

Remarks on the fundamental left-right asymmetry of natural languages and verb clusters

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This talk reflects on Cinque's recent papers on a left-right asymmetry in natural languages that seems to govern unmarked word order in different domains. In each of these domains, we find basically the same hierarchy-order relations that characterize the cross-linguistic distribution of neutral word orders of demonstrative, numeral, adjective, and noun within the noun phrase.

In the first part of the talk I will discuss the concepts necessary to generalize Cinque's (2005) theory of the hierarchy order relations in the noun phrase (as reformulated by Abels and Neeleman 2012) so that it can apply to the other cases. I will pay particular attention to the concepts of a domain of application and to different classes of modifiers of a head.

In the second part, I discuss what light the emerging theory of neutral word order sheds on the verb cluster in Germanic, a long standing problem of word order, revisiting and refining my own earlier work on the subject.

The final part of the talk points out that the interactions between different classes of modifiers have not been studied systematically but that they may well require a rethinking of basic structure-building operations.