Syntax 1

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Aims of the unit

- Introduce and explain three key concepts of syntax: openness, grammaticality and hierarchical structure.

- Present the fundamental syntactic units, and give criteria for their identification

- Show how the syntactic structures of sentences can be represented in tree diagrams

- Explain the need to identify syntactic relation

- Identify some of the major types of syntactic relations

- Illustrate by example some differences in the structure of the sentences of the world's languages

- Remark on similarities and differences between morphology and syntax

Syntax: Opennes

- In all human languages word can be put together to express meaning that separate words cannot express on their own.

- In other words - Syntax is able to express meanings that lexical and morphological resources cannot express

- Syntax is concerned with - **the means available in language for putting words together in a sequence**

- Grammar = not only syntax but also morphology, phonology and semantincs

- Syntax provides means of 'opening' the grammatical system for:

   + The expression of new meanings

   + Nuances of meaning

   + Precision in meaning

   + Link between ideas

   + Means for speakers to go beyond the limitations of morphology and lexicon

Syntax: Opennes

- **The notion of sentence**

+ The largest linguistic unit showing, the largest unit over which grammatical rules or patterns apply. (The opposite side of the scale from a morpheme)

' The fisherman hung the net on the fence. I saw him'

'The fisherman hung the net on the fence'.

' I saw him'

The fisherman hung the net on the fence, didn´t he?

What is more common? To find new words or to produce novel sentences?

Syntax: Grammaticality

- Not all possible string of words in a language form grammatically acceptable sentences.

* 'The the hung fisherman fence net on the'

- The notion of grammaticality should not be confused with meaningfulness or interpretability. = I can produce a grammatically appropriate structure with no meaning whatsoever.

    ' Colourless green ideas sleep furiously''

Can speakers of English understand ungrammatical sentences?

Grammaticality reveals aspect of the syntax in any language.

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

- **Grouping**

+ 3 types of grammatical units: sentences, words and morphemes.

Do we have any more?

' The train chugged along the line through the mountains'

3 groups: The train / chugged / (along the line) (through the mountains)

BOXES

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

■ **Evidence for grouping words**

- Movability

- Contractibility

- Structural ambiguity

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

➡ **Movability**

+ If certain words always move together in a sentence the constitute a single group

Example:

'The fisherman hung the net on the fence'

'On the net the fisherman hung the net'

'It was on the fence that the fisherman hung the net'

' The net was hung on the fence by the fishermen'

' It was the fisherman who hung the net on the fence'

' It was the net that was hung on the fence by the fisherman'

Can we find any way to separate the single group 'on the fence'?

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

➨ ' It was the fence that the fisherman hung the net on'

➨ Can we follow all the time this criteria?

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

- **Contractibility**

    + The potential for a string of words to be replaced by a single word.

    Fisherman by he? / The net by it?

    + If the string can be replaced by a single word, it behaves a single word (identify syntactic functions)

This criterion again does not work in all the cases

'The train **chugged along the** line through the mountains'

Syntax: Hierarchical structure in sentences

- **Ambiguity**

   + Meaning differences. In some cases string of words admit different interpretations that can be explained by different groupings.

'The policeman shot the man with a rifle'

'The policeman shot the man with a rifle'

Syntax: Syntactic units

- Syntactic units are grammatical items showing unified behaviour, that behave as an indivisible whole: morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

- Clauses = simple sentences – What do we mean by simple sentences?

    + Sentences that **contain just one verb and specify a single event**

    ' I broke my foot'

Simple sentences can be joined to form complex sentences

    ' The fisherman made the fence last year'

    ' The fisherman hung the net on the fence and pulled the plough into the shed'

Syntax: Syntactic units

▸ **Phrases**

+ Units intermediate in size between words and clauses

+ They are grouping of words that normally do not constitute clauses, just part of clauses.

Let's analyse this:

' The train chugged along the line through the mountains'

Syntax: Syntactic units

- **Types of phrases**

- NPs: Usually made up of noun which is the most important element in the phrase and normally accompanied by one or more words or morphemes

- E.g. 'My beautiful car', 'The outstanding research'

Syntax: Syntactic units

- **Types of phrases**

- VPs: Verb phrases are groups of words and morphemes that normally contain a lexical verb, conveying the most important lexical information, usually along with other morphemes.

- VPs refer to events as opposed to NPs that refer to entities.

- Ex:

  Chugged, was chugging, might chug

Syntax: Syntactic units

- Other phrase types
- PPs = Prepositional phrase = Phrases made up of a preposition an a NP

'The train chugged along the line through the mountains'

In this sentence there are two prepositional phrases. Which are they?

Syntax: Syntactic units

- AdjP and AdvP

- Adjp = adjectival phrases normally have an adjective and a modifier indicating degree of intensity as for example in:

"very tall", "quite high" and "somewhat stupid".

- AdvP = adverbial phrases have an adverb and a modifier again indicating degree of intensitiy:

"very badly or excessively well"

Syntax: Syntactic units

- Any idea of **embedding**?

- 'The man on the moon'
- 'A house on the hills'

- A NP indicating a possessor can also be embedded in another NP.

- The old's woman three cats

- The new president's flight to the artic

Syntax: Syntactic units

- A second complication: sentences can be **conjoined** such as <u>and</u> and <u>or</u> to form more complex structures.

- *Ex: a word and a number*

- *A booklet and the necessary cables*

- *Words can be also conjoined "Boys and girls", "salt and pepper" "big and little people"*
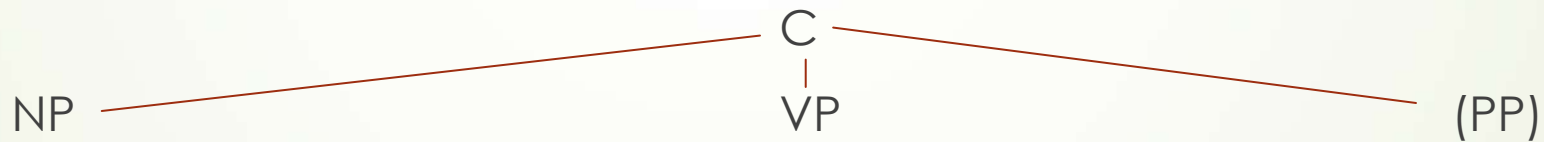
- *Old men and women*

Syntax: The structure of clauses

- Fundamentals

Description of the clause in terms of phrases

- The notions previously developed allow us to describe clauses as sequences of phrases of various types (same as NPs and VPs as sequences of words)

In this sense a prototypical clause could be

C

NP   VP   (PP)

Syntax: The structure of clauses

- Some examples

The dog ran towards the child

The little child squealed with joy

The train goes in the morning

Not every English sentence satisfies this model, in other words, is not that easy
YOUR TURN

Is the locomotive in the shed?

On the corner stands a statue

Marlowe slugged his assistant

Is the president Bill Clinton?

The teacher will give his wife a gift of considerable value

What is that thing?

When was the locomotive on the line through the mountains?