Introduction

Some brief notes on linguistic description.

As readers of this textbook you certainly are graduates from a course in phonemics; and even if not, you will be familiar with phonetic terms, at least with those that are well-known generally, such as 'syllable, foot, stress, intonation, sentence', etc. Nevertheless, are you certain about what the widespread concept of 'word' means to us? There are linguists who claim for 'word' to be a fundamental notion in the description of language on the phonic level and there are also those who oppose, arguing that the concept of 'word' is only workable on higher levels, say, morphological, syntactic, and even semantic. Indeed, it is rather difficult to present a fair definition of 'word': Is it a unit of morphology, or syntax, or perhaps meaning; or of all these planes, in the end? And if so, we must ask a question why linguists operate with other terms, besides others 'morpheme, sentence, lexeme'? Answers can be found with your tutors, and in abundant literature, of course[1]. Let us now only realise that although 'word' cannot well be pushed away from the linguist's vocabulary, the truly scientific approach has always searched for something to provide a theory which may be general enough for all languages. Inspired by the ingenious phoneme concept linguists began to work with 'morpheme' as a certain minimal unit of the grammatical structure. In good hope that this concept will bring about desired simplicity in the grammatical description, its advocates still have to solve some problems involved: namely, they must identify the morphemes, then compile a list of all of them, classify them, and finally, state their distribution. Once this is done, we can imagine that units of higher rank (such as words and sentences) are built of them. Thus, viewed from the other way around, 'morpheme' is believed to be a minimal "grammatical passage" arrived at by the piecemeal segmentation of larger units of discourse, the passage that cannot be subdivided any further without the loss of meaning. Obviously, should such a minimal meaningful unit be made to split further on, it would lose its identity and break down, ultimately, to speech-sounds. This is an easily comprehensible test to illustrate: *divide* represents but one morpheme, since no "shorter" form, e.g., *di*, the less so *d*, will be a carrier of meaning. However, we must admit that morpheme is composed of phonemes, which in 'speech' are often reflected as variants, e.g., *call<u>ed</u> [d]*, *kick<u>ed</u> [t]*, or alternations, e.g., *take – took*, or zero morphemes, e.g., *I put* (present) – *I put* (past). No wonder that the links between morphological structures to phonetic variation were soon referred to. As early as Trubeckoy spoke of 'morphonemics', where so-called morphoneme as a minimal abstract units was believed to underlie both phoneme and morpheme, combining the grammatical plane with the phonemic plane. Moreover, morphemes play a syntactic role, too. Thus, e.g., the *-ation* morpheme turns verbs into nouns, which undoubtedly have different syntactic properties; let us compare *We derive words.* : *Words are due to derivation.* Let us note, too, that morphemes are of various kinds, say, of different "effectiveness", with regard to meaning. They represent categories, one of them operating within the area of creating new naming units (say, words), the other within the area of word-forms.[2] We can understand easily that the abovementioned example, namely, the *-ation* morpheme is certainly of different category than *-s* in, e.g., *call<u>s</u>*. Correspondingly, the latter category, unlike the former, leave the syntactic properties of the base unchanged: in, e.g., *I call my friends.* : *He calls...* : *I / He called...* all the three forms, namely, *call/calls/called* are verbs functioning as predicates. In

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[1] See, for example, Kavka, S. "Morphology", in *Rudiments of English Linguistics I*, pp. 61-92.
[2] See more in Kavka, S. 2003b.

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other words, morphology as a "branch" of linguistic analysis deals with two sets of tasks: one that tackles word-forming and is elaborated in lexicology, and one that studies word-forms and is solved in the domain of grammar. This only is a very brief introduction to what will be discussed partly in Chapter One, and also in courses of syntax and lexicology. What we meant to show now is the belief that there are hardly any clear-cut boundaries between what is traditionally called linguistic disciplines, namely, phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicology. Following the **functional approach** to language phenomena we opt in for the interplay of all the features involved, which makes language exist and work as a balanced system.

The present textbook deals with the English verb after all. Both a prospective linguist and a practitioner are expected to realise the huge charge of information that the label 'verb' contains. As a matter of fact, 'verb' is also a notion of its own (originally, in Latin, it meant nothing else but 'word'!), a fairly abstract notion, ascribed to all words which show the same characteristic features. These can be listed, organised, perhaps also generalised, and testified both in 'langue' and 'parole'.[1] In order to make it illustrative, let us imagine that the verb is used in narration, as a command, invitation, etc., and these speaker's intentions are expected simultaneously on the interlocutor's part. It is **pragmatics** that examines the ways in which the meanings are interpreted by the listener / reader. The meanings of the verb, generalised as much as possible, are something that can be labelled 'actions', viewed as 'activities', 'events', or 'states'; these are studied by **semantics**. Yet before this discipline (as a science on meaning) is on programme, let us only realise that it does not only cover what is referred to as **lexical meaning** (*"What does this word mean?"*), but also **grammatical meaning** (expressing past, for instance, or non-reality of actions, or simply showing nominal characteristic of sentence members, and the like). Thus asking the question, e.g., *What are the semantics of the past tense in English?*, the linguist will describe all the functions that the past tense has. What s/he needs to do is the art of **grammatical description**, namely, the description of forms (see above: *call – called*; *speak –spoke*), as well as the description of **syntactic component** (e.g., *milk* is a 'noun' acting as the syntactic object in *He likes drinking milk*). Moreover, observing, describing, and respecting everything that embraces the verb's features from the point of view of morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, as well as understanding the interplay of all respective characteristics, is what we call **language analysis (of verb)**.

Readers of this textbook are expected to have learnt quite a lot on word-forms and, something at least, on fundamentals of grammatical meanings and semantic structures.[2] And so also they are expected to know quite a lot about the verb as one of so-called **word-classes**, or **parts of speech** (from Latin 'partes orationis'). Thus it may be possible for everybody interested to make a synthesis of all the facts on a higher level and to show that they are able to move over and across the quasi-borderlines between the respective linguistic disciplines.

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[1] See more in Kavka, S. 2003a.
[2] Readers of this textbook must have passed an obligatory course in 'Introduction to English Linguistics'. In order to revise the subject matter briefly see Kavka, S. 2003a.

Here is at least one example to illustrate:

> To express future actions either future tense or the 'be going to' construction or the preset tense are at our disposal. Counting continuous (progressive) forms, at least four grammatical forms can be used. In practice, of course, not all of them are employed. For instance, we could only hardly have the verbs expressing states rather than activities in continuous forms; hence we would reject as ungrammatical **I'll be liking it*. And yet the speaker's intentions play a decisive role in certain cases: thus *I'll be wanting it [the book] on the train*. sounds quite all right in the context "don't pack the book…": the sense of '*want*' that the speaker has in mind implies 'activity', something like '*read / study*'. Let us note that the four forms are not fully identical in their 'meanings' due to other reasons, too. Future actions are not conceived as real, and hence they are indicated by means of the auxiliary *will*, whose semantics points to that: what is implied here is clearly 'intention', and the predicate construction 'will+infinitive' does not usually refer to a fairly specific point in future. We would very probably prefer to say, e.g., *He will play Mozart* in the context "after he has studied the concerto". Now, if the context suggests "he has already begun to study the concerto", the preferred version would be *He is going to play Mozart.* Generally speaking, the more real as the action is, viewed by the speaker, the greater chance there is for a genuine indicative form to be used: thus *He is playing Mozart tonight* will be accepted as truly idiomatic. Having this 'semantics' in mind, we will also understand the present tense simple in the prototypical *Our train leaves at 5.17 hrs.* and *I cross the Rubicon.* The pragmatic aspect, too, should be taken into consideration: namely, speakers ought to be able to construct utterances in such a way that their intended meanings be decoded equally by interlocutors. For instance, *Will you make coffee?* is usually interpreted as a request, meaning "I would like you to make coffee"; if we expect nothing more but receive an answer to the unmarked yes/no question, and thus in order to avoid the potential ambiguity in interpretation, the grammatical form combining 'activity' semantics with the intentional meaning of *will* should be preferred, namely, *Will you be making coffee?*.

Chapter One

On the notion of 'Grammatical Category'.

The notion 'category' has been used widely in linguistics, and so everybody takes it for something granted. The same word is also used in everyday language, and people do not seem to have problems in understanding what it actually means. Yet are we certain enough what definition would be most appropriate to offer for 'grammatical category'? The etymology of the word may help a little: the Greek κατηγορειν [kategorein] had several meanings, and one of them, namely, *to predicate*, could be a good clue. Provided that we accept the fundamentals of Aristotelian logic, *to predicate* meant 'to attribute properties to things', and *categories* were modes, or simply, ways in which predications of things could be made. If we apply this approach to language phenomena, what we call nouns will be defined as 'substances', i.e. subjects of predication, while adjectives will be 'permanent qualities', and verbs 'dynamic qualities', these two functioning as predications proper. From the philosophical point of view we speak of so-called ontological approach: namely, the names of objects, their qualities, etc., are reflection of extra-lingual reality, and they are classified, i.e. **categorised** on a sufficiently general level to allow for an adequate description of languages. Briefly, a **category** can be understood as **any group of 'elements', or 'features'** which are **recognised in the description of particular languages.**

This definition will hold even if we accept 'syntactic aspect': as a matter of fact, the groups, or classes of elements, or features, are made out of grammatical components. Thus Alexandrians, for instance, claimed for the adjectives to be a subclass of nouns, simply because the two categories were inflected alike.[1] (Speakers of Slavic languages can imagine easily what we have in mind: *dobrá žena – dobré ženě – dobrou ženou – dobrými ženami*, etc.) This approach seems to have prevailed in linguistics through long centuries, mainly in the trends that can be viewed as formalist ones.

Functioning of language as a means of human communication is based on the existence and cooperation of two components, namely, (1) naming component, and (2) syntactic component. Hardly anybody could object to this; therefore it is right to assume that the 'elements / features' and their 'groups' are recognised on both the ontological and the syntactic grounds, or better: on the combination of these. Let us have an illustration: Anybody competent in English will know what *work* means; but could we speak of a substance or rather a quality of dynamic aspect in order to define the expression *work* as a noun-category or a verb-category? Here, undoubtedly, only its concrete syntactic position will decide; hence, e.g., *I go to work$_N$.* : *I work$_V$ hard.*

The categories of noun, adjective, verb, etc. are not the only ones to be employed in language description. If we say 'number', or 'tense', or if we refer to 'subject', or 'predicate', or 'circumstantial', we also use certain categories. Even beginners in linguistic studies will understand that these are of different ranks. Likewise larger tracks of utterances (e.g. complex sentences) are composed of smaller ones (e.g. clauses), the categories, too, are arranged in a fairly complex systems, and they are believed to be so elaborate that they can serve perfectly

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[1] As we can deduce from the preceding comment, Aristotle must have considered adjectives to be a subclass of verbs.

to the precise description of 'langue' of any particular language. Thus so-called **functional categories** (to use Lyon's terminology), namely, subject, object, predicate, and circumstantial, operate on the level of sentence / clause as so-called 'slots' (to use Pike's tagmemic approach term), and they are represented by **primary grammatical categories**, such as noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, numeral, preposition, conjunction, etc. The latter group shows their respective **secondary grammatical categories**, namely, number, case, tense, mood, and many others.

We must always bear in mind that in languages like English there is no direct one-to-one correspondence between the functional categories and the primary grammatical categories; just on the contrary, any functional 'slot' can practically be filled in with any 'filler'. This phenomenon, which we observe in Modern English, is called **conversion**, and it makes some linguists claim that the parts of speech merge, or even that they do not actually exist! And indeed, as we showed here above, the word *milk*, for instance, is defined as a noun only because our primary thought on *milk* relates to its ontological meaning, and consequently, to its most frequent syntactic use, namely, as a subject / object. (Interestingly, we would very probably hesitate to determine the same word *milk* as an adjective in *a milk factory*, although we must admit that the slot of attributive function is normally reserved to adjectives.)

Unless we try to follow a specific approach, it seems to be useful to recognise all the abovementioned categories, provided that we observe their hierarchy and complexity. This holds good for verbs too.

Verbs are believed
(1) to describe activities and states, in other words, to describe actions, of more or less dynamic aspect;
(2) to fill in the functional slot usually reserved to predicates; in other words, to represent the head of verb-phrase;
(3) to show the categories of person, number, tense, aspect, mood, and voice.

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The following chapters are meant to offer practical illustrations of cooperation of the categories within the respective classes 1, 2, and 3 as well as across the categories. Hence we can ask such questions as, for example, "What do tense and aspect have in common?", or "Does 'activity' coincide with the aspect category?" or "Is the substance of the notion 'number' in verbs identical with that in nouns?", and many others. Not all questions will be answered entirely in the text; it is desirable that even prospective linguists train their wit by themselves.