**Syntax**

* 1. Heads and modifiers

Two central ideas:

1. Certain relationships hold between words whereby one word, the **head**, controls the other words, the **modifiers**.
2. Words are grouped into phrases and that groupings typically bring together heads and their modifiers.

E.g. #1 in *The large dog* … the word *dog* is the head, and *the* and *large* are modifiers.

E.g. #2 in *barked loudly…* the word *barked* is the head and *loudly* the modifier.

A **phrase** is a group of interrelated words. Groups of interrelated words can be moved around inside **clauses** as a single unit; in such groups various links among the words are recognized, between heads and their modifiers.

This relationship of **modification** is fundamental in syntax.

How do we understand the statement ‘one word, the head controls the other words, the modifiers’?

Examine the following examples:

1. a. Sarah was sitting at her desk.

b. \*The Sarah was sitting at her desk.

1. a. \*Accountant was sitting at her desk.

b. The accountant was sitting at her desk.

c. Accountants audit our finances every year.

Plural nouns exclude **a** and **an** but allow words such as **some** and **more** as in (3).

1. a. \*I would like a waiters to bring my dinner.

b. Some waiters are arranging the desks in the restaurant.

c. Would more waiters be hired ?

Another type of noun, which includes words such as salt, sand and water, can occur without any word such as the, a or some, as in (4a, b), and can occur in the plural but only with a large change in meaning. Example (4c) can only mean that different type of sand were scooped.

1. a. The gritter spreads salt.

b. The gritter spreads the salt.

c. The gritter spreads salts.

Note too that a plural noun such as gritters allows either less or fewer, as in (5c) and (5d), whereas salt requires less and excludes fewer, as in (5a) and (5b).

(5) a. This gritter spread less salt than that one.

b.\*This gritter spread fewer salt than that one.

c. There are fewer gritters on the motorway this winter.

d. There are less gritters on the motorway this winter.

The central idea of the above examples is that *Sara, accountant, waiter, salt and gritter* permit or exclude the plural suffix and permit or exclude words such as *the, a, some, less and fewer.*

The above is an example of phrases with nouns as the controlling word, but there are other types of word that exercise similar control.

E.g. many adjectives such as sad or big allow words such as very to modify them---very sad, very big, but exclude words such as more—sadder but not more sad. Other adjectives, such as wooden, exclude very and more---\*very wooden,\*more wooden. That is wooden excludes very and more in its literal meaning.

Even a preposition can be a controlling word in a group. Prepositions link nouns to nouns (books *about* horses), adjectives to nouns (rich *in* calcium) and verbs to nouns (aimed *at* the target).

1.2 Heads, modifiers and meaning

The distinction between heads and modifiers is that the head controls the other words in a phrase, the modifiers.

The heads convey a central piece of information and the modifiers convey .

E.g. The phrase, *Expensive books* …. The head word *books* indicates the very large set of things that count as books, while *expensive* indicates that the speaker is drawing attention not to the whole set but to the subset of books that are expensive. A longer phrase, *the expensive books, the* signals that the speaker is referring to a set of books which have already been mentioned or otherwise obvious in a particular context.

The same idea applies to verbs. Note that different verbs have different powers of control. Some verbs (6a) exclude a direct object, other verbs require a direct object (6b) and a third set of verbs allows a direct object but does not require one (6c).

(6) a. \*The White Rabbit vanished his watch/ The White Rabbit vanished.

b. Dogs chase cats/ \*Dogs chase.

c. Ala’a cooks/ Ala’a cooks gourmet meals.

**Heads may have several modifiers**.

Example: The phrase *bought a present for Amal in Zara last Tuesday* contains four modifiers of *bought—a present, for Amal, in Zara and last Tuesday.*

The modifiers narrow the meaning down.

1.3. Complements and adjuncts

Modifiers fall into two classes: obligatory modifiers, known as **complements**, and optional modifiers, known as **adjuncts**.

Example: *My sister bought a present for Amal in Zara last Tuesday*.

Refer to (6a-c) the different types of verbs—controlled if the direct object is excluded, required or merely allowed.

The verb bought controls all the other phrases in the clause and is the head of the clause. With verbs, such time and place expressions are always optional and are held to be adjuncts.

Phrases that are obligatory are called complements; adjunct – something adjoined or tacked on and not part of the essential structure of clauses.

All verbs in English declarative clauses require a noun to their left; they must be mentioned by means of a noun. Verbs such as BUY also require a noun on to their right. Without one, the clause would be incomplete for speakers of English.

1.4 Clauses

In discussing Syntax, we need units for our analysis. One unit is the phrase, the other is heads and modifiers. Another unit is the clause. Clause enabes us to talk about the relationships between verbs and different types of phrase.

An ideal clause contains a phrase referring to an action or state, a phrase or phrases referring to the people or things involved in the action or state and possibly phrases referring to place and time.

*My sister bought a present* is a clause. The phrase *my sister* refers t to the buyer, *bought* refers to the action and *a present* refers to what was bought. We can add the phrase *for Amal*, which refers to the person benefitting from the action. Finally, we can tack on, or leave out, the place phrase *in Zara* and the time phrase *last Tuesday*.

A clause is a unit which as a minimum consists of a verb and its complements but which may consist of a verb, its complements and its adjuncts.

Examine example (7): The cat shot into the kitchen on Sunday morning carrying a dead mouse.

Directional phrases in general are complements but are not always obligatory.

Consider (8): The cat pranced into the kitchen carrying a dead mouse.

Consider (9): The cat lies on the rug in front of the fire.

The verb shoot requires a directional phrase; lie excludes the directional phrases and prance allows a directional phrase but does not require it.

1.5 Dictionary entries and collocations

An important point to note is that the status of phrases as complement or adjunct varies from verb to verb.

A third property of complement—combinations of verb and object in which the actual lexical items that can occur are severely limited.

Examples: toast bread, toast marshmallows, toast your toes.

Can’t grill bread

People lay tables, chop or split logs, make beds, wire money.

These regular fixed combinations of verbs and nouns are called collocations and they involve heads and complements.

Fixed combinations of verb and adjective are also found—prove useless, prove necessary.

Verbs with prepositions—Blame someone for something and blame something on someone, set expressions --for and on can be used.

Adjectives and nouns—heavy smoker, heavy drinker, staple diet, staple crop, staple industry.

1.6 Verbs, complements and the order of phrases.

The relationships between heads and modifiers are called dependencies or dependency relations.

In clauses the verb and its complements tend to occur close together, with the adjuncts pushed towards the outside of the clause as shown in (9).

(9) a. Ahmad drove his car from Riyadh to Qasim on Monday.

b. On Monday Ahmad drove his car from Riyadh to Qasim.

c. Ahmad drove his car on Monday from Riyadh to Qasim.

In (9a), the object his car is next to the verb, followed by the directional phrases from Riyadh to Qasim. Objects and directiona phrases are complements. The time- when phrase on Monday is at the end of the clause in (9a) and at the beginning of the clause in (9b) . In (9b), it is closer to drove, but this is not important. What is important is the fact that the adjunct does not come between the head and any of the complements. This happens in (9c) making it awkward.

Summary

Every phrase contains a head and possibly, but not necessarily, one or more modifiers. Each clause has a head, the verb. There are two types of modifiers, namely complements and adjuncts. Adjuncts are optional; complements are typically obligatory and are always mentioned in the lexical entries for verbs (or nuns or prepositions). Many collocation restrictions apply to heads and complements (but also to phrases other than complements). Heads and complements are typically adjacent where a head has two or more complements, adjuncts typically come before or after the sequence of head and complements.