Today

• Turn in HW1
• How grammar contributes to meaning
  – Structurally
  – Through constructional meaning
  – Other higher-order contributions
An utterance > its parts
Grammar is the linear and hierarchical organization of an utterance.
Grammar contributes structurally to meaning

• Words provide meaning

• Grammar arranges the meaningful parts

• The organization is meaningful, through assignment of roles
  
  – *The monkey bit the prof ≠ The prof bit the monkey*
But constructions might also contribute to meaning directly

• Perhaps patterns of words make their own contributions to meaning, in combination with the words themselves

• Consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Ditransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You slid the cup to Mary.</td>
<td>You slid Mary the cup.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Are these two sentences synonymous?
When you look more closely...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Ditransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You threw the keys to the floor.</td>
<td>?You threw the floor the keys.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

only possible if the floor is a potential recipient

- Maybe the grammar itself is meaningful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Ditransitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’re sliding the tray to Sally.</td>
<td>You’re sliding Sally the tray.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caused motion</td>
<td>transfer of possession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grammatical constructions

• Maybe the different constructions make you attend to different parts of the same scene, or construct representations of it that are subtly different
The basic idea of constructions

Ditransitive

Meaning: $X$ transfer $Y$ to $Z$ by means

You | slid | Sally | the saucer

Dative

Meaning: $X$ move $Y$ along path $Z$ by means

You | slid | the saucer | to Sally
Grammatical constructions

• Note: constructions are controversial

“[...] there are no rules for particular languages and no construction-specific principles [...] traditional grammatical constructions are perhaps best regarded as taxonomic epiphenomena—collections of structures with properties resulting from the interaction of fixed principles with parameters set one way or another.”

(Chomsky, 1989:43)
More generally

• A construction is a stored pairing of form and meaning that is not predictable on the basis of the rest of what you know about the language.
  – For Goldberg (R5), this is an analytical criterion: as the analyst, if your description of the language would be insufficient without positing a construction then there must be a construction there
  – For R6, this is a processing criterion: if you can’t explain human language processing without positing a construction, then posit a construction
Constructions everywhere

• Constructions vary in
  – Specificity vs generality
    *The monkey kicked the bucket*
  – Whether they have slots, and their constraints
    *The more the merrier vs Boom goes the dynamite!*
  – Similarity across languages
    *What a fool I was! vs I was a fool.*
The constructicon

• In Construction Grammar, the mental lexicon includes not just words, but also constructions (so it’s a constructicon)
• This is your repository of constructions, organized hierarchically
• There’s no clear-cut distinction between words and (other constructions), they just vary
• (There’s another version (R7), that proposes that you also perform mental simulations.)