

The Syntax of Greek and Latin 1: Key Concepts and Terms

1 Overview of course

Lecture 1: Key concepts and terms

Lecture 2: Predication and syntactic structure

Lecture 3: Government, concord and subjects

Lecture 4: Displaced and discontinuous constituents

2 What is syntax?

- Abbott and Mansfield: syntax differentiated from accident and in two parts
- 2 areas: Elements making up grammatical units + relationship to a larger unit
- Reveals meaning: dog bites man vs man bites dog
- Important to language: Is the boy who is unhappy watching Mickey Mouse?
- σύνταξις = 'putting *or* arranging together', calqued into Latin as *con-structio*
- Syntax = "ways in which words . . . are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence." (Matthews, *Syntax* p.1)
- (Parts of) sentences analysed in terms of **constructions** (= syntactic units of any size)
- BUT what is a sentence?
 - OED: "a series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought."
 - cf Priscian: *ordinatio dictionum congrua sententiam perfectam demonstrans*
a concordant ordering of words which expounds a complete idea
 - What is a thought, an idea?
 - Punctuation? But many languages do not use punctuation
- Easier to analyse constructions that do occur - independent ones are sentences:
 - 'she asked for a book'
 - 'come in'
 - 'the horse ran away because the train was noisy'
- Within the constructions certain rules clearly operate – e.g. of word order, agreement
- (Exception 1: ellipses: 'Where are you going?' 'To town')
- (Exception 2: interjections: 'Yes', 'Blimey!' 'Least said, soonest mended')
- Sentences are the largest units over which syntactic relations hold.

3 Why is it interesting/useful

- So much of our syntax understanding is intuitive. So we can arrange sentences
 - kicked ball the they
- What about more complicated ones?
 - say it can give what you break a Kevin and
 - "One witness told the commissioners that she had seen sexual intercourse taking place between two parked cars in front of her house."
 - "Off-duty police officer shoots dead outraged father who confronted him after he mowed down his four-year-old daughter"
 - "Dog helps lightning strike Redruth mayor."
- Helps to learn languages
 - wǒ zhīdào nǐ bù shì Yīngguó rén
I know that you are not English
 - μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles
 - ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον
Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices

4 Defining constructions

- An element with a function has a particular **constructional relationship** with other elements:

is minimum eget mortalis, qui minimum cupit

a relative clause 'relates' its content to / specifies the subject of main clause
subject and object are both in specific constructional relationships with the verb.

5 The problem with dead languages

- Syntacticians must formulate rules as efficiently as possible in conformity with the **grammaticality judgements** of native speakers
 - They believe the Master to be a genius
 - The Master is believed to be a genius
 - **They say the Master to be a genius
 - The Master is said to be a genius
- We may not have complete picture for Greek and Latin

6 The boundaries of syntax: morphology

- Morphology = form of words, syntax = connection between them
- But no distinction in speech: what's the justification? Problems:
 - 'they are trying hard'

7 The boundaries of syntax: semantics

- Syntax explains the grammaticality of constructions
 - Tom gives Peter a book
 - Ben sounds well
 - Dan sounds a fool
- But syntax cannot explain all ungrammatical sentences:
 - *Tom sits Luke a book
 - *They took fresh
 - *Dan goes a fool
- They sautéed the potatoes
- ?They sautéed the rice

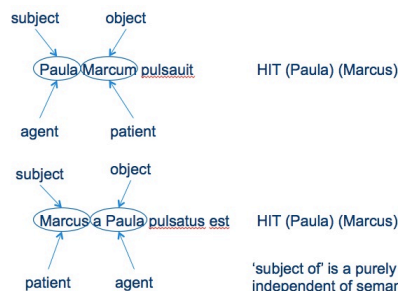
8 Semantic structure: Predicate-Argument

a) it's snowing	ningit	SNOW
b) Marcus fell	Marcus cecidit	FALL (x)
c) Paula hit/loves Marcus	Paula pulsauit/amat Marcus	HIT/LOVE (a)(b)
d) Marcus will give Paula Marcus a gift	Paulae donum dabit	GIVE (x) (y) (z)

- **Arguments** are 'participants' **necessarily** present
- Predicates assign specific **semantic** (or **thematic**) **roles** to each argument:
 - AGENT (**Marcus** will give Paula a gift)
 - PATIENT (Marcus will give Paula **a gift**)
 - BENEFICIARY (Marcus will give **Paula** a gift)
 - EXPERIENCER (**Paula** is grateful)
 - INSTRUMENT (Marcus wins Paula over **with the gift**)

• **NB** Semantic structure does not always match syntactic structure

• Mismatch 1: Passives



• Mismatch 2: Missing arguments

e) *Caesar conatus est pontes reficere*
 Caesar tried to rebuild the bridge
 TRY (Caesar) REBUILD (Caesar)(bridge)

• Mismatch 3: Other forms of ellipsis

f) *Paula Marcum et Iulia Gaium amat*
 (LOVE (Paula) (Marcus)) & (LOVE (Julia) (Gaius))

9 Semantic vs syntactic structure

- Syntax has certain principles of its own, despite being tied to semantics in many ways.
- Each argument and each predicate will normally have its own syntactic realisation ...
- ... but the overall form of the resulting sentence may be unpredictable
- Arguments are typically realised as **noun phrases** (NP) or **prepositional phrases** (PP), predicates typically as **verbs** (V) ...
- ... but there may be unexpected gaps in the syntax (ellipsis) or free choice of form
- So keep syntax and semantics distinct!
 - 'agent', 'patient', 'predicate' are **semantic** notions
 - 'subject', 'object', 'verb' are **syntactic** notions
 - Paula Marcum pulsauit HIT (Paula) (Marcus)
 - subject **denotes** the agent argument of predicate-argument structure
 - object **denotes** the patient argument
 - verb **denotes** the predicate HIT which binds the arguments together

10 Further reading

Brown and Miller 1991, *Syntax* (2nd edn.)
 Lyons 1968, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (chapter 6)
 Matthews 1981, *Syntax* (especially chapters 4, 6, 11)
 Robins 1964, *General linguistics* (edition 4, chapter 6)
 Pinker 1995, *The Language Instinct*
 Language Log on noun pileups: <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?cat=26>
 Language Log on crash blossoms: <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?cat=118>