**Linguistic Units**

**The basic Units of Grammar**

Traditionally, the linguistic theory operates with two fundamental units of grammatical description: ***the word*** and ***the sentence***, with the word as the basic unit. But, some linguists have reacted against this and argue that the classical grammarians were little concerned with the analysis of words into smaller units. Such minimal units of grammatical analysis are called ***morphemes***. Moreover, intermediate between the word and the sentence, two other units are commonly recognized: ***phrases*** and ***clauses***. Therefore, we have five different units of grammatical description: the morpheme, the word, the phrase, the clause and the sentence.

The relation between the five units of grammatical description is that of composition. If we call the sentence the highest unit and the morpheme the lowest unit, we can arrange all five units on a scale of rank, saying that units of higher rank are composed of units of lower rank as in the following diagram:

Sentence

Clause

Phrase

Word

Morpheme

**1. The Sentence**

Sentences are classified into different types. First, by function as: statements, questions, exclamation and commands. Examples of these types of sentences:

* The bus is late today.
* How did you become a good player?
* What a lovely car!
* Clean your room.

Second, sentences can be classified according to their structural complexity as: simple, complex, compound or compound complex. Examples of these types of sentences:

* He likes reading books.
* Although he revised for hours, he still needed to do more.
* He revised for hours, but he still needed to do more.
* I do not like cakes because they are so sweet, so I do not eat them.

**2. The Word**

The word is the basis of the distinction which is frequently drawn between morphology and syntax, and it is the principal unit of lexicography. *Morphology* deals with the internal structure of words and *syntax* with the rules governing their combination in sentences.

Most languages contain both ***variable*** and ***invariable*** words. Variable words are those in which regular series of grammatically different word forms are found, wherein one part remains constant, and the variations in the other parts are matched by similar variations in other words.

**e.g. eat**  **eat**s **eat**ing

**table** **table**s

invariable words are those which appear in only one form.

**e.g.**  since, when, seldom, etc.