

Syntax is not phonology-free: towards a new perspective of phonologically informed syntactic derivations

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The position for a phonology-free syntax has been categorically argued for in Zwicky and Pullum (1986 and seq.), Guasti and Nespors (1995), among others, expressing the idea that there are no syntactic operations that are motivated by phonological rules. Thus while it may be accepted that prosodic weight and stress may influence preferences in the order of constituents within co-ordinations and fixed pair expressions, and affect NP shift (heavier constituents are generally preferred to follow light constituents), this is always with reference to two sentences that are syntactically grammatical. In cases of focus and topic, where the prominence of a constituent can be argued to motivate its movement to a focus position in syntax (e.g. Szendrői (2003) for Hungarian) it is treated as related to discourse or stylistic factors that fall outside core syntax. The compromise is the position taken in Inkelas and Zec (1990) building on work in prosodic phonology, that the interface between phonology and syntax must be mediated by prosodic structure (which can in turn be modelled in OT as in Golston (1995)).

Following work in Demuth and Harford (1999), this paper challenges both these positions arguing that tone can be seen to function as a cue to the choice between different syntactic structures in which reference to prosodic structure is not strictly necessary. This pursuit is engulfed within the idea that phonology primarily acts as a parsing indicator that can as such inform syntactic derivations. Two examples from Bantu will be discussed in this respect.

The first is a differentiation between a relative and a declarative reading of a sentence by tone. The data in (1) are minimally different only in that they differ in the tone of the subject marker *a-*, which in syntax merits them different representations. In addition, the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive relatives is indicated by differing final tone on the head noun. The prosodic marking in both cases determines how these strings are syntactically distinguished in processing by signalling different syntactic structures, showing that prosody has a direct impact on the choice of syntactic derivation.

The second is a tonal distinction on the verb (shown in (2)) that indicates whether a following complement is within the same syntactic phrase as the verb or not, the so-called *conjoint and disjoint forms*. A phonological treatment of these facts also lends support to the otherwise cross-linguistically intriguing facts of immediate-after-verb focus that are related to these verb patterns. In this case, movement is phonologically motivated in a manner akin to Hungarian with the difference being that the focus position is not defined in syntax but in phonology with recourse to the interaction of strong versus weak positions in a metrical structure-like algorithm.

Both these phenomena gain greater insight when viewed from a perception based grammar coupled with an on-line left-to-right syntactic derivation model as advocated in Dynamic Syntax (Kempson et al. 2001), for example. Under this view phonology can directly influence syntactic tree building obliterating prosodic structure.

Within this larger architecture of grammar, this paper will focus on the phonology of relative clauses and conjoint-disjoint forms to highlight the influence of phonology on syntax and illustrate the approach here advocated.

Examples:

- (1)a. umúluméndo á-mwééne Chisanga maílo (Bemba)
 1boy 1SM-see.PERF C. yesterday
 ‘The boy saw Chisanga yesterday’
 *‘The boy (who) Chisanga saw yesterday’
- b. umúluméndó à-mwééne Chisanga maílo
 1boy 1REL.1SM-see.PERF C. yesterday
 ‘The boy (who) Chisanga saw yesterday’
 *‘The boy saw Chisanga yesterday’
- (2) a. kè tlàà bíná Disjoint (Tswana)
 SUBJ TNS dance
 ‘I am dancing’
- b. kè tlàà bínà lé èné Conjoint
 SUBJ TNS dance PP
 ‘I am dancing with her’
- c. *kè tlàà bíná lé èné Disjoint + following complement
 ‘I am dancing with her’

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