

NOTES ON SYNTAX

YANNAN MAO

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SYNTACTIC CATEGORIES

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

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

1.1.3 COMPLEMENTARY DISTRIBUTION

Two words are ***in complementary distribution*** if their distributions do not intersect. Complementary distribution implies identical syntactic category.

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.