Syntax IV

Forrest Davis

October 9, 2025

Fall 2025 FSEM CORE S119: Language as Human Nature
Colgate University

Refreshing Aims of Linguistic Analysis

- Identify the basic units and rules that govern language
- Use these units/rules to characterize both:
    - individual languages (e.g., aspiration in English)
    - differences between languages (e.g., Tagalog has infixation while English uses prefixes and suffixes)

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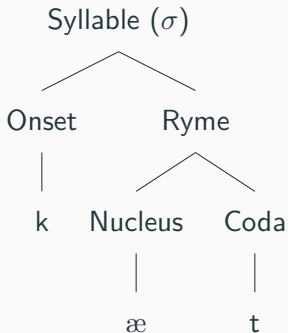 - Segments (i.e., phones)
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Refreshing Phonology

- What are some **basic units** in phonology?
    - Segments (i.e., phones)
    - Phonemes
    - Syllables

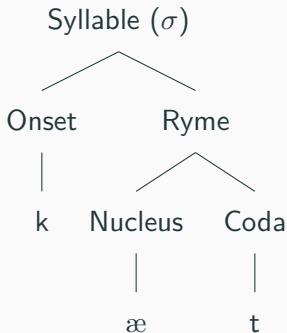## Refreshing Phonology: Syllables and Cross-Linguistic Variation

Syllable (σ)

Onset   Ryme

k   Nucleus   Coda

æ   t
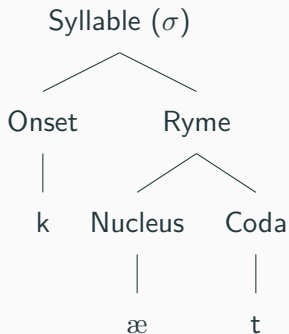
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Refreshing Phonology: Syllables and Cross-Linguistic Variation

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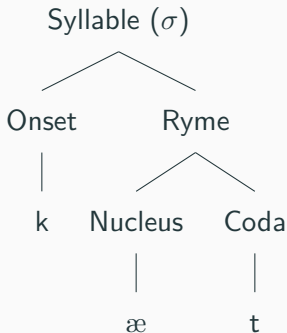
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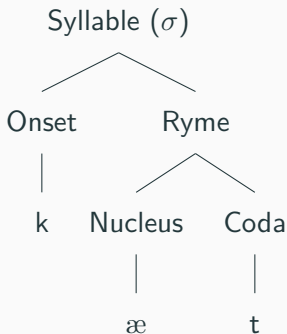**Refreshing Phonology: Syllables and Cross-Linguistic Variation**

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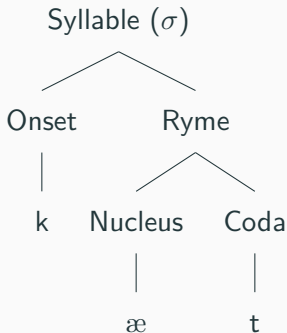
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  - [bisuketo] ('biscuit')

Refreshing Morphology: Structure and Cross-Linguistic Variation

A
Affix   A
un   V   A
lock   able

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Refreshing Morphology: Structure and Cross-Linguistic Variation

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- Languages differ in what information is separate words vs. affixes
- English has some tenses/aspects like ongoing events as separate words
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- Farsi uses affixes
  - [mixarid] ('(he) was buying')

Syntax Units and Processes

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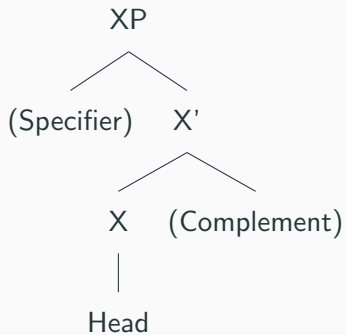- The basic process (called **Merge**) is the operation that builds phrases by

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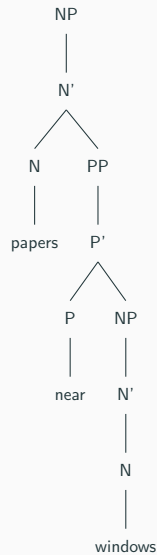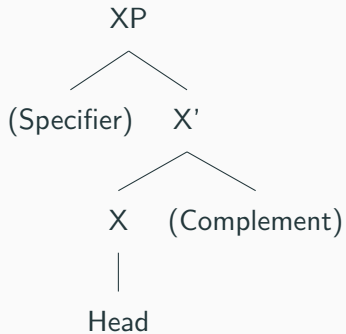   - selecting a **head** (e.g., nouns, verbs, tense)

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    - selecting a **head** (e.g., nouns, verbs, tense)
    - the head selects a **complement**, which is a phrase (e.g., verbs can select noun phrases as their complement, noun can select preposition phrases as their complement)
    - the head and complement (e.g., N', V', T') selects a **specifier** which can be a phrase or a part of speech (e.g., verbs can take adverbs as specificers and prepositional phrases, nouns can select adjective phrases as specifiers and also determiners)
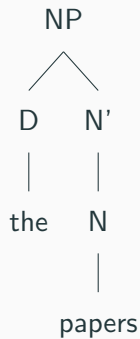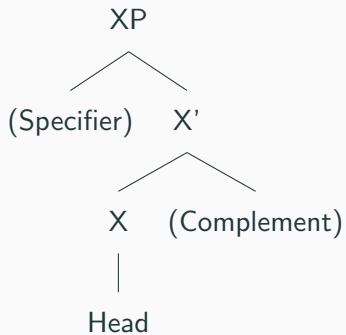
X'-Schema

```
        XP                          NP
       /  \                          |
(Specifier)  X'                      N'
            /  \                      |
           X  (Complement)            N
           |                          |
          Head                      papers
```
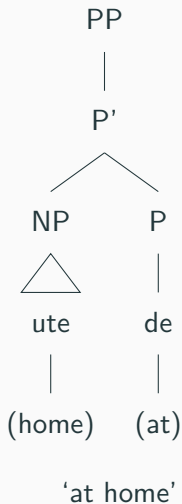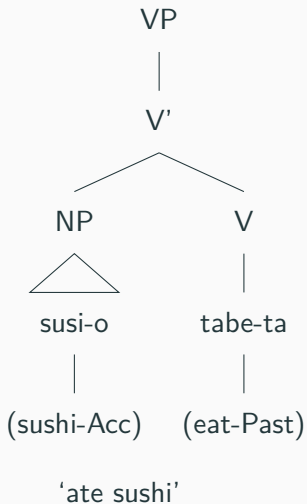
X'-Schema

```
        XP                              NP
       /  \                            /  \
(Specifier)  X'                       D    N'
            /  \                       |    |
           X  (Complement)            the   N
           |                                |
          Head                           papers
```
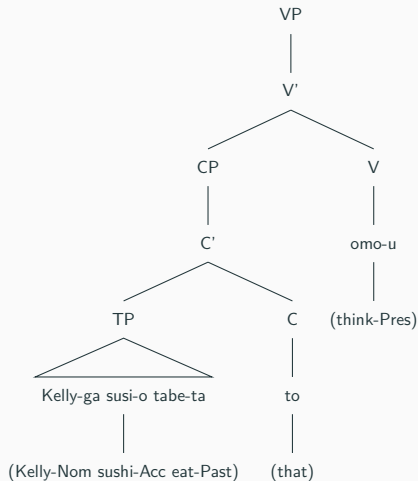
X' Scheme

Assumptions:

- Languages have the same heads (languages build the same structures)
- All heads form phrases
- All structure is generated, even if there are no (overt) words
- Only two things can be combined at once
- Sentences are comprised of CPs

Cross-Linguistic Variation with X' Schema

'thinks that Kelly ate sushi'

- What is different about the X'-Schema for Japanese?

Building More Complicated Structures

'the boy will believe that some cats had slapped the book of poems'

- **An Algorithm:**
    1. Find the heads (N, A, V, P, C, T)
    2. Start with the far right and then work your way towards the left
    3. For each head identify its complement and specifier (if it has one)

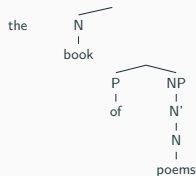the boy will believe that some cats had slapped
the

book

of

poems

the boy will believe that some cats had slapped

the   N

book

P
|
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N
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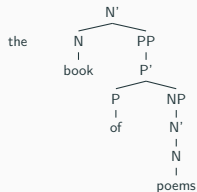
the boy will believe that some cats had slapped

```
                    N'
          the      N      PP
                   |       |
                 book      P'
                        P      NP
                        |       N'
                        of      |
                                N
                                |
                              poems
```

the boy will believe that some cats had slapped

```
              NP
          ____/\____
         D          N'
         |       __/  \__
        the     N       PP
                |       |
              book      P'
                     __/  \__
                    P        NP
                    |        |
                    of       N'
                             |
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                             |
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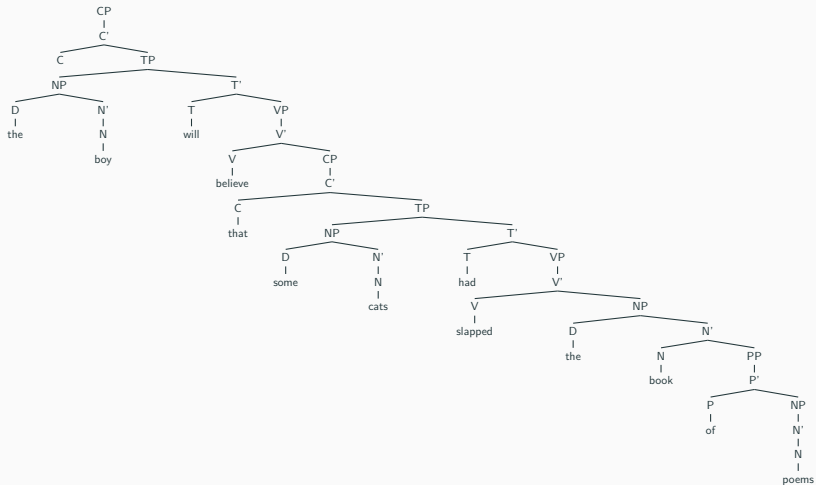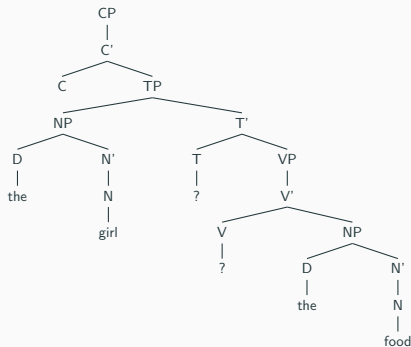
the boy will believe

Building More Complicated Structures

'the girl hated the food'

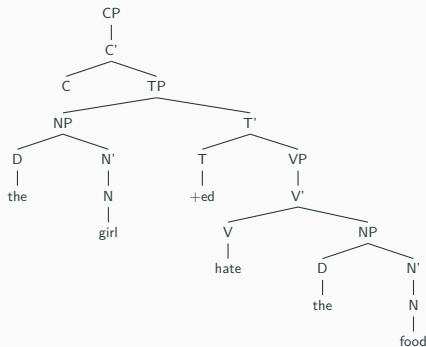- Is there a tense in this sentence?

'the girl hated the food'

- It's in past tense. How
  could we encode this?

Treatment of Tense

'the girl hated the food'

- The T and the V fuse together into one word in English
- Is this because the T lowers to V? Or is this because the V raises to T?

Accounting for a Difference between 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.'

Yes-No Question Formation in English

(4)   a.   Will Sarah walk home?
        b.   Did Sarah walk home?
        c.   Does Sarah walk home?

Syntactic Theory

Assumptions:

- Languages have the same heads (languages build the same structures)
- All heads form phrases
- All structure is generated, even if there are no (overt) words
- Only two things can be combined at once
- Sentences are comprised of CPs
- Syntax involves displacement or movement of elements