

Linguistic Principles of English Grammar

Constituent Structure and Noun Phrases

Reading: Berk, Chapter 2

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Big Idea

Linear Order

Constituency (clumping)

Hierarchical Structure

Hierarchical Structure

Police kill mentally deranged man with knife!

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The Noun Phrase

- Box Diagrams
 - How many Noun Phrases (NPs) are in the following sentence?

*In the ditch, by the dirt back road, late in
March, a few black snowdrifts lie in
the grass like old men asleep in their coats.*

The Noun Phrase

- What is the head of a Noun Phrase?

The Noun Phrase

- What is the head of each of the following Noun Phrases?
 - The big black angry Doberman that always barks at me as I try vainly to sneak past the junkyard on my way home from my piano lesson . . .
 - A bag of bones . . .
 - The Prince of Wales' coffee maker . . .
 - A lot of people . . .

Ambiguity

- **Lexical ambiguity** arises when one lexical item (a word) has more than one possible meaning. Only context can disambiguate:
 - "Let's find another bank."
 - "Lucretia is lying in the parking lot."

Ambiguity

- **Structural ambiguity** occurs when one string of words can have more than one syntactic structure:
 - "Visiting relatives can be boring."
 - "Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg address while traveling to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope."

Ambiguity

- Sometimes a string can be multiply ambiguous for both lexical and structural reasons:
 - "Michelle wrote an article on Jason's forehead."
 - "Fruit flies like a papaya."
 - "I saw her duck."

Practice

- The following strings are ambiguous. Indicate whether the ambiguity is lexical, structural or both:
 - Sign in a drugstore: "We dispense with accuracy."
 - British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands.
 - Local high school dropouts cut in half.
 - Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant.
 - Kids Make Nutritious Snacks.