

LNGT0101

Introduction to Linguistics



Lecture #9
Oct 6th, 2014

Announcements

- Any questions on HW #2?
- HW #3 will be posted by Friday Oct 8 at the latest. It'll be due the Friday after.

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A quick follow-up on Myth 10

- Does English have a grammar?
- A couple of aspects of grammatical differences between languages.

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Tense

- English:
 - a. I work_Ø. (present)
 - b. I **worked**. (past)
 - c. I **will** work. (future)
- Lithuanian:
 - a. dirb-**u** "I work"
 - b. dirb-**au** "I worked"
 - c. dirb-**siu** "I will work"

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Chibemba past tense system

- Remote past (before yesterday):
Ba-àlí-bomb-ele "they worked"
- Removed past (yesterday):
Ba-àlí-bomba "they worked"
- Near past (earlier today):
Ba-àcí-bomba "they worked"
- Immediate past (just happened):
Ba-á-bomba "they worked"

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Chibemba future tense system

- Immediate future (very soon):
Ba-áláá-bomba "they'll work"
- Near future (later today):
Ba-léé-bomba "they'll work"
- Removed future (tomorrow):
Ba-kà-bomba "they'll work"
- Remote future (after tomorrow):
Ba-ká-bomba "they'll work"

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Evidentials

- Some languages indicate the degree of certainty regarding the occurrence of an event by means of morphological markers, called **evidentials**, as in Tuyuca (Brazil and Colombia):
 - a. díga apé-**wi**
soccer play-VISUAL
“He played soccer (I saw him).”

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Evidentials

- b. díga apé-**ti**
soccer play-NON-VISUAL
“He played soccer (I heard him playing).”
- c. díga apé-**yi**
soccer play-APPARENT
“He played soccer (I have evidence but I didn’t actually witness the game in any way).”

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Evidentials

- d. díga apé-**yigi**
soccer play-SECONDHAND
“He played soccer (Someone told me).”
- e. díga apé-**hiyi**
soccer play-ASSUMED
“He played soccer (It seems reasonable that he did).”

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The Piraha

- <http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/show/141519/the-grammar-of-happiness>

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What’s syntax?

SYNTAX
is the study of sentence structure
in human language.

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Syntax

- What are some things about the syntax of English that you find strange? Think of things that speakers of other languages would find hard to understand.
- What are some things about the syntax of other languages that you know which you find strange?

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Syntax

- What do we know when we know the syntax of our language?
- There are several aspects of syntactic knowledge that native speakers have about their language.
- Let's look at some examples.

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Grammaticality

- Native speakers know what is grammatical and what is ungrammatical in their language, e.g.,
The silly man hit the nice woman.
**Silly hit man the nice the woman.*

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Grammaticality

- But **grammaticality does not depend on meaning.**
Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.
- Similarly, we can figure out the meaning of an ungrammatical sentence, e.g.,
**I will in the office for you wait.*
- These two facts seem to suggest that **syntax is an autonomous system**, that is, it has its own rules independent of meaning.

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Ambiguity

- Our syntactic knowledge also enables us to understand cases of **ambiguity**. Remember these sentences?
Anne hit the man with an umbrella.
Visiting relatives can be a nuisance.
- And a couple of new ones:
We need more honest politicians.
This is a large man's hat.

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Bob, the elf, the table, and the hat

- Let's make that more fun!

Bob hit the elf on the table with the hat.

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Sentence relatedness

- Our knowledge of the syntax of our language also enables us to know cases of **synonymy** or **near-synonymy** between sentences, as the case is with active and passive sentences:
John broke the window.
The window was broken by John.

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Sentence relatedness

- Another case of sentence relatedness is that holding between statements and questions:

They will be in London tomorrow.

Will they be in London tomorrow?

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But, ...

- Speakers also know that the following two sentences, despite identicalness in structure on the surface, have completely different interpretations with regard to the role of 'John' in each sentence.

- *John is eager to please.*

- *John is easy to please.*

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Recursiveness

- Remember also that a sentence in human language could, in principle, be **recursively infinite** as in the following example:

This is the dog that chased the cat that killed the rat that ate the cheese that was on the table that was in the room that ...

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Recursiveness

- The linguist knows that this language has become extinct.*
- The biologist believes that the linguist knows that this language has become extinct.*
- The neuroscientist claims that the biologist believes that the linguist knows that this language has become extinct.*
- etc.*

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Cross-linguistic variation (e.g., in word order)

- Languages can also differ dramatically in their syntax.
- **English:**
The child might think that she will show Mary's picture of John to Chris.
- **Japanese:**
Taroo-ga Hiro-ga Hanako-ni zibun-no
Taroo-SUB Hiro-SUB Hanako-to self-POSS
syasin-o miseta to omette iru
picture-OBJ showed that thinking be
"Taro thinks (literally, is thinking) that Hiro showed a picture of himself to Hanako."

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Syntax

- For our theory of grammar to be adequate, it has to account for these different aspects of native speakers' subconscious syntactic knowledge, and explain to us why languages differ in their sentence structures the way they do.
- In the syntax section of this class, we discuss these two issues. (More detailed discussion of syntax in my Spring 2015 class ☺).

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Syntax

- Syntax is the study of sentence structure in human language.
- A sentence is not a mere sequence of words; rather, every sentence has a **syntactic structure**.
- The key notion to understanding syntactic structure is that of **constituency**.
- Let's see what this means.

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Constituency

- Consider the following sentence:
The linguist has drawn a tree.
- If I ask you to, intuitively, divide the sentence into two units, where would you draw the line?
- Probably this:
(1) The linguist | has drawn a tree.

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Constituency

- Intuitively, we “know” that certain words “hang together” in the sentence to the exclusion of others. We call such strings of words “**constituents**.”
- And we can actually determine constituency by means of “objective” diagnostic tests, since intuitions can sometimes be rather unreliable here.
- There are four constituency tests: **substitution**, **movement**, **clefting**, and the **stand-alone test**.
- Let's consider each in turn.

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Substitution test for constituency

- If a string of words can be replaced by one word and the result is a grammatical sentence while preserving the original meaning, then it must be that this string of words comprises a “constituent”.

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Substitution test for constituency

- (2)
- a. [The linguist] has drawn a tree.
✓ *He* has drawn a tree.
 - b. The linguist has drawn [a tree].
✓ The linguist has drawn *it*.
 - c. The [linguist has drawn a tree].
*The ???
 - d. [The linguist has] drawn a tree.
*??? drawn a tree.
 - e. [The linguist has drawn a] tree.
*??? tree.
 - f. The linguist [has drawn a tree].
The linguist *has*. (In response to “Who has drawn a tree?”)

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Substitution test for constituency

- (3)
- a. [The tall boy] ate the burrito.
✓ *He* ate the burrito.
 - b. The tall boy ate [the burrito].
✓ The tall boy ate *it*.
 - c. [The tall boy ate] the burrito.
*??? the burrito.
 - d. The tall boy [ate the burrito].
✓ The tall boy *did (so)*. (In response to “Who ate the burrito?”)
 - e. The tall boy ate the burrito [in the classroom].
The tall boy ate the burrito *there*.
 - f. The tall boy ate [the burrito in the classroom].
*The tall boy ate *it*. (The sentence may look ok, but we changed the meaning)

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Movement test for constituency

- If a string of words can be moved together in a sentence keeping the same meaning intact, then this string of words comprises a “constituent”. Consider the examples in (4a-f).
 - a. We will hold the meeting [in Sam’s office].
In Sam’s office we will hold the meeting.
 - b. We will hold [the meeting in Sam’s office].
**The meeting in Sam’s office* we will hold.

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Movement test for constituency

- c. I know he will [eat the whole pizza], and
eat the whole pizza he will.
- d. *I know he [will eat the] whole pizza, and
will eat the he whole pizza.
- e. I read [this book by Chomsky] before.
This book by Chomsky I read before.
- f. I read this book [by Chomsky before].
**By Chomsky before* I read this book.

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Clefting

- Clefting (*It is X that ...*) may also be used as a constituency diagnostic:
This linguist drew these trees on the board.
- Apply clefting to some strings:
It is **this linguist** that drew these trees on the board.
It is **these trees** that this linguist drew on the board.
It is **on the board** that this linguist drew these trees.
**It is trees on* that this linguist drew these the board.
**It is linguist drew* that this these trees on the board.

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Stand-alone test

- If a string of words can stand alone as an answer to a question, then it is a constituent, e.g.,
Q: What did John eat?
A: The whole pizza./*The whole.

Q: What did John do?
A: Eat the whole pizza./*Eat the.

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Constituency

- The next question to ask is: What are the types of constituents there is in syntactic structures?
- We’ll discuss this and more on Wednesday.

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Next class agenda

- Phrase structure grammar and syntactic trees.
- Transformations.
- Finish reading Chapter 3, pp. 109-129.

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