Features and categories

Introduction to Syntax, EGG Summer School 2017

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Overview

Pre-Introduction: Admin

About this course

Five lectures with me (András) in week 1, five with Sandhya in week 2

- Syllabus available on: `http://www.eggschool.org/teachers-classes/intro-courses/introduction-to-syntax/`
- Slides available on: `http://andras.barany.at/egg2017/`
- Time: 11:30–12:45
- Literature:
  - David Adger. 2003. *Core syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
  - Olaf Koeneman & Hedde Zeijlstra. 2017. *Introducing syntax*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Any questions?

What is syntax?

What is syntax?

Studying syntax means studying the structures of sentences

- e.g. the properties of the English declarative sentences in (1) vs. (2) …

(1)   Olomouc is beautiful.

(2) *Is beautiful Olomouc.

- … or the English interrogative sentences in (3) vs. (4)

(3)   Does Mary like him?

(4) *Does Mary like he?

Grammaticality

? What's wrong with (5b)?

(5)   a.   Olomouc is beautiful.

    b. *Is beautiful Olomouc.

Grammaticality

? What's wrong with (5b)?

(5) a. Olomouc is beautiful.

b. *Is beautiful Olomouc.

· (5a,b) use the same words but one of them has "bad" syntax
▸ We say that (5a) is grammatical ...
▸ ... and (5b) is ungrammatical.

Acceptability

? What's wrong with (6b)?

(6) a. Milena is singing.

b. ?Olomouc is singing.

Acceptability

? What's wrong with (6b)?

(6) a. Milena is singing.

b. ? Olomouc is singing.

- (6a,b) have the same *structure* but one of them is "odd"
- ▶ We say that (6a) is acceptable …
- ▶ … and (6b) is odd (but still grammatical).

What determines grammaticality?

What property of sentences determines whether they are grammatical?

- Is it about *words*?

(7) * Is beautiful/old/small/large/... Olomouc.

What determines grammaticality?

What property of sentences determines whether they are grammatical?

- Is it about *words*?

(7) *Is beautiful/old/small/large/… Olomouc.

- ▸ No adjective in (7) makes the sentence grammatical
- ▸ Something else is wrong with (7)

(8) Olomouc is beautiful/old/small/large/… .

- ▸ (8) is grammatical with any adjective.
- ▸ The structure of (8), not the choice of words, makes it grammatical.

Words and categories

We can also change the subject of (8), not just the predicate:

(9) Olomouc/Jiři's birthplace/that tree/… is beautiful/… .

How can we abstract away from words?

▸ We refer to categories!

In English, a declarative sentence of the form (10) will generally be grammatical:

(10) [3rd person SG noun (phrase)] *is* [adjective]

▸ Rather than listing sentences, grammars allow abstract structures

Words and categories II

(11) a. [$_N$ Olomouc] is [$_A$ beautiful].

  b. [$_N$ Olomouc] is [$_A$ small].

  c. [$_N$ That tree] is [$_A$ big].

  d. [$_N$ Jiři's birthplace] is [$_A$ old].

  e. ...

Koeneman & Zeijlstra's (2017: 9) first central insight:

> *Syntax cares not about individual words but rather about kinds of words.*
> *The linguistic term for 'kind of word' is category.*

Categories and features

Identifying categories

How do we figure out what category a word belongs to?

- By looking at the word's form?
- Or its meaning?
- Or something else?

(12) a. Everybody was dancing well.

    b. John's dancing was the best.   (Koeneman & Zeijlstra 2017: 11)

? How do the two instances of *dancing* in (12) differ from each other?

Identifying categories II

▸ We can use syntax to test the distribution of different categories

(13) a. Everybody was singing well.

   b. Everybody sings well.

   c. *Everybody story well.

(14) a. John's singing was the best.

   b. John's funny story/singing was the best.

   c. *John's funny sings was the best.

▸ Different categories have different properties
? Give some more examples!

Categories: interim summary

So far, we have seen three categories, nouns, verbs and adjectives

- · nouns can be subjects, and appear in possessive constructions
- · verbs can be modified by adverbs, and have tenses
- · adjectives can ...?
- ▸ We can substitute elements of one category for each other

Are categories all we need?

Our rule in (10) refers to more than categories…

(10) [3rd person sɢ noun (phrase)] *is* [adjective]

Why is that? Why can't we just use something like (15)?

(15) [$_N$ N] *is* [$_A$ A]

What kinds of sentences would (15) allow?

Categories and features

We can think of categories as features of lexical items ("words")

- *Milena* has an N feature, *sing* has a V feature, etc.
- these are called categorial features
- ⚠ but categorial features are not enough!

What about the following examples?

(16) a. [_N Olomouc] is [_A beautiful].

  b. [_N Czech towns] are [_A beautiful].

Are *is* and *are* different categories? Are they the same?

  ❓ How can we describe *is* vs. *are*?

Features and sub-features

There are different classes of features:

- categorial features: N, V, A, ...
- φ-features: person, number, gender
- **?** Can you think of others?

Sometimes categories must match in their (sub-)features:

(17) a. [N: 3SG Olomouc] [V: 3SG is] [A beautiful].

  b. [N: 3PL Czech towns] [V: 3PL are] [A beautiful].

? Can you think of differences in other languages?

Sub-types of categories

Now we know that categories need to match in their features, too. Is that enough?

(18) a. [N: 3SG A car] [V: 3SG is] red.

    b. [N: 3PL The cars] [V: 3PL are] red.

    c. [N: 3PL Cars] [V: 3PL are] red.

    d. *[N: 3SG Car] [V: 3SG is] red.

    e. [N: 3SG Blood] [V: 3SG is] red.

? What's wrong with (18d)?

? What's the difference between (18d) and (18e)?

Types of N

car is a count noun, and *blood* is a mass noun

- both are nouns, but their distribution is slightly different
- **?** How can we analyse their similarities and differences?
- ▸ What if *a* and *the* have silent variants in (18b) and (18c)?

(19) a. [? A car] is red.

     b. [? cars] are red.

     c. [? blood] is red.

     d. [? The car/cars/blood] is/are red.

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    b. [∅ cars] are red.

    c. [∅ blood] is red.

    d. [The car/cars/blood] is/are red.

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(19) a. [$_D$ A car] is red.

   b. [$_D$ ∅ cars] are red.

   c. [$_D$ ∅ blood] is red.

   d. [$_D$ The car/cars/blood] is/are red.

- ▸ The subject is category D, different nouns are different types of N
- **?** Can you think of yet another type of N/D?

Features of V

We have already seen a type of feature that is relevant for verbs: φ-features

	SG	PL
1	*táncol**ok***	*táncol**unk***
2	*táncol**sz***	*táncol**tok***
3	*táncol*	*táncol**nak***

Table 1 Forms of Hungarian *táncol* 'dance'

	SG	PL
1	*dance*	*dance*
2	*dance*	*dance*
3	*dance**s***	*dance*

Table 2 Forms of English *dance*

- A set of such forms makes up a paradigm
- **?** What other verbal features can you think of?

Conclusions

Conclusions

- Syntax cares for categories, not single words
- Categories can be identified by their distribution
- Generally, one member of a category can be substituted for another
- We can think of categories as a type of feature
- There are other features, like φ-features, tense features, …

🕐 Tomorrow we will look at how syntax puts objects together to form larger structures!

Abbreviations: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, PL = plural, SG = singular.

References I

Adger, David. 2003. *Core syntax.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Koeneman, Olaf & Hedde **Zeijlstra**. 2017. *Introducing syntax.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.