

Theoretical grammar essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. The definition of language. The distinction between language and speech.
Language as a semiotic system: its functions, elements and structure.
Lingual elements (units) as signs. Segmental and supra-segmental lingual units.
2. The levels of lingual units, their structural and functional features.
Hierarchical relations between units of different levels. Language and speech levels. Primary and secondary levels.
3. General principles of grammatical analysis.
4. The systemic character of grammar. Morphology and syntax – the two main sections of grammar. The main unit of morphology. Theoretical and practical grammar. Other types of grammar (indep. work, addit. inf-n).
5. Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in grammar.
6. The plane of content and the plane of expression; synonymy and homonymy in grammar.
7. The notions of diachrony and synchrony; diachronic and synchronic relations in grammar.
8. Grammatical meaning. Grammatical category. Grammatical form.
(+definitions)
9. From the history of grammar, morphology in particular (indep. work, addit. inf-n)

Key terms: language, speech, sign, lingual unit, system, subsystem, systemic approach, segmental lingual units, supra-segmental lingual units, hierarchy, hierarchical (hierarchic) relations, phoneme, morpheme, word (lexeme), word-combination (phraseme), denoteme, sentence (proposeme), supra-sentential construction (supra-phrasal unity, dicteme), nomination, predication, corteme, signeme, plane of content, plane of expression, synonymous relations (synonymy), homonymous relations (homonymy), paradigm, paradigmatic relations, syntagma, syntagmatic relations, synchrony, synchronic relations, diachrony, diachronic relations

1. Language is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon which can be studied and described from various points of view: as a psychological or cognitive phenomenon, as a social phenomenon, from the point of view of its historic changes, etc. But first and foremost language is treated as a semiotic system (system of signs). A system is a structured set of elements united by a common function. Language is a system of specific interconnected and interdependent lingual signs united by their common function of forming, storing and exchanging ideas in the process of human intercourse. A systemic approach prevails in many spheres of linguistics, and it is particularly relevant and important in the sphere of grammar.

The foundations of systemic language description were formulated at the turn of the 20th century in the works of many linguists, among them the Russian linguists I. A. Baudoin de Courtenay, A. A. Potebnya and others. The originator of the systemic approach in linguistics is considered to be a Swiss scholar Ferdinand de Saussure. He was the first to divide the phenomenon of language in general into two sides: an ‘ executive’ side (‘ parole’), concerned

with the production, transmission, and reception of speech, and an underlying language system ('langue'). This is one of the basic postulates of modern systemic linguistics, according to which language in general comprises two aspects: the system of special lingual units, language proper, and the use of the lingual units, speech proper.

In other words 1) language in the narrow sense of the term is a system of means of expression, while speech is the manifestation of the system of language in the process of intercourse. 2) The system of language comprises the lingual units and the rules of their use, while speech includes the act of producing utterances and the result of it (the text). 3) Speech is individual, personal while language is common for all individuals. 4) Language is abstract and speech is concrete. 5) Language is stable, less changeable while speech tends to changes. 6) Language is a closed system, its units are limited while speech tends to openness and infinity (безкінечність). Other terms are used in linguistics by different authors to denote the two basic aspects of language (which, however, do not always coincide with the 'language – speech' dichotomy): 'language competence' and 'language performance' (N. Chomsky), 'linguistic schema' – 'linguistic usage', 'linguistic system' – 'linguistic process' ('text') (L. Hjelmslev), 'code' – 'message' (R. Jakobson), etc. Still, the terms 'language' and 'speech' are the most widely used.

Language is opposed to speech and accordingly language units are opposed to speech units. The language unit phoneme is opposed to the speech unit – sound: phoneme /s/ can sound differently in speech – /s/ and /z/. The sentence is opposed to the utterance; the text is opposed to the discourse.

Ferdinand de Saussure was also among the first scholars who defined lingual units as specific signs – bilateral (two-sided) units that have both form and meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure spoke about a link between a phonetic ‘signifier’ (те, що позначає), and a ‘signified’ (позначуване). In the system of language a lingual sign has only a potential meaning; in speech, in the process of communication, this potential meaning is “actualized”, connected with a particular referent.

That is why a lingual sign is graphically presented in the form of a triangle, including the material form, the meaning and the referent. For example, the word ‘elephant’ is a sign, consisting of a signifier, or form – the sequence of phonemes (or, in written presentation, of letters), and a signified, or meaning – the image of the animal in our mind; the referent is the ‘real’ animal in the outside world, which may or may not be physically present. Referent

Elephant

Form meaning

The units of language are divided into two types: segmental and supra-segmental. Segmental lingual units consist of phonemes, which are the smallest material segments of the language; segmental units form different strings of phonemes (morphemes, words, sentences, etc.). Supra-segmental lingual units do not exist by themselves, their forms are realized together with the forms of segmental units; nevertheless, they render meanings of various kinds, including grammatical meanings; they are: intonation contours, accents, pauses, patterns of word-order, etc. Cf., the change of word-order and intonation pattern in the following examples: He is at home

(statement). – He is at home? (question). Supra-segmental lingual units form the secondary line of speech, accompanying its primary phonemic line.

2. Segmental lingual units form a hierarchy of levels. The term ‘ hierarchy’ denotes a structure in which the units of any higher level are formed by the units of the lower level; the units of each level are characterized by their own specific functional features and cannot be seen only as a mechanical composition of the lower level units. The linguists distinguish basic and nonbasic (or primary and secondary) levels. This distinction depends on whether a level has got its own unit or not. If a level has its own unit then this level is qualified as basic or primary. If a level doesn’t have a unit of its own then it is a non – basic or secondary.

Thus the number of levels entirely depend on the number of language (or speech) units. There’s a number of conceptions on this issue: some scientists say that there are four units (phoneme/phone; morpheme/morph; lexeme/lex and sentence), others think that there are five units like phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, word -combinations (phrases) and sentences and still others maintain that besides the mentioned ones there are paragraphs, utterances and texts. As one can see there’s no unity in the number of language and speech units. The most wide – spread opinion is that there are five language (speech) units and respectively there are five language (speech) levels, they are: phonetic/phonological; morphological; lexicological, syntax – minor and syntax – major. Their units are as follows: 1. phonological/phonetical level: phoneme/phone

2. morphological level: morpheme/morph 3. lexicological level: lexeme/lex 4. Syntax – minor: sentence 5. Syntax – major: text Thus, non – basic or secondary level is one that has no unit of its own. Stylistics can be said to be non-basic (secondary) because this level has no its own unit. In order to achieve its aim it makes wide use of the units of the primary (basic) levels. The stylistics studies the expressive means and stylistic devices of languages. According to I. R. Galperin “ The expressive means of a language are those phonetic means, morphological forms, means of word -building, and lexical, phraseological and syntactical form, all of which function in the language for emotional or logical intensification of the utterance.

These intensifying forms of the language have been fixed in grammars, dictionaries”. The 1st level. The lowest level in the hierarchy of levels has two special terms: phonology and phonetics. Phonology is the level that deals with language units and phonetics is the level that deals with speech units. The lowest level deals with language and speech units which are the smallest and meaningless. So, the smallest meaningless unit of language is called phoneme; the smallest meaningless unit of speech is called phone. Phonemes differentiate the meanings of morphemes and words. E. g.: man – men, там – дам. The language units are abstract and limited in number which means that phonemes are abstract and that they are of definite number in languages. The speech units are concrete, changeable and actually endless.

This means that language units (phonemes) are represented in speech differently which depends on the person that pronounces them and on the combinability of the phoneme. Phonemes when pronounced in concrete

speech vary from person to person, according to how he has got used to pronounce this or that sound. In linguistic theory it is explained by the term “idiolect” that is, individual dialect. Besides, there may be positional changes (combinability): depending on the sounds that precede and follow the sound, the pronunciation of it may be different, compare: low and battle. The sound “l” will be pronounced differently in these two words because the letter “l” in the first word is placed in the initial position and in the second word it stands after the letter “t”. So we face “light” (in the first word) and “dark” version (in the second case). These alternants are said to be in the complimentary distribution and they are called allophones (variants, options or alternants) of one phoneme.

Thus allophone is a variant of a phoneme. The 2nd level in the hierarchy of strata is called morphological. There’s only one term for both language and speech but the units have different terms: morpheme for language and morph for speech. This level deals with units that are also smallest but in this case they are meaningful. So the smallest meaningful unit of language is called a morpheme and the smallest meaningful unit of speech is called a morph. The shortest morpheme can consist of one phoneme, e. g.: step-s; -s renders the meaning of the 3rd person singular form of the verb, or, the plural form of the noun. The meaning of the morpheme is abstract and significative: it does not name the referent, but only signifies it. The morphs that have different forms, but identical (similar) meanings are united into one morpheme and called “allomorphs”.

The morpheme of the past tense has at least three allomorphs, they are. /t/, /d/, /ɪd/ – Examples: worked, phoned and wanted. The variant of the

morpheme depends on the preceding sound in the word. The 3rd level is lexicological which deals with words. Word may be a common term for language and speech units. Some linguists offer specific terms for language and speech: “lexeme” for language and “lex” for speech. The correlation between “lexeme” and “lex” is the same as it is between “phoneme” and “phone” and “morpheme” and “morph”. “Lexeme” is a language unit which has a nominative function.

“Lex” is a speech unit which also has a nominative function. Thus, both lexeme and lex nominate something or name things, actions phenomena, quality, quantity and so on. Examples: tree, pen, sky, red, worker, friendship, ungentlemanly and so on. An abstract lexeme “table” of language is used in speech as lex with concrete meaning of “writing table”, “dinner table”, “round table”, “square table”, and so on. There may be “allolexes” like allophones and allomorphs. Allolexes are lexes that have identical or similar meanings but different forms, compare: start, commence, begin. To avoid confusion between “morpheme” and “lexemes” it is very important to remember that morphemes are structural units while lexemes are communicative units: morpheme are built of phonemes and they are used to build words – lexemes.

Lexemes take an immediate part in shaping the thoughts, that is, in building sentences. Besides, lexemes may consist of one or more morphemes. The lexeme “tree” consists of one morpheme while the lexeme “ungentlemanly” consists of four morphemes: un – gentle – man – ly.

Lexemes or words, nominative lingual units, express direct, nominative meanings: they name, or nominate various referents. The words consist of

morphemes, and the shortest word can include only one morpheme, e. g.: cat. The 4th level is formed by word-combinations, or phrasemes, the combinations of two or more notional words, which represent complex nominations of various referents (things, actions, qualities, and even situations) in a sentence, e. g.: a beautiful girl, their sudden departure.

In a more advanced treatment, phrases along with separate words can be seen as the constituents of sentences, or notional parts of the sentence, which make the fourth language level and can be called “denotemes”. The 5th level is the level of sentences, or proposemes, lingual units which name certain situations, or events, and at the same time express predication, i. e. they show the relations of the event named to reality – whether the event is real or unreal, desirable or obligatory, stated as a fact or asked about, affirmed or negated, etc., e. g.: Their departure was sudden (a real event, which took place in the past, stated as a fact, etc.).

Thus, the sentence is often defined as a predicative lingual unit. The minimal sentence can consist of just one word, e. g.: Fire! The term “Syntax – minor” is common one for both language and speech levels and their unit “sentence” is also one common term for language and speech units. Example: “An idea of writing a letter” on the abstract language level can have its concrete representation in speech: John writes a letter. A letter is written by John. The 6th level is formed by sentences in a text or in actual speech. Textual units are traditionally called supra-phrasal unities (надфразові єдності); we will call such supra-sentential constructions, which are produced in speech, «dictemes» (from Latin ‘dicto’ ‘I speak’).

Dictemes are characterized by a number of features, the main one of which is the unity of topic. As with all lingual units, dictemes may be reducible to one unit of the lower level; e. g., the text of an advertisement slogan can consist of just one sentence: Just do it!; or, a paragraph in a written text can be formed by a single independent sentence, being topically significant: ... began..., began long ago... “ Syntax- major” represents both language and speech levels due to the absence of separate term as well as “ text” is used homogeneously for both language and speech units. The language and speech units are interconnected and interdependent.

This can easily be proved by the fact that the units of lower level are used to make up or to build the units of the next higher level: phones are used as building material for morphs, and morphs are used to build lexes and the latter are used to construct sentences. Besides, the homonyms that appear in the phonetical level can be explained on the following higher level, compare: – “ er” is a homonymous morph. In order to find out in which meaning it is used we’ll have to use it on the lexicological level; if it is added to verbs like “ teacher”, “ worker” then it will have one meaning but if we use it with adjectives like “ higher”, “ lower” it will have another meaning.

3. According to the Bible: ‘ In the beginning was the Word’. In fact, the word is considered to be the central (but not the only) linguistic unit (одиниця) of language. Linguistic units (or in other words – signs) can go into three types of relations:

a) The relation between a unit and an object in the world around us (objective reality). E. g. the word ‘ table’ refers to a definite piece of

furniture. It may be not only an object but a process, state, quality, etc. This type of meaning is called referential meaning of a unit. It is such a language level as semantics which studies the referential meaning of units. b) The relation between a unit and other units (inner relations between units). No unit can be used independently; it serves as an element in the system of other units. This kind of meaning is called syntactic. Formal relation of units to one another is studied by syntactics (or syntax). c) The relation between a unit and a person who uses it. When we are saying something, we usually have some purpose in mind. We use the language as an instrument for our purpose (e. g.), so one and the same word or sentence may acquire different meanings in communication. This type of meaning is called pragmatic.

The study of the relationship between linguistic units and the users of those units is done by pragmatics. Thus there are three models of linguistic description: semantic, syntactic and pragmatic (Students are students). The first part of the XXth century can be characterized by a formal approach to the language study. Only inner (syntactic) relations between linguistic units served the basis for linguistic analysis while the reference of words to the objective reality and language users were actually not considered.

Later, semantic language analysis came into use. However, it was surely not enough for a detailed language study. We discover our identity as individuals and social beings when we acquire it during childhood. It serves as a means of cognition and communication: it enables us to think for ourselves and to cooperate with other people in our community. Therefore, the pragmatic side of the language should not be ignored either. Functional approach in language analysis deals with the language ‘in action’. Naturally, in order to

get a broad description of the language, all the three approaches must be combined.

4. The term “ grammar” goes back to a Greek word that may be translated as the “ art of writing”. But later this word acquired a much wider sense and came to embrace the whole study of language. Now it is often used as the synonym of linguistics. A question comes immediately to mind: what does this study involve? The study of grammar may be either practical (practical grammar), which describes grammar as a set of rules and regulations to follow, or theoretical (theoretical grammar), aiming at the explanation of how and why the grammatical system works. Each sub-system distinguishes not only its own set of elements, but its own structural organization. For example, within the grammatical system we single out parts of speech and sentence patterns.

The parts of speech are further subdivided into nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs, functional parts of speech; this subdivision of grammar is known as morphology. Morphology deals with the internal structure of words, peculiarities of their grammatical categories and their semantics while traditional syntax deals with the rules governing combination of words in sentences (and texts in modern linguistics). So, the main objectives of Morphology are: - to study the internal structure of the word and means of word form building in relation to the abstract meanings they express; - to study general grammatical characteristics of words which enable them to make up sentence; - to classify words into a few basic classes.

Sentences are further subdivided into simple and composite: composite sentences are subdivided into complex and compound, etc.; this subdivision of grammar is known as syntax. The grammatical signals have a meaning of their own independent of the meaning of the notional words. This can be illustrated by the following sentence with nonsensical words: Woggles ugged diggles. According to Ch. Fries, the morphological and the syntactic signals in the given sentence make us understand that “ several actors acted upon some objects”. This sentence which is a syntactic signal, makes the listener understand it as a declarative sentence whose grammatical meaning is actor – action – thing acted upon.

One can easily change (transform) the sentence into the singular (A woggle ugged a diggle.), negative (A woggle did not ugg a diggle.), or interrogative (Did a woggle ugg a diggle?) All these operations are grammatical. Then what is the main issue of grammar – structure. Let us assume, for example, a situation in which a man, a boy, some money, the man the giver, the boy the receiver, the time of the transaction – yesterday... are involved Any of the units man, boy, money, an act and time of giving could appear in the linguistic structure as subject.