

What is Syntax?

1. What is syntax?
 - a. Syntax is a sub-discipline of linguistics that seeks to determine the principles from which the rules of sentence construction can be derived.
 - b. Syntax examines the ways that words and phrases can and cannot combine in different languages.
 - c. Syntax = Grammar
2. The theory
 - a. Why are we theorizing at all?
 - b. What makes a good theory of grammar?
 - i. Observational adequacy
 - ii. Descriptive adequacy
 - iii. Explanatory adequacy
 - c. The theory we will use in this course is generally known as **Generative Grammar**.
 - d. The generative approach to studying the structure of language was first developed by Noam Chomsky and some of his colleagues in the 1950s as a response to Skinner's behaviorist theory.
 - e. The key tenet of generative grammar is that human beings have an innate capacity for language consisting of the principles of **Universal Grammar**.
 - f. These **principles** are common to all natural languages.
 - g. Cross-linguistic variation is explained by a finite set of binary **parameters** (imagine on-off switches), which are set during the language acquisition process.
3. Arguments for UG and the generative approach
 - a. Recursion
 - b. Productivity
 - c. Poverty of the Stimulus
 - d. Underdetermination of the data
 - e. Typological universals
4. What is the method?
 - a. Observe some language data
 - b. Make generalizations about the data
 - c. Form a **falsifiable** hypothesis that could explain the data and make predictions about new data