A DYNAMIC NETWORK MODEL OF PARTS OF SPEECH

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Abstract. This article defines combining research from cognitive linguistics with research from typology, discusses that the major parts of speech are best analyzed in the framework of a network model in which particular lexical items are linked to particular word class schemas.

Keywords: word class network, word class schema, noun, verb, adjective, filler-slot relation, grammaticalization, language universals, past tense debate, minor word classes.

Traditionally, parts of speech are analyzed as classes of lexical items with the same or similar structural properties, but the structural criteria that are used to define the major parts of speech (e.g., the occurrence of certain function words or inflectional affixes) can also be seen as properties of particular slots of constructional schemas. Crucially, while the slots of word class schemas are commonly defined by distributional criteria, they are not merely structural concepts but evoke particular conceptualizations.

The simplest possible relationship between a word class and a syntactic category is identity of distribution. If and where it obtains, an adverb, for instance, can be defined as a word that has the same distribution as an adverbial phrase.6 Alternatively, if the theory is based on word classes, an adverbial phrase can be defined as a complex construction that has the same distribution as an adverb. Identity of distribution between a word class and a syntactic category is guaranteed by definition if the construction of that syntactic category is endocentric, with the word class in question as its head (s. §3.2). However, for each of the syntactic categories in T1, there are subtypes that do not fulfill this condition; for instance, a transitive verb phrase is not endocentric. And on the other hand, most of the word classes in use are not so conceived. Actually, every word class splits into a number of subclasses which differ in their distribution. Only one of them has the same distribution as the corresponding syntactic category. In the case of the nominal category, that is – in English and some other languages – the proper noun, which is not even considered a typical representative of the word class 'noun'. The distinguished subclass is then joined with other distribution classes under a common word class on the basis of semantic criteria and membership of some words in more than one of these classes. For instance, English ad-adjectival (e.g. very) and ad-verbal (e.g. hard) adverbs are subsumed under one class of adverbs because they appear to be semantically similar and because a couple of adverbs such as partly are members of both subclasses. There are various ways how a biunique correspondence between word class and syntactic category may fail to hold. First of all, there are languages which do not apply syntactic categories at the root or even stem level. In Latin, roots are acategorial. In Late Archaic Chinese, Kharia, Tagalog and in Polynesian languages like Samoan or Tongan, stems are largely uncategorized in terms of syntactically relevant word classes. For a subset of these languages (Chinese, Tagalog, Tongan), the authors claim that lexemes do fall into grammatical classes, but these are not syntactic categories. In all of these cases, it is only the combination with categorized expressions, esp. certain grammatical formatives, that categorizes a root or stem in terms of a syntactic category. Such syntactic categories, then, do not lexicalize into root or stem classes, resp. The same is true for particular syntactic constructions in many other languages.

The correspondence between word class and syntactic category may also fail for the opposite reason: certain word classes do not expand into phrases (do not "project", as some would have it). That is true for the Yucatec numeral and numeral classifier just illustrated. It is typically the case of small closed classes, like the adjective or verb in languages which only have a small closed set of these, and of classes of grammatical formatives like the articles and auxiliaries, in general. Where categorial uniformity between syntactic categories and word classes does obtain, the relationship between an endocentric construction and the stem that forms its head is reciprocal in a certain way:1. On the one hand, the construction is an expansion (a "projection") of its head. Since the head is an item of the inventory, its category is given, and an endocentric expansion aims at a construction that preserves the head's combinatory potential.2. On the other hand, the head is a lexical condensation of the construction. The category of the construction is determined by syntactic principles. If the construction reduces to a stem, the latter inherits the syntactic category, so that it becomes a stem category (a word class). Note that these are not just a scientist's alternative perspectives on his object, but there are actually linguistic processes running in these converse directions:

1. The syntactic operation of modification affords the endocentric expansion of a stem.

2. Grammaticalization and lexicalization afford the condensation of a phrase into a stem.

That means, in effect, that syntactic category and word class stabilize each other. One may hypothesize that the part-of-speech system of languages such as most SAE languages, and in particular their categorization at the stem level, is diachronically stable because it obeys categorial uniformity. The relationship, however, is not symmetric. Word classes exist and are such as they are because they come about through grammaticalization of syntactic constructions and word formations. That is, they are the product of a reductive process. Syntactic categories, instead, have a functional motivation in terms of the propositional operations of reference and predication. It is at the level of the sentence that these operations are situated and marked as such by the speaker. The speaker using an expression clarifies whether he is using it as a referring expression or as a predicate. Markers giving this kind of information essentially specify its category in terms of parts of speech, roughly speaking, as a nominal or verbal category.

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