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| **Module: Linguistics** | | **Faculty of Letters and Languages** | **Level: First Year LMD** | |
| **Semester: 02** | | **Department of English & Literature** | **Academic Year: 2021-2022** | |
| **Lecture № 04: Branches of Linguistics: Syntax** | | |

**1. Definition of Syntax**

We have studied the phonological and morphological structures of the English language. But to know a language and to speak it correctly also involves being able to articulate complete sentences. The study of the syntax of a language is the study of its sentence structure as well as the linguistic knowledge necessary to form sentences.

**2. Definitions of Sentence**

**a) Aristotelian definition**

Aristotle claimed that a sentence is an utterance consisting of *subject* and *predicate*.

**Examples:**

1. Birds Fly.

2. The president of the United States of America visited Russia last week.

3. Elizabeth believes that astrology is garbage.

4. What you are doings now is not my business.

**b) logical definition**

A logical definition claims that a sentence is the expression of one single, complete thought. However, complex sentences may consist of several thoughts which are interwoven. Thus, this definition does not apply to all sentences. Complex, compound, and compound-complex sentences are examples of complex thought structures.

**Example:** Albert enlisted in the Army, and **Robert**, *who was his older brother*, **joined him a day later**.

**c) structuralist definition (Bloomfield)**

A sentence is independent of any other linguistic form because it can stand alone, other than a single word, which represents no independent syntactic unit. According to this definition, subordinate clauses are not sentences of their own because of their dependence on the main clause.

**3. Grammaticality and Acceptability**

Sentences can also be categorized under the aspects of grammaticality and acceptability. Sentences of a language can be grammatically correct or not. In the latter case, we call them ungrammatical sentences. This term may sound contradictory, since a sentence is, per definition, grammatically correct and complete. Sentences can, nevertheless, lack correct grammaticality,

e.g.: *I wakened was with thundering noise.*

Ungrammatical sentences appear in everyday language and literary language. When you observe your own language, you should find plenty of them.

Also, sentences may be grammatically correct, but still make no sense at all. In this case, they lack acceptability. An example from English is the sentence *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*. Acceptability hence means that the meaning content of the sentence must be clear, understandable or acceptable to the reader.

**4. Major and Minor Sentences**

A ***major sentence*** is a *regular* sentence; it has a [*subject*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subject_%28grammar%29) and a [*predicate*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predicate_%28grammar%29). For example: *I have a ball.* In this sentence one can change the persons (e.g.: *We have a ball*)*.* However, a minor sentence is an irregular type of sentence. It does not contain a finite verb. For example, *Mary!*, *Yes*, *Coffee*, etc. Other examples of ***minor sentences*** are headings (e.g. ***Major and Minor Sentences***), stereotyped expressions (*Hello!*), interjections (*Wow!*), phrasal questions (*tea or coffee?*), signs (*No Smoking*), proverbs (*Better an open enemy than a false friend*), etc. This can also include [nominal sentences](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nominal_sentence) like *The more, the merrier*.

**5. Description of Sentences: Modes of Representation**

**a) Labeled bracketing**

Bracketing is one way of representing the results of distributional analysis. Different bracket types are here reserved for particular structure levels of a sentence. Braces **{}**, for example, contain whole sentences. To remind of its function, the brace is additionally labeled after the opening with an "s". Parentheses **()** indicate noun- or verb-phrases, and brackets **[]** indicate nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

**Example:** {S(NP[Apoor]+[NJohn])+(VP[Vran]+[Advaway])}

**b) Block diagram**

In this way of representing the constituents, the broadest structure appears at the bottom of the diagram, with each row further up showing a more segmented level. Each row thus shows the immediate constituents of its lower row.

**Example:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Poor** | **John** | **ran** | **away** |
| **Poor** | **John** | **ran** | **away** |
| **Poor** | **John** | **ran** | **away** |

**c) Tree diagrams**

Tree diagrams have proven to be the most convenient way of representing an IC-analysis. In the diagram, so-called *nodes*, where the NP, VP, etc. are situated, are connected by *links*, which serve for connection similar to the branches of a tree. At the top of the diagram, the "s" represents the sentence. The immediate constituents of the sentence are the NP and VP.



**6) Syntactic Ambiguity**

Noam Chomsky suggested that any sentence must has a ***deep*** structure and a ***surface*** structure. What he called the surface structure of a sentence was its grammatical form, and the deep structure was understood as the meaning of sentence. For example, the two sentences: “Mary opened the door”and “The door was opened by Mary” differ in their surface structure, but not in their deep structure. Still, it is the deep structure that might cause the biggest problems. Certain sentences, although easily understood, can be ambiguous because of their structure, like for instance *He hit a guy with a car*. This sentence can mean that he was driving a car and hit someone, or that he hit somebody who had a car. Here are other ambiguous sentences in terms of their structure:

1. Visiting neighbours could be a nuisance.
2. Anne likes horses more than Mark.
3. The Shooting of hunters was appaling.
4. Small boys and girls are easily frightened.
5. Yesterday, I met our English history teacher.