

The syntax of intonational phrasing from the standpoint of English

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This paper centers on the ways in which intonational phrasing in phonological representation is dependent on the phrase structural properties of the interface syntactic representation. It assumes a grammatical architecture in which syntax mediates between phonology and semantics and where the syntax-phonology interface is characterized in terms of a set of optimality theoretic interface constraints (cf. Selkirk 1995, Truckenbrodt 1999).

The paper begins with a tutorial on the characteristic phonetic and phonological features of intonational phrases in English. Following Potts 2003, 2005 it is then argued that the Intonational Phrase is syntactically grounded in the syntactic constituent type *Comma Phrase*, rather than in the Emonds 1970, 1976 *root sentence*, as has been assumed by Downing 1970, 1973, Bing 1979, Nespor and Vogel 1986 and Truckenbrodt 1995, among others. A Comma Phrase, according to Potts, is a featurally marked syntactic constituent which is an integral part of the phrase structure of a sentence, but whose interpretation is independent of the “at issue entailments” of the sentence and which constitutes a separate speech act. Thus, nonrestrictive relatives, *as*-parentheticals, left dislocated constituents, etc. are Comma Phrases, and so are matrix sentences.

It is argued that the CommaPhrase status of a constituent gives it a systematic relation to the parsing of a sentence into Intonational Phrases. Specifically, it is shown that the effect is asymmetric, such that the *right edge* of a Comma Phrase is required to align with an Intonational Phrase edge, while the left edge is not. This asymmetry, captured in an inherently asymmetric interface alignment constraint Align R (CommaP, IntP), is revealed in the fact that medial [+comma]-marked phrases such as nonrestrictive relatives are always followed by an Intonational Phrase break, but not separated from the preceding erstwhile “head” by anything more than a lower order Major Phrase break. It is also revealed in the tendency for adjunctions to the right of the matrix sentence to always be separated from the matrix by an IntP break, regardless of the Comma Phrase character of the adjunct itself, while adjunctions to the left of the matrix may fail to be separated into a distinct IntP if lacking the status of a CommaPhrase.

A theory of intonational phrasing that is based on syntax-phonology interface Align (Selkirk 1986, 1995) and Wrap (TrucKenbrodt 1995, 1999) constraints which require syntactic constituents of fundamental types (comma phrase, XP, branching constituent, morphosyntactic word) to correspond, respectively, to prosodic constituents of fundamental types (Intonational Phrase, Major Phrase, Minor Phrase, Prosodic Word) is shown to be superior to the Sense Unit Condition of Selkirk 1984 in accounting for the syntactically governed regularities in intonational phrasing in English.