

Descriptive grammar



Definition:

- It is a grammar that "describes" how language is used by its speakers. A **descriptive grammar** looks at the way a language is actually used by its speakers and then attempts to analyse it and formulate rules about the structure.

For example:

- I am older than her.
- An individual can update their profile with their name and address.
- I graduated Japan university.
I graduated from Japan university. (standard usage)

TYPES OF DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR

- Non-Structural
Descriptive Grammar
- Structural Descriptive
Grammar



Non-Structural Descriptive Grammar

- Henry Sweet (1845–1912).
- His work New English Grammar, Logical and Historical (1891).
- Otto Jespersen(1860–1943)
- The Philosophy of Grammar (1924)



Henry Sweet

Parts of speech are syntactic categories – they manifest themselves in the sentence as **relational categories**: the noun is related to the verb, the adverb is related to the verb, the preposition is related to the noun, the adjective is related to the noun.



Otto Jespersen(1860–1943)

- His theory is set out in The Philosophy of Grammar (1924)
- He proposes three principles of classification – meaning, form, and function.



Otto Jespersen(1860–1943)

- The Philosophy of Grammar (1924) is based on the concepts of ranks distinguished in predication and subordination.
- The term rank is used of successive levels of subordination, or dependency.



The Philosophy of Grammar

- E.g. **very cold water**.
- **water** has the highest rank and is a primary;
- **cold** has the next highest rank and is a secondary;
- **very** has the lowest and is a tertiary. (третичный)



The Philosophy of Grammar

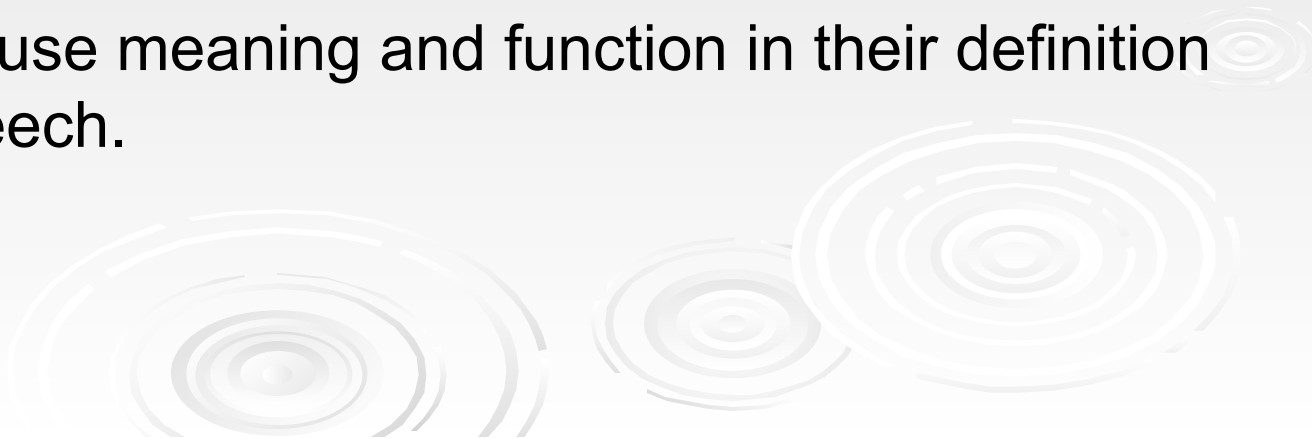
Otto Jespersen(1860–1943)

- He (primary) writes (secondary) a letter (primary) every day(tertiary).
- This sentence contradicts his theory of ranks since a letter is



Non-Structural Descriptive Grammar

- Descriptivist's focus their attention on actual usage without trying “to settle the relative correctness of divergent(расходящийся)usages”
- Descriptivist's rely on the English of the best authors of their day as well as the English of the past. To them, change in language is not associated with corruption;
- Descriptivists use meaning and function in their definition of parts of speech.



Structural Descriptive Grammar

- Leonard Bloomfield
- Language (1925-1930)
- Charles Fries (1956)



Structural Descriptive Grammar

- English was regarded as a language having its specific structure,
and the task of a linguist was to reveal it by using scientific (i.e. formal) methods of analysis.
- Meaning as a criterion was not reliable since, being unobservable, it could be interpreted differently by different linguists.
- The linguist was to devise formal methods of analysis and replace meaning by form;
- The linguist must be interested in what he observes, i.e. objective data.



Structural Descriptive Grammar

- Smaller units are built into larger units(phonemes and morphemes).
- Lexemes serve to build the largest unit, the sentence.



- Structural grammarians have pointed out four devices used in English to indicate structural meaning:
- 1) word form;
- 2) function words;
- 3) word order;
- 4) intonation and accent patterns (prosodic patterns).



- Function words having little or no lexical meaning of their own, they serve to vary the functions of the lexical words.

E.x. **The mother of the boy will arrive tomorrow.**

The words **mother, boy, arrive, and tomorrow** have meaning in themselves quite apart from their grammatical relation, or meaning, in the sentence



- Structural grammarians used formal methods of linguistic analysis, such as immediate constituent, distribution, substitution, transformation (deletion, permutation, etc.).
- The term immediate constituents (IC) was introduced by L. Bloomfield



- The aim of IC (immediate constituent) analysis is to discover and demonstrate the interrelationships of the words in a linguistic structure – the sentence or the word-combination.



Immediate constituent analysis

- Ex.: *Poor John ran away*
- sentence could be described by a traditional grammarian as a simple sentence whose subject is a nounphrase, made up of the noun *John* modified by the adjective *poor*, and whose predicate is a verb-phrase consisting of the verb *ran* modified by the adverb *away*.

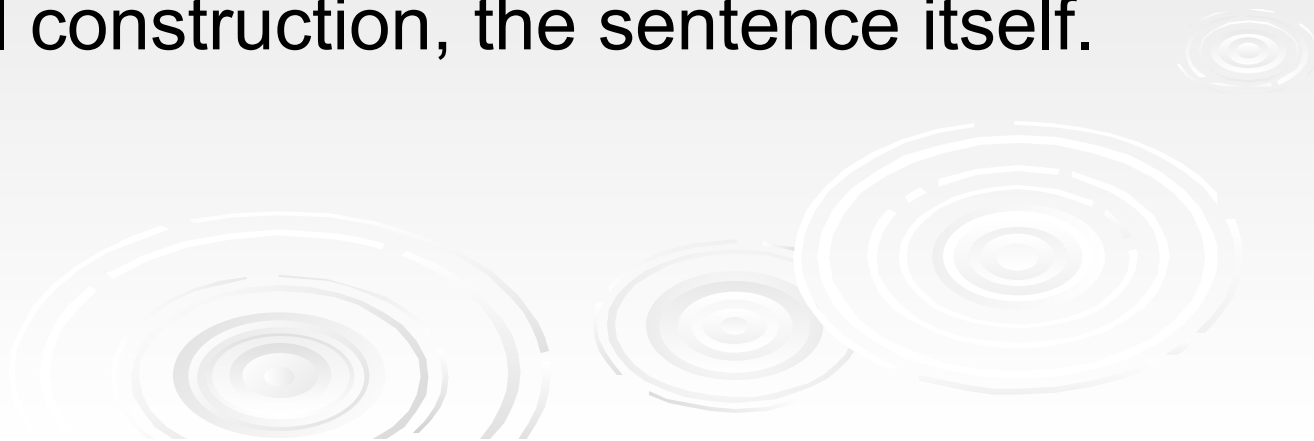
The analysis of the sentence Poor John ran away can be represented

graphically in a number of ways:

- a) we may use brackets: (Poor/John) (ran/away)
- b) we may construct a tree diagram:

The words ran and away are the immediate constituents of another construction (layer) indicated by 'node'

The two constructions Poor John and ran away are the immediate constituents of the highest-level construction, the sentence itself.



Such syntactic notions as

- *subject,*
- *predicate,*
- *object,*
- *complement,*
- *attribute,*
- *adverbial,*

which constitute the basis of traditional analysis, practically *were never used by structuralists.*

