

Syntax

Etymology of syntax (Origin of SYNTAX)

c. 1600, from French *syntaxe* (16c.) and directly from Late Latin *syntaxis*, from Greek *syntaxis* "a putting together or in order, arrangement, a grammatical construction," from stem of *syntassein* "put in order," from *syn-* "together" (see [syn-](#)) + *tassein* "arrange" (see [tactics](#)).
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php>.

Date: 1500-1600

Definition of syntax

Syntax deals with the arrangement of words in sentences, clauses, and phrases, and the study of the formation of sentences and the relationship of their component parts.

In English, the main device for showing this relationship is word order; for example, "The boy loves his dog" follows standard subject-verb-object SVO word order, and switching the order of such a sentence would change the meaning or make the sentence meaningless. Word order is much more flexible in languages such as Latin, in which word endings indicate the case of a noun or adjective; such inflections make it unnecessary to rely on word order to indicate a word's function in the sentence. (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syntax>)

Syntactic Changes in English

The loss of case endings in English occurred together with changes in the rules of syntax, which constrained word order more than it had been. In Old English, word order was freer because the case endings alone disclosed the thematic or meaning relation in a sentence. Thus, the following sentences

were all grammatical in Old English, and all meant "The man slew the king":

Se man sloh þone kyning.

þone kyning sloh se man.

Se man þone kyning sloh.

þone kyning se man sloh.

Sloh se man þone kyning.

Sloh þone kyning se man.

Se was a definite article used only with the subject noun, and *þone* was the definite article used only with the object noun. The syntactic rules of Modern English permit less variation in word order.

Change in the form and order of words--is . . . sometimes described as 'an elusive process as compared to [sound change](#).' Its apparently puzzling nature is partly due to its variety. The behaviour of verbs can alter. [Middle English](#) *I kan a noble tale* 'I know a fine story' reveals that *can* could once be used as a [main verb](#) with a [direct object](#).

English is divided into three historical forms:

Old English: 449-1100

Middle English: 1100-1500

Modern English: 1500-present

(Fromkin and Rodman, *An Introduction to Language*)

Parts of a sentence

Subject and predicate (A University Grammar of English 2.2 p. 10)

In order to state general rules about the construction of sentences, it is constantly necessary to refer to smaller units than the sentence itself. The smaller units are SUBJECT and PREDICATE.

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Predicate</u>
John	carefully searched the room
The girl	is now a student at a large university
His brother	grew happier gradually
It	rained steadily all day
He	had given the girl an apple
They	make him the chair man every year
That the world is round	is a fact.

Operator, Auxiliary and Predication 2.3 *A university grammar of English page 11*

In contrast with the subject, there are few generalizations that we can usefully make about the predicate since it tends to be a more complex and heterogeneous unit. We need to subdivide it into its elements or constituents. One division has already been suggested; this distinguishes AUXILIARY or OPERATOR from what we may call the PREDICATION.

1. Statement sentences:

	<u>Predicate</u>	
<u>Subject</u>	<u>Auxiliary as operator</u>	<u>Predication</u>
He	had	given the girl an apple.
I	'm	enjoying the party.
I	have	been teaching here for five years.

2. Interrogative sentences:

	<u>Predicate</u>	
<u>Auxiliary as operator</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Predication</u>
<i>Had</i>	he	given the girl an apple?
<i>Are</i>	you	enjoying the party?
<i>Have</i>	you	been teaching here for five years?

Range of operators: See *A University Grammar of English* 2.4 page 12

Sentence Elements: See *A University Grammar of English*, 2.5 pages 12&13

Exercise on sentence elements

Identify the sentence elements of the following:

1. The children are in bed.
2. They named their son John.
3. The book was not expensive.
4. The assumption is that things will improve.
5. Jane made coffee while the guests were finishing their dessert.
6. The noise in the school makes learning difficult.
7. No one knows why she is afraid of lizards.
8. I sold one customer five pairs of shoes yesterday.
9. My uncle buys and sells antiques for a living.
10. Are you feeling ill?
11. In 1603 James became King of England.
12. Where the candy bar is hidden remains a mystery.