Multidominance and Structural Syncretism

While syntactic research on multidomiance has led to a number of important theoretical and empirical insights involving the properties of multidominate structures, the linearization and interpretation of such structures, there is less of an understanding of how different types of multidominate structures interact. This talk (joint with Martina Gračanin-Yuksek) seeks to remedy this gap. We assume the basic architecture of the grammar in which there are two types of multidominate (MD) structures: Internal Merge (Move) creates MD structures in which one of the mothers dominates the other (as in (1a)), and Parallel Merge creates MD structures in which neither mother dominates the other (as in (1b)). Furthermore, both Parallel Merge and Internal Merge can apply to a single object (as in (1c)).

(1) a. Internal Merge/Move   b. Parallel Merge   c. Parallel Merge + Internal Merge

We focus on the following questions:

A. Are the two types of MD structures (those created by Internal Merge and Parallel Merge) subject to different constraints?
B. What kinds of mismatches are allowed in what types of multidominate structures (and under what circumstances)?
C. How do the two types of multidominance interact?

To address these questions, we contrast Right Node Raising (e.g. *John wrote and Mary reviewed a new article*), which we take to involve Parallel Merge, with ATB wh-questions (e.g. *What article did John write and Mary review*?), which we take to involve both Parallel Merge and Internal Merge. Based on data from English, Polish and Croatian, we show that Right Node Raising tolerates mismatches that are not possible in ATB questions (namely those that violate the Parallelism Constraint of Williams 1978), and we derive this contrast from a constraint on Merge we dub BiCoM (*Binarity Constraint on Merge*), which prevents Merge from relating more than two positions within a single derivation. We then show that Merge can relate three (or more) positions only if two of them are identical (‘structurally syncretic’). Thus, structural syncretism can rescue otherwise impossible ATB derivations just like morphological case syncretism can rescue ATB derivations with conflicting case requirements on the fronted wh-pronoun.