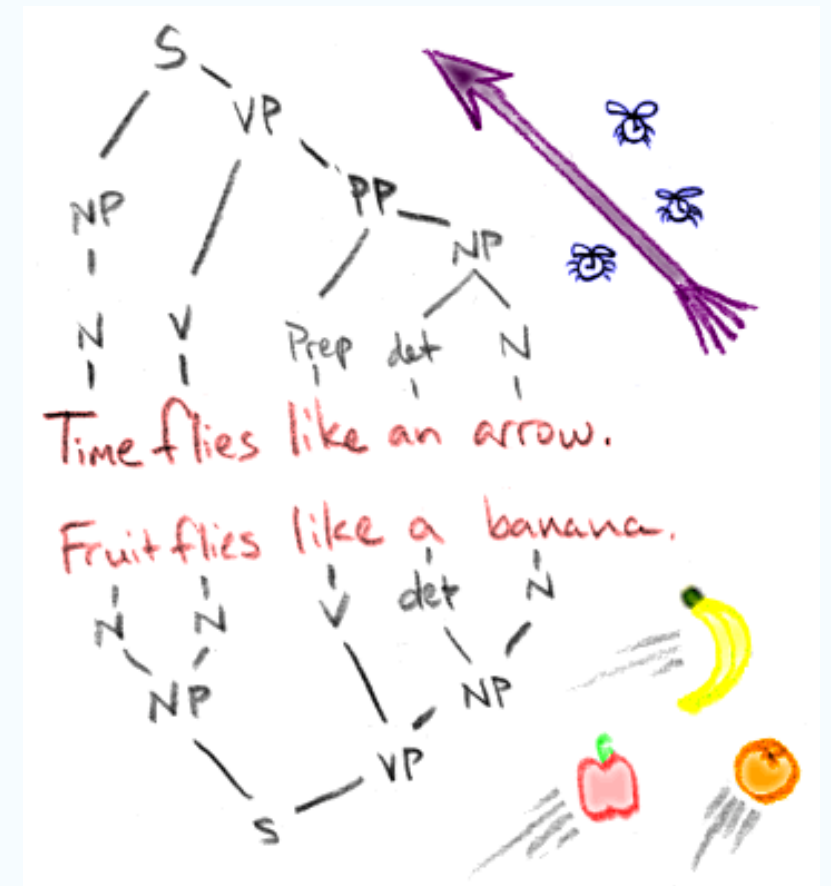




Syntax III: Constituency and Dependency

Reading: FRH Ch. 3

PLIN0006: Introduction to Language



Constituency

- We saw that **merge** takes two inputs and combines them into a phrase.
- The units that are combined by merge are called **constituents** (i.e. the building blocks of a phrase).
- It's important to know what is and isn't a constituent.
For example, **move** can only be applied to constituents.

Constituency Tests: Displacement

- Sue gave **the book to the professor**.
- **To the professor**, Sue gave **the book** [t].
- **The book**, Sue gave [t] **to the professor**.
- *Book to, Sue gave the professor.
- *To the, Sue gave the book professor.

- **the book** and **to the professor** are constituents
- **book to** and **to the** are not constituents

Constituency Tests: **Substitution**

- The man with the black laptop will recite a poem in the auditorium.
- **He** will recite a poem in the auditorium.
- **He** will recite **one** in the auditorium.
- **He** will recite **one** **there**.

→ *The man w. the bl. laptop*, *a poem*, and *in the auditorium* are constituents.

Constituency Tests: Deletion

- He will **recite a poem in the auditorium**, and she will [...] too.
 - He will **recite a poem** in the auditorium, and she will [...] in the library.
 - Jim read five **books** by Chomsky, but Mary only read four [...].
- *recite a poem in the auditorium*, *recite a poem*, and *books* are constituents.

Subject-Verb Agreement: Data

- [The **doctor**] **talks** to the patient.
- [The **doctors**] **talk_** to the patient.

- [The **doctor** who plays piano] **talks** to the patient.
- [The **doctors** who play piano] **talk_** to the patient.

- [**The patient**] **is** talked to by [the doctors].
- [**The patients**] **are** talked to by [the doctor].

Subject-Verb Agreement is a **dependency**

- SV-Agreement is a **dependency** between the **verb** and an **NP**.
 - The NP doesn't have to be next to the verb.
 - ... nor does the NP's **head**.
 - The NP doesn't have to be the **agent** described by the verb.
 - However, the NP must be the **subject** of the clause containing the verb.
 - The subject of a clause is in turn determined on the basis of a clause's hierarchical structure.
- Knowledge of syntactic structure plays a role in speakers' knowledge of intra-sentential dependencies.

Subject-Verb Agreement across languages (part 1)

- Some languages don't have SV-Agreement.
- Some languages exhibit SV-Agreement not only for person, but also for e.g. number and gender.

Subject-Verb Agreement across languages (part 2)

- In some languages, the syntactic properties of the subject are relevant, in others, the semantic properties are relevant:
 - AmE: The committee is meeting.
 - BrE: The committee are meeting.
 - BrE: England has won. *versus* England have won.
- In some languages, linear properties of the sentence are relevant (in addition to hierarchical structure).

Closest Conjunct Agreement in Lebanese Arabic

(1) Neemo huwwe w hiyye bi l-bet
slept.**PL** **he** **and** **she** in the-house
'He and she slept in the house.'

(2) Neem huwwe w hiyye bi l-bet
slept.**3MS** **he** and she in the-house

(3) *Neemit huwwe w hiyye bi l-bet
slept.**3FS** he and **she** in the-house

Reflexive Pronouns: Data

- **Bill** hurt **himself**.
- I helped **him**. *versus* *I helped **himself**.
- ***Bill**₁ arrived, **I**₂ helped **himself**₁.
- ***Bill** thinks **Mary** hurt **himself**.
- **Bill**₁ thinks **Joe**₂ hurt **himself**₂. *versus* ***Bill**₁ thinks Joe₂ hurt **himself**₁.
- ***Himself** hurt **Bill**.

Reflexive Pronouns in English

- In English, reflexive pronouns require an **antecedent**,
i.e. the reflexive pronoun is **dependent** upon another NP.

- **Some conditions:**
 - The antecedent must be within the same clause.
 - The reflexive pronoun cannot (generally) precede its antecedent.

Do antecedents have to be subjects?

- **In English**, antecedents for reflexive pronouns don't have to be subjects:

- Bill showed **Mary herself** in the mirror.

- **In Norwegian**, the antecedent must be the subject:

(1) **Jon** fortalte **meg** om **seg-selv**

John told me about him-self

'John told me about himself.'

(2) ***Vi** fortalte **Jon** om **seg-self**

We told John about him-self

'We told John about himself.'

Summary

Knowledge of syntactic structure consists of (at least):

- Knowing what grammatical categories individual words belong to.
- Knowing how these categories can be combined into larger phrases, and phrases into larger phrases and sentences.
- Knowing what dependencies words and phrases may enter into.
- Knowing the relevant properties of dependencies
(e.g. knowing that verbs agree with the **subject** of their clause).

References

- Aoun, Benmamoun & Sportiche (1994) Agreement, word order, and conjunction in some varieties of Arabic. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 25, 195-220.