

A Cartesian dream:
A geometrical account of syntax
In honor of Andrea Moro

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Guglielmo Cinque
Luigi Rizzi

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A CARTESIAN DREAM

A geometrical account of syntax

In honor of Andrea Moro

Edited by

Matteo Greco & Davide Mocci



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To our *Maestro*
(Matteo and Davide)

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Selective grammatical encoding of emotions in language

Guglielmo Cinque

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In Cinque 2013 I considered one potential argument for Universal Grammar. One stemming from the limited number of functional notions that are grammatically encoded in the languages of the world. What we find is that only a fraction of our cognitive concepts and distinctions seems to receive a grammatical encoding, where by ‘grammatical encoding’ I mean encoding in one of the closed classes of categories (affixes, particles, auxiliaries, clitics, etc.) that belong to the functional rather than the substantive lexicon of languages. Most cognitive concepts and distinctions do not find any such encoding.¹ For example, verbal projections in clauses never grammatically encode such human cognitive universals as “mourning”, “incest avoidance”, “health”, “sexual attractiveness”, (Brown 1991), etc. , nor otherwise cognitively significant concepts like “peril”, “hunger”, “death”, “pain”, etc. (even those relevant to selection). We could very well imagine the existence of languages that marked grammatically some such distinctions in their verbs or nouns; yet none are found (see the discussion in Cinque 2013), a fact which we should find puzzling. The limitation does not appear to follow naturally from cognitive, historical, cultural, processing, or other factors; which makes it

1. Of course, any concept can be expressed linguistically through a combination of lexical (and grammatical) means (paraphrases), but this is very different from the specific sense utilized here of *grammatical encoding*, which is through one of the various closed classes of categories.

plausible to think of them as forced upon us by Universal Grammar, perhaps as a consequence of how it crystallized at some distant point of the evolution of our species. Here I focus on the specific domain of emotions.

If one considers emotions one finds that only a tiny subset is grammatically encoded, and universally so, it appears. Among the emotions listed in Darwin 1872 and Ekman 1992, only commiseration/compassion/pity (commiserative morphology/syntax), affection (endearment morphology), contempt (pejorative morphology), and possibly wish/desire (optative morphology/syntax) are attested, but not ‘love’, ‘hatred’, ‘joy’, ‘sadness’, ‘embarrassment’, ‘remorse’, ‘pride’, ‘shame’, ‘jealousy’, ‘envy’, etc. Here I document the case of commiseration/pity. For affection and contempt see Cinque 2015 and Guillaume 2018.

A commiserative grammatical morpheme is found in the following language families:

Algonquian: Meskwaki (Goddard 2011: p. 91) =**tike**: enclitic morpheme meaning ‘poor thing’.

Arawakan: Tariana (Aikhenvald 2003: p. 178) =**miki**: “poor.thing clitic”.

Austronesian: Belep (Oceanic - McCracken 2012: p. 232f) commiserative particle (= ‘poor.’). **Ledo** (Celebic - van den Berg 2021: p. 60) *pakasi*: ‘poor thing’ particle. **Muna** (Celebic - van den Berg 2021: §3) *kaasi*: commiserative particle. **Napu** (Celebic - Hanna 2001: §5.3.3) commiserative pronoun. **Pamona** (Celebic - van den Berg 2021: p. 60) *tobusi*: ‘the poor thing, exclamation of empathy’. **Uma** (Malayo-Polynesian - Martens 1987: §4) =*hawo*: commiserative clitic.

Cariban: Hixkaryana (Kalin 2011: p. 12) *uro tho* Lit. me poor ‘poor me’: ‘devalued particle’, which follows the N.

Chibchan: Guatusa (Umaña Constenla 1998: p. 82) *sajá, chumá*: partículas conmiserasivas

(*curíjuri sajá* mujer pobre ‘the poor woman’).

Guajiboan: Sikuaní (Queixalós 2011: p. 159) *boka*: commiserative modal auxiliary.

Indo-European: Arvanitic Albanian (<https://afbo.info/pairs/88>) *mavro-*: ‘black, pitiful’, e.g. *mavro-p ak* ‘poor old man’. **Paduan** *poro*: grammaticalized form of *povero* ‘poor’, only meaning ‘arousing pity’: *el me poro nono* ‘my poor grandfather’ (Paola Benincà, p.c.)². **Yiddish** (Matisoff 1973: p. 574) *nebðx*: ‘commiserative particle’.

Panoan: Chácobo (Tallman 2018: §11.9.7) “The morpheme =*tapirá* [...] encodes that the speaker feels self-pity [...]. It is often translated in Spanish as “pobrecito mí” (roughly “poor me”).” **Yaminawa** (Neely 2019: p. 146) The suffix *-nābe*, which is also sometimes realized as *-nāmē*, expresses pity, typically for a very elderly or very ill person, or for someone who is deceased.

Papuan: Tayap (Torricelli - Kulick & Terrill 2019). “Vowel length expressing sympathy and pity (‘poor thing’)” (§2.1.2.1). **Ulwa** (Sepik - Barlow 2018: §6.8) affective/commiserative pronouns (pronoun + *ngusuwa* ‘poor’) *un* 2ndPers. + *ngusuwa* = *ungusuwa* ‘you poor thing’.

Tai-Kadai: Lakkja (Fan 2018: §2.1.12) *kho*⁵¹: prefix meaning ‘pitiful’.

Takanan: Takana *ichenu*: clitic marker of compassion (*deja=ichenu* Lit. person=poor ‘pitiabie person’) (Guillaume 2018: §3.2); similarly in other Takanan languages: *chenu* in **Reyesano** and *shana* in **Cavineña** (Guillaume 2018: §4.2).

Tupi-Guaraní: Guaraní (Estigarríbia. 2020) *anga*: ‘commiserative particle’. “*Anga* expresses speaker commiseration for an event participant” (p.188).³

2. The adjective ‘poor’ is also used to express commiseration in Italian and other Romance varieties, even though it is not as reduced as it is in Paduan.

3. See:

(i) Jairo h-eta anga o-sufri o-kakuaa aja
 Jairo possm3-numerous poor.thing 3.act-suffer 3.act-grow.up while
 ‘Jairo suffered a lot growing up, poor thing.’

Kokama-Kokamilla (Vallejos Yopán 2010: §5.4.2.3) = *chasu* ‘affective clitic’; *ayuma* ‘brother in law’ *ayuma=chasu* ‘poor brother in law’; *wayna* ‘woman’ *wayna=chasu* ‘poor woman’.

Uralic: Mansi (Keresztes 1998: p. 419) ‘commiserative mood’.

Yukaghir: Tundra Yukaghir (Schmalz 2013: p. 51, and §3.4.3.3.2) –*ködi*: ‘commiserative suffix’.

Wakashan: Kwak’wala (Sardinha 2016: abstract) = *gas*: clitic meaning ‘poor thing’.

Language isolates: Kamsá (Fabre 2001: p. 8; O’Brien 2021: §5.3). In Kamsá the pre-nominal adjective ‘poor’ is rendered with a “caritative” suffix, *-jema* (while adjectives are either pre-nominal or post-nominal).

Kwaza (van der Voort 2004: p. 967; 2015, §3.7) –*wỹte*: ‘lamentative suffix’.

Trumai (Guirardello-Damian, Trumai and Trumai. 2017: passim) the *de* and *ita* morphemes mean ‘pitiful’.

In many languages commiseration is expressed via a non-intersective, non-predicative, functional adjective, which appears to be merged very high in the hierarchy of adjectives, also preceding value adjectives and even adjectival and participial reduced relative clauses, as well as cardinal numerals.⁴ The high Merge of commiserative modifiers is also clearly indicated by languages like Maltese, whose adjectives are otherwise postnominal (Borg 1996: section 3.12), as they precede the noun (see (1)) like the synthetic superlative adjectives (2)

4. See the possible pre-numeral order of *poor* in English (*My poor two children*, attested in internet: (https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g294009-d16883392-r766171218-Al_Messila_a_Luxury_Collection_Resort_Spa_Doha-Doha.html), The Irish Widow, p. 76, <https://books.google.it/books?id=DUdWAAAACAAJ>, much like the adjective in the superlative form (*The black*(est) two dogs that I’ve (ever) seen*. - Kayne 2008, note 15). Both can also follow the numeral in English. Also see the higher position of *poor* relative to other prenominal non-intersective adjectives: *My poor_{comm} little_{endear} old_{longstanding} friend*. In Kokama-Kokamilla the commiserative suffix is external to the diminutive/endearment suffix, as expected from the mirror principle.

and the ordinal adjectives (3), which precede the cardinal numeral in pre-nominal position (cf. Winchester 2019: p. 17).⁵

- (1) il-povra mara
DEF-poor.FSG woman
'the unfortunate woman' (Gatt 2018: ex. (3) of section 2)
- (2) a. l-aħjar tliet ristorante
DEF-best three restaurant.PL
'the best three restaurants' (Winchester 2019: p. 18)
- b. l-isbaħ ktieb
DEF-beautiful(superl) book
'the most beautiful book' (Fabri 2001: p. 156)
- (3) a. l-ewwel għaxar volume
DEF-first ten volume.PL
'the first ten volumes' (Winchester 2019: p. 17)
- b. l-aħħar każ
DEF-last.MSG case.MSG
'the last case' (Gatt 2018: ex. (4) of section 2, p.176)

While 'commiseration' (as well as 'endearment' and 'contempt') appear to be universally encoded grammatically, it remains to be seen whether other emotions are similarly encoded in the languages of the world. There is, to date, no clear evidence that they are.

5. In the analytic form the superlative morpheme precedes the noun while the adjective follows:

- (i) a. l-izjed għadu kattiv
the-most enemy cruel
'the cruelest enemy' (Borg 1996: p. 14)
- b. l-aktar ktieb interessanti
DEF-most book interesting
'the most interesting book' (Fabri 2001: p. 156)

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