Once and Twice[*]

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The study of English *once* and *twice* yields evidence that both are complex phrases containing two visible morphemes and one silent one, rather than simple lexical items. The *-ce* morpheme is akin to a postposition, despite English being primarily prepositional.

The silent element is a silent counterpart of *time*, represented as TIME. Evidence is discussed that favors taking this instance of TIME to be singular, even in the case of *twice*. There appears to be a link between TIME and the syntax of classifiers (cf. Kayne (2003), Cinque (2013)).

The presence of silent TIME with *once* and *twice* (and in other cases discussed) indirectly provides evidence for the presence of other antecedentless silent (nominal) elements in the human language faculty such as NUMBER.

Silent elements of this sort are not visible (even via an antecedent) in the primary data available to the learner. Their properties, for example their singularity or plurality and their licensing conditions, therefore provide us with a privileged window onto the invariant core of the language faculty itself.

The presence of silent elements such as TIME and NUMBER in various cases in one language or another can itself be traced back to a principle of decompositionality (Kayne (2005a, Appendix)), to the effect that the human language faculty imposes a maximum of one interpretable syntactic feature per lexical item.

References

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