

PF isn't any more dirty than syntax

A pervasive effect of the minimalist programme is that many phenomena and mechanisms that were held to be syntactic in earlier practice are unloaded from syntax. Since in Chomsky's view language is "perfect" just like other natural systems are (in reference to Galileo's "nature is perfect"), the minimalist programme pursues the goal of a "perfect" FLN (Faculty of Language in the Narrow sense). In Hauser et al.'s (2002) view (reiterated by Chomsky 2021), narrow syntax is FLN, while phonology is only FLB (Faculty of Language in the Broad sense) and thus may be non-perfect. Non-perfect syntactic-looking phenomena that on minimalist standards do not qualify as being syntactic anymore include ellipsis (relevant constituents are "deleted at PF"), copy deletion or PF movement. These are thus removed from syntax to make it clean, and placed into the adjacent space, PF. Clean syntax, dirty phonology.

The talk argues that PF isn't any more dirty than syntax. This involves the status of phonology: if it cannot be reduced to third factors, i.e. if it has specifically phonological content, it belongs to (perfect) FLN and does not qualify as a dustbin. Evidence in favour of this status is discussed. On the other hand, the unloading of items from syntax to PF has quite dramatic consequences for the latter: while in the classical inverted T model, PF was more or less coextensive with phonology, i.e. the phonological computational system, it has come to be loaded with operations and objects that have nothing to do with what phonologists call phonology. That is, in the minimalist prospect PF has become "phonology plus X". But ever since it is unclear what this X is, what it looks like, what status it has in a modular landscape and how it relates to true phonology.

The talk shows that X is incompatible with one of the most deeply rooted commitments of generative thinking, modularity. This is because it makes syntactic structure and labels coexist with phonological material within the same computational space (Vocabulary Insertion occurs without syntactic structure dying). This is impossible, though: the very definition of modules is to be domain-specific, i.e. to work on one single type of vocabulary.

Unloading into X may be considered as a first attempt to serve the minimalist ambition, but which showed little concern for the landscape that received the pieces. A truly minimalist project is thus to reconcile both minimalist ambitions: unloading and modularity. If ellipsis, copy deletion, PF movement and the like do not take place at PF, what are they and where are they managed? Newell & Sailor's and Sailor's contributions to the conference indicate directions to follow regarding ellipsis: rather than being deletion, it is viewed as non-insertion. That is, spell-out / Vocabulary Insertion may get ellipsis out of the way. This is also the direction taken by nanosyntax more globally.

The talk also addresses a number of consequences that minimalism has for the relationship between morpho-syntax and phonology. A relevant issue here is the number of devices that do or ought to define computational domains. In a phase-based environment, pieces are shipped from syntax to phonology and there is no way syntax and phonology could independently define what a relevant domain is: the pieces shipped and received are the same. The fact that interface theories have always been designed by phonologists (whose job is heavily impacted by whatever comes down from morpho-syntax, while syntacticians simply fire and forget) has led to phonology-centric views such as the deeply rooted mantra that post-lexical phonology is non-cyclic. This is phonological jargon, meaning that there are no derivationally defined computational domains for items above the word size. This cannot be correct if there are phases.

It is further shown that computational domains evidenced by syntactic and phonological

evidence may or may not coincide: some domains relevant on one side leave no footprint on the other side. This appears to be a hard fact that all theories of the interface need to address, and which commits syntacticians to also take into account phonological evidence for the existence of domains (something that is not current practice).

Finally, a consequence of this view on computational domains is that one of the two types that are traditionally entertained in phonology has to go. Since the 80s, there is a division of labour between items below and above the word size: in the former area domains are defined derivationally (cycles, today phases), while in the latter they have a representational definition (prosodic constituency). A genuine minimalist concern is to reduce the number of devices (Occam): since phases are needed anyway in syntax, but prosodic constituency is restricted to phonology, the latter have no *raison d'être* if they can be reduced to the former. The abandon of prosodic constituency does away with the alleged absence of cycles above the word level that was mentioned, and eliminates a strong modularity violation that constraint-based definitions of prosodic constituents take the liberty to sustain (Align constraints).