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Saggi



Economy and Explicitness. Easiness and Faithfulness. Iconicity and Efficiency. Are these terms equivalent?

PAOLO RAMAT

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to confront dichotomic terms which have been used in order to describe and understand the forces operating in language. It will be shown that they are not equivalent and, on the contrary, refer to different approaches to language: they are not reducible to a single opposition. Consequently, a different approach, based on the efficiency criterion, is suggested that goes beyond the dichotomies underlying traditional linguistic types.

KEYWORDS: grammar, analyticity, transparency, iconicity, efficiency.

1. *Economy and Explicitness*

As stated in the abstract, this article deals with some conceptual and lexical dichotomies which have been and still are discussed in linguistic literature. The sections consider the opposite terms that are usually paired in dichotomies, starting with ‘economy’ vs. ‘explicitness’ and explains what these terms refer to. ‘Easiness’ and ‘faithfulness’, with their more or less German equivalents *Bequemlichkeit* and *Deutlichkeit*, as used by Georg von der Gabelentz, are the subject of § 2, while § 3 introduces a new couple of terms – ‘iconicity’ and ‘efficiency’ – which transfers the approach to language to a different level, namely the functional one: from the (typological) description of the linguistic structures to their communicative efficiency. Such a viewpoint leads to the conclusion that the dichotomies alluded to in the title of this paper have to be reconsidered under this more pragmatically-oriented aspect.

In a recent and interesting article Bisang (2020) has reconsidered Dahl’s concept of ‘maturation’ (Dahl, 2004: 103-155). According to Dahl, linguistic ‘maturation’ refers to phenomena that take time to develop and consists

in accumulation of grammatical material. The ‘maturation’ processes lead to complex word structures with overt expression of grammatical features, as inflectional morphology with apophony and case markers, genders, as well as agreement at the syntactic level, etc. (see the list of ‘maturation’ phenomena in Dahl, 2004: 114-115). These features entail a long process of grammaticalization and involve intermediate stages: «Fusional morphology presupposes that there was affixal morphology at an earlier stage, and affixal morphology presupposes periphrastic constructions» (Dahl, 2004: 107). The final result is an explicit, ‘grown’ grammar, (relatively) free from alignment restrictions and simple juxtaposition of lexical elements, that are necessary in a ‘lesser grown’ morphosyntax. One might conclude that agglutinating and above all inflectional languages have undergone a longer maturation process than Chinese and other Sinitic languages, along this path: periphrastic constructs → affixes → fusion.

But we know that the process is not unidirectional and may be reverted, as is the case for the development from basically inflexional Latin with a (relatively) free alignment to the more analytic Romance languages with a (relatively) more rigid alignment, or for the similar development from Proto-Germanic to German and Scandinavian languages. Similarly, we know that Archaic Chinese had inflection. Consequently, Bisang (2020: 30) says that Dahl’s approach «cannot account for the absence of a lot of the [...] maturation-related phenomena in an isolating language like Chinese and most mainland Southeast Asian languages with their long histories of grammaticalization».

Therefore, Bisang suggests a split of an earlier stage of grammar (G’) which was valid both for explicitness-based maturation (of agglutinating, inflectional and even polysynthetic languages) and economy-based maturation (of isolating languages; see Figure 1):

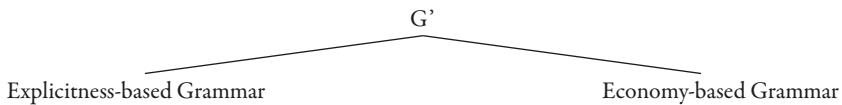


Figure 1. *Representation of an early stage of grammar according to Bisang (2020).*

Two examples of Explicit Grammar: (1) is traditionally called ‘agglutination’; (2) is typically inflectional:

- (1) Turkish
in- dir- il- emiy- ebil- ecek- ler
 descend- CAUS- PASS- INAB- POT- FUT- 3PL
 “It may be that they will not be able to be brought down.”
 (INAB = inability suffix; POT = potentiality suffix)

- (2) Ancient Greek
λυ- θή- σ- οι- ν- το
 release- PASS- FUT- OPT- PL- 3PERS
 “They will be possibly released.”

As can be seen in (1) and (2), every segment of the word corresponds just to one morphological and hence semantic function. However, if we consider the morphological format, i.e. the paradigm of the same word, the verb “to release” has λύ-ω [1st Sing., Pres., Indic., Active], with four pieces of grammatical information, so to say ‘economically’ condensed in -ω, contrary to explicitness.

Here is an example of Economy Grammar, whereby ‘economy’ refers to the absence (contrary to (1) and (2)) of explicit grammatical information whose semantic functions can be retrieved from the context by pragmatic inference:

- (3a) Chinese
qǐng nǐ gěi wǒ chī diǎn ānmiányào
 please 2SG give 1SG eat some sleeping.pill
 “Please let me take some sleeping pills.” (with *gěi* as causative)
 “Please, take some sleeping pills for me.” (with *gěi* as preposition)
 (Bisang, 2020: 21)

whereas in (3b) the same *gěi* functions as preposition or as passive:

- (3b) Chinese
ānmiányào gěi tā chī-le
 sleeping.pill give 3SG eat-PFV
 “The sleeping pills, [he] took them for him.” (with *gěi* as preposition)
 “The sleeping pills were taken by him.” (with *gěi* as passive)
 (Bisang, 2020: 24)

Examples (3a) and (3b) show the multifunctionality of *gěi*, whose different functions may be gleaned from the co(n)text. The crucial difference

between (1) and (2) on the one hand, and (3a) and (3b) on the other hand, is that (1) and (2) are words, while (3a) and (3b) are sentences¹.

As I wrote in a previous paper (Ramat, 2012), the functional principle ‘1 form = 1 meaning’ at the basis of the explicitness (diagrammatic)-strategy may sometimes result in non-economic bundles of forms, which are not easy to process and to memorize. Dressler (1985: 4 ff.) quotes as p.c. of the late lamented Ferenc Kiefer (a native speaker Hungarian linguist) the following Hungarian example, which is directly comparable to (1):

- (4) Hungarian
meg- szent-ség- telen- it- bet- tét- ek
 PREFIX- saint-ABSTR.N- NEG- DENOM.V- MOD- PRET- 2SG
 “You may have made (it) unholy.” (Ramat, 2012: 64)

An exceedingly diagrammatic structure may represent a growing burden for the (short-term) memory and violate the easiness principle. Nonetheless, despite the long sequence of bound morphemes, both words (1) and (4) are perfectly regular according to the Turkish and, respectively, Hungarian grammars. Clearly, explicitness does not automatically correspond to easiness nor to economy. It is not easy for the speaker to analyse and understand (1) and (4), nor to disambiguate (3a) and (3b) – see below.

2. *Easiness and Faithfulness, Bequemlichkeit and Deutlichkeit*

Bisang’s concept of bipolarity can be confronted with the bipartition the Russian linguist Solntsev (1985) had already observed: there exist from the morphosyntactic point of view two crucial macrotypes with two basic strategies that implement the relations between the elements of a sentence:

- (a) through the word order and auxiliary words (as in Chinese and, at least partially, in English);
- (b) inside the words themselves (as in Ancient Greek or Turkish – and the polysynthetic languages: see fn. 1).

¹ Note that also the polysynthetic (or incorporating) languages are nearer to (1) and (2) than to (3a) and (3b):

(a) Alutor (Chukotko-Kamtchatkan)
Gəm-nan akək tə- n- nalgə- n- kuww- at- avə- tk- ən
 I-ERG son.ABS 1SG.SUBJ- CAUS- skin- CAUS- dry- SUFF- SUFF- PRES- 1SG.SUBJ
 “I am making my son dry a skin/skins.” (GERDTS, 2000: 343)

These two techniques are central to the linguistic system inasmuch as they influence the relationship between sounds and syllable, syllables and morpheme, morphemes and word: in type (a) the syllable shape usually knows a limited number of possible variants and the total number of syllables is limited. The boundaries of morphemes normally coincide with those of syllables, and a word may consist of just a morpheme. This is not the case in type (b). We are dealing with a contrast between isolating languages on the one hand, and non-isolating languages (agglutinative, inflectional, polysynthetic or incorporating) on the other. Note, however, that the opposition between (a) and (b) is not watertight: we shall see below that Modern Mandarin Chinese polysyllabic compounds and type (b)-languages are plenty of monosyllabic words like French *eau* “water”, Czech *stín* “shadow”, or German *Bach* “brook” and English *brook*.

It is not easy to unite under the same flag Bisang’s and Solntsev’s bipartitions: Bisang considers Chinese and other Southeast Asian languages as economy-based, but the use of auxiliary words and word order as a grammatical means tend towards explicitness (as in the Romance languages the innovation of a periphrastic form *habeo dictum* which partially substituted the ancient Latin perfect *dixi*, or the replacement of the genitive *Caesaris* with the PP *de Cesare*, along with replacement of a substantially free word order by a fixed one: *Caesarem Brutus necavit* or *necavit Brutus Caesarem*, *Brutus Caesarem necavit* “Brutus killed Cesar”, but **Cesare uccise Bruto* – unless with a particular suprasegmental emphasis on *CESARE*) is not accepted in Italian and the other Romance languages. Remember that already August Wilhelm Schlegel (1818: 16) had opposed the ‘analytic’ Romance to the ‘synthetic’ Latin.

Can we conclude that Solntsev’s type (a) shows an explicitness-based grammar while type (b) has an economy-based grammar? Are the criteria the same for both classifications? If we consider the one-to-one principle (i.e. ‘1 form = 1 meaning’), examples (1) to (3a) are strictly comparable, though both (3a) and (3b) may have two different readings. Both are sufficiently “transparent”, *deutlich* to use Gabelentz’s terminology (see Gabelentz, 1901 [1891¹]: 181-185). But neither (1) nor (2) are “easy” (*bequem*) for speaker and hearer. In a collective volume having the programmatic title *Competing Motivations in Grammar and Usage*, MacWhinney (2014: 367) alludes from a psycholinguistic point of view to the «basic competition between the motivations of Easiness and Faithfulness», whereby «Easiness seeks to minimize effort in production [and] leads to all manner of assimilations and

deletions, both within and between words» (MacWhinney, 2014: 371). On the contrary, «Faithfulness requires a close match between the output and the target form in long-term memory» (MacWhinney, 2014: 371)². Easiness and Faithfulness may be compared with Gabelentz's *Bequemlichkeit* and *Deutlichkeit*, respectively. To note that Gabelentz (1901 [1891]: 256) speaks of "tendency" towards easiness (*Bequemlichkeitstrieb*) and faithfulness (*Deutlichkeitstrieb*). While the speaker's trend is toward the least effort and consequently to minimize his/her phonetic effort, the hearer needs to clearly understand what is said. The two tendencies are active through all the history of every language. This means that easiness and faithfulness are never realised hundred per cent: on the contrary the two tendencies alternate in every moment of the linguistic history.

One could think that the one-to-one strategy is, generally speaking, near to the analytic type as in (1) and (2) where the concatenation of morphs (each one of them bound to a fixed position) contributes to explicitness. However, we have seen in (4) the extreme complexity the grammar of an agglutinating language can attain (see also the Alutor example in fn. 1). On the other hand, speakers of isolating languages need to store in their short-term memory more linguistic material in order to understand the sentence. It seems that Bisang's dichotomy 'explicitness \approx economy' is not comparable with the dichotomy 'easiness (*Bequemlichkeit*) \approx faithfulness (*Deutlichkeit*)'. These dichotomies belong to two different layers, namely to the morphosyntactic organization and, respectively, to the discourse level, i.e. to the pragmatic exchange between speaker and hearer. Of course, the effects of the pragmatic interaction can 'mature' in the long (or short) run of the history of a linguistic tradition and consequently become part of the grammar of that tradition³. In other words, though easiness and faithfulness are general concepts which belong to the general definition of what is a language, they play their role inside a particular linguistic tradition and not at a

² At the phonological level a similar balancing or «continual tug-of-war between demands on the output on the one hand and system-based constraints on the other» has been affirmed by LINDBLOM (1990: 420) in his sketch of the *H&H* Theory (hearer-oriented [Hyperspeech] and system-oriented [Hypospeech]): speakers may tune their performance according to situational demands, controlling both production-oriented factors and output-oriented constraints. Consequently, speakers vary their performance along a *continuum* of hyper- and hypospeech. I wish to thank Federico Albano Leoni for letting me know this aspect of the language dialectic.

³ In the diachronic perspective I prefer to speak of 'linguistic tradition' instead of 'language'. The Romance languages pertain to an uninterrupted tradition that goes back to Latin, though French, Spanish etc. are quite different from Latin.

general cross-linguistic level: what can be ‘easy’ or ‘faithful’ in Chinese may be ‘uneasy’ or ‘not-faithful’ for the Alutor or Quechua speakers. Given that easiness and faithfulness operate inside a specific language, it is not easy to establish an absolute scale, even if the parameters of analicity and syntheticity can boast a general status.

3. *Iconicity and Efficiency*

In the functional typological perspective adopted in these pages we have to consider the concept of efficiency.

Should we assume that the analytic type is intrinsically ‘easier’ than the synthetic one, because of the one-to-one correspondence between morpheme and function, we would fall again into the idea of a typological hierarchy linguists of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century were convinced of. On the other hand, also the idea that ‘All Languages are Equally Complex’ (ALEC) has recently been criticized. There may exist languages that are simpler than others (perhaps the Indonesian Riau and the Amazonian Pirahã)⁴, even if it is difficult speaking of ‘absolute simplicity’. As we shall see below, there usually exists a balancing in the simplicity/complexity of a language system. However, it is certain that in the large sample of spoken and dead languages we now know of «primitive languages are nowhere to be found» (Dahl, 2004: 296): languages of so-called ‘primitive cultures’ may be as complex as languages of ‘high developed cultures’. We have to divide cultural level from linguistic complexity.

A lively discussion took place in recent years concerning ‘Linguistic Complexity’ (LC; see Dahl, 2004; McWhorter, 2001; 2007; Miestamo *et al.*, 2008, eds.; Ramat, 2012, among others). LC is an absolute concept, not bound to a particular language or language type. Limiting our observation to morphology, we may say that a language with four moods in the verbal system like Ancient Greek (Indicative, Subjunctive, Optative, and Imperative) is certainly more complex from the point of view of modality than Modern English which only has Indicative and Imperative, and some remnants of Subjunctive. A language with three genders like Latin is certainly more complex from the point of view of gender than Turkish, which has no

⁴ On the discussion about the ALEC principle see BICKERTON (1981), RAMAT (2016b). On the ‘simplicity’ of Pirahã see, however, the online discussion by FUTRELL *et al.* (2016).

gender distinction at all. But in these examples LC concerns particular, even if not isolated phenomena. We shall see in what follows that LC has to be considered from another point of view – namely that of efficiency.

Accordingly, what makes the difference is not the linguistic type, e.g. isolating vs. the concatenative agglutinating, inflectional and polysynthetic types, but the ‘iconic transparency’ according to which «the greater the syntactic (or morphological) complexity, the more elements capable of bearing meaning. The more elements of meaning, the more complex the meaning» (Newmeyer, 1972: 767; see Ganfi, 2018: 75). For instance, Dressler and other linguists of the ‘Vienna school’ have drawn attention, in the frame of the ‘natural morphology’, on the fact that plurals will have with more than chance probability more morphological material – i.e. complexity – than their corresponding singulars (Dressler, 1985; Dressler *et al.*, 1987, etc.; see also Mayerthaler, 1981): see in example (2) Greek *-v-to* [3rd Plur.] vs. *-to* [3rd Sing.]; Italian *avev-a* “(s)he had” vs. *avev-a-no* “they had”; Turkish *ev* “house” vs. *ev-ler* “houses”, Swedish *huvud* “head” vs. *huvud-en* “heads”, Spanish *amigo* “friend”, English *friend* [Sing.] vs. *amigo-s* “friends”, *friend-s* [Plur.], etc. A future tense usually shows more morphological material than the present: see French *je dirai* “I will say” vs. *je dis* “I say”, up to periphrastic, i.e. more transparent forms as German *ich werde sagen* “I will say”⁵.

John Hawkins has written relevant contributions on the concept of communicative efficiency (see Hawkins, 2001; 2009; 2014). According to Hawkins, the parameters for evaluating the language efficiency are rapidity of communicating the properties of a language, the precise focussing of the structural selections from the viewpoint of their frequency and accessibility. This means that communication is efficient when the speaker’s message is rapidly received by the hearer and with his/her minimal effort. A first example of the minimal effort principle could be the so-called ‘*che* polivalente’ we find in substandard Italian as marker of a relative clause, independently of the relation the relative clause has with the main sentence:

⁵ Counterexamples are always possible – and therefore I have used the Greenbergian formula ‘with more than chance probability’: e.g. Czech *město* “town” [Nomin. Sing.] vs. *měst* “towns” [Genit. Plur.]; Lombard (a north Italian dialect) *la scarpa* “the shoe” vs. *i scarp* “the shoes”; see MAYERTHALER (1981: 43). Examples of inanimate nouns with overtly marked singular vs. zero marked plurals (e.g. Sinhala (Indo-Aryan): *pot-a* “book” vs. *pot* “books”) are quoted by CRISTOFARO (2019: 54). She explains the phonetic changes that led to this marked morphology.

(5a) Italian

La ragazza che ci ho comprato un foulard
 the girl that to.her I.have bought a foulard
è la mia ragazza.
 is the my girlfriend
 “The girl to whom I have bought a foulard is my girlfriend.”

instead of the more complex *la ragazza a cui/cui/alla quale ho comprato un foulard*:

(5b) Italian

Il libro che te ne parlavo ieri è interessante.
 the book that to.you of.it I.spoke yesterday is interesting
 “The book about which I spoke to you yesterday is interesting.”

instead of the more complex *il libro di cui/del quale ti parlavo ieri*.

However, one could object that the polyvalent *che*, an economical *passé-partout* expression for the speaker, demands an interpretation effort by the addressee in order to understand what kind of relation *che* has with the main clause. What is gained in morphological simplicity – or speaker’s easiness, as speakers use just one form to introduce the relative clause – is countered by a stronger hearer’s effort of comprehension.

A clearer example is given by the ‘adjacency principle’ which immediately derives from communicative efficiency: the German negation at the very end of a sentence makes the encoding and decoding of the message difficult: speaker and hearer have to store in the short-term memory a lot of linguistic material before they arrive to grasp that the entire sentence has a negative meaning (see Hawkins, 2001; Ramat, 2006):

(6) German

Ich schätze das von mir gestern gekaufte
 I appreciate the by me yesterday bought
Buch überhaupt nicht.
 book at.all not
 “I don’t appreciate the book I bought yesterday at all.”

This efficiency-based approach is not automatically bound to the traditional linguistic types. There are patterns at the basis of ease of processing and efficiency in language usage that are valid cross-linguistically and across types. There are degrees of syntactic complexity that impact the alignment choices in different languages, whenever choices are possible (i.e. whenever

there are no syntactic obligatory constraints). Let's consider, for instance, the Minimizing Domain:

The human processor prefers to minimize the connected sequences of linguistic forms and their conventionally associated syntactic and semantic properties in which relations of combinations and/or dependency are processed. The degree of this preference is proportional to the number of relations whose domains can be minimized in competing sequences or structures, and to the extent of the minimization in each domain. (Hawkins, 2014: 55)

This principle has different effects upon languages that have different word orders: this means that typology is involved in and interacts with the efficiency principles: a speaker of a VO language like English will prefer to say (7) instead of (8), though both sentences are grammatical:

(7) s [*The man* v_p [*waited* pp_1 [*for his son*]] pp_2 [*in the cold but not unpleasant wind*]].

(8) *The man waited in the cold but not unpleasant wind for his son.*

Example (7) involves a shorter domain than (8) in order to recognize the VP *waited for his son*.

In a head-final language like the OV Japanese the phrase structure processings are shortened by positioning long before short phrases and an order corresponding to (8) will be preferred to the order of (7), while the unmarked Japanese word order would correspond to:

(9) *The man in the cold but not unpleasant wind for his son waited.*

In a similar vein, we may consider the (in)consistency of the alignments in head-final or head-initial languages (OV and VO order, respectively). Speakers of a consistent VO language will need a longer processing when faced with a sentence of the OV type. As a matter of fact, Italian * $[_o$ [*il libro*] $_v$ [*ho letto ieri*]] is ungrammatical. In order to have O before V we have to topicalize O and insert an anaphoric pronoun: *Il libro l'ho letto ieri*, while in English *the book I read yesterday* is actually a relative clause of an unfinished sentence, with deletion of the relative pronoun: *the book that I read yesterday*⁶.

⁶ This holds also for interrogative sentences *Quel libro(.) l'hai comprato?*, with a possible pause <(.)> after *libro*. **Quel libro hai comprato?*, **that book did you buy?* are not possible, differently from Japanese:

(a) *sono hon- (o) kimi ga katta ka*
that book- OBJ you SUBJ bought INTERR (the OBJ marker *o* may be cancelled)

Moreover, Relative Clause + Main Sentence is impossible in Italian and other VO languages: *[_{REL}[*che ho letto ieri*] *il libro non mi è piaciuto*], *[_{REL}[*that I read yesterday*] *the book I didn't like*]. German may transform the relative clause in an adpositional ADJ: [_S [_{NP} [*Das* [_{ADJ} [*von mir gestern gelesene*] *Buch*] *hat mir kaum gefallen*] "I didn't appreciate the book I bought yesterday", but the presence of the definite article *das* at the beginning of the sentence is a clear sign that we have to do with an NP and not a relative clause⁷.

4. Conclusions

To sum up: the functional perspective considers languages not from the traditional, descriptive typological viewpoint. By no means should this be understood as a dismissal of the usual typological classification of the world's languages. Traditional types (the isolating type on the one side and the concatenative agglutinating, inflectional and polysynthetic types on the other) are a useful linguists' classification for a preliminary approach to the multifaceted linguistic reality. Typologists have been able to uncover internal consistencies or trends that are typical of a particular type (for instance, a heavily inflecting type will show with more than chance probability a more flexible word order than a heavily isolating one). However, since the traditional types – as already said – are not watertight boxes and, on the contrary, languages of type A may adopt properties of type B and *vice versa*, it is possible to think of a *continuum* obtaining between different types, with languages nearer to the 'ideal type' of, say, inflecting fusional (e.g. Sanskrit) and languages which are more distant from it (e.g. English, which has many features of the isolating type, like Chinese).

However, from the functional point of view adopted in this article, what matters is efficiency in terms of communication – and this may also explain why there is a kind of balance among the different language layers.

⁷ Of course, there are exceptions to a rigid word order, since – as already noted – linguistic types are not watertight boxes (see below, § 4). For instance, it is possible to have in Italian N+ADJ consistent with the head-initial type: *Luisa ha una casa bella* as well as ADJ+N: *Luisa ha una bella casa*, while English is in this case more consistent with the VO type: *Louise owns a beautiful house* / **a house beautiful*. Note that the possibility of having N+ADJ as well as ADJ+N in Italian as well as in French (but not in the Germanic languages!) may produce in some more or less stereotyped expressions very different meanings: *numerose famiglie* "many families" vs. *famiglie numerose* "families with many members"; *un pover'uomo* "a poor devil" vs. *un uomo povero* "a needy man". See SIMONE (1993: 77 ff.) and RAMAT (2006: 555 ff.).

To quote just an example, De Groot (2008: 213), speaking of diverging variants of Hungarian has written:

In terms of complexity, the copula deletion [in Hungarian; *P.R.*] decreases syntactic complexity (structural complexity) but increases morphological complexity if we take zero marking to be more complex than overt marking. (De Groot, 2008: 213)

Actually, balancing appears in many languages and we must be very careful in considering a language as ‘simple’: a language may be lacking ‘subtle distinctions’ such as gender or nominal classifiers (see Fedden and Corbett, 2017), but this lack doesn’t make the language simpler, when considered in its totality. We cannot consider, say, Turkish simpler than Chinese or Russian because it lacks gender and classifiers. On the contrary, Turkish has much more morphological infixes and suffixes than Chinese and Russian, as we have seen in example (1).

Accordingly, we have to take into account that macrotypes as ‘isolating’ or ‘economy-based’ are, to use Humboldt’s words, ‘ideal types’ (see Skalička’s, 1966 *typologische Konstrukte*) which are never completely realised in historical languages: properties, say, of Solntsev’s type (a) can leak in type (b), up to transform an (a)-type language into a (b)-type and *vice versa* (Humboldt, 1836: 653 ff.; see Lehmann, 2018: 705). It is well-known the case of Semitic languages spoken in Ethiopia like Amharic and Tigrinya, that under the influence of Cushitic (Oromo and Somali) passed from a VSO word order (still used in conservative Ge’ez) to SOV. Mandarin Chinese has many bisyllabic compounds as *shíhuī* “lime” (lit. “stone dust”), *shígāo* “plaster” (lit. “stone cream”) and Modern Mandarin has largely developed this trend, perhaps under the influence of American English, which – as is well-known – is extremely easy to create compounds. If we consider that in compounds such as *shuìjiào* “to sleep” (lit. sleep_V + sleep_N “to sleep a sleep”) the second element cannot appear isolated, we are faced with a phenomenon somehow comparable to the English suffixes *-hood* or *-dom* which cannot appear in isolation, though they originally were the second element of compounds (*child-hood*, *king-dom*; see Ramat, 2016a: 109). The examples of ‘trespassing zones’ between neighbouring categories could easily be increased. Just a last example from Lehmann (2018: 705): Japanese is generally considered to be agglutinative, with morphemes (including stems and affixes) remaining invariable after their union. The morphemes *ga* and *o*, that indicate the syntactic role of an NP as ‘nominative’ (*Taroo ga kita* “Taroo came”) and ‘accusative’ (*Taroo wa sono_{DET} hon o katta* “Taroo bought that book”), respectively, can be considered postpo-

sitions or suffixes according to the linguist's analysis. If *ga* and *o* are considered as suffixes they are immediately comparable to the declension suffixes of languages like Sanskrit (*dev-a-h*_{NOM}, *dev-a-m*_{ACC}) or Latin (*lup-u-s*_{NOM}, *lup-u-m*_{ACC}), with a change *-o-* > *-u-* of the thematic vowel which – contrary to the agglutinative type – can often be found in fusional languages).

Coming back to the title of this article, we have to conclude that, whatever dichotomy we accept as starting point, whatever approach we adopt, whatever level of the language analysis we choose, we are not dealing with watertight compartments: language is formed by *continua* at all levels and levels interact with each other, from phonology to syntax, from syntax to text. Finally, the long-term 'maturation' alluded to at the beginning of this paper, fits well the idea of typological *continua*.

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