Syntax IV

FSEM CORE S119: Language as Human Nature
Fall 2025
Prof. Forrest Davis

October 9, 2025

Warm-up

1. Discuss with your neighbor what you are most looking forward to this break.

2. Mark the following sentences as grammatical or ungrammatical

   - Kelly often drinks coffee
   - Kelly drinks often coffee

Logistics

- Report 1 revisions due Oct. 21

- Report 2 due Oct 9

- Course Observation today with Prof. Tomlinson

Learning Objectives

- Describe X' Schema variation across languages

- Build structures that highlight the movement of T (in English and French)

- Describe yes-no question formation in English and use our hypothesis to describe why some sentences are ungrammatical
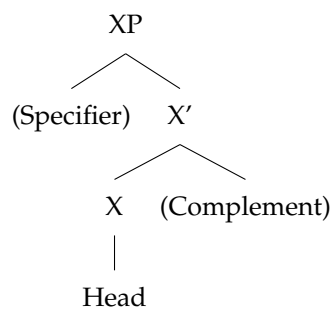

Summary: We contextualize syntax with the other forms of linguistic analysis we have discussed (i.e., phonology and morphology). Then, we use syntactic structure to account for differences in word order, the placement of adverbs, and the formation of questions in English and other languages.
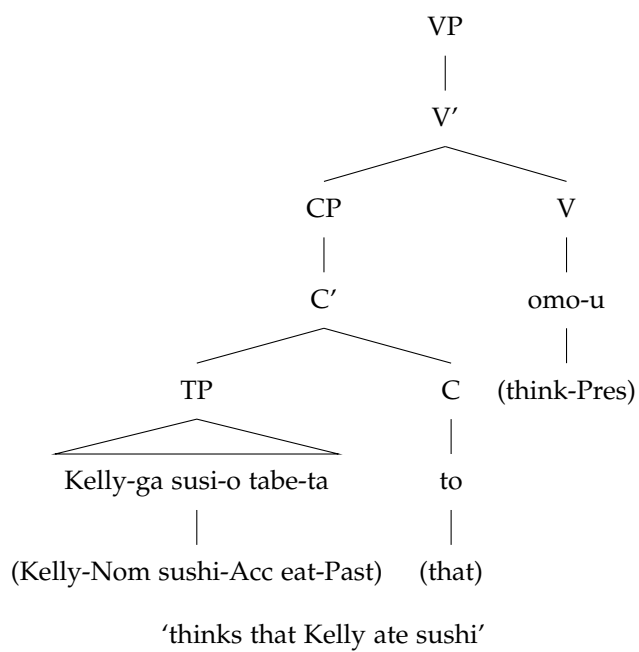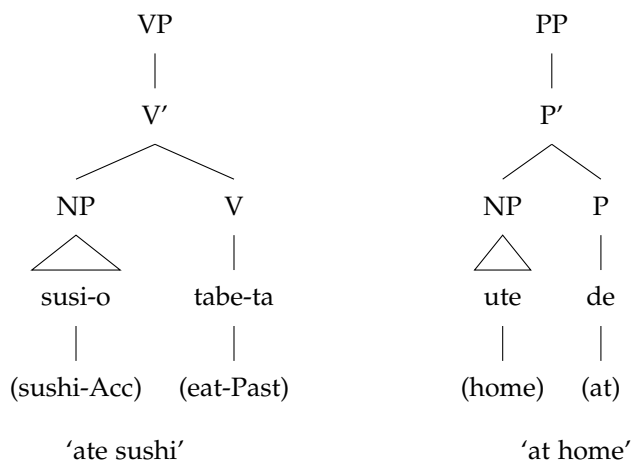
Stepping Back and Refreshing our Aims

ACROSS PHONOLOGY, MORPHOLOGY, AND SYNTAX we have been building a unified approach to accounting for language. There are basic units and there are processes which make reference to these basic units. Some core points and examples are covered in the slides.

X'-Schema and It's Uses

LAST CLASS WE INTRODUCED ANOTHER way of thinking about syntax. In the slides, we refresh the points. There is a universal structure to the building of syntactic phrases, called **X' Schema**:

```
                XP
              /    \
      (Specifier)   X'
                   /  \
                  X   (Complement)
                  |
                Head
```

While the basic structure of heads selecting complements, which then combine to select specifiers, is universal, there is variation in orderings. Consider the following data from Japanese.

```
        VP                              PP
        |                               |
        V'                              P'
       /  \                            /  \
     NP    V                         NP    P
     /\    |                         /\    |
 susi-o   tabe-ta                  ute    de
    |        |                       |      |
(sushi-Acc) (eat-Past)           (home)   (at)

    'ate sushi'                      'at home'
```

```
                        VP
                        |
                        V'
                      /    \
                    CP       V
                    |        |
                    C'     omo-u
                   /  \      |
                 TP     C  (think-Pres)
                /  \    |
  Kelly-ga susi-o tabe-ta  to
              |             |
(Kelly-Nom sushi-Acc eat-Past)  (that)

        'thinks that Kelly ate sushi'
```

Building More Complicated Sentences with CPs

AS DISCUSSED LAST CLASS, VERBS SELECT FOR THINGS OTHER THAN NOUN PHRASES. We review the approach to accounting for sentences like 'the boy will believe that some cats had slapped the book of poems' in the slides.

> **Practice Problems**
>
> Give a tree for the sentence 'the cat might wish that the man would feed him'.

Accounting for Cross-Linguistic Variation

LANGUAGES TAKE DIFFERENT STRATEGIES to solve problems like issue of tenses without lexical items discussed on the slides. Consider the following data from English and French.

(1) a. Sarah will often walk home.
    b. *Sarah will walk often home.

(2) a. Sarah often walked home.
    b. *Sarah walked often home.

(3) a. Sarah mang-er-a   souvent des   fruits
       Sarah eat-FUTURE-3SG often   some fruits
       'Sarah will often eat fruit.'
    b. *Sarah souvent mang-er-a   des   fruits
       Sarah often   eat-FUTURE-3SG some fruits
       'Sarah will often eat fruit.'

Question

What is the difference between French and English highlighted with these data?

1. Draw trees for the grammatical sentences

2. Consider the relationship between T and V to build a hypothesis about what the languages do differently.

Movement: Inversion

WITH THE STRUCTURE WE HAVE POSITED SO FAR, we can now address the formation of questions. We start with yes-no questions:

Sarah will walk home	Will Sarah walk home?
Sarah walked home	Did Sarah walk home?
Sarah walks home	Does Sarah walk home?

Question

Give an account of how yes-no questions work in English.

1. Draw the trees for the sentences in the left column above (i.e., the declarative or non-question sentences)

2. How would you modify the trees you drew to build the sentences in the right column (i.e., the questions)?

3. Consider the following data:

   (a) Fig thought that I should sleep

   (b) *Fig thought that should I sleep?

   (c) Fig thought should I sleep?

   Based on your account of yes-no questions, why is the second sentence (b) ungrammatical?

Before Next Class

- No reading/pre-class quiz next week. Enjoy your break!