

Morphosyntactic relations

Morphological classifications

- Before the 20th century, grammar was mainly morphology.
- Syntax was the part of grammar dealing with “the meaning of word classes and word forms” (Miklosich 1883)
- Syntax in its present meaning was conceived by the 20th century structuralists

Hybrid theories of syntactic relations

- The notions of government (*rectio, regimen*) and agreement (*concordia, congruentia*) have been known since antiquity.
- These notions refer to morphosyntax; to what extent can we regard them as syntactic? What is their relationship to syntactic structure?
- In the grammar of Eastern European languages, there is a tendency to identify these morphological relations with syntactic relations.

Hybrid classifications of syntactic relations

This led to the formulation of a system of three types of ‘syntactic relations’ which are really morphosyntactic:

- government (*upravlenie, składnia rządu, valdymas*)
- agreement (*soglasovanie, składnia zgody, derinimas*)
- contiguity (*primykanie, składnia przynależności, šliejimas*)

This classification is still standard in Lithuanian and Latvian school grammar.

Hybrid classifications of syntactic relations

- This system is internally contradictory because the basic notions are ambiguous: the notion of government may refer to syntactic requirement (complementation) or morphological requirement (case assignment), and both are tacitly assumed to coincide; this, however, is not always the case.
- In order to make the facts fit the classification, government must either be stretched, ignoring morphology (which contradicts the definition), or be interpreted purely morphologically (in accordance with the definition), in which case they are unfit to underly a syntactic classification.

Meanings of ‘government’

The notion of government is tricky:

“Il n’y avait pas en indo-européen de „rection“ d’un mot par un autre, comme il y en a en latin par exemple; l’autonomie du mot est le principe qui commande la structure de la phrase indo-européenne” (Meillet 1934).

This notion keeps popping up in works from Eastern Europe (Kurzová 1993, Ambrazas 2006) but what does it mean? Does rection mean ‘complementation’ or ‘case assignment’?

Meanings of ‘government’

- If it means ‘complementation’, then e.g. free adverbial accusatives (modifiers) become objects (complements), which means different principles of syntactic structure for languages “in their infancy” and “developed” languages (which contradicts the ‘uniformitarian principle’)
- If it means ‘rektion’ then the syntactic nature of the process is doubtful: semantically determined morphological alternations are reduced – a process which is led to its logical conclusion when the cases system declines.

Setting apart syntactic and morphosyntactic dependency

- The most explicit rejection of this traditional mixing up of morphology and syntax is found in Mel'čuk (Levels of Dependency in Linguistic Description <http://olst.ling.umontreal.ca/pdf/Dependency.pdf>).
- Mel'čuk distinguishes three levels of dependency:
 - semantic (anaphora and predicate-argument relation)
 - syntactic
 - morphological (government and agreement)

Misconceptions

- Traditional misconceptions resulting from the mixing up of levels of dependency, according to Mel'čuk:
 - mutual dependency between subject and verb: the subject is syntactically dependent on the verb but the verb may be morphologically dependent on the subject (agreement)
 - double dependency: object predicates are syntactically dependent on the verb though they may be syntactically dependent on the object (*si vis eum vivum videre*)

Directions of dependency

- The mixing up of morphosyntax and syntax in 19th century grammar leads to the assumption that the direction of morphological and syntactic dependency must coincide: if A agrees with B, then A must depend on B.
- But even without this identification of syntactic and morphological dependency, the assumption that the controller of agreement must be the head may seem plausible; it is widely assumed, for instance, in Generative Grammar.

Head and Dependent Marking

- Johanna Nichols (Head marking and dependent-marking grammar, *Language* 1985) was the first to voice the view that that the directions of dependency may not coincide:
the children play (verb agrees with its dependent, the subject)
Hung. *a János ház-a* ‘John’s house’, lit. ‘John his house’ (*ház* agrees with its dependent *János*)

How are SD and MD related?

- Mel'čuk:
 - government reflects syntactic dependency (if the case of A is determined by B, and B itself does not have this case feature, then the case of A must evidently be determined by the *syntactic* properties of B)
 - agreement reflects a semantic relationship (coreferentiality or predicate-argument relation), but not necessarily syntactic dependency

The notion of government

- *altum mare* – agreement: *altum* is neuter singular because *mare* is neuter singular
- The notion of agreement can be stretched so as to accommodate default agreement: Lith. *Sportuoti yra sveika* ‘playing sports is healthy’ (Lithuanian adjectives have neuter forms to agree with words without gender features)
- *vidit Marcum* – government: *Marcum* shows a feature imposed by *vidit* but not itself characteristic of *vidit* (verbs have no case)

Directions of SD and MD

- government: if A governs the case of B, then B is a complement of A
- agreement: if B agrees with A, then
 - B may depend on A (*dideli namai*)
 - A may depend on B (*the children play*)

Atypical government

- Hebrew *bēt 'ēl* ‘the house of God’ – ? *bēt* is in the construct state because it is modified by *'ēl* (if not modified its form will be *bayit*, the absolute state); this is not agreement (*'ēl* is in the absolute state), but is it government?
- The Persian *ezafe*, i.e., the ending *-e* in *ketāb-e dust* ‘the/a friend’s book’ marks the presence of a modifier, but does not agree with it (the modifier itself has no *ezafe*).

Case and case government

- Most linguists agree that ‘case’ is a means of marking dependents in their relation to heads, so that the construct state and the *ezafe* would not be instances of case.
- But is the morphosyntactic relationship one of government? If not, a third type of morphosyntactic relationship must be formulated alongside government and agreement.

Government as head marking?

- As a rule, dependent marking is government and head marking is agreement.
- Zwicky (1993): semantic functors are government triggers.
 - heads govern the case of their complements
 - modifiers (also semantic functors) govern the form (case?) of the heads.
- This is a counterpart to the generalisation formulated earlier by Keenan: semantic functors are agreement targets.

Zwicky on government and agreement

- Semantic functors as agreement targets:
 - verbs agree with their subjects and often also with their objects
 - adjectives agree with nouns
- Semantic functors as government triggers:
 - verbs and prepositions govern the case of their complements
 - modifiers govern the case of their modified nouns

Grammatical morphemes as governors?

- Georgian

Gogi *c'eril-s* *c'er-s.*

Gogi:ABS letter:DAT write:PRS.3

'Gogi is writing a letter.'

Gogi-m *c'eril-i* *da-c'er-a*

Gogi:ERG letter:ABS PF-write:AOR.3sg

'Gogi wrote a letter.'

- Cf. also the nominative as a case governed by finite verb forms (assigned within the tense phrase in Generative Grammar).

Grammatical morphemes as governors?

- However, this faculty of grammatical morphemes to govern case is lexically constrained, cf. Lith.
 - *skaityti knygą* ‘read a book’ : *Jonas skaito knygą* ‘John (NOM) is reading a book.’
 - *reikėti* ‘need’ : *Jonui reikia pagalbos* ‘John (DAT) needs help’
- It seems that lexemes in certain syntactic configurations govern (= are able to assign) case, while their tense features may influence the choice of this case.

Verbal government

- The nominative governed by *skaityti* and the dative governed by *reikėti* are, after all, both lexical cases
- The number of verbs governing a nominative subject is much larger than that governing a dative subject; this is why the nominative is perceived as being a feature of the construction as a whole – a structural case;
- Structural cases tend to be high on the case hierarchy and they often alternate with other cases (which are lower on the case hierarchy), cf. the genitive of negation in objects and intransitive subjects. This case alternation sometimes correlates with grammatical features on the government controller.

Atypical agreement

- Usually agreement is understood as the form of one word being determined by the morphosyntactic properties of the controller.
- However, the copying of morphosyntactic features may extend to features expressed by separate subsidiary words, cf.
 - Greek *ho ánthrōpos ho agathós*
 - Russian *na vysokom na beregu* (in folk poetry)
 - (?) Macedonian *mu ja davam knjigata na Petar*
- Though puzzling and often hard to interpret, these examples do not add anything essential to our understanding of the syntactic conditions of agreement.

The nature of government and agreement

- Croft characterises government as relational marking and agreement as indexical marking. Nouns whose case is governed show their dependency but do not point to the lexeme on which they are dependent by copying its features. Agreeing lexemes point to their agreement controllers by copying their features, which is captured by the term ‘indexation’.

The nature of government and agreement

- Agreement can be of two kinds (Lehmann): internal agreement is observed, e. g., within the noun phrase (*aukštas namas* ‘high house’), whereas external agreement is observed, e. g., between verb and subject or object (*children play*).
- Originally agreement is, according to Lehmann, external, and internal agreement is its side product.
- Agreement is, according to Lehmann, a means of identifying referents by reproducing grammatical features of the nouns denoting them.
- Secondarily agreement can become a means of marking constituency.

Complementarity

- If we take external agreement to be the prototypical instance of agreement, then government and agreement, as dependent and head marking, can be viewed as complementary means of marking grammatical relations at sentence level: nouns mark their dependency on the predicate by assuming case forms reflecting the semantic roles assigned by the predicate, whereas the verb identifies its arguments by copying their grammatical features. Agreement does not reflect semantic roles but relative discourse salience; it is therefore sensitive to obliqueness and obeys the obliqueness hierarchy.

Morphosyntactic dependency or unification?

- Though Nichols 1986 states that the notions of head and dependent marking can be formulated both in a dependency and in a constituency framework, in practice constituency-based theories show little concern for it.
- In generative grammar and many other formal theories, agreement and government are increasingly considered in terms of ‘unification’: features are ‘checked’ against each other but nothing is said about the direction of dependency. Current GG dislikes ‘governed case’ and seems to regard government as an instance of agreement.

Syntax and morphology

- It is agreed upon that syntax is ‘morphology-free’ (Zwicky): syntactic rules do not see the internal morphological structure of words, though morphological features are visible beyond the confines of the word.

Lith. *geri vyrai* / *žmonės* / *sūnūs*

‘good men / people / sons’

The principle of morphology-free syntax predicts that there can be no language in which the adjective would agree differently with *vyrai*, *žmonės* and *sūnūs* (*geri vyrai* alongside **gerūs sūnūs*)

Syntax and morphosyntax

- To what extent can / should syntax be morphosyntax-free?
 - we are able to identify *atviros* in *atviros durys* and *open* in *open door* as modifiers, though one shows agreement and the other doesn't;
 - perhaps it would be an advantage from the point of view of universal grammar if we could identify *penki* in *penki namai* 'five houses' and *pięć* in *pięć domów* 'id.' as instances of the same category (quantifiers?) in spite of morphosyntactic differences.