

Hall
Ling 503
Spring 2006

Feature Theory and Naturalness: Not Just for Phonology!

As we saw on the first day or so of class, phonology is all about pattern recognition. The skills you have learned in this class are skills that extend beyond Ling 503 and can help you understand all sorts of phenomena in the world around you. To help you see how even some of the particulars that we have talked about can be used in other arenas (and in fact have been used by you for many years, I'm sure), the final class activity involves developing a feature theory for candy and using it to help us classify different pieces.

You will each be given a bag of assorted candy (all individually wrapped!). Before you start eating it, fill out the following feature chart and answer the questions below.

The inventory of candy you are dealing with:

Hershey's Treasures (chocolate creme, caramel, peanut butter)

Hershey's Minis (milk chocolate, dark chocolate, milk chocolate with crisped rice, milk chocolate with peanuts)

Laffy Taffy (grape, strawberry, sour apple, banana)

DumDums (grape, strawberry, chocolate, butterscotch, cream soda, raspberry, bubblegum)

Starbursts (orange melon, pina colada, strawberry banana)

I. Candy Features – give the definition for the feature, and list whether you think each set of items under it is “plus” or “minus” that feature.

[chocolate] –

Treasures, Minis –

Starbursts, Laffy Taffy, DumDums –

[chewy] –

DumDums, Treasures, Minis –

Starbursts, Laffy Taffy –

[distributed] –

Treasures, Laffy Taffy –

Minis, Starbursts, DumDums –

[red] –

brown, red, purple, brown with red, pink, orange –

yellow, green, blue –

[yellow] –

brown, brown with red, orange, yellow, green –

red, purple, pink, blue –

[blue] –
brown, brown with red, purple, green, blue –
orange, yellow, red, pink –

[pale] –
red –
pink –
all other colors –

[solid] –
brown, red, purple, green, blue, yellow, pink, orange –
brown with red –

II. Questions for discussion

1. Give the feature specification for: strawberry banana Starbursts; Krackels; raspberry DumDums
2. What is the natural class of [+pale] candies? What about the [-chocolate, +purple] candies?
3. Can every different type of candy be uniquely defined using the features listed above?
4. Could the different types of candy have been uniquely defined using other features? Why or why not? Give an example of a different type of feature that could have been used.
5. Does our feature theory predict that you could ever find [+chocolate, +red, +pale] candies? Why or why not? Do we have any such candies? Do you think this is a fault of the theory or an accidental gap?
6. Are chocolate DumDums [+solid] or [-solid]? Why?
7. Find someone who has a “minimal pair” with your bag. Name at least one type of candy that contrasts in this system.
8. Are there any rules that you can determine that governed the types of candy that went into each bag?