**Mafioso Parameters and the Limits of Syntactic Variation**

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We build on recent work proposing non-UG-specified, emergent parameter hierarchies ([1]), arguing that a system of this kind addresses objections levelled against earlier formulations of parameters ([2], [3], [4]), and offers a suitably restrictive theory of the nature and limits of syntactic variation. Our specific focus is the so-called Mafioso Effect by which certain parametric options are simply ‘irresistible’.

Following [5], we assume acquisition to i.a. entail the determination of which features are grammaticalised (participate in Probe/Goal relations) in a language, and how these formal features interact with movement-diacritics \(^\wedge\). The ‘sequence’ in which these facts are established is guided by restricted UG-specified elements (the availability of a \([u\!F]/[i\!F]\) distinction, \(^\wedge\), Merge and Agree) and third-factor-imposed acquisition strategies, including [6]’s Feature Economy/FE and [7]’s Input Generalization/IG. By FE, acquirers posit as few formal features as possible; by IG, they assume the minimum number of distinct elements/operations compatible with the PLD, maximally generalising input patterns.

(1) illustrates a simplified word-order hierarchy where \(^\wedge\) signifies ‘comp-to-spec-movement’. Following [8], we assume that UG-given \(^\wedge\) triggers movement, but that movement-direction remains unspecified in UG. However, the theoretically possible option ‘\(^\wedge\)=LEFT/RIGHT’ is in effect a Mafioso (macro)Parameter: \(^\wedge\)=RIGHT will always be ruled out by the processing-influenced PLD, rendering a system in which \(^\wedge\)=LEFT ‘irresistible’.

“Smaller” parameters can also have this ‘mafioso’ property. Alongside the word-order case, we show how this holds for the negation hierarchy in (2) [9], the V-movement hierarchy in (3) [10], and the alignment hierarchy in (4) [11].

(2) presents a theoretically possible system – partial Negative Concord, in which the sentential negation marker(s) are specified \([u\!NEG]\), thus depending on the presence of an abstract negative operator to deliver a negative reading, while negative indefinites are specified \([i\!NEG]\), thus not requiring this operator. This possibility is ruled out on PLD grounds as there is no unambiguous input leading to its postulation and credible third-factor motivations (FE, IG, and the more general biases discussed in [12]) also oppose it.

For (3), we show that the \(Y\) and \(N\) options under \(v/Aux\text{-}to\text{-}T\) lead to indistinguishable entities, since there is no surface difference between inflecting TMA particles (which are first-merged in the T-field) and auxiliaries (which are first-merged in \(v\) and attracted into the T-system). Although these are two theoretically different options, their indistinguishability renders the choice spurious.

(4) relates to the apparent non-existence of syntactically ergative split-S languages. Building on [13] and [14], we propose that syntactic ergativity results where \(v\) not only assigns theta-related ERG-Case to its specifier, but also bears \(^\wedge\), triggering object-movement past the subject. While unergative \(v\) can freely assign ERG (yielding a morphologically ergative split-S system), it cannot bear \(^\wedge\) because there is no moveable XP in such cases. We propose that this ‘mafioso’ effect actually constrains the order of parameters in the emergent hierarchy.
As such, “emergent” parameter hierarchies are restricted by a range of (interacting) first, second and third-factor considerations. In short, there will be parametric “offers that cannot be refused”.

Data and References