

Non-monotonic derivations

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Two of the most prominent principles within derivational theories of syntax are the Minimal Link Condition (MLC) and the Strict Cycle Condition (SCC). Unfortunately, in quite a number of cases syntactic analyses that are well motivated on independent grounds seem to be in conflict with either the MLC or the SCC. Various proposals have been made as to how this conflict is to be solved: a) allowing for acyclic operations (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Richards 2001, Stepanov 2004); b) rendering possible interveners invisible, aka “inactivity” (Chomsky 2000, 2001, Řezáč 2003); c) procrastinating constraint evaluation until the phase level (Chomsky 2001); and d) declaring certain elements as indistinguishable for the MLC, aka “equidistance” (Chomsky 1993, 1995).

None of these proposals is entirely satisfactory: acyclic operations are typically motivated for adjuncts only (Lebeaux 1988 and subsequent literature), the Activity Condition is empirically problematic (Nevins 2004, Merchant 2006), equidistance is a stipulation, phase level evaluation increases the representational residue of derivational theories.

In my talk, I want to make a novel proposal that avoids all of these problems. It is based on the observation that there is an implicit assumption in most current syntactic theorizing that derivations must be monotonic: each application of a syntactic operation either increases the complexity of the tree or at least preserves it. In contrast to this, I propose that syntactic derivations can be non-monotonic, i.e., trees may temporarily shrink. Material that has been removed from the tree is stored in a separate workspace (WSP, a concept independently needed for complex specifiers, Bobaljik 1995, Uriagereka 1999) awaiting further manipulation. I illustrate that accepting this premise offers a new way to eschew violations of the MLC and the SCC, thus allowing to maintain them in their strongest form. Empirically, the proposal is close to the equidistance theory of Chomsky (1993, 1995) in that it ties the possibility of a non-monotonic derivation to the presence of head movement. However, it does so without invoking additional notions such as minimal domain or equidistance as such. Rather, equidistance-like effects are ultimately derived from the SCC.