Platonic Syntax

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Main Topic: the flexibility of word meanings & its consequences for grammar

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Outline

1.   Flexibility: empirical evidence
   1.1.   Verbs: stative and dynamic
   1.2.   Nouns: mass and count
   1.3.   Adjectives: bounded and unbounded
2.   Existing accounts?
   2.1.   Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987)
   2.2.   Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, Michaelis & Lambrecht 1996, Kay & Fillmore 1999)
3.   Platonic Syntax
   3.1.   Distributed Morphology (DM; Halle & Marantz 1993, Harley & Noyer 1999)
   3.2.   A case-study: absence of principle B effects (Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011)
   3.3.   Exo-Skeletal Model (Borer 2005a,b)
4.   Back to flexibility
   4.1.   Mass-count (De Belder, to appear)
   4.2.   Stative-dynamic (Vanden Wyngaerd 2009)
   4.3.   The boundedness distinction (Vanden Wyngaerd 2010)
5.   Conclusion
6.   References

1.   FLEXIBILITY: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

1.1.   Verbs: stative and dynamic

(1)   De baksteen springt uit de muur.
   the brick   jumps out the wall
   'The brick juts out of the wall.'
   'The brick jumps out of the wall.'

stative → dynamic

(2)   a.   She liked him in a minute.   (Michaelis 2005)
     b.   I'm feeding him a line and he's believing every word.
(3)   a.   I'm lovin' it.
     b.   I'm hating it.
     c.   The food is tasting great!

dynamic → stative

(4)   a.   De weg loopt door het dorp.
                'The road runs through the village.'
'   b.   De tekst loopt niet.
                the text runs not
                'The text doesn't flow.'
        c.   Die serie loopt op Canvas.
                'The show runs on Canvas.'
        d.   Het contract loopt over drie jaar.
                'The contract runs over three years.

(5)   a.   Dat boek gaat/handelt over taalkunde.
                that book goes/deals on linguistics
                'That book is on linguistics.'
        b.   De elfde erfgoeddag draait rond armoede.
                the 11th heritage.day turns around poverty
                'The eleventh heritage day has poverty as its theme.'

1.2.   *Nouns: mass and count*

The Universal Grinder (Pelletier 1975)

(6)   "If men/unicorns/numbers were physical objects, and if we were to put one into the grinder,
        there would be man/unicorn/number all over the floor." (Pelletier 1975:457)
(7)   a.   Mother termite complains about her son Johnny: "Johnny is very choosy about his
                food. He will eat book, but he won't touch shelf."   (Gleason 1965)
        b.   Much missionary was eaten at the festival.   (Bach 1981:10)
        c.   Give me some pillow.   (Fillmore 1989:48)
        d.   There was cat all over the driveway.   (id.)

The Universal Packager

(8)   a.   There are several German beers available.   (Fillmore 1989)
        b.   After two beers he's incoherent.

•   "Every noun, given the right context can occur in either type of usage, count or mass" (Gleason
     1965:136-7)

1.3.   *Adjectives: bounded and unbounded*

Adjectives can be bounded or unbounded, as appears from different modifiers they take (Barbiers
1995, Paradis 2001, Kennedy 2007, Kennedy & McNally 1999, 2005, Vanden Wyngaerd 2001,
Wechsler 2005:

(9)   a.   De fles is helemaal/bijna/half/*erg leeg.   (bounded)
                'The bottle is completely/almost/half/*very empty.'
        b.   Die tafel is *helemaal/*bijna/*half/erg lang.   (unbounded)
                'That table is *completely/*almost/*half/very long.'

Siegel (1979):

| (10) | a. | John is tall for a ten year old. | (unbounded) |
| | b. | #This glass is full for a wine glass. | (bounded) |

Toledo & Sassoon (2011):

| (11) | a. | X is taller than Y ↛ X is tall / Y is not tall | (unbounded) |
| | b. | X is emptier than Y → Y is not empty | (bounded) |

bounded → unbounded

| (12) | a. | The glass is half/completely/almost full. | (bounded) |
| | b. | a (very) full schedule | (unbounded) |

(13)	a.	De trossen zijn helemaal/bijna half los.	(bounded)
		'The hawsers are completely/almost/half loose.'	
	b.	De moraal is er erg los.	(unbounded)
		'Morals are very loose there.'	

unbounded → bounded

| (14) | De concrete is almost/half/completely hard. | (bounded) |

2. EXISTING ACCOUNTS?

2.1. *Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987)*

Syntax is deeply affected by conceptualization or world knowledge: combinatorial possibilities of nouns/verbs/adjectives are affected by the ways in which we conceive of their meanings. These conceptualizations are variable and flexible.

2.2. *Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, Michaelis & Lambrecht 1996, Kay & Fillmore 1999)*

Words have meanings. Syntactic structures ("constructions") also have meanings. The meaning of structure beats the meaning of words.

(15)   Override Principle (Michaelis 2005)
        If a lexical item is semantically incompatible with its syntactic context, the meaning of the lexical item conforms to the meaning of the structure in which it is embedded.

3.   PLATONIC SYNTAX

3.1.   Distributed Morphology (DM; Halle & Marantz 1993, Harley & Noyer 1999)

(16)   a.   Classical ('lexicalist') view:
                 I. Lexicon → II. Syntax

       b.   Distributed lexicon view:
                 I. Functional Lexicon → II. Syntax → **III. Content Lexicon (Encyclopedia)**

- The Functional Lexicon contains:
       (a) morpho-syntactic features: φ-features (person, number, gender), (in)definiteness,
           quantifiers, tense, etc.
       (b) roots √ (placeholders for content words, to be inserted post-syntactically)

(17)   The cat slept
       I. Functional lexicon:

           [+def] [{P:3, N:sg, G:m}] [+Past] √ √

       II. Syntax:

           [$_{CP}$ C [$_{TP}$ [$_{DP}$ [+def] [$_{NumP}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:3, N:sg, G:m}] [$_{NP}$ √]]] [$_{T}$ [+Past]] [$_{VP}$ √]]]]
       III. After post-syntactic lexical insertion:
           [$_{CP}$ C [$_{TP}$ [$_{DP}$ the cat] T° [$_{VP}$ slept]]]]

- Syntax is kept clean of all the rich semantic content that comes with content words, and it is
  restricted to manipulating functional features.

- Syntax is also kept clear of morphological mess, such as form-meaning correspondences that are
  not 1-to-1.

(18)

'to be', present tense, indicative			
		English	*French*
sg	1	am	suis
	2	are	es
	3	is	est
pl	1	are	sommes
	2	are	êtes
	3	are	sont

(19)   Syntax ('You$_{[pl]}$ are crazy!'- 'vous êtes fous!')
       ... [$_{DP}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:2, N:pl}]] ... [$_{T}$ {P:2, N:pl}] ...

(20)   Post-syntactic lexical insertion (English, not French!)

       a.   {P:1, N:sg}   ↔   am

       b.   {P:3, N:sg}   ↔   is

       c.   elsewhere   ↔   are

(21)   *Subset Principle* (Halle 1997:428)
        The phonological exponent of a Vocabulary item is inserted into a morpheme in the
        terminal string if the item matches all or a subset of the grammatical features specified in the
        terminal morpheme. Insertion does not take place if the Vocabulary item contains features
        not present in the morpheme. Where several Vocabulary items meet the conditions for
        insertion, the item matching the greatest number of features specified in the terminal
        morpheme must be chosen.

3.2.   *A case-study: absence of principle B effects (Rooryck & Vanden Wyngaerd 2011)*

(22)   a.   Jan$_i$ heeft zich$_{i/*j}$ gewassen.   [Standard Dutch]
                Jan has REFL washed
                'Jan washed himself.'
        b.   Jan$_i$ heeft hem$_{*i/j}$ gewassen.
                'Jan washed him.'

(23)   a.   Jan$_i$ heeft me$_{*i/j}$ gewassen.   [Standard Dutch]
                'Jan washed me.'
        b.   Ik$_i$ heb me$_i$ gewassen.
                'I washed myself.'

(24)   a.   Jan$_i$ heeft je$_{*i/j}$ gewassen.   [Standard Dutch]
                'Jan washed you.'
        b.   Jij$_i$ heb je$_{i/*j}$ gewassen.
                'You washed yourself.'

➢   Basic intuition: 3P contrasts with 1/2P because there is a dedicated reflexive form for 3P that is
    lacking in 1/2P:

(25)

Standard Dutch		
	nonreflexive	reflexive
1	me	*mich
2	je	*jich
3	hem	zich

(26)   *Absence of Principle B Effect (APBE)*
        Pronouns behave like anaphors when a dedicated class of reflexive pronouns is lacking. (cf.
        Pica 1984, Bouchard 1983:58ff; 1985, Burzio 1989a, 1989b). In such a case, pronouns
        function as 'elsewhere' forms (Déchaine & Manfredi 1994).

(27)   a.   They like [$_{DP}$ each other's bags].
        b.   He likes [$_{DP}$ his dog].

(28)   a.   Hon$_i$ ser sin$_{i/*j}$ man.   [Swedish]
        b.   Hon$_i$ ser hennes$_{*i/j}$ man.
                'She sees her husband.'

(29)   a.   Ioannes$_i$ sororem suam$_{i/*j}$ vidit.   [Latin; Bertocchi & Casadio 1980]
            b.   Ioannes$_i$ sororem eius$_{*i/j}$ vidit.
                  'Ioannes saw his sister.'

(30)   a.   On$_i$ uze rasskazal mne o svoej$_{i/*j}$ zizni.   [Russian; Timberlake 1979]
            b.   On$_i$ uze rasskazal mne o ego$_{*i/j}$ zizni.
                  'He had already told me about his life.'

(31)   a.   Jørgen$_i$ elsker sin$_{i/*j}$ kone.   [Danish]
                  Jørgen loves self's wife
            b.   Jørgen$_i$ elsker hans$_{*i/j}$ kone.
                  Jørgen loves self's wife

(32)   a.   *De$_i$ elsker sine$_i$ koner.   [Danish]
                  They love self's wives
            b.   De$_i$ elsker deres$_{i/j}$ koner.
                  They love their wives

(33)   Jan$_i$ heed 'm$_{i/j}$ gewasse.   [Flemish Brabant Dutch]
          Jan has him washed
          'Jan washed himself/him.'

(34)

Flemish Brabant Dutch		
	nonreflexive	reflexive
1	me	*mich
2	je	*jich
3	hem	*zich

- Syntax (Platonic, i.e. universal & explicit!)

(35)   a.   ... [$_{DP1}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:3, N:sg, G:m}]] ... [$_{DP2}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:3, N:sg, G:m, reflexive}]] ...
            b.   ... [$_{DP1}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:3, N:sg, G:m}]] ... [$_{DP2}$ [$_{Num}$ {P:3, N:sg, G:m}]] ...

- Lexical insertion (variable from language to language)

Standard Dutch:
(36)   a.   {P:1}   ↔   me / ___ accusative, weak
            b.   {P:3, reflexive}   ↔   zich
            c.   {P:3, N:sg, G:m}   ↔   hem / ___ accusative, weak

Flemish Brabant Dutch:
(37)   a.   {P:1}   ↔   me / ___ accusative, weak
            b.   {P:3, N:sg, G:m}   ↔   hem / ___ accusative, weak

- Syntax is **Platonic**: it is maximally simple, general, explicit and universal. It contains full feature specifications. It has 1-to-1 relations between features and meanings. Language variation and further 'messiness' resides in the morphological/lexical material a language happens to have at its disposal.

3.3.   Exo-Skeletal Model (Borer 2005a,b)

- As in DM, content words are inserted post-syntactically.
- Function words & syntactic structures: meanings are strong → not easily coerced
- Content words: meanings are vague and malleable → shifts easily occur

4.   BACK TO FLEXIBILITY

4.1.   Mass-count (De Belder, to appear)

- Nouns are not inherently mass or count. Functional features [Num] and [Size] contribute the effect of mass and count. Packaging and Grinding are effects of syntactic configurations which are built using these features.

(38)   a. $[_{DP} D° [\sqrt{}]]$ mass reading

            b. $[_{DP} D° [_{DivP} Num° [\sqrt{}]]]$ kind reading (e.g. *I grow three apples*)

            c. $[_{DP} D° [_{NumP} Num° [_{SizeP} Size° [\sqrt{}]]]]$ unit (count) reading

- The Dutch diminutive morpheme –*je* realizes the feature [Size].
- Filip (1999:62) (referring to Fillmore & Kay 1994:29): the Universal Packager is "largely restricted to foodstuffs":

(39)   *I'll have a dirt here.
         Intended: I'll have a shovelful of dirt here

(40)   a.   Er zat een vuiltje op het glas.
                there sat a dirt.dim on the glass
                'There was a little piece of dirt on the glass.'
        b.   een houtje, ?een metaaltje, een zilvertje, ?een katoentje, etc.
                'a small piece of wood/metal/silver/cotton, etc.'

- This theory explains flexibility, i.e. the packaging/grinding phenomena: the syntax (the features [Num] and [Size], as visible in plural and diminutive morphology) determines the meaning. Content words are inserted post-syntactically. Their meaning is encyclopedic, and flexible.
- There continues to be a contrast between (41a) and (41b)

(41)   a.   There's blood on the wall.
        b.   ??There's dog on the wall.

- De Belder calls this "conceptual boundedness": whether a content word can be inserted in a syntactic structure depends on its encyclopedic properties, more in particular whether or not we easily recognize units.

4.2. Stative-dynamic (Vanden Wyngaerd 2009)

- Functional lexicon contains event-structural operators/functional verbs/light verbs (cf. Den Dikken 2008):

(42)   GET   (inchoativity)
       GO   (directed motion)
       CAUSE   (causation)
       DO
       BE

- The stative-dynamic distinction reduces to the presence or absence of BE in the syntactic structure.
- The two readings of (1) are accounted for by assigning two different syntactic derivations to it:

(1)   De baksteen springt uit de muur.
       'The brick juts out of the wall.'
       'The brick jumps out of the wall.'

(43)   a. $[_{vP}$ GET+MANNER $[_{RP}$ DP$_{subj}$ [Relator $[_{PP}$ P$_{dir}$ $[_{PP}$ P$_{Loc}$ DP]]]]]   (dynamic)
       b. $[_{vP}$ BE+MANNER $[_{RP}$ DP$_{subj}$ [Relator $[_{PP}$ P$_{dir}$ $[_{PP}$ P$_{Loc}$ DP]]]]]   (stative)

- The dynamic reading involves a combination of GET+MANNER, i.e. the brick moves in a jumping manner.
- The stative reading involves a combination of BE+MANNER, i.e. the brick is in a jumping manner.
- The meaning of the verb *springen* 'jump' is underspecified or vague: it can be inserted into structures which are as distinct as GET+MANNER and BE+MANNER.

4.3. The boundedness distinction (Vanden Wyngaerd 2010)

- (un)boundedness is not basic to the adjective itself, but rather depends on the noun (or something related to the noun) that the adjective is predicated of.

(12)   a.   The glass is half/completely/almost full.   (bounded)
       b.   a (very) full schedule   (unbounded)

(44)   The window is half/completely/almost open.   (bounded)

- BNC corpus "very open": 49 hits

(45)   a.   a very open person/process/view/weave texture/landscape/texture/intelligence/
             capital market system/mind   (unbounded)
       b.   very open people/questions/gravel flushes   (unbounded)

- BNC corpus "half open": 35 hits

(46)   The door/gate/mouth/eyes/top/wings/flaps {is/are} half open.

(47)   Eigenlijk is 't misschien wel veel mooier om ze direct voor het raam te hangen in plaats van
       helemaal lang van boven naar beneden.   (Tribushinina & Janssen 2010:7)
       'Actually it will probably be nicer to only cover the window instead of hanging them
       [=curtains] completely long from above to below.'

(48)   a.   een (*half)lange tafel.   (M. De Belder, p.c.)   (unbounded)
               'a (half)long table'
       b.   een halflange rok   (bounded)
               a half.long skirt
               'a mid-length skirt'

- Since the boundedness distinction is due to the subject that the adjective is predicated of,
  boundedness will vary with the subject. This explains flexibility.
- Encyclopedic properties of the subject noun determine boundedness.
- These encyclopedic properties affect combinatorial possibilities of adjectives with certain
  modifiers. In Platonic syntax, these combinatorial restrictions are not expressible as syntactic
  restrictions, because they depend on something that is not present in the syntax. They must
  therefore be semantic/encyclopedic restrictions holding at some post-syntactic level.

5.   CONCLUSION

- Various subcategories in nouns/verbs/adjectives are flexible.
- Platonic Syntax provides a means of accounting for this flexibility.
    - Syntax is simple, general, explicit and universal.
    - Earthly messiness resides in the morphological/lexical/phonological material different
      languages make available.

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