# HOW THEORY CAN HELP DESCRIPTION AND VICEVERSA

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Cinque started his contribution with an irritating answer to the theme question: "'As much as we can' or 'none at all'", but he went on: "...depending on what is meant by 'theory'". If theory means theoretical understanding of a particular phenomenon (this, by the way, is not what is meant in the title question), then, of course, the more you have, the better you fare, for individual languages as well as cross-linguistically, since, clearly, the better we understand a phenomenon in one language and its counterpart in another language, the better will be the result of comparing the two.

But Cinque was rather sceptical about the state of the art: He took it as obvious "that we are still far from understanding the properties of any one language, and farther still from understanding the properties of Universal Grammar." And he warned against what one could call the filtering effect of linguistic theories: Adopting the point of view of a given theory makes some things more visible or interesting than others. Therefore theory-driven descriptions tend to marginalize phenomena which are not 'interesting' for the theory in question. And this is why Cinque answers "none at all" to the title question, if 'theory' means a particular set of assumptions and principles for grammatical analysis.

But then, what he really argued for was an eclectic and tentative use of different theoretical approaches for descriptive purposes rather than total theoretical abstinence. He illustrated his point with the grammatical representation of aspect (discussed at length in Cinque 1998), an underdeveloped area in generative syntax and a topic for which general theoretical accounts are much needed.