



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of  
Terms used in Linguistics  
*presents*

# Constituency



## *Basic idea*

- A **constituency** is a group of entities that form a **part-whole relationship**.
  - An orange is made up of *the peel, the flesh, the sacs, water, vitamin C, etc.* These parts make up the constituent that is the orange.
  - A tree is made of *roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc*
  - A house is made of *walls, pillars, roofs, plumbing, wiring, etc.* The walls are in turn made of *bricks, tiles and concrete, ...*



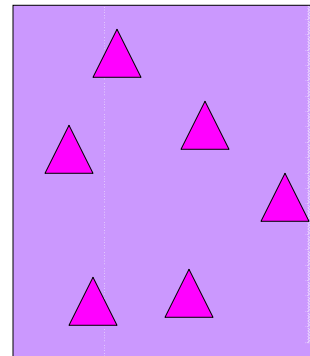
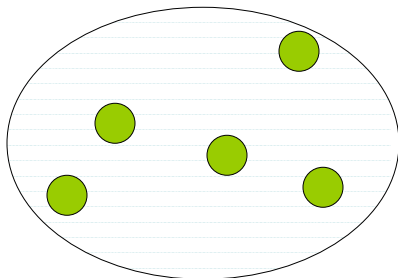
## Basic idea

- Because of the part-whole relationship, elements that form a constituent **pattern together**.
- Thus, I cannot move an orange without also moving the peel, flesh, sacs, vitamins together. Likewise, if a tree is to be transplanted, then roots, trunk, leaves and all have to move together with the tree.

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## Experiment



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## *Abstractness of constituencies*

- In many cases, it may be hard to actually see constituencies.
- Constituencies are **abstract postulates** for indicating part-whole relationships based on observations about entities that pattern together.

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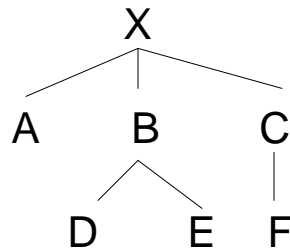
## *Dominance & Transitivity*

- Constituency is often represented in a tree, where entities that form a constituent are **dominated** by a node indicating the constituency.

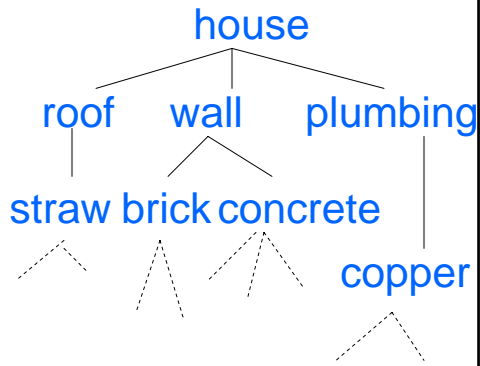
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## Dominance & Transitivity



The relationship is **transitive**. If B is part of X and D, E are part of B, then D, E are also part of X.

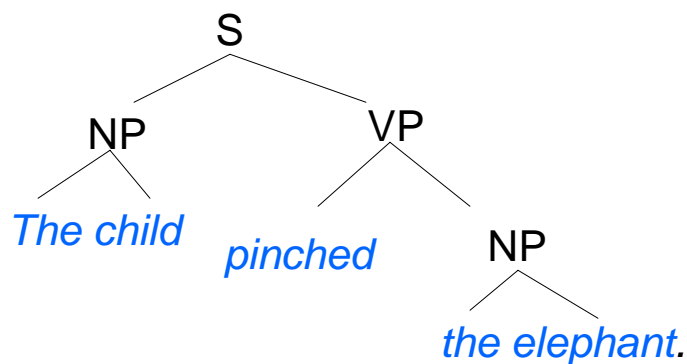


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## Constituency in Linguistics

- Example from syntax



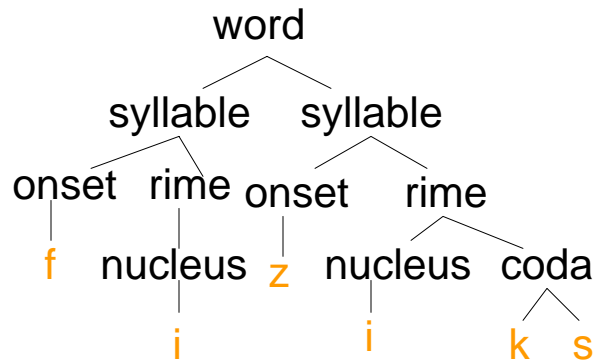
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## Constituency in Linguistics

- Example from phonology

*physics*  
[fiziks]



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## Testing Constituency

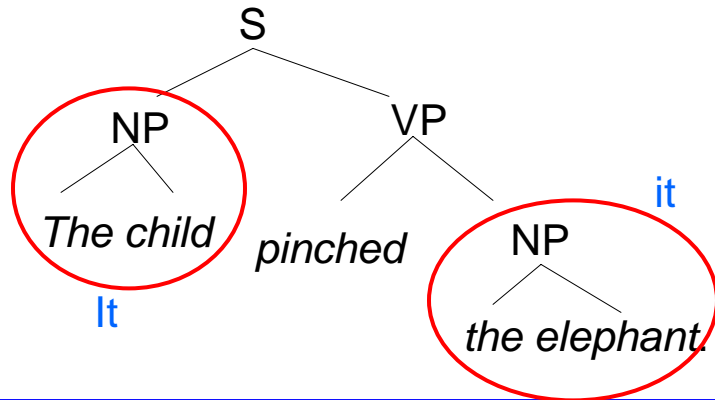
- In linguistics, and elsewhere, it is insufficient to simply claim that a number of elements form a constituency. Such claims must be **justified**.

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## Testing Constituency

- Recall

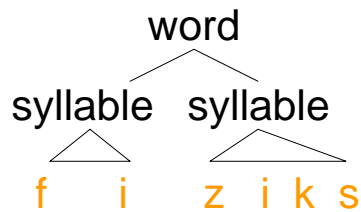


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## Testing Constituency

- What about [fiziks]?



- Pause insertion

fi ... ziks  
~~fiz...ik...s~~  
 f..iz..iks  
 fizi...ks  
 fizik...s

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## Testing constituency

- This is a task that requires creativity and careful thinking.
- The demonstrations provided earlier are not foolproof though they suffice as a simple introduction.
- To be safe, one must be very critical about tests for constituencies, even those provided in textbooks can have problems.

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## Further reading

- Baltin, Mark and Chris Collins (eds.) (2001) *The Handbook of Contemporary Syntactic Theory*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Fromkin, Victoria and Robert Rodman (1998) *An Introduction to Language*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, pp.111-119. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Haegeman, Liliane (1995) *Introduction to Government and Binding Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Chapter 1-2. Blackwell Publishers.
- Kroeger, Paul R. (2005) *Analyzing Grammar: An Introduction*, Chapter 3.2. Cambridge University Press.
- Ouhalla, Jamal (1999) *Introducing Transformational Grammar: From Principles and Parameters to Minimalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Chapter 2. London: Edward Arnold Publishers.
- Payne, Thomas E. (2006) *Exploring Language Structure: A Student's Guide*, Chapter 6. Cambridge University Press.
- Radford, Andrew (1988) *Transformational Grammar*, Chapter 2. Cambridge University Press.
- Radford, Andrew, Martin Atkinson, David Britain, Harald Clahsen and Andrew Spencer (1999) *Linguistics: An Introduction*, Chapter 19. Cambridge University Press.

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## *Further reading*

Tserdanelis, Georgios and Wai Yi Peggy Wong (2004) *Language Files*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, Files 6.4-6.5. The Ohio State University Press.

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## **The End**

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)  
*An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.*  
Hong Kong Baptist University.