

## On spines and skeletons

Cora Pots<sup>1</sup> & Cavirani Edoardo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> KU Leuven; <sup>2</sup> Meertens Institute

**Background.** According to the Chomsky-Borer conjecture, “variation [is] attributable to differences in features of particular items”. This is echoed in Van Oostendorp & D’Alessandro Magnetic Grammar (2017), in which “variation is based purely on features and elements [namely] in the representation of the primitives”. As shown by the latter, this holds for both syntax and phonology: in both modules, variation is determined by the combinatorial properties of representational primitives. For instance, (((the variation of) the linearization of) hierarchical) syntactic structures follow(s) from the featural content of syntactic objects. Similarly, the variation concerning static (i.e. phonotactics) and dynamic (i.e. alternations) phonological generalizations can be derived by the featural/elemental content of phonological objects.

**Proposal.** Building on the analogies just sketched out, we address the implications this view might bear on two other representational primitives, namely the functional spine (Cinque 1999) and the autosegmental skeleton (Goldsmith 1976). We do this by discussing the variation concerning a) Dutch and Afrikaans verb clusters involving posture verbs and b) the linearization of phonological exponents in Berber, German and Lunigiana varieties. We show how the featural content of the relevant syntactic and phonological objects drives their positioning along the backbone encoding the relative (linear?) ordering of the objects that enter the syntactic and phonological computation, namely the functional spine (FS) and the autosegmental skeleton (AS).

**Discussion.** Given the fairly abstract content of the proposal, as well as of the premises it builds on, a substantial part of the talk is represented by the discussion of the implications of such an approach. For instance, given a) the Chomsky-Borer conjecture, the Minimalist Program and b) Magnetic Grammar and works concerning e.g. the internal structure of phonological elements (see cavirani & van Oostendorp *in press* for an overview)

- how sure can we reasonably be about the existence/necessity of FS and AS (which, crucially, have been repeatedly argued to be part of UG)? And, related to this:
- how much FS and AS depend on other (un)necessary module-internal theoretical assumptions (such as, in phonology, the CVCV hypothesis (Lowenstamm 1996)? Or, rather,
- is it possible to derive FS and AS themselves from the combinatorial possibilities and the nature of features? Or, also,
- is it possible to cast (some of the properties of) FS and AS in terms of interface conditions (see e.g. Ramchand & Svenonius 2014 for the semantics-syntax interface and Scheer 2011 for the syntax-phonology one)?