

Lecture 2: The Structure of the English Sentence

1. Difference between Phrase, Clause and Sentence

1. Phrase:

A phrase is a group of words that work together to do one job but do not contain a subject and a verb.

Grammarians tend to classify phrases in two different ways:

1. Five types according to their main word: Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb and Prepositional Phrases.

2. Six types according to their headword: Participial, Gerund, Infinitive, Prepositional, Absolute and Appositive Phrases.

Noun phrases do the same jobs as single-word nouns. They act as the subjects, objects or complements of sentences. In fact, only a small percentage of sentences have single-word nouns as their subjects, objects or complements. There are many such sentences of course:

Time is money or *Pandas eat bamboo*. But it is far more common to find a noun phrase — even if it is only a very short one containing nothing more than a noun and an article — in these positions. Noun phrases can be very short simple groups of words such as *the computer* — a phrase that consists only of a noun and an article or they can be long and complicated groups such as *the already outmoded computer that they spent so much money on*.

Noun phrases can contain other sorts of phrases including noun phrases. For instance, the phrase *the already outmoded computer that they spent so much money on* contains the noun phrase *so much money*.

Verb phrases are comprised of a main verb and a helping verb (*Maria was sleeping*.)

Adjective phrases are groups of words that do the same job as adjectives. The following sentence: *He is afraid of his wife* contains the adjective phrase, *afraid of his wife* as its complement. The main word is *afraid*.

Adverb phrases contain an adverb as its main word plus other modifiers like in: *They almost never meet*.

Prepositional phrase refers to groups of words that are introduced with a preposition. Typically the words that follow the preposition — and make up the bulk of the noun phrase — This classification is not exactly parallel to the others because, it does not identify a phrase type so much by the job it does in a sentence as by the *kind of word* it begins with. Prepositional phrases do the job either of adverbials or of adjectives. In the first case they are doing the job of a sentence part, the adverbial; in the second case they are doing the job of a word class, the adjective.

2. Clause:

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb or a *verb phrase*.

It is important to notice that, according to the definition, simple sentences are clauses. This is because simple sentences must contain a subject and a verb.

All simple sentences are clauses but all clauses with one subject and one verb phrase do not qualify as simple sentences. Clauses like: *Susie sings in the shower* are simple sentences but clauses like: *when Susie sings in the shower* or *Susie singing in the shower* are not simple sentences.

3. Sentence:

It is a set of words that tells a complete thought, typically containing a subject and a predicate, conveying a statement (declarative sentences), question (interrogative sentences), exclamation (exclamatory sentences) or command (imperative sentences).

Sentences can be divided according to their purpose and even their structure (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex).

Any sentence must start with a capital letter and ends with a terminal punctuation mark (./?!)

2. Finite/ Non-Finite/ Verbless/ Dependent / Independent Clauses

Clauses can be classified as adjective clauses (The tree *that was in the backyard* grew very slow), noun clauses (Maria told her mother *that she cannot go to school*) and adverbial clauses (she lost some weight *when she got sick*) depending on what role they play in the structure of the whole sentence they belong to. On the other hand, they can be classified in another way, according to their internal grammatical structure as either finite or non-finite. It is necessary first to understand the distinction between a finite verb phrase and a non-finite verb phrase. A finite verb phrase is one that contains either a present tense or a past tense verb. A non-finite verb phrase is one that does *not* contain either a present tense or a past tense verb. (In other words, all the words in a non-finite verb phrase must be infinitives, past participles, or *-ing* forms.)

1. Finite Clause:

A finite clause is a clause whose verb element is a finite verb phrase which means that it shows tense. This finite clause might be either a subordinate (dependent) clause or a main (independent) clause.

2. Non-Finite Clause:

A non-finite clause contains a verb phrase that does not show any tense. There are four types of non-finite clauses. Three of these can be further divided into two subdivisions according to whether or not a subject is present.

1. Infinitive clauses with *to*: I want *to tell you something*.

2. Infinitive clauses without *to* ('bare infinitives') I heard him *whisper in her ear*. This construction is possible with only a small number of verbs; all of these belong to one of two groups: verbs of perception such as *see*, and *hear* and causative verbs such as *make*, *help*, and *let*.

3. *-ing* clauses

Forgetting her promise, she let the truth slip out.

He doesn't like his daughter *hanging around in places like that*.

4. Past participle clauses

The people injured in the riots did not receive proper medical treatment.

His head covered in bandages; he made a humiliating apology.

3. Verbless Clauses:

Some scholars defined a verbless clause as a group of words that does not contain a verb. For example: 'good morning', 'happy birthday'. Although the verb is ellipped, the sentence fragment has a meaning since it provides specific information. Generally speaking, verbless clauses are

independent which means that they can function alone and provide meaning without needing to be included in a sentence. This is why they are also called verbless sentences.

Verbless clauses can be classified into four categories: declarative, exclamatory, interrogative and interjectional.

- The declarative verbless clause provides an answer to a question or a response that does not include yes or no. For instance:

A: did you enjoy the party?

B: very much.

- The second type is the exclamatory verbless clause which expresses surprise, discontent, warning or alarm. For example:

Strange man! ; Gossiping girl! ; Beware!

- The third category includes interrogative verbless clauses. This type encompasses a form of yes/no question that is used to elicit information by urging the respondent to answer either by yes or no. for instance:

Anybody there? Any news?

Also, it can include ‘wh’ questions like: Why?

- The fourth type is the interjectional verbless clause which takes the form of an interjection. For example: Yes! ; No!; Ok!; Well!

4. Dependent Clause:

There are three types of dependent clauses introduced by different kinds of words

- Adverbial clauses by subordinating conjunctions.
- Adjectival clauses by relative pronouns and relative adverbs.
- Noun clauses by expletives and interrogatives.

These three kinds of clauses function differently in their sentences:

- Adverbial clauses modify verbs.
- Adjectival clauses modify nouns. They do not function as sentence parts but as parts of the

noun phrases that are subjects and objects. For example, in the sentence:

The old, grey horse that was standing beside the barn had a sad look in its eyes

the noun phrase “*the old, grey horse that was standing beside the barn*” is the subject. The headword of this noun phrase is *horse*. The two adjectives *old* and *grey* give us information about the horse; in other words, they modify the word *horse*. In a similar way, the clause “*that was standing beside the barn*” modifies the headword and is therefore called an adjective clause.

- Nominal clauses fill NP slots as subjects, direct objects, and so on.

5. Independent Clause:

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand on its own as a sentence: it has a subject, a verb, and is a complete thought.

3. A Brief Introduction to Sentence Types (Simple/ Compound/ Complex/ Compound-Complex)

1. Simple Sentences:

All sentences, must have at least one subject and one verb; a group of words which does not contain a subject and a verb cannot be a sentence. Many sentences — including the compound

and complex sentences that are the main subject of these notes — have more than one subject and more than one verb but: Simple sentences contain only one subject and one verb phrase.

As well as containing one subject and one verb a simple sentence may have an object or a complement and it may contain one or more adverbials. There are, however, many simple sentences such as: He agreed.

2. Compound Sentences:

A simple sentence — which is *also* a clause — can be combined with another simple sentence (another clause) to form a compound sentence. For example, the simple sentence/clause: *Susie sings in the shower*, can be combined with the simple sentence/clause: *Jack accompanies her on the piano* to form the compound sentence: *Susie sings in the shower and Jack accompanies her on the piano*

When simple sentences are joined together in this way — when they become parts of compound sentences — we no longer call them simple sentences. We say instead that they are independent clauses. Independent clauses are clauses that, despite being joined together in one sentence, are grammatically of equal importance to one another. The essential difference between compound and complex sentences is that the clauses that make up a complex sentence are not grammatically equal to one another.

3. Complex Sentences:

In a complex sentence, the clauses are not equal in grammatical importance. If there are two clauses in a complex sentence, one of them will be less important than the other because it will be part of the other one. The less important clause is called the dependent clause, and the more important clause is called the main clause.

When the cat was on the mat, the dog was on the log. The dependent clause here is: *when the cat was on the mat* and the independent clause is: *the dog was on the log.*

4. Compound-Complex Sentences:

A complex–compound sentence has two or more independent clauses and also contains one or more dependent clauses.

The teacher was on time but the students were all late because the bus was suddenly out of gas.

4. Coordination Vs Subordination

They are various ways of sentence expansion through adding modifiers to nouns, verbs, and to the sentence itself.

1. Coordination: To coordinate words, phrases, and clauses, we use three kinds of connectors:

1. Coordinating conjunctions: and, or, but, yet, for, so, nor.
2. Correlative conjunctions: both-and, either-or, neither-nor, not only-but also.
3. Conjunctive adverbs: however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, so, yet, etc.

Understanding the various kinds of conjunctions will help you use compound elements effectively.

An important consideration for coordinate elements is that they be parallel. A sentence is parallel when all of the coordinate parts are of the same grammatical form. The conjunctions must join grammatical equivalents, such as pairs of noun phrases or verb phrases or adjectives:

Noun phrases: The university plans to build a new library and three residence halls.

Verb phrases: They will also remodel the administration building and repair the tennis courts.

Adverbs: Swiftly yet gracefully, Michele skated across the ice.

Prepositional phrases: The line stretches down the hall and out the front door.

Nominal clauses: I don't care who you are or what you want.

The coordinate elements should have turned out to be parallel. Unparallel parts occur most commonly with the correlatives, the two-part conjunctions like either-or and neither-nor:

For Kim's birthday present, I'll either buy a CD or a video.

It's easy to see the problem: The word group following either is a verb phrase; the one following or is a noun phrase. It's easy to correct the problem too. Just shift one part of the correlative pair so that both introduce the same kind of phrase:

I'll buy either a CD or a video, [noun phrases]

I'll either buy a CD or rent a video, [verb phrases]

2. Subordination:

Subordination markers are used to connect dependent clauses to the main clauses and noun phrases that they are part of. (To say that one thing is 'subordinate' to another is to say, roughly, that it is dependent on that thing; dependent clauses can also be called 'subordinate clauses'.) There are two important subgroups of subordination markers. The subordinating conjunctions such as *if*, *when*, *although*, and *that* are used with adverbial clauses and noun clauses; and the relative pronouns such as *that*, *who*, and *which*, are used to connect adjective clauses to the nouns they modify.

Practice

Exercise 1: Mark the italicized finite clauses with ‘F’ and the italicized non-finite clauses with ‘NF’:

1. Statistics Canada has found *what many people have long suspected*.
2. Officials were told *that the missing fish could number as many as 1.2 million*.
3. Of course, *being an intellectual hockey player*, doesn't always help.
4. *When people survive a heart attack*, damage to the organ is often so great *that they eventually suffer another attack and die*.
5. Mr Fuller, *who spent fifteen days in jail awaiting trial*, received the longest sentence *given to a participant in the riot*.
6. *Emptying the mind before physical action* will improve success in sports.
7. The chemical appears to increase serotonin levels in the brain, *taking away the compulsive desire to place a bet*.
8. If you want to find out *what youth are doing*, go deeper.

Exercise 2: Underline all the dependent clauses in the following sentences. Use single underlining for the finite clauses and double underlining for the non-finite clauses. In the blank space, indicate the function of the clause or clauses as follows: noun, ‘n’; adverbial, ‘adv’; adjective, ‘adj’. If there is more than one clause in the sentence, separate your symbols with a comma.

1. An American combat plane, firing air-to-air missiles, shot down an Iraqi MiG fighter which intruded into the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. _____
2. In Hong Kong's fashionable district of Lan Kwai Fong, 20 people were killed when crowd celebrations went wrong. _____
3. The 15,000 revelers were gripped by panic after a number of people fell to the ground. _____
4. David Schoo and his wife Sharon, a well-to-do couple from Chicago, were charged with child cruelty after leaving their daughters, aged nine and four, alone at home while they spent Christmas on the beach at Acapulco, Mexico. _____
5. Mr Lu stressed that there had been no improvement in relations with Britain. _____

Exercise 3: Decide whether the following sentences are simple, compound or complex.

1. A family of baboons jumped from the rear window of a car.

2. The knife blades shine in the afternoon sunlight as the man in the flashy shirt pushes them deeper inside the metal hoops.
3. He rushes forward and then he dives head first through the treacherous hole.
4. An hour's drive south of Budapest is Lake Balaton, which offers a sunny, uncrowded beach.
5. The Shakers died out, but they left behind some great furniture and interesting houses.
6. The island of New Guinea is one of the most intriguing destinations in the world.
7. About half the photosynthesis that removes carbon dioxide from the air occurs in the tropics.
8. The species is believed to be near extinction.
9. Many marchers stayed at the barricades into the early morning hours today.
10. Mr Nimro insists that he talked to Mr.Squevel in 1979.

Exercise 4: Revise each of the following sentences using the coordinating or correlative conjunction shown in parentheses:

The first sentence is done.

1. The students studied until 3:00 a.m. (and)
The students studied and partied until 3 :00 a.m.
2. The children played on the porch all afternoon, (and)
3. I will work on my math assignment tomorrow, (either-or)
4. Pam changed the oil before leaving for spring break, (and)
5. Our teacher looked cheerful in class this morning, (yet)
6. Our visitors this weekend were unexpected, (but)
7. I can go with you to the police station, (and)
8. John can speak Spanish like a native, (both-and)
9. Juan can speak English like a native, (not only-but also)
10. My roommates are going to San Diego for spring break, (either-or)
11. I've decided that majoring in math was a mistake, (and)

Exercise 5: Underline the correlative conjunctions in each sentence, and identify the grammatical elements that are connected.

1. Elephants are found both in Africa and in Asia. *Prepositional phrases*
2. The African elephant is neither the largest nor the heaviest mammal in the world. *Adjectives*
3. Either you leave or I will call the police.
4. I have neither the time nor the energy for your trivial complaints.
5. People both admire tigers as beautiful animals and fear them as man-eaters.
6. Many species of animals spend most of their time either eating or sleeping.
7. This position requires not only specialized know ledge b u t also the ability to handle people tactfully.
8. He was either ignorant of the policy or unaware of its relevance to his job description.
9. While in his nineties, Bertrand Russell spoke both vigorously and eloquently against the development of nuclear weapons.
10. Neither what you say nor how you say it will affect my judgment.