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LANGUAGE

DAVID CRYSTAL



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16 • THE STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES

The study of sentence structure is called *syntax*, and because there is so little variation in the grammatical structure of English words (§14), a syntactic analysis forms the dominant element in a modern English grammar. The area thus provides the main point of contrast with traditional grammars (§13), which because of their Latinate origins paid little attention to the syntactic properties of sentences.

Sentences

The sentence is probably the most familiar of all grammatical terms. We are introduced to it in our early school years, if not before, and it quickly becomes part of our linguistic awareness. We imagine we speak in sentences, and we teach children to write in them, making sure that they put in all the periods. It might therefore be thought that sentences are easy things to identify and define. The opposite turns out to be the case.

Those who learned some traditional grammar will remember the old definition of a sentence as 'a complete expression of a single thought'. Unfortunately, this *notional* approach is too vague to be of much help. There are many sentences which seem to express a single thought, but which are not complete, by traditional standards:

Lovely day! Taxi! Nice one! Tennis?

There are also many sentences which are complete, but express more than one thought:

For his birthday, Ben wants a bike, a computer game, and a visit to the theme park.

The *formal* approach to English grammar, by contrast, tries to avoid these kinds of difficulty by describing the way in which sentences are constructed – the patterns of words they contain. It is an approach which can lead to some surprises, especially when we look carefully at what happens in everyday speech.

SPOKEN AND WRITTEN SYNTAX

One of the legacies of traditional grammar is the view that the spoken language has 'less' grammar because it does not 'follow the rules' which are found in writing (p. 192). There are indeed many differences between the two types of communication (p. 291), and some of the most important of these are to do with the notion of a sentence. Putting it at its simplest: Do we speak in sentences? The answer is that we do, but the kind of sentence organization we find in speech is rather different from that found in writing, as the first transcript below shows.

When we are writing, we usually have time to make notes, plan ahead, pause, reflect, change our mind, start again, revise, proof-read, and generally polish the language until we have reached a level which satisfies us. The reader sees only the finished product. But in everyday conversation, there is no time for such things to happen. We do not have the

Find the sentence

As this is a transcript of speech, there are no capital letters. Major pauses are shown by – , and units of rhythm by / . (After D. Crystal & D. Davy, 1975.)

we had our breakfast in the kitchen / - and then we sort of did what we liked / and er got ready to go out / we usually went out quite soon after that / - erm the children were always up / at the crack of dawn / with the farmer / - and they went in the milking sheds / and helped him feed the pigs / and all this / you know we didn't see the children / - and er then we used to go out / we - we had super weather / - absolutely super / - and so we went to a beach / usually for er but by about four o'clock it we were hot and we had to come off the beach / - so we'd generally go for a tea somewhere / just in case supper was delayed you know / and then we'd get back / and the children would go straight back on to the farm / and have ponies / their own children had ponies / and they'd come up and put them on the ponies' backs / and er - and the milking it was milking time / and really we were committed to getting back for milking time /

We had our breakfast in the kitchen, and then we did what we liked, and got ready to go out.

We usually went out quite soon after that.

The children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer, and they went into the milking sheds and helped him feed the pigs.

We didn't see the children.

And then we used to go out.

We had super weather, absolutely super.

And so we went to a beach, but by about four o'clock we were hot and we had to come off the beach.

So we'd generally go for a tea somewhere, just in case supper was delayed.

And then we'd get back, and the children would go straight back on to the farm, and have ponies.

Their own children had ponies, and they'd come up and put them on the ponies' backs.

And it was milking time, and really we were committed to getting back for milking time.

opportunity to plan what we want to say, and we have to allow for false starts, interruptions, second thoughts, words on the tip of the tongue, and a host of other disturbances which take place while we are in full flow.

Extracts of informal spoken conversation look weird in print, because it is not possible to show all the melody, stress, and tone of voice which made the speaker sound perfectly natural in context; but it does show how spoken grammar differs from written. Punctuating the material in such a transcript is not easy, as can be seen by the second version below, where an attempt has been made to cut out hesitations and false starts, and to identify possible sentences. The use of *and* in particular makes it difficult to work out where one sentence ends and the next begins. Readers who doubt the seriousness of this problem might care to pencil in their own impressions about where the sentences end, and then compare their decisions with those shown below. There will be several discrepancies.

WORD ORDER

Word order is at the heart of syntax, and most of English grammar is taken up with the rules governing the order in which words, and clusters of words, can appear. The importance of this domain can be seen from the following set of examples, where the meaning of the sentence alters fundamentally once the order varies.

Dog chases postman. / Postman chases dog.
They are outside. / Are they outside?
Only I saw Mary. / I saw only Mary.

Naturally, I got up. / I got up naturally (*not awkwardly*).

Show me the last three pages (*of one book*). / Show me the three last pages (*of three books*).

The man with a dog saw me. / The man saw me with a dog.

There are also many rules forbidding us to put words in a certain order. Mother-tongue speakers never think twice about them, because they unconsciously learned these rules as children. But the rules are there, nonetheless, making us use the first of the following alternatives, not the second (the

asterisk shows that the sentence is unacceptable).

I walked to town. / *I to town walked.

Hardly had I left... / *Hardly I had left...

That's a fine old house. / *That's an old fine house.

John and I saw her. / *I and John saw her.

She switched it on. / *She switched on it.

Mother-tongue speakers instinctively know that the first is correct, and the second is not; but explaining why this is so to anyone who asks (such as a foreign learner) is a specialist task, which requires a professional approach if it is to succeed.

Three general points apply to any English sentence.

- Sentences are constructed according to a system of rules, known by all the adult mother-tongue speakers of the language, and summarized in a grammar. A sentence formed in this way is said to be *grammatical*.
- Sentences are the largest constructions to which the rules of grammar apply. (The formation of larger units, such as paragraphs, is discussed on p. 232.) This means that, before we can satisfactorily carry out the task of identifying sentences, we need to know something about grammatical analysis. Once we have worked our way through a good English grammar, we know what the possible sentences are, because the grammar has told us.
- Sentences are constructions which can be used on their own – units of meaning which seem to ‘make

sense’ by themselves. This is an ancient and plausible criterion, but it is never a straightforward one. For example, if we apply it to the sentences in the extract opposite, we find that we need to do some editing to make it work. *We didn't see the children* poses no problem; but *We usually went out quite soon after that* does, for we have to ‘fill out’ the meaning of *that* with reference to what has gone before. Also, to make the sentences in the extract sound truly ‘self-contained’, we have to find a way of dealing with the conjunctions which appear at the beginning of several of them – perhaps by analysing some as dispensable ‘thinking’ noises rather than as true conjunctions with a genuine linking function (p. 227). The problem turns out to be quite a complex one – and typical of the intriguing questions which arise when we begin the investigation of syntax.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

A sentence is something which begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop? This traditional definition, which applies only to the written language, is faulty on three counts.

- We have to allow for question marks and exclamation marks as well (as in the first sentence of this caption).
- Punctuation is often not used in writing, and yet we still know when a construction is a sentence. Many advertisements, public notices, newspaper headlines, and legal documents lack punctuation marks.
- People disagree about the best way to punctuate a text. In particular, some manuals of style say we should never end a

sentence before such words as *and* or *but*, and this rule is often taught in schools. Its source lies in the uncontrolled way in which young children use *and* in their early written work, reflecting its frequency in natural conversation. But there are other manuals which accept that authors often do begin sentences in this way (usually to emphasize a contrast in meaning), and these do not condemn the usage. It is a regular feature of the style of the present author, who finds it on occasion a much more dramatic and rhythmical way of drawing a contrast than to use the various alternatives available. To replace *but* by *however* two sentences above, for example, would be to slow down the movement of the paragraph quite noticeably – in his view an unnecessary change of pace in a piece of text which wishes to make its point quickly and economically.

Magazine covers destroy any simple definition of sentences in terms of initial capital letters and final full stops. Here we have a sentence which is all capital letters, and four others where an unusual use of capitals has replaced conventional punctuation.



THE END OF THE BEGINNING



Winston Churchill, according to the Chambers *Biographical Dictionary*, ‘the last of the classic orators with a supreme command of English’.

The quotation is from the end of the third and the opening of the fourth paragraph of Book 1 of *The History of the Second World War*. The succinct, dramatic effectiveness of the contrast should silence for ever those who unthinkingly condemn the use of a sentence-initial conjunction as ‘bad style’. But it won’t!

To those Frenchmen – and there were many in high authority – who had fought and suffered in 1870 it seemed almost a miracle that France should have emerged victorious from the incomparably more terrible struggle which had just ended. All their lives they had dwelt in fear of the German Empire. They remembered the preventive war which Bismarck had sought to wage in 1875; they remembered the brutal threat which had driven Declassé from office in 1905; they had quaked at the Moroccan menace in 1906, at the Bosnian dispute of 1908, and at the Agadir crisis of 1911. The Kaiser’s ‘mailed fist’ and ‘shining armour’ speeches might be received with ridicule in England and America: they sounded a knell of horrible reality in the hearts of the French. For fifty years almost they had lived under the terror of the German arms. Now, at the price of their life-blood, the long oppression had been rolled away. Surely here at last was peace and safety. With one passionate spasm the French people cried ‘Never again!’
But the future was heavy with foreboding...

TYPES OF SENTENCE

It is obvious, as we look through the pages of a novel, or a daily newspaper, that there must be a large number of sentence patterns in English. What is less obvious is that these can be grouped into two main types, on the basis of whether they are formed in a regular or an irregular way. Regular sentences are often referred to as *major sentences*; irregular ones as *minor sentences*.

Major sentences

The major sentences are in the vast majority. All the sentences in this book, apart from the headings and some of the examples, are of this type. Essentially, they are sentences which can be broken down into a specific and predictable pattern of elements. The following examples show some of the possibilities.

The visitor	brought	a book	for you.
I	gave	the letter	to Mary.
Mary	saw	Jane	today.

We need a term to describe 'patterns of elements' of this type, and many grammars use *clause* for the purpose. Sentences which consist of just one clause (pattern of elements) are said to be *simple sentences*. Sentences which can be immediately analysed into more than one clause are *multiple sentences* (described further on p. 227).

SIMPLE AND MULTIPLE SENTENCES

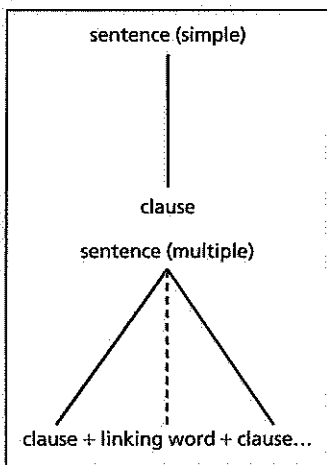
The difference between simple and multiple sentences can be seen in the following two examples:

A book has fallen on John's foot.

A book has fallen on John's foot and a book has fallen on Mary's foot.

The same clause pattern turns up twice in the second sentence; the only difference between them is the lexical change (the change of name). Indeed, it is possible to imagine a sentence in which this clause pattern is used repeatedly, with innumerable books falling on innumerable feet, and just the name changing each time. As long as the speaker kept adding *and...and...and...*, or some other linking word, the sentence could continue indefinitely.

The diagram summarizes the two possibilities.



MINOR SENTENCES

Minor sentences are not constructed in a regular way. They use abnormal patterns which cannot be clearly analysed into a sequence of clause elements, as can major sentences. There are only a few minor sentence types, but instances of each type are frequently used in everyday conversation and when conversations are represented in fiction. They are also common in certain types of written language, such as notices, headlines, labels, advertisements, sub-headings, and other settings where a message is presented as a 'block'.

Minor sentences do not follow all the rules of grammar. For example, in a major sentence the verbs can change their persons: *How do you manage?* > *How does he manage?* But the greeting *How do you do?* is a minor sentence, and we cannot change the person to **How does he do?* (without changing the sense

into something quite different). Nor can we change the tense and ask **How did you do?* The sentence has to be learned as a whole, and used as an idiom (p.162).

It will be seen from this example that some types of minor sentence look quite complex – so much so that on a first impression they might be thought to be displaying a major pattern. But in each case there is something 'odd' about them. For example, one type uses an archaic verb form (the subjunctive) to express wishes, as in *God save the Queen!* and *Heaven forbid!* Another type uses question words idiosyncratically: *How come she's gone out?* These are minor sentences because it is not possible to introduce the full range of normal grammatical changes into their structure, to produce such forms as *God saves the Queen* or *God doesn't save the Queen*. Only major sentences allow systematic variations of this kind.

SOME MINOR SENTENCE TYPES

- Formulae for stereotyped social situations, such as *Hello*, *How do you do?*, *Thanks*, and *Cheers!*
- Emotional or functional noises (traditionally called *interjections*), many of which do not follow the normal pronunciation patterns of the language, such as *Eh?*, *Ugh!*, *Ow!*, *Tut tut*, and *Shh!*
- Proverbs or pithy sayings (*aphorisms*, p. 163), such as *Easy come, easy go* or *Least said, soonest mended*.
- Abbreviated forms, such as are used in postcards, instructions, or commentaries, as in *Wish you were here*, *Mix well*, and *One lap more*.
- Words and phrases used as exclamations, questions, and commands, such as *Nice day!*, *Taxi?*, and *All aboard!*

EXIT

NO SMOKING

FINANCIAL TIMES

Monday, July 10, 1990

NO PARKING

TAXI

RAMSEY STREET

LEVELS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE

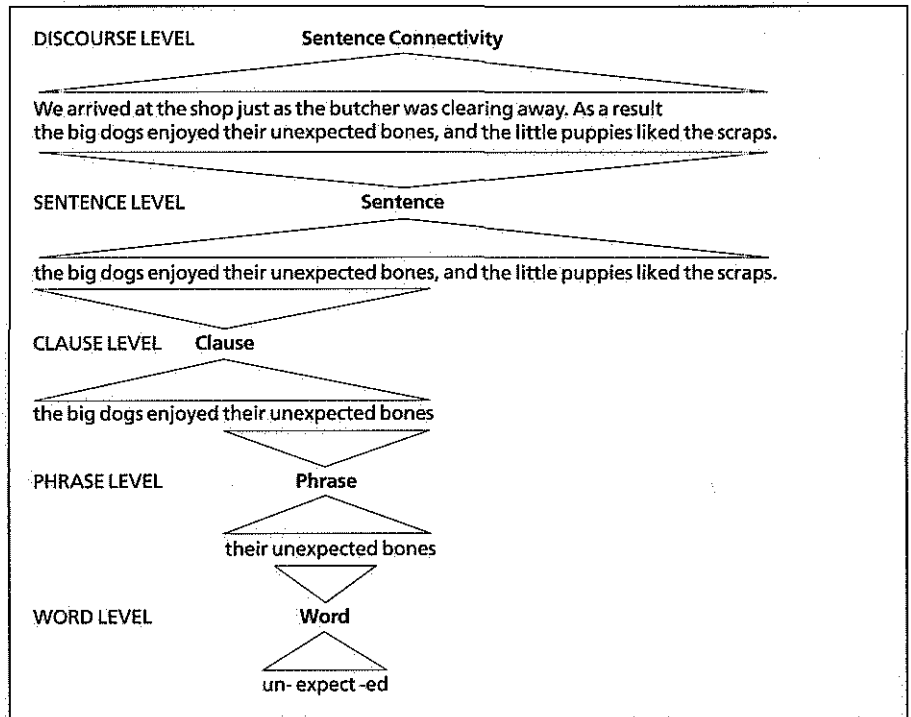
Major sentences can be very simple (*I love you*), but they have the potential to contain a great deal of grammatical structure, as is evident from almost every instance on this page. Literature, oratory, and other sophisticated forms of communication provide particularly striking examples of sentence complexity (p. 70). To demonstrate the order which controls this complexity, all grammars work with the idea of 'levels' of organization.

A 'level' is a way of recognizing the fact that a sentence is not a simple linear string of items. Rather, items are grouped together into units, which then work as wholes in relation to other units. Adult native-speakers do not have to be told that these units exist: they 'know' that they do, subconsciously, as a result of learning the language. (They may not be able to describe the elements they sense to be present, of course, for that is a more conscious task – the difference between 'knowing about' rather than just 'knowing' language, p. 191.)

The sentence *The big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones quickly yields evidence of a hierarchy of levels of organization. The smallest level of this hierarchy hardly needs an explanation. If asked to divide this sentence into its parts, most people would immediately identify the seven words. But this is not the whole story.*

- Four of these words contain smaller units: *dog* + *-s*, *enjoy* + *-ed*, *un-* + *expect* + *-ed*, and *bone* + *-s*. The use of suffixes and prefixes shows that there is a level of structure within the word (the *morphological level*, §14).
- The first three words, and the last three, both combine into larger units: *the big dogs* and *their unexpected bones*. These larger units are called *phrases*, and they show that there is a level of structure between the word and the sentence.
- It would be possible to make the sentence bigger by linking it to a similar sequence of words: *The big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones, and the little puppies liked the scraps*. The sentence now consists of two clauses (p. 216), showing that there can be a further level of structure between the phrase and the sentence.

These four levels – word, phrase, clause, sentence – comprise the grammatical hierarchy summarized in the figure (above), which also gives further examples of the units which operate at each level. The figure also suggests the possibility of a level of grammatical organization which is larger than the sentence: this is discussed on p. 232 and in §19.



FINDING GRAMMATICAL UNITS

The following sentences are taken from the regularized monologue on p. 214.

We usually went out quite soon after that. The children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer, and they went into the milking sheds and helped him feed the pigs. We didn't see the children. So we'd generally go for a tea somewhere, just in case supper was delayed.

Clause level

The conjunctions and other linking words have been omitted below. Note that the subject of *helped* has to be understood from the previous clause, as has the subject of *feed*. *Helped him feed the pigs* presents a problem of analysis, as some grammarians would take this construction as a single clause.

we usually went out quite soon after that
the children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer
they went into the milking sheds
helped him
feed the pigs
we didn't see the children

we'd generally go for a tea somewhere
just in case supper was delayed

Phrase level

Only multi-word phrases are listed below. However, it is important to note that in this approach the notion of *phrase* also extends to single words, as long as they are potentially expandable into a larger unit: for example, *supper* is considered an example of a *noun phrase* (p. 222) because it could be expanded into *our supper*, *the big supper*, etc. Grammarians can spend hours debating the merits and demerits of such decisions. The point shows that even a simple instruction as 'find the phrases' raises interesting questions of analysis. Similarly, there are issues over the analysis of clauses (see above) and words (see below).

went out quite soon after that
the children were...up at the crack of dawn with the farmer
into the milking sheds
the pigs didn't see 'd...go for a tea in case

was delayed

Word level

The existence of several irregular forms makes the analysis of word structure more complex than may appear at first sight: *went*, for example, is the past tense of *go*, and can thus be analysed as *go* + *-ed*.

usually (a derivational suffix, p. 211)
went (an irregular past tense form, p. 204)
children (the changed vowel of *child* is not apparent in the written form)
were (another irregular past tense form)
milking (a derivational suffix, p. 208)
sheds (*milking sheds* can also be analysed as a compound word, p. 129)
helped
him (objective form of *he*, p. 203)
pigs
didn't (*did* is another irregular past tense form)
we'd
generally (another derivational suffix)
somewhere (a compound form, p. 129)
was (another irregular past tense form)
delayed

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS

Traditional grammars recognized four types of sentence function: *statement*, *question*, *command*, and *exclamation*. Some modern grammars, especially those which work within a framework of speech acts (p. 290), recognize a much larger range of functions. Even if we restrict ourselves to the four 'classical' types, though, there are certain refinements which need to be introduced. In particular, the notion of 'question' covers several different kinds of construction; the sentences called 'commands' express other kinds of meaning in addition to commanding; the notion of 'exclamation' is unacceptably vague; and there is an important sentence type (the 'echo' utterance) which fits into none of these four categories.

STATEMENTS

Almost all the sentences used in this book are statements. A statement is a sentence whose primary purpose is to 'state' – to convey information. Two criteria usually apply:

- The clause contains a subject (p. 220) – though in informal conversation this is sometimes omitted.

(I) Beg (your) pardon?
(I) Told you so.
(It) Looks like rain.

- The subject precedes the verb. Here too there are a few exceptions, such as when the clause begins with *hardly*, *barely*, or other 'negative' words.

Hardly had we left when it started to rain. (not *Hardly we had left...)

These sentences are traditionally said to have a *declarative* structure – a structure which 'declares' or 'makes something known'.

QUESTIONS

Questions are sentences which seek information. They fall into three main types, depending on the kind of reply they expect, and on how they are constructed. Sentences formed in these ways are said to have an *interrogative* structure – a structure which 'interrogates'.

- *Yes-no questions* allow an affirmative or negative reply – often just 'yes' or 'no'. The subject follows the auxiliary verb (p. 207).

Are they ready?
Is the plumber here?

In addition, a questioning tone of voice (p. 248) can turn a statement into a *yes-no* question. These questions have the

structure of a declarative sentence, and only the question-mark shows their function in writing.

Mary's outside?
You've bought a new car?

- *Wh-questions* allow a reply from a wide range of possibilities. They begin with a question word, such as *what*, *why*, *where*, or *who*.

Where are you going?
Why don't they answer?

- *Alternative questions* require a reply which relates to the options given in the interrogative sentence. They always contain the connecting word *or*.

Will you be travelling by train or by bus?

EXCLAMATORY QUESTIONS

Some sentences resemble questions in their structure, but are actually being used as exclamations. They express the speaker's strong feelings, and ask the hearer to agree. Despite the presence of a negative element, they are strongly positive in meaning.

Hasn't she grown!
Wasn't it marvellous!

Often, both positive and negative forms of the sentence can be used, with very little difference in meaning. In such cases, the auxiliary verb and the subject are usually strongly stressed.

Wasn't he angry!
Was he angry! (I'll say he was!)

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

These sentences also resemble questions in their structure, but they are used as if they were emphatic statements. The speaker does not expect an answer.

Who cares?
How should I know?
What difference does it make?

Public speakers, politicians, poets, and all who give monologues quite often use rhetorical questions as a means of making a dramatic point.

Is man an ape or an angel? (Disraeli)

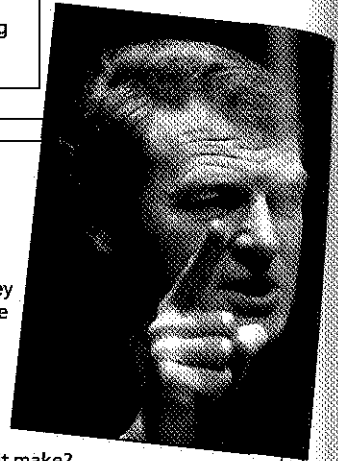
There is always the risk, of course, in a public speech, that a member of the audience will choose to reply, in the pause which follows.

Poets tend to self-question more than others:

Do I wake or sleep? (Keats)

but we are all prone to it:

Now, shall I stop here or add another sentence?



TAG QUESTIONS

Sometimes the interrogative structure is left to the end of the sentence, in the form of a *tag question*, which expects a *yes/no* kind of reply.

It's there, isn't it?
She's not in, is she?

The *n't* ending of some tag questions is replaced by *not* in formal English. In legal cross-examination we might hear:

They left early, did they not?

This usage is conversationally normal in some regional dialects, such as northern British and Irish.

If we change the intonation (p. 248), we alter the meaning of a tag question. In

many dialects, when the melody is rising, the sentence is 'asking'; when it is falling, the sentence is 'telling'. In writing, the punctuation can indicate the difference:

They're not in, are they?
(I really want to know)
They're not in, are they!
(I told you so)

But in speech this contrast can be unclear, prompting the complaint 'Are you asking me or telling me?'

Tag questions are illustrated further on p. 299.

TAGS, EH?

Informal English uses a few words which perform the same function as tag questions. They include *eh?*, *OK?*, and *right?* Dialects often have a distinctive form, such as Canadian *eh?* or Welsh *ay?* (pronounced [aɪ]). A joke told by Welsh singer and entertainer Max Boyce relies on this last example:

How do people in Bangor spell Mississippi?
M, ay? double s, ay? double s, ay? double p, ay?



DIRECTIVES

Directives are sentences which instruct someone to do something. They are often called commands, but this term is misleading. Commanding is just one of the many uses of directive sentences.

- **Commanding:**
Sit down!
- **Inviting:** Have a drink.
- **Warning:** Mind your head!
- **Pleading:** Help me!
- **Suggesting:** Let's walk.
- **Advising:** Take an aspirin.
- **Instructing:** Turn left.
- **Permitting:**
Help yourself.
- **Requesting:** Open the window, please.
- **Meditating:** Let me see.
- **Expressing good wishes:**
Have a nice day!
- **Expressing an imprecation:**
Go to hell!

In each case, the verb is in its basic form, with no endings (p. 204), and there is usually no subject element present. Structures of this type are called *imperatives* – from Latin *imperare* 'to command'.

Some directives do not use the basic pattern:

- They allow a subject, with a strong stress:

You be quiet!
Nobody move!

- They begin with *let*, followed by a subject:

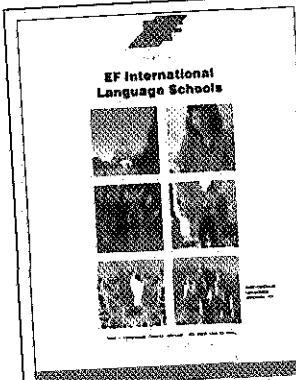
Let me see.
Let us pray.
Let's go.

- They begin with *do* or *don't*:

Do come in.
Don't laugh.
Do not leave.

BUY NOW! PAY LATER!

Advertisements rely a great deal on imperative sentences. But not every verb can be used in a directive way, and there are several restrictions on the use of those which can. In particular, many verbs which express a state, rather than an activity, cannot be used as directives: we can say *Buy a new car* but not **Need a new car*. Nor may we use an imperative form of a verb along with a past time reference: we can say *Buy tomorrow!* but not **Buy yesterday!*



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EXCLAMATIONS

Exclamations are sentences which show that a person has been impressed or roused by something. They often take the form of a single word or short phrase – a minor sentence (p. 216) such as *Gosh!*, *Oh dear!*, or *Of all the nerve!* But exclamations can have a major sentence status too, with a structure which

differentiates them from statements, questions, and directives.

- Their first element begins with *what* or *how*, and is followed by a subject and a verb, in that order:

What a lovely day it is!
What a mess they've made!
How nice they look!

- They also occur frequently in a reduced form, using only the first element:

What a lovely day!
What a mess!
How nice!

Sentences of this kind are said to possess an *exclamative* structure.

Exclamatives with subject and verb inverted are possible, but rare. They can sometimes be found in literary or mock-dramatic contexts:

How often have I cursed that terrible day!

The abbreviated exclamation, with its succinct and punchy style, is highly favoured in dramatic newspaper headlines.

28 Sport

POST SPORT Top coverage of Test & County cricket

What a farce!

'Joke ton' leaves Lancs star cold

GLAMORGAN starred in a spectacular seven-wicket win at Old Trafford yesterday after Lancashire's Gary Chappell had hit a 'joke century' in a world record time of 20 minutes 50 seconds.

But 18-year-old Yorkshire-born Chappell was not all that excited with his feat after the wicket-keeper found the YLCA's much-maligned computer scoring system too hot to handle.

ECHOES

The traditional classification of major sentences into statements, questions, commands (or directives), and exclamations ignores one other type of sentence: the *echo sentence*. It is used only in dialogue, and its purpose is to confirm, question, or clarify what the previous speaker has just said.

The essential feature of an echo utterance is that it reflects the structure of the preceding sentence, which it repeats in whole or in part. All types of sentence can be echoed.

Statements

A: John didn't like the film.
B: He didn't what?

Questions

A: Have you got my knife?
B: Have I got your wife?

Directives

A: Sit down here.
B: Down there?

Exclamations

A: What a lovely day!
B: What a lovely day, indeed!

Echoes sometimes sound impolite, unless accompanied by an apologetic 'softening' phrase, such as *I'm sorry* or *I beg your pardon*. This is most noticeable with the question *What did you say?*, which is often shortened to *What?* A common parental plea to children focuses on this form, which adults consider to be bad manners: *Don't say 'What?', say 'Pardon (me)'.*

INTELLIGENT ECHOES

In the film version of the novel *Being There*, by Jerzy Kosinski, Peter Sellers played the role of a simpleton gardener who repeats (in a slow, almost meditative style) what other people say to him. The result is that he is thought to be highly intelligent.

A similar strategy is not uncommon in life off the screen. For example, if we find ourselves out of our depth in a conversation, it is possible to convey an intelligent impression by occasionally echoing parts of what the other people are saying. Once, the present author was even congratulated by a town councillor for having such sensible ideas, when all he had been able to do was repeat, at irregular intervals, fragments of what had emerged in the councillor's own monologue.



CLAUSE ELEMENTS

All clauses are made up out of elements, each expressing a particular kind of meaning. Traditional grammars recognized two main elements, which they called the *subject* and the *predicate*. These make a useful starting-point for sentence analysis, but the predicate heading needs to be analysed further, in order to distinguish several very different kinds of construction. The present grammatical analysis recognizes five types of clause element, all of which appear in the following sentence:

That cyclist / has called / Dave / a fool / twice.

- The first element in this clause is the subject (S). The subject usually identifies the theme or topic of the clause. We are evidently talking about a cyclist.
- The second element is the verb (V). The verb expresses a wide range of meanings, such as actions, sensations, or states of being. Here we are talking about the action of calling, performed by the cyclist.
- The third element is the object (O). Objects identify who or what has been directly affected by the action of the verb. Here we are talking about Dave, who is the object of the cyclist's attention.
- The fourth element is the complement (C). Complements give further information about another clause element. Here, *a fool* adds to the meaning of *Dave* – *Dave is a fool* (according to the cyclist).
- The fifth element is the adverbial (A). Adverbials usually add extra information about the situation, such as the time of an action, its location, or its manner of being performed. Here, we are talking about the frequency of the calling. The cyclist was plainly very upset.

In Modern English, in about 90 per cent of the clauses which contain a subject, verb, and object, the subject precedes the verb, and the verb precedes the object. The language was not always like this (p. 44), and there are several important types of exception, notably in questions (p. 218).

ELEMENTS AND WORDS

As the examples on this and the previous page suggest, a clause element is not the same as a word. An element may be a single word, or several words. The following sentences each contain a subject, verb, and object, but there are varying numbers of words.

I	saw	Fred.
My uncle	has seen	Fred.
All the kids	know	dear old Fred.

VOCATIVES

A vocative (from Latin *vocare* 'to call') is a name used for the person(s) to whom a sentence is addressed. It may be there to attract attention (as in *Mike, phone for you*), or to express a particular social relationship or personal attitude (as in *Doctor, I need a tonic* or *Leave it alone, imbecile!*). In traditional grammar (p. 192), it was claimed to be a distinct noun 'case', and glossed by the word *O* – a usage now found only in religious contexts (*O God, who...*).

- The vocative is an optional element: it can be added to or removed from a sentence without affecting the rest of the construction.
 - It may occur in various positions in a sentence, as in (*John*) *I'd like auntie (John) to be here (John)*.
 - It is not an element of clause structure like subject or verb.
- A vocative belongs to a whole sentence, however many clauses it contains, as in *Mary, come in, sit down, and tell me what happened*.

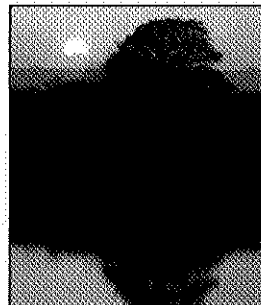
MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN...

Vocatives can be of several kinds.

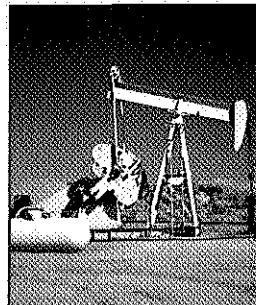
- Names, with or without titles: *David, Mrs Smith*.
- Family labels: *mum, uncle*.
- Markers of status or respect: *sir, my Lord*.
- Labels for occupations: *waiter, nurse*.
- Evaluative labels: *darling, pig, dear*.
- General labels: *lads, ladies and gentlemen*.
- The pronoun *you* (an extremely impolite use): *You, where's the phone?*
- Certain kinds of clause: *Come out, come out, whoever you are!*
- Some vocatives can be expanded: *old man, you fat fraud!*



ANALYSING COMPOUNDS



sunrise
'the sun rises' (S + V)



oil well
'the well contains oil' (S + O)



scarecrow
'it scares crows' (V + O)

Compounds are an important part of the lexicon (p. 129), but they can be usefully classified into types based on the kind of grammatical meaning they represent. *Popcorn*, for example, can be paraphrased as 'the corn pops', and the relation of *corn* to *pops* is that of subject to verb. The order of the elements (as in this example) does not necessarily correspond to that found in a grammatical sentence. A list of the chief grammatical relations involved follows.

Nouns

Subject + verb

sunrise, headache, hangman, popcorn, washing machine, working party, dancing girl

Verb + object

haircut, tax-payer, scarecrow, crime report, chewing-gum, window-cleaner, sightseeing living-room ('live in a room')

playgoer ('go to a play')

Subject + object
motorcycle, windmill, oil well, gaslight, doorknob, table leg, postman,

chairperson

Subject + complement

('X is Y' or 'X is like/for Y')
oak tree, handyman, darkroom, flypaper, goldfish, birdcage, tissue paper, blackboard

Adjectives

Verb + object

man-eating, breathtaking
Verb + adverbial
law-abiding, handmade, typewritten, widespread
Verbless
homesick, camera-ready, rock-hard, Franco-German

CLAUSE TYPES

Clause elements combine into a very small number of patterns. In fact, most sentences can be analysed into one of only seven basic clause types, each minimally consisting of two, three, or four elements:

S + V: I / yawned.
 S + V + O: I / opened / the door.
 S + V + C: I / am / ready.
 S + V + A: I / went / to London.
 S + V + O + O: I / gave / him / a pen.
 S + V + O + C: I / got / my shoes / wet.
 S + V + O + A: I / put / the box / on the floor.

There are a few other kinds of construction which can be derived from these basic types. They include directives (p. 219) and various kinds of elliptical sentences (p. 228).

- S** • The subject usually appears before the verb in statements, and after the first verb in questions.

The boy yawned.
Are you going?

- The subject controls whether the verb is singular or plural in the third person of the present tense (p. 204).
She looks fine. They look fine.
- The subject controls the form of certain objects and complements:
I shaved myself. They shaved themselves.
- Some pronouns (p. 203) have a distinctive form when used as a subject:
I can see her. She can see me.
- Subjects can be noun phrases (including single nouns), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
The train was late. Mary went home.
Beer, crisps, and cheese are for sale.
I like fishing. What he said was funny. (i.e. It was funny.)
- In this analysis, a series of noun phrases is analysed as a single clause element, not as a sequence of different elements. There is only *one* subject recognized per clause.

- O** • Object elements usually follow the subject and verb in a clause. There are two types: *direct* and *indirect*. The direct object is the common one, typically referring to some person or thing directly affected by the action expressed by the verb.

The child lost her ball. I remember the occasion.

- The indirect object typically refers to an animate being which is the recipient of the action. In these cases, a direct object is usually present in the clause as well.

She gave the dog a stroke. I told them my news.

In these constructions, the indirect object precedes the direct. In such clauses as *I gave my paper to the boy*, the order is reversed.

- Some pronouns (p. 203) have a distinctive form when used as an object:
She saw him. They asked me.
- Objects can be noun phrases (including single nouns), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
I saw our new house. We asked Fred. Now hear this.
She said I'd been foolish. (i.e. She said this.)
- As with subjects, a set of connected noun phrases is analysed as a single element, in this analysis: *He saw a cat, a dog, and a cow* is S + V + O.

- V** • The verb plays a central role in clause structure. It is the most obligatory of all the clause elements, as can be seen from such clauses as

That farmer drinks beer by the bucketful.
 S V O A

We can omit the adverbial (*That farmer drinks beer*), the object (*That farmer drinks by the bucketful*), and even the subject, in casual style (*Drinks beer by the bucketful*, nodding in his direction), but we cannot omit the verb (**That farmer beer by the bucketful*). There is just one type of exception – 'verbless' clauses

such as *If possible* (i.e. if it is possible), *arrive early*.

- The verb element must be a verb phrase (including a single verb):

The bus is coming. The dog ate the crisps. I'm sorry.

In this analysis, only one verb element is allowed per clause, though this may consist of a sequence of auxiliary verbs as well as a main verb (p. 207), all of which combine to express a single grammatical meaning.

- The choice of verb largely determines what other elements are used in the clause, such as whether an object is present or not (p. 212).

- C** • Complements express a meaning which *adds* to that of another clause element – either the subject (the *subject complement*) or the object (the *object complement*).

- A subject complement usually follows the subject and verb. The verb is most often a form of *be*, but it may also be one of a few other verbs that are able to link complements to their subjects in meaning. These are called *copular* ('linking') verbs.

She is a doctor. The bull became angry. (i.e. It was angry.)
The tune sounds lovely. (i.e. It is lovely.)

- An object complement usually follows the direct object, and its meaning relates to that element. The basic identity between them is shown in parentheses.

They elected Clinton president. (i.e. He is president.)
It made me angry. (i.e. I was angry.)

- Complements can be noun phrases (including single nouns), adjective phrases (including single adjectives), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):

She is a journalist. They became students.
Arthur is very happy. The car's ready.
Where's that? That's what I said.

- When the complement is a noun phrase, it agrees in number with its corresponding element:

The child is an angel > The children are angels.
I find your child an angel > I find your children angels.

- A** • Adverbials differ from other clause elements chiefly in that there can be an indefinite number of them in a single clause:

She arrived on the bus / on Thursday / in the rain ...

- Adverbials can be used in several possible positions in the clause, though they are most common at the end:

Twice I asked him. I twice asked him. I asked him twice.

- Adverbials express a wide range of meanings, such as manner, place, and time:

I stayed quietly at home all day.

- Adverbials perform diverse roles in sentence construction. Some add information about an event; some link clauses together; and some add a comment about what is being expressed.

I walked quietly.

The bus was full. However, I found a seat.

Frankly, I think it's wrong.

- Adverbials can be adverb phrases (including single adverbs), prepositional phrases, some nouns and noun phrases, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):

They ran very quickly. They walked home.

We walked in the garden. She phoned me this morning.

I laughed when I saw you.

- Some verbs require an adverbial to complete their meaning. These are the S + V + A and S + V + O + A constructions.

*The path goes around the field. (We cannot say *The path goes.)*

*I put the book on the table. (We cannot say *I put the book.)*

PHRASES

A phrase is a syntactic construction which typically contains more than one word, but which lacks the subject–predicate structure usually found in a clause (p. 220). Phrases are traditionally classified into types based on the most important word they contain: if this is a noun, for example, the phrase would be called a *noun phrase*; if an adjective, an *adjective phrase*, and so on. Six word classes (§15) – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions – are found as the identifying elements (or *heads*) of phrasal constructions. However, there are considerable differences between the syntactic patterns which can occur within each type of phrase, ranging from the very limited possibilities of pronoun phrases to the highly variable patterns found within noun phrases.

- *Pronoun phrases* are restricted to a small number of constructions, and tend not to be recognized as a productive type in English. Examples include *Silly me!*, *You there!*, *she herself*, *we all*, *nearly everyone*, and such relative clause constructions as *those who knew Fred* ... They are usually analysed as a minor type of noun phrase.
- *Adverb phrases* are typically found as short intensifying expressions, such as *terribly slowly* and *very happily indeed*. Also common are such time phrases as *quite often* and *very soon*, and constructions of the type *as quickly (as I could)*.
- *Adjective phrases* are usually combinations of an adjective and a preceding intensifier, such as *very happy* and *not too awkward*. Other types include *cold enough* and a wide range of constructions which complement the adjective, such as *easy to please* and *loath to do it*.
- *Verb phrases* display very limited syntactic possibilities: a main verb preceded by up to four auxiliaries (p. 207), as in *may have gone* and *won't have been listening*. However, this limitation does not prevent the verb phrase from expressing a wide range of meanings to do with time, mood, and manner of action.
- By contrast, *noun phrases* allow an extremely wide range of syntactic possibilities, from such simple constructions as *the hat* to such complex phrases as *not quite all the fine new hats which were on sale*. They need to be described separately (see right).
- *Prepositional phrases* are combinations of a preposition plus a noun phrase: *in the back garden*, *beneath the hedge*. They typically perform the role of adverbial in a clause: *I saw it in the garden* = *I saw it there*. They are also adjectival: *the linguist with the red beard*.

NOUN PHRASE STRUCTURE

The noun phrase (NP) is the main construction which can appear as the subject, object, or complement of a clause (p. 221). It consists essentially of a noun or noun-like word which is the most important constituent of the phrase: *a fat cat*, *the horses in the stable*, *the poor*, *ten Chinese*. Sometimes the noun appears alone in its phrase (*Cats are nice*). More often, it is accompanied by one or more other constituents, some of which are themselves fairly complex syntactic units in their own right. As a result, noun phrases are more varied in their construction than any other kind of phrase in English.

The parts of a noun phrase

No matter how complex a noun phrase is, it can be analysed into one or more of the following four constituents:

- The head is the most important constituent, around which any other constituents cluster. It is the head which controls any agreement with other parts of the sentence. Thus we have *His new book is interesting* alongside *His new books are interesting*, and *The girl in the garden saw it herself* alongside *The boy in the garden saw it himself*.
- The *determiner* appears before the noun. This constituent decides ('determines') what kind of noun is in the phrase – in particular, whether it is definite or indefinite, proper or common, count or noncount (pp. 208–9). Words such as *a*, *those*, *some*, and *any* are determiners. It is not essential for a noun phrase to have a determiner (for example, proper nouns

do not take one), but most noun phrases do, and the commonest determiners (*the* and *a*) are among the most frequent words in the language.

The determiner can be the centre of its own cluster of words which share in the expression of quantity. In the present approach, those which appear before the determiner are called (logically enough) *predeterminers*; they include *all the people*, *twice the cost*, *half the money*. Those which immediately follow the determiner, preceding any adjectives which may occur, are called *postdeterminers*; they are chiefly the numerals (*my three fat cats*, *the second big party*) and a few other quantifying words (such as *many* and *several*).

- The *premodification* comprises any other words appearing between the determiner and the head noun – mainly adjectives or adjective-like words. In the phrase *those lovely old French wooden spoons*, everything between *the* and *spoons* is said to 'premodify' the noun. (In some grammars, the notion of premodification is broader, and includes *everything* in the noun phrase which appears before the head, including the determiner and its satellites.)

- The *postmodification* comprises everything which appears in the phrase after the head. The chief types are prepositional phrases (*the car in the garage*), finite clauses (*the film that I saw*), and nonfinite clauses (*the new car parked outside*). Adverbs and adjectives are also sometimes used to 'postmodify' the noun, as in *the journey home* and *something different*.

GROWING NOUN PHRASES

	Buns	are for sale.			
	The buns	are for sale.			
	All the buns	are for sale.			
	All the currant buns	are for sale.			
	Not quite all the currant buns	are for sale.			
	Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns	are for sale.			
	Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns on the table	are for sale.			
	Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns on show on the table	are for sale.			
	Not quite all the many fine interesting-looking hot buttered home-made currant buns which grandma cooked on show on the table	are for sale.			
Predeterminer	Determiner	Postdeterminer	Premodification	Head	Postmodification
Not quite all	the	many	fine...currant	buns	which...table

This postcard message shows a number of 'bare minimum' NPs, consisting of a noun only, as well as several Determiner + Noun constructions. The longest example also shows one NP (the boat) being used as part of the postmodification of another.

POST CARD

Dear Mum

Friday

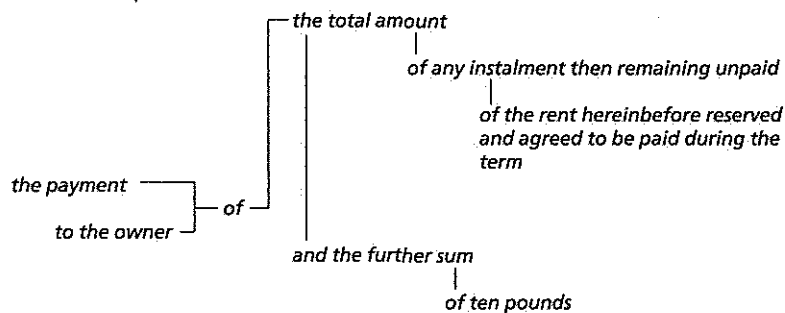
We're having a smashing time, though the weather's not brilliant. Paul's bought a new jacket to replace the blue monstrosity that (luckily) was plucked on the boat. You'll love the colour this time! And it was half the price! Now we're off to see some Roman ruins – with brollies, of course. We'll try and phone Sunday morning. Hope you're all well. Paul sends his love.

Kate XX

Aspects of noun phrase structure

There are so many facets to the structure of the noun phrase that it is not possible to refer to all of them in a general book. No other syntactic unit in English presents such possibilities for structural variation. One consequence of this is that distinctive noun phrase patterns are often part of the stylistic identity of a text, as can be seen in such varieties as popular journalese (p. 380) and scientific writing (p. 372). Another is that several of the meanings expressed by the noun phrase are extremely subtle, requiring a careful consideration of many examples before their function can be consciously appreciated. And even in the 1990s, not all of the rules governing the way noun phrases work are fully understood.

Legal English displays a marked preference for postmodification in the noun phrase, as can be seen in this extract from an insurance agreement. When the structure is presented visually in this way, the meaning is fairly easy to grasp. Without such assistance, the language becomes dense and confusing – and a target of Plain English campaigns (p. 376).



THE ARTICLES

The article system is a good example of the subtle meanings which the noun phrase can express. The contrasts are not easy to define – despite the fact that most features of the system have been intuitively grasped by the time a child is 5 years old.

Three concepts are involved, two of which are familiar from traditional grammar: the *definite article* (*the*), the *indefinite article* (*a* or *an*), and the absence of an article (the *zero article*). The use of these forms affects the meaning of the noun phrase – in particular, allowing us to think of nouns in a *specific way*, referring to individuals (*A the dog is eating*) or in a *generic way*, referring to a general class or species (*A the dog is an interesting animal, Dogs are nice*).

The definite article

• *The* can refer to the immediate situation or to someone's general knowledge:

Have you fed *the dog*?
He was wounded in *the war*,...

• *The* can refer back to another noun (what is sometimes called *anaphoric reference*):

She bought a car and a bike, but she used *the bike* more.

• *The* can refer forward to the words following the

head noun (*cataphoric reference*):

I've always liked *the wines* of Germany.

• *The* can refer to human institutions that we sporadically use, attend, observe, etc.:

I went to *the theatre*.
I watched *the news* on TV.

The indefinite article

• *A(n)* does not presuppose that a noun has been mentioned already. In *The book arrived*, the speaker assumes we know which book is being referred to. In *A book arrived*, no such knowledge is assumed.
• *A(n)* often expresses a general state of affairs, or a notion of quantity:

I'm training to be *a linguist*.
He's scored *a hundred*.
Take this six times *a day*.

The zero article

The article is often omitted in idiomatic usage when talking about human institutions and routines, means of transport, periods of time, meals, and illnesses:

go to bed in winter
travel by car have lunch
at dawn caught
pneumonia

A common error of non-native learners of English is to introduce an article in those cases where it is impossible or inappropriate, as in **I shall go to the bed now, *I have caught a pneumonia*.

THE ORDER OF PREMODIFIERS

Why do you think we make Nuttall's Mintoes such a devilishly smooth cool creamy minty chewy round slow velvety fresh clean solid buttery taste?

This advertising caption from the 1960s probably holds the record for number of adjectives in a single noun phrase. It is of course a highly unusual example – not just because of its length and its use of unexpected word combinations (e.g. *taste* being described as *round* or *solid*, p. 162), but because the adjectives do not display any restrictions on their order. They could be shuffled and dealt out again, and the result would probably be just as acceptable.

The following example shows that not all adjectives can be used in this random kind of way.

a nice big cardboard box
not

*a big nice cardboard box
*a cardboard nice big box
*a nice cardboard big box

or any of the other possible sequences. This is the kind of grammatical rule that most people never think twice about. However, working out the factors which make one sequence acceptable and others not is an intricate business, and one that is still not entirely understood.

ADJECTIVE ZONES

Examples such as the following suggest that there are four main 'zones' within the pre-modifying section of a noun phrase, here labelled I, II, III, and IV.

I've got the same big red garden chairs as you.
I II III IV

IV Words which are usually nouns, or closely related to nouns, are placed next to the head. They include nationality adjectives (*American, Gothic*), noun-like adjectives which mean 'involving' or 'relating to' (*medical, social*), and straightforward nouns (*tourism brochure, Lancashire factory*). Thus we say:

an old Lancashire factory not *a Lancashire old factory
a bright medical student not *a medical bright student

III Participles and colour adjectives are placed immediately in front of any in zone IV: *missing, deserted, retired, stolen, red, green*. Thus we say:

an old red suit not *a red old suit
the red tourism brochures not *the tourism red brochures

I Adjectives with an absolute or intensifying meaning come first in the sequence, immediately after the determiner and its satellites: *same, certain, entire, sheer, definite, perfect, superb*. Thus we say:

the entire American army not *the American entire army
the perfect red suit not *the red perfect suit

II All other adjectives (the vast majority in the language) occur in this zone: *big, slow, angry, helpful*, and all those in the advertising caption above. Thus we say:

a superb old house not *an old superb house (with a zone I item)
an old stolen car not *a stolen old car (with a zone III item)
an old social disease not *a social old disease (with a zone IV item)

There are also signs of 'zones within zones'. For example, we tend to say *a beautiful new dress* not *a new beautiful dress*, suggesting that evaluative adjectives in zone II precede other kinds of adjectives there. We also tend to say *a recognizable zig-zag pattern* not *a zig-zag recognizable pattern*, suggesting that more abstract adjectives precede more concrete ones. But, as the word 'tend' suggests, the rules are not hard and fast.

VERB PHRASE MEANINGS

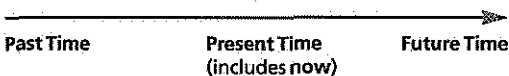
With only a few verb endings to take into account (p. 204) and a very limited range of auxiliary verbs and sequences (p. 212), the verb phrase would seem to provide the linguist with an easy task of syntactic description. But appearances are deceptive. It is true that the possible patterns of constituents can be described quite quickly, but the meanings which each pattern can convey are extremely difficult to state, being influenced by what else is happening in the sen-

tence, and even by the meaning of particular types of verb. For example, an accompanying adverbial (p. 221) can dramatically alter the period of time to which a verb form refers: *I'm leaving tomorrow* is hours away from *I'm leaving* (said while going through the door). And a verb which expresses a specific action works differently from one which expresses a state of awareness: we can say *I was kicking it* but not **I was knowing it*. Teasing out the various meaning contrasts of tense, aspect, mood, and voice makes the verb phrase one of the most intriguing areas of English syntax.

TENSES

One of the important functions of the verb is to indicate the time at which an action takes place. The term *tense* is traditionally used to refer to the way verbs change their form to express this meaning. On this definition, English has only two tenses – present and past – though traditional grammars would extend the notion to include various kinds of auxiliary verb usage as well (p. 196).

Time is often shown as a line, on which the present moment is located as a continuously moving point. But there is no identity between tense and time. Present and past tenses can refer to all parts of the time line.



PRESENT TENSE

Three uses refer to present time.

- The *state present* is used for timeless statements or 'eternal truths': *Oil floats on water, Two and two make four.*
- The *habitual present* is used for repeated events. There is usually an accompanying adverbial of frequency: *I go to town each week.*
- The *instantaneous present* is used when the action begins and ends approximately at the moment of speech. It is common in demonstrations and sports commentaries: *Smith passes to Brown.*

Three uses refer to other times:

- The *historic present* describes the past as if it were happening now: *I hear you've resigned.*
- In jokes and imaginative writing, a similar use promotes *dramatic immediacy*: *We look outside (dear reader) and we see an old man in the street.*
- With some time adverbials, the present tense helps to refer to a specific course of action in *future time* (see above right): *We leave tomorrow.*

PAST TENSE

Most uses refer to an action or state which has taken place in the past, at a definite time, with a gap between its completion and the present moment. Specific events, states, and habitual actions can all be expressed with this tense: *I arrived yesterday* (event), *They were upset* (state), *They went to work every day* (habitual).

The past tense is also used for present or future time.

- The *attitudinal past* reflects a tentative state of mind, giving a more polite effect than would be obtained by using the present tense: *Did you want to leave?* (compare the more direct *Do you want to leave?*)
- The *hypothetical past* expresses what is contrary to the speaker's beliefs. It is especially used in *if*-clauses: *I wish I had a bike* (i.e. I haven't got one).
- In indirect speech (p. 230), a past tense used in the verb of 'saying' allows the verb in the reported clause to be past tense as well, even though it refers to present time: *Did you say you had no money?* (i.e. you haven't any now).

FUTURE TENSE?

English has no future tense ending (unlike Latin, French, and many other languages). Rather, future time is expressed by a variety of other means. One of these – the use of *will* or *shall* – is often loosely referred to as the 'future tense'. But this usage changes the meaning of the word 'tense' so that it no longer refers only to the use of verb endings. There are in fact six main ways of referring to future time.

- *Will, shall, or 'll* followed by the infinitive without to (*I'll see you then*) or the progressive form (*I'll be seeing you*). This is by far the commonest use.

- *Be going to*, followed by the infinitive: *I'm going to ask him*. This common informal use (often pronounced *gonna*) usually suggests that the event will take place very soon.
- The present progressive (p. 225), stressing the way a future event follows on from an arranged plan: *The match is starting at 2 p.m.* The happening is usually imminent.
- The simple present tense, often implying definiteness: *I leave soon, Go to bed.*
- The use of *be to, be about to, have to*, and a few others, all expressing a future action at various removes from the present: *She's to sit here, She's about to leave.*
- The modal verbs (p. 212), which also convey a future implication: *I may/might/could/should travel by bus.*

SHALL OR WILL?

Traditional grammars drew a sharp distinction between the use of *will* and *shall* (p. 194).

- To express *future time*, they recommended *shall* with first persons, and *will* with second and third persons: *I/we shall go, You/he/she/it/they will go.*
- To express an *intention to act*, they recommended *will* with first persons, and *shall* with the others: *I/we will go, You/he/she/it/they shall go.*

On this basis, sentences such as *I will be 20 soon* were condemned as wrong, because (it was said) we cannot 'intend' to be a certain age.

Modern usage does not observe this distinction. Indeed, it may never have existed in the language, but only in the minds of grammarians anxious to impose order on a 'messy' area of usage. The issue is of less relevance today, as *shall* has come to be increasingly replaced by *will* in several varieties. Even in conservative southern British English, it is now rare to find *shall* in the second and third person (*Shall you go? Mary shall sit there*), and it is becoming less common in the first person. Nonetheless, usage variation remains, as shown by these headlines, both appearing on the same day and ostensibly reporting the same royal remark.



ASPECTS OF ASPECTS

Aspect refers to how the time of action of the verb is regarded – such as whether it is complete, in progress, or showing duration. English uses two types of aspectual contrast, which it expresses with auxiliary verbs: the *perfective* and the *progressive*. Such contrasts were called tenses in traditional grammar (e.g. the ‘perfect tense’), but far more is involved than simply the expression of time, and indeed the semantic analysis of aspect has proved to be one of the most complex areas of English linguistics. The examples below illustrate the topic, but by no means indicate the extent of this complexity:

Perfective aspect

This is constructed using forms of the auxiliary verb *have*.

• The *present perfective* is chiefly used for an action continuing up to the present. This meaning of ‘current relevance’ contrasts with the past tense meaning:

I've lived in Paris for a year (and I still do).
I lived in Paris for a year (but I don't now).

In informal American English, there is a strong tendency to use the past tense instead of the present perfective – a trend which has begun to affect non-US varieties also.

US: Did you eat?
 You told me already.
 UK: Have you eaten?
 You've told me already.

• The *past perfective* also expresses ‘anterior time’, but in an earlier time frame. Thus, *I am sorry that I have missed the train*, put into the past, becomes *I was sorry that I had missed the train*.

Specific events, states, and habitual actions can all be expressed using the perfective aspect.

He *has/had built* a car. (event)
 The house *has/had been empty* for years. (state)
 He's/*d done* it often. (habitual)

Progressive aspect

Forms of *be* can be used along with the *-ing* form of the main verb (p. 204) to express an event in progress at a given time. This is the *progressive* (also called the *continuous*) aspect. It is used with

both tenses and with both perfective aspects. Non-progressive forms are known as *simple* forms.

<i>Simple</i>	<i>Progressive</i>
They jump	They're jumping
They jumped	They were jumping
They've jumped	They've been jumping
They'd jumped	They'd been jumping

With the progressive, the usual implication is that the activity is taking place over a limited period, and is not necessarily complete. By contrast, the simple aspect tends to stress the unity or completeness of the activity. The contrast can be seen in these sentences:

I live in France. (permanently)
 I'm living in France. (at present)

Only a small proportion of all verb phrases appear in the progressive form, and most of those are found in conversation. On the facing page, for example, the text contains 90 verb phrases (excluding the examples), but only a sixth of these use a progressive.

TWO VOICES

The action expressed by a clause can often be viewed in either of two ways.

The dog saw the cat.
 The cat was seen by the dog.

This kind of contrast is referred to as *voice*. The first type of construction is known as the *active voice*. The second, which is far less common, is the *passive voice*.

Most verbs which take an object (transitive verbs, p. 212) can appear in both active and passive constructions: *kick, jump, eat, break*, etc. There are just a few exceptions, such as *resemble* and most uses of *have*: *I had a car* does not transform into **A car was had by me*.

The passive is infrequent in speech. In writing, it is more common in informative than in imaginative prose, especially in contexts which demand an objective, impersonal style, such as scientific and official publications. When it is over-used, it tends to attract criticism, especially

from those campaigning for clearer forms of English in official documents (p. 376), and many writers have been influenced by their arguments. But passives cannot be dispensed with entirely. They give writers the option of an impersonal style, which can be very useful in contexts where it is irrelevant to state who actually carried out an action. That elements X and Y were mixed to form compound Z is usually the important point, not that it was me, Mary, John, or Dr Smith who did the mixing.

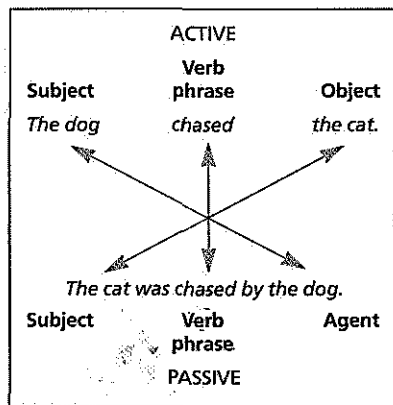
HOW TO FORM ACTIVES FROM PASSIVES

- Move the subject (p. 221) of the active verb to the end of the clause, making it the passive agent. Add *by*.
- Move the object of the active verb to the front of the clause, making it the passive subject.
- Replace the active verb phrase by a passive one – usually a form of the auxiliary verb *be* followed by the *-ed* participle (p. 204).

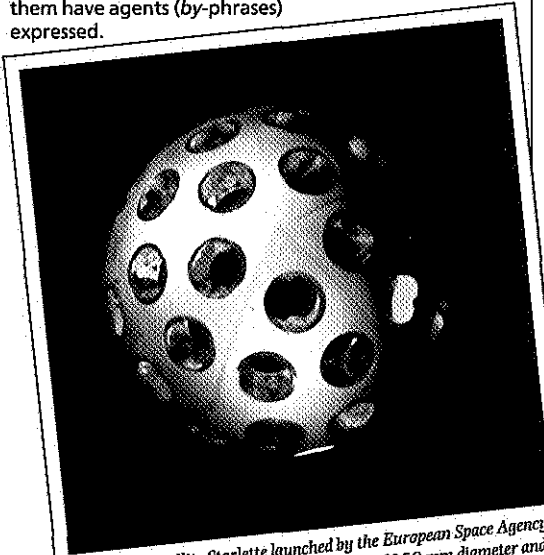
Get can also be used as a passive auxiliary, especially in contexts where we want to focus attention on the (usually unpleasant) event affecting the subject. *I got kicked at the match* reports the perception of a somewhat more vicious event than *I was kicked at the match*. The use of *get* is avoided in formal style, and even in informal style it is much less frequent than *be* (apart from in invective, such as *Get stuffed!*).

Another option is to omit the *by*-phrase agent. Indeed, this phrase is missing in around 80 per cent of passive clauses, usu-

ally because the addition of an agent would be to state the obvious: *Jack fought Mike and was beaten (by Mike)*. Sometimes, though, the omission is deliberate, either because the agent is not known (*The car's been stolen*) or because the speaker does not want it emphasized – as when someone returning a damaged library book says, neutrally, *I'm afraid this page has been torn*, rather than adding *by me*.



This illustration, taken from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Earth Sciences*, shows a typical use of the passive in scientific prose. Each sentence has an example, and (as is often the case with captions) two of them have agents (*by*-phrases) expressed.



6.15: The satellite Starlette launched by the European Space Agency in February 1975. The satellite is a sphere of 250 mm diameter and has sixty reflectors distributed over its surface. Its core is made mainly of uranium giving it a weight of 35 kg and a density of about 18 kg/m³. The satellite is tracked by lasers as a means of determining the Earth's gravity field and tidal deformation.

MULTIPLE SENTENCES

Up to this point in Part III, most of the sentences illustrated contain only one clause (p. 220): they are *simple sentences*. But many sentences can be immediately analysed into more than one clause: they are *multiple sentences*. In fact, multiple sentences form the majority of the sentences in formal writing, and are common in everyday conversation too. The kind of monologue reported on p.214, although presenting several problems of analysis, makes it plain that much of the spontaneous character of conversational speech is due to the way it uses multiple sentence constructions. These constructions are often classified into two broad types, both recognized in traditional grammar (p. 192): *compound sentences* and *complex sentences*.

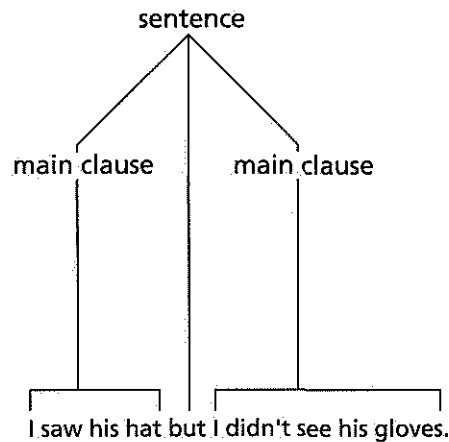
Compound sentences

In compound sentences, the clauses are linked by *coordination* – usually, by the *coordinating conjunctions* (p.213) *and*, *or*, or *but*. Each clause can in principle stand as a sentence on its own – in other words, act as an *independent clause*, or *main clause*. Tree diagram A (above right) shows the ‘balance’ between two clauses linked in this way. The same analysis would be made even if one of the clauses had elements omitted due to ellipsis (p.228). In *I cycled as far as Oxford and Mary as far as Reading*, *Mary as far as Reading* can – once the ellipsis has been ‘filled out’ – stand as a main clause: *Mary cycled as far as Reading*. ‘Main’, in this context, has a purely grammatical sense, and does not have its everyday general meaning of ‘most important’.

Complex sentences

In complex sentences, the clauses are linked by *subordination*, using such *subordinating conjunctions* as *because*, *when*, and *since* (p.213). Here, one clause (called the *subordinate clause*) is made dependent upon another (the main clause). This can be seen in tree diagram B (below right). The subordinate clause cannot stand as a sentence on its own. *When Mike dropped the plates* needs some other clause before it can be used.

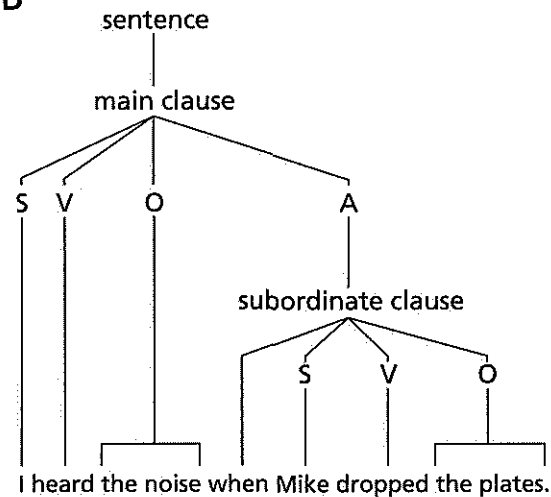
A



The adverbial identity of the subordinate clause can be tested using the technique of substitution. The clause *when Mike dropped the plates* can be replaced by an adverb of time, such as *then*: *I heard the noise then*.

This example shows the importance of clause elements in carrying out the analysis of complex sentences. If one is unable to distinguish between subjects, verbs, objects, complements, and adverbials in single clauses (see p. 221), the prospects of carrying out a successful analysis of a multiple sentence are slim.

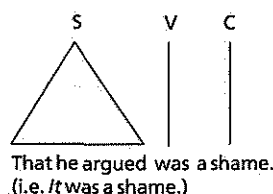
B



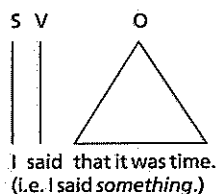
ELEMENTS AS CLAUSES

Subordinate clauses can replace the whole of any clause element except the verb. Their grammatical function can always be tested by replacing the clause with a simpler unit whose identity is known, such as a pronoun, adjective, adverb, or noun phrase. A clause as adverbial has already been illustrated above. Here are examples of clauses as subject, object, and complement.

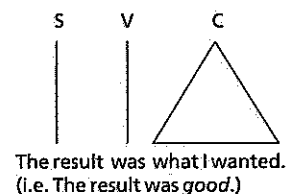
Clause as subject



Clause as object



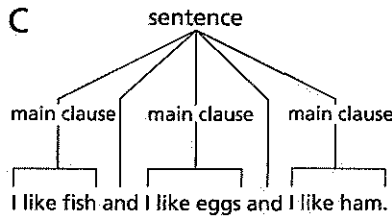
Clause as complement



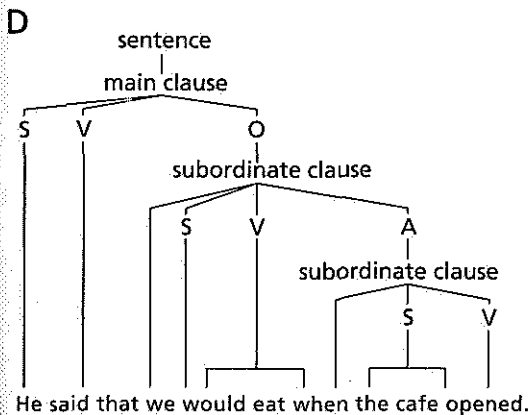
MULTIPLE STRUCTURES

Both compound and complex sentences can contain several instances of coordination or subordination.

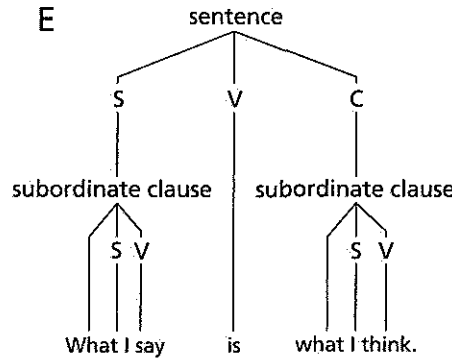
- With *multiple coordination*, the analysis is simple, as seen in tree diagram C. The continual use of *and* to build up a long sentence is by no means unusual, as the real-life example on p. 214 suggests.



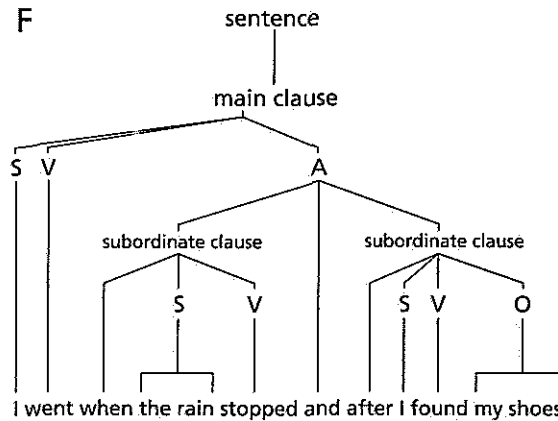
- With *multiple subordination*, we must take special care to keep the different 'levels' of subordination apart. In tree diagram D, the main clause is *He said [something]*. The first subordinate clause tells us what the speaker said ('We will eat when the cafe opens'), and is therefore the object of the verb *said*. The second subordinate clause tells us when they would eat ('when the cafe opens'), and is an adverbial modifying *eat*.



- Several instances of subordination may occur 'at the same level'. The sentence *What I say is what I think* may seem complex at first sight, but in fact it has a simple three-part structure, just like *That is that*, as shown in tree diagram E.



- Coordination and subordination may of course occur in the same sentence, to produce a *compound-complex sentence*. This possibility is shown in tree diagram F. These are among the most complicated sentence structures to draw, but the sentences these diagrams represent are by no means unusual. A child of 9 could have said the sentence analysed in the diagram, which only goes to show how much grammatical ability we have all unconsciously assimilated without realizing it.



COORDINATION AT OTHER LEVELS

A coordinating conjunction can join any two syntactic units, as long as they have the same status in the sentence. In addition to linking clauses, it can link noun phrases, adjectives, pronouns, and several other forms.

I bought a paper and a book.
We were hot and dirty.
It's them or us.

There is theoretically no limit to the number of units which can be connected in this way.

Coordination seems a simple grammatical matter, but it has some hidden subtleties. To begin with, the different conjunctions express a range of meanings. For example, *and* can convey more than simple addition: in *I ran hard and (therefore) caught the bus*, it expresses 'result'; in *I woke up and (then) got dressed*, it expresses 'time sequence'. When the meaning is one of addition, we may reverse the order of clauses: *I take the bus and she takes the train* can become *She takes the train and I take the bus*. When other meanings are involved, we may not: **I caught the bus and (therefore) I ran hard*, **I got dressed and (then) I woke up*.

Moreover, when two phrases are linked by *and*, they may or may not retain their separate grammatical roles. Compare the following two sentences:

Matthew and Ben are strong.
Matthew and Ben are alike.

The two sentences look the same, but further analysis shows they are different. In the first case, we can say *Matthew is strong and Ben is strong*. Each phrase can be expanded into its own clause. But in the second case, this cannot happen: we cannot say **Matthew is alike and *Ben is alike*. There is something about *alike* which forces the two nouns to work together. Similarly, *Arthur and Joanna have separated* cannot be expanded into **Arthur has separated and Joanna has separated*. Cases of this kind add complexity and interest to what initially seems a straightforward area of English syntax.

MORE AND MORE USES OF AND

There are several idiomatic uses of *and* which are especially common in informal speech and often criticized in writing.

- In such constructions as *I'll try and see him*, *and* is not functioning as a coordinator, but as an informal equivalent of the infinitive particle *to* (p.204): *I'll try to see him*.
- Likewise, in such constructions as *The room was nice and warm*, *nice and* is being used as an intensifying item (similar to *very*), and not as a coordinator. *He was well and truly drunk* is another example.
- By coordinating a word with itself, special meanings are expressed. In *The car went slower and slower*, the sense is one of intensification. In *They talked and talked*, it is continuous action. A particularly interesting usage is found in *There are roses and roses*, meaning 'Everyone knows that some roses are better/worse than others'.



...and then there are roses!

OTHER SYNTACTIC ISSUES

This exploration of English grammar is not intended to be comprehensive, but only to convey some of the interesting issues which arise when we engage in the task of syntactic analysis. The topics so far have related to the analysis of clauses, and to the ways clauses combine into sentences. The remaining pages of Part III deal with issues which go beyond the structure of an individual clause, involving sentences as wholes, and even sentence sequences (p. 232).

Abbreviating the sentence

There are two main ways in which a sentence can be shortened, to avoid saying or writing the same thing twice.

- A *pro-form* can be used – a word which replaces or refers to a longer construction in a sentence. The first process, replacement (or substitution), can be seen in *I've bought a new coat and Mary's bought one too*, where the *pro-form* *one* replaces the noun phrase *a new coat*. The second process, referring to another construction, can be seen in *The children hurt themselves*, where the *pro-form* *themselves* refers back to the noun phrase *the children*. Here, *themselves* does not replace *the children*, but simply refers back to it. *The children hurt the children* would mean that some children hurt some other children. When the *pro-form* has the same meaning (or 'reference') as another construction, but does not replace it, we talk about *pro-form co-reference*.

- *Ellipsis* occurs when part of a sentence is left out because it would otherwise repeat what is said elsewhere. In *I'd like to eat that biscuit, but I won't*, the second clause is elliptical, with *eat that biscuit* being omitted. People usually find the full form of such sentences unnecessary or irritating, and use ellipsis to achieve a more acceptable economy of statement. Conversation dialogues are full of it. If ellipsis were not used, our sentences would become gradually longer as a conversation progressed.

A: Where are you going?

B: To the shops. (i.e. I am going to the shops)

A: Why? (i.e. Why are you going to the shops?)

B: To get some bread. (i.e. I am going to the shops to get some bread)

A: Is John going with you? (i.e. Is John going with you to the shops to get some bread?)

In most cases, the ellipsis refers to something which has previously been said, but sometimes it anticipates what is about to be said: *Don't ask me why, but the shop has sold out of bread* is desirably short for *Don't ask me why the shop has sold out of bread, but the shop has sold out of bread*.

WHAT CAN BE A PRO-FORM?

- *Pro-forms* used in co-reference are usually definite pronouns (p. 210), such as *she, they, myself, his, theirs, that, and such*. We can also use a few definite adverbs of time or space, such as *then, there, and here*.

Mat's ill. He's got flu.
My hat's red. Hers is green.
I'm off to town. See you there.

- *Pro-forms* used in substitution can be either definite or indefinite. They are mostly indefinite pronouns (p. 210), such as *one(s), some, none, either, few, many, several, all, and both*. We can also use a few adverbs, such as *so* and *thus*, and the verb *do* plays an important role in such constructions as *do so*.

I have change. Do you want *some*?
Have you seen the new designs? I've bought *several*.
I asked him to leave, and he *did (so)*.

- Most *pro-forms* replace or refer to some or all of a noun phrase (p. 222); but a few other constructions can be involved. Adverb *pro-forms* relate to adverbials, as in *Martha went to the shops and I went there too*. *Do* relates to a part of the clause containing the verb: *Martha went to the shops and I did too* (where *did* replaces *went to the shops*). *So* can replace an object, a complement, an adverbial, or even a whole clause:

A: I'm not feeling well.

B: I thought so. (i.e. I thought that you're not feeling well)

NEVER A TRUER WORD

This extract, from one of the articles written by British humorist Miles Kingston for *The Independent* (26 July 1993), relies for much of its impact on the succinct style which the use of *pro-forms* and ellipsis can convey. The aim of the interview is to obtain advice on how to get through life from 'an expert on clichés'. Because clichés rely greatly on verbosity, and are usually found in full, to see them in an abbreviated, catechism-like form produces a striking stylistic effect.

Q. What is life?

A. Life is what you make it.

Q. What kind of life is it?

A. It is a hard life.

Q. But is it a good life?

A. Yes, if you don't weaken.

Q. How does one get through life?

A. One travels down life's road.

Q. What kind of road is it?

A. A bumpy road.

Q. How do you start?

A. As you mean to go on.

Q. But what kind of start do you need in life?

A. A good one.

Q. How is this acquired?

A. By working hard to get the right qualifications.

Q. What does this involve?

A. Burning the midnight oil.

Q. But not the candle at both ends?

A. Oh, certainly not. At the same time, all work and no play makes a chap a dull boy.

Q. What is the chap's name?

A. Jack.

Q. How do parents contribute to this good start in life?

A. They scrimp.

Q. Is that all?

A. No. They also save.

Q. But what of those who have no scrimping and saving parents, and not even the right qualifications?

A. They must make their own way in life.

Q. By what do they pull themselves up?

A. Their own bootstraps.

Q. To what educational establishments do they later claim to have gone?

A. The university of life.

Q. Is this academy known by any other name?

A. Yes. The school of hard knocks...



Miles Kingston

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT HAS BEEN LEFT OUT?

Faced with an elliptical sentence, there are three ways in which we can work out what has been omitted.

- We can look at the surrounding text. In *I asked for some soup and then for some bread*, the ellipsis in the second clause (*I asked*) can be easily identified just by referring to the words in the first clause.

- We can use our knowledge of English grammar. In a telegram, where the amount paid is based on the number of words used, there is a natural tendency to omit predictable items. These can be restored using our intuition. We automatically read in the auxiliary verbs and prepositions required to

make sense of *John arriving Holyhead station today 3 p.m.* And we deal with newspaper headlines similarly, automatically adding a verb and articles in order to interpret *NURSE TO LEAVE, SAYS JUDGE*.

- We can look at the situation in which the sentence is used. In conversation, a very common ellipsis involves the omission of the subject and/or auxiliary verb; but there is never a problem deciding what is missing. Simply by observing the situation, we see which people are involved and what the time reference is.

Want a drink?
Serves you right.
You hungry?
Good to see you.
Told you so!

ADDING A COMMENT

People often wish to make a comment, or express an attitude, about what they are saying or the way they are saying it. How does the grammar of the language enable them to do this? The answers to this question require novel terminology, as this issue was never addressed in traditional grammar (p. 192).

Disjuncts

An important role is played by a type of adverbial (p. 221) here called a *disjunct*.

• Some disjuncts convey the speaker's comment about the style or form of what is being said – expressing the conditions under which the listener should interpret the accompanying sentence. In *Frankly (said Jane), Charles should have gone by bus*, Jane is not just saying that 'Charles should have gone by bus', but is adding a comment about how she is making her point – she is 'being frank'. There are many words of this kind, such as *honestly, literally, briefly, strictly, and confidentially*.

• Other disjuncts make an observation about the truth of a clause, or a value judgment about its content. In *Fortunately, Charles caught the bus*, Jane is not just saying that 'Charles caught the bus', but that (in her opinion) it was fortunate that he did so. Other words of this kind include *curiously, foolishly, regrettably, undoubtedly, and hopefully* (which was arbitrarily singled out for adverse criticism during the 1980s by purist commentators on usage).

Comment clauses

Disjuncts may be words or phrases, and they may even have a clausal character, as can be seen in the sequence *regrettably, to my regret, and I regret to say*. When they are clausal, they can be analysed as part of a large number of constructions that have been grouped together as *comment clauses*. These are particularly common in informal conversation, where they are often spoken in a parenthetical tone of voice, with increased speed and decreased loudness.

The rest, *I suppose*, will never be known.

You know, it's time you paid me back.

It's over now, *I'm glad to say*.

Comment clauses express several kinds of meaning:

- *Tentativeness*: I think, I assume, I suppose, I'm told, they say, it seems, rumour has it.
- *Certainty*: I know, I'm sure, it transpires, I must say, it's true, there's no doubt.
- *Emotional attitude*: I'm pleased to see, I'm afraid, I hope, Heaven knows, I'm delighted to say, to be honest, frankly speaking.

- *Asking for attention*: you know, you see, mind you, you have to admit, as you may have heard.

When comment clauses become noticeable in conversation through over-use, it is widely held to be a sign of unclear or evasive thinking. For example, they are often to be heard to excess in the linguistic wriggling of a politician faced by an aggressive interviewer – the 'yes, well, you know, to be honest about this, putting it in a nutshell' response. This usage has led some critics to condemn *all* comment clauses, whatever the context. But this is going too far. These clauses play an important role in conversation, argument, and spontaneous monologue, helping speakers to 'think on their feet', and giving listeners a chance to grasp what is being said (p. 291). The same effects can also be introduced into elegant informal writing, where the judicious use of a comment clause can add personal perspective, strengthen writer-reader rapport, and improve the accessibility of a dense piece of text.

TELLING THE STORY

Alistair Cooke's best-selling *America* (1973) was acclaimed for the way it captured the friendly tone of the original commentary in his television series. One of the stylistic features which contributes to this warmth is the regular use of comment clauses and disjuncts. Here are a few examples (my italics) from the first few pages of his opening chapter.

...my mental picture of the United States, and of such scattered human life as it supported, became sharper but not, *I regret to say*, more accurate.

But I believe that the preconceptions about another country that we hold on to most tenaciously are those we take in, *so to speak*, with our mother's milk...

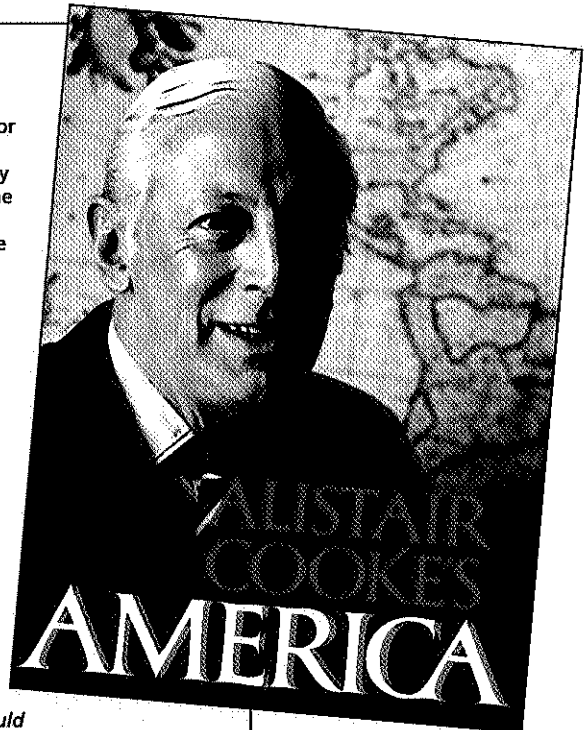
So I jotted down a long list of such places, most of them, *I should guess*, not much known to tourists or even to the standard history books...

Most people, *I believe*, when they first come to America, whether as travelers or settlers, become aware of a new and agreeable feeling: that the whole country is their oyster.

There are, *in fact*, large regions of the United States that will challenge the hardihood of the most carefree wanderer.

Undoubtedly, all the land mass of the United States has been mapped, and the prospects for a livelihood in any part of it are known.

Fortunately, the broad design was drawn for us, nearly a century and a half ago, by a Frenchman...



REPORTING SPEECH

The usual way in which we report someone's speech is by using a special *reporting clause*, such as *she said, he wrote, they replied*—sometimes adding extra information (*He replied angrily*). The accompanying speech or writing is given in the *reported clause*, which can appear in either of two forms: *direct speech* and *indirect speech*.

• *Direct speech* gives the exact words used by the speaker or writer. They are usually enclosed by quotation marks: *Michael said, 'I like the colour'*. The reporting clause may occur before, within, or after the direct speech. When it occurs in the middle or at the end of the sentence, the order of subject and verb can sometimes be inverted:

'I think,' Michael said, 'that it's time to leave.'

'I think,' said Michael, 'that it's time to leave.'

This inversion is most common when the verb is *said*, and the subject is not a pronoun. *Said she* is literary or

archaic, and forms such as **commented he* or **laughed they* are unacceptable. Inversion at the beginning of a sentence is found only in some narrative styles, such as popular journalism: *Declared brunette Lucy ...*

• *Indirect speech* (also called *reported speech*) gives the words as subsequently reported by someone. It usually takes the form of a subordinate clause (p. 226) introduced by *that*: *Michael said that he liked the colour*. The conjunction is often omitted in informal contexts: *Michael said he liked the colour*.

This distinction has long been recognized in English grammar. Older grammars used Latin names for the two modes: *oratio recta* (for direct speech) and *oratio obliqua* (for indirect speech). However, the basic distinction does not capture the whole range of stylistic possibilities: mixed and modified forms are used in literature, such as 'free direct speech' and 'free indirect speech', conveying a wide range of dramatic effects (p. 419). And the construction has also been used as a fruitful source of humour (p. 409).

GRAMMATICAL CHANGES

When indirect speech is used, speakers need to introduce grammatical changes to allow for differences between their current situation and the situation they are reporting.

• It is usually necessary to change the *tense forms* of the verbs used in the direct speech (p. 224). In most cases, a present tense becomes past, and a past tense is shifted still further back, by using the perfective aspect (p. 225).

I said, 'I'm leaving'.

I said I was leaving.

I said, 'I saw John'.

I said I had seen John.

The rules governing the correct relationship between the verbs in the reporting and reported clauses are traditionally labelled the *sequence of tenses*. They are actually much more complex than these examples suggest. For example, if the time reference of the original utterance is still valid at the time of reporting, the tense shift is optional.

Mark said, 'Oil floats on water.'
Mark said oil floated on water.
Mark said oil floats on water.

And there are special strategies when it comes to reporting sentences other than statements (p. 218).

'Are you in?' asked Pru.
Pru asked if I was in.

'Sit down,' said Pru.
Pru told me to sit down.

• *Time and place references* also need to be altered: for example, *tomorrow* becomes *the next day* or *the following day*, *here* becomes *there*.

I said, 'I saw it here yesterday.'
I said I'd seen it there the day before.

• *Personal pronouns* need to be altered (p. 210). First and second person pronouns have to be changed to third person, unless the original participants are still involved in the conversation.

Pru said to Joe, 'I like your tie.'
Pru said she liked his tie.
(if the speaker is talking to someone other than Joe)
Pru said she liked your tie.
(if the speaker is talking to Joe)

REPORTING STYLES

Several conventions are used to represent direct speech in fiction. Some authors take great pains to vary the verb of the reporting clause (p. 419), to avoid the repeated use of *said* (see A below). Some use *said* regularly, even in place of other stalwarts (e.g. *asked, exclaimed*) (B). The reporting clause is often omitted, if the identity of the speakers is clear from the context (C). And in drama, the verb of the reporting clause is always absent, with quotation marks never used (D).

A
Jorge could not keep from commenting in a low voice. 'John Chrysostom said that Christ never laughed.'

'Nothing in his human nature forbade it,' William remarked, 'because laughter, as the theologians teach, is proper to man.'

'The son of man could laugh, but it is not written that he did so,' Jorge said sharply, quoting Petrus Cantor.

'Manduca, iam coctum est,' William murmured. 'Eat, for it is well done.'

'What?' asked Jorge, thinking he referred to some dish that was being brought to him.

'Those are the words that, according to Ambrose, were uttered by Saint Lawrence on the gridiron, when he invited his executioners to turn him over, as Prudentius also recalls in the *Peristephanon*,' William said with a saintly air. 'Saint Lawrence therefore knew how to laugh and say ridiculous things, even if it was to humiliate his enemies.'

'Which proves that laughter is some-

thing very close to death and to the corruption of the body,' Jorge replied with a snarl...

(Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1983, First Day: Compline)

B
'I'm afraid I missed the UTE conference this year.'

'If that's the one I attended here in '79, then you did well to avoid it,' said Morris Zapp. 'I mean real conferences, international conferences.'

'I couldn't afford to go to one of those,' said Robyn. 'Our overseas conference fund has been cut to the bone.'

'Cuts, cuts, cuts,' said Morris Zapp, 'that's all anyone will talk about here. First Philip, then Busby, now you.'

'That's what life is like in British universities these days, Morris,' said Philip Swallow, presenting Robyn with a glass of rather warm Soave. 'I spend all my time on committees arguing about how to respond to the cuts. I haven't read a book in months, let alone tried to write one.'

'Well, I have,' said Robyn. 'Read one or written one?' said Morris Zapp.

'Written one,' said Robyn. 'Well, three quarters of it, anyway.'

'Ah, Robyn,' said Philip Swallow, 'you put us all to shame. What shall we do without you?'
(David Lodge, *Nice Work*, 1988, Ch. 6.)

C
And she won, she knew she did, because Kurtz spoke first, which was the proof.

'Charlie, we recognise that this is very painful for you, but we ask you to continue in your own words. We have

the van. We see your possessions leaving the house. What else do we see?'

'My pony.'

'They took that too?'

'I told you already.'

'With the furniture? In the same van?'

'No, a separate one. Don't be bloody silly.'

'So there were two vans. Both at the same time? Or one after the other?'

'I don't remember.'

'Where was your father physically located all this time? Was he in the study? Looking through the window, say, watching it all go? How does a man like him bear up—in his disgrace?'

'He was in the garden.'

'Doing what?'

'Looking at the roses.'

(John Le Carré, *The Little Drummer Girl*, 1983, Ch. 7)

D
STANLEY (*quickly*). Why are you down here?

McCANN. A short holiday.

STANLEY. This is a ridiculous house to pick on. (*He rises*.)

McCANN. Why?

STANLEY. Because it's not a boarding house. It never was.

McCANN. Sure it is.

STANLEY. Why did you choose this house?

McCANN. You know, sir, you're a bit depressed for a man on his birthday.

STANLEY (*sharply*). Why do you call me sir?

McCANN. You don't like it?

(Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party*, 1960, Act 2)

SENTENCE INFORMATION

There are many ways in which we can organize the information contained in a sentence, as can be seen from these alternatives:

- A mechanic is fixing a car.
- There's a mechanic fixing a car.
- It's a mechanic that's fixing a car.
- It's a car that a mechanic is fixing.
- A car is being fixed by a mechanic.

These sentences all express the same basic meaning, but they convey several important differences of style and emphasis. The analysis of these differences is also part of the study of grammar.

Given and new information

There are usually two kinds of information in a sentence. One part of the sentence tells us something *new*. The other part tells us something that we were aware of already (either from previous sentences or from our general knowledge) – in other words, its information

is *given*. The distinction between given and new information can be clearly seen in this dialogue:

- A: Where did you put your bike?
- B: I left it / at my friend's house.

The first part of B's sentence is 'given' (by A); the second part is new.

Given information tells us what a sentence is about; it provides the sentence *theme*. Because the information it contains is familiar, this part of the sentence is not likely to be spoken with any extra prominence (p. 248). New information, on the other hand, provides the point where we expect people to pay special attention, or *focus*. The part of the sentence containing the focus is always spoken in a prominent way.

In most sentences, the theme appears first, and the focus of the message last. But it is possible to bring the focus forwards, so as to emphasize an earlier part of the sentence. This especially happens when we want to state a contrast, as in *The plates are new, not the cups*. Conversations make frequent use of emphatic contrasts of this kind.

VARYING THE INFORMATION STRUCTURE

There are several ways in which special attention can be drawn to the theme of a sentence.

Fronting

Fronting occurs when we move to the beginning of a sentence an item which does not usually belong there. This item then becomes the theme, and in such cases it carries extra prominence:

Across the road they ran.
David I said my name was.

Inversion

Here the subject and verb appear in the reverse of their normal order:

Here's Johnny.
Down came the rain.
They were happy and so *was* I.

The verb must be in its simple form (p. 225); we cannot say **Down was coming the rain*.

Cleft sentences

Another way of altering the normal emphasis in a simple sentence is to split ('cleave') the sentence into two clauses, giving each its own verb. The first clause consists of the pronoun *it* and a form of the verb *be*. The second clause begins with a pronoun such as *that* or *who*. These constructions are called *cleft sentences*:

Ted broke the plate.
It was Ted who broke the plate.
It was the plate that Ted broke.

Extraposition

Where the subject or object element is a clause (p. 220), it is possible to change the

sentence around so that the clause comes later. The original element is then replaced by the pronoun *it*, which 'anticipates' the following clause:

What you say doesn't matter.
It doesn't matter what you say.

I find reading comics fun.
I find it fun, reading comics.

In examples like these, the clauses have been moved *outside* their normal position in the sentence. The effect is thus said to be one of *extraposition*.

Existentials

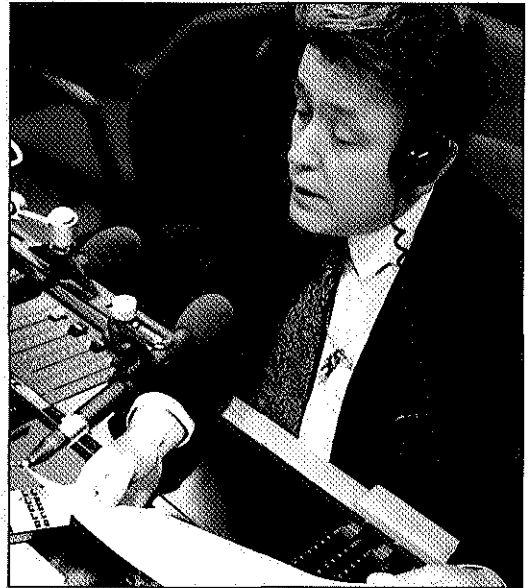
Sometimes we want to bring the content of a whole clause to the attention of our listener or reader, making it all new information. To do this, there is a construction in which the first words have no meaning. They seem to act as a theme, because they appear at the beginning of the sentence, but it is a 'dummy' theme. The main means of achieving this effect is to use the word *there* (without giving it any stress) followed by the simple present or past tense of *be*:

Many people are in danger.
There are many people in danger.

Such sentences express the general existence of some state of affairs, and are thus called *existential sentences*. *Be* is not the only verb capable of being used in this way, but others (such as *exist* and *arise*) are rarer and more literary:

There exist several alternatives.
There arose a great cry.

FROM MOSCOW, OUR CORRESPONDENT...



News reporting frequently makes use of variations in information structure in order to capture attention and avoid monotony. The following extracts from radio broadcasts illustrate the use of these techniques.

It was in June that Horace Williams, an unemployed labourer, first met the Smiths.

There were cheers inside the court today when a verdict of not guilty was returned...

In the West Indian city of Georgetown, the final day of the Fourth Test between the West Indies and England has been washed out by rain.

BEYOND THE SENTENCE

In real life, a sentence is rarely used in isolation. Normally, sentences – whether spoken or written – appear in a sequence, such as a dialogue, a speech, a letter, or a book. Any set of sentences which ‘cohere’ in this way is called a *text* – a term which applies to both spoken and written material (p.290). The coherence is achieved through the use of a wide range of features which connect sentences, some of which fall well outside the domain of grammar, but they are outlined here because it is not really possible to appreciate the specific role of syntax in connectivity without seeing it in this broader perspective.

• *General knowledge.* We often make a link between sentences because of our general knowledge or expectations about the way the world functions.

The summer was one of the best they had ever had. The vintage was expected to be superb.

Here there is no obvious connection in either grammar or vocabulary to link these sentences. But anyone who knows about wine can readily supply the missing link. Such techniques as inference, deduction, and presupposition are used in these circumstances.

• *Vocabulary.* Often the choice of words is enough to connect two sentences:

Look at that dachshund. He'd win a prize in any dog show.

Because we know that a dachshund is a kind of dog, we have no difficulty in making the relevant connection between the sentences.

• *Punctuation and layout.* Graphic and graphological features of a text (p.257) may be enough to show that sentences, or even paragraphs, are to be connected in a specific way. The use of panels, headings, special symbols (such as bullets), and colour within a text to show how the meaning is organized, provides a particularly clear example – as on the present page.

• *Prosody* (p.248). Variations in pitch, loudness, speed, rhythm, and pause combine to provide the spoken equivalent of the visual organization and contrastivity of a written text. Question–answer sequences, parenthetical utterances, rhetorical climaxes, and many other features of speech which involve a sequence of sentences are usually signalled through the use of prosodic effects. Several spoken genres, such as radio news bulletins and sports commentaries, are also notable for the way they use prosody to demarcate topics and types of activity.

BEWARE!

A text is a coherent, complete unit of speech or writing. As such it typically consists of many sentences. But it is possible to find a text which contains only one sentence, and a short one at that (p.216).



GRAMMATICAL CONNECTIVITY

Several aspects of grammar, already discussed in this section with reference to sentence structure, can also be used to connect sentences.

Space and time adverbials (p.221)

We left Paris on Monday morning. *By the same evening* we were in Rome.

Pronouns and other pro-forms (p.228)

The children were back in time for dinner. *They* were very tired.

Determiners (p.207)

A Mercedes was parked in the street. *The* car looked new.

Comparison (p.199)

Six children took part in the sack race. Jill was easily the *fastest*.

Conjunctions (p.227)

Several people complained. *And* I did too.

Connecting adverbials (p.229)

There are several points. *First of all*, we need to know the motive.

TRACING SENTENCE CONNECTIONS

Often several features of grammatical connectivity are present to link a pair of sentences, and in a longer passage the various links combine and overlap in many ways. This can be seen in the following passage, where the specifically grammatical connections have been highlighted. A \wedge symbol indicates a point of ellipsis (p.228). (Many other links of the same kind are also used to link clauses within sentences, but these are not separately identified.)

The Improbability-proof control cabin of the Heart of Gold looked like a perfectly conventional spaceship except that it was perfectly clean because it was so new. Some of the control seats \wedge hadn't had the plastic wrapping taken off yet. The cabin was mostly white, oblong, and about the size of a smallish restaurant. In fact it wasn't perfectly oblong: the two long walls \wedge were raked round in a slight parallel curve, and all the angles and corners of the cabin \wedge were contoured in excitingly chunky shapes. The truth of the matter is that it would have been a great deal simpler and more practical to build the cabin as an ordinary three-dimensional oblong room, but then the designers would have got

miserable. As it was the cabin looked excitingly purposeful, with large video screens ranged over the control and guidance system panels on the concave wall, and long banks of computers set into the convex wall. In one corner \wedge a robot sat humped, its gleaming brushed steel head hanging loosely between its gleaming brushed steel knees. It too was fairly new, but though it was beautifully constructed and polished it somehow looked as if the various parts of its more or less humanoid body didn't quite fit properly. In fact they fitted perfectly well, but something in its bearing suggested that they might have fitted better.

(Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), Ch. 11.)



THE PARADOX OF GRAMMAR

The linguistic literature abounds with metaphors trying to capture the significance of grammar. Grammar is said to be at the very 'heart' of language, at the 'core' of communication. It is seen as the 'key' to our understanding of the way meaning is expressed and interpreted. It has been called the 'skeleton' of narrative and the 'touchstone' of verbal humour. It has been widely hailed as the 'mechanism' which, by manipulating a finite number of grammatical rules, enables us to generate an infinite number of sentences. It dominates the 'milestones' of language learning and acts as a 'yardstick' during the course of language breakdown and recovery (p. 426). There is no doubt, when we read such accounts, that the field of grammar is fundamental, dynamic, relevant, and real.

On the other hand, there is equally no doubt that grammatical study can lack all these attributes. This is the paradox of grammar: how can something which ought to be so fascinating come to be so boring? The historical reasons have been reviewed in earlier pages (p. 190), but even in a positive and optimistic intellectual linguistic climate there is no gainsaying the fact that the relationships of grammar are abstract and at times intricate, and its terminology imposing and at times abstruse. The level of difficulty is probably no worse than that encountered in several other sciences, but the information purveyed by those sciences is established in school curricula in ways that are far in advance of what is as yet available for grammar. The familiarity and accessibility of geography or chemistry is the result of a long pedagogical tradition, in which the selection and grading of information has been tried and tested, and curricula devised which are principled and motivating. Modern approaches to English grammar are not yet in this position, but there is plenty of evidence to show that efforts are being made to improve matters. The examples on this page illustrate just a few of the approaches that are now being used to help people obtain insight into grammatical structure.

GIANT WAVES DOWN FUNNEL

Using sentences which are grammatically ambiguous can motivate an enquiry into the competing structures involved. (Examples from W. H. Mittins, *A Grammar of Modern English*, 1962.)

The only spectators were a woman carrying a small baby and a large policeman. We saw the Eiffel Tower flying from London to Paris.

A sailor was dancing with a wooden leg.

Bus on Fire!
Passengers Alight!

The airship was about to leave the airport. The last person to go up the gangway was Miss Hemming. Slowly her huge nose turned into the wind. Then, like some enormous beast, she crawled along the grass.

DISCUSSING THE PROBLEM

If teaching grammar is a problem, it can help to bring the children into the discussion at the earliest possible point, using role play, stories, poems, and other genres to focus their attention on a linguistic issue. This poem by Mike Rosen has been much discussed in British secondary schools following its use in a publication

written in association with the BBC television series *Language File* (1990).

The teacher said:
A noun is a naming word.
What is a naming word in the sentence
'He named the ship, Lusitania'?

'Named' said George.
'WRONG - it's ship.'

The teacher said:
A verb is a doing word.
What is the doing word in the sentence

'I like doing homework?'
'Doing' said George.
'WRONG - it's like.'

The teacher said:
An adjective is a describing word.
What is the describing word in the sentence
'Describing sunsets is boring'?

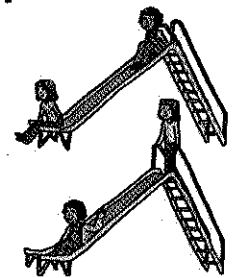
'Describing' said George.
'WRONG - it's boring.'
'I know it is,' said George.

TAKING NOTHING FOR GRANTED

One reason why grammar teaching can fail is that the notions being taught take too much for granted. For example, it is not possible to teach a young child the concept of letter order (in spelling) or word order (in sentences) if the basic notion of 'order' is itself not clear. This point was appreciated by Jessie Reid and Margaret Donaldson, who gave it special attention at the beginning of their reading and language programme, *R&D* (1984), aimed at children from around the age of 8.

Who went first?

One day Mandy and Jay went to play on the slide. Mandy went down the slide first. Jay went second.
Then Jay said:
"It's my turn to go first now."
So Jay went first and Mandy went second.



- ★ The first time, the children went in one order.
- The next time, they went in another order.
- Mandy first, Jay second is one order.
- Jay first, Mandy second is another order.

The next day Tim came to play on the slide with Jay. Mandy was not there.

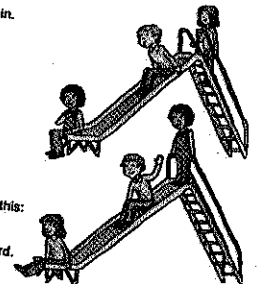
Write the two orders that Tim and Jay could go in. Use the words first and second. Make pictures for the two orders.

The next day Tim and Jay and Mandy were all playing on the slide. The pictures show you how they went down.

Write the order for each picture in your book, like this:

Jay first, _____ second, _____ third.

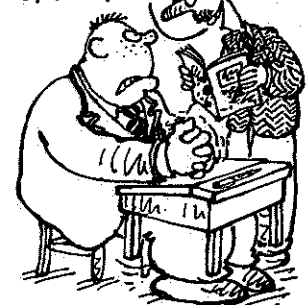
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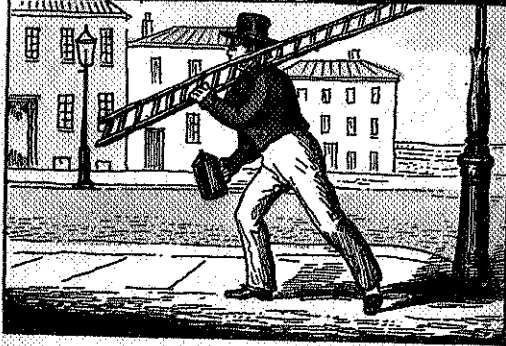
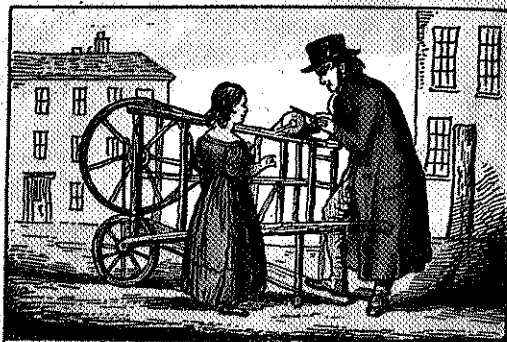


DRAWING TO A CLOSE

Animation, cartoons, and computer products are just some of the modern ways of putting across a grammatical point. While the sophistication of the software currently lags considerably behind what is available in hardware, the way a child can be motivated to learn about grammatical structure is well demonstrated by the numerous packages which already teach aspects of grammar to special groups, such as language-disordered children (p. 434). Cartoons are also now widely used. The following is an offering from Edward McLachlan to a series of books for British secondary school children by the present author, *Language A to Z* (1991). It accompanies an entry which is attempting to explain to 15-year-olds what a 'comment clause' is (p. 229).

Your handwriting, you know, to be honest, quite frankly, speakly personally, I must say, basically, know what I mean, as a matter of fact,





15

K for an old **K**nife-grinder
stands,

Who wheels his own machine;
And thus the cart before the horse
Is very plainly seen.

L for a brisk **L**amplighter stands,
Who lights the gas, and soon
Our streets will so illuminate,
We shall not miss the moon.

18

O for an **O**yster-woman stands;
The oysters now begin
To find some one is at the door,
Who's trying to break in.

P for **P**oliceman we shall take,
His number, twenty-five;
And there he's running at full speed,
To catch a thief alive.

