Is Minimalism too Diverse?

Minimalism is a program, not a theory.

Minimalist theories differ in many parameters:

- feature system
- feature checking
- movement
- traces
- constraints
- grammar mode

These two properties do not hold of competing formalisms a narrowly restricted class.

So is Minimalism just a random hodge podge of ideas, or is there a technical common ground?

Unification via Minimalist Grammars

Minimalist grammars (MGs; Stabler 1997) are a formalization of pre-Agree Minimalism. In recent years, they have been expanded in various directions. (Fowlie 2013; Gärtner and Michaelis 2010; Graf 2011, 2012b, 2014a,b; Hunter 2010; Kobele 2006, 2011; Stabler 2011)

- new feature systems
- a system for implementing all known movement types
- a system for implementing most syntactic constraints
- Agree, phases, and (late) adjunction
- representational characterizations
- mapping to LF structures
- mapping to prosodic structures

MGs have become a flexible formalism that can span the full range of ideas from the syntactic literature.

Comparing Minimalist Theories

While Minimalist proposals stay within the same class, they may occupy very different points in that class. We can measure their distance via three notions of equivalence.

- Equivalence Grammars have the same.
- derivational derivations
- strong output structures
- weak string yields

D-equivalent grammars are virtually indistinguishable, they describe the same I-language.

A Few Surprising Equivalences

Many contentious issues have no measurable impact, the competing pieces of machinery are d-equivalent:

- privative ⇔ binary ⇔ multi-valued
- features ⇔ constraints
- traces ⇔ copies ⇔ multi-dominance
- derivational ⇔ representational

The choice of movement types has the biggest impact, but even then weak equivalence usually holds.

Conclusion

- Minimalist research is characterized by the factorization into two finite working memory components.
- Variation within that class can be precisely measured.
- A surprising number of contentious issues have no measurable bearing on matters of I-language.

References