Null complementizers reconsidered

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In this talk, we provide a grammatical account of the distribution of the overt vs. null COMP that in diverse contexts (e.g. clausal complements, sentential subjects) and other seemingly-related phenomena (e.g. that-trace effect). Based on the fact that the COMP that originates as a demonstrative (Roberts & Roussou 2003), we propose that the declarative COMP in English has an additional $d$(eictic)-feature along with its probing features such as $\phi$, Tense, and Case features. (1) is the underlying structure of the COMP that, both overt and null, and we further develop the detailed syntactic mechanism feature inheritance (Chomsky 2008) towards criterial freezing (Rizzi 2004) to account for various empirical facts in relation to the distribution of overt vs. null COMPs in English.

$$
(1) \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{CP}_2 \\
\text{C}_2[d] \quad \text{CP}_1 \\
\text{C}_1[\phi, T, \text{Case}] \quad \text{TP}
\end{array}
$$

**Take 1** $C_1$ raises to $C_2$ and $T$ inherits all the features from the complex $C_1+C_2$ head

(i) When $C_1$ raises to $C_2$, the complex $C_1+C_2$ head has $[d, \phi, T, \text{Case}]$ features and is spelled out *that*.

(ii) Adopting the views that CP subjects occupy the Topic position (Koster 1978, Alrenga 2005), and Topics are anaphoric (López 2009), we argue that the CP$_2$ sentential subject can serve as a Topic, due to the $[d, \phi]$ features on the $C_1+C_2$ head.

(iii) $T$ subsequently inherits all the features from the $C_1+C_2$ head, as a result of which the raised subject at Spec, TP is frozen and cannot be extracted.

**Take 2** $T$ first inherits the probing features from $C_1$, and $C_1$ raises to $C_2$

(i) When feature inheritance from $C_1$ to $T$ precedes $C_1+C_2$ formation, the complex $C_1+C_2$ head cannot be spelled out as *that*, leading to a null COMP: *that* lexicalizes a C head when $C$ has all $[d, \phi, T, \text{Case}]$ features.

(ii) The CP$_2$ sentential subject cannot serve as a Topic: the $C_1+C_2$ head has only a $d$-feature, lacking a $\phi$-feature, thus failing to be an anaphor.

(iii) $T$ inherits features only from $C_1$, not all of $C$’s features. Thus, Spec, TP is not a criterial position, and the subject at Spec, TP is not frozen.

Finally, we extend our proposals to account for the (limited) distribution of null COMPs in other languages, such as French, Korean, and Japanese in similar contexts.