

FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SYNTACTIC RELATIONS IN ENGLISH: CONTEMPORARY LINGUISTIC PARADIGMS AND COGNITIVE APPROACHES

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Abstract

This paper presents the functional-semantic analysis of syntactic relations in the English language. Moving beyond the limitations of traditional structural syntax, the study examines the semantic organization, cognitive mechanisms, and communicative functions of sentence constituents and syntactic structures. Drawing upon M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, as well as the cognitive-semantic models developed by Charles J. Fillmore and Ronald W. Langacker, the article provides a scholarly analysis of the role of syntactic units in the construction and interpretation of meaning. Particular attention is given to the interaction between syntactic structure, semantic representation, cognitive conceptualization, and communicative intention. The findings contribute to contemporary linguistic theory and may also serve as a theoretical and methodological basis for teaching English grammar in higher education.

Keywords: Syntactic relations, functional-semantic analysis, Systemic Functional Grammar, cognitive syntax, transitivity system, proposition.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary linguistics, the concepts of syntactic connection and syntactic relation are not always clearly distinguished; in some linguistic studies, the two terms are used interchangeably or treated as semantically overlapping notions.

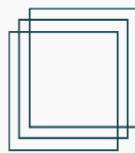
Within the Russian linguistic tradition, for instance, scholars commonly classify syntactic connection into agreement, government, and adjacency. Other scholars, however, constrain these categories primarily to relations within word combinations (phrases).

In a number of grammatical frameworks, the components of a phrase are considered to be connected through morphological forms of words, function words, intonation, and word order. Such structural dependencies are commonly classified in terms of agreement, government, and adjacency, each of which represents a particular mechanism through which syntactic constituents are formally and functionally integrated.

Contemporary Uzbek grammar, in turn, increasingly emphasizes the conceptual distinction between syntactic connections and syntactic relations. According to this approach, syntactic connection refers to the grammatical linkage established between words within a phrase or sentence, as well as between sentences within discourse.

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Syntactic relation, by contrast, concerns the grammatical meaning and functional role that one word or sentence assumes in relation to another within a phrase, sentence, or broader discourse structure.

This distinction is particularly evident in structures containing vocatives and parentheticals. Although such elements may not enter into a direct syntactic connection with any constituent of the core sentence, they nevertheless perform a specific syntactic and communicative function by expressing a particular type of syntactic relation. Thus, syntactic structure cannot be adequately understood solely in terms of formal grammatical dependencies; it must also be examined through the functional, semantic, and communicative roles assumed by individual constituents within the overall utterance.

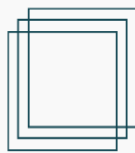
From a contemporary functional-semantic perspective, therefore, syntactic relations constitute more than formal links between linguistic units. They reflect the interaction of grammatical structure, semantic interpretation, discourse organization, and communicative intention. This broader perspective provides a theoretical basis for reconsidering syntactic relations within modern linguistic paradigms and for integrating structural, functional, semantic, and cognitive dimensions into the analysis of English syntax.

In contemporary linguistics, syntax is no longer regarded merely as a set of rules governing the formal combination of words; rather, it is increasingly conceptualized as a dynamic and multidimensional system that reflects the structures of human cognition and the communicative needs of language users. Although traditional grammar primarily classifies syntactic relations according to formal criteria, particularly morphological and positional features, such an approach is insufficient to fully account for the semantic depth and functional complexity underlying linguistic structures.

A functional-semantic analysis of syntactic relations requires an integrated approach that moves from form to meaning and from meaning to its discursive realization. Such an approach makes it possible to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interrelationships among agentivity, patientivity, modality, and information structure, particularly the organization of information in terms of theme and rheme, within English syntax. From this perspective, syntactic structures are interpreted not merely as formal configurations but as meaningful linguistic constructions shaped by the interaction of grammatical organization, semantic conceptualization, cognitive processes, and communicative intentions.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theoretical and methodological framework of the present study is grounded in three major scholarly paradigms that have significantly shaped contemporary approaches to syntax, semantics, and cognition.



1. M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)

Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system in which grammatical structures are intrinsically related to meaning and communicative purpose. From this perspective, the clause is not merely a formal syntactic configuration but a multifunctional linguistic unit that simultaneously realizes three fundamental metafunctions: the ideational metafunction, through which experience and states of affairs are represented; the interpersonal metafunction, through which social relations, attitudes, and communicative roles are enacted; and the textual metafunction, through which linguistic resources are organized into coherent and contextually appropriate discourse.

This theoretical perspective provides an important basis for examining syntactic relations not only in terms of their formal organization but also in relation to the semantic and communicative functions they perform in discourse.

2. Charles Fillmore's Case Grammar and the Theory of Semantic Roles

The Case Grammar developed by Charles J. Fillmore, together with subsequent developments in the theory of semantic roles, makes it possible to identify the semantic roles underlying syntactic positions such as the subject and object. In this framework, syntactic constituents are interpreted in relation to the participants involved in the situation or event represented by a clause. Such semantic roles as Agent, Patient, Instrument, and Experiencer provide a means of explaining how syntactic configurations encode different types of semantic participation and event structure.

This approach is particularly relevant to the functional-semantic analysis of English syntax, since it demonstrates that grammatical functions cannot always be adequately explained through formal syntactic criteria alone; rather, they are closely associated with the semantic roles assigned to the participants of a predicated situation.

3. R. W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar

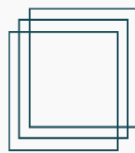
Ronald W. Langacker's Cognitive Grammar approaches syntactic structures as manifestations of conceptualization, that is, as linguistic representations of how human beings perceive, construe, organize, and mentally represent aspects of reality. Within this framework, grammar is not treated as an autonomous formal system but as an integral component of general cognitive processes.

From a cognitive-grammatical perspective, the relationship between syntactic form and semantic structure is therefore motivated by the way a conceptualizer construes a particular situation. Differences in syntactic organization may consequently reflect differences in perspective, profiling, prominence, and the distribution of conceptual attention.

In addition to these major theoretical paradigms, significant contributions to the functional-syntactic analysis of English sentence structures, as well as to the componential and syntacticeme-based analysis of syntactic units, have been made by A.

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M. Mukhin, L. I. Yurevich, U. U. Usmanov, Z. J. Jabborov, R. E. Kichmov, Sh. S. Ashurov, D. T. Kubaysinova, E. B. Aristova, M. R. Jalilbekova, M. S. Kayumova, and other scholars.

Within Uzbek linguistic scholarship, A. G'ulomov and M. Asqarov distinguish two principal types of syntactic connection between constituents: predicative and non-predicative relations. According to their approach, a predicative relation gives rise to a sentence, whereas a non-predicative relation forms a phrase. This distinction provides a valuable foundation for understanding the hierarchical organization of syntactic structures.

Their claim that a sentence centers upon the subject–predicate relation holds true as the foundation of predication. However, such an interpretation leaves insufficiently explored the syntactic mechanisms through which other constituents, apart from the subject and predicate, participate in the organization of the sentence.

The present study therefore extends the analysis beyond the subject–predicate relationship by examining other syntactic units within the structure of the sentence at the level of phrase organization. In this context, the relations between constituents may be interpreted in terms of attributive, objective, and other types of syntactic-semantic relations. Such an extended perspective makes it possible to move from a predominantly formal description of syntactic dependency toward a more comprehensive account of the interaction between syntactic structure, semantic roles, conceptualization, and communicative function.

Accordingly, the methodological framework adopted in this study integrates structural, functional-semantic, and cognitive approaches. This integration enables syntactic relations in English to be examined as multidimensional phenomena in which formal organization, semantic interpretation, cognitive construal, and discourse-level communicative function operate in an interconnected manner.

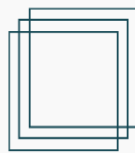
METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

It is well established that, in traditional grammatical frameworks, syntactic analysis of the sentence is primarily conducted by distinguishing between principal and secondary sentence constituents. Within such a constituent-based approach, however, syntactic relations themselves are not always explicitly accounted for, and a clear distinction between syntactically separable and inseparable units is often lacking. Furthermore, the notion of sentence constituents does not always adequately address the phenomenon of elementary syntactic units, which constitute fundamental components of syntactic organization.

According to the views of a number of linguists, traditional grammatical approaches tend to examine syntactic relations at the level of phrases and classify them into predicative and non-predicative relations. Predicative and non-predicative combinations can be differentiated according to the grammatical functions they perform within sentence structure. In particular, a predicative construction realizes two

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fundamental grammatical categories within the sentence: predication and modality. Non-predicative combinations, by contrast, are typically established through such forms of syntactic dependency as agreement, government, and adjacency.

At the same time, this classification remains a subject of considerable theoretical debate, since the relationship between predication, modality, phrase structure, and syntactic dependency cannot always be adequately explained within a strictly formal framework. A more comprehensive analysis therefore requires attention to the structural organization of constituents as well as to the semantic and functional relations established between them.

In the present study, the syntactic relations between constituents occurring within the sentence are modeled through the junctional modeling approach, which makes it possible to represent the structural dependencies between syntactic units in a systematic and visually interpretable manner. The term junctional model derives from the Latin *iungere*, meaning “to join,” “to connect,” or “to link.” A junctional model is constructed along the horizontal axis and represents the actual distribution of constituents within a sentence, together with the dependency relations established between them.

Following the methodological tradition developed by A. M. Mukhin and further elaborated in a number of dissertation-based studies, the present research applies junctional modeling to provide a visual representation of the syntactic relations between the linguistic units constituting an English sentence. This approach makes it possible to identify and systematically represent the structural dependencies among individual constituents, thereby providing a more explicit account of the organization of syntactic structure.

Within English syntax, the relations between syntactic units are primarily examined at two interrelated analytical levels:

1. The System of Transitivity and Semantic Roles

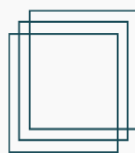
The first level concerns the transitivity system, through which the clause represents processes, states, events, and the participants involved in them. From a functional-semantic perspective, transitivity provides a framework for examining how different types of processes are encoded syntactically and semantically and how their participants are assigned particular semantic roles. These roles may include Agent, Patient, Experiencer, Instrument, Recipient, and other participant functions, depending on the semantic configuration of the clause.

2. Syntactic Relations and Their Functional-Semantic Interpretation

The second level focuses on the syntactic relations established between constituents and on the ways in which these relations contribute to the semantic and communicative organization of the sentence. At this level, formal dependency is examined in conjunction with semantic roles, grammatical functions, information structure, and communicative intention. Such an integrated perspective allows syntactic relations to

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be interpreted not merely as formal connections between constituents, but as functional-semantic mechanisms through which meaning is structured and conveyed in discourse.

Accordingly, the methodology adopted in this study combines junctional modeling, functional-semantic analysis, transitivity theory, and semantic-role analysis. The integration of these methods provides a multidimensional framework for investigating how syntactic structure interacts with semantic interpretation and communicative function in contemporary English.

In English clause structure, the relationship between the verb and its surrounding constituents is primarily realized through the following major process types:

Process Type	Participant	Syntactic Realization (Example)
Action/Activity	Agent $\rightarrow$ Patient	The researcher analyzed the data.
Mental / Experiential	Experiencer $\rightarrow$ Phenomenon	The student understood the concept.
Relational	Carrier $\rightarrow$ Attribute	The result is significant.
Verbal	Sayer $\rightarrow$ Target/Verbiage	The author claims that...

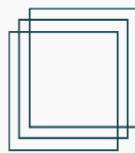
In traditional syntax, the structures *The researcher analyzed the data* and *The data was analyzed by the researcher* are primarily distinguished in terms of **voice**, namely Active and Passive Voice. From a functional-semantic perspective, however, these constructions differ fundamentally in terms of their **information focus and diathesis**. In passive constructions, the foregrounding of the **Patient** position shifts the focus of discourse from the performer of the action toward the affected entity and the outcome of the process. Thus, the passive voice should not be regarded merely as a formal grammatical transformation; rather, it constitutes a functional resource for reorganizing information structure and directing the reader's or listener's attention toward a particular participant or aspect of the situation.

Cognitive Syntax and Conceptual Profiling

Syntactic relations are closely associated with the way in which a language user **frames and construes a particular aspect of reality**. From a cognitive perspective, different syntactic constructions may encode alternative ways of conceptualizing the same event. Consider the following two syntactic constructions:

- (a) John opened the door with the key.
- (b) The key opened the door.

From a formal syntactic perspective, the key functions as the grammatical subject in sentence (b). A functional-semantic analysis, however, demonstrates that the entity



occupying the subject position represents the **Instrument** semantic role. In other words, an instrument that functions as a means of accomplishing an action in (a) is syntactically construed as the initiating participant in (b). This syntactic alternation can be interpreted as a form of **conceptual profiling**, whereby the instrument is foregrounded and construed as an independently salient participant in the event.

Such constructions demonstrate that the relationship between syntactic form and semantic interpretation is not necessarily one-to-one. A change in syntactic configuration may alter the degree of conceptual prominence assigned to individual participants while preserving the general event structure. Consequently, cognitive syntax provides a useful framework for explaining how speakers select particular syntactic constructions in accordance with their perspective, communicative goals, and conceptual construal of a situation.

Implications for Pedagogical and Linguodidactic Practice

Teaching English syntax on the basis of functional-semantic principles enables students to move beyond the mechanical memorization of grammatical rules and develop deeper skills in semantic analysis, academic communication, and professional discourse. Such an approach is particularly relevant to contemporary higher education, where effective language use requires not only grammatical accuracy but also an understanding of how linguistic choices influence meaning, information structure, and communicative effectiveness.

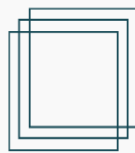
Academic Writing

In academic and scientific writing, understanding the functional necessity of passivization and nominalization contributes to the construction of an objective and impersonal discourse style. For example, the transformation of the verb analyze into the noun analysis illustrates how nominalization can reorganize experiential content and package processes as conceptual entities. Such grammatical choices allow academic writers to foreground processes, findings, and conceptual relations rather than individual agents.

Analytical Thinking

A functional-semantic approach also contributes to the development of students' analytical thinking skills by enabling them to identify the meanings underlying particular syntactic constructions and to interpret the author's communicative intentions. Students learn to recognize that alternative syntactic choices are not merely stylistic variations but may reflect differences in information focus, semantic prominence, perspective, and discourse organization.

Therefore, functional-semantic and cognitive approaches to syntax can serve as an effective linguodidactic framework for developing advanced grammatical awareness,



interpretive competence, and the ability to make context-sensitive syntactic choices in academic and professional communication.

CONCLUSION

The functional-semantic analysis of syntactic relations in English demonstrates that syntax should not be viewed merely as an aggregate of formal structures and grammatical rules. Rather, it constitutes a flexible and dynamic system shaped by semantic, cognitive, and discourse-related requirements. Examining syntactic constructions in close connection with their cognitive and communicative functions provides valuable insights into current issues in linguistic theory and offers effective perspectives for contemporary linguodidactic practice in higher education.

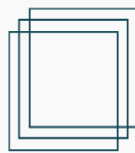
The nature and classification of syntactic relations remain subjects of considerable theoretical debate among linguists, which has contributed to the distinction between formal syntax and functional syntax. Within the framework of functional syntax, the analysis of sentence structure makes it possible to distinguish several major types of syntactic relations, including core predicative, subordinative, coordinative, and non-core relations.

The core predicative relation differs fundamentally from other types of syntactic relations in that it does not depend on another syntactic relation for its realization. Instead, it establishes a grammatical and semantic relationship between two structurally central components that together constitute the core of the clause and express a complete predicative proposition. In this sense, the core predicative relation forms the fundamental structural basis of the sentence, establishing the relationship through which a situation, event, or state is represented as a proposition.

The remaining types of syntactic relations may be regarded as non-core relations, since they connect dependent constituents to structurally dominant or head constituents within the sentence. Subordinative relations establish hierarchical dependency, whereas coordinative relations connect syntactically equivalent constituents. These relations contribute to the expansion, specification, and semantic organization of the core predicative structure.

Consequently, a comprehensive account of English syntax requires an analytical framework that integrates formal structure with functional-semantic interpretation. The interaction between syntactic dependency, semantic roles, information structure, cognitive construal, and communicative intention demonstrates that syntactic relations are multidimensional linguistic phenomena rather than merely formal connections between words. The functional-semantic and cognitive approaches adopted in this study therefore provide a productive theoretical framework for understanding how English syntactic structures encode meaning, organize information, and reflect alternative ways of conceptualizing reality.

From a broader educational perspective, the integration of these approaches into English grammar instruction can promote not only grammatical competence but also



students' semantic awareness, analytical reasoning, discourse competence, and ability to make context-sensitive syntactic choices. Thus, the functional-semantic study of syntactic relations has both theoretical significance for contemporary linguistics and practical value for the development of innovative approaches to English language teaching in higher education.

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