

Grammar, Syntax, Semantics and Discourse

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Abstract. The paper contains a significant role of grammar, syntax, semantics and discourse in the use of English language. It focuses on the role of four different categories but one single issue of handling the language efficiently using these conventional elements as well it concentrates on the issue of exhibiting Style of oneness, the impact of science as equal to language trying to prove that linguistics part of a language is a ever changing trend according to the change of nature, etc.

Keywords: Grammar, Syntax, Semantics and Discourse ,etc.

1. Introduction

English grammar is a description of the usages of the English language by good speakers and writers of the present day. -Whitney

A description of account of the nature, build, constitution, or make of a language is called its grammar – Meiklejohn

Grammar teaches the laws of language, and the right method of using it in speaking and writing. - Patterson

Grammar is the science of *letter*; hence the science of using words correctly. -Abbott

The English word *grammar* relates only to the laws which govern the significant forms of words, and the construction of the sentence. -Richard Grant White

These are sufficient to suggest several distinct notions about English grammar-

(1) It makes rules to tell us how to use words.

(2) It is a record of usage which we ought to follow.

(3) It is concerned with the *forms* of the language.

(4) English *has* no grammar in the sense of forms, or inflections, but takes account merely of the nature and the uses of words in sentences.

Fierce discussions have raged over these opinions, and numerous works have been written to uphold the theories. The first of them remained popular for a very long time. It originated from the etymology of the word *grammar* (Greek *gramma*, writing, a letter), and from an effort to build up a treatise on English grammar by using classical grammar as a model.

Perhaps a combination of (1) and (3) has been still more popular, though there has been vastly more classification than there are forms.

During recent years, (2) and (4) have been gaining ground, but they have had hard work to displace the older and more popular theories. It is insisted by many that the student's time should be used in studying general literature, and thus learning the fluent and correct use of his mother tongue. It is also insisted that the study and discussion of forms and inflections is an inexcusable imitation of classical treatises.

Which view shall the student of English accept? Before this is answered, we should decide whether some one of the above theories must be taken as the right one, and the rest disregarded.

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The real reason for the diversity of views is a confusion of two distinct things,-what the *definition* of grammar should be, and what the *purpose* of grammar should be.

The province of English grammar is, rightly considered, and wider than is indicated by any one of the above definitions; and the student ought to have a clear idea of the ground to be covered.

It must be admitted that the language has very few inflections at present, as compared with Latin or Greek; so that a small grammar will hold them all.

It is also evident, to those who have studied the language historically, that it is very hazardous to make rules in grammar: what is at present regarded as correct may not be so twenty years from now, even if our rules are founded on the keenest scrutiny of the "standard" writers of our time. Usage is varied as our way of thinking changes. In Chaucer's time two or three negatives were used to strengthen a negation; as, "Ther *nas no man nowher* so vertuous" (There never was no man nowhere so virtuous). And Shakespeare used good English when he said *more elder* ("Merchant of Venice") and *unkindest* ("Julius Cæsar"); but this is bad English now.

If, however, we have tabulated the inflections of the language, and stated what syntax is the most used in certain troublesome places, there is still much for the grammarian to do.

Surely our noble language, with its enormous vocabulary, its peculiar and abundant idioms, its numerous periphrastic forms to express every possible shade of meaning, is worthy of serious study, apart from the mere memorizing of inflections and formulation of rules.

Grammar is eminently a means of mental training; and while it will train the student in subtle and acute reasoning, it will at the same time, if rightly presented, lay the foundation of a keen observation and a correct literary taste. The continued contact with the highest thoughts of the best minds will create a thirst for the "well of English undefiled."

Coming back, then, from the question, *What ground should grammar cover?* we come to answer the question, *What should grammar teach?* and we give as an answer the definition,-

English grammar is the science which treats of the nature of words, their forms, and their uses and relations in the sentence

This will take in the usual divisions, "The Parts of Speech" (with their inflections), "Analysis," and "Syntax." It will also require a discussion of any points that will clear up difficulties, assist the classification of kindred expressions, or draw the attention of the student to everyday idioms and phrases, and thus incite his observation.

A few words here as to the *authority* upon which grammar rests.

The statements given will be substantiated by quotations from the leading or "standard" literature of modern times; that is, from the eighteenth century on. This *literary English* is considered the foundation on which grammar must rest.

Here and there also will be quoted words and phrases from *spoken* or *colloquial English*, by which is meant the free, unstudied expressions of ordinary conversation and communication among intelligent people.

These quotations will often throw light on obscure constructions, since they preserve turns of expressions that have long since perished from the literary or standard English.

Occasionally, too, reference will be made to *vulgar English*, -the speech of the uneducated and ignorant,- which will serve to illustrate points of syntax once correct, or standard, but now undoubtedly bad grammar.

The following pages will cover, then, three divisions:-

Part I. The Parts of Speech and Inflections.

Part II. Analysis of Sentences.

Part III. The Uses of Words, or Syntax.

Here is the list of few significant parts of grammar been discussed forthwith:

Traditional grammar classifies words based on eight parts of speech: the verb, the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the adverb, the preposition, the conjunction, and the interjection.

2. Syntax

In linguistics, syntax (from Ancient Greek σύνταξις "arrangement" from σύν *syn*, "together", and τάξις *táxis*, "an ordering") is the study of the principles and rules for constructing phrases and sentences in natural languages.

In addition to referring to the overarching discipline, the term *syntax* is also used to refer directly to the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of any individual language, as in "the syntax of Modern Irish."

Modern research in syntax attempts to describe languages in terms of such rules. Many professionals in this discipline attempt to find general rules that apply to all natural languages.

The term *syntax* is also used to refer to the rules governing the behavior of mathematical systems, such as formal languages used in logic. See Syntax (logic); Computer-programming languages; Syntax (programming languages).

Though there has been an interplay in the development of the modern theoretical frameworks for the syntax of formal languages and natural languages, this article surveys only the latter.

3. Early History

Works on grammar were written long before modern syntax came about; the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini is often cited as an example of a premodern work that approaches the sophistication of a modern syntactic theory. In the West, the school of thought that came to be known as "traditional grammar" began with the work of Dionysius Thrax.

For centuries, work in syntax was dominated by a framework known as *grammaire générale*, first expounded in 1660 by Antoine Arnauld in a book of the same title. This system took as its basic premise the assumption that language is a direct reflection of thought processes and therefore there is a single, most natural way to express a thought. That way, coincidentally, was exactly the way it was expressed in French.

However, in the 19th century, with the development of historical-comparative linguistics, linguists began to realize the sheer diversity of human language, and to question fundamental assumptions about the relationship between language and logic. It became apparent that there was no such thing as the most natural way to express a thought, and therefore logic could no longer be relied upon as a basis for studying the structure of language.

4. Semantics

Semantics (from Greek *sēmantiká*, neuter plural of *sēmantikós*) is the study of meaning. It focuses on the relation between *signifiers*, such as words, phrases, signs and symbols, and what they stand for, their denotata.

Linguistic semantics is the study of meaning that is used by humans to express themselves through language. Other forms of semantics include the semantics of programming languages, formal logics, and semiotics.

The word "semantics" itself denotes a range of ideas, from the popular to the highly technical. It is often used in ordinary language to denote a problem of understanding that comes down to word selection or connotation. This problem of understanding has been the subject of many formal inquiries, over a long period of time, most notably in the field of formal semantics. In linguistics, it is the study of interpretation of signs or symbols as used by agents or communities within particular circumstances and contexts. Within this view, sounds, facial expressions, body language, and proxemics have semantic (meaningful) content, and each has several branches of study. In written language, such things as paragraph structure and punctuation have semantic content; in other forms of language, there is other semantic content.

The formal study of semantics intersects with many other fields of inquiry, including lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, etymology and others, although semantics is a well-defined field in its own right, often with synthetic properties. In philosophy of language, semantics and reference are closely connected. Further

related fields include philology, communication, and semiotics. The formal study of semantics is therefore complex.

Semantics contrasts with syntax, the study of the combinatorics of units of a language (without reference to their meaning), and pragmatics, the study of the relationships between the symbols of a language, their meaning, and the users of the language.

In international scientific vocabulary semantics is also called *semasiology*

5. Discourse

Discourse (from Latin *discursus*, meaning "running to and from") generally refers to "written or spoken communication". The following are three more specific definitions:

- In semantics and discourse analysis: A generalization of the concept of conversation to all modalities and contexts.
- "The totality of codified linguistic usages attached to a given type of social practice. (E.g.: legal discourse, medical discourse, religious discourse.)"
- In the work of Michel Foucault, and social theorists inspired by him: "an entity of sequences of signs in that they are enouncements (enoncés)." An enouncement (l'énoncé - often translated as "statement") is not a unity of signs, but an abstract matter that enables signs to assign specific repeatable relations to objects, subjects and other enouncements. Thus, a discourse constitutes sequences of such relations to objects, subjects and other enouncements. A discursive formation is defined as the regularities that produces such discourses. Foucault used the concept of discursive formation in relation to his analysis of large bodies of knowledge, such as political economy and natural history.

So many slighting remarks have been made of late on the use of teaching grammar as compared with teaching science, that it is plain the fact has been lost sight of that grammar is itself a science. The object we have, or should have, in teaching science, is not to fill a child's mind with a vast number of facts that may or may not prove useful to him hereafter, but to draw out and exercise his powers of observation, and to show him how to make use of what he observes... .. And here the teacher of grammar has a great advantage over the teacher of other sciences, in that the facts he has to call attention to lie ready at hand for every pupil to observe without the use of apparatus of any kind while the use of them also lies within the personal experience of every one. -Dr Richard Morris.

The proper study of a language is an intellectual discipline of the highest order. If I except discussions on the comparative merits of Popery and Protestantism, English grammar was the most important discipline of my boyhood. -John Tyndall.

As per the discussion above the nature of linguistics is not constant and it changes according to the growing needs of culture, Media and language, that is why English is considered as an International language.

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