles

- Are they grammaticalised units deriving from more contentful elements or do particles tend not to be elements that have undergone grammaticalisation processes?
- How frequently are particles homophonous with (an)other particle element(s) in the same language, which may or may not differ in positioning and/or headedness?

4. Particles cross-linguistically

- How similar/different are particles in different languages families (e.g. those found in the Celtic languages, in Germanic and in the languages of East Asia, Austronesia, Africa, etc.)?
- Does it make sense to think in terms of a typology of particles?

Papers may deal with these questions from any theoretical or empirical standpoint. We particularly welcome papers focusing on particles in lesser studied languages and on languages which exhibit structures that (superficially appear to) violate (1).

Presentations will be allotted forty minutes (30 minutes for the presentation followed by ten minutes for questions). Abstracts should not exceed two A4/letter-size pages and be in 10- or 12-point type with standard margins. They should be submitted by e-mail in pdf format to Theresa Biberauer (mtb23@cam.ac.uk) by **1 September 2008**. Notification of acceptance by **15 September 2008**.

Local Organisers: Theresa Biberauer and Glenda Newton

Scientific Committee

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