



UNIVERSITÀ
di VERONA

Dipartimento
di LINGUE
E LETTERATURE STRANIERE



Prof. Peter Svenonius

(CASTL, University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway)

will give a lecture on:

Spell-out, spans, and the syntactic definition of word

Thursday, 30th June 2022

from 5pm to 7pm

Co-working room, Dipartimento di Lingue, Palazzo di Lingue, Piano mezzanino

(Zoom link: <https://univr.zoom.us/j/88112022520>)

PhD program in Linguistics

Prof. Stefan Rabanus

Prof.ssa Alessandra Tomaselli



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Abstract

It has proven so difficult to come up with a satisfying non-phonological definition of ‘word’ that some linguists have taken to denying its very existence. Yet it seems obvious to everyone else that there are words, even if we find it difficult to define them precisely in a way that is relevant to syntax.

The dominant syntactic theory of words is based on head movement, according to which a word can be defined as a maximal X0 (i.e., an X0 which is not dominated by any other X0). However, syntactic head movement is theoretically problematic for a number of reasons. Some people have therefore suggested that head-movement is not syntactic, in which case it gets us no closer to a syntactic definition of word. It is therefore important to explore alternatives.

One such alternative to head movement is based on the notion of spans, which are sequences of heads related by complementation. They are combined by External Merge, not Internal Merge.

From the perspective of a span-based theory of spell-out, what we intuitively call a word is a subpart of a span that is spelled out in a single cycle. I show how this way of thinking about words is useful, compared to various alternatives.