

**-----  
: STRUCTURE :  
-----**

**14.0 Objectives**

**14.1 Syntax**

**14.1.1 Introduction**

**14.1.2 Syntax as a Cognitive Science**

**14.1.3 Modeling Syntax**

**14.1.4 Substitution and Word–Classes**

**14.1.5 Words to Phrase Types**

**14.1.6 Lexical Categories**

**14.1.7 Sticking Words Together**

**14.2 Pragmatics**

**14.2.1 Introduction**

**14.2.2 Speech Acts**

**14.2.3 Cooperative Principles**

**14.2.4 The Concept of Politeness**

**14.3 Self – Learning Activities with Answers**

**14.3.1 Draw Trees for the following Adjective Phrases, Adverb Phrases and Noun Phrases**

**14.3.2 Draw Trees for the following Noun Phrases and Prepositional Phrases**

**14.3.3 Draw Trees for the Verb Phrases**

**14.3.4 Convert the following Sentences in Polite Requests.**

**14.3.5 Comment on the following Utterances and Explain the Politeness Processes**

**14.4. Let Us Sum Up**

**14.5 Key Words**

**14.6 Books Suggested**

---

**14.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

In this unit we shall;

- understand how language is produced through the scientific method of linguistics,
- differentiate between the various branches of linguistic study,
- learn about Syntax as a key component of linguistics,
- discern Pragmatics and its impact on language.

On completing the unit you should be able to;

- employ syntax and pragmatics on language,
- evaluate language on the yardstick of syntax and pragmatics.

---

## 14.1 SYNTAX

---

### 14.1.1 Introduction :

Language functions in a mysterious way; although it happens so routinely and with very less effort, the actual methods of language understanding still remains a mystery for science to unravel. The purposes to which language is put varies according to the needs of the users however in spite of the large usage and its omnipresence it is still engulfed in a layers of sub–context which need to be peeled off before we get the core of its workings. For example let's take what is happening right now, you are reading this and it makes *sense* to you, although you are not putting any conscious effort into understanding into how the process is happening. There is no conscious knowledge how you are able to extract meaning of what you are reading, still there is a semblance of sense coming out and that is the mystery surrounding language. The study of this mystery is termed as *linguistics*. Generally understanding of a language does not require extensive conscious effort, other than the early stages of second language acquisition.

Language is a psychological or cognitive property of humans. This means that there is some set of neurons in your head firing away that allows the writer to write and another set of neurons that you have which allows you to translate these collection of alphabets into coherent ideas and thoughts. Within this system there are many sub–systems which work in helping the transition from symbols to coherent meaning. One of these systems is termed as syntax– how sentences are structured. Syntax studies the level of Language that lies between words and the meaning of utterances : sentence. It is the level that mediates between sounds that someone produces (organized into words) and what they intended to say. It can also be understood as the ways in which words can be put together to make up larger units, such as sentences. The journey going from produced sounds to interpreted meaning due to the structure of the sentence is termed as Syntax.

**Example :** Consider an unobjectionable sentence such as (1)

- The princess kissed the frog.

Nobody would raise a question regarding the order of the word in this sentence, if we changed it to (2), we would completely change the meaning :

- The frog kissed the princess.

Moreover, the fact that the words come in that order is a specific fact about English that would not hold in other languages. For example in Hindi or Gujarati to provide the message in (1), you would have to say something that would translate literally as (3)

- (The) princess (the) frog kissed.

So there are some fundamentals of the grammar of a language which are so fundamental that they are virtually invisible, yet they can make a big difference to how easily we understand our language. Syntax is concerned with the ways in which sentences are made up of words, and how those sequences of words are interpreted.

#### 14.1.2 Syntax as a Cognitive Science :

Language plays an important role in how we think about abstract notions, or at the very least, Language appears to be structures in such a way that it allows us to express abstract notions. Sentences are how we get at expressing abstract thought processes, so the study of syntax is an important foundation stone for understanding how we communicate and interact with each other as humans.

#### 14.1.3 Modeling Syntax :

The dominant theory of syntax is due to Noam Chomsky and his colleagues; which is popularly known by different names, thoughts, its development, such as Transformational Grammar (TG), Transformational Generative Grammar, Standard Theory, Extended Standard Theory, Government and Binding Theory (GB), Principles and Parameters Approach (P&P) and Minimalism (MP). These are generally accepted under the blanket terms of **Generative Grammar**. The underlying thesis of generative grammar is that sentences are generated by a subconscious set of procedures (like a computer program). These procedures are part of our minds (or of our cognitive abilities). The goal of syntactic theory is to model these procedures. In other words, we are trying to figure out what we subconsciously know about the syntax of our language.

In generative grammar, the means of modelling these procedures is through a set of formal grammatical **rules**. These rules are not similar to the rules of grammar that are part of school and college education. These rules don't tell you how to properly punctuate a sentence or not to split an infinitive. Instead they tell you the order in which to put your words. These rules are thought to generate the sentence of a language, hence the name *generative grammar*. You can think of these rules as being like the command lines in a computer program. They tell you step by step how to put together words into a sentence.

#### 14.1.4 Substitution and Word–Classes :

Let us look at sentence (4)

- The man sneezed

If we consider this sentence as a string of words, then the words are not randomly chosen from English. For each of the words, we can substitute a number of others which will give us a sentence. However they may not be synonymous sentences, but they will be English sentences nonetheless. On the contrary there will be other set of words also which cannot be substituted. Consider sentence (5) which presents some possible substitutions for each of the words in (4) and (6) which show there are words which cannot be substituted in each of the available slots.

- The man sneezed
- A cat died
- Our child fainted
- Some professors laughed
- This woman snored

In (6) the (\*) is used to indicate that replacing the relevant words in (5) with the marked word would lead to something which is not a sentence of English.

- The man sneezed
- \*man \*sneezed \*the
- \*on \*on \*on
- \*afraid \*utilize \*yellow

What the examples in (4), (5) and (6) show is that words belong to different classes and that words in the same class can substitute for each other in a sentence like (4). The words in these classes are sometimes called Substitution Classes or just Word–Classes. Some substitution classes are quite large such as in (5) other are small such as in (7)

- The \_\_\_\_\_ barked.

#### 14.1.5 Words to Phrase Types :

One simple mechanism we recognize is that in forming grammatical sentences, we start from words, or ‘lexical’ categories. These lexical categories then form a larger constituent ‘phrase’; and phrases go together to form a ‘clause’. A clause either is, or is part of, a well–formed sentence.

#### 14.1.6 Lexical Categories :

The basic units of syntax are words. The first question is then what kinds of words (also known as parts of speech, or lexical categories, or grammatical categories) does English have ? Are they simply noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, and maybe a few others ? Most of us would not be able to come up with simple definitions to explain the categorization of words. For instance, why do we categorize book as a noun, but kick as a verb ? To make it more difficult, how do we know that virtue is a noun, that without is a preposition, and that well is an adverb (in one meaning) ?

Words can be classified into different lexical categories according to three criteria : meaning, morphological form, and syntactic function. Let us check what each of these criteria means, and how reliable each one is.

At first glance, it seems that words can be classified depending on their meaning. For example, we could have the following rough semantic criteria for N (noun), V (verb), A (adjective), and Adv (adverb) :

- a. N : referring to an individual or entity
- b. V : referring to an action
- c. A : referring to a property
- d. Adv : referring to the manner, location, time or frequency of an action

The main goal of syntax is building a grammar that can generate an infinite set of well-formed, grammatical English sentences. Let us see what kind of grammar we can develop now that we have lexical categories. To start off, we will use the examples in

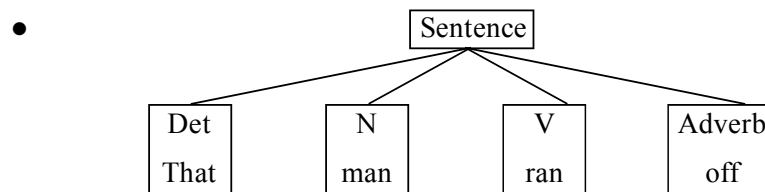
- a. A man kicked the ball.
- b. A tall boy threw the ball.
- c. The cat chased the long string.
- d. The happy student played the piano.

**14.1.7 Sticking Words Together :**

We not only need to know what kind of words we are dealing with, but how they go together. *Kabir sneezed* is a perfectly good sentence of English, while *\*sneezed light* is not to see how this words we need to continue the idea of substitution that was introduced in the previous section and see how sequences of words and single words can be substituted for each other and leave coherent constructions behind, so that complex constructions are elaborations of simple ones, but elaborations that hold to quite strict constraints. Each of the bits in *Kabir sneezed* can have a longer sequence of words substituted for it. Consider the various expansions suggested in (8) below :

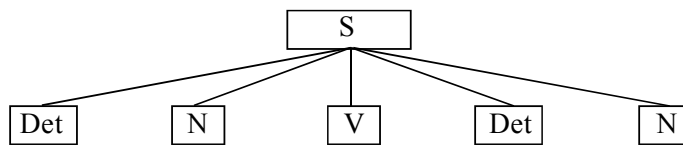
- Kabir sneezed
- The man ran off
- The bald man ran to work
- The very tall model ran to the town
- The very fit teacher of English ran quickly to the classroom

The importance of this is that we can find very complex sequences like *The very fit teacher of English ran quickly to the classroom* and discover its basic structure by substituting other words for the various Constituents of the sequence and so discover its fundamental structure. To make things easier we usually use TREES instead. Trees provide precise information. *The tree for That man ran off* would be (9)



Given only the lexical categories that we have identified so far, we can set up a grammar rule for sentence (S) like the following :  $S \rightarrow \text{Det (A) N V Det (A) N}$

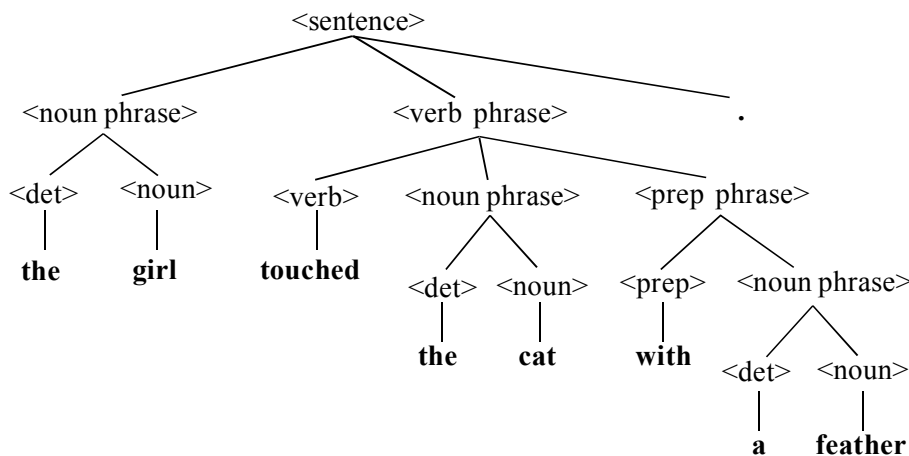
The rule tells us what S can consist of : it must contain the items mentioned, except that those which are in parentheses are optional. So this rule characterizes any sentence which consists of a Det, N, V, Det, and N, in that order, possibly with an A in front of either N. We can represent the core items in a tree structure as in



A detailed version of the Tree can be as follows :

Sentence

- (noun phrase) (verb phrase).
- (determiner) (noun phrase) (verb phrase).
- **The** (noun phrase) (verb phrase).
- **The girl** (verb phrase).
- **The girl** (verb) (noun phrase) (prepositional phrase).
- **The girl touched** (determiner) (noun phrase) (prepositional phrase).
- **The girl touched the** (noun phrase) (prepositional phrase).
- **The girl touched the cat** (prepositional phrase).
- **The girl touched the cat** (preposition) (noun phrase).
- **The girl touched the cat with** (noun phrase).
- **The girl touched the cat with** (determiner) (noun).
- **The girl touched the cat with a** (noun).
- **The girl touched the cat with a feather.**




---

## 14.2 PRAGMATICS

---

### 14.2.1 Introduction :

One may ask a question– What is the purpose of language ? This is a very difficult question to answer and accordingly many answers have been offered. One is that we have language in order to be able to lie. If this suggestion sounds too cynical, then you may agree with another suggestion that is frequently made, that we have language in order to communicate information. Superficially at least, this sounds more reasonable. Even a boring sentence such as, *the cat sat on the mat* tells us something about the cat and about the mat; it makes explicit the relationship between the two at some time in the past. In that sense, it appears to be communicating information.

If that is one thing that language does, though, it is not the only thing that language does. If you say, “Where are the toilets ?”, you are not so much communicating information you, as indicating precisely what information you would like the interlocutor to provide for you. If you say, ‘Close the door !’ you are inadvertently communicating that the door is open, but you are really attempting to make some other person behave in a particular way. So rather than say that the purpose of language is to communicate information, we might be better to say that language allows us to communicate information among other things.

Despite its scientific acclaim, the notion of pragmatics remains somewhat enigmatic and is still difficult to define. This holds for its readings in everyday discourse as well as in scholarly contexts. Nonetheless, when we refer to attitudes and modes of behaviour as pragmatic, we mean that they have a factual kind of orientation in common. People who act pragmatically or take a pragmatic perspective generally have a preference for a practical, matter of fact and realistic rather than theoretical, speculative and idealistic way of approaching imminent problems and handling every day affairs. To put it differently, they share a concrete, situation–dependent approach geared to action and usage rather than an abstract, situation–independent and system–related point of view. While essentially the same is true for linguistics in generally, there is no commonly accepted definition of pragmatics in linguistics which would refer to a single, unified and homogeneous field. In linguistics, is there a narrow and a broad way of delineating pragmatics. According to the narrow view, pragmatics is understood as the systematic investigation of what and how people mean when they use language as a vehicle of action in a particular context and with a particular goal in mind. Thus, the context–dependency of utterance meaning is the central component of more narrowly defined accounts of pragmatics, which focus on a few key issues that can be juxtaposed with related issues in other modules of language theory such as grammar and semantics.

Pragmatics is fundamentally concerned with communicative action in any kind of context. In the pragmatic perspective, language use and language users in interaction are primary, as opposed to language as a system of signs or a set of rules. The pragmatic perspective scrutinizes neither just individual words nor sentences nor even isolated texts, but rather whole speech events or language games in real social contexts, considering both the present state of affairs and its connectedness with prior and succeeding actions. It rejects a localization of language in a limited segment of the acts of speaking, understanding and responding or within the conscious of the individual. It supplants a view of language as an abstraction without variation by speaker, region or time, of language as a non–cultural, non–social, static, depersonalized fact independent of context and discourse. Pragmatics goes beyond the perspective of written texts with their carefully marshalled grammatical sentences to embrace everyday talk and the “messiness” of language in real embodied human contexts, where participants with personalities, feelings and goals interact in complex ways with physical objects and other participants within institutions and communities.

**14.2.2 Speech Acts :**

If you say something like (10), the saying it does not make it true

- a. I like to eat an apple.

Sentence (10) may be true, or it may be false, depending upon who *I* refers to and the time at which it is uttered. If, on the other hand, you say (11), it is not clear that it can be fairly characterised as either true or false.

- b. I promise to eat an apple.

While (10) merely describes a situation, (11) performs an action : (11) is itself the promise, while (10) does not in itself constitute the liking whether or not you keep the promise that is made by saying (11), the promise is made because you perform a promise by using the verb *promise* in this way.

There are many Performative verbs of this kind in English. Some examples are given in (12)

- c. a. I name this ship Thor.  
 b. I bet your Rs. 100 that Sid is late.  
 c. I now pronounce you man and wife.  
 d. I sentence you to 10 years' imprisonment.  
 e. I declare the convocation open.  
 f. I resign.

For any of these to work, certain Felicity Conditions or Happiness Condition has to be met. For e.g. (12d) does not work as a performative unless the speaker is a judge.

Consider a sentence (13)

- d. Can you pass me the salt ?

If this sentence is posed during dinner and someone answers with a 'Yes', without following up with the action, the it may mean they have taken the sentence "literally" they have disregarded the illocutionary force that the speaker had intended. Part of the reason that 'Yes' is not a good answer to (13) is that it fails to recognize that a conversation is an exercise in cooperation. The people taking part in the conversation have to work together to make the conversation effective, and listeners will draw conclusions from apparent breaches in the cooperative principle.

**14.2.3 Cooperative Principles :**

The cooperative principle was introduced by H.P.Grice, who set it out as a number of sub-principles, or Maxims as in (14)

- e. The cooperative principle

Quantity	Make your contribution as informative as is required
	Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
Quality	Do not say what you believe to be false.
	Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation	Be relevant
Manner	Avoid obscurity of expression.
	Avoid ambiguity.
	Be brief.
	Be orderly.
	Speak idiomatically unless there is a good reason not to.

Let us see what happens when one of these maxims is broken. For example if the speaker says

f. Siddharth is meeting a man this evening.

We will assume that the professor concerned is not a close relative; otherwise more information would have been given (following the first clause of the maxim of quality). So (15) would be considered misleading if the man concerned was Siddharth's father. Of course, it is always possible that the speaker does not know that Siddharth is actually meeting his father, and that (15) is all that can be honestly said under the maxim of quality, but the listener is still likely to interpret (15) as meaning that the man is not Siddharth's father/ brother/ son. That's why the exchange in (16) contains a kernel of truth, although it ends up degenerating the speaker's wife.

g. A : Who was that lady I saw you with last night ?

B : That was no lady; that was my wife.

#### **14.2.4 The Concept of Politeness :**

We might think that there is another maxim in the cooperative principle which is namely, be polite. We can certainly see a lot of our behaviour as being driven by such a principle. But being polite is not simply a matter of behaving in a consistent way, and often seems to lead to breaches of the cooperative principles.

If you speak English, unless you are a commanding officer in the armed forces or a dictatorial ruler, the one thing you should never do if you want people to do something for you is tell them directly to do it. The command in (17) is more likely to get a rude response than the desired result.

h. Get my new phone from the other room.

The example in (17) has been chosen not to be the kind of order a child might make. English-speaking children are often asked, 'What's the magic word ?' to get them to mitigate orders of this type into requests with the word please. So the very least we can do with something like (17) is add a please to it. However, (17) probably involves some considerable effort on the part of the person who is to do the fetching so that it is more likely that a speaker will make a considerable effort to make the request more polite. Typically, at least in English, the way of making a request more polite is to make it less direct. This can be done linguistically, by turning the order into a question format. In general, we also make the request more polite by making it more removed from the here and now. One way we do that, in English, is to use part tense verbs rather than present tense ones. So in (18)

we have a number of possible versions of (17), each of them more polite than (17) and generally more polite the less direct they are.

- i. Can you get my phone from the other room ?  
 Could you get my phone from the other room ?  
 I wonder if you could get my phone from the other room.  
 I wondered if you could get my phone from the other room.

Another way to make an order appear less abrupt is to make the task sound less of an imposition on the hearer. Some examples are (19)

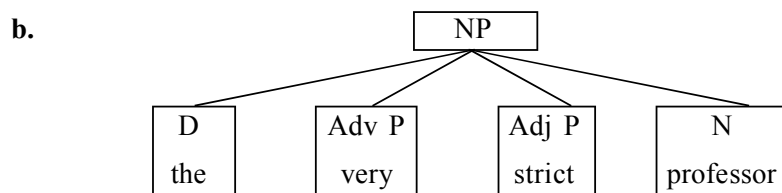
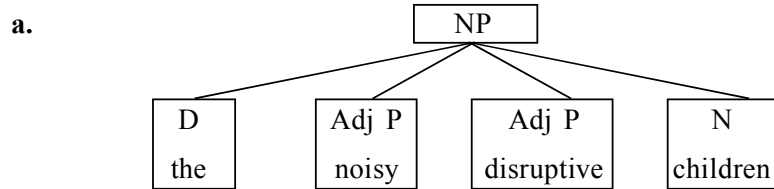
- j. Could you possibly get my phone from the other room ?  
 I wonder if you could, like, get my phone from the other room.  
 Could you perhaps just get my phone from the other room ?  
 While you're going to the kitchen, could you get my phone from the other room ?

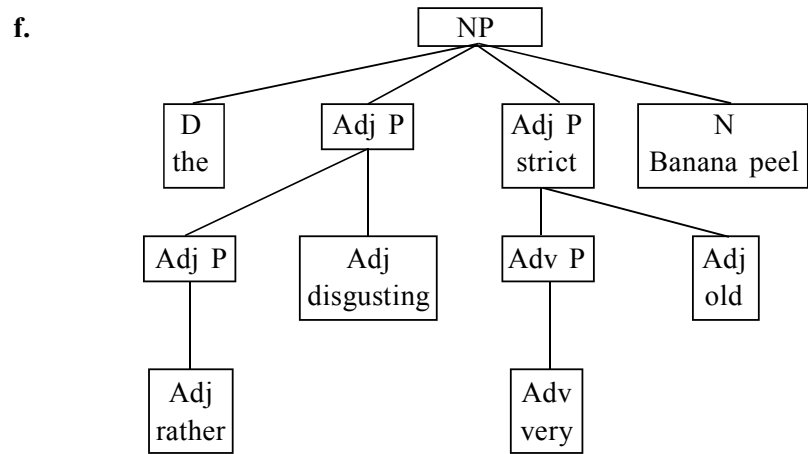
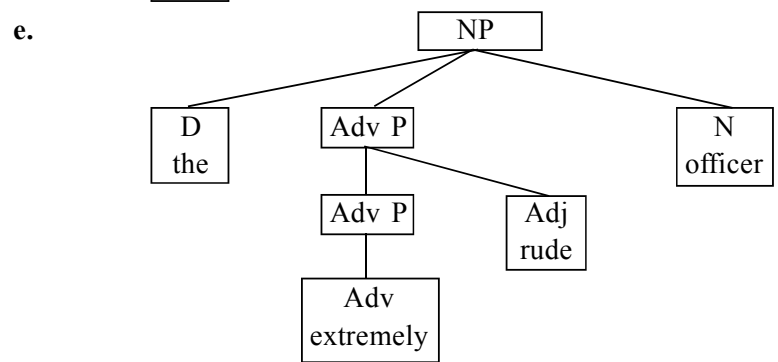
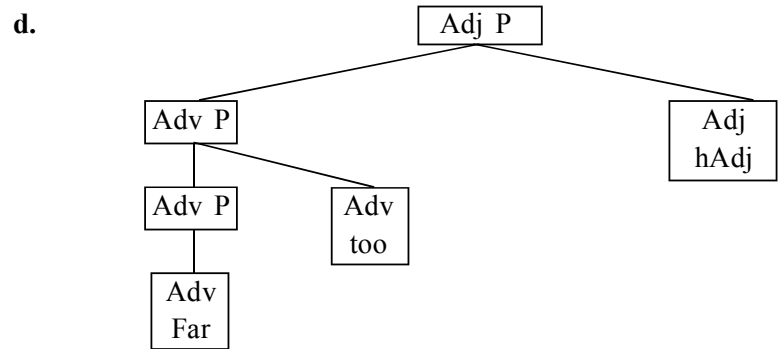
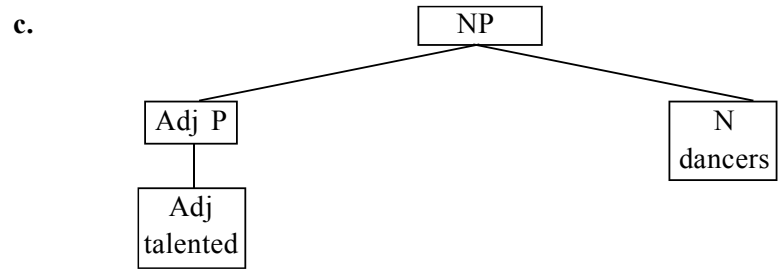
The theory behind all of this is concerned with the notion of Face. We have, the theory goes, two kinds of face : positive face and negative face. Positive Face is the desire of the individual to be liked, to be part of the group, and to share the needs of interlocutors. Negative face is the desire to be free and be able to act independently and of one's own volition, rather than at someone else's behest.

### 14.3 SELF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### 14.3.1 Draw trees for the following adjective Phrases, Adverb Phrases and Noun Phrases :

- a. the noisy disruptive children
- b. the very strict professor
- c. talented dancers
- d. far too honest
- e. the extremely rude officer
- f. the rather disgusting old banana peel

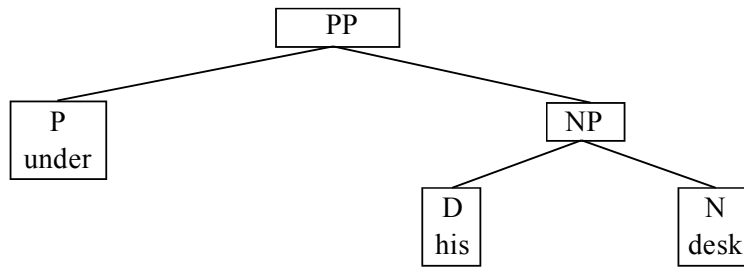




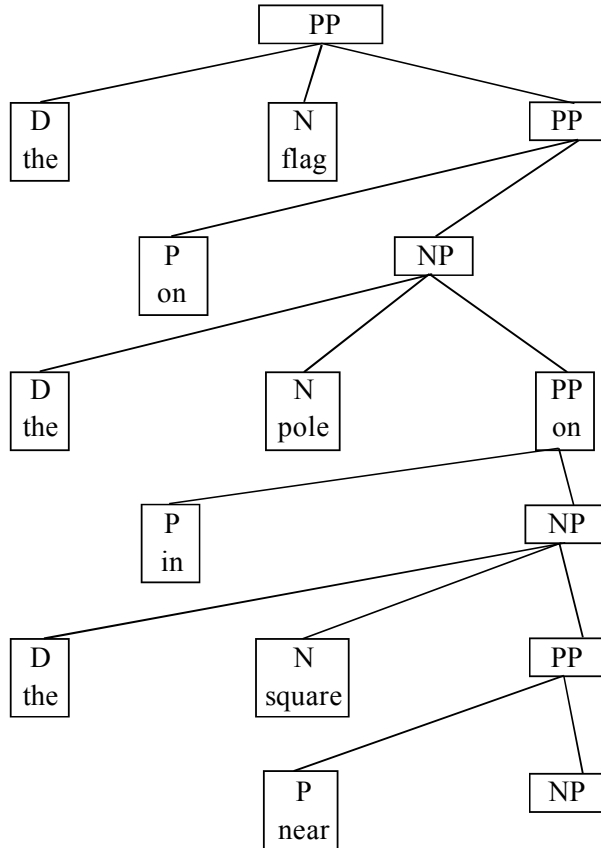
**14.3.2 Draw Trees For The Following Noun Phrases And Prepositional Phrases :**

- a. under his desk
- b. the flag on the pole in the square near the legislature

a.



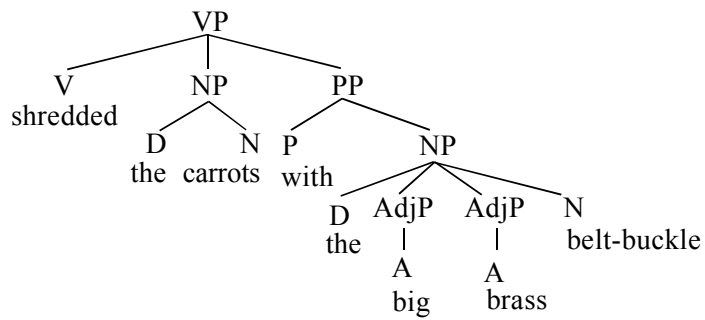
b.



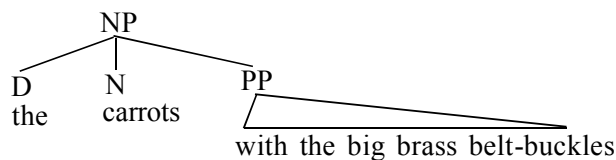
**14.3.3 Draw Trees for the Verb Phrases :**

- a. shredded the carrots with the big steel kitchen knife
- b. often reads trashy novels in the bus
- c. frequently reads eloquent novels by Tolstoy
- d. read a trashy novel by Tolstoy in the bus yesterday

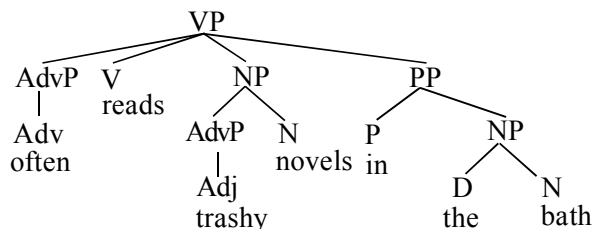
a.



If the carrots had belt-buckles (instead of being shredded by them), then the PP would attach under the NP :

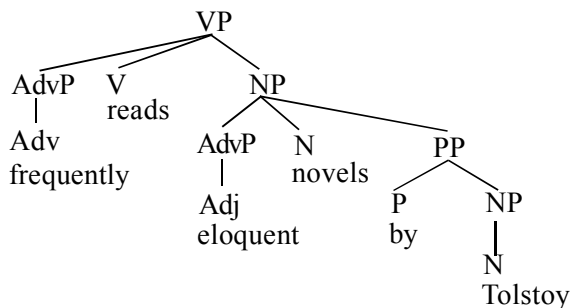


b.

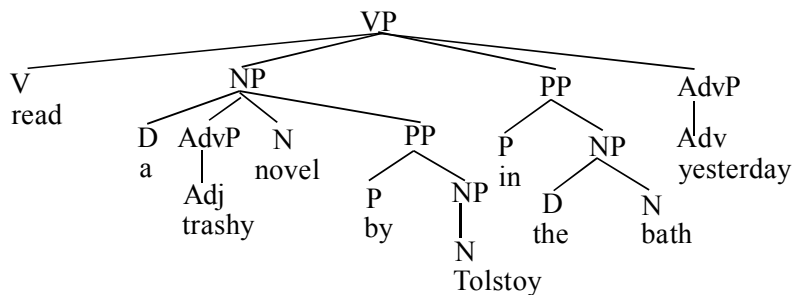


Note that the PP *trashy novels* modifies the verb *reads*, so it is attached under the VP rather than under the NP. Also note that if you have an adverb like *often*, it must be an AdvP (rather than just Adv), because the VP rule says you are allowed an AdvP in this position, not an Adv.

c.



d.



This VP has two PPs in it. One (*by Tolstoy*) modifies the N, so is attached in under the NP headed by *novel*. The other (*in the bath*) modifies the verb *read*, so is attached in under the VP.

#### 14.3.4 Convert the Following Sentences in Polite Requests :

- Call the student
- Bring the bag
- This should be done by tomorrow evening
- I have not received the email yet
- The team wants you to take this responsibility.
- Its either now or never.

### 14.3.5 Comment on the Following Utterances and Explain the Politeness Processes That They Show :

- a. Look, I'm terribly sorry to bother you but would there be any chance of your lending me just enough money to get a railway ticket to get home ?
- b. I must have dropped my purse and I just don't know what to do.
- c. Hey, got change for a quarter ?
- d. Look, sonny, it might not be advisable to just go pushing your little fingers into this little pie.
- e. If you don't mind me asking, where did you get that dress ?

---

## 14.4 LET US SUM UP

---

In this module we looked at how language functions, naturally without a conscious effort being made by the users in employing it. However, as mentioned afore, the mystery is not magic or unrealistic supernatural phenomenon. Language functions within the constraints of syntax (structure) and pragmatics (context). Syntax and semantics are very tightly ties together; the difference which has effects on the semantic interpretation of the sentence. Sentences are all about building up coherent messages from meaningful elements whose relationship to each other has to be made explicit. Verbs are central in relating elements to each other. Pragmatics always takes some kind of linguistic structure and deals with the way in which that structure becomes interpreted in context, and why it might mean more than we would want to attribute to the meaning of the element itself. For example water might mean something we could gloss as 'H<sub>2</sub>O', but if a desperate man comes up to you in the middle of the Thar Desert and request for 'Water!' you will interpret that as meaning more than just 'H<sub>2</sub>O'. These two crucial elements work in tandem to assist language use and understanding for each user. A careful analysis and understanding of these elements will not only assist a better insight into how language works but will also assist in helping other learn the language better.

---

## 14.5 KEYWORDS

---

1. syntax (sin-taks) : the way in which words are combined to form sentences
2. generative grammar (gen-er-a-tive grammar) : rules for using grammar in language
3. Pragmatics (prag-ma-tiks) : a field of study that looks at relation between sentences and the situation in which they occur
4. Speech acts : the function fulfilled by speaking; the study of various functions in language
5. tree : diagrammatic representation of the structure of a sentence

---

**14.6 Books Suggested**

---

- Birner, Betty. *Introduction to Pragmatics*. Wiley–Blackwell, 2012.
- Carnie, Andrew. *Syntax : A Generative Introduction*. Wiley Publication, 2007.
- Chomsky, Naom. *Syntactic Structures*. Walter de Gruyter, 2012.
- Griffiths, Patrick. *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Koeneman, Olaf & Hedde Zeijlstra. *Introducing Syntax (Cambridge Introductions to Language and Linguistics)*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- McGregor, William B. *Linguistics : An Introduction*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
- Radford, Andrew. *English Syntax : An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆