

Luigi Rizzi

## 2 CENTRAL UNRESOLVED THEORETICAL ISSUES

A ‘What are the major open questions in the theory of generative syntax today?’

On syntactic representations

The possibility of representing syntactic configurations as tree graphs expressing hierarchical structures in a visually effective manner always had a high impact on the heuristic capacity of syntactic research, elementary and advanced teaching, collaborative projects with neighboring cognitive disciplines. Various issues are raised by some core minimalist assumptions. Here is a partial list:

1. Is the head – projection distinction needed for theoretical (e.g., the labeling algorithm) or empirical (e.g., the statement of typological generalizations) reasons? How can the distinction be reconciled with basic tenets of bare phrase structure?
2. Is linear order encoded in syntax, or is it just a property of externalization?
3. What is the status of head movement? Should syntactic head movement, as distinct from phrasal movement be postulated (but then, how can it be made consistent with set-theoretic merge, no tampering, etc.)? Can it be seen as post-syntactic (but why does it look so syntactic, expressible as probe-goal, obeying familiar syntactic locality,...? And how can it have effects on interpretation?)? Can “head movement”, e.g., verb movement in the inflectional space and in the C system, be reduce to phrasal movement in disguise (but how can one motivate the massive increase in movement steps that this would require?)?
4. What is the size of the functional lexicon and how is it used in syntax? Is the C T v system assumed in much minimalist analysis just a convenient abbreviation for richer structures described in cartographic studies? Or does it represent an empirical hypothesis on clausal structures? Or could syntactic configurations be kinds of “fractal” structures, allowing descriptions at different levels of magnification, at which the same geometric configurations are found? These questions arise for the structure of clauses and of all major phrases.
5. What are the principles constraining the assignment of morphosyntactic features to functional (and contentive) items? Are complex featural arrays built in the lexicon, or only in syntax, through head movement or other manifestations of merge?

### 3 SYNTAX IN RELATION TO OTHER FIELDS OF LINGUISTIC INQUIRY

B 'What are the main success stories and bottlenecks in the interaction between syntax and the experimental subdisciplines (language acquisition, sentence processing, neurolinguistics), and how can syntax be more useful to those?'

Theoretical syntax has successfully interacted with acquisition studies, at least ever since the early parametric models in the early 1980's, which created a tool (also) for comparative acquisition studies, and defined an agenda (what is the developmental course of parameter fixation?). This trend created a scientific community which is now firmly established, with its own regular conferences (GALA, GALANA, Romance Turn, etc.), regular presence at larger conferences (BU), journals and book series.

Similar developments took place in the theory-conscious study of language processing (CUNY Conference, etc.)

Recently, new directions of research have emerged which integrate theoretical research and acquisition and processing studies. For instance, the systematic delay of certain object A'-dependencies (certain object relatives, object questions, etc.) has been treated as determined by the intervention of the subject in the dependency, a configuration to be analyzed as a particular case of intervention locality (Relativized Minimality). This line of research provided a useful basis for cross-linguistic acquisition studies, and for comparative studies involving first and second language acquisition, and various language-related pathologies. It has also triggered an in-depth reflection on the nature of intervention effects in syntactic theory, and on the system of morphosyntactic features which is involved; it also prompted a reassessment of the competence-performance divide (how distinct are parsing principles from straight grammatical principles? How can one distinguish grammatically-based accounts from pure performance accounts, etc.).

If sizeable communities have consolidated in the domains just mentioned, the relations of theoretical linguistics with psycholinguistic, development studies and cognitive psychology at large remains problematic, and in fact are getting worse. Formal linguistics, and syntax in particular, is often perceived as an abstruse formal exercise, whose heuristic capacity is very limited in suggesting possible research lines for experimental investigation. The message one gets, sometimes quite explicitly stated, is that current syntactic theory is not worth the effort of figuring out its subtleties, given the meager payoff in inspiring experimentally addressable questions. This problem is visible in the extreme (and increasing) difficulty of publishing theoretically-informed research in major journals of cognitive psychology, and hampers the possibility of interdisciplinary projects, access to funds, etc. Definitely, action must be taken to limit, and possibly revert, this negative trend.

#### 4 THE ROAD AHEAD

B 'In which direction(s) would you like to see the field proceed, and where would you like the field to be in ten or twenty years' time?'

Ideally, fundamentals of scientific linguistics should become part of the background of all the disciplines that deal with language. Much as mathematics is part of regular curricula in the natural sciences, but also in medical school, psychology, economics and other social sciences, elements of linguistics should be part of the curriculum of all sectors of the humanities, including literary and cultural studies, philosophy, communication studies, and psychology.

Perhaps even more important would be the presence of fundamentals of linguistic analysis at the level of high school education, alongside, mathematics and physics, but also, in some curricula, philosophy and psychology: language is so central to all our activities that it is absurd that a contact with the scientific study of language is so drastically restricted to a bunch of university curricula, and no contact is foreseen in any secondary school system I know of.