Cukier-Goldstein-Goren Center for Mind, Cognition and Language,
School of Philosophy, Linguistics and Science Studies,
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THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 01/02/2024

16:15-17:45

Elise Newman, MIT

https://tau-ac-il.zoom.us/j/89733373023?pwd=UUlwVEZXcklDRVZBZlpEeDdBVUpPQT09

When wh-phrases are their own interveners

Much work on syntactic locality has shown that processes like wh-movement are subject to several kinds of locality restrictions. In addition to being sensitive to intervening wh-phrases, wh-movement must proceed successive cyclically through various points in the clause, and in some cases/languages, may not cross intervening arguments (see e.g. Branan and Erlewine (2022) for a recent overview). Sensitivity to intervening arguments is known to be quite fine-grained: according to insights from Keenan & Comrie (1977) and others, languages might differ with respect to what kinds of arguments count as interveners for a wh-element, and might also treat arguments vs. adjuncts differently.

In this talk, I propose that all of these locality restrictions and their various levels of granularity are interconnected. More specifically, I suggest that they reduce to a particular view of how selection influences the projection of category information from daughter nodes to their mothers. I show that by examining the nature of selection and projection, we can leverage the architecture of grammar to predict the requirement for wh-movement to be successive-cyclic: the projection rule makes it so that wh-phrases create their own barriers for extraction if their wh-features get too high, meaning they have to move outside the scope of their own features in order to extract. The theory entails that movement must be successive cyclic, but does not say through which positions. By varying the different allowed parameters in this theory, I show that it also captures variable sensitivity to the Keenan & Comrie hierarchy. Thus, the various locality requirements governing wh-movement can be reduced to basic principles governing selection and projection.

Click here to see the colloquium program.

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