2. Introduction to syntax and parsing

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Reading: Jurafsky & Martin: 5.0–1, 12.0–12.3.3, 12.3.7, [13.1–2]. Bird et al: 8.0–4.
Syntax:

- The combinatorial structure of words.
- How words can be linearly organized: left/right precedence, and contiguity.
- How words can be hierarchically organized into phrases and sentences.
The cat hunted the squirrel living in the tree with persistence.

[ [The cat] [hunted [the squirrel [living [in [the tree] ]]] ] [with [persistence]] ]

Syntactic structure

2
The cat hunted the squirrel living in the tree with persistence.
The cat hunted the squirrel living in the tree with persistence.
Syntactic structure

- **Goal**: meaning, interpretation, semantics.
- So why do we care about syntax?
Grammars and parsing

- **Grammar:**
  - Formal specification of allowable structures.
    - Knowledge
    - Representation

- **Parsing:**
  - Analysis of string of words to determine the structure assigned by grammar.
    - Algorithm
    - Process
Main issues:

- Which words are grouped together into phrases.
- How words within a phrase project the properties of a single, common **word** (the **head** of the phrase).
- How different phrases **relate** to each other.

Grammar encodes these relations. Some grammars interpret these relations with respect to meaning.
Good and bad grammars

• There are many possible grammars for any natural language.
  • Some are better than others.

• Desiderata:
  • Faithfulness to (vastly divergent) details about language.
  • Economy of description.
  • Fidelity to some prevailing linguistic intuition.
  • Efficiency of parsing.
Elements of grammar

- **Primitives**: lexical categories or parts of speech.
  - Each *word-type* is a member of one or more.
  - Each *word-token* is an instance of exactly one.
  e.g. *The cat in the hat sat.*

- Categories are **open** or **closed** to new words.

- Eight main categories, many subcategories.
  - Nine
  - Seven
  - Twenty-three
Elements of grammar

- **Primitives**: lexical categories or parts of speech.
  - Each *word-type* is a member of one or more.
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- Categories are *open* or *closed* to new words.
- Eight main categories, many subcategories.
- The categories might possibly be language-specific as well.
Parts of speech 1

- **Nouns**: denote an object, a concept, a place, ...
  - **Count nouns**: dog, spleen, Band-Aid, ...
  - **Mass nouns**: water, wheat, ...
  - **Proper nouns**: Fred, New York City, ...
- **Pronouns**: he, she, you, I, they, ...
- **Adjectives**: denote an attribute of the denotation of a noun.
  - **Intersective**: pink, furry, ...
  - **Measure**: big, ...
  - **Intensional**: former, alleged, ...
• **Determiners, articles:** specify certain attributes of the denotation of a noun that are grammatically relevant.
  - *the, a, some, …*

• **Verbs:** predicates, denote an action or a state. Numerous distinctions, e.g. transitivity:
  - **Intransitive:** *sleep, die, …*
  - **Transitive:** *eat, kiss, …*
  - **Ditransitive:** *give, sell, …*
  - **Copula:** *be, feel, become, …*
Adverbs: denote an attribute of the denotation of a predicate.
- Time and place: today, there, now, …
- Manner: happily, furtively, …
- Degree: much, very, …

Prepositions: relate two phrases with a location, direction, manner, etc.
- up, at, with, in front of, before, …
- **Conjunctions**: combine two clauses or phrases:
  - Coordinating conjunctions: *and, or, but*
  - Subordinating conjunctions: *because, while,…*
- **Interjections**: stand-alone emotive expressions:
  - *um, wow, oh dear, balderdash, crikey, …*
Elements of grammar

- **Combinations:**
  - **Phrase:** a hierarchical grouping of words and/or phrases.
  - **Clause:** a phrase consisting of a verb and (almost) all of its dependents.
  - **Sentence:** a clause that is syntactically independent of other clauses.

- Can be represented by tree (or a labelled bracketing).

- **Terminology:** A *constituent* is a well-formed phrase with overtones of semantic and/or psychological significance.
Types of phrase

- **Noun phrase (NP):**
  - a mouse
  - mice
  - Mickey
  - the handsome marmot
  - the handsome marmot on the roof
  - the handsome marmot whom I adore

- **Verb phrase (VP):**
  - laughed loudly
  - quickly gave the book to Mary
Types of phrase 2

- Adjective phrase (AP):
  - green
  - proud of Kyle
  - very happy that you went

- Prepositional phrase (PP):
  - in the sink
  - without feathers
  - astride the donkey
Clauses and sentences

**Clauses:**
- Ross remarked upon Nadia’s dexterity
- to become a millionaire by the age of 30
- that her mother had lent her for the banquet

**Sentences:**
- Ross remarked upon Nadia’s dexterity.
- Nathan wants to become a millionaire by the age of 30.
- Nadia rode the donkey that her mother had lent her for the banquet.
- The handsome marmot on the roof [in dialogue].
Clauses and sentences

- Clauses may act as noun phrases:
  - *To become a millionaire by the age of 30 is what Ross wants.*
  - *Nadia riding her donkey is a spectacular sight.*
  - *Ross discovered that Nadia had been feeding his truffles to the donkey.*
The structure of an idealized phrase

XP $\rightarrow$ ZP  X  YP

subject or pre-modifier

head word

object, complement or post-modifier, adjunct
Example phrases

```
AP
  |--- ADV
  |   |--- very
  |--- A
  |   |--- happy
S
  |--- that you went

VP
  |--- ADV
  |   |--- quickly
  |--- V
  |   |--- go
PP
  |--- to the store
PP
  |--- with Maya

S
  |--- NP
  |   |--- Kim
  |--- AUX
  |   |--- will
  |--- VP
  |   |--- go
```
A context-free grammar is a quadruple $G = (V_t, V_n, P, S)$, where

- $V_t$ is a finite set of terminal symbols.
- $V_n$ is a finite set of non-terminal symbols.
- $P$ is a finite set of production rules of the form $A \rightarrow \alpha$ where $A \in V_n$ and $\alpha$ is a sequence of symbols in $(V_n \cup V_t)^*$.
- $S \in V_n$ is the start symbol.
A very simple grammar

\[ S = S, P = \{ \]

\begin{align*}
S & \rightarrow NP \ VP \\
NP & \rightarrow Det \ N \\
NP & \rightarrow Det \ Adj \ N \\
NP & \rightarrow NP \ PP \\
VP & \rightarrow V \\
VP & \rightarrow V \ NP \\
PP & \rightarrow P \ NP \\
Det & \rightarrow \text{the} | \text{a} | \text{an} \\
Adj & \rightarrow \text{old} | \text{red} | \text{happy} | \ldots \\
N & \rightarrow \text{dog} | \text{park} | \text{statue} | \text{contumely} | \text{run} | \ldots \\
V & \rightarrow \text{saw} | \text{ate} | \text{run} | \text{disdained} | \ldots \\
P & \rightarrow \text{in} | \text{to} | \text{on} | \text{under} | \text{with} | \ldots \\
\end{align*}

\[ \}

Lexical categories:
NT’s that rewrite as a single T.

\[ V_t \text{ and } V_n \text{ can be inferred from the production rules.} \]

\[ The \ lexicon: \]
In practice, a separate data structure
Terminology

- **Non-terminal (NT):**
  A symbol that occurs on the left-hand side (LHS) of some rule.

- **Pre-terminal:** a kind of non-terminal located on the LHS of a lexical entry.

- **Terminal (T):**
  A symbol that never occurs on the LHS of a rule.

- **Start symbol:**
  A specially designated NT that must be the root of any tree derived from the grammar.

  In our grammars, it is usually S for sentence.
• **Parsing**: Determining the structure of a sequence of words, given a grammar.
  
  • Which grammar rules should be used?
  
  • To which symbols (words / terminals and nodes / non-terminals) should each rule apply?
Input:

- A context-free grammar.
- A sequence of words
  
  \( \text{Time flies like an arrow} \)

or, more precisely, of sets of parts of speech.

\[ \{\text{noun, verb}\} \quad \{\text{noun, verb}\} \quad \{\text{verb, prep}\} \quad \{\text{det}\} \quad \{\text{noun}\} \]

Process:

- Working from left to right, \textit{guess} how each word fits in.
If a guess leads to failure (parse is stymied), **back up to a choice point** and try a different guess.

- Backtracking, non-determinism.
- At each guess, must save state of parse on a stack.
- (Or, explore in parallel.)

Want to guess right:

- Order of preference for rules.
Top-down parsing

- **Top-down** or **rule-directed** parsing: “Can I take these rules and match them to this input?”
  - Initial goal is an S.
  - Repeatedly look for rules that decompose /expand current goals and give new goals.  
    *E.g.*, goal of S may decompose to goals NP and VP.
  - Eventually get to goals that look at input.  
    *E.g.*, goal of NP may decompose to *det noun*.
  - Succeed iff entire input stream is accounted for as S.
Top-down parsing

• Example: A *recursive descent parser.*
  ```python
  >>> nltk.app.rdparsesr()
  ```

• Operations on *leftmost frontier node:*
  • *Expand* it.
  • *Match* it to the next input word.
Available Expansions

S -> NP VP
NP -> Det N PP
NP -> Det N
VP -> V NP PP
VP -> V NP
VP -> V
PP -> P NP
NP -> 'I'
Det -> 'the'
Det -> 'a'
N -> 'man'
N -> 'park'
N -> 'dog'
N -> 'telescope'
V -> 'ate'
V -> 'saw'
P -> 'in'
P -> 'under'
P -> 'with'

Last Operation: Expand: N -> 'man'

Step Autostep Expand Match Backtrack
Top-down parsing

• Choice of next operation (in NLTK demo):
  • If it’s a terminal, try matching it to input.
  • If it’s a non-terminal, try expanding with first-listed untried rule for that non-terminal.
Bottom-up parsing

- **Bottom-up or data-directed** parsing: “Can I take this input and match it to these rules?”
  - Try to find rules that match a possible PoS of the input words …
  - … and then rules that match the constituents so formed.
  - Succeed iff the entire input is eventually matched to an S.
Bottom-up parsing

Example: A *shift–reduce* parser.

```python
>>> nltk.app.srp.parser()
```

Operations:

- **Shift** next input word onto stack.
- Match the top $n$ elements of stack to RHS of rule, *reduce* them to LHS.
Available Reductions

Stack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NP</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Det</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>Det</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remaining Text

in the park with a statue

Last Operation: Reduce: NP -> Det N
Bottom-up parsing

• Choice of next operation (in NLTK demo):
  • Always prefer reduction to shifting.
  • Choose the first-listed reduction that applies.

• Choice of next operation (in real life):
  • Always prefer reduction to shifting for words, but not necessarily for larger constituents.
Problems

• Neither top-down nor bottom-up search exploits useful idiosyncrasies that CFG rules, alone or together, often have.

• **Problems:**
  • Recomputation of constituents.
  • Recomputation of common prefixes.

• **Solution:** Keep track of:
  • Completed constituents.
  • Partial matches of rules.