

Horn amalgams as grafts

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Abstract

In this talk I will address, again, the issue of what I have been calling “grafts”. By grafts I mean constructions that seem to constitute syntactic bracketing paradoxes of a certain kind. Typical (though perhaps too simple) are cases like *a far from simple matter*. On the one hand we want to say that *simple* is the head of the attributive AP (for example because of the adjacency required of prenominal adjectives, but also in view of the semantics). But on the other hand it appears as if *simple* is the complement of the preposition *from*, and the whole PP *from simple* seems to be a complement of the adjective *far* (cf. Van Riemsdijk, 2001).

A construction that is much richer in analytical problems and theoretical implications is that called “transparent free relatives” (TFRs). The first sentence of this abstract contains an example of a TFR. In earlier work I have come to the conclusion that the best analysis for such cases is a three-dimensional one in which two syntactic subtrees are joined (merged, if you wish) at one of the terminal nodes, the shared element or, in my metaphorical terminology, the “callus” (cf. Van Riemsdijk, 2005). In the above example the shared element is the adjective *simple*, while in the TFR of the first sentence it is the noun *grafts*. In adopting such an analysis I do not reject the idea that the TFR is a free relative, but I do reject the notion that it is a free relative that is integrated in a matrix tree in the manner of “regular” free relatives.

In a long and substantive article in NLLT (2003), Grosu argues against my position. In the present talk I will address a number of the points he raises. But more specifically I will broaden the empirical domain in a way that I believe supports my position. This is where “Horn Amalgams” (HAs) come in. In a 1974 paper, George Lakoff discusses a number of constructions under the heading “syntactic amalgams”, a term covering by and large the same set of phenomena that I analyze by means of grafts. One construction introduced into the discussion by Lakoff is attributed by him to Larry Horn, hence the name HA. The construction in question is exemplified by the following type of sentences:

- (1) John is going to, I think it’s Chicago on Saturday
(Lakoff, 1974:324 ex (13a))

What I intend to show is that these HAs have largely the same transparency properties that are so characteristic of TFRs. Hence, I take the fact that TFRs look like free relatives to be largely epiphenomenal. What is important is the shared element, *Chicago* in (1), a good reason to pursue the graft theory.

Semantically, there are interesting questions to be raised, not least among them the fact that the graft minus the callus generally has the function of an intensional modifier, a hedge, that can negate the validity of (the appropriateness of) the shared element, as in

- (2) a. They served me what they erroneously referred to as a steak
b. John went to, I don't think it could have been Chicago last Saturday

I will limit myself to raising these questions, however, hoping that the semanticists in the audience will be inspired to think about them.

References

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