

STRUCTURAL, SEMANTIC, AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF A SENTENCE IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Summary

The present article deals with a meaningful unit of a language, i.e. a sentence. Considered in terms of its hierarchical relationship to other units of language structure, a sentence must be placed at the top of the pyramid formed by these units, since the purpose of all other structural units is ultimately the formation of a sentence. A sentence is a concept of wide scope, covering a wide range of sentence structures from single-word to complex polypredicative constructions. The purpose of the investigation is to study a sentence from different points of view. The article explores the three aspects of the sentence: structural, semantic, and pragmatic. They are the main ones since they cover three main aspects of a sentence: form, content, and use. A sentence is the product of the creative activity of the author of the statement. It is the most complex unit in the language system. The complexity of the sentence lies in the multiplicity of its components, the number of which is not structurally limited in the sentence: the sentence can be large and any sentence can be continued indefinitely, although the number of elements making up each sentence is final. The complexity of this unit is connected with the diversity of the mutual relations of the elements making up the sentence. It is a minimal syntactic construction used in acts of speech communication, characterized by predictivity and realizing a certain structural scheme. Intonational design is an essential feature of any sentence. In the language relative features of such design are more important than absolute ones.

Key words: sentence, predicativity, structure, feature, unit.

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1. Introduction

As it is known, a sentence is the most widely studied part of the syntax. Traditionally it is called not a "syntactic construction" but a "group of words". Since any syntactic construction is usually a group of words, the definition of a sentence through a syntactic construction does not lose the information conveyed in the traditional definition. So, we can define a sentence more precisely in the following way: a syntactic construction is a group of words, but not every group of words is a syntactic construction. (*Ivanova, Burlakova, Pochepcov, 1981: 164*) Describing a sentence as a syntactic construction, the feature that combines a sentence with some other syntactic units, and the generic affiliation of the sentence are taken into consideration. Concerning specific features, then, since we are dealing with a meaningful unit of the language, they should reflect the features associated with the characteristics of the structure, content, and use of the sentences – three aspects that characterize each unit of the language that has the meaning: structure, semantics, and pragmatics.

2. Discussion

A sentence is the minimum unit of verbal communication. Structural units of a “lower” rank than a sentence (words and their combinations of a non-sentence status) can only act as its constituents. They are incapable of independent usage out of the sentence in acts of speech. Further, a sentence (even a one-word one), in contrast to a word and phrases, denotes some actualized, i.e. a situation correlated in a certain way with reality. So, “*night*” as a word is only “inventory”, as a dictionary unit, naming the corresponding natural phenomenon. The noun “*night*” is nothing more than a linguistic expression of the concept of “a part of a day”. The other case is the sentence “*Night*”. The sentence “*Night*” presents the phenomenon of *night* already as a fact of reality. The corresponding phenomenon both for the author of the statement and for the addressee has been updated. Though implicitly it gets a modal characteristic (the speaker considers the corresponding phenomenon as a reality), as well as a certain time perspective (the plan of the present, past, or future).

It’s much easier in sentences containing the finite form of the verb, which has morphologically fixed indicators of modality and time: *The wind blows* as opposed to *the wind blow*.

Actualization as a syntactic phenomenon has a special name – predicativity. It is made up of the categories of modality and time. Finally, the most important structural feature of the sentence is the closure of mutual syntactic links between the components of the sentence. Not a single word of this sentence can act as a main or dependent element about words outside it. At the basis of this phenomenon lies the correspondence of each sentence to a certain structural scheme, the set of which is finite and specific for each language. All the above-mentioned features are sufficient to identify sentences in the speech stream. (Longman, 2002: 58)

Thus, we get to the following definition of a sentence. A sentence is a minimal syntactic construction used in acts of speech communication, characterized by predicativity and realizing a certain structural scheme.

Predicativity is structurally the most important feature of a sentence. The language is different by its capacity for an infinite variety of ways to designate even identical denotations. So, the same person can be named, for example, *John, you, I, this (young) man, my roommate, Johnson's son, Ann's brother*, etc. The list of possible lexical names for the person known as *John* is endless and always open, including new words, which don’t exist yet.

The same feature of the variability of the ways of denotation is inherent for syntactic units. It should be admitted that here the inventory of possible ways of designating a denotation is finite, and therefore the correlation “denotation - designation” is more rigid.

To indicate a situation, this sentence is either an independent unit or a part of a complex sentence (My father has arrived. When my father arrived...), phrase (my friend's arrival), and the word as a sentence component (the battle). The most essential difference between them is the predicativity which is present in the sentence and absent in the phrase and word. The correlation of the latter with reality, their actualization is possible only when they are used as a component of a sentence or as a sentence. The relation to reality, though not independent, but through the sentence, is also inherent in the components of the sentence. In the sentence, *I admired the beauty of the countryside*, each of the significant words has a real denotation in reality. There is a point of view that the relation to reality is a characteristic feature of speech in general, and not of a separate sentence. One can agree with this view, but at the same time, it should be borne in mind that the relation of speech to reality is provided by the corresponding feature of sentences, not vice versa. The sentence also has means of expressing predicativity.

Three are some other characteristic features of the sentence. A sentence is the product of the creative activity of the author of the statement. Man is a creature of creative thinking and it is natural to expect from him the demonstration of creativity in such a sphere, closely related to consciousness, speech activity, and the use of language. If we talk about creativity in speech activity about syntax, then here it is realized in the generation of an infinite diversity of new sentences. For a person who speaks a language normally, it is typical not to store in memory ready-made sentences “for all occasions” (it is clear that this is simply impossible), but to construct new sentences for one-time use, even for similar situations. (*Fries, 1952: 125*)

The suitability of a sentence for use in the acts of verbal communication is connected particularly with the fact that a sentence just gives a person the opportunity to respond creatively and actively to a constantly changing, dynamic reality, to interact using language with new conditions both in terms of reflected content and direct participants of a speech act.

In the sentence, the stability of the structure is combined with the constant novelty of the content and each sentence is new. In a book containing hundreds of thousands of sentences, it is very difficult to find an identical sentence for one taken at random. The construction of each sentence by the speaker is a creative act. From a finite number of words, using a finite set of rules, a native speaker can build an infinite number of sentences of different structures and content. Until recently, the creative aspect of constructing sentences has attracted little attention from researchers, but with the development of the theory of generative grammar, modelling this ability of a person becomes one of the tasks of linguistics.

A sentence, like any other meaningful unit of language, has a form. As in the case of other meaningful units of language, the attention of native speakers is usually not fixed on the form of the sentence, and therefore its existence is not as obvious as the content. But it should be brought to mind that a sentence is a compound unit and its form consists of a set of characters of a certain form, constant and variable for a given sentence, arranged in a certain sequence. Based on formal features we define ‘*There were no fresh vegetables*’ as a sentence and ‘*Were fresh vegetables there no?*’ as a non-sentence.

Consequently, the form of the sentence is multi-stage and multi-component. In particular, it includes formal indicators of the components that make up the sentence – parts of the sentence, the way these components are organized, as well as the set itself.

Each sentence is designed intonationally. Intonational design is an essential feature of any sentence. In the language in the intonational design, it is not the absolute features of such design that are important, but relative ones, based on the opposition of intonation, which characterizes different communicative types of sentences. One can compare the intonation of declarative and interrogative sentences (general questions). (*Ivanova, Burlakova, Pochepcov, 1981: 169*) Considering the structural organization of the sentence, in the grammatical study of the sentence, the intonation design should be considered as an additional feature, the description of which is outside of grammatical theory and falls within the purview of phonetics. For the grammatical study, the demonstration of grammar and phonetics interaction is interesting, as, for example, cases of neutralization of grammatical indicators of sentence narration as a result of using intonation that is not characteristic of this structural type of sentences: ‘*So you agree with me?*’ Cases of this kind show that in the hierarchy of linguistic means of expression narration/interrogation phonetic indicators occupy a higher position than grammatical ones.

The results of the description of any complex system depend on the fact that is taken by the researcher as the main, central in this system through which and in connection with which other elements of the system are studied. For syntax, such a central unit is a sentence as it is a final product of the system which we call language.

Considered in terms of its hierarchical relationship to other units of language structure, a sentence must be placed at the top of the pyramid formed by these units, since the purpose of all other structural units is ultimately the formation of a sentence. The formation of a sentence is its structural purpose, although for most of them it is not directly realizable, while the sentence has a different, communicative purpose being not only the structural but also the structural-communicative unit.

So, admitting the fact that a sentence is the central unit of a syntactic description, however, the question arises: how to deal with formations larger than a sentence, like a paragraph or a text, about which a sentence is a constituent? Perhaps a sentence is not final, but only an intermediate unit?

The reality of the text as a special speech construction cannot be questioned. The question is whether a text (or a paragraph as a part of a text) is a structural language unit. One can answer it negatively. A text does not have unambiguous structural characteristics, similar to those that a sentence has. There are no single structural schemes for constructing a text, which characterizes every meaningful unit of language, like a sentence. None of the structural-semantic means that contribute to the connection of sentences into a text is specific to a text. They operate in a sentence as well, i.e. in the text, we are dealing simply with their extended use. The fact that a text is not a structural unit of the language is also shown in the following. Each meaningful structural unit of the language performs a nominative function, being a linguistic sign, and in some cases a linguistic analogue of the corresponding extralinguistic quantities. In this regard, the functions of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences are similar. And if the extralinguistic correlate of a sentence is a situation and a quantitatively limited set of structural schemes of the sentence and the semantic configurations underlying them are modelled using the language also a quantitatively limited set of types of situations, then the text is characterized neither by a given set of schemes of structural linguistic construction nor by any categorically defined correspondence in extralinguistic reality. Thus, the centrality of the sentence in the linguistic, including syntactic, description remains valid in the context of the existence of a new direction in linguistics, called "linguistics of the text".

A sentence is a concept of wide scope, covering a wide range of sentence structures from single-word to complex polypredicative constructions. Speaking about the centrality of the sentence in the structure of the language and, accordingly, in the syntactic description, we mean, first of all, a so-called simple sentence, a monopredicative construction. (*Blokh, 1983: 95*) A simple sentence fully satisfies all the features of the sentence as a structural and communicative unit. However, it underlies all other syntactic constructions of any complexity. Another important question connected with the problem of the centrality of a sentence in a syntactic description is the question of a sentence–utterance relation. Being not just a structural but also a communicative unit, a sentence in the process of speech communication acquires features that are only potentially embedded in the sentence and are implemented when the sentence is actualized in speech. For example, *It's cold here* in an act of speech may simply be a factual statement, but it can also be an incentive to action, equivalent in terms of the speech-communicative effect produced by the sentence *Let's go to another place*. The realized sentence is richer in its characteristics than the sentence taken in abstraction from the conditions of realization. That is true, but there can be nothing that would not be incorporated as potency in the sentence. Thus, each utterance appears as a speech demonstration of a linguistic unit, i.e. a sentence.

As it was mentioned above, a sentence is the most complex unit in the language system. The complexity of the sentence lies in the multiplicity of its components, the number of which is not structurally limited in the sentence: the sentence can be large and any sentence can be

continued indefinitely, although the number of elements making up each sentence is final. The complexity of the sentence is connected with the diversity of the mutual relations of the elements making up the sentence. This is the relationship characterizing the members of the sentence, the relations connecting components of phrases and simple combinations of words, the relations of a linear sequence of sentence elements, their emphatic emphasizing, and the role of individual components in the formation of the semantics of the sentence members or a sentence as a whole, etc. Finally, the complexity of a sentence is determined by its inherent multiplicity of possible relationships between content and form.

The form of a sentence is specific. The main task is to establish how words are combined into a sentence, and how a sentence differs from a simple set of words. Therefore, this aspect of the sentence can be called an aspect of the structural organization of a sentence. Along with the "organizational side of the matter", the formal indicators of grammatical meanings should be studied as well. Formal indicators of meaningful differences belong to the structural aspect of the sentence.

The second aspect of the sentence is a semantic one. Subordinate clauses and sentence members have certain semantic features. Parts of a compound sentence have certain mutual semantic relations as well.

Finally, we can single out the pragmatic aspect of the sentence associated with the use of sentences in acts of speech. A sentence is a unit of language that has an obvious and very important extra structural-functional purpose for the language - to serve as the main unit of speech communication. So, one can observe the differences in the communicative plan between sentences, a complex system of connecting up to interchange, between sentences that differ pragmatically.

These three aspects - structural, semantic, and pragmatic – are the main ones, and this system can only be improved if the aspect (or aspects) of the same general status can be named. This is not easy to do. At least the aspects proposed so far do not go beyond the specified trichotomy, correlative with form, meaning, and use of the sentence, and all are reducible to it. For example, it has been suggested to distinguish seven aspects in modern Indo-European languages: 1) logical-grammatical, 2) modal, 3) completeness of the sentence, 4) role about another sentence in an extended speech, 5) the cognitive attitude of the speaker, or actual division of the sentence, 6) communicative task and 7) emotional. It is easy to see that all named in this list of aspects are reducible to the named three main aspects.

Structural, semantic, and pragmatic aspects are the main ones since they cover three main aspects of a sentence: form, content, and use. Difficulties in separating these seven aspects can only be because some of them may be interpreted as built based on formal or meaningful features. With the introduction of certainty in this respect, they will find a place in the trichotomous classification of aspects.

3. Conclusion

Scientific investigation of a sentence in the English language makes it possible to come to the following conclusions:

1. A sentence is not "a syntactic construction" but "a group of words". A syntactic construction is a group of words, but not every group of words is a syntactic construction.
2. A sentence is a minimal syntactic construction used in acts of speech communication, characterized by predicativity and realizing a certain structural scheme.

3. A sentence, like any other meaningful unit of language, has a form. The form of the sentence is multi-stage and multi-component, it includes formal indicators of the components that make up the sentence – parts of the sentence.

4. Intonational design is an essential feature of any sentence. In the language relative features of such design are more important than absolute ones.

5. The complexity of a sentence is determined by its inherent multiplicity of possible relationships between content and form.

6. Structural, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of a sentence cover three main aspects of a sentence: form, content, and use.

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