

Some thoughts on merge: typology, labeling, and freezing effects

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ABSTRACT

In this talk, I would like to discuss a typology of merge which is inspired by the study of the labeling algorithm: item-item, item-phrase, and phrase-phrase merge. The three types involve distinct, and increasing computational resources, generating a typology of computational systems which may be of help to study the ontogeny and phylogeny of language.

A labeling algorithm based on locality (Chomsky 2013) offers a formal basis for differentiating transiting positions (positions from which movement must continue) and halting positions (positions in which movement must stop, freezing positions), if completed by a maximality principle restricting phrasal movement to maximal phrases (Rizzi 2015).

This approach raises issues of indeterminacy in cases of phrase-phrase configurations which suggest a modification of the labeling algorithm, and the potential relevance of a generalized notion of selection. I will explore some consequence of such a selection-based algorithm, which requires a reflection on the featural system which licenses (in a way to be made formally precise) applications of merge.