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

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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 jumps out of the wall.’
    ‘The brick juts 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.
    ‘The bottle is completely/almost/half/*very empty.’
  b.  Die tafel is *helemaal/*bijna/*half/*erg lang.
    ‘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?


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.


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


(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: \( \phi \)-features (person, number, gender), (in)definiteness, quantifiers, tense, etc.
  (b) roots \( \sqrt{\ } \) (placeholders for content words, to be inserted post-syntactically)

(17) The cat slept
   I. Functional lexicon:
   \(+\text{def}\) \([\text{P}:3, \text{N}:sg, \text{G}:m]\) \(+\text{Past}\) \(\sqrt{\ }\)
   II. Syntax:
   \([\text{CP} \ [\text{TP} \ [+\text{def}] \ [\text{NumP} \ [\text{Num} \ [\text{P}:3, \text{N}:sg, \text{G}:m] \ [\text{NP} \ \sqrt{\ }] \ [\text{T} \ [+\text{Past}] \ [\text{VP} \ \sqrt{\ }]]]]\]
   III. After post-syntactic lexical insertion:
   \([\text{CP} \ [\text{TP} \ [\text{DP} \ \text{the cat} \ \text{T}^\circ \ [\text{VP} \ \text{slept} \ ]]]]\)

- 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘to be’, present tense, indicative</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 am</td>
<td>vrai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 are</td>
<td>êtes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 is</td>
<td>est</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 are</td>
<td>sommes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 are</td>
<td>êtes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 are</td>
<td>sont</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(19) Syntax (‘You \(\text{ja}\) are crazy!’- ‘vous êtes fous!’)

   … \([\text{DP} \ [\text{Num} \ [\text{P}:2, \text{N}:pl]]] \ [\text{VP} \ [+\text{Past}] \ [\text{VP} \ \sqrt{\ }]]\) …

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

a. \([\text{P}:1, \text{N}:sg] \leftrightarrow \text{am}\)

b. \([\text{P}:3, \text{N}:sg] \leftrightarrow \text{is}\)

c. elsewhere \leftrightarrow \text{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, heeft zich\_i\_gewassen. [Standard Dutch]
   Jan has REFL washed
   ‘Jan washed himself.’

   b. Jan, heeft hem\_i\_gewassen.
   ‘Jan washed him.’

(23) a. Jan, heeft me\_i\_gewassen. [Standard Dutch]
   ‘Jan washed me.’

   b. Ik, heb me, gewassen.
   ‘I washed myself.’

(24) a. Jan, heeft je\_i\_gewassen. [Standard Dutch]
   ‘Jan washed you.’

   b. Jij, heb je\_i\_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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Dutch</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nonreflexive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflexive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 me</td>
<td>*mich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 je</td>
<td>*jich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hem</td>
<td>zich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(26) **Absence of Principle B Effect (APBE)**

(27) a. They like [DP each other’s bags].
    b. He likes [DP his dog].

(28) a. Hon, ser sin\_i\_man. [Swedish]
    ‘She sees her husband.’

   b. Hon, ser hennes\_i\_man.
(29)  
a. Ioannes, sororem suam *i/*j vidit.  [Latin; Bertocchi & Casadio 1980]  
b. Ioannes, sororem eius *i/*j vidit.  ‘Ioannes saw his sister.’

(30)  
a. On, uze rasskazal mne o svoej *i/*j zizni.  [Russian; Timberlake 1979]  
b. On, uze rasskazal mne o ego *i/*j zizni.  ‘He had already told me about his life.’

(31)  
a. Jørgen elsker sin *i/*j kone.  [Danish]  
b. Jørgen elsker hans *i/*j kone.  Jørgen loves self’s wife

(32)  
a. *De elsker sine *i/*j koner.  [Danish]  
b. De elsker deres *i/*j koner.  They love their wives

(33)  
Jan, heed ‘m *i/*j gewasse.  [Flemish Brabant Dutch]  
Jan has him washed  ‘Jan washed himself/him.’

(34)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flemish Brabant Dutch</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nonreflexive</td>
<td>reflexive</td>
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<td>*jich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hem</td>
<td>*zich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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.

\[(38)\]

\[\begin{array}{l}
\text{a. } [\text{DP } D^\circ [\sqrt{\text{ }}]] \quad \text{mass reading} \\
\text{b. } [\text{DP } D^\circ [\text{D_{num}} \text{Num}^\circ [\sqrt{\text{ }}]]] \quad \text{kind reading (e.g. I grow three apples)} \\
\text{c. } [\text{DP } D^\circ [\text{D_{num}} \text{Num}^\circ [\text{Size}^\circ [\sqrt{\text{ }}]])] \quad \text{unit (count) reading}
\end{array}\]

- 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

\[(40)\]

\[\begin{array}{l}
\text{a. } \text{Er zat een vuill\text{e}tje op het glas.} \\
\quad \text{there sat a dirt.dim on the glass} \\
\quad \text{‘There was a little piece of dirt on the glass.’} \\
\text{b. } \text{een houtje, }\text{een metaal\text{tje}, een zil\text{e}ver\text{tje, }\text{een katoentje, etc.} \\
\quad \text{‘a small piece of wood/metal/silver/cotton, etc.’}
\end{array}\]

- 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)

\[(41)\]

\[\begin{array}{l}
\text{a. } \text{There’s blood on the wall.} \\
\text{b. } ??\text{There’s dog on the wall.}
\end{array}\]

- 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)**


  (42)  
  \[
  \begin{array}{ll}
  \text{GET} & \text{(inchoativity)} \\
  \text{GO} & \text{(directed motion)} \\
  \text{CAUSE} & \text{(causation)} \\
  \text{DO} & \\
  \text{BE} & 
  \end{array}
  \]

- 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. \[
  \left[ \:\text{vP GET+MANNER} \;\text{[RP DP_{subj} [Relator [PP P_{dir} [PP P_{loc} DP ]]]]} \right] \]  \text{(dynamic)}
  b. \[
  \left[ \:\text{vP BE+MANNER} \;\text{[RP DP_{subj} [Relator [PP P_{dir} [PP P_{loc} DP ]]]]} \right] \]  \text{(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. \text{(bounded)}
  b. a (very) full schedule \text{(unbounded)}

  (44)  
  The window is half/completely/almost open. \text{(bounded)}

- BNC corpus “very open”: 49 hits

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

- BNC corpus “half open”: 35 hits

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

6. REFERENCES