Optimality Theory 1

# Exception in human language

## Standard assumption: most elegant grammar is best

### most elegant = fewest exceptions

## Responses to exceptions

### exceptions are bad

#### exceptions show that we haven’t got the generalisation right

##### we need to re-formulate the generalisation

#### we ignore exceptions but note them for future work

##### footnotes in traditional grammars

##### noted in theoretical grammars

## Traditional grammars are full of exceptions

## Modern grammars are also full of exceptions

### it has been claimed that every principle of GB had some exception

#### e.g. Case Filter: every DP is in a Case position – except for PRO

#### e.g. trace cannot follow that – except in relative clause

## It seems that exceptions are normal in human languages

# Exception as the permitted violation of grammatical principle

## If exceptions are a natural part of language, then it seems that the principles responsible for generalisations are sometimes violated by grammatical expressions

# Allowable violation as conflict resolution

## Why would principles be violated and still produce grammatical expressions?

## Case Filter – a second look

### All DPs must be in a Case position

### PRO is a DP

### PRO is never in a Case position

### PRO cannot be governed

### All Case positions are governed

## This list contains conflicts

### They cannot be satisfied all at once

# Conflicting principles as natural grammar

## There are many instances where we find conflicts in grammatical principles

### Wh-phenomena

#### Arguments and adjuncts occupy relevant IP internal positions

#### Wh-elements occupy CP initial positions

#### Wh-elements are arguments or adjuncts

### Subject related phenomena

#### All clauses have subjects

#### Subject position is filled by most prominent DP argument

#### Some verbs have no DP argument

### Verb and negation relations

#### Tense is supported by first verbal element

#### Tense precedes negation

#### Negation precedes verb

#### Verb can be first verbal element

### Inversion

#### Tense is supported by first verbal element

#### Tense precedes subject

#### Subject precedes verb

#### Verb can be first verbal element

### It seems, therefore that conflict is normal in human grammar

# How to deal with conflict

## If all grammatical principles are inviolable, conflict leads to ungrammaticality

### As conflict is so common, there would be very little that was grammatical

## It seems that in cases of conflict, expressions are grammatical because some principles are allowed to be violated

### But in other cases, the same principles cause ungrammaticality if violated

## The situation appears to be like this:

### All principles should be adhered to

### In cases of conflict, some principles are violated

### This enables the others to be adhered to

# Complex interaction of conflicting principles

## A: Complementisers are optional

### I think (that) he left

## B: Don’t have a complementisers in front of an empty subject

### who do you think (\* that) left

## C: Relative clauses with empty subjects must be marked as clauses

### the man \*(that) left

## This shows that we canot simply have two types of principle

### Those which are always adhered to

### Those which aren’t

## In this case A is violated because of B and B is violated because of C

### So B is one that is not violated when in conflict with A

### But B is one that is violated when in conflict with C

# Ranking as a way to decide

## The above scenario suggests that principles are ranked with respect to each other

### C < B < A

# Linguistic Variation: re-ranking

## Ranking provides us with a viable way to view linguistic variation

### C < A < B

#### Relative clauses would have to start with complementisers, but other clauses with empty subjects would have optional complementisers

### B < C < A and B < C < A

#### All clauses with missing subjects could not start with complementisers

### A < C < B and A < B < C

#### All clauses have optional complementisers