

# Compositionality or generalization?

Christopher Potts

Stanford Linguistics

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# Overview

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## Where the questions lead me

- *Learning* semantic representations can lead to richer theories of language and language use,
- but compositionality is too constraining in these situations.

# Plan

1. The compositionality principle
2. The compositionality heuristic
3. Semantic parsing
4. Recursive deep learning models
5. Conclusions

# Compositionality semantics and statistical NLP

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## Cooper (2012):

There has been a recent intensification of interest in “semantics” in computational linguistics. I write the word in scare quotes because there are very different views of what computational semantics is. Broadly, it divides into the view that word meaning can be modeled in distributional terms and the view that meaning is to be viewed in terms of model theory of the kind employed in formal semantics deriving from the seminal work of Richard Montague (1974).

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Not anymore!

# Pater's target article and a historical note

## Pater (2019):

When viewed from a sufficient distance, neural network and generative linguistic approaches to cognition overlap considerably: they both aim to provide formally explicit accounts of the mental structures underlying cognitive processes, and they both aim to explain how those structures are learned.

# The compositionality principle

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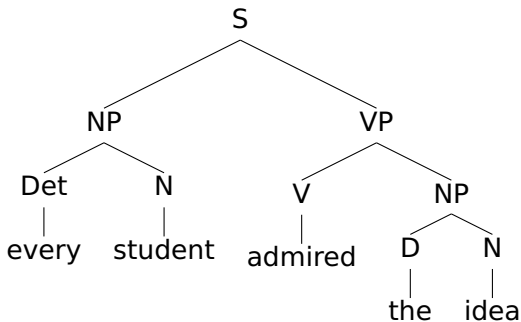
## Compositionality

The meaning of a phrase is a function of the meanings of its immediate syntactic constituents and the way they are combined.

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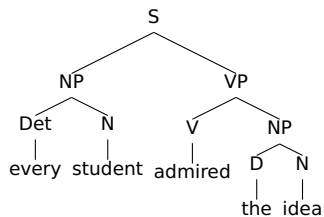
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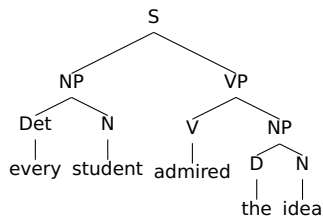
## 1. Modeling all meaningful units



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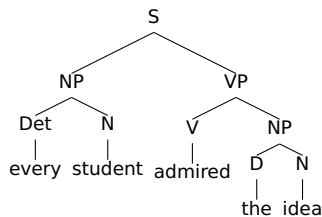
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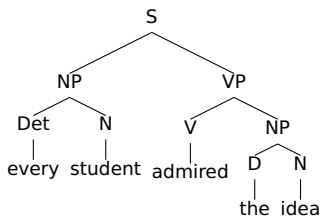
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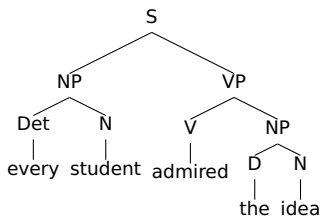
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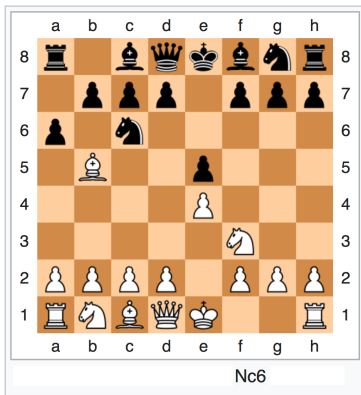


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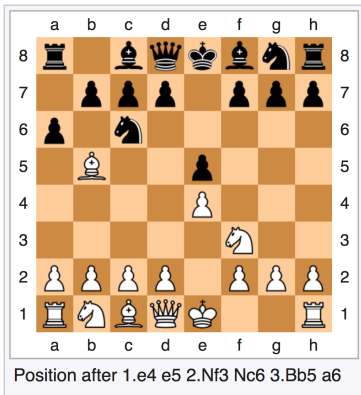
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4. Systematicity



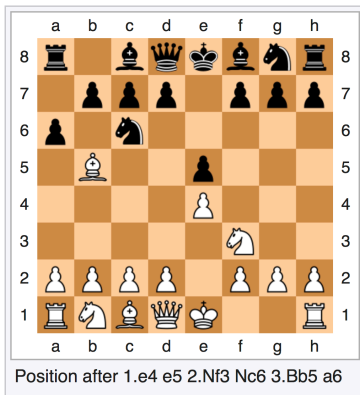
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## Szabó (2012):

The second moral is that – given certain assumptions about meaning in chess notation – we can have productive and systematic understanding of representations even if the system itself is not compositional.

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The central idea is that anything that should count as a grammar should be able to be cast in the following form: the syntax is an algebra, the semantics is an algebra, and there is a homomorphism mapping elements of the syntactic algebra onto elements of the semantic algebra.

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[...]

It is the homomorphism requirement, which is in effect the compositionality requirement, that provides the most important constraint on UG in Montague's sense [...].

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## Propositional logic semantics as homomorphism

$\llbracket p \rrbracket \in \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$  for all propositional letters  $p$

$\llbracket \neg \varphi \rrbracket = \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\} - \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$

$\llbracket \varphi \vee \psi \rrbracket = \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \psi \rrbracket$

$\llbracket \varphi \wedge \psi \rrbracket = \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket \cap \llbracket \psi \rrbracket$

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## Kazmi & Pelletier (1998) respond “Wait, what?”

Here is a non-compositional semantics:

- $\llbracket A \rrbracket = \llbracket B \rrbracket$
- $\llbracket C.A \rrbracket \neq \llbracket C.B \rrbracket$

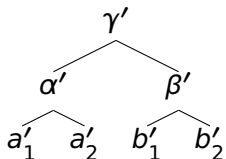
Zadrozny showed how to create a kind of syntactic layer where compositionality holds. A similar argument is made by Dever 1999.

# Dowty's context-free compositionality

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## Dowty (2007):

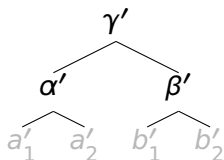
When a rule  $f$  combines  $\alpha, \beta(\dots)$  to form  $\gamma$ , the corresponding semantic rule  $g$  that produces the meaning  $\gamma'$  of  $\gamma$ , from  $\alpha'$  and  $\beta'$ , may depend only on  $\alpha'$  "as a whole", it may not depend on any meanings from which  $\alpha'$  was formed compositionally by earlier derivational steps (similarly for  $\beta$ ).



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# The compositionality heuristic

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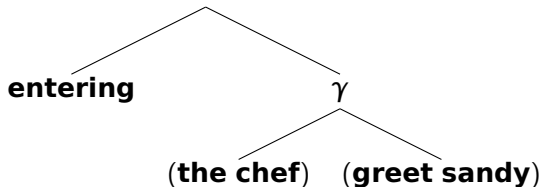
Janssen (1997:461)

Compositionality is not a formal restriction on what can be achieved, but a methodology on how to proceed.

# Example: Subjectless predicational adjuncts

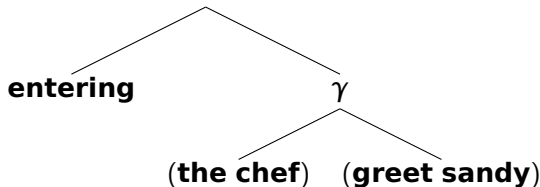
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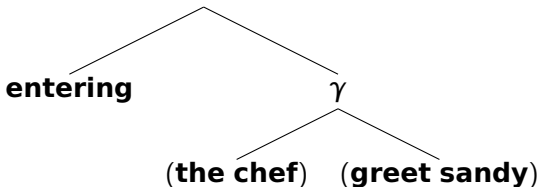


### Potential rule

The implicit argument of a front subjectless predicational adjuncts must be the subject of the matrix clause.

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Assuming context-free compositionality, the rule cannot be correct as stated.

## Example: Subjectless predicational adjuncts

From <http://arnoldzwicky.wordpress.com/category/danglers/>:

1. “Having been in Australia for 17 years, a foreign national wishing to work in Australia must be of good character.”
2. “Fearing a massive lay-off, there was a general sense of relief when the boss announced there would be no new budget cuts.”
3. “Rich and creamy, your guests will never guess that this pie is light.”

# Example: Subjectless predicational adjuncts

## Pragmatic constraint

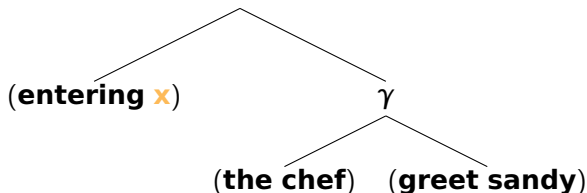
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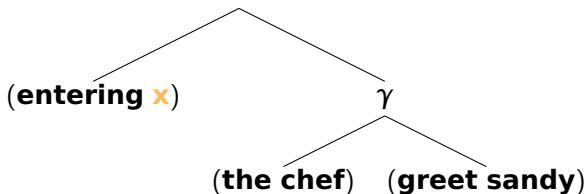


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## Subjects/topic correlation

In English, subjects are often topics.

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1. Exceptives adjoin only to universal quantifiers:
  - a. Every Muppet except Kermit danced.
  - b. No Muppet except Kermit danced.
  - c. \*Most Muppets except Kermit danced.

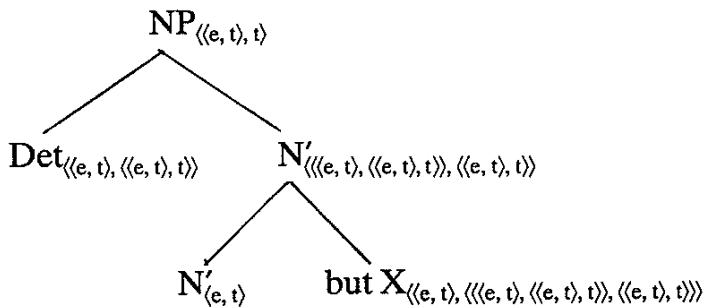
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2. The exceptive's determiner affects VP entailments:
  - a. Every Muppet except Kermit danced.  
⇒ Kermit didn't dance.
  - b. No Muppet except Kermit danced.  
⇒ Kermit did dance.

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von Fintel (1993):



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Assumptions challenged

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## Assumptions challenged

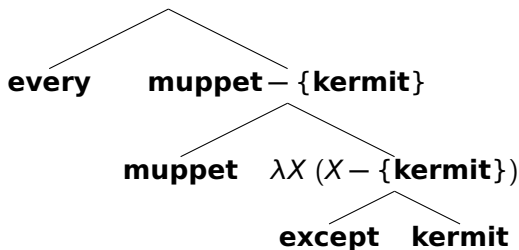
1. Exceptives adjoin to lots of phrases!
  - a. Does poetry matter? Few but other poets may read it. (Horn 2005)
  - b. She didn't eat almost anything except pills. (Horn 2005)
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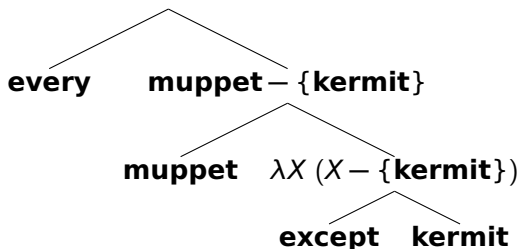
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2. The VP entailments are merely implicated!
  - a. Well, we can't find Karl, but we've verified that everyone except Karl has an alibi, so let's find out whether he does too. (Hoeksema 1996)
  - b. "All of you are moving on [to Spanish 102] except for Jeff. Turns out you – pause for dramatic effect – will be seeing me next semester. In Spanish 102. Because he passed, you know, and I'm the only Spanish teacher." (*Community* 1:12).

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See also Higginbotham 1986 and Nadathur & Lassiter (2014) on *unless*

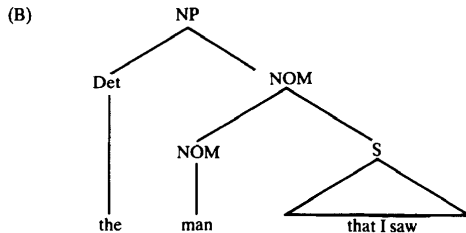
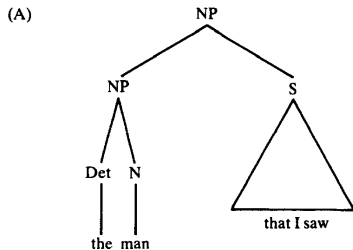
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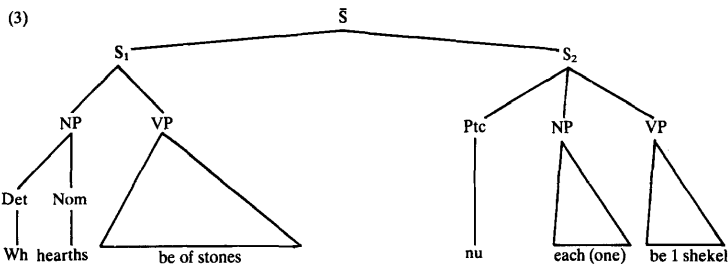
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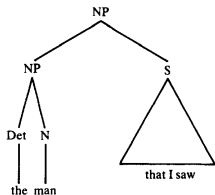
- (1) And every hearth which is made of stones costs 1 shekel.  
 (2) ŠA NA<sub>4</sub> . HI. A.-ia kuiēš GUNNI . MEŠ nu kuišša 1 GÌN  
 gen. stone-pl. -and which hearth-pl. ptc. each (one) 1 shekel



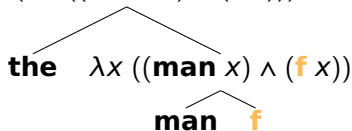
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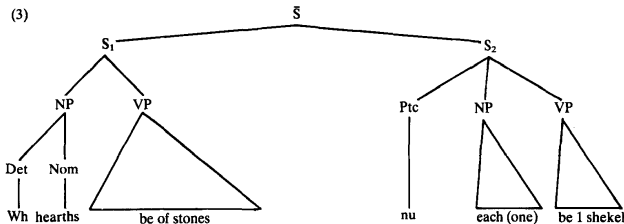
(A)



**the**  $(\lambda x ((\mathbf{man} x) \wedge (\mathbf{f} x)))$



(3)



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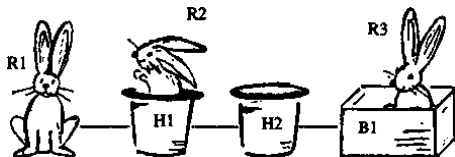
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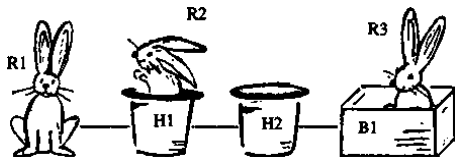
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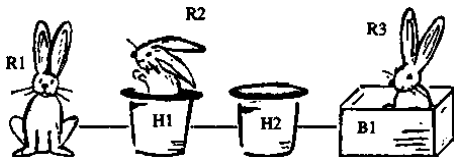
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Bumford (2017): these cases show us that definites introduce new discourse referents and constrain them, and these operations can take scope separately.

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### Levin et al.'s (2018) novel compounds experiment:

Modifier	Head	Example	Top inference	Rate
Artifact	Artifact	stew skillet	Event	97.3%
Natural kind	Artifact	stream wheel	Event	96.4%
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(Why is there consensus that compounds aren't compositional but no real concern about *flat tire/beer/note* or *throw a ball/party/fight* (though see Keenan 1974; Hirst 1987; Partee 1984)?)

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2. Contextual ambiguity resolution is no longer taken to challenge compositionality:
  - a. I saw a crane.
  - b. The crane flew away.
  - c. The crane lifted the beam.
3. Pragmatic free variables are no longer taken to be a challenge to compositionality:
  - a. Being a master of disguise, Bill would fool anyone.
  - b. Wearing his new outfit, Bill would fool anyone.

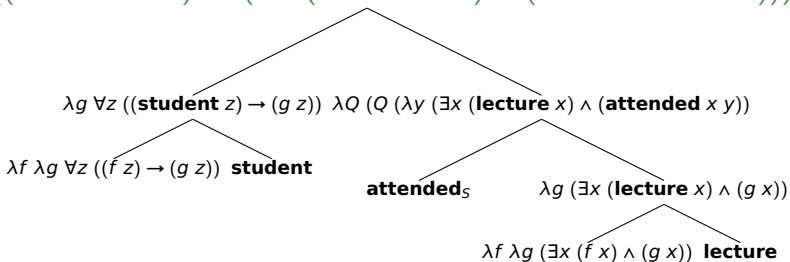
# Semantic parsing

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# The semanticist's ideal

*Every student attended a lecture*

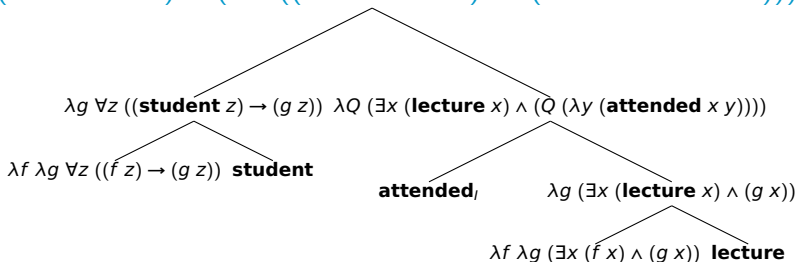
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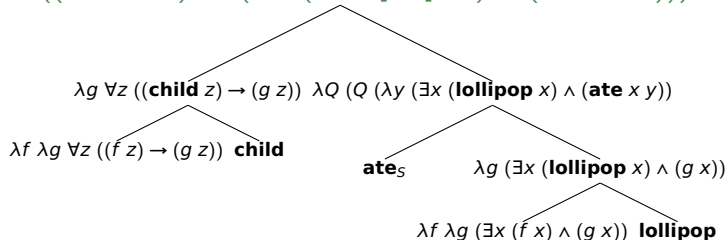
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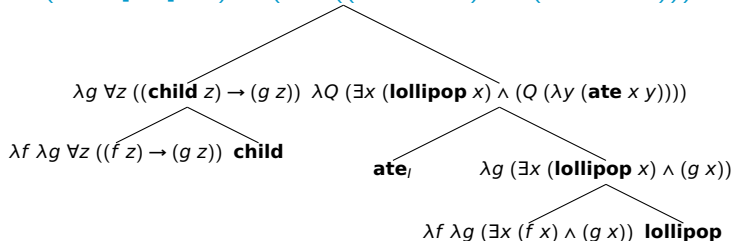
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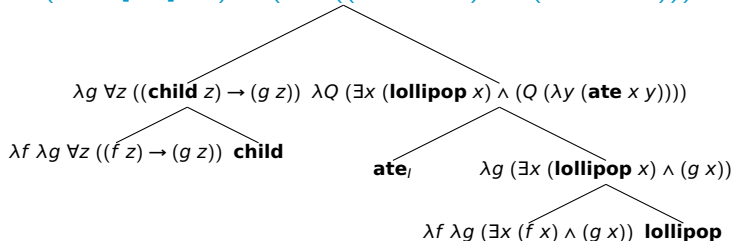
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But is this really so ideal?

# Crude grammars refined via learning

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Chat80 (Warren & Pereira 1982):

```
/* Sentences */
sentence(S) --> declarative(S), terminator(.) .
sentence(S) --> wh_question(S), terminator(?) .
sentence(S) --> yn_question(S), terminator(?) .
sentence(S) --> imperative(S), terminator(!) .

/* Noun Phrase */
np(np(Agmt, Pronoun, []), Agmt, NPCase, def, _, Set, Nil) -->
  {is_pp(Set)},
  pers_pron(Pronoun, Agmt, Case),
  {empty(Nil), role(Case, decl, NPCase)} .

/* Prepositional Phrase */
pp(pp(Prep, Arg), Case, Set, Mask) -->
  prep(Prep),
  {prep_case(NPCase)},
  np(Arg, _, NPCase, _, Case, Set, Mask) .
```

# Crude grammars refined via learning

```
1 for  $w \in \text{Words}$ 
2   for  $X \in \text{Categories}$ 
3     for  $d \in \text{Domain}$ 
4       yield ' $X \rightarrow w : d$ '
```

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```

```
0  $N \rightarrow \text{dog} : \mathbf{dog}$ 
0  $V \rightarrow \text{dog} : \mathbf{dog}_V$ 
0  $N \rightarrow \text{dog} : \mathbf{cat}$ 
0  $N \rightarrow \text{cat} : \mathbf{cat}$ 
0  $N \rightarrow \text{cat} : \mathbf{dog}$ 
0  $V \rightarrow \text{jump} : \mathbf{dog}$ 
0  $V \rightarrow \text{jump} : \mathbf{jump}$ 
```

# Crude grammars refined via learning

N  
|  
dog : **dog**

```

1  for  $w \in \text{Words}$ 
2      for  $X \in \text{Categories}$ 
3          for  $d \in \text{Domain}$ 
4              yield ' $X \rightarrow w : d$ '
  
```

```

1  N → dog : dog
0  V → dog : dogv
0  N → dog : cat
0  N → cat : cat
0  N → cat : dog
0  V → jump : dog
0  V → jump : jump
  
```

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```

1  for  $w \in \text{Words}$ 
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3          for  $d \in \text{Domain}$ 
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```

N  
|  
dog : **dog**

V  
|  
dog : **dog<sub>v</sub>**

```

1  N → dog : dog
1  V → dog : dogv
0  N → dog : cat
0  N → cat : cat
0  N → cat : dog
0  V → jump : dog
0  V → jump : jump
  
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1  N → dog : dog
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0  N → dog : cat
1  N → cat : cat
0  N → cat : dog
0  V → jump : dog
0  V → jump : jump
  
```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog
  
```

```

      V
      |
dog : dogv
  
```

```

      N
      |
cat : cat
  
```

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```

N  
|  
dog : **dog**

V  
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```

2  N → dog : dog
1  V → dog : dogv
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```

N  
|  
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N  
|  
dog : **dog**

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```

```

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0  N  $\rightarrow$  dog : cat
1  N  $\rightarrow$  cat : cat
0  N  $\rightarrow$  cat : dog
0  V  $\rightarrow$  jump : dog
0  V  $\rightarrow$  jump : jump

```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog

```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog

```

```

      V
      |
dog : dogv

```

```

      N
      |
cat : cat

```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog

```

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```

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0  N  $\rightarrow$  dog : cat
1  N  $\rightarrow$  cat : cat
0  N  $\rightarrow$  cat : dog
0  V  $\rightarrow$  jump : dog
1  V  $\rightarrow$  jump : jump
  
```

```

      N           N
      |           |
dog : dog    dog : dog
  
```

```

      V           V
      |           |
dog : dogv  jump : jump
  
```

```

      N
      |
cat : cat
  
```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog
  
```

# Crude grammars refined via learning

```

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1  V  $\rightarrow$  jump : jump
  
```

```

      N           N
      |           |
dog : dog    dog : dog
  
```

```

      V           V
      |           |
dog : dogv  jump : jump
  
```

```

      N           N
      |           |
cat : cat    cat : cat
  
```

```

      N
      |
dog : dog
  
```

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```

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```

3	N	→	dog	:	dog
1	V	→	dog	:	dog <sub>v</sub>
0	N	→	dog	:	cat
2	N	→	cat	:	cat
0	N	→	cat	:	dog
0	V	→	jump	:	dog
1	V	→	jump	:	jump

N  
|  
dog : **dog**      dog : **dog**

V                                  V  
|                                    |  
dog : **dog<sub>v</sub>**      jump : **jump**

N                                  N  
|                                    |  
cat : **cat**              cat : **cat**

N  
|  
dog : **dog**

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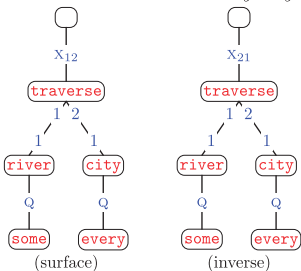
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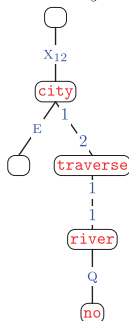
Liang et al. (2013):

*Some river traverses every city.*



(c) Quantifier scope ambiguity (Q, Q)

*city traversed by no rivers*



(d) Quantification (Q, E)

## Additional feature functions

I previously showed some features that correspond to local trees. Those look nicely compositional. However, a smart NLPer will also have features like:

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1. How many distinct lexical items are in the sentence?
2. Am I in the c-command domain of a negation?
3. Does this structure contain a specific set of tree fragments?
4. What is the average sentiment of words in this sentence?

# Comparison with traditional semantic theory

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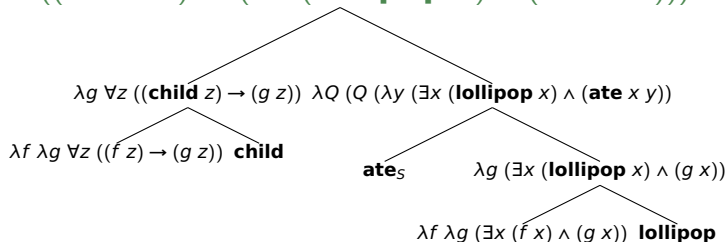
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  - ▶ Semantic parsing grammars make predictions about preferences for ambiguity resolution.
  - ▶ Linguistic grammars limit themselves to representation.

# The linguist's ideal again

*Every child ate a lollipop*

$\forall z ((\mathbf{child} z) \rightarrow (\exists x (\mathbf{lollipop} x) \wedge (\mathbf{ate} x z)))$

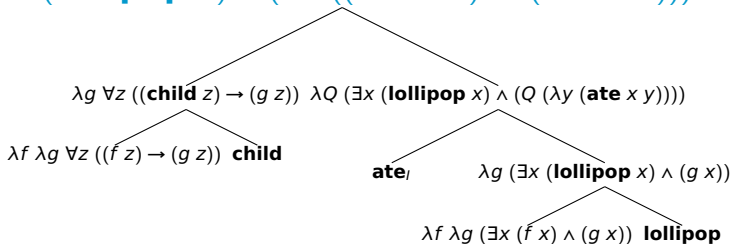


Score: +5

# The linguist's ideal again

*Every child ate a lollipop*

$\exists x (\text{lollipop } x) \wedge (\forall z ((\text{child } z) \rightarrow (\text{ate } x z)))$



Score: -2

# Recursive deep learning models

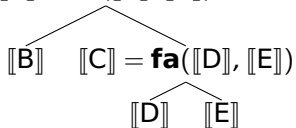
1. The compositionality principle
2. The compositionality heuristic
3. Semantic parsing
- 4. Recursive deep learning models**
5. Conclusions

# Composition with functions or with vectors

# Composition with functions or with vectors

## Functions

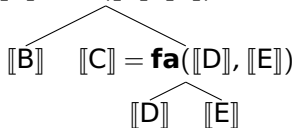
$$[[A]] = \mathbf{fa}([B], [C])$$



# Composition with functions or with vectors

## Functions

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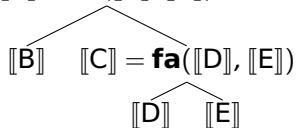


## Vectors

# Composition with functions or with vectors

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$$[[A]] = \mathbf{fa}([B], [C])$$

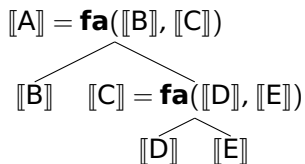


## Vectors

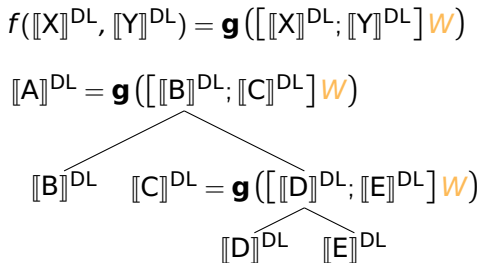
$$f([X]^{DL}, [Y]^{DL}) = \mathbf{g}([X]^{DL}; [Y]^{DL}) \mathbf{w}$$

# Composition with functions or with vectors

## Functions



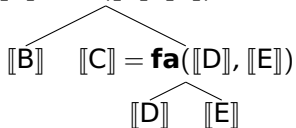
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# Composition with functions or with vectors

## Functions

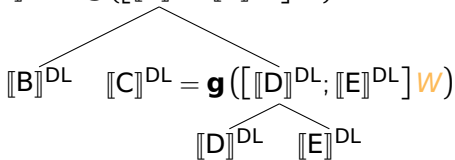
$$[A] = \mathbf{fa}([B], [C])$$



## Vectors

$$f([X]^{DL}, [Y]^{DL}) = \mathbf{g}([X]^{DL}; [Y]^{DL} w)$$

$$[A]^{DL} = \mathbf{g}([B]^{DL}; [C]^{DL} w)$$



### Lexicon

B	-0.42	0.10	0.12	...
D	-0.16	-0.21	0.29	...
E	-0.26	0.31	0.37	...

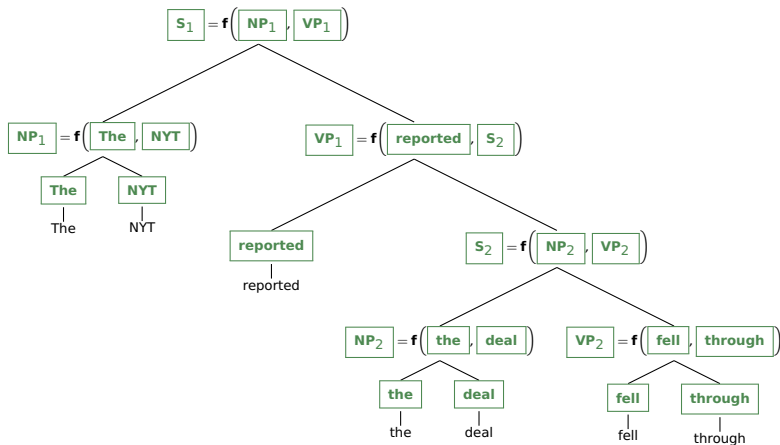
# Simple example

$$\tanh \left( \begin{bmatrix} -0.10 & 0.10 & -1.00 & 1.00 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} 0.06 & 0.32 \\ -0.14 & -0.53 \\ 1.24 & 0.00 \\ 0.02 & 1.06 \end{bmatrix} \right) = \begin{bmatrix} -0.85 & 0.75 \end{bmatrix}$$

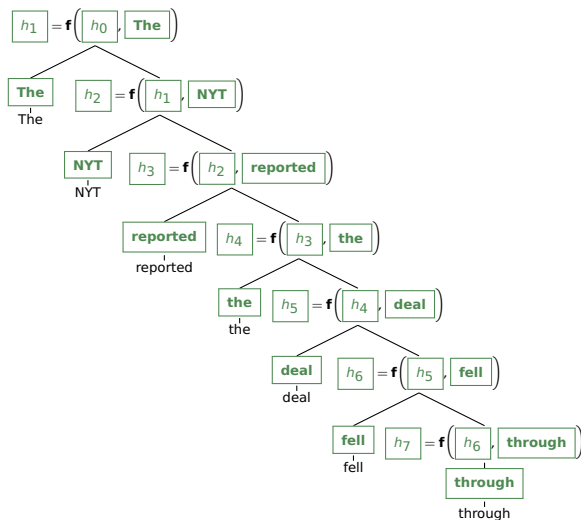
$\begin{bmatrix} -0.10 & 0.10 \end{bmatrix}$        $\begin{bmatrix} -1.00 & 1.00 \end{bmatrix}$

not                      terrible

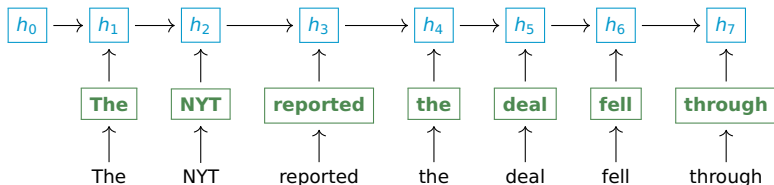
# Recursive deep learning models



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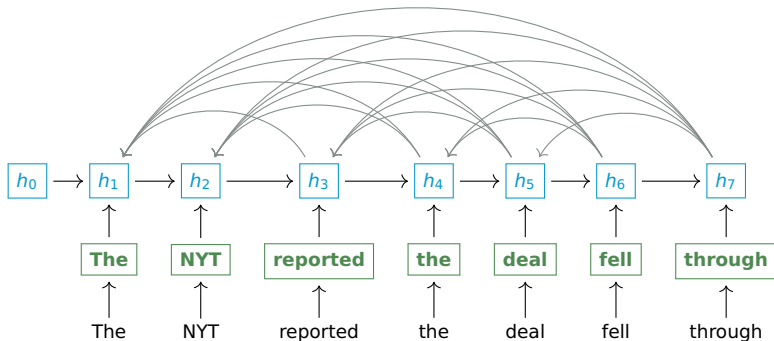


# Recursive deep learning models



# Recursive deep learning models

All our parses are wrong, but perhaps we can discover the right one(s).



# A new perspective on compositionality

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## Partee (1984):

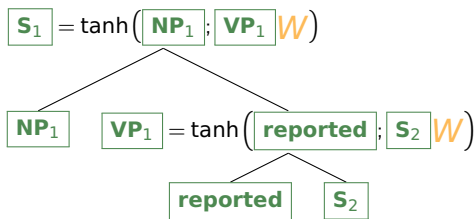
Context-dependence, Ambiguity, and Challenges to Local, Deterministic Compositionality

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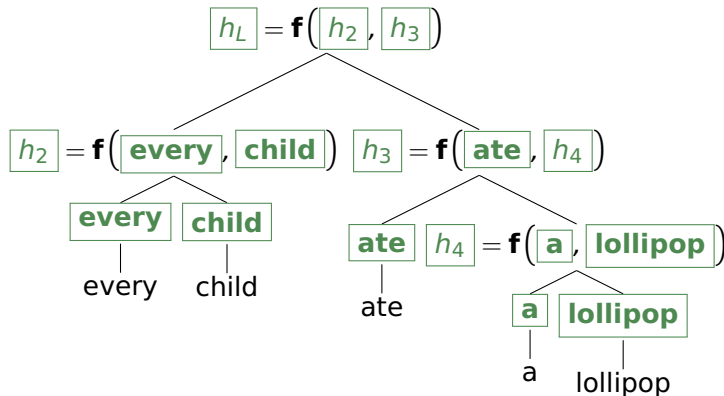
## Global parameters creating local lexical effects



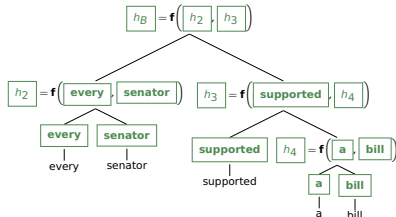
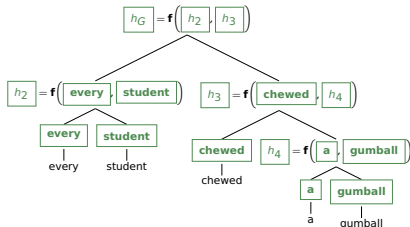
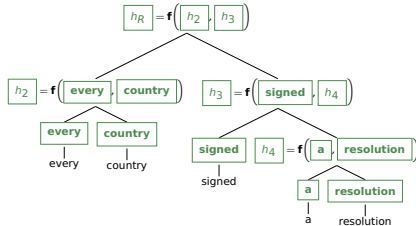
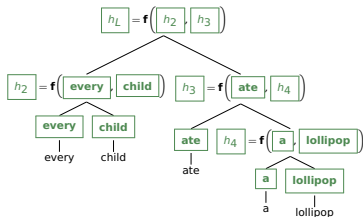


# The linguist's ideal again

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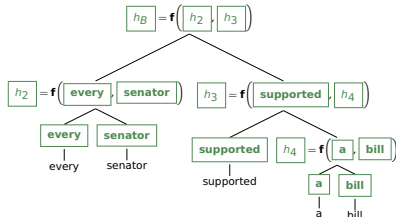
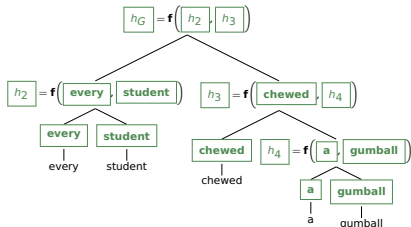
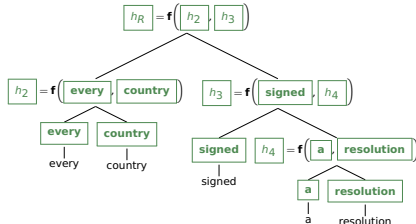
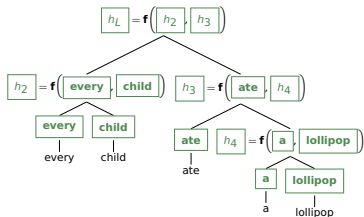


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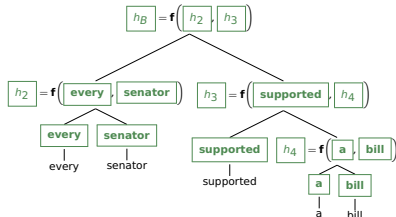
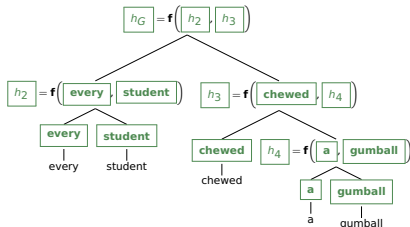
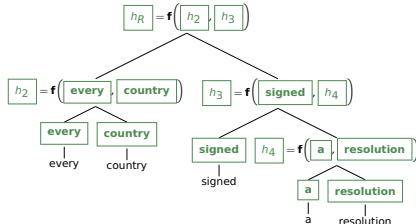
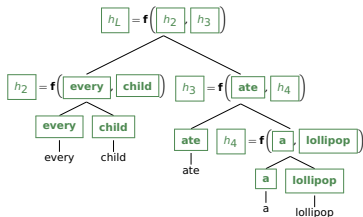
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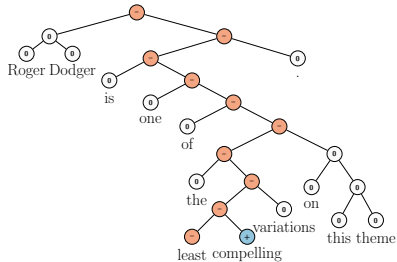
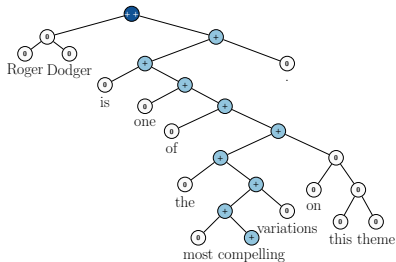


# The linguist's ideal again

$$\text{sim}(h_L, h_G) > \text{sim}(h_L, h_R) \text{ or } \mathbf{g}(h_L, \text{many lollipops eaten}) = \text{entail}$$



# Examples from Socher et al. 2013





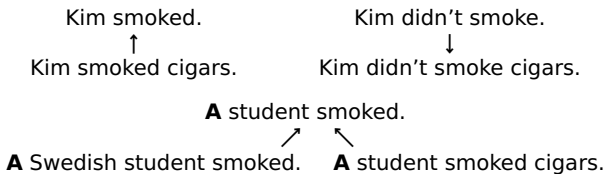
# Monotonicity and semantic *precision*

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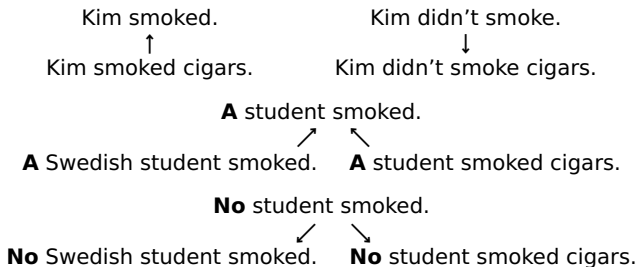
Kim smoked.  
↑  
Kim smoked cigars.

Kim didn't smoke.  
↓  
Kim didn't smoke cigars.

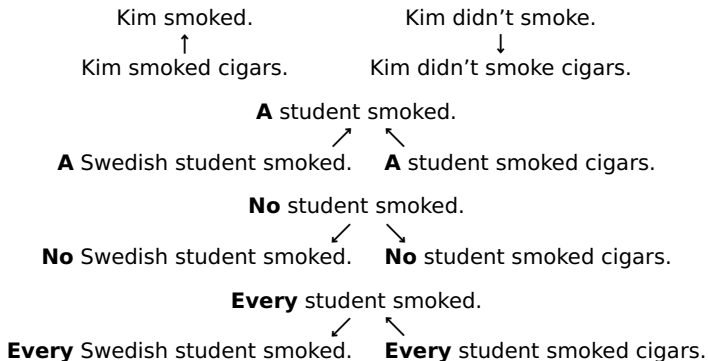
# Monotonicity and semantic *precision*



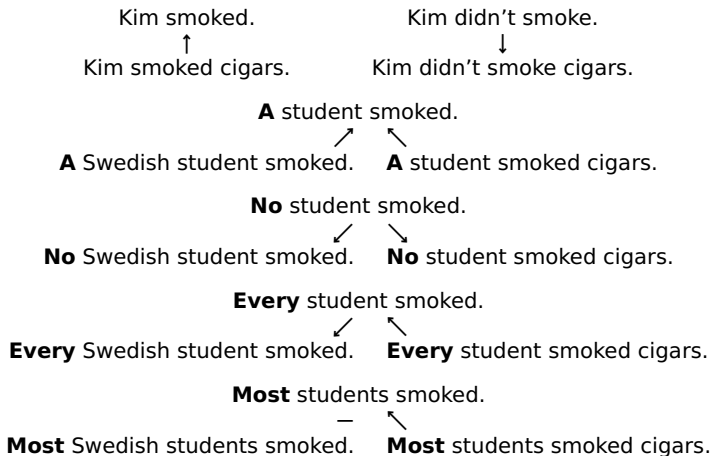
# Monotonicity and semantic *precision*



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# Monotonicity and semantic *precision*



# Monotonicity and semantic *precision*



(Bowman 2016)

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## 4. Precision:

- ▶ Current deep learning are not precise.
- ▶ Linguistic grammars are extremely precise.

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- ▶ Linguistic grammars are narrowly compositional.

## 4. Precision:

- ▶ Current deep learning are not precise.
- ▶ Linguistic grammars are extremely precise.

## 5. Ambiguity resolution:

- ▶ Deep learning grammars make predictions about preferences for ambiguity resolution.
- ▶ Linguistic grammars limit themselves to representation.

# Conclusions

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**Semantics**

**Semantic parsing**

**Deep learning**

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# Conclusions

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## **Semantics**

Recursive

## **Semantic parsing**

Recursive

## **Deep learning**

Recursive

# Conclusions

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**Semantics****Semantic parsing****Deep learning**

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Recursive

Recursive

Recursive

Symbolic

Symbolic

Not symbolic

# Conclusions

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**Semantics****Semantic parsing****Deep learning**

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Recursive

Symbolic

Symbolic

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Compositional

Partly compositional

Compositional?

# Conclusions

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## Semantics

## Semantic parsing

## Deep learning

---

Recursive

Recursive

Recursive

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Precise

Precise

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**Semantics****Semantic parsing****Deep learning**

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Partly compositional

Compositional?

Precise

Precise

Not precise

Purely representational

Preferences learned

Preferences learned

# Conclusions

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## Semantics

Recursive

Symbolic

Compositional

Precise

Purely representational

Open-class lexicon often neglected

## Semantic parsing

Recursive

Symbolic

Partly compositional

Precise

Preferences learned

Learned symbolic lexicon

## Deep learning

Recursive

Not symbolic

Compositional?

Not precise

Preferences learned

Learned lexical embedding

# Conclusions

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**Semantics****Semantic parsing****Deep learning**

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Recursive

Recursive

Recursive

Symbolic

Symbolic

Not symbolic

Compositional

Partly compositional

Compositional?

Precise

Precise

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Purely representational

Preferences learned

Preferences learned

Open-class lexicon often neglected

Learned symbolic lexicon

Learned lexical embedding

Rich treatment of functional lexicon

Possible rich treatment of functional lexicon

No functional/open-class distinctions

# Conclusions

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Recursive	Recursive	Recursive
Symbolic	Symbolic	Not symbolic
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Purely representational	Preferences learned	Preferences learned
Open-class lexicon often neglected	Learned symbolic lexicon	Learned lexical embedding
Rich treatment of functional lexicon	Possible rich treatment of functional lexicon	No functional/open-class distinctions
Sharp sem/prag division	Blurry sem/prag division	No sem/prag division

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Thanks!

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