

Introduction to syntactic theories

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09.10.2018



Main theories

- Merge theory
- Theta theory
- Case theory





Categories and Features

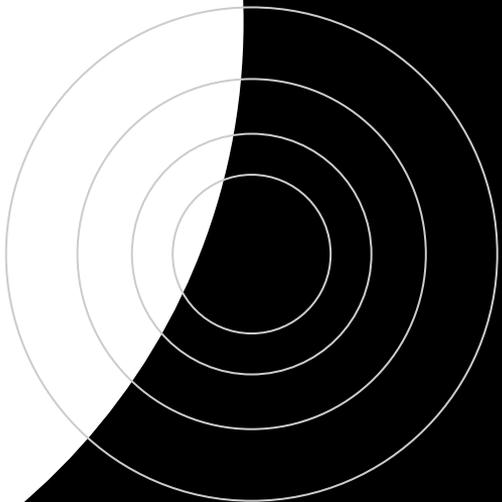
1. Categories
2. Features
3. Sub-features

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a large white number '1' centered within a dark gray circle. This circle is partially overlapped by a larger, lighter gray circle. The background of the slide is black, and a large white circle is positioned behind the text.

1

Combinatorial possibilities of words

Let's start with nouns

A decorative graphic on the right side of the slide. It consists of several concentric white circles of varying diameters, centered around a point on the right edge of the white circle. The circles overlap and create a ripple effect.

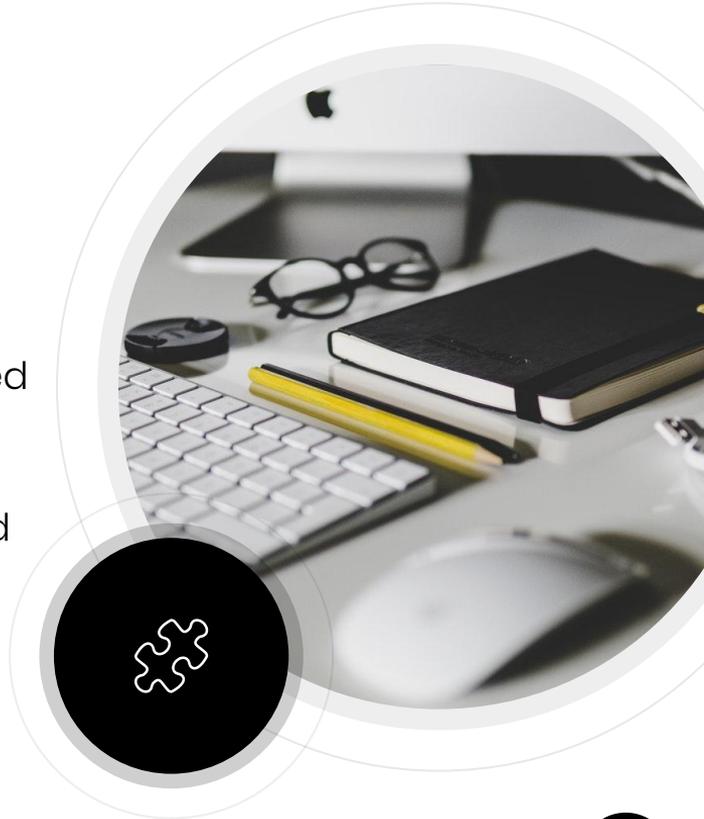
Combinatorial possibilities of nouns

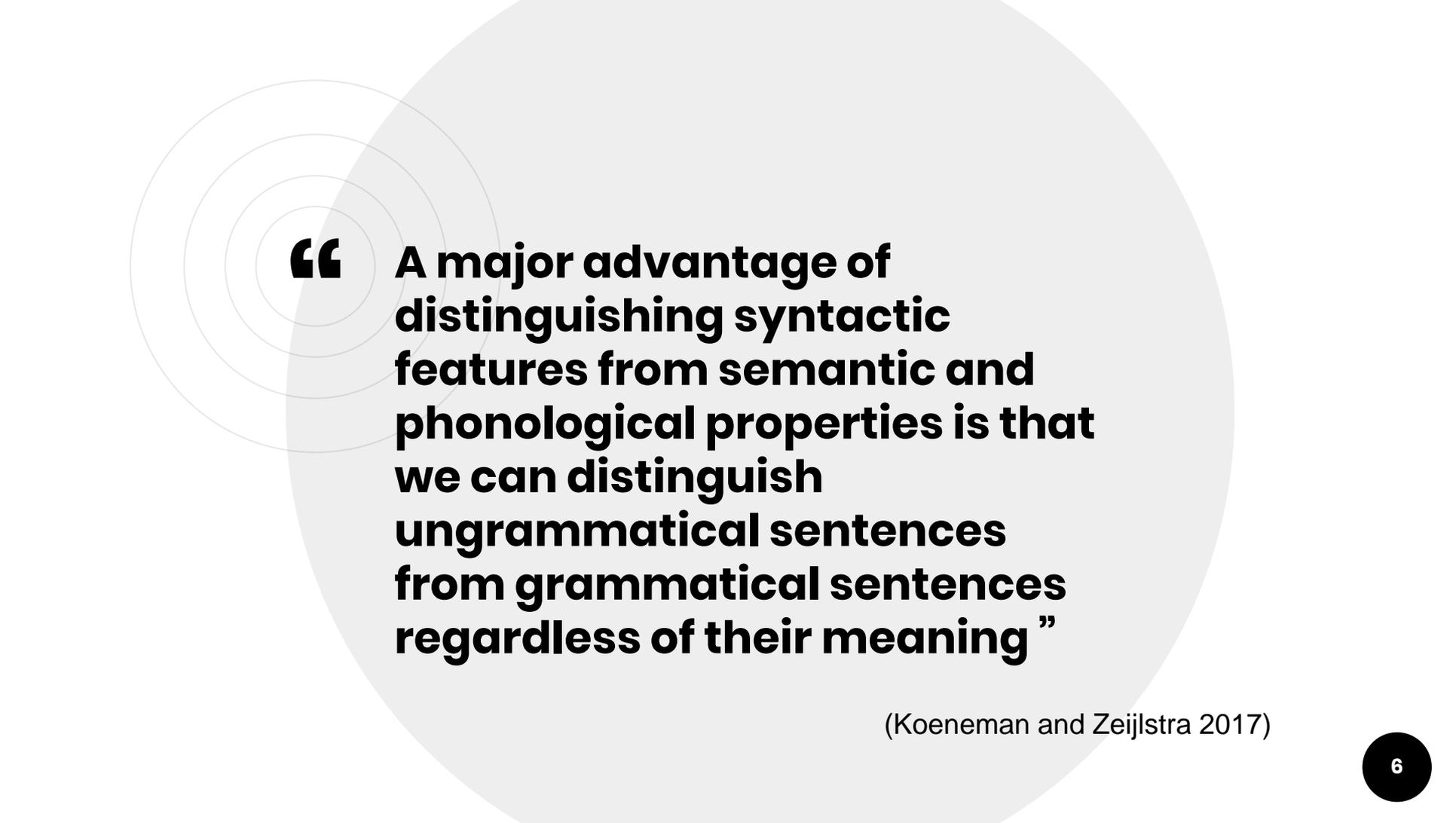
English

- Nouns can be preceded by articles
- Nouns can be modified by adjectives
- Nouns can be combined with plural morpheme -s

Georgian

- Nouns can be preceded by determiners (pronouns)
- Nouns can be modified by adjectives
- Nouns can be combined with case and number markers





“ A major advantage of distinguishing syntactic features from semantic and phonological properties is that we can distinguish ungrammatical sentences from grammatical sentences regardless of their meaning ”

(Koeneman and Zeijlstra 2017)

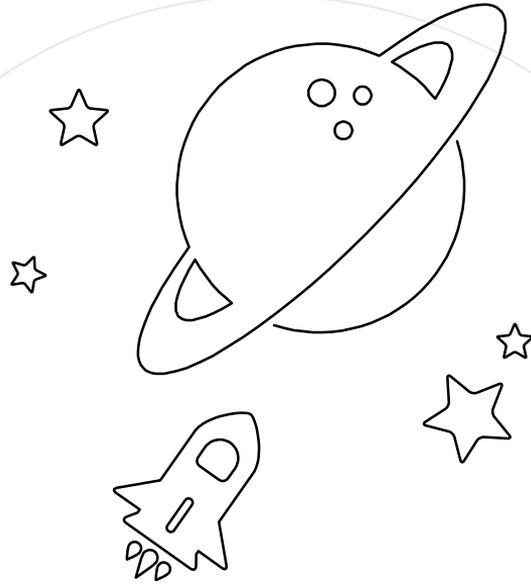
Grammaticality

- A good theory of syntax should: – Generate all of the grammatical sentences of a language –And none of the ungrammatical ones
- A sentence may be grammatical without being meaningful

The glump flattered

Глокая куздра штеко бодланула бокра и бокрячит бокренка





How to check grammaticality

- Cartoon test
- Substitution test



Cartoon test

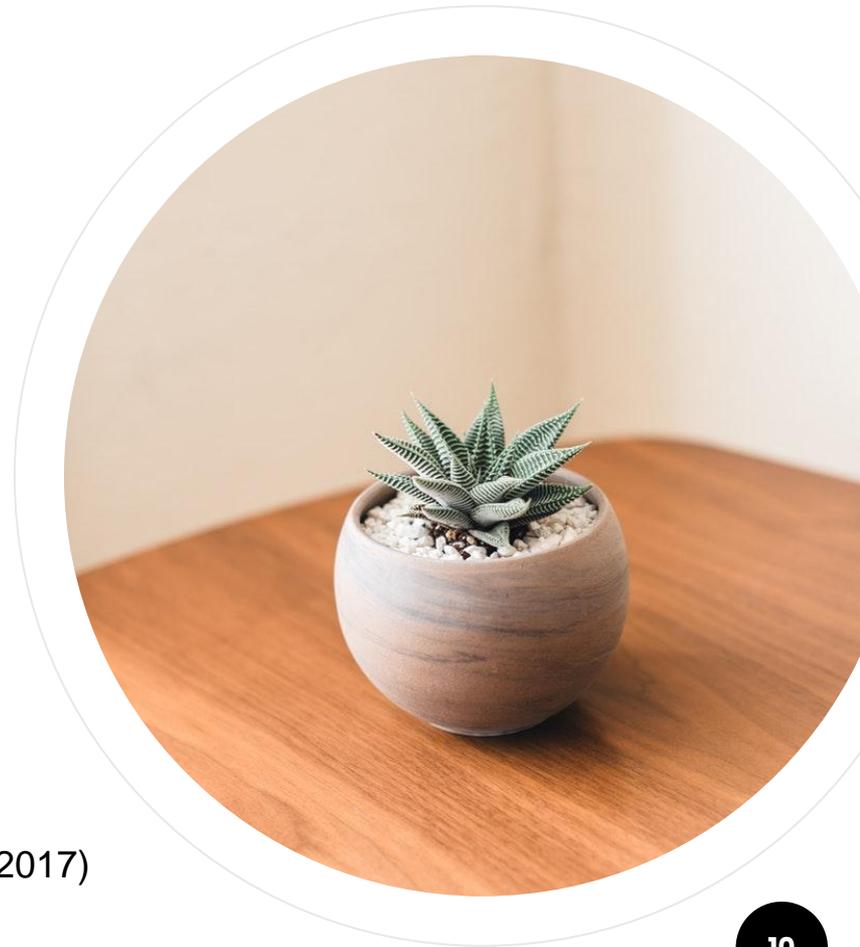
- *Giorgim aveji dalia* (semantically weird)
- *Giorgim q'ava dalia* (semantically right)

Grammatically both correct

Substitution test

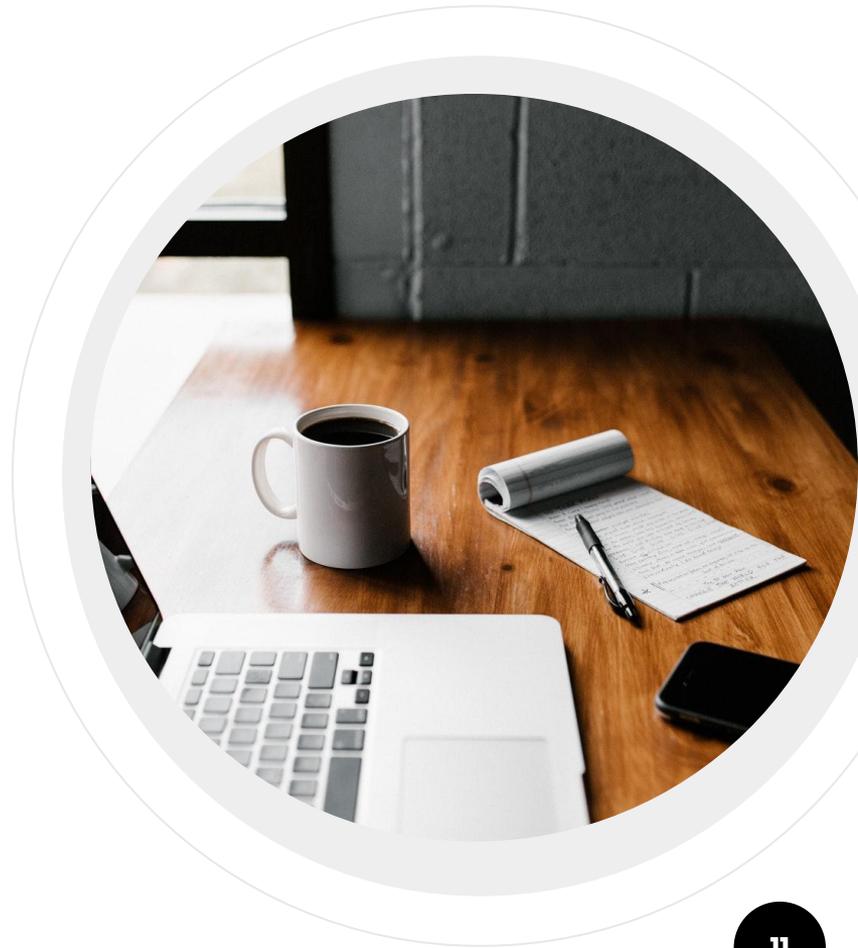
“If two elements X and Y share the same syntactic features, then in every grammatical sentence that contains X you can replace X by Y (and vice versa) and the sentence remains grammatical.”

(Koeneman and Zeijlstra 2017)

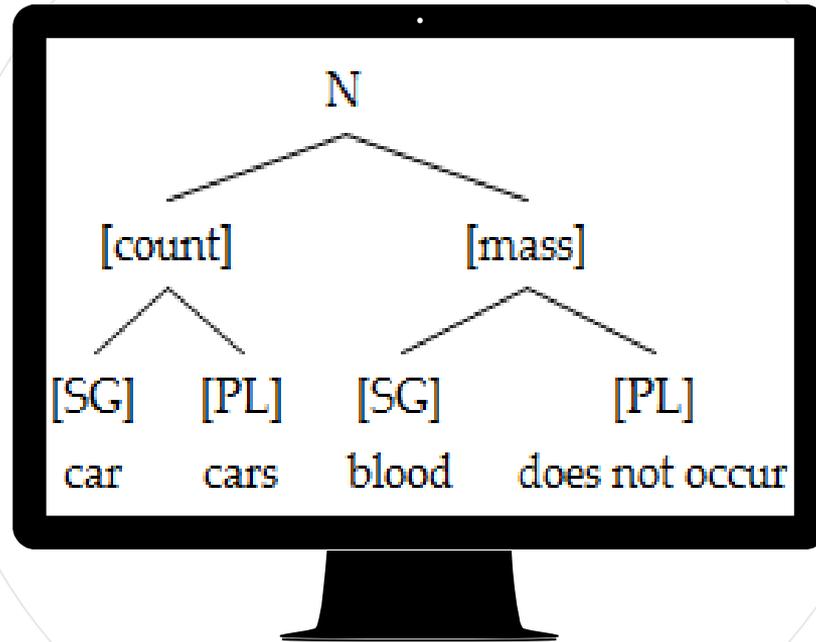


Substitution test

- a. John saw the red car.
- b. John saw the red cars.
- c. John saw red cars.
- d. * John saw red car.



Plural number



Use of articles in PL

არტიკლები	[მხოლოებითი] [თვლადი] [N]	[მრავლობითი] [თვლადი] [N]
განსაზღვრული [D]	the car	ან [უთვლადი: კრებითი და ნივთიერებათა] [N] the cars, the blood
განუსაზღვრელი [D]	a car	∅ cars, ∅ blood



Sub-features

Nouns [N]	[count]/[mass], [SG]/[PL]
Pronouns [D] [N]	[SG]/[PL], [1 st Person]/[2 nd Person]/[3 rd Person]

Categories

Open-classed
categories i.e. lexical
categories

- Nouns
- Verbs

Close-classed
categories i.e.
functional categories

- Articles
- Complementisers





Close-classed categories

- (a) there is a fixed number of members of such categories;
- (b) they have more grammatical function in the sentence;
- (c) in comparison with open-class lexical words, like nouns or verbs, they have more restricted meanings and are less detailed and less referential.

Close-classed categories in Georgian

- Postpositions
- Conjunctions
- Particles



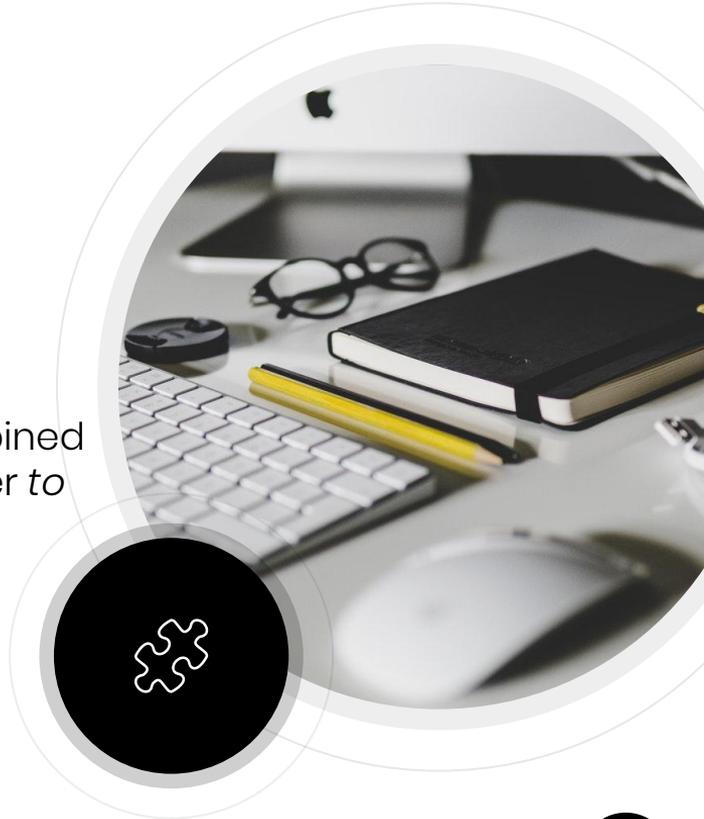
Verbs

Finite verb

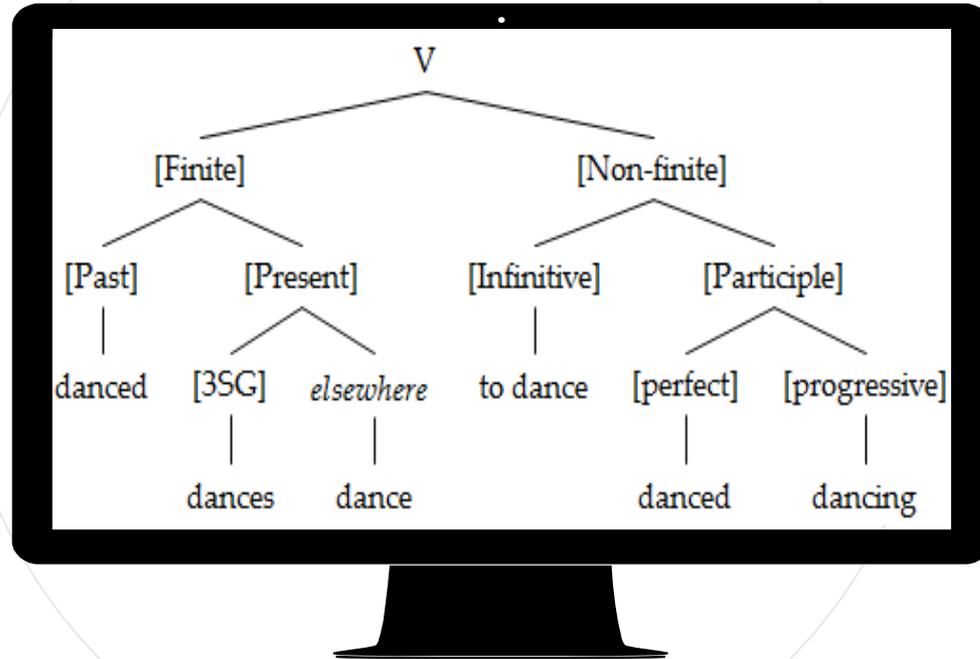
- is marked for tense
- is marked for agreement
- can be combined with a subject

Non-finite verb

- a real infinitive is combined with an infinitive marker *to*
- Participles denoting perfectness are accompanied by *have*
- Participles denoting progressiveness are accompanied by *be*



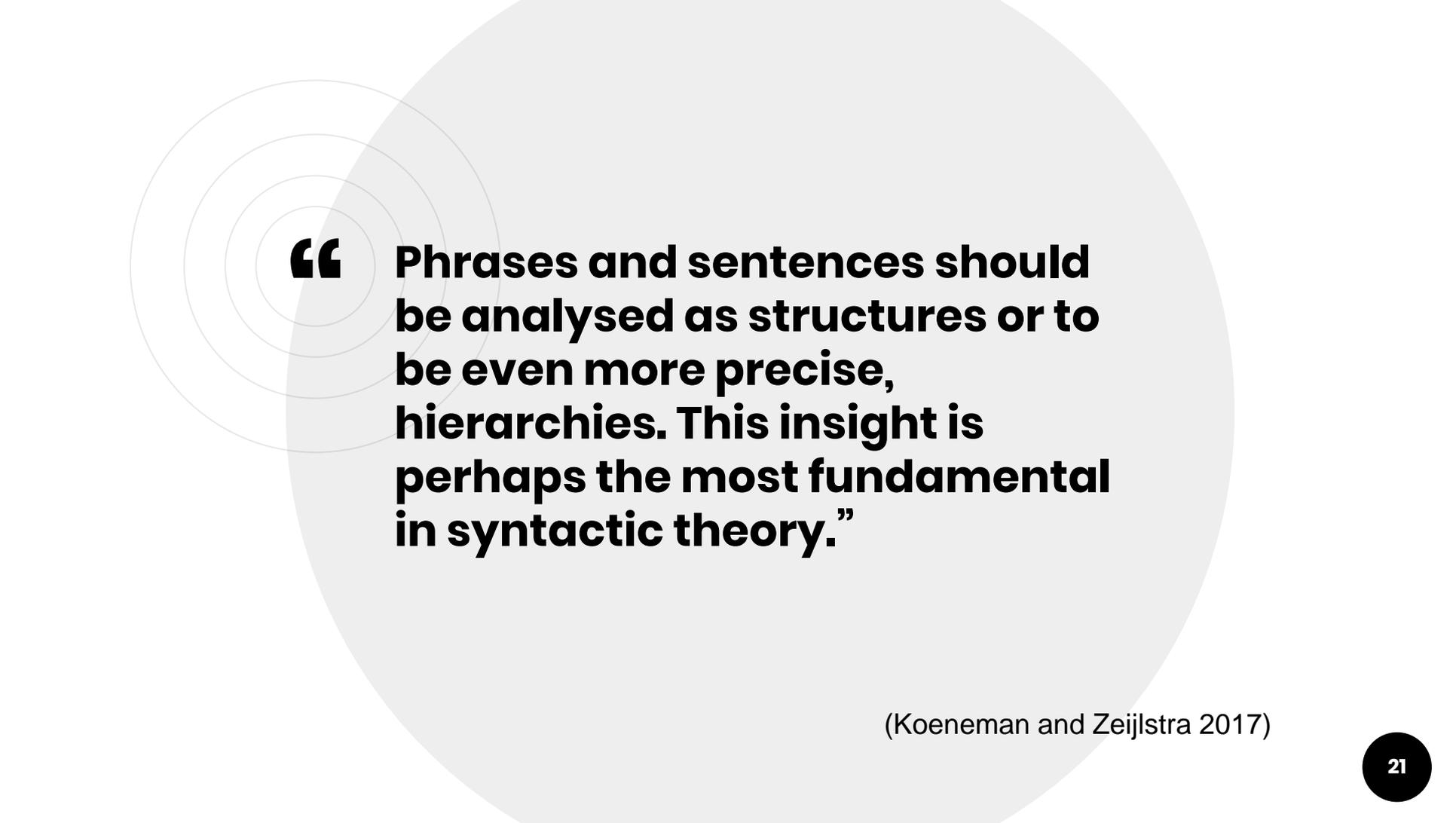
Verbs



A circular frame containing a photograph of a desk. On the desk, there is a potted plant in a white pot with a lace-like top, a large black letter 'A', and a wooden block with the letter 'S'. A smartphone is visible in the foreground, reflecting the letter 'A'. The background shows a window with light coming through.

2

Merge Theory



“ Phrases and sentences should be analysed as structures or to be even more precise, hierarchies. This insight is perhaps the most fundamental in syntactic theory.”

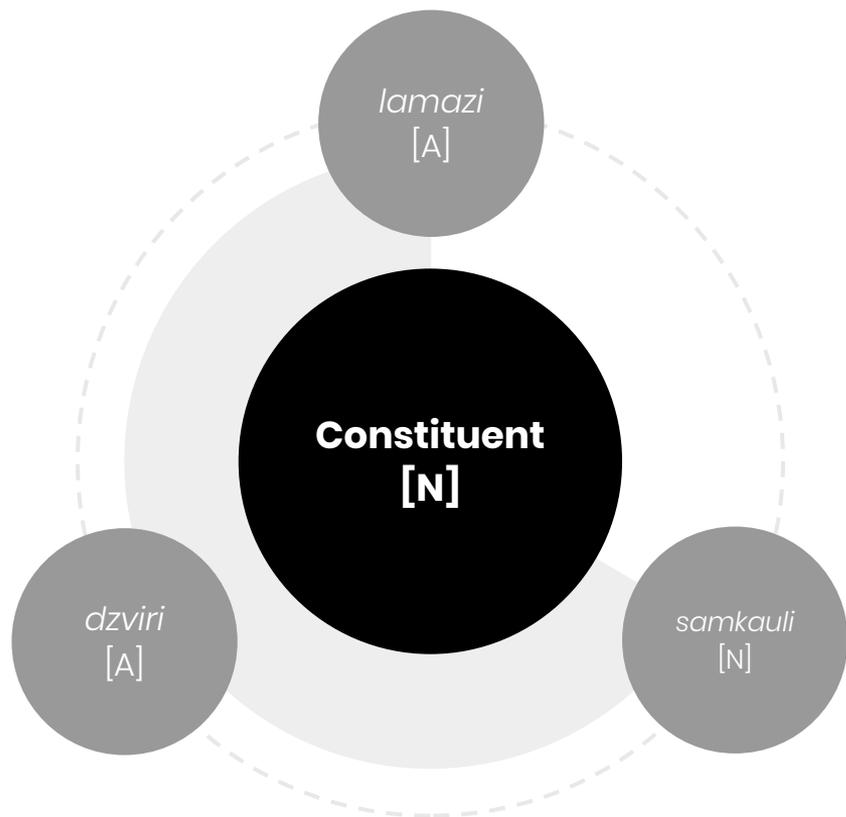
(Koeneman and Zeijlstra 2017)

Constituent

“

No matter how big constituent is, there is always one word in it that is responsible for the feature of the entire constituent.”

“Every constituent has a feature that is the same as the feature of one of the words in it.”



(Koeneman and Zeijlstra 2017)

Examples

English

[delicious_[A] sausages_[N]]_[N]

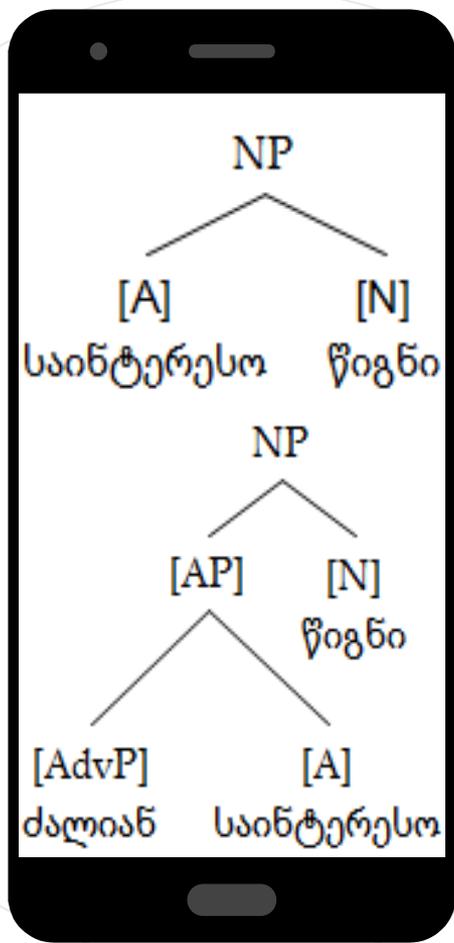
[extremely_[Adv] delicious_[A]]_[A]

Georgian

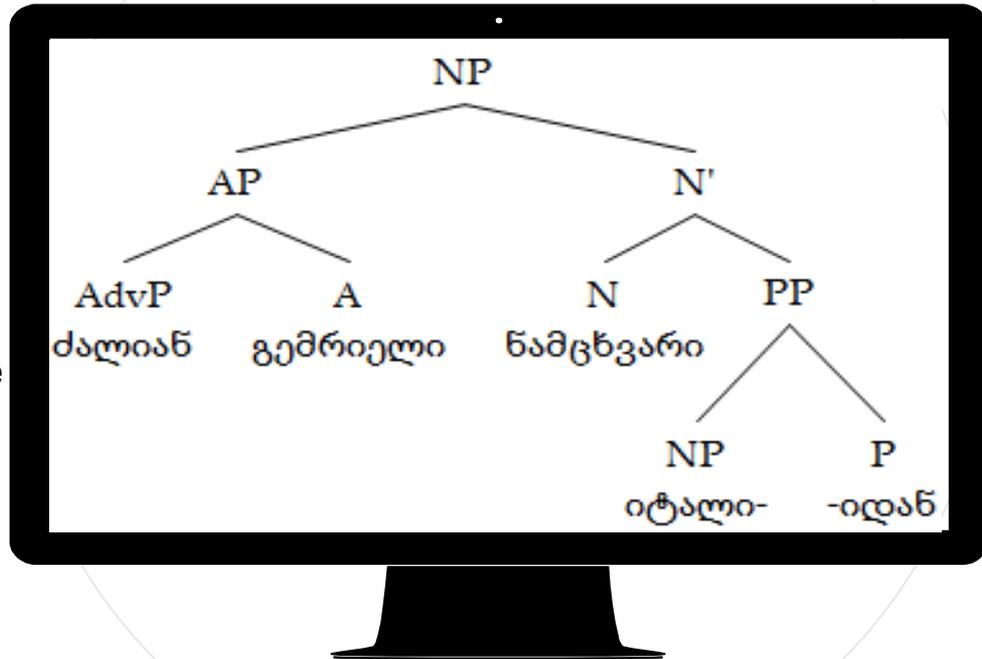
[ლამაზი_[A] ტანსაცმელი_[N]]_[N]

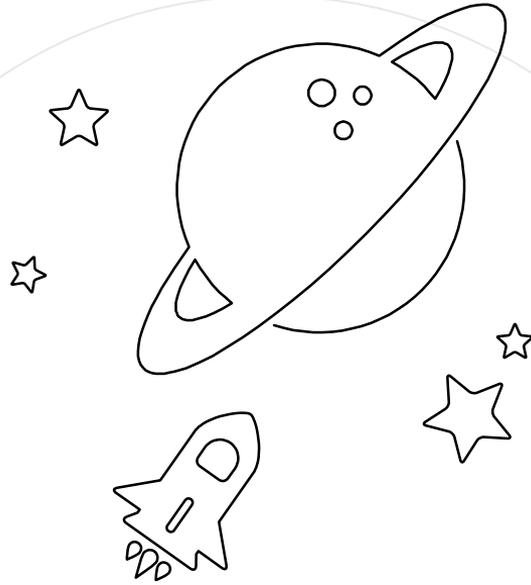
[ძალიან_[Adv] გემრიელი_[A]]_[A]





Every maximal phrase, XP, contains minimally a head X but can in addition contain one or more phrases: [...(ZP) X (YP)...]_{XP}

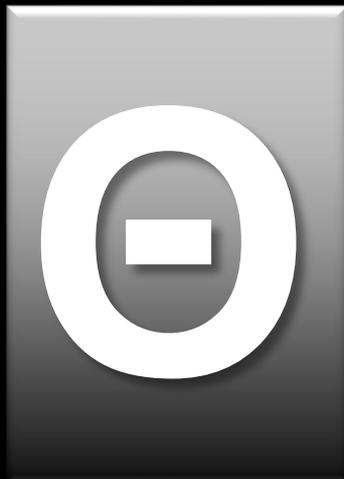




How to check constituency

- Substitution test
- Movement test

3



Theta Theory

Verbs can merge with nominal constituents

The meaning of the verb constraints how many nominal constituents it can merge with

One argument

with only a subject

Mary snores (ENG)

Nikas sdzinavs (GEO)

intransitive verbs

Two arguments

with a subject and direct object

Mary kills Bill (ENG)

Nino ts'igns kitxulobs (GEO)

transitive verbs

Three arguments

with a subject and two objects

Mary assigns Bill an important task (ENG)

deda adzlevs temos davalebas (GEO)

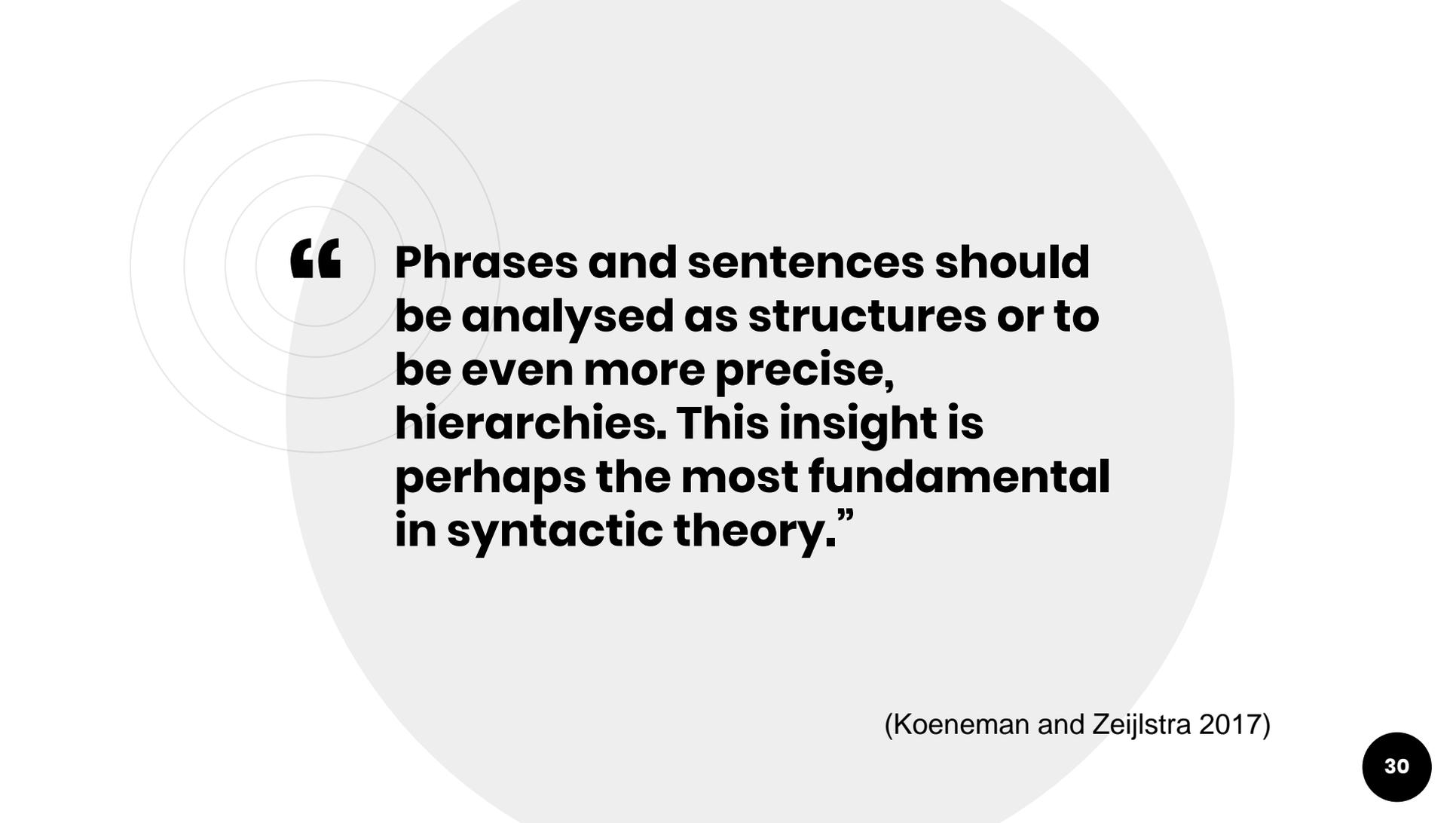
ditransitive verbs



Arguments can be

- Nominal constituents [N]
- Nominal phrases [NP]
- „that“ clauses
- Prepositional phrases [PP]





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(Koeneman and Zeijlstra 2017)

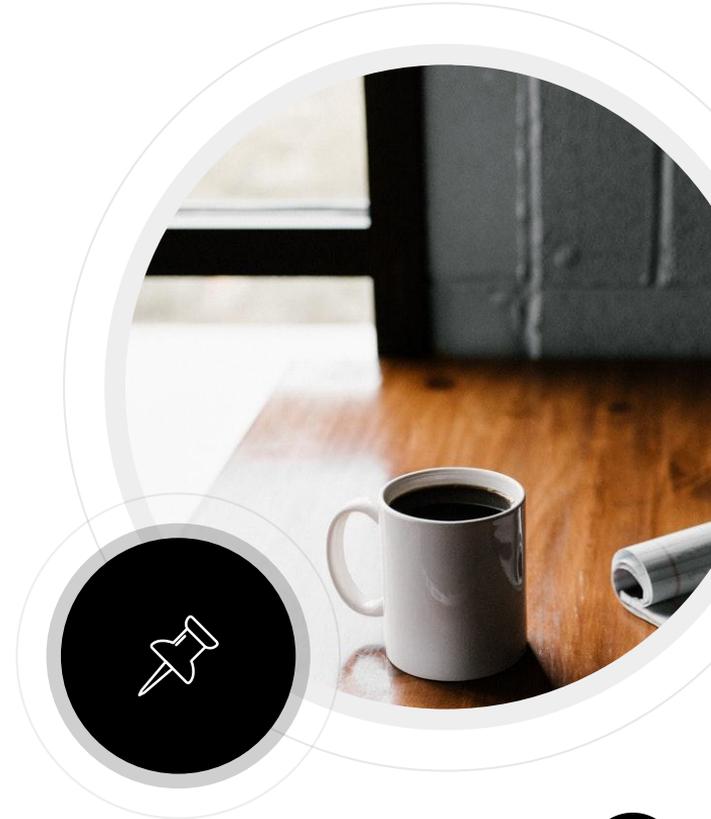
The θ -criterion

Every θ -role must be assigned to a unique argument and every argument must receive a θ -role.



The θ -criterion

θ -criterion is the implementation of the idea that the meaning of a verb constrains the number of arguments it can be merged with.



The θ -criterion

Examples

English

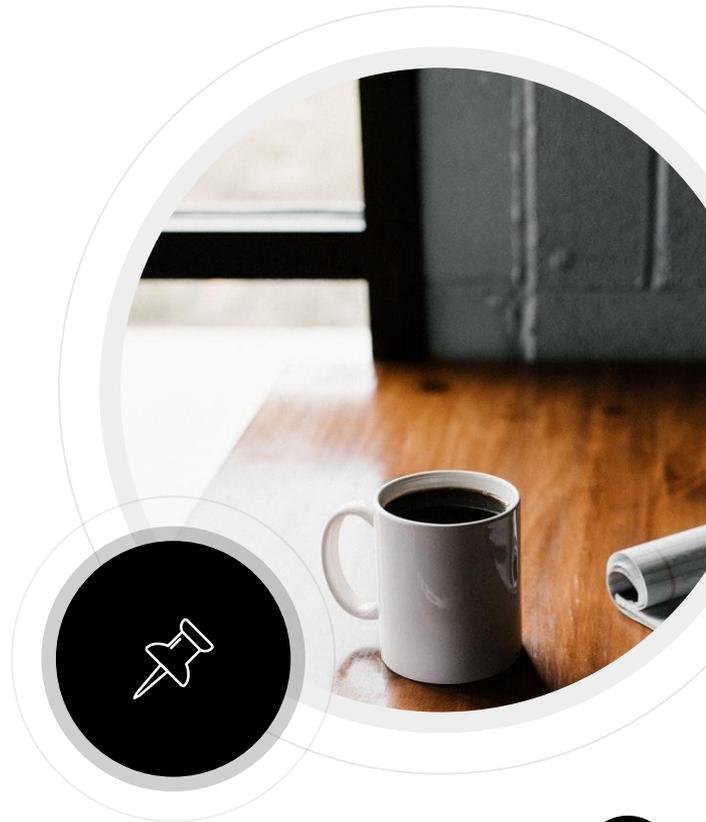
Edith gave a book.

Edith gave Peter a book.

Georgian

ანა წამს.

ანა წამს საჭმელს.



-roles

AGENT

აგენსი

PATIENT

პაციენსი

THEME

თემა

RECEPIENT or BENEFECIARY

რეციპიენსი ან ბენეფიციარი

GOAL

მიზანი



⓪-hierarchy

AGENT > RECEPIENT > PATIENT/THEME > GOAL



Examples

a. *Mary loves the children.*

AGENT PATIENT

a. *Meris uq'vars bavshvebi*

AGENT PATIENT

b. *Mary loves classical music.*

AGENT THEME

b. *Meris uq'vars klasikuri musika.*

AGENT THEME



Examples

c. *John* *sent* *Peter* *a book.*
AGENT RECEPIENT THEME.

d. *John* *sent* *a book* *to Peter.*
AGENT THEME GOAL.

e. *John* *sent* *a book* *to the post-office*
AGENT THEME GOAL.



Examples

- c. *Ninom* *gaugzavna* *Ekas* *ts'igni*
AGENT RECEPIENT THEME
- d. *Ninom* *gaugzavna* *ts'igni* *Ekas*
AGENT THEME RECEPIENT
- e. *Ninom* *gaagzavna* *ts'erili* *postashi*
AGENT THEME GOAL

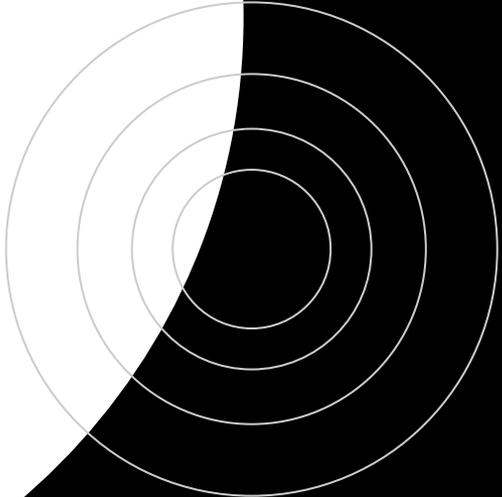




4

Case Theory

Theory that determines which case forms can appear in which position





The number of argument cases is predictably small: the case(s) of subject, object, possessor, and indirect object

(Blake 2001)

The majority of other forms are represented by locative (adjunct) cases, which encode location and direction.

(Comrie and Polinsky 1998)

subject case/object case > possessor case > indirect object case”

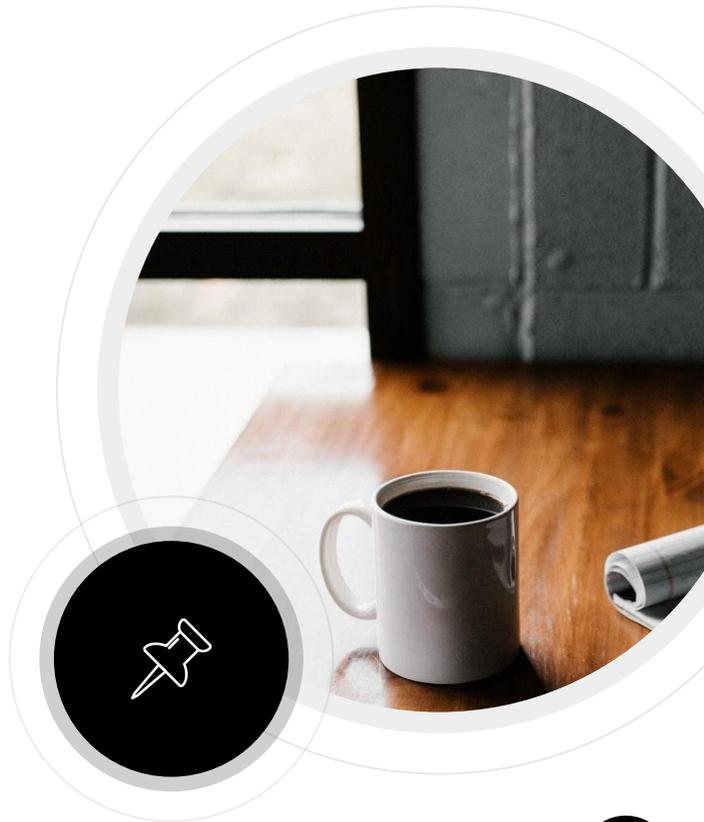
(Polinsky and Preminger 2014)

Abstract cases must be distinguished from the morphological cases

Morphological case is a parameter as it does not apply to all languages, while abstract Case is a universal principle. Because in such case grammatical functions are indicated with morphosyntactic features.

Abstract case can be indicated by morphological case markers or by adpositions (prepositions/postpositions).

(Testelefs 2001)



The general principles of Case Theory

1

Case Uniqueness Principle

DP may receive only one case

2

The Case Filter

Every nominal argument must be assigned case

3

Case Licensing

Every instance of Case must be properly licensed



“One standard way of implementing the Case filter is by using a mechanism known as feature checking. The Case filter becomes a requirement that a noun be close enough to a Case assigner to check that the noun has the right features. The noun must be close to its Case assigner.”

(Carnie 2013)

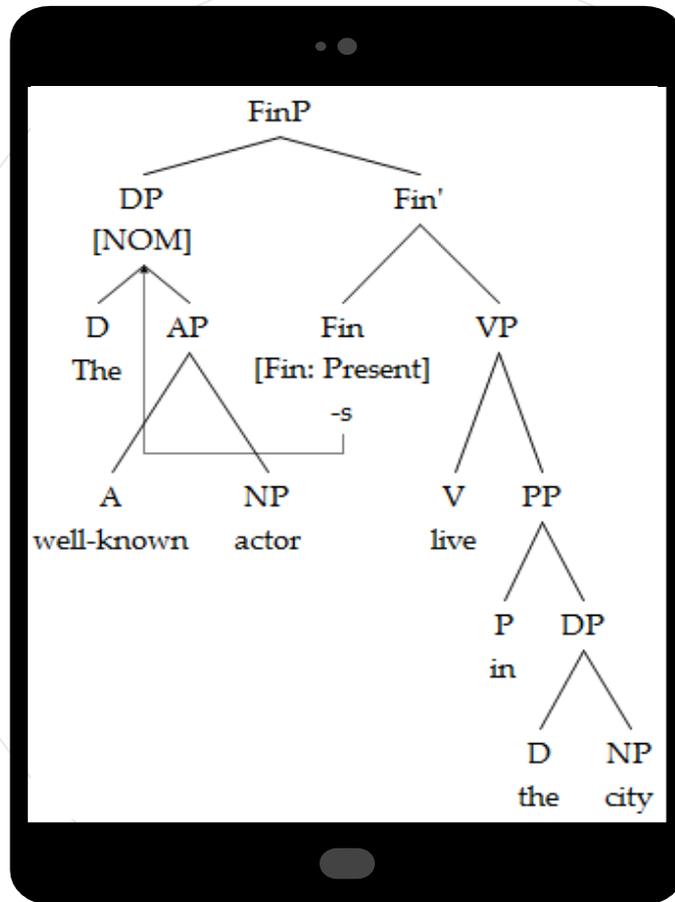




In English different heads are responsible for different cases

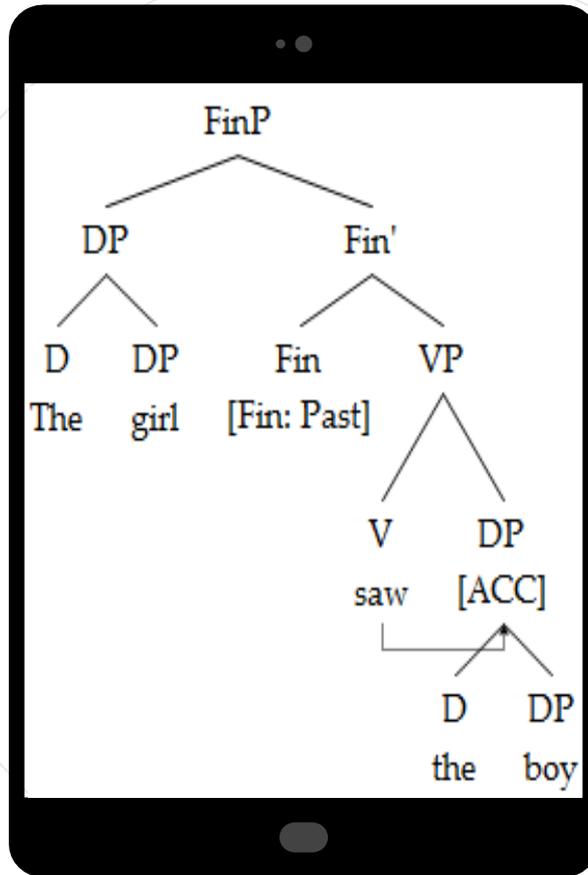
1. Finite clause subjects need to be assigned nominative Case by T[Fin] – [NOM]
2. Objects need to be assigned accusative Case by a verb or preposition. So, V, P are responsible for assigning accusative Case [ACC]
3. Possessors need to be assigned genitive Case by D 's [GEN]

Examples



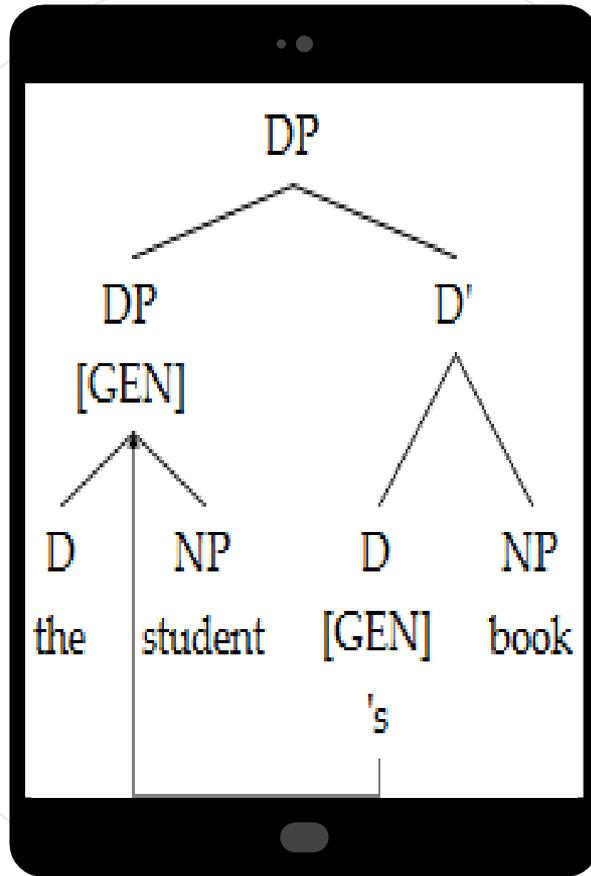
Fin checks nominative Case against a DP in spec, FinP

Examples



V checks accusative
Case against a DP
sister

Examples



D 's checks genitive Case



Case theory - summary

Merge with:	Case assigned:	Examples:
[Finite]	nominative	he, she, a boy, an introduction
[V], [P]	accusative	him, her, Mary, the man
's [D]	genitive	student's, officer's



Thanks!

Any questions?

You can find me at

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