

Thursday Interdisciplinary Colloquium
Winter 2013-Spring 2013
Thursdays, 16:15-17:45, Webb 103

13.06.13

Gal Belsitzman

Tel Aviv University

On the Notion of Equivalence in Narrative Coordinated Constructions

We all have strong intuitions about a connection between Coordination and the notion of "equivalence" (Hebrew: *škilūt*, שְׁקִיּוּלוֹת). This is reflected by the fact that researchers often use terms like 'parallelism', 'similarity' or 'symmetry' when providing structural definitions of coordinated constructions (e.g., Azar 1977; Haspelmath, 2007; Van Valin 1990).

Certain questions, such as the following, remain unaddressed in this connection: (1) What exactly is meant by "equivalence"?; (2) What components go to make up structural equivalence?; (3) Are all coordinated constructions equivalent?

The present study aims to refine the notion of "equivalence" between two or more clauses combined by processes of coordination. Following Reinhart's (1995) idea of equivalence as a means of narrative evaluation, I apply a set of carefully defined criteria to examine the relations between what Haspelmath terms *coordinand* clauses in coordinated constructions occurring in a naturalistic sample of orally elicited Hebrew narratives.

Preliminary results are presented together with several questions arising from my analysis, along with suggestions for further research into issues that remain unresolved.

06.06.13

Julie Fadlon

Tel Aviv University

***The Directionality of Verbal Derivational Relationships:
A Psycholinguistic Study***

Introduction: Different lexical manifestations of an eventuality denoting concept (transitive: 'John **opened** the window', unaccusative: 'The window **opened**', passive: 'The window was **opened**,' etc.) are commonly considered to be connected by a derivational operation. Theoretical models addressing this connection discuss the issue of directionality: Is one alternate derived from the other or is it the case that both originate from an abstract source? If the former is correct, which is the input of the operation and which is its output? Different frameworks provide various arguments to favor one route over the other.

I show that a psycholinguistic research can shed light on this debate. I suggest that speakers' perception of an alternation should reflect the derivational complexity of its members. Hence, I put forward and justify the ICE (**I**nput

Contextual Effect) Hypothesis: Given a derivational operation, the input would be a better facilitator for the retrieval of the output than vice versa. My empirical array for this purpose is the transitive-unaccusative alternation (e.g. 'John *rolled* the ball'/'The ball *rolled* ') (Levin & Rappaport 1995; Marantz 1997; Chierchia 2004; Reinhart & Siloni 2005; Ramchand 2006; Pylkkänen 2008 ,among others).

Method: 66 Hebrew speakers participated in two carefully designed cross-modal lexical priming experiments. Experiment 1 compared reaction times (RTs) to transitive-unaccusative (TU) prime-target pairs with RTs to unaccusative-transitive (UT) pairs. Experiment 2 compared derivationally unrelated entailer-entailed prime-target pairs (e.g. *cinen* 'chilled-transitive', *hitkarer* 'cooled-unaccusative') with entailed-entailer pairs.

Results: (1) RTs to TU pairs were significantly shorter than RTs to UT pairs
(2) No significant difference was found between entailer-entailed and entailed-entailer pairs indicating that the results of (1) are not due to an entailment relation.

Discussion: Assuming ICE, the results suggest that speakers perceive the transitive as the basic alternate and its unaccusative counterpart as the derived one.

30.05.13

Leonard Babby

Princeton University

An Integrated Theory of Morphosyntax

My talk is an outline of the integrated (balanced) theory of morphosyntax that is the basis of a book (*An Integrated Theory of Morphosyntax*) that I am working on at present and is scheduled to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2015 (it is a continuation of my 2009 Cambridge book *The Syntax of Argument Structure*).

My theory's starting point is the fact that current generative theory (Principles and Parameters Theory + the Minimalist Program), which is "syntactocentric" in the sense that it has only one computational domain -- syntax, is not able to offer a truly explanatory account of the realization of the core grammatical relations in languages which, unlike English, have complex verb-internal morphological structure (e.g., agglutinating languages like Turkish and polysynthetic languages like Mohawk, and, to a lesser extent, synthetic languages like Russian). Of special interest are polysynthetic languages like Mohawk, which, I argue, obligatorily realize all the verb's arguments as verb-internal prefixes rather than as DPs in syntactic structure (see Mark Baker's Polysynthesis Parameter) and, consequently, do not have core syntactic structure, which is present in all non-polysynthetic languages.

My main hypothesis is that a universal theory of sentence structure must be morphosyntactic, not syntactic, and thus must have two autonomous computational domains, i.e., the syntactic computational phase of sentence derivation is preceded by the argument structure (AS) computational phase, which is responsible for the introduction of productive verb-internal, stem-external morphology (which has its own AS). The AS computational phase is the

locus of morphosyntax in the theory I am proposing. A canonical sentence derivation thus has the following form: Initial AS (which has hierarchical structure that encodes grammatical relations) + AS-phase merger of the verb stem's AS with the ASs of the productive affixes involved in the derivation (e.g., causative affix, applicative affix, etc.), which may alter the verb's initial grammatical relations) derives Final AS, which projects Initial Syntactic Structure (in non-polysynthetic languages). Initial Syntactic Structure + syntactic phase rules/operations derive Final Syntactic Structure, which feeds Information Structure. In polysynthetic languages, Final AS projects verb structure rather than syntactic structure. Thus the universal core grammatical relations encoded in universal AS representation is realized in the sentence as syntactic relations defined on phrase structure or, in polysynthetic languages, as affixal relations in verb structure.

I present evidence that this type of dual-computational domain morphosyntactic derivation is more explanatory and actually more parsimonious than single-computational-domain, main-stream American generative theory. I am not proposing that P&P Theory be abandoned; my proposal is that the AS computational domain needs to be incorporated into existing syntactic theory.

16.05.13

Elizabeth Ritter

Ben Gurion University

Animating the Clausal Spine: INFL and Aspect in Blackfoot

This talk explores the distinctive nature of the functional categories that make up the clausal "spine" in Blackfoot, an Algonquian language of Western Canada. My point of departure is the Universal Substantiation Hypothesis of Ritter & Wiltschko (2009), which asserts that each functional category in the clausal spine has a fixed universal function, but that languages differ in the formal substantive content that they use to fulfill these functions. In particular, following Enç 1987, R&W hypothesize that the universal function of INFL is anchoring. In English and French, for example, INFL has temporal substantive content. In Blackfoot, a tenseless language, it does not. R&W propose that the formal substantive content of Blackfoot INFL is participant-based, rather than temporal. In a root declarative clause of a tense language, INFL specifies *when*, relative to the utterance, the event denoted by the predicate occurs. In Blackfoot, on the other hand, INFL specifies *who*, relative to the utterance participants, is involved in the event. Languages with temporal content in INFL also have temporal content in (Outer) Viewpoint Aspect and (Inner) Situation Aspect. I argue that Blackfoot has participant-based content in the counterparts of these aspectual categories, with consequences for the classification of events and event structure.

09.05.13

Ezer Rasin

Tel Aviv University

A Learning Algorithm for Optimality Theory Grammars

An Optimality Theory (OT) grammar comprises a lexicon of underlying representations and a finite set of ranked constraints. Classical OT maintains a highly restrictive view of the acquisition of these grammars; the constraints are assumed to be universal, and the task left to the language learner is to discover the correct constraint ranking (along with the lexicon).

This research aims to provide an alternative perspective on learning in OT. We present a learning algorithm that searches through an infinite space of grammars and induces both faithfulness and markedness constraints along with underlying representations.

We first discuss the early generative idea of the evaluation metric, a simplicity criterion for comparing grammars given the data. We show that the original formulation of the criterion led to grammars that over-generalize, and failed to confront the Subset Problem of language acquisition. We propose a revised simplicity criterion based on the idea of Minimum Description Length that incorporates an additional notion of restrictiveness, and construct an evaluation metric for OT grammars that avoids the challenges faced by its predecessors.

We then show how the learner can use the metric to traverse an infinite hypothesis space, eliminating suboptimal grammars as it proceeds. Preliminary simulation results are presented and compared to previous results in this area.

02.05.13

Shira Farby

Bar Ilan University

***Islands for WH-Movement in Hebrew:
Acceptability Judgments of Gaps and Pronouns***

Interrogative clauses with islands are unacceptable to speakers. One analysis of this unacceptability is that WH-movement out of island domains is ungrammatical (Ross 1967, Chomsky 1986, Boeckx 2008). This analysis predicts that in the absence of movement, the island will be acceptable: replacing the trace with a (resumptive) pronoun is predicted to improve acceptability. If the offending grammatical operation is of movement leaving a trace, a pronoun is expected to be grammatical since it is not derived by movement (Shlonsky 1992, Adger and Ramchand 2005).

In order to examine the extent of this improvement in acceptability, I conducted three acceptability judgment experiments. The first two experiments compare the acceptability of islands with and without pronouns. The results show that pronouns do not improve acceptability. The similar acceptability of islands with and without pronouns shows that resumptive pronouns are similar to traces in their sensitivity to islands, and suggests that they may be also similar in their derivation (Shlonsky 2004). The final experiment shows that acceptability of resumptive pronouns is also sensitive to embedding, again similarly to traces.

The similarity of resumptive pronouns to traces is consistent with the analysis of these special pronouns as required by the grammar, rather than as a last-resort device which may facilitate processing (Erteschik-Shir 1992, Alexopoulou and Keller 2002, 2007).

25.04.13

Ariel Cohen

Ben Gurion University

***An Experimental and Theoretical Investigation
of Embedded Epistemic Modals***

Embedding presents a challenge to any theory of epistemic modals (henceforth EMs): if they are quantifiers over possible worlds, they should be freely embedded; if they are illocutionary operators, embedding should be impossible. But the facts appear to be more complicated.

Papafragou (2006) follows Lyons's (1977) distinction between subjective and objective EMs, and claims that the former cannot be embedded, while the latter can.

In order to test these judgments, an experiment was designed and carried out. The results indicate that when embedded in non-assertive contexts, subjective EMs are significantly worse than objective ones; but when embedded under assertive contexts, such as verbs of saying, both are equally good.

I take von Stechow and Gillies (2011) as the starting point for my explanation. They take the standard view that 'might P' means that P is compatible with X's knowledge, but propose that a set of propositions is introduced; in each proposition, X has a different referent: speaker, hearer, or speaker + hearer.

The introduction of this set of propositions crucially relies on the speaker making the sentence available for denial and uptake. I propose that this is the reason why subjective EMs are ruled out in non-assertive contexts, which do not allow denial or uptake.

Following approaches to "objectivized" interpretations of vagueness (Wright 1987), clarity (Wolf and Cohen 2011), and personal taste (Cohen 2010), I propose that in the case of objective EMs, X refers not to the speaker or hearer, but to a group of knowledgeable people, who are the experts on the matter at hand. Crucially, no set of propositions needs to be introduced: both speaker and hearer take the EM to be evaluated with respect to the group of experts. Hence, objective EMs are not required to be in an assertive context, and may be freely embedded.

18.04.13

Geoffrey Khan

University of Cambridge

Some Features of the Phonology and Morphophonology of Neo-Aramaic

The North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic dialects exhibit fundamental changes in structure from the type of Aramaic attested in written texts dating to earlier historical periods. Many of these changes have been stimulated by contact with

non-Semitic languages of the region, especially the Iranian languages and Azeri Turkish. The talk will focus on a variety of features of phonology and morphophonology in the Christian Urmi dialect that exhibit change from earlier Aramaic. The topics include the following:

- (i) Phonological emphasis (pharyngealization) and its domain. It is shown that pharyngealization has undergone a reanalysis. It is now a suprasegmental feature and is not located in the feature matrix of individual phoneme segments.
- (ii) The implications that this phonological reanalysis of pharyngealization has for the phenomenon of root extraction.
- (iii) Phonotactic boundaries, showing in particular how the different locations of boundaries in different grammatical categories serve as a vehicle for diachronic change of category.
- (iv) The development of the genitive morpheme from an inflectional suffix into a clitic, showing the conditions for this change.

04.04.13

Nirit Kadmon and Aldo Sevi

Tel Aviv University

On the Pragmatics of Three Prosodic Patterns in All-New Sentences

It is traditionally assumed that the interpretation of pitch accent placement involves two semantic/pragmatic factors: 'focus' and some notion of 'given' (usually understood as 'present in prior discourse', aka $given_k$). In this paper, we explore three patterns of accent placement whose different uses cannot be analyzed in terms of focus and givenness, since all three are found in sentences which are all-new both in the sense that the whole sentence is focused, and in the sense that nothing in them is $given_k$. We have identified the following three possible prosodic patterns in canonical NP+VP clauses:

- a. The whole clause is contained in a single intermediate phrase, and the nuclear pitch accent falls within the subject NP.
e.g. A: What's wrong with the house we saw yesterday?
B: The PIPES are rusty.
- b. The whole clause is contained in a single intermediate phrase, the nuclear pitch accent falls within the VP, and there is a pre-nuclear accent in the subject NP.
e.g. A: Why do you have to renovate the bathrooms?
B: The pipes are RUSTY.
- c. There is an intermediate phrase boundary between the subject NP and the VP, so, of course, each of them contains a nuclear pitch accent.
e.g. A: Why is the water coming out of the tap brown?
B: The PIPES | are RUSTY.

We present a variety of pragmatic factors which play a role in determining which

of the three patterns is preferred in a given context.

14.03.13

Hadas Velan

The Hebrew University

***Lexical Representation of Printed Words:
Language Specific or Structure Specific?***

What determines the representation and processing of printed words? Is that the writing system, the salient morphological structure or rather the word's specific morphological structure?

Although having an alphabetic writing system, previous studies suggest that basic orthographic effects, which are markers of visual word recognition in Indo-European languages, cannot be obtained in Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic. These different result patterns were attributed to the different morphological structure of the two language families. Based on these results, it has been suggested that the mental lexicon of Indo-European and Semitic languages is organised and accessed in a different manner and that different models of printed word recognition are needed when describing the reading process of different language families. Recent studies show that the same orthographic effects obtained in Indo-European languages can also be obtained in Hebrew, but only in mono-morphemic words. These results imply that there is a qualitative difference in accessing words with different morphological structure. This difference is critical from a very early stage of the recognition process.

07.03.13

Bruno Nicenboim

University of Potsdam

***The Effect of Distance on Wh-Dependencies:
An Individual Differences Perspective***

Compare the following sentences:

- (1) (a) You have heard that Mary **said something** to John.
(b) **What** have you heard that Mary **said** _ to John?

One of the differences between (1a) and (1b) is that while sentence (1a) has a local dependency between the verb *said* and its argument *something*, sentence (1b) has a long distance dependency (also called unbounded or filler-gap dependency) between the same verb *said* and its argument *What*. The successful comprehension of (1b) depends, among other things, upon the reconstruction of this non-local dependency. This reconstruction is not a trivial task, since the wh-element *What* has to be held in memory and retrieved only at the right moment.

My study examines the effect of increasing the length of dependencies, that is between the wh-element and the verb that assigns the thematic role or the gap, in wh-questions in Spanish.

Memory-based explanations (such as Gibson 2000 and Lewis & Vasishth 2005) and expectation-based theories (Hale 2001; Levy 2008) predict opposite patterns. Memory-based explanations predict a slow-down when the distance is increased since the representation of the wh-element in memory is degraded. Contrarily, expectation-based theories predict a speed-up since more distance strengthens the predictions of the relevant verb, thus facilitating its processing.

Eye-tracking data together with working memory and reading skill tests provide evidence that both explanations are not mutually exclusive and are mediated by individual differences (working memory capacity and reading skills).

28.02.13

Aviad Albert

Tel Aviv University

***Phonotactic Universals in Modern Hebrew:
Evidence for Prosodic Alignment of Stops***

The optimal, or the least marked consonant in a VCV environment (i.e., a simple onset following a vowel) is thought to be a stop. This, however, doesn't always seem to be the case, as witnessed in the phonological literature by spirantization processes, where fricatives in a VCV environment are preferred. Using experimental data that capture universal phonotactic preferences in the grammar of Modern Hebrew speakers, I claim that these seemingly contradicting predictions for the optimal post-vocalic onset should be understood as a universal tendency of stops to align with left edges of prosodic constituents.

The theoretical benefits of this proposal lie in its ability to use a single mechanism to account for syllabification of sequences involving stops (as in the experimental target case in Modern Hebrew), as well as the optimal post-vocalic onset, which may be a stop or a fricative, depending on the prosodic level of alignment in a given grammar: Languages that exhibit no spirantization will align stops with *Syllables*, while languages that do, will align stops with *Prosodic Words*, or some higher-level *Phonological Phrases*.

This study is framed within a larger hypothesis regarding the status of the notion *Sonority* and its relevance to phonotactics, as well as its phonetic correlate(s). In the talk I will also go over the fundamental ideas behind this new approach.