

ELENA MĂRĂSCU

SYNTAX



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Referenți:

Conf.univ.dr. CARMEN NEDELCU

Lect.univ.dr. MĂDĂLINA CERBAN

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Str. Brestei, nr. 156A, Craiova, Dolj, România

Tel.: +40 251 598054

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THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

Traditionally the basic unit of language for the purpose of analyzing its grammar is the sentence. But this immediately presents a problem: what is a sentence? There is no easy definition but, thoroughly speaking, an English sentence must have

- a) a subject that ‘governs’ the verb
- b) a finite verb (that is, a verb with tense)

The apparent exception to this is the imperative, where usually the subject is implied rather than stated.

It is important to distinguish between a sentence and an utterance. In connected speech or writing, there are plenty of utterance which fail conditions a) and b) above but which are grammatically acceptable. They are clearly signaled as complete in spoken English by intonation, and in written language by punctuation:

*Oh dear! Not at all. Thanks. Ok. Coming! Meaning what? In London.
What a pity! But now to more serious matters. To be honest, no!*

The sentence is the basic unit of syntax. It is considered to be an independent unit which conveys a logic judgment or an idea sometimes implying a subjective attitude or some will.

From the point of view of the aim of the message, sentences can be:

1. statements, conveying a piece of information like:

Columbus discovered America in 1492.

2. interrogative, though which a piece of information is asked.

3. injunctions, which express an order, a request or some urge:

Open the book!

Switch on the radio!

4. sentences showing an exclamation and expressing surprise, satisfaction or discontent:

Oh, how attractive she is!

From the point of view of their structure sentences can be:

1. unextended simple sentences- formed of a subject and a predicate:

Dogs bark.

2. extended simple sentences- which contains besides the subject and the predicate some other parts of sentence:

Yesterday he went to school by bike.

3. elliptical simple sentences- from which certain parts are missing but they can be edited to a predicate we have to refer to the verb.

The structure of simple sentences as well as the structure of extended can be discussed taking into account the part of the sentence and especially the predicate. When referring to a predicate we have to refer to the verb.

The verbs have been classified to several criteria and one of these criteria is the lexical meaning of the verbs. Thus one can discuss about auxiliaries but at the same time about transitive and intransitive verbs. If we take into account the lexical meaning as a main criterion we can obtain the following subtypes of sentences:

1. simple sentences- where the pattern can display:

a. subject+ intransitive verb

b. subject+ auxiliary+ the predicative part of a nominal predicate

2. the pattern of an extended sentence:

a. subject+ intransitive verb+ an adverbial modifier: *He swims in the sea.*

b. subject and an auxiliary verb and an adverbial modifier of place:

Our cat is here.

c. a third pattern- where a subject is combines with an transitive verb and a direct object: *She has found the book.*

d. subject+ transitive verb+ direct object+ another direct object: *The man asked the boy several questions.*

e. subject is combines with an transitive verb+ a direct object+ a indirect object: *Father gave the toy to the boy.*

f. subject+ transitive verb+ direct object+ an extra predicative part of a nominal predicate: *They appointed him chairman.*

g. subject+ transitive verb+ direct object+ a prepositional adverbial modifier: *I helped him with his homework.*

The part of the sentence- can be grouped in:

- main parts of the subjects and the predicate;
- secondary parts like the direct object, the indirect one, the prepositional object, the adverbial modifiers.

All these parts have certain characteristics:

1. they are expressed through parts of speech
2. they have a certain place in the sentence
3. they have specific characteristics like: the agreement or they can be subjective to certain transformation

The Subject- Characteristics:

a) it is expressed generally speaking by a noun group, but it may also be expressed by a subordinate sentence, having the role of a subject.

b) the subject has its usual place before the predicate in Affirmative sentences and after the verb in Interrogative sentences.

c) there is an agreement between the subject and the predicative, taking into account the number and the person.

The Predicative- is expressed through a transitive verb or intransitive one, either having a finite form or being an auxiliary followed by a predicate part. Its place is usually after the subject. The agreement is done taking into account the subject.

The Direct Object- is expressed either by the noun group or by a subordinate sentence, having the function which is in most of the cases a noun function. The Direct Object follows the predicate usually and also it becomes the subject in a sentence that was submitted to the passive transformation.

The Indirect Object- expressed by a noun group; it follows usually the Direct Object and it is introduced by the preposition to or for. It cannot be used without a direct object.

The Predicative Part of a Nominal Predicate: usually expressed by a noun group and adjective or a subordinate sentence, having a noun function. It follows verbs like: *to be, to become, to turn*. It does not become subject of a sentence in a passive transformation.

The Predicative Adjunct or Extra- predicative:

-is expressed by a noun group, an adjective or a subordinate sentence

-it follows the subject and the predicate: *The boat swept close.*

-it does not become the subject of a sentence after a passive transformation.

The Adverbial Modifier:

- usually is represented by an adverb or a subordinate sentence having the function of an adverbial modifier; it can also be expressed by a noun group or a prepositional construction.

- the adverbial modifier does not have a fixed place. Generally the adverbial modifier represents an option. In other words it can be added or not used in a sentence which does not lack a grammatical pattern under the circumstances.

Sentence Types

There are four basic sentence types: statements, commands, questions, and exclamations.

- **Sentence types: statements**

These are also referred to as **declarative sentences** or **declaratives** (Latin *declare*: "to make clear").

Written prose is made up mainly of statements. This is the sentence type mainly used in this book and described by the forms SVO, SVC, SVA and so on, as discussed earlier in this section.

The function of statements is to convey information.
My dog + has buried + his bones + in the lawn. SVOA

- **Sentence types: commands**

These are also referred to as **imperative sentences** or **imperatives** (Latin *imperativus*: "proceeding from a command").

The subject of a command is usually left out, but it is understood as the second person pronoun "you".

Shut the gate. VO

Be quiet! VC

Get off the grass. VA

A gentler or more polite form of the command begins with "let's":

Let's have a party.

Commands are common in instructions:

Rub the fat into the flour. Add a small pinch of salt. Mix in the water, and work to a smooth dough. Alternatively, put all the ingredients in a blender. Whizz them until the pastry has formed into a ball. Chill for at least 2 hours before rolling out.

- **Sentence types: questions**

These are also referred to as **interrogative sentences** or **interrogatives** (Latin *interrogativus*: "of a question").

There are four main types of question:

1. **Yes/no questions**

These sentences expect "yes" or "no" for an answer.

Is your brother still at school? Has anyone brought some cushions? Does it ever snow in Christchurch? Do you like living in Waipu? Did someone lose this towel? Would you like some tea?

Historically, questions could be formed with or without "do":
Dost thou say this? or Sayest thou this?

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene ii, when Hamlet is first told about the appearance of the ghost, he asks the following questions:
Hold you the watch tonight? Then saw you not his face? What, look'd he frowningly? Stay'd it long?

All these yes/no questions are formed in a way that was quite usual in Shakespeare's time. Today we would usually use the auxiliary "do": Do you hold the watch tonight? Then didn't you see his face? What, did he look frowningly? Did it stay long?

2. **Wh questions**

These sentences begin with a Wh word: what, which, when, who, why, where, how. They cannot be answered with yes or no.

Why is your shirt dirty? What do you think about casinos? How did Dunedin get its name?

Interviewers who use yes/no questions can have difficulty eliciting much response when the person questioned just answers "yes" or "no".

A: Are you unhappy about the verdict?

B: No.

A: Did the fact that she was a woman have anything to do with it?

B: Yes.

A questioner who wants a fuller answer must use Wh questions:

A: What did you think about the verdict?

B: Well, I thought ...

A: Why do you think they said those things?

B: Because ...

3. Alternative questions

These are very similar to yes/no questions, but they offer a choice of answer.

Did it happen on Monday or Tuesday?

Should I ring up, or should I write?

For Māori and Samoan speakers, alternative sentences can cause trouble.

To the question "Do you want an apple or an orange?" the Pakeha teacher expects a specific answer: "An apple please." The Samoan child is more likely to answer simply "Yes", meaning he wants one or the other, and wait for the teacher to elucidate which by a further question. The housing officer who asks "Do you want this house or that?" and gets the answer