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Semantics & Syntax

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Semantics & Syntax 3.1

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HELLO EVERYONE!

Course book: **An Introduction to Language** by Victoria Fromkin.

We will study only **Chapter 4 Semantics & Chapter 5 Syntax**.

The edition I have is the 8th edition; however, you can download the 4th or 5th editions from the internet. They are somehow the same.

This course is not complex at all, but you need to study well.

Our subject is called 'semantics and syntax', so we will deal only with these two fields of linguistics.

Linguistics is a big field that includes pragmatics, semantics, syntax, phonology, morphology, etc.

What is syntax? علم النحو

It is concerned with **forming words into phrases, and phrases into sentences. It's concerned with sentences and their structures.**

Can we form a sentence randomly? No.

We need rules to form a sentence.

What is the function of syntax? Why are we studying syntax?

It's to determine the meaning of a certain sentence through the arrangement of words.

Syntax:

1. Syntax is concerned about word order:

Word order is universal. In all languages syntax is concerned about word order because if you are not familiar with word order, no one can understand you.

What is the right word order in English?

Subject/verb/object

-The boy gave me a ball.

I can't change the order of the sentence.

2. Syntax is concerned about the meaning of a particular group of words.

-He refused what I accepted.

-I accepted what he refused.

Are they similar in meaning? The meaning here is different.

Why? Because we have different word order. They have the same words but with **different arrangement = different meaning.**

3. Syntax is concerned about grammatical structure.

-My cat chased your dog.

My cat → subject

Your dog → object

- **Your dog chased my cat.**

Your dog → subject

My cat → object

Because of the arrangement, we have different grammatical structures.

4. Syntax is concerned with meaningful structures:

-Sara found...

Is this correct? It is **fragment**. It is not correct at all because it is a transitive verb (it needs object). The sentence is not grammatically correct.

-The child found quickly. It's nonsense. No meaning.

-Sara slipped the baby. It is not correct because slipped is intransitive verb. I should say only 'Sara slipped'.

Syntax decided forming the sentence structures.

Let us discuss some sentences as a practice.

- **Jack tries John to be a gentleman.**

Is it correct? No, because it doesn't need an object.

Let us correct it:

-Jack tries to be a gentleman. Is it correct? Yes.

Another example,

-Jack believes to be a gentleman. Is it correct?

It should be 'Jack believes himself to be a gentleman'.

We need object.

In syntax, we have to know the meaning of grammatical categories, such as determiners, verbs, adjectives, etc.

What do we mean by **determiners**? They are like articles.

- *The boy usually eats an apple*

I can't use past simple here because we have the word 'usually'.

-The boy ate an apple.

This is past simple.

How many constituents we have in this sentence?

Here, we have three constituents.

1. The boy (Subject)

2. Eat (ate -v2)(Verb)

3. an apple (Object)

Here, we have five items but three constituents.

Noun phrase is a constituent. Constituent means one unit that can stand alone.

How I can test if something is a constituent or not?

We can do that by asking a question.

1. Asking question:

What did the boy eat?

The answer is 'an apple', not 'apple'.

Who did eat an apple?

The answer is 'the boy', not 'boy'.

This is one way to test if a structure is a *constituent or not*.

Another way:

2. Replacing the constituent:

If you want to change the sentence, just change the constituent.

- ***The boy found a ball.***

I can change the constituent.

- ***The girl found a ball.***

Can I replace it by a proper noun?

- ***Sara found a ball.***

It is correct but we have different structure.

Is this a noun phrase?

Yes, it is also a noun phrase even if we have proper nouns.

There is a third way.

3. Movement:

- ***An apple was eaten by a boy.***

Here, we have the passive voice. Even when we changed the voice, the constituent is the same: 'a boy', 'eat', and 'an apple.'

Eat is a **verb phrase** even if we changed the form:

Ate, was eaten, can eat, must eat, has to eat, is eating, etc.

Another example,

- ***The boy played in the garden.***

- ***In the garden, the boy played.***

Noun phrases can be subjects or objects.

Verb phrases can be any phrase in which the head word is the verb.

Functional words are articles, prepositions, and determiners (functional category).

Content words are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (lexical categories).

Thank You

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