Where does (sentence) meaning come from?

> '*A central assumption in generative grammar research on the relationship between syntax and the lexicon is that syntax is a projection of the lexicon. The structure of sentences is a reflection of the lexical properties of the individual lexical items they contain.*'
> Huang (1997:45)

For more than thirty years, since the publication of *Lectures on Government and Binding* (Chomsky 1981), generative research has been informed by the Projection Principle, by which syntax is construed as a 'projection of lexical properties.' In subsequent Minimalist approaches (e.g. Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000), this restriction is tightened up further through the requirement that syntactic computations operate exclusively with the lexical items introduced in the initial array (numeration), without reference to any node labels or other extraneous symbols (e.g., theta-roles, indices, movement traces, levels of representation) that might contribute to sentence meaning. This does not, of course, exclude reference to abstract formal features—indeed, these are crucial to most Minimalist analyses—but it requires that such features are ultimately drawn from the lexicon: they are themselves lexical entries, alongside contentful, arbitrary lexical items. Whatever the theoretical advantages of this approach for delivering an extremely spare Minimalist syntax, it should be clear that this massively increases lexical complexity, leading to a multiplicity of different abstract features attaching to what are, intuitively speaking, the same lexical items. Grammatical theory is a zero-sum game: if the syntax does little or no semantic work, the burden necessarily falls on lexical specification.

The importance of the Projection Principle cannot be overstated, since it largely predetermines the answers given to most of the significant ontological questions that generativists have asked themselves over the last few decades. These include the existence or otherwise of a universal base (UBH), the locus of syntactic parameters, the choice between derivational and representational models, and the relevance of morphology to narrow syntax, as well as questions about the physical extent of syntactic analysis (the right-edge problem). If—leaving aside the effects of scope and constituency—all grammatical meaning inheres in and projects from the lexicon, then syntax can be construed as the radically spare, un-parameterized, thoroughly derivational, computational procedure that informs current generative models. Moreover, if syntax is just the projection of lexical properties, it might be supposed that *everything* that projects from the lexicon—all uttered material, up to and including clause-peripheral discourse particles—necessarily enters into the syntactic computation.

But what if it ain't so? What if we have fundamentally misconstrued the syntax-lexicon relationship? In this talk, I'll consider an antithetical alternative: that the lexicon—or at least, a theoretically interesting subpart of it—is better viewed as a projection of syntactic meaning. Anti-Projection. Words as filters, exponents of syntactic configurations, acquiring their meaning in virtue of their syntactic position. Lexical, rather than syntactic, Minimalism: *cf.* Marantz (2005), Borer (2007). I will argue that this reversal offers more than a novel perspective on the syntax of familiar inflectional languages: it is the only reasonable and empirically adequate way to treat multi-functional morphemes in isolating languages like Vietnamese.

In contrast to inflectional languages, Vietnamese does not differentiate subtle grammatical contrasts in the lexicon: instead, it disposes of a set of radically-underspecified 'multifunctional' items, whose semantics are determined in part—and in some instances exhaustively—by their position in phrase-structure. A clear example of this multifunctionality is offered by the modal auxiliary *được* (also *phải, nên*), which is variously interpreted as a deontic, epistemic or abilitative modal—even as a non-modal (*realis*), aspectual, particle—depending on its structural position. This is illustrated in (0); see Duffield (1999), Phan & Duffield (in prep.)

0. a. Ông Quang *được* mua cái nhà.
        PRN Q.   CAN buy CL house
        'Quang was allowed to buy a house.'

    b. Ông Quang mua *được* cái nhà.
        PRN Q.   buy CAN CL house
        'Quang bought a house.'

    c. Ông Quang mua cái nhà *được*.
        PRN Q.   buy CL house CAN
        'Quang is able to buy a house/Quang may possibly buy a house.'

Through an examination of these and other functional morphemes in Vietnamese, with particular focus on two particles—*không/thể*—on the right edge of interrogatives, I will try to make a case for Anti-Projection/Lexical Minimalism, and consider its corollaries for the other larger questions mentioned above, including the physical boundaries of syntax—whether uttered elements can be 'extra-syntactic'. Finally, I will speculate on whether such a fundamental principle might itself serve as a locus of grammatical parameterization.

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