

المحاضرة الرابعة

المادة: مقدمة في اللغويات العامة

الفرقة الثالثة- لغة انجليزية - عام

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AN INTRODUCTION TO SYNTAX

❖ Syntax is the study of how words are combined into sentences.

❖ Syntactic analysis is to determine the relevant components of a sentence and to describe these parts grammatically.

- ❖ **The component parts of a sentence are called constituents.**
- ❖ **‘Syntactic analysis’ involves two related tasks:**
 - (a) breaking down the sentence into its constituents and**
 - (b) labeling each constituent, stating what type (form)of constituent it is, and what grammatical function it has.**

Every sentence can be analyzed at four distinct levels:

- **the sentence– level**
- **the clause–level**
- **the phrase–level**
- **the word–level.**

This is called the rank scale.

SENTENCE ↔ CLAUSE ↔ PHRASE ↔ WORD ↔ MORPHEME

For example, the sentence

“The snake killed the rat and swallowed it”

could be analyzed as follow:

(1a) First level: Sentence level

[The snake killed the rat and swallowed it]

(1b) Second level: Clause level

[[The snake killed the rat] and [swallowed it]]

(1c) Third level: Phrase level

[[[The snake] [killed [the rat]]] and [[swallowed [it]]]

(1d) Forth level: Word level

**[[[[The] [snake]] [[killed] [[the][rat]]]] [and] [[swallowed]
[[it]]]]]**

Functions of Sentence Elements

- ❖ Sentences are not random collections of words, but strings of words which are organized according to certain rules.**
- ❖ It is the task of syntax to give an account of those rules.**
- ❖ In this chapter we will look at how these constituents function in the sentences of which they are a part.**

1. Subject and Predicate

Consider the pair of sentences below:

(1) The cat devoured the rat.

(2) The rat devoured the cat.

The structure of these sentences can be represented as in (3)

and (4) below using brackets:

(3) [The cat] [devoured [the rat]]

(4) [The rat] [devoured [the cat]]

- ❖ As we see, these sentences contain exactly the same words, but differ quite radically in meaning.**
- ❖ This meaning difference comes about as a result of the different roles played by the various constituents.**

- ❖ **In (3) and (4) distinct entities, namely the cat and the rat respectively, carry out the action denoted by the word devoured. We will call words that denote actions verbs.**
- ❖ **Also, notice that we could say that (3) is concerned with telling us more about cat, while (4) is concerned with telling us more about the rat.**
- ❖ **We can now define the Subject of a sentence as the constituent that on the one hand tells us who performs the action denoted by the verb (i.e. who is the Agent), and on the**

other hand tells us who or what the sentence is about. So to find out what is the Subject of a particular sentence we can ask ‘Who or what carried out the action denoted by the verb?’ and also ‘Who or what is this sentence about?’ The answers to these questions will pinpoint the Subject.

- ❖ The second bracketed units in the sentences in (3) and (4) are devoured the rat and devoured the cat, respectively. These constituents tell us more about the Subject of the sentence,**

namely what it was engaged in doing (or, to be more precise, what its referent was engaged in doing).

- ❖ In (3) the Subject (the cat) was engaged in eating a rat.**
- ❖ whereas in (4) the Subject (the rat) was engaged in eating a cat.**
- ❖ We will use the term Predicate for the unit in a sentence whose function is to specify what the Subject is engaged in doing.**

- ❖ **The notion Predicate is therefore a second type of grammatical function. In any given sentence, the Predicate is everything in the sentence except the Subject.**
- ❖ **The subdivision of sentences into Subjects and Predicates is very rough-and-ready and. It is noticed that the Subject of a sentence is often defined as the unit that indicates who or what is engaged in carrying out the action specified by the verb, and also as the unit that tells you what the sentence is about. In each of the sentences we looked at so far the**

referent of the Subject was indeed engaged in performing the action denoted by the verb, and the Subject also indicated what the sentence was about.

- ❖ However, referents of Subjects need not always be doing something.**
- ❖ Consider the sentences in (5)–(8) below and think about the question why they are problematic for our initial definition of the notion Subject.**

- (5) *My brother* wears a green overcoat.
- (6) *The committee* disliked her proposal.
- (7) *The girl* with the red hat stood on the platform.
- (8) *This car* stinks.
- ❖ Although the italicized Subjects have a relationship with their Predicates, their referents cannot be said to be instigating any kind of action: ‘wearing a coat’, ‘disliking a proposal’, ‘standing on a platform’ and ‘stinking’ are not activities.

- ❖ **What these sentences show, then, is that Subjects can also precede stative Predicates.**
- ❖ **The Predicates we have encountered up to now, by contrast, were dynamic.**
- ❖ **Our initial definition of the notion Subject turns out to be problematic in another respect: in addition to the referent of a Subject sometimes not performing any kind of action,**

- ❖ **Subjects can be elements that are meaningless, and cannot therefore be said to tell us what the sentences of which they are the Subject are about.**
- ❖ **Consider the following:**
 - (9) It is raining in England.**
 - (10) It was hot.**
 - (11) There were three lions in the cage.**
 - (12) There exist ways of making you talk.**

- ❖ **The element it in (9) and (10) is often called weather it, because it is used in expressions which tell us about the weather. It is also called non-referential it.**
- ❖ **This second term brings out the important fact that this element does not refer to anything in the way that referential it in (13) does:**

(13) Where did I put my hat? Ah, I put it in the car.

- ❖ **Here it refers back to the string of words my hat which in its turn refers to a concrete object in the real world.**
- ❖ **There in sentences (11) and (12) is called existential there because it is used in propositions that have to do with existence. Existential there should be kept apart from locative there which, as the name implies, specifies a location, as in (14):**

(14) I saw the cat a minute ago. There it is!

- ❖ **Non-referential it and existential there are said to be meaningless because all they seem to be doing in the sentences in which they occur is fill the Subject slot.**
- ❖ **It would be odd to say that it and there tell us what (9)–(12) are about. What emerges from (5)–(12) is that although our earlier (semantic) definition of Subject is practical and useful, we must use it only as a general guideline. If we want to define the notion Subject more precisely, we will need to**

do so in structural terms, i.e. in terms of syntactic configurations.

- ❖ The first thing to note about the Subjects of the sentences we have looked at so far is that they predominantly consist of groups of words whose most important element denotes a person (that stupid waiter, the stuntman, she, my brother, the girl with the red hair), an animal (the cat, the rat), a group of people (the police, the committee), an institution (this factory) or a thing (this car). We will call such words nouns.**

- ❖ **Furthermore, we will refer to groups of words such as the cat, that stupid waiter, the girl with the red hair etc. as Noun Phrases (NPs).**
- ❖ **The generalization we can now make is to say that Subjects are usually Noun Phrases.**
- ❖ **Secondly, in straightforward run-of-the-mill sentences, i.e. those that are used to make a statement, the Subject is the first NP we come across.**
- ❖ **Thirdly, Subjects are obligatory.**

❖ Fourthly, Subjects determine the form of the verb in such cases as the following:

(15) She never writes home.

(16) James always sulks.

(17) This book saddens me.

(18) Our neighbor takes his children to school in his car.

- ❖ **We say that the Subjects in these sentences (she, James, this book, our neighbor) agree with the verbs (write, sulk, sadden, take). This agreement is visible through the -s ending on the verbs. Such agreement occurs only if we have a third person singular Subject. Such a Subject does not denote the speaker or the hearer (i.e. a third person is not me or you), but someone (or something) else. Any Subject other than a third person singular Subject takes what is**

**called the base form of the verb, i.e. a form of the verb that
has no endings:**

(19) I like tea.

(20) You like tea.

(21) We like tea.

(22) They like tea.