CLINES OF CATEGORIALITY IN SENTENCE COMPLEXING

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Abstract

This paper argues that the dynamism of multidimensional processes of sentence complexing cannot be fully understood without due attention paid to both dichotomies and clines of categoriality (also referred to as scales or gradients). First the scope of analysis is proposed, taking into view both the micro- and macrostructures of the text. Then the simplifying impact of binary sets on certain syntactic taxonomies is exemplified, followed in the application section by the discussion of the gradient of integration of dependent clauses into their respective Head-clauses, ranging from fully integrated (and interlaced) *embedded clauses* to loosely attached *enhanced clauses*.

1   Introduction

One of the global myths, passed on from generation to generation of linguists, concerns the view that dichotomies and binary sets are ideal tools to operate with when classifying linguistic processes and their products, i.e. authentic language data (be it micro- or macro-structures). Inspired by Enkvist's seminal study (1994), we have tried to project this myth onto various levels of language representation (Tárnyiková 2000), with the aim of pinpointing the simplifying impact of binary sets on the relevant interpretation of a large number of authentic language data.

As Enkvist (1994) has pointed out, in linguistics, the Aristotelian tradition of binarism has left deep imprints, amplified e.g. by the Jakobsonian conception of grammar as a *real ars obligatoria* that "imposes upon the speakers its *yes-no*-decisions" (Jakobson 1959: 141, cited from Enkvist 1994: 44), and "the heuristically motivated emphasis on contrast as a basic criterion in classical phonemics and morphemics" (Enkvist 1994: 44).[1]

Pragmatically, dichotomies are more transparent than scales, and the two-valued sub-categorization is supported by the various life situations, in which we are faced with either/or decisions (cf. test tasks, questionnaires, library catalogues). Moreover, as Enkvist (1994) has pointed out, computers "in their present-day form are indeed epistemic tyrants insisting on clear, discrete classification" (ibid.: 43).

The aim in Tárnyiková (2000) was not to reject binarity (dichotomy) but rather to advocate the admission of the fact that for some language data, more

relevant results would be obtained if gradients (clines, scales) rather than binary oppositions were taken into account, since without due attention paid to both dichotomies and scales, linguists are likely to fall into simplifying interpretations.

Below, we are discussing some of the scalar properties which we find particularly relevant to sentence complexing[2], with the focus in the application section on the gradient of integration of subordinate clauses into their Head-clauses.

2   The scope of analysis

This study, following van Dijk's Text Grammar theory and drawing heavily on his influential and still inspiring monograph from 1980, simply called *Macrostructures,* is based on the assumption that relevant results in sentence complexing can be obtained if both micro- and macrostructures are taken into consideration.

The point of macrostructures, as understood by the author, is "*that texts not only have local or microstructural relations between subsequent sentences, but that they also have overall structures that define their global coherence and organization"* (Van Dijk, www hyperlink, p.1 cf. References).

Van Dijk's theory has become a permanent part of our approach to both the multidimensional processes of sentence complexing and their product, i.e. a sentence complex, seen as a result of a complex interplay of those multidimensional processes. In other words, sentence complexes will be looked upon here from a text perspective, as coherent and cohesive contributions to the overall texture but also as consequences of the multidimensional processes of text shaping, sensitive to semantic representation, grammatical structuring and the overall information packaging in a given text.

3   Application of scales and gradients in sentence complexing

A gradient-sensitive approach to an analysis of sentence complexes (cf. also the revised version of Quirk et al. 1985) has been systematically applied in Thompson's studies (cf. References) and the studies of her collaborators (Hopper & Thompson 1984). Within their approach, the concept of "clines of categoriality" has been introduced into the theory of clause complexes, pre-echoed by Halliday's statement (1961) quoted by Matthiessen (2002) *"Likeness, at whatever degree of abstraction, is of course a cline, ranging from 'having everything in common' to 'having nothing in common'"* (ibid.: 245).

In all these studies, the acceptance of scales/gradients and their relevance for the analysis of authentic language data (corpora) is beyond any doubt. What has to be taken into account, however, is the fact that when dealing with scales (taking into view more delicate segmentation of conceptual spaces), we have to be prepared to be faced with many "buts".

Thus, for example, we can hardly ignore the fact that
- the clause in a sentence complex can be a main clause but semantically rather empty compared to its subordinate (dependent) clause. This discrepancy between syntactic and semantic hierarchy can be traced in sentence complexes with *epistemic qualifiers* of the type

(1)   *I think (that) you're right.* -

- in which the main clause functions rather as an attitudinal operator, while the subordinate clause specifies the semantic content (cf. also introductory signals of attitudes and judgements in Poldauf 1964); – or, to put it another way,
- the clause can be subordinate but its content is more important than the content of its super-ordinate clause. In (2) below, the main clause represents a kind of syntactic skeleton into which more elaborate subordinate clauses are, as it were, embroidered:

(2)   The fact *that she was a twin* seemed to matter as little as the fact *that she had been raised as an Episcopalian and he as a Baptist.* (TM: 157)

- the clause can be a main clause but not independent (cf. the context-recoverable ellipses, as in "He will never attend such a place – *but I will"*); cf. also … *and He as a Baptist* in Ex (2). The process is known as *gapping.*[3]
- the clauses can be co-ordinated by the prototypical conjunction *and* but the result is not a semantically co-ordinated complex: it is rather a sequence of Auxiliary + Head (Satellite + Nucleus in Hopper 2002: 148)), as in

(3)   *Vrin, be an angel and let's have a little piano music*. (BCN CHG 1659)

(in which the first clause compensates, as it were, for a politeness marker, e.g. *please*), or –

(4)   *If you are sad and feel the need to cry, go ahead and do so*. (BNC AYK 679)

(Here, the first imperative co-ordinate (*go ahead*) has a supportive function: the speaker encourages the addressee to perform the activity indicated by the second co-ordinate (*do so*).

Similar sequences of co-ordinate verbal predications of the type *try and come; go and see, go ahead and tell him*, based on formal symmetry but semantic asymmetry, are referred to as *verbal hendiadys* in Hopper (2002: 148ff.).

Such findings obviously open up space for gradients rather than dichotomies, allowing e.g. for formally incomplete main clauses with a context retrievable semantic interpretation (cf. *... or he me* in endnote 3); for main clauses with the status of attitudinal operators (*I think, I hope, I suppose...*) but also for main clauses structured as co-ordinates but functioning as Auxiliaries operating on the second co-ordinate in the above mentioned hendiadic constructions. In Ex (2), on the other hand, the content of dependent clauses was more important than the one conveyed by the main clause.

All these findings lead us to believe that for a data-sensitive analyst the idea of a gradient ranging from co-ordination via pseudo-coordination to subordination[4] offers a more reliable tool to operate with.

Inspired by a seminal study on complex condensation phenomena in Modern English (cf. Vachek 1976), the present author verified the validity of the gradient of compactness in sentence complexes (ranging from relatively loose configurations of clauses in sentence complexes – to complexes with a whole range of interlaced sentence condensers (both verbal and non-verbal) by which (sensitive to their configurations, intensity of clustering and text-prioritised distribution) various degrees of back-grounding effect have been achieved (cf. Tárnyiková 2007, Chapter Three).

In the following section attention will be paid to a tacitly shared but sporadically discussed gradient of integration of subordinate clauses into their respective Head-clauses.

3.1 The gradient of integration: embedded and enhanced subordinate clauses

The integration of subordinate clauses into their Head-clauses within a sentence complex is looked upon as a space opened between two poles represented by integrated and non-integrated subordinate clauses. The transition is gradual, depending on the structural properties, semantic representation and text-level strategies in information shaping. At one end of the spectrum, there are subordinate clauses that are interlaced with their respective Head clauses to function as their sentence elements (subject clauses, object clauses, complement clauses …). For these we borrowed Halliday's term (1985) *embedded subordinate clauses* (with various degrees of integration into the Head clause). Compare the following examples, in which the subordinate clauses represent integral components of their respective Head-clauses –

(5)   *I do now know [where I have put my bunch of keys].* (object clause)

(6)   [*That Susan could be my friend*] *takes me by surprise.* (subject clause)

(7)   *What I say is what I think.* (subject and complement-clause)

(8)   *The boy* [*who is standing next to you*] *is my school mate.* (attributive restrictive relative clause)

(9)   *She lives where she has always lived: at her uncle's*) (adverbial locative clause).

As is apparent from examples (7-8), not all attributive clauses (if identified in recent grammars as such) are treated as integrated, i.e. embedded clauses[5] (cf. e.g. the status of non-restrictive attributive relative clauses), and only a limited number of adverbial clauses (if the semantics of the Head clause predication requires it, as in (9) above, can be appended to the list of integrated clauses.

The opposite pole of the integration scale is represented by *enhanced subordinate clauses* (Halliday 1985), later referred to by Halliday as *enhancing hypotactic clause combination* (Halliday 1986). Here we will choose to call them *enhanced clauses* for brevity's sake. Enhanced clauses are either non-integrated or only partly integrated (loosely attached to the periphery of their respective Head (super-ordinate) clauses, and subsume the traditional adverbial clauses (of time, place, manner, reason, regards, accompanying events …). There is no doubt that the processes of language economy (cf. the above mentioned gradient of compactness) significantly contribute to the dynamism of the gradient of integration.

The ordering within the *Head clause + subordinate clause* sequences (unless grammaticalised) is sensitive to the overall structure of the text and its priorities in perspectivisation (cf. the participant-oriented, event-oriented, time-oriented or place-oriented staging of the message in the text).

Compare, for example, the time-oriented sequences of events in chronicles, diaries, etc. The final position for locating circumstantials, on the other hand, might be due to the end-focus principle of information packaging in the text, highlighting the circumstances of the respective events rather than the events themselves.

Consequently, the same adverbial clause may either initiate the sequence of events and pinpoint the time of narration, as in

(10)   *When I was a child of about eleven, a new excitement suddenly flared up in my life.* (S: 13)

or, it may highlight the temporal specification and/or contrast it with other possible temporal relations within the text:

(11)   *I was full of expectations and resolutions <u>when I was a child.</u> <u>Now</u>, I am more skeptical about that.*

3.2 Text-level perspective

A coherent, text-level approach was suggested by Matthiesen and Thompson (1988). The authors are of the view that though the nature of *clause combining* has been the subject of much discussion in grammar, studies addressing the general issue of subordination from a text-level perspective are rather rare, in spite of the fact that "*in order to characterize what it is that distinguishes a 'subordinate' from a 'main' clause, one must appeal to the discourse context in which the clause in question appears*" (ibid.: 275).

In Matthiesen and Thompson (1988: 317) it is argued that "*there is no advantage to postulating a <u>grammatical</u> category of 'subordinate' clause* " since more crucial (in their view) is the <u>*text/discourse account of the notion*</u> *of a "subordinate" clause*, and the consequent distinction made between "embedding" (i.e. the previously mentioned group of "highly" integrated subordinate clauses) and "clause combining" (i.e. hypotactically[6] enhanced clauses and coordination).

In their view, enhanced *clauses* elaborating or extending their respective Head-clauses can be "usefully viewed as a grammaticalisation of a very general property of the hierarchical structure of the discourse itself" (op. cit.: 275). From this perspective, what Halliday (1986) calls *enhancing hypotaxis* and what the authors refer to as hypotactic clauses of circumstantial relations (temporal, conditional, reason, concessive, purpose, means and manner, coded by respective connectives *when, while, before…; if, unless, provided that …; because, since, as …; although, even though, except that ...* (op. cit.: 278)), is/are looked upon as grammaticalisations of Nucleus-Satellite textual relations.

3.3 Ramification

A less predictable type of clause interlacing is represented by ramified utterances, in which one communicative line is interrupted by another communicative line (which is inserted into it). If the inserted part is represented by a clause or even a sequence of clauses, then we are faced with another space on the imaginary scale of clause integration represented by enhanced clauses integrated into their matrix clause in such a way that they tear, as it were, the matrix clause in the positions where the syntagmatic units are interrupted so that the final effect is that of creating a communicative tension. The following examples might illustrate the situation

(12) *Guy, one time owner of Montefort, Antonia's first cousin and dear ally, had, - when he fell in battle early in 1918, been engaged to Lilia – at seventeen a wonderful golden willow of a girl.* (WL: 15)

(13) *When the porter's wife, who used to answer the house-bell, announced "A gentleman and a lady, sir," I had, as I often had in those days – the wish being father to the thought – an immediate vision of sitters.* [HJ: 5]

3.4 Chopping

To stretch the looser end of the integration spectrum, we could perhaps mention the process of chopping, known in Czech under the label of *větná struktura parcelovaná* (Daneš et al. 1987: 679), by which the clauses that are connected by integrating connectives can be formally isolated to create separate communicative units, i.e. separate utterances. In (14-16) below, it is the subordinate clauses that are structurally separated, though semantically linked to the preceding combination of clauses (14), or a single sentence (15). In (16) two isolated subordinators are used in succession in order to introduce chopped utterances.

(14) *You'll have to co-operate and answer their questions and explain. Even if it wastes your time.* (BNC AN8 1924)

(15) *He will help me. For he has a kind heart ...* (BNC FPH 729)

(16) [Writers spend much of their lives in silence.] *We spend our days in a room, or in my case at a café table alone. Because, unfortunately, it is not possible to write and talk. So our vocal cords are hardly ever fully stretched.* (TWN: 293)

4   Conclusion

Considering the intricacies of sentence complexing in English, with all the processes of condensation, integration, ramification, chopping, etc., we can only agree with Halliday (1986) that the sentence complex represents

> *the dynamic potential of the system – the ability to 'choreograph' very long and intricate patterns of semantic movement while maintaining a continuous flow of discourse that is coherent without being constructional* (Halliday 1986: 201).

Some of the processing manoeuvres are less predictable, but only to a certain degree, since there seem to be conservative processes at play here, as well as processes of grammaticalisation, which increase the predictability of both sentence complex production and perception.

Notes

[1] There is no doubt that the myth about the 'magic power of binarity' in analysing language data has been kept alive by the traditional strategy in many grammar books to prioritise memory-evoked, regular and pedagogically prescribed examples of language manifestations rather than corpus-based, natural, and functionally described data about authentic language use. With the existence of authentic language corpora, we are, however, not at liberty to brush evidence beneath the carpet, and, consequently, the analyst cannot be immune to various manifestations of fuzziness endowed in a natural language with specific communicative functions.

[2] The term 'sentence complexing' (belonging to Halliday's conceptual framework) is preferred here to the term 'sentence combining', since it explicitly evokes integrity (but does not exclude linearity), while 'combining' primarily tends to evoke the sequential linearity of sentences or propositions.

[3] Gapping results in a reduced clause, which is far from independent in status. In Huddleston (1990: 204) the meaning of the term *gapping* is narrowed to refer to bound ellipses only, e.g. "he me" in *I would never cheat him, or he me*, where the ellipsis leaves a gap in the middle of a clause, i.e. he_me (= he <u>would never cheat</u> me); cf. also Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1337).

[4] It is only fair to note that not all traditional grammarians have been "addicted" to the clear-cut dichotomy of co-ordination and subordination. Compare Kruisinga's standpoint (1931) that "it is perhaps hardly necessary to observe that the distinction between co-ordination and subordination is a relative one, allowing of intermediate cases" (ibid.: 501).

[5] The term 'embedding', very often used as an umbrella term for all kinds of integration of subordinate clauses within the Head clause (cf. the conception in Quirk et al. 1985), is narrowed in the above-mentioned scalar approach to refer to only one part of the gradient of integration, i.e. to the more integrated subordinate clauses, while for the other pole of the spectrum (i.e. the non-obligatory circumstantials), the term 'enhancing' is used. Different terms, however, can be met with in Discourse/Text Grammars, as is apparent from the proposal in the next section.

[6] As is apparent from the above-mentioned approach, the analyst has to be sensitive to the fact that identical terms, i.e. 'hypotaxis', can serve different degrees of abstraction (generalisation). While a generally accepted sense seems to be the more abstract notion of hypotaxis as one of the logical relations between unequal parts of the whole, in Matthiesen and Thompson's approach (1988) the term is "rank-shifted" to refer to one type of subordination, i.e. enhancement (loose integration).

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