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Phrase

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The chapter should be between 2500 - 3500 words, including references and tables, or around 3-4 printed pages but there is some flexibility with the word count.

Article Title

Phrase

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Abstract

Please provide a 50-100 word synopsis of the article, which will be used to summarise the work when presented online.

In linguistics, the term **phrase** is used to refer to **a group of words acting together as a unit**. Groups of words can form a unit with respect to different properties: their **meaning** (PHRASAL COLLOCATIONS), their **intonational contour** (INTONATIONAL PHRASES) or their **structural properties** (SYNTACTIC PHRASES). The different types of phrases can be orthogonal to each other; for example a phrasal collocation need not coincide with an intonational phrase, or with a syntactic phrase. **Phrase structure grammars** are models of constituent structure that rely on syntactic phrases as primary building blocks.

Teaching Slide (optional)

This should be a single, concise, pictorial, and visual summary of the main findings of the article.

Keywords

Idiom, intonational phrase, phrasal verb, phraseology, phrase structure grammar, syntax

Key points

Please provide a short, bulleted list of key point or objectives for the article

- The term **phrase** in linguistics is used to refer to **a group of words acting together as a unit**.
- The criteria used to group words together as a unit can be of different types: semantic, prosodic and syntactic.
- Semantic phrases are groups of words with an associated meaning that are fixed in the sense that they do not freely permit structural modifications such as permutation with synonyms, additional modification or syntactic processes such as questions, passives or relativisation.

- Intonational phrases are stretches of speech that appear under a common intonational contour.
- Syntactic phrases are groups of words that behave as a unit with respect to constituent structure tests (pronominalisation, displacement, coordination).
- Phrase structure grammars are an influential model to represent constituent structure.

Glossary (optional)

Please provide 5-10 glossary entries with brief, dictionary-style definitions for any technical or unfamiliar terms used in the article. Include terms that may be unfamiliar to the average undergraduate. These should be listed alphabetically.

Nomenclature (optional)

List of nomenclature used including all definitions and units.

Units should be expressed in the form ms⁻¹ rather than m/s

Conversion factors for non-SI units should be listed in the Introduction to the article.

Phrase

In linguistics, the term **phrase** is used to refer to **a group of words acting together as a unit**.

This general definition does not specify the criteria used to group words together as a unit. Groups of words can form a unit either with respect to their **meaning**, their **intonational contour** or their **structural properties**. Phrases that act together with respect to their meaning are called more precisely PHRASAL COLLOCATIONS, phrases defined with respect to intonation are INTONATIONAL PHRASES, while phrases defined on the basis of structural properties are SYNTACTIC PHRASES.

Note that these different uses of the term PHRASE are orthogonal to each other. On the one hand, phrasal collocations like the future expression *to be going to* do not form a syntactic phrase or an intonational phrase. On the other hand, a syntactic phrase like *the brown dog* does not form an (unanalyzable) semantic unit as the meaning is compositional: it can be constructed from the meaning of the individual words *the*, *brown* and *dog*. In the following phrasal collocations, intonational phrases, and syntactic phrases are presented separately. The discussion of syntactic phrases includes a brief presentation of phrase structure grammars.

1. Phrasal collocations are fixed expressions containing more than one word. Other terms used for this type of expression are SET PHRASE, IDIOM or PHRASEME. Fixed multi-word expressions pose a challenge for linguistic analysis as their description has to involve syntax (i.e. how the multiple words of the expression are combined) and semantics (the meaning of the multiword expression as a whole). Some cases of phrasal collocations have a non-compositional meaning, i.e. a meaning that is not obtained by composing the meaning of the constituent parts: for example the meaning of *sweet spot* is 'ideal conditions for an activity or purpose' and not derivable from the composition of the meanings of *sweet* and *spot*. Other cases of phrasal collocations are compositional but the combination of their elements is not free several respects. Firstly, the components are fixed or the expression cannot freely be replaced by synonyms (*strong tea* vs. *mighty/powerful tea*; *I worry a great deal* vs. *#I worry*

an enormous deal). Secondly, modifiers – which are generally optional – may not be optional in phrasal collocations. In some cases a modification can be obligatory *I worry a great deal* vs. *#I worry a deal*, while in other cases collocations may bar further modification *kick into the long grass* `postpone' *#kick vigorously into the very long grass*. And finally, certain collocations (*kick the bucket* `die') do not admit syntactic processes such as wh-questions (*Which bucket did he kick?* - literal meaning only), passives (*The bucket was kicked/ His bucket was kicked* - literal meaning only) or relativisation (*The bucket he kicked was unfortunate/ unexpected* - literal meaning only). (see the Entries for COLLOCATION, PHRASEOLOGY and IDIOMS and for details and references).

Phrasal collocations can take different syntactic forms. PHRASAL VERBS combine a verb and one or more particles as in *come in* or *look forward to*. PERIPHRASES express grammatical meaning using a fixed combination of lexical material as in the causative periphrasis *to make + VP: I made him run*. PHRASAL TEMPLATES are sentence length collocation that contain empty slots like *To V or not to V - that is the question* or *A X's gotta do what a X's gotta do*. Phrases that form a unit of meaning can be also be whole sentences as in SAYINGS - also called PROVERBS - *No man is an island*. CATCHPHRASES are expressions that are characteristic of an individual or a story as for example *Elementary, my dear Watson* for Sherlock Holmes or *Hohoho* for Santa Claus, or *May the force be with you* for the Starwars films.

2. Intonational phrases In the study of prosody, INTONATIONAL PHRASES are stretches of speech that appear under a common intonational contour. Metrical phonology and prosodic phonology analyse prosody as the result of phonological constituent structure that has intonational phrases as one of its possible realisations (see Ladd 2008:10 for references and discussion.)

3. Syntactic phrases

Work on the syntax of natural language agrees on the observation that sentences are not simply sequences of words but are structured by grammatical relationships. Dependency grammars analyse the grammatical relationships as dependency relations with some words depending on other words. In contrast, constituency grammars take constituents, i.e. groups of words that behave as a unit with respect to an array of syntactic diagnostics, to be the main building blocks of syntax. This means that the relationships are established at a layer of structure superordinate to the individual words (see Borsley 2019:302 for discussion and illustration). As summarised in Blevins & Sag (2013), for constituent grammars “structure involves a part-whole relationship between elements and a larger superordinate unit” while dependency grammars postulate “an asymmetric dependency relationship between elements at the same level”.

Note that the notion of SYNTACTIC PHRASE is distinct from notion of PHRASE used in school grammar. The school grammar definition distinguishes PHRASES that form a syntactic grouping but cannot stand alone as a sentence from SENTENCES that can stand alone. In the school grammar sense like [*the children*] or [*saw a squirrel*] are phrases while [*The children saw a squirrel*] is a sentence. In contrast with this use of phrase, in many linguistic analyses of syntax, sentences are analysed as syntactic phrases in the sense discussed here.

3.1 Syntactic phrases: constituent structure and dependency relations

Analyses of syntax that rely on the notion of SYNTACTIC PHRASE, generally combine constituent structure with dependency relations within constituents.

The idea that **constituent structure** is the organising principle of linguistic expressions goes back to the IMMEDIATE CONSTITUENT ANALYSIS developed in the Bloomfieldian tradition (see Blevins & Sag 2013 for details). In this view, syntactic structure is organised by means of relationships between superordinate units that can be divided into smaller units, as in Gleason's 1955 formulation:

“The process of analyzing syntax is largely one of finding successive layers of ICs and of immediate constructions, the description of relationships which exist between ICs and the description of those relationships which are not efficiently described in terms of ICs. The last is generally of subsidiary importance; most of the relationships of any great significance are between ICs” (Gleason 1955: 151, apud Blevins & Sag 2013:202)

[IC = immediate constituent]

This process of immediate constituent analysis is illustrated in the following example:

The children saw a squirrel => ICs [*the children*] and [*saw a squirrel*]

saw a squirrel => ICs [*saw*] and [*a squirrel*]

In addition to constituent structure, the analysis of syntactic phrases also includes **dependency information within the constituents**. This is based on the idea that in complex expressions generally a particular word type – called the HEAD of the phrase – is decisive for its syntactic distribution. For example [*ducks*], [*the ducks*] and [*the little ducks*] have very similar syntactic distributions: one analysis capturing this parallelism postulates that the head in these constituents is the noun *ducks* and that the three constituents have in common that they are NOUN PHRASES. In a similar fashion the distribution of the constituents [*run home*] or [*sleep in the garden*] is determined by the fact that their head is a verb (*run* or *sleep*), and in this view both constituents are analysed as VERB PHRASES.

Syntactic theories give different answers to the question whether all linguistic complex expressions can be analysed as headed phrases: Some syntactic frameworks admit headless phrases while others do not (as an example see the discussion of coordination in Borsley 2019). Syntactic frameworks further differ with respect to the inventories of syntactic heads they assume. There is general agreement that the lexical categories noun, verb, adjective and (to a lesser degree) preposition can be heads of corresponding phrases. Differences between frameworks arise in the analysis of grammatical function words like complementisers (*whether*), determiners (*the*), quantifiers (*every*) and auxiliaries (*has*, *is*) that are taken to be heads in some frameworks but not in others. Consequently, syntactic theories differ in whether an expression like [*the ducks*] is analysed as a determiner phrase (DP), headed by the determiner *the* or as a type of noun phrase (NP), headed by the noun *ducks* and modified by a determiner *the* (see Borsley 2019 for examples and discussion).

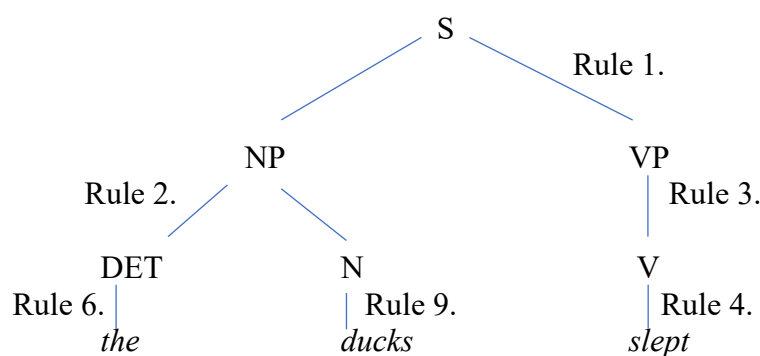
3.2 Phrase structure grammars

Chomsky (1957) showed that PHRASE STRUCTURE GRAMMARS can be applied to the analysis of natural language. A phrase structure grammar is a set of rewrite rules with an initial symbol as in the following example.

Example Phrase structure grammar

- a. Initial symbol: S
- b. Rewrite rules
 - Rule 1. S → NP VP
 - Rule 2. NP → DET N
 - Rule 3. VP → V
 - Rule 4. V → *slept*
 - Rule 5. V → *ran*
 - Rule 6. DET → *the*
 - Rule 7. DET → *some*
 - Rule 8. N → *cats*
 - Rule 9. N → *ducks*

This small phrase structure grammar can generate a small number of sentences. In the example below each rewriting rule from the example grammar allows an unfolding of a further level of structure:



A Rewrite rule in essence gives instructions how to rewrite the element on the left of the arrow. The symbols that do not appear on the left of a rewrite rule are TERMINALS (marked in italics in the example above). They are terminals because there is no rewrite rule that would allow to decompose them further. Rules that introduce terminals are called LEXICAL INSERTION RULES, as they insert lexical items into the structure. In order to account for larger sets of sentences, phrase structure rules need to take into account more information: this includes more terminal elements but also more rewrite rules. For example, to distinguish

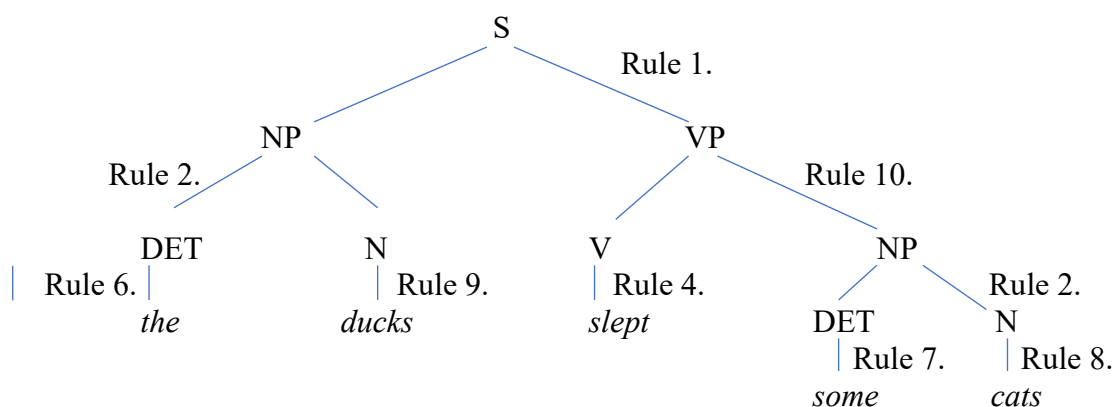
transitive verbs (*the ducks saw the cats*) from intransitive verbs (*the ducks ran*) the grammar minimally has to distinguish verb phrases that only contain a verb without a complement as in Rule 3. (repeated below) from verb phrases that can be rewritten as a verb followed by a nominal complement as in Rule 10:

Rule 3. VP → V

Rule 10. VP → V NP

Rule 10. represents a containment relationship between a syntactic phrase headed by a verb (a verb phrase or VP) and a syntactic phrase headed by a a noun (a noun phrase or NP). These containment relationships between syntactic phrases are an important feature of phrase structure grammars, that distinguish them from dependency grammars.

At the same time, a grammar containing richer rule system needs to be constrained to rule out the generation of ungrammatical sentences like *#the ducks slept some cats*:



Different models of syntax developed different mechanisms to restrict possible phrase structures (see Blevins & Sag 2013 for discussion).

The structures generated by phrase structure grammars can be interpreted in two main ways. On the DERIVATIONAL interpretation of phrase structure, syntax is built bottom up: syntactic rules are assembly instructions that combine smaller units to yield larger syntactic units. On this view the phrase structure of a complex expression charts an incremental derivational process with smaller constituents assembled before they are combined into larger constituents (see Lasnik & Lohndal 2017 for discussion and references). On the alternative interpretation, phrase structure is viewed as REPRESENTATIONAL: phrase structure reflects the constituent structure and the dependencies within a larger linguistic expression but does not imply a temporally ordered assembly process with some parts assembled later than others. In the representational view, phrase structure rules are in effect interpreted as constraints on possible structures (see Blevins & Sag 2013 for discussion and references).

3.3 Beyond phrase structure grammars

The procedure of constituent analysis and the decomposition in phrase structure grammars is geared towards locally adjacent syntactic relationships. However, it was recognised early on that there are syntactic constructions that suggest constituency relationships between non-

adjacent material such as phrasal verbs with separable particles, yes-no questions and non-subject wh-questions illustrated below (see Blevins & Sag 2013 for details).

Wake your friends up. (separable particle)

Did the man come? (yes-no questions)

What did you see? (non-subject wh-questions)

Discontinuous constituents were an important motivation for later additions to simple phrase structure grammars such as TRANSFORMATIONS on phrase markers in TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMARS or enriched feature inventories and constraint-based formulations as in Head-driven phrase structure grammar (HPSG) or Lexical functional grammar (LFG) (see Blevins & Sag 2013 for details).

Conclusion

Phrases provide a level of structure grouping together linguistic elements that are attested independently. Phrases can be established at different levels yielding phrasal collocations, intonational phrases and syntactic phrases.

It is essential to note that the different types of phrases need not coincide. For example a phrasal collocation can cross-cut intonational phrases, or syntactic phrases, and intonational phrases need not coincide with syntactic phrases.

Phrase structure grammars are influential models of constituent structure that share the assumption of syntactic phrases as primary building blocks of syntax. Dependencies between syntactic phrases can be in terms of inclusion relations, an important contrast with dependency grammars.

Further reading

Phrasal collocations Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor 1988 is a foundational work on constructions in syntax. Espinal & Mateu 2019 and Sailer 2013 are overviews with detailed references.

Intonational phrases Ladd (2008) for a classic book-length treatment of intonational phonology, Warren & Calhoun 2021 introduce the key concepts in the study of intonation and the relationship of intonation to other linguistic structure.

Syntactic phrases Borsley (2019), Blevins & Sag 2013 on phrase structure grammars. Dalrymple, Lowe & Mycock 2019 for a discussion of phrase structure in Lexical Functional Grammar.

Entries in this dictionary

For detailed discussion of phrasal collocations see the entries Phraseology, Collocations, Idioms. For a theory that explores the connection between phraseology and syntax see the entry Construction Grammar. For a discussion of a type of phrase structure grammar see the entry Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar.

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