CHAPTER FOUR

THE SYSTEM BEHIND THE NOISE

1. Preliminaries

In the previous chapter we have argued for a VocP field which hosts the functional features [i-p] and [2nd person], which are responsible for generating direct addresses. These features are associated with the head Voc° and act as probes on D° or N°. This analysis dissociates [i-p], [2nd person] from D°, and is, thus, more promising for covering a wider range of cross-linguistic variations in the composition of the Vocative Phrase.

That being said, in this chapter we investigate the type of operations that apply to the derivation of VocP, aiming to formally grasp the mechanics at work. The main argument is that, behind the noisy data, there are, essentially, two configurations that underlie the variation in the composition of VocPs: VocP > DP or VocP > NP. While VocP > NP is the most economical derivation, VocP > DP is resorted to when the vocative constituent contains elements that can only be licensed in a DP field (e.g., possessive adjective or nominalized adjectives).

First, we compare the structure of VocPs with the structure of DPs used in argumental positions. In this respect, the conclusion is that the same syntactic operations apply (i.e., internal or external merge of the lexical items in the derivation). Then, we point out the aspects in which VocP and DP arguments differ, that is, in the outcome of the feature checking of [i-p] and [2nd person]. This outcome (i.e., how D° becomes compatible with second feature semantics) is discussed in detail for Romanian, leading us to propose derivational patterns that yield variations in the linear word order. These patterns are then verified on other languages (Albanian, Bulgarian, English, Greek, Italian, Bantu).

1.1. What We Do in This Chapter

In Chapter 3, the configurations in (29) showed how the direct/external merge of Vocative Particles takes place in VocP: free morphemes merge in Spec, VocP; bound morphemes in Voc°. The particles check the [2nd person] and/or the [i-p] feature of Voc°, either through a Spec-head structural relation or through direct merge in Voc°.
In this chapter, we explore the variations that arise from the combinations allowing for the checking of the two features, irrespective of their spell out through Vocative Particles or/and through nouns. These variations involve: the type of Merge that applies to the nominal constituent (i.e., internal and external); the set of available lexical elements (i.e., presence or absence of Vocative Particles, plus their bound/free morphological status); and the type and functional status of the definite article (i.e., whether it is or is not enclitic). Although such variations yield a wide range of word orders within VocP, the derivations are, however, constrained by the configuration in (28) presented in Chapter 3.

The main point of our discussion will be that several patterns for feature checking may occur within one language; however, some patterns are preferred over others, depending on more general morpho-syntactic properties of the language. The languages we selected for discussion illustrate variations in syntactic derivations; that is, what happens when the nominal phrase is DP or NP; whether movement takes place to VocP (either as head-to-head or as XP to Spec, VocP); how Vocative Particles (lexical or null) interact with the nominal syntax.

1.2. What We Do Not Do in This Chapter

One point we need to stress before presenting the syntactic analysis is that our survey does not factor in phonology, although vocatives are often recognized due to their peculiar intonation. In fact, Qvonje (1986) claims that in some languages phonology is the only way of encoding the vocative status of a noun (see also Sonnenhauser & Noel Aziz Hanna 2013: 7). Indeed, it is well known that one universal property of vocatives is that they stand as independent intonation units, with high pitch. In addition, syllable stress and tone are phonemic in vocatives in some languages. For example, placement of syllable stress in Romanian may play a role in triggering an addressee reading in certain constituents, as reported in Croitor & Hill (2013) and illustrated in (1).

(1) om bun ‘good man (non-address)’ versus ‘good man, . . . (address)’

In (1), the bisyllabic constituent has only one syllable stress. The location of the stress makes a difference in reading, indicating the argumental versus the address/vocative status of the constituent. Note, however, that the relevance of syllable stress depends on the syllable constituency, and, as such, it cannot be generalized over morpho-syntactic domains.