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Ling 102 Section

September 14

Section
Wednesdays 7:15–8:00
Boylston 303

Office Hours
Tuesdays 3:00–4:00
2 Arrow St Room 423

Introduction

A typical section will consist of exercises and practice regarding the material of the previous class, demonstrations on how linguists may go about solving problems or creating hypotheses regarding theories, and generally answering questions regarding the class and section material. I encourage you all to email me questions or difficulties about class material a day or so before section so that I may discuss them in class, or to bring them up in section for me to answer. There's no such thing as a stupid question! On weeks where assignments are due, I will use part of the section to go over the assignment; feel free to email me or meet in office hour with me to discuss about areas of the assignments which you find difficult.

Expectations

Your participation grade for this class includes being present for the section, participating in in-section activities, and bringing questions/comments regarding course material in section. If you will be absent from a section, please email me ahead of time to let me know, and we can figure out a time (during office hours or otherwise) to go over any questions, excersizes, or other material from the section.

Office Hours

Office hours as posted are Tuesdays from 3:00–4:00 PM. I will make myself available on Tuesdays from 4:00–5:00 PM as well, and am happy to organize a meeting outside of those times. I will also be meeting with students from Ling 112 around this time, so I have posted a sign-up sheet online so that you may all coordinate what times you would like to meet with me.

Discussion Groups

You are encouraged to form discussion groups to discuss p-sets, but the final answers that you submit must be in your own words. Feel free to work with whomever you like. The last five minutes of class today are dedicated to you all being able to mingle and exchange contacts to form groups at your disgression.

1 What does "Language" mean?

"Language" can refer to various concepts:

(1) a. Universal Grammar (UG): Inherent capacity to learn language: a set of rules or mechanisms which govern the possibility space of language.
b. I(nternal) Language: The grammar and lexicon of a language as it is represented in the mind.
c. E(xternal) Language: Instances of language in the world

UG and I-Language constitute tacit knowledge: an English speaker may not know that "dog" and "cat" are called "nouns" but they know to use them as they would use other nouns. A person need not know the concept of verb phrases and subjects, but all people with language faculty can create and combine verb phrases and subjects.

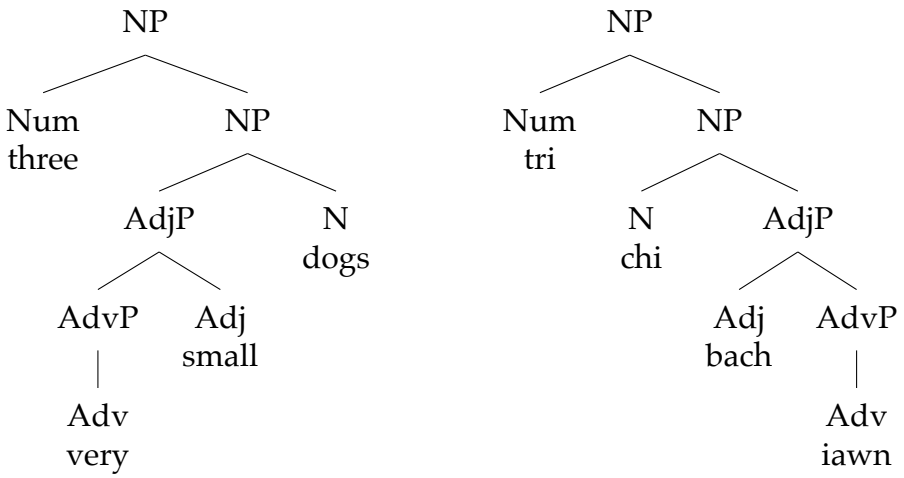
Syntax as a science is the attempt to make models of how the structure of UG and I-language work based on observations of grammaticality and interpretation of word order in E-language.

2 Categories and Constituents

The concept of a constituent is created to describe sets of words which act as a unit under syntactic operations (movement, elision, coordination, pro-forms). We can represent these constituents as nodes in a syntactic tree.

How many constituents are in either tree in (2)?

(2)



Categories are used to refer to certain kinds of constituents which behave similarly. These can be heads (Noun, Verb, etc.) or Phrases (Noun Phrase, Verb Phrase, etc.).

How many unique categories are in either tree in (2)? What is similar about the structure of the tree? How do these trees differ?

(3) How to tell if constituent X and consituent Y are of the same category.
   a. Mutual substitutability: you can replace X with Y and have a sentence still be grammatical?
      (i) ^{OK}His hat fell, ^{OK}The man in blue fell → "his hat" and "the man in blue" likely share a category (noun phrase).
      (ii) ^{OK}The bird is above the tree, ^{OK}The bird is inside the tree → "above" and "inside" like share a category (preposition)
   b. Complementary distribution: Is it impossible to have a phrase contain X and Y in the same relative position?
      (i) *John's his hat → "John's" and "his" likely share a category (determiner)
      (ii) *read the book the newspaper → "the book" and "the newspaper" likely share a category (noun phrase)
   c. Morphological distribution: Can X and Y both take the same morphology (suffixes, prefixes, etc.)?

3 Constituency Tests

(4) a. Movement: only constituents can undergo movement as a unit.
      (i) Passivization: Passivize a verb and move the object to subject position.
      (ii) Wh-movement: Turn part of a constituent into a wh-item and move the constituent to the left of the clause.
      (iii) Topicalization: Move some constituent to the left of the clause.
      (iv) Clefting: It was X that [Y t_X]
      (v) Pseudo-clefting: What [Y t_X] is X
      (vi) Verb preposing
   b. Coordination: only constituents can undergo coordination (without right node raising)
   c. Pro-Forms: Only constituents can be substituted with pro-forms (single words which represent some/any member(s) of a set of a given category)
   d. Ellipsis: Only constituents can undergo ellipsis.

Some sentences to do tests on:

(5) a. That puppy eats the kibble in his bed.
   b. Some students gave the librarian a pretty book.
   c. The children believe that the tooth fairy exists.

What can we replace with pro-forms? Are there any movement operations we can apply to this sentence? Are there any parts of this sentence we can coordinate?

Problematic analyses

(6) a. Sue said she ate the cake, and indeed she did eat ~~the cake~~ → Because "the cake" cannot be elided, "the cake" is not a constituent.
b. The smart doctor saw this patient > Which doctor saw this patient? → Because "The smart doctor saw" can be made into a wh-phrase (Which doctor saw) and move to the left of a clause, "The smart doctor saw" is a constituent.
c. Sue will eat the octopus, and ~~Sue will eat~~ the shrimp, too. → Because "Sue will eat" can be elided, "Sue will eat" is a constituent.

What are some problems with these analyses? Longer distances between the affected constituent and where they are generated (where they come from) can help distinguish false positives from true instances of constituency:

(7) a. [Eat the octopus] she said that she would ~~[eat the octopus]~~
b. *[She would eat] she said that ~~[she would eat]~~ the octopus.

(8) a. I said that I will eat the octopus, and John said that he will ~~eat the octopus~~, too.
b. *I said that I will eat the octopus, and John said that ~~he will eat~~ the octopus, too.

4 Ambiguity and Constituency

Structure affects meaning! What are the different meanings this sentence has, and how can we represent them with our trees?

(9) John saw his sister with a telescope.

Why is this sentence not ambiguous? What other meaning might we expect it to have if we didn't have syntactic structure?

(10) I gave the letter to John to Mary.

The following sentence is a 'garden path' sentence: when reading it the first time, you expect a different meaning then the one the sentence actually has. Why might structure play a part in the confusion of this sentence?

(11) The horse raced passed the barn fell.