

## Categories

### 1 Major lexical categories of English

- **N(oun)**: *dog, book, jelly, sincerity, chaos, ...*
- **P(reposition)**: *in, on, among, away, atop, under, until, ...*
- **V(erb)**: *run, play, contemplate, parse, ...*
- **A(djective)**: *happy, tired, orange, crucial, scared, ...*
- **Det(erminer)**: *the, every, all, a, most, many, few, ...*
- **Adv(erb)**: *happily, tiredly, crucially, often, sometimes, ...*

## **2 The big questions**

1. What distinguishes each of these categories from the others?
2. Does linguistic theory need to recognize each of these categories as primitives?
3. Are these categories universal?
4. Are there other categories than these?
5. How do these categories combine with each other to form phrases?

## **3 Exploring the big questions**

Below are a number of tests that purport to distinguish each of the above categories from the others.

When using the tests, it is vital to ask:

- Does this test uniquely identify the word class in question from all others?
- If it does not uniquely identify the word class in question, then which classes does it distinguish among?
- Do **all** the words in this word class pass the test, or do only some of them pass the test?

## 4 Nouns

- Can inflect for number (singular/plural)
- Can inflect for gender
- Cannot have noun phrase sisters
- Can be modified by adjectives
- Meaningful count/mass distinction
- Very open class of lexical items: new nouns appear all the time, and it is possible to coin new ones whenever we want

## 5 Verbs

- Can inflect for tense
- Can inflect for aspect (e.g., the progressive form *running*, formed with the suffix *-ing*)
- Can immediately follow a modal verb (*can, could, shall, should, may, might*, and perhaps others)

## 6 Adjectives

- Can be modified by adverbs
- Can be modified by *very*
- Can modify nouns
- Can be inflected for the comparative (-*er*) and the superlative (-*est*)
- Can appear immediately following *seem*, *appear*, and *become*

## 7 Prepositions

- Can be modified by *right*
- Seem to form a closed class (that is, new prepositions emerge relatively rarely, and it is almost impossible to coin new ones)
- Can appear next to the verb *journey* and *head* (*journey to the store*, *journey into work*, *\*journey the store*, ...)

## **8 Determiners**

- Can immediately precede the phrase *other poem* or *other poems*
- Form a closed class
- Affect the singular/plural marking on their associated nouns

## **9 Adverbs**

- End in *-ly*
- Modify adjectives