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Discussion

Basic Operations : minimal Syntax-Semantics

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Abstract: In this programmatic paper, we articulate a minimalist conception of linguistic composition, syntactic and semantic, with the aim of identifying fundamental operations invoked by the human faculty of language (HFL). On this view, all complex expressions are formed via the operation COMBINE(A, B). But this operation is not primitive: $COMBINE(A, B) = LABEL[CONCATENATE(A, B)]$. We take labeling to be a computationally simple but perhaps distinctively human operation that converts a mere concatenation of expressions, like $A^{\wedge}B$, into a more complex unit like $[A A^{\wedge}B]$, with the subscript indicating a copy of the dominant constituent. We discuss several virtues of this spare conception of syntax. With regard to semantics, we take instances of COMBINE(A, B) to be instructions to build concepts. More specifically, we claim that concatenation is an instruction to conjoin monadic concepts, while labeling provides a vehicle for invoking thematic concepts, as indicated by the relevant labels.

Keywords: Basic operations ; Concatenate ; Label ; Copy ; Conjoin ; Close

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