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LING 203 Workshop Week 3

Simple sentences

I. Summarise Ch.1 from B&B (2001)

II. Questions directly related to the lecture

1. Consider once more the syntactically ambiguous example (6) on the handout. Compare it with sentences (i-iii), below:

(i) I saw bats.
(ii) British Left Waffles on Falklands
(iii) Fat people eat accumulates.

There's something about all three sentences that makes them less than completely straightforward to process — but only one of them is structurally (=syntactically) ambiguous.

(a) Which one is it?
(b) Where in the sentences does the ambiguity lie? (I.e. what are the alternative ways of drawing the constituent boundaries, cf. [*screwed in*][*the lightbulb*] vs. [*screwed*][*in the lightbulb*]. What is your evidence for this? (Think of the unit-of-sense test and the various formal tests referred to in the lecture and explained in detail in B&B 2001:23-34.)
(c) What are the problems with the other two sentences that make them difficult to process?

2. Because newspaper headlines must be short, ambiguity frequently arises (another reason being that the result is often funny). The two main types of ambiguity are lexical (i.e. based on an ambiguous word, cf. *They parked the car near the bank*) and structural (i.e. different syntactic structures).

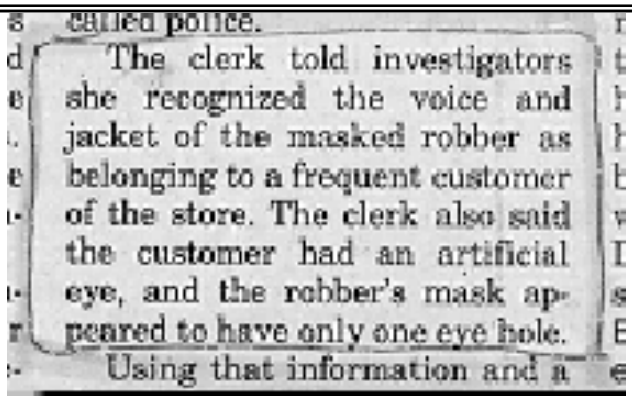
(a) Consider the following (real!) examples of headlines, and decide whether the ambiguity is lexical or structural. In case it's structural, describe the differences in constituent structure between the two interpretations – use *constituency tests* to support your suggestions. Recall that we saw in the lecture that these tests can be used to determine which bits of the sentence belong together, i.e. which words of the sentence form a single *constituent* (as opposed to belonging to, say, two or three different constituents). In working out an answer to this question, try to make sure that you all understand, and agree on, the way in which the various constituency tests work. Remember that the more tests point towards a certain constituent structure, the more likely it is that that is structure is correct. This means that using just one test (say, the movement test) is not going to be very convincing.

i. Complaints About NBA Referees Growing Ugly.
ii. Kids Make Nutritious Snacks.
iii. Killer Sentenced To Die For Second Time In Ten Years.
iv. Two Sisters Reunited After Eighteen Years At Checkout Counter.

(b) Try to come up with a handful or so structurally ambiguous headlines yourself.

III. Linguistic analysis

1. Consider the following newspaper clipping:


called police.

The clerk told investigators she recognized the voice and jacket of the masked robber as belonging to a frequent customer of the store. The clerk also said the customer had an artificial eye, and the robber's mask appeared to have only one eye hole.

Using that information and a

(a) Identify *all* the morphemes in this clipping – for each morpheme state whether it's free or bound, and if bound, whether inflectional or derivational.

(b) In your group discussion of this exercise, I'm sure you'll find that there differences of opinion concerning the structure of at least *some* of the words in question — this is perfectly OK, and is in fact what I would expect. The important thing is that you try to find arguments for the particular morpheme structure that you believe is the correct one. What words did you not completely agree on? Why do you think you didn't agree on these words? Would you say that perhaps the morpheme structure of a given word may be not be the same for all speakers? If so, how could that be, given that you're all speakers of the same language?

IV. Mini-investigation

In this week's mini-investigation you'll have a look at Old English word structure — which as we saw in the lecture was very different from Present-day English, in that the many word classes ((pro)nouns, adjectives but also determiners such as definite and indefinite articles) took on different forms (often different endings) depending on the meaning and grammatical function of the constituent in question, i.e. subject or subject complement/predicate (the so-called *Nominative case*), direct object (*Accusative*), indirect object (*Dative*), possessor (*Genitive*), etc. Verbs also displayed a far greater variety of forms than is the case nowadays. Not only did they look differently depending on whether they were, say, present or past (*love* vs. *love-d*) but also depending on the person and the number of the subject (i.e. different forms for 1st person singular *I love* and 2nd person singular *you love*, i.e. *lufie, lufast*, past tense *I loved, you loved: lufode, lufodest*).

Below you find two bits of Old English that I'd like you to analyse. They're not just random bits of text, but instead they're riddles, taken from the well-known Exeter Book, which contains almost a hundred of these.

In order to answer questions (a) and especially (b), below, you'll find it useful to consult one or more grammars of Old English. Many textbooks on the history of English will have some information, e.g.:

Blake, Norman F. 1996. *A history of the English language*. London: Macmillan. Chapter 4 on Old English.
Freeborn, Dennis. 1992. *From Old English to standard English*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Hogg, Richard. 2002. *An introdcution to Old English*. Eidnburgh: EUP. Chapters 2-6.
Smith, Jeremy. 1999. *Essentials of early English*. London: Routledge.

In addition, you may find it useful to consult an Old English dictionary, e.g.

Bosworth, J. 1898-1972. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. London: OUP.
Sweet, H. 1896. *The student's dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The library has copies of both. The internet is another potentially useful resource, both for Old English grammar and for dictionaries, though you should try to make sure that the site(s) you use haven't just been written by some enthusiast without any proper background in the area.

When looking for information in these (or other books) you should bear in mind that most grammatical descriptions focus on one particular dialect, i.e. West-Saxon. While the riddles are written in what we may

roughly call the Saxon dialect, there may be some slight differences between it and the dialect described in the grammars. This means that when trying to identify e.g. case endings (Nom, Acc, etc.) the riddles may be a little bit different from the information you find in the literature. In other words: try to be a bit "flexible" in your analysis.

(a) What are the solutions to the riddles? The second one in particular is difficult. On the face of it it seems, well, rather naughty (these riddles were written down in c.960-990 — a looong time, in other words, before Queen Victoria came around and started imposing her morals on English society!), but there's actually a perfectly innocent solution.

(b) Consider the words in bold. For each of them, identify what word class they belong to. If they are nouns, verbs or adjectives, what is the *root* (stem), and what is the *affix* (ending)? If they're (pro)nouns, verbs, adjectives or articles, are they singular or plural? If they're nouns, pronouns or adjectives, what case are they (i.e. Nom, Acc, Dat, Gen)? Why are they in that particular case?

Hrægl is min **hasofag**, hyrste beorhte,
reade ond scire on reafe **minum.**
Ic dysge dwelle ond dole hwette
unrædsiþas, oþrum styre
nyttre fore. Ic þæs nowiht wat
þæt **heo** swa gemædde, mode bestolene,
dæde gedwolene, deoraþ mine
won wisan gehwam. Wa him þæs þeawes,
siþþan Heah bringað **horda** deorast,
gif hi unrædes ær ne geswicaþ.

My dress is dark, but my adornments bright
and glittering and red among my clothing.
I lead astray the stupid, urge the fool
to rash adventures; others I restrain
from useful journeys. I have no idea why they
why they, thus mad and having lost their minds,
their deeds gone wrong, should glorify to all
my wicked ways. For this they shall have grief,
when the High Lord brings forth the dearest treasure,
if they have not then ceased in this bad counsel.

Ic eom wunderlicu **wiht**, wifum on hyhte,
neahbuendum nyt; nængum sceþþe
burgsittendra, nymþe bonan anum.
Staþol min is steapheah, stonde ic on **bedde**,
neoþan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum
ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor,
modwlonc meowle, þæt heo on mec gripeð,
ræseð mec on reodne, reafað **min heafod**,
fegeð mec on fæsten. Feleþ sona
mines gemotes, seo þe mec nearwað,
wif wundenlocc. **Wæt** bið þæt **eage**.

I'm a strange creature, for I satisfy women,
a service to the neighbors! No on suffers
at my hands except for my slayer.
I grow tall, erect in a bed,
I'm hairy underneath. From time to time
a good-looking girl, the doughty daughter
of some churl dares to hold me,
grips my russet skin, robs me of my head
and puts me in the pantry. At once that girl
with plaited hair who has confined me
remembers our meeting. Her eye moistens.