Syntax

• The study of sentence construction: how words are put together to form phrases and sentences
• Human-specific aspect of language

Recursion

• Syntax is fun.
• John thinks that syntax is fun.
• Mary suspects that John thinks that syntax is fun.
• Sue knows that Mary suspects that John thinks that syntax is fun.
  ...

Recursion

• My older brother’s wife’s father was the voice of Nemo’s dad.
• Audrey Wood’s The Napping House

And on that cat, there is a mouse
A slumbering mouse
On a snoozing cat
On a dozing dog
On a dreaming child
On a snoring granny
On a cozy bed
In a napping house, where everyone is sleeping.

Syntax

• Is syntax a study of grammar?
• Prescriptive grammar
  – Don’t say, “I ain’t do nothing wrong.”
  – Avoid split infinitives: “He is made to quickly go.”
• Grammar: principles about the sound system, the form of words, phrases and sentences, etc.
  – How to produce and interpret sentences
• So, syntax is a part of grammar.
Two opposing views

- **Structuralism**
  Chomsky: A grammar is a model (= systematic description) of those linguistic abilities of native speakers of a language which enable them to speak and understand their language fluently.
  (Radford 1988)
  – Competence vs. Performance

- **Functionalism**
  Givón: It is through language use that language is acquired, and grammar is shaped or changed.
  – “…The functional approach to grammar is founded on the assumption that grammar…is adaptively motivated and thus in principle non-arbitrary…”

**Linguistic typology**

- Cross-linguistic diversity and universals
- Linguistic universals: common properties that all languages have
- What types of construction are possible and what types are impossible in the world’s languages
- Factors that constrain diversity

**Grammar**

- Native speaker’s intuition
  – Able to tell whether a sentence is ‘well-formed’
  – Able to tell whether a sentence has a certain structure
- Well-formed vs. ill-formed
- Grammatical vs. ungrammatical
- Acceptable vs. unacceptable
Native speaker’s intuition

• Intuitions about syntactic well-formedness
  I gave a cat to her.
  I gave her a cat.
  *I gave a cat her.
  ฉันให้แมวกับเขา
  ให้แมวเขา
  *ให้เขาแมว

Syntactic ill-formedness

• Pragmatically and semantically anomalous sentence
  John killed the stone.
  John killed Mary, but she didn’t die.
  Killed Mary John.
  Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

Native speaker’s intuition

• Intuitions about syntactic structure
  – Know which words go with other words
  สายสมรใส่เสื้อสวยมาก
  You could not go to her party.

Syntactic rule

• Structure-independent rule
  You are watching TV. Are you watching TV?
  Pat will come to the party. Will Pat come to the party?
  I must go. Must I go?
  The president will come to the party.
  *President the will come to the party?
  Move the 2nd word in a sentence in front of the first word.
Syntactic rule

• All grammatical rules are structure-dependent.

• NP-AUX inversion: Invert a noun phrase (NP) with an immediately following auxiliary verb (AUX)

• Must know syntactic structure and grammatical categories

What does syntax express?

• Word order
  – Basic word order: SVO (English, Thai), SOV (Japanese, Korean), VSO (Welsh), VOS, OVS, OSV

  Most rap, I don’t like. (Gregory & Michaelis)

  – Marked vs. Unmarked

What does syntax express?

• Structures
  – Embedded clauses
  
  I think [Nancy will come].
  – Recursion

  I ran into a tree.
  I ran into a friend.

What does syntax express?

• Promotion and demotion processes
  – Passive: promotion to subject position, and demotion of old subject (and a change in verb form)

  Pat hit the ball.
  The ball was hit by Pat.