

Typology of lexical categories

Course module: AM3a: Sprachtypologie und Sprachvergleich
Leistungspunkte: 6
Course place: Haus 24, 0.50
Course time: Thursdays, 12:00–14:00

Instructor: Dr. Luis Vicente
Office: Haus 35, 1.03
Contact: vicente@uni-potsdam.de
Office hours: Wednesday 10:00–12:00 or by appointment

“It is ironic that the first thing one learns can be the last thing one understands. [...] Often when students enter their first linguistics class, one of the few things they know about grammar is that some words are nouns, others are verbs, and others are adjectives. Linguistics classes teach them many fascinating things that go far beyond these basic category distinctions. But when those classes are all over, students often know very little more about what it means to be a noun, a verb, or an adjective than they did at first.”

[Baker, Mark. 2001. *Lexical categories*, p. 1]

Course description

In this course, we will go fairly deep into the problem of understanding lexical categories. We will approach this problem from both a typological and a theoretical perspective. We will see that deciding whether a word is a noun, a verb, and adjective, or a member of some other category is not always an easy task, even in the languages that we are familiar with; more exotic languages make this task even more complicated. These problems arise because, surprisingly, it is not easy to offer a formal definition of what a noun (or a verb, or an adjective) is! In order to remedy this situation, we will be looking at the different ways in which languages encode nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. In doing so, we will understand lexical categories a bit better, and we will also learn a few new things about both morphosyntax and typology.

There are a number of topics that we need to cover, namely:

- Theoretical grounding of lexical categories.
- Finer divisions within the categories of verb, noun, adjective, and preposition.
- Category-changing morphology.
- Cross-linguistic realization of the previous two points.
- Lexical categories vs. functional categories.

However, if you have any special wishes for a topic you want to discuss (whether it is theory-related or language-related), you should tell me, and we'll try to find the time to discuss it.

Pass requirements

- This course is structured as a seminar/reading group. This means that attendance and active participation are necessary. You cannot miss more than three classes without proper justification (e.g., if you say you are sick, I'll need to see a note from your doctor certifying that you were sick).
- Each week I will assign some article or book chapter in preparation for the following class, which all students must read. In addition, we will start each class (except for the first one) with one student making a short presentation (ca. 10-15 minutes) of the reading assigned for that class. All students must make at least one short presentation.
- Occasionally, I will also assign a small problem set, which must be handed in at the beginning of the following class.
- At the end of the course, you must write a final paper on any topic of your own choice. The paper should be around 5000 words long (around 12-15 single-spaced pages, with a normal-sized font), and it must be handed in no later than Friday March 18 (six weeks after the last class).
- The last weeks will be reserved for you to make long-ish presentations (about 20-30 minutes) of the preliminary research you have done for your paper.

Bibliography

- Abney, Steven. 1987. The English Noun Phrase in its sentential aspect. Doctoral dissertation, MIT.
- Aske, Jon. 1989. Path predicates in English and Spanish: a closer look. *Proceedings of BLS* 15.
- Baker, Mark, and O.T. Stewart. 1996. Unaccusativity and the adjective/verb distinction: Edo evidence. *Proceedings of NELS* 27.
- Baker, Mark. 2000. "Verbal adjectives" as adjectives without phi-features. Ms., Rutgers University.
- Baker, Mark. 2003. *Lexical categories: verbs, nouns, and adjectives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bolinger, Dwight. 1967. Adjectives in English: attribution and predication. *Lingua* 18:1-34.
- Borer, Hagit. 1990. V + ing: it walks like an adjective, it talks like an adjective. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21:95-102.
- Borer, Hagit. 2005. *In name only*. Oxford University Press.
- Borer, Hagit. 2005. *The normal course of events*. Oxford University Press.
- Carey, Susan. 1994. Does learning a language require a child to reconceptualize the world? *Lingua* 92:143-167.
- Cheng, Lisa, and Rint Sybesma. 1999. Bare and not-so-bare nouns and the structure of NP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30:509-542.
- Cinque, Guglielmo. 1990. Engative adjectives and the lexicalist hypothesis. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 8:1-40.
- Croft, William. 1991. *Syntactic categories and grammatical relations*. University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, Henry, and Hamida Demirdache. 2000. On lexical verb meanings: evidence from Salish. In *Events as grammatical objects*, ed. Tenny and Pustejovsky, 97-142. CSLI Publications.
- Dechaine, Rose Marie. 1993. Predicates across categories. Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
- Dechaine, Rose Marie, and Mireille Tremblay. 1996. Adverbial PPs and prepositional adverbs in French and English. In *Canadian Linguistics Association Proceedings*.
- Dechaine, Rose Marie. 2005. Grammar at borderline: a case study of P as a lexical category. *Proceedings of WCCFL* 24.
- Demirdache, Hamida, and Lisa Matthewson. 1995. On the universality of syntactic categories. *Proceedings of NELS* 25.
- den Dikken, Marcel. 2007. On the functional structure of directional and locative PPs. Ms., CUNY Graduate Center.

- den Dikken, Marcel. 2009. Directions from the get-go: on the syntax of manner-of-motion verbs and directional constructions. Ms. CUNY Graduate Center.
- Emonds, Joseph. 1985. *A unified theory of syntactic categories*. Foris.
- Hopper, Paul, and Sandra Thompso. 1984. The discourse basis for lexical categories in universal garmmar. *Language* 60:703-752.
- Kennedy, Chris. 1999. *Projecting the adjective*. Garland.
- Levin, Beth, and Malka Rappaport. 1986. The formation of adjectival passives. *Linguistic Inquiry* 17:623-661.
- Maling, Joan. 1983. Transitive adjectives: a case of categorial reanalysis. In *Linguistic categories: auxiliaries and related puzzles*, ed. Henry and Richards. 253-289. Reidel.
- McCawley, James. 1982. On the non-existence of syntactic categories. In *30 million theories of grammar*. 177-202.
- Murasugi, Keiko. 1990. Adjectives, nominal adjectives, and adjectival verbs in Japanese. *UConn Working Papers* 55-86.
- Neeleman, Ad. 1997. PP complements. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 15:89-137.
- Newmeyer, Frederick. 1998. *Language form and language function*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Newmeyer, Frederick. 2000. The discrete nature of syntactic categories: against a prototype-based account. *Syntax and Semantics* 32:221-250.
- Omoruyi, Thomas. 1986. Adjectives and adjectivization processes in Edo. *Studies in African Linguistics* 17:283-301.
- Pereltsvaig, Asya. 2000. Syntactic categories are neither primitive nor universal: evidence from short and long adjectives in Russian. *Proceedings of FASL* 9.
- Snyder, William. 2001. On the nature of syntactic variation. *Language* 77:324-343.
- Sproat, Richard. 1985. On deriving the lexicon. Doctoral dissertation, MIT.
- Sproat, Richard, and Chilin Shih. 1991. The cross-linguistic distribution of adjective ordering restrictions. In *Interdisciplinary approaches to language*, ed. Georgopoulos and Ishihara, 565-593. Reidel.
- Thompson, Sandra. 1988. A discourse approach to the category adjective. In *Explaining language universals*, ed. Hawkins, 167-185. Blackwell.
- Williams, Edwin. 1983. Another argument that the passive is transformational. *Linguistic Inquiry* 13:160-163.
- Wodjak, Rachel. 2001. An argument for category neutrality? *Proceedings of WCCFL* 20.
- Zubizarreta, Maria Luisa. 2007. *On the syntactic composition of manner and motion*. MIT Press.