

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

4th Year Linguistics

Main Textbook: The Study of Language, 6th Edition (George Yule, 2017)

Lecture Title: The study of Grammar

Aim: this lecture aims to introduce you to the main schools of grammar

- **Grammar** can be defined as the process of describing the structure of phrases and sentences in such a way that accounts for all the grammatical sequences in a language and rule out all the ungrammatical sequences.
- There are two main approaches to study grammar: the first approach is known as **prescriptive approach** and the second is known as **descriptive approach**.

Prescriptive Approach to Grammar

- The traditional Approach to study grammar, which is prescriptive in nature, focuses on the traditional grammatical categories, such as
 1. parts of speech (also referred to as word classes), so words can be classified into nouns, pronouns , verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles and conjunctions.
 2. agreement with:
 - i. number (singular or plural)
 - ii. person (first, second or third)
 - iii. tense (present or past)
 - iv. voice (active or passive)
 - v. gender (masculine or feminine)
- It is important to distinguish between natural gender and grammatical gender. **Natural gender** is based on sex (male and female), whereas **grammatical gender** is based on the type of noun (masculine and feminine) and is not tied to sex. Note, for instance, how the word window in Arabic (شباك) is considered masculine noun, even though it is in fact inanimate. In this sense, nouns are classified according to their grammatical gender and we have to choose the forms of the articles and adjectives that have “agree with” the gender of the noun used in the sentence.
- Traditional grammarian wanted to develop rules for the “proper” use of English. They believed that the structure of English sentences should be like

the structure of sentences in Latin. The most well-known rules developed by traditional grammarians are:

- i. You must not split an infinitive
- ii. You must not end a sentence with a preposition

Descriptive Approach to Grammar

- Unlike in traditional grammar, in the descriptive approach to grammar we do not force any language into the framework of another. This is mainly because each language has its own logic and, thus, borrowing rules from another language is not necessarily useful in describing the language we want to study.
- Therefore, in descriptive approaches to grammar we describe the regular structures of the language we want to study as they are used, not according to some view of how it should be used.
- One method of descriptive approach is called **structural analysis** and its main concern is to investigate the distribution of forms in a language. The method involves the use of “**test frames**” which can be sentences with empty slots in them to identify all the forms that can fill these slots.
- In the traditional Latin-influenced analysis, pronouns were described as “words used in place of nouns.” with the use of test-frame, we can now see that it is more accurate to say that pronouns are used in place of noun phrases (not just nouns). By developing a set of test-frames of this type and discovering which forms fit the slots in the test-frames, we can produce a description of (at least some) aspects of the sentence structures of a language.
- Another method of descriptive approach is called **constituent analysis**. This method is designed to show how small constituents (or components) go together to form larger constituents. Constituent analysis can be done by using tables (see figure 1 below) or labeled and bracketed sentences (see figure 2 below).

An	old	man	brought	a	shotgun	to	the	wedding

Figure 1

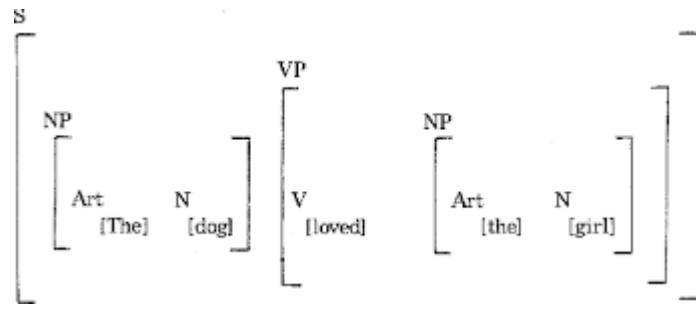


Figure 2