Decomposition, cartography, and antisymmetry: scattering objects

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The points of departure for my talk are Greenberg's (1963) Universal 20 and its syntactic modeling (Cinque, 2005), Antisymmetry and Japanese (in Kayne's 2005), and various works on the distribution of objects. In the languages of the world, an invariant hierarchical order of Merge (Dem(Num(A))) surfaces prenominally (Greenberg 1963), but postnominally, a much greater variety of orders is attested, but certain patterns are systemically unattested (Cinque 2005). Cinque (2005) proposes that all orders are derived from a uniform syntactic hierarchy by leftwards movement of a constituent containing the nominal head, with various pied-piping options responsible for the greater opacity and variability of postnominal orders. Unattested orders are those that cannot be derived by the rules and principles of UG. Similar patterns have since become apparent in a great variety of other domains.

From these studies, we can draw the following lesson: the linear order before some "lexical" head is likely to reveal part of the syntactic hierarchy (the order of Merge, both internal and external), but post head order may show considerable opacity, and therefore should be analyzed with utmost care (contrary to current practice). All orders can be taken to derive from a unique hierarchy of Merge, under antisymmetry, with leftward movement and pied-piping.

I will apply this lesson to the clausal domain, focusing in particular on the distribution of objects and the different hierarchical positions they occupy, In many languages, objects show different syntactic distributions or formal encodings, depending on whether they are (weak pronouns), definite DPs, (focused DPs, quantified DPs, specific indefinites, indefinites. (cf. Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003, Diesing 1977), which can be represented as a structural hierarchy.

This presentation explores the question whether this hierarchy can in fact be taken to hold for all human languages, with UG leaving languages no choice in the matter Kayne, 1998. This "cartography" of objects is expected to show up invariably preverbally (O Aux V/VAux), regardless of whether objects are preverbal or postverbal AUX V O, with postverbal objects derived by movement of V/VP constituents past the objects, and v/VP remaining stuck at various different heights. In my talk, I will discuss languages from different language families that support the theory, languages that seem to pose apparent problems, and the general type of languages that are predicted to be unattested, given the theory under discussion.

Selected References

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