Syntax:

1.0 GRAMMATICALITY

1. Place an asterisk next to any of the sentences that are ungrammatical for you. Can you figure out what makes these sentences ungrammatical?

   a) The instructor told the students to study.
   b) The instructor suggested the students to study.
   c) The customer asked for a cold beer.
   d) The customer requested for a cold beer.
   e) He gave the Red Cross some blood.
   f) He donated the Red Cross some blood.
   g) The pilot landed the jet.
   h) The jet landed.
   i) A journalist wrote the article.
   j) The article wrote.
   k) Jerome is bored of his job.
1) Jerome is tired of his job.

2.0 CATEGORIES OF WORDS

A fundamental fact about words in all human languages is that they can be grouped together into a relatively small number of classes, called syntactic categories. This classification reflects a variety of factors, including the type of meaning that words express, the type of affixes that they take, and the type of structures in which they can occur.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun (N)</td>
<td>Harry, boy, wheat, policy, moisture, bravery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb (V)</td>
<td>arrive, discuss, melt, hear, remain, dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective (A)</td>
<td>good, tall, old, intelligent, beautiful, fond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition (P)</td>
<td>to, in, on, near, at, by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb (Adv)</td>
<td>silently, slowly, quietly, quickly, now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree word (Adverb)</td>
<td>too, so, very, more, quite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifier (Adverb)</td>
<td>always, perhaps, often, never, almost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determiner (Det)</td>
<td>the, a, this, these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auxiliary (Aux)</td>
<td>will, can, may, must, should, could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction (Con)</td>
<td>and, or, but</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.0 THREE CRITERIA FOR CLASSIFYING WORDS:

3.1 Meaning

One criterion involves meaning. For instance, nouns typically name entities, including individuals (Harry, Sue) and objects (book, desk). Verbs, on the other hand, characteristically designate actions (run, jump), sensations (feel, hurt), and states (be, remain). Consistent with these tendencies, comb in 3 refers to an object when used as a noun but to an action when used as a verb.

The meanings associated with nouns and verbs can be elaborated in various ways. The typical function of an adjective, for instance, is to designate a property or attribute of the entities denoted by nouns. Thus, when we say that tall building, we are attributing the property ‘tall’ to the building designated by the noun. In a parallel way, adverbs typically denote properties and attributes of the actions, sensations, and states designated by verbs. In the following sentences, for example, the adverb quickly indicates the manner of Janet’s leaving and the adverb early specifies its time.

5) Janet left quickly.
Janet left early.

A word’s category membership does not always bear such a straightforward relationship to its meaning, however. For example, there are nouns such as difficulty, truth, and likelihood, which do not name
entities in the strict sense. Moreover, even though words that name actions tend to be verbs, nouns may also denote actions (*push is a noun in *give someone a push). Matters are further complicated by the fact that in some cases, words with very similar meanings belong to different categories. For instance, the words *like and *fond are very similar in meaning (as in *Mice like/are fond of cheese), yet *like is a verb and *fond an adjective.

### 3.2 Inflection

Most linguists believe that meaning is only one of several criteria that enter into determining a word’s category. As Table 5.2 shows inflection can also be very useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Inflectional affix</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>plural -s</td>
<td>books, chairs, doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>possessive -’s</td>
<td>John’s, (the) man’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>past tense -ed</td>
<td>hunted, watched, judged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>progressive -ing</td>
<td>hunting, watching, judging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>comparative -er</td>
<td>taller, faster, smarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>superlative -est</td>
<td>tallest, fastest, smartest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for distinguishing among different categories of words. (For a discussion of inflection, see Chapter 4, Section 5.) However, even inflection does not always provide the information needed to determine a word’s category. In English, for example, not all adjectives can take the comparative and superlative affixes (*intelligenter, ~ fulest) and some nouns cannot be pluralized (*moistures, *knowledges).

### 3.3 Distribution

A third and often more reliable criterion for determining a word’s category involves the type of elements (especially functional categories) with which it can co-occur (its distribution). For example, nouns can typically appear with a determiner, verbs with an auxiliary, and adjectives with a degree word, in the sort of patterns illustrated in Table 5.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Distributional property</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>occurrence with a determiner</td>
<td>a car, the wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>occurrence with an auxiliary</td>
<td>has gone, will stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>occurrence with a degree word</td>
<td>very rich, too big</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, a verb cannot occur with a determiner or degree word in these sorts of patterns and a noun cannot occur with an auxiliary.

6) a verb with a determiner:

*the destroy
a verb with a degree word:
*very arrive

a noun with an auxiliary:
*will destruction

Distributional tests for category membership are simple and highly reliable. They can be used with confidence when it is necessary to categorize unfamiliar words.

4.0 TESTS FOR PHRASE STRUCTURE

The words that make up a sentence form intermediate structural units called phrases. How can linguists be sure that they have grouped words together into phrases in the right way? The existence of the syntactic units, or constituents, found in tree structures can be independently verified with the help of special tests. We will briefly consider three such tests here. Not every test will work for every constituent.

4.1 The substitution test

Evidence that phrases are syntactic units comes from the fact that they can often be replaced by an element such as they, it, or do so. This is illustrated in 13, where they replaces the NP the children and do so replaces the VP stop at the corner. (This is called a substitution test.)

13) [NP The children] will [VP stop at the corner] if they see us do so.

(they = the children; do so = stop at the corner)

The substitution test also confirms that a PP such as at the corner is a unit since it can be replaced by a single word in a sentence such as 14.

14) The children stopped [PP, at the corner] and we stopped there too.

(there substitutes for at the corner)

Elements that do not form a constituent cannot be replaced in this way. Thus, there is no word in English that we can use to replace children stopped, for example, or at the.

4.2 The movement test

A second indication that at the corner forms a constituent is that it can be moved as a single unit to a different position within the sentence. (This is called a movement test.) In 15, for instance, at the corner can be
moved from a position after the verb to the beginning of the sentence.

15) They stopped [PP at the corner].
    ===> [PP At the corner], they stopped.

Of course, at the, which is not a syntactic unit, cannot be fronted in this manner (Mt the, they stopped corner).

4.3 The coordination test

Finally, we can conclude that a group of words forms a constituent if it can be joined to another group of words by a conjunction such as and, or, or but. (This is known as the coordination test, since patterns built around a conjunction are called coordinate structures.) The sentence in 16 illustrates how coordination can be used to help establish that stopped at the corner is a constituent.

16) The children [VP stopped at the corner] and [VP looked both ways].

QUESTIONS

6. Apply the substitution test to determine which of the bracketed sequences in the following sentences form constituents. Rewrite each sentence, replacing the words in brackets with one word. Is the bracketed sequence a constituent?

a) [The tragedy] upset the entire family.

b) They hid [in the cave].

c) The [computer was very] expensive.

d) [The town square and the civic building] will be rebuilt.

e) Jane [left town].
7. Apply the movement test to determine which of the bracketed sequences in the following sentences form constituents. Rewrite each sentence so that the bracketed sequence has been moved. Is the sequence a constituent?

a) We ate our lunch [near the river bank].

b) Steve looked [up the number] in the book.

c) The [island has been] flooded.

d) I love [peanut butter and bacon sandwiches], but not salad.

e) The environmental [movement is gaining momentum].

f) The goslings [swam across] the lake.