Mixed computations for mixed phrase structure: theoretical and empirical perspectives

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In this talk we will argue that the theory of phrase structure a certain linguistic approach assumes implies taking a stance on the formal nature of the computational procedures that generate a phrase marker. We will proceed by critically evaluating generative theories of phrase structure and labeling, and building on -and opposing to- the proposals we review, we will claim that syntactic objects are not computationally uniform (meaning, they combine different kinds of dependencies, belonging to different levels in the Chomsky Hierarchy), and therefore the computational system in charge of establishing dependencies between symbolic objects within the mind is likewise not uniform: modern syntactic theories are based on computational ‘Divide and Conquer’ algorithms, which result procrustean and problematic in many instances for natural languages. We argue in favor of a linguistic-cognitive model which dynamically ‘chooses’ different grammars based on the complexity of the input, and is capable of assigning a mixed structural description to an object that presents more than one computational pattern, so that there is neither ‘excess structure’ nor ‘too little structure’ (Lasnik, 2011; Chomsky, 1963). Empirical evidence is provided in favor of our mixed approach to phrase structure building from coordination in Spanish, Latin, and English (Krivochen and Schmerling, 2016), pseudo-auxiliary constructions in English, and auxiliary chains in Spanish (Bravo et al., 2015).