Plan

1. Ambiguity vs. vagueness
2. Stepwise change of category
3. Supercategories
4. Decategorialisation
5. An alternative view of categories

1.1 Intro

- *Cambridge Grammar*: conventional word classes adjusted to capture distributional facts better.

I haven’t seen him since Tuesday
he resigned

- All these uses of since are P (not Adv, P, C).

- Classes justified on basis of *morphosyntax*.
- Language-particular. ‘Methodological opportunism’?

Huddleston & Pullum (2002); Croft (2001: 30); Haspelmath (2010)

1.2 Word class ambiguity

Visiting relatives can be boring.

- visiting
  - adjectival participle modifying relatives
  - verbal -ing (gerund) governing relatives as object

1.3 Word class vagueness

- Some speakers can use *fun* either as *N* or *Adj*.

a. And I’m like, ”I don’t really do things that are really that fun. The ultimate fun is doing nothing.” (2000, COCA)

b. So you must have had fun doing this. I mean, this is just really -- it’s very silly and very fun. (2002, COCA)
Word class vagueness

- For such a speaker, in unambiguous sentence

It was fun.

word class of fun is underspecified but constrained.

Jespersen (1909-49: I 41)

2. Stepwise change

- Word classes defined by basket of properties, not all necessary and sufficient.
- Some word classes share distributional properties.
- Word moving from one to other need not acquire entire distribution of new category at once.
- Evidence:
  - lexical diffusion
  - distributional variation
  - inter-speaker variation

2.2 N > Adj

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding and behavioural properties</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Adj</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X takes D as dependent (the man, some people)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XP can be subject, direct object, indirect object, complement of P</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X can postmodify N (a politician greedy for power)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X takes intensifier as dependent (very big, so dangerous)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X can premodify N (bad habits, coal strike)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XP can be predicative complement (be a poet, be happy)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various features characteristic of V, e.g. tense</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various features characteristic of other PoS</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X inflects for plural (three strikes, the children)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X inflects for genitive (the boycot’s impact)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X can be marked for cp and superlative (heavier, more dangerous)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

adapted from Denison (2013: 160)

Underdetermined: N ~ Adj

- Attributive position
  - he reeled through four savage rounds before he got the killer punch ... (1982, COHA)
  - killer‘very effective; excellent, ”sensational”’

- Predicative position (non-count only)
  - The directors are denying any knowledge of this and the report originated in the Star so it could be rubbish (BNC)

Test: postmodification

Each track has something killer on offer (2013, via WebCorp)

Adler believes in filling your surroundings with all things fun and joyful, ... (2005, COCA)

Test: derivation

- -ly suffix to form Adv only added to Adj
  - one exception: partly

The concept of his art is inherently hard to put into words. But most commonly (and amateurly put), Turrell’s Skyspaces can be described as ... (2013, via WebCorp)

Trying to explain the ferry system very draftly (2005, via WebCorp)

OED s.v. -ly suffix
Adj properties arrive stepwise

- Corpus data
- Informant testing
  - Postmodification with rubbish better than comparison
  - Age-graded reactions to fun in (a-c):
    a. Doing something fun like redecorating your room ... (1951, OED)
    b. And they are so fun to eat! (1979, COHA)
    c. Walking and looking is boring. Touching is funner. (1990, COCA)

2.2 Adj > D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding and behavioural properties</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Adj</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Prn</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lexical rather than grammatical</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can iterate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>number marking</td>
<td>(–)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(–)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nominative-accusative marking</td>
<td>(–)</td>
<td>(–)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>comparison</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>can act as predicate</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>?</td>
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Examples of various in OED

One whose conversation was so various, easy, and delightful. (1852)
- sense 7.a. ‘[e]xhibiting variety of subject or topic’
- purely lexical sense, typical Adj, ? obsolescent

Dr. Jackson...is very careful in marking all those various effects produced from similar causes. (1805)
- sense 8.a. ‘of different kinds’

Various

The eyeball is moved in various directions by six muscles. (1879)
- sense 9, ‘in weakened sense, as an enumerative term: Different, divers, several, many, more than one’
- sense close to quantifier, more typical of D.
- OED note: “It is not always possible to distinguish absolutely between this sense and 8, as the meaning freq. merges into ‘many different’: cf. DIVERS adj. 3.”
- Semantics and syntax go hand in hand
- difficult to find explicit formal differences

Test: partitive construction

- Only D can appear in this construction:
  a. He went about the town on foot, called on various of the sovereigns at their hotels (BNC)
  b. [...] crime being behaviour that breaks certain of the rules of society (BNC)
- Both various and certain described as ‘somewhat marginal members of D’
- Subtle, incremental semantic changes in divers(e), several, certain and various
- Syntax change, leftward movement (if it shows)

2.3 V > P

- Forms such as concerning, considering, during, given, granted, including, regarding, following
  In the years following the publication of the General Theory, doubts started to be expressed about [...] (BNC)
- Underdetermined: V (subject = years) ~ P (like after)

Following a general strike and calls for his resignation, the President was arrested on 26 March by fellow army officers. (BNC)
- P


2.4 V > Adj

a. One night she brought him to see a horror film about the Living Dead, and he was so frightened by the zombies that he fled into the foyer in a panic. (BNC)
   • is verbal (dynamic, What happened to him was ...)

b. Although he was nine years old […], Frankie was still frightened of the dark. (BNC)
   • is adjectival (statal, can be modified by very)

c. They were frightened. (BNC)
   • is unclear without further context

Intensifier with mental state Ved

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(very) much</td>
<td>14.18</td>
<td>17.43</td>
<td>13.17</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>17.94</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>11.94</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>7.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Vartiainen’s figures (COHA, normalised per m words)
• Confirms replacement of (very) much by much from late 19C/early 20C
• Vartiainen notes use of both modifiers by same author.

Reanalysis & statistical change

• Adjectival use developed out of verbal use.
• Thought to be different, so “must” be reanalysis.
• Then what kind of change is seen in chart?
  • continuing reanalysis of V as Adj?
  • changing preference between two pre-existing structures?
  • diffusion through lexicon of preference for Adj?
  • NR. V and Adj may co-exist for same speaker
  • steady increase in preponderance of states over events?
    • surely unlikely, though possible genre/corpus effect
  • gradual change in correlation between particular syntactic structures and particular semantic interpretations?

Test: complement of seem

• Verbal participles cannot occur in complement of seem, appear, remain, etc.

a. She seems happy. Adj
b. *She seemed arrested by the police. V

c. She seemed interested in art. Adj

• Often used as knockdown test for Adj.
• Adj very different from V.

Test not reliable

• Many examples of seem + verbal Ved up to early 20C.
• Sporadic examples appear in PDE:

The article "Music for the senses" (21 October) appears based on the hoary old assumption that anything which can make waveforms can make music. (1995, New Scientist)

[..] and God’s absolute freedom would seem secured. (2000, Eagleton)
Gradient from V to Adj?
A He had taken it  V
B He was killed by Tom – ‘slightly less verbal than A with respect to its complementation’
C a rarely heard work by Purcell – ‘much less verbal still by virtue of the severe restrictions on permitted dependents’ but ‘less adjectival than D because it cannot occur as predicative complement’
D a broken vase / it seemed broken – ‘less adjectival than E because it is ungradable’
E a worried man / He seemed worried  Adj

How to solve boundary issues
• Solve problems of demarcation by lumping some categories together in supercategories?
• Majority of my examples of stepwise change involve overlap between Adj and some other class. Interestingly, adjectives emerge […] as the most versatile in being capable of resembling the syntactic behaviour of the other categories. (Aarts)
• Abolish category Adj and subsume its members under N, V, Adv, and so on?

Against abolishing Adj
• Perverse to abolish Adj when – if anything – Adv is derived.
• If treat Adj and Adv as a single class, then would have boundary problems with N, V, P as before.
• And not all boundary problems involve Adj.

Other supercategories
• Perhaps supercategory to include N and Adj
• resembles some traditional classifications
• recalls [±N], [±V] of early generative grammar
• Hudson proposed supercategory of N, Prn, D.
• But conflict with other needed supercategories if retain assumption of unique word class for each word.
• Granularity of Cambridge Grammar system is contrived to be efficient in capturing generalisations about English, but cf. lumpers and splitters.

3. Supercategories

4. Decategorialisation
N ~ Adv after low-trans. verb
- Grammaticalisation weakens evidence of category membership.
- Grammaticalised *much, more*:
  It coste me moche more. (c1400(c1378), MED)
  His bath costs much; his riding house costs more. (1647, OED)
- Syntactic analysis of *dear* in *cost somebody dear* is 'unclear' for H&P.

New minor category
- Modal verbs
  - either most idiosyncratic of verbs
  - or no longer verbs at all
- Have (nearly) lost characteristic features of English verbs, such as inflectional marking of person and tense, and predication.

5. An alternative view

How conventional categories fail
- Stepwise change, underspecification, decategorialisation.
- Over-rigidity:
  With admirable clarity of purpose, the *Cambridge Grammar* always tries to figure out the best analysis when there is a choice. [...]By rejecting the less good analysis, but one which nevertheless was persuasive enough to require detailed rejection, it doesn't allow for the part played in a speaker's grammar by the analogies of that second analysis. [H]istorically, by rejecting reanalysis until all evidence of the older state has disappeared entirely, [the *Cambridge Grammar*] has no explanation for gradually changing distributions and dispositions over time. [...] Denison (2013: 181)

Avoid problem?
- In Radical Construction Grammar, word classes are epiphenomena rather than building-blocks of sentences.
- Attractive, but descriptions usually involve word classes and historical accounts can be *post hoc*.

Why conventional categories work
a. The child is heavy.
b. The child is alive.
- Even not-very-good category member behaves syntactically just like fully typical member in that context.
- Possible also that vague or intermediate examples are inherently unstable diachronically.
- Would tie in with idea of category strengthening – though most relevant to new categories like D and M.

Denison, ‘Underspecified categories’
Mischievous analogy: dialect
- Linguists don’t reify ‘the’ dialect of area X.
- Yorkshire dialect is a non-linguistic, lay-persons’ label influenced by cultural knowledge.
  - definition and boundaries highly problematic
  - individual usage far more complex than “±Yorkshire”
- But useful generalisation even for linguists.
  - covers features common to most Yorkshire speech
  - broadly distinguishes one cluster of regionally-based idiolects from most other Englishes
  - ‘The’ category of a word is just a cluster of similarities.

Topology of category space
- Denison

Category space
- Aarts

Provisional end-point
- Continue to work with form-based word classes as practical abstraction, but recognise
  - fuzzy edges
  - semantics not irrelevant
  - syntagmatic context sometimes more important than paradigmatic replaceability.
- Messing up a neat analytical system?
- Yes! But individual speakers, let alone whole speech communities, cannot have maximally economical and entirely self-consistent grammars.

THANK YOU
http://tinyurl.com/DD-download
References


Breban, Tine. 2014. Beyond mere syntactic change: A micro-analytical study of *various* and *numerous*. In Marianne Hundt (ed.), *Late Modern English syntax* (Studies in English Language), 113-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


*OED* = *Oxford English Dictionary online*. www.oed.com


