Syntax 1 Fall 2006
Assignment 2 Due October 5

Yes/No Questions

(1a-c) illustrate yes/no questions (so named because they elicit one of these answers).

(1) a. Has she declined the offer?
b. Will the documents have arrived by Tuesday?
c. Has the Earth been getting warmer?

Here are some ungrammatical yes/no Qs; you should be able to construct others:

(2) a. *Will have the documents arrived by Tuesday?
b. *Has been the earth getting warmer?
c. *Has she might decline(d) the offer?
d. *Called you the plumber yesterday?
e. *Is the polar ice cap has/have/having decreased in size?

Part A Consider the following two hypotheses:

(3) *Hypothesis A*
Yes/no questions are directly generated by the principles of phrase structure and selection.

(4) *Hypothesis B*
Yes/no questions are derived from structures resembling (or identical to) the corresponding nonquestions by some (as yet unspecified) operation.

First, make Hypothesis A explicit by stating precisely what we would need to assume about phrase structure and the lexicon (in particular, the lexical entries of auxiliary verbs) in order to account for the data in (1) and (2), plus any additional data that you feel is relevant. Next, construct an argument against (your version of) Hypothesis A and in favor of (some version of) Hypothesis B. Make all assumptions explicit; formulate all restrictions, lexical entries and rules; illustrate with examples and trees.

For the purposes of this assignment, you may start by assuming that subjects are introduced by the rule in (5), and that sentences are the unanalyzed category S (they are not projected from anything). If you want to modify this assumption, go ahead; will certainly modify it shortly in class.

(5) $S \rightarrow NP\ VP$

Part B Extend your response by forumlating an explicit proposal about the operation involved in Hypothesis B. State precisely your hypothesis about how yes/no questions are derived from corresponding non-question forms, say what changes/modifications to our assumptions about the generative component we need to make to implement your hypothesis, and show how your analysis accounts for the crucial data.