

PAPER 6 (DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS)

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of IC analysis.

Immediate Constituent analysis has the following advantages and disadvantages:

ADVANTAGES OF IC ANALYSIS

A. Identification of the layers of relationship in a construction: IC analysis discovers the layers of relationship in a construction. English syntax is based on this ability of structures to function within larger structures, which are, in turn, serving other functions in still larger, more complex structures (sentences). Composing a more complex sentence such as

The pretty girl put on her red and blue coat kissed her mother and left.

demonstrates the nature of relationship that must be negotiated if a hearer or a reader is to understand such a sentence. Actually anyone who is capable of understanding the meaning of the sentence obviously has the mental capacity to keep all those relationships afloat as he hears or reads the sentence.

B. Fixity of word order: In IC analysis the word order is not disturbed in any way. This advantage is best demonstrated by sorting the relationship found in the following sentences which are composed of the same words but which are different in word order:

1. The boy played marbles on his knees.

2. The boy on his knees played marbles.

3. On his knees the boy played marbles.

These sentences may be said to be stylistically different. In the first, the prepositional phrase "on his knees" modifies the verb phrase; in the second, it modifies the noun phrase; in the third it modifies all the rest of the sentence. Yet in the word order within the structure "on his knees" does not change.

C. To account for ambiguities and distinguish them: A famous example 'old men and women' can be paraphrased in two ways; it is either "old men and women of all ages" or

'old men and women'. The principle of expansion here allows us two interpretations. Either 'old men' is an expansion of a single morpheme (e.g. men or boy) or 'men and women' is an expansion of a single morpheme (e.g. people or men). This would allow us to recognize two different IC analysis shown by the tree diagram:

1. old men and women

2. old men and women

LIMITATIONS OF IC ANALYSIS

A. Presumptions about the grammatical status of the elements: Although IC analysis is supposed to precede any attempt to identify and classify the ICs as subjects, objects, noun phrase, it is based on the tacit assumptions about the grammatical status of the elements. Example: "want to go" can be cut in two ways, i.e. want/ to go and want to/go.

If we compare it with 'want food' then clearly the first analysis would be 'want to/go'.

But the answer given was in favor of 'want/to go' because the possibility of 'to go' is easy where obviously 'to go' is a constituent. Here such identification is clearly grammatical because we are tacitly accepting an analysis which allows us to consider 'to go' as some kind of nominal element and favoring the comparison with 'want food', so that 'to go' is an expansion of 'food' because it is of the same grammatical type.

B. Discontinuity: Sometimes IC analysis cannot divide a construction into two because elements that belong together are separated in the sequence(i.e. discontinuous).

In example 'Is John coming?' 'is' is nearer to coming than to John. Again 'in' such a lovely house' 'such' is nearer to lovely house' than to 'a'.

1. Is John coming

2. such a lovely house

The objection to both these diagrams is that they are really 'dodges'. Of course, we can always carry on the IC analysis by merely permitting discontinuity, but this does surely make less plausible the very assumption on which IC analysis is based - that language is essentially a one dimensional linear string which can be chopped up into decreasing segments. It must be recalled that IC analysis depends on expansion, the substitution of sequences by single morphemes but discontinuous sentences are not sequences.

C. IC analysis is not below the words: In IC analysis it is tacitly assumed that there will be no division into pieces smaller than words (morphemes) until all the words have been divided. If we cut 'criminal lawyer' into 'criminal/lawyer', it does not sound tenable in actual practice because 'criminal lawyer' generally means a lawyer who deals with criminal cases. So unless we cut 'criminal lawyer' in the way like 'criminal - lawyer', the meaning does not come out clearly. But because IC analysis does not go below the level of words, we cannot analyze the phrase 'criminal lawyer' in a meaningful way.

D. Unbalanced bracketing: IC analysis does not refer to our grammatical knowledge, so it does not take us very far and without the help of labeled bracketing we cannot point out

the sources of ambiguity in many sentences. The labeled bracketing can be used to differentiate the two possibilities is an example that is often against IC analysis.

Flying planes can be dangerous.

Here in one case 'flying' is the head of the noun phrase while on the other hand is 'planes'.