IOANA MURAR
ANA-MARIA TRANTESCU
CLAUDIA GABRIELA PISOSCHI

IOANA MURAR
ANA-MARIA TRANTESCU
CLAUDIA GABRIELA PISOSCHI

ENGLISH SYNTAX
A MULTIPLE LINGUISTIC
PERSPECTIVE

PART I

A DESCRIPTIVE VIEW
ON ENGLISH SYNTAX

Chapter 1
TYPES OF SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

1.1. The components of language

Morphology vs. syntax: The structure of words is represented by morphology. The words make up the lexicon, i.e., the total stock of words in the language. In other words, the term *lexicon,* in the most general sense, is synonymous with vocabulary. Lexical words can consist of a single morpheme (a stem, such as *go, book, cat*), or they can have a more complex structure created by a process of:

i. inflection: lexical words can take inflectional suffixes to signal meanings and roles which are important to their word class, such as 'plural' in the case of nouns, 'past tense' in the case of verbs, 'comparison' in the case of adjectives or adverbs;

ii. derivation: which involves adding an affix, i.e. a morpheme attached to the beginning of a word (a prefix) or to the end of a word (a suffix); unlike inflection which does not change the identity of a word (i.e. it remains the same lexeme), derivation creates new nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs;

iii. compounding: another form of derivation, which also leads to more complex words; unlike inflection and derivation which result in complex words, with a stem plus one or more affixes, compounds contain more than one stem, e.g. noun + noun: *chair + man*, verb + noun: *guess + work*, etc.).

If morphology is the part of grammar dealing with morphemes, i.e. parts of words, such as stems, prefixes, suffixes, syntax is the part of grammar dealing with larger types of grammatical units, i.e. words (which consist of one or more morphemes), phrases (which consist of one or more words), clauses (which consist of one or more phrases), and sentences.

In general, grammatical units are described in terms of four factors: their structure, their syntactic role, their meaning, and the way they are used in discourse.

Fromkin & Rodman (1998: 9) discuss the creativity of linguistic knowledge represented by *syntax*, which is the way words may be combined into phrases and sentences or the structure of such phrases and sentences. The two scholars point out the fact that knowledge of a language enables you to combine words to form phrases and phrases to form sentences, in other words, knowing a language means being able to produce new sentences never spoken before and to understand sentences never heard before.

This ability is referred to as part of the *creative aspect* of language use (Chomsky, 1972).

Simple memorization of all possible sentences in a language is impossible in principle. If, for every sentence in the language a longer sentence can be formed, then there is no limit to the length of any sentence and therefore no limit to the number of sentences. In English we can say:

	This is the house.
or:	*This is the house that Jack built.*
or:	*This is the malt that lay in the house that Jack built.*
or:	*This is the dog that chased the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built,* etc. (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998: 10).

Through this recursive or iterative process, in principle, there is no limit to the number of sentences. All human languages permit their speakers to form indefinitely long sentences, creativity being a universal property of human language.

1.2. Linguistic knowledge (competence) and performance
1.2.1. Linguistic knowledge (competence)

An important distinction is made between competence and performance. In brief, it is a difference between what you know, which implies your linguistic competence and how you use this knowledge

in actual speech production and comprehension, which is your linguistic performance.

According to David Crystal (1992: 66), competence is a term used in linguistic theory, and especially in generative grammar, to refer to speakers' knowledge of their language, the system of rules which they have mastered so that they are able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences, and to recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities (i.e. words or sentences that have two or more linguistically determined meanings).

The notion has led to the development of several related terms, notably pragmatic or communicative competence, referring to the ability to produce and understand sentences appropriate to the social context in which they occur – what speakers need to know in order to communicate effectively in socially distinct settings. It is an idealized concept of language, which is seen as in opposition to the notion of performance, the specific utterances of speech.

The Saussurean distinction between *Langue* and *Parole* is similar, but there are important differences between the definitions of competence and *Langue*. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist, the phenomenon of language should be analysed into an 'executive' side ('parole') concerned with the production, transmission, and reception of speech, and an underlying language system ('langue'), seen as having objective reality in a specific society (Matthews, 2008: 355).

1.2.2. Linguistic performance

Performance is a term used in linguistic theory, and especially in generative grammar, to refer to language seen as a set of specific utterances produced by native speakers. It is opposed, in this sense, to the idealized concept of language known as competence (D. Crystal, 1992: 254). The notion was introduced by Noam Chomsky in the 1960s and is analogous to the Saussurean concept of *parole*.

The utterances of performance will contain features irrelevant to the abstract rule system, such as hesitations, unfinished structures, pauses arising from the various psychological and social difficulties acting upon the speaker (e.g. lapses of memory and attention, or biological limitations, such as pauses), which are a normal part of speech production.

The idea that performance features are unimportant has been strongly criticized in recent years. A grammar which takes into account the various psychological processes involved in speech is a performance grammar. The factors which contribute to performance grammars are now of considerable interest, especially in psycholinguistics.

1.3. Kinds of syntactic analysis

This section gives a brief overview of various kinds of syntactic analysis: 1.3.1. Descriptive grammar; 1.3.2. Bloomfieldian structural linguistics: Immediate constituent analysis; 1.3.3. The post-Bloomfieldian school: The structuralist approach; 1.3.4. 'Deep' syntax (1.3.4.1. Tagmemic theory: Tagmemics; 1.3.4.2. Scale and Category Grammar; 1.3.4.3. Stratificational Grammar; 1.3.4.4. Case Grammar); 1.3.5. Generative-Transformational grammar; 1.3.6. Functional /systemic grammar; 1.3.7. Universal grammar.

1.3.1. Descriptive grammar

The most straightforward treatment of syntax is that provided by descriptive grammars. Descriptive grammars attempt to make precise, systematic statements about the syntax of a particular language. The basic methodology is simply to describe how the language works in practical terms. One of the most widely used of such grammars is Randolph Quirk et al.'s *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985).

The procedure adopted by descriptive grammars is quite different from that used by prescriptive grammars, which attempt to

lay down rules about how people ought to speak and write rather than how they actually do.

The aim of descriptive linguistics is to account for the facts of linguistic usage as they are, and not how they ought to be, with reference to some imagined ideal state (D. Crystal, 1992: 100).

The emphasis on a given time places descriptive linguistics in contrast with historical linguistics, where the aim is to demonstrate linguistic change: descriptive linguistics aims to describe a language synchronically, at a particular time.

The emphasis on 'a' language distinguishes the subject from comparative linguistics, as its name suggests, and also from general linguistics, where the aim is to make theoretical statements about language as a whole. It ought not to be forgotten, of course, that there is an interdependence between these various branches of the subject: a description is the result of an analysis, which must, in turn, be based on a set of theoretical assumptions. But in descriptive linguistics the theory is only a means to an end, viz. the production of a descriptive grammar (or one of its subdivisions, e.g. phonology, lexicon, syntax, morphology).
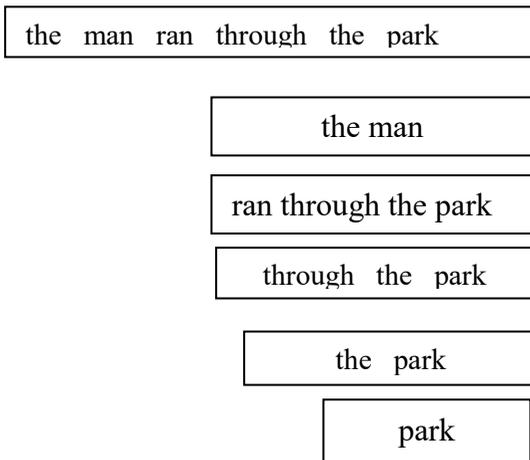
1.3.2. Bloomfieldian structural linguistics

The modern approach to syntax begins with the development of more explicit techniques of grammatical analysis, of which the most important was Immediate constituent (IC) analysis. This term was introduced by Leonard Bloomfield in his book *Language* (1933). He illustrated the way in which it was possible to take a sentence (he chose *Poor John ran away*) and split it up into two immediate constituents (*Poor John* and *ran away*), these being in turn analyzable into further constituents (*Poor* and *John,* and *ran* and *away*). In other words, a sentence is seen not as a sequence or a 'string' of elements, *Poor + John + ran + away,* but as being made up of 'layers' of constituents.

According to G. Finch (2000: 100), immediate constituency analysis is a form of analyzing word strings, beginning with the

smallest linguistic unit, and showing how this combines with others to form larger ones.

Constituent analysis is, therefore, the process of analyzing sentences into a series of constituents, which are organized in a hierarchical way. The major divisions made at a given level are called immediate constituents (or ICs); the smallest units resulting from this process of analysis are the ultimate constituents (or UCs). A grammar which analyses sentences in this way is called a constituency grammar.

Constituents are always represented hierarchically but the precise form in which they are shown varies among linguists. The most popular representation is in the form of a tree diagram. But they may be represented in rectangular boxes as in:

the man ran through the park

the man

ran through the park
through the park

the park

park

Alternatively, parentheses can be used:
(((the) (man)) ((ran) ((through) ((the) (park)))

1.3.3. The Post-Bloomfieldian school: The Structuralist approach

The structuralist approach pays explicit attention to the way linguistic features can be described in terms of patterned organization