

Asymmetries in Form and Meaning: Surface Realization and Interface Conditions

This paper addresses the issue of how languages package the same features of meaning into morphophonological units of different sizes, giving rise to mismatches between surface form and meaning. A contrastive study of causatives in Japanese and Eastern Armenian shows that the same syntactic properties and semantic information are surfaced as a single word in Japanese while they are realized as a phrase in Eastern Armenian. The paper provides an account for the distinct surface realizations of similar causative constructions in these two languages based on interface relations between syntax and the PF and LF components. In particular, it is argued that the different surface realizations of predicates across languages can be captured by a language parameter that determines the spell-out to the PF interface.

The investigation of the syntactic and semantic properties of causatives in Japanese and Eastern Armenian shows that the verb form *tabesasetta* in Japanese (1) and the causative phrase *batsel t'vets* in Armenian (2) both behave as analytic causatives: they are bi-predicative (i.e., consist of two v_{cause} heads), have agentive embedded subjects, do not give rise to idiomatic readings and are iterative. Despite these common properties, the ‘make’ causatives in Japanese are realized as a single morphophonological word, while the Armenian verb is surfaced as a phrasal or analytic causative.

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| (1) | Jon-wa
John-Top
'John made/let Biru eat Soba noodles.' | Biru-ni
Biru-Dat | soba-o
soba.noodles-Acc | tabe-sase-ta
eat-Caus-Past | |
| (2) | Ara-n
Ara-Nom
'Ara made the child open the window.' | yerex-in
child-Dat | pat'uhan-e
window-Acc | batsel
open-Inf | t'v-ets
give-Aor.1sg |

We provide a predicate-based approach to verb-formation, which combines the primitive components of the verbal construction using syntactic principles within a single computational system (Hale and Keyser 1993, Marantz 1997, among others). We will show that the analysis proposed accounts for the common properties of these causatives without positing two distinct modules of verb-formation, as has been traditionally assumed. In addition, we show that the distinct surface forms of these causatives are accounted for by the interface conditions.

The surface realizations of causatives across languages (i.e., as words or as phrases) cannot be captured by the strict lexicalist approaches, which attempt to form all complex predicates in the lexicon. Classical generative approaches, which assume distinct domains of formation for words and phrases, are also unable to explain the form and meaning asymmetry observed. We adopt the idea of derivation by phase or ‘multiple spell-out’ (Chomsky 1999, Uriagereka 1999). These models, however, posit a unique node that determines the point of spell-out to the interfaces. Instead, we propose that the spell-out node to PF should be taken as a parameter across languages in order to capture the observed asymmetry between surface form and meaning. The spell-out to the LF or logico-semantic component, on the other hand, is constant in all languages and applies at nodes that Chomsky refers to as ‘strong’ phases. Hence, for the causative in (2) in Eastern Armenian, the PF-phase will apply at the structural node vP . All structure below vP will then be realized as a single morphological word (or PF-word), while the causative v head above vP will be realized as the light verb *t'al* (give). In the case of Japanese, the PF-phase applies at a higher level, extending the domain of the morphological word while displaying the same semantic and syntactic properties as in Armenian. In Japanese, the verbal elements incorporate via head-movement until the PF-phase node has been reached.

Thus, we argue that any asymmetry between form and meaning is due to the universality of the LF-word and the language-particular character of the PF-word. The proposed analysis has a direct bearing on defining the process of derivation by phase, since it claims that the phase that delivers the syntactic constituent to LF is distinct from the phase that spells it out to PF.