# Understanding the Semantic Tree

“The connection is **indispensable** for the expression of thought. Without the connec­tion, we would not be in a position to express a single continuous thought and we would only be capable of producing a succession of isolated images and ideas, with nothing link­ing them together.”

*Preamble, The Connection,* (Tesnière, 2015)

“Structural connections establish **dependency** relations between words. In principle, each connection unites a **superior** term and an **inferior** term. The superior term is called the **governor**, and the inferior term the **subordinate**. A word can be both subordinate to a superior word and governor of an inferior word.

The set of words of a sentence constitutes a veritable **hierarchy**.”

*Preamble, Hierarchy of Connections,* (Tesnière, 2015)

“In principle, a subordinate can only depend on a **sole** governor. A governor, in con­trast, can govern **multiple** subordinates. Every governor that governs one or more subordinates forms what we call a **node**.

Thus, we define a node as a set consisting of a governor and all of the subordinates that are directly or indirectly dependent on the governor and that the governor in a sense **links** together into a bundle.

Just like connections, nodes can be superimposed. There is therefore a **hierarchy of nodes**, just as there is a hierarchy of connections.

The node formed by the governor that governs all the subordinates of a sentence is the **node of nodes**, or the **central node**. It is at the center of the sentence and ensures its structural unity by tying the diverse elements into a single bundle. It can be identified with a sentence.

The node of nodes is generally verbal, as is evident from the examples produced thus far. But nothing prevents a sentence from having a noun as its central node, or an adjective, or an adverb. These cases are frequent in colloquial speech and in titles of literary works.

Since the inferior connections can be numerous, we are obliged to cheat in the graphic representation by using slanted instead of vertical lines.

The set of connection lines constitutes a stemma. The stemma clearly shows the hier­archy of connections; it presents the various nodes that join connections into groups sche­matically, and therefore, visually manifests the structure of the sentence. The stemma is thus a visual representation of an abstract notion: the structural schema of the sentence.”

*Preamble, Node and Stemma,* (Tesnière, 2015)

**“Understanding** a language involves trans­forming linear order to structural order.”

*Preamble, Structural and linear order,* (Tesnière, 2015)

# Bibliography

Tesnière, L. (2015). *Elements of Structural Syntax.* Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.