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Friday, March 28th: 6:00-7:00

The Middle Way: a (re)look at features and movement crosslinguistically

Baker and McCloskey (2007) propose a Middle Way of doing linguistic research that looks at ‘fewer languages than a typical typological study, but at more languages than a typical generative study’. This methodology, they write, ‘would greatly reduce the danger of spurious generalizations that besets formal work, while at the same time reducing the danger of errors introduced by superficiality of analysis that besets typological work’. In this paper, I use the Middle Way to investigate movement and features across several languages and several language families in order to determine whether generalizations that have been made are, indeed, spurious. I argue that, contra Chomsky (2001), head movement should not be excluded from core syntax, and further that it is not ‘conditioned by the phonetically affixal character of the inflectional categories’. I show that the type of language that he predicts not to exist —languages where VPs and D⁰s move instead of V⁰s and DPs — in fact does exist. In particular, I will be looking at Celtic, Mayan, and Austronesian languages and arguing that they are candidates for VP/D movement. Further, I argue that by investigating these languages closely, one gains valuable insights not only into the languages themselves but also into the nature of movement and the role of features in triggering movement.

References

- Baker, Mark C. and Jim McCloskey. 2007. On the relationship of typology to theoretical syntax. *Linguistic Typology* 11: 285–296.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2001. Derivation by phase. In *Ken Hale: a life in language*, ed. Michael Kenstowicz, 1-52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.