Incorporating semantic features into Merge: A case study of Japanese

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The following propositions seem true.

(1)   For any speaker of Language α,
   a.   If he/she knows the meanings of the lexical items composing a given sentence of α <u>in isolation</u>, then he/she knows what meaning the sentence may have.
   b.   If he/she knows the pronunciation of the lexical items composing a given sentence of α <u>in isolation</u>, then he/she knows how the sentence may be pronounced.

Generative grammar in particular Chomsky's (1995) Minimalist Program, whose general assumptions are stated in (2), is favorable in describing (1).

(2)   a.   Each lexical item consists of syntactic, semantic and phonological features.
   b.   The computational system (i) selects a set of lexical items to form a numeration, (ii) combines the items of the numeration through Merge, and (iii) yields at the output two representations: semantic and phonological representations.

We wish to remind you that the assumptions in (2) are far-reaching. By spelling out the semantic and phonological features of lexical items explicitly, and by describing how they are combined through Merge, i.e. by incorporating semantic and phonological features into Merge, we are able to define the computational system's contribution to sentence meaning and sound. In fact, we believe this is what we syntacticians must aim to do. In this view, significant part of semantic and phonological studies is actually the study of syntax, and thus should not be conducted independently. In this talk, we introduce a portion of our project where we attempt to incorporate semantic features into Merge and describe the Japanese language.