THERE ARE NO UNIVERSAL GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES

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Linguistic Universals

Statements which are true of all natural languages.
Features which exist in

e.g. “IF there is a glottal stop, THEN there must be a primary oral stop.” (universal no. 787, http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive)

? → e.g. p, k

❖ (absolute) universals vs. statistical universals
Grammatical categories (nº1)...  
(e.g. Shopen, 2007)

sets of morphological or (non-lexical) syntactic features which:

• convey meanings within the same conceptual domains (semantics, information structure, discourse, ‘pragmatics’);
• are expressed in ‘similar’ ways; and
• are (usually) mutually exclusive of each other.
Grammatical categories (nº1)...

e.g.:
- polarity
- aspect
- tense
- mood/modality
- directionals/locationals
- person
- number
- case
- definiteness
- specificity
- voice
- valence changing devices (e.g. causatives, applicatives)
- noun class
- classifiers
- interclausal categories (e.g. switch reference)
- mirativity
- evidentiality
- honorifics
- ......
Grammatical categories (nº2)...
(e.g. Payne 1997)

= word classes/ parts of speech/ lexical categories
(classification of words based on their morphosyntactactic behaviour)

- noun
- pronoun
- verb
- adjective
- ‘adverb’
- adposition

- ‘particle’
- article
- determiner
- expressive
- interjection
- ......
Grammatical categories (nº3?)...

“Structural categories of grammar (such as clitic, affix, compound, adjective, pronoun, dative, subject, passive, diphthong, coronal)” (Haspelmath 2007:119)

- grammatical categories (nº1: ‘concept-based’ GramCat)
- grammatical categories (nº2: word classes)
- grammatical relations
- phonological/ morphosyntactict constituentes
Distributional analysis
(e.g. Croft 2001)

e.g. English Subject

- subject agreement on verbs (present tense):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>OBJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. She see-s me.</td>
<td>2. She see-s him.</td>
<td>3. You see- me.</td>
<td>4. You see- him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English Subject

- *subject agreement on verbs*

- *case marking on pronouns:*

  5. *She (/*her) tickles him (/*he).*
  6. *He (/*him) is tickled by her (/*she).*
  7. *Who (/*whom) tickles him?*
  8. *Who (/*whom) is tickled by her?*
English Subject

- subject agreement on verbs
- case marking on pronouns
- word order:

9. He ignores [the zombie lady/ her].
10. Female zombies he ignores.
   (e.g., Male zombies he squints at.)
11. * he her ignores/ * her ignores he/
   * ignores he her/ * ignores her he
### Distributional analysis

**English Subject (& other grammatical relations)**

| English:                  | Subject | Object | ...
|-------------------------|---------|--------|------
| verb agreements         | ✓       |        |      |
| subject pronouns        | ✓       |        |      |
| object pronouns         |         | ✓      |      |
| *who*                   | ✓       |        | (✓)  |
| *(whom)*                 |         | ✓      |      |
| before the verb         | ✓       | ✓      |      |
| after the verb          |         | ✓      |      |
| :                      |         |        |      |
The grammatical relations in a language can only be defined by morphosyntax, and not semantics.

12. _She_ tickles _him_. (subject = agent)
13. _He_ is tickled by _her_. (subject = theme)
14. _He_ squints at _him_. (subject = experiencer)
Grammatical relations

English Subject: subject agreement

Niuean Subject: no subject (person-)agreement

15) SUBJECT OBJECT

tunu e matua fifine he simala.

cook NOM parent female ACC sweet.potato

‘The mother is cooking the sweet potato.’ (de Sousa 2001:19)

16)

tunu au he simala.

cook NOM:1SG ACC sweet.potato

‘I am cooking the sweet potato.’
Grammatical relations

English Subject: case marking (pronouns)
Tok Pisin Subject: no case marking

17) **mi** raus-im **em**.
   
   *1SG expel-TR 3SG*

   ‘I expel him/her.’

18) **em** i raus-im **mi**.
   
   *3SG PRED expel-TR 1SG*

   ‘S/he expels me.’
Grammatical relations

English Subject: case marking (pronouns)
Tok Pisin Subject: no case marking

17) mi ø raus-im em.
   1SG expel-TR 3SG
   ‘I expel him/her.’

18) em l raus-im mi.
    3SG PRED expel-TR 1SG
   ‘S/he expels me.’

19) mi ø raus-im yu.
    1SG expel-TR 2SG
   ‘I expels you.’
Grammatical relations

English Subject: fixed word order
Czech Subject: word order not fixed

20) Pavel zabil Petra.
   Pavel:NOM    kill:PST:M:SG    Petr:ACC
   ‘Pavel killed Petr.’

   Petra zabil Pavel.
   Pavel Petra zabil.  (Naughton 2005:216)
   ...
   ‘Pavel killed Petr.’
Grammatical relations

English Subject: very few IS restrictions

Sesotho Subject:

‘highly topical, old, given information’

21.* mang o-pheh-ile lijo?
who SBJ-cook-PFV food
‘Who cooked the food?’

22. lijo li-pheh-il-o-e ke mang?
food SBJ-cook-PFV-PASS-MOOD by who
‘The food was cooked by who?’ (Demuth 1989:67-68)
Grammatical relations

‘Subject’: 30 possible properties (Keenan 1976)

None shared by all languages.

- ergative languages: ‘subject-like’ properties more distributed;
- Philippines-type languages: prominent phrase = topic? subject?

NO universal grammatical relations
Word classes

Defined morphosyntactically, not semantically:

English Nouns (e.g. *the ___*):

*concrete pole*

*fire*

*love*

*theocracy*

*obese*

*race (competition)*
Word classes

E.g. English word classes (adopted from Croft 2001:37-38):

Subclasses of one word class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH:</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
<th>the ___</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count Noun: e.g., student, book</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Noun: e.g., mud, air</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Separate word classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH:</th>
<th>the ___</th>
<th>the ___</th>
<th>be predicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun: e.g., student, book</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective: e.g., tall, sad</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
two word classes? three?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH:</th>
<th>the ___</th>
<th>the ___ one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun: e.g., box, woman</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective: e.g., tall, sad</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun &amp; Adjective?</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun+Adjective?: e.g., rich, poor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Word classes

Verby property words in Okinawan:

- e.g., *kusasan* ‘stinky’
  - (< *kusa-sa* ?an)

  stinky-ness have

23. ?aree hwisa nu kusas-?a-
3SG:TOP foot NOM stinky-PRED

‘His/her feet stink.’

(‘As for him/her, feet stink.’)

24. ?aree sikarasi nu ?a-
3SG:TOP experience NOM have-PRED

‘S/he has experience.’

(‘As for him/her, experience exists.’)
Word classes

Verby property words in Okinawan:

e.g., kusasan ‘stinky’

(< kusa-sa ?a?n)

stinky-ness have

25.[hwisa nu kusasa-ru] ccu
[foot NOM stinky-ATRB] person
‘person whose feet stink’

26.[sikarasi nu ?a-ru] ccu
[experience NOM have-ATRB] person
‘person who has experience’
## Word classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>\textit{kusa-sa-\textit{n}} ‘stinky’</th>
<th>\textit{\textit{?a}n} ‘have’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n-past</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-sa-\textit{n}}</td>
<td>\textit{\textit{?a}-\textit{n}}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-sa-ta-\textit{n}}</td>
<td>\textit{\textit{?a}-ta-\textit{n}}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n-past neg</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-koo nee(-ra)-\textit{n}}</td>
<td>\textit{nee(-ra)-\textit{n}}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past neg</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-koo neen-\textit{ta}n}</td>
<td>\textit{neen-\textit{ta}n}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pol n-past</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-saibi\textit{ii}-\textit{n}}</td>
<td>\textit{\textit{?a}ibi\textit{ii}-\textit{n}}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pol past q</td>
<td>\textit{kusa-saibi-t\textit{ii}\textit{i}i}</td>
<td>\textit{\textit{?a}ibi\textit{ti}i}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>......</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Word classes

- **kusa-sa-n** ‘stinky’
- **kusa-sa-kutu**
- **kusa-sa-n**
- **kana-sa-n** ‘cute’
- **kana-sa-ru**
- **kanasii**
- **kusa-ku**
- **kanasi-ku**
- **kusa-sa**
- **kana-sa**

- **ʔa**
- **ʔa-kutu**
- **ʔa-ru**
Word Classes?

- Descriptive linguistics must use morphosyntactic criteria to distinguish word classes in a language (semantics too fuzzy, sometimes not applicable);
- 2 classes? 2 subclasses of 1 class? decision arbitrary;
- no meaningful ways to resolve word class membership:
  - abandon the idea of solid word classes
  - no universal word classes
Concept-based categories...

e.g.:
- polarity
- aspect
- tense
- mood/modality
- directionals/locational
- person
- number
- case
- definiteness
- specificity
- voice
- valence changing devices (e.g. causatives, applicatives)
- noun class
- classifiers
- interclausal categories (e.g. switch reference)
- mirativity
- evidentiality
- honorifics
- ......
Universal?

Grammatical categories: no.
Concepts: yes

- Concept-based GramCat: concept
- Word classes: e.g. object, property and action (Croft 2001)
- Grammatical relations: semantic roles and information status
Bibliography


