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# Sentence Elements

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# Outline

## A. Classical Classification

1. Subject & Predicate
2. Operator & Predication

## B. Alternative Classification

1. Subject
2. Objects (direct/indirect objects ;simple/complex/compound)
3. Complements (subject/object complements)
4. Categories of verbs (intensive / extensive; stative / dynamic; transitive / intransitive)
5. Categories of adverbials (adjuncts, disjuncts, conjuncts)

## C. Sentences within Sentences

# A. Traditional Classification

In order to state general rules about the construction of a sentence, it is necessary to refer to smaller units.

Traditionally, there is a primary distinction between **subject** and **predicate**.



	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Predicate</b>
[1]	John	carefully searched the room
[2]	The girl	is now a student at a large university
[3]	His brother	grew happier gradually
[4]	It	rained steadily all day
[5]	He	had given the girl an apple
[6]	They	elect him the chair every year

# Operator, Aux, and Predication

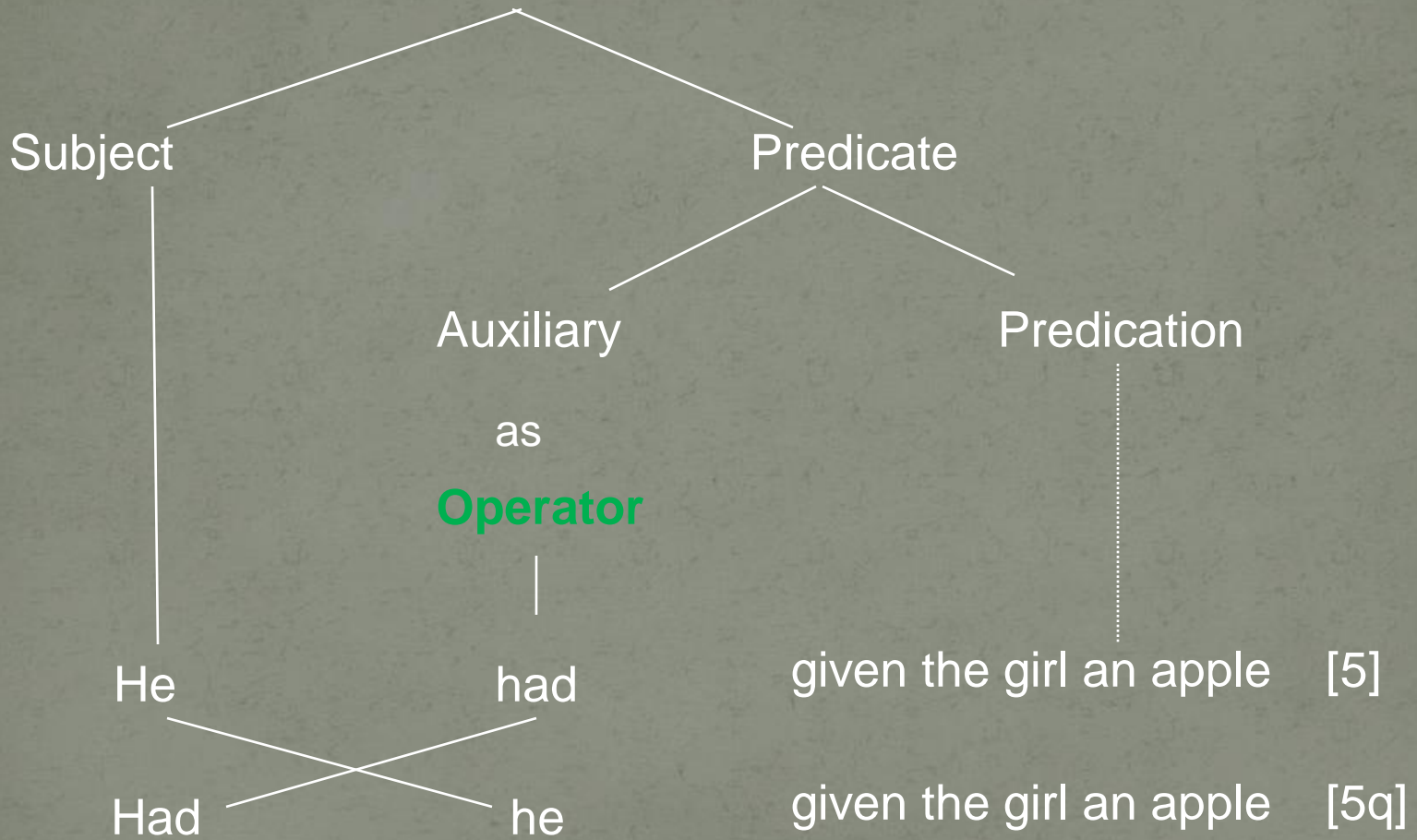
Contrary to the subject, the predicate tends to be a more complex and heterogeneous unit.



We need to subdivide it into its elements and constituents

One division has been suggested; this distinguishes **AUXILIARY** as **OPERATOR** (as in [5q]) from what we may call the **PREDICATION**.

# Sentence





This particular division of the sentence helps us to understand, for example, how interrogative and negative sentences are formed, how certain adjuncts are positioned, and how certain types of emphasis are achieved.

The verb phrase may have several auxiliaries; e.g.

He *should have been questioned* by the police

In such cases, it is the first auxiliary that acts as operator:

*Should* he have been questioned by the police?

No, he *shouldn't* have been questioned by the police.

Yes, he *should.*

When the verb phrase has no auxiliary in the positive declarative sentence, do is introduced when an operator is required:

It rained steadily all day.

Did it rain steadily all day?

No, it didn't.

The verb be can act as an operator whether it is an auxiliary as in

John is searching the room / Is John searching the. . .?

or an ordinary verb as in:

The girl is now a student / Is the girl now. . .?

The same is true to some extent (esp. in BrE) for have:


He has a degree. / Has he a degree?

Does he have a degree? (AmrE)



## B. Alternative Classification


A sentence may alternatively be seen as comprising five units called ELEMENTS of sentence (or clause) structure:

**SUBJECT**            **S**

**VERB**            **V**

**OBJECT**            **O**

**COMPLEMENT**            **C**

**ADVERBIAL**            **A**

# Subject

The subject of the sentence has a close general relation to “what is being discussed”, the “**theme**” of the sentence, with the normal implication that something new (**the predicate**) is being said about a ‘subject’ that has already been introduced in an earlier sentence.

This is a general characteristics and not a defining feature; it is patently absurd in relation to sentence [4].

The subject determines **concord / agreement**: the form of the verb (singular/plural) depends on whether the subject is singular as in [2], *the girl is*, or plural as in [6], *they elect*.

The subject is the part of the sentence that changes its position as we go from statement to question:

Had *he* given the girl an apple? [5q]

# Object

## Direct Object

A **direct object** is a noun phrase that receives the action of a transitive verb in an active sentence or a verbal.

### *object of a verb:*

- ❑ I *met* **her** this morning.
- "Her" is the **simple object** that receives the action of being met.

### *object of a verbal:*

- ❑ *Meeting* **her** was nice.
- "Her" is the **object** of the gerund "meeting."
  
- ❑ I always wanted *to meet* **her**.
- Here, "her" is the **object** of an infinitive.

It can also be the

### *object of a preposition:*

- ❑ He is fond *of* **her**.
- "Her" is the **object** of the preposition "of."



A direct object answers the questions **what?** or **whom?** about the transitive verb.

Examples:

- ❑ The secretary wrote **the report**.
- **What** did the secretary write? - She wrote **the report**.
  
- ❑ The jury interviewed **the candidate**.
- **Whom** did the jury interview? - They interviewed **the candidate**.

A direct object can also be **compound**, that is, composed of two or more noun phrases joined with a coordinating conjunction.

*e.g.*

□ The secretary wrote **the report and the invitations**.

**Compound Object:** the report and the invitations

## *How else can I identify a direct object?*

Another useful method for determining whether a noun phrase acts as the direct object is to attempt to rephrase the sentence in the **passive voice**. If you can turn the sentence into the passive form, then the direct object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence. If the noun or noun phrase is not a direct object, then the sentence will not convert into a passive form.

Examples:

1- Sarah *wrote an e-mail*.

**Passive** – An e-mail **was written** by Sarah. The direct object, "*an e-mail*," of the *active sentence* becomes the **subject** of the **passive** one.

2- Mr. Jones has become the chief executive officer of the company.

"the chief executive of the company" is not a direct object and thus cannot become the **subject** in a passive sentence.

Incorrect: \* The chief executive officer of the company has been become by Mr. Jones.



# Indirect Object

Some action verbs can take an **indirect object** as well as a direct object. Most commonly, these are verbs that involve giving something **to** someone or making something **for** someone. Indirect objects are usually placed directly before the direct object. They usually answer the questions "to what/whom?" or "for what/whom?".

Example:

- ❑ She gave **her boss** a rose.
- She gave a rose **to whom?** Her boss.
- The predicate of the above sentence consists of the transitive verb "gave," the indirect object "her boss," and the direct object "a rose." predicate = gave her boss a rose

the Indirect object almost always precedes the direct object; it is characteristically (though by no means always) a noun referring to a person, and the semantic relationship is often such that it is appropriate to use the term '**recipient**'.

Loosely, one might say in most cases that something (the direct object) tends to be done for (or received by) the indirect object.

# Complements

## Subject Complement

A subject complement can either be a predicate noun, which renames the subject, or a predicate adjective, which describes the subject.

Linking verbs (be, appear, become, seem, feel, grow, act, look, taste, smell, sound, get, etc.) connect a **subject complement** to the subject. These complements complete the meaning of the subject.

- ❑ The office was a **busy bee**.

"Was" is a **linking verb** which links the **subject complement** (predicate noun) "busy bee" to the **subject** "office."

- ❑ The office was **busy**.

"busy" is a predicate adjective linked through the verb "was."



# Object Complement

With some **transitive verbs**, the direct object can be followed by another noun or modifying phrase called an **object complement**. The object complement renames or defines the direct object.

Some of the verbs which can take an object complement are:  
**make, name, elect, call, find, consider, paint, appoint, believe, judge, declare, turn.**

Examples of **object complements**:

❑ He dyed his hair **blonde**.

The predicate of the above sentence consists of the transitive verb "dyed," the direct object "his hair," and the **object complement "blonde."** predicate = dyed his hair blonde

❑ The students elected him **president**.

The predicate of the above sentence consists of the transitive verb "elected," the direct object "him," and the **object complement "president."** predicate = elected him president

# Categories of Verbs

There are different types of verb corresponding closely to the different types of object and complement.

Sentences which have **subject complements**, have **intensive** verbs and all other sentences have **extensive** verbs.

The girl is now a student at a large university. (intensive)

Intransitive verbs do not permit any of the four object and complement types so far distinguished.

It rained all day yesterday. (extensive/intransitive)

Extensive verbs are otherwise transitive.

All transitive verbs take a direct object; some permit an indirect object, and these will be distinguished as **di-transitive**

A few verbs take an object complement or an adverbial complement and these are referred to as **complex transitive**. The rest are **mono-transitive**.

But distinction between verbs need to be drawn in relation to object-and complement-types but also in relation to whether they themselves admit the aspectual contrast of 'progressive' and 'non-progressive'. Thus it is possible to say

- ❑ John carefully searched the room or
- ❑ John was carefully searching the room

But it is not possible to use the progressive in

- ❑ The girl is now a student at a large university
- ❑ John knew the answer

When verbs (either habitually or in certain uses) will not admit the progressive , they are called **Stative**. When they will admit it , they are called **dynamic\***.

\*For further discussion of the difference between stative and dynamic verbs follow this link: <http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/410/grammar/stat.htm>



# Verbs

## Intensive

What comes after the verb complements the subject

### Stative

be  
seem  
appear  
look  
sound  
feel  
...

### Dynamic

get  
Become  
turn  
go  
...

## Extensive

What comes after the verb (if any) complements the verb

### Stative

- Verbs of thinking
- Verbs of feelings
- Verbs of involuntary perception
- Verbs of relation

### Dynamic

- All other kinds of verbs

### Transitive

Mono-  
Transitive

Di-  
Transitive

Complex-  
Transitive

### Intransitive

# Adverbials

An **adverbial** is a syntactic function at clause level.

Adverbials fall into three categories **adjuncts**, **conjuncts**, and **disjuncts**.

Strictly speaking, it is only the first category-the adjunct-that can be right labeled an adverbial, which is generally treated as one of the five elements of a clause.

Unlike subjects, verbs, and objects, most adverbials are optional and may be omitted without making a sentence ungrammatical:

The girl is now a student at a large university

This might have had fewer elements:

- The girl is a student at a large university.
- The girl is a student.
- The girl is now a student.
- The girl is now at a large university.

But the sentence could not have been formed initially as:

\*The girl is now. (incorrect)

The adverbials 'now' and 'at large university' belong to different classes and it seems natural to label them 'time' and 'place' respectively.

John searched the room **carefully**.

The adverbial carefully could be replaced by many others, making acceptable sentences in each case :

➤ John searched the room carefully/slowly/noisily/without delay

But if these same adverbials were inserted in sentences which had **stative verbs**, the sentences become unacceptable:

\*The girl is now a student at university carefully/slowly/noisily/without delay

It is clear that we again have a subclass of adverbials. Because the verbs with which they can occur allow the progressive aspect, it is appropriate to refer to these adverbials as '**process**'.

Adverbials can be realized by **adverb phrases** (slowly, well, very fast), **noun phrases** (next week, last time), **prepositional phrases** (on the table), or **subordinate clauses** (Although she is so competent, ....).



# Adjuncts

**Adjunct** is a type of **adverbial** indicating the circumstances of the action. It modifies, hence, the verb in a clause or sentence.

They express such relations as time, place, manner, reason, condition, i.e. they are answers to the questions *where*, *when*, *how* and *why*.

- She is in her office now.  
(adjunct of place) + (adjunct of time)
- She was writing slowly since she was in no hurry.  
(adjunct of manner) + (adjunct of reason)

Most of adjuncts are **optional**. Only adjuncts of location when occurring after a **stative intensive** verb or a **complex transitive verb**, i.e. in **SVA / SVOA** patterns, are obligatory.

- She **is** in her office now. **SVA**  
(stative intensive) + (adjunct of place) + (adjunct of time)  
obligatory optional
- Customers must not **put** their children on the counter. **SVOA**  
(complex transitive) (adjunct of place)  
obligatory

Adjuncts are relatively mobile, being able to take the initial, medial or end position.

Generally speaking, **time adjuncts** may occur at all the three positions, eg:

- *Yesterday, they had an accident.*
- *They yesterday had an accident.*
- *They had an accident yesterday.*

By contrast, **manner adjuncts** appear more often at the end position:

- *They live frugally.*
- *He always drives carefully.*

Sometimes for rhetorical reasons, a manner adjunct may occur at the head of the sentence:

- *Quietly, she walked on and on.*
- *Noiselessly, the girl crept across the floor and stole out of the house.*

**Place adjuncts** normally appear at the end of the sentence, eg:

- *The porter will take your luggage upstairs.*
- *I couldn't find it though I had looked everywhere.*

# Disjuncts

**Disjunct** a type of **adverbial** that is always **optional** in the clause. It is different from an adjunct in that it does not integrate itself into the structure of a clause. It is somewhat detached from the clause structure and has a more or less peripheral nature. It is often set off with commas at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a clause.

Semantically, a disjunct does not modify the action or process denoted by the verb but characteristically modifies an entire sentence or comments on its probability, desirability or style. That is why, it is called also **sentence adverbial** , **sentential adverbial**, or **sentence modifier**.

- ❑ **Surprisingly**, they boycotted the product instead of endorsing it.
- ❑ **Unfortunately**, they refused the proposal..
- ❑ **To tell you the truth**, I'm tired of it.
- ❑ **Officially**, he's on holiday; he is, **actually**, in hospital.
- ❑ **Hopefully**, you will learn to admire the beauty of a grammar.
- ❑ **Generally speaking**, large companies tend to monopoly the market.



The disjunct generally expresses:

1. **the speaker's judgement of the truth of the utterance** (modal disjuncts, e.g. *probably, certainly, maybe*)
2. **the speaker's evaluation of a fact** (fact-evaluating disjuncts, e.g. *fortunately, actually, to my surprise*),
3. **the speaker's comment on his/her own wording of the sentence** (e.g. *briefly, in other words, to tell you the truth*), or
4. **the speaker's comment on the subject referent** (subject-evaluating disjuncts, e.g. *Wisely, she spent the money* = 'she was wise to spend the money')

Disjuncts are mostly realized by **adverb phrase**. The adverbs that are commonly used as disjuncts include:

admittedly	personally	frankly	indeed	wisely
surprisingly	unexpectedly	probably	surely	naturally
certainly	fortunately	officially	luckily	hopefully
possibly	practically	scientifically	superficially	perhaps
technically	undeniably	unfortunately	educationally	
financially	really	honestly	definitely	

Disjuncts can also be realized by **prepositional phrase** (“to my surprise”), **non-finite clause** (“to tell you the truth”), and occasionally by **finite clauses** such as “what’s more important”, etc.

# Conjuncts

Conjuncts differ from adjuncts and disjuncts in that they do not modify anything nor comment on the accompanying clause, but function as **connectives** between clauses and express relations between them:

- Relation of “**addition**” and “**reinforcement**”: also, besides, furthermore, moreover, then, in addition, above all, what is more, etc.
- Relation of “**apposition**”: namely, for example, for instance, that is (i.e.), that is to say, etc.
- Relation of “**result**”: consequently, hence, so, therefore, thus, as a result, etc.
- Relation of “**equation**”: equally, likewise, similarly, in the same way, etc.
- Relation of “**inference**”: (or) else, otherwise, therefore, then, in that case, etc.
- Relation of “**replacement**”; alternatively, rather, in other words, etc.
- Relation of “**antithesis**”: instead, on the contrary, in / by contrast, by comparison, on the other hand, etc.
- Relation of “**concession**”: anyhow, anyway, however, nevertheless, still, though, yet, in any case, at any rate, in spite of that, after all, all the same, etc.
- Relation of “**temporal transition**”: meanwhile, on the meantime, etc.
- Relation of “**topical transition**”: by the way, incidentally, etc.
- Relation of “**conclusion**” or “**summation**”: (all) in all, in short, in conclusion, to sum up, in a word, etc.
- Relation of “**sequence**” and “**enumeration**”: first(ly), second (ly), ... , to begin with, to start with; in the first place, ... ; next, then ; finally, last (ly); to conclude, etc.

Conjuncts can also be described as **text organizers**, in that they guide the hearer/reader through the text, showing how the different pieces hang together, and where they belong in the text.



## C. Sentences Within Sentences

Considerable variety is possible in realizing each element of structure. Indeed **S**, **O**, and **A** can themselves readily have the internal constituents of sentences:

[7] She saw that it rained all day

She (S) saw (V) **that [ it (S) rained (V) all day (A) ]** (O)

[8] His brother grew happier when his friend arrived

His brother (S) grew (V) happier (Cs) **when [ his friend (S) arrived (V) ]** (A)

[9] That she answered the question correctly pleased him enormously

**That [ she (S) answered (V) the question (O) correctly (A) ]** (S)  
pleased (V) him (O) enormously (A)



## Bibliography

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## Webography

***The Basic Elements of English Grammar Guide.***

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/eduweb/grammar/>

***HyperGrammar***

<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/grammar.html>

***University of Victoria / the Language Center***

<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/410/grammar/stat.htm>