

## Some thoughts on some of questions / Ivy Sichel

### 1.a. Strengths.

The Minimalist Program in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has led to excellent new work on Syntax in its interfaces with the other subfields and sophisticated new forms of argumentation. There have been impressive developments at the Syntax-lexicon interface, including DM and other work on argument structure and event structure; on QR, reconstruction, ellipsis, etc. at the Syntax-semantics interface; on linearization and focus at the Syntax-phonology interface. All these areas have seen a leap in empirical coverage and theoretical development, all owing to the general Minimalist spirit. This has obviously led to a significant de-centralization within the field, but I'm not sure that it is problematic; I'm not sure it's a problem that a person working on contemporary argument-structure isn't up on the latest developments in the domain of Control theory, for example. It's more problematic when fragmentation occurs within a sub-field, i.e. within the study of a phenomenon with more or less agreed upon boundaries, such as within the area of locality, which I write more about below.

### 2. Central unresolved theoretical issues

#### a. What are the major open questions in the field of generative grammar today?

Locality is a major open question. Despite an impressive amount of very valuable empirical work, which does add up and makes it possible to ask the questions I formulate below, we still do not really know a lot in one of the central areas that distinguishes syntax from other sub-disciplines. What exactly are islands? Are they syntactic, semantic, processing, or phonological (PF-related) phenomena? What is the nature of the division that started out as the complement/adjunct asymmetry, and why do we find it where we do (i.e. What is the weak/strong island typology? i.e. do Weak islands have anything else in common, besides exhibiting this asymmetry)? How, if at all, do 'ECP phenomena', formerly treated under 'antecedent government' fit it? These questions are obviously related to the following questions formulated in terms of theoretical constructs: What are phases? Why do we have the phases that we have? What, if any, is the extent of cross-linguistic variation in this area? What, if any, is the relation between locality and cyclicity? It may well be that there are many open questions because indeed the empirical landscape in this area is indeed very complex and it will take a while to sort it out. In other words that there is no 'problem' here and we should be patient. On the other hand, I worry about the prospects of successfully moving ahead when this subfield feels? / seems? very fragmented (with weird internal divisions along geographical lines, gender lines, and other such seemingly irrelevant properties); there seems to be little consensus even regarding *what* is primary/core vs. *what* is secondary/more peripheral- this makes it difficult to evaluate the overall *theoretical* achievement of the last 50-60 years (whereas the empirical achievement is crystal clear!).

#### b. What is (or ought not to be) in the field's common theoretical core?

It's probably pretty clear that I think that locality is / ought to be one of the topics at the core. Within this area, broadly construed, it's difficult, however, to tell which sub-areas are at the core right now; there may be a focus on phenomena related to the PF theory of islands (ellipsis, sluicing, resumption), but it still is far from clear how exactly-or

broadly- PF considerations trigger island sensitivity, and how all this would interact with other known aspects of the A-bar system. Other areas in the core: hierarchical arrangement vs. considerations related to linearization; single output vs. multiple outputs; constraints on displacement vs. constraints on other kinds of dependencies (agreement, binding, control); the scope of the application of QR / other syntactic scope shifting mechanisms; interfaces with semantics, phonology and lexicon.

### 3. Syntax in relation to other fields

#### 4. The road ahead

a. What do you see as the biggest challenges in the coming years/decades?

BIG DATA in linguistics, the kind of contemporary work that sometimes calls itself 'usage-based approaches'. A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches is probably necessary, but the work I have in mind is usually aimed to argue against the existence of UG, tends to not base itself on any linguistic theory, and to ignore the knowledge accumulated over the years in syntax and in linguistics in general. In the spirit of Evans' Language Myth, the usage-based linguists make broad anti-generative and anti-UG claims which are far from grounded but nevertheless attract students and funding.

b. In which directions would you like to see the field proceed?

Creating a situation in which the significance / relevance of work in syntax is more obvious to people in experimental sub-disciplines (acquisition, processing, etc.), and also to people working in other cognitive, non-linguistic domains. For example, the door opened by work in developmental psychology by Liz Spelke and Susan Carey, which explains the human-specific aspects of non-linguistic knowledge by appealing to abstract properties of linguistic knowledge. This is a whole new - and exciting- way to think about language and thought, cast in structural terms, and moreover structural properties which characterize Language as such rather than any particular language (embedding and hierarchy; syntactic categories; kinds of inflectional morphology etc.). Fodor's modularity thesis may have been useful for a while for keeping linguists on track with language-related explanations, but it's time to outgrow the modularity paradigm, especially if the kinds of properties that might be shared are structural.