Reading notes of Cambridge Grammar of English Language

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This note is a reconstruction of the contents The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, henceforth CGEL).

1 Theoretical preliminaries

For the discussion on the underlying theoretical framework, see the relevant chapter in this note. Briefly speaking, the framework is coarse-grained Minimalism: invisible functional heads are erased, but dependency relations created by the functional projections are kept (Fig. 1(a)), and the corresponding CGEL tree is obtained by replacing the name of dependency relations by syntactic function-form pairs (Fig. 1(b)). The head is defined as the dominant *lexical* word. This makes CGEL look like old-fashioned X-bar theory, where a lexical word projects into a phrase (CGEL § 5.2 [5]), but there can be several "maximal projections" headed by the same lexical word (CGEL § 5.2 [11]). This is actually consistent with Minimalism (Fig. 2).

The standard of "lexical", however, varies from one author to another. A PP and a CaseP (in generative terms) are similar objects, but in the coarse-grained CGEL framework, the latter is definitely an NP, but the status of the first is kind of controversial: should we recognize the preposition as a lexical word, or as a functional word? In the first analysis, a PP in generative terms is still a PP, while in the second analysis, a PP in generative terms is an oblique NP. Choosing between the two analyses is merely a problem of notation. But it is good practice to choose a notation that hints the readers about certain properties of the construction in question. For example, if a PP is analyzed as a PP, then probably the preposition has some predicative properties.

Not all dependency relations can be expressed purely by the context-free phrase structure grammar (Pullum and Rogers, 2008). Movements (or cross-serial dependencies in dependency terms) in Minimalism are represented by a gap (CGEL § 2.2 [5]), or by indirect dependency (CGEL § 5.14.1).

The close relation between CGEL and generative syntax apparently deviates from the common descriptive practice (or Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT)), but this distinction is illusory: while BLT assumes a flatter phrase structure, information coded by the binary-branching phrase structure in CGEL is coded by dependency arcs in BLT (Fig. 3).

2 The clause structure

References

Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language.* Cambridge University Press, 2002. doi: 10.1017/9781316423530.

Geoffrey K Pullum and James Rogers. Expressive power of the syntactic theory implicit in the cambridge grammar of the english language. In *annual meeting of the Linguistics Assocition of Great Britain, University of Essex*, 2008.

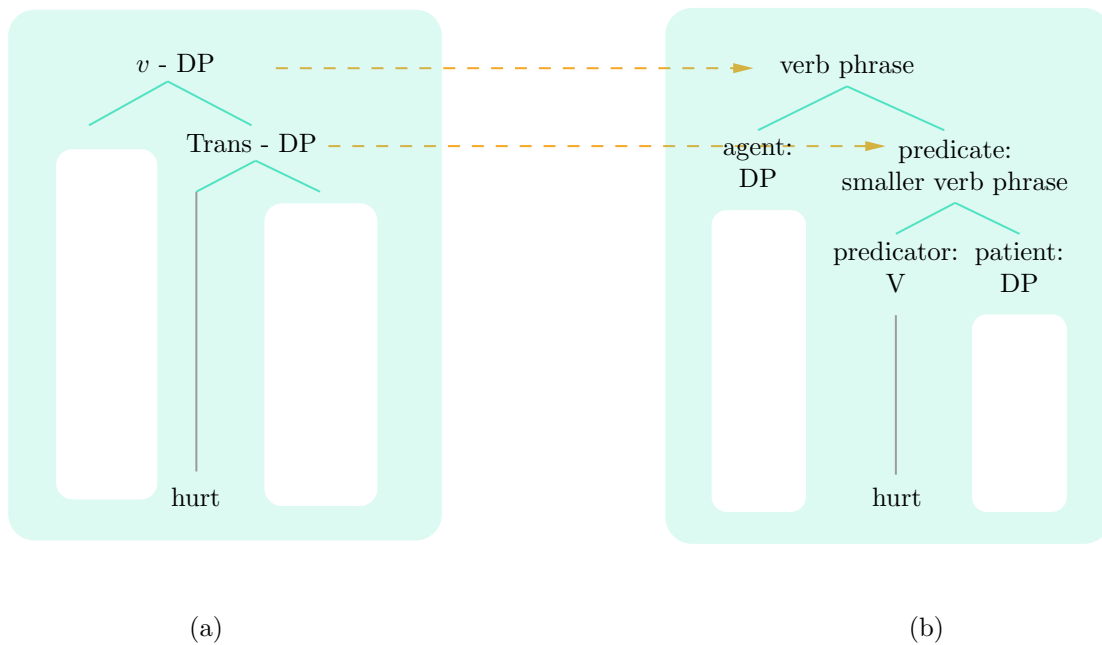(a)   (b)

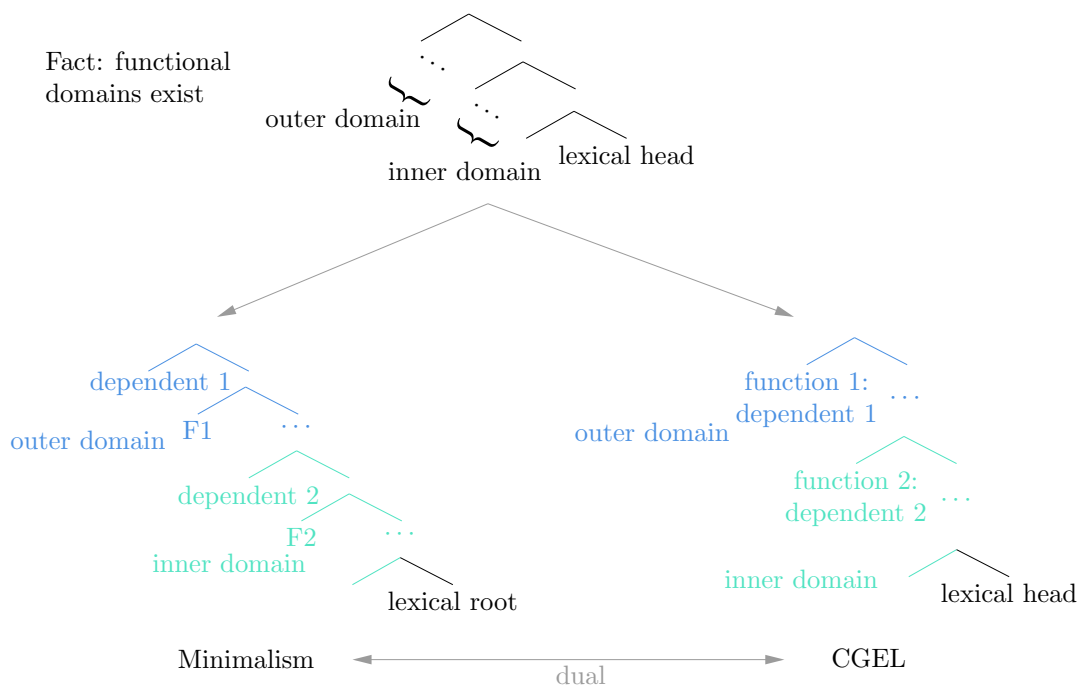Figure 1: From coarse-grained Minimalist derivational tree to CGEL tree

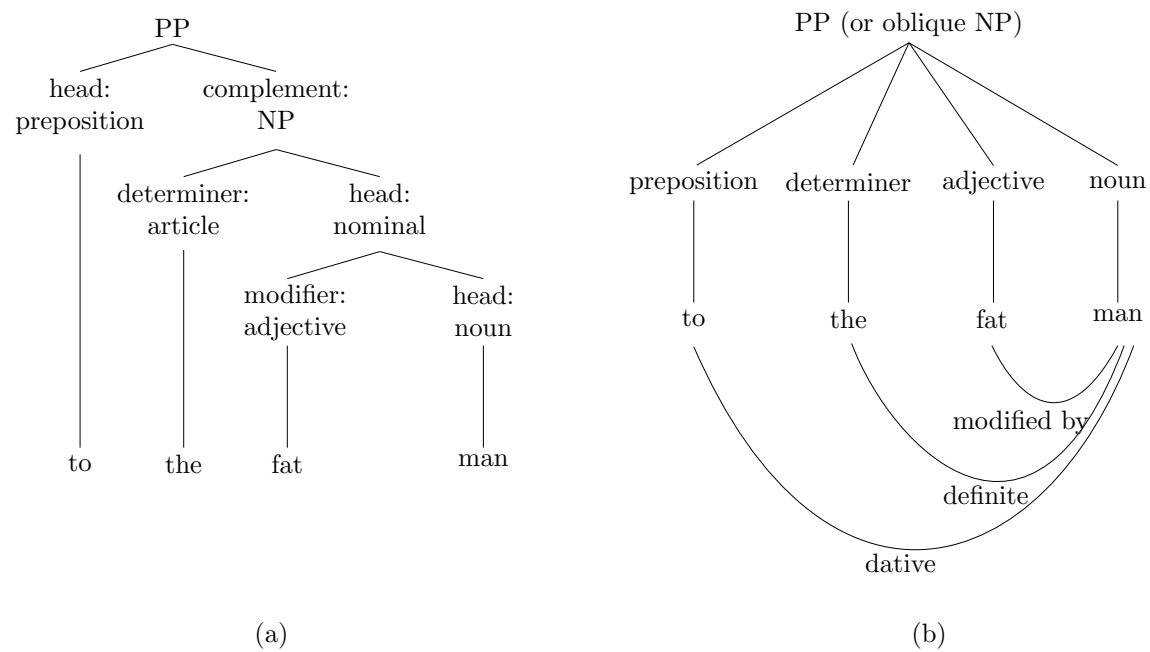Figure 2: Duality between CGEL and Minimalism

Figure 3: Comparison between the CGEL and BLT analyses of *to the fat man*