FORMAL CONSTRAINTS VS. COGNITIVE AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS OF PARTS OF SPEECH IN ENGLISH

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Annotation: The article analyzes two sets of features of parts of speech in English are essentially incommensurate, since the semantic features derive from the functions of language in communication and cognition, while the structural features are essentially based in the combinatorial potential of signs in a text.

Аннотация: В статье анализируются два набора признаков членов предложений на английском языке, по существу несоизмеримых, поскольку семантические признаки вытекают из функций языка в общении и познании, а структурные признаки по существу основаны на комбинаторном потенциале знаков в тексте.

Annotatsiya: Maqolada ingliz tilida gap bo'laklarining mohiyatan bir-biriga mos kelmaydigan ikki xil xususiyatlar tahlil qilinadi, chunki semantik xususiyatlar tilning muloqot va bilishdagi vazifalaridan kelib chiqadi, strukturaviy xususiyatlar esa matndagi belgilarning kombinatsion imkoniyatlariga asoslanadi.

Key words: category, systematicity, heterogeneous functions, constraints, uniform nature, universal functional motivation.

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.

Categories of parts of speech have both semantic and structural aspects.

Consequently, the two sets of features are largely independent of each other. Their combination in a language yields sets of parts of speech whose systematicity is largely language-internal. To the extent that there is a functional motivation for parts of speech, three restrictions must be made:

1) It is not, in the first place, a cognitive, but rather a communicative motivation.

2) The functional motivation of word classes is not direct, but mediated by semantic and syntactic categories of higher order.

3) Only the primary parts of speech (verb and noun) are motivated in this way.

The secondary parts of speech (adjectives, adverbs etc.) and the minor parts of speech (pronouns, subordinators etc.) increasingly have a system-internal structural rather than a universal functional motivation. Given these heterogeneous functions and constraints, there is no uniform nature to all parts of speech.

The problem of the nature of parts of speech may be articulated as the question for the forces which are responsible for • the existence of parts of speech in general

• particular parts of speech in different languages • the assignment of a particular part of speech to a lexeme coding a given meaning.

As we shall see, different factors and motivations are behind these three aspects of the nature of parts of speech. On the one hand, there is a common basis to the part-ofspeech systems of the languages of the world; and on the other hand, there is no universal part-of-speech system that was represented in every language. In this, parts of speech behave just like any other linguistic property of a semiotic nature, i.e. one that concerns signs or categories of signs: their conformation is an affair of the particular language as a historical and cultural activity. Such properties are therefore not preassembled at the universal level. They do, however, obey universal principles since every language is a system for the solution of a set of cognitive and communicative problems which, at an appropriate level of abstraction, is the same for all languages and human beings.

The language system is a semiotic system. As such, it is the result of the interplay of two essentially independent forces. Thus, entities of grammar, including parts of speech, have a purely formal side determined by the constraints imposed on any semiotic system. At the same time, this formal side is not empty, but is laden with cognitive and communicative content. In more concrete terms: Grammatical categories, relations, constructions and operations are necessary for a semiotic system to operate, and they do have some purely formal properties. At the same time, those are categories like tense, relations like the indirect object relation, constructions like the causative construction and operations like nominalization; and none of these is purely formal, all of them have their semantic side. Putting it yet another way: in a semiotic system, everything concerning the sign as a whole is meaningful. The association of form and function in language is not biunique.

A classification of semiotic entities, including grammatical ones, by semantic criteria yields results different from a classification based on formal criteria. This is true for word classes just as for any other grammatical category.

For instance, there is, in English, a distribution class that includes noun phrases (like a bright girl), proper nouns (like Linda) and certain pronouns, among them personal pronouns (like she), while it excludes nominals (like bright girl), common nouns (like girl) and other pronouns (like one; cf. a bright one with a bright she). The members of that distribution class have no common semantic basis that would not also be shared by other kinds of nominal elements. And on the other hand, a semantic criterion such as denoting an act would subsume members of different word classes such as ask and question.

Grammatical concepts, including parts of speech, may be defined at different levels of generality. The two levels that are of interest here are the language-specific and the interlingual (alias cross-linguistic alias typological) level. These are levels of abstraction. Thus, the English perfect has certain particular properties that it may not

share with the perfect of any other language. It nevertheless instantiates an interlingual category of perfect, a concept which must be sufficiently abstract and prototypical in nature in order to fulfill its methodological function of serving in the description and comparison of more than one language.

From there on, extension of the part-of-speech system is guided by universal and then increasingly language-specific structural constraints. The next step in the extension of the system is concerned with expanding the range of concepts used in reference and predication. All languages can do that, some languages, however, only at the level of modifying syntactic operations of attribution and adjunction. Now if a language opts for categorial uniformity, it needs modifiers. Here is another field where it can be economic to store prefabricated modifiers as a lexical class. This yields adjectives and adverbs, which make use of the structural device of modifying relationality. Similarly, the structural device of governing relationality is put to use in order to create subclasses of the classes generated so far which differ in their valency and thus afford more flexibility in syntagmatic combination. This

then opens a rich field of further subdivision according to grammatical selection restrictions and, thus, to the subcategory of the complement.

Finally, the overall burden of categorization and relationalization cannot be born by the lexicon alone. There must be flexibility in recategorizing items and putting them into new relations. Apart from the purely isolating language, all languages derive minor classes from the lexical classes by grammaticalization. Their members help in pinning down the category that an expression belongs to, thus introducing redundancy into the message. Some of these minor classes, like demonstrative and interrogative pronouns, are again motivated by universal principles of communication. In principle, however, their organization is a matter of language-internal structure. The notion constituting the title of the present article – the nature of parts of speech – is not a unified notion. They are of very different nature.

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