Semantics & Syntax

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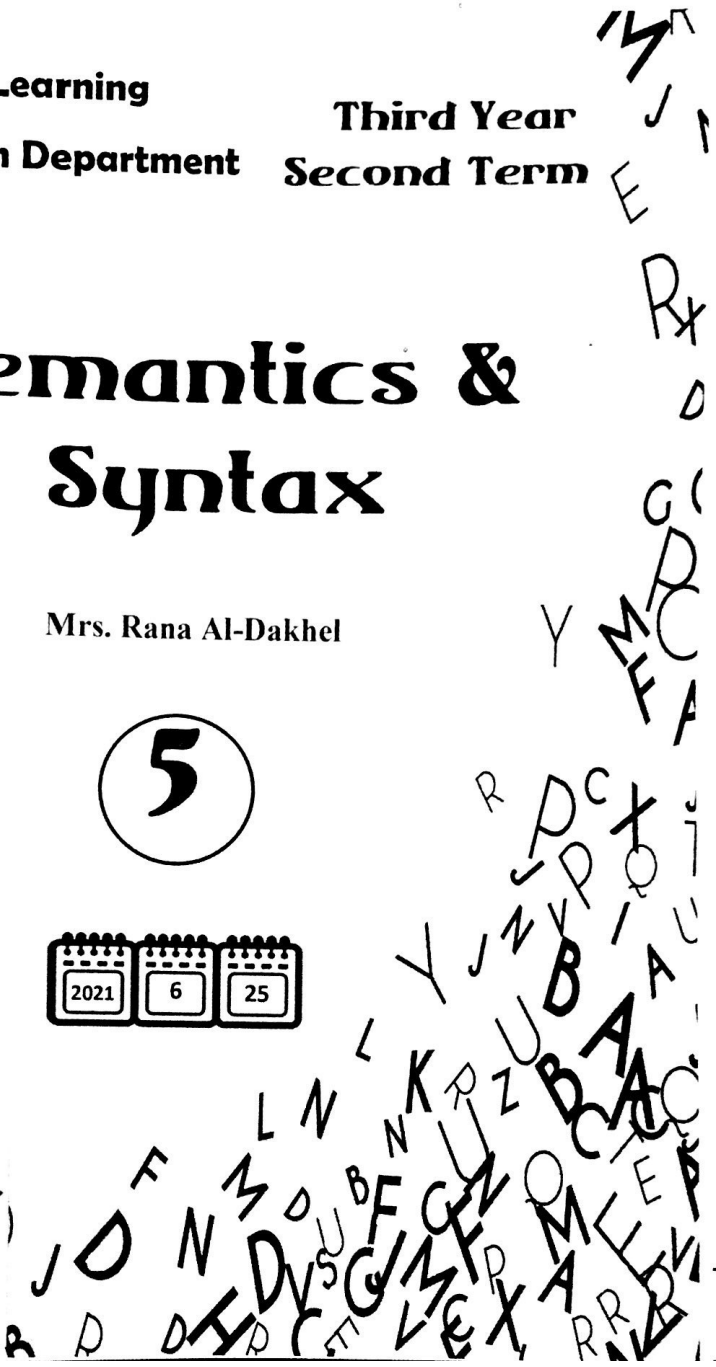
GOOD MORNING EVERYONE!

In English, we have two kinds of ambiguous sentences:
- **Lexical ambiguity**: it is related to the words.

E.g. *I went to the bank.*

Do they mean here by "bank" the financial institution or the side of the river?
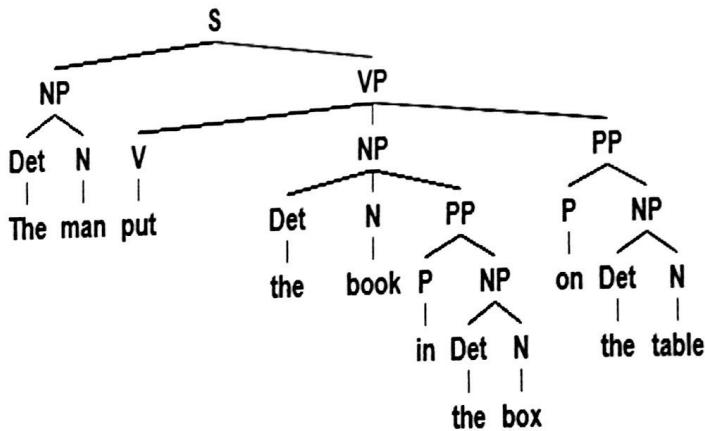
- **Structural ambiguity**: it is related to the structure of the sentence.

✎ **The man put the book in the box on the table**

This sentence is ambiguous. We have structural ambiguity.

<u>The first meaning:</u>

The man put the book, which is within the box, on the table. So, the book was already in the box, and the man carried the box and put it on the table.
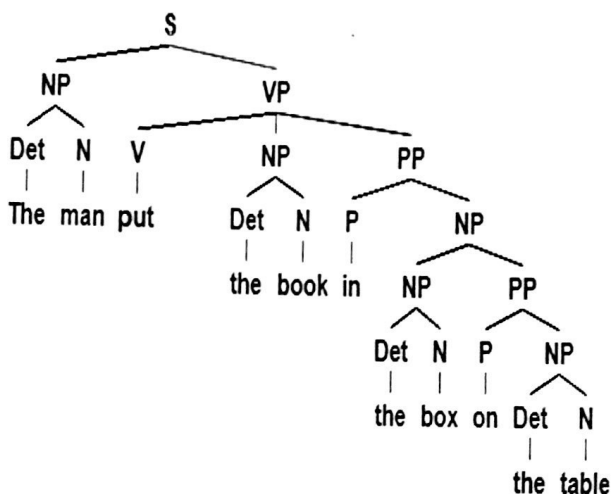

The verb phrase includes three constituents: a verb, a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase.

"In the box" is included within the second constituent, which is the noun phrase, as we see in the tree diagram above.

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Here, "In the box" is dominated by the noun phrase "the book."

The second meaning:

The man put the book in the box, which is on the table. So, the box here was already on the table, and the man took the book and put it inside the box.

The verb phrase also includes three constituents: a verb, a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase.

"In the box" is included within the third constituent, which is the prepositional phrase, as we see in the tree diagram above.

Here, "in the box" is not related to "the book." It is related to "on the table," and both of them are dominated by the verb "put."

Student: is it right to have three constituents?

Professor: yes, with recursive rule we can generate new categories.

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According to phrase structure rules, having a verb (V) in a verb phrase (VP) is <u>obligatory</u> because the verb is the head. However, having a noun phrase (NP), a prepositional phrase (PP) or a complementiser phrase (CP) is <u>optional</u>.

<u>So, with **recursive rule** we can add to the verb the categories we want.</u> In this example, we added a noun phrase and a prepositional phrase to the verb "put."

> Homework:
> I killed the king with a knife.

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Transformational rules

The boy is sleeping.

For analyzing it syntactically, I use this rule: S → NP VP.

If I want to make a question from this sentence, I say:
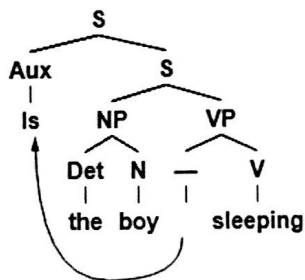
Is the boy sleeping?

How can I analyze this interrogative sentence syntactically?

We have something called **transformational rules**, which means I want to transmit some elements to the initial position. Here, the auxiliary "is" moves to the initial position.

By applying the transformational rule, we get the structure:

> S → Aux S

The syntactic analysis would be like this:

The shape (—) means that here there is a **shift**.

The sentence "The boy is sleeping" is called **deep structure**.

The sentence "Is the boy sleeping?" is called **surface structure** because it is resulted from the application of transformational rules.

Alongside interrogative sentences, we use transformational rules with:
- Some forms of conditional sentences.
E.g. *had he studied well, he would have passed the exam.*
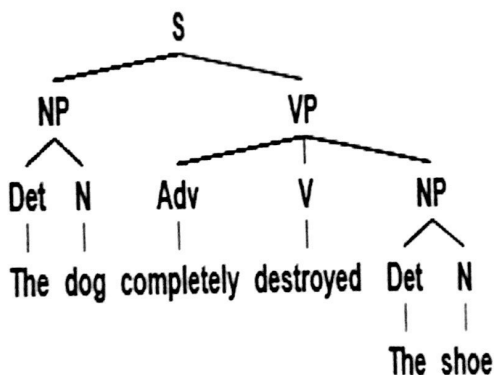- Passive sentences.
E.g. *the cat was chased by the boy.*
However, I just want you to focus on questions.
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✎ **The dog completely destroyed the shoe**
Here, we have an adverb. The adverb "completely" modifies the verb "destroyed."

The syntactic analysis would be like this:

```
                        S
              ┌─────────┴─────────┐
             NP                   VP
             /\          ┌────────┼────────┐
          Det   N      Adv       V         NP
           |    |       |        |         /\
          The  dog  completely destroyed Det  N
                                          |   |
                                         The shoe
```

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So, we have a new rule according to recursive rule:

$$VP \rightarrow (Adv) \ V \ (NP)$$

The parentheses mean that this category is optional.

We said before that with recursive rule we can generate new categories or constituents within the phrase.
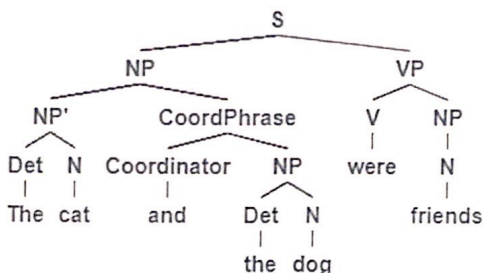
✎ **The cat _and_ the dog were friends**

Here, we have a coordinator conjunction.

The first noun phrase is written with bar (NP') because we have sisters here. "The cat" and "the boy" are sisters.

Then, we will write coord phrase, and this contains the coordinator and the second noun phrase.

The syntactic analysis would be like is:

Student: isn't "were" an auxiliary?

Professor: no, it is the main verb here.

This is the last lecture talking about syntax. Next lecture, we will start with semantics.

That is all for today
See you next week

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