

Real English: The Syntax of Language Use

Winter 2003-4

Linguistics 128/228

MW 4:15–5:45 P.M.

Room 160-315 (Wallenberg Center)

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Course description: This course introduces syntax through the study of natural spoken and written syntactic data including spontaneous conversations as well as newspaper reportage, using tagged and parsed corpora such as the Penn Treebank. Topics include standard subject matter suitable for a syntax introduction, but each of the core topics is investigated empirically in natural English with hands-on corpus investigations.

Required for this course:

Each student should have a SUNet account enabling access to the campus AFS distributed file system. Students must also sign up for to use the Linguistics Department corpus collection which is on `/afs/ir/data/linguistic-data/`. Permission to access these corpora must be requested from Susanne Riehemann (sr@csl.stanford.edu). Instructions on how to do all this is provided on this webpage:

<http://www.stanford.edu/departments/linguistics/corpora/>

We will be using these two groups of corpora:

- /afs/ir/data/linguistic-data/Switchboard/Switchboard-Transcripts
- /afs/ir/data/linguistic-data/Treebank

Students should also purchase or photocopy the following text (which may be ordered in class):

Analyzing Syntax: A Lexical-Functional Approach, by Paul R. Kroeger. Pre-publication draft, November 2002. (Forthcoming from Cambridge University Press in the Spring of 2004).

Class project: The final class project will consist of presenting a fully syntactically annotated mini-corpus together with a short essay on patterns or generalizations you have discovered in your investigations of English data.

Syllabus

The central project of the class is for you to construct your own annotated mini-corpus of spoken English to test the analysis of syntactic constructions as they are discussed in the text and in class. The weekly assignments include the gradual expansion of your analysis of your individual mini-corpus.

Note: unless otherwise indicated, all assignments are due on the next class meeting after the day they are assigned.

Week #1 Why study spoken English? [Annie]

- **Wednesday, Jan 7:** Motivation for the course: why study spoken English? Current syntactic theory is based almost entirely on written English, with only lip service paid to spoken English. Does spoken English have distinctive syntactic properties? Research on several other languages shows that spoken language often differs strikingly from written language. The course investigates whether this is also true for English.
- **Assignment:** Find a conversation from the unparsed Switchboard transcripts—

/afs/ir/data/linguistic-data/Switchboard/Switchboard-Transcripts

—and translate it into written English suitable for publication in a newspaper or magazine article as an interview.. Discuss any differences you see between the spoken and the written versions. Due on Monday, Jan 12.

- **Reading:** Chapters 1 and 2 of Kroeger (basic concepts and constituent structure)

Week #2 What structures occur in spoken English? [Annie, Joan]

- **Monday, Jan 12:** We discuss the differences you found between written and spoken English. We introduce some Unix tools we will use in our investigations.
- **Assignment:** Read the on-line unix tutorial found at:
<http://www.ee.surrey.ac.uk/teaching/unix/unix0.html>
 Using the unix tools presented in class, construct a word frequency list of your chosen Switchboard dialogue.
- **Wednesday, Jan 14:** We do an example syntactic analysis of the tree structures in our written and spoken passages from Switchboard, and we list the main points of difference. We introduce tgrep.
- **Assignment:** Annotate the tree structures of the written passage you created and also the spoken original. Mend disfluencies. Due Wednesday, Jan 21.
- **Assignment:** Each student sets herself up to use tgrep on AFS. As an exercise, the student uses tgrep to find various constituents and prints out the results. [We will provide detailed instructions.]

Week #3 Building forests and finding trees. [Annie, Joan]

- **Monday, Jan 19: Martin Luther King Day. No classes.**
- **Wednesday, Jan 21:** Annotated passages due. We discuss spoken vs. written syntax. More on tgrep pattern syntax.
- **Assignment:** Make a ranked frequency list of all verbs in the parsed Switchboard corpus vs. the Wall Street Journal corpus. Also personal pronouns. What does this tell us about spontaneous conversation and business reporting? Due on Monday, Jan 26.
- **Reading:** Ch. 3 of Kroeger (the material on datives).

Week #4 Datives. [Joan]

- **Monday, Jan 26:** The NP dative and PP dative in English. Semantics of different verb classes.
- **Assignment:** Find all ditransitive constructions in your mini-corpus and annotate them. Due Wednesday, Jan 28.
- **Wednesday, Jan 28:** More on the dative. Quantitative study.
- **Assignment to be given**
- **Reading:** Ch. 3 of Kroeger (the material on passives).

Week #5 Passives [Joan]

- **Monday, Feb 2:** Why are passives used? Agentful and agentless passives and generalized subject actives. Indefinite ‘you’ vs ‘they’.
- **Assignment:** Find all active transitives and passives in your mini-corpus and annotate them. What do they show about how and why passives are used? How many indefinite uses of ‘you’ and ‘they’ occur in your mini-corpus, compared to specific uses of these pronouns? Due Wednesday, Feb 4.
- **Wednesday, Feb 4:** Quantitative study of passives.
- **Assignment:** Make a ranked frequency list of all transitive verbs in the parsed Switchboard corpus and then make one for the WSJ corpus. Make another pair of ranked frequency lists of all intransitive verbs in both corpora. For each corpus, look at the verbs that occur on both lists; is the meaning relation between both always the same? Is there a difference between the Switchboard and the WSJ corpus?

Week #6 Valency and Alternations [Annie]

- **Monday, Feb 9:** Transitivity and intransitivity (different forms of object deletion, different types of object promotion)
- **Assignment:** Find and annotate all intransitive verbs in your mini-corpus. Due Wednesday, Feb 11.

- **Wednesday, Feb 11:** Discussion of transitivity and intransitivity in the Switchboard and the WSJ.
- **Assignment:** Read Chs. 4 and 5 of Kroeger. Pull out reflexives in the parsed Switchboard corpus, and classify them as emphatic, bound anaphor, or other. Due Wednesday, Feb 18.

Week #7 Reflexives and Control [Joan]

- **Monday, Feb 16: President's Day. No class.**
- **Wednesday, Feb 18:** Discuss reflexives assignment.
- **Assignment:** Annotate all reflexives in your mini-corpus. How can you annotate the relation between a reflexive and its antecedent? Due Monday, Feb 23.
- **Reading:** Ch. 6 of Kroeger.
- **Assignment:** Find the Long Distance Dependencies in your minicorpus. Due Monday, Feb 23.

Week #8 Discourse structure phenomena: Topics, Left and right dislocations, clefts [Annie]

- **Monday, Feb 23:** The syntax of long-distance dependencies.
- **Assignment:** Write a tgrep query to find topics and left-dislocations in the parsed Switchboard corpus. Collect 10 examples of each. Due Wednesday, Feb 25.
- **Wednesday, Feb 25:** The use of dislocations and topicalizations. Can they be used in the same context(s) or not?
- **Reading:** Ch. 7 of Kroeger.
- **Assignment:** Find all of the relative clauses in your mini-corpus. Which grammatical function(s) are relativized? Due Monday, March 1.

Week #9 Relativization and Clefts. [Annie]

- **Monday, March 1:** The Accessibility Hierarchy. Does it have any relevance for English?
- **Reading:** Reading on clefts (to be handed out.)
- **Wednesday, March 3:** Clefts. Different kinds of clefts. How are they used?
- **Assignment:** Annotate all long-distance dependencies in your mini-corpus. Due Monday, March 8.

Week #10 Presentation and Discussion of Class projects

- **Monday, March 8:**
- **Wednesday, March 10:**