

COVENANT UNIVERSITY
NIGERIA

TUTORIAL KIT
OMEGA SEMESTER

PROGRAMME: LANGUAGES

COURSE: ENG 221

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ENG221: ENGLISH SYNTAX

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QUESTIONS

1. What is syntactic structure, and what does it mean to say that sentences are structured?
2. With rich examples, explain the following transformations:
 - a. Deletion
 - b. Insertion
 - c. Movement
3. Is it true that words have paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship?
4. Write one sentence for each of the following sentence patterns:
 - a. Subject + Predicator
 - b. Subject + Predicator + Direct Object
 - c. Subject + predicator + Indirect Object + Direct Object
 - d. Subject + Predicator + Complement
5. Using examples you are very familiar with, explain ambiguous sentence
6. Explain the causes of ambiguity in an English sentence
7. Describe the constituent of the English sentence
8. Explain any four rules of forming question from declarative sentence in English
9. Differentiate between simple and non-simple sentences in English
10. What are the basic properties of subject in English?
11. Structurally distinguish between command and question
12. How can a constituent structure be tested using rules, conjunctions and clefts?
13. With examples explain appositive phrase
14. What is transformational rule and how does it affect the English sentence?
15. What are the conventions for building phrase structure rules?
16. Draw a tree diagram for each of the following sentences:
 - a) My brother drove the car
 - b) I gave my sister some water
 - c) The dog is in the room

d) Her brother is a lawyer

e) I like mangoes

17. How does passivisation work in English sentences?

18. With examples explain what principles and parameters are in syntax

19. Describe the syntactic processes involved in the formation of English sentences

20. Differentiate between a complement and an object

1 What is syntactic structure, and what does it mean to say that sentences are structured?

Syntactic structure means the pattern or form of a sentence of a language that is acceptable and meaningful in that language. Human languages contain sentences that are constructed from putting together words in a pattern that is acceptable in a particular language. Human beings do not arbitrary string together words to make sentences. In other words, there is order in the selection and putting together words no matter how free a language is. Sentences occur in a certain linear order governed by rules of a language. For example, the English sentence has the following features:

(a) it is divisible into parts (called constituents),

(b) there are different kinds of parts (different categories of constituents),

(c) the constituents are arranged in a specifiable way (**distributional restrictions**)

(d) each constituent has a certain specifiable **function** in the structure of the thing as a whole.

This is what we mean when we say sentences have **structures**.

2 Using examples you are very familiar with, explain ambiguous sentence

An ambiguous sentence is the one that has more than one linguistic meaning. The ambiguity may be lexical or structural. A lexically ambiguous sentence occurs when a word or words in the sentence has/have more than one linguistic interpretation. For example:

a. The sentence is very long

b. I went to bank

The ambiguity in *a* and *b* is attributable to the words *sentence* and *bank*. While *a* may be referring to *prison sentence* or *linguistic sentence*, *b* may be either *money bank* or *river bank*.

On the other hand, a structurally ambiguous sentence is the sentence that has more than one meaning as a result of its structure. For example:

c. The mother of the boy and the girl will be leaving soon.

In *c*, the ambiguity is not attributable to any word have more than one meaning, yet it is ambiguous. One meaning could be that *the boy* and *the girl* have the same *mother* or that the boy and the girl have different mothers and the one in the sentence belongs to the boy.

3 Explain any four rules of forming question from declarative sentence in English

Four question rules in English are:

1. Rule 1: to form a question from a declarative sentence, place the verb at the beginning of the sentence. Example:
 - a. *Can* John lift the stone? From *John can lift the stone*
2. Rule 2: where here are two verbs, place he first one at the beginning of the sentence. Example:
 - a. Are many English people thought to be lazy? From *Many English people are thought to be lazy*
3. Rule 3: place an appropriate form of the verb *do* at the beginning of the sentence and make appropriate changes in the main verb. Example:
 - a. Did you know these people? From *You knew these people*
4. Rule 4: place the main or auxiliary verb of the predicate in the beginning. Example:
 - a. Will the woman who is standing on the table drink her juice now? From *The woman who is standing on the table will drink her juice now*

4 How can a constituent structure be tested using rules, conjunctions and clefts?

There are many ways to test the constituent structure of a language. The rules of the language, cleft sentences, and conjunctions can be used to test constituency of sentence parts. For example, in *the woman who is standing on the table is crying*, *the woman who is standing on the table* is a constituent structure. This is so because when we apply the question rules on the sentence, it stands as a meaningful constituent: *is the woman standing on the table....?* It is wrong to say ** is the standing on the table woman* or ** is the on the table sanding woman....?*

Cleft sentence is another means of test the constituent structure in English. A cleft sentence consists of *it* followed by some form of the verb *to be*, followed by some constituent *x*, followed by clause introduced by *that* from which *x* has been extracted. For example:

- a. it is *Tiff* that I want to see
- b. it was *on the table* that we saw the ball
- c. it was *at five o'clock in the morning* that we sighted them

Another means of testing constituent structure is through conjunction. In English, only constituents of the same type are conjoined with *and*. Thus, only when the constituents are of the same type before they can occur in the same: ---- and ----- . For example:

- a. *the man* and *the boys* slept (NP and NP)
- b. Mary *ate the apple* and *washed the plate* (VP and VP)

- c. She climbed *onto the table* and *into the room* (PP and PP)

A sentence of the structure:

- d. *She played the piano and into the night

Will be considered ungrammatical.

5 Differentiate between a complement and an object

A complement is the constituent in a phrase other than the head that completes the meaning of the phrase and which is C-selected by the verb. In the phrase *found a ball*, the NP *a ball* is the complement of the verb *found*. Therefore, a complement is an expression which combines with a head word to project the head into a larger structure of essentially the same kind. Complements typically follow their heads, especially in English. Examples:

- a. Close the door
- b. Good at physics
- c. After dinner

The door, at physics and *dinner* are complements of *close, good* and *after* respectively. The choice of the complement is determined by properties of the head. On the other hand, object refers to a major constituent of a sentence or clause structure that is associated with the receiver and goal of an action. For example, in the expression: *the boy kicked the ball*, *the ball* is the object. Thus, object is a complement of a transitive item. It is generally restricted to complements which carry objective case – i.e. to nominal and pronominal complements. In this case, in the expression: *I said nothing*, *nothing* is both the object and complement of the verb *said*. But in the expression: *I said that nothing will happen*, the *that*-clause is a complement and not the object of the verb *said*.

6 With examples explain what principles and parameters are in syntax

In syntax, parameters means the small set of alternatives for a specific phenomenon made available by Universal Grammar. For instance, a phrase must have a head and possible complements; a parameter states whether the complement precedes or follows the head. The principles describe potentially universal properties of grammatical operations or structures. Principles and Parameters theory, therefore maintains that universal properties of natural language grammars reflect the operation of a set of universal grammatical principles, and that grammatical differences between languages can be characterised in terms of a restricted set of parameters.

7 What is transformational rule and how does it affect the English sentence?

A transformational rule is a syntactic rule that applies to an underlying phrase structure tree of a sentence and derives a new structure by moving or inserting elements. For example, the transformational rule of *wh* movement and *do* insertion relate the deep structure sentence *John saw who* to the surface structure *who did John see*. In English sentence, transformation rule converts an input tree structure into a different structure by adding, deleting, or

rearranging materials. It consists of a structural description of the input and the structural change that they effect.

8 What are the basic properties of subject in English?

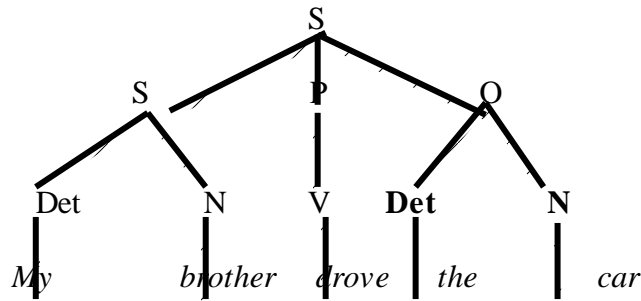
The subject is one of the chief constituent/components of a clause. The subject of a sentence is typically the entity performing the action described by the verb. It is also the expression which agrees with the verb, it precedes the verb and it often carries nominative case. A pronoun or noun can be the subject of a sentence. A clause or phrase that is nominal can also be subject of a sentence. Therefore the basic features of subject in English are:

1. It is the doer of the action performed by the verb
2. It is always in agreement with the verb
3. It precedes the verb
4. It is usually nominal or pronominal

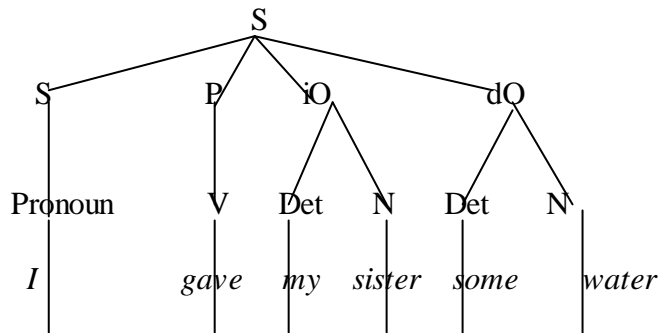
9 Draw a tree diagram for each of the following sentences:

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2. I gave my sister some water
3. The dog is in the room
4. Her brother is a lawyer
5. I like mangoes

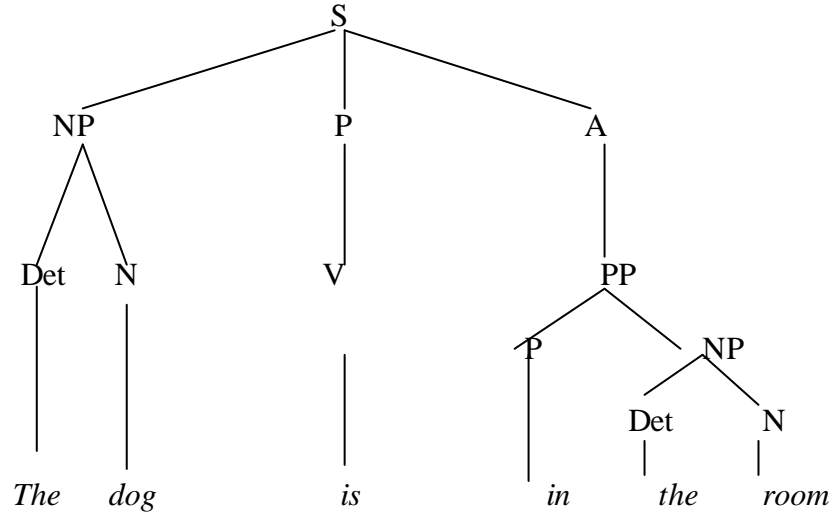
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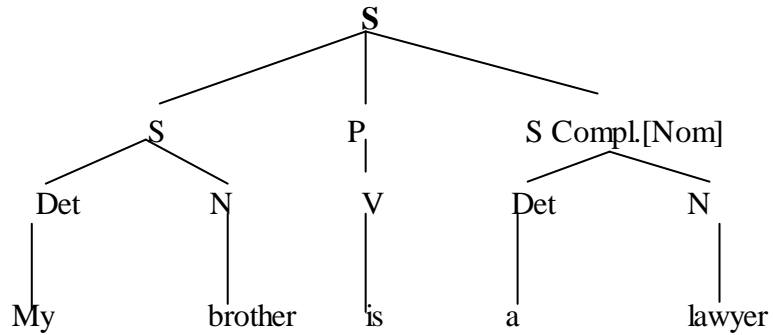
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4



- 10 Make the following passive
- i. He bought a big cow
 - ii. The food was eaten by Omolara
 - iii. My friend will be writing a book
1. A big cow was bought by him
 2. The food was eaten by Omolara
 3. A book will be being written by my friend