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DESCRIPTIVE

ENGLISH SYNTAX

THEORY AND PRACTICE

FOREWORD

Descriptive English Syntax. THEORY AND PRACTICE has a double purpose: 1. It is primarily designed as a course book and a reference grammar for students of English, especially second-year university students. 2. The authors of this grammar book have also included a number of exercises which can be used as a classroom textbook or for self-study by students. The exercises provided at the end of each chapter are varied in form, purpose as well as the degree of difficulty: some are for basic review being suitable for private study, while the more demanding exercises may be used as the basis of class discussion sessions.

Authors

INTRODUCTION TO DESCRIPTIVE ENGLISH SYNTAX

The purpose of a descriptive syntax of the English language is to identify and present the main patterns and structures of expression in contemporary English.

Syntax is that branch of linguistics which describes the phenomena of the contemporary language in point of relations between words and their correct arrangement in units of expression apt to reflect logical units and patterns.

Therefore, while morphology studies words and their changes in various situations and contexts, syntax describes the situations and contexts themselves, the relations between words, deriving the principles, the rules and the patterns governing the arrangement of morphological elements as part of independent or connected sense-units.

As these units are meant not only for writing but also (or rather mainly) for oral expression, it is but natural for syntax to go hand in hand with some aspects of suprasegmental phonetics such as sentence stress rhythm, emphasis and intonation.

As a matter of fact, given the progress of the sciences connected with communication and of the interdisciplinary subjects, the term syntax has come to be used – together with the term grammar – in order to indicate the rules for the specific arrangement of elements in various arts: poetry, prose, stylistics.

Thus, syntax can be seen as a set of principles, rules and indications governing the best arrangement of elements in the structure of communication.

Among the various disciplines and branches of linguistics, syntax aims at offering the most adequate structures for thecommunication of people's thoughts. That is why, many of the notions and terms employed in syntax (as part of the grammar of a language or of all languages) are so closely connected with logic and

philosophy; some of them are not only the counterparts of notions and terms in those sciences but even identical with them.

Since linguistics and psycholinguistics have proven that human thoughts are not articulate – that is, they do not take a definite form – until they are embodied in words (even before they are uttered aloud or set down on paper), the concatenation between thinking and its materialized forms no longer requires demonstration. Hence the interpenetration between logic (as the set of rules governing correct thinking and reasoning) and grammar (or rather syntax, which recommends the best models for the arrangements of words – we may say ordinance – in such a way as to facilitate the best expression of thoughts).

Since the basic syntactical units are called *sentences*, the syntactical subunits are necessarily called *parts of the simple sentence (or clauses* in the case of compound or complex sentences).

Naturally, classification attaches much importance to criteria of form, but content preserves its importance in syntax too, as it is the essence of the communication which matters and that is what syntactical relations indicate (also with assistance from phonetics and punctuation).

Grammarians who analyse the deep structure of the communication have proven that it may be expressed aloud or in writing in different and sometimes dissimilar surface structures. That is why the same trend of the communication may appear in the form of a declarative, or of an apparent exclamation, the most obvious example being that of requests or invitations which are most politely formulated as questions.

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SENTENCES

1.1. *Criteria of Classification*

Since speech and writing are the expression of articulate thinking, utterances and written sentences will be the materialized forms of thoughts.

Articulate thoughts (in the field of logic) find their expression in *sentences or propositions* (terms which have their origin in the same field of logic) and take the oral form of utterances (in suprasegmental phonetics). Language and its component elements (phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, grammatical rules, structures, patterns, etc.) are the materials and means employed by human beings in order to embody their thoughts.

The oral and written expressions of human thoughts are part and parcel of communication and may express different trends or purposes of communication, and on the other hand may assume a variety of forms. That is why the traditional manner of classifying notions – in point of content and in point of form – assumes the following aspects when we differentiate the linguistic expressions of thoughts:

- classification in point of *trend or purpose of communication* (therefore a matter of content);
- classification in *point of structure (of communication)* or *of composition* (therefore a matter of form);
- classification in point of *status or grammatical dependence*.

The first classification proceeds from the *trend or essence or content of communication* because it is more general than the other classifications. The discrimination of sentences according to the purpose/ intention/ attitude of the speaker or writer is essential and can apply to all the subdivisions separated under the incidence of the other classifications. Long, extended, elliptical etc. sentences or clauses are all declarative or exclamatory, etc.

From the point of view of *trend or purpose of communication* – which means semantic as well as logical and psychological content – sentences are normally divided into: Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative and Exclamatory.

So, it is a matter of the fundamental attitude which the speaker/writer adopts towards his/her communication. R. Quirk *et al* (1972: 387), as well as other linguists, consider that any communication – even statements (Declarative Sentences) does reflect or reveal an attitude or modality.

The second classification, the formal one, refers to the way thoughts are expressed, whether destined for uttering or writing. The classification in point of *structure/composition/form* distinguishes three main types of sentences: the simple sentence, the compound sentence and the complex sentence.

The Simple Sentence expresses just one thought at a time, by means of one predicate between two punctuation marks that are destined for separating thoughts – or between two conclusive pauses in the speech chain, indicating the beginning of a new utterance and its end.

The Compound Sentence (the word "compound" is employed in the sense of homogeneity/ similarity/ coordination/ equality) is a thought which includes more than one unit, all placed on an equal footing. In syntactical terms, the English compound sentence corresponds to the notion of *fraza (compusă) prin coordonare*, that is a sentence made up of two or more clauses (= *propoziţii coordonate*), which discharge the same function and are connected between them with or without the help of coordinating conjunctions.

The Complex Sentence involves the notion of "complex" in the sense of diversity/non-homogeneousness/inequality/ subordination of the various component elements. In purely syntactical terms, it corresponds to the Romanian *fraza (compusă) prin subordonare* that is a unit of thinking made up of one or more main/principal clauses (= *propoziţii principale*) and one or more subordinate clauses (= *propoziţii secundare/subordonate*).

Sentences can also be classified in accordance with their *status* (of dependence or independence) or in point of *grammatical dependence*, that is in terms of their position as regards other syntactical units. This classification is rather intricate, because it brings into play all three types of sentences classified in point of structure, or rather simple sentences as such (or independent clauses, as part of a compound sentence) and the non-homogeneous components of a complex sentence: the subordinator(s) and the subordinated.

It is in fact a matter of government, of equality or of juxtaposition and the difficulties increase when it comes to equating the various classes in other languages (cf. in this respect the points on terminology in the table below).

In point of status or degree of grammatical dependence, sentences are classified into:
- *Independent Sentences* (isolated);
- *Independent Clauses* (as part of a compound sentence);
- *Main/principal/head Clauses* (in complex sentences);
- *Governing Clauses* (as part of a complex sentence, in case there are two or more levels of subordination);
- *Subordinate/Secondary Clauses* (as part of Complex sentences).

Independent Sentences are in fact simple sentences, their name differing only according to the angle from which they are viewed.

e.g. *It is ten o'clock.*
I have to go to the airport.

If linked by conjunctions, independent sentences become (more or less) independent clauses (in case of coordination, as part of a compound sentence – e.g.: *It is ten o'clock and I have to go to the airport*), while in the case where they are placed in a hierarchy, they turn into main clauses, subordinate clauses proper or governing clauses – e.g.: *It is ten o'clock and so I have to go to the airport, unless I want to be late again.*

Independent Clauses are the complete elements or units which are brought together in a closer connection as part of the speech chain, without, however, being dependent upon each other or upon anything else in point of meaning or of grammatical status; their independence can at any time be proven, through replacing commas or coordinating conjunctions by full stops, without their full sense being altered.

Main Clauses, also called *Principal* or *Head Clauses*, are elements that rank first in the hierarchy established as part of a complex sentence, that is they have in their subordination both secondary/subordinate clauses and governing clauses, in case the latter are present. While subordinate clauses display great variety, main clauses are limited in their variability, being usually statements, although questions, imperatives or, less frequently exclamations occasionally do appear as main clauses.

Governing Clauses have the intermediate position, i.e. they have the ambivalent/hybrid nature of governed and governing at the same time, when the stratification within the complex sentence is more diversified. They behave as subordinates to the main clause(s) while governing the subordinate clause(s) proper,

e.g. *He said* **that he would return the book** *when he finished it.*

Subordinate or Secondary Clauses are an indispensable element of complex sentences: the very notions of "complex sentence" (= heterogeneous, unequal) and of main clauses are impossible without the existence of subordinate elements.

Their government by main or governing clauses is the principal area where the rules of sequence of tenses manifest themselves.

The comparison with Romanian inevitably requires a perfect understanding of the equivalence of terms presented in the following table. This summarizes in fact all the above[1]:

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[1] Andrei Bantaş, *Descriptive English Syntax*, p. 89

Romanian		English	
propoziţie independentă/simplă		independent/simple *sentence*	
propoziţie independentă coordonată (în cadrul unei fraze compuse prin coordonare)		coordinated independent *clause* (as part of a compound sentence)	
propoziţie principală (în cadrul unei fraze compuse prin subordonare)		main/principal/head *clause* (as part of a complex sentence)	
propoziţie secundară/subordonată (idem)		subordinate/secondary *clause* (idem)	
propoziţie regentă (idem)		governing *clause* (idem)	
frază (compusă) prin coordonare		compound *sentence*	
frază (compusă) prin subordonare		complex *sentence*	
locuţiune gramaticală		grammatical *phrase*	
Expresie		Idiom, idiomatic *phrase*	

1.2. Compound Sentences

Just as a phrase may be simple or complex, depending on whether it is composed of one word or more than one, a sentence may be simple (i.e. consists of a simple clause) or complex, the complex sentence consisting of more than one clause. The relationships between the clauses of a sentence are of two kinds: a) coordination, b) subordination.

Coordination (or conjoining) is the process of forming compound sentences by joining or uniting two or more sentences of equal rank. In most cases, coordination is achieved by means of coordinating conjunctions, or coordinators (sometimes called syndetic coordination), but in some cases the conjunctions may be absent altogether (asyndetic coordination).

From the point of view of the logical relations between two clauses forming a compound sentence, coordination can be

subdivided into: copulative, disjunctive, adversative, consecutive, causative.

Copulative coordination is achieved by means of the following conjunctions: *and*, *as well as*, *nor*, *neither*, *not only ... but also, both ... and*, *neither ... nor*. When two or more clauses are coordinated, repeated elements, which are therefore redundant, are ellipted (deleted) from all but one of the clauses:

- if two ore more coordinated sentences have identical subjects, the subject of the second (third, etc.) sentence is usually deleted, e.g.

> e.g. *He1 went into the shop (he1) bought a tie and (he1) paid for it at the cash desk.*

- if the predicates in the coordinated sentence contain the same auxiliary, it is deleted (ellipsis is usually anaphoric, with realized items in the first of a series of clauses).

> e.g. *They were married in 1960, (they were) divorced in 1970, and (they were) reconciled in 1972.*
> *I've been waiting and (I've been) wondering where you are.*

- an identical head verb of a VP can be deleted

> e.g. *John has written a poem and Bob (has written) a novel.*

- the compound sentence may be reduced to only one sentence with a compound constituent,

> e.g. *John will come later and Mary will come later – John and Mary will come later.*

The conjunction *and* coordinates sentences as well as their constituent parts. As well as linking two main clauses, *and* can link subordinate clauses.

> e.g. *He asked to be transferred because he was unhappy and (because) conditions were far better at the other office.*

The conjunction *and* denotes merely a relation between the clauses, the second clause being a pure addition to the first.

> e.g. *John was tired and hungry.*