CORE SYNTAX

CHAPTER 2:

MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES
• What does syntax regulate?

• What is morph-syntactic feature?

• How do syntacticians motivate the existence of such features?
What is the nature of syntactic formatives?

- words

*word shapes* = morphological forms

✓ morphosyntactic features
What is a morphosyntactic feature?

It is a property of word that

• syntax is sensitive to
• may have morphological effect on the word
• may have semantic effect on the word
Morphosyntactic feature are the core elements of languages that relate sound and meaning.
morphosyntactic features

- interpretable
- uninterpretable
How are morphoantactic features such as the ones related to number represented?
PLURAL: N [plural]

SINGULAR: N [singular]
PLURAL: N [plural]

SINGULAR: N [ ]
PLURAL:  N [plural]

SINGULAR:  N [singular]

DUAL:  N [plural, singular]
default feature

Add [singular] to a noun which has no other number feature.
Features have binary values:

**PLURAL:**  N [-singular, +plural]

**SINGULAR:**  N [+singular, -plural]
PLURAL: N [number: plural]

SINGULAR: N [number: singular]
privative feature

A feature has no value, and may be present or not.
How are features motivated?
1. relations between
the shape of words (morphological forms) and
an effect on semantic interpretation
(e.g. Pl & Sing feature)
2. form without meaning

A variation in morphological form that makes no difference to semantic interpretation.

(e.g. scissors)
3. meaning without form

An effect on semantic interpretation, but none on morphological form.

(e.g. sheep)
4. no effect on semantic interpretation and morphological form

The feature must be posited because a syntactic relation must be established or the wrong prediction about grammaticality will result.

(e.g. case features)
Content of Words

- morphosyntactic features
- phonological features
- semantic features
QUESTION

If syntax relates features of words, then the question arises of whether phonological and semantic features of words are accessible to syntax?
ANSWER

NO, syntax only has access to morphosyntactic features.
phonological evidence

There are no syntactic relations that hold between words with high vowels, or words that have nasalized first syllables.

Of course there are phonological effects of syntactic relations.
There are no syntactic rules that are sensitive to semantic features.
apparent counterexample

The agreement Phenomenon in English
This syntactic rule does not care about whether the object referred to is semantically singular or plural, but rather it refers to whether the object is specified with the syntactic feature [plural].

For example

“scissors” is semantically singular, but triggers plural agreement in a verb.

The scissors are/*is lost.
“Scissors” has the morphosyntactic feature [plural] and that’s the feature responsible for plural agreement with the verb.
THE OTHER MAIN MORPHOSYNTACTIC FEATURES
MAJOR CATEGORY
FEATURES/ CATEGORY
FEATURES

Noun: [N]
Verb: [V]
Adjective: [A]
Preposition: [P]
PHI FEATURES (Ø- features)

**number feature:**
[singular],
[plural],
[plural,singular]

**person feature:** [1], [2], [ ], [1,2]

**gender feature:**
[masc], [fem] (may need others)
PROBLEM: overgeneration

[ 1 ], [ 2 ], [ 3 ], [ 1, 2 ], [ 1, 3 ], [ 2, 3 ], [ 1, 2, 3 ], [  ]
modification

I [ 1 ]
you [ 2 ]

he/ she / it [ ]

we [ 1 ]
you [ 2 ]

they [ ]
the result of this modification

first person: [ 1 ]

second person: [ 2 ]

third person: [ ]

fourth person: [ 1, 2 ]
inclusive pronoun: [ 1, 2, plural ]
“Shall we go to the cinema?”

exclusive pronoun: [ 1, plural ]
“We’re all going to the cinema, but you’re not.”
PHI FEATURES (Ø- features)

number feature:  
[singular],  
[plural],  
[plural,singular]

person feature: [1], [2], [ ], [1,2]

gender feature:  
[masc], [fem] (may need others)
Case features

nominative: [nom]
accusative: [acc]
genitive: [gen]

(may need others)
Examples (68) – (73)

Case features are uninterpretable.
verbal features

tense features

in English & Gaelic : past [past] v.s. non-past [ ]

The difference between English and Gaelic lie in how the semantic rules interpret the lack of a past feature.

English→ present v.s. Gaelic→ future
tense features

in Modern Irish:

past: [past]

future: [future]

present: [ ]

future perfect: [future, past]
other verbal features

**participle feature**

- present participle: $[V, \text{part}]$
- past participle: $[V, \text{past, part}]$

**infinitive feature**

$[\text{inf}]$
END OF CHAPTER TWO