Phonological traces of syntactic phases in the varieties of Italian.

This work explores the possibility that syntactic phases may leave phonological traces, an idea developed by Scheer (2008) who relates phonological representations of morphosyntactic boundaries and phases. It will be shown how Scheer’s proposal concerning the translation of morphosyntactic information in phonology by means of phonological objects nicely derives in a non arbitrary way the difference between two varieties of Italian that ought to be set apart after examining the Italian phrasal phonology: the variety spoken in the South, which displays a series of external sandhi phenomena and the one spoken in the North, where word boundaries resist any modification. In line with Scheer's ideas, because word boundaries in the North pattern with utterance boundaries in the South, the sandhi vs "anti-sandhi" behaviour of the two varieties will be ascribed to a difference in the minimal unit that in the two varieties is sent to PF for spell out: the utterance in sandhi varieties and the word in "anti-sandhi" varieties.

As Scheer observes languages seem to differ as to the length of the string that is sent to PF for the spell out and phonology seems to indicate that word and utterance two possible sizes. There is a good match between utterance and CP whereas the word, which represents a phonologically isolated chunk in many languages, does not seem to be a chunk subject to independent spell out in syntax. As for other syntactic contexts indicated as possible phases, this work will show that the analysis of corpora of spoken Italian display cases where external sandhi is blocked utterance-medially, contrarily to what the literature suggests (Marotta 2008 among others). Following the assumption that sandhi in such varieties is blocked by a phase boundary, then there is the possibility that Italian "sandhi varieties" can shed some light on phases below the CP.