Cukier-Goldstein-Goren Center for Mind and Language,
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THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 18.11.2021

16:15-17:45

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Dominant grammatical tone at the syntax/phonology interface

All African tone languages exhibit GRAMMATICAL TONE, defined as tonal changes in a specific morphological/syntactic environment that cannot be attributed to general phonology. One type of grammatical tone (GT) can systematically delete/replace other tone – so-called DOMINANT GT – but only if the target is morpho-syntactically inward. This is unlike non-dominant GT patterns (e.g. simple concatenative floating tone) which may apply inward or outward, depending on the language. This typological finding is called the DOMINANT GT ASYMMETRY, summarised below.

	Trigger	→	Target	NON-DOM GT	DOM GT
Inward	Affix	→	Root	✓	✓
	Modifier	→	Noun	✓	✓
	Outer affix/mod.	→	Inner affix/mod.	✓	✓
Outward	Root	→	Affix	✓	*
	Noun	→	Modifier	✓	*
	Inner affix/mod.	→	Outer affix/mod.	✓	*

In this talk, I propose a novel account of GT dominance, which takes as its starting point the output of the syntactic derivation. When this is sent to Spell-out, terminal syntactic features activate entries within the Vocabulary, essentially stored syntax-phonology pairings familiar to realizational models of morphology. The syntactic output and the activated vocabulary are mapped to a phonological input which consists of (*i*) linearised morphs composed of phonological primitives, (*ii*) recursive layering of these morphs based on their syntactic position, and (*iii*) initial prosodification (ω, ϕ). I will demonstrate how this input in conjunction with a novel representation called PHANTOM STRUCTURE (independently proposed) can derive the dominant GT asymmetry. Finally, I will argue that this model has the benefit of being fully modular in the sense that after Spell-out the grammar can only refer to phonological primitives and elationships, and there is no longer sensitivity to syntactic primitives or structure (e.g. c-command).

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