



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Constituency



Basic idea

- A **constituency** is a group of entities that form a **part-whole relationship**.
 - An orange is made up of *the peel, the flesh, the sacs, water, vitamin C, etc.* These parts make up the constituent that is the orange.
 - A tree is made of *roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc*
 - A house is made of *walls, pillars, roofs, plumbing, wiring, etc.* The walls are in turn made of *bricks, tiles and concrete, ...*



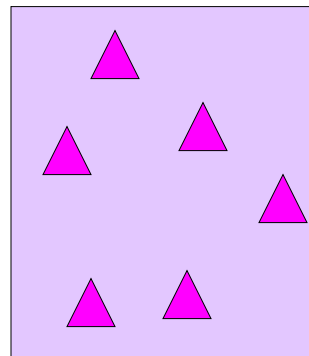
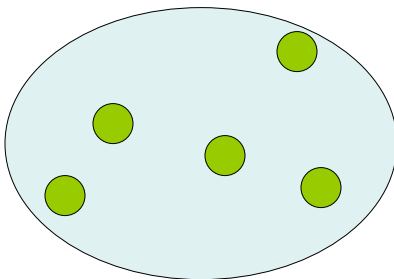
Basic idea

- Because of the part-whole relationship, elements that form a constituent **pattern together**.
- Thus, I cannot move an orange without also moving the peel, flesh, sacs, vitamins together. Likewise, if a tree is to be transplanted, then roots, trunk, leaves and all have to move together with the tree.

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Experiment



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Abstractness of constituencies

- In many cases, it may be hard to actually see constituencies.
- Constituencies are **abstract postulates** for indicating part-whole relationships based on observations about entities that pattern together.

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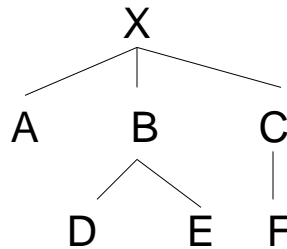
Dominance & Transitivity

- Constituency is often represented in a tree, where entities that form a constituent are **dominated** by a node indicating the constituency.

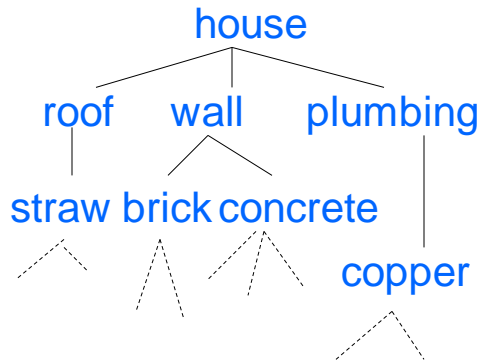
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Dominance & Transitivity



The relationship is **transitive**. If B is part of X and D, E are part of B, then D, E are also part of X.

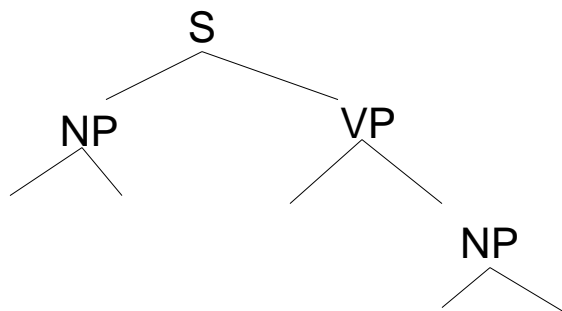


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Constituency in Linguistics

- Example from syntax



The child pinched the elephant.

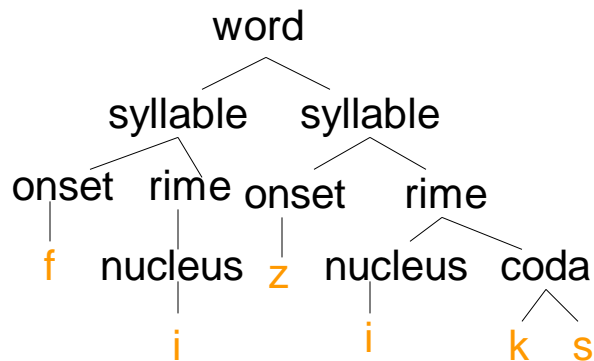
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Constituency in Linguistics

- Example from phonology

physics
[fiziks]



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Testing Constituency

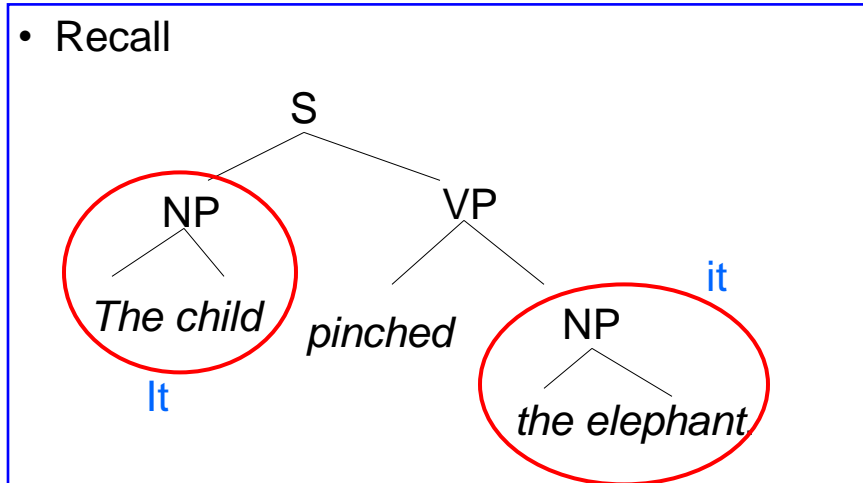
- In linguistics, and elsewhere, it is insufficient to simply claim that a number of elements form a constituency. Such claims must be **justified**.

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Testing Constituency

- Recall

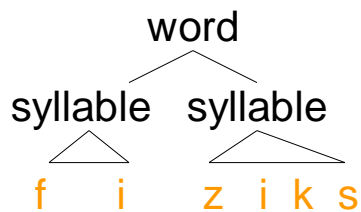


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Testing Constituency

- What about [fiziks]?



- Pause insertion


fi ... ziks
~~fiz...ik...s~~
f..iz..iks
fizi...ks
fizik...s

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Testing constituency

- This is a task that requires creativity and careful thinking.
- The demonstrations provided earlier are not foolproof though they suffice as a simple introduction.
- To be safe, one must be very critical about tests for constituencies, even those provided in textbooks can have problems.

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The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University.

