Minimalist Interfaces
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Minimalist Interfaces. Evidence from Indonesian and Javanese
by Yosuke Sato
Minimalist Interfaces
Evidence from Indonesian and Javanese

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National University of Singapore

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Dedicated with love to my wife, Dwi Hesti Yuliani
and in memory of my first teacher,
Professor Tsuyoshi Oishi (1950–2008)
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Chapter 1

Minimalist interfaces

1. Minimalist interfaces

This book is a theoretical investigation of the interface between core syntactic computation and its neighboring grammatical modules within the framework of Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2008). The goal is to see the extent to which a thesis I call Minimalist Interfaces serves as an adequate hypothesis of the intermodular architecture of the human language faculty in the broad sense (Hauser et al. 2002). The fundamental idea behind this thesis is that syntax-external linguistic components play a critical role in applying a handful of domain-specific operations to legitimize otherwise illicit objects created by syntax for the purposes of the language-independent Articulatory-Perceptual/ AP and Conceptual-Intentional/CI systems (Chomsky 1995). The core intuition behind this thesis is that syntax is not entirely crash-proof, as argued for in Frampton and Gutmann (1999, 2002), in that it makes certain derivational mistakes but syntax-external linguistic interfaces make use of whatever resources they can to attempt to make them converge for the purposes of the external phonetic and conceptual systems. An equally important claim the thesis makes is that only certain mistakes committed by syntax can be repaired/remedied at the interfaces for convergence. This leads to a view of the interface between syntax and semantics/phonology, according to which syntax-external components can make use of their autonomous operations distinct from syntax to legitimize otherwise illicit syntactic objects but only within a very narrow range of options made available by the combination of universal principles of syntax with language-particular parametric values.

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1. I am very grateful to Andrew Carnie (personal communication, October 2007) for suggesting the term Minimalist Interfaces as one of the potentially overarching hypotheses that characterize this book. Thanks also to Noam Chomsky (personal communication, January 2005) for encouraging me to take seriously the role of linguistic interfaces and their relations with the language-independent concept and sound modules.
There are two aspects of the present book that are worth mentioning here. First, my current investigation attempts to show that syntax is functionally blind; it does whatever its abstract computational processes (i.e. Internal/External Merge, Agree, Spell-Out, Transfer) allow it to do to construct complex objects in a recursive fashion based on a language-particular subset of the universal pool of morphosyntactic features (e.g. T, v, V, C, etc.), without ever caring about the fate of the objects thus created, leaving the task of their convergence/interpretability entirely to the language-external sound- and meaning-related modules. Therefore, it is natural to expect that syntax creates objects that would be simply unusable from the perspective of the modules. This view of interface-oriented interpretability is a reasonable one in light of another consideration that what actually interfaces with the AP and CI systems is not syntax per se but the intermediate components that connect the syntax and the two systems. A variant of this view has also been developed by Boeckx (2007), who proposes to let linguistic interfaces determine the legitimacy of a syntactic object. Our current view, therefore, invites the possibility mentioned above, namely, that linguistic interfaces are equipped with domain-specific operations to legitimize syntactic objects to make them readable for the AP and CI systems.

Second, the proposed thesis of Minimalist Interfaces suggests that there is no room for the Lexicon as traditionally conceived of as a static storage point for words and their formation process; this time-honored assumption does not find its natural place under the most parsimonious version of the minimalist view of the linguistic interfaces, adopted in this monograph, under which what syntax interacts with is the sound and meaning component. Accordingly, the thesis leads us to expect that (at least part of) the traditional roles of the Lexicon in the Lexicalist sense should be played instead by the post-syntactic linguistic interfaces by such means as late insertion of phonological material, as recently argued for in the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, 1994; Harley & Noyer 1999; Embick & Noyer 2007).

The present volume discusses some of the empirical ramifications of the Minimalist Interfaces thesis defined above on the basis of the comprehensive theoretical analysis of a sizable portion of the syntax, semantics, phonology and morphology of two under-represented Malayo-Polynesian languages from the Austronesian family, Indonesian and Javanese. I examine a wide variety of areas in these languages where syntax interacts with phonology, morphology, and semantics. They include, but are not limited to, the interaction of the syntactic movement with the distribution of the active voice morphology, the crosslinguistically atypical pattern of P-stranding under sluicing, the denotation and morphosyntax of bare nominals, and nominal vs. verbal reduplication asymmetries. I analyze these apparently disparate phenomena in great depth to provide converging evidence for the idea...
that syntax-external linguistic interfaces make use of whatever domain-specific resources they can to modify/remedy/repair certain mistakes created by syntax, if any, but only within the narrow space set up by the combination of the architectural design of the syntactic computation and the language-particular values of the independently motivated parameters. To mention one such case from what follows, the analysis proposed in Chapter 4 of P-stranding in Indonesian, French, and English draws on two parameters: one concerns the percolation of the [+wh] feature of the interrogative NP onto its dominating PP while the other concerns the D-to-P incorporation in the syntax. I propose there, developing the idea of repair by ellipsis (Merchant 2001), that the phonological component can repair the failure of the [+wh] feature percolation by deleting the offending PP structure, but not the failure of the D-to-P incorporation, suggesting a bifurcated view of the reparability of computational failures.

Although the subtitle of the book gives the impression that the database of our inquiry is limited to Indonesian and Javanese, this book also contains a wealth of examples and descriptions from a far wider range of genetically unrelated languages encompassing Indo-European, Austronesian, Altaic, and Sino-Tibetan, as long as their investigation bears on the question of the extent to which the Minimalist Interfaces thesis holds.

2. Overview of the book

Beyond the present introductory chapter, this book is composed of five chapters. Chapters 2–5 are organized in such a way that the phenomenon discussed in each chapter constitutes an investigation of the interface between syntax and one of its interacting grammatical modules (lexicon, morphology, phonology, and semantics). Chapter 2 concerns the interface of syntax with the Lexicon in the Lexicalist sense; Chapter 3 concerns the interface of syntax with (post-syntactic) morphology; Chapter 4 concerns the interface of syntax with phonology; Chapter 5 concerns the interface of syntax with semantics. Below is the summary of the content of each successive chapter, with particular emphasis on the relevance of each phenomenon discussed therein to the thesis of Minimalist Interfaces.

Chapter 2 explores the interface of the syntax with the Lexicon in the Lexicalist sense. The empirical domain on which I base my investigation is a curious asymmetry between nominal and verbal reduplication in Indonesian. A corpus study of four popular newspapers published in Indonesia reveals that verbal derivational affixes have a strong tendency to feed only stem reduplication whereas nominal derivational affixes allow either stem reduplication or stem-affix reduplication. I show that this new observation is also confirmed by the data I elicited
with one native Indonesian consultant. I show that the stem-internal reduplication pattern as well as the observed asymmetry pose empirical/architectural paradoxes for several well-known variants of the so-called Lexicalist theory as in Chomsky (1970), Anderson (1982, 1992), Kiparsky (1982a, b, c, 1985), Mohanan (1986), and Di Sciullo and Williams (1987). Since the debate between Lexicalist and non-Lexicalist approaches to word formation has quite a long history sometimes coupled with heated rhetoric, I make it clear what specific aspects of these variants of the Lexicalist theory are not tenable with respect to the facts in Indonesian reduplication. Based on this result, I propose a morphosyntactic analysis of Indonesian reduplication within the uni-modular syntactic approach to word formation as in Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993, 1994; Marantz 1997; Harley & Noyer 1999; Embick & Noyer 2007). I show that the observed facts receive a straightforward account under the post-syntactic bottom-up cyclic insertion of phonological features once we take seriously a hierarchical arrangement of morphosyntactic features and the underlying syntactic category of input stems for reduplication. The architecture of the syntax–morphology interface that emerges from this investigation is one where there is in fact no such interface in the strict sense, because the current analysis indicates that morphological structure is itself syntactic structure unless otherwise motivated (Harley & Noyer 1999; Embick & Noyer 2007). This conclusion, I argue, is optimal under the most restrictive view of the Minimalist Interface guideline, namely, that language must minimally interface with the A-P and C-I systems, but not with any other language-internal modules such as the Lexicon in the Lexicalist sense, unless empirical evidence suggests otherwise.

With our results in Chapter 2 as background, Chapter 3 conducts a theoretical exploration of the interface between syntax and the (now post-syntactic) morphology within Phase Theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2008) with a detailed case study of the voice-movement interaction in Indonesian and Javanese. I start by reviewing the descriptive generalization, first made by Cole and Hermon (1998), that, in Malay/Indonesian, the movement of an NP across the active voice marker men- results in the obligatory deletion of the active voice marker, and by showing that this generalization also holds for Kendal Javanese in terms of the deletion of the nasal active voice prefix. I propose that the obligatory deletion of the active voice morphology in Indonesian and Javanese is the reflex at the syntax-external phonological component of the Spec-Head D-feature checking relation that holds between the moved NP and its local v head at the vP phase. To the extent that this analysis is tenable, the current investigation provides important evidence for the role of the vP phase at the syntax–morphology interface. Though numerous types of evidence have been accumulated in recent generative research for successive cyclic movement through intermediate CPs, evidence supporting
comparable movement through intermediate vPs has proven difficult to come by. In this regard, contributions from under-represented languages such as Indonesian and Javanese are highly significant. I conclude this chapter by making it clear how the results in this chapter support the idea that the way the phonological component conducts the deletion of active voice morphology tells us a lot about the way syntactic derivation proceeds in tandem with its neighboring interface. The investigation conducted here, then, leads to the conclusion, expected under the Minimalist Interfaces thesis, that the phonological interface is endowed with a handful of domain-specific operations, but can apply them only within the range of options set by universal principles of syntax.

Chapter 4 explores the interface between syntax and phonology through detailed investigation of the P-stranding pattern and sluicing in Indonesian. I present novel evidence that the P-stranding pattern in Indonesian presents a counterexample to Merchant’s (2001) Preposition-Stranding Generalization as a language that disallows P-stranding under wh-questions but allows P-stranding under sluicing. I also present arguments against potential analyses based on clefts, resumption, and (PF) P-drop that would make the Indonesian pattern consistent with the generalization. I argue that this apparently special pattern is naturally accounted for under the recent idea of repair by ellipsis. Specifically, I propose that the failure of percolation of the wh-feature is repaired by deletion in the PF, and provide independent evidence for this analysis from P-stranding under pseudogapping. I also show that P-stranding in French and German cannot be repaired since the violation in question is a syntactic one related to syntactic incorporation. Our investigation suggests a bifurcated view of violations (Boeckx & Lasnik 2006): representational violations pertaining to the syntax–phonology interface can be repaired whereas derivational violations pertaining to the syntactic computation cannot. A much broader implication of my analysis, relevant to the minimalist interface guideline, is that syntax is not entirely crash-proof (Frampton & Gutmann 1999, 2002); syntax could make a variety of “mistakes”, so to speak, whose severity for linguistic computation varies depending on the parametrically defined curve set by a particular language. I also address the question why only certain syntactic failures such as the failure of the [+wh] feature percolation can be repaired, but not other failures such as the failure of the D-to-P incorporation and argue that this bifurcation directly follows from the very architecture of the grammar assumed within the Minimalist Program.

Chapter 5 turns to the investigation of the interface between syntax and semantics with a case study in the denotation and morphosyntax of bare nominals in Indonesian and Javanese. Chierchia (1998a, b) proposes the Nominal Mapping Parameter as a semantic parameter concerning whether a particular language allows its bare nominals to denote the name of a kind, the name of a property, or