

COURSE TITLE: SYNTAX

WEEK 14: GRAMMAR AND SEMANTICS

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Without syntax human beings would be unable to construct complex messages conveying information about complex situations, proposals or ideas.
- ▶ Word classes have various meanings-
- ▶ Different affixes also communicate different meanings-
- ▶ The girl passed her examinations.
- ▶ The girls passed their examinations.
- ▶ Consider the use of the plural morpheme.
- ▶ Suffixes can signal case, number, person.

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ This information is semantically central.
- ▶ These suffixes occur in specific ways as a result of various syntactic environments.
- ▶ This shows that there is a strong connection between syntax and meaning.
- ▶ In this lesson, we shall explore some areas of grammar and explore their relationship with syntax.
- ▶ Hence, certain distinctions in the grammars of languages (including the grammar of English) signal important distinctions of meaning

Expected learning outcomes

- ▶ By the end of the lesson, you should be able to:
 - i. Discuss the relationship between grammar and semantics.
 - ii. Evaluate various grammatical meanings.
 - iii. Evaluate the use of sentences in various contexts

CASE

- ▶ Case in traditional view refer to the use of pronouns in a sentence
- ▶ Four types of case:
- ▶ **Nominative case:**
- ▶ This is used for the subject of a sentence.
"She went to the store.
- ▶ **"Accusative case:**
- ▶ This is used for the direct object of a sentence.
- ▶ "I saw **him** at the park."

CASE

- ▶ **Genitive case:** This is used to show possession.
- ▶ "That is Jamie's car."
- ▶ **Dative case:** This is used for the indirect object of a sentence.
- ▶ "I gave the book to him."
- ▶ **NOTE:**
- ▶ The nominative and accusative cases are the most commonly used in modern English.
- ▶ The genitive and dative cases are less frequent, but still important for proper grammar and sentence structure.

MODERN VIEW OF CASE

- ▶ CASE is relevant to English;
- ▶ The relations between verb and nouns in clauses are signalled by position and by the presence or absence of prepositions.
- ▶ In the basic active declarative construction the subject is to the left of the verb, with no preposition,
- ▶ and the direct object is to the right of the verb, with no preposition.
- ▶ In the indirect object construction, the indirect object is immediately to the right of the verb and followed by the direct object
- ▶ All other nouns in a clause are connected to the verb by a preposition.

GENDER

- ▶ Latin nouns fall into various classes called ‘genders’ - masculine gender’, ‘feminine gender’ and ‘neuter gender’. (Miller, 2002).
- ▶ The different classes of noun are grammatically important ;
- ▶ which class a noun belongs to determines which case suffixes it takes an
- ▶ which case suffixes any modifying adjectives take.
- ▶ English nouns fall into classes that are more closely linked to natural gender
- ▶ There is a major split between animate and inanimate nouns, linked to the use of *it* as opposed to *he* and *she*.
- ▶ The animate nouns split into male and female, which governs the use of *he* as opposed to *she*.
- ▶ Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

GENDER

- ▶ Pronouns:
- ▶ Personal pronouns have gender - he/him/his (masculine), she/her/hers (feminine), it/its (neutral).
- ▶ Other pronouns like "they/them/their" can be used for gender-neutral or unknown gender references.
- ▶ Nouns:
- ▶ Most English nouns are gender-neutral and do not have a grammatical gender associated with them.
- ▶ Some nouns have natural gender based on the biological sex of the person/animal, e.g. "man/woman", "bull/cow", "king/queen".
- ▶ Some nouns have gender-specific forms, e.g. "actor/actress", "waiter/waitress", but these are becoming less common in modern English.

MOOD

- ▶ Speakers using syntax in order to talk about situations, adopting different perspectives on a given situation. (Miller, 2002)
- ▶ **Indicative mood**
- ▶ **Imperative mood**
- ▶ Speakers have different modes of presenting information.
- ▶ Speakers can make statements about situations - *This is happening, That happened.*
- ▶ They can ask questions about situations and about participants in situations - *Is this happening?, Did that happen?*
- ▶ They can require or request that a particular situation be created or not created - *Do this, don't do that.*
- ▶ Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Pg. 137

MOOD

- ▶ They can present situations as factual - *This happened, This did happen.*
- ▶ They can present situations as possible - *This might happen.*
- ▶ They can present situations as necessary - *This has to happen, That must happen.*
- ▶ They can state their authority for making a statement - *Evidently, she has decided to change jobs, I know for a fact that this plane is unsafe.*
- ▶ They can present situations as the objects of wishes, hopes, fears -
- ▶ *I wish he had better manners, She's afraid he's going to make a fool of himself*

SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD

- ▶ The term ‘subjunctive mood’ relates to special sets of verb forms.
- ▶ English used to have such forms; indeed, in a sense it still does have them, but they have fallen into disuse and are now almost archaic.
- ▶ They occur in examples such as *If I were in such difficulties,*
- ▶ *I would take to my bed,* where *were* occurs with the singular subject.
- ▶ NOTE:
- ▶ Most speakers and writers nowadays use *was*. Another example, even more unusual, is *be* in *If this be true, the plan should be abandoned.*

SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD

- ▶ The subjunctive forms were used in order to present a situation as remote from reality -
- ▶ the speaker being in difficulties - or as possibly remote from reality - this being true.
- ▶ Expresses unreal situations/
- ▶ Wishes and suppositions.
- ▶ To present a situation thus, speakers have to construct a main clause containing a verb such as *hope* or *wish* with a subordinate complement clause expressing the hoped-for situation.

Epistemic and deontic modality

- ▶ The presentation of situations as possible or necessary is achieved in English by modal verbs.
- ▶ The essential distinction in this area is between epistemic and deontic modality (Miller, 2002)
- ▶ ‘Epistemic’ derives from the Greek *episteme* (knowledge),
- ▶ epistemic modality relates to the way (the mode) in which speakers know a situation;
- ▶ do they know that it exists,
- ▶ do they consider it as merely possible or’
- ▶ do they treat it as necessarily existing (although they have not
- ▶ seen it themselves) on the basis of evidence?

Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pg. 139.

Epistemic and deontic modality

- ▶ ‘Deontic’ derives from the Greek verb *deo* (tie). Deontic modality relates to whether speakers present a situation as possible because;
- ▶ permission has been given, or as necessary because circumstances require it,
- ▶ for example because someone with authority has issued a command or
- ▶ because the situation is such that other actions are ruled out.
- ▶ Epistemic possibility is expressed by *could*, *may* or *might*,.

She could/might/may be in the hospital (= It is possible that she is in the hospital)

Epistemic and deontic modality

- ▶ *May* is neutral but *might* and *could* express more remote possibility.
- ▶ Note that *can* is not excluded in principle from expressing epistemic possibility but occurs very rarely with this interpretation.
- ▶ In addition to asserting that propositions are epistemically possible, speakers assert that they are epistemically not possible.
- ▶ She may/might not be in her room just now (= It is possible that she is not in her room)
- ▶ *Can/could* and *may/might* derive historically from different verbs and diverge in meaning to the extent that *can* and *could* can be used to refer to physical or mental ability, whereas *may* and *might* cannot.
- ▶ The girl can/could multiply large numbers in her head (= is/ was able to)
- ▶ The girl may/might multiply large numbers in her head (= it is possible for her to multiply large numbers)

Epistemic and deontic modality

- ▶ Deontic modality in linguistics refers to the grammatical expression of obligation, necessity, permission and related notions.
- ▶ It deals with the degree of desirability or necessity of an action or state of affairs.
- ▶ Some key points about deontic modality in English:
- ▶ Auxiliary Verbs:
- ▶ Deontic modality is often expressed using modal auxiliary verbs like "must," "should," "ought to," "have to," "can," "may," etc.

Epistemic and deontic modality

- ▶ These modal verbs indicate the degree of obligation, permission, or necessity associated with the main verb.
- ▶ For example: "You must go to bed early." "She may take the day off." "They can leave now if they want."
- ▶ Adverbs:
- ▶ Adverbs like "necessarily," "possibly," "probably," "definitely," etc. can also convey deontic meaning.
- ▶ For example: "You necessarily have to complete this task today." "She will probably be able to attend the meeting."

ASPECT

- ▶ Speakers of any language convey a large amount of information about situations and time.
- ▶ They can represent a given action as ongoing or as completed;
- ▶ they can represent it as having taken place once or as being repeated or as being a habit.
- ▶ We can locate a situation in past, present or future time and we can locate situations in time relative to other situations
- ▶ Whether a situation is ongoing or completed, repeated or habitual comes under the heading of aspect,
- ▶ which can be thought of as the aspect or view which a speaker offers of a particular situation.
- ▶ The location of a situation in past, present or future time, or of two situations relative to each other in time, comes under the heading of tense,

Grammatical aspect in English: Progressive and Simple aspect

- ▶ English verbs occur in the Progressive or Simple forms.
- ▶ The Progressive is a syntactic construction consisting of *be* plus the participle in *-ing*. (*be*+ *-ing*)
- ▶ The Simple form consists of just the verb stem plus the suffixes whose central or prototypical forms are *-s* or *-ed*.

The English perfect

- ▶ Another syntactic construction central to the tense-aspect system of English is the Perfect,
- ▶ The snow **has** blocked the track.
- ▶ It has two constituents, *has* or *have* and a past participle, here *blocked*.
- ▶ (The label ‘participle’ is not helpful; it derives from the Latin words meaning ‘take part’ or ‘participate’ and is supposed to reflect the fact that in, for example,
- ▶ (forms of ‘have’ + -en)

The English perfect

- ▶ The participle indicates an action that is completed,
- ▶ and this is why the Perfect looks like an aspect;
- ▶ but *has* signals present time, and this makes the Perfect look like a tense.
- ▶ The Perfect has been defined as focusing upon the presently accessible consequences of a past event, rather than upon the past event per se;
- ▶ This is summed up in the traditional formula that the Perfect has current relevance.
- ▶ The Perfect in standard written English has four major uses,

The English perfect

- ▶ Meanings (Miller, 2002):
- ▶ Resultative- I have published my work.
- ▶ Hot news/ recent past- The minister has just arrived.
- ▶ Extended now/ persistent situation- I have been in this city for seven years.
- ▶ Experiential/ indefinite anterior- Have you ever been to Kenya?

Miller, J. (2002). *An introduction to English syntax*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press pg. 150.

TENSE

- ▶ Traditional grammars of English talk of past, present and future tense.
- ▶ One view is that past and present tense go together, since they are both formed from verb stems plus the suffixes *-s* and *-ed*.
- ▶ (Note that there are irregular verbs such as *swim* and the suffix-less present-tense forms.)
- ▶ The traditional future tense is formed from the auxiliary verbs *shall* and *will* plus the verb stem (although many speakers do not use *shall*)-
- ▶ This is the periphrastic marking.

Tense

- ▶ the traditional future tense is a syntactic construction but ;
- ▶ the past and present tenses are single words.
- ▶ Some people assert that this grammatical difference should make us suspect that the 'future tense' is not a tense at all but has some other meaning.

What does this statement remind you about from Traditional Grammar?

TENSE

- ▶ The *will* construction does not just place an event in future time but in many cases signals the intention of the speaker;
- ▶ *will* derives historically from a verb that was equivalent to *want* or *intend* and can still be used with this meaning.
- ▶ In examples with first-person subjects, such as *I'll return the book tomorrow* and *I'll meet you in the morning*, the speaker's intention is part of the message.
- ▶ We talk of future events in terms of intentions and obligations because
- ▶ future time, unlike past and present time, cannot be inspected.

VOICE

- ▶ The category of voice has to do with the different constructions available
- ▶ for taking an event or state and presenting it from different perspectives.
- ▶ Active
- ▶ Passive

The active vs The passive

- ▶ Bandits attacked children. (Active)
- ▶ Children were attacked by bandits. (Passive)
- ▶ There was an attack(Passive)
- ▶ If we want to make sure that our addressee gets all the details, we mention the Agent and the Patient
- ▶ In the passive, we mention only the Patient and to omit the Agent:
- ▶ Some gifts get used several times a year.
- ▶ Children got infected.

The passive

- ▶ The Patients can be omitted because they are closely connected with the activity denoted by the verb.
- ▶ People read books and newspapers, they hunt foxes, pheasants or deer and they cook food.
- ▶ Patient NPs can also be omitted in clauses describing habitual actions.
- ▶ The middle passive :
- ▶ They have to do with permanent properties of entities.
- ▶ This sweater washes well.
- ▶ This book reads well.
- ▶ Many middles have what is called as ‘episodic’ interpretation, that is, they denote a single episode or event.

Summary

- ▶ We have looked at the grammatical constructions and meaning.
- ▶ We have seen that syntax is important in meaning.
- ▶ Case
- ▶ Gender
- ▶ Aspect
- ▶ Tense
- ▶ Voice

Conclusion

- ▶ END OF THE COURSE.
- ▶ THANK YOU.

References

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