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Lexical Semantics, Syntax, and Event Structure

Edited by
MALKA RAPPAPORT HOVAV, EDIT DORON, AND IVY SICHEL
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General Preface

The theoretical focus of this series is on the interfaces between subcomponents of the human grammatical system and the closely related area of the interfaces between the different subdisciplines of linguistics. The notion of ‘interface’ has become central in grammatical theory (for instance, in Chomsky’s recent Minimalist Program) and in linguistic practice: work on the interfaces between syntax and semantics, syntax and morphology, phonology and phonetics etc. has led to a deeper understanding of particular linguistic phenomena and of the architecture of the linguistic component of the mind/brain.

The series covers interfaces between core components of grammar, including syntax/morphology, syntax/semantics, syntax/phonology, syntax/pragmatics, morphology/phonology, phonology/phonetics, phonetics/speech processing, semantics/pragmatics, intonation/discourse structure as well as issues in the way that the systems of grammar involving these interface areas are acquired and deployed in use (including language acquisition, language dysfunction, and language processing). It demonstrates, we hope, that proper understandings of particular linguistic phenomena, languages, language groups, or inter-language variations all require reference to interfaces.

The series is open to work by linguists of all theoretical persuasions and schools of thought. A main requirement is that authors should write so as to be understood by colleagues in related subfields of linguistics and by scholars in cognate disciplines.

In this volume, the editors have collected a series of papers which explore the nature of event structure (broadly construed so as to include lexical semantic class, aspect, and tense) and specifically how the architecture of the grammar divides the labour between the lexicon, morphosyntax, and semantics in this domain.

David Adger
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Introduction

MALKA RAPPAPORT HOVAV, EDIT DORON, AND IVY SICHEL

1.1 Overview

The chapters in this volume are based on talks presented at a workshop entitled ‘Syntax, Lexicon, and Event Structure’ that was held in 2006 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, honouring Professor Anita Mittwoch on her eightieth birthday. The themes of the workshop were related to Professor Mittwoch’s lifelong work on the linguistic representation of temporality and its interaction with the lexical semantics of verbs and the syntax and semantics of arguments and modifiers. The topics covered at the workshop and in this volume range from the basic ingredients lexicalized by roots to the formation of morphologically derived verbs and the morphosyntactic encoding of lexical aspect, viewpoint aspect, and modality. Despite the broad array of topics covered, the chapters all address aspects of the same basic research programme: determining the division of labour between the lexicon, (morpho)syntax, and compositional semantics in the encoding of what can broadly be construed as event structure, encompassing event participants and the temporal properties associated with the linguistic representation of events.

1.2 Linguistic representations of event structure

One of the basic functions of language is to segment the flux of happenings in the world into units which speakers refer to as events. This view is intuitively appealing to ordinary speakers; its significance for the logical representation...
of sentences was recognized in the work of Reichenbach (1947) and Davidson (1967), which stimulated the development of event semantics (Bach 1986; Kamp 1979; Krifka 1989; Link 1987; Parsons 1990). The new metaphysics of events provided useful insights for the study of the semantics of verbs and their arguments within formal semantics, converging with work independently developed in the tradition of lexical semantics (Croft 1990; Fillmore 1968; Gruber 1976; Ostler 1979; Jackendoff 1983, 1990; see Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2005 for overview).

In the framework of event semantics, verbs are taken to be predicates of events; however, the linguistic units which describe specific events include the verb, its arguments, and various types of VP modifiers. The ultimate semantic properties of the event description encoded in particular sentences are determined by a complex interaction between the lexical semantics of the verb, the referential properties of arguments and their morphosyntactic expression, and properties of temporal and locative adjuncts. Many of the linguistically significant properties of events emerge from the study of the ways in which these factors combine to produce the internal structure of the event. Much current research is devoted to determining which of these properties are lexically encoded, which arise from semantic composition or as a result of particular morphosyntactic encoding strategies, and what the impact of cross-linguistic variation in grammatical encoding of these properties is. The chapters in the volume address many of the questions currently at the focus of this research. Here we briefly review the components which give rise to the properties of event descriptions as encoded in natural language.

While happenings in the world can be characterized by infinitely many properties, research focused on the linguistic representation of events has revealed that only a subset of these properties is linguistically significant. These linguistically relevant properties define the templates for the linguistic representation of events, referred to as EVENT STRUCTURE (Borer 2005; Croft 1990; Jackendoff 1990; Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998; Rothstein 2004; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 2005). The grammatical relevance of these semantic properties can be detected by grammatical processes and representations which are sensitive to them.

First, events involve various temporal dimensions. The grammatically relevant semantic properties of event descriptions having to do with internal temporal properties of events give rise to a typology, often referred to as AKTIONSART, which differentiates between event types according to features such as eventivity, durativity, and telicity (Kenny 1963; Vendler 1967; Dowty 1979). Telicity, which is the concept that has received the most attention in the recent literature, involves associating an endpoint, or TELOS, to an event. Some
verbs lexically entail a telos for the event they describe. Yet endpoints to events can be derived through an interaction between the referential properties of certain kinds of arguments and the lexical semantics of the verb. The way in which the lexical properties of verbs and the referential properties of these arguments, often called INCREMENTAL THEMES, interact, has been intensively studied (Dowty 1991; Jackendoff 1996; Krifka 1998; Tenny 1994; Verkuyl 1989). Telicity can also be introduced by elements not selected by the verb, including result phrases and cognate objects (Dowty 1979; Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995; Wechsler 2005). Languages differ in terms of how telicity is lexically encoded, and in the morphosyntactic means available for constructing telicity (Borer 2005; Filip 2005; Ramchand 2007).

Second, event structure varies depending on the way in which the verb grammatically relates to its arguments, and in particular to its external argument. The nature and syntactic encoding of the external argument determines different classifications of the event; these are the different voices associated with a verb, whose most common instantiations are: active, passive, and middle. We find variation between languages in the different voices available, and their morphosyntactic encoding. Interacting with the voice system is the system of marking different forms of verbs related by various kinds of causative relations. While it has become accepted by many that at least some external arguments are introduced syntactically, and that some morphological marking involving the encoding of the external argument has syntactic significance, what exactly can be gleaned from the patterns of morphology regarding the contribution of syntax and the lexicon in introducing the external argument is the topic of much recent debate (Alexiadou et al. 2006; Doron 2003; Harley 2005; Haspelmath 1993; Kratzer 2004; Pylkkänen 2008; Reinhart 2002).

Next, an event may be presented from a variety of temporal perspectives, often referred to as VIEWPOINT ASPECT, whose most common instantiations are PERFECTIVE and IMPERFECTIVE, encoding whether the event is presented from an external or internal perspective, i.e. as ongoing or completed (Comrie 1976). Not all languages appear to make a clear distinction between the viewpoint aspects. Accordingly, viewpoint aspect can be shown to be distinguished semantically from aktionsart. While aktionsart deals with eventivity, durativity, and telicity, which are ways of characterizing events, viewpoint aspect is defined in terms of relations between temporal intervals spanning the event and the perspectives from which it is viewed (Klein 1994; Kratzer 1998). Though viewpoint aspect and aktionsart are to be distinguished, there are well-known interactions between them. For example, in many languages, perfective viewpoint is sensitive to the eventivity/stativity of the event. The