

COURSE TITLE: SYNTAX

WEEK 1: MEANING OF SYNTAX AND AN OVERVIEW OF WORD CLASSES.

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Lesson objectives

- ▶ By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:
 - ▶ i. Describe the meaning of syntax
 - ▶ ii. Examine the role of the rules of syntax
 - ▶ iii. Discuss the form and function of the word classes

INTRODUCTION TO SYNTAX

- ▶ What is syntax?
- ▶ It is part of Grammar:
- ▶ Consider the following structures:
 - a). All students have reported.
 - b). Reported students all have.
- ▶ We can distinguish these and state that the first is correct, the second is not.

INTRODUCTION TO SYNTAX

- ▶ Ability to draw such distinctions-evidence that speakers already know the rules of grammar .
- ▶ They apply these rules everyday.
- ▶ Hence, working knowledge of grammar
- ▶ We undertake a formal study of grammar to make explicit the knowledge of the rules that we apply when we use a language.
- ▶ Hence, a formal knowledge of the rules.

MEANING OF SYNTAX

- ▶ When studying the grammar of a language, you are dealing with its morphology and its syntax.
- ▶ Syntax is therefore, is the study of rules of sentences.
- ▶ It is the part of grammar that governs the organization of words in phrases and sentences (Finegan, 2015).
- ▶ The study of syntax addresses the structure of sentences and their relationships to one another: both structurally and functionally.

Finegan, E. (2015). *Language: Its structure and use*. USA: Cengage Learning pg.133.

MEANING OF SYNTAX

- ▶ Syntax is the scientific study of sentence structure.
- ▶ Science because syntax uses methodology of pure sciences , so it is properly considered a science.
- ▶ Taking a hypothesis about the subject matter,
- ▶ testing it by observing and gathering data,
- ▶ making generalizations about the patterns in that data
- ▶ revising the hypothesis to account for the new generalizations

MEANING OF SYNTAX

- ▶ The sentence is an important structure in language -
- ▶ competence and performance are measured.
- ▶ We do not utter the same set of sentences each time but we can construct new and unlimited number of well-formed sentences.
- ▶ This is the creativity aspect of language.
- ▶ We can construct an infinite number of correct sentences

- ▶ The cat chased the mouse.
- ▶ The cat chased the mouse that ate the cheese.
- ▶ The cat chased the mouse that ate the cheese that came from the cow.
- ▶ The cat chased the mouse that ate the cheese that came from the cow that grazed
- ▶ in the field.

SYNTACTIC RULES- WHAT THEY DO

- ▶ **The rules of syntax combine words into phrases and phrases into sentences.**
- ▶ They specify the correct word order.
- ▶ SVO
- ▶ SVC

SYNTACTIC RULES- WHAT THEY DO

- ▶ **Describe the relationship between the meaning of a particular group of words and the arrangement of those words.**
- ▶ The sentences below contain the same words, but the meanings are quite different
- ▶ I mean what I say.
- ▶ I say what I mean.

SYNTACTIC RULES- WHAT THEY DO

- ▶ **The rules of the syntax also specify the grammatical relations of a sentence, such as subject and direct object.**
- ▶ That man gave an excellent idea.
- ▶ An excellent idea was given by the man.
- ▶ This transformation is important

RULES OF SYNTAX -WHAT THEY DO

- ▶ **Syntactic rules also specify other constraints that sentences must adhere to.**
- ▶ Consider, for example, the sentences in below. As an exercise you can first read through them and place a star before those sentences that you consider to be ungrammatical.
- ▶ (a) The boy found.
- ▶ (b) The boy found quickly.
- ▶ (c) The boy found in the house.
- ▶ (d) The boy found the ball.
- ▶ (e) Disa slept the baby.
- ▶ (f) Disa slept soundly

RULES OF SYNTAX - WHAT THEY DO

- ▶ Our syntactic knowledge crucially includes rules that tell us how words form groups in a sentence,
- ▶ or how they are hierarchically arranged with respect to one another.
- ▶ Consider the following sentence:
- ▶ The captain ordered all old men and women off the sinking ship.
- ▶ This phrase “old men and women” is ambiguous, referring either to old men and to women of any age or to old men and old women.

- ▶ [old men] and [women]
- ▶ When we group them like this, the adjective old modifies both men and women.
- ▶ [old [men and women]]
- ▶ The rules of syntax allow both of these groupings, which is why the expression is ambiguous.

AN OVERVIEW OF WORD CLASSES

- ▶ Word classes are fundamental building block of all language is the word.
- ▶ Words are classified into **parts of speech** according to the way words function in a sentence.
- ▶ a word's part of speech is not inherent in the word itself but in the way the word is used.
- ▶ a word to belong to more than one part of speech class depending on how the word is used.

NOUNS

- ▶ The nouns make - the largest category in terms of number of dictionary entries,
- ▶ In texts we find more nouns than words of any other category.
- ▶ (a) Meaning
- ▶ Category denoting all kinds of physical objects, such as persons, animals and inanimate objects: computer, monument, .
- ▶ There are also innumerable abstract nouns such as absence, manliness, fact, idea, sensitivity, computation, etc.

- ▶ (b) Inflection
- ▶ The majority of nouns, though certainly not all, have an inflectional form contrast between singular and plural forms:
 - ▶ cat - cats, tiger - tigers, man - men, woman - women, etc.
- ▶ (c) Function
- ▶ Nouns generally function as head of NPs, and NPs in turn have a range of functions, including that of subject.

Differences from traditional grammar

Modern grammar covers common nouns proper nouns (Kim, Sue, Washington, Europe, etc.

and pronouns (I, you, he, she, who, etc.).

In traditional grammar the pronoun is treated as a distinct part of speech rather than a subclass of noun.

This, however, ignores the very considerable syntactic similarity between pronouns and common or proper nouns.

- ▶ Most importantly, pronouns are like common and proper nouns in their function:
- ▶ they occur as heads of NPs.
- ▶ They therefore occur in essentially the same range of positions in sentences as common and proper nouns -
- ▶ and this is why traditional grammars are constantly having to make reference to 'nouns or pronouns' .

VERBS

- ▶ (a) Meaning
- ▶ We use the term situation for whatever is expressed in a clause, and the verb is the chief determinant of what kind of situation it is:
- ▶ an action (I opened the door),
- ▶ some other event (The building collapse{}),
- ▶ a state (They know the rules), and so on.

Lexical and auxiliary verbs

INFLECTION OF VERBS

- ▶ Inflection
- ▶ The most distinctive grammatical property of verbs is their inflection. In particular,
- ▶ they have an inflectional contrast of tense between past and present.
- ▶ A past tense that is marked by inflection is called a preterite.
- ▶ In the present tense there are two forms, depending on properties of the subject (primarily whether it is singular or plural):

Function of the verb

Verbs characteristically occur as head of VPs that themselves function as predicate in a clause.

As head of the VP, the verb largely determines what other elements are permitted in the VP.

She left the airport but not **She arrived the airport*;

He seemed mature but not **He knew mature*;

DETERMINATIVES

- ▶ Definiteness
- ▶ There is a class of words called determinatives.
- ▶ The two most common members are the words *the* and *a*.
- ▶ These function as determiner in NP structure.
- ▶ They mark the NP as definite (in the case of *the*) and indefinite (in the case of *a*).

- ▶ (b) Determinative vs determiner
- ▶ Notice that determinative is the name of a category (a class of words), while determiner is the name of a function.
- ▶ There are other determinatives besides the and a: examples *include this, that, some, any, many, few, one, two, three, etc .*
- ▶ They can likewise function as determiner, but that isn't their only function.

Differences from Traditional grammar

- ▶ Traditional grammars generally don't use the term 'determinative' .
- ▶ The words in that class are treated as a subclass of the adjectives.
- ▶ But in fact words such as *the* and *a* are very different in grammar and meaning from adjectives.
- ▶ They perform different functions

ADVERBS

(a) Relation to adjectives

The most obvious adverbs are those derived from adjectives by adding *-ly*:

ADJECTIVE	Careful	Certain	Obvious	Fortunate	Rapid	Usual
ADVERB	Carefully	Certainly	Obviously	Fortunately	Rapidly	Usually

Words like the ones in the second row constitute the majority of the adverb class, though there are

also a fair number of adverbs that do not have this form, some of them quite common :they include *almost, always, not, often, quite, rather, soon, too, and very.*

FUNCTION OF ADVERBS

- ▶ It is mainly function that distinguishes adverbs from adjectives.
- ▶ The two main functions of adjectives exemplified in are **attributive** and **predicative**,
- ▶ but adverbs do not occur in similar structures: compare **a jealously husband* and **He became jealously*.
- ▶ Instead adverbs mostly function as *modifiers of verbs (or VPs), adjectives, or other adverbs*.

Adverbs

- ▶ MODIFYING A VERB OR VP- *She spoke clearly, I often see them.*
- ▶ 11 MODIFYING AN ADJECTIVE- *This is a remarkably good idea, It is very expensive.*
- ▶ 111 MODIFYING AN ADVERB- *She spoke quite emotionally, It will end quite soon.*

PREPOSITIONS

- ▶ The most central members of the preposition category have primary meanings expressing various relations of space or time:
- ▶ Across the road near the river at the bank before noon
- ▶ By the roadside for an hour into the ocean after
midnight.

- ▶ Prepositions occur as head of preposition phrases (PPs),
- ▶ and these in turn function as dependents of a range of elements, especially verbs (or VPs), nouns and adjectives.
- ▶ DEPENDENT ON A VERB OR VP- *I sat [by the door].*
- ▶ DEPENDENT ON A NOUN - *the man [in the car]*
- ▶ DEPENDENT ON AN ADJECTIVE- *keen [on golf]*

Differences from Traditional Grammar

- ▶ In traditional grammar the class of prepositions only contains words that combine
- ▶ with nouns (actually, in our terms, NPs).
- ▶ Modern grammar drops this restriction and extends the membership of the preposition category.

COORDINATORS

- ▶ The central members of the coordinator category are *and*, *or*, *and but*
- ▶ in traditional grammar they are called 'coordinating conjunctions'
- ▶ Their function is to mark the coordination of two or more expressions,
- ▶ where coordination is a relation between elements of equal syntactic status.
- ▶ This syntactic equality is typically reflected in the ability of any one element to stand in place of the whole coordination

SUBORDINATORS

- ▶ The most central members of the subordinator category are *that*, *whether*, *if*
- ▶ the one that is generally interchangeable with *whether* (as in I don 't know whether/if it 's possible) .
- ▶ These words serve to mark a clause as subordinate.
- ▶

Differences from Traditional grammar

- ▶ One minor difference is that we follow most work in modern linguistics in:
- ▶ taking subordinators and coordinators as distinct primary categories
- ▶ However, subclasses of a larger class of 'conjunctions '

Summary

- ▶ The meaning of syntax
- ▶ Rules of syntax
- ▶ Overview of word classes

References

- ▶ Finegan, E. (2015). *Language: Its structure and use*. USA: Cengage Learning.