Readings for next time:


Optional:

Comments on Legendre (2001)

This is an introductory chapter for a book on Optimality Theory syntax, laying out some of the ideas of Optimality Theory. This is where you should start, particularly if you are not already familiar with OT in phonology. This chapter talks about the ideas of OT and provides some brief examples with expletive subjects, information structure, and wh-movement/inversion.

One important note: Because of the way the file converted, the notation you see here is highly unconventional. Where you see a／(" you should think／(" and where you see a／(“ you should think／(". Tableau T2 should look like this, but it doesn’t:

T2. English (Input rain, [present])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJ</th>
<th>FULL-INT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>It rained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Rained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments on Pesetsky (1997)

This paper is good, very clear, but somewhat dense. You will not be able to skim this one; you will need to read the sentences as they come. If you do, though, you shouldn’t have much trouble with this paper, because it is written for an audience which is not necessarily expert in syntactic theory or OT.

Pesetsky’s basic proposal, in the end, is that OT seems to play a role in the pronunciation but not the construction of syntactic trees. In this respect, it’s something of a relative to OT phonology. The constraints all have to do with how things are pronounced—it’s bad to pronounce functional elements, it’s bad to leave things unpronounced that are not recoverable, it’s bad to pronounce a trace, it’s good to pronounce a CP starting with a C. This is different from Grimshaw’s system, where OT is directly involved in building trees.

Comments on Grimshaw (1995)

This was a very influential paper and one of the earliest efforts toward applying Optimality Theory principles to syntax. The basic framework is one where, instead of Merge, Move, and all of the other things that go on in, say, Minimalist syntax, you instead of some kind of input and the tree you get as an output is basically the best one you could have had.

The paper talks primarily about subject-auxiliary inversion and do-support in English.

I’ve listed it as “optional” because between the Legendre intro and the Pesetsky chapter, you already have a lot to read. This paper also requires a lot of deep thinking to see exactly what the constraints are doing, even though it is written in a reasonably accessible way. I’ll try to talk a bit about this paper, and it might be useful for you to at least skim it to get an idea of what “OT purists” do with OT in syntax.

Stuff for you to do:

• Do the readings, no summaries due, but the readings are fairly extensive, so don’t wait until the last minute.

Next time:
Discussion of OT in syntax, led by me, no student presentations.