A Distinctness Condition on *Linearization* Statements?

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Norvin Richards (2010: 3) observes that a "number of phenomena in different languages seem to be constrained by a ban on multiple objects of the same type that are too close together". For example, English sluicing is allowed to involve two remnants, but is impossible if both remnants are DPs:

(1) a. *I know everyone danced with someone, but I don't know who with whom.*
b. **I know everyone insulted someone, but I don't know who whom.*

Richards views this ban as a distinctness condition on linearization statements, applying at the syntax–phonology interface. I will argue that this view is incorrect.

Richards's conception of linearization incorporates two widely held assumptions: 1) linearization applies to the complement of a phase head as soon as that head is merged; 2) the linearization algorithm makes use of Kaynian statements ⟨α, β⟩ such that α asymmetrically c-commands β. With this background in place, Richards can explain contrasts like (1) in terms of the Distinctness condition in (2), ruling out trees in which two nondistinct nodes stand in an asymmetric c-command relation within the same linearization domain. He also surmises that the system might reject such 'repetitive' statements "as self-contradictory instructions to make nodes precede themselves" (Richards 2010: 5).

(2) If a linearization statement ⟨α, α⟩ is generated, the derivation crashes.

Elegant though it is, this implementation of the ban faces several empirical problems. The severest ones arise from contrasts that lend themselves to a Distinctness-based analysis even though the relevant nondistinct nodes never seem to form a linearization statement in Richards's sense. Examples can be drawn from *faire*-infinitive causatives of transitive verbs in Romance (cfr. (3))—as well as from restrictions on direct objects in the VOS Mayan language Chol (cf. Coon 2010).

(3) a. *Chiara fa* [*riparare la macchina*]$_{\text{VP}}$ **(a) Svevo.*
Chiara makes repair.INF the car to Svevo
'Chiara makes Svevo repair the car.'
b. ?**La mamma fa* [*regalare un trenino al bimbo*]$_{\text{VP}}$ *al papà.*
the mummy makes give.INF a toy_train to_the child to_the daddy
'Mummy makes Daddy give the baby a toy train.'

The picture that emerges is one of a constraint which makes no reference either to linear adjacency or to c-command relations. As it seems, Distinctness is a ban on the mere existence of two nondistinct (functional) heads within the same cyclic domain, irrespective of their mutual relations. Where this ban should find its place within the grammar is left an open question.

References

Coon, Jessica (2010). "VOS as predicate fronting in Chol". *Lingua* 120: 354–378.
Richards, Norvin (2010). *Uttering trees*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.