

## Lecture 07 : Part One : Syntax

### Introduction:

Syntax means “*sentence construction*”. That is, how words group together to make phrases and sentences. Some people tend to use the term “*Grammar*” to mean the same as syntax, although most linguists follow the more recent practice whereby the grammar of a language includes all of its organizing principles: information about the sound system, about the form of words, how we adjust language according to context, and so on; syntax is only one part of this grammar.

### 1. What is Syntax?

According to Hana (2011), Syntax comes from the Greek word “*syntaxis*” from *syn* (together) + *taxis* (arrangement). Syntax – the part of linguistics that studies sentence structure including:

- word order:

e.g, I want these books.

- Agreement – subject and verb, determiner and noun, . . . often must agree:

e.g, He wants this book.

e.g, I want these books.

- How many complements, which prepositions and forms (cases):

e.g, I give Mary a book.

e.g, I see her.

- Hierarchical structure – what modifies what

e.g, We need more (intelligent leaders). (more of intelligent leaders)

e.g, We need (more intelligent) leaders. (leaders that are more intelligent)

- Syntax is not about meaning! Sentences can have no sense and still be grammatically correct:
- Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. – nonsense, but grammatically correct

This sentence was composed by Noam Chomsky in 1957 as an example of a sentence whose grammar is correct but whose meaning is nonsensical.

### 2. Sentences and phrases

Since **Syntax** is the study of sentence structure , it is necessary to distinguish between “*sentence*” and “*phrase*”. **Sentences** are composed not directly out of words but of **constituents** which may consist of more than one word, called phrases. **A phrase** is an expression which is a constituent in a sentence and is the expansion of a head (i.e. key word)., For example in (a), the constituent *the king*, or the constituents *my brother* and *an expensive car* in (b) are Noun Phrases, abbreviated as NPs, because their key elements are the nouns (Ns) *king*, *brother* and *car*, respectively (Varga, 2010).

a. The king laughed.

b. My brother bought an expensive car.

Note that a phrase can be realised by a single word or a pronoun. For instance the NPs *John*, *Mary* and *apples* in (c) consist of the Ns “*John*”, “*Mary*” and “*apples*”, and “*nothing else*”. In (d) “*he*” is a special NP because its head is a pronoun rather than a noun.

c. John gave Mary apples.

d. He went home.

### 3. Sentences and clauses:

The terms sentence and clause can be used synonymously. A sentence or clause is an expression which minimally contains a subject and a predicate, and which may also contain other types of elements. For instance,

- Example (a):

It consists of just a subject and a predicate. The NP “*the king*” is the subject, and the Verb Phrase (VP) which is composed of a single verb (V) “*laughed*,” is the predicate.

### 4. Complements

According to Verga, “A complement is a constituent whose presence is structurally “dictated” (required or licensed) by a particular word. The presence of the complement “follows” from the presence of the word which it is a complement of” (Varga, 2010). Consider the previously mentioned examples:

- Example (b):

The NP *my brother* is the subject, the V *bought* is the predicate, and the NP *an expensive car* is a complement (direct object, of the verb “*bought*”).

- Example (c):

The subject is the NP “*John*”, the predicate is the V “*gave*”, and there are two complements, the NP “*Mary*”, functioning as an indirect object, and the NP “*apples*” functioning as a direct object.

- Example (d):

The complement of the V “*went*” is the Adverb Phrase (AdvP) “*home*”, consisting of the single adverb (Adv) “*home*”.

### 5. Adjuncts

The sentence or clause may also contain constituents which are not structurally required by the verb but add optional information about *place*, *time*, *manner*, *purpose*, etc. Those constituents are known as adjuncts.

### 6. Grammatical functions Vs syntactic categories

The terms subject, predicate, object (direct and indirect), adverbial, attribute; complement and adjunct refer to **grammatical functions** which constituents may perform in the sentence. The terms such as NP, VP, AP, AdvP, PP, N, V, A, Adv, P, etc. refer to **syntactic categories**, they name the grammatical category to which the constituent belongs (Varga, 2010).

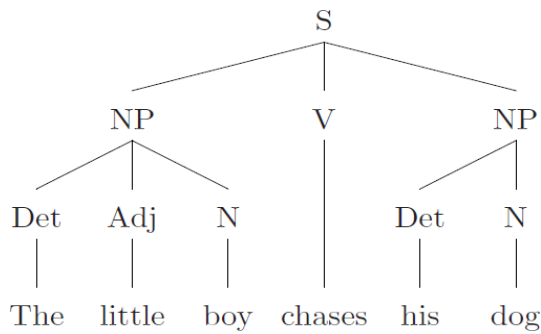
### 7. Representation

Sentences consist of structural units larger than lexical categories, these sentence constituents are called phrases. The constituent structure of sentences can be represented in two ways: **tree diagrams**, and **bracketings**.

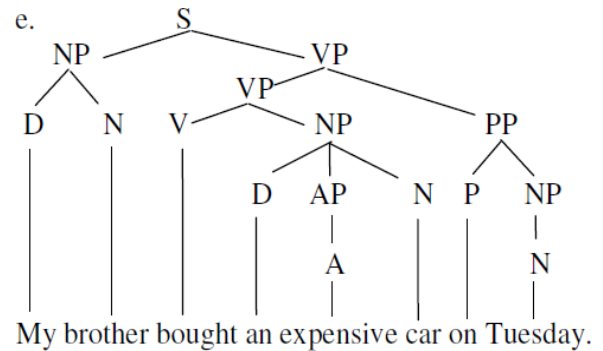
#### a. Tree diagram:

One of the most common ways to create a visual representation of syntactic structure is through tree diagrams Yule (2010). Yule added that a set of the symbols can be used to label parts of the tree as a try to

capture the hierarchical organization of those parts in the underlying structure of phrases and sentences. The following figures are examples of a tree diagram:



(Hana, 2011)



(Varga, 2010)

### b. Bracketings

Labeled bracketing is a way of representing the structure of an expression by writing square brackets ('[' and ']') to the left and right hand side of its component parts, i.e. words or constituents. The brackets carry subscripts, so-called labels, which state the category of the unit in question. 1) and 2) are examples of Labeled bracketing:

- 1) [S[NP[Det My][N friend]] [VP[V ran] [Adv home]]].
- 2) [S[NP[D My][N brother]] [VP [VP[V bought][NP[D an][AP[A expensive]] [N car]]] [PP[P on][NP[N Tuesday]]]]].

- Although the two ways of representation are logically equivalent, we prefer tree diagrams because they help visualise structure better than bracketings do. Tree diagrams are like uprooted trees, with branches and nodes. The nodes in a tree diagram are the topmost point, the bottom points, and all those intermediate points at which the tree branches. The labels are the abbreviated names of the categories to which the constituents belong (Varga, 2010).

### 8. Deep structure and surface structure

Deep structure and surface structure concepts are used in linguistics, specifically in the study of syntax in the Chomskyan tradition of transformational generative grammar.

- **Surface structure** can be defined as the syntactic form they take as actual sentences. In other words, it is forms of sentences resulted from modification/ transformation. Consider these sentences:

- (1) You close the door.
- (2) The door is closed by you.
- (3) Close the door!

- **Deep structure** is defined as an abstract level of structural organization in which all the elements determining structural interpretation are represented. Deep structure is what you wish to express and surface structure how you express it in with the help of words and sentence.

## 9. Structural ambiguity

Structural or syntactic ambiguity is the potential of multiple interpretations for a piece of written or spoken language because of the way words or phrases are organized. It means that two distinct underlying interpretations that have to be represented differently in deep structure. One of the classic examples is:

e.g : The chicken is ready to eat”

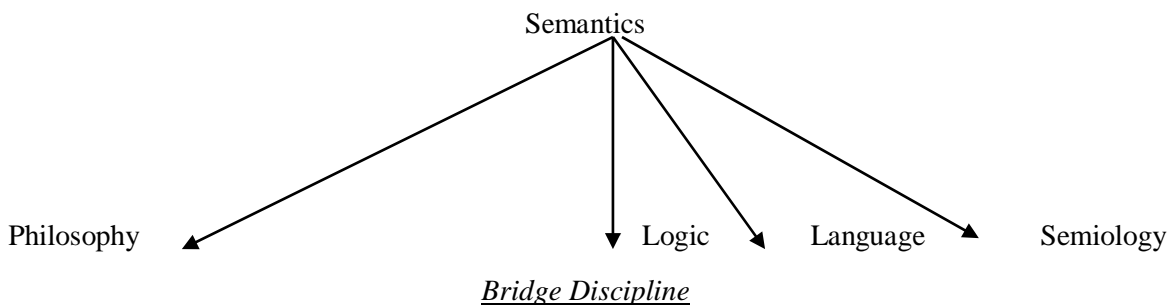
**1<sup>st</sup> interpretation:** a live chicken is hungry.

**2nd interpretation:** a prepared chicken is ready to serve for dinner.

## Part two: Semantics

### Introduction

*Semantics* is a bridge through which we can tackle other disciplines as: philosophy, logic, language and semiology. The latter means the study of signs. In fact, psychologists thought that semantics is part of semiology. This can be clearly shown through the following:



It is meant that *Semantics* belongs to other disciplines, i.e. a point of interest of more than a specialist in different fields. Many differences have been tackled before about “meaning” according to “*Saussure*” who dealt with signs that are part of Semiology; “*Bloomfield*”, who rejected it because he wanted his study to be more scientific, and finally “*Chomsky*”, who gave priority to Syntax rather than Semantics.

Further, *Semantics* was not given a prominent rule. All linguists were aware of the semantic value of the language, but they preferred to deal with the technical way of approaching language rather than its linguistic aspect. It was not acceptable as an integral part of linguistics until recent studies where it was included as sub component of levels of language.

### What is Semantics?

*Semantics* is a technical term which is used to refer to the study of meaning and since meaning is part of language, *semantics* is part of linguistics.

In fact, the word “meaning” has not a particular definition since there is no general agreement about the nature of “meaning”. One of the most famous books on *Semantics* was “The meaning of meaning” by Ogden & Richards published in 1923.

A different use of “Meaning” is found in sentences as: “It wasn’t what he said, but what he meant” and “Lewis Carroll” made play with the difference between *saying* and *meaning* in “**Alice’s Adventures in wonderland**”:

- “Then you should say what you mean” the March Hare went on.
- “I do” Alice hastily replied, “at least, at least I mean what I say- that’s the same thing, you know!”

But it was suggested that *how* can we fail to *say* what we *mean* or rather how the words fail to *mean* what they *mean*? Of course, words don’t mean what is thought to mean because there is *some other meaning besides the literal meaning of words*.

## I- Semantics and Linguistics

- *Semantics* can be placed within *linguistics* for we can assume that *semantics* is a component or a level of *linguistics* of the same kind as phonetics and grammar. Thus, all linguists have accepted that a linguistic model contains the three levels mentioned (phonetics, grammar and semantics).

- *Linguistics* is “The Scientific study of language” and a scientific study must be empirical (concrete). It is very easy to apply this to phonetics because we can observe what is happening, we can listen to a person speaking and describe the physical characteristics of sounds; unlike phonetics, *Semantics* cannot be tackled in the same way.

A further difficulty with *semantics* is that meanings don’t seem to be stable but with generalizations. For this reason, there is a distinction that can be made between the linguistic System, i.e. “Grammar” and the use made of that system by speakers and hearers, i.e. “Semantics”.

## II- Types of Meaning

a- **Conceptual Meaning:** Sometimes called “*denotative*” or “*cognitive*”. It is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistics communication.

The conceptual meanings of a language seem to be organized largely in terms of contrastive features. So that the meaning of the word “woman” could be specified as (+ human, - male, + adult) different from “boy” (+ human, + male, - adult.)

b- **Affective Meaning:** Or “*Emotive*”. It is one kind of expressive meaning, i.e. non-descriptive meaning to which both literary critics and moral philosophers have paid particular attention, i.e. our affection that can affects our every day communication.

c- **Social Meaning:** It is the use of language to establish and maintain social roles and social relations. And much of our every day discourse has this as its principle purpose. It can be seen or taken as “*phatic communion*”, i.e. “*phatic function*” by means of speech.

In fact what is said and the way in which it is said are determined by the social relations obtaining among the participants and social purposes.

d- **Thematic Meaning:** It is the communication through which a speaker or a writer organized the message in terms of *ordering*, *focus* and *emphasis*.

It is clear that the active sentence (1) has a different meaning from its passive equivalent (2) although in conceptual content they seem to be the same.

- (1) Mrs. Mary Smith received the first prize.

(2) The first prize was received by Mrs. Mary Smith.

### III-The Levels of Semantics:

The linguist has three stating points to study “*semantics*”: (The *word* level, the *sentence* level and the *utterance* level).

- **Word Meaning:** Can be understood either through the word or the word reference.
- **Sentence Meaning:** is directly related to the grammatical and lexical features of a sentence.
- **Utterance Meaning:** includes all secondary aspects of meaning especially those related to context.

### VI- Semantic Roles

Instead of thinking of the words as 'containers ' of meaning, we can look at the '*roles*' they fulfill within the situation described by a sentence. If the situation is a simple event, such as "*The boy kicked the ball*", then the verb describes an *action* (kick). The noun phrases describe the roles of entities, such as people and things, involved in the action. We can identify a small number of “semantic roles” for these noun phrases.

#### a- Agent, Theme, Instrument

In the sentence above, one role is taken by "*the boy*" as the entity that performs the action, technically known as the "**agent**". Another role is taken by the "*ball*", as 'the entity that is involved in or affected by the action', technically known as the "**Theme**". The theme can also be an entity (the ball that is simply being described, as in "*The ball was red*"). Identifying entities denoted by noun phrases as the agent & the theme is a way of recognizing the semantic roles of those noun phrases in a sentence.

Although "**agents**" are typically human, they can also be non-human forces (the wind blew the ball array), machines (the car ran over the ball), or Creatures (the dog caught the ball). If an agent uses another entity in performing an action, that other entity fills the role of "instrument". In writing with a pen or eating with a spoon, the noun phrases "*a pen*" and "*a spoon*" have the semantic role of instrument. The theme can also be human. Indeed, the same physical entity can appear in two different semantic roles, as in "*the boy kicked himself*". Here The boy is “the agent” and himself is “the theme”.

#### b- Experiencer, Location, Source, Goal

When a noun phrase designates an entity as the person who has a feeling, a perception or a state, it fills the role of "**experiencer**". If you see, know or enjoy something you don't really have to perform any action (hence you aren't an agent.

You are in the role of experiencer. If someone asks, Did you hear that noise? The **experiencer** is 'you' and the **theme** is "that noise".

A number of other semantic roles designate where an entity is in the description of the event, where an entity is (on the table, in the room) fills the role of location. Where an entity moves from the "**source**" and where it moves to is the "**goal**". when we talk about transferring money from 'savings' to 'checking'. All these semantic roles are illustrated in the following scenario.

- Mary saw a mosquito on the wall  
"Experiencer" "Theme" "location"

-She borrowed a magazine from George  
 "Agent" "Theme" "Source".

-and she hit the bug with the magazine "Agent" "Theme"  
 "Instrument"

-She handed the magazine back to George  
 "Agent" "theme" "Goal"

## VI- Lexical Relations

Words can't be only treated as 'containers' or as fulfilling 'roles', they can also have relationships. The latter is known as "*Sense Relations*" which are classified into two broad categories:

- Those involving "*Similarity*" in meaning: "*Synonymy*"
- Those that include "*Difference*" in meaning "*Antonymy*", "*Polysemy*", "*Hyponymy*".

1- **Synonymy:** Sameness in meaning between words. It exists in language but not always full. Synonymy, i.e. the degree of sameness is less than 100%.

**For instance:** Beautiful/handsome, Liberty/Freedom, Stop/give up, world/ universe.... In this group of synonyms, the sameness is not 100% in degree because they are synonyms but with reserves because they can't be interchangeable within context. Some of these words aren't of the same origin, *for example* "*Brotherly*" is an English word, while "*Fraternity*" is a French one.

*Synonymy as a general definition:* Two items are synonymous if they are associated with the same meaning. It is widely believed that there are "few" if any "real" synonyms in natural languages to quote **ULL Man:** "*It is almost a truism (evidence) that total. Synonymy is an extremely rare occurrence, a luxury that language can ill-afford.*"

2- **Homography:** The same spelling and/or pronunciation and different meaning

- The same spelling and pronunciation as: *plant/plant; Bow/Bow; left/left*
- The same spelling but different pronunciation as: *live/live.*

### 3- Homonymy and Polysemy

**a-Homonymy:** Words shared the same spelling, but different meaning or words which have the same pronunciation, but not the same spelling and of course the meaning is different. There are two kinds: 1 -

**Homophony:** Words that have the same pronunciation but not the same spelling. For example; meat/meet, see/sea, knight/night.

**b-Polysemy:** When a word has many meanings. So the same morphological word may have a range of different meanings as a glance at any dictionary will reveal. In the dictionary there is entry for any given word, the meanings are listed in a particular order with the central meaning given first followed by the most closely related meanings, and with metaphorical extensions coming last. The principle of polysemy is to transfer. The distinction between "*Homography*" & "*Polysemy*" is evident in the organization of the dictionaries. "*Homographs*" will be listed as different words, whereas "*Polysemes*" will be given under one "entry"

- What are the criteria followed by linguists?

The first criterion is *Etymology* (The origin of the word). Etymologists looked for the meaning of the word, if they find that the word has different origins, they are “*Homographs*” and if they have one origin, they are “*Polysemies*”. But, in fact, the idea of the origin isn’t always successful, it depends on how far we go to the “Etymology” of the word. e.g. “**port**”, *Harbour* is derived from the Latin “**Portus**”, whereas port “**strong wine**” is derived from “**Oporto**” which is the city from where wine is obtained and the origin of this word is “**Portoguese**”.

- The historical study doesn’t guarantee the difference in origins, e.g. *Flower & flour*, *Flower* is the origin since “*flour*” is derived from “*flower*”.

We shouldn’t allow the historical study.

4- **Antonymy**: Two words with oppositeness in meaning. For instance; *Safe/ danger, fat/thin, male/female, buy /sell, easy/difficult, intelligent/idiot, good/bad*.

Some of these words aren’t gradable, i.e. there is a scale of degrees and comparison like “*Hot*” & “*cold*”, there are items that are gradable: *warm/coal*. But it isn’t always the case; we can say, for example “*more polite*” but we never say “*more alive*”.

5- **Hyponymy**: It stands for meaning *inclusion*, for example: **Tree & forest**. One is included in the other (*Tree is included in Forest*). The relationship of implicit inclusion is called “*Hyponymy*”

## **PRAGMATICS**

Besides the meaning of words, there are, however, other aspects of meaning which are not derived from the meaning of words used in phrases and sentences. In fact, when we read or hear pieces of language, we normally try to understand not only what the words mean, but what the writer or speaker of these words intended to convey. This study of intended speaker meaning is called “*pragmatics*”.

- **Invisible Meaning**: “*Pragmatics*” is the study of invisible meaning in order to have some insights into how more gets communicated than it is said.

Thus we take the words, understand their meanings, and consider the context in which they occur, then we try to arrive at what the is intended to be conveyed.

**Example: It** is taken from a newspaper advertisement, and think not only about what the words might mean, but also about what the advertiser intended them to mean: “*Baby & Toddler Sale*”. Normally, we understand it as advertising for babies’ clothes rather than the selling of children or babies themselves.

The word “*clothes*” doesn’t appear, but our normal interpretation would be that the advertiser intended us to understand his message as relating to the sale of baby clothes and not of babies.

In these examples, there is emphasis on the influence of context. The latter can be either “*linguistic*” or “*physical context*” due to be place, time...etc.

“*Pragmatics*” is the theory of linguistic communication, what is involved in linguistic communication, how the speaker accomplishes the intended communication, How & why certain strategies are selected under particular circumstances’(context) to bring about communication.

The Speakers’ intentions to convey are very important as well as the hearer who should recognize the attitude; like intention to apologize. e.g. when a mother says to her son: “*I will take you out skiing in your birthday*”. This



utterance can be either a promise or a threat if the son doesn't like this thing this can be clearly distinguished according to the knowledge that she & he have. That's to say, it is only according to the context that this utterance can be understood.

## - **Context**

There are, of course, different kinds of context to be considered. one kind is best described as "*linguistic context*" also known as "*context*". The "*context*" of a word is a set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence. The surrounding "*context*" has a strong effect on what we think the word means .e.g. The word "*bank*" is a complex word & can be understood only in its context, i.e. a form with more than one meaning (homonym) . From the "*linguistic Context*", we can know which type of bank is intended.

More generally, we know what those words mean on the basis of another type of context, best described as "*physical context*". If you see, for example, the word "*bank*" or the wall of a building in a city, the "*physical location*" will influence your interpretation. Our understanding of much of what we read and hear is tied to the physical context particularly the time & the place, in which we encounter linguistic expressions.

**To conclude,** "Semantics" is a very important component as well as "Syntax" and "phonology". They all go together, hand in hand with "Pragmatics" in order to understand a particular language.