WHERE SYNTAX AND PHONOLOGY TOUCH. A REPRESENTATIONAL VIEW OF THE INTERFACE
Marc van Oostendorp (Meertens Institute & Leiden University)

Let us suppose that we have a working model of syntax as well as one of phonology. We are then still faced with the problem how to connect those models to each other. The standard assumption is that this is done through some translation (quasi-)module, taking certain aspects of the syntactic representation (constituent structure, maybe some features) and translating them into phonological representations (prosodic trees) and have phonology operate on those. This leaves several questions unanswered such as why is it trees that map onto trees, and why is other syntactic information irrelevant to phonology; as well as: why do phonologically empty elements often display a special syntactic behaviour.

I argue that a purely representational view of language can answer these questions. There are no syntactic or phonological derivations, let alone a translation machine translating the outcome of one to the input to the other. Rather, there is syntactic and phonological structure which form two dimensions of the same structure.

These two dimensions are shaped according to similar principles: features, and structure. The features are necessarily domain-specific, because they talk about different things. However, structural principles are shared between the two modules. Furthermore, the modules can also notice whether or not there are any features at all on the other side, or nothing. I will show how various well-known and not so well-known cases of syntax-phonology mapping follow from this view, which then argues for taking purely representational ideas of linguistic theorizing more seriously.