

Let us see how linguistic elements work from single nucleus to a group and to the unit..

Elements of language:

W1 + W2 + W3 + W4 + W5

Groups of elements:

the + boy + kicks + the + ball

Units of language

The + boy + kicks + the + ball
Det N V Det N

Higher Units of language

Subject + Verb + Object

Different organizational levels

Words in linear order = word level



G.C. for Constituents = formal level



Subj; Obj & Verb = Notional level



Subj-Nom Obj-Acc = Categorical level



Agent; patient; theme = relational level



Elements of human language

Linear arrangement of words in a sentence...

W1 + W2 + W3 + W4 + W5

With very few exceptions (Polysynthetic languages), most human languages arrange their words in order to produce sentences in linear order.

This helps the natives to produce or pronounce these elements/atoms of language easily.

It also defuses the Encoding/Decoding power into it as it becomes the part of the communication.

This is the only possible way to make one string of words different from others with regard to the meaning(s).¹¹

It is said that the languages of world would have been so naïve and simple if the linear ordering were the only possibility for languages to arrange their elements.

The utterances could have been very short and simple and easy to understand and acquire.

However, ideas expressed by this kind of language could have been limited.

Meaning, the human language could also have been very similar to that of many animal languages with regard to form and functions.

Thankfully, human languages have a special feature called 'constituent-ship' that non-human languages do not seem to have.

And even if any non-human language has it, this feature is not as developed as it is in human languages.

Power of Constituent

Constituent-ship means that linguistic elements must 'group together' or 'merge' (Chomsky1995) in discourse.

This is a fact that all language users unconsciously know about their mother tongue. (innateness hypothesis).

So, the 'grouping together' or 'merging' the elements into a sentence can be done in several ways.

And each way is uniquely grounded in some method or principle which is similar across the board.

For example:

a. [good girls] and boys]] or [good[girls and boys]

Hierarchical Structure

HS means that linguistic elements, having merged to one another or grouped together, must further 'nest' with one another like a spider web.

HS is good because it makes human life easier and simpler.

This has been proven by psychological experiments as well as common sense that human mind can ONLY deal with a small number of things at a time.

The number of things, human mind can deal with at one time, has been suggested to 'from four to six' at the most (Payne 2006).

Take an example of phone no. 9868608884, if this is given to us when we did not have anything to write it down, what would we do?

a. Repeat it many times, so that we remember it for quite some time.

An example of 'short-term memory to long/permanent memory' also known as 'over-learning'.

b. We would unconsciously, however according to our idiosyncratic style/convenience, 'group' or 'clump' the No. into two, or more parts.

When we memorize these groups in a series like this, we convert the 'groups' into 'units' to ease our storage process in memory.

Once they become 'units', we group them again and again to make higher and higher units with some unique embedded structure.

Hierarchical Structure in languages is a natural consequence of the same fact of human cognition, where elements are grouped into parts and parts into units and units into bigger units and so forth ..

Rule governed/grammaticality

As we saw that 'human language' is nothing but a matter of organizing the elements in different layers for the purpose of contextual requirement.

Every language has some or other 'conventionalized pattern or rules' that must be obeyed in terms of constructing linguistic elements into units.

Human mind seems to compartmentalize elements of language into different sets for the sake of comfortable retrieval of these elements at need.

The need is the context when we want different items/elements to clump together to make communication possible.

In grouping or clumping the elements together human mind makes use of 'predictability' over randomness in terms of the possibility of occurrence of next element.

Linguistic elements higher than words

If we want to examine the linguistic elements responsible for the production of human communication for the level that is higher than a word, we must evaluate the ‘phrases’ and their processes of being formed.

Like a word(i.e. sound/group of sounds), a phrase can be made of either a word or a group of words.

When it is just one word, things are easy, however, when there is more than a word, we have to examine the ways these words are related to one another.

It is but necessary that one of words has to act a head, and others will be its dependents.

This brings to us a very useful classification of linguistic elements as ‘head and dependent’.

If we know what a ‘head’ is, anything which is not that will be dependents anyway..