Week 7: Types and structure of phrases

1.   Recap

- members of certain LEXICAL CATEGORIES (N, V, A, P, Adv) can combine with other words and form larger units called PHRASES
- words that are the central elements of the phrases are called HEADS; the name of the PHRASAL CATGEORY is based on the lexical category of the head (→ NP, VP, AP, etc.)
- phrases, like sentences, have internal structure, which can be captured in a tree diagram representation (or with brackets, boxes)
- this internal structure is not arbitrary and abstract: it has a basis in the way in which we interpret the phrases (consider e.g. the COMPLEMENT v. MODIFIER distinction → different interpretation, different analysis)
- internal structure of some phrases, esp. VPs and NPs, can get quite complicated → today's topic

2.   Phrasal categories

SZ: Your new film, Magnolia, is the favourite for the golden bear in Berlin. Despite the fact that it is three hours long.

Paul Thomas Anderson: That's an exaction, right? The back of every human being is programmed in a way that after two hours it has enough of sitting in the cinema.

SZ: If you had to write three headlines to your film, what would they be?

PTA: So that people would go and see it? There are only these three: Tom Cruise. Tom Cruise. Tom Cruise (laughs).

SZ: How much did you have to pay the star for his supporting role?

PTA: Nothing. He was so pleased with the script that he worked for free. My producers could hardly believe it.

SZ: Tom Cruise was just nominated for the OSCAR for this part.

PTA: He must win. You know why? Because I said to him: You have worked with so many great directors, if you should now receive the OSCAR for " Magnolia ", you are obliged to work for free for me for the rest of your life.

SZ: And what did he say?

PTA: He agreed. One day I'll remind him of that.

SZ: At the end of your new film it rains frogs from the sky. But you don't want to talk about it. Actually why not?

PTA: Oh God, the frogs. I am so sick of the frogs. My girlfriend was the first to read the script and immediately she offered me a small frog. In the meantime I own a frog clock, a frog cup, a frog waste basket. And still some friends come and say: We know that you have already everything with frogs, but I have this frog lamp, that you certainly haven't seen yet...

SZ: But that's your own fault.

PTA: Of course. I can't get rid of the spirits I raised. With " Boogie Nights " it was similar. Complete strangers sent me video tape recordings on which they had sex, and only because this film played in the porn industry. However I'm not an expert on pornography, and also not on frogs.

(adapted from Sonntagszeitung 20/02/2000)

- NP: *an exaction, the back of every human being, the cinema, you, my producers*
- VP: *'s an exaction, is programmed in a way that after two hours it has enough of sitting in the cinema, had to write three headlines to your film, could hardly believe it*
- AP: *golden*, *so sick of the frogs, small*
- PP: *of sitting in the cinema, to your film, for his supporting role, with so many great directors*
- AdvP: *right, hardly, actually,*

3.   Verb phrases

3.1   Internal structure of verb phrases with more than one verb

(1)   You have worked with so many great directors.

- how to analyse the structure of the predicate VP?
- in most cases we split up constituents into 2 branches (BINARY BRANCHING) — though in a few cases we analyse them as having 3: ditransitive verbs (VP → V Od Oi, cf. B&B 2001:174-5) and complex transitive verbs (VP → V Od ComplementO, cf. B&B 2001:177-8)
- in terms of meaning, one might argue that the verbs *have* and *worked* form a unit, and that therefore these should be one constituent, and the PP *with so many great directors*, another constituent

- …but one could equally suggest that the perfect Aux *have* somehow modifies the entire string of words following it, *worked with so many great directors*

have worked with so many great directors   have worked with so many great directors
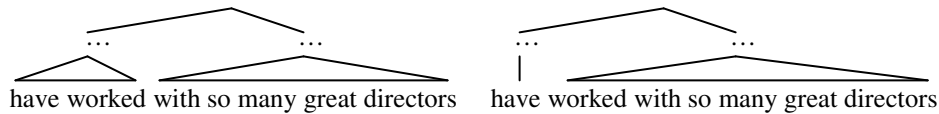
- semantics equivocal → structure? → if you carry out the various constituency tests the second analysis turns out to the correct one → e.g. replacement test:

(2)   You have ~~worked with so many great directors~~ *done so*.

    → evidence that *worked with so many great directors* is a constituent (see further B&B 2001:144-5)

3.2   Sentence vs. clause; tense vs. time

(3)   He was so pleased with the scripts that he worked for free.

- sentences are to some extent artefacts of written language; boundaries are signalled by a capital first letter and a full stop
- clauses are defined as sentences or parts of sentences containing *one* predicate, which minimally consists of one verb (clauses usually also have a subject) → ex. (3) is a COMPLEX SENTENCE, consisting of 2 clauses (more on complex sentences in Week 8)
- if a clause has only one verb, it is (normally) FINITE, i.e. marked for TENSE
- only one verb of a given VP is finite: the first one
- English has two morphologically marked tenses: past and present → ex. (3) *was*, *worked*; both inflected for past tense
- the tense of a verb is related to the time when the event described took place, but not always directly:

(4)   Immediately she offers me a small frog.

    → *offers*: present tense but refers to past (HISTORICAL PRESENT)

(5)   If you should now receive the OSCAR for " Magnolia ", you are obliged to work for free for me for the rest of your life.

    → *are:* present tense, but refers to some event that lies (may lie) in the future
- some other ways of referring to the future *be going to* (*gonna*) + Inf, *be* V-*ing*, *will* + Inf:

(6)   One day I'll remind him of that.

    B&B: "there is no future tense in English" (2001:147), compare e.g. Romance:
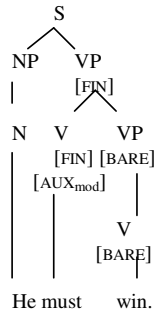
(7)   French
    je le rappeler-ai
    I him remind-FUT.1SG
    'I will remind him'
(8)   Spanish
    le recordar-é
    him remind-FUT.1SG
    'I will remind him'

- future tense *not marked morphologically* in English
- but there are periphrastic means of signalling the same meaning, e.g. with the auxiliary verb *will*
- for some other linguists this means that English does have a future tense (or even more than one) – it just depends on how you define tense marking

3.3   Auxiliary vs. lexical verbs

(9)   You *have* worked with so many great directors.
(10)   One day I'*ll* remind him of that.
(11)   My producers *could* hardly believe it.
(12)   He *must* win.
(13)   Tom Cruise *was* just nominated for the OSCAR for this part.
(14)   You *are* working with so many great directors.
(15)   And what *did* he say?
(16)   You *do*n't want to talk about it.

- how to recognise auxiliaries?
- auxiliary verbs *help* other verbs to form complete predicates; they never occur on their own (*be, have* and *do* can occur on their own when used as *lexical* verbs, in which case their meaning is different, "richer")
- another way of saying that auxiliaries combine with other verbs: they're COMPLEMENTED by VPs (or SUB-CATEGORISE for a VP complement), in the same way that e.g. the verb *believe* is complemented by a NP (see e.g. ex. (11))
- we can mark auxiliary status in a tree structure representation → [AUX]
- we can also be specific about the types of verbal complement, e.g. *to*-infinitive → [INF], bare infinitive (= infinitive without infinitive marker *to*) → [BARE], past/passive participle → [PPART], present participle → [ING]
- finiteness can also be marked → [FIN]

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            S
          /   \
        NP     VP
         |    [FIN]
         |    /  \
         N   V    VP
         | [FIN] [BARE]
       [AUX_mod]  |
         |    |   V
         |    |  [BARE]
        He  must  win.
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(for more trees cf. B&B 2001: 179ff.; for more on recognising auxiliaries cf. pp.150-3)

- *He has to win* → B&B: *to* is an auxiliary verb (pp.182-4); but this makes very little sense: better to analyse it as an infinitive marker (InfMarker in trees)
- we distinguish between 2 types of auxiliaries:

  ➢ MODAL AUXILIARIES: possibility, probability, certainty, permission, necessity, ability: *can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must* (marginal modals/quasi-modals: *need, ought, dare, better*, etc.; have some but not all properties typical of modals)

  NB: historically, these verbs weren't always modal auxiliaries – in OE they were (pretty) normal lexical verbs; in the course of the ME period they became more and more a special class (for more details see e.g. Denison 1993, Ch.11)

(17) Wultu   kastles   and kinedomes? (a1225 *Ancr. R*. 398)
      will-you castles   and kingdoms
      'Do you want castles and kingdoms?'
(18) Ne can ic   eow (c1000 Ags. Gosp. Matt. xxv. 12)
      not can I   you.PL
      'I don't know you'

  ➢ PRIMARY AUXILIARIES: *have* used to form the perfect, as in (9); *be* used to form the passive, as in (13), *be* used to form the progressive, as in (14), dummy *do* to form questions and negative sentences in cases where the sentence doesn't contain an auxiliary verb yet, as in (15-16; *say* and *want* are not auxiliaries)

- *be, have* and *do* aren't always auxiliaries:

(19) Magnolia *is* the favourite for the golden bear in Berlin.
(20) I *have* this frog lamp.
(21) *Do* the Twist!
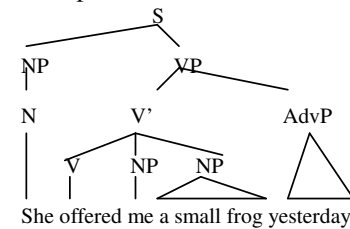
→ not complemented by VPs but NPs so here not Aux but lexical verbs

3.4   Lexical verbs classified according to their complementation pattern

- verbs portray events, actions, situations, states, etc.
- most events, actions etc. require that there be at least one entity involved in it , the subject (e.g. *die*); many require one or more additional entities, i.e. complements (see also Week 4)

(22) Frank Mackey's father dies towards the end of the movie.
(23) You had to write three headlines to your film.
(24) She offered me a small frog.
(25) Magnolia is the favourite for the golden bear.
(26) He was so pleased.
(27) And you, you fucking call me *lady*?

- we may label verbs according to the number of entities automatically evoked:
  ➢ only one entity → subject — INTRANSITIVE VERB, ex. (22)
  ➢ two entities → subject and one complement, (MONO-)TRANSITIVE VERB if direct object, ex. (23); COPULA (INTENSIVE) if subject complement, ex. (25-6)
  ➢ three entities → DI-TRANSITIVE VERB if complements are indirect object and direct object, ex. (24); COMPLEX TRANSITIVE VERB if complements are object and object complement, ex. (27)
- syntactic structure of verb phrases is clearly motivated by cognitive structure
- in trees we use the V vs. V' ("V bar") distinction to differentiate between complements and modifiers of verbs:

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              S
           /     \
         NP       VP
          |      /   \
          N     V'    AdvP
          |    / | \    /\
          |   V NP NP  /  \
          |   |  |  | /____\
        She offered me a small frog yesterday.
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→ V' intermediate between full VP (*offered me a small frog yesterday*) and level of the specific verb (*offered*) → bar notation used when the sister node of some element is not a complement of that element (the adjunct *yesterday* is not a complement of *offered me a small frog* but a modifier)
NB B&B (2001) are not entirely consistent in their use of X-bar notation in Ch.6 (they *are* in Ch.7, when they talk about NPs)

- …but now consider *rain* → in the syntactic structure it has a subject, but in the conceptual structure there's nothing to correspond to (motivate) that → DUMMY subject → example of the syntax to some extent having a life of its own

4. Noun phrases

- how to spot? → headed by a noun, so spotting nouns is the first step
- but often NPs contain much more material than N and possibly a Det, in other words NPs are often longer than you might initially think
- test: replace group of words that you suspect may be a NP with a pronoun → if result grammatical then that's evidence that you're indeed looking at a NP:

(28a) The *back* of every human *being* is programmed in a way that…
(28b) It is programmed in a way that…
(29a) Complete strangers sent me *video tape recordings* on which *they* had *sex.*
(29b) Complete strangers sent me those.

- the underlined NPs in (28a), (29a) both contain more than one N (*italicised*) → how do we know which one is the head?
- semantics: the head is the central element, what the phrase essentially describes:

  ➢ Q: What kind of thing(s) are we talking about in (28a)? A: The *back* → head noun
  ➢ Q: What kind of thing(s) are we talking about in (29a)? A: *Recordings* → head noun

- just like the structure of a VP the internal structure of a NP is in a way fixed, i.e. it can be divided up into certain zones around the head noun that may (though need not be) occupied by certain elements:

predeterminer	determiner	premodifier(s)	**head noun**	complement	postmodifier(s)
	the		**back**		of every human being
	ø	video tape	**recordings**		on which they had sex
all	the	video tape	**recordings**	of their child	that they ever made

- complements of nouns are never more than 1 (remember that some verbs, e.g. *give*, may occur with more than 1 complement); modifiers, on the other hand, may be stacked (see also B&B 2001:75ff)
- as regards determiners, because their absence can signal a meaning difference (compare *the video recordings* v. *ø video recordings*) cases where they're absent may be analysed as having a ZERO determiner → ø (see B&B 2001:194)
- order isn't 100% rigid, e.g. complements (especially if they're very long) may sometimes also follow postmodifiers (see B&B 2001:205)

- X-bar notation → N' is used for the level(s) in between the full NP and the individual N, where the sister node of the noun is not a complement (i.e. determiner / modifier):

the back of every human being

all the recordings of their child that they ever made
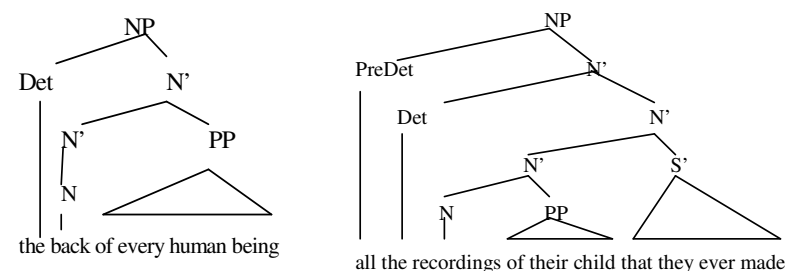
NB the section on trees in B&B (2001), Ch.7 (on NPs) doesn't have PreDet in it

5. Concluding remarks

- VPs, NPs and other phrase types are not just random strings of elements: they have internal structure, which is to some extent motivated by the things they describe (or rather, by the way in which we *think* about the things they describe)
- some aspects of their syntax, though, aren't motivated by meaning, e.g. the requirement of predicate VPs in English to be combined with subjects, or e.g. the fact that determiners are positioned NP-initially rather than finally (indeed, in some languages, e.g. Akan (Kwa), we find determiners at the *end* of the phrase, cf. Tallerman 1998:39)

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