

COURSE TITLE: SYNTAX

WEEK 2: LEXICON AND SYNTAX

UNIT LECTURER: DR.LILLIAN KEMUNTO OMOKE

UNIVERSITY OF EMBU

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
 - ▶ i. Describe the meaning of lexicon
 - ▶ ii. Examine the importance of the lexicon in language analysis.
 - ▶ iii. Discuss the meaning of subcategorization
 - ▶ iv. Examine selectional restrictions
 - ▶ v. Examine the role of fixed phrases in syntax.

Introduction

- ▶ Why the lexicon?
- ▶ Dictionary- you cannot divorce knowledge of words from the study of language, hence syntax.
- ▶ Setting up word classes we have to appeal to syntactic criteria, to morphology and morpho-syntax and to meaning.
- ▶ the idea that the head of a given phrase controls the other constituents in the phrase
- ▶ there are different subclasses of nouns and verbs that impose different requirements on phrases and clauses.
- ▶ A man (wear/wears)...

Introduction

- ▶ Syntactic constructions, however, are not identical with specific clauses;
- ▶ particular clauses do not appear until lexical items are inserted into a general syntactic structure.
- ▶ For example,
- ▶ the structure Noun Phrase-Verb-Noun Phrase corresponds to indefinitely many clauses:
- ▶ The dog chewed its bone, The cat scratched the dog, Dogs like meat.
- ▶ The process of insertion is not simple. You need the knowledge of words; hence the need for the lexicon.

LEXICAL ITEMS

- ▶ Particular lexical items only fit into particular pieces of structure
- ▶ - some verbs combine with one noun phrase, others with two, and a third
- ▶ set of verbs with three. Some singular nouns combine with the and a, and;
- ▶ some exclude them.
- ▶ there are many instances both of particular lexical items that typically combine with other specific lexical items (rock hard),
- ▶ and of fixed phrases (know something like the back of one's hand).

LEXICAL ITEMS

- ▶ Information about the interplay between lexical items and syntactic
- ▶ structure has always been available in all but the smallest dictionaries.
- ▶ For example,
- ▶ Chambers 20th Century Dictionary (1983), Miller (as cited in Miller, 2002)for example, includes the following information in the entry for knife:

knife [*nɪf*]; an instrument for cutting; *verb transitive*: to cut
knifeless; *knifing* the act of putting a knife into someone
war to the knife *have one's knife in*

Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

The role of the lexicon

- ▶ The entry gives some information about syntax;
- ▶ the verb is described as transitive,
- ▶ which means that in the basic ACTIVE DECLARATIVE construction it requires a noun phrase to its right.
- ▶ a rough guide to the pronunciation - does not use the International Phonetic Alphabet,
- ▶ a definition of the meaning of the noun,
- ▶ two words that are derived from the basic stem and,
- ▶ two idiomatic phrases.

The role of the lexicon

- ▶ The major grammars of languages, particularly languages that are both spoken and written, include information about;
- ▶ all the word,
- ▶ phrase, clause
- ▶ and sentence constructions in a large body of data,
- ▶ mostly drawn from written texts but nowadays likely to include transcripts of speech

The role of lexicon and

- ▶ Another approach to the writing of grammars has as its goal the writing of explicit rules, which ‘generate’ sentences.
- ▶ involves the writing of rules that specify syntactic constructions,
- ▶ involves the writing of an accurate and,
- ▶ detailed dictionary and it involves a detailed account of how the correct lexical item is inserted into a given syntactic structure,
- ▶ and of how only acceptable combinations of lexical items are specified.

Importance of the lexicon

- ▶ This approach must also ensure that the rules do not specify unacceptable structures.
- ▶ explicit rules and of a system of rules in order to organize our discussion of the lexicon.
- ▶ What is of crucial concern, of course, is the set of concepts to be used in the
- ▶ analysis of syntax
- ▶ (whether the syntax of English or of some other language);

Subcategorization and restrictions

VERBS

Intransitive Verb [excludes a noun phrase to its right)

Transitive Verb [requires a noun phrase to its right,

- ▶ gave Ditransitive Verb ['twice transitive'] [requires two noun
- ▶ phrases to its right,
- ▶ sat Intransitive Locational Verb [excludes a noun phrase to
- ▶ its right but requires a prepositional phrase,

subcategorization and restrictions

Transitive Directional Verb [requires to its right both a noun phrase and a directional phrase]- handed

- ▶ Copula (linking verb) [requires to its right an adjective phrase , or a noun phrase, as in seemed a sensible person,
- ▶ or a prepositional phrase, as in seemed in good spirits, or an infinitive, as in seemed to be unhappy]
- ▶ NOTE: given lexical item controls ‘lexical insertion’, the inserting of lexical items into its complements.

Sub-categorization and restrictions

- ▶ A recent approach is:
- ▶ to have no separate set of rules that specify syntactic structure but to have that work carried out by lexical entries.
- ▶ The entry for *seem* can be thought of as a set of instructions to build a syntactic structure containing a noun phrase, a verb and, for example, an
- ▶ adjective phrase.
- ▶ The entry for *hand* can be thought of as a set of instructions to build a syntactic structure containing a noun phrase, a verb, a
- ▶ noun phrase and a directional prepositional phrase,
- ▶ and so on for the other types of verb.

Subcategorization

- ▶ Subcategorization -
- ▶ The constraints that lexical verbs place on number and type of
- ▶ constituents, choice of preposition and choice of case
- ▶ We are dealing with the class or category of verbs,
- ▶ but the different constructions required by different verbs allow us to set
- ▶ up subclasses or subcategories of verb.
- ▶ Hence the term ‘subcategorization’.

Selectional restrictions

- ▶ Lexical entries also contain information about the roles assigned to the nouns in a clause.
- ▶ Consider:

The Romans built this aqueduct.

The computer will calculate the value of the variable

- ▶ build and calculate assign Agent role to their subject noun and Patient role to their direct object noun.

Selectional restrictions

- ▶ Lexical verbs impose restrictions on the type of noun that can occur to their left or right.
- ▶ A verb such as blame requires a human noun to its left, while a verb such as kill requires an animate noun to its right.
- ▶ Speakers and writers regularly utter sentences such as (I) and
- ▶ (II).
- ▶ The dog blamed us for her stay at the vet's.
- ▶ These objections killed the proposal.

Selectional restrictions

- ▶ Speakers and writers who produce (I) know perfectly well that blame
- ▶ is assigned by moral beings;
- ▶ they merely assume that dogs qualify.
- ▶ In our treatment of (II), we continue to state that kill requires an animate noun to its right.
- ▶ The clash between this requirement and the fact that proposal is inanimate imposes a **metaphorical interpretation**.

Selectional restrictions

- ▶ Constraints affecting the type of lexical noun are known as selectional restrictions.
- ▶ Selectional restrictions range from large classes of nouns such as animate and human nouns (‘nouns denoting animate beings’ and, ‘nouns denoting human beings’) to smaller classes
- ▶ such as nouns denoting liquids.
- ▶ For example, the verb flow requires a subject noun such as water, river or lava.

Selectional restrictions and classes of nouns

- ▶ Selectional restrictions,, lead us to employ large subclasses of nouns that are familiar from traditional grammar.
- ▶ The subclasses are:
 - ▶ a. concrete vs abstract
 - ▶ b. common vs proper
 - ▶ c. count vs mass
 - ▶ d. animate vs inanimate
 - ▶ e. human vs non-human

Restrictions Classes of nouns

- ▶ Common nouns, which are not the names of people, towns and so on, typically allow or require the or a:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 4) a. Ethel was sitting at her desk. | *The Ethel was sitting at her desk. |
| b. *Lecturer was sitting at her desk. | The lecturer was sitting at her desk. |
| 5) a. The gritter spread salt. | The gritter spread the salt. |
| b. The gritter spread salts. | |
| c. Too much salt damages vehicles. | *Too many salt damages vehicles. |
| d. *Too much vehicles are damaged by salt. | *Too many vehicles are damaged by salt. |

From Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Classes of nouns

- ▶ The distinction between count and mass nouns is involved in important grammatical choices but likewise has a meaning component.
- ▶ With respect to grammar, mass nouns require much, and exclude many;
- ▶ count nouns require many and exclude much.
- ▶ With respect to meaning, count nouns refer to entities that are thought of as individuals, that can be counted - boy, plant, idea.

Classes of nouns

- ▶ Mass nouns denote entities that are conceived of as a mass of stuff that cannot be split into countable individuals
- ▶ - water, flour, wine, salt.
- ▶ Mass nouns typically occur in the singular;
- ▶ when they occur in the plural,
- ▶ they change their meaning.
- ▶ Wines has the interpretation 'kinds of wine'

Classes of nouns

- ▶ labels such as ‘concrete’, ‘count’ and ‘human’ represent properties of nouns;
- ▶ these properties are known as inherent properties, and features such as
- ▶ ‘concrete’ are known as inherent features.
- ▶ All the examples in this chapter have been of the ACTIVE DECLARATIVE construction as in A and B
- ▶ a. Frank gave a piano to Jane.
- ▶ b. Frank gave Jane a piano.
- ▶ PASSIVE SENTENCE
- ▶ c. A piano was given to Jane by

- ▶ GIVE- a ditransitive verb, hence can take two objects.
- ▶ the same lexical items occur, but the animate noun Jane is a noun phrase
- ▶ immediately following the verb and not preceded by a preposition.
- ▶ c), an example of the passive construction,
- ▶ the animate noun Frank is not to the left of the verb but to its right, inside a prepositional phrase, by Frank.

Subcategorization, selection and constructions

- ▶ We would have to write separate entries for each construction that a given verb occurs in, and there are different constructions.
- ▶ we would not capture in our account the system of constructions,
- ▶ the fact that paths lead from the basic ACTIVE DECLARATIVE positive construction out to the other constructions,
- ▶ some directly, some via intervening constructions.
- ▶ The way round this problem is to state the subcategorisation and selectional restrictions once for the basic ACTIVE DECLARATIVE positive construction
- ▶ and to have the information about the restrictions carried from one construction to the next.

Fixed phrases

- ▶ the connection between syntax and lexical items is closer than we might have imagined,
- ▶ with respect to the number of connections and the powerful role played by individual lexical items, especially verbs.
- ▶ analysts have come to realize that in any language there is a large
- ▶ set of phrases and even whole clauses that are not freely built up but
- ▶ fixed.
- ▶ Crystal in *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* in Miller, (2002), we can distinguish various types of fixed phrase:

From Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Fixed phrases

Types of fixed phrase

POLYWORDS: in a nutshell; once and for all

INSTITUTIONALISED EXPRESSIONS: Give me a break; How do you do?; Long time no see; Pleased to meet you; See you soon, come to think of it; it doesn't bear thinking about

HIGHLY CONSTRAINED PHRASES: as I was ___ (saying/ mentioning); as far as I ___ (can see/can make out/know); I (just) can't think straight; I thought I told you not to do that

SENTENCE BUILDERS: my point is that ___; let me begin by___; not only ... but also

COLLOCATIONS: staple food/diet/industry; wouldn't/won't/couldn't budge; a heavy smoker; a heavy drinker

Fixed phrases

- ▶ The above types of phrase and clause do not always conform to the
- ▶ syntax of written English and may have idiosyncratic meanings;
- ▶ a heavy smoker is not a smoker with a weight problem.
- ▶ these phrases and clauses must be listed as single items in the dictionary,
- ▶ at the time of writing there are no explicit descriptions of English or other languages that handle fixed phrases in an adequate way.
- ▶ What analysts are more and more certain of is that the number of fixed expressions in English
- ▶ (and other languages) and the frequency of engagement

Summary

- ▶ We have looked at:
- ▶ Lexicon
- ▶ The role of the lexicon
- ▶ Subcategorization
- ▶ Selection restrictions
- ▶ Fixed phrases

References

- ▶ Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press