



GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL MEANING OF WORDS AND THEIR VARIABILITY IN NATURAL LANGUAGE.

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ABSTRACT

The motive of the given article is to discuss about the study tested a recent functional theory of the grammar-lexicon contrast by confronting a word distinction based on the theory with an aphasic speech sample consisting of both agrammatic and fluent aphasic speech. The word distinction is a distinction between grammatical and lexical instances of modal verb forms and the verb form. It is suggested that the grammatical items would be more severely affected than the lexical items in a grammatic speech and the lexical items would be more severely affected than the grammatical items in fluent aphasic speech.

Key words: semantic distinction, distributional distinctions, grammar-lexicon distinction, theoretically-based distinction.

The distinction between grammatical and lexical words is standardly dealt with in terms of a semantic distinction between function and content words or in terms of distributional distinctions between closed and open classes. This paper argues that such distinctions fall short in several respects, and that the grammar-lexicon distinction applies even within the same word class. The argument is based on a recent functional and usage-based theory of the grammar-lexicon distinction and on the assumption that aphasic speech data represent the ideal testing ground for theories and claims about this contrast. A theoretically-based distinction between grammatical and lexical instances of Dutch modal verb forms and the verb form hebben was confronted with agrammatic and fluent aphasic speech. A dissociation between the two aphasia types was predicted and confirmed. Two of the central features that distinguish human language from animal communication systems are a large inventory of symbolic units and a mechanism for combining these units into complex symbols. At least, much of the effort to understand what language is has been focused on these two features, i.e. grammar and its contrast with the lexicon. There is wide



consensus that while the lexicon consists of symbolic items, grammar consists of procedures/rules/templates for combining such units, but also of a set of items. There is however no consensus when it comes to understanding what grammar is and how it differs from the lexicon. Part of the disagreement is centered on the problem of capturing at the same time both the combination aspect and the item aspect of grammar. The two dominating theoretical positions propose solutions to this problem that are to some degree reductionist. Chomskyan linguistics focuses on the former of these two aspects and tries to fit grammatical items into a general view of grammar as procedures/rules/templates, dealing with them as rule-governed or as “functional” phrasestructural “heads”. Construction Grammar – as the most prominent of the functional-cognitive theories in opposition to Chomskyan ones – focuses on the item aspect to a degree where also templates for combination are dealt with as items. Both positions are problematic. On the one hand, the view of grammatical items as rule-governed may be seen as nothing but a stipulation - albeit a theoretically motivated one. On the other hand, the treatment of the combination aspect of grammar on a par with lexical items is at odds with neurolinguistic evidence. Contrasts between grammatical and lexical words are found in a theoretical vacuum. They are largely ignored both by Construction Grammar and by Chomskyan theories; in the former case because construction grammar downplays the distinction between grammar and the lexicon, in the latter case because, as mentioned, Chomskyan theories focus on the combination aspect of grammar. In absence of a coherent theoretical anchor, the contrast between grammatical and lexical words has often been dealt with in terms of distinctions between “function” or “form” and “content words” and between “closed-” and “open-class words”. The intuition behind the former of these distinctions is that words differ in terms of degree of semantic richness. While this may be so, a distinction between less and more semantically rich words cannot, arguably, be co-extensive with a distinction between grammatical and lexical words, as virtually the same content or function may in some cases be expressed both grammatically and lexically. Consider the sentence in “*King has always hated chasing a stick*”.



Among the lexical items in this sentence are the verbs hate and chase. In some contexts, chase is primary i.e. expresses the main point, for instance in a discussion of things King has always hated. In other contexts, hate is primary, for instance in a conversation about dog attitudes towards chasing sticks. In contrast, grammatical items such as the auxiliary have, the article a and the affixes -s, -ed and -ing cannot express primary information outside metalinguistic and contrastive contexts, where conventions are arguably not adhered to, and where linguistic items are considered in relation to paradigmatic alternatives rather than syntagmatically related items. After a superficial scanning of the sentences, it is known that the main point has to do with the lexical element King, always, hate, chase or/and stick and not with any of the grammatical items – if we know the conventions of English. According to the functional theory, this is the functional rationale behind grammar and its contrast with the lexicon. The prioritization of parts of complex utterances enables us to concentrate our processing efforts on the most important parts.

In conclusion, this research paper analyzed the modes of expression in semantics, semantics as a series of phrases and phrases adequate to communicate meaning, complexity of phrases, multiplicity of meanings, flexibility of forms, reference and its quintessential types. Components serve to distinguish among the meanings of semantically related lexemes in the same semantic domain. Analysis in terms of components, when the total meaning of a lexeme is seen in terms of a number of distinct elements or components of meanings, is not sufficient but can help to define the meaning of a lexeme formed by a number of semantic signs.

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