

## UNIT ONE

### SOME BASIC CONCEPTS IN SYNTAX

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Syntax is defined as the study of the arrangement of words in sentences and of the means by which such relationships are shown (Hartmann and Stork 1972:231). It is concerned with structures of sentences in terms of meaningful constituents (and not, for example, in terms of such meaningless things as on individual sounds) and the communicative functions of such meaningful constituents. This UNIT is an introduction to the structure of the sentence.

#### 2. SENTENCE CONSTITUENTS

##### 2.1 Sentence and Clause

In traditional grammar a sentence was defined as the expression 'complete thought' (Hartmann and Stork 1972:206). Such a notional definition is inadequate because it is vague. It is vague because it does not tell us when the expression of a 'thought' is to be considered complete. But it is also inadequate because it assumes that language is used only to express thoughts – which is not the case (for instance, language is also used to get someone do something as in **Bring it here!**). It is because of the inadequacies of definitions based solely on notions (= **notional definitions**) that linguists prefer definitions based on grammatical structure. A typical **structural definition** consists in saying that the sentence "is the largest unit on which linguistic can be carried out, i.e. it is a grammatical form which can be analysed into constituents but which is not a constituents but which is not a constituent of any larger form" (Hartmann and Stock 1972:206). However, it is important to note that there is as yet no universally agreed upon structural definition. For example, one could contend, in respect of Hartmann and Stork's suggestion, above, that a sentence **may** be a constituent of a larger unit, a **text**, as in Discourse analysis or Text Linguistics.

A sentence may be defined as a group of words containing a subject, i.e. The person or the thing talked about, and a **predicate**, i.e. what is said about the subject. For example, in **Kalusha Bwalya scored one goal**, **Kalusha Bwalya** is the subject and scored one goal is the predicate.

However, both the subject and the predicate may themselves be sentences.

For example, in **That he is wrong is obvious**, the subject of **is obvious** is a sentence, he **is wrong**, made of the **he** and the predicate **is wrong**. Similarly, in **Max said you are crazy**, the predicate **said you are crazy** contains a sentence, **you are crazy**, made of you as the subject and are crazy as the predicate. To capture this fact, linguists refer to the smallest sentence, i.e. a sentence that does not contain any other sentence, for example the sentence **Max Kissed Lee in the Supermarket**, as a **CLAUSE** and say that a sentence is made of one or more clauses.

## 2.2 Sentence Constituents

### 2.2.0 General

Native Speakers have structural intuitions about the grammaticality of sentences (= syntactic well-formedness) and on **syntactic structure** (= division of a sentence into constituents). (Radford 1988:50). A sentence is composed of one or more clauses (see 2 – 1 above), a clause is composed of one or more phrases and a phrase is composed of one or more words.

**The shoot** is a sentence consisting of one phrase consisting of one word (Leech et al – 1982:28):

Sentence



Clause



Phrase



Word



Shoot

### 2.2.1 Word Level Categories

We saw the traditional list of parts of speech: **noun, adjective, adverb, article, pronoun, preposition** and **interjection**. Such terms which denote word classes are called in syntax **word-level categories** (Radford 1988:56-64). Word-level categories include, among others:

- a) noun (N)
- b) adjective (A)
- c) adverb (ADV)
- d) preposition (P)
- e) verb (V)
- f) determiner (D), a category of words used to specify nouns and comprising **articles, demonstratives, possessives**, etc.

### 2.2.2 Phrasal Categories

Some of the above mentioned word-level categories can be expanded into corresponding phrasal categories (Radford 1988:64). The **word-level categories** are often referred to as major word-level categories. They are: noun, verb, adjective, adverb and preposition. We therefore have five types of phrasal categories, as follows:-

<b>Word-level category</b>	<b>Corresponding phrasal category</b>
Noun (N)	Noun Phrase (NP)
Verb (V)	Verb Phrase (VP)
Adjective (A)	Adjectival Phrase (AP)
Adverb (Adv)	Adverbial Phrase (Adv. P)
Preposition (P)	Prepositional Phrase (PP)

Consider, for example, the sentence in (1) below:

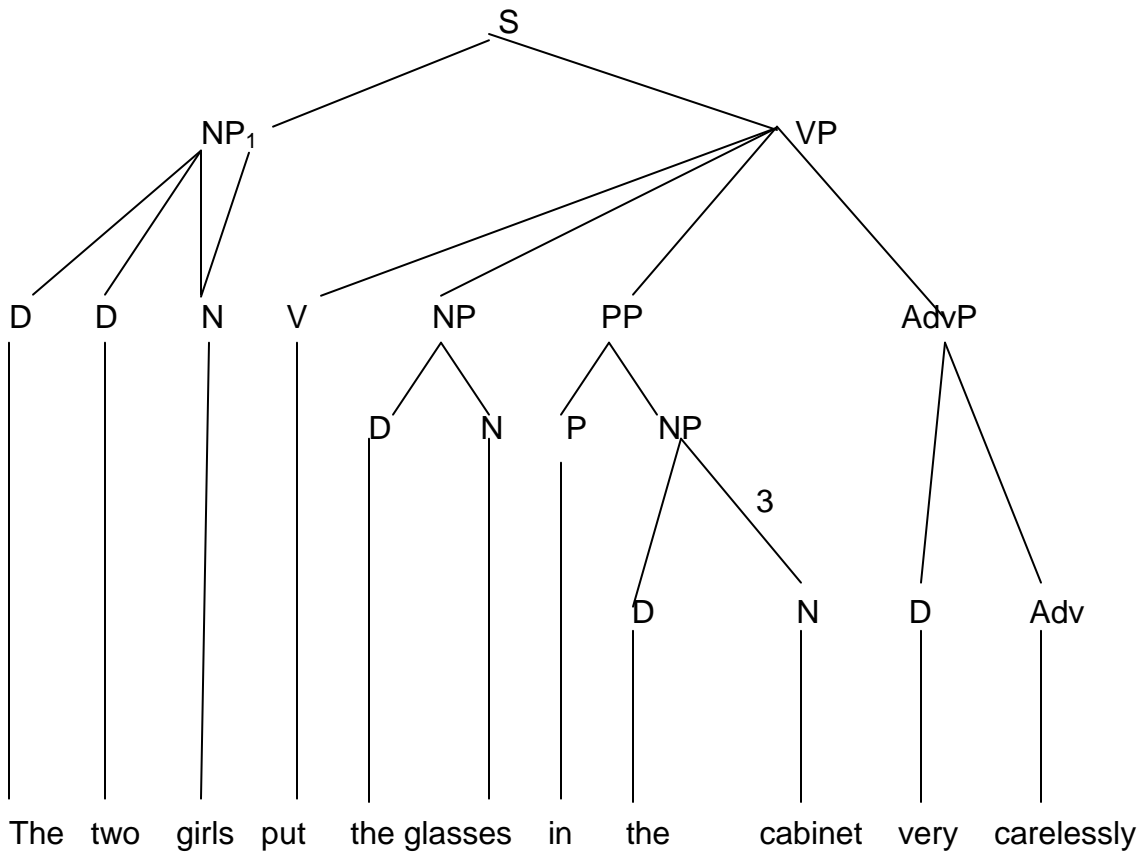
(1) The two girls put the glasses in the cabinet very carelessly.

The phrases that make up this sentence are as shown in (2)

- (2) a. the two girls = NP (girls = N)
- b. put the glasses in the cabinet very carelessly = VP (put = V)
- c. the glasses = NP (glasses = N)
- d. in the cabinet = PP (in = P)
- e. very carelessly = AdvP (Carelessly = Adv)

Observe that the NP, PP and AdvP in (2c-e) are parts of VP in (2b). We can therefore represent the structure of the sentence in (1) as follows:

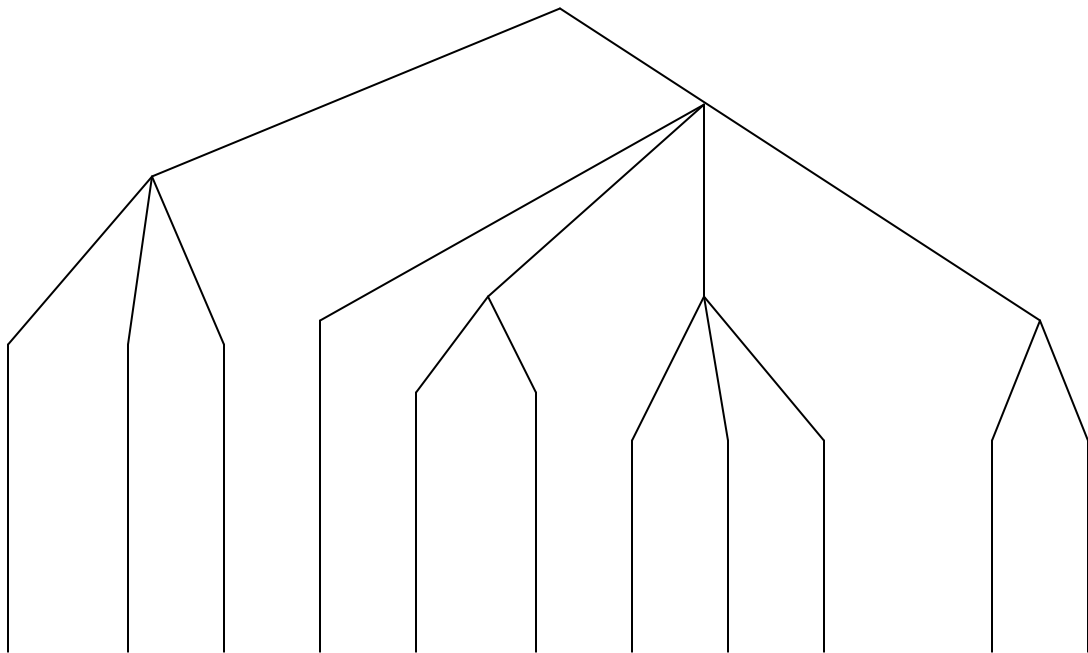
3.



a / s	=	Sentence
b / NP	=	noun phrase
c/ VP	=	verb phrase
d/PP	=	prepositional phrase
e/AdvP	=	adverbial phrase
f/ D	=	determiner
g/ N	=	noun
h/ V	=	verb
i/ P	=	preposition
j/ Adv	=	adverb
<b>Note</b>	=	The NPs are numbered here (NP <sub>1</sub> , NP <sub>2</sub> and NP <sub>3</sub> ) merely for convenience.

The symbols S, NP, VP, PP, AdvP, D, N, etc. are called **labels**. If we remove all labels from the figure in (3), the figure in (4) obtains:

4.



a            b            c            d            e            f            g            h            i            j            k

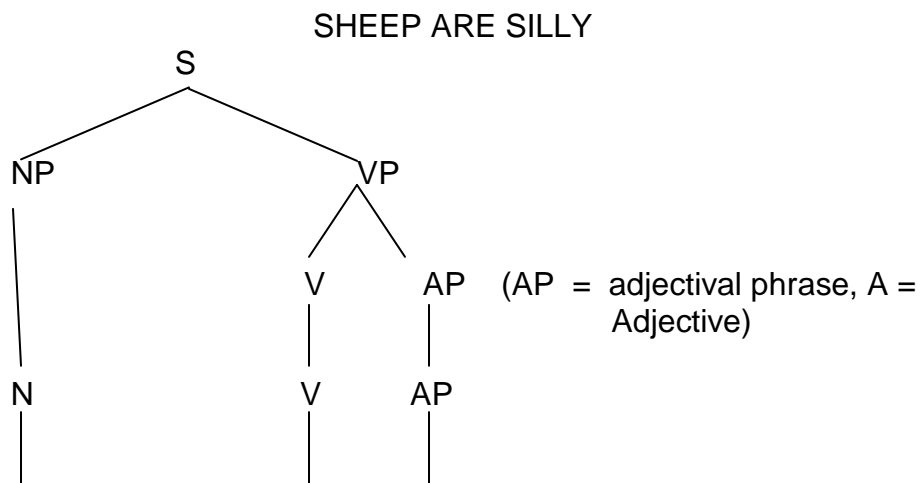
A figure like those in (3) and (4), above, is called a **tree-diagram**, the dot in (4) and the places occupied by labels in (3) are called nodes while the lower-case letters (a, b, c, etc.) in (4) represent words. A straight line linking two nodes is a **branch** of the tree-diagram. A tree-diagram with **labelled nodes**, like in (3), may be called a **phrase-marker** (or P-marker in short).

Tree-diagrams are very useful as they help one to visualise relationships between nodes. Two such relationships are **domination** and precedence. **Domination** is the relationship between the higher and the lower nodes in the tree. For instance in (3), S dominates all the other nodes, since it is the highest node, and NP<sub>1</sub> dominates D, D and N. A node **immediately dominates** another node if there is no intervening node between them. Thus in (3) S immediately dominates NP<sub>1</sub> and VP. If two or more nodes are immediately dominated by the same node, they are said to be **sisters** and the dominating node is their **mother**. For example, in (3) again, NP<sub>1</sub> and VP are sisters and their mother is S. Similarly, in (3) VP is the mother of four sisters, V, NP, P and AdvP. If we concentrate on PP, in (3), we say that PPP has two **left sisters** (V and NP) and one **right sister** (AdvP). It is important to note that there is no relationship of domination among sisters. I now define the relationship of **precedence**. A node A is said to **precede** another node B if A is to the left of B in the tree. For example, in (3) NP<sub>1</sub> Precedes VP, V precedes NP<sub>2</sub>, PP, AdvP, P etc.

### 3. Examples

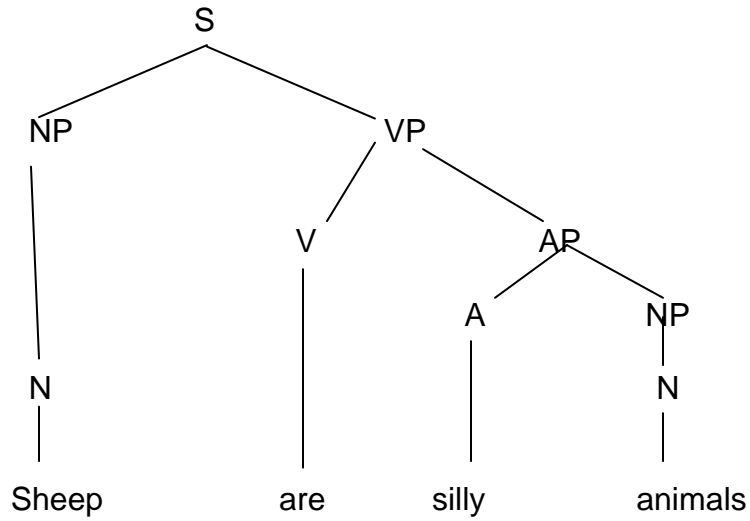
To reinforce what you have learnt in the previous section, I give in this section the tree-diagrams representing the syntactic structures of three sentences.

#### (5) Sentence 1:



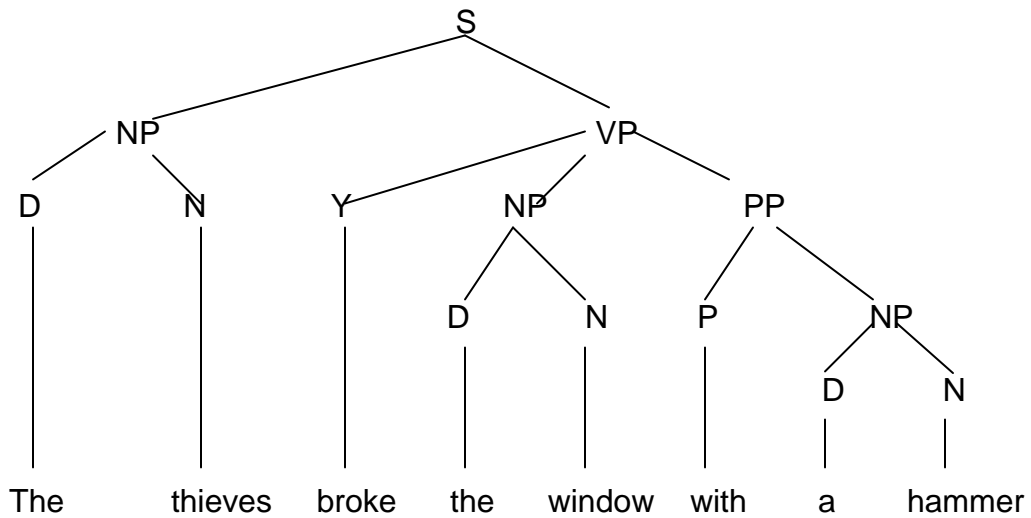
6. Sheep are silly  
**Sentence 2:**

SHEEP ARE SILLY ANIMALS



7. **Sentence 3:**

THE THIEVES BROKE THE WINDOW WITH A HAMMER



## REFERENCES

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## REVISION QUESTIONS

1. In traditional grammar, a sentence is defined as the expression of a complete thought.  
  
Discuss.
2. A sentence may be defined as a group of words containing a subject and a predicate. Explain and illustrate what is meant by subject and 'predicate'.
3. Sentential categories (i.e. categories belonging to the sentence) are either word-level categories or phrasal categories. Explain and exemplify.
4. What are the 'major' word-level categories and why are they so called?
5. Using the P-marker of the third sentence in Section 3, explain the following:
  - a) domination
  - b) precedence
  - c) immediate domination
  - d) sister
  - e) mother
  - f) node
  - g) branch
  - h) label
6. Draw a tree-diagram representing the sentence. HIS DAUGHTER WENT TO THE CLUB WITH A FRIEND.

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### 3. SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

The various words and individual phrases that combine to form clauses play specific 'functions' or 'roles' and so do clauses that combine to form sentences. In this lecture, I will deal with:

- (a) discourse functions of sentences;
- (b) functions of phrases; and
- (c) the concept of 'head'

#### 3.1 THE DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF THE SENTENCE

From a discourse point of view, the following four types of sentences have traditionally been recognised:

- (a) **statements**: utterances that are primarily used to convey factual information;
- (b) **questions**: utterances that are primarily used to request the listener to supply some lacking information on a specific point;
- (c) **commands**: utterances primarily used to instruct somebody to do something;
- (d) **exclamations**: utterances primarily used to express the speaker's own feelings or emotions.

(Quirk and Greenbaum - 1972. 385-6)

Sentences that perform these discourse functions are called **declarative sentences**, **interrogative sentences**, **imperative sentences** and **exclamative sentences**, respectively. They are illustrated below:

#### 1. Declarative

Pitch is distinctive in most Bantu languages.

#### 2. Interrogative

- (a) Is pitch distinctive in this language?
- (b) How many syllables are there in this sentence?
- (c) Who wrote **syntactic structures**?

3. **Imperative**

Explain what is meant by commanding.

4. **Exclamative**

- (a) How pretty she was!
- (b) What a long-time it lasted!

(Quirk and Greenbaum - 1972. 385-6)

It is important to note that the four discourse functions are not always performed by sentences. For example, the exclamation in (5) is not a sentence:

5. **Marvellous**

Likewise, If I want to order my son to come where I am, I can simply say.

6. **Here**

Accompanying this utterance with the appropriate gesture of my right hand.

It is also important to distinguish between **form** and **function**. The four types of Sentences, Distinguished on the Basis of the Functions They Perform (**statement, question, command** and **exclamation**) have specific formal properties. For example interrogative sentences in English have their subjects put after a verb (e.g. are you alright? Will you take this? Does **he** work?) Therefore, a sentence which is a question is not necessarily an interrogative sentence. Thus (7) is not an interrogation sentence because it does not have the form of an interrogative sentence:

7. I am asking you if you intend to resign. The sentence in (7) is **formally** a declarative sentence which is **functionally** a question.

## 3.2 FUNCTIONS OF PHRASES

### 2.0 General

Traditionally, a sentence is often “seen as comprising five units called **elements** of sentence ... **structure, subject, verb, complement, and object, adverbial**”. Apart from ‘verb’, these terms actually refer to functions. The term ‘verb’ denotes a word class and is an important element forming the core of most phrases that function as **predicates**. I shall, therefore, replace ‘verb’ with ‘predicate’ in the above list.

### 2.1 Subject and Predicate

These two terms are used in philosophy, logic and, traditionally, in grammar to refer to what is being talked about (**topic or theme**) in a sentence and what is said about it, respectively. For example, in (8) below, **The gun** is the subject, **is** and **under the bed** is the predicate:

8. The gun is under the bed.

Like most notional definitions these definitions are inadequate because they cannot apply in all cases. To illustrate this point, Crystal (1993-94) gives the following examples:

9. a. It’s raining.  
b. Michael asked Mary for a pen.

While it is clear to anyone who knows English that (9a) is a well-formed sentence and the grammatical subject thereof is it,

- c. It cannot possibly be the topic of the sentence. On (9b), Crystal observes that “it is difficult to decide which of Michael, Mary, or the pen is the topic – or whether we have **three** topics.”

Despite the failure to offer an adequate universal definition of ‘subject’ and ‘predicate’, speakers of a language are generally capable of identifying subjects just as, despite the failure to adequately define what the sentences is, they are generally capable of identifying sentences. It seems that the identification of subjects, predicates, sentences and other linguistics units is based both on **notional** and **formal** features of the various units.

The term 'subjects' covers a number of distinct roles, such as the roles of **agent** and **experiencer**.

## 2.2 Complement

Hartmann and Stork (1972:44) have defined a complement as "that part of verbal phrase which is required to make it a complete predicate in a sentence". For example (Ibid)

- the object noun that occurs with a transitive verb (**hit the ball**).
- the noun or adjective that occurs after a copulative verb (became president or is beautiful).
- the adverb in a phrase like it happened yesterday.

It is important to note that complements are obligatory. Thus for the following phrases to be well-formed, they must be followed by an appropriate word or phrase and it is such a word or phrase which is called a complement:

10. a. He hit –
- b. He became

**Complement** is traditionally associated with 'completing' the action or state expressed by the verb (*Crystal 1985:60*). Thus, in its broadest sense, a complement is **any** obligatory phrase other than the verb within the predicate such as the object in sentences like **He greeted the boss** or the adverbial in sentences like **He was in the car**. However, as pointed out by Crystal (1992:67). "In some approaches, the complement is given a more restricted definition, e.g. to refer only to the 'completing' function of structures following the verb **to be** (or similar verbs – in such an analysis, **He kicked the doctor** would be subject – verb – object, whereas **He is a doctor** would be subject – verb – complement".

Furthermore, a distinction is often made between:

- (a) Subject complement, e.g. **(the) president** in **He is the president**, and;
- (b) **Object complement**, e.g. president in **They elected him president**. *Crystal (Ibidem)* concludes his explanation by saying that "the domain of complementation remains an unclear area in linguistic theories, phrases other than VP (= verb phrase) may

contain complement. Thus Radford (1988: 174-9, 187-207) gives examples of NPs (=noun phrases) with what is considered to be complements. One of such examples is (p.176):

### 11. The student of Physics with long hair

In this example, the pp (= prepositional phrase) **of physics** is complement of **student** while the pp **with long hair** is not a complement because, unlike **with long hair, of physics** is necessary in that it “tells what it is that the individual concerned studies.”

## 2.3 Object

The term object refers to the complement of verb other than **to be** (or similar verbs such as **to become**). An object is a constituent that can be given as an answer to a question beginning with **what** or **who** where **what** or **who** is not a subject.

### Examples:

12. a. He kicked the ball  
b. What did he kick? – The ball (= object)
13. a. He kicked his boss.  
b. who did he kick? – His boss (= object)
14. a. She gave her husband a glass of wine.  
b. What did she give her husband? – A glass of wine.  
(= object)  
c. Who did she give a glass of wine? – Her husband (= object)

The objects in (8b), (9b) and (10b) are examples of **direct object** while the object in (10c) is an **indirect object**. Traditionally, the direct object is defined as the person or thing which suffers the action of one verb in the sentence “and the indirect object is” “the person or thing for which or on whose behalf an action is carried out” (Hartmann and Stork 1972:55).

Consider the following sentences:

15. a. I read the whole book.  
b. I read the whole night.

These two sentences have the same structure: **I read** is in both cases followed by an NP (**the whole book** in (15a) and **the whole night** in

(15b). however, the what/who – test proposed earlier reveals that **the whole book** is an object while the whole night is not an object:

16. a. I read the whole book.  
b. I read the whole night.  
c. What did I read? - The whole book (= object)  
\* The whole night

(The asterisk, or star, \*, means that the whole night cannot be an answer to the question in (16c).

The concept of **object** and that of **transitivity** are related. **Transitive verb** is a verb with a direct object and an intransitive verb is a verb which can make sense without an object. Note, however, that (a) some verbs can be used either **transitively** (i.e. with a direct object) or **intransitively** (i.e. without an object).

17. a. He drinks on Saturdays. (intransitive)  
b. He drinks only wine. (transitive)

Verbs that must be used transitively include, among many others, **to hit, to fill, to tear**; those that are always used intransitively include **to sleep, to arrive, to come, etc.**

I now wish to present what is meant by **cognate object**. A cognate object is a word which is a direct object and is **etymological** (i.e. **historically**) and **semantically** (i.e. in meaning) related to the verb of which it is the object, e.g. **song** in **to sing a song** (Hartmann and Stork 1972:40, or in Bemba **ukulaala utulo**, meaning literally, to sleep a sleep.

To wing up this section, consider the following examples:

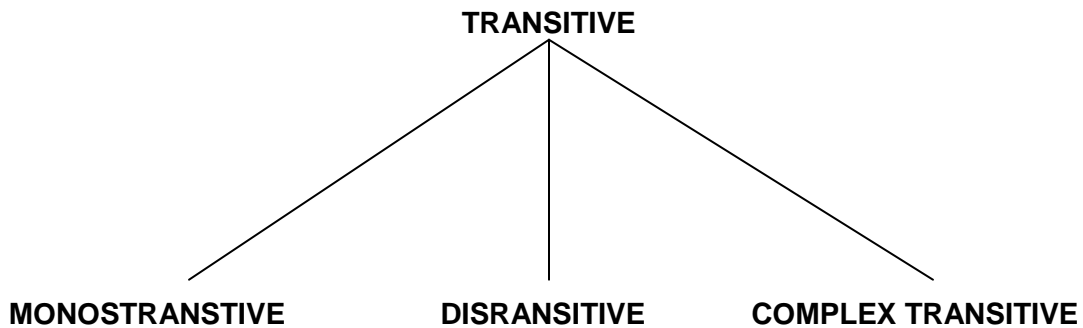
18. (a) Lee is **old** (= subject complement)  
(b) Lee grew **old** (= subject complement)  
(c) Lee wants **a bike** (= direct object)  
(d) Lee gave **Bob** a **bike** (= indirect object + direct object)  
(e) Lee made **Bob happier** (= direct object, object complement)

(f) Lee slept. (no object, no complement)

Verbs like those in (18a – b) with a subject complement are called **intensive verbs** and all the others are called **extensive verbs** (*Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:14*). Extensive verbs are of three types:

- (a) **monotransitive verbs**, verbs with a direct object;
- (b) **ditransitive verbs**, verbs with a direct object and an indirect object, and
- (c) **complex transitive verbs**, with an object complement
- (d) **intransitive verbs**, verbs with no object and no complement.

Note that all verbs in (a – c) are transitive verbs:



## 2.4 Adverbial

### 2.4.1 Definition and adverbial functions

As pointed out by Leech et al. (1982:76), “Adverbials fill out the clause by adding extra circumstantial information of various kinds,” for examples (Leech et al. 1982:77):

19.

<b>Adverbial type</b>	<b>Eliciting question</b>	<b>Example</b>
Place	Where?	(on a box)
Direction	Where to/from?	(to/from York)
Time-when	When?	(on Sunday)
Duration	How long?	(for a month)
Frequency	How	(once a week), (every day)
Manner	How? In what Manner?	(quickly), (with Confidence)
Agency	By whom	(by a tall dark Stranger)
Goal	To/for whom?	(to Mary), (for himself)
Reason	Why?	(because of her Mother)
Condition	In what circumstances?	(if you do the dishes)
Degree	How much? How far?	(completely), (to some extent)
Sentences Adverbial	(express attitude Connection, etc)	(in fact), consequently

## 2.4.2 Units realising adverbial functions

In English, the functions of the adverbial are realised by (*Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:207*):

20. a. - adverb clause, e.g.  
- Peter was playing **as well** as **he could**.  
- We'll stay **there**
- b. noun phrases, e.g.  
- Peter was playing **last week**.
- c. prepositional phrases, e.g.  
- Peter was playing **with great skill**.
- d. Finite verb clauses, e.g.  
- Peter was playing **although he was tired**.

**NOTE:** In English, finite verbs are verb forms other than infinitives (e.g. '(to) talk'), the – ing participle (e.g. 'talking') and the – ed participle (e.g. talked): infinitives, -**ing** participles and –ed participles are non-finite verb forms in English. The distinction between finite and non-finite verbs is based at least on tense. Thus Hartmann and Stock (1972:85 and 153) define **finite verb** as "A form of the verb which is limited in time by a tense and also, in many languages, shows agreement with person and number" and **non-finite verb** as "A form of the verb which is not limited by person, number or time."

- e. non-finite verb clauses, in which the verb is
- (i) infinitive, e.g.  
Peter was playing **to win**.
- (ii) - **ing** participle, e.g.  
- **wishing to encourage him**, they praise Tom.
- (iii) - **ed** participle, e.g.  
if urged by our friends, we'll stay.
- f. Verbless clauses, e.g.  
- Peter was playing, **unaware of the danger**.  
(*Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:207*)

### 2.4.3 Clauses of adverbials: adjuncts, disjuncts, conjuncts

*Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:207-8* have defined adjuncts, disjuncts and conjuncts as follows:

“Adverbials may be **integrated** to some extent into the structure of the clause or they may be **peripheral** to it. If integrated, they are termed ADJUNCTS. If peripheral, they are termed DISJUNCTS and CONJUNCTS, the distinction between the two beings that conjuncts have primarily a connective function.”

An adverbial is integrated to some extent in clause structure if it is affected by such clausal processes as negation and interrogation.

For example, it is an adjunct if:

Either (1) It cannot appear initially in a negative declarative clause:

\* **Quickly** they didn't leave for home.

Or (2) It can be the focus of a question or of clause negation: does he writes to his parents **because he wants** to (or does he write to them **because he needs money**?)

We didn't go to Chicago on **Monday** (but we did go there on **Tuesday**).

In contrast, a disjunct or a conjunct is not affected by either of these clausal processes. For example, the disjunct **to my regret** can appear initially in a negative declarative clause:

**To my regret**, they didn't leave for home and cannot be the focus of a question or of clause negation:

\* We didn't go to Chicago, **to my regret**, (but we did go there, **to my relief**).

Items can belong to more than one class. For example, **naturally** is an adjunct in:

They aren't walking **naturally** ('in a natural manner').

And a disjunct in:

Naturally, they are walking ('of course')

(*Quirk and Greenbaum 1973:207-8*)

**NOTE:** \* (= asterisk) is against here to mean that the example it precedes is ungrammatical.

As pointed out above, **conjuncts** differ from **disjuncts** in that they have a connective meaning.

In the examples in (21) and (22), the dots (---) stand for a clause:

**21. Examples of disjuncts**

- a. Seriously ---- (e.g. seriously, did you mean it?)
- b. Briefly, ---
- c. Very frankly ---
- d. Even more important, ---
- e. Most importantly, ---
- f. To our regret, ---
- g. Surprisingly, ---

**22. Examples of conjuncts**

- a. You are wrong for two reasons. First, --- secondly, ---
- b. We went to the Playhouse and to a nightclub. All in all, we've had very good time.
- c. However, ---
- d. Furthermore, ---
- e. For example, ---
- f. Likewise, ---
- g. By the way, ---
- h. Consequently, ---
- i. Alternatively, ---
- j. Anyway, ---
- k. As a result, ---

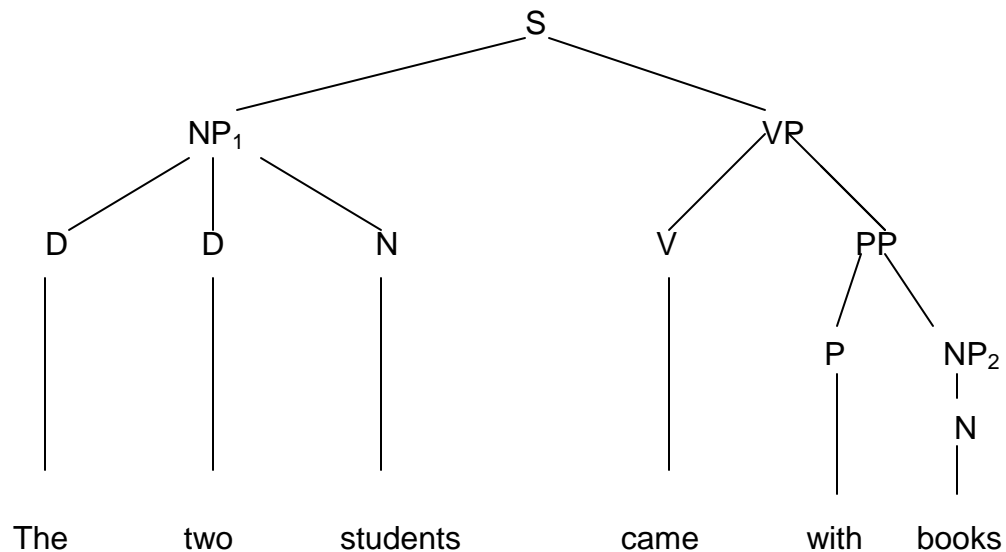
Notice that conjuncts **connect** what is being said to what has been said previously.

### 3.3 The Head

Crystal (1991:163) has defined 'head' as 'A term used in the grammatical description of some types of phrase (**endocentric phrases**) to refer to the central element which is **distributionally** equivalent to the phrase as a whole, "adding that such constructions are sometimes referred to as **headed** (as opposed to **non-headed**)."

Consider the following sentences:

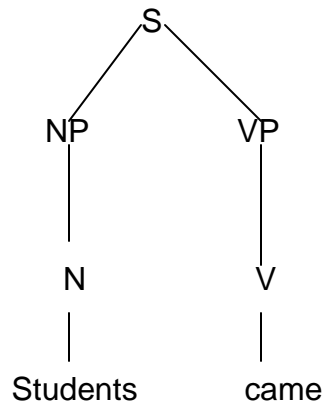
23. The two students came with books.  
This sentence may be analysed as follows:



Noun phrases (NPs) and verb phrases are said to be endocentric because in NPs and VPs the noun (N) and the verb (V) may have the same function as a whole NP and a whole NP and a whole VP respectively, as shown in (24):

24. a. students came

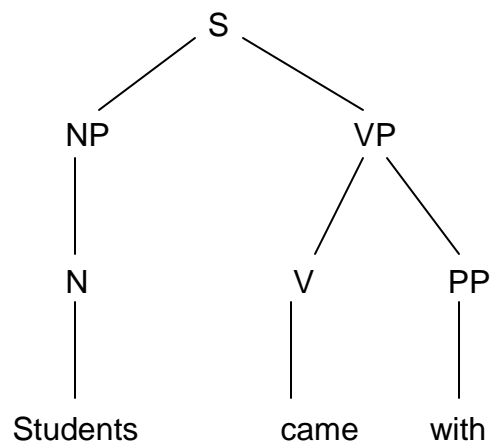
b.



Phrases like PP are **exocentric**: although in PP the central word is P (=preposition), P cannot function as a whole PP:

25. a. \* students came with

b. \*



(\* means 'ungrammatical')

In endocentric phrases (generally NPs and VPs), the 'central' element is said to be the **head** of the phrase. Thus in (23) and (24), **students** (N) and **came** (V) are heads of NP<sub>1</sub> and VP, respectively.

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## REVISION QUESTION

1. Explain and exemplify the four types of sentences distinguished on the basis of discourse functions.
2. With examples show that 'Question' and 'interrogative sentence' are not exactly synonymous (i.e. they do not exactly mean the same thing)
3. With examples briefly discuss the terms subject and predicate.
4. (a) What is a complement? Exemplify.

- (b) Can an NP have a complement? Justify your answer.
5. Identify objects and complements in the following sentences:
- (a) The Assembly appointed him chairman of the sub-committee.
- (b) The man is now a tycoon.
- (c) He told the chairman what had happened in the office.
- (d) What did you do this morning?
- (e) She passed away last night after a long illness.
6. In the sentence in 5, identify:
- (a) intensive verbs, extensive verbs
- (b) monotransitive verbs, ditransitive, complex transitive verbs
- (c) adverbials
7. Name and exemplify any five different types of adverbials (give your own examples).
8. In English (and other languages), the functions of the adverbial are realised by various types of constructions. Name and exemplify any four such constructions.
9. With examples, explain the following:
- (a) adjunct
- (b) disjunct
- (c) conjunct
10. Using the sentence some ministers resigned from the ruling party, explain the following:
- (a) endocentric and exocentric phrases
- (b) head

## **UNIT TWO: SOME BASIC CONCEPTS IN SEMANTICS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Human articulated language may be said to be made of two substances, sound and meaning. Sounds and meanings, which are comparable to the two sides of a coin, combine to form morphemes and words. The latter combine to form phrases which combine to form clauses which combine to form sentences. From a discourse point view (the above view is a grammatical one), sounds and meanings combine to form meaningful utterances. For example, Good morning! Is an utterance and this utterance is not a sentence. A meaningful utterance is not always a sentence.

While phonetics and phonology are concerned with the phonic substances (i.e. sounds), semantics is concerned with meaning. Semantics is simply defined as the study of meaning. There is no agreed upon definition of 'meaning'. The inability to define 'meaning' in a satisfactory manner can be seen in the following extracts from Hartmann and Stork (1972):

- MEANING: "The sense that a word or group of words convey"
- SENSE: "The semantic meaning that a word or phrase has for a speaker (writer or hearer (reader))"

Such definitions can not help one understand what meaning is since 'sense' is used to define meaning and meaning is used to define sense. However, like 'word', everybody knows what meaning is although he/she cannot offer an adequate definition.

The proof that you know what meaning is, is that you will all agree with me that (1) is meaningful and (2) is meaningless.

- (1) This course is a foundation course, as you all know.
- (2) \*Foundation course is a course know you course as.

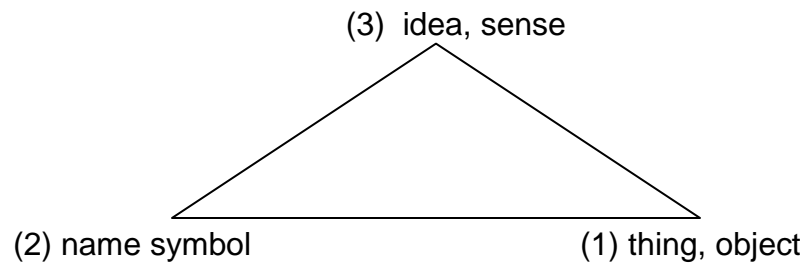
In this Lecture, I discuss some theories of meaning, some semantic relations and properties, and the concept of semantic role.

### **2. SOME THEORIES OF MEANING**

#### **2.1 Triadic theory of meaning**

Richards (1949) holds that linguistic meaning can be understood in terms of the relationship between:

- A/ the thing or concept to which reference is made by
- B/ the symbol or name used to refer to the thing or concept; and
- C/ the mental image or sense:



(Hartmann and Stork 1972: 204)

The theory is known as the triadic theory of meaning because it attempts to explain meaning in terms of relationships among three entities (triad means 'group or set of three related people or things', Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). It is also referred to as the Semantic Triangle because the relations among the three entities of the triad can be represented by a triangle (see above).

Note that the dotted line in the triangle means that there is no direct connection between the name or symbol and the thing or object referred to. Note that the theory is a referential theory of meaning since it holds that words refer to things. Such a theory is inadequate since many words (e.g. the, things, and, etc) do not refer to any thing. The theory is also an ideational theory ( see 2.2. below).

## 2.2 Ideational theory of meaning

According to this theory the meaning of a word is the set of thoughts, feelings or images that it evokes in the speaker's mind or the hearer's mind. An ideational theory of meaning is also inadequate. It is so because a word (a) does not always evoke the same thoughts, feelings or images in the mind of the same speaker or in the mind of the same hearer and (b) does not evoke the same thoughts, feelings or image in the minds of the speaker and the hearer.

## 2.3 Behavioral theory of meaning

This theory holds that the meaning of a word is the type of behaviour that it induces in the hearers. This theory cannot suffice either: (a) induces in the hearers, different persons may read differently or even in no way at all; (b) upon hearing the same word on different occasions, the same person may react differently (Hospers)

### 3. SOME SEMANTIC RELATIONS AND PROPERTIES

#### 3.1 Synonymy

This is the relationship between synonyms. A synonym is one of two or more words with identical meaning, e.g. buy and purchase. True or pure synonyms, however, are rare. (Hartmann and Stork 1972)

#### 3.2 Antonymy

This is a word used to refer to the relationship between antonyms. An antonym is one of two or more words with opposite meaning, e.g. hot and cold, hope and despair, young and old. (Hartmann and Stork 1972)

#### 3.3. Paraphrase

This is the process or result of rewording an utterance, (i.e. word, phrase, sentence, etc) without altering (i.e. changing) the meaning e.g. She had a large amount of money and she had a considerable sum of money.

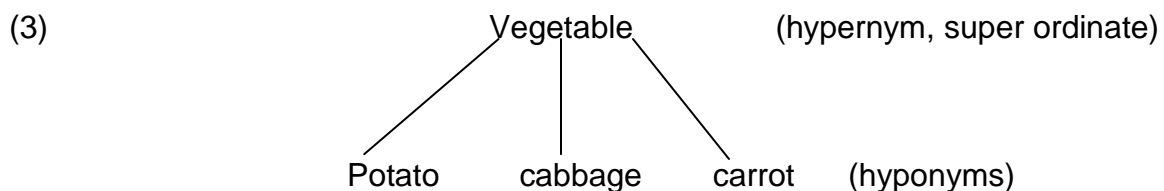
#### 3.4 Patronymic

The term refers to the relationship between paronyms. A paronym is one of two or more lexemes derived from the same base, e.g. childhood / childish / childlike. The term 'paronym' also refers to one of two or more lexemes historically derived from the same source ( e.g. LATIN amour 'love', FRENCH amour 'love'). (Hartmann and Stork 1972)

#### 3.5 Hyponymy and hyponymy

Hyponymy is the relationship that links a specific term (= hyponym) to a general term

(= hyponym and hyponymy is the relationship that links a general term (= hyponym) to a specific term (= hyponym). A hyponym is said to be super ordinate to the hyponyms, e.g.



### 3.6 Anomaly

e.g.

- (4) a I ate three phonemes for breakfast  
b My hair is bleeding

(Allan 1986: 141)

### 3.7 Contradiction

e.g.

- (5) My brother is an only child

(Allan 1986: 145)

### 3.8 Ambiguity

An utterance is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning. There are two types of ambiguity: lexical ambiguity and grammatical (or structural) ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity is one that is due to the fact that a word has more than one meaning, as in (6):

- (6) I found the table fascinating.

(‘table’ = piece of furniture? Or = table of figures?)

(Crystal 1991: 17)

Grammatical (or structural) ambiguity is one that is due to the fact that more than one constituent structure can be assigned to a construction, e.g.

- (7) Flying planes can be dangerous

The sentences in (7) has two readings (= meaning) as follows:

- (8) a. To fly planes can be dangerous  
b. Planes that are flying can be dangerous

## 4. ARGUMENTS AND THEMATIC ROLES

### 4.1 Arguments

The term argument is used to refer to (a) the subject of a clause, (b) the direct and indirect object and, in some theories, to some types of complement (e.g. the NP in a Pp). For example, in the sentence in (8), the thief and two windows are the arguments of broke.

#### (8) The thief broke two windows

A transitive verb break is said to be a two-place predicate (one place for the subject and another for the direct object), an intransitive verb, e.g. sleep, is a one-place predicate (the place occupied by the subject) and a verb like give is a three-place predicate (subject, direct object and indirect object). In the lexicon the three verbs can be presented as follows:

- (9) a. SLEEP, verb (x)  
b. BREAK, verb (x, y)  
c. GIVE, verb (x, y, z)

### 4.2 Thematic roles

The term thematic roles (often abbreviated to theta-roles or  $\theta$  – roles) refers to the various semantic functions played by arguments (see 4.1 for the term 'argument'), such as (Radford 1988: 373):

- (10) a. THEME (or PATIENT) = Entity undergoing the effect of some action  
(e.g. Many fell over)
- b. AGENT (or ACTOR) = Instigator of some action (e.g. John killed Harry)
- c. EXPERIENCER = Entity experiencing some psychological state  
(e.g. John was happy)
- d. BENEFACTIVE = Entity benefiting from some action (e.g. John bought some flowers for Mary)
- e. INSTRUMENT = Means by which something comes about (e.g. John wounded Harry with a knife).

- f. LOCATIVE = place in which something is situated or takes place (e.g. John hid the letter under the bed.)
- g. GOAL = Entity towards which something moves (e.g. John passed the book to Mary)
- h. SOURCE = Entity from which something moves (e.g. John returned from Paris)

Consider, for instance the sentence in (11):

- (11) a. John made these chairs
- b. These chairs were made by John.

The theta-role of John in (11a) and (11b) is the same (AGENT), although John is not the grammatical subject in (11b). Similarly, the theta-role of these chairs in (11a) and (11b) is the same (= PATIENT or THEME) although it is a subject in (11b) and an object in (11a).

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## REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Explain
  - a. Triadic theory of meaning
  - b. Ideational theory of meaning
  - c. Behavioral theory of meaning
  
2. With examples, explain the following
  - a. synonymy
  - b. antonym
  - c. paraphrase
  - d. paronymy
  - e. hyponymy
  
3. Two types of ambiguity have been recognized. Name them, explain and exemplify them. (Give your own examples)
  
4. Consider the following sentences and answer the question that follows:
  - a. I hit him on the head with a hammer
  - b. He was hit with a hammer
  - c. The thief opened the cupboard with a knife
  - d. Suddenly, the door opened

In each sentence show the argument (s) and indicate the theta-roles of all noun phrases.

### **UNIT 3: SOME BASIC CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

So far we have been dealing with linguistic structures and competence. This unit is concerned with language use, or performance. It is concerned with how language is actually used in society, in context. In other words, this unit is on Sociolinguistics, “A branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society” (Crystal 1991: 319). The following topics will be dealt with:

- Language, dialect, idiolect and lect
- Speech community
- Standard language
- Vernacular language
- Bilingualism and multilingualism
- Code-switching
- Diglossia
- Language and social context
- Language and communication
- Language and the Nation
- Ethnolinguistics and anthropological linguistics

#### **2. LANGUAGE, DIALECT, IDIOLECT AND LECT**

People do not speak a language, say English, in exactly the same way. The way they speak may depend, for instance, on where they learnt the language or on their personal background. Each language is made of language varieties. A regional variety of a language is used by a specific social class, the language variety is known as a social dialect or sociolect. A sociolect is a variety of language used only by members of particular group. The term ‘dialect’ is also used to refer to a language as it is spoken at a given time in its historical development (= temporal dialect). And the way an individual speaks a language is his idiolect. Therefore there are as many idiolects as there are speakers. In other words, each speaker has his own idiolect. Any variety of language (dialect and idiolect) is a lect.

#### **3. SPEECH COMMUNITY**

A speech community is “A group of people, usually in the same area, speaking the same variant of a language” (Hartmann and Stork 1992: 215)

#### **4. STANDARD LANGUAGE**

A standard language, or standard dialect, is the variety of language that is socially favoured for some reason (s), e.g. education, culture, politics, history, etc. On this Hartmann and Stork (1972: 218) point out that 'such standard dialects are imitated and used as auxiliary language by speakers of other regional and social dialects for the purpose of formal discourse and writing as well as for teaching the language to foreigners.

#### **5. LINGUA FRANCA**

The term lingua franca is used to refer to a language used for communication 'between people of an area in which several languages are spoken (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary), for example Swahili in East Africa and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

#### **6. VERNACULAR LANGUAGE**

The indigenous languages of a country where a foreign language is used as the national official language may be referred to as vernaculars. For example, in Zambia the indigenous languages may be referred to as vernacular since a foreign language, English, has been adopted as the national official language.

#### **7. BILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM**

Bilingualism is the use of two languages by an individual, speech community, a region or a country. Multilingualism, or plurilingualism, is the use by an individual, a speech community, a region or a country of two or more languages.

The individuals, speech community, etc, involved are said to be bilingual or multilingual. A person, speech community, etc using only one language is monolingual.

#### **8. CODE – SWITCHING**

Bilinguals who speak or write to people who know the two languages may, in the course of their speaking or writing, switch from one language to the other, once or several times. Likewise, bidialectals (= individuals who can use two dialects of the same language) may switch from one dialect to the other. Hymes (1972) has proposed thirteen elements reduceable to the acronym SPEAKING: Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, key, Instrumentalities, Norms and Genres. Bell (1976: 79-81) explains these elements as follows:

1. **Setting and Scene** – refer to the general physical circumstances in which the communication event takes place, particularly the time and place, in the case of the first term and the cultural definition of the occasion in the second. For example, a lecture might be defined within a setting such as, ‘the lecture theatre, 11.0 a.m. Thursday 14 March 1994 and the scene ‘relatively formal’.
2. **Participants** – speaker, sender, addresser and hearer, receiver, audience or addressee. For example, in a dyad, face to face communication would involve a speaker and a hearer, while a telephone conversation would require a sender and a receiver and in large interaction like a lecture an addresser and addressee (s) or audience.
3. **Ends** – divided into outcomes – results, intended and unintended – goals – individual and general. For example, a lecture may be intended to be illuminating and entertaining but in the event turn out to be vague and boring, while the lecturer’s goal may be to engender interest in an aspect of sociolinguistics but that of the audience to spend an hour in a warm comfortable atmosphere.
4. **Act sequence** – the form and content of the message: how and what is said; the ‘word’ and the ‘topic’. To continue the example of lecture, the form would be fifty minutes or so of text analysable by well-tried, and some less well-tried, techniques of descriptive linguistics, while the content might be subjected to semantic analysis of various kinds and an integrated description of the two attempted.
5. **Key** – the manner in which the message is conveyed, e.g. the lecture might be delivered in a precise way or perhaps in a light hearted way.
6. **Instrumentalities** – these include both the channels employed and the forms of speech, language, dialect, etc. To return yet again to the lecture, the channel would be essentially spoken language, including the ancillary pseudo and paralinguistic resources and probably back-up use of the written channel, handouts when speaking or writing to people who know the two dialects, switch from one dialect to the other, once or several times. The switching from one language to another or from one dialect to another in bilinguals and bidialectals is known in the sociolinguistic literature as code-switching. (Note: code=language or dialect here).
7. **Norms** – both the interaction itself contains norms of behaviour on the part of the participants and the interpretation of the

communication can be similarly seen as containing norms, in the sense of expectations, particularly on the part of the receivers. In a lecture for example, the British, lecturer and his audience usually expect a monologue, free of interruptions, with questions left until the end, although each group has considerable latitude in this respect and often the lecturer will state, at the beginning of a course, what rules he expects the interaction to follow. Similarly, the audience will expect the cognitive meaning of the utterances they hear to be those intended by the speaker. They will not, unless they are accustomed to the lecturer's style, (i.e. key), expect remarks to be ironic for example, indeed one of a lecturer's greatest disappointments is that his most humorous remarks fall flat, simply because the audience is not expecting them to be any thing other than serious.

8. **Genres** – categories which can be fairly clearly identified through the linguistic forms they typically employ; the lecture is actually a good example of a particular genre and, of course, the term has a considerable history in literary studies. To be able to communicate effectively studies in a language, one must have not only a linguistic competence, in the sense of an adequate knowledge of the vocabulary and grammatical rules, but a communicative competence, which include linguistic competence, as defined above, and an adequate knowledge of how to use the language, taking adequate account of the necessary social (e.g. social status, sex, age, etc, of the addressee) and other variables, which include, among others, the use of gestures.

### 9. **Diglossia**

In a bilingual or multilingual situation, one language may be considered 'high' and the other(s) 'low'. Likewise, in a bidialectal or multidialectal situation, one dialect may be considered 'high' and the others 'low'. The high language / dialect is used for formal occasions and in written text and the low one (s) in informal occasions. The presence of a high language, or dialect, and a low language or dialect (s) is called diglossia and the situation is referred to as a diglossic situation. Note that the notion of 'high' coincides with that of 'standard.'

### 10. **Language and Social Context**

The use of language is determined by a number of social and other variables, such as social status, sex, age, culture, etc. Questions such as;

- To whom am I speaking?
  - About what am I speaking?
  - Where am I speaking?
- are crucial in using a language.

## 11. LANGUAGE and COMMUNICATION

When an individual is busy thinking (silently, or loudly), he may be said to 'communicate' with himself and this type of 'communication' may be referred to as interpersonal communication. However, since language is primarily a social affair, we generally think of communication as interpersonal, that is, involving at least two people, an addresser, (=speaker or writer) and an addressee (=hearer or reader).

A communication event involves at least the following components:

- a. participants = addresser and addressee (s)
- b. message = what is said or written
- c. channel = the physical means used by the addresser to transmit his message to the addressee (s)
- d. code = symbols used (= 'language')

## 12. Language and the Nation

While the linguist is primarily concerned with the analysis of languages, the Nation as a whole is primarily concerned with which language (s) should be used or how they should be used in the country.

In connection with the relationship between language and nations, I give below ten terms and their definitions proposed in a document titled The use of vernacular language in education: the Report of the UNASCO Meeting of Specialists, 1951:

1. Indigenous language: the language of the people considered to be the original inhabitants of an area.
2. Lingua franca: a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different to facilitate communication between them.
3. Mother or native tongue: the language which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication.

4. National language: a language of a political social and cultural entity.
5. Official language: a language used in the business of a government – legislative, executive and judicial.
6. Pidgin: a language which has arisen as a result of contact between people of different languages, usually formed from a mixing of the languages.
7. Regional language: a language which is used as a medium of communication between peoples living within a certain area who have different mother tongues.
8. Second language: the language acquired by a person in addition to his mother tongue.
9. Vernacular language; a language which is the mother tongue of a group which is socially or politically dominated by another group speaking a different language.
10. World language: a language used over wide areas of the world.

Note that nowadays, sociolinguists prefer the term first language to the term mother tongue. Note also that the term international language is preferred to world language, Note further that a pidgin which has become a native language, or first language (L1) of a community is called a creole.

Many countries in the Third World have chosen foreign languages to be National Official Languages (NOLs). For example, in Zambia English is the NOL and several languages (Bemba, Kaonde, Lozi, Lunda, Luvale, Nyanja and Tonga) are Regional Official Languages (ROLs). An exoglossic country is a country whose NOL is a foreign language (e.g. Zambia) and an endoglossic country is a country in which one of the indigenous languages is the NOL (e.g. Russia, Great Britain, France). Note that a few countries (e.g. Canada) may be viewed as having two NOLs (in Canada English and French) or two ROLs without having a NOL.

To wind up this section, here are some more terms. (Crystal 1991: 194).

- a. Language planning, or language engineering: a systematic attempt to solve the communication problems of a community by studying the various languages or dialects it uses and developing a realistic policy concerning their selection and use;

- b. Language loyalty or language maintenance: the concern to preserve the use of a language or the traditional form of a language;
- c. Language shift: the gradual or sudden move from the use of one language to another;
- d. Language loss: the situation which arises when a language ceases to be used by a person a community;
- e. Language death: a term used to refer to language loss when there is no doubt that the process is irreversible;

### **13. Language and Culture**

As pointed out by J.H. Greenberg quoted by Bell (1976:14), language is a 'set of culturally transmitted behaviour patterns shared by a group of individuals', e.g. language is part of 'culture'. However, while language is an integral part of culture, it is also a vehicle of culture in the sense that most other cultural elements are transmitted through language, so that cultural transmission and cultural development depend on language.

Another relationship between language and culture is that culture is one of the many variables which may determine how a speaker should use language.

A third relationship between language and culture is what is known as relativity of the Whorfian Hypothesis. This is the 'view proposed by the American anthropological linguist B.L. Whorf (1897-1941) and previously by the German ethnologist W. von Humbolt (1767-1835), that a speaker's language determines his view of the world (=Weltanschauung in German) through the grammatical categories and semantic classifications that are possible in the linguistic system that he has inherited together with his native culture' (Hartmann and Stork 1972: 195).

### **14. Anthropological Linguistics and Ethnolinguistics (Hartmann and Stork 1972: 15, 78, 79)**

Anthropological linguistics is the use of special research technique from the fields of anthropology and linguistics to study the languages of speech communities which have no writing system.

Ethnolinguistics is a branch of anthropological linguistic which studies the relationships between a person's language and his attitudes towards it.

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## UNIT FOUR: SOME BASIC CONCEPTS IN PRAGMATICS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Just as, traditionally, syntax is taken to be study of the combinatorial properties of words and their parts, and semantics to be the study of meaning, so pragmatics is the study of language usage. It is the study of those principles that will account for why a certain set of sentences are anomalous, or not possible utterances. That set might include:

- (1) ?? Come there please!
- (2) ?? Aristotle was Greek, but I don't believe it.
- (3) ?? Fred's children are hippies, and he has no children.
- (4) ?? Fred's children are hippies, and he had children.
- (5) ?? I order you not to obey this order.
- (6) ?? I hereby sing
- (7) ?? As everyone knows, the earth please revolves around the sun.

The explanation of the anomalies (cfr the symbol? at the beginning of example sentences) exhibited by these sentences might be provided by pointing out that there are no, or at least no ordinary, contexts in which they could be appropriately used.

Another kind of definition that might be offered would be that pragmatics is the study of language from a functional perspective, that is, that it attempts to explain facets of linguistic structure by reference to non-linguistic pressures and causes. But such a definition, or scope, for pragmatics would fail to distinguish linguistic pragmatics from many other disciplines interested in functional approaches to language, including psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

One quite restricted scope for pragmatics that has been proposed is that pragmatics should be concerned solely with principles of language usage, and have nothing to do with the description of linguistic structure. Or, to invoke Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance, pragmatic is concerned solely with performance principle of language use.

Another definition of pragmatics is that "pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory".

Or, as Gazdar (1979:2) has put it, assuming that semantics is limited to the statement of truth conditions:

“Pragmatics has as its topics those aspects of the meaning of utterances which cannot be accounted for by straight forward reference to the truth conditions of the sentence uttered. Put crudely: Pragmatics = Meaning – Truth conditions.

Finally, there is another definition of pragmatics that gives the context dependent nature of pragmatic phenomena more centrality.

“Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding”.

In this definition language understanding is used in the way favoured by workers in artificial intelligence to draw attention to the fact that understanding an utterance involves a great deal more than knowing the meaning of the words uttered and the grammatical relations between them. Above all, understanding an utterance involves the making of inferences that will connect what is said to what is mutually **assumed** or what has been said before.

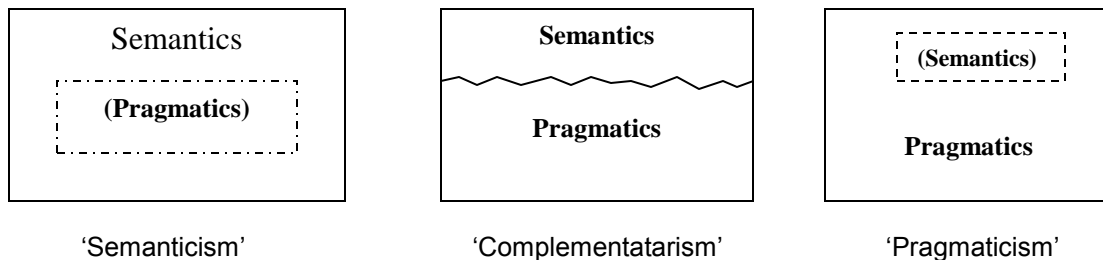
## 2. **Semantics and Pragmatics**

In practice, the problem of distinguishing ‘language’ (langue) and ‘language use’ (parole) had centred on a boundary dispute between semantics, and pragmatics but the difference between them can be traced to two different uses of the verb to **mean**.

3. What does X mean?            (b)    What did you mean by X?

Semantics traditionally deals with meaning as a dyadic relation as in (a) while pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation, as in (b). Thus meaning in pragmatics is defined relative to a speaker or user of the language, whereas meaning in semantics is defined purely as a property of expressions in a given language, in abstraction from particular situations, speakers or hearers.

The view that semantics and pragmatic are distinct, though complementary and interrelated fields of study, is easy to appreciate subjectively, but is more difficult to justify in an objective way. It is best supported negatively, by pointing out the failures or weaknesses of alternative views. Logically, two clear alternatives are possible: It may be claimed that the uses of meaning shown in (a) and (b) are both the concern of semantics; or that they are both the concern of pragmatics. The three views that we have mentioned may be diagrammed and labelled as shown in the figure below:



Because of difficulties of terminology and definition, it is hard to pin down clear cases of semanticism and pragmaticism. In practice, one notices a preference of a semantic type of explanation to a pragmatics one, or vice versa. In a modified sense, therefore, the labels 'semanticist' and 'pragmaticist' may be applied to those who assimilate as much of the study of meaning to one position as possible. Considering the three viewpoints represented above, the third viewpoint, i.e. that of complementary, is the one that we shall support. The arguments for this position will take the following form. Any account of meaning in language must (a) be faithful to the facts as we observe them, and (b) must be as simple and generaliseable as possible. If we approach meaning entirely from a pragmatic point of view, these requirements are not met; however, if we approach meaning from point of view which combines semantics and pragmatics, the result can be a satisfactory explanation in terms of these two criteria.

### 3. Grice's theory of implicature

Some of the phenomena for which a pragmatic theory must account (cfr Stalnaker, 1972) are: deixis, implacture, presupposition, speech acts, and aspects of discourse structure.

Grice's theory of implicature is essentially a theory about how people use language. Grice's suggestion is that there is a set of over arching assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation. These arise, it seems from basic rational guiding the conduct of conversation. These arise, it seems from basic rational considerations and may be formulated as guidelines for the efficient and effective use of language in conversation to further co-operative ends. Grice identifies as guidelines of this sort four basic maxims of conversation or general principles underlying the efficient co-operative use of language, which jointly express a general co-operative principle (CP). These principles are expressed as follows:

### **The Co-operative principle (CP)**

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

### **The Maxim of quality**

Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

- (i) do not say what you believe to be false
- (ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

### **The Maxim of quantity**

- (i) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
- (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

### **The Maxim of relevance**

Make your contribution relevant

### **The Maxim of manner**

Be perspicuous and specifically:

- (i) avoid obscurity
- (ii) avoid ambiguity
- (iii) be brief
- (iv) be orderly

In short, these maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way: they should sincerely relevantly and clearly, while providing sufficient information.

To this view of the nature of communication there is an immediate objection: the view may describe a philosopher's paradise, but no one actually speaks like that the whole time! But Grice's point is subtly different. It is not the case, he will admit, that people follow these guidelines to the letter. Rather, in most ordinary kinds of talk these principles are oriented to, such that when talk does not proceed according to their specifications, hearers assume that, contrary to appearances, the principles are nevertheless being adhered to at some deeper level. The following example should make this clear:

- A. Where's Bill?
- B. There's a yellow VW outside Sue's house.

Here B's contribution, taken literally, fails to answer A's question, and thus seems to violate at least the maxims of quantity and relevance. We might therefore expect B's utterance to be interpreted as a non co-operative response, a brushing aside of A's concerns with a change of topic. Yet it is clear that despite this apparent failure of co-operation, we try to interpret B's utterance as nevertheless co-operative at some deeper (non-superficial) level. We do this by assuming that it is in fact co-operative, and then asking ourselves what possible connection there could be between the location of Bill and the location of a yellow VW, and thus arrive at the suggestion (which effectively conveys) that, if Bill has a yellow VW, he may be in Sue's house.

#### 4. **Deixis**

The single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves, is through the phenomenon of deixis. The term is borrowed from the Greek word for pointing or indicating, and has as prototypical of focal examples the use of demonstratives first and second person pronouns, tense, specific time and place adverbs like now and here, and a variety of other grammatical features tied directly to the circumstances of utterance.

Essentially, deixis concerns the ways in which language encode or grammaticilise features of the context of utterance or speech event, and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterances depends on the analysis of that context of utterance. Thus the pronoun this does not name or refer to any particular entity on all occasions of use; rather it is a variable or place holder for some particular entity give by the context (e.g. by a gesture). The facts of deixis should act as a constant reminder to theoretical linguist of the single but immensely important fact that natural languages are primarily designed for use in face to face interaction and thus there are limits to the extent to which they can be analysed without taking this into account – (Lyons 1977:589).

The importance of deictic information for the interpretation of utterances is perhaps best illustrated by what happens when such information is lacking (Fillmore, 1975:38-9). Consider, for example, finding the following notice on someone's office door:

- (1) I'll be back in an hour.

Because we don't know when it was written, we cannot know when the writer will return. Or, imagine that the lights go out as Harry has just begun saying:

- (2) Listen, I'm not disagreeing with you but with you, and not about this but about this.

Or suppose we find a bottle in the sea, and inside it a message which read:

- (3) Meet me here a week from now with a stick about this big.

We do not know who to meet, where or when to meet him or her or how big a stick to bring.

Deixis belongs with the domain of pragmatics, because it directly concerns the relationship between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used. But all such categorisations are theory – dependent, and on the view that we have adopted for convenience, namely that pragmatics concerns those aspects of meaning and language – structure that cannot be captured in a truth-conditional semantics, the grammatical category of deixis will probably be found to straddle the semantics/pragmatics border.

### Usage of deictic expressions

By deictic expression we mean those linguistic units or morphemes that have a deictic usage as basic or central, for most such expressions have non-deictic usages. In addition to deictic vs non-deictic usages of deictic expressions, we shall need to distinguish distinct kinds of deictic usage. Following Fillmore (1976) two kinds of deictic usage can be distinguished: **Gestural usage** and **Symbolic usage**. Terms used in a gestural deictic way can only be interpreted with reference to an audio-visual-tactile, and in general a physical, monitoring of the speech event. As a rough and ready guide, one can think of these gestural usages as requiring at least a video tape of the speech event if the proper interpretation is to be available from a recording. Instances would be demonstrative pronouns used with a selecting gestures as in;

- (1) This one's genuine, but **this** one is a fake or second or third person pronouns used with some physical indication of the referent (e.g. direction of gaze) as in:
- (2) He's not the Duke, he is, He's the butler.

There are usually a few words in a language that can only be used gesturally: for example there are presentatives like French *voici* and toasts like British

English **cheers**. In contrast, **symbolic usages** of deictic terms require for their interpretation only knowledge of (in particular) the basic spatio-temporal parameters of the speech event (but also, an occasion, participant role and discourse and social parameters). Thus it is sufficient to know the general location of the participants in order to interpret:

(3) This city is really beautiful.

And to know the set of potential addresses in the situation in order to interpret:

(4) You can all come with me if you like.

And to know when the interaction is taking place in order to know which calendar year is being referred to in:

(5) We can't afford a holiday this year.

In brief we could formulate the distinction between usage of deictic expressions as follows: **gestural usages** requires a moment by moment physical monitoring of the speech event for their interpretation, while **symbolic usages** make reference only to contextual co-ordinates available to participants antecedent to the utterance. It will then follow that the following are gestural usages, though the sense of gesture is here, of course, vocal:

(6) Tom can only speak about **this loud**.

(7) Don't do it now, but Now!

These two kinds of deictic usage contrast with the non-deictic usage of the same words or morphemes. Some examples will help to make the three way distinction clear; in the following the a cases are gestural usages, the b cases symbolic usages, and the c cases non-deictic usages.

(8) a. You, you, but not you, are dismissed.  
b. What did you say?  
c. You can never tell what sex they are nowadays.

(9) a. This finger hurts.  
b. This city stinks.  
c. I met this weird guy the other day.

(10) a. Push not now, but now.  
b. Let's go now rather than tomorrow  
c. Now, that's not what I said.

- (11) a. Not that one, idiot, that one.  
 b. That's a beautiful view.  
 c. Oh, I did this and that.
- (12) a. Move it from there to there  
 b. Hello, is Tom there?  
 c. There we go.

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### REVISION QUESTIONS

1. What is Pragmatics?
2. Explain Pragmatics = Meaning – Truth Conditions.
3. “Though Pragmatics and Semantics are distinct, they are complementary and interrelated fields of study’. Comment.
4. What does the Co-operative principle (CP) state?
5. What do the maxims of conversation consist of?
6. What the different usages of deictic expressions?
7. Through examples, how does gestural usage differ from symbolic usage of deictic expressions?