CAS LX 522
Syntax I

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Morphosyntactic features, part II
(2.4.2-)

General structure of the account

- Knowing a language is:
  i) knowing the "words"
  ii) knowing how to put them together
  iii) knowing how to pronounce them
  iv) knowing what they mean in combination

The lexicon

- To construct a sentence, we start with the "words" and put them together.

- We can describe the knowledge of the words of a language as being a list, a mental *lexicon*.

Interfaces

We can view a "word" as a bundle of features, as defined by its properties. The grammar *assembles* words into sentences. The sentences are *interpreted* and *pronounced*.

"words"

Lexicon

assembly

interfaces

Grammar

A-P system   C-I system

sound   meaning
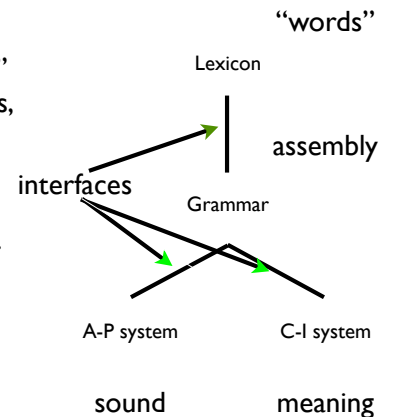
Interfaces

- The assembly process is the grammar proper.

- The system that interprets sentences is another cognitive module ("conceptual-intensional system") concerned with meaning, reasoning, etc. It interprets the constructed sentence at the *interface*.

- The system that determines the pronunciation of sentences is yet another cognitive module ("articulatory-perceptual system"), interpreting the constructed sentence at its interface.

Points of tension

- For English, it seems that independent [sg] and [pl] features is more complicated than we need—it seems to overgenerate.

- In the broader picture, Language needs to allow for independent [sg] and [pl] features in order to accommodate duals in, e.g., Hopi.

Tension

- We need a hypothesis about what is different in languages with no dual (e.g., English).
- Adger's suggestion: All languages have singulars, but in languages without duals, singular is the *default*, the "number for nouns not specified for number." The feature [sg] is *not recorded* in the English lexicon: *book* [], *books* [pl].
- So languages can differ in whether they record [sg] in the lexicon.

What are the features?

- Hard to say. A universal set, some used in some languages, but not others? Learned?
- Some features seem not to exist, why?
- Okham's razor: keep theories as simple as possible. Here, we want to define the simplest set of features we can get away with and still explain the data.

Category

- Syntax is concerned with *distribution*.
- Words seem to come in distributional classes.
  - One class of words can appear after the possessive pronoun *my* (*my book*, **my at*, **my quickly*, **my explode*, **my purple*). The *nouns*.
  - One class of words is compatible with past tense. The *verbs*.
  - One class of words is compatible with comparative (*happier*). The *adjectives*.

Category

- Words can be separated into classes: noun, verb, adjective, preposition, etc.
- Classes also vary with respect to the kind of morphological endings they can have, and so forth. (*Arrival*, *replacement*, *destruction*; *widen*, *computerize*)

Distribution examples

- They have no *noun*.
- They can *verb*.
- They are *adjective*.
- Very *adverb*, very *adjective*.
  - So long as it makes sense (e.g., with gradable adjectives; *#they are very absent*).
- Right *preposition*. (*right over the house*)

Nouns and verbs

- Nouns have a category feature [N].
  - *Books* [N, pl]
- Verbs have a category feature [V].
  - *Complained* [V]
- Two independent features.
- Four predicted categories.

[N], [V], [N,V], []

- So, nouns are [N], verbs are [V].
- What might [N,V] be? Maybe adjectives are a bit "nouny" and "verby" at the same time.
- And the fourth possibility? []?
- The other basic category would presumably be prepositions.
- But, really? []?

Privative? Or binary?

- There's something kind of uncomfortable about saying the prepositions simply *lack* category features.
- We can soothe ourselves somewhat by adopting binary category features instead of privative features.
- Same predictions, but more in line with our intuition about what "category" should be.

[±N, ±V]

- The [±N, ±V] category system may seem a bit "out of the blue." But it does yield some descriptive benefit. To wit:
- Consider what *un-* can attach to:
  1) *untie*, *unfold*, *unwrap*, *unpack*
  2) *unhappy*, *unfriendly*, *undead*
  3) **uncity*, **uncola*, **unconvention*
  4) **unupon*, **unalongside*, **unat*

[±N, ±V]

- Basically, it applies to (reversible) verbs and adjectives, but not to nouns or prepositions.
- Well, what are those?

Russian case

- Case is a morphological form nouns take on depending on where they are in the sentence (subject vs. object). English pronouns show this distinction: *I like her, she likes me*. Some languages (like Russian) show differing case forms on all nouns.
- When Russian nouns are modified by an adjective, the adjective is *also* marked for case.

Russian case

- What gets marked for Case in Russian?

1) Krasivaya   dyevushka vsunula
   beautiful   girl   put

   chornuyu koshku v pustuyu   korobku
   black   cat   in emtpy   box
   'The beautiful girl put the black cat in the empty box.'

Categories: Lexical vs. functional

- Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs: These are *lexical* categories. They carry significant and arbitrary meaning, and they are *open-class* (new ones can be invented).

- But not all words are of this kind (except maybe those on telegrams).[†]

[†]*Telegram* (n.): An ancient form of texting.

Functional categories/ syntactic "glue"

- Sentences are held together by little "function words" as well. These are *functional* categories.

1) I expect that the CEO will want to retire.

- Determiners: *the, a(n), some, every, that, ...*
- Pronouns: *you, him, they, my, your, ...*
- Infinitival to: *to*
- Auxiliaries/modals: *have, be, do, can, should, ...*
- Complementizers: *that, for, if, ...*

Determiners

- Determiners generally come before a noun, and come in a few different types. There are differences between the types, though for now we'll lump them together. Category: [D].

  - Articles: *the, an*

  - Quantificational determiners: *some, most*

  - Interrogative determiner: *which*

  - Demonstratives: *that, this*

  - Possessive pronouns: *my, your, their*

"Pre-noun things" vs. determiners, adjectives

- Can we lump determiners together with adjectives?

  - They both come before nouns.
  - They both seem to "modify" the noun.
  - If we didn't need both categories (if they don't matter for syntax/distribution), we'd have a simpler theory putting them together.

- *Tall building, that building, a building, my building.*

Determiners vs. adjectives

1) The big fluffy pink rabbit
2) *The my rabbit
3) *The that rabbit
4) *Every my rabbit

- Determiners cannot co-occur with other determiners, must precede any adjectives.

- Adjectives can occur with other adjectives.

To properly describe the distribution of these elements, we really need to separate them into two classes. Lumping them together will not give us a simpler descriptive systems.