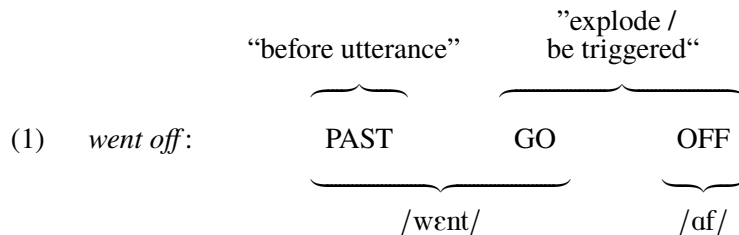


Natural language without semiosis: a precis

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The last few decades have borne witness to a toppling of the lexicalist paradigm as it concerns the mapping between syntax and morphology. At the same time, work on the syntax-semantics mapping has remained largely ensnared in lexicalist thinking. My goal here is to provide arguments for, and an implementation of, a symmetrically non-lexicalist model for syntax at both its interfaces, with form (PF) and with meaning (LF). This is a model where individual syntactic nodes, in the general case, need not map onto a form or a meaning. Instead, syntax is mapped to the interfaces via *PF-formatives* and *LF-formatives*. A PF-formative is a rule that spells out a contiguous piece of syntactic structure (which may consist of a single node or more) to the morpho-phonology. An LF-formative is a rule that spells out a contiguous piece of syntactic structure (which, again, may consist of a single node or more) to the semantics.

This way of characterizing the mappings to PF and LF predicts that we should find cases where the nodes spelled out using a given PF-formative and those spelled out using a given LF-formative stand in a relation of partial overlap. And this prediction is borne out. Consider, for example, an expression like *went off* (in the sense of “exploded” or “was triggered”). Here, there is an LF-formative (not decomposable into the meanings of its parts) consisting of GO and OFF, and a PF-formative (not decomposable into the forms of its parts) consisting of PAST and GO. As shown in (1), these formatives stand in exactly the kind of partial-overlap relation just mentioned. Crucially, the PF contribution of OFF and the LF contribution of PAST in this case are still their “regular” respective contributions: the trivial, single-terminal PF-formative associated with OFF (since *off* does not exhibit any contextual allomorphy here), and the trivial, single-terminal LF-formative associated with PAST (since the past tense does not exhibit any contextual allomorphy here).



Cases of this sort provide the basis for a broader architectural claim: individual syntactic atoms have neither form nor meaning, nor are they directly associated with forms or meanings. Instead, they are mapped onto forms and meanings via PF- and LF-formatives. As we have seen, some formatives can be trivial (mapping a single syntactic terminal to the relevant interface), while others can involve multiple syntactic nodes at once.

On this view, we might also expect to see syntactic nodes for which there is simply no trivial PF-formative available, and ones for which there is simply no trivial LF-formative available. Such nodes could only be mapped to the relevant interface if they happened to occur in the right context, namely, a context for which an appropriate non-trivial formative were available. This is indeed attested. There is no LF-formative, for example, whose insertion context is the node FANGLE (which can be found in the expression *newfangled*). Instead, there is only the LF-formative whose insertion context consists of NEW, FANGLE, and PARTICIPIAL. Conversely, there is a PF-formative in English whose insertion context consists of NONPAST and MUST, but no PF-formative consisting of MUST alone (**to must*; compare: *to have to*).

Because syntactic atoms are merely the building blocks from which the insertion contexts of PF- and LF-formatives are constructed, and are not themselves “interpreted” or “pronounced”, this proposed model can be seen as a final rejection of the semiotic basis upon which the atoms of generative grammar have traditionally been built. I will argue that even those contemporary linguistic frameworks that distance themselves from outright Saussureanism, such as *Distributed Morphology* (Halle & Marantz 1993, 1994) and *Nanosyntax* (Caha 2009, 2019, Starke 2009), retain certain Saussurean vestiges that render them less explanatory than the current proposal.