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Word Order Typology: a change of perspective

In this talk I will suggest the opportunity of reversing the perspective of current word order typology, not by asking what the predominant correlates of OV and VO orders in actual languages are, but by asking what precisely the head-initial and head-final harmonic word order types are that we can theoretically reconstruct, and to what extent each language (or subset of languages) departs from them (with the "rigid" types, Altaic SOV and Austronesian VOS, approximating most closely the ideal harmonic orders). This change of perspective entails viewing the "harmonic" orders as abstract and exceptionless, and independent of actual languages, though no less real. I will also suggest that these harmonic orders should not be regarded as primitives, but rather as derived from a universal structure of Merge that reflects the relative scope of the elements involved via two distinct movement options, with actual languages departing to varying degrees from the "ideal" derivations (where more deviations should imply fewer languages instantiating that type).