

The Syntax-Semantics Antagonism

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We shall argue on the basis of [Kracht, 2003] that there is an antagonism between syntax and semantics that can be summed up as follows. *If a head H selects another head K , the meaning contribution of K is zero. Instead, K acts solely as a case marker.* This means that there must be two ways for the head K to combine with its complement LP. In addition to standard function application of Categorical/Montague Grammar there is another mechanism, adding K to the case feature of LP, leaving the semantics and categorial status of LP intact. Case is then nothing but a sequence of morphological heads selected for by a higher head. This explains a variety of otherwise mysterious phenomena (eg that Ps are able to transmit θ -roles, see [Webelhuth, 1992]).

Whereas the quoted paper discussed thoroughly discussed Finnish and Hungarian data, German data was only briefly used. We shall thus look at German in more detail. The theory predicts that while any head has a meaning, that meaning is dropped under selection. A first instance is the spatial prepositions, „an”, „auf”/ etc. Semantically, they take an object and return a (parametrized) location (see [Kracht, 2002]). Evidence is from basic constructions:

- (1) Johann ist in Berlin/an der Bar/auf der Straße/hier
 John is in Berlin/at the bar/on the street/here

The verb „sein” requires a location. Evidence is twofold. First, different Ps as well as adverbials can be used to express location. Second, to ask for the location you have to use the word „wo” (where).

Lets turn to verbs selecting PPs.

- (2) Johann ist an dem Nikolaus/*auf der Straße/*hier interessiert.
 John is in Santa Claus/*on the street/*here interested

If the complement were a location we would expect different choices of P to be possible, especially when they describe the same location. Also, adverbials expressing locations should be ok. But they are not. The restrictions are not semantic. Similarly with the the verb „glauben”:

- (3) Johann glaubt an den Nikolaus/*auf der Straße/*hier
 John believes in Santa Claus/*on the street/*here

Again, the origin of the restrictions is not semantic.

Indeed, the verb „glauben” selects a PP with „auf”, which in turn selects accusative, „interessiert sein” selects a PP with „auf”, which in turn selects dative. The consequence is that selection affects two heads: the preposition and the case. Both heads are semantically empty.

If we assume that coordination can only be between syntactically identical categories (minus φ -features) then the following facts call for an explanation.

(4a) Johan wohnte teils hier und teils auf dem Land.
 Johan lived partly here and partly in the countryside

(4b) ??Johan arbeitete am Strand und an seiner Dissertation
 Johan worked on the beach and on his dissertation

(4a) suggests that syntactically „auf dem Land” is of the same category as „hier”, that is, an adverbial, while in (4b). Hence, if we consider the combination in the first example as standard, then the P „auf” will ordinarily change the DP into an adverbial. Thus, in selectional contexts DPs do not change their syntactic category; instead the head acts as a case marker.

The similarity between cases and Ps is strengthened further by looking at the meaning of cases. Accusative on its own can denote a stretch of time. Again, using the diagnostics above it is validated that „jeden Tag” depending on context is an adverbial, or an accusative marked DP. This constitutes different uses of the same morpheme, as explained above. This eliminates the need to double up cases or prepositions, as for example in [Przepiórkowski, 1999] who is led to conclude that every case in Polish exists both in a structural and an inherent version.

Yet, there are some conceptual problems that we shall address. One is that coordination also requires identity in type, so it is not always clear whether coordination is problematic for semantic or for syntactic reasons. Also, the PP complement of many verbs seem to be entirely semantically motivated. A case in point is P „über” in the meaning of subject matter occurring as complements of verbs of talking and arguing as in „Sie sprachen über die EU.” (*They talked about the EU*). Formally, this could be treated as a case of selection. To decide the matter, additional evidence will be given. Finally, the theory implies that what is syntactic case, as opposed to morphological case, depends on the entire lexicon, and thus is systemic. This in turn requires to rethink the syntactic case system of a given language, which we shall exemplify using German.

References

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