

# Towards a performance theory of markedness in combinatory categorial grammar

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To the extent that syntactic theory is concerned with the search for a suitably restrictive grammar formalism — one whose generative capacity is the class of natural languages, and where the grammars of languages belonging to statistically common types are less ‘marked’ than those of languages belonging to statistically uncommon types — the combinatory categorial grammar (CCG) formalism of Steedman (2000) represents a promising starting point for investigations. CCG is powerful enough to capture what formal linguists agree are the most complex syntactic phenomena found in natural languages (e.g. the cross-serial dependencies in Dutch subordinate clauses), but not so powerful that formally conceivable but empirically unattested dependencies can be generated (e.g. doubly unbounded long distance scrambling). In addition, CCG predicts certain correlations among distinct parameters of language variation which are supported by data from typological studies (e.g. the observation of Ross (1970) that VSO languages are generally right-gapping languages whilst SOV languages are generally left-gapping).

However, there are some well-known generalisations about language variation which CCG does not predict. Examples are the general preference for languages to consistently place heads in the same position within their projections, and the cross-linguistic tendency for heavier constituents to occur later in the sentence. Hawkins (1994) explains these phenomena in functional terms — the language faculty systematically prefers those grammars which prioritise fast access to information about immediate constituency. This talk will discuss the implications of such functional explanations for a theory of the CCG lexicon.

## References

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