

Structural Analysis of the English Sentence

Abdullah CAN



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Abdullah CAN

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While teaching various courses in English Language Teaching and Educational Sciences departments of the Education Faculty at Bursa Uludağ University, he also worked for administrative groups organized to accredit universities.

He retired voluntarily in 2017 to fulfill his dream of living in a seaside town, and still resides in Mudanya.

He is also the author of the books **SPSS ile Nicel Veri Analizi** (Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS), **İngilizce Öğretmenlerine Türkçe Hikâyeler** (Turkish Stories for English Teachers), **Eğitim mi dediniz?** (Did you mean education?), and **Herkes için kısa, kolay eğitim** (A short introduction to education for everyone).

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FOREWORD

It is a great pleasure to be asked to write the Foreword to this book.

Abdullah and I go back a long way. He was my student in the ELT Department at the Education Faculty of Uludağ University back in the mid-1990s, when the Faculty was located a long way from where it is now. Even then, Abdullah displayed the same thoroughness that still characterizes everything he does, even in retirement. In those days, he would hand out computer printouts before the debates in our Speaking Skills classes before the rest of us knew what even a computer looked like, let alone a printout.

Several years later, Abdullah and I became colleagues at the same Education Faculty, in the place where it is located now, on the main campus. of course, while I remained a mere lecturer with a bachelor's degree and CELTA certificate, Abdullah continued to study and to further his career, so that he became much better qualified, in terms of academic seniority, than I could ever be. However, he still calls me "Sir", which is an indication of the respect that he continues to show me after all these years.

I am very happy to endorse this book, which I am sure will be of great use to both English teachers and linguists alike.

Philip Smith

INTRODUCTION

In this work, I attempt to introduce an approach to analyze the structure of the English language.

With this approach, I mainly intend to provide English teachers with a set of reliable criteria that can be used for the evaluation of structural units from the viewpoint of their correctness.

Most of the time, we judge the grammaticality or correctness of a structural unit by using our “inner criteria”, which is the result of our self-monitoring and self-correction of our own productions (Gattegno, 1976, p. 29). However, this self-awareness is neither objective nor easy to express with a meaning familiar to others. An English teacher should be able to judge the correctness of a structural unit by using objective and reliable criteria, and through terms and explanations that can make the meanings familiar to the learners.

Language teachers deal with grammar; they teach the structure and the rules of the language. On the other hand, a language teacher who believes in the importance of communication pays attention to language functions. For this dual purpose, teachers mostly use sentences, since the essential language unit which embeds the basic language structures and language functions is the sentence. In other words, a sentence is a unit of language in which two crucial aspects of language, “form” and “function”, overlap. For this reason, this book aims to show English teachers **what the structural units of a sentence are, and the rules that regulate syntactic behaviours of these units in the sentence structure**. A detailed structural analysis of the sentence seems to be a good way to realize the main aim of the book.

Our knowledge about a language can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, we know the rules of the language that govern the way it works, either explicitly or implicitly. On the other hand, we can make use of what we know about the language to produce and to understand it. The first one is generally called “competency”, and the latter is “performance”. Today it is widely accepted that in language instruction, from the viewpoint of learners, “performance” gets more attention. Still, from the perspectives of language teachers, “competency” constitutes a significant part of their professional background of language teaching, since a deep understanding of how a language works might enable them to find solutions to some specific language teaching problems. Moreover, except young learners, there may be analytical learners who have some questions about the rules of language, and instead of a response such as “it is a rule”, a response which says “this is the rule” may facilitate the learning of the language.

This book is not a general language teaching / learning book. This book is intended as a tool for language teachers who would like to know and explain how language works and for those who need to judge the structural correctness of a language structure with reliable and objective criteria. This work can be considered to be a short book for grammatical awareness.

To understand how something works, we generally try to divide it into its components to see how the smaller parts behave, what their functions are, and what type of interconnections or relationships there are among them. This process is simply called “analyzing something”.

Following the approach suggested by Flor Aarts and Jan Aarts (1982), this book suggests a multi-dimensional sentence analysis which includes both sentence functions such as subject, object, etc., and their realizations such as noun phrase, adjective phrase, etc. This approach interconnects functional analysis with categorical analysis. I show that one more dimension can be added to the analysis with the semantic roles of the structural units. Moreover, I expand the analyses of some structural patterns, such as discontinuous modifiers, which consist of different phrase types. In the structural analysis, I use the same terminology that Aarts and Aarts used. However, in some cases, I have needed to add some additional terms such as “postpositional phrase” or “determinative group”. Most of the sentences that constitute the examples of structures are quoted from Aarts and Aarts.

In the literature, customarily, the English language is analyzed within four levels by the followers of structural linguistics, and each one is referred to as a linguistic level. These levels are:

- 1-Sound level (phonetics and phonology, which deals with the sound system)
- 2-Morphological level (morphology, which deals with word structure)
- 3-Syntactic level (syntax, which deals with sentence or phrase structure)
- 4-Semantic level (semantics, which deals with meaning and usage)

In this work, although there are interdependencies between the levels, I focus on an analysis of the English language from the morphological level to the syntactic level due to the goals I have set. When the units of analysis are considered from this perspective, the following hierarchical table of units emerges:

- 1-Morphemes, 2-Words, 3-Phrases, and 4-Clauses (or sentences)

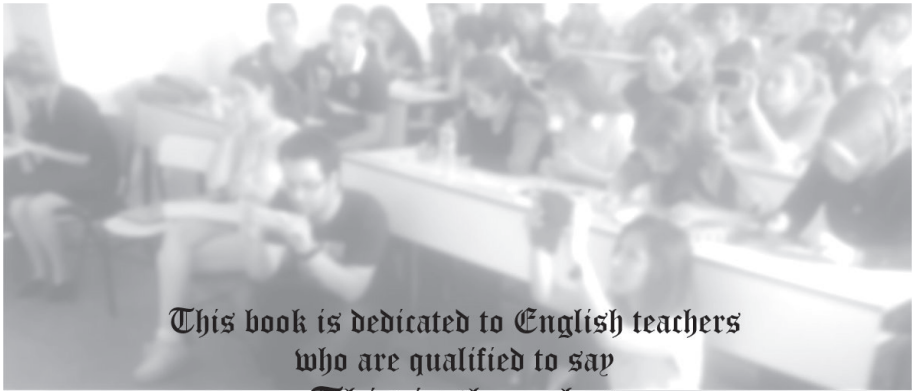
With the examples of phrases that can include clauses within their internal structures, some deviations from this hierarchy are shown as well.

I have taught the topics within this book to English teacher candidates for many years and, at first, some teacher candidates and even a few colleagues found them difficult and showed resistance. However, according to my periodic surveys on the subject, in the end, most of the teacher candidates confessed that they had learned those details for the first time from this perspective and that they found the lectures beneficial and useful. With this book, I am also trying to share what I have accumulated together with those teacher candidates who would like to deal with the structure of the English language. of course, the final evaluation of this work will be made by readers with their discussions and contributions in the future.

For this book, I owe much to my university teachers, later colleagues of mine, **Dr. Mehmet Zaman**, who introduced me to those aspects of the language and encouraged me in my studies in that way, and **Philip Smith**, who proofread and checked the whole book. I would also like to thank Pegem Academy Publishing for making this book available to those who are interested in the subject.

Without the unconditional love and support of my wife **Seyhan** and my son **Oguzhan**, I would not be writing these lines. **Any remaining mistakes and inadequacies in this work are my own.**

Dr. Abdullah Can

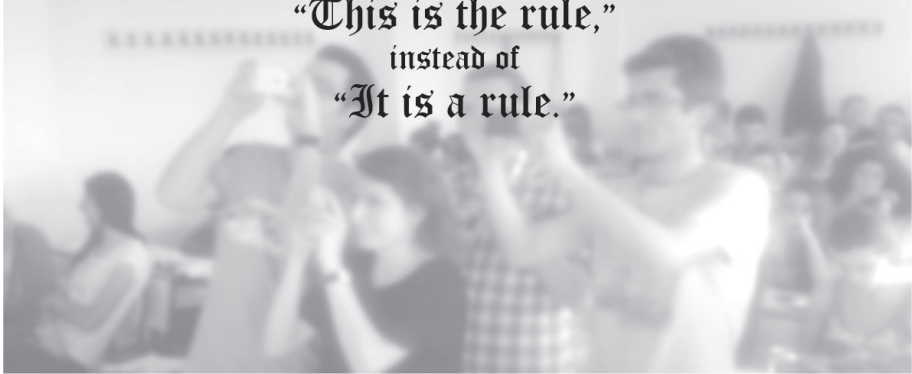


This book is dedicated to English teachers
who are qualified to say

“This is the rule,”

instead of

“It is a rule.”



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CHAPTER 1.

MORPHEMES: BUILDING BLOCKS OF WRITTEN WORDS

A morpheme, by definition, is **the smallest** unit of the written (spelt) language, which has either a **meaning** or a **function**.

Generally, morphemes are considered as the “**building blocks**” of written words, and each block should have either a meaning or a function. In other words, if a written word is divided into its smallest components in such a way that each component should have either a meaning or a function, then in that case, each remaining component can be considered to be a morpheme.

For example, when we consider the word “unacceptable” from this viewpoint, this word can be divided into three indivisible building blocks (**un-accept-able**). Each block has either a meaning or a function. The following three parts are the morphemes that compose the word “unacceptable”:

un: This block does not have any meaning but has a grammatical function which negates (gives negative meaning to) the following item.

accept: This block is a verb which has a meaning (Its meaning is “to take or receive (something offered) with approval”)

able: This block does not have any meaning, either, but it has a grammatical function, which is converting a verb into an adjective by changing its word class.

As Katamba (1993, p.20) argues, lego provides a useful analogy for morphemes. According to his view, morphemes can be compared to pieces of lego that can be used again and again as building blocks of words to form many new words. When we are constructing something new with legos, due to the forms of the legos, each lego fits into another accurately and there remains no piece that does not fit into another appropriately. However, when the case is forming new words with morphemes, in the construction process, we may see slight differences in comparison with forming something new with legos.

We both write and say words following two different fashions from different levels of analysis. On the one hand, we consider speech sounds and syllables of the sound system. On the other hand, we consider morphemes. At this stage, it is important to avoid confusing morphemes (or building blocks of words) with syllables¹. Since syllables and morphemes do not overlap exactly, from time to time, we need to make some modifications in the structure of morphemes when we are forming words by using morphemes as building blocks of words, due to the phonological issues. In other words, if we consider the phonology of language with the morphemic structure at the same time, morphemes may not behave as if they were legos, and in such cases, we need to make some changes to the structure of the morphemes. From the viewpoint of the level of analysis, this is the result of the interaction between the sound level and morphological level. As the result of this interaction, we generally make three types of modifications to the structures of the morphemes within the words, as seen in the following examples (in which some adjectives are formed by simply adding the typical adjective-forming morpheme “-al” to nouns):

1- We may **remove** some part of the morpheme:

To form the adjective “**medicinal**” (medicine+al→medicin(e) + al→medicin-al→**medicinal**)

To form the adjective “**tribal**” (tribe+al→trib(e) + al→trib-al→**tribal**)

2- We may **change** some part of the morpheme:

To form the adjective “**sensual**” (sense+al→sens (e)→(u) + al→sens(u)-al→**sensual**)

To form the adjective “**colonial**” (colony+al→colon (y)→(i) + al→colon(i)-al→**colonial**)

1 Syllables are groupings of sounds for the purpose of articulation, while morphemes are the smallest units of meaning or grammatical function. For example, the word “camera” has three syllables [kæ-mə-rə/] but has only one morpheme (that is, it is impossible to divide the word “camera” into its smallest units that each unit has either meaning or grammatical function). On the other hand, the word “books” has one syllable [buks/], but has two morphemes in its structure (that is, “book” a noun that has a meaning of printed sheets of paper, and “-s” which has a grammatical function that refers to the fact that the preceding item is in its plural form.)