Key Concepts

Unboundedness of syntaxis a feature of language that refers to numberand length of the sentences which are unbounded.

Behavioral Objectives

After studying this section students can:

1. Define the feature of unboundedness of syntax.
2. Relate the feature creativity to unboundedness of syntax.

Unboundedness of Syntax

One of the characteristics of human language is its creativity, which means with limited forms we can express unlimited meanings. In the area of syntax, this feature of language causes unboundedness of syntax that refers to number and length of the sentences which are unbounded. Actually combining limited set of words, we can make unlimited sentences in language so the number of sentences in language is unbounded. Also using connectors and conjunctions we can make too long sentences out of short ones so the length of sentences is unbounded (just the limitation in meaning and processing abilities of the mind imposes some limitations on the length of sentences).

1- Which feature causes, unboundedness in the area of syntax?

- Combining
- Creativity
- Recursion
- Abstractness

Key Concepts

Grouping is the grouping of words into meaningful and functional phrases, which are constituents of larger phrases.

Function is related to grammatical relations, parts of speech and head and modifiers.

Word order is the temporal or linear sequences of words and sentences.

Behavioral Objectives

After studying this section, students can:

1.Specify the different constituents and phrase in English sentences.

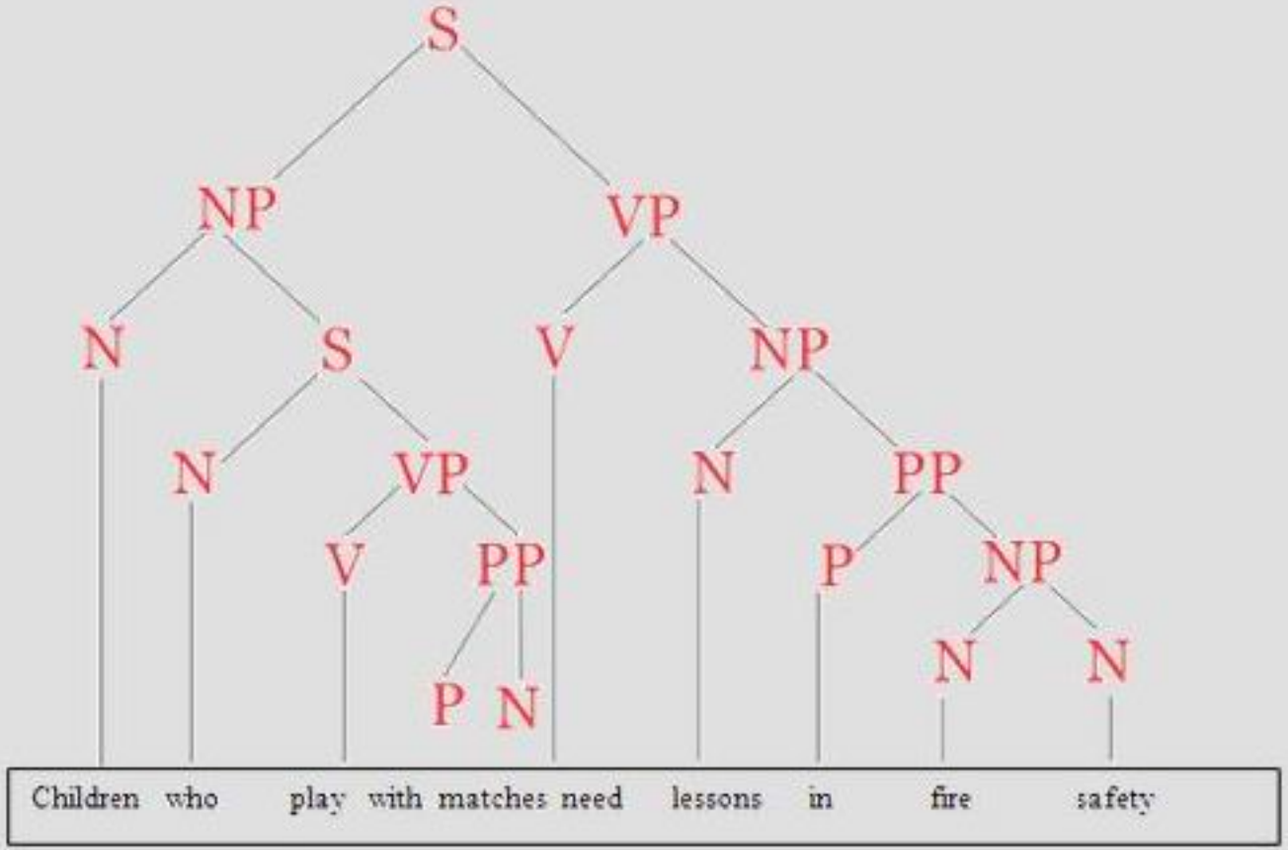
2.Determine the grammatical relations of each NP in the sentence.

Grouping, Function and Word Order

Grouping, function and word orderare the three aspects of the syntactic structure that will be discussed here. These three aspects are all represented in a tree diagram. Look at the tree structure which represents the sentence "Children who play with matches need lessons in fire safety". (The tree structure is given in its simple form. You will be

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Grouping

Grouping is the grouping of words into meaningful and functional phrases, which are constituents of larger phrases. In the tree diagram the grouping of the words which make the mentioned sentence is represented. To show that the first NP (Children who play with matches), is a constituent you can use the substitution test. Because that is a Whole or one constituent you can replace it by single pronoun.



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Function

Function is related to grammatical relations, parts of speech and head and modifiers. See the following examples.



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Word Order

As it was mentioned another aspect of syntax is word order. Word order is thetemporal or linear sequences of words and sentences. (Temporal sequence refers to Speech and linear refers to written form of language).



For example English has SVO word order, in French we have SVO order, in Persian we have SOV word order which is the main word order but can be changed because Persian has partial or free order. In contrast, Arabic is a free word-order language. (Refer to p.91).

1- Function is NOT related to:

- grammatical relations
- parts of speech
- creativity
- head and modifiers

2- Which of the following statements is NOT true?

- Grouping is the grouping of words into meaningful and functional phrases, which are constituents of smaller phrases.
- Another aspect of syntax is word order.
- Word order is the temporal or linear sequences of words and sentences.
- Temporal sequence refers to speech and linear refers to written form of language.

Key Concepts

Recursion is actually one aspect of creativity in language.

Behavioral Objectives

After studying this section, the students can:

1. Explain the relation between recursion and unboundness.
2. Explain the relationship between these two features of syntax. i.e. recursion and unboundness.

Recursion in Syntax

At the beginning of this chapter it was mentioned that unboundedness of syntax refers to number and length of the sentences which are unbounded.

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Now the question is that how we can create unboundedness in length of sentences?

The answer is by **recursion. Recursion** is actually one aspect of creativity in language.



How recursion takes place in sentences?

The answer is by **embedding** phrases within phrases or sentences within sentences and by **coordination** of phrases and sentences. (Examples:P.92).

Coordination is a sort of recursion according to which groups like sentence, noun phrase, verb phrase, and prepositional phrase may be expanded as pair of such phrases joined by coordinating conjunction such as 'and' or 'or'.

1- How we can create unboundedness in length of sentences?

- By means of Combining
- By means of Creativity
- By means of Recursion
- By means of Abstractness

Key Concepts

1- Abstractness of syntax refers to the fact that we don't mark the constituents or functions concretely by means of pronunciation or punctuation or any other signs.

2- Different kinds of ambiguity:

Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word has different meanings.

Grouping ambiguity or structural ambiguity occurs when words may have different groupings.

Function ambiguity occurs when a word or phrase has different functions but not different meaning or different grouping

Behavioral Objectives

After studying this section, students can:

1- Get familiar with the concept of abstractness of syntax.

2- Learn the concept of ambiguity.

3- Realize the ambiguous constructions and their type in English.

Abstractness of Syntax

One of the features of syntax is its **abstractness**. Abstractness of syntax refers to the fact that we don't mark the constituents or functions concretely by means of pronunciation or punctuation or any other signs. So is there any evidence for the knowledge about these syntactic elements in our mind?

There are 3 kinds of evidences for knowledge about constituents: **replacement, movement, grouping ambiguity.**



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Another aspect of the abstractness of syntax, as mentioned before, is the abstract knowledge we have about the syntactic functions. This knowledge is revealed in various ways. For example the agreement between subject and verb shows that we have an abstract knowledge about subject. Or the abstract knowledge about head and modifier is revealed by the fact that the verb agrees in person and number with the head of a noun phrase not with the modifier. Or it can be revealed in function ambiguity.

Different Kinds of Ambiguity:

In general there are three kinds of ambiguity in language:	
Lexical ambiguity	• Lexical ambiguity occurs when a word has different meanings. For example in 'we met at the bank', 'bank' might be the land at the side of the river or a financial institution.
Grouping ambiguity	• Grouping ambiguity or structural ambiguity occurs when words may have different groupings.
Functional ambiguity	• Function ambiguity occurs when a word or phrase has different functions but not different meaning or different grouping. For example in 'I like ice cream more thanyou.' We can detect function ambiguity. Because in one meaning (i.e. I like ice cream and you but like ice cream more than you), 'you' is the object. But in another meaning (i.e. both me and you like ice cream but I like it more than you like), 'you' is subject.

1- The agreement between subject and verb in English .... .

- Shows that we have an abstract knowledge about subject.
- Shows abstractness of syntax
- Reduces function ambiguity
- Reduces lexical ambiguity

2- ..... occurs when words may have different groupings.

- Function ambiguity
- Structural ambiguity
- Lexical ambiguity
- Agreement

1- "Are the chickens ready to eat?" has ..... ambiguity.

- Grouping
- Lexical
- ✓ Function
- No

2- 'This pen is empty' has.....Ambiguity.

- Grouping
- ✓ Lexical
- Function
- No

3- In 'I understand money matters' we can detect ....

- Grouping ambiguity
- Function ambiguity
- Lexical ambiguity
- No ambiguity

4- In 'Don't sit on those glasses!' we can detect ....

- Grouping ambiguity
- Function ambiguity
- Lexical ambiguity
- No ambiguity

5- In 'The dog looked at the snake longer than the cat', there is ..... ambiguity.

- Grouping
- Lexical
- Function
- No