

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

Constituency, wordhood, and the morphology-syntax distinction: description and typology

Call for papers

- DATE: April 22nd – 24nd 2020
- VENUE: [Laboratoire Dynamique du Langage \(DDL\)](#), CRNS–Université Lumière-Lyon 2, Lyon (France)
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- DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACT SUBMISSION: **January 31st 2020**
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This is a call for abstracts for a workshop that will take place between the 22th and 24th of April in France, hosted by Laboratoire Dynamique Du Langage (DDL, CNRS—Université Lumière-Lyon 2).

The workshop will be concerned with the description and typology of constituency and its relationship to the morphology-syntax distinction. We are interested in studies that empirically motivate the distinction or else show that it is not necessary. A description of the themes treated by the workshop is provided below.

Interested participants will send an abstract between 1-2 pages to constituency.lyon2020@gmail.com by January 31st 2020. Tables and references can be on a separate page. You will receive a notification of acceptance by February 14th 2020. Presentations will be 20 minutes long with 10 minutes for discussion.

The organization of grammars

Most grammatical descriptions are organized around a global distinction between morphology and syntax. Some assume that morphology refers to the internal structure of words, while others allow morphology to be positioned either with respect to phrasal categories or phonological constituents (e.g. ‘phrasal affixes’ or ‘special clitics’, see below). At the same time linguistic descriptions will often discuss a range of intermediate or indeterminate cases (clitics, clitics that behave as affixes, compounds intermediate between words and phrases, etc.). Such intermediate, indeterminate, or ‘mixed’ cases can be so ubiquitous that they have been described as typical of certain language areas (e.g. of Amazonia, Payne 1990; Tallman and Epps *to appear*). When most of the empirical phenomena are classified as indeterminate with respect to the systems to which they should be organized, one may begin to wonder whether those systems are motivated at all.

Is the adoption of a morphology-syntax or word-phrase distinction simply an organizational tool or crutch in grammar-writing, or must its adoption imply that the dual structuring of syntagmatic facts is relevant for the language in question (see Tallman 2018)? Is the distinction between morphology and syntax more important for some languages than it is for others (see Pike 1945)?

The levels problem in typology

From a typological perspective the word-phrase distinction has been argued to be even more problematic for at least three reasons. First, the category of word is indeterminate even in specific languages. The diagnostics that identify words do not line up with one another. It has been proposed that a distinction between phonological and grammatical words solves this problem (e.g. Dixon and Aikhenvald 2002, *inter alia*), but it does not. It only solves the problem of misalignments when comparing a phonological domain (stress domain, vowel harmony, etc.) with a morphosyntactic one (fixed order, non-separability, etc.). When there are misalignments within these domains, a distinction between grammatical and phonological words provides no solution.

Second, there are no jointly necessary and sufficient criteria that identify words across languages (Haspelmath 2011). It has been proposed that this problem is not so bad because the word refers to the span of structure where the criteria ‘tend to coincide’ (Matthews 2002). However, it has never been made explicit how many criteria should coincide and when we can truly say there is a tendency for coincidence in the face of misalignments (see Tallman et al. 2019).

A third problem is that it is not clear when some proposed diagnostic should be understood as symptomatic of wordhood rather than some other level of structure. Indeed, most of the proposed wordhood tests have also been proposed as constituency tests in general, and the fact that there are no jointly necessary and sufficient criteria should make us question whether there is any such thing as a wordhood diagnostic, rather than just constituency diagnostics in general (Tallman *accepted*). Even deviations from biunique mappings between form and meaning, which have been used to argue for morphology as autonomous from syntax, also occur at the syntactic level and are not a necessarily a property of morphology (e.g. agglutination) (see Tallman and Epps *to appear*; Stump *to appear* for a relevant theoretical discussion).

Is there a method for determining what level (stem, word, phrase) a given diagnostic identifies in a cross-linguistically consistent fashion? Are there any tendencies for certain types of diagnostics to identify higher levels of structure than others, how do we know and why? It is sometimes stated that wordhood diagnostics are better than others – is this a fact about individual languages or true in general? Are there languages where the so-called wordhood diagnostics really do converge around a consistent span of structure beyond chance, and how can this be demonstrated? What methods could be used to calculate the probability of chance convergence around a span of structure? What methods could be used to demonstrate that deviations from biuniqueness have a statistical prevalence to occur in words as opposed to levels above them? How can these methods be valid without a predefined word and given the issues discussed in the previous paragraph related to the indeterminacy of wordhood?

We invite papers of the following sort

- Detailed descriptions of constituency diagnostics/tests/variables applied to individual languages, and what they mean for the analysis of these languages (these do not have to refer just to elicitation data)
- Studies that provide empirical justification for a morphology-syntax distinction even in the face of, or despite of, some indeterminate cases (clitics, periphrasis, compounds)
- Studies that provide empirical justification for rejecting the morphology-syntax distinction (perhaps because there are too many indeterminate cases)
- Comparative studies of constituency or the morphology-syntax divide in languages of the same family
- Studies that provide solutions to, or discuss, the levels problem in linguistic typology

- Studies that show some conceptual or empirical distinction between wordhood and morphological autonomy (e.g. by arguing in favor of some type of phrase level morphology see Anderson 1992, 2005; Tallman 2018)
- Comparisons of the results of applying a wordhood/constituency diagnostic or a class of wordhood/diagnostics to multiple languages (When are two constituency diagnostics the same or comparable across languages? How do we measure similarity and difference in our results?) (see Bickel and Zúniga 2017)
- Quantitative and computational (i.e., probabilistic/statistical/machine learning) methods for investigating intra-linguistic and/or cross-linguistic variation in the morphology-syntax distinction and/or whether constituency diagnostics tend to line up around a certain category
- The relationship between biuniqueness (in form and meaning) and the morphology-syntax distinction (e.g. studies that show that word-internal elements that display biuniqueness are statistically marginal or not, or studies that show deviations from biuniqueness occur in the syntax as well)
- Studies that show variation between and within speakers with respect to constituency and wordhood and how these relate to cross-linguistic patterns of variation.
- Studies that discuss or propose how cognitive biases may explain the observed universal tendencies and patterns of diversity.

Any questions about abstract submissions and the conference in general can be directed to constituency.lyon2020@gmail.com.

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