

SYNTAX: THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF SENTENCE FORMATION IN ENGLISH STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of syntax as a core component of English grammar, focusing on its role in sentence formation and linguistic coherence. Syntax governs how words are structured and ordered within a sentence, enabling clear communication and proper understanding. The paper outlines key syntactic rules in English, including sentence structure, word order, and subject-verb agreement. It also highlights the importance of syntax in language acquisition and communication. By understanding syntactic patterns, learners can improve both their written and spoken English skills. This study emphasizes that mastering syntax is vital for achieving linguistic accuracy and fluency.

Keywords: Syntax, sentence structure, English grammar, subject-verb agreement, word order, language learning, sentence formation, syntactic rules, fluency, linguistic accuracy

INTRODUCTION

Syntax is one of the essential branches of linguistics that studies the structure of sentences and the relationships between words within them. In English, syntax refers to the set of rules that govern how words are arranged to form meaningful and grammatically correct sentences. A solid understanding of syntax not only helps language learners speak and write more effectively but also enhances their ability to comprehend complex texts and ideas. This paper explores the definition, rules, and significance of syntax in English, along with its role in language learning.

1. What is Syntax?

Syntax is derived from the Greek word *syntaxis*, meaning “arrangement” or “ordering together.” In linguistics, it specifically refers to the rules and principles that dictate how words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. Unlike vocabulary, which deals with the meaning of words, syntax focuses on structure. A sentence may contain correct words, but without proper syntax, its meaning may become unclear or even nonsensical. For instance, while the sentence “The cat chased the mouse” is clear and grammatically correct, reversing it to “The mouse the cat chased” introduces ambiguity and breaks the standard word order.

2. The Rules of English Syntax

English typically follows a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) structure. For example:

Subject – “The boy”

Verb – “kicked”

Object – “the ball”

So, the complete sentence reads: The boy kicked the ball.

English syntax also includes rules about adjective placement (before nouns), adverb positioning (before or after verbs), prepositional phrases, and relative clauses.

Additionally, proper sentence structure includes the correct use of conjunctions, punctuation, and subordination.

Clauses play a key role in syntax:

- Independent clauses express complete ideas.
- Dependent clauses rely on main clauses and often begin with subordinating conjunctions like because, although, or when.

3. Sentence Types and Word Order

English has four main sentence types: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory. Each of these requires different syntactic constructions. For example:

- Declarative: She studies every night.
- Interrogative: Does she study every night?
- Imperative: Study every night!
- Exclamatory: What a hard-working student she is!

Word order in English is relatively fixed compared to other languages. Changing the word order often changes the meaning or makes the sentence grammatically incorrect. For example, “John loves Mary” is not the same as “Mary loves John.” Word order also plays a vital role in emphasis and focus, particularly in formal or poetic writing.

4. Syntactic Agreement

Agreement is another critical aspect of syntax. Subject-verb agreement ensures that the verb matches the subject in number and person. For example:

- He runs every morning. (singular subject and verb)
- They run every morning. (plural subject and verb)

Mistakes in agreement can make sentences sound awkward or incorrect. Pronoun-antecedent agreement is also important; pronouns must agree with the nouns they replace in number and gender. For instance: “Every student must bring his or her textbook.”

5. The Importance of Syntax in Language Learning

For English language learners, mastering syntax is essential for fluency and comprehension. Syntax helps learners understand how to put words together in a logical and correct order. It also aids in reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and spoken clarity. Many errors made by second-language learners stem from syntactic misunderstanding rather than vocabulary limitations. Activities such as sentence transformation, sentence diagramming, and role-playing dialogues can significantly help students internalize English syntax. Teachers should place special emphasis on syntactic patterns in everyday communication and academic writing.

CONCLUSION

Syntax is a central pillar of language structure. It governs how words and phrases are organized to produce coherent, meaningful sentences. In English, the rules of syntax ensure effective communication and understanding. For learners, syntax provides a framework to build correct and clear expressions. As such, a deep understanding of English syntax is not just an academic goal but a practical necessity for successful language acquisition.

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