The Interface of Syntax and Information Structure

Steedman’s CCG approach

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A CCG approach to information structure

Combinatory Categorial Grammar (CCG; Steedman 2000a,b)

- CCG in a nutshell
- Structure, intonation, and information structure
- The two dimensions of information structure
- Combinatory Prosody

CCG in a nutshell

- Syntactically potent elements such as verbs are associated with a syntactic category that identifies them as functions and specifies the type and directionality of their arguments and the type of their result.

- A “result leftmost” notation is used:
  - $\alpha/\beta$ is a rightward-combining functor over a domain $\beta$ into a range $\alpha$
  - $\alpha\beta$ is the corresponding leftward-combining functor.
  - $\alpha$ and $\beta$ may themselves be functional categories.

(1) proved := ($S\backslash NP$)/$NP$

Rules and derivations

- Functor categories can combine with their arguments by the following rules:

  (2) Forward application ($>$)
  \[
  X/Y \ Y \Rightarrow X
  \]

  (3) Backward application ($<$)
  \[
  Y \ X\backslash Y \Rightarrow X
  \]

- Derivations are written as shown below, on the left side. Note the direct correspondence to the upside-down constituency tree shown on the right.

Marcel proved completeness
$$NP \quad (S\backslash NP)/NP \quad NP \quad NP\quad completeness \quad NP \quad VP \quad S\backslash NP \quad S$$
**Semantics and Principle of Type Transparency**

- The lexical categories can be augmented with an explicit identification of their semantic interpretation and the rules of functional application are accordingly expanded with an explicit semantics.

  (4) proved := (S\NP)/NP : prove'

  (5) Forward application (>)

  \[ X/Y : f \ Y : a \Rightarrow X : fa \]

- The semantic interpretation of all combinatory rules is fully determined by the Principle of Type Transparency:

  All syntactic categories reflect the semantic type of the associated logical form, and all syntactic combinatory rules are type-transparent versions of one of a small number of semantic operations over functions including application, composition, and type-raising.

**Example derivation with semantics**

Marcel NP : marcel'
proved (S\NP)/NP : prove'
completeness NP : completeness'
> S\NP : prove' completeness' marcel'

**More rule schemata**

CCG includes linguistically motivated rule schemata such as the one for coordination of constituents of like type shown below:

(6) Coordination (< & >)

\[ X \text{ conj } X \Rightarrow X \]

**Combinators**

- In order to account for coordination of contiguous strings that do not constitute traditional constituents, CCG allows certain operations on functions called "combinators", including the rule of functional composition in (7).

  (7) Forward composition (>B)

  \[ X/Y : f \ Y/Z : g \Rightarrow X/Z : \lambda x.f(gx) \]

- CCG includes type-raising rules, which turn arguments into functions over functions-over-such-arguments.

  (8) Forward type-raising (>T)

  \[ X : a \Rightarrow T/(T\ X) : \lambda f.f a \]

  (9) Backward type-raising (<T)

  \[ X : a \Rightarrow T\ (T/X) : \lambda f.f a \]

  \( X \) ranges over argument categories (e.g., NP and PP). The rules are order-preserving, e.g., (8) can turn an NP into a rightward-looking function over leftward functions, preserving the linear order of subjects and predicates.
**Non-standard surface structures**

- Complement-taking verbs like *think*, VP/S, can compose with fragments like *Marcel proved*, S/NP, which accounts for right-node raising (10), and also provides the basis for an analysis of unbounded dependencies (11).

(10) [I disproved]$_{S/NP}$ and [you think that Marcel proved]$_{S/NP}$ completeness.

(11) the result that [you think that Marcel proved]$_{S/NP}$

Strings such as *you think that Marcel proved* are taken to be surface constituents of type S/NP.

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**Motivating non-standard surface structures**

- According to Steedman (2000a), the non-standard surface structures are not spurious ambiguities but relevant since they subsume the intonation structures needed to explain the possible intonation contours for sentences of English.

- Intonational boundaries contribute to determining which of the possible combinatorial derivations is intended.

- The interpretations of the constituents that arise from these derivations are related to semantic distinctions of information structure and discourse focus.

- Steedman’s claims:
  - Where intonational boundaries are present, they contribute to disambiguation.
  - Conversely, any such boundaries must be consistent with some syntactic derivation, or ill-formedness will result.

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**Examples for impossible intonation boundaries**

    b. * (Seymour prefers the nuts) (and bolts approach).
    c. * (They only asked whether I knew the woman who chaired) (the zoning board).
Steedman’s claims:

- **Surface structure and information structure** coincide, the latter simply consisting in the interpretation associated with a constituent analysis of the sentence.

- **Intonation** coincides with **surface structure**, and hence information structure, in the sense that all intonational boundaries coincide with syntactic boundaries (but not all syntactic boundaries are intonationally marked).

As a result, fragments such as *Marcel proved* in (13c), are not only prosodic constituents but surface syntactic constituents, complete with interpretations.

(13) a. Marcel proved completeness.

b. Marcel proved completeness

c. *Marcel proved completeness*

(14) Q: I know who proved soundness. But who proved completeness?

A: *(Marcel) (proved completeness).*

H* L L+H* LH%

(15) Q: I know which result Marcel predicted. But which result did Marcel prove?

A: *(Marcel proved (completeness)).*

L+H* LH% H* LL%

**Evidence:** Exchanging the answer tunes between the two contexts in (14) and (15) yields complete incoherence.

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**Theme and Rheme and their intonational realization**

Steedman observes the following relationship for English:

- The L+H* LH% tune is associated with the **theme**.

- The H* L and H* LL% tunes (among others) are associated with the **rheme**.
Intonationally unmarked themes/rhemes

• There also are *intonationally unmarked themes*:

(16) Q: Which result did Marcel prove?
   A: (Marcel proved) (COMPLETENESS).
       \[ H^* \quad LL\%

(17) Q: What do you know about Marcel?
   A: (Marcel) (proved COMPLETENESS).
       \[ H^* \quad LL\%

• The same contour can also occur with an *all-rheme* utterance:

(18) Guess what? (Marcel proved completeness!)
    \[ H^* \quad LL\%

Semantic characterization of theme and rheme

• Following Jackendoff (1972), the *theme* is characterized semantically via
  functional abstraction, using the notation of \( \lambda \)-calculus, as in (19),
  corresponding to the theme of (15) and (16).

(19) \( \lambda x. \text{prove'} x \text{ marcel'} \)

• When such a function is supplied with an argument in the form of the rheme,
  it reduces to give a proposition, with the same predicate-argument relation as
  the canonical sentence.

(20) \( \text{prove'} \text{ completeness'} \text{ marcel'} \)

Semantic characterization of theme and rheme (cont.)

• The \( \lambda \)-abstraction operator is closely related to the existential quantifier \( \exists \)

(21) \( \exists x. \text{prove'} x \text{ marcel'} \)

• The *theme* can be associated with the *rheme alternative set*: the set of
  propositions that could instantiate the corresponding existentially quantified
  proposition.

(22) \( \{ \text{prove'} \text{ decidability'} \text{ marcel'}
         \text{prove'} \text{ soundness'} \text{ marcel'}
         \text{prove'} \text{ completeness'} \text{ marcel'} \}\)

• The theme tune and the rheme tune can be specified in semantic terms:

(23) Theme tunes *presuppose* a rheme alternative set.
    Rheme tunes *restrict* the rheme alternative set.

Focus and Background

• Within both theme and rheme, those words that contribute to distinguishing
  the theme and the rheme of an utterance from other alternatives made
  available by the context may be marked via a pitch accent.

(24) Q: I know that Marcel likes the man who wrote the musical. But who does he
    admire?
   A: (Marcel \text{ admires} (the woman who \text{ directed} the musical)).

   \[ \text{background focus background focus background} \]

   \[ \begin{array}{ccc}
   \text{theme} & \text{background} & \text{rheme}
   \end{array} \]
Themes, pitch accents, and the theme alternative set

- The significance of the presence or absence of primary pitch accents within a theme lies in the prior existence of a theme differing in its translation only in those elements corresponding to the accented items.

- The presence of pitch accents in the translation of themes is marked by distinguishing the corresponding constant with an asterisk.

\[(25) \exists x. \text{admires}' x \text{ marcel}' \]

- The set of alternative themes is called the theme alternative set.

\[(26) \{ \exists x. \text{admires}' x \text{ marcel}' \}
\{ \exists x. \text{likes marcel}' \} \]

- Such an utterance is only felicitous if a compatible prior theme can be retrieved or accommodated (i.e., the theme alternative set contains more than one element).

Combinatory Prosody: Pitch Accents

- Six pitch accents are distinguished as markers either of theme (θ) or rheme (ρ).

\[(27) \theta\text{-markers: } L+H^*, L^*+H^*\]

\[(28) \rho\text{-markers: } H^*, L^*, H^*+L^*, H^*+L\]

- Pitch accents affect both the syntactic category and the interpretation of the words they occur on.

  - With basic types, such as NP, the effect of a θ- or ρ-marking accent is to associate with the category a value of θ or ρ on a feature information, which is notated as NP_θ or NP_ρ.

  - With function types, such as S\NP, the effect of a θ- or ρ-marking accent is to θ- or ρ-mark the domain and range of the function, as in S_θ\NP_ρ.

  - Any argument that combines with such a marked function has to be compatible with its theme- or rheme-hood.

Combinatory Prosody: Pitch Accents (cont.)

- θ- and ρ-marking happens pre-syntactically, at the level of lexical categories.

\[(28) \text{proved} := (S_\rho\NP_\rho)/\NP_\rho : \lambda x.\lambda y. \ast \text{prove}' xy \]

\[H^*\]

- All lexical items in a sentence are associated with a pitch accent or with the "null tone", a phonological category corresponding to the absence of any tone.

- This null tone
  - marks a syntactic category with a null information feature value η,
  - which is a variable unique to each particular occurrence of the null tone, that ranges over the theme and rheme markers θ and ρ (and nothing else except η itself).

\[(29) \text{proved} := (S_\eta\NP_\eta)/\NP_\eta : \lambda x.\lambda y. \ast \text{prove}' xy\]

Combinatory Prosody: Spreading of theme and rheme

- The phonologically augmented categories allow intonational tunes to be spread over arbitrarily large constituents.

\[(30) \text{Marcel} \quad \text{PROVED} \quad \text{COMPLETENESS} \]

\[L+H^* \quad \text{LH}^%\]

\[\left( S/(S\NP) : \lambda p. p \text{ marcel}' \right) / \left( S_\rho\NP_\rho / \NP_\rho : \lambda x.\lambda y. \ast \text{prove}' xy \right) \quad \text{B}\]

\[S_\eta/\NP_\eta : \lambda x. \ast \text{prove}' x \text{ marcel}'\]
Iterated compositions of the same kind have the effect of allowing the theme and rheme markers associated with the pitch accents to spread unboundedly across any sequence that forms a grammatical constituent according to the combinatory grammar.

\[ (31) \text{ALICE says he proved COMPLETENESS} \]

\[ \frac{S_\theta/(S\theta \setminus NP_\theta)}{(S\setminus NP)/S} >^B \frac{S/(S\setminus NP)}{(S\setminus NP)/NP} >^B \]

The distinction between intermediate phrases and intonational phrases:
- **Intermediate phrases** consist of one or more pitch accents, followed by either the L or the H boundary, also known as the *phrasal tone*.
- **An intonational phrase** consists of one or more intermediate phrases followed by an L% of H% boundary tone.

The intermediate phrase boundaries are assigned a category which transfers the theme/rheme marking to the corresponding semantic functions \( \theta' \) and \( \rho' \) via the variable \( \eta' \):

\[ (32) L, H := S\$\setminus S\$\eta : \lambda f. \eta' f \ (\text{with } S\$\eta = S\eta \text{ or mapping into } S\eta) \]

Syntactically, it maps \( \theta \) and \( \rho \)-marked categories onto identically \( \iota \)-marked categories, where \( \iota \) will no longer unify with \( \eta \), \( \theta \), or \( \rho \). This prevents further combination with anything except similarly complete prosodic phrases.

The modal operators \([S]\) and \([H]\) are intended to distinguish speaker's and hearer's knowledge (in a further to be worked out manner).

Two examples from Steedman (2000a)
Invisible boundaries

- The majority of themes in utterances are null themes, unmarked by explicit boundary tones.
- The position of the theme-rheme boundary is usually ambiguous in these cases, as for example in (34).
  
  (34) a. (I read a book about)\textit{Theme (COMPLETENESS)}\textit{Rheme}
  
  b. (I read)\textit{Theme (a book about COMPLETENESS)}\textit{Rheme}
  
  c. (I)\textit{Theme (read a book about COMPLETENESS)}\textit{Rheme}
  
  d. (I read a book about COMPLETENESS)\textit{Rheme}

- Steedman assumes that intermediate phrase L and H boundaries are indistinguishable from the null tone and may therefore be postulated anywhere there is no tone.

Invisible boundaries (cont.)

- Invisible boundaries can act as an edge of an unmarked theme.
- Undetectable boundaries are also allowed in other positions where there is no tone; for example, at the right-hand edge of an utterance-initial rheme followed by an unmarked theme.

(35) Q: Who proved completeness?
A: (Marcel) \textit{proved completeness}.

(36) I read a book about \textit{COMPLETENESS} L \textit{LL%}

Overview of Steedman’s architecture

- Steedman’s approach requires continuous constituents since only adjacent material can be combined. This seems to incorrectly predict that information structure units must be continuous.
- Steedman’s account seems to lack a restrictive theory of theme/rheme projection. How is projection of the rheme restricted, for example, from the subject onto the verbal projection, given that the subject and the verb can form a constituent in his approach? How can word order changes restrict projection?
- How can multiple focus (= rheme in Steedman’s terminology) constructions be dealt with?
- Is there convincing motivation for the empty categories Steedman introduces for invisible boundary tones?


