

## Syntax: definitions and boundaries

### 1 Overview of the course

Lecture 1: Syntax: definitions and boundaries

Lecture 2: Syntactic Analysis: constituency and dependency

Lecture 3: Syntactic Analysis: government and concord

Lecture 4: Applied Syntax: conditional clauses and negation in Greek

### 2 What is syntax?

- Abbott and Mansfield: syntax differentiated from accident and in two parts
- 2 areas: Elements making up grammatical units + relationship to a larger unit
- Reveals meaning:
  - dog bites man vs man bites dog
- Understanding these units important to language:
  - Is the boy who is unhappy watching Mickey Mouse?
- Syntax = “ways in which words . . . are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence.” (Matthews, *Syntax* p.1)
- Syntax = “the way in which words are arranged to show relationships of meaning within (and sometimes between) sentences” (David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* p. 94)
- BUT what is a sentence?
  - OED: a series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought.
  - cf Priscian: *ordinatio dictionum congrua sententiam perfectam demonstrans* a concordant ordering of words which expounds a complete idea
  - Logical: subject and predicate

Lecture 1: Syntax: definitions and boundaries

- Punctuation? But many languages do not use punctuation
- Easier to analyse constructions that do occur - independent ones are sentences:
  - 'she asked for a book'
  - 'come in'
  - 'the horse ran away because the train was noisy'
- Within the constructions certain rules clearly operate – e.g. of word order etc.
- “A sentence is thus the largest unit to which syntactic rules apply; an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form” (L. Bloomfield, *Language*, p. 170)
- Some exceptions:
  - ellipses: 'Where are you going?' 'To town'
  - interjections: 'Yes', 'Blimey!' 'Least said, soonest mended'
- How to define a construction?
- How many constructions in 'Leave the meat in the kitchen'?

### 3 Why is it interesting/useful

- So much of our syntax understanding is intuitive. So we can arrange sentences
  - kicked ball the they
- What about more complicated ones?:
  - say it can give what you break a Kevin and
- One witness told the commissioners that she had seen sexual intercourse taking place between two parked cars in front of her house
- Helps to learn languages
  - wǒ zhīdào nǐ bù shì Yīngguórén
  - ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον  
Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices,
  - μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεὰ, πηληιάδεω, Ἀχιλλῆος  
The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles,

## 4 The boundaries of syntax: morphology

- Morphology = form of words, syntax connection between them
- But no distinction in speech: what's the justification? Problems:
  - 'they are trying hard'
  - 'Jill has disappeared'

## 5 The boundaries of syntax: grammaticalisation

### Example 1: English Future Tense

- The 'going to' future
  - Bill is going to go to college after all
  - Bill is gonna go to college after all
  - \*Bill is going to gonna college after all
  - I am going to the shops = just motion
  - I am going to buy some milk = purpose

### Example 2: Italian future tense

- Italian future *cantaremo*
- Latin future = inflectional *cantabo* OR  
*Haec habeo cantare*  
'I have these to sing'
- First example of *habeo* + infinitive:  
*Multos ferro, multos veneno [occidit]; habeo enim dicere quem... de ponte in Tiberim deicerit*  
'Many he killed by the dagger, many by poison; I can even give you an example of one man whom... he threw from the bridge into the Tiber'  
Cicero *For Sextus Roscius of Ameria*, 100 (c. 40 BC)
- *cantare habemus* > \**cantarabemus* > \**cantaremus* > *cantaremo*
- In syntactic terms: [[*cantare*] *habeo*] has been reanalysed as [*cantare habeo*]
- Easier when we distinguish form vs content words

## 6 The boundaries of syntax: semantics

- Syntax explains the grammaticality of constructions
  - Peter reads a book
  - Tom gives Peter a book
  - They smelled the roses
  - Ben sounds a trumpet
  - Dan sounds a fool
  - \*Tom sits Peter a book
  - \*They took fresh
  - \*Dan goes a fool
- But syntax cannot explain all ungrammatical sentences:
  - They sautéed the potatoes
  - They sautéed the rice

## 7 Chomsky and Transformational Grammar

- TG considers the similarities between different sentences:
  1. He put the car in the garage
  2. Did he put the car in the garage
  3. The car was put in the garage
  4. Where did he put the car?
- Deep structure vs surface structure

## Bibliography

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