

Syntax problem set 1

24.900 — Introduction to linguistics

February 22, 2005

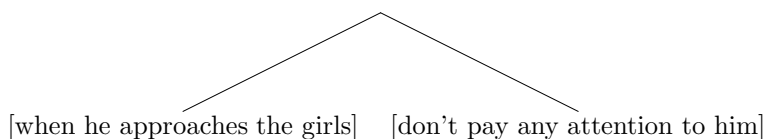
1 Ambiguities

For each of the following sentences, give an unambiguous paraphrase for each meaning. Then draw a tree structure that is detailed enough to illustrate the difference between the available readings (the trees do not have to be exhaustive). For example:

- When he approaches the girls don't pay any attention to him

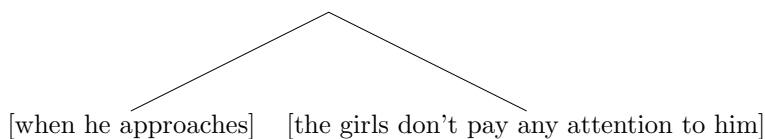
Reading 1

- Paraphrase: you shouldn't pay attention to him when he approaches the girls



Reading 2

- Paraphrase: the girls don't pay any attention to him when he approaches



Do the same for the following sentences:

- The angry men and women walked in.
- They fed her baby carrots.
- Herb forgot how good beer tastes.
- The clown hit the man with the banana on his head.

2 Constituency tests

Choose two of the ambiguous sentences in the previous problem. Use constituency tests to argue for the structures you assumed above, for all the readings. Use at least two constituency tests per reading. For example:

- When he approaches the girls don't pay any attention to him

Reading 1

- Paraphrase: you shouldn't pay attention to him when he approaches the girls.
 - Structure: [when he approaches the girls] [don't pay any attention to him]
1. Coordination: [at noon] and [when he approaches the girls] don't pay any attention to him
 2. Answer fragment: (So) [when] don't pay any attention to him? – [When he approaches the girls]
 3. Substitution: [then] don't pay any attention to him

Reading 2

- Paraphrase: the girls don't pay any attention to him when he approaches
 - Structure: [when he approaches] [the girls don't pay any attention to him]
1. Substitution: [then] the girls don't pay any attention to him
 2. Clefting: It is [when he approaches] that the girl's don't pay any attention to him
 3. Movement: The girls don't pay any attention to him [when he approaches]

3 Subcategorization frames

What is the subcategorization frame of the following words? Remember that only complements are listed in subcategorization frames, and also that complements may be optional.

- send
- demolish
- weigh (tr. and intr.)
- expire

- throw
- hope_V
- order_V
- destruction
- transfer_V
- transfer_N
- inquire
- stubborn
- proud
- growth
- aware

4 Fieldwork

Choose one of the topics in the Morphology section of the Squib topics handout, and conduct some exploratory research in the language that you have chosen for your final project. Two reasonable topics to try to tackle now could be the structure of compounds or the morphology of the verb. If you choose the former, pick one type of compound (make sure it exists in the target language) and describe how it is formed (is the head to the right or to the left? is there any special morphology on either member of the compound?) If you choose the latter, pick one or at most two verbs, and try to figure out what things are encoded as morphemes on the verb (is the person and number of the subject encoded? is tense or negation?) If it is possible at this stage, give the template with the order of the morphemes on the verb.

Your answer to this question should be in essay format (do not exceed one page, though), and should present sufficient data to make your points clear.