

Syntax Beyond Merge: Replacing Head Movement with “Mirroring”

A question arises for contemporary syntactic theory that derive syntactic structure from the recursive combination (“Merger”) of constituents: How much of syntactic well-formedness should be computed at the point of Merger in a derivation and how much should be determined from constraints or rules computed over the resulting Merged tree structures? I am investigating an approach to syntax in which syntactic well-formedness involves strictly local conditions on linear projections of Merged trees, following the lead of T. Graf’s work within Tier-based Strictly Local grammars. Within generative grammar, principles that involve “c-command” relations between constituents already refer to a linear path through a tree; I generalize the use of such paths to two linear projections from the hierarchical tree structure. The first involves just phrases and the heads that combine with phrases; this is the c-command projection. The second involves heads that Merge with other heads; this is the head projection. Linearization of constituents involves both projections, with the c-command projection ordered by Kayne’s “Linear Correspondence Algorithm” (higher is left) and the head projection ordered by a version of Brody’s “Mirror” (higher is right).

This talk will explore the empirical consequences of this approach for the English auxiliary system, for subject-aux inversion and verb second, for the explanation of Holmberg’s generalization, and for explaining various Final-Over-Final condition effects within words. On this last point, note that, although “unlockable” is famously ambiguous, “unlockability” can only mean the property of being able to be unlocked, a Final-Over-Final effect explained by the theory.