

September 28, 2004

## CLASS 6: MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES

### WHAT IS A FEATURE?

Features are our shorthand notation for **morphosyntactic features**, the abstract properties of individual classes to which particular **morphological forms** belong (a given word shape).

They are **morphological** in being related to the morphological form, and **syntactic** in playing a role for **the computational system** that assembles these forms from the **lexicon** and creates the syntactic **structure** which is then interpreted

- for meaning by the **conceptual-intentional system** in the **semantic component** (also known as **Logical Form / LF**), and

- for articulation meaning by the **articulatory-perceptual / sensorimotor system** in the **phonetic component** (viz. **Phonetic Form / PF**).

A classic example of a feature is **number** expressing singular, plural, or dual numbers across languages. There are **at least five ways** to integrate this expression:

1. a **unique feature** approach (for each property): [SINGULAR], [PLURAL], [DUAL]
2. a **feature bundle** approach: [SG], [PL], [SG, PL]
3. a **privative feature** approach (“default”): [ ], [PL] (depending on one’s view, [DL])
4. a **binary feature** approach: [+SG, -PL], [-SG, +PL], [+SG, +PL] — \*[-SG, -PL]
5. a **feature class** approach: [NUM: SG], [NUM: PL] — [NUM: SG, PL] / [NUM: DL]

Adger (and us): use the **privative feature approach** for the time being and develop it.

### WHAT ARE THE FEATURES?

This is a good question with a bad answer: anything that seems necessary to **relate form and meaning** (incl. form without meaning, meaning without form) — and sometimes beyond (no form and no meaning, but a **necessity for the syntactic computation**).

- categorial features: [N], [V], [A], ...
- semantic features: [mass], [count], ...
- phonological features: [voice], [nasal], ...

But these arguably don’t play as big a **role in the syntax** as the following:

- phi-features: person ([1], [2], [3] / [ ]), number ([SG], [PL]), gender ([MASC], [FEM], [NEUT])
- case-features (nominal): nominative [NOM], accusative [ACC], genitive [GEN], ...
- tense-features (verbal): present [PRES], past [PAST], ...
- (other) V-features: [INF], [PART], ...

(Morpho)syntactic features are **interpretable** or **uninterpretable** at the semantic interface.