

Government in Dependency Grammar

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Abstract

Dependency grammars (DGs) conceive of government in two ways: either in terms of form determination or licensing. This abstract outlines these two possibilities and suggests that a definition in terms of licensing is a more solid notion and therefore that an understanding of government solely in terms of form determination should be rejected.

Two definitions that see form determination playing the key role in government are as follows:

Zwicky (1985:7): ...government, speaking rather loosely, is the selection of the morphosyntactic shape of one constituent (the governed or subordinate constituent) by virtue of its combining with another (the governor).

Groß (1999:33): A word constituent x governs another distinct constituent y if a morpheme μ^1 in x determines a morpheme μ^2 in y .

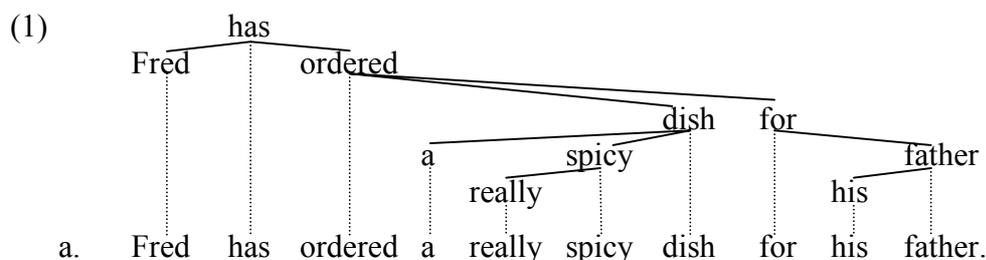
See also Mel'čuk 2003:195 for a lengthy definition along the same lines. These definitions are similar to the traditional concept of government, whereby verbs, prepositions, and some adjectives are said to govern their complements, i.e. they determine the morphological case of their complements.

Another widespread concept of government among DGs is understood in terms of licensing in general. A given head governs all of its dependents, regardless of whether or not the dependents receive morphological case from their head. Jung (1995) defines this notion of government (=Rektion) as follows:

Jung (1995:88): Government obtains when a dominant element (head) A opens a slot for a dependent element B. [Translated from German]

This concept of government is maximally general; any time a given word takes a dependent, it governs that dependent. Tesnière (1959/69:22) use of the term *regissant* 'governor' suggests that he subscribed to this general understanding of government, and the widespread use of the term *Regens* 'governor' to denote heads in DGs of the German schools is also consistent with this understanding of government (e.g. Engel 1994:90ff., Jung 2003). Starosta (1988:21) also appears to have adopted this understanding of government, since he employs the term *regent* to denote a head.

This second understanding of government (in terms of licensing) sees auxiliary verbs governing their subjects and infinitival verbs, infinitival verbs governing their object nouns, prepositions governing their objects nouns, adjectives governing their adverbs, nouns governing their determiners, etc.:



This tree illustrates the dependency structure of a typical declarative sentence of English. Adopting Jung's definition, government points down the tree. Thus *has* governs *Fred* and *ordered*; *ordered* governs *dish* and *for*; *dish* governs *a* and *spicy*; *for* governs *father*; *spicy*

governs *really*; and *father* governs *his*. Note that due to the poverty of inflectional morphology in English, only regarding *has* governing *ordered* can one see these instances of government involving form determination.

This second understanding of government is a more principled and defensible concept, and it is the one we employ in our writings, e.g. Osborne (in press) and Osborne et al. (in press). The problem with defining government in terms of form determination is that many head-marking languages (see Nichols 1986) would have to view government running in the opposite direction of syntactic dependencies. In many cases, government would become almost synonymous with agreement. The following examples taken from Nichols (1986) illustrate the problem:

- (2) ev-in kapi-si (Turkish) kapi-si (3) az ember ház-a (Hungarian) ház-a
 house-gen door-3sg the man house-3sg the man's house
 'the door of the house' ev-in az ember
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These examples show head-marking. The subordinate noun determines the inflectional ending on the dominant noun. If one defines government in terms of form determination as suggested by Groß' and Zwicky's definitions, these cases would be candidates for government. It should be apparent, however, that such data can be more profitably addressed in terms of agreement. Thus in order to preserve traditional notions about agreement and government, a more fine-grained definition of the two would be necessary (cf. Mel'čuk 2003:194ff.). However, if one defines government in terms of licensing, then government points down the hierarchy.

Our contribution will explore these matters, i.e. the understanding of government in DGs. It will provide DG definitions of the key notions of agreement and government, focusing on the roles of determination and licensing. It will argue that licensing is the better concept upon which to build a definition of government. It will explore operational tests (e.g. omission and substitution) that DGs typically employ to identify the direction of licensing. In other words, the means used to distinguish governor from governee (=head from dependent) will be explored. Backed by these operational tests, the resulting notion of government will be almost synonymous with dependency.

Literature

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