

## A SYNOPSIS OF ENGLISH SYNTAX

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# A SYNOPSIS OF ENGLISH SYNTAX

*by*

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## PREFACE

With the exception of the Preface and Chapter I, this *Synopsis of English Syntax* was presented to the University of Michigan as a doctoral dissertation in 1943. It is obviously a precarious undertaking to publish a scientific work so many years after it was written. So much takes place in the present-day development of any science, and surely Descriptive Linguistics is no exception. Indeed, in this field particularly there have been almost unprecedented advances both in theory and methodology. One thing is certain: If I were going to rewrite this dissertation it would be in many respects quite different.

Any present treatment of English syntax, such as was attempted in this Synopsis, would have to pay much greater attention to intonation, which is here treated only under Bloomfield's taxeme of "modulation". But my analysis was made prior to Pike's initial work on English intonation (Kenneth L. Pike, *The Intonation of American English*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1945) and the later treatments by Wells (Rulon S. Wells, "The Pitch Phonemes of English", *Language*, 21.27-39, 1945) and by Trager and Smith (George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith Jr., *An Outline of English Structure, Studies in Linguistics, Occasional Papers*, 3, Norman, Oklahoma, Battenburg Press, 1951). The consistent and careful notation of intonational structures would have both clarified a number of structures and provided criteria for distinguishing otherwise confusing patterns.

The present Synopsis is also lacking in a systematic analysis of phonemic junctures, both actual and potential. Such features would have provided important diagnostic, though not necessarily definitive, criteria for many immediate-constituent divisions. However, in 1943 the significance of junctures was only being initially explored, and since that time their relevance for any grammatical treatment of English has been fully attested (see Trager and Smith, *op. cit.*, and Noam Chomsky, Morris Halle, and Fred Lukoff, "On Accent and Juncture in English", in the volume *For Roman Jakobson*, 1956, pp. 65-80).

The employment of Pike's "Tagmemic Theory" (Kenneth L. Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*, Glendale, California, Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954; "Grammemic Theory in Reference to Restricted Problems of Morpheme Classes", *IJAL*, 23, 1957, pp. 119-128; and "On Tagmemes,

Née Gramemes", *IJAL*, 24.273-92, 1958) would be useful in focusing attention on the "spots" which are structurally relevant. However, the general orientation of the approach adopted in this Synopsis is toward constructions in terms of immediate constituents, rather than the string of units which comprise the total frame.

The most useful recently developed technique and descriptive framework is "transformational analysis" (see Zellig S. Harris, "Co-occurrence and Transformation in Linguistic Structure", *Language*, 33, 1957, pp. 283-340; Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, 's-Gravenhage, Mouton and Co., N.V., 1957; and Robert B. Lees, "Review of *Syntactic Structures* by Noam Chomsky", *Language*, 33, 1957, pp. 375-408). The recognition of transforms, in terms of basic kernel sentences capable of generating different types of constructions, would permit distinguishing between formally similar constructions which are structurally distinguishable because derived from different kernels and which in turn give rise to diverse constructions.

In addition to these four significant areas of major advance in descriptive methodology as related to syntax, there are of course a number of other important contributions, each of which would, in its area of special concern, influence any future revision of this type of synopsis. The most important of these articles and books are:

- Harris, Zellig S., "From Morpheme to Utterance", *Language*, 22.161-183 (1946).  
*Methods in Structural Linguistics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951).  
 Wells, Rulon S., "Immediate Constituents", *Language*, 23 (1947), pp. 81-117.  
 Fries, Charles Carpenter, *The Structure of English; An Introduction to the Construction of English Sentences* (New York, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1952).  
 Bar-Hillel, Yehoshua, "A Quasi-Arithmetical Notation for Syntactic Description", *Language*, 29 (1953), pp. 47-58.

On the basis of the extent to which this Synopsis would require changing to bring it into line with contemporary developments in descriptive linguistics, it is legitimate to ask why it is being republished, especially since the original work was not intended for publication (which would have required fuller explanations of many technical terms, a more extensive introduction, and many more notes). The truth is that, quite contrary to expectation, there has been a consistent demand for copies of this dissertation. It has been put out in two multilith editions of several hundred copies each, and more recently was in part published in Japan, with a special introduction and notes in Japanese. The reasons for this interest are probably twofold: (1) it is still the most extensive synopsis of English constructions described in terms of immediate constituents, and (2) it contains many useful lists of words functioning as syntactic classes.

In addition to the shortcomings noted above, the reader will inevitably recognize several others, including especially:

1. The lack of phonemic notation for the illustrative data.
2. An arrangement which places the immediate constituents of many constructions at some distance from each other in the outline.
3. A failure to treat alternative orders as fully as desirable.

4. The recognition of certain alternative arrangements of immediate constituents, but without a systematic attempt to follow out the implications of such alternative structuring.
5. The somewhat "antiquated" terminology, especially in the use of the form-function dichotomy, rather than of the item-arrangement or item-distribution distinction. It should be noted, however, that, more or less throughout, the vocabulary follows Bloomfield's usage, e.g. modulation, pausepitch, taxeme, relation-axis construction, etc.

In preparing this volume for publication some minor changes have been introduced, which involve (1) the revision of some awkward descriptions, (2) the addition of footnotes, where the text seemed unduly obscure, and (3) the rearrangement of some sections, e.g. the treatment of nonrestrictive clauses.

The text has been slightly revised from that published in 1960 under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of Oklahoma, in their *Linguistic Series*, No. 4. The principal changes are shifts in the order of presentation of material and certain editorial improvements, for which I am indebted to Dorothy L. Tyler. I also wish to express appreciation for the careful, detailed proofreading done by Robert Murrow.

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June 1963

EUGENE A. NIDA





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NOTE. – The position of the three dichotomies, namely, (1) single clause frame – multiple clause frame, (2) independent exocentric constituents – dependent exocentric constituents, and (3) clauses as heads – attributives to clauses, is dictated by practical considerations of grouping together all the information relative to multiple clause frames, dependent exocentric constituents, and the attributives to clauses, since they are identical for all major sentence types. Technically, they should be considered under the major sentence types – namely, actor-action and goal action – with appropriate cross-references to indicate the range of possibilities and occurrences.



## GUIDE TO OUTLINE OF THE TEXT

The purpose of this outline is to aid the reader in following the major patterns of the Synopsis, and to permit ready reference to any large section. Only the beginning page of each section is indicated. Certain sections of the main text which indicate relationship of taxemes or conditioning factors are omitted. Only those sections showing constituent elements are included. The section headings are the same as those in the complete outline given in the text.

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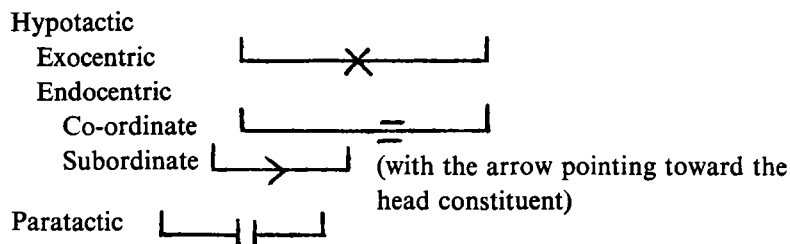
## OUTLINE OF STRUCTURES

The principal constructions in English are introduced in this chapter by means of a series of diagrams, so arranged as to constitute an "outline of English structure", in order that the reader may understand more readily some of the essential features of English syntactic structure and follow the detailed analyses of these constructions in subsequent chapters.

The order of constructions is not exactly that followed in the text. Rather, they are so grouped as to provide what seems to be maximum intelligibility. Page references indicate the position in the text of full analyses. Since at each stage the outline indicates both immediate constituents, there is some degree of overlapping and repetition; these, however, serve to make the statements to which they refer in the text more adequately understood. In treating the constructions of highest rank, very simple components were chosen, in order not to complicate the picture unduly by introducing constructions which are described in detail in the text.

In a few instances the examples given here have more components than those in the text, and in others they include more components than are required to identify the immediate constituents in question. The additional components are then included in parentheses, but the structural relations are so drawn that the relation of the construction to the immediately higher structural rank (or ranks) can be seen.

In addition to the usual set of lines used to show relationships between immediate constituents, an additional set of symbols has been employed to mark exocentric, endocentric, and paratactic relationships:



Under paratactic constructions no attempt is made to distinguish between (a) appositive, (b) duplicative, and (c) associative types of parataxis, since the constructions are not numerous and the relationships are usually quite evident.

Some brief explanation may be required for certain types of subordinate endocentric relationships, namely, the attributives to transitive and equational verbs. All regular predicate constructions (there are a few minor types not possessing verb heads) have verbs as the indispensable component, and the additional constituents are structurally “attributive” to these verbs (though they do not “modify” the verb in the same way that adjectives seem to modify noun heads). The following series indicates the structural relevance of the verb head.

He ran.

He ran away.

The cow ran dry.

He ran the mill.

We may describe the equational verb with its equated attributive (e.g. *was good*) and the transitive verb with its objects, including both direct and indirect (e.g. *hit the man* and *gave him a quarter*), as being structurally equivalent to an intransitive verb, with or without attributives. The indispensable and head constituents of such expressions are verbs, and the attributives should be regarded as being endocentrically subordinate to these heads.

It is important to note that the so-called “predicate nominative” (here described as an “equated attributive”) is not structurally attributive to the subject (even though the words in question may semantically modify the subject); for a verb plus equated attributive may occur entirely without a specific subject, e.g. *To be good is a dubious advantage in some circumstances*, in which the verb expression *to be* is followed by the equated attributive *good* without a subject constituent.

The illustrated List of Constructions follows.

### *List of Constructions*

#### I. MAJOR SENTENCE TYPES (pp. 66-165)

##### A. Actor-action (pp. 66-130)

##### 1. Transitive (pp. 66-126)