

TENSE IN LFG : SYNTAX AND MORPHOLOGY

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1. The morphology–syntax interface in LFG

An important tenet of LFG is the lexical integrity principle which says that the leaves of c-structure trees are complete surface words. Given this principle, the morphological component is seen as distinct from the syntax. It can be modelled by sublexical rules as we will illustrate below but the principles that apply to these rules are different from those applying in the syntax (see Bresnan and McComb (1995) for discussion). The way LFG is set up allows single words and phrases to contribute the same or similar information to an f-structure. For example a form like *parlé*, passé simple of *parler*, contributes information similar to that contributed by *a parlé*, the passé composé of the same verb. The framework allows a similar treatment for the two forms as well as the maintenance of lexical integrity and makes it possible to avoid word formation rules in the syntax without losing paradigmatic transparency (see Vincent and Höjsgaard (1996) for discussion). These possibilities, however, are not always exploited as well as they could be, and using them transparently is made less easy than it could be by another architectural feature of LFG.

The distinction that the architecture of LFG makes between c-structure and f-structure was meant to embody the insight that word order and other constituent structure differences are not necessarily indicative of profound syntactic differences among languages. LFG follows here the distinction made e.g. in Kemon (1976) between coding properties and genuine syntactic characteristics. The f-structure allows us to abstract away from superficial word order differences to bring out the more fundamental syntactic similarities (or differences) among languages. This abstracting away from certain differences is theoretically important but also practically, e.g. in the context of translation. It makes the f-structure into a structure that comes close to the underspecified representation used in the Coee Language Engine (see Gemabith and Crouch (1996); (Alshawi (1992), Alshawi and Crouch (1992)), which can be argued to be, from a practical point of view, a good candidate for input and output of transfer rules (see Dorna et al. (1998)). But the traditional architecture gets us only half way; while it abstracts away from c-structure phenomena, it encodes all the morphological information in the f-structure. This information, however, is to a large extent as much encoding information as word order is.

¹ We would like to thank the following people for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article: John Maxwell, who proposed a similar architecture in conversations with the second author; Hervé Kampé, Muriel Butt, Frédérique Segond and Véronique Krüppel. In particular we thank Joan Bresnan for extensive comments and suggestions. The issues she raised could not be discussed in sufficient detail in this short contribution. Needless to say that the commentators do not necessarily share the perspective we are taking here. Special thanks go also to Marc Brytman for judgements on French data. We alone are responsible for remaining errors.

Spil Plus 13 On The Interface Of Morphology And Syntax

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