Syntax problem set 3

24.900 — Introduction to linguistics

March 7, 2005

1 C-command and binding

Draw full trees for each of the following sentences and answer the questions that accompany them. Once again, you don't need to be punctilious about X-bar, but indicate all the structure that is necessary to show the complement vs. adjunct distinction and all c-command relations that are relevant to answer the questions.

- $John_i$ complained that [that friend of $his_j]_k$ loves $himself_{k,*i,*j}$ too much.[1]

  - For each of *John*, *his* and *that friend of his*, say whether it c-commands *himself*.
  - Why is it not possible for *himself* to be coindexed with *John*?
  - Why can't it be coindexed with *his*?

- John asked him why Harv took the screwdriver.

  - What principle of the binding theory bears on what *him* can corefer with? Show how it bars *him* from being coindexed with *John*.
  - What principle bars *him* from being coindexed with *Harv*? How?

2 Presupposition, entailment, and implicature

For each of the following sentence pairs, indicate whether the first presupposes, entails or implicates the second. The sentence in parentheses is given for context.

- Where did you hide the smuggled goods? You hid smuggled goods.

- I know that John won the lottery. John won the lottery.

- John ate breakfast at noon today. John ate breakfast.

- The current king of France is bald. There is a current king of France.

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[1]I.e., j is the index for *his*, and k is the index for the whole noun phrase *that friend of his*.

- (How was your date?) He had neatly tied shoelaces. He was thoroughly unremarkable.

- John did five homeworks. John did exactly five homeworks.

- John stopped having fits in section. John had fits in section.

- John is a bachelor. John is unmarried.

Extra credit: the following sentences are nearly synonymous. Can you identify where the meaning difference lies?

- John is poor and honest.

- John is poor but honest.

3   Fieldwork

Select a topic from the syntax section of the squib topics handout, and conduct some exploratory research with your language consultant. Some topics about which one could get some meaningful information in one or two short sessions could be: (1) word order of the language; (2) how questions are formed; (3) whether or not the language is *pro*-drop.

Remember that this exercise is about working with raw language data. We are not interested in stuff that you can find in a book, or things that your informant tells you *about* the language. Instead, we require that you collect data, present it and discuss it in an orderly fashion, and arrive at your own conclusions, even if they are limited in scope. Look at the solution to the last morphology problem set to see a small sample of how you could structure your answer.

Make sure that you're not too ambitious about what you're trying to find, and that you keep your data simple (i.e., without too many free variables). For instance, if you're investigating basic word order, work only with declarative sentences, keep the number of constituents to a minimum (a subject, a verb, an object, and at most an adverb), and don't vary too much the content of the constituents themselves (word order in a language can be sensitive to things such as the type of verb in a sentence, the size of the direct object phrase, whether the direct object is definite or indefinite, and many other factors that would complicate your analysis immensely).

Also, remember that when collecting data, you don't need to limit yourself to passively recording your consultant's translations of the English sentences that you provide her/him. You can also test your conjectures by asking her/him if a sentence that you put together is OK in the language (even if it requires minor corrections). This would be indispensable, for instance, to find out whether different word orders are allowed in a language.