The syntax-semantics alignment: where semantics is systematic at all, semantics and syntax cannot independently vary, that is, language formats thought as opposed to expressing it.

- p. 506: The ‘inverted-Y’ (EST) grammar explicitly conceptualizes narrow syntax or the computational system of grammar as a device that mediates between thoughts on the one hand and sounds on the other. In one current version of minimalist grammar, the same axiomatics is written into the very architecture of language faculty, in that the computational system of language is rationalized by appeal to the expressive conditions ‘imposed’ by extralinguistic systems of ‘thought’ (C-I systems), with which it is said to ‘interface’ (...) There is no independent task or output to be matched; the task accomplished by grammar arises with grammar itself.

  a) Hinzen’s proposal it is radically opposed to the Strong Minimalist Thesis (SMT). How can we ask principled questions (why questions) of the kind that Minimalism encourage us to do if language has the format it has by itself?

- p. 506: Just as we do not want to assume purpose-engineered specialized rule-systems for every grammatical construction in every language, but overarching and underspecified principles, we perhaps shouldn’t assume either that syntax evolved to match a specific and pre-set semantic task (...) It is as if semantics is essentially self-justifying, while syntax is not. ‘Thought’ is simply there, as it always has been in the rationalist tradition.

  b) But we know (do we?), at least following Hauser, Chomsky & Fitch (2002), that other species have cognitive-intentional systems of some sort. Then, from an evolutionary point of view, something like a rudimentary C-I was there before syntax. Is this evolutionary perspective a valid argument contra Hinzen’s proposal?

- p. 507: Note that the existence of the C-I interface is no conceptual necessity. Conceptually necessary is only that language is used.
c) Conceptual necessity is only that language is used and also acquired. Does it tell us something else? Does it have some implication for Hinzen’s hypothesis about the syntax-semantics alignment?

d) A lot of attention is paid to the non-existence of a C-I interface, all meaning growing naturally out of syntax. However, in which position does the PF interface stand? It is often noted that the mapping to PF faces many difficulties that the mapping to LF does not. Does this point to the existence of a PF in the classical minimalist sense? Otherwise, could we think of a model of grammar in which phonological content arises from syntax in such a natural way as semantics does in Hinzen’s terms?

- p. 511: **Truth, in short, arises at a large stage in the build-up of hierarchical, structural complexity, which by itself indicates that it, as a semantic core primitive, is syntactically conditioned. At the other end of the complexity spectrum, we see that what is syntactically maximally simple is semantically maximally simple as well.**

e) In fact, most linguistic studies (in argument structure, left periphery and others, like Hale and Keyser, 1993), try to derive semantic primitives from strictly syntactic structures, thus emphasizing a strong correlation between the two components. In these works, instead of postulate a priori labelled phrases for each semantic function, it is the structure and the position of phrases which determines its semantic roles. Are most minimalist studies, then, proposing a syntax-semantics alignment to some extent like Hinzen does, or these are merely ways of explaining how syntax and semantics optimally interface, according to the SMT?

f) This presence of truth in structures with complex syntax/semantics is explicitly absent in examples like those in p.510 (‘Fire!’, proper names). What kind(s) of language use do we encounter in such examples? If there is no propositional content in them and therefore, no syntax is involved in their creation, are they language at all?

- p. 513: **The project is to systematically ‘deflate’ terms such as ‘event’ or ‘proposition’ into notions such as that of a syntactic structure headed by v or C.**

g) One of the common moves of current syntactic works is trying to dispense with most syntactic categories/processes/operations and other traditionally postulated notions. If we assume Hinzen’s hypothesis, doesn’t it mean that we need to create a syntactic entity for each semantic notion and, therefore, heavily increase the syntactic machinery?
Once that [that grammar provides the structures we need for the analysis of our thoughts] is understood, (...) we might make it our vision to show that syntax is ‘crash-free’, hence that whatever representations it generates, they cannot fail to be interpretable. A syntactic object that wouldn’t mean anything couldn’t be derived in the first place.

h) Syntactitians construct impossible sentences to test their models. Where would these sentences stand in Hinzen’s model? In a different fashion, does this pose a problem for those examples which are impossible to interpret because of the impossibility of assigning references (cf. Colorless green ideas sleep furiously)?

i) The core of Hinzen’s argumentation is to claim that the syntax of language is one and the same as the syntax of thought. As a result, the prediction would be that we cannot conceive a situation which we cannot express in syntax, even when syntax provides all the elements and mechanisms to implement it. However, there are well-known syntactic restrictions on the kind of structures we can generate that do not seem (at least intuitively) to translate into difficulties to process those situations in thought. Two of these are the Person-Case Constraint and all of the islands effects. For example:

Syntax provides the way to build a Wh-question, by fronting the Wh-element and moving the verb:

- You said something \(\Rightarrow\) What did you say?

It doesn’t matter how embedded the moved element is (except in extreme cases, by memory restrictions):

- What did John think that Sarah said that Mary considered that we should buy Michael?

However, there are domains from which it is impossible to extract an element:

- Talking about those books became difficult
- *Which books did talking about become difficult?

In this example, there is nothing preventing us from conceiving the situation in which we want to inquire about that element, and moreover, syntax has the means (Wh-fronting) to do it. However, there are restrictions over these sentences which render them ill-formed.

Is this a strong counter-argument for Hinzen?