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immediate constituent analysis

structural method for analysing the hierarchical relations among the constituents of complex linguistic constructions, proceeding consecutively from the higher to the next lower level until no further breakdown into smaller units is possible.

IC-Analyse

strukturelle Analysemethode zur Beschreibung der hierarchischen Konstituentenstruktur einer komplexen Äußerung, bei der diese so lange in ihre Teile zerlegt wird, bis die Analyse bei nicht weiter teilbaren Einheiten angelangt ist.

Immediate constituent analysis was developed by L. BLOOMFIELD (1933). It is an effective descriptive procedure used to analyse complex expressions (sentences, syntagms, word formations, and inflected words) into binary parts called "immediate constituents" (ICs) in successive layers until the layer of the so-termed "ultimate constituents" (UCs) is reached, which are no longer divisible into smaller meaningful units. IC-analysis was conceived as a method to establish the "structural order" of the constitutive parts of linguistic constructions without having to determine the meaning proper of the constituents themselves. In post-Bloomfieldian linguistics, it became common practice to represent IC-analyses by means of brackets or tree diagrams. Applied to sentences, the analysis first yields the division into subject and predicate as the primary ICs, e.g. *His father* and *buys a piano*. BLOOMFIELD justifies this first division by pointing out that it is intuitively clear; historically, splitting up a sentence according to the subject-predicate dichotomy revives an age-old Western tradition in logic and grammar going back to Antiquity. The basic assumption of IC-analysis is that complex utterances are to be analysed in terms of part-whole relations. In the example *His father buys a piano*, the first IC can be further divided into *His* + *father*, the second one into *buys* + *a piano*. Conversely, constituents such as *his* and *father* are no longer divisible and are, therefore, UCs; *father*, for instance, cannot be analysed as *fa* + *-ther*, since *-ther* is not a constitutive morpheme in lexical units such as *father*, *mother*, *brother*. Yet IC-analysis

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still applies to *buys* and *a piano*, the UCs being *buy + -s* and *a + piano*, respectively. IC-analysis shows that constructions are layered and hierarchically organised around a central constituent at each layer. (In later models of syntactic analysis, however, different views were put forward as to which IC is the central one, e.g., in *buys* and *a piano*). This holds true not only for sentences, but for all kinds of constructions, cf. *friend > friendly > unfriendly > unfriendliness*.

Different tests have been conceived to support IC-analyses, most notably the substitution test, e.g. *His father buys a piano > [He] buys a car / His father buys [it]* etc., and the permutation test, e.g. *It is [his father] who buys a piano / It is [a piano] his father buys*. Closely related constituents, however, do not necessarily have to occur adjacent to each other syntagmatically; this is a matter of the specific word order rules of individual languages.

There has been considerable controversy concerning the historical roots of IC-analysis. An influence on BLOOMFIELD that was more important than the subject-predicate dichotomy in the Greek tradition of logic and the works of several 19th century authors seems to have been W. WUNDT's psychology of language (cf. PERCIVAL 1976 for discussion).

The method of IC-analysis has been of fundamental importance to the development of syntax ever since the times of structuralism and, more recently, in generative and functional theories of syntax. The most promising alternative to IC-analysis was developed by the French linguist L. TESNIÈRE. In his dependency and valency grammar, Tesnière rejects part-whole relations, arguing that they are of a logical and not a linguistic nature and therefore not a viable basis for syntactic analyses. According to TESNIÈRE, the underlying structure of constructions is determined by words governing other words. For instance, in the example above the verb *buys* governs the arguments *his father* and *a piano*, *father* governs *his*, and *piano* governs *a*.

Literature

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