A prosodic constraint on the head-complement linearization

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We propose to reinterpret the Head Final Filter (HFF) (Williams 1982) and the Final-over-Final Constraint (FOFC) (Biberauer et al. 2014) as a prosodic constraint on the head-complement linearization, Minimal Prosodic Boundaries (MPB). We argue that MPB can explain the counterexamples to HFF and FOFC.

Sheehan (2017) tries to assimilate the HFF to the basic FOFC *[$_{\alpha P}$ [$_{\beta P}$ β γP] α] without the extended projection requirement. However, East Slavic and Greek permit [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ A PP] N]. Alexeyenko & Zeijlstra (2021) argue that HFF can be violated in languages (e.g. Greek) that have rich agreement morphology on both attributive and predicative adjectives. However, West Slavic (e.g. Czech and Slovak) have rich morphology but obey HFF (Siewierska & Uhlifova 1998).

As an alternative, we propose a constraint (1) and a syntax-PF mapping (2).

(1) Minimal Prosodic Boundaries (MPB): A constituent is Externalized with minimal prosodic boundaries between its sub-constituents.

(2) Interpret boundaries of syntactic constituent [...] as prosodic boundaries /.../

{$_{\alpha P}$ α, {$_{\beta P}$ β, {$_{\gamma P}$ ..γ..}}} is linearized as in (3) and (4) (ex. {$_{VP}$ V, {$_{PP}$ P, DP}} *WALS*).

(3) a. [$_{\alpha P}$ α [$_{\beta P}$ β [$_{\gamma P}$ ..γ..]]] > / α / β / ..γ.. ///   [$_{VP}$ V [$_{PP}$ P DP]]   456 languages
    b. [$_{\alpha P}$ [$_{\beta P}$ [$_{\gamma P}$ ..γ..] β] α] > /// ..γ.. / β / α /   [$_{VP}$ [$_{PP}$ DP P] V]   472 languages

(4) a.%[$_{\alpha P}$ α [$_{\beta P}$ [$_{\gamma P}$ ..γ..] β]] > / α // ..γ.. / β //   [$_{VP}$ V [$_{PP}$ DP P]]   42 languages
    b. *[$_{\alpha P}$ [$_{\beta P}$ β [$_{\gamma P}$ ..γ..]] α] > // β / ..γ.. // α /   [$_{VP}$ [$_{PP}$ P DP] V]   14 languages

The harmonic orders (3a, b) have no more than one prosodic boundary (/) between α, β and γP while the disharmonic orders (4a, b) have two boundaries between α and ..γ... MPB explains the fact that (3a, b) outnumber (4a, b). We argue that a sequence of left brackets can be interpreted as one prosodic boundary: X [[.. Y > X / Y. Then, (4a) can be Externalized as / α / ..γ.. / β //, which satisfies MPB.

German and West Slavic languages have initial stress in words and phrases, and have the order [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ **PP** A] N] (3b), which conforms to MPB and the initial stress, but not [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ A **PP**] N] (4b), which violates MPB and does not match the initial stress. East Slavic and Greek have near-to-final stress, and cannot have the [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ **PP** A] N] order with initial stress; they allow [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ A **PP**] N] (4b), which violates MPB, a nonabsolute constraint, but matches the near-to-final stress.

Selected Reference: • Siewierska, A. & L. Uhlifova (1998) An overview of word order in Slavic languages. In A. Siewierska (ed.), *Constituent Order in the Language of Europe*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 105–149.