Uttering Trees

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The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

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This book was set in Times New Roman and Syntax on 3B2 by Asco Typesetters, Hong Kong.
Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Richards, Norvin.
Uttering trees / Norvin Richards.
p. cm. — (Linguistic inquiry monograph ; 56)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-262-01376-5 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-262-51371-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Prosodic analysis (Linguistics) 2. Grammar, Comparative and general—Phonology.
3. Grammar, Comparative and general—Syntax. I. Title.

P224.R53 2010
414′.6—dc22 2009024581

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

1 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 $\langle \alpha, \beta \rangle$ is only interpretable if α and β 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 $\langle$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 investigating the interaction between prosody and syntax (Zubizarreta 1998, Ishihara 2001, Szendrői 2001, Arregi 2002, Vicente 2005, and the references cited there), some of which develop the idea that syntactic movements 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 successes, many of which are captured by the theory of Distinctness developed in chapter 2. To the extent that that theory succeeds, it not only broadens the empirical coverage of the existing theories, but offers an answer 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 languages do not in fact vary; all languages, I claim, obey a universal prosodic condition on *wh*-questions. The apparent variation can be reduced to previously observed variations in prosodic systems.