Introduction

This is a book about conditions imposed on the narrow syntax by its interface with phonology. The idea that some of the properties of syntax follow from its interface with phonology is not new. Chomsky’s (1995) Minimalist Program pursues the idea that most if not all of the properties of syntax are consequences of the need to create linguistic objects that are well suited for the interfaces. Kayne’s (1994) Antisymmetry is a particular proposal about an algorithm for rendering the hierarchical structure of a tree as a linearly ordered string of words, which has consequences for which types of trees are acceptable.

I will make two new proposals about the conditions on the syntax-phonology interface. The first, called “Distinctness,” is a claim about the nature of well-formed linearization statements, of the type first proposed by Kayne. In particular, I claim that a linearization statement $\langle a, b \rangle$ is only interpretable if $a$ and $b$ are distinct from each other. In some languages, such as English, nodes are typically nondistinct if they have the same label (though we will see that in many languages, distinctness is more difficult to define than this). Consequently, any phase in which two DPs, for example, must be linearized with respect to each other yields a linearization statement $\langle \text{DP, DP} \rangle$, which causes the derivation to crash. I will claim that parts of classic Case theory can be made to follow from this general principle, which also covers facts that have nothing to do with DPs.

The second proposal, “Beyond Strength and Weakness,” is an attempt to predict, for any given language, whether that language will exhibit overt $wh$-movement or not. The claim is that all languages are required to minimize the number of prosodic boundaries of a certain type between $wh$-phrases and the complementizers where they take scope. In some languages, this general prosodic requirement can be met by manipulating the prosody directly. In others, the prosody cannot be manipulated in this
way, and the only way to satisfy the general condition is to move the
\(wh\)-phrase closer to the complementizer in question. I claim that we can
predict whether a language can leave \(wh\) in situ or not by investigating
more general properties of its prosody, which have nothing to do with
\(wh\)-questions particularly. The proposal is related to recent works investi-
gating the interaction between prosody and syntax (Zubizarreta 1998,
ences cited there), some of which develop the idea that syntactic move-
ments can have the purpose of improving the prosodic structure of the
sentence.

Both of these proposals attempt to deepen our current explanations for
syntactic phenomena. Classic Case theory has a number of empirical suc-
cesses, many of which are captured by the theory of Distinctness de-vel-
oped in chapter 2. To the extent that that theory succeeds, it not only
broadens the empirical coverage of the existing theories, but offers an an-
swer to a question that we often do not ask: Why should languages have
Case at all? In chapter 3, I turn to another typically unasked question:
Why do some languages have overt \(wh\)-movement, while others do not?
The goal in that chapter is to find the level of description on which lan-
guages do not in fact vary; all languages, I claim, obey a universal pros-
dic condition on \(wh\)-questions. The apparent variation can be reduced to
previously observed variations in prosodic systems.