
Ambiguities at the interface: production and comprehension

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Over the last few decades, several theories on how syntactic phrasing influences prosodic phrasing have been proposed. However, it is equally assumed that prosodic phrasing is not only determined by syntactic structure, but by other modules as well, e.g., information structure. Furthermore, prosodic phrasing often seems to undergo a postsyntactic ‘rephrasing’ process to meet certain well-formedness constraints (a.o., Selkirk 1995). The resulting mismatches between syntax and prosody raise the question as to how the influence of syntax on prosody (during production) is in fact reversible (during comprehension).

The idea of grammar as consisting of different modules with their own principles and parameters has been adopted into several frameworks. This talk will discuss the interaction between the two modules of syntax and prosody in Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG; Kaplan & Bresnan (1985)) with respect to German case ambiguities. In the following example, the syncretism between the feminine forms of the dative and the genitive articles leads to an ambiguity in the subordinate clause’s second DP *der Gräfin*.

- (1) Alle waren überrascht dass
Everyone was surprised that
[der Diener]_{DP1} [der Gräfin]_{DP2} zuhörte.
the.MASC.NOM servant the.FEM.GEN/DAT Countess listened
'Everyone was surprised that [the Countess' servant listened // the servant listened to the Countess].'

Based on experimental evidence, it will be shown that it is indeed crucial to distinguish between the two processes of comprehension (prosody → syntax) and production (syntax → prosody) and that the modular framework of LFG allows for a straightforward modeling of this difference at the syntax-prosody interface.

References: • Selkirk, E.O. 1995. The prosodic structure of function words. In Beckmann, Dickey and Urbanczyk (eds.), *Papers in Optimality Theory*, University of Massachusetts. • Kaplan, R.M. and J. Bresnan. 1982. *Lexical-Functional Grammar: A formal system for grammatical representation*. In

Bresnan (ed.) *The Mental Representation of Grammatical Relations*. Cambridge, MA [a.o.]: MIT Press.