

COURSE TITLE: SYNTAX

WEEK 8: STRUCTURALISM

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Last week, we studied Traditional grammar.
- ▶ We established its strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Structural grammar improves traditional grammar
- ▶ This theory addresses various shortcomings of traditional grammar.
- ▶ As we noted earlier, a theory helps us to understand linguistic phenomena.
- ▶ Structuralism deals with language structure;
- ▶ its aim is to study the structure of a given language.

Lesson objectives

- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
 - ▶ i. Describe the contribution of various structuralists
 - ▶ ii. Discuss the dichotomies of De Saussure
 - ▶ iii. Analyze sentences using Immediate Constituent Analysis

PROponents OF STRUCTURALISM

- ▶ Emergence: Developed independently in Europe and America in the early 20th century.
- ▶ Significance: Shifted language study away from philosophy to a more scientific approach.
- ▶ a. **Franz Boaz (1858-1954)**
- ▶ b. **Edward Sapir**
- 1. c. **Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949)**
- ▶ d. **Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913).**

FRANZ BOAZ

- ▶ -Mainly interested in describing the phonology, morphology and phrase structure of native Indian languages.
- ▶ When he realized that T.G. was not suitable for his purpose, he adopted a structuralist's approach.
- ▶ He strongly believed that the features of one language should not be imposed on another
- ▶ The imposition creates a distorted picture

EDWARD SAPIR

- ▶ regarded language as a social phenomenon.
- ▶ rejected the practice of the time which was to study language from a historical perspective but instead focused on Native American languages.
- ▶ parts of speech of T.G. were largely not applicable except for nouns and verbs.
- ▶ each language should be studied in its own right.
- ▶ He however thought that word order is a universal phenomenon,
- ▶ meaning that all languages have a predictable way of arranging their words in order to form meaning.
- ▶ language as it occurs and the mental process involved in the production of that speech.

LEONARD BLOOMFIELD

- ▶ He rejected Sapir's mental approach to the study of language and,
 - ▶ instead saw language as a set of acquired habits.
 - ▶ These habits were observable and accounted for language learning.
 - ▶ He demonstrated that language has a definite structure at the level of phonology, morphology and syntax.
- ▶ According to him phonology should be the starting point of any linguistic study.
- ▶ He was the first person to convincingly show that the study of language is indeed a science.

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

Background: Swiss linguist, considered the father of modern linguistics.

Key Contributions:

Emphasized studying the structure of language.

Introduced key dichotomies:

Synchronic vs. Diachronic

Langue vs. Parole

Syntagmatic vs. Paradigmatic

Signifier vs. Signified

SYNCHRONIC VS DIACHRONIC APPROACHES

Lyons ,1981

▶ **Diachronic:**

- ▶ Focuses on language change over time.
- ▶ Examples: Evolution of French from Latin, historical spelling changes.

▶ **Synchronic:**

- ▶ Examines language at a specific point in time.
- ▶ Example: Analyzing American English syntax in the 21st century.

Lyons, John. (1981). *Language and Linguistics: An introduction*. UK: Cambridge University Press, pg. 35.

LANGUE VS PAROLE

- ▶ **Langue:**

- ▶ The systematic structure of language shared by a community.
- ▶ Competence (knowledge of rules).

- ▶ **Parole:**

- ▶ Individual speech acts or utterances.
- ▶ Performance (actual usage).

PARADIGMATIC VS SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS

- ▶ **Syntagmatic:**
 - ▶ Horizontal relationships in sentences (e.g., word combinations).
 - ▶ Example: "Tom loves chapati."
- ▶ **Paradigmatic:**
 - ▶ Vertical relationships (substitutability).
 - ▶ Example: "A packet of milk" could be "a bucket of milk."

SIGNIFIER VS SIGNIFIED

- ▶ Linguistic Sign: Composed of:
 - ▶ **Signifier:**
 - ▶ The form of a word or phrase (e.g., sounds, written letters).
 - ▶ **Signified:**
 - ▶ The concept it represents (e.g., the idea of a "tree").
 - ▶ The relationship is arbitrary and context-dependent.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STRUCTURALISM

- ▶ **Descriptive Nature:** Collection and description of language data without judgment.
- ▶ **Language Differentiation:** Each language is studied individually, acknowledging structural differences.
- ▶ **Language Change:** Recognizes that languages evolve over time without value judgment.
- ▶ **Form and Position:** Definitions based on form and syntactic position rather than meaning.
- ▶ **Systematic Structure:** Languages are structured systems, as illustrated by the Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA) technique.

IMMEDIATE CONSTITUENT ANALYSIS (ICA)

- ▶ Developed by Leonard Bloomfield.
- ▶ Its goal is to identify and describe words that are closely related (immediate constituents).
- ▶ A two way binary system is used in dividing up a sentence into decreasing parts called constituents.
- ▶ The biggest constituent is the sentence while the smallest is the word (in syntax).
- ▶ In morphology the smallest is the morpheme and this could be bound/free.
- ▶ The analysis of a sentence into its several layers of constituents can be effected using a number of techniques:

PARSING

- ▶ This involves dividing the sentence into structures which are a immediate to each other and which tend to cohere/ stick together e.g.
- ▶ a) The // big /// girls //// cooked // the /// food.
- ▶ The //big /// girl////s / cook////ed // the /// food.
- ▶ b) Several boys walked slowly.
- ▶ Several // boy///s / walk///ed //slow///ly.
- ▶ This method was very cumbersome.

BRACKETING

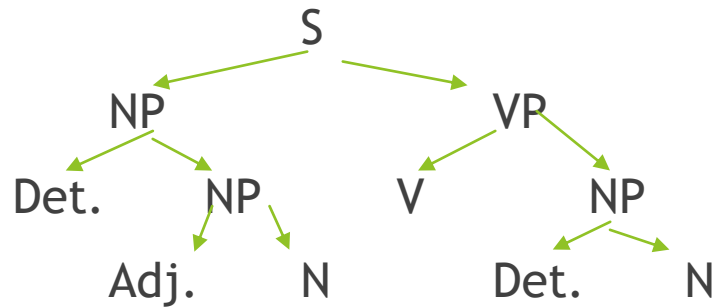
- ▶ This involved the use of unlabelled square brackets
- ▶ a) The big girls cooked the food.
- ▶ [[[The][[[big][girls]]][cooked[the][food]]]]
- ▶ b) Several boys walked slowly.
- ▶ [[Several][boy] [s]][walk[ed][slow[ly]]
- ▶ This was difficult to read unless the brackets are numbered to show which opening and closing brackets belong together.
- ▶ Like parsing it was very cumbersome.

LABELLED BRACKETS

- ▶ Several boys walked slowly.
- ▶ [VP[Several]N[boy] [s]]VP[walk] [ed] [slow] [ly]]
- ▶ Though this method was an improvement from the first two methods that were very cumbersome and difficult to read.
- ▶ It also had similar challenges

TREE DIAGRAMS / Phrase structure tree

- ▶ a) The young man / followed a girl.



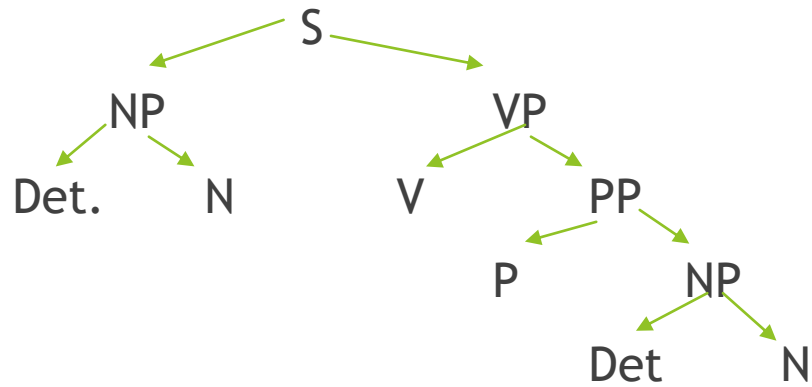
Also called phrase structure tree (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2003)

Yule, George. (2010). *The study of language*. UK: Cambridge, pg. 100)

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2003). *An introduction to language*. USA: Thomson, Wadsworth.

TREE DIAGRAMS

▶ *A girl/ came / into the room.*



EXERCISE

- ▶ Analyze the following sentences using ICA
- ▶ Those innocent children played everyday.
- ▶ Television is a powerful tool.
- ▶ The students made a good presentation.

- ▶ Note: Make use of tree diagrams.

Weaknesses of ICA

- ▶ **Weaknesses of ICA**
- ▶ Has no capacity to generate new sentences
- ▶ It cannot detect ill-formed structures such as: *The apple ate the girl.*
- ▶ The binary division does not work in some constituents e.g. boys and girls.
- ▶ The question is where does the co-ordinator belong? Is it with boys or with girls?
- ▶ It cannot handle discontinuous elements e.g. separable phrasal verbs and to-infinitive e.g. *She wanted to actually sing.*
- ▶ ‘to’ and ‘sing’ are closely related but ICA has no way of putting them in the same constituent.

WEAKNESSES OF ICA

- ▶ It has no way of indicating missing but understood elements such as 'you' in 'sit down'.
- ▶ It has no way of showing how various types of sentences are related e.g. active and passive, statement and question, affirmative and negative sentences etc.
- ▶ It has no way of handling irregular nouns and verbs such as: came, caught, sheep etc.
- ▶ It cannot cater for constituents smaller than words e.g. morphemes such as the plural marks -s and the past tense morpheme -ed
- ▶ The relationship among constituents is not applicable to most languages so they are not universal.

STRENGTHS OF ICA

ICA has the ability to show constituents that are closely related and to describe them.

Has the ability to show the hierarchical nature of constituents that is from the biggest to the smallest.

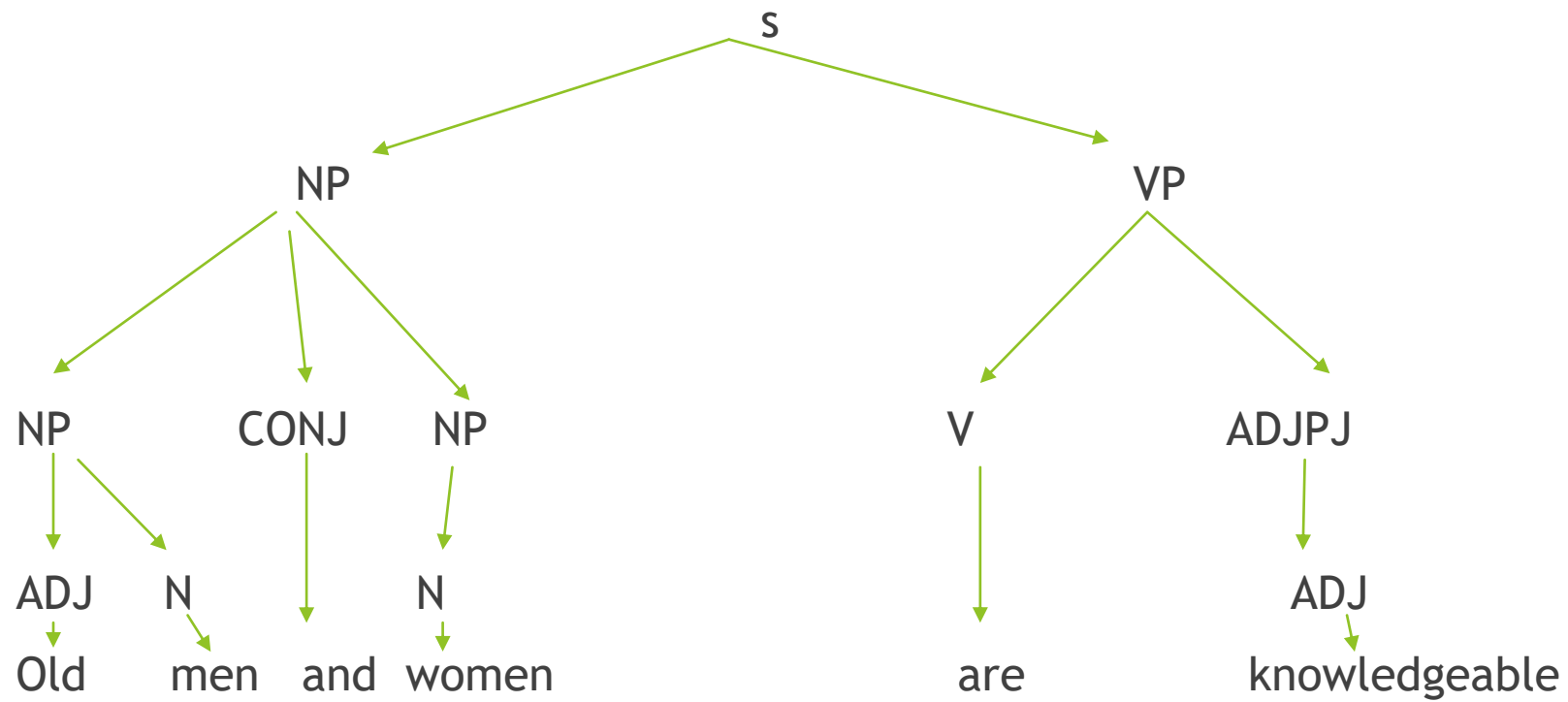
Has the ability to remove ambiguity in sentences

REMOVAL OF AMBIGUITY

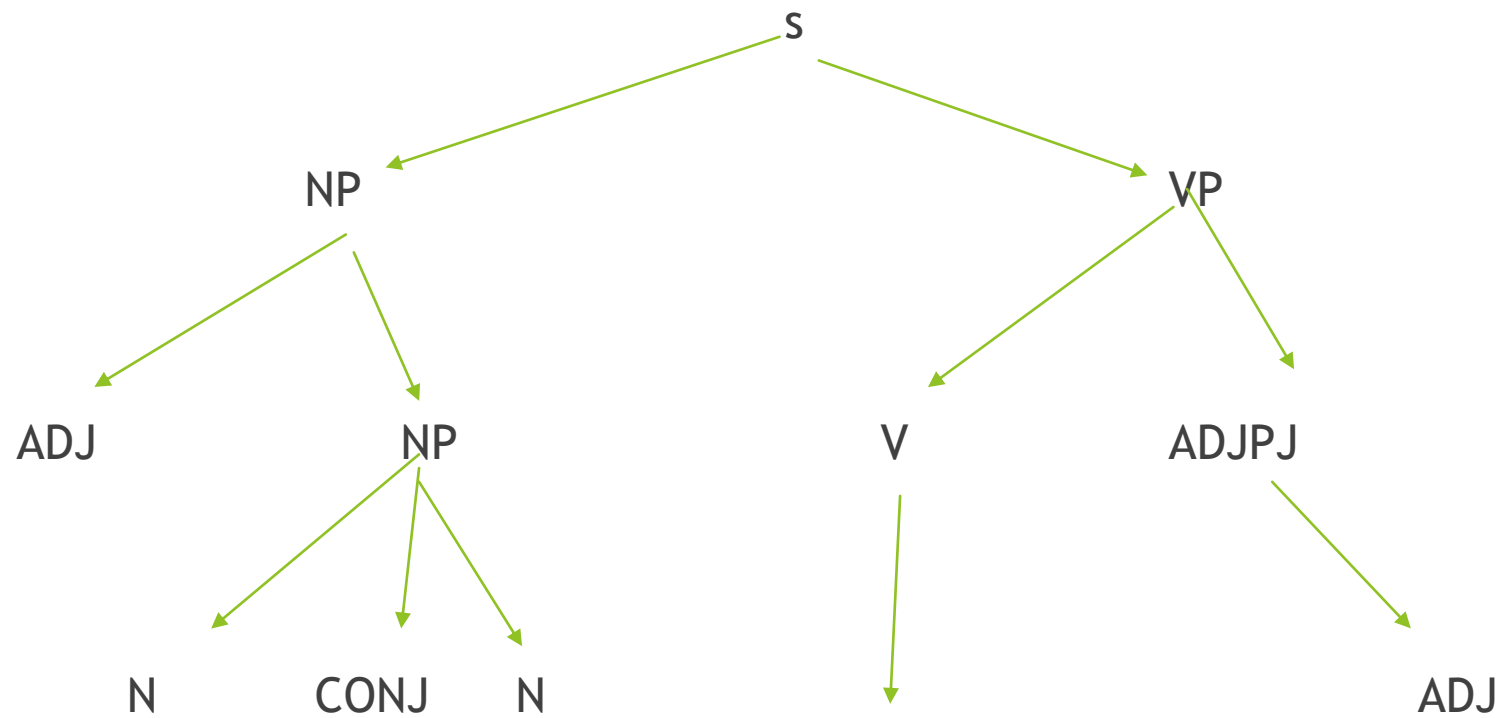
- ▶ OLD MEN AND WOMEN ARE KNOWLEDGEABLE
- ▶ This sentence has two meanings:
- ▶ 1. only men are old
- ▶ The adjective 'old' pre-modifies the first noun 'men'
- ▶ This is called structural ambiguity (Yule, 2010)
- ▶ 2. Both men and women are old
- ▶ The adjective pre-modifies both nouns 'men and women'
- ▶ Therefore, we need two diagrams to show the two meanings.

Yule, George. (2010). *The study of language*. UK: Cambridge, pg 99.

Only men are old



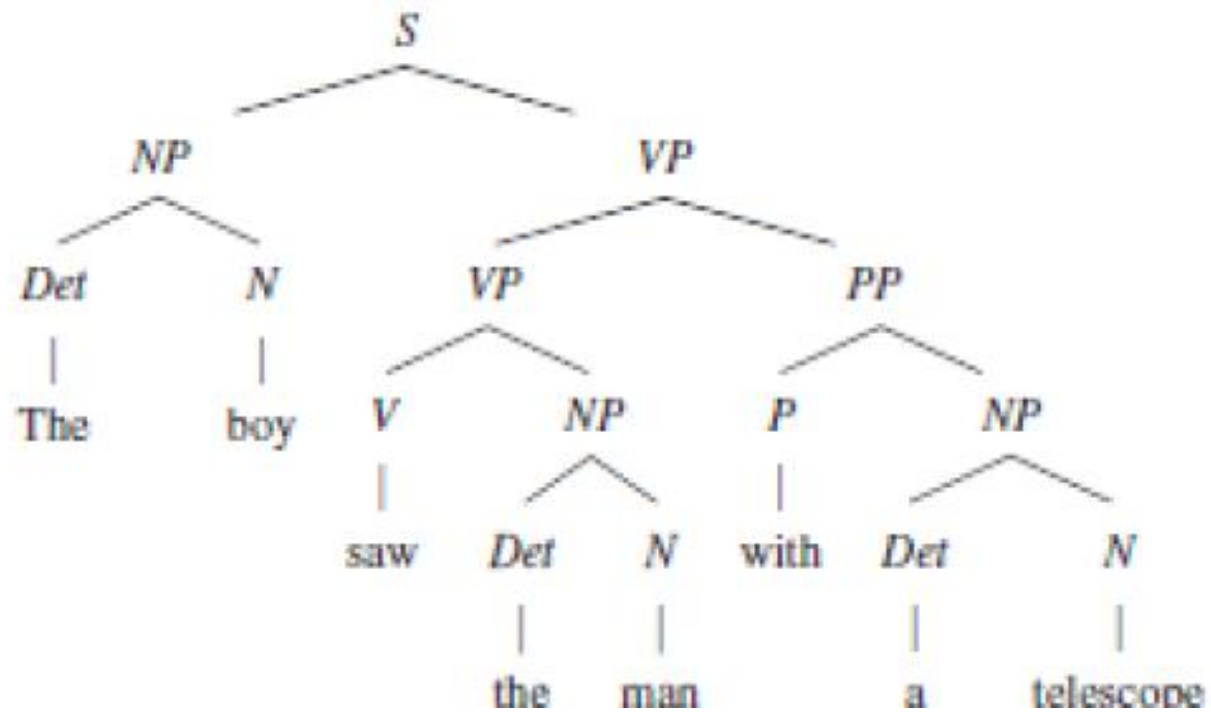
Both men and women are old



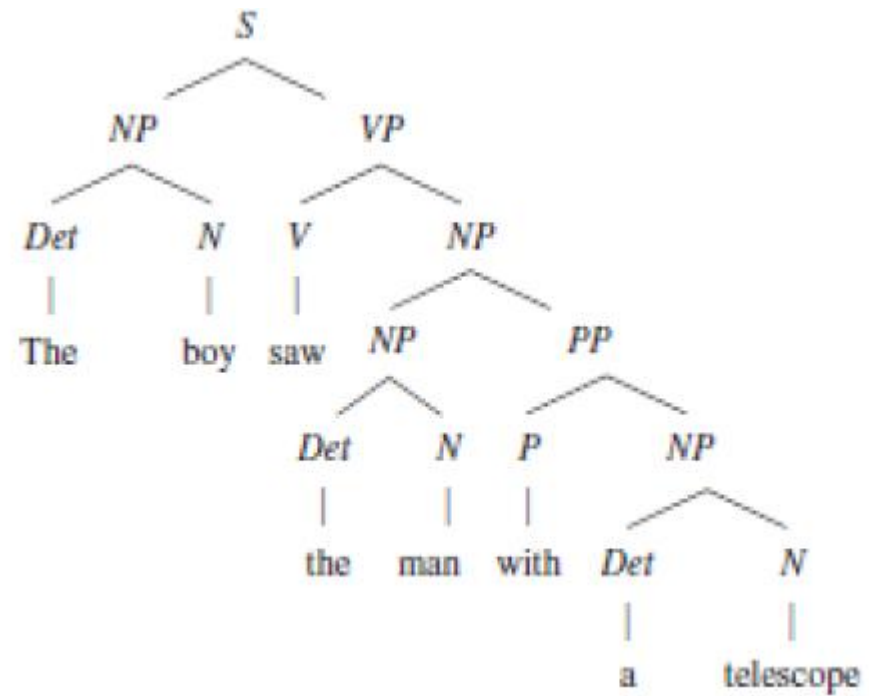
ICA Analysis

- ▶ I saw a man with a telescope
- ▶ 1. I used a telescope to see the man
- ▶ 2. the man I saw had a telescope
- ▶ In (1) the PP with a telescope modifies the VP, and the interpretation is that the action of seeing occurred by use of a telescope.
- ▶ In (2) the PP with a telescope modifies the NP the man, and the interpretation is that the man has the telescope.

ICA Analysis



ICA Analysis



Summary

- ▶ Meaning of structuralism
- ▶ Proponents
- ▶ De Saussure's dichotomies
- ▶ ICA

References

Fromkin, V., Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2003). *An introduction to language*. USA: Thomson, Wadsworth.

Yule, George. (2010). *The study of language*. UK: Cambridge.

Lyons, John. (1981). *Language and Linguistics: An introduction*. UK: Cambridge University Press.