In this paper, I explain how syncretic forms can satisfy multiple grammatical requirements. The approach combines having one syntactic node per feature (as in nanosyntax, Starke 2009) with grafting (or multidominance) (Citko 2005, Van Riemsdijk 2006). The free relative construction in (1) from German serves as an illustration.

(1) Was du mir gegeben hast, ist prächtig.

‘What you have given to me is wonderful.’ (Groos and Van Riemsdijk 1981, p. 212)

In (1), gegeben hast ‘have given’ requires accusative case and ist prächtig ‘is wonderful’ requires nominative case. Despite these different case requirements, the sentence is grammatical, because German has a syncretic form was ‘what’ for the neuter nominative and the accusative.

The grammaticality of (1) requires that (i) part of the syntax must be shared, (ii) the syntax allows multiple conflicting features on a syntactic node, and (iii) a single form corresponds to different features. I argue, similar to other grafting proposals (cf. Citko 2005), that particular features are merged into two different structures, with the result that features are structurally shared (i). Furthermore, I take a Nanosyntactic approach that assumes that each feature corresponds to its own terminal node, and I adopt Caha’s (2009) universal case hierarchy. Since more complex cases are structurally built from less complex cases (i.e. the accusative contains the nominative), features are actually never conflicting (ii). The sentence is only grammatical because the shared features are spelled out by the same lexical entry. This follows naturally from phrasal spellout, as syncretic forms are spelled out by a whole phrase via an underspecified lexical entry (iii).

In Figure 1, the pronoun with functional structure up to the accusative (Acc) is required by the verb geben ‘to give’. The structure up to the nominative (Nom), which is contained in the accusative, is required by the predicate ist prächtig ‘is wonderful’. The two clauses share the structure up to the nominative. The shared structure and the accusative node that contains the shared structure are spelled out by the same lexical entry, which makes the result grammatical.

Leaving gender and verbal syncretisms (Pullum and Zwicky 1986) aside, the analysis makes two predictions. First, in agglutinating languages where case containment is morphologically overt (Radkevich 2010), multiple case requirements can be satisfied even without syncretism. Since the containing (e.g. accusative) form morphologically contains the contained (e.g. nominative) form, there is no spellout conflict for the shared element in these languages. Second, the satisfaction of multiple case requirements is caused by syntactic sharing rather than solely by an identical phonological form. Therefore, accidental homophones (i.e. forms that are non-contingent in the case hierarchy) should not satisfy multiple case requirements even though they share the same surface form. I discuss data from free relatives in different languages and other similar constructions, such as Across-the-Board phenomena and Right Node Raising constructions (e.g. in Asarina (2011)).