

Morphosyntactic gambits (or: ‘don’t assume syntacticians will do your morphological washing’)¹

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1 The intellectual landscape

1.1 *The Set-theoretical School*

Linguists who worked on mathematical models in linguistics, starting in Moscow in 1956, in response to questions posed by Andrej Kolmogorov. A detailed survey is given by van Helden (1993); Meyer (1994) provides a helpful review of van Helden. The work of Zaliznjak is particularly relevant to our topic (e.g. Zaliznjak 1973/2002).

1.2 *Simple syntax*

- impact of Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar, Klein, Pullum & Sag 1985)
- syntax is phonology free (Pullum & Zwicky 1988)
- and morphology free (Zwicky 1996: 301, Corbett & Baerman 2006)

1.3 *Canonical Typology*

1.4 *Why this matters here*

¹ The support of the European Research Council (grant ERC-2008-AdG-230268 *MORPHOLOGY*) is gratefully acknowledged. I also wish to thank especially Matthew Baerman and Axel Holvoet for several very helpful discussions of the issues, also Dunstan Brown, Patricia Cabredo Hofherr, Marina Chumakina, Andrew Hippisley, Aleksandr Krasovitsky, Marianne Mithun, Enrique Palacar, Ivan Sag, Lameen Souag, Greg Stump, Claire Turner and Martin van Tol, for various comments and suggestions. Usual disclaimers.

2 The issue

2.1 *There are some remarkably interesting problems at the interface of syntax and morphology*

Russian (as in writings of Platonov)

(1) skuča-l-a po rebenk-u
miss-PST-SG.FEM for child-SG.DAT
'missed (her) child'

(2) skuča-et po nem
miss-3SG for 3SG.LOC
'is missing him'

2.2 *They are sometimes missed*

2.3 'Gambits'

recall Pullum's (1976) 'Duke of York Gambit'

2.4 *Morphosyntactic features*

A morphosyntactic feature must be relevant both to morphology and to syntax.

German (Findreng 1976: 159)

(3) Heide und Moor dehnen sich endlos weit.
heath and moor stretch-PL REFL endlessly far
'Heath and moor stretch into the endless distance.'

(4) ... daß wieder Zucker und Kaffee herauskam.
that again sugar and coffee came.out[SG]
... 'that sugar and coffee came out again.'

(5) Agreement with conjoined noun phrases in German (calculated from Findreng (1976: 145, 165-166, 197))

	animate		inanimate	
	N	% PL	N	% PL
subject-predicate	1095	96	1702	67
predicate-subject	379	93	925	40

Thus number is a morphosyntactic feature in German, animacy is not.

3 Canonical typology

3.1 *Basic ideas*

Adopting a canonical approach means that we take definitions to their logical end point, and this enables us to build theoretical spaces of possibilities. Only then do we investigate how this space is populated with real instances. Canonical instances are those that match the canon: they are the best, clearest, the indisputable ones.

3.2 *Research to date*

Inflectional morphology has been treated by Baerman, Brown & Corbett (2005: 27-35), Spencer (2005), Stump (2005, 2006), Corbett (2007a, 2007b, forthcoming d), Nikolaeva & Spencer (2008), Stump & Finkel (2008) and Thornton (2008), and phonology by Hyman (2009). In syntax, agreement has occupied centre stage, for instance in Corbett (2003, 2006), Comrie (2003), Evans (2003), Polinsky (2003), Seifart (2005: 156-74) and Suthar (2006: 178-98).

A working bibliography of this growing body of research can be found at <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/LIS/SMG/CanonicalTypology/index.htm>.

3.3 *Levels of analysis*

4 **Canonical morphosyntactic features and their values**

Canonical morphosyntactic *features* and *values* have been described in terms of two overarching principles (covering ten converging criteria), described and illustrated in Corbett (2008: 6-14).

Principle I (morphological):

Features and their values are clearly distinguished by formal means (and the clearer the formal means by which a feature or value is distinguished, the more canonical that feature or value).

- Criterion 1: Canonical features and their values have a dedicated form (are 'autonomous').
- Criterion 2: Canonical features and their values are uniquely distinguishable across other logically compatible features and their values.
- Criterion 3: Canonical features and their values are distinguished consistently across relevant parts of speech (word classes).
- Criterion 4: Canonical features and their values are distinguished consistently across lexemes within relevant parts of speech.

Principle II (syntactic):

The use of canonical morphosyntactic features and their values is determined by simple syntactic rules.

- Criterion 5: The use of canonical morphosyntactic features and their values is obligatory.

- Criterion 6: Canonical use of morphosyntactic features and their values does not admit syntactic conditions.²
- Criterion 7: Canonical use of morphosyntactic features and their values does not admit semantic conditions.
- Criterion 8: Canonical use of morphosyntactic features and their values does not admit lexical conditions from the target (governee).
- Criterion 9: Canonical use of morphosyntactic features and their values does not admit additional lexical conditions from the controller (governor).
- Criterion 10: The use of canonical morphosyntactic features and their values is sufficient (they are independent).

5 Classic gambits: the two principles in conflict

SINGULAR PLURAL		
<i>azg</i>	<i>azgk'</i>	NOMINATIVE
<i>azg</i>	<i>azgs</i>	ACCUSATIVE
<i>azgi</i>	<i>azgs</i>	LOCATIVE
<i>azgi</i>	<i>azgac'</i>	DATIVE

Figure 1: Classical Armenian *azg* 'people' (from Baerman 2002)

Compare Zaliznjak (1973/2002: 628-632) on case; fully analogous instances with other morphosyntactic features are given in Corbett (forthcoming c).

6 A canonical space for morphosyntax

§4 gave previous work on canonical morphosyntactic features and their values. §6 gives new morphosyntactic criteria.

6.1 Canonical government: governors govern

Criterion 11: A canonical rule of government consists of what the governor requires and the domain of government.

6.2 Canonical agreement: controllers control agreement

Criterion 12: A canonical rule of agreement consists of the feature specification of the controller and the domain of agreement.

² Of course there is a syntactic outcome, but canonically there are no *additional* syntactic conditions (for instance, concerning topicality or word-order).

6.3 *Canonical interaction: morphosyntactic features ‘mind their own business’*

Criterion 13: The distribution of morphosyntactic feature values is constrained by the rules of government and agreement; it is not canonical for the values of other morphosyntactic features to have a role.

6.4 *Canonical interaction of part of speech classifications and features: no effect on feature values*

Criterion 14: Part of speech classification is accessible to morphosyntactic features; it is not canonical for it to be accessible to determine their values.

6.5 *Canonical limit on lexical eccentricity*

Criterion 15: Lexical items may have idiosyncratic inherent specification but may not canonically have idiosyncratic contextual specification.

For the inherent/contextual distinction:

(6) My friend plays the banjo.

Number on *friend* is an ‘inherent’ feature; number on *plays* is an ‘imposed’ feature, according to Zwicky (1986). ‘Imposed’ is often replaced by ‘contextual’, following Booij’s (1996) use in his distinction of types of inflection; Corbett (2006: 123-124) transposes Booij’s distinction to the features as such.

6.6 *Remaining problems are not self-evidently the syntactician’s problem*

7 How such issues “ought” to be resolved

Russian

(7) ja viž-u star-yj dom
I see-1SG old-? house[?]
‘I see an old house’

(8) tam sto-it star-yj dom
there stand-3 SG old-SG.M.NOM house(M)[SG.NOM]
‘there stands an old house’

Compare the following pair:

(9) ja viž-u star-ogo drug-a
I see-1SG old-? friend-?
‘I see an old friend’

(10) žen-a star-ogo drug-a
wife(F)-SG.NOM old-SG.M.GEN friend(M)-SG.GEN
‘the wife of an old friend’

(11) Partial paradigms of two Russian nouns

	<i>žurnal</i> 'magazine' (inflectional class I)	<i>komnata</i> 'room' (inflectional class II)
	SINGULAR	SINGULAR
NOMINATIVE	žurnal	komnata
ACCUSATIVE	?	komnatu
GENITIVE	žurnala	komnaty

- (12) ja viž-u star-ogo dedušk-u
I see-1SG old-? grandfather-SG.ACC
'I see (my) old grandfather'

(13) Partial paradigm of the adjective *staryj* 'old'

	SINGULAR MASCULINE
NOMINATIVE	staryj
ACCUSATIVE	as NOMINATIVE / GENITIVE
GENITIVE	starogo

To show what is going on, the sentences are repeated with full glossing (according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, where '()' indicates an inherent specification, and '[]' shows information inferable from the bare stem):

- (14) ja viž-u star-yj dom
I see-1SG old-M.INAN.SG.ACC house(M.INAN)[SG.ACC]
'I see an old house'
- (15) ja viž-u star-ogo drug-a
I see-1SG old-M.ANIM.SG.ACC friend(M.ANIM)-SG.ACC
'I see an old friend'
- (16) ja viž-u star-ogo dedušk-u
I see-1SG old-M.ANIM.SG.ACC grandfather(M.ANIM)-SG.ACC
'I see (my) old grandfather'

8 Examples of morphosyntactic gambits

8.1 Canonical government: governors govern

Criterion 11: A canonical rule of government consists of what the governor requires and the domain of government.

We set aside 'conditions', involving non-morphosyntactic features: a famous example Georgian (Harris 1981, 1985, 2008).

Russian numerals like *pjat'* 'five' show different case requirements according to their own case:

Russian

(17) Na ulic-e sto-it pjat' dom-ov
on street-SG.LOC stand-3SG five[NOM] house-PL.GEN
'There are five houses on the street.'

(18) k pjat-i dom-am
towards five-DAT house-PL.DAT
'towards five houses'

We may treat this as a part of speech problem: the numeral's part of speech varies, in that it has noun-like properties in the direct cases and adjective-like properties in the oblique cases.

Russian numerals are of legendary complexity; for discussion and key references see Corbett (1978; 1983: 215-240, 1993), Pesetsky (1982), Babby (1987), Mel'čuk (1985) and Franks (1995: 93-129).

(19) The simple cardinal numerals of Russian (Corbett 1978)

		odin '1'	dva '2'	tri '3'	pjat' '5'	sto '100'	tysjača '1,000'	million '1,000,000'
1.	agrees with noun in syntactic number	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.	agrees in case in the direct case	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
3.	agrees in gender	+	(+)	-	-	-	-	-
4.	agrees in animacy	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
5.	has no semantically independent plural	+	+	+	+	(-)	-	-
6.	fails to take agreeing determiners	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
7.	does not take noun in genitive plural throughout paradigm	+	+	+	+	+	±	-

8.2 Canonical agreement: controllers control agreement

Criterion 12: A canonical rule of agreement consists of the feature specification of the controller and the domain of agreement.

There are non-canonical instances, but these tend to be also non-canonical in respect of criterion 14, and so we deal with them there.

8.3 Canonical interaction: morphosyntactic features 'mind their own business'

Criterion 13: The distribution of morphosyntactic feature values is constrained by the rules of government and agreement; it is not canonical for the values of other morphosyntactic features to have a role.

Romanian (Anca Sevcenco, personal communication)

- | | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|------------|------|--------------------------|-----------|
| (20) | student | înalt | (23) | student-î | înalţ-i |
| | student(M)[SG] | tall[M.SG] | | student(M)-PL | tall-M.PL |
| | 'a tall (male) student' | | | 'tall students' | |
| | | | | | |
| (21) | scaun | înalt | (24) | scaun-e | înalt-e |
| | chair(N)[SG] | tall[M.SG] | | chair(N)-PL | tall-F.PL |
| | 'a tall chair' | | | 'tall chairs' | |
| | | | | | |
| (22) | student-ă | înalt-ă | (25) | student-e | înalt-e |
| | student(F)-SG | tall-F.SG | | student(F)-PL | tall-F.PL |
| | 'a tall (female) student' | | | 'tall (female) students' | |

SINGULAR		PLURAL	
înalt	înalţ-i		MASCULINE
înalt	înalt-e		NEUTER
înalt-ă	înalt-e		FEMININE

Figure 2: Romanian gender agreement (*înalt* 'tall')

Mian: gender distinguishing articles (Fedden 2007)

- | | | | |
|------|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| (26) | (a) | naka=e 'a/the man' | naka=i '(the) men' |
| | (b) | unăng=o 'a/the woman' | unăng=i '(the) women' |
| | (c) | imen=e 'a/the taro' | imen=o '(the) taros' |
| | (d) | am=o 'a/the house' | am=o '(the) houses' |

Foley proposed a *two*-gender analysis (1986: 81), see Fedden (2007: 189).

gender	agreement patterns		example
	singular	plural	
masculine	=e	=i	naka 'man'
feminine	=o		unăng 'woman'
neuter 1	=e	=o	imen 'taro'
neuter 2	=o		am 'house'

Figure 3: Mian agreement patterns for a *four*-gender analysis (Fedden's preferred analysis, 2007: 188)

Russian (Corbett 1993 and references there)

(27) četyre bol'shie knig-i
 four[NOM] large-PL.NOM book(F)-SG.GEN
 'four large books'

(28) četyre bol'six knig-i
 four[NOM] large-PL.GEN book(F)-SG.GEN
 'four large books'

(29) četyre bol'six žurnal-a (*bol'sie*, NOM, is rare and less preferred)
 four[NOM] large-PL.GEN magazine(M)-SG.GEN
 'four large magazines'

8.4 Canonical interaction of part of speech classifications and features: no effect on feature values

Criterion 14: Part of speech classification is accessible to morphosyntactic features; it is not canonical for it to be accessible to determine their values.

Jarawara (Arawá family, Dixon 2000: 494, 497)

(30) Okomobi tafa-ka
 Okomobi eat-DECL.M
 'Okomobi (a man) is eating'

(31) Manira tafa-ke
 Manira eat-DECL.F
 'Manira (a woman) is eating'

gender value depends on part of speech

(32) ee tafa-ke
 1INCL eat-DECL.F
 'We (inclusive) are eating'

“Split ergativity”: case value dependent on part of speech

	ERG	NOM-ABS	ACC
PRONOUN 1SG	ngayu	ngayu	nganhi
NOUN 'girl'	gabiirngun	gabiir	gabiir

Figure 4: Guugu Yimidhirr (Baerman, Brown & Corbett 2005: 42-45, based on Haviland 1979: 47–51, 66–67); and compare Goddard (1982)

Agreement in number dependent on part of speech

Bulgarian (Katina Bontcheva, personal communication)

(33) Vie ste razbra-l-i vsičko.
 you AUX.2PL understand-PST-PL everything
 'You (polite) have understood everything.'

(34) Vie ste ljuboznatelen / ljuboznateln-a.
 you COP.2PL inquisitive[M.SG] / inquisitive-F.SG
 'You (polite) are inquisitive.'

- (35) *Vie ste poet.*
you COP.2PL poet(M)[SG]
'You (polite) are a poet.'

- (36) Semantic agreement with honorific *Vie* 'you' in Bulgarian (Dončeva-Mareva 1978)

finite verb	active participle	adjective	noun
[0%]	4% (N=167)	97% (N=163)	[100%]

The data fit well with Comrie's Predicate Hierarchy (1975), discussed in Corbett (2006: 230-231).

8.5 Canonical limit on lexical eccentricity

Criterion 15: Lexical items may have idiosyncratic inherent specification but may not canonically have idiosyncratic contextual specification.

English-prime (Corbett 2000: 66-67: **peesh* 'cloned sheep')

- (37) This *peesh* has been fed. [Hypothetical] (one *peesh*)
(38) This *peeshes* has been fed. [Hypothetical, claimed excluded] (more than one)

Russian: distributive *po*

- (39) *po dva po tri po pjat'*
by two.ACC by three.ACC by five.ACC
'two each' 'three each' 'five each'
- (40) *po odn-omu*
by one-DAT
'one each'

9 The classic morphosyntactic gambit: Latvian

The Baltic language Latvian shows 'star' gambit behaviour:

- it is mentioned by Zaliznjak (1973/2002: 630-631) in his discussion of non-autonomous values, and has been the subject of intermittent discussion since then, with contributions by Fennell (1975), Löttsch (1978), Matthiassen (1997: 41), Holvoet (2000); Andronov (2001) gives an explicit account following Zaliznjak's set-theoretical method.
- it is a genuinely challenging gambit, since there are several conflicting lines of argument.³

³ I am extremely grateful to Axel Holvoet, for his expert explanations of Latvian over several years, also to Terje Matthiassen and Jānis Valdmanis for help with the Latvian data and to Matthew Baerman for useful discussion of the issues.

- (41) Latvian nominal paradigm (typical presentation: Veksler & Jurik 1978: 25)

<i>galds</i> ‘table’	singular	plural
nominative	gald-s	gald-i
genitive	gald-a	gald-u
accusative	gald-u	gald-us
instrumental	gald-u	gald-iem
dative	gald-am	gald-iem
locative	gald-ā	gald-os

Latvian (Veksler & Jurik 1978: 87):

- (42) Skolotāji runā par grāmat-u
 teachers talk about book-SG.ACC
 ‘The teachers are talking about a book.’
- (43) Skolotāji runā par grāmat-ām
 teachers talk about book-PL.DAT/INS
 ‘The teachers are talking about books.’
- (44) Grūti dzīvot bez draug-a
 hard live.INF without friend-SG.GEN
 ‘It’s hard to live without a friend.’
- (45) Grūti dzīvot bez draug-iem
 hard live.INF without friend-PL.DAT/INS
 ‘It’s hard to live without friends.’

Latvian postpositions (Axel Holvoet, personal communication):

- (46) man-a draug-a dēļ
 1SG.POSS-SG.GEN.M friend-SG.GEN because.of
 ‘because of my friend’
- (47) man-u draug-u dēļ
 1SG.POSS-PL.GEN friend-PL.GEN because.of
 ‘because of my friends’

9.1 Comparison with Turkish

	noun		pronoun					
	‘house’		1st person		2nd person		3rd person	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
NOM	ev	ev-ler	ben	biz	sen	siz	o	onlar
GEN	ev-in	ev-ler-in	ben-im	biz-im	sen-in	siz-in	onun	onların

Figure 5: Turkish forms governed by *gibi* ‘like’ (Matthew Baerman, p.c., Lewis 1967: 85-86, Kornfilt 1997: 423-424, Jaklin Kornfilt p.c.)

10 Conclusion

- the data present some remarkable analytical challenges
- they are thrown into relief by the Canonical Approach
- in terms of canonical morphosyntax, many languages are canonical much of the time
- these very interesting ‘gambits’ should not escape us

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