

Derivational Structure and Ellipsis

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In derivational grammar formalisms, like tree adjoining grammars, categorial grammars, and minimalist grammars, the derivational process has structure in its own right, and can be shown to be rich enough to support semantic interpretation. In the context of minimalist grammars, this renders many of the traditional arguments for derived levels of structure, in particular LF, suspect.

In this talk, I will show how derivations are structured, and will argue that this is, in fact, the right notion of structure for minimalism. When looked at carefully, familiar arguments for the structure sensitivity of elliptical phenomena are revealed to establish only that ellipsis must be sensitive to the syntactic category of its antecedent. I will then present a theory of ellipsis in these terms. The resulting theory not only makes ellipsis sensitive to just the right amount of structure to account for its sometimes-structure-sensitive-sometimes-not behaviour, but is also efficiently implementable in the following sense: the cost of associating a meaning with a discourse (which may contain elliptical sentences) is simply the sum of the costs of parsing each of its component sentences.