

Ling 51/Psych 56L:  
Acquisition of Language

Lecture 17

Development of syntax I

# Announcements

HW 5 is due 11/30/18 - be working on it

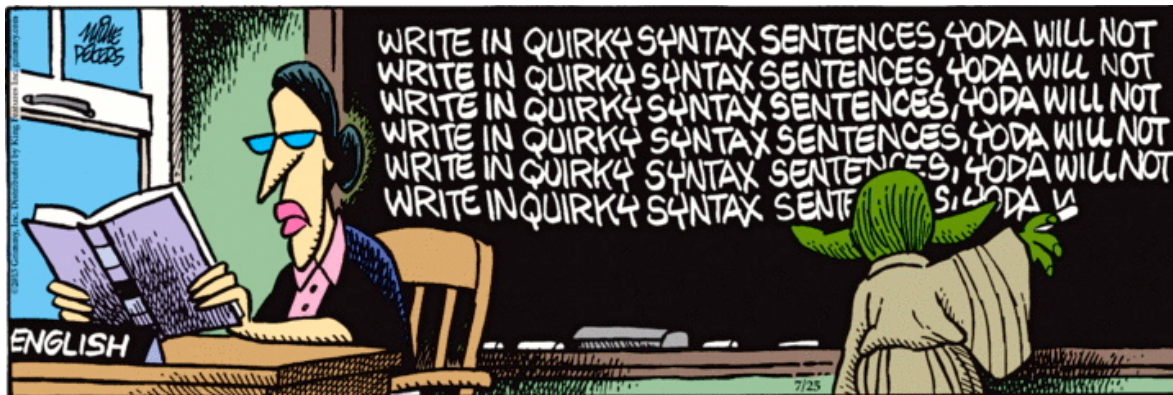
Be working on the review questions for morphology and syntax

Consider taking language science courses next quarter (LINGUIS)!

# Adult knowledge: The target state for syntax



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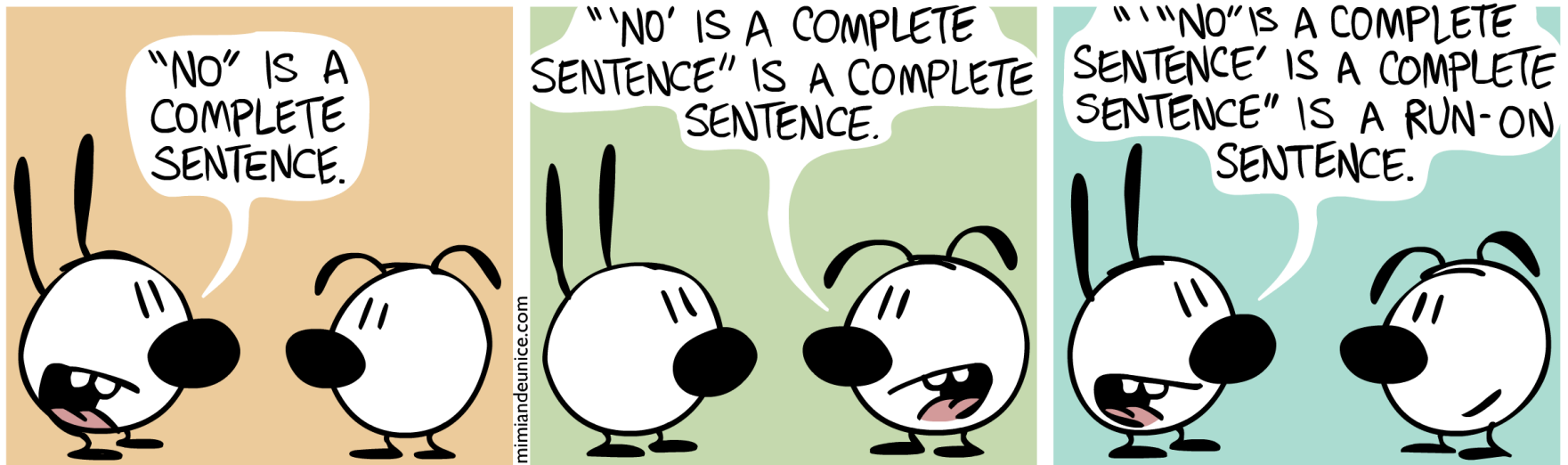


<http://arnoldzwicky.org/category/syntax/word-order/>



<http://arnoldzwicky.org/category/syntax/word-order/>

# Adult knowledge: The target state for syntax



<http://mimiandeunice.com/2011/09/23/sentenced-to-death/>

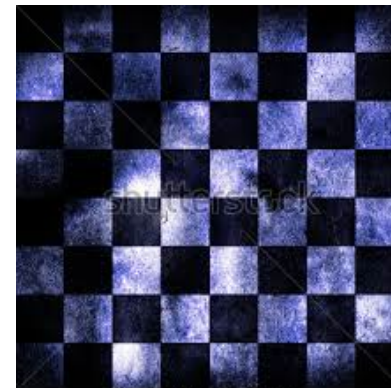
# Creativity of human language

Ability to combine signs with simple meanings to create

- (1) Utterances with complex meanings
- (2) Novel expressions
- (3) *Infinitely* many

Sentences never heard before...

*“Some tulips are starting to samba across the chessboard.”*



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Sentences of prodigious length...

“*Sir Didymus said...*”

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Sentences of prodigious length...

*“Sir Didymus said that he thought...”*



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Sentences of prodigious length...

*“Sir Didymus said that he thought that the odiferous leader of the goblins had it in mind...”*

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Sentences of prodigious length...

*“Sir Didymus said that he thought that the odiferous leader of the goblins had it in mind to tell the unfortunate princess...”*

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Sentences of prodigious length...

*“Sir Didymus said that he thought that the odiferous leader of the goblins had it in mind to tell the unfortunate princess that the cries that she made during her kidnapping from the nearby kingdom ...”*

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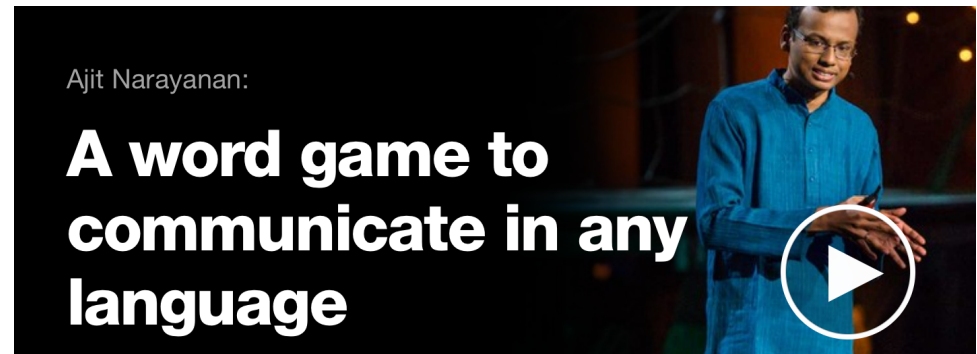
Sentences of prodigious length...

*“Sir Didymus said that he thought that the odiferous leader of the goblins had it in mind to tell the unfortunate princess that the cries that she made during her kidnapping from the nearby kingdom that the goblins themselves thought was a general waste of countryside ...”*

# Creativity of human language

Ability to combine signs with simple meanings to create

- (1) Utterances with complex meanings
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[https://www.ted.com/talks/ajit\\_narayanan\\_a\\_word\\_game\\_to\\_communicate\\_in\\_any\\_language](https://www.ted.com/talks/ajit_narayanan_a_word_game_to_communicate_in_any_language)

“So there is another hidden abstraction here which children with autism find a lot of difficulty coping with, and that's the fact that **you can modify words and you can arrange them to have different meanings, to convey different ideas**. Now, this is what we call grammar. And grammar is incredibly powerful, because grammar is this one component of language which **takes this finite vocabulary that all of us have and allows us to convey an infinite amount of information, an infinite amount of ideas**. It's the way in which you can put things together in order to convey anything you want to.”

# An account that won't work

“You just string words together in an order that makes sense”

In other words...

“***Syntax*** is determined by ***Meaning***”

(The way words are put together is determined solely by what they mean)

# Syntax is more than meaning

## Nonsense sentences with clear syntax

Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. (Chomsky)

A verb crumpled the ocean.

I gave the question a goblin-shimmying egg.

## ...which are incomprehensible when the syntax is nonsense

\*Furiously sleep ideas green colorless.

\*Ocean the crumpled verb a.

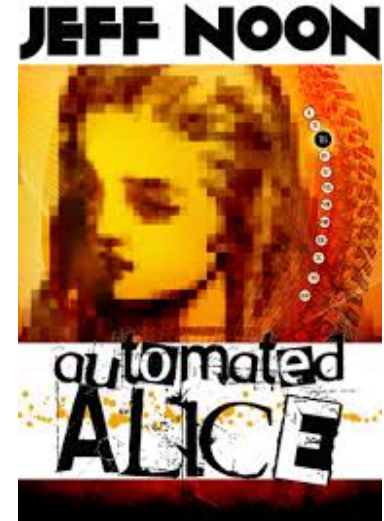
\*The question I an egg goblin-shimmying gave.

# Syntax is more than meaning

More nonsense sentences with clear syntax

From “Automated Alice” by Jeff Noon:

Oh spoons may dangle from a cow  
With laughter ten feet tall;  
But all I want to know is how  
It makes no sense at all.  
Oh shirts may sing  
to books who pout  
In rather rigid lines;  
But all I want to turn about  
Is how the world unwinds.





# Syntax is more than meaning

## Famous nonsense sentences with clear syntax

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogroves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe

Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

- Lewis Carroll, *Jabberwocky*



# Syntax is more than meaning

'It seems very pretty,' she said when she had finished it, 'but it's RATHER hard to understand!' (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) 'Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas -- only I don't exactly know what they are! However, **SOMEBODY** killed **SOMETHING**: that's clear, at any rate -- '



# Syntax is more than meaning

And these same nonsense sentences with nonsense syntax are incomprehensible...

'Toves slithy the and brillig 'twas  
wabe the in gimble and gyre did...



# Syntax is more than meaning

Ungrammatical sentences that make perfect sense

Jareth put the cape on.

Jareth put on the cape.

Jareth put it on.

\*Jareth put on it.



# Syntax is more than meaning

Ungrammatical sentences that make perfect sense

Sarah gave a ring to the Wiseman.

Sarah gave him a ring.

Sarah donated a ring to the Wiseman.

\*Sarah donated him a ring.



# Syntax is more than meaning

Ungrammatical sentences that make perfect sense

Jareth made Hoggle leave.

Jareth let Hoggle leave.

Jareth saw Hoggle leave.

\*Jareth wanted Hoggle leave.

\*Jareth made Hoggle to leave.

\*Jareth let Hoggle to leave.

\*Jareth saw Hoggle to leave.

Jareth wanted Hoggle to leave.



# Syntax is more than meaning

## Ungrammatical sentences that make perfect sense

Hoggle poked at the wall.

Hoggle hit at the wall.

\*Hoggle touched at the wall.

\*Hoggle poked the stick against the wall.

Hoggle hit the stick against the wall.

\*Hoggle touched the stick against the wall.



# Syntax is more than meaning

## Cross-linguistic variation

If syntax was entirely determined by meaning, then we should not expect to find syntactic differences between languages of the world....but we do see variation.

English: Sarah          sees          that book.

Korean: Sarah          ku chayk          poata.  
         Sarah          that book          see



# Syntax is more than meaning

## Cross-linguistic variation

If syntax was entirely determined by meaning, then we should not expect to find syntactic differences between languages of the world....but we do see variation.

English:

Baso put the money in the cupboard.

Selayarese (spoken in Indonesia):

Lataroi	doe	injo	ri lamari	injo	i Baso.
put	money	the	in cupboard	the	Baso

# So...what does determine how you string words together?

Answer: Syntax!

(That is, our knowledge of the possible *forms* of sentences in our language.)

**“Syntax is determined by Meaning”**

(The way words are put together is determined solely by what they mean)



# A template

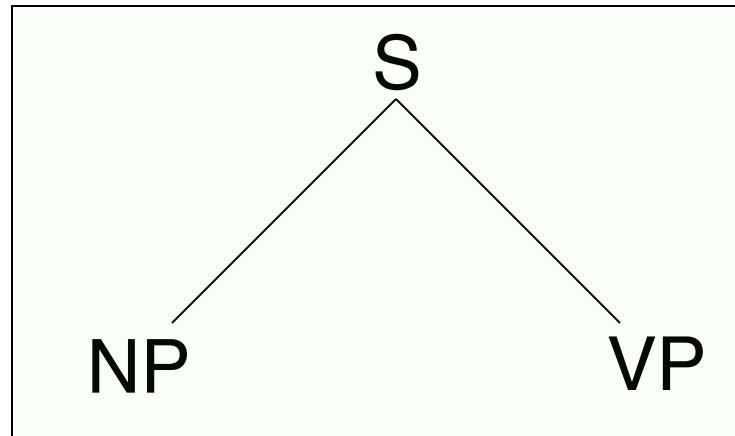
A sentence often consists of a **Noun Phrase** followed by a **Verb Phrase**

$S \rightarrow NP VP$



Phrase Structure Rule

Phrase Structure Tree



# A template

## Noun Phrase

Hoggle

The chicken

Seven goblins

Sarah

A feeling

The strangest story  
that you ever did hear

## Verb Phrase

slept

tricked the guards

left

said that Ludo thought that  
pixies were nasty

kicked the bucket

got drunk on dwarf wine

# A template

Noun Phrase

Verb Phrase

Hoggle

slept

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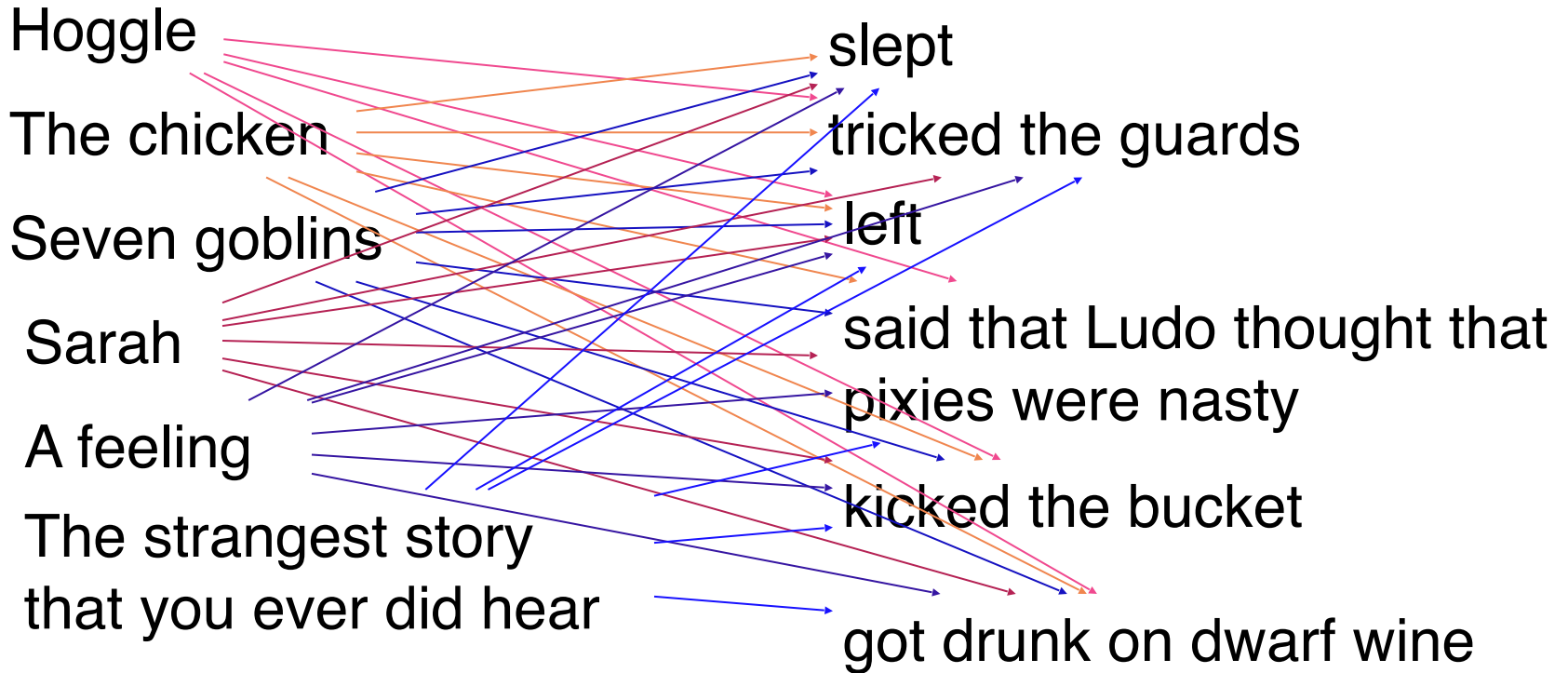
got drunk on dwarf wine

**6 Sentences**

# A template

Noun Phrase

Verb Phrase

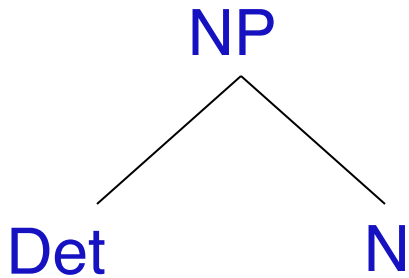


**36 Sentences**

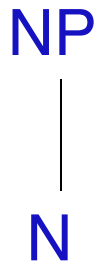
# A template

## Noun Phrase

NP  $\rightarrow$  Det N

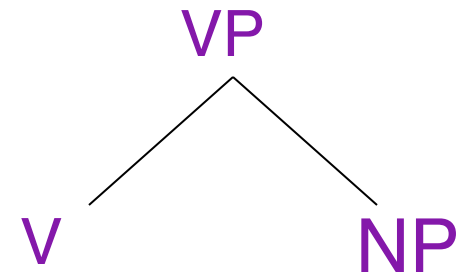


NP  $\rightarrow$  N

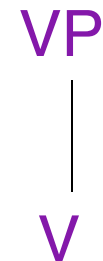


## Verb Phrase

VP  $\rightarrow$  V NP



VP  $\rightarrow$  V



# A tiny little grammar

5 Rules

S --> NP VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

9 Words

Det: *the, four, some*

N: *goblins, crystals, peaches*

V: *understood, ate, approached*

468 Sentences



# A tiny little grammar

5 Rules

S --> NP VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

30 Words

10 Determiners

10 Nouns

10 Verbs

**122,100 Sentences**

# Embedded sentences

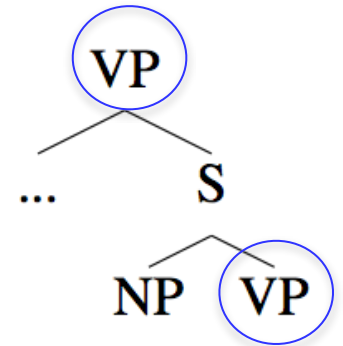
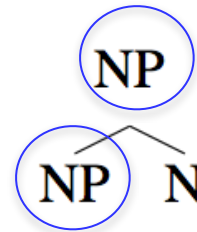
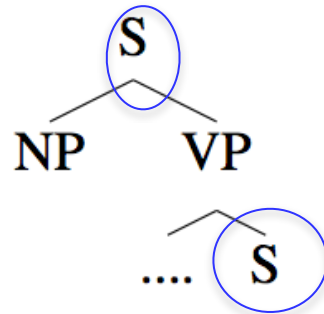
## Additional VP Rule

Hoggle thought Sarah ate the peach.

VP → V S ←

Can be used to create a sentence-inside-a-sentence = example of *recursion*

Recursion = a phrase of one kind inside a phrase of the same kind (a sentence is a kind of phrase, so a sentence-inside-a-sentence fits this definition)

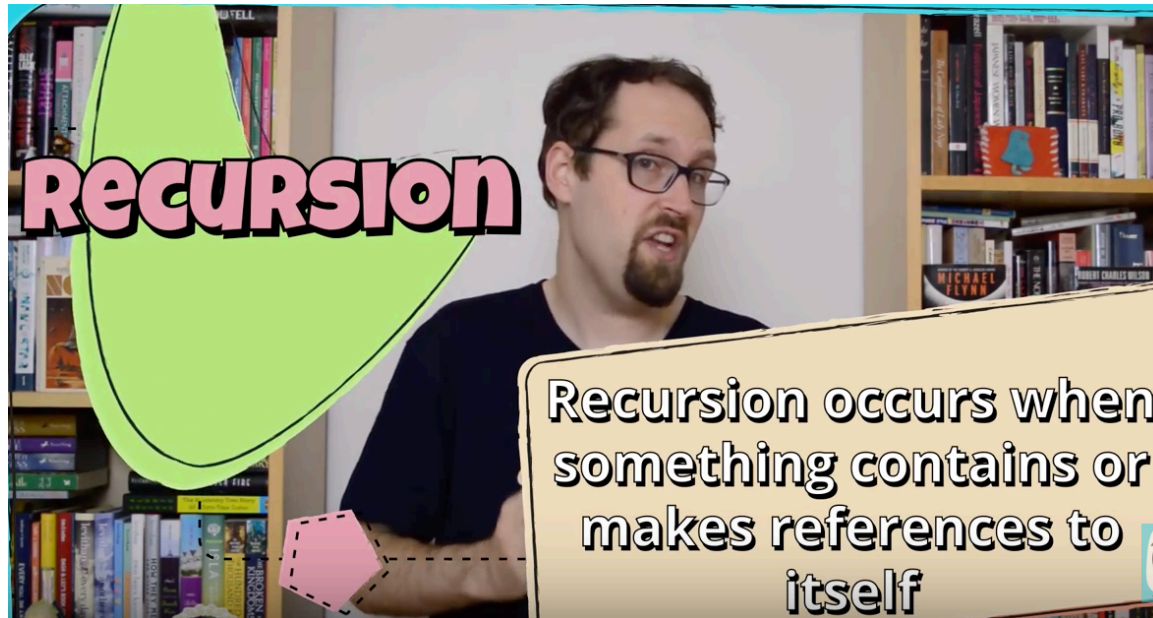


# Recursion: the LingSpace

<http://www.thelingspace.com/episode-86>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9g77Wj5wr0>

1:34-2:30 = recursion

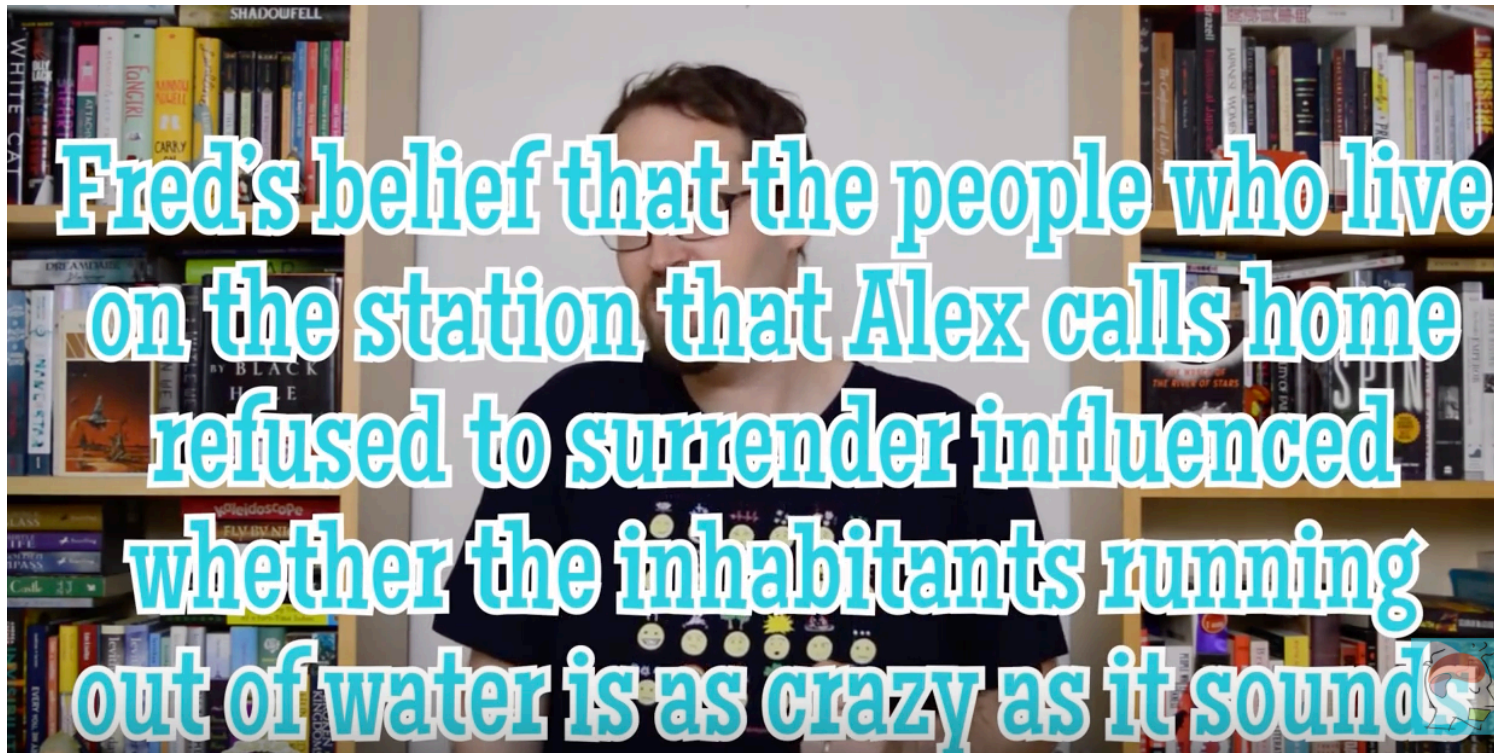


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<http://www.thelingspace.com/episode-86>,

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5:07-5:31 = long recursive example



# Recursion

## Additional VP Rule

Hoggle thought Sarah ate the peach.

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S

**Infinitely many sentences  
can be generated!**

Ludo said Hoggle thought Sarah ate the peach.

The fairy claimed Ludo said Hoggle thought Sarah ate the peach.

The Wiseman's birdhat hoped the fairy claimed Ludo said Hoggle thought Sarah ate the peach.

# Recursion

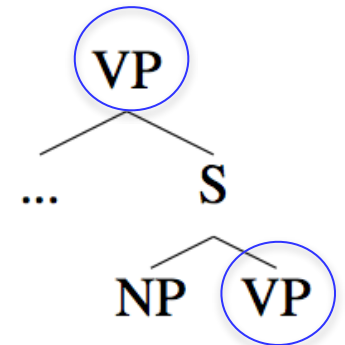
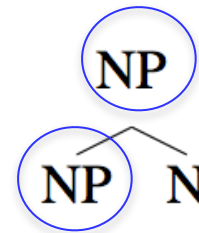
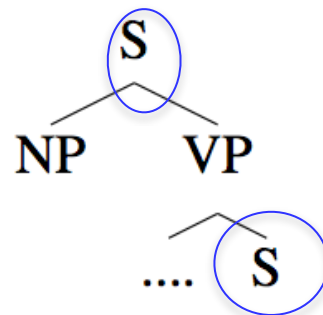
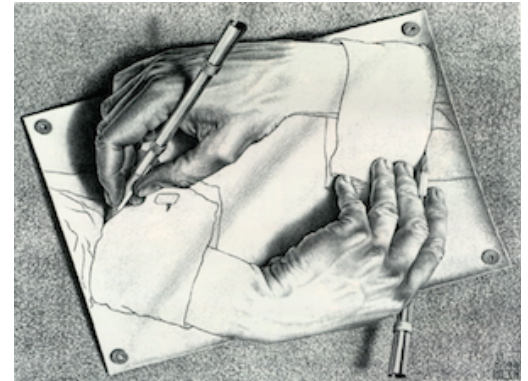
We can also see this property in English noun phrases

NP → NP's Noun

Sarah's friend is a dwarf.

Sarah's friend's uncle is a dwarf.

Sarah's friend's uncle's neighbor is a dwarf.



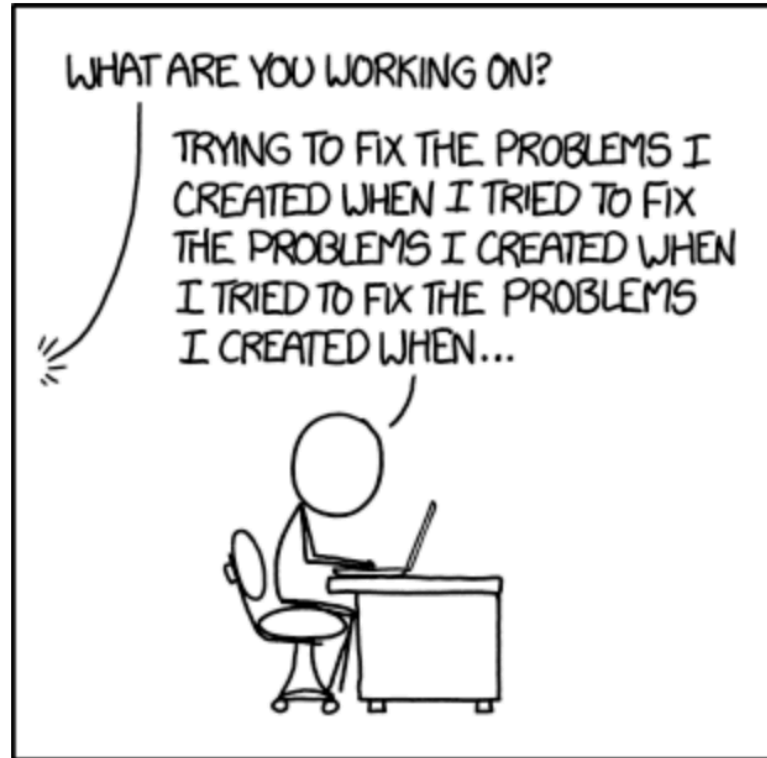
# Recursion

<http://xkcd.com/1557/>



# Recursion

<http://xkcd.com/1739/>





# Recursion

<http://phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=1758>



WWW.PHDCOMICS.COM

"What if I know what I don't know, but I don't know how to know what I need to know to know what I don't know?"

# Recursion

<http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2010/02/please-stop.html>

**Me:** "It's a free country! I can sit on your bed if I want!"

**My sister:** "PLEASE STOP!"

**Me:** "PLEASE STOP SAYING PLEASE STOP!"

**My sister:** "PLEASE STOP TELLING ME TO PLEASE STOP SAYING PLEASE STOP!"

**Me:** "PLEASE STOP TELLING ME TO PLEASE STOP TELLING YOU TO PLEASE STOP SAYING PLEASE STOP!"

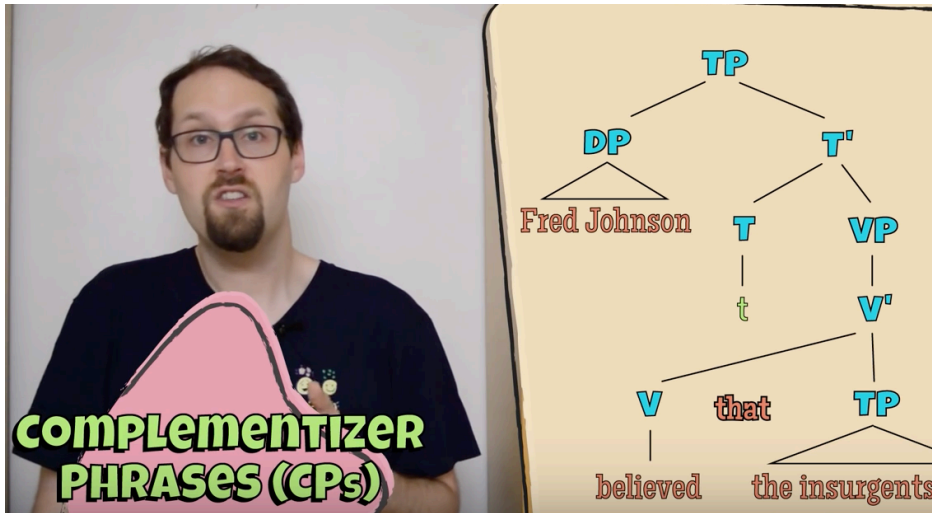
We had discovered a glitch in the system -- Please Stop was flawed. It could be used against itself *infinitely*, thereby becoming useless. We were in a goddamn Mexican standoff.

# Complementizers: the LingSpace

<http://www.thelingspace.com/episode-86>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9g77Wj5wr0>

2:31 - 4:30 = complementizers



*Note: In structure examples,  
DP = NP*

*TP = S*

*CP = S'*

*for our purposes*

# Clauses as subjects or objects: the LingSpace

<http://www.thelingspace.com/episode-86>,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9g77Wj5wr0>

4:56 - 5:07 = clauses as subjects or objects



# Complementizer

Complementizer (Comp): words like THAT, IF, and WHETHER that allow one sentence to be the subject or object of another sentence

Hoggle realized that Sarah ate the peach.

Whether Sarah ate the peach didn't matter.

$S' \rightarrow \text{Comp } S$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$S \rightarrow S' VP$

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Example of Recursion 1:

S expands to include S'

S' expands to include S

$S \rightarrow S' VP \rightarrow \text{Comp } S VP$

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$S \rightarrow S' VP$

Example of Recursion 2:

S expands to include VP

VP expands to include S'

S' expands to include S

$S \rightarrow S' VP \rightarrow S' V S' \rightarrow S' V \text{Comp } S$

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VP expands to include S'

S' expands to include S

$S \rightarrow S' VP \rightarrow S' V S' \rightarrow S' V \text{Comp } S$

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

$S \rightarrow S' VP$

$NP \rightarrow Det N$

$NP \rightarrow N$

$VP \rightarrow V NP$

$VP \rightarrow V$

$VP \rightarrow V S$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

Sentences it can generate:

Hoggle likes jewels.

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$N$

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$V NP$

$NP \rightarrow N$

$N$



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VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

Sentences it can generate:

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S --> NP VP

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

N

V NP

Hoggle

likes NP --> N

N

jewels

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

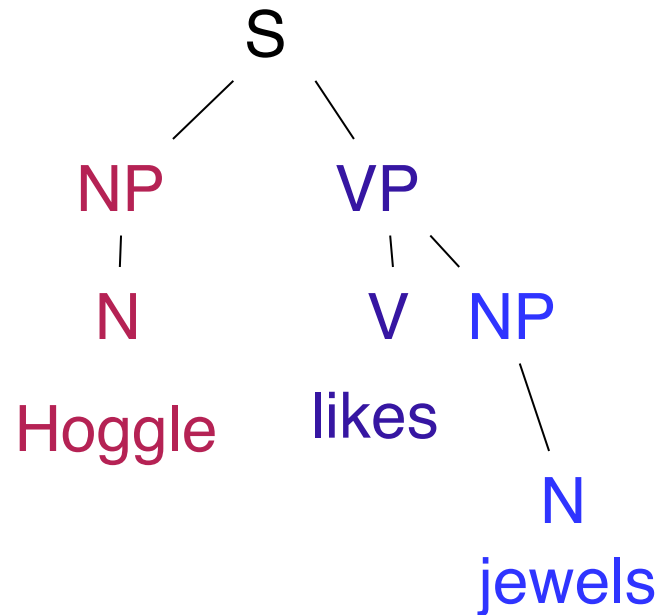
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Sentences it can generate:

Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.

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N

V S'

Sarah

thought

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

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$S \rightarrow S' VP$

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$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

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Comp S



# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

Sentences it can generate:

Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.

S --> NP VP

NP --> N

VP --> V S'

N

V S'

Sarah

thought

Comp S

that

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

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$VP \rightarrow V S$

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$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

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Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

$NP \rightarrow N$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

N

V S' Comp

Sarah

thought

that S

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

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$VP \rightarrow V NP$

$VP \rightarrow V$

$VP \rightarrow V S$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

Sentences it can generate:

Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

$NP \rightarrow N$

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V S' Comp

Sarah

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that

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

# A slightly bigger grammar

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$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

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$NP \rightarrow N$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$N$

$V S' Comp$

Sarah

thought

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NP VP

# A slightly bigger grammar

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$VP \rightarrow V S$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$S' \rightarrow Comp S$

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$NP \rightarrow N$

$VP \rightarrow V S'$

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Sarah

thought

that

NP VP

$NP \rightarrow N$

$VP \rightarrow V NP$

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NP --> N

VP --> V NP

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NP --> N

VP --> V S'

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V S' Comp

Sarah

thought

that

NP VP

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

N

V NP

she

solved

# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

S  $\rightarrow$  NP VP

S  $\rightarrow$  S' VP

NP  $\rightarrow$  Det N

NP  $\rightarrow$  N

VP  $\rightarrow$  V NP

VP  $\rightarrow$  V

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S'

S'  $\rightarrow$  Comp S

Sentences it can generate:

Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.

S  $\rightarrow$  NP VP

NP  $\rightarrow$  N

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S'

N

V S' Comp

Sarah

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that

NP VP

NP  $\rightarrow$  N

VP  $\rightarrow$  V NP

N

V NP

she

solved

NP  $\rightarrow$  Det N

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V S' Comp

Sarah

thought

that

NP VP

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

N

V NP

she

solved

NP --> Det N

Det N

the Labyrinth



# A slightly bigger grammar

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

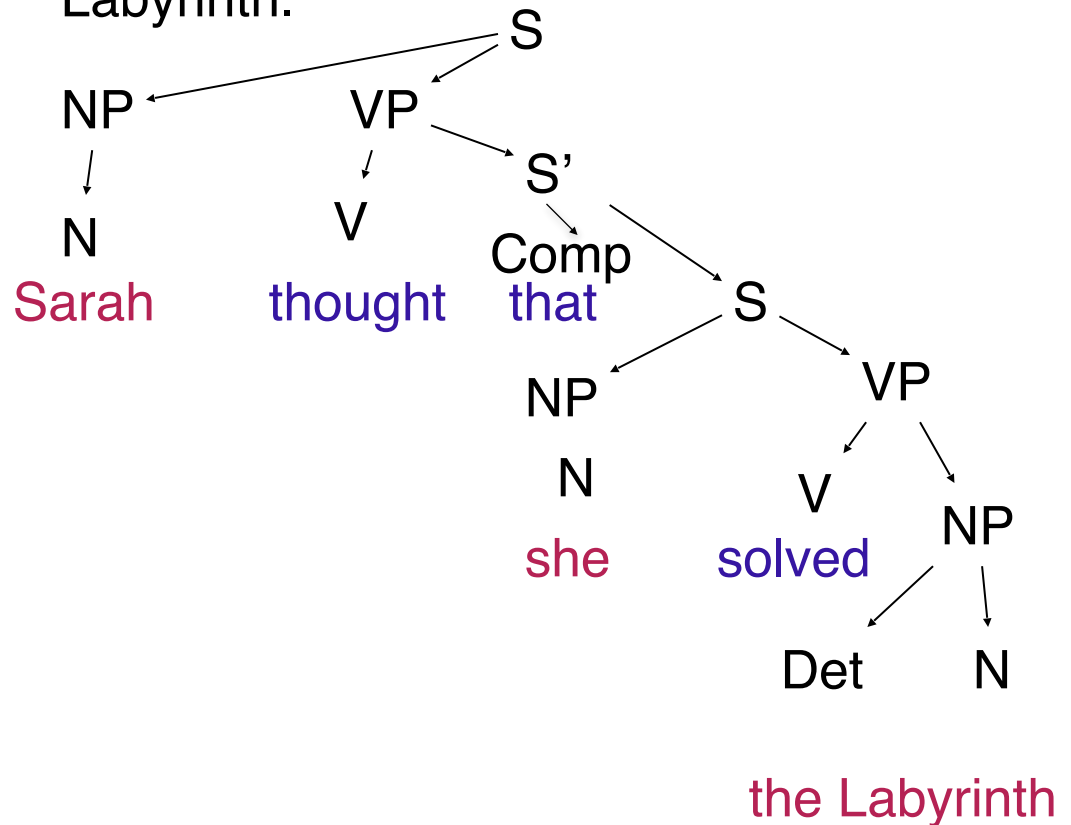
VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

Sentences it can generate:

Sarah thought that she solved the Labyrinth.



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S  $\rightarrow$  NP VP

S  $\rightarrow$  S' VP

NP  $\rightarrow$  Det N

NP  $\rightarrow$  N

VP  $\rightarrow$  V NP

VP  $\rightarrow$  V

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S'

S'  $\rightarrow$  Comp S

Sarah thought that Hoggle was a cheat.

# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

N	V	Comp	N	V	Det	N
Sarah	thought	that	Hoggle	was	a	cheat.

# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

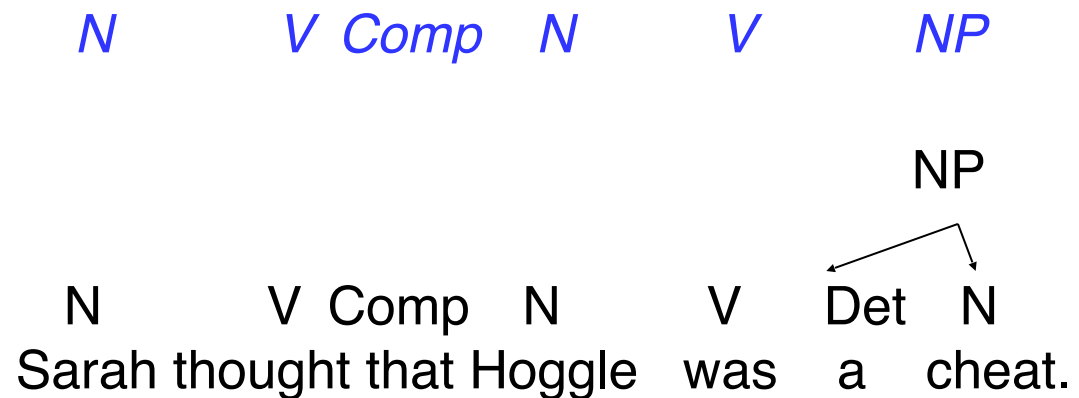
VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

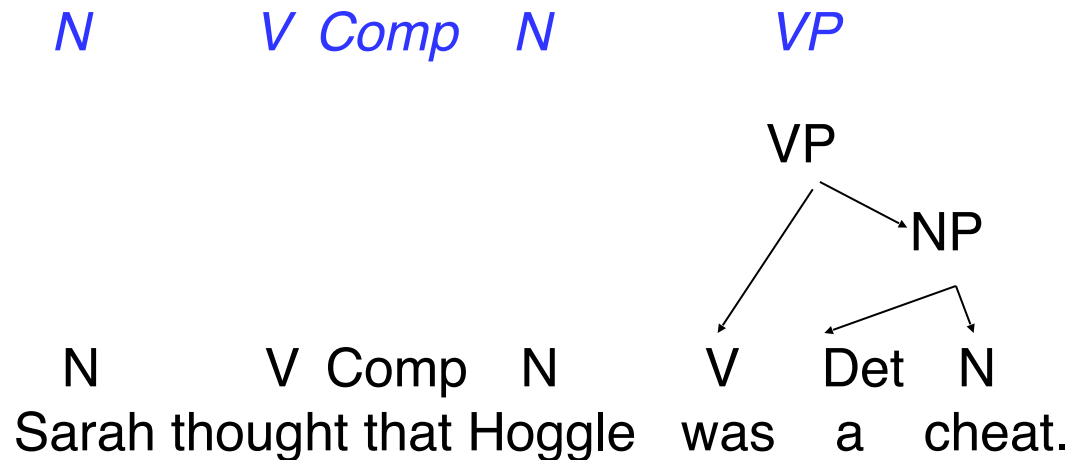
VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

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NP --> Det N

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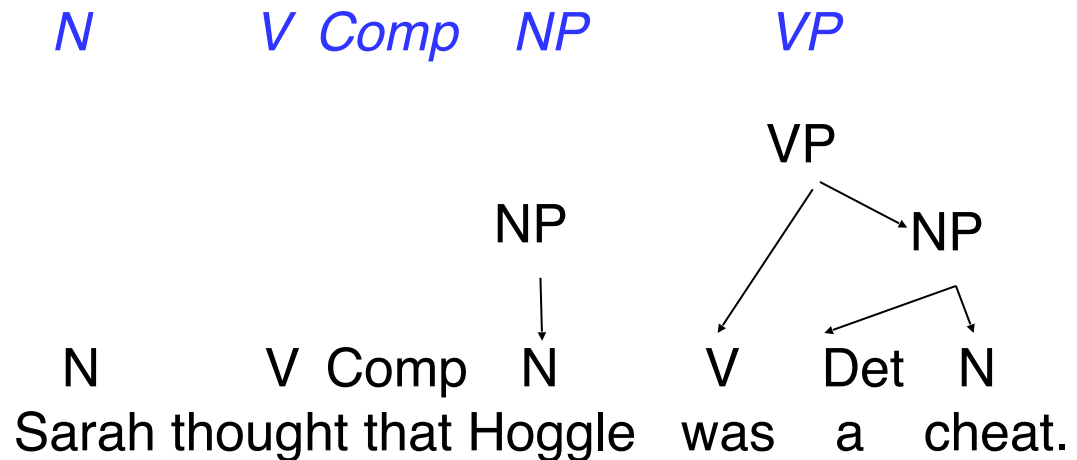
VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

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# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

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$NP \rightarrow Det N$

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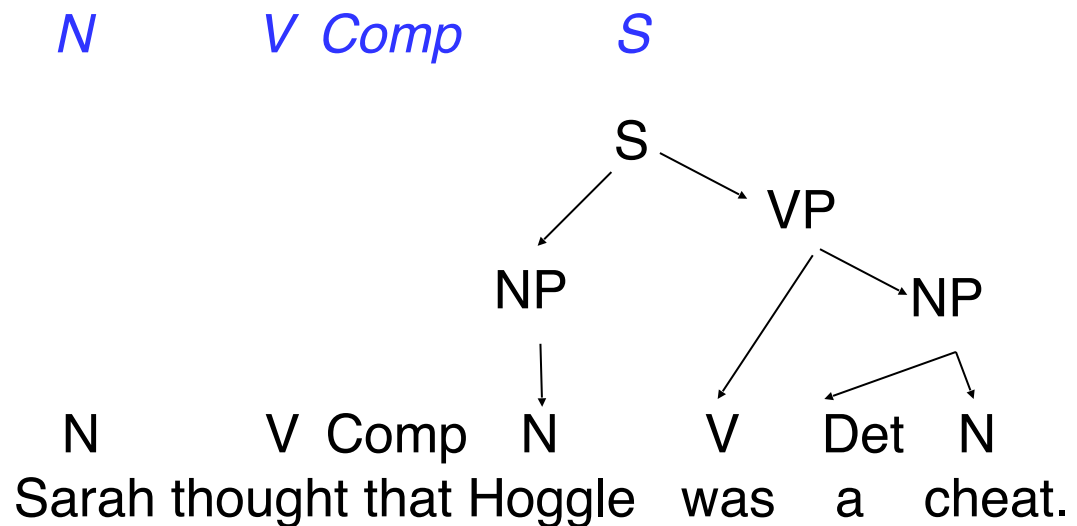
$VP \rightarrow V NP$

$VP \rightarrow V$

$VP \rightarrow V S$

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# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

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NP --> Det N

NP --> N

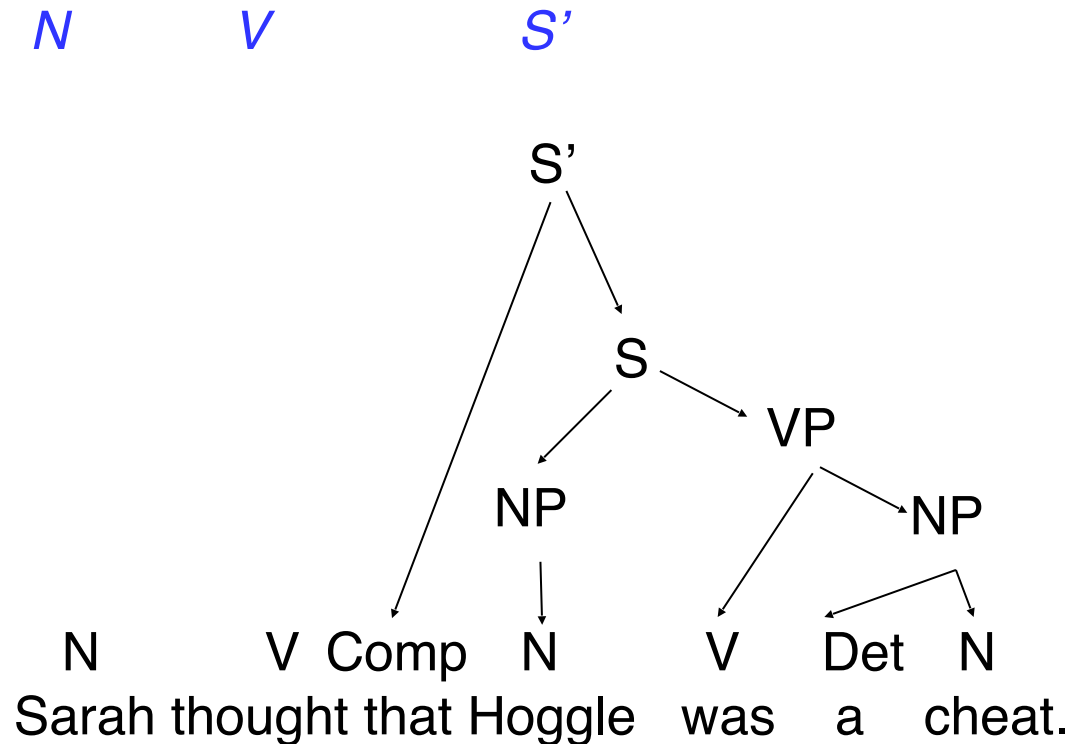
VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S





# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

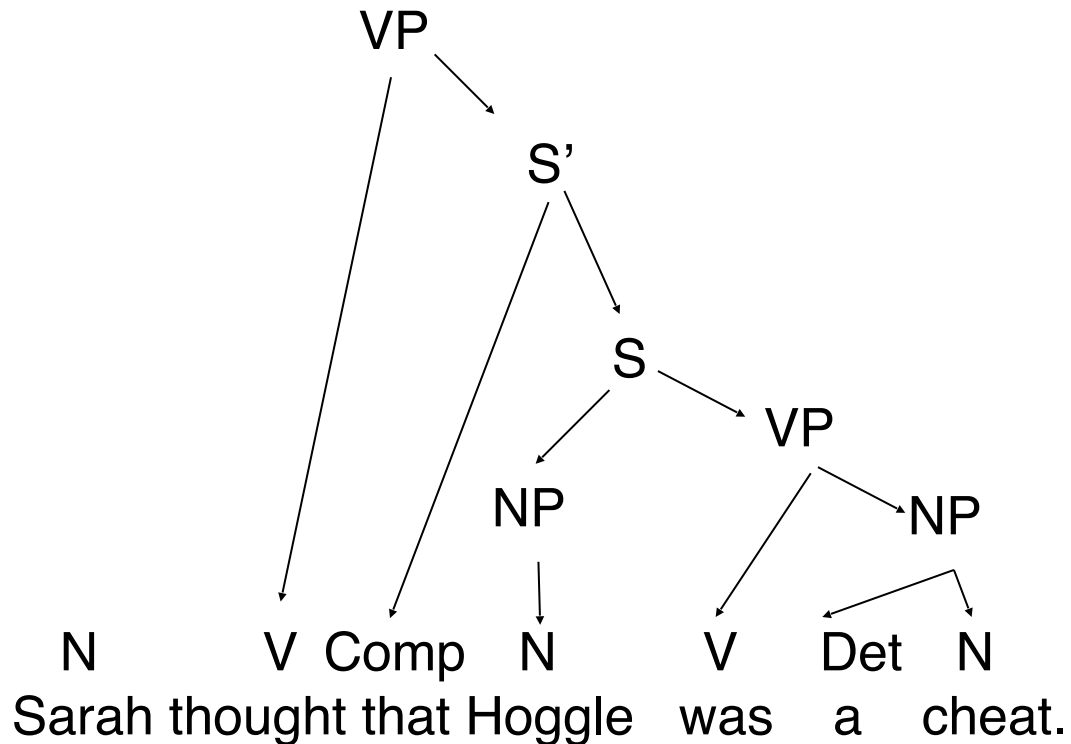
VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

*N*

*VP*



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

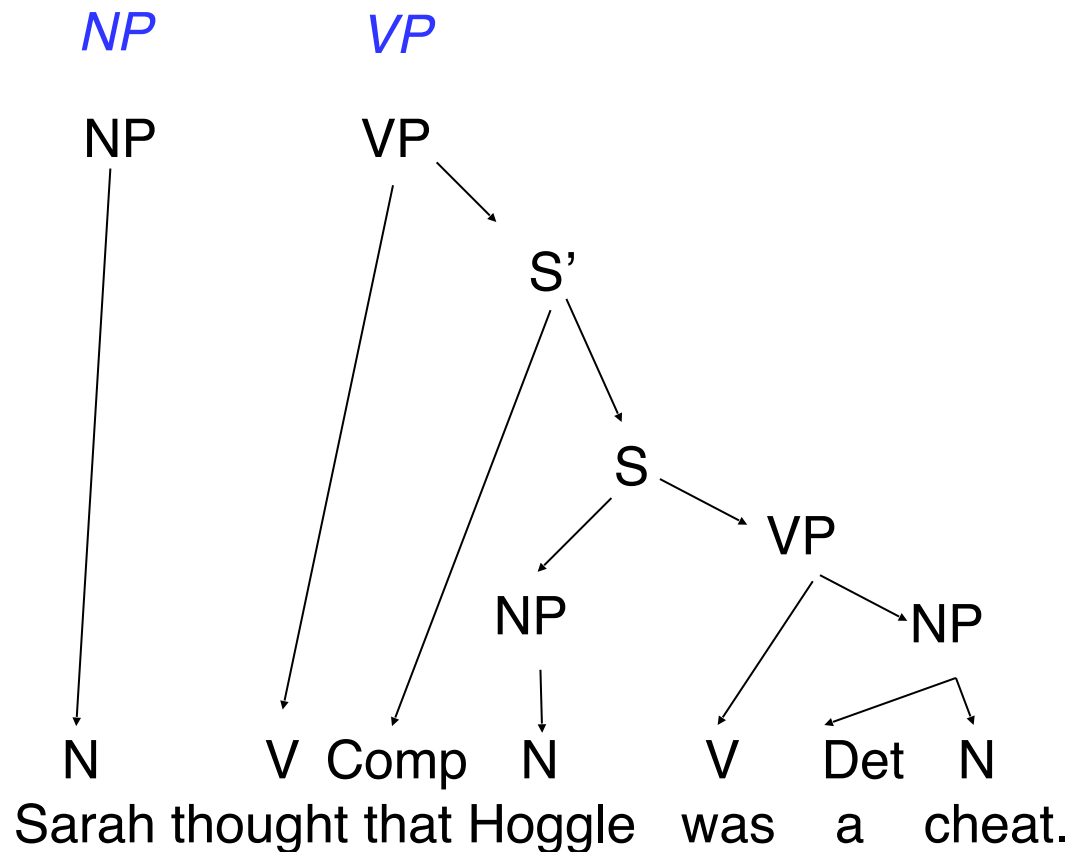
VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

9 Rules

$S \rightarrow NP VP$

$S \rightarrow S' VP$

$NP \rightarrow Det N$

$NP \rightarrow N$

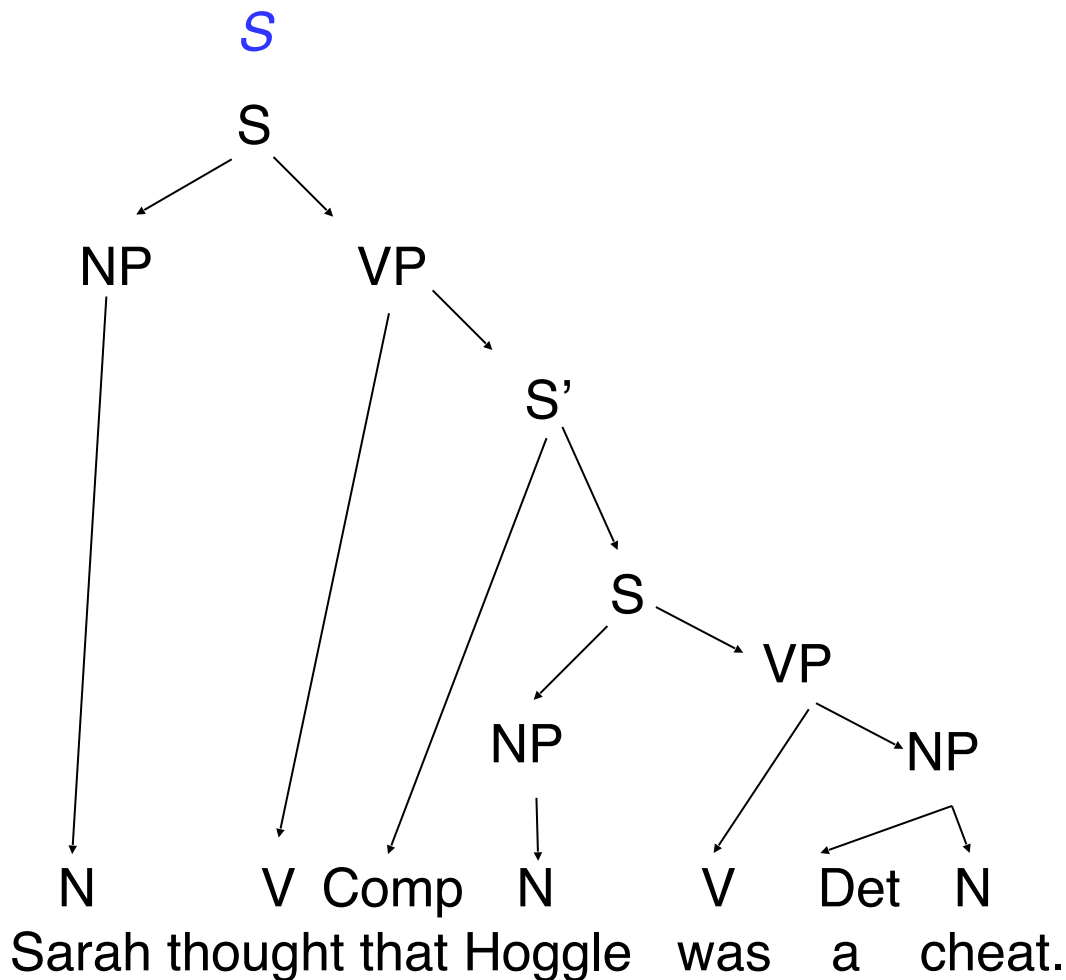
$VP \rightarrow V NP$

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$VP \rightarrow V S$

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# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S  $\rightarrow$  NP VP

S  $\rightarrow$  S' VP

NP  $\rightarrow$  Det N

NP  $\rightarrow$  N

VP  $\rightarrow$  V NP

VP  $\rightarrow$  V

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S

VP  $\rightarrow$  V S'

S'  $\rightarrow$  Comp S

That Hoggle lied surprised Sarah.

# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

Comp    N        V        V        N

That Hoggle    lied    surprised    Sarah.

# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

S --> S' VP

NP --> Det N

NP --> N

VP --> V NP

VP --> V

VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

S' --> Comp S

*Comp*    *N*            *V*            *V*            *NP*

NP



Comp    N            V            V            N

That Hoggle    lied    surprised    Sarah.

# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

## 9 Rules

S --> NP VP

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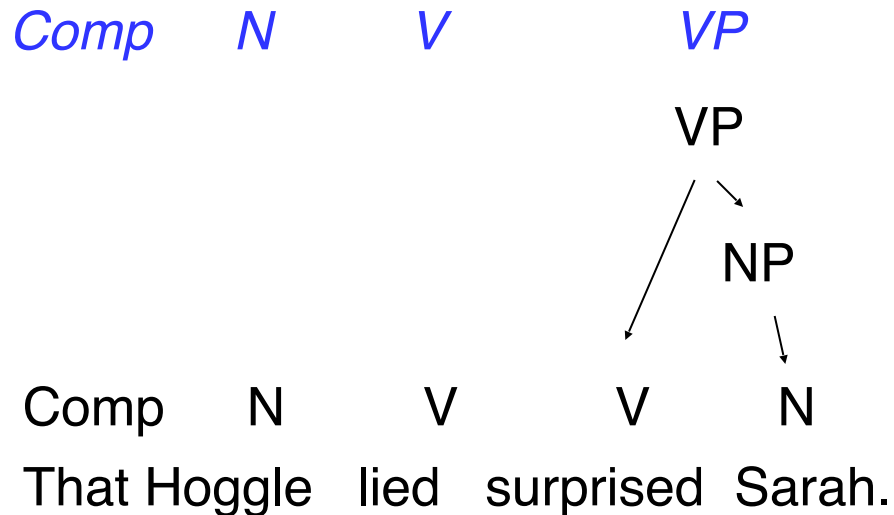
VP --> V NP

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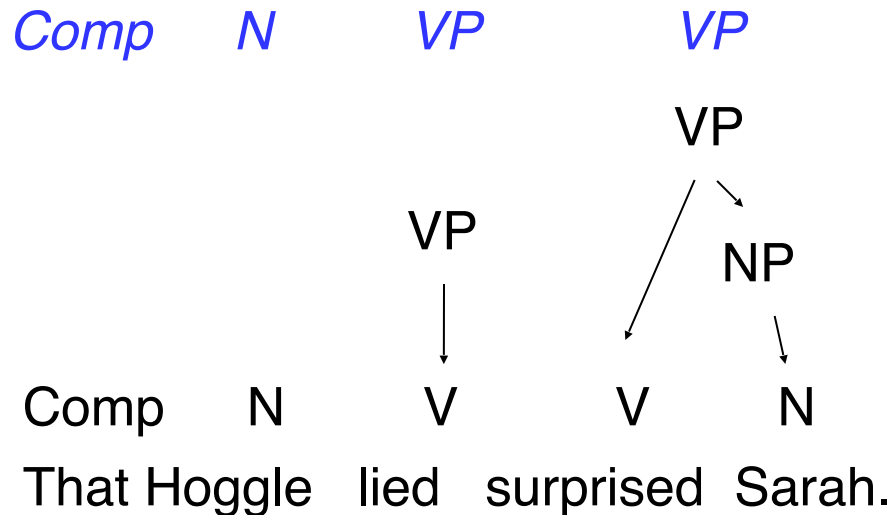
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# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

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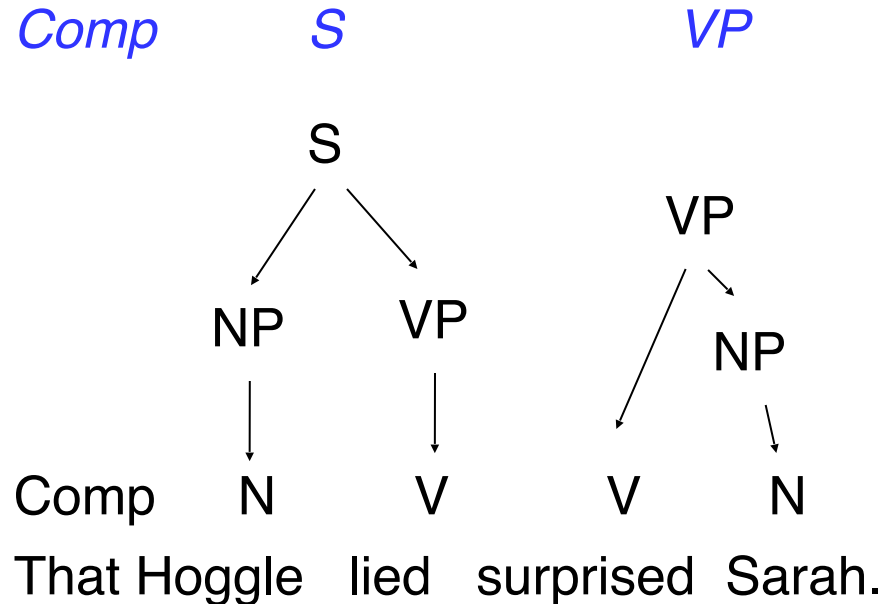
$VP \rightarrow V NP$

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$VP \rightarrow V S'$

$S' \rightarrow Comp S$



# Figuring out structure: bottom-up

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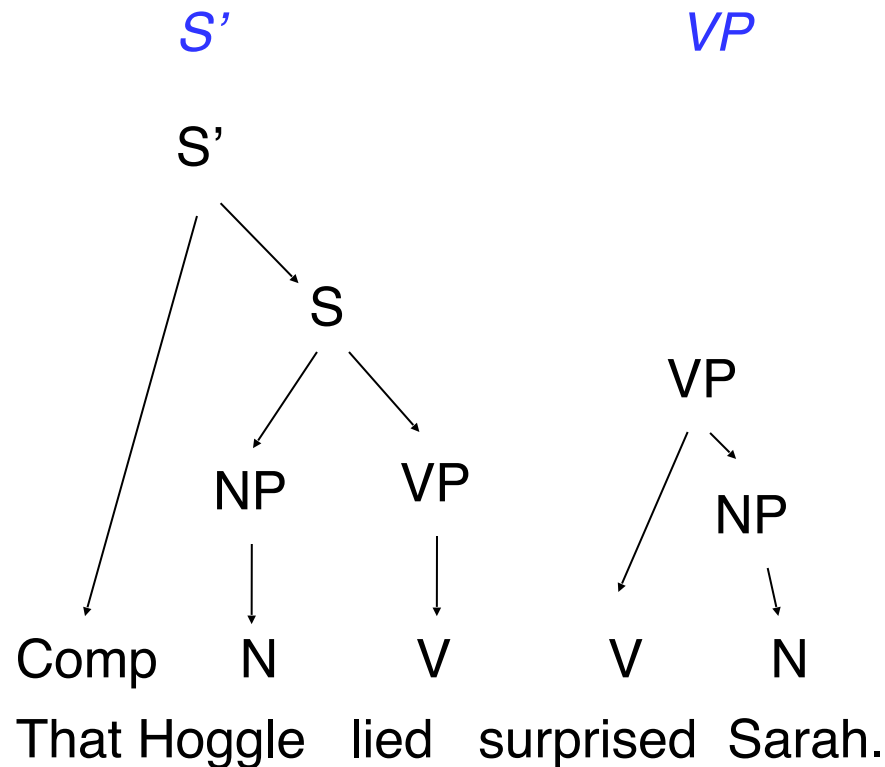
$VP \rightarrow V NP$

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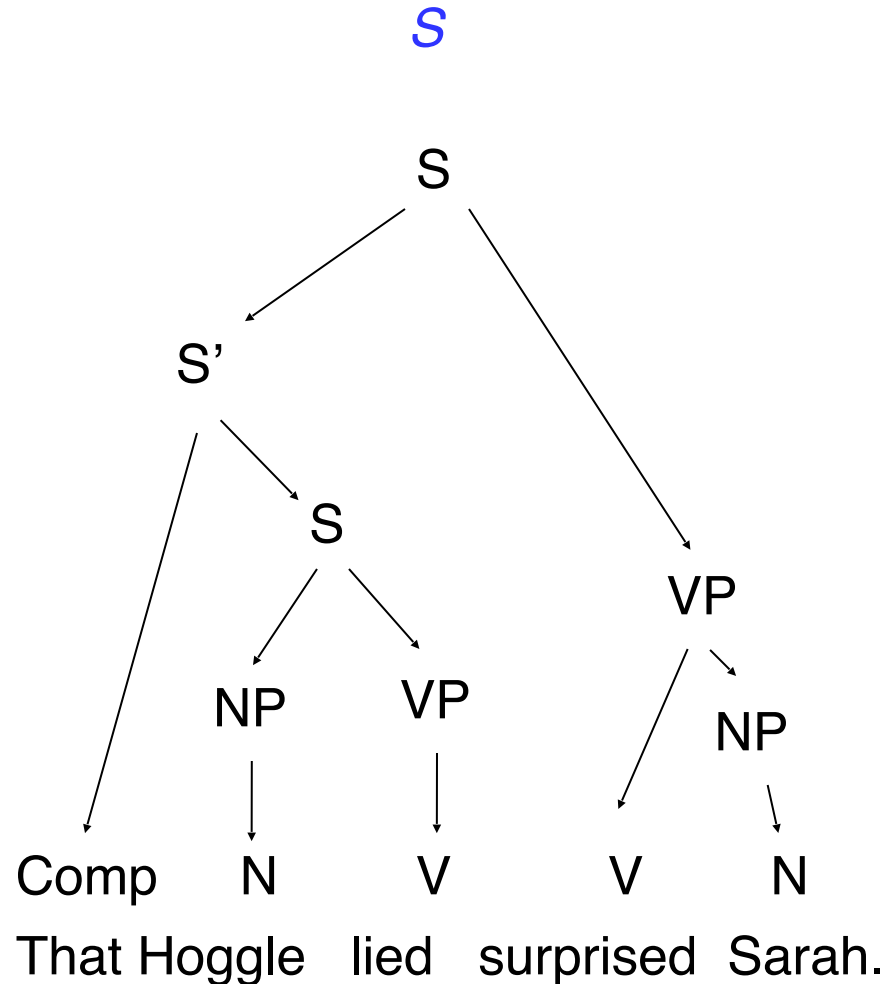
VP --> V NP

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VP --> V S

VP --> V S'

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# Syntax recap

The structure of language (syntax) involves more than simply the meaning of the words. It involves rules about how the words themselves are allowed to go together.

It isn't enough to know the list of possible sentences in the language. Because adults can generate novel sentences and sentences of infinite length, adults need to know a rule system that can generate sentences.

Adults know (unconsciously) a system of rules for generating the word orders they use. A fairly small set of rules can generate a fairly large set of sentences.

# Questions?



You should be able to do up through question 6 on the review questions, and up through question 9 on HW5.