Discontinuous Noun Phrases in Yucatec Maya

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The first part of my talk will be programmatic in nature. I will offer an outline of current studies and projects in general linguistics that illustrate the type of generalizations that a general linguist expects to obtain through repeated-observation designs (corpora and experiments).

In the main part of my talk I will present my current exercise on split noun phrases in Yucatec Maya. Mayan languages have two interesting grammatical properties that are relevant for understanding the properties of discontinuity: (a) clearly demarcated left peripheral positions for topics and foci and (b) several morphological reflexes of nominal ellipsis and adjectival syntax. Property (a) is informative for our assumptions about the landing site of movement; property (b) is informative for the syntactic configuration out of which the discontinuous constituents arise.

Several instances of apparent discontinuity appear in Yucatec Mayan noun phrases: the challenge is to identify the exact operations that result to these constructions as well as the syntactic entities to which these operations apply. This talk shows that the observed cases of discontinuity in this language are the result of two different syntactic operations: a first subset of apparently split NPs is traced back to a continuous base, while a second subset involves semantically-related NPs that are independent from each other.