Speaker: **Greg Kobele**
University of California, Los Angeles

Title: **On Ellipsis and Derivational Identity**

Date: Monday, January 22, 2007
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Place: Rosenfeld Hall (corner Temple & Grove Streets)

Abstract:

Natural languages have constructions which necessarily involve some sort of formal identity between two objects. In the domain of phonology this is well known and studied. However, in syntax too we find the need to posit grammatical devices for ensuring that two expressions have the same form: the germanic wh-copy construction, A- not-A questions in Chinese, predicate clefting in Vata, etc. But how do these `copy mechanisms' work? Most studies focus their attention on interface effects---when copies are pronounced, how they are interpreted, etc---and not on how the copies are constructed in the first place. Looking at syntactically complex copies (as are found in Yoruba) allows us to distinguish different hypotheses about how copying is effected. Perhaps the simplest is that syntactic identity is determined on the basis of the derivation of the objects in question; two objects count as identical just in case they are derived in the same way (i.e. they are derivationally identical). Such a hypothesis allows us to account for surface-opaque `copies' in Yoruba in an elegant way.

Here, I formulate a bolder hypothesis: ALL identity effects in grammar are mediated by derivational identity. The best known such case is ellipsis. Once we formulate our hypothesis in the context of ellipsis, elision gives us a window into grammar---if a constituent is elided, it is derivationally identical to its antecedent. This provides us with a powerful and new kind of syntactic test: not just for constituency, but for how an expression was constructed. Even without settling on a particular theory of syntax (minimalism, TAGs, categorial grammar, etc), we are forced to certain strong conclusions about passivization (passives and actives are derivationally related), nominalization (VPs are derivationally related to gerunds), etc.

Using minimalist grammars, it is straightforward (and standard) to write grammars for natural languages (here: English) which satisfy these constraints. Thus, in the context of minimalist grammars and the derivational approach to identity, certain previously puzzling cases of putative identity mismatches are seen to dissolve upon closer inspection.

Other cases of identity mismatches are not so easily dispelled. It is, however, clear, in the context of our derivational theory of identity, how to approach their resolution. Here, I focus on antecedent contained deletion (ACD), which (under the assumptions made above) forces us to assume that objects are first merged into a position higher than their theta-positions. I provide a formal implementation of this idea which not only resolves the problems posed by ACD, but also formally derives the difference between A and A-bar movement.