L322 Syntax

Chapter 1: Generative Grammar

Linguistics 322

1   Syntax as a Cognitive Science

Linguistics, Philosophy, Psychology, and Computer Science

Language differs us from other animate beings — There is no concrete evidence to the opposite.

2   Modelling Syntax

Generative Grammar and Descriptive Grammar

Generative is not such a good term to use, but it is now fixed.

Rules of Grammar

These rules may be a set of correspondences

$$S \longleftrightarrow NP + VP$$

S is a set {S}, NP and VP are subsets of {S}.

Contain or consist are valid terms here.

3   Syntax as Science — The Scientific Method

Gather and observe data

Make generalizations

Develop hypotheses

      return

hypotheses = theorems = rules.

prescriptive and descriptive rules

anaphora — an example

    pronominals: person, ±First, number, case.

3.1   Sources of Data

Positive information and negative information

Grammatical judgments, semantic judgment, and the judgments of argument structure which is a liaison between semantics and syntax.

Intuition = subconscious knowledge. (not making guesses about things)

4   Where Do Rules Come from?

4.1   Learning vs. Acquisition

Acquire is subconscious acquisition of language

Learning is a conscientious attempt to acquire the rules of language

Innateness refers to any principle that might be built into our capacity for language— a very controversial topic.

4.2   Innateness: Language as an Instinct

Kids will acquire a language if there is any kind of language contact.

Brain damage may interfere with acquisition.

If so, then it is a universal (among human beings—we don't know what Martians have for language if any at all).

4.3   The Logical Problem of Language Acquisition

Many sentences are unique — never uttered before.

    The bald King of Southern France eloped with the quadriplegic Queen of Mesoptamia.

Recursion

A sentence can be indefinitely long—it has an end point.

Hence, language is creative.

4.4 Other Arguments for UG

It is assumed but unproven that all clauses have a subject, whether over or covert. No counterexamples have been found. If this is true, then we have a universal: all clauses have a subject.

Similarly all languages appear to a form which can be identified as a pronoun in some sense of the term. If this is true, then we have another universal.

If it is true that all languages have sentences, clauses, phrases, and words, then this is an example of another universal.

All these universal are collectively known as Universal Grammar.

4.5 Explaining Language Variation

No two distinct languages have the same set of rules. These differences, or variations of rules, are attributed to language variation. More specifically, where there are variational rules, each variation is said to be a parameter. For examples there seems to be a Universal Rules that all clauses contain a subject and a predication.[1] We could represent this as "S <--> NP and VP, with no implied order." In English and many languages, this NP, the subject of the clause, precedes the predication (VP). In a few languages, the predication precedes the subject as in Malagasy. Now we have two variations of the subject predicate rule. A **parameter** determines the ordering here. Because subject final languages are so rare, we may consider this ordering as marked. If we think of a parameter as an "off/on switch," then when the switch is on, the subject follows the predication (S <--> VP NP). If the switch is off, the subject occurs first (*S <--> NP VP).

Next, VP may contain a (main) verb and an object NP, usually called the direct object. In English and many Indo-European languages, the verb precedes the direct object (VP <--> V NP). In other languages includes many in Asia, the direct object precedes the verb: (VP <--> NP V). Another parameter is required to determine the order of V and NP. Which is the marked order is not certain at this time. Another parameter plac-

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[1] The term 'predication' is a technical term used to refer to the remainder of a sentence after the subject has been extracted. Some people call this a 'predicate.' This word has a distinct use in lexico or cognitive semantics. Hence, the term 'predication' is being used more and more to keep these two notions distinct.

es the verb first before the subject and the object. This is too complex a problem to offer a solution for at this time.

5   Choosing about Theories of Syntax

Come from standard science, theory formation is based on three steps:

> Observationally adequate — must be able to account for all ungrammatical as well as all grammatical sentences in L. (corpus and noncorpus)

> Descriptively adequate — finding the best description to account for observation.

> Explanatorily adequate — an attempt to find all the universal principles that might exist to account description — this also includes how a child might acquire language. Universal grammar, if it exists, is the bottom line here.

Although we may choose one, it isn't the only that is selected. In many cases, the selection is not made on intellectual grounds, but on political and personal grounds. Even if we weed these out, it is very difficult, virtually impossible, to know that one you have selected is the "ONE". (sigh!).