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Toward a Discovery Procedure

Abstract:
A discovery procedure, as Chomsky famously discussed in Syntactic Structures, produces a grammar for a linguistic corpus. At the time it was deemed premature for serious investigation and subsequent research has set on the more modest project of an evaluation procedure: Among a set of available grammars, which one provides the best account of the data?
Almost 70 years later, and with a much deeper understanding of language and how children learn it, I would like to suggest that a discovery procedure may be within sight. But we must abandon the goal of finding a BEST grammar, while rejecting the dominant paradigm in the theory of learning that seeks to identify the most probable, compact, or accurate hypothesis with respect to data. I will present how a merely ADEQUATE discovery procedure can be pursued, with illustrative examples from inflectional morphology, recursive structures, and syntactic islands.