Syntax I: chapter 5

1. What is syntax? parsing?
2. The word order of English is relatively fixed. What does this mean? Give examples where it’s fixed, and where it may vary.
3. What do we mean by lexical categories, or parts of speech? The term lexical categories is more useful than parts of speech, in part because it carries a lot less baggage, letting us look at syntactic analysis more objectively.
4. Why do traditional school definitions of the parts of speech fall short? Give examples where they lack explanatory adequacy.
5. When is a noun not the name of a person, place or thing?
6. Why are semantic definitions of the parts of speech less useful than ones which consider a word’s form and function?
7. Why should we consider both form and function in assigning lexical categories?
8. What forms distinguish nouns? What functions?
9. What forms distinguish verbs? What functions?
10. Adjectives? Adverbs? Prepositions?
11. We say that lexical categories may be open or closed. Define and give an example of an open and a closed category.
12. Pronouns are traditionally a fairly closed category; nouns are an open category. Give some examples of new nouns and pronouns.
13. The notion of a well-formed sentence is descriptive. That of a properly formed sentence is prescriptive. Explain the difference between these two notions of sentence appropriateness.
   a. The “rules” that say you can’t end a sentence with a preposition, that you can’t split an infinitive, that a double negative equals a positive, are all prescriptive.
   b. The “rule” that says English speakers typically put the subject before the verb in a declarative sentence is descriptive.
   c. Writers are told that the difference between its and it’s is, its is a possessive pronoun, it’s is a contraction of it is. But the Constitution prints the possessive pronoun it’s. How do you explain this apparent violation in the supreme law of the land?

Syntax II: chapter 6

14. Explain the problem we may have when we encounter sentences like The horse raced past the barn fell.
15. Syntactic analysis allows us to represent how we understand language.
16. The goal of syntactic analysis is to describe.
   a. the patterns that emerge from large databases of language
   b. what a native speaker knows about their language
   c. how is language acquired?
   d. how is linguistic knowledge put to use?
17. Generative grammar is a theory that explains how language is possible, how any child can learn any language using the same mental blueprint.

18. We can use English perfectly well not being able to articulate the principles of sentence construction, so why analyze it?

19. The concept of *universal grammar*: fundamental to a theory of competence and performance.
   a. All humans acquire language; we all acquire it *in the same way.*
   b. *Universal grammar* seeks the fundamental properties that all languages share.
   c. Structural dependency: sentence structure in all languages depends on *groupings of words* rather than linear strings.
   d. constituents are syntactic units – words that work together -- that fit into larger units that constitute a sentence, or that form a sentence by themselves.
   e. unlike trains, which depend on linear order, sentences depend on word relations

20. Clauses and sentences:
   a. **independent clause**: may be a sentence itself
   b. or it may be joined to another clause
   c. **dependent clause**: (subordinate clause) cannot stand alone; it is embedded or inserted into an independent clause; if modifies a constituent in the independent clause or it modifies the *entire* independent clause.
   d. **dependent clauses include**:
      1. adverbial: often introduced by a subordinating conjunction (*when, because, after, if, although*)
      2. relative: typically introduced by relative pronoun, typically adjectival in function
      3. complementizer: often introduced by *that* or *wh-* words; fills the slot of an NP to complete a VP

21. Concept of *langue* and *parole*: the language, as an abstraction (French, English, Arabic) and the language “*in the mouth of/from the keyboard of a particular user of that language.*”

22. The concept of grammatical and acceptable: Speakers of a language know the difference between an utterance that is grammatical (well-formed) and one that is acceptable. Explain what this means, and what it tells us about the nature of language competence?

23. What are the major *constituents*, the ‘components’ of a sentence? Sentence > clause > phrase > word. How do we distinguish among them?

24. Every sentence contains a clause; some have more than one [this assumes the Sentence to be a logical structure] -- this is to some extent an arbitrary unit of analysis, based in part on the intuition that speakers have a tacit understanding of how they chunk their utterances, essentially into sentences and words.

25. Explain the concept of universal grammar. Give examples of grammatical elements that are universal, and ones that are not.
26. Why is the sentence a useful unit of grammatical analysis? Obviously, there are larger units as well: a conversation, a book, a speech; and smaller ones, such as morphemes and phonemes.

27. What are the limitations of taking the sentence as the basic unit of grammatical analysis?

28. How to test for a constituent:
   a. Substitution: can it be replaced by a single word?
   b. Stand-alone test: Can it function as the answer to a question?
   c. Movement test: constituents can often move as units.
   d. Coordination test: can you join it using and plus a constituent that you know?

29. Phrase Structure rules:
   a. $S \rightarrow (NP/S) \ VP$
   b. $NP \rightarrow (\text{Det})(\text{Adj}+) \ N (\text{PP}+)$
   c. $\text{ADJP} \rightarrow (\text{ADV}) \ ADJ$
   d. $\text{VP} \rightarrow (\text{ADVP}+) \ V (NP/S) (\text{PP}+) (\text{ADVP}+)$
   e. $\text{ADVP} \rightarrow (\text{ADV}) \ ADV$
   f. $PP \rightarrow P \ NP$

30. Transformations – a set of rules for going from PS to surface structure
   a. For example: active/passive: in the active form, which we arbitrarily pick as the base form, the agent (the performer of an action) is the subject of the verb, and the patient (the noun or NP affected by the action) is the object of the verb.
   b. In the passive: the patient becomes the subject of the verb; the verb is reconfigured as a form of to be (or another auxiliary verb) + the past participle of the main verb. The agent appears as the object of the preposition (usually by); the agent is optionally deletable.
      - John took me for a ride
      - I was (got) taken for a ride (by John).
   c. The passive transformation consists of the set of steps a speaker applies to get from the active to the passive. Such steps involve: moving the patient to subject position; altering the verb structure from active form to passive; moving the agent into a prepositional phrase.

31. Syntax, Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar
   a. well-formed sentence is a descriptive notion: it describes what speakers do to form grammatical and acceptable sentences (utterances) in their language. Each language has its own set of syntactic requirements for well-formedness: for example, adjectives typically precede nouns in English; in French they typically follow nouns.
   b. in contrast, properly formed sentence is a stylistic, prescriptive notion – rules of etiquette rather than rules of practice.
   c. some prescriptive issues:
      - fragments and run-ons – we speak in fragments because context supplies the missing elements; what happens when we write in fragments?
• punctuation: Curzan and Adams assert several times that grammarians created punctuation marks to disambiguate hierarchical structures. Not so. Punctuation practice depends on writers (and printers and editors) who develop conventions – conventions which change over time and according to context. Those who insist on observing the rules of punctuation often stress the difference a comma makes:
  o *Let’s eat, grandma*, vs.
  o *Let’s eat grandma*
  o But it’s important to remember that observing punctuation rules is a matter of style and context: In pretty much every context you’re likely to find the *let’s eat* sentence, no one’s eating anyone.
• dangling participles: sometimes they are ambiguous, sometimes funny; but often the meaning is clear – as in this old want ad from a newspaper -- *Wanted: bathtub for baby with enamel bottom.*
• when is it important to supply context and make sure your words are not ambiguous?