

Making copies: insights from computation

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As linguists, we are interested in the typology of copy constructions in the world's languages, for one to answer the question: what is a possible copy construction? What questions should we be asking in this regard? One prominent line of questioning, motivated by the idea that (syntactic) copying could be dealt with via (copy) movement, has been to focus on the distributional relationship between copies in a copy construction. Less prominent (in syntax) have been the questions of (1) the internal structure of copies, and (2) what counts as a copy in a copy construction. These are the questions I would like to focus on. Recent work in mathematical linguistics offers us an extremely refined classification of copying patterns, with straightforward informal characterizations ("does syntax break down in copies", "is there recursive copying") admitting of simple linguistic investigation, with fundamentally important consequences for grammatical architecture ("is TAG/CCG wrong", etc).