

Lecture 2: **Syntax**

1. Introduction

- Intuitive understanding by native speakers how to put words together
- e.g. ___ kicked ___ - this puzzle would yield few types of answers – most typical answers would have a pronoun or a name first, then an article, followed by a noun
- Also cf. Cheddar Gorge
- Syntax is the branch of grammar that explains why this is

2. Definitions

- Syntax = from Greek συντάσσω ‘to put together in order’
- Syntax = “the way in which words are arranged to show relationships of meaning within (and sometimes between) sentences”
David Crystal *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* p. 94
- But what is a sentence?
- Priscian: *ordinatio dictionum congrua sententiam perfectam demonstrans*
But:
‘an egg’ 1 thought, not a sentence
‘I shut the door, as it was so cold’ 1 sentence, 2 thoughts
- Logical definition – a subject (=the topic) and a predicate (=what is being said about the topic)
- This works well for simple sentences
e.g. The book is on the table
Subject = ‘the book’, predicate = ‘is on the table’
- But difficulties:
‘it’s raining’ – what is the topic
‘Michael asked Mary for the pen’ – what is the topic?
- Punctuation?
- But many languages do not use punctuation - Greek punctuation added
- Phonetically, too, no such thing as a sentence
- So a sentence is an abstraction, a linguistic desideratum that doesn’t really exist.
- Easier to analyse constructions that do occur
‘she asked for a book’
‘come in’
‘the horse ran away because the train was noisy’
- Within the units certain rules clearly operate – e.g. of word order etc.
- You can’t just add together different units to make a sentence

- “A sentence is thus the largest unit to which syntactic rules apply; an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form” L. Bloomfield 1933, p. 170
- Some exceptions:
 - ellipses: ‘Where are you going?’ ‘To town’
 - interjections: ‘Yes’, ‘Blimey!’ ‘Least said, soonest mended’

3. Sentence analysis

- Group together units within sentence
‘Hilary couldn’t open the window’
- Hilary couldn’t open = verb phrase, the window = noun phrase
- Phrases can be seen of as extensions of a central element (‘the head’)
 - ‘cars’
 - ‘the cars’
 - ‘the big cars’
 - ‘all the big cars in the garage’
- ‘Hilary opened the windows, but David couldn’t open the doors’
- 2 units within sentence called clause
 - sentences
are analysed into
clauses
are analysed into
phrases
are analysed into
words
are analysed into
morphemes

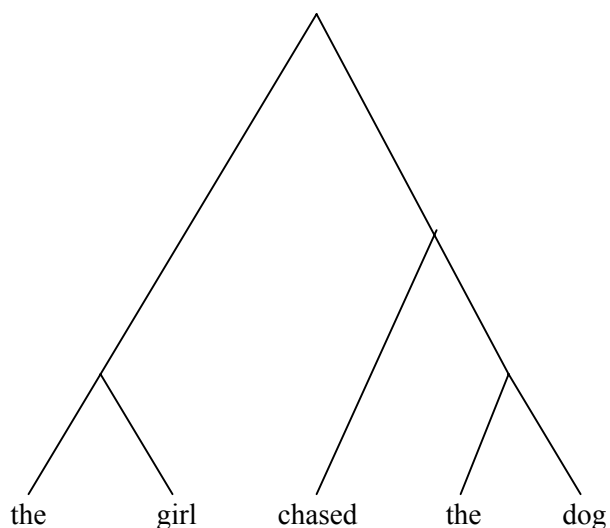
4. Immediate Constituent Analysis

- Functional labels:
 - Subject (S)
 - Verb (V)
 - Object (DO)
 - Adverb (Adv)
- S+V The dog + is running
- S+V+DO The man + saw + a cow
- S+V+DO+IDO The man + gave + a book + to John
- S+V+A The + book + fell + quietly
- Languages vary in how they mark the different functions
- English = word order, Latin and Greek = morphology
- Japanese marked by special particles

| | | | | | | | |
|--------|------|-----------|-----|-----|-----|----------|-------|
| kodomo | ga | tomodachi | no | inu | ni | mizu o | youtu |
| child | SUBJ | friend | GEN | dog | IDO | water DO | gives |

‘The child gives water to the friend’s dog’

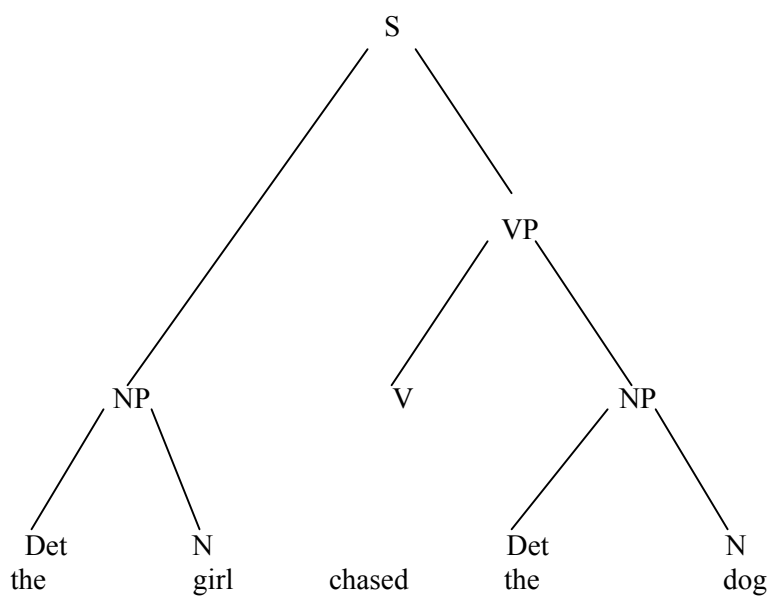
- Identify the major components
 The girl chased the dog
 (The girl) (chased the dog)
 (The girl) (chased (the dog))
 ((The) (girl)) (chased ((the)(dog)))
- This can be represented by a tree diagram:



- But some sentences harder to divide up:
 ‘The three old men’ = the + three old men or the three old + men

5. Phrase Structure

- Label the constituents.
- In this sentence NP = the girl + VP chased the dog



6. Complements and adjuncts

- Complement = all those entities that need to be present in order to make the predication syntactically and semantically complete.
- Adjunct = optional extra
- e.g. *Marcus heri canem necabat*
- *Marcus* and *canem* are complements
- *heri* is an adjunct
- Different verbs have different valency
- *necare* = 2-place verb
- *dare* = 3-place verb

7. Government and concord

- Government: specific lexical class governs morphosyntactic feature
e.g. verb governs case of object
habet muros 'holds the walls'
Typically between heads and complements
- Concord: relation between words that share a morphosyntactic feature
e.g. *la ragazza, le ragazze*
Typically between head and modifier
- Problem: verb and subject

8. Syntactic theories

1. Transformational Grammar

- Sentences of different syntactic types are related
e.g. It tastes nice
How nice it tastes
Does it taste nice?
- Regular change of form correlates with regular changes of meaning

2. Generative Grammar

- The rules that generate a tree structure for individual languages?
- English =
S → NP + VP
VP → V + NP
NP → Det + N, Det + A + N, NP + RC
- These rules are recursive eg
This is the house that Jack built
This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built
This is the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built

Reading

David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*
Matthews, *Syntax*