Many cross-linguistic generalizations reveal asymmetries between the different arguments of multi-argument predicates. The asymmetries are visible in syntactic processes such as relativization or reflexivization (argument A may undergo rule R, argument B does not); in linear ordering (argument A is preferred before B, not vice versa); and in surface coding (argument A is coded morphosyntactically, argument B is not, and/or argument A is coded using less phonological material than B). These asymmetry rankings have been captured in the form of hierarchies of grammatical relations, hierarchies of morphological cases and verb agreement, hierarchies of thematic roles, and in linear precedence preferences (cf. e.g. Greenberg 1966, Keenan & Comrie 1977, Primus 1999, Siewierska 1988). The paper raises the question: why should there be such consistent rankings and asymmetries among the arguments of a predicate? It proposes some partial answers using the principles of efficiency and complexity developed in Hawkins (2003, 2004), argues against some proposals that have been made in the literature, and takes note of the phenomena that are still puzzling from this point of view. A wide range of languages will be considered in presenting these patterns of asymmetry, including many from Europe and North and Central Asia.

REFERENCES


