

Open Learning
Translation Department

Third Year
Second Term

Semantics & Syntax

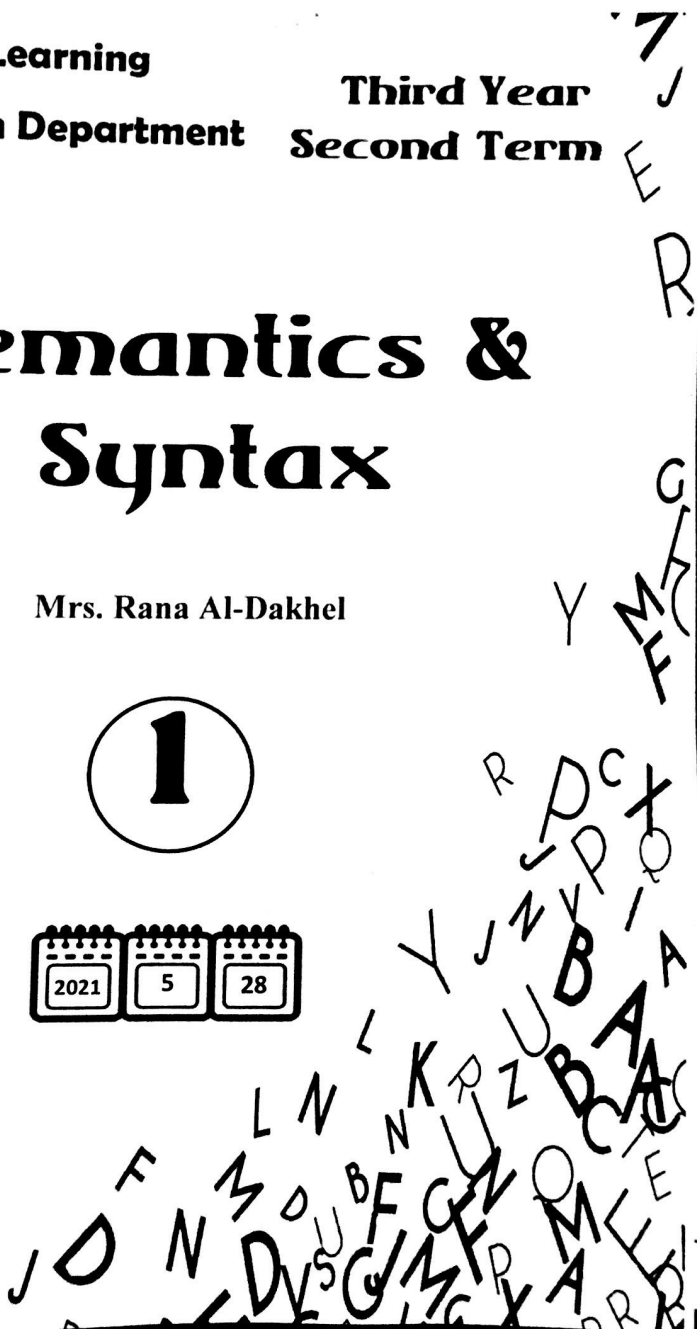
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موسسة النوار التعليمية

Study!
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GOOD MORNING EVERYONE!

Our course is called **syntax and semantics**.

What is the meaning of **linguistics**? It is the study of the language itself in a scientific way.

We have several branches of linguistics:

- **Phonetics**: it deals with sounds.
- **Morphology**: it is related to the word.
- **Syntax**: it is related to the structure of sentences; how words are organized into phrases, and how phrases are organized into clauses to form a sentence.

• **Semantics**: it is related to the lexical meaning of the word. We have something called connotation and denotation. For example, if I say, "professional," it has connotation of excellence and skill.

• **Pragmatics**: it is related to the context, and how the meaning is served. Maybe I say something, but I mean something different. We call it sometimes functional meaning.

In this term, we'll deal with syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

Introduction to syntax

When we want to form any sentence, we have stages; we have a process.

Student: we have to start with the subject.

Professor: right! We have to start any sentence in English with a subject, except for imperative.

How can I know, for example, that this certain word is a noun?

Student: I can know from where it is placed in the sentence.

Professor: excellent! I should know its position in the sentence. For example, the word “walks” could be a noun and a verb. I can decide from its position.

E.g. Mary goes on many long walks.

The word “walks” here is a noun because it is preceded by a modifier (many) and an adjective (long).

All of us know that in English we have adjectives, and then we have nouns. That’s why, here, I can identify the **syntactic category** of the word “walks.”

E.g. Mary walks the dog.

The **syntactic category** of the word “walks” here is verb because it is preceded by a subject (Mary) and followed by an object (dog).

This is what we call **syntactic category**.

If we say, “Six gorillas,” this is a group of words. What do we call it?

Student: we call it noun phrase.

Professor: yes, **noun phrase**.

What does this noun phrase contain? It contains a quantifier (Six) and a noun (gorillas).

Can I omit “Six”?

Student: yes.

We call the word “gorillas” head of the noun phrase because we cannot omit it.

We have only ONE head in a noun phrase.

In syntax, determiners can include:

Articles: a, an, the.

Demonstrations: this, that, these, those.

Numbers: one, two, three, etc.

Quantifiers: many, some, few.

Here, we are talking about noun phrases. We said that "gorillas" is the head. "Six" and "gorillas" are the **constituents** of the noun phrase. So, here we have TWO constituents.

Constituents: a group of words that form a syntactic category.

Now, we have in syntax this rule that is called **phrase structure rule**. This rule helps us identify the syntactic category of any group of words.

The head of any noun phrase is a noun, and any noun phrase must contain a head. So, having a noun in a noun phrase is obligatory. Adding determiners in a noun phrase is optional.

In a noun phrase, you can include **ONLY** a noun or you can have determiners.

What about adjectives?

I can say: six hungry gorillas.

So, I can add adjectives to the noun phrase.

Student: you said that determiners are optional, but if we have just a noun, then it doesn't make a phrase. We need to have something with the noun so that they form a phrase.

Professor: no, not necessarily. We can have a noun phrase with just a noun. If I say "gorillas," this is a noun phrase.

Adjectives are sometimes called modifiers, as they modify nouns.

Let's talk just about nouns in general. Some nouns cannot be preceded by articles. For example:

- **Proper nouns:**

I cannot say, for example, "the Mary." However, there are cases in English where we can add articles before proper nouns, like "the United States."

• **Generic nouns:**

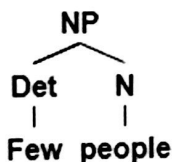
E.g. lions roar.

Here, we are talking in general, and we don't have to use "the."

In syntax, we have something called **tree diagram** that helps you understand the syntactic category.

E.g. Few people

It is a noun phrase (NP). "Few" is a determiner (Det), and "people" is a head noun (N).



Why do we need tree diagram? It is because some sentences are ambiguous. So, I need this tree diagram to help me understand the syntactic category of the words.

In syntax, you have something called **generative grammar**.

For example, we have a rule for forming past tenses. We all know that to form a past tense, we add "ed" to the verb.

E.g. study + ed = studied.

So, here we generated another verb by using this rule.

I can use this rule with other verbs and generate a lot of verbs. This is what we mean by generative grammar.

Let's have other sentences and try to draw a tree diagram:

Exercise: All students should have been reading the book.

This sentence (S) contains two phrases:

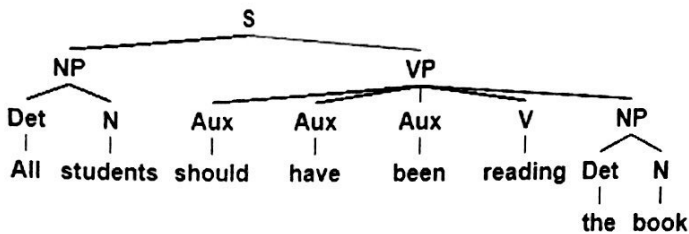
Noun phrase (NP): "All students." The head is "students."

Verb phrase (VP): "should have been reading the book."

The head here is the verb "reading."

“Should,” “have” and “been” are auxiliaries (Aux).

“The book” is a noun phrase that is included in the verb phrase.



In syntax, we cannot write auxiliaries the way we want; rather, there is a specific order. For example, we cannot say, “All students should been have reading the book.”

In general, the forms of verbs we have are Infinitive, present tense, past tense, present participle, and past participle.

However, in syntax we have three forms of verbs:

Main verb: reading.

Modal: should.

Auxiliary: have, been.

In syntax, you should start with modals, then auxiliaries, and finally main verbs.

Phrase structural rule for verb phrases: the auxiliary is optional, and the verb is obligatory.

Auxiliary may contain modals, “be” and “have.”

Can we have a verb phrase of only a verb without an auxiliary?

Student: yes.

Professor: yes.

E.g. Ahmad studies.

Here, the word “studies” is a verb phrase.

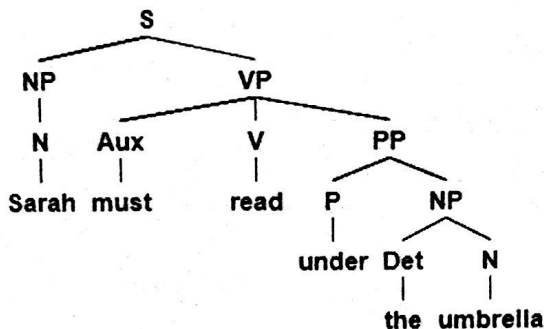
Exercise: Sarah must read under the umbrella.

This sentence (S) contains two phrases:

Noun phrase (NP): "Sarah." The head is "Sarah."

Verb phrase (VP): "must read under the umbrella"

"under the umbrella" is a prepositional phrase (PP). The head of it is the preposition (P) "under." The noun phrase "the umbrella" is included in the prepositional phrase.



In the noun phrase, we have one constituent, which is a noun (Sarah). In the verb phrase, we have three constituents: an auxiliary (must), a verb (read) and a prepositional phrase (under the umbrella).

In the EXAM, you may have an empty tree, and you want to fill, or I give a sentence, and you'll have to choose the correct tree for it.

Student: do all sentences have just two parts: noun phrase and verb phrase?

Professor: no, but today is just an introduction, and we are dealing with only simple sentences. Next times, we will deal with more complicated sentences.

Next lecture, we will start with questions and negatives of verb phrases.

That is all for today

See you next week