

NOTES ON SYNTAX

YANNAN MAO

27TH MARCH 2024

CONTENTS

1	Syntactic Categories	1
1.1	Distribution	1
1.1.1	Morphological Distribution	1
1.1.2	Syntactic Distribution	2
1.2	Classification of Syntactic Categories	2
1.2.1	Open and Closed Classes	2
1.2.2	Lexical and Functional Categories	2
1.3	Subcategories and Features	2

SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES

The *syntactic category* of a word, also known as its *part of speech* or *word class*, is determined by its *distribution*. For English, we note syntactic categories including

- (a) *nouns* (N),
- (b) *verbs* (V),
- (c) *adjectives* (Adj),
- (d) *adverbs* (Adv),
- (e) *prepositions* (P),
- (f) *determiners* (D),
- (g) *conjunctions* (Conj),
- (h) *complementisers* (C),
- (i) *tense markers* (T), and
- (j) *negation* (Neg).

1.1 DISTRIBUTION

1.1.1 MORPHOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION

The smallest meaningful units in language are referred to as *morphemes*. A *free morpheme* can occur independently, and a *bound morpheme* or *affix* must attach to another unit, referred to as the *stem*. An affix attached at the end of the stem is a *suffix*; at the start, a *prefix*; inside, an *infix*; and at both the start and the end, a *circumfix*.

The stem required by an affix is referred to as its *complement*. An affix requires its complement to be of a certain syntactic category, a process referred to as *c-selection* or *category selection*. That affixes c-select complements of certain syntactic categories form the *morphological distribution* of those categories.

A *lexeme* is a unit of meaning underlying a set of word forms related by inflection. An affix which modifies the lexeme of its complement is a *derivational morpheme*, and one which retains the lexeme thereof is an *inflectional morpheme*.

Example 1. The English suffix *-ise* is a derivational morpheme and c-selects N or Adj.

1.1.2 SYNTACTIC DISTRIBUTION

A syntactic category occurs in certain syntactic structures, referred to as its ***syntactic distribution***.

1.2 CLASSIFICATION OF SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES

We classify the syntactic categories noted above in two ways.

1.2.1 OPEN AND CLOSED CLASSES

Syntactic categories that permit new members are ***open classes***, and those that do not are ***closed classes***. N, V, Adj, and Adv are open classes; and P, D, Conj, C, T, and Neg are closed classes.

1.2.2 LEXICAL AND FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

Syntactic categories with full semantic content are ***lexical categories***, and those without are ***functional categories***. Lexical categories coincide with open classes, and functional categories coincide with closed classes.

1.3 SUBCATEGORIES AND FEATURES

D and T have ***subcategories***. The subcategories of D are

- (a) ***articles***,
- (b) ***deictic articles***,
- (c) ***quantifiers***,
- (d) ***numerals***,
- (e) ***possessive pronouns***, and
- (f) some *wh*-question words;

and the subcategories of T are

- (a) *auxiliaries*,
- (b) *modals*, and
- (c) *non-finite* tense marker.