University of Batna 2
Department of English Language and Literature
Module: **Linguistics**
Second-Year BA/ Groups **6** & **7**
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Taxonomic Grammar

Introduction

➢ In the early 20th century, linguistic study underwent a fundamental transformation, shifting from an *"item-centred" view to a "structure-centred" framework*. This shift, pioneered by structuralists, posits that linguistic elements (be they sounds, words, or phrases) possess no inherent significance when viewed in isolation.
➢ Instead, they function as part of a unique relational structure. From this perspective, the analysis of language is the study of a system as a whole.
➢ This systemic view gave rise to "Taxonomic Grammar" (or Bloomfieldian Grammar) in the 1940s and 1950s.
➢ This methodology is characterised by **a preoccupation with form over meaning, focusing strictly on the segmentation and classification of utterances.**

1. Two Meanings of Structuralism

1. Broad meaning
Structuralism is the idea that:
- Every language is a unique system of relationships.
- Linguistic analysis must study elements **as parts of a whole system**.

2. Narrow meaning
Structuralism also refers specifically to the work of American linguists in the 1940s and 1950s, especially **Bloomfieldian or Taxonomic Grammar**.

2. What is Taxonomic Grammar?

→ The word structural refers to a focus on **form** rather than meaning.
→ The word taxonomic refers to **classification**.
So, Taxonomic Grammar is a structuralist approach to language analysis that focuses on the classification of linguistic forms based on their distribution in sentences rather than their meaning. Its key features are:

- Developed by American structural linguists, especially in the **1940s–1950s**.
- Associated with Bloomfieldian structuralism.
- Focuses on form, structure, and distribution, not on meaning.
- Uses **inductive classification**: observing language data and grouping similar forms.
- Divides sentences into parts through **segmentation** and **classification,** meaning: word classes are defined by where they appear in sentences, not by what they mean.

Also, structuralists believed:
- Each language should be described **on its own terms**.
- We should not assume that all languages share the same categories.

3. The Four Classes of Forms

Taxonomic grammarians identified **four** major classes of content words.

Class 1: Nouns	Class 2: Verbs	Class 3: Adjectives	Class 4: Adverbs
Examples: •The **movie** was exciting. •The **child** found the key. •The **doctor** arrived early. Here: •movie •child •doctor are *nouns*.	Examples: •The movie **was** exciting. •The child **found** the key. •The doctor **arrived** early. Here: •was •found •arrived are *verbs*.	Examples: •The movie was **exciting**. •The **exciting** movie ended late. Here: •exciting is an *adjective*.	Examples: •The long speech ended **suddenly**. •The boy finished his work **carefully**. Here: • suddenly • carefully are *adverbs*.

4. The Three Groups of Function Words: The Structural Glue

In addition to the four content classes, taxonomic grammarians identified **three groups of function words**.

- **Group A (Determiner Position):** All words that can occupy the position of the word "the," such as *a, an, any, some, one, three, this,* and *those* .
  Example: ***Those*** books are interesting.

- **Group B (Auxiliary Position):** These are words that appear in the position of: *may, would, have*
  Example: The teacher ***may*** arrive soon.

- **Group C (Negation):** A unique group containing only the word **not** .
  Example: The lesson was ***not*** difficult.

5. Showing Sentence Structure

- A method used to show how sentences are built.
- Focuses on the structure of phrases inside a sentence.
- Uses **rules and tree diagrams** to represent sentence structure.

Weakness of Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA):

Although ICA is useful for dividing sentences into their main parts, it has some limitations. In certain cases, ***it is not clear where the divisions should be made***, especially with ambiguous expressions such as *old teachers and students*, which can mean either *(old teachers) and (students)* or *old (teachers and students)*. In addition, *ICA only shows how a sentence is segmented into parts*; it ***does not explain deeper grammatical relationships between sentences***, such as the connection between statements and questions or between active and passive forms. Therefore, ICA alone cannot provide a complete understanding of the structure of a language.

Example: Old teachers and students. Possible meanings (Old teachers) and (students) OR: Old (teachers and students)

Immediate Constituent Analysis (ICA)

- ICA is a technique used to divide a sentence into its main parts.
- It shows how a sentence is organised step by step.
- Each step divides the sentence into **smaller constituents**.
- The process continues until only **individual words** remain.

6. Adding Labels to the Structure:

→ Another way to make the analysis more informative is to **assign labels to each part** that appears whenever a sentence is divided. By naming these elements, we can clearly identify the ***grammatical role*** of each part.

→ Consider the sentence: **The teacher will read the book.**

Using labeled analysis, we describe it as follows:

- The whole sentence is a **Sentence (S)**.
- It is made up of:
    - a **Noun Phrase (NP)**: *the teacher*
    - a **Verb Phrase (VP):** will read the book

The noun phrase (NP) consists of:

- a Determiner **(Det):** *the*
- a Noun **(N)**: *teacher*

The verb phrase **(VP)** consists of:

- a Verb **(V):** *will read*
- a Noun Phrase **(NP)**: *the book*

The **verb** itself consists of:

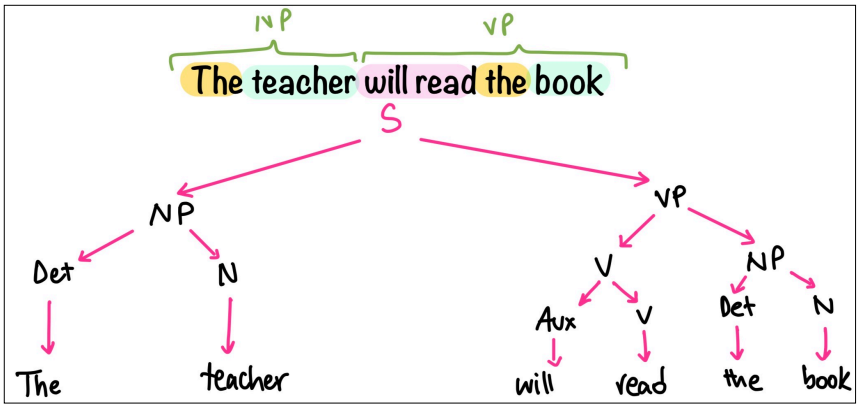
- an Auxiliary **(Aux)**: *will*
- the main verb **(V)**: *read*

The noun phrase **the book** consists of:

- a Determiner **(Det)**: *the*
- a Noun **(N):** *book*

Linguists improved ICA by **labelling each part** of the sentence. Common labels include:

- **S** = Sentence
- **NP** = Noun Phrase
- **VP** = Verb Phrase
- **Det** = Determiner
- **N** = Noun
- **V** = Verb
- **Aux** = Auxiliary



→ A simpler and more efficient way to present this analysis is by using a **labeled tree diagram**, which visually shows the structure of the sentence:

* Phrase Structure Grammar / Phrase Marker (P-marker)

→ This kind of representation of the phrase structure of this sentence is called ***Phrase structure or Phrase Marker (P marker).***

→ Phrase structure rules:

1) S → NP+VP.
2) VP → verb+NP.
3) NP → det+N.
4) Verb → aux +V.
5) Det → the……the.
6) N → teacher……book.
7) Aux → will……..read.
8) V → read……..

Summary of the Structuralist Lens

The taxonomic and phrase-structure approaches allow us to analyse language with scientific rigour. By focusing on the visible distribution and formal classification of elements, we bypass the subjectivity of "deeper" meaning in favour of a clear map of the linguistic system. Key Points to Remember:

- ICA divides sentences into smaller parts.
- Some sentences are ambiguous in ICA.
- Adding labels gives more grammatical information.
- Phrase structure grammar uses: tree diagrams and rules.
- A small number of rules can generate many sentences.