

Phrase structure basics

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In these lectures I will discuss four generalizations about phrase structure, the data that challenge them, and the hypotheses that may explain them. The relevant generalizations are (i) that syntactic dependencies are conditioned by c-command (from the 'antecedent' to the 'dependent'), (ii) that syntactic structures are binary-branching, (iii) that linearization of sister nodes is subject to variation, and (iv) that multidominance is only permitted under narrowly delineated circumstances (namely in coordinate structures or in the absence of a shared root node).

Phenomena that I will look at include Universal 20, heavy-NP shift, coordination and right-node raising.

I think that the c-command requirement holds without exception and can be traced back to the inclusiveness condition. The binary branching requirement holds widely because a generalized version of the theta criterion forces all asymmetric structures to be binary. That leaves coordination as the single predicted exception to the binary branching constraint. Variable linearization is pervasive but does not extend to nodes created by head movement, owing to processing difficulties associated with rightward movement. I do not understand the restriction on multidominance in (iv) but will present some evidence supporting it.

The theory that emerges after these expositions clashes with various hypotheses, including antisymmetry, radical syntactic decomposition and the notion that movement is internal merger.