## Week 2: Simple sentences

1. Recap

- English sentences have structure, i.e. they are not random and flat strings of words (linguistic + psycholinguistic evidence)
- linguistic structure is grounded in the function of language → the system allowing coherent communication of ideas, i.e. the grammar of English (in all its varieties), and indeed of any language, is *not* an abstract system of arbitrary rules (e.g. parallel subject-predicate distinction and structure of thought/propositions)
- that is not to say that the function of all aspects of grammar is always fully transparent or easily rendered transparent → language change
- the structure of sentences may be conveniently (and is conventionally) represented by trees, brackets, or boxes
- a knowledge of (how to analyse) linguistic structure is relevant, often even crucial, in other areas of language study

2. Word structure

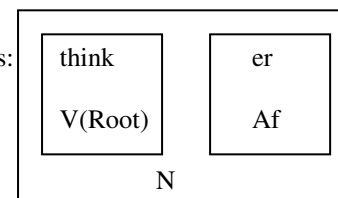- MORPHEME: smallest meaningful linguistic element:

(1)　　great
　　　　think-er-s
　　　　of
　　　　starv-ing
　　　　kid-s

- FREE (can be a word by itself) v. BOUND morpheme (is always attached to something else, the so-called BASE): *think* v. *-er*
- ROOT (carries the main component of the word's meaning; N, V, A or P) v. AFFIX (always bound, not N, V, A or P), see e.g. *think-er*
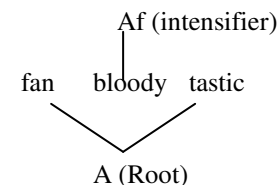
Tree:
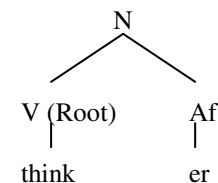
Brackets: $[_N[_{V(Root)}\text{think}][_{Af}\text{er}]]$

Boxes:

- in English affixes almost invariably precede or follow the root (PREFIXES v. SUFFIXES); INFIXATION being very rare (*fan-bloody-tastic*, *abso-fuckin'-lutely*) but rather more common in some other languages

2.1 Some evidence for word structure

- productivity: *ewok-s*, *gimble-d*
- in child language acquisition: *weetabix* → *weetabick*

2.2 Types of morphological word formation

- two main types: INFLECTION v. DERIVATION:

  thinker-s → basic meaning of the word remains the same, but some functional information is added concerning the semantic/syntactic relation to other words in the sentence → in English always suffixes (not universal, cf. e.g. Tagalog (*ma*)*yaman* 'rich (Sg)' v. (*ma*)*ya-yaman* 'rich (Pl)')

think-er → the meaning of the word is changed quite drastically, often even the category; in English may involve prefixes or suffixes (not universal, cf. e.g. Agta *dakal* 'big' v. *dumakal* 'grow big', *furáw* 'white' v. *f-um-uráw* 'become white')
→ DERIVATIONAL v. INFLECTIONAL AFFIXES

- COMPOUNDING: *whenever, earthquake, flower-pot, dark room* → more than one free morpheme → spelling, stress (meaning change → derivational)

3. Inflectional morphology in Present-day English v. older varieties: a brief look

(2) Middle English, c.1154 (*Peterborough Chronicle*)
I ne can ne i ne mai <u>tellen</u> alle þe wunder ne alle þe pines ð hi diden <u>wreccemen</u> on þis land. 7 ð lastede þa .xix. wintre wile Stephne was king 7 æure it was uuerse 7 uuerse. þa was corn dære. 7 flec 7 cæse 7 butere. for nan ne wæs o þe land. <u>wreccemen</u> sturuen of hunger. þar sæ me tilede. þe erthe bar nan corn. for þe land was al fordon mid suilc<u>e</u> dæd<u>es</u>

(3) Present-day English (literal translation)
I not can not I not may <u>tell</u> all the horrors not all the pains that they caused <u>wretched-men</u> in this land. & that lasted the 19 winters that Stephen was king & ever it was worse & worse. then was corn dear. & flesh & cheese & butter. for none not was in the land. <u>Wretched-men</u> died of hunger. Where so one tilled. the earth not bore not corn. for the land was all ruined with such deeds.

(4) Old English (reconstructed)
ic ne cann ne ic ne mæg <u>tellan</u> ealle þa wundor ne ealle þa pinas þe hie dydon <u>wreccum</u> <u>mannum</u> on þissum lande. 7 þæt læste de þa .xix. wintra þa hwile þe Stephne cyning wæs 7 æfre hit wæs wyrsa 7 wyrsa. þa wæs corn deore. 7 flesc 7 cese 7 buttere. for nan ne wæs on þæm lande. <u>wreccan menn</u> sturfon of hungre. swa hæwr swa man tilode. seo eorþe ne bær nan corn. for þæt land wæs eall fordon. mid swilcum dædum.

➢ OE noun declension, an example (Masculine, mutation plural):

	Sg	Pl
Nom	mann 'man'	menn
Acc	mann	menn
Dat	menn	mannum
Gen	mannes	manna

➢ OE adjective declension, an example (Masculine, weak):

	Sg	Pl
Nom	goda 'good'	godan
Acc	godan	godan
Dat	godan	godum
Gen	godan	godra/godena

➢ OE verb conjugation, an example (weak, present and past indicative)
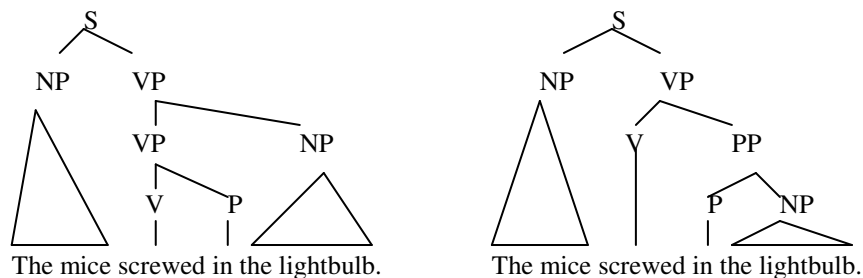Inf. lufian 'love'

	Simple present		Simple past	
	Sg	Pl	Sg	Pl
1	lufige	lufiaþ	lufode	lufodon
2	lufast	lufiaþ	lufodest	lufodon
3	lufaþ	lufiaþ	lufode	lufodon

→ in the course of the history of English: collapse of the very rich OE system of inflectional morphology (and with it, agreement, e.g. between subject and verb, between modifier(s) and noun) → correlation with changes in the syntax (week 4)
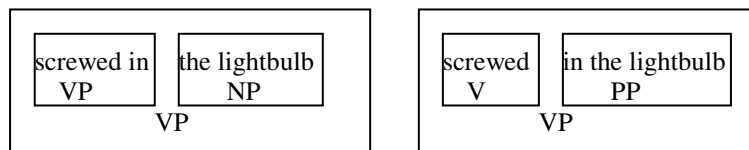

4. Constituency

- CONSTITUENT: a word or string of words that functions as a unit at some level of interpretation (and therefore of syntactic analysis)

(5) Bradley says [[financial support for students from poorer backgrounds] now outweighs his objections to the principle of variable fees]. (*Guardian* 18 January 2004)

- *financial support for students for students from poorer backgrounds now outweighs his objections to the principle of variable fees* constitutes a natural group, since this is what Bradley (the subject) says (it is, then, the object of the verb *says*)
- also, intuitively, *financial* goes with support, as does *for students from poorer backgrounds*; similarly, *to the principle of variable fees* belongs in some sense with *his objections*
- on a lower level, *of* forms a unit with *variable fees* rather than with *principle*
- B&B (2001:25) refer to these kinds of judgments as the "unit of sense" criterion → something that forms a unit syntactically does so because it forms a unit in our interpretation of the sentence — syntactic analysis must *make sense*
- it follows that if a sentence can make sense in two different ways, each way corresponds to a different syntactic analysis

(6)   When I came home the mice were screwing in the lightbulb.

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        S                                    S
      /   \                                /   \
    NP     VP                            NP     VP
    /\    /  \                           /\    /  \
   /  \  VP   NP                        /  \  V    PP
  /    \ / \  /\                       /    \ |   /  \
 /_____\V  P/__\                     /_____\|  P    NP
        |  |                                  |  |  /\
                                                    /__\
The mice screwed in the lightbulb.   The mice screwed in the lightbulb.
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[VP[VPscrewed in][NPthe lightbulb]]   [VP[Vscrewed][PPin the lightbulb]]

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┌─────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ ┌──────────┐ ┌────────────┐ │   │ ┌────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ │
│ │screwed in│ │the lightbulb│ │   │ │screwed │ │in the lightbulb│ │
│ │   VP     │ │    NP      │ │   │ │   V    │ │     PP       │ │
│ └──────────┘ └────────────┘ │   │ └────────┘ └──────────────┘ │
│             VP              │   │             VP              │
└─────────────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────────┘
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→ syntacticians would have ways to find "formal" evidence to suggest that on one interpretation *in* forms a constituent with *screwed*, on the other, with *the lightbulb*

4.1   Formal constituency tests

- SENTENCE FRAGMENT

(7)   Q: What did the mice screw in? A: [The lightbulb].
(8)   Q: Where did the mice screw? A: [In the lightbulb].

- SUBSTITUTION

(9)   (The cats [screwed in] [the hook];) the mice [*did the same with*] [the lightbulb].
(10)   The mice screwed [*there*].

- MOVEMENT (FRONTING and CLEFTING)

(11)   [The lightbulb] the mice screwed in — not the hook! (fronting)
(12)   It was [the lightbulb] that the mice screwed in. (clefting)
(13)   (In the fridge, the mice enjoyed a good meal;) [in the lightbulb] the mice screwed.
(14)   It was [in the lightbulb] that the mice screwed.

- COORDINATION

(15)   The mice screwed in [the lightbulb] and [the hook].
(16)   The mice screwed [in the lightbulb] or [in the shower head].

- for some additional, less reliable tests, viz. REDUCTION, OMISSION and INTRUSION see B&B (2001:33ff)
- intrusion: *between you and me, almost certainly, believe it or not, to my surprise*

(17)   The mice [screwed in], believe it or not, [the lightbulb].
(18)   The mice [screwed], much to my surprise, [in the lightbulb].

4.2 Levels of constituency

- sentences may have many levels of constituents, i.e. below the division between subject NP and predicate VP (which usually represent the highest branches in the structure of a sentence, though see e.g. B&B (2001:104ff) on DISJUNCTS and CONJUNCTS)
- "nested constituents" (B&B 2001:34ff), see e.g. *the lightbulb*, which is a NP constituent of the PP *in the lightbulb*
- the more deeply nested constituents are, the harder may be to apply the tests for constituent status, in particular the reduction test (there may be too little left to reduce it further) and intrusion (aside comments tend to be given in between relatively high-level not low-level constituents)

4.3   Weighing up the evidence

- the results of the various tests do not always line up (see B&B 2001:35-8 for an example); in these cases some syntacticians choose to weigh up the evidence, analysing the structure according to the results of the majority of the criteria used

- this is a dangerous way to proceed; consider e.g. that the number of possible tests in any given case is not clearly delimited (in the literature you will find several other tests in addition to the ones listed in B&B (2001), and you will find disagreement as to which tests are appropriate and which ones aren't)
- it is more prudent to ask why it should be that not all tests yield the same result — semantics is important in this connection, both of the sentence under investigation and of the tests themselves → *a proposed syntactic analysis must make sense!!!*
- conflicting evidence often arises when sentences are relatively complicated (e.g. many levels of nesting); in these cases one may also try to replace the (complicated parts of the) sentence with something simpler (with a sufficiently similar internal structure!) and try to use the constituency tests again

5. Concluding remarks

- words have internal structure, which may be represented as tree structures, or using brackets, boxes, or…
- OE (just like other old Germanic languages, as well as some present-day ones) had a rich system of inflectional morphology; over the course of time this has decreased sharply (this decline is related to certain changes in the syntax → week 4)
- syntactic analysis involves teasing a sentence apart into its (various, hierarchical levels of) constituents
- constituent structure corresponds to semantic structure (i.e. the way we interpret the situation portrayed by the sentence); this is the suggestion that underlies the unit of sense test
- other constituency tests (substitution, movement, etc.) may be used in analysing sentence structure
- the tests should not be performed blindly but always against the background of an understanding of what they actually do (mean), and what the sentences to be analysed mean

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