

## 10 Basic Clause Patterns

### KEY CONCEPTS

Clause elements: subjects, predicates

Subjects

Semantic roles

Auxiliary verbs

Tense and aspect

Basic clause patterns

Appendix: time and tense

### INTRODUCTION

Until now, we have examined the grammar of English in bits and pieces—phonemes, morphemes, words, and phrases. In this chapter, we put these pieces together into the basic grammatical structure of language—the clause. Clauses are basic for several reasons. First, you need only one of them to make a sentence, though, of course, sentences may consist of an indefinite number of clauses. Second, in actual communication, shorter utterances are usually reconstructed and understood by reference to clauses. For instance, *over here* might be understood as *I'm over here* or *Shine the light over here*. The grammatical importance of clauses probably reflects the fact that the clause most directly represents the most fundamental structure of meaning—the proposition (a description of a state of affairs whose truth may be asserted, questioned, or otherwise manipulated). It doesn't make much sense to say that a clause represents a complete thought, as school grammars often do, unless we know what a complete thought is. A proposition is the best model of a complete thought (whatever it is) that we have. For the present, we will proceed on the assumption that the sense of clausehood is intuitive, based on our competence as native speakers and perhaps on our status as human makers of meaning, although students may need practice in identifying clauses.

Of the many reasons why we should know about clauses, we'll briefly discuss just four. First, clauses are an important punctuation unit. When a clause constitutes a whole sentence, in written English it must begin with a capital letter and end in a period or its equivalent. When multiple clauses combine to constitute a sentence, the individual clauses may require special punctuation, such as separation by commas. Certainly, the single-clause sentence is the best unit to begin teaching punctuation with.

Second, and relatedly, writing teachers are concerned about sentence fragments, that is, non-sentential units improperly punctuated as sentential

units. As we noted earlier, fragments are typically internally grammatical, that is, they are well-formed phrases or clauses. Students must learn the differences between clauses and their constituent units and between clauses and sentences in order to learn to punctuate appropriately.

Third, a developed writing style requires control of a range of sentence types, from sentences with just a single clause through sentences with an indefinite number of clauses. A traditional technique for helping student writers expand their repertoires is sentence combining, or more accurately, clause combining. Teachers wishing to create clause combining exercises for their students must know about clauses, especially if they want to tailor the exercises to their students' actual needs.

Fourth, an important aspect of standard English grammar is subject-verb agreement. That is, the subject and verb of a clause must grammatically agree with each other in person and number. In order to be able to teach subject-verb agreement, teachers must know about subjects, verbs, and clauses. And, while the general agreement principle is quite simple, it is quite intricate in its details (which we deal with in our chapter on Usage in Book II).

In this chapter we first examine the internal organization of clauses. Next we discuss the subject function, illustrating the use of formal characteristics to identify it. We then discuss the **semantic roles** subjects and other phrases may play in clauses. The main part of the chapter provides details on seven major clause patterns in the language.

## ELEMENTS OF THE CLAUSE

The basic functional analysis of a clause is very simple:

- (1) A clause is a grammatical unit that contains a subject and a predicate.

That's all. Only a subject and a predicate are needed. No less than a subject and a predicate will do. (Recall our discussion of necessary and sufficient conditions!) According to this definition all of the expressions in (2) are clauses. (Subjects are italicized; predicates are bolded.)

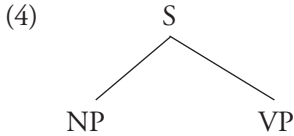
- (2) a. *Birds* **twittered**.
- b. *All the birds of the neighborhood* **congregated in the venerable elms in the park**.
- c. that *no one* **approves of the decision**
- d. **which I lost**

e. **whenever** *the phone rings*

Traditional (Reed/Kellogg) sentence diagramming represents the functional subject/predicate relationship, as in (3).

(3) Head of subject | head of predicate    Birds | twittered

Structural diagrams represent the basic elements of clauses, as in (4).



S is the abbreviation for “sentence,” and is the category/part of speech label for both clauses and sentences. The tree (4) is generated by the phrase structure rule (4a).

(4) a.  $S \rightarrow NP VP$

This says that the category S is composed of an NP followed by a VP. The constituents of NPs and VPs are discussed in our chapter on Phrases. The NP in (4) functions as the subject of its clause while the VP functions as the predicate. We deal with subjects in our Subjects section and with predicates in our Basic Clause Patterns section later in this chapter. As we go along, we will introduce complexities to the diagramming systems as needed.

In contrast to the expressions in (2), those in (5) are not clauses.

- (5)
- a. twittered
  - b. all the birds of the neighborhood
  - c. approves of the decision
  - d. over here
  - e. when in the course of human events

The fact that a group of words has a certain length or can be understood in some context is inadequate to define a clause. (5b), for example, contains more words than (2a,d, or e). Likewise, *over here* can be understood if one imagines a context.

Clause patterns provide the basic skeletons of English sentences. Full sentences consist of clause patterns either minimally or extensively devel-

oped—through expansion of their component phrases and/or by including more than one clause.

In the following pages, we will consider first the subject function in ways that will apply to all basic clause patterns. We will indicate the fundamental forms of subjects and then their meanings, stated in terms of **semantic roles**.

We will then turn to the various types of predicates, pointing out their functional and formal characteristics. Since different patterns have differing types of objects and complements, we will describe each pattern in a way that expands slightly on the simple subject + predicate division.

## SUBJECTS

The traditional definition of subject is “what the sentence is about,” (a.k.a. the **topic** of the sentence). A traditional grammarian would say that sentence (6) is about *Oscar*.

- (6) Oscar willed Elmer his worm-farm.

What it says about him is that he willed Elmer his worm-farm. Predicates, from a traditional point of view, complete a sentence by saying something about its subject. This function is sometimes referred to as the **comment** of the sentence.

Subjects tend to refer to entities that are assumed to be already familiar to the hearer; they often represent what has been variously referred to as “known,” “old,” or “given” information. Predicates generally contain the “new” information in a sentence. The traditional definition of subject is neither a formal, functional, nor semantic one. Rather, it defines a subject in terms of how the sentence in which it appears relates to the ongoing play of meaning in a discourse. Unfortunately, unless we have a way to accurately identify what a sentence is about, this definition is unusable. And even when we can reliably identify what a sentence is about, the definition may give incorrect results, as in (7):

- (7) And speaking of subjects, we should identify them formally.

In (7), given the appropriate context, we might argue that *And speaking of* is a marker of topichood and so the topic of (7) is the phrase *subjects*, though *subjects* is not the subject of the sentence.

The shift from grammar to discourse is particularly serious when we look at more complicated sentences, such as (8).

- (8) Whenever you feel like raking those leaves, go ahead and do it, because I won't rake them.

What is the topic of this sentence? Raking the leaves? If so, it isn't a subject. If only subjects can qualify as topics, then either *you* or *I* or both must be its topics. Can a sentence have two topics? The traditional definition doesn't say. Is every subject a topic? The traditional definition doesn't say. If every subject is not a topic, how do you identify the topic? The traditional definition doesn't say. In short, one cannot identify topics of sentences out of context, and when we examine sentences in context, the topics may well turn out not to be subjects. Thus the traditional discourse-based criterion for establishing a grammatical category reflects a mistaken notion of grammatical criteria. And it just doesn't work.

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### Exercise

*Using only the traditional definition of subject*, try to identify the *whole* subjects of the following sentences:

- a. Oscar closed the door.
- b. Amanda helped herself to the nectarines.
- c. One usually takes a long time to recover from a back injury.
- d. No one understands me.
- e. Advantage was taken of the loophole by the cabinet ministers.
- f. It is clear that power breeds corruption.
- g. It rained yesterday.
- h. There will be more rain tomorrow.

What kinds of problems did you run into? Besides the definition, what assumptions did you have to make?

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### *Identifying a subject*

In this section we present a formal characterization of subject to replace the definition based on discourse function. We can provide a more accurate and more general characterization by using the position, agreement patterns, and case markings of subjects in clauses. Consider the following sentences:

- (9)
- a. I am at home.
  - b. You are at home.
  - c. He/she/it is at home.
  - d. We/you/they are at home.

There would be universal agreement that the subjects of the clauses in (9) are the pronouns, *I, you*, etc. From these simple clauses we can derive a general pattern, namely that an English subject typically occurs more or less immediately *before* the verb of its clause.

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### Exercise

Using only the fact that an English subject occurs more or less immediately before the verb(s) of its clause, identify the whole subject of each of the following sentences:

- a. Oscar made most of the children laugh most of the time.
- b. Many deer are killed on the roads each year.
- c. It is raining.
- d. In spite of his stature, Tom Thumb ran for election to high office.
- e. As for TV bloopers, they should be left on the cutting room floor.
- f. Bill, with great skill and daring, quickly extricated himself from the web of intrigue.
- g. Rarely have I been so disgusted.
- h. There are a number of rhetorical problems here.

What problems did you run into, and how did you solve them?

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From our discussion of pronouns in our chapter on Minor Parts of Speech, we hope you remember that pronouns, if they replace anything, replace entire noun phrases. It follows that if we replace the pronouns in (9) with more complex NPs, then those more complex NPs (bolded) must also be the subjects of their clauses.

- (10) a. **Olive** is at home.  
b. **Olive and Popeye** are at home.  
c. **The one you're looking for** is at home.  
d. **All the little children** are at home.

Many school grammars, writing manuals, and composition textbooks identify the head of the subject phrase as the subject of the clause. Some texts are more careful and distinguish the **simple subject** from the whole subject. By simple subject they mean the head of the subject phrase. Logically, however, if a pronoun is the subject of a clause, then any expression, regardless of how complex, that replaces the pronoun must also be the sub-

ject of that clause. We will follow the practice of linguists: when we speak of the subject of a clause, we mean the entire subject. If we wish to refer to the head of the subject, then we will speak of the head of subject. We will not use the terms simple subject nor will we ever use the term subject to refer just to head of the subject. Similar remarks apply to predicates, objects, complements, and modifiers. So, please, when we ask you to identify the subject, object, etc. in an expression, identify the entire phrase, not just its head word.

Notice now that as we changed the subject of the clauses in (9), we also changed the form of the verb. Thus, *I* goes with *am*; *we/you/they* with *are*; *he/she/it* with *is*. When two (or more) parts of an expression are mutually dependent in this way they are said to **agree** with each other; that is, when one is altered the other must also be altered.

Notice too that in order to create grammatical sentences our subjects *must* agree with their verbs. If they don't, the resulting strings of words are not well-formed standard English sentences:

- (11) a. \*I is at home. (grammatical in some varieties)  
 b. \*We/you/they am at home.  
 c. \*He/she/it are at home.

The verb *be* is the most morphologically complex verb in English. It has more forms than other verbs (see the chart in our chapter on Phrases), and so shows the agreement between subject and verb most clearly. But a reduced version of this agreement pattern can be seen also in other verbs:

- (12) a. I/you/we/they/Bill and Molly *like* rutabagas.  
 b. He/she/it/Fred *likes* rutabagas.

Most verbs have only two forms in the present tense, one that ends in *-s* and another that has no ending. The *-s* form occurs with third person singular subjects. The uninflected form occurs with all other subjects. So, in general, English subjects must agree with their verbs, as well as occur before them.

We can use these characteristics of subjects to determine just which of several phrases in a clause is its subject. Suppose, for example, that we have a sentence in the past tense with several NPs in it, and we wish to decide just which of these is the subject. Now, the *-s* marker does not occur in the past tense; there are no verbs of the form *\*likeds* in English, and, except for *be*, the English past tense shows no indication of agreement. So to observe the

agreement pattern we must change the past tense verb to the present tense. Then we can systematically change the NPs in the sentence and observe whether we must also change the verb. When we find the one (and there will be only one) NP that forces us to change the verb in order to create a grammatical sentence, we will have found the subject of the sentence. Consider:

(13) a. I liked your poem.

Change (13a) to present tense:

(13) b. I like your poem.

Remember that only a third person singular subject requires the *-s* ending on the verb. Note that *your poem* is third person. If *your poem* were the subject, the verb would be *likes*. Therefore *your poem* is not the subject. *I* is not third person singular, but if we change it to *She* we have to change the verb to *likes* to maintain grammaticality.

(13) c. She likes your poem.

We can conclude that *She* is the subject of (13c), and because *She* replaced *I* in (13b), *I* must be the subject of (13b) and also of (13a).

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## Exercise

Using *only subject-verb agreement* (that is, change the NPs and observe whether the verb form must also change), identify the whole subject in each of the following sentences.

- a. He eats a bagel every morning.
- b. She sees her dentist at least twice a year.
- c. Gasoline costs a fortune these days.
- d. He sent his mother flowers for Mother's Day.
- e. Chickens cross roads.
- f. There are several cookies in the box.
- g. It is raining.

What problems did you encounter? How did you solve them?

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Another way to determine the subject of a sentence is to replace all its NPs with pronouns. The NP that can only be replaced by a pronoun in the **nomi-**



**native** case form will be the subject. Thus:

- (14) a. The man handed the child to the girl.

When we replace each NP with an appropriate pronoun we get:

- (14) b. He handed him to her.

The only nominative pronoun is *he*, which replaced *the man*, so *the man* must be the subject of (14a).

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### Exercise

Using only the case of pronouns, identify the whole subject of each of the following sentences:

- a. Oscar lies beautifully.
- b. Oscar wrote searingly witty plays.
- c. Mary sent her sister to the movies.
- d. The books, Mary put on the shelves.
- e. Our bikes were stolen by the Over-the-Hill Gang.
- f. It is raining.

What problems did you encounter? How did you solve them?

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It is important to have a variety of ways of identifying subjects, because it is not always easy to identify them in a specific sentence. For example, more than one NP may occur before the verb in a sentence:

- (15) Bill, Fred likes.

This is called a **topicalized** sentence. The first NP, *Bill*, is not the subject, as we can see by substituting pronouns and observing their case markings:

- (16) a. Him, he likes.  
 b. \*He, he likes.  
 c. \*He, him likes.  
 d. \*Him, him likes.

(16a) is the only grammatical reformulation of (15), and as *he* is the only nominative pronoun, it must be the subject of (16a); and as it is *Fred* that is

replaced by the nominative pronoun, *Fred* must be the subject of (15).

*Fred* is also the subject by the agreement test. If we replace *Fred* by a first person form, we are forced to change the verb to *like*. This does not happen if we change *Bill* to a first person form.

- (17) a. Bill, I like.  
      b. \*Bill, I likes.
- (18) a. Me, Fred likes.  
      b. \*Me, Fred like.

As we noted elsewhere, the more tests we have to support an analysis, the more confident we can be in that analysis, and it is especially satisfying when all the tests give the same result.

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### Exercise

For each of the following sentences, identify its (entire) subject, using whichever of our criteria are most appropriate and convincing:

- a. An afternoon nap is a must.
- b. My bookstore just ran out of comics.
- c. In the beginning, there was chaos.
- d. Things aren't any better now.
- e. Bill seems to have gone ahead.
- f. Margaret has been awarded a fellowship.
- g. There is a house in New Orleans.
- h. It was a blast.
- i. It was Jack that built the house.

What criteria did you use in each case? What problems did you encounter? How did you solve them?

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### SEMANTIC ROLES

Now that we have developed ways to identify the subject of a clause, let's examine another traditional definition of subject: the subject represents the doer of the action. This characterization sometimes helps:

- (19) a. *The eagle* swallowed a trout.  
      b. *Jesse* dismissed her campaign manager.  
      c. *Abercrombie* embezzled \$1,000,000.

However, as a general characterization of the subject, it will not do. We saw in our chapter on Major Parts of Speech that not all verbs denote actions. For example, *be*, *belong*, *become*, *seem*, *ache*, *know*, and *own* denote states. How then can we use the definition to identify the subjects in (20)?

- (20) a. *That sculpture* belongs to the Art Institute.  
 b. *Egworm* seems moody today.  
 c. *My sinuses* ache.  
 d. *Who* owns the earth?

The situation is even more complex than this, because even verbs that do denote actions may have subjects that do not denote the doer of that action (assuming that a doer is a person or at least an animate entity that does something):

- (21) a. *The keys* opened the door.  
 b. *Fred* received a letter from the IRS.  
 c. *The storm* knocked out the power lines.  
 d. *The heavy oaken door* opened silently.

In this section, we define a set of terms developed by linguists to describe the **semantic** roles of subjects, as well as of objects and other phrases in clauses. Consider the sentences:

- (22) a. John broke the windshield.  
 b. John approached Mary.

*John* is the subject of both sentences in (22), and in traditional grammar would have been defined as the “doer” of the actions of breaking the windshield or approaching Mary. Glossing the subject in this way is an attempt to provide a general statement of the semantic relation between the subject and the verb in an indefinite number of sentences. Modern linguists have attempted to give a more precise characterization of this relationship. They would say that *John* is the **Agent** of these two sentences. Agent is defined as *the animate instigator of the action denoted by a verb*.

The term Agent contrasts with other terms in a set of semantic roles that may be assigned to subjects and other grammatical relations. Compare the sentences of (22) with the sentences of (23):

- (23) a. The hail broke the windshield.

- b. The wind knocked down the power lines.

In (23a), *The hail* cannot be the Agent of the action denoted by the verb. This is because hail is inanimate, and so cannot be agentive by our definition. We will refer to *the inanimate cause of an event* as the **Force**. While a Force cannot be animate, it must have its own potency.

To insist on distinguishing Agent from Force is not to play a mere terminological game lacking empirical consequences. To appreciate the difference between Agent and Force in sentences (22) and (23), consider what happens when we add adverbs of willfulness to the sentences.

- (24) a. John deliberately broke the windshield.  
b. John deliberately approached Mary.  
(25) a.\*The hail deliberately broke the windshield.  
b.\*The wind deliberately knocked down the power lines.

(24a,b) are perfectly innocuous sentences requiring no special interpretation. (25a,b), on the other hand, can only be interpreted if we personify hail and wind.

Consider now:

- (26) John is in the kitchen.

In (26), *John*, although animate, is in no sense the “doer” or instigator of an action, and therefore is not an Agent. We will refer to the semantic relationship that *John* bears in (26) as the **Theme** of the sentence. *Theme is the NP referring to the entity whose movement, existence, location, or state is predicated.* For example, the italicized phrases below are Themes:

- (27) a. *The balloon* floated into the sky.  
b. *The king* is in his counting house.  
c. *Elves* no longer exist.  
d. *Frederika* is very tall.

The movement or location may be metaphorical:

- (28) a. *Harold* went from bad to worse.  
b. *Susan* is in a foul mood.  
c. *Leslie* weighs 145 lbs.

Consider now the roles played by the italicized noun phrases in:

- (29) *John* is currently in *Turkey* walking along *the Dardanelles* on his way from *Pakistan* to *Malta*.

Here *John* is the Theme, as it refers to the entity whose movement is in question; *Turkey* is his **Location**; *the Dardanelles* is his **Path**; *Pakistan* is his **Source**; and *Malta* is his **Goal**.

The Path role is played by *the NP referring to the route along which the referent of the Theme moves*. For example:

- (30) We left by *the rear entrance*.

The Location role is played by *the phrase that designates the place or state at or in which the referent of the Theme is at a particular time*. For example:

- (31) John is in *bed* in *Boston* in *a foul humor* in *his evening wear*.

The Source role is played by *the phrase indicating the location from which the referent of the Theme moves*.

- (32) We took the candy from *the baby*.

The Goal role is played by *the phrase that indicates the place or state to which the referent of the Theme moves*.

- (33) We sent it to *the Pentagon*.

- |      |   |             |
|------|---|-------------|
| (34) | <b>Source</b>                           | <b>Goal</b> |
|      | John went from New York to New Orleans. |             |
|      | his bed                                 | his bath    |
|      | silly                                   | serious     |

The **Time** role is played by *a phrase indicating when a situation occurred*:

- (35) a. Let's meet at *midnight*.  
 b. At *dawn* the generals led their armies out to battle.

Other semantic roles include:

**Experiencer:** *the animate entity inwardly or psychologically affected by the event or state.*

- (36) a. *Henry* knows all the answers.  
b. *We all* feel the pain of loneliness occasionally.

**Stimulus:** *the cause of an experiencer's psychological state.*

- (37) a. Jack likes *Turkey Giblets*.  
b. Alan is afraid of *spiders*.

**Patient:** *the animate entity physically affected by the state or event.*

- (38) a. The speeding car struck *Bill* a glancing blow.  
b. The surgeons operated on *her* for several hours.

**Instrument:** *the object with which an act is accomplished.* Instruments are usually inanimate and lack their own potency:

- (39) a. John opened the door with *the crowbar*.  
b. *The crowbar* opened the door.

**Recipient:** *the animate being who is the (intended) receiver of the referent of the Theme.*

- (40) a. Some students give *teachers* gifts.  
b. *Teachers* sometimes get gifts from their students.

**Benefactive:** *the animate being affected (positively or negatively) by the occurrence denoted by the verb.*

- (41) a. I cut the grass for *my grandmother*.  
b. I baked *Sandy* a birthday cake.

**Effected/Factitive:** *the entity that comes into existence by virtue of the event denoted by the clause.*

- (42) a. Frankenstein created *a monster*.  
b. Those two wrote *this book*.

**Attribute:** *a status, property, or characteristic ascribed to some entity.*

- (43) a. Bullwinkle is *the game warden*.  
 b. The people elected Barack Obama *President of the US*.

*The game warden* is a status ascribed to Bullwinkle by virtue of the state of being denoted by *is* in (43a), and *President of the US* is attributed to *Barack Obama* by virtue of *elected* in (43b).

**Empty/Expletive:** *a phrase that does not refer to anything.*

- (44) a. *It* is snowing.  
 b. *It* is six p.m.  
 c. I would appreciate *it* if you turned down the music.  
 d. *There* are a number of issues to be considered.

Typically, NPs with Empty semantic roles are either *it* or *there*. Because they are semantically vacuous, these NPs cannot sensibly be questioned:

- (45) a. \*What is snowing?  
 b. \*What is six p.m.?  
 c. \*What would you appreciate if I turned down the music?  
 d. \*Where/what are a number of issues to be considered?

Let's look now at the kinds of semantic roles that subjects can play. Subjects can play most, if not all, of the roles we have mentioned.

- (46) a. *The horse* bucked the rider. (AGENT)  
 b. *The storm* knocked out the phone lines. (FORCE)  
 c. *The rider* felt the pain. (EXPERIENCER)  
 d. *Spiders* freak me out. (STIMULUS)  
 e. *He* underwent a heart transplant. (PATIENT)  
 f. *Fred* is the strongest candidate. (THEME)  
 g. *This key* opens the strongbox. (INSTRUMENT)  
 h. *Fred* got a birthday kiss from his mom. (RECIPIENT)  
 i. *Oscar* had his own cake made for him. (BENEFACTIVE)  
 j. *Man* evolved from apes. (FACTITIVE)  
 k. *Texas* is where the best hot sauce comes from. (SOURCE)  
 l. *Colorado* is where we're going. (GOAL)  
 m. *Spain* is where the rain falls. (LOCATION)

- n. *Today* is the last day to register. (TIME)
- o. *It* is raining. (EMPTY)

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### Exercise

Using (a) as a model, identify the (whole) subject and then its semantic role in each of the following sentences:

- a. [Macmillan] gave his wife a ring. AGENT
- b. The ring was delivered by a liveried messenger.
- c. It had been crafted by a skilled goldsmith.
- d. Lightning causes forest fires.
- e. Carelessness causes injuries.
- f. Plastic is derived from petroleum.
- g. There are only a few good tickets left.
- h. This project cost me a great deal of time.

What problems did you encounter? How did you solve them?

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The preceding discussion should make it clear how misleading it is to define the subject in terms of only a single role, such as “doer of an action.” The exercise should give you an indication of how to adequately assign the roles in specific instances.

As we progress through the various sentence patterns, we will take the subject for granted, except for instances in which its form or semantic role helps us to understand the pattern.

### AUXILIARY VERBS

Before we deal with the various basic clause patterns, we must discuss a characteristic that all patterns have in common—their capacity to include **auxiliary verbs** such as *be*, *have*, *do* and the modal verbs *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*, *must*. As we noted in other chapters, these occur before the main verb of the clause:

- (47) a. Bill may/must/might leave.
- b. Bill is leaving.
- c. Bill has left.
- d.\*Bill left has.

The modal verbs and *do* are followed by a verb in its infinitival form; the progressive *be* is followed by a verb ending in *-ing*; and the perfective *have* is



followed by a verb in its past participle form.

The passive *be* must be mentioned here, too. Unlike the progressive *be*, it is followed by a past participle:

(48) Bill was followed by the FBI.

A clause may contain several auxiliary verbs:

(49) Bill may have been being followed by the FBI.

But they will always occur in the order:

(50) (Modal) (Perfective *have*) (Progressive *be*) (Passive *be*)

Each auxiliary is enclosed in parentheses because each is optional, and each clause may contain from zero to four auxiliary verbs.

Although the order of auxiliary verbs is invariant, the position of the first auxiliary verb with respect to the subject of its clause depends upon the type of clause involved. In indicative clauses, it occurs between the subject and the verb phrase. In interrogatives, the first auxiliary is placed to the left of the subject. In negative clauses, the negator, *not*, is placed immediately after the first auxiliary verb. Compare the indicative (a), interrogative (b), and negative (c) clauses below:

(51) a. Bill must leave.  
b. Must Bill leave?  
c. Bill must not leave.

(52) a. Bill is leaving.  
b. Is Bill leaving?  
c. Bill is not leaving.

(53) a. Bill has left.  
b. Has Bill left?  
c. Bill has not left.

(54) a. The postcard was mailed yesterday.  
b. Was the postcard mailed yesterday?  
c. The postcard was not mailed yesterday.

(55) a. Bill should have been being followed by the FBI.  
b. Should Bill have been being followed by the FBI?  
c. Bill should not have been being followed by the FBI.

Because the placement of the first auxiliary verb is affected by whether its clause is interrogative or indicative, we place it in a special phrase, which we call **AUX**, for auxiliary. Because every clause may include auxiliary verbs, we include AUX in all the formal patterns that we present below. We will deal in more depth with the placement of multiple auxiliaries in our chapter on Modifications of Basic Clause Patterns.

## TENSE AND ASPECT

What we are calling “basic clauses” here are sentences consisting of a single clause, which we referred to as “simple sentences” in our Skeleton of English Grammar chapter.

All English main clauses and many types of subordinate clause must be marked for tense and may be marked for aspect. We briefly introduce these two grammatical categories here and discuss tense more thoroughly in the Appendix to this chapter.

### *Tense*

Both tense and aspect involve reference to time. Time is a continuum on which events succeed each other from the past through the present to the future. The past is prologue and the future is the yet-to-be-written postscript. English allows many ways to refer to time. In *John Kennedy was assassinated at 12:30 p.m. on November 22, 1963*, for example, the PPs, *at 12:30 p.m.* and *on November 22, 1963*, identify the time of day and the date of Kennedy’s assassination. The time is given in terms of the two twelve hour periods into which we divide days; the date is given in terms of the day of the month and the year in the western calendar.

**Tense** is the set of grammatical categories that languages use to relate the time of the situation denoted by the clause to the time at which the clause is said or written. Grammatical categories, as we have seen, are represented by elements of the grammar of a language rather than by its words. English grammatically distinguishes three tenses: past, present, and future. The past and present tenses are indicated by inflectional morphemes: the regular past tense is indicated by {-ed}, though there are many irregular forms, such as *was/were, had, did, won, bought*. The regular present tense has no marking, unless the subject of its clause is third person singular, in which case the verb takes the {-s} inflection, though, again, there are a few exceptions, such as *is, has*. The future is typically indicated by a modal verb, especially by *will*. For example:

- (56) a. She liked her linguistics classes. [Past tense]  
b. She likes her linguistics classes. [Present tense]

- c. She will like her linguistics classes. [Future tense]

If there is no auxiliary verb in a clause, the tense is marked on the main verb, as in (56a,b). If the clause does contain an auxiliary, the tense will be marked on the first auxiliary. *Will* in (56c) is in the present tense; its past tense is *would*. Compare the present and past tense forms of the auxiliaries in:

- (57) a. Oscar **is/was** playing bridge.  
 b. Oscar **has/had** dealt the cards.

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### Exercise

To convince yourself that only the first auxiliary verb in a sequence may be marked for tense, observe what happens when you move the tense marking from the first to the other verbs in *The pie might have been eaten by the cat*, e.g., *\*The pie may had been eaten by the cat*. You should find that placing the tense marker on any verb other than the first one results in ungrammaticality.

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Very simplistically, the past tense indicates that the situation represented by the clause occurred prior to the time at which the clause is uttered; the present tense indicates that the situation represented by the clause overlaps the time at which the clause is uttered; and the future tense indicates that the situation is spoken about prior to when it occurs (if it ever does). For instance, in (58), note the correlations between the time adverbs, *yesterday*, *today*, and *tomorrow*, and the verb forms in the clauses they belong to:

- (58) **Yesterday**, Oscar **inherited** a million dollars; *today* he *owns* a Testarossa; tomorrow he will be broke again.

While these tense forms are quite simple, their actual uses are quite complex, and we deal with them more fully in the Appendix to this chapter.

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### Exercise

The following text is from Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905/1989: 10-11). (a) Identify all the tense forms in the text. (b)

Discuss the systematic difference between the use of past and present tense forms in the passage. Why do you think the author used the two tenses in this way? What would happen to the text if you were to re-write it so that all the present tense forms were changed to past tense forms, and vice versa? Why would that be so?

She began to saunter about the room, examining the bookshelves between puffs of her cigarette smoke. Some of the volumes had the ripe tints of good tooling and old morocco, and her eyes lingered on them caressingly, not with the appreciation of an expert, but with the pleasure in agreeable tones and textures that was one of her inmost susceptibilities. Suddenly her expression changed from desultory enjoyment to active conjecture, and she turned to Selden with a question.

“You collect, don’t you—you know about first editions and things?”

“As much as a man may who has no money to spend. Now and then I pick up something in the rubbish heap; and I go and look at the big sales.”

She had again addressed herself to the shelves, but her eyes now swept them inattentively, and he saw that she was preoccupied with a new idea.

“And Americana—do you collect Americana?”

Selden stared and laughed.

“No, that’s rather out of my line. I’m not really a collector, you see; I simply like to have good editions of the books I am fond of.”

She made a slight grimace. “And Americana are horribly dull, I suppose?”

---

## *Aspect*

**Aspect** is the set of grammatical devices that languages use to categorize situations according to such characteristics as occupying an expanse of time, taking only an instant of time, being repeated, and being complete. Although tense is probably much more familiar to you than aspect, aspect occurs more frequently than tense in the world’s languages.

English uses the auxiliary verbs *be* and *have* and the idiom *used to* to create three grammatical forms that are regarded as aspects: the progressive, the perfect, and the habitual, respectively. We distinguish between the (a), (b),

and (c) forms in (59) and between (60a) and (60b):

- (59) When we arrived,  
 a. he made sandwiches.  
 b. he **was making** sandwiches.  
 c. he **had made** sandwiches.
- (60) a. He cycled to work.  
 b. He **used to cycle** to work.

The clause in (59a) has a simple past tense form, but is not marked for aspect. The bolded elements in (59b) (a form of the verb *be* followed by a verb ending in {-ing}) mark the **progressive aspect**. Sentences like (59c) are said to be in the **perfect aspect**, characterized by a form of *have* followed by a past participle (Ven) (bolded). Sentence (60b) illustrates the **habitual aspect**, indicated by the expression *used to* followed by an uninflected verb (bolded). The auxiliaries *be* and *have* of the progressive and perfect aspects can be either past or present tense. These aspects can occur together in sentences:

- (61) a. He has been making sandwiches for over an hour.  
 b. He used to be writing a book.

Sentence (61a) combines perfect and progressive; (61b) combines habitual and progressive.

Tenses and modals can also combine with the progressive and perfect aspects. *Had* in (62) indicates both past tense and perfect aspect; *been making* indicates the progressive. (63) combines the present tense modal, *may*, with the perfect, *have*, and the progressive, *been making*.

- (62) He had been making sandwiches for hours by the time we arrived.  
 (63) He may have been making bombs, for all we know.

While tense links the situation represented by a sentence to the time at which the sentence is uttered, aspect represents features of the temporal structure of the situation the sentence describes. The progressive aspect characterizes an event as (a) enduring for a period of time, (b) temporary, and (c) not necessarily complete.

The perfect indicates that a situation that obtained in the past is still relevant at some later time. If the sentence is a present perfect (e.g., *I have lived here for seven years*), the relevant later time is the time of utterance. If the sen-

tence is a past perfect (e.g., *I had met him several times by 2004*), the relevant later time is prior to the time of utterance and may be specified by an adverbial; *2004* has this function in the current example. If the sentence is a future perfect (e.g., *I will have lived here for 30 years by 2010*), the relevant time is later than the present and may be specified by an adverbial such as *by 2010*.

The habitual aspect indicates that a situation continued for such an extended period of time in the past that it can be taken as a characteristic of the entire period. We explore the complexities involved in interpreting these forms in more detail below.

### **Progressive aspect**

We begin by illustrating three features of the interpretation of the progressive aspect. The form indicates that the event is viewed as involving a period, rather than merely a point of time:

(64) The jet changed direction.

(65) The jet is changing direction.

The first of these two sentences is neutral with respect to whether the change of direction is sudden or gradual. The second sentence characterizes the change of direction as taking time. How much time is not at issue.

The situation represented in the progressive aspect is viewed as temporary rather than permanent, as illustrated in (66) and (67).

(66) I live with my parents.

(67) I am living with my parents.

The progressive sentence is readily compatible with a continuation such as, *while my own house is being rebuilt*. The simple present is not quite so natural with that continuation.

The progressive suggests that the situation it represents is not necessarily complete, as (68) and (69) show.

(68) The man died.

(69) The man was dying.

The latter sentence is compatible with a continuation that indicates that the dying process was never completed: *but we managed to save his life*. The former is not.

The progressive frequently represents a situation during which another

situation occurs:

- (70) The burglar was leaving by the rear window when/as the police arrived.

It is also interpreted as indicating repeated action when its main verb represents events as taking only a point of time. Compare the following:

- (71) John is hitting his carpet.  
 (72) John is vacuuming his carpet.

*Hit* is understood as taking only a point of time; *vacuum* as requiring a period. So a natural interpretation of the first is that John repeatedly hits his carpet; the second most naturally represents continuous activity, not repeated vacuumings.

The final issue we raise in regard to the progressive has to do with the classes of verbs that can occur in this aspect. We noted in our chapter on Major Parts of Speech that all verbs except those that refer to states can appear as progressives. Thus verbs representing events, whether momentary (*hit, wink*), transitional (*arrive, leave*), action (*drink, type*), or process (*grow, widen*) occur with the progressive. State verbs, which include verbs of perception (*hear, see*), cognition (*know, understand*), or having and being (*be, contain, own*) are not compatible with the progressive.

There are however, certain state verbs that appear to be exceptions to this generalization. One can say, for example, *John is being silly*. When we view sentences such as this from the perspective we have developed we can see that it really is not particularly exceptional. Compare it to *John is silly*. The latter sentence suggests that silliness is a more or less permanent or typical characteristic of John, while the former suggests merely that while John is currently silly, he is not necessarily typically or permanently so. If we were to paraphrase the former sentence, we would probably use a verb such as *act*: *John is acting silly*. So it appears that *be* in this kind of sentence is interpreted as an activity rather than a state verb. We saw this kind of recategorization of words earlier in our discussion of mass and count nouns.

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## Exercise

1. For each of the following sentences, indicate the meaning of the progressive by selecting the appropriate choice in parentheses. (One of these sentences raises questions about the generalizations above. Can

you find it?)

- a. The plane is taxiing. (The action does/does not take a period of time.)
- b. I watch television. (Is/is not compatible with continuation “while my clothes are drying.”)
- c. I was watching television. (Is/is not compatible with continuation “while my clothes were drying.”)
- d. I am earning \$4.75 an hour. (Suggests permanence/impermanence.)
- e. (1) As the beast advanced, (2) the hikers were planning their escape route. (Event (1) occurred during event (2)/Event (1) did not occur during event (2).)
- f. Sarah was jumping well at the meet. (Implies repeated jumping/continuous activity.)
- g. Oscar is being a ninny. (Implies that Oscar is a temporary/permanent ninny)

2. Other verbs besides *be* may be followed by Ving forms, e.g., *The Energizer Bunny keeps on going, and going, and going. The rescuers continued working through the night.* (a) What other verbs can you think of that take the progressive Ving form? (b) What meaning do these verbs have in common?

3. The following text is adapted from “A New List for a New Year,” an article by David Noonan, *Newsweek* (January 21, 2008 p. 18). The article is about making a list of illnesses besetting oneself and one’s friends. (a) Identify all the instances of the progressive in the text, making sure not to be misled by non-progressive Ving forms and progressives with an omitted but understood wh-word and form of *be*. (b) Identify the tense of each of the progressives you listed. (c) List the different forms of the progressives you identified. (d) Discuss the reasons why the author might have chosen the progressives in this text. Are they consistent with the discussion of the progressive just above?

I got the idea for my list a couple of days after Christmas, during a memorial service for an old friend who died of Huntington’s disease. . . . As I sat listening to stories about my friend, I thought about my brother, John, who was diagnosed with oral cancer in 2005 and who is now doing fine. I also thought about my father, who beat colon cancer 22 years ago; a younger member of my extended family



who is living with bipolar disorder, and a friend facing the daily challenge of hepatitis C. You see where this is going. . . .

With my list in hand, I'm working toward a new way of thinking about health and disease. Illness is the rule, not the exception. That may sound depressing, but if I accept the idea—and how can I not when I read all those names?—then I have to do more than wait around for the next dreaded phone call. . . .

Another thing I can do is be more useful to the people on my list. Like most folks, I usually make it a point not to think about a friend's or relative's health problems when I'm hanging out with him. But talking can be a good thing. It may not be easy—for either party—but there's no doubt that sharing the burden of an illness can be beneficial.

### Perfect aspect

The perfect aspect represents an earlier situation as being relevant in some way at a later time, so it must be distinguished from the simple past tense. Situations that continue right up to the time of reference can be viewed in this way, as can very recent situations:

- (73) I have been a taxpayer since 1980.  
 (74) By 2005, I had been a taxpayer for 23 long years.

In (73) the time of reference is the time at which the sentence is uttered, so the present perfect is used; in (74) the time of reference is 2005, which is before “now,” so the past perfect is used. Both sentences imply that the condition of being a taxpayer continued up to the reference time.

The situation need not be a state or condition. When the verb represents an event, the sentence may represent repetition of that event. This usually requires an appropriate adverbial phrase:

- (75) We have visited Norway every July for 15 years.

The relevance of the situation represented by the sentence need not be as clear as the continuation of the situation itself. *We have visited Norway* suggests that we made at least one visit during the period leading up to the time of utterance. The situation may also be interpreted as an event that resulted in a state that continued to the time of reference. *The bus has stopped* implies that the bus is now stopped, just as *Mother has arrived* implies that Mother is now here.

The relevant time span can also be interpreted as shortly before the reference time, or recently:

(76) I had (just) finished another paper by then.

(77) Have you seen my spectacles (recently)?

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### Exercise

1. Using the discussion just above, identify what is implied by the use of the perfect in each of the following sentences.

a. Mary has played tennis for seventeen years.

b. Mary has played tennis.

c. Mary has just played tennis.

d. Martin has given a Groundhog Day party for 17 years.

2. Why is the following interchange odd?

Zeke: Have you cooked dinner?

Clem: Yes, about ten years ago.

(What happens if you add *ever* or *yet* to Zeke's question?)

3. The following is an extract from a *Scientific American* article by Rob Dunn, (December 2007: 46) on the surprising speed at which evolution can occur. (a) Identify all the instances of the perfect aspect in the passage. You should find that almost all the sentences in the passage are in the perfect. (b) What is the tense of each perfect clause? (c) Why do you think the author chose the perfect aspect as basic for this piece? To help with this last question you might try re-writing the passage without using the perfect, for example, in the simple past tense, and comparing the two versions.

We see rapid evolution most often where some force (often us) has given it a jump start by suddenly and dramatically altering an organism's environment. Rats have developed smaller bodies when introduced to islands. Trophy fish have also adopted smaller body sizes in response to fishers' preference for big fish (which, if killed, do not breed). Mayflies in streams where trout were released now forage at night to avoid the fast-swimming predators. Many hundreds of herbivorous species have switched to novel, sometimes toxic, food sources introduced by humans and have come to specialize in consuming those new resources. Various native species have evolved in

response to newly arrived competitors. Cedar trees have begun making toxins to protect themselves from being eaten by deer now roaming in their formerly benign habitats. Mussels in New England have evolved the ability to detect invasive green crabs and produce thicker shells where the crabs are present.

### Habitual aspect

The habitual aspect represents states or habits that are characteristic of an entire period. The English habitual marker *used to* is generally understood to indicate a situation that obtained in the past: *We used to have five cats*; *We used to drive to work every morning*. However, these sentences do not strictly entail that these situations no longer hold. We could add to either of these sentences the continuation . . . *and in fact we still do*.

Note the spelling: it is *used to* not *use to*. *Used* is in its past tense form, as you would expect for a verb referring to events in the past.

### Exercise

Why do we have the tendency to spell *used to* as *use to*?

## BASIC CLAUSE PATTERNS

The basic clause patterns differ from each other by the type of main verb in their verb phrases, that is, their predicates. The verb types are differentiated from each other by the functions and phrases they require to be present or to be absent in the VP. We resume our use of formal tree diagrams and the Reed/Kellogg system of functional diagramming.

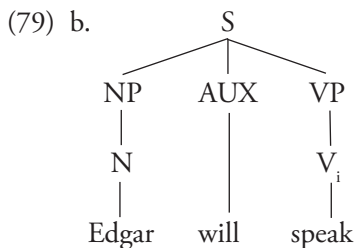
### *Basic clause pattern 1: intransitive*

The simplest clause pattern corresponds to the functional formula in (78a) and exemplified in (78b):

- (78) a. Basic clause pattern 1                      (78) b. Edgar | will speak  
           Subject    Verb Head

Formally, this pattern contains an NP with a VP whose head verb is intransitive. (We abbreviate this verb as  $V_i$ .) The clause can contain no objects or complements. The formal pattern is (79a), whose corresponding tree diagram is (79b):

(79) a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V<sub>i</sub>]



Examples of this pattern are:

- (80) a. Edgar spoke.  
 b. Edgar spoke eloquently.  
 c. Edgar spoke to the crowd.  
 d. Edgar spoke eloquently to the crowd.  
 e. Edgar will speak to the crowd this evening.  
 f. Edgar spoke eloquently to the crowd after the protest march.  
 g. Edgar spoke eloquently to the crowd after the protest march had concluded.  
 h. Edgar will have been speaking for an hour in just a few moments.

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### Exercise

Identify the whole subject, any auxiliaries, and the whole VP in each of the sentences in (80).

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The greater length and complexity of some of these sentences arise not from changes in the basic clause pattern of the simpler examples, but because of choices in auxiliaries and modifiers. Modifiers in the VP and auxiliaries have no effect on the basic pattern. This fact holds true even when, as in (80g), a modifier is a clause: the modifying clause naturally has its own pattern (here also pattern 1), but as a modifier, it is irrelevant to the pattern of the clause that contains it.

### *Basic clause pattern 2: simple transitive*

If clauses represent propositions, and propositions represent situations, then many situations involve more than a single essential participant. Some require two, others three, and a few four. The next five clause patterns consist of ways to add participants represented by various types of objects and/or complements. Note that all of the clause patterns require a subject, either

overt or “understood.”

Pattern 2 has the functional structure (81a), exemplified by (81b):

- (81) a. Basic clause pattern 2                      (81) b. Adam | likes | ribs  
           Subject    Verb Head    Direct Object

The formal pattern, (82a), contains a VP consisting of a transitive verb, (V<sub>t</sub>), and an NP. Its corresponding tree diagram is (82b):

- (82) a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub> V<sub>t</sub> NP]                      (82) b.
- 
- ```

graph TD
    S --> NP1[NP]
    S --> AUX[AUX]
    S --> VP[VP]
    NP1 --> N1[N]
    N1 --> Adam[Adam]
    VP --> Vt[V_t]
    Vt --> likes[likes]
    VP --> NP2[NP]
    NP2 --> N2[N]
    N2 --> ribs[ribs]
  
```

By definition any verb that takes an object is transitive. The objects are italicized in the following examples of pattern 2:

- (83) a. Adam likes *ribs*.  
       b. Eve enjoys *apples*.  
       c. The snake held *a particularly luscious Granny Smith*.  
       d. Occasionally, Adam would accept *small appealing gifts* from Eve.  
       e. Adam likes *those who offer something for nothing*.

Regardless of the complexity of the direct object NPs in (83), these sentences still represent pattern 2.

A convenient test for this pattern is to replace the NPs with appropriate pronouns. The result will be of the following pattern:

- (84) He/she/it/they - Verb - him/her/it/them  
       Nominative                                      Accusative

The nominative pronouns replace the subject NP; the accusative pronouns replace the object. By this test, sentences (83a) and (83e) both reduce to *He*

*likes them*. As in the case of the intransitive pattern, modifiers and auxiliaries do not affect the basic pattern.

Another test of objecthood is based on the fact that many clauses of pattern 2 may be passivized. Generally, direct objects may be passivized; modifiers can never be. The (a) clauses below are the active counterparts of the passive (b) clauses.

- (85) a. The entire family can enjoy nature movies.  
b. Nature movies can be enjoyed by the entire family.
- (86) a. Multinational corporations exploit poor countries.  
b. Poor countries are exploited by multinational corporations.

The object of the active clause corresponds to the subject of the passive. You should convince yourself that *nature movies* and *poor countries* really are the subjects of (85b) and (86b), respectively, by applying the tests for subjecthood we developed earlier.

As a final remark on objects, note that most of the semantic roles available to subjects are available also to objects, so objects may be interpreted in a wider range of ways than just the traditional “entity affected by the action of the verb.”

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## Exercise

(a) Identify the (whole) object in each of the following clauses, then (b) identify the object’s semantic role:

- a. Bill moved the table.
- b. Bill made the table.
- c. The divorce upset him.
- d. The doctor stitched the wound.
- e. We use a word processor for our work.
- f. The fund drive benefited the local radio station.
- g. We left the room.
- h. We approached the border.
- i. We skied the mountain trails.
- j. We would appreciate it greatly if you would leave.

What problems did you encounter? How did you solve them?

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### ***Basic clause pattern 3: subject complement***

The subject complement construction resembles the direct object pattern in

having three basic elements. The main difference between the two lies in the nature of the head verb and the semantic relations it creates. The functional formula is (87a), exemplified by (87b):

- (87) a. Basic clause pattern 3  
 Subject Verb Head Subject Complement

- (87) b. Mary | became \ famous

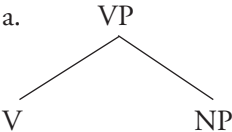
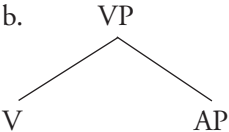
The pattern is slightly complicated by the fact that two different forms can act as subject complement: a noun phrase or an adjective phrase. The italicized phrases in (88) and (89) illustrate NP and AP complements, respectively.

- (88) a. Mary became *a doctor*.  
 b. You are *a nuisance who ought to be barred from the pool*.  
 c. He proved *a success at ice-carving*.  
 (89) a. Mary became *famous*.  
 b. I am *quite aware of her foibles*.  
 c. He proved *unwilling to cooperate with my attorney*.

The formal formula for pattern 3 is NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub> V {NP/AP}], which combines the two formulae, (90a, b):

- (90)a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub> V NP]                      (90)b. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub> V AP]

We represent the VP portions of these formulae as (91a, b):

- (91) a.                       (91) b. 

NP complements are sometimes called **predicate nominals** or **predicative nominatives**. AP complements are sometimes referred to as **predicate adjectives**.

A pattern that is helpful in distinguishing subject complements from objects and modifiers is number agreement with the subject NP. If we make the subject NP plural, we must also make a subject complement NP plural. Compare (88a) with:

- (92) a. Mary and Terry became doctors.  
 b. \*Mary and Terry became a doctor.  
 c. \*Mary became doctors.

Because English APs are not marked for number, this test does not work for AP subject complements.

Meaning can also help identify a subject complement. First, the subject and the subject complement must denote the same entity. This may be indicated by assigning the subject and the complement the same subscript:

- (93) Mary<sub>i</sub> is a doctor<sub>i</sub>.

Thus *Mary* and *a doctor* apply to the same individual. As we noted above, the semantic role of the complement is Attribute. The subject complement denotes either a permanent or a temporary status, characteristic, or property of the subject. Understanding the function in this way will allow you to distinguish pattern 3 from pattern 2, where the NP following the verb group does not ascribe a characteristic to the subject:

- (94) Mary visited a doctor.

Of course, the entire VP assigns a characteristic (of visiting a doctor) to Mary, but our test applies only to the structure after the verb. In (94) we are referring to two distinct individuals; in (93) we refer only to one.

Semantics also enters into the identification of subject complements because of the nature of the head verb. We can describe the basic meaning of the verb in subject complement clauses as BE/BECOME. These are the primitive notions of state and change of state. (Do not confuse this difference with stative and activity meanings of verbs.) These are the **linking verbs** we met in our chapter on Minor Parts of Speech. We list some of them in Table 1.

|                                              |        |       |       |
|----------------------------------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| be (am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been) |        |       |       |
| appear                                       | become | feel  | get   |
| go                                           | grow   | look  | make  |
| prove                                        | seem   | smell | sound |
| taste                                        | turn   |       |       |

TABLE 1. SOME LINKING VERBS



However, nearly all of these verbs may have meanings other than BE or BECOME. When they have those other meanings, they may not take a subject complement. In the following examples, the (a) clauses contain subject complements, and the (b) clauses represent some other pattern.

- (95) a. Hoolihan appeared weak.  
 b. Hoolihan appeared. (Pattern 1)
- (96) a. Boris felt sorry.  
 b. Boris felt pain. (Pattern 2)
- (97) a. Newton proved unreliable.  
 b. Newton proved the theorem. (Pattern 2)
- (98) a. The milk turned sour.  
 b. Osgood turned away. (Pattern 1)

We can use passivization to distinguish between VPs containing subject complements and those containing direct objects. We can often passivize a direct object (99) but never a subject complement (100).

- (99) a. Einstein proved the theory.  
 b. The theory was proved by Einstein.
- (100)a. Einstein proved the better physicist.  
 b.\*The better physicist was proved by Einstein.

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## Exercise

- (a) Identify the (whole) subject complement in each of the following clauses. (b) Using one appropriate criterion, prove that the phrase you identified as the subject complement really is the subject complement. (c) Draw both Reed/Kellogg and structural diagrams for each clause.
- Elena grew tired.
  - The onions smelled sulphurous.
  - The anchovies tasted fishy and salty.
  - The sax sounded off-key.
- 
- 

### ***Clause pattern 4: object complement***

The object complement pattern may be viewed as a combination of pattern 2, the basic transitive pattern, and pattern 3, the subject complement pattern. Just as pattern 3 includes a subject complement, pattern 4 adds a complement to its direct object. The functional formula for pattern 4 is

(101a), exemplified by (101b):

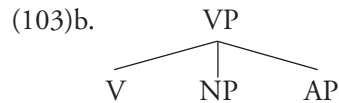
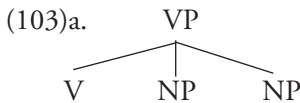
(101)a. Basic clause pattern 4  
 Subject Verb Head Direct Object Object Complement

(101)b. I | consider | Elvira | *weird*

The two formal patterns corresponding to (101a) are (102a,b) which we can abbreviate as (102c):

(102)a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP NP]  
 b. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP AP]  
 c. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP {NP/AP}]

The trees corresponding to the two VPs involved are:



Object complements are similar to subject complements in four respects. First, an object complement may be formally expressed as either an NP or as an AP, italicized in:

- (104)a. I consider Elvira *a weirdo*.  
 b. We proclaimed her *our champion*.  
 c. She painted the room *a ghastly color*.  
 (105)a. I consider Elvira *weird*.  
 b. We found her *guilty*.  
 c. She painted the room *mauve*.

The second feature common to subject and object complements is that in both, an NP complement must agree with its antecedent (the subject or the object):

(106) I consider Elvira and Elvis weirdos/\*a weirdo.

Here again, because English APs cannot be marked for plural, there can be no agreement between an AP object complement and the direct object of its clause.

To see the third parallel with subject complements, we must observe the semantic relation between the direct object and its complement. If you consider carefully the sentences in (104) and (105), you will notice that the semantic relations between the object and its complement are BE and BECOME. For instance, in (104c) the room becomes a ghastly color. Here again the semantic role associated with the complement is Attribute.

The final similarity between subject and object complements is that the complement phrase and the subject or object to which it is semantically linked refer to the same entity or entities. We indicate this by identically subscripting the object and the complement:

- (107)a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP<sub>i</sub> NP<sub>i</sub>]  
 b. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP<sub>i</sub> AP<sub>i</sub>]

Object complements have one further defining trait, the meaning of the head verb. Examine Table 2 to see if you can identify any semantic common denominators.

|         |           |        |          |       |
|---------|-----------|--------|----------|-------|
| appoint | call      | choose | consider |       |
| declare | designate | elect  | find     |       |
| imagine | make      | name   | paint    | prove |

TABLE 2. TYPICAL OBJECT COMPLEMENT VERBS

The two semantic classes that unite most of these words are CONSIDER TO BE (*consider, imagine, think*) and CAUSE TO BECOME (most of the others), illustrated by the examples in (108) and (109), respectively.

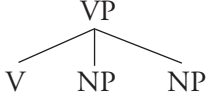
- (108)a. We find his conclusion ridiculous.  
 b. They called each other liars.  
 (109)a. The president named him Secretary of the Bubblegum Department.  
 b. The children painted all the walls kelly green.

Object complement verbs, just like subject complement verbs, have a variety of meanings, not all of them compatible with object complements. The (a) version of each clause below contains an object complement; the (b) versions contain the same verb in a different pattern.

- (110)a. We declared Woople the winner.  
 b. We declared a holiday. (Pattern 2)  
 (111)a. Scott and Zelda painted the town red.



As the formula indicates, the last two functions occur in this order: indirect object (IO)—direct object (DO). (Recall that in pattern 4 the DO appeared *immediately after* the verb head.) Formally, both objects are typically NPs. The formal version of pattern 5 is:

- (114)a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP NP]      (114)b. 

In each of the following examples the IO is italicized:

- (115)a. Willard gave *Susie* roses.  
 b. The eighteenth century brought *England* great prosperity.  
 c. She paid *her creditors* a part of the debt.  
 d. Oscar made *his friend* a beautiful desk.

In patterns 4 and 5, a verb may be followed by two NPs. These two structures can be readily distinguished. In pattern 4, the two NPs refer to a single entity; in pattern 5, each NP refers to a separate entity.

As usual, semantics plays a role in the pattern, both in the nature of the verb and in the semantic role of the indirect object. The verb has the prototypical meaning of GIVING or of BENEFITING. In (115a,b,c), the notion of giving is clear; (115d) illustrates the meaning of benefiting.

On these semantic grounds, we can identify certain verbs that take indirect objects. We list a typical sample in Table 4.

|        |       |        |          |       |
|--------|-------|--------|----------|-------|
| allow  | ask   | assign | bequeath | bring |
| buy    | deny  | forbid | forgive  | grant |
| hand   | leave | lend   | make     | owe   |
| pardon | pay   | refund | refuse   | remit |
| sell   | send  | show   | sing     | spare |
| teach  | tell  | throw  | write    |       |

TABLE 4. SOME DOUBLE OBJECT VERBS

The list in Table 4 hides some complexities. First, most of the verbs commonly occur in patterns that do not have explicit indirect objects:

- (116)a. Allison asked a profound question. (Pattern 2)  
 b. Walpole refused. (Pattern 1)

- c. Finkle made a successful legislator. (Pattern 3)
- d. We made Portnoy our representative. (Pattern 4)

Second, many verbs not on the list can be understood as having a Beneficiary, especially if they refer to some type of production:

(117) Wanda baked Phyllis a birthday cake.

Third, the action denoted by the verb may involve something that is not literally “transferred” to a recipient, nor is it always “beneficial”:

(118) Roscoe gave Morgentherrp a sound thrashing.

Since the meaning of verbs is so flexible, it is more illuminating to consider the semantic roles assigned to the noun phrases in this pattern. The subject is likely to be a causer such as an Agent or Stimulus:

- (119)a. Anderson bought us souvenirs. (Agent)
- b. The accident taught us a bitter lesson. (Stimulus)

Indirect objects tend to be Recipients or Benefactives; direct objects tend to be Themes. But this is just a tendency, not an absolute restriction. In (120), for example, the subject is an Agent, the direct object a Factitive, and the indirect object is a Source.

(120) They asked me an unanswerable question.

There is a relatively reliable test for distinguishing pattern 4 from pattern 5 constructions. We will call this the Dative Test. (Dative is the Latin term for the case of indirect objects.) Pattern 5 clauses can generally (though not always) be paraphrased by a clause pattern in which the order of the two object NPs is reversed, and a preposition is inserted before the second (corresponding to the IO). *To* usually indicates Recipient; *for* usually indicates Beneficiary. The sentences in (121) paraphrase a selection of those above:

- (121)a. Willard gave roses to Susie.
- b. The eighteenth century brought great prosperity to England.
- c. She paid a part of her debt to her creditors.
- d. Warthog built some kitchen shelves for his aunt.
- e. Wanda baked a birthday cake for Phyllis.

f. Anderson bought souvenirs for us.

One drawback of the Dative Test is that it does not distinguish between the Recipient and Goal meanings of the preposition *to*. Only the former is relevant in this context, so (122a) reflects pattern 2 with a verb modifier, not pattern 5:

- (122)a. Anderson sent the children to the lake.  
 b. \*Anderson sent the lake the children.

Also, the test will not work with certain fixed indirect object constructions:

- (123)a. It cost me a fortune.  
 b. \*It cost a fortune to/for me.  
 c. He gave me a ring. (ambiguous)  
 d. He gave a ring to me. (unambiguous)

The object complement construction has no such paraphrase:

- (124) \*We elected president to/for him.

Moreover, we can apply passive to the IO in pattern 5 clauses, just as we can to the DO in pattern 4:

- (125) I was given the roses by Warthog.

Some varieties of English even allow the direct object of pattern 5 clauses to be passivized:

- (126) The roses were given Susie by Warthog.

The object complement NP in the VP of pattern 4 clauses cannot be passivized:

- (127) \*President was elected him by the voters.

A final restriction on this pattern is that the direct object NP cannot be a pronoun:





While the meanings and semantic roles represented by this pattern are not identical to those represented by pattern 5, they are similar enough so that many traditional and school grammars refer to the NP expressing the Recipient or Benefactive roles as an indirect object. From a formal point of view, this NP is the object of the preposition that governs it, so in keeping with our formalist preferences, we will restrict the term *indirect object* to the NP that occurs directly after the verb and before the direct object in sentences of pattern 5.

As we noted in our discussion of pattern 5, the two patterns cannot be viewed simply as variants of each other. That is, we cannot always rephrase a sentence in one pattern as a sentence in the other pattern. Such substitutions may either change the meaning or result in ungrammaticality. In particular, if the direct object of a pattern 6 sentence is a pronoun, as in (132a), then rephrasing the sentence as a pattern 5 sentence results in an ungrammatical sentence like (132b):

- (132)a. We made it for Oscar.  
 b. \*We made Oscar it.

Sentences such as (133a) are ambiguous. They can describe a telephone call or a gift of a ring. However, their pattern 6 counterparts, (133b), can only describe a gift-giving:

- (133)a. Oscar gave Amanda a ring.  
 b. Oscar gave a ring to Amanda.

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### Exercise

(a) Identify the (whole) Recipient/Benefactive phrase in each of the following clauses. (b) Using one appropriate criterion, prove that the phrase you identified as a Recipient/Benefactive phrase really is a Recipient/Benefactive phrase. (c) Draw both Reed/Kellogg and structural diagrams for each clause.

- a. She gave a bone to the dog.
  - b. We made balloon animals for the children.
  - c. Oscar wrote the plays for his adoring public.
  - d. Wanda sang a lullaby for the babies.
- 
-

**Basic clause pattern 7: intransitive Location and Goal clauses**

Sentences like (134a and b) respectively represent an entity as being in a Location and an entity moving to a Goal (which, of course, is a Location to or toward which something moves or is moved):

- (134)a. The king was in his counting house.
- b. The king went to the council chamber.

We can represent these functionally as:

- (135) Subject Verb Head Location/Goal

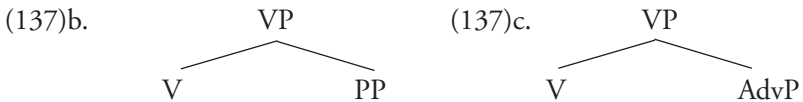
The Location and Goal roles can be represented either as a PP (as in (134a,b) or as an AdvP, as in:

- (136)a. The King is away (on business).
- b. The King has gone away.

So they can be represented formally as:

- (137)a. NP AUX [<sub>vP</sub> V {PP/AdvP}]

We can represent these VPs by the trees:



**Basic clause pattern 8: transitive Location and Goal clauses**

Sentences like (138) represent someone or something moving an entity to or toward a Goal (italicized):

- (138) Oscar put his bicycle *in the laundry room/away*.

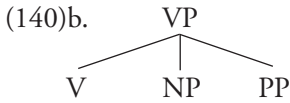
We can represent these functionally as:

- (139) Subject Verb Head Direct Object Location/Goal

And formally as:

(140)a. NP AUX [<sub>VP</sub>V NP {PP/AdvP}]

We can represent these VPs by the trees:



You probably noticed the parallel between patterns 3/4 and patterns 7/8. Patterns 3 and 7 are the intransitive version of patterns 4 and 8. Patterns 3 and 7 represent, respectively, an attribute and a Location/Goal of the subject, while 4 and 8 represent, respectively, an attribute and a Location/Goal of the direct object.

Note that pattern 8 clauses cannot be rephrased as pattern 5 clauses:

(141) \*Oscar put the laundry room his bicycle.

Before we leave these clause patterns, we should briefly discuss just why we regard them as basic. First, they are all simple sentences; that is, none of them includes another clause within it. Second, they can all be elaborated by the addition of various types of optional modifiers, such as adverbial phrases. Third, and most important, is the fact that each pattern is a direct reflection of the class of verb that heads the verb phrase. In particular, each pattern is a reflection of the semantic roles assigned by the verb to the phrases (if any) in the predicate. Each pattern is also a reflection of the formal requirements imposed by its head verb. Some verbs require two NPs, some an NP and a PP, and some nothing at all. Thus verbs impose both semantic and formal requirements on the clauses they head.

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### Exercise

- (a) Identify the (whole) Location or Goal phrase in each of the following clauses. (b) Using one appropriate criterion, prove that the phrase you identified as a Location/Goal phrase really is a Location/Goal phrase. (c) Draw both Reed/Kellogg and structural diagrams for each clause.
- The king is in his counting-house.
  - Eleanor put the eggs in the refrigerator.
  - I left my laptop on the bus.
  - My son eventually put his clothes away.
- 
-

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## GLOSSARY

**AGENT:** the semantic role that denotes the animate instigator of an action.

**AGREE:** a grammatical relationship in which the form of one element (e.g., a subject) varies with the form of another element (e.g., a verb).

**ATTRIBUTE:** the semantic role that indicates the status, property, or characteristic ascribed to some entity.

**BENEFACTIVE:** the semantic role that indicates an animate being who benefits (positively or negatively) from an event.

**COMMENT:** the part of the sentence that says something about the topic. See

**TOPIC.**

**EFFECTED** (also called **FACTITIVE**): the semantic role that indicates the entity that comes into existence by virtue of an event.

**EMPTY/EXPLETIVE**: the semantic role assigned to a phrase that neither refers to an entity nor denotes an attribute.

**EXPERIENCER**: the semantic role that indicates the animate entity inwardly or psychologically affected by an event or state.

**FACTITIVE**: See **EFFECTED**.

**FORCE**: the semantic role that indicates the inanimate cause of an event. Has its own potency.

**GOAL**: the semantic role that indicates the place or state to which something moves.

**INSTRUMENT**: the semantic role that indicates the object (usually inanimate) with which an act is accomplished. Lacks power of its own.

**LINKING VERB**: a verb, such as *be* or *become*, that serves as the main verb in basic clause pattern 3; grammatically links subject and subject complement.

**LOCATION**: the semantic role that indicates the place or state at or in which something is at a particular time.

**PATIENT**: the semantic role that indicates the animate entity physically affected by the state or event.

**PREDICATE ADJECTIVE**: the syntactic function of an adjective phrase that follows a linking verb.

**PREDICATE NOMINAL** (also called **PREDICATE NOMINATIVE**): the syntactic function of a noun phrase that follows a linking verb.

**RECIPIENT**: the semantic role that indicates the animate being who is the (intended) receiver of the Theme.

**SEMANTIC ROLE**: a semantic relation between a noun phrase and a verb or other role assignor in a clause.

**SOURCE**: the semantic role that indicates the location from which something moves.

**STIMULUS**: the semantic role that indicates the trigger of an experiencer's psychological state.

**THEME**: the semantic role that indicates the entity whose movement, existence, location, or state is predicated by a verb.

**TIME**: the semantic role that denotes the time at which an event occurred.

**TOPIC**: the part of a sentence about which the remainder of the sentence says something. See **COMMENT**.

**APPENDIX: TIME AND TENSE**

We briefly discussed tense and aspect earlier in this chapter. Here we elabo-

rate on our discussion of English tenses. While we believe that every (English) teacher should have a good understanding of the tense system, we feel that a more detailed knowledge is most essential for teachers responsible for the education of students for whom English is a second (or later) language. However, as we ground our discussion of English tenses in their characteristic uses in texts, we believe that all teachers will find information of value in this appendix.

As we noted, every main clause and many types of subordinate clause in English are marked for tense. **Tense** is one way of indicating when the situation represented by the clause occurs. In order to sensibly talk about tense, we must first talk a little about time and some other ways in which time is indicated in English.

We conceptualize time as a line stretching indefinitely far into the past and indefinitely far into the future. The past is behind us and the future before us. (Note the spatial metaphor here.) The past is time already gone; the future is time yet to come. However, times are past, present, or future in relation to some chosen point of time. That point can be either fixed or variable. The fixed time may be the time of an important cultural event, for example, the birth of Christ in the western tradition or the birth of Mohammed in the Muslim tradition. The variable time is typically when an utterance is spoken, the **time of utterance**, “now.” However, in narratives and other text types, “now” is determined within the text.

Identifying the time at which situations occur relative to the fixed point of time depends on systems for measuring time. We use cyclic occurrences such as days, months, and years for measurement from the fixed time point. So, as we write this, the year is the 2008<sup>th</sup> year following the birth of Christ. The choice of the beginning year is relatively arbitrary, but some selection must be made and going back to the Big Bang is a bit inconvenient.

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## **Exercise**

1. Do all languages/cultures have seven day weeks? Two day weekends? Four season years? Twelve month years? Solar years?
2. Do other languages/cultures divide their days into segments similar to ours?
3. English has a number of ways of expressing dates, some used primarily in the written language and some more likely to occur in the spoken language. For example, 8/22/07 is a written form. (a) Create

at least three more dates in this pattern and then fully and accurately describe the pattern. (b) Create at least three date expressions based on one other pattern that we use, then fully and accurately describe that pattern as well. (c) Is this second pattern more likely to occur in written English than in spoken, or vice versa? Imagining that you are teaching these patterns to someone who has never encountered them might help you to articulate them precisely.

4. English has several ways of expressing time, some used primarily in written language and some more likely to occur in the spoken language. For example, as this is being written it is 1:20 p.m. (a) Create at least three more time expressions of this sort, then fully and accurately describe this pattern. (b) Create at least three time expressions based on one other pattern that we use, then fully and accurately describe that pattern as well. (c) Is this second pattern more likely to occur in written English than in spoken, or vice versa? Again, imagining that you are teaching these patterns to someone who has never encountered them might help you to articulate them precisely.

We shift our focus now to a discussion of a system of time reference that employs an implicit and constantly moving reference point. Imagine that you call the garage where you left your car for repairs to ask if the car is ready. The receptionist who answers the phone says, *The mechanic is working on it right now*. When does *now* refer to? We can paraphrase the receptionist's answer as *The mechanic is working on it as I speak*. So *now* refers to the time at which the utterance it occurs in is said.

### Exercise

How about *then*? Does *then* simply refer to times other than those we would refer to as *now*, or is it somewhat more complicated? Make up some sentences with *then* and work out the rules for using it.

Many expressions besides *now* and *then* depend for their full interpretation on identifying the time at which they are said. They include *today*, *yesterday*, and *tomorrow*. *Today* refers to the 24 hour period beginning at midnight and extending to the next midnight, within which the expression is said. So if on 6/25/2008 I say *I'll do it today* then I am saying that I will

do it sometime during 6/25/2008. *Yesterday* refers to the day before the day in which the expression is said, and *tomorrow* refers to the day following the day during which the expression is said. Expressions that depend for their full interpretation in this way on when (where, and by whom) an expression is uttered are called **deictic expressions** and the time (place, and speaker) are called the **deictic centers**.

### ***Tenses***

It is important to distinguish time from tense. Time is a non-linguistic phenomenon experienced by human beings; tense is a grammatical category, one of several ways that languages may use to refer to time. English and many (though by no means all) other languages have **grammaticized** ways of indicating temporal characteristics of states of affairs, that is, ways that have become part of the grammar (rather than the vocabulary) of the language.

A **tense** is a grammaticized way to indicate when a state of affairs occurs relative to the **time of utterance**, that is, the time at which that situation is spoken about. Generally, past tense refers to a time earlier than the time of utterance; future tense refers to a time later than the time of utterance; and present tense refers to a time that is identical to, or more typically, overlaps the time of utterance.

### **Past tense**

We begin with the English past tense because we think that its regular forms and meanings are simpler than those associated with the other tenses.

### **Past tense forms**

The regular past tense is formed by adding the suffix {-ed} to the word stem, for example: *delay*, ***delayed***; *print*, ***printed***. This suffix has three main allomorphs: [t], [d], and [ɪd] or [əd]. {-ed} is pronounced [ɪ/əd] when the word it is attached to ends in a [t] or [d], e.g., *lifted*; [t] when it is attached to a word that ends in a voiceless sound other than [t], e.g. *kissed*; and [d] otherwise, e.g., *rowed*.

The past tense marker {-ed} is spelled in various way. If the word ends in <e> then only <d> is added, *locate*: ***located***; if the word ends in a consonant followed immediately by <y>, change the <y> to <i> and then add <ed>: *empty*, ***emptied***; if the word ends in a double consonant then add <ed>: *dress*, ***dressed***; but if the word ends in a stressed syllable with a single vowel followed by a single consonant, then double that consonant and add <ed>: *drop*, ***dropped***; *prefer*, ***preferred***.



### Past tense meanings

The basic meaning of the past tense is very simple. It indicates only that something was the case in the past, that is, before “now.” If I say *John was in his room*, then I am claiming that the description *John is in his room* held in the past. It says nothing about whether John is still in his room; he may or may not be, as can be seen from the fact that the sentence above can be followed by either *and he’s still there* or *but he’s not there now*.

The situation represented as occurring in the past may involve a single point of time (1a), repetition of events (1b, c), a period of time (1d), or a state (1e), respectively:

- (1) a. The clock struck one.
- b. The clock chimed twelve times.
- c. We visited each other every weekend.
- d. The noise droned on and on.
- e. For many years Chris owned a Ferrari.

The past tense is compatible with completed situations and, indeed, many past tense sentences do denote situations that ended in the past. The suggestion that the situation was completed in the past is due to a number of factors, but not to the past tense form itself. For example, if the event was instantaneous, as in *The balloon burst*, or if the event has a natural culmination, such as *I wrote a poem*, *He fell asleep*, or *He read the book*, the situations will be interpreted as completed. Adverbials can be added to indicate specific lengths of time, *for three hours*, or a particular period of time, *yesterday*, or at a particular time, *at midnight*.

To indicate that an activity occurred regularly or repeatedly in the past, we can use adverbials that denote repetition, e.g., *I walked to school **every day***. Generally, though not necessarily, this will be interpreted to mean that I no longer walk to school. If we wish to indicate the period during which these walks took place we can add an adverbial denoting a period of time, e.g., *as a child*. If the situation continues through the time of utterance, we can add an adverbial to that effect, e.g., *as I do to this day*.

In texts it is not unusual for a time to be established early, and if that time is in the past, then succeeding clauses are likely to be in the past tense. For example, in the following text the first sentence establishes the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the time reference; as a result, the verb (bolded) in each succeeding clause is in the past tense:

The 19<sup>th</sup> century has been called the “linguistic century.” During that time scholars **carried** out a great deal of research into the dialects of several European languages. They **explored** the historical relations among the languages of Europe and parts of Asia, and **developed** concepts that are still in use. In short, 19<sup>th</sup> century philologists **laid** the foundations of modern linguistics.

A number of researchers have argued that the past tense indicates “distal events,” by which they mean situations or events removed in one way or another (not just in time) from the current situation, for example, hypothetical or conditional situations:

- (2) a. If I **were** a rich man, I’d buy an Aston Martin.  
b. If wishes **were** horses, beggars would ride.

In conditionals the past tense may be chosen instead of the present to give the impression that the condition is unlikely to be fulfilled. Compare:

- (3) a. If he **has** time, John **will** volunteer at the homeless shelter.  
b. If he **had** time, John **would** volunteer at the homeless shelter.

Sentence (3a) represents a condition that is more likely to be true than the condition represented in sentence (3b).

Distancing oneself from what one is saying can be used also to indicate politeness or deference. Compare:

- (4) a. I **wonder** if I **can** borrow your car.  
I **want** to ask you whether your class **is** full.  
b. I **wondered** if I **could** borrow your car.  
I **wanted** to ask you whether your class **was** full.

The bolded verbs of the (4a) sentences are in the present tense while the bolded verbs of (4b) are in the past. We hope you will agree that the (4b) sentences are more deferential than the (4a) sentences.

We can also put wishes and desires under the heading of “distal events.” These are distal because they are removed from actuality. We regularly find the past tense after verbs such as *wish*: *I wish I **had** more money*. In this sentence, even though the wish is to have more money now and in the future, the verb *had* is in the past tense.

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## Exercise

The following text is from the novel, *Gilead*, by Marilynne Robinson (2006: 75-6). (a) Identify all the past tense verbs, both regular and irregular in the passage. (b) Discuss each one using the framework for understanding past tense presented in the discussion just above. (c) You should also note that the excerpt includes present tense verbs in addition to the past tense ones. Why do you think the author shifts from past to present tense when she does? (d) The past tense is the basic, most frequently used tense in this novel. Why do you think that a writer might choose the past tense as the basic one for a novel?

My father was born in Kansas, as I was, because the old man had come there from Maine just to help the Free Soilers establish the right to vote, because the constitution was going to be voted on that would decide whether Kansas entered the Union slave or free. Quite a few people went out there at that time for that reason. And, of course, so did people from Missouri who wanted Kansas for the South. So things were badly out of hand for a while. All best forgotten, my father used to say. He didn't like mention of those times, and that did cause some hard feelings between him and his father. I've read up on those events considerably, and I've decided my father was right. And that's just as well, because people have forgotten. Remarkable things went on, certainly, but there has been so much trouble in the world since then it's hard to find time to think about Kansas.

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## *The simple present/non-past tense*

### Forms

#### Pronunciation

The English simple present tense has two forms. One is created by adding the suffix {-s} to the word stem if the subject it agrees with is third person, singular; for example, *She reads very quickly*. With other subjects the form used is the uninflected form; for example *If you/we/they read very quickly*.

The {-s} suffix has three allomorphs: [s], [z], and [ɪz] or [əz]. [ɪ/əz] occurs when the verb ends in a sibilant consonant, e.g., *passes*; [s] occurs when the verb ends in a voiceless non-sibilant, e.g., *pats*; and [z] occurs when the verb ends in a voiced non-sibilant consonant, e.g., *pads* and *paws*. Remember, we

are describing the pronunciation here, not the spelling.

### Spelling

The present tense marker is spelled in a variety of ways, too. If the word ends in <s, z, sh, ch, x, o>, then it is spelled <es>: *passes, waltzes, crushes, catches, xeroxes, echoes, vetoes*; if the word ends in a consonant followed immediately by <y> then change <y> to <i> and add <es>: *empty, empties*; otherwise it is spelled <s>: *gets, steps*.

### Meanings

The simple present tense indicates that a state of affairs holds at the time of utterance. The situation may extend indefinitely far into the past and/or into the future. All the present tense indicates is that the description applies at the time of utterance. However, this meaning interacts in interesting ways with the semantics of the main verb, and the present tense is used conventionally for certain types of contexts and purposes, even when present time is not intended.

### Present tense of state verbs

The present tense interacts semantically with verb class, particularly with state and activity verbs. We will begin by illustrating the present tense with state verbs as these are simpler. For example, *Jordan is ill* merely asserts that Jordan is ill as the utterance is spoken. He may have been ill for an indefinite time in the past, he may be ill for an indefinite time in the future, or he may have just become ill and may recover immediately. We can demonstrate that the present tense is indifferent to the length of time that a situation lasts by showing that it is compatible with contradictory adverbials of time. Compare *Jordan is ill; he's been ill for years now and it seems that he'll be ill for years to come* with *Jordan is ill; he got a sudden fever which will disappear as rapidly as it came*.

There are several kinds of state verbs, of which *be* is the most frequent. Other state verbs in the present tense are interpreted pretty much as *be* is, that is, as denoting a time that extends through the time of utterance and indefinitely far backwards and forwards. For example:

Relationship verbs:

Leonardo owns a Ferrari 500 F2.

Mia resembles her mother.

Emotion and feeling verbs:

I love my mother.  
I feel pretty, oh so pretty.

Sense perception verbs:  
I taste the saffron.  
I hear it now.

Cognitive state verbs:  
I know how to cook paella.  
I doubt his story.

Because the simple present of state verbs denotes a state of affairs which includes the present time but may extend indefinitely into the past or the future, we can indicate the extent of the time involved by adding various temporal adverbials, such as *now, these days*. For example, *She loves you now but it won't be for long, We all live in a yellow submarine these days, We are here now but we're leaving shortly*.

### Present tense of activity verbs

With activity verbs the present is interpreted somewhat differently. *I exercise* denotes a series of events rather than a single exercise event. The series may extend indefinitely into the past and the future. Even though I may not be exercising as I utter the sentence, the period of time occupied by the series includes the present time. So, activity verbs in the simple present can denote repetitions of events that overlap the present time. This usage is often referred to as the **iterative**.

Temporal adverbials may be added to indicate how regularly or frequently the events take place (*everyday, regularly, frequently*), when they occur (*at noon, whenever I feel like it*), when they begin (*from 6 a.m.*), when they end (*till late at night*), and how long they last (*for an hour, while watching The Young and the Restless*). For example, *I exercise everyday for an hour from 6 to 7 a.m.*

Many textbooks claim that the present tense of activity verbs denotes habitual or regular actions. However, their examples typically include adverbials indicating regularity or habituality. The present tense itself says nothing about frequency or regularity; the adverbials do this. One can say without contradiction, *I exercise, though neither frequently nor regularly*.

### Timeless truths

The simple present is used also for “universal or timeless truths,” permanent

states of affairs, such as, *A square has four equal sides, Dogs bark, Tigers are dangerous, Verbs denote activities and states.* This usage is used by lexicographers in defining words in dictionaries and by textbook writers to explain technical terms, as a quick review of this book will show.

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### Exercise

Dictionary definitions are often expressed with the simple present tense. Find five words in your dictionary that are defined using the simple present tense.

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Closely related to timeless truths are states of affairs that are treated as if they were permanent, such as *New York lies along the Hudson, The Eiffel Tower stands in central Paris.* We know New York has lain along the banks of the Hudson for as long as it has existed and that the Eiffel Tower has stood in Paris since it was built, and if we expect no change in these locations, we can use the simple present.

### Play-by-play

The simple present can be used for “play-by-play” commentary (a.k.a. “*in situ* narrative”) on sports or ceremonies. In this use, activity verbs denote events that are almost simultaneous with the utterance that describes them: *McCool **steps** into the ring. He **looks** his opponent in the eye. Ripkin **swings** and . . . **misses**. Ronaldo **shoots** and **it’s** a goal.*

Related to the play-by-play usage is a speaker’s commentary on what they themselves are doing. For example, when a speaker is demonstrating something, say, following a recipe, they may use the simple present: *I now **add** the crushed garlic and the chopped onions.* Or in relatively formal business letters, one may write: *I **enclose** my check for \$50.00.*

### Historical present

To communicate immediacy, the present tense is often used to refer to past events in narratives and stories, a use that is often referred to as the historical present, for example, *So the cop **comes** over to us and **says** . . .*

### Scheduled events in the future

The simple present may also be used to denote future scheduled or planned events: *Tom leaves for Dallas tomorrow.* Adverbials indicating when the event is to take place may be included. In the example above, no repetition of

events is denoted, but other examples may be interpretable as denoting either a single future scheduled event or a series of events: *Flight 1750 leaves at 6 p.m.* unless a unique time is understood from the context or specified in the sentence: *Flight 1750 leaves at 6 p.m. tomorrow.*

This usage is not possible with events that are not schedulable. For example, *It freezes tonight* is strange because, even if the freeze were accurately and confidently forecast, it is still not scheduled. However, even though scheduling is typically done by humans, nature may be regular enough so that certain events may be regarded as scheduled. We can say, *El Niño returns next year* during the year prior to when we know that phenomenon regularly returns.

However, Comrie (1985: 47 fn 15) points out, sentences like “*The train departs at five o’clock tomorrow morning*” is not synonymous with sentences like “*The train is scheduled to depart at five o’clock tomorrow morning.*” The first “does say explicitly that the train will depart at the said hour, and moreover that this is the result of scheduling; the latter, however, says only that according to the schedule five o’clock is the train’s departure time, but does not say that the train will in fact leave according to that schedule.” So there is no contradiction in saying *The train is scheduled to leave at five o’clock tomorrow morning, but in fact it won’t leave till six*, but it is contradictory to say *The train departs at five o’clock tomorrow morning, but in fact it won’t leave till six*.

### Performatives

Performatives (utterances that name the verbal act as they are performing it, such as, *I admit that I am guilty*, which both admits and names the admitting) always occur in the simple present tense because their effect coincides with the time of the utterance. Performative utterances often contain such adverbs as *now* and *hereby*: *I now pronounce you husband and wife, I hereby declare this park open*. These adverbs indicate the simultaneity between the time of the utterance and the time of its effect. Other performative verbs include *promise, reject*: *I promise that I will never do that again, I reject your suggestion that I resign*.

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### Exercise

1. Collect five naturally occurring sentences referring to scheduled future events and test the claim we have made by checking the tense(s) used.

2. Find five more performative verbs and put them in appropriate sentences. Include *now* and *hereby* to be sure you really have created performative sentences. What happens if you change the simple present to another tense and/or aspect?

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### Reviews

Reviews of books, records, videos, movies, software, and the like are primarily (though certainly not exclusively) written in the simple present. For example, *This review, therefore, describes not only the contents. . .* (College English 40, 1: 72). *The book is suitable for students. . .* (Language 73, 4: 862).

Reporting verbs such as *say*, *suggest*, and *claim* generally occur in the simple present in reviews to represent what the author of the reviewed item has written: *In a recent book on literacy, for example, Baynham (1995) suggests that literacy always serves social purposes. . .* (TESOL Quarterly 30, 1: 163).

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### Exercise

Pick a review from any of the journals in the fields of TESOL, linguistics, or English studies and identify the reporting verbs and the tenses they occur in.

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### Hear and tell

In ordinary conversation when we want to report what someone recently said to us, we can use the simple present of verbs such as *hear* and *tell*: *I hear you passed your exams, Maya tells me that you have been ill.*

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### Exercise

The following text is from the novel, *Mr Phillips*, by John Lanchester (2000: 28). (a) Identify all the simple present tense verbs, both regular and irregular in the passage. (b) Discuss each one using the framework for understanding present tense presented just above. (c) You should also note that a few past tense verbs also occur. Why do you think the author shifts to the past tense as he does? (d) While the past tense is the basic, most frequently used tense in novels, the basic tense of this novel is the present tense. Why do you think that the writer might have chosen the present tense as basic for this novel? To help you answer this question, you might change all the present tense verbs into the past



tense and then compare the two versions of the passage.

At about seven o'clock, Mr Phillips hears the dustbin lorry turn into the far end of the street. The dustmen call to each other, shout, bang bins, swear, make noises that are associated with the effort of heaving bags up onto the back of the cart, all the sounds which are always different but always the same. The lorry is part of its being Monday, a process which started last thing on Sunday night with remembering to put out the rubbish—which is more complicated than it once was, since the council now recycles rubbish, and there are different-coloured plastic bags and different weekly schedules for paper and plastics and bottles. Cardboard, however, you still have to either put in with the normal rubbish or take it up to the council dump by the dog track, which Mr and Mrs Phillips have formally decided, after doing it what felt like a million times, they can no longer be bothered to do.

### The future

The grammar of the future is more complex than that of the past or present tenses. There are several grammatical forms, each with different interpretations. In English, these forms are not inflectional. The most important one (the *will* future) is created with a modal verb. The fact that the main English future is modal has led some linguists to claim that English has no future tense. This is certainly true if by “tense” we mean *inflected* verb forms denoting future situations. However, English has several grammatical means of indicating futurity.

As you might expect but probably didn't think to put it quite so oddly, “the future is what now is prior to” (McCawley 1981: 341), and the grammatical future forms locate “situations in time subsequent to the present moment” (Comrie 1985: 43).

However, the future is conceptually different from the present and the past. Arguably, there is only one actual past and one actual present, but there are many futures. There is the future that we have planned, the future we predict, the future we wish for, the future that we have to bring about, and lots of others. And, of course, there is the future that will actually occur, although, as McCawley remarks, “[t]he notion of ‘actual future’ may give one a queasy feeling, in view of the fact that one has very little conception of which of the infinitely many possible futures is the actual one; . . . Nonetheless, speakers of natural languages frequently indulge

in the rashness of making statements that purport to describe the actual future” (McCawley 1981: 342-4). So, there are lots of possible futures, which is why it makes a great deal of sense for a language to use its modal system as its main grammatical way of denoting futurity. In this section we describe the various grammatical forms used to denote future in English and the particular kinds of futures each denotes.

## Will

### Forms

The form often called the “simple future” is created by using the modal verb *will* followed by an uninflected verb form: *Jake will bring it*. Sometimes, especially in formal contexts and in British English, *shall* may be used instead of *will* when the subject of the sentence is first person (*I* or *we*): *I shall return*, *We shall overcome*.

### Meanings

The *will* future simply indicates that a situation will obtain in the future relative to the time of utterance. When the situation begins and how long it lasts are irrelevant to the *will* future. It is compatible with situations that began in the past, held through the present, and will continue indefinitely into the future: *Deborah still loves Raymond and will love him forever*. In this example, *still* indicates that the state of affairs, *Deborah loves Raymond*, held in the past and has held up to “now.” *Forever* obviously indicates that the situation will continue indefinitely.

The *will* future is also consistent with situations that begin and end within a very short time in the future: *The clock will chime once at exactly midnight tonight*. When a state of affairs begins and ends can be indicated by various temporal adverbials.

How long a state of affairs lasts may also be indicated by the nature of the main verb, specifically by whether or not it is punctual, as well as by various adverbials: *The balloon will pop presently*, *Timothy will remain in prison for the rest of his life*. *Pop* denotes an event that takes no more than a moment of time; *remain* denotes a state that occupies an indefinite period of time.

The *will* future is compatible also with events that occur at specific times in the future: *I'll give you your money at noon tomorrow*. It is also compatible with vague times: *The Earth will certainly be hit by a large meteor, but we have no way of knowing just when that will happen*.

Like the present and the past, the future interacts with the type of main verb involved. With state verbs, the *will* future indicates an unchanging

state of affairs that will hold in the future; context or adverbials may indicate when it began or when it will end: *He will be here tomorrow from 3 to 4 p.m.*

With activity verbs, the future can denote either single or repeated occurrences of events. Just which is determined by other parts of the sentence, such as an object or a temporal adverbial: *He will eat a sandwich, He will sing a song, He will eat sandwiches (every day for the next week, just as he did this week).*

Whether an event recurs regularly and habitually is independent of the future tense marker. Habituality is indicated by objects or adverbials: *I will be late for class **every day next week**, I will go to **an occasional movie** next year.*

Consistent with its denotation of future situations, *will* may be used for intentions, predictions, conditions, requests, offers, and promises:

|                      |                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Intentions:</b>   | <i>I'll stay for the entire week! We won't forget to write to you.</i>                                                             |
| <b>Predictions:</b>  | <i>You will enjoy good fortune throughout your life.</i>                                                                           |
| <b>Conditionals:</b> | <i>If the rain continues, the river will overflow its banks.<br/>When the weather warms up, people will throng to the beaches.</i> |
| <b>Requests:</b>     | <i>Will you bring the beer this time?</i>                                                                                          |
| <b>Offers:</b>       | <i>I'll bring the beer, if you want.</i>                                                                                           |
| <b>Promises:</b>     | <i>I'll bring the beer, I promise.<br/>I promise that I'll be on time next time.</i>                                               |

The forms of *will* can occur in elliptical responses: *Will you, Heather, have this man, Henry, to be your lawful wedded husband? I **will**. Don't be late! I **won't**.*

## Be going to V

### Form

This future form is created with the expression *be going to* followed by the uninflected form of a verb: *Jake **is going to leave** soon.*

If the *be* is the first auxiliary verb in a tensed clause, it must be inflected to indicate the person and number of its subject as well as the tense of the clause. It may be inflected for present or past tense. With the past tense we create a “future of a past”: *John **was going to leave**, but he missed his plane.*

Stylistically, *be going to* is less formal than *will* and is more frequent in conversational than in written English. It is often pronounced [gəʊnə],

which is typically spelled “gonna.”

### Meanings

*Be going to* communicates a more certain future than *will*, either because the speaker strongly intends to bring that future about or it has already been planned: *I am going to finish this if it kills me. It's all arranged; I am going to fly to Los Angeles next week.*

The future may also be quite certain because it results from causes operating in the present: *The temperature is dropping; it's going to snow. He's 12 points ahead; he's going to win the game.*

When used to express the future result of a current cause, *be going to* communicates an inference that the result will occur almost immediately. This suggestion of immediacy appears to be due to pragmatic factors. If the result is not going to be immediate, then the speaker may override the inference with a temporal adverbial such as *next month, next year, in 2009*. For example, *Current weather trends indicate that we are going to have very cold weather next week/month/year.*

In spite of their differences, *will* and *be going to* are often interchangeable without much apparent effect, for example: *They will be in the hospital for ten days/They are going to be in the hospital for ten days. I think it'll rain/I think it's going to rain.*

In other cases, substituting *be going to* for *will* causes significant changes of meaning. For example, expressing an intention with *will* allows it to be interpreted as an offer: *I'll bring dessert*, whereas expressing that intention with *be going to* suggests a fixed plan: *I'm going to bring dessert*. It may also suggest the speaker's expectation that someone might try to thwart their intention: compare, *I'll answer it* with *I'm going to answer it* when the phone rings. Similarly, substituting *be going to* for *will* in requests and promises causes them to seem either preemptory and intrusive or questions about statements of fact: *Are you going to bring the beer this time? I am going to help you on Saturday (whether you like it or not).*

In some contexts, substituting *will* for *be going to* results in ungrammaticality. Compare *If it's going to rain, you should bring an umbrella* with \* *If it will rain, you should bring an umbrella*.

In continuous text *be going to* and *will* may sometimes alternate in any order: *It'll be cooler tomorrow, because it's going to be cloudy in the afternoon. It's going to be cooler tomorrow, because it'll be cloudy in the afternoon.*

### Present progressive

Just like the simple present tense, the present progressive with an appropri-

ate temporal adverbial may also be used to express a planned future event: *I am having a birthday party this year. Grandpa is coming to visit next week. John is leaving on the six o'clock bus.*

### Modals

We can use modal verbs + infinitives to express how likely a future situation is: *I will/may/might leave.* Or whether it is required: *I must/should leave.* Or permitted: *I may leave.* Or (physically) possible: *I can lift that for you.*

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### Exercise

The following paragraph is (a slightly amended) part of the small print from an advertisement for a Southwest Airlines Visa card that appeared in *Newsweek* (January 21, 2008: between pp. 52-3). (a) Identify all of the expressions in the paragraph that refer to future time. (b) When is that future time? (c) Why is *will* used as the primary expression referring to the future in this paragraph? (d) Besides being part of an ad, what other genre(s)/domain(s) does this paragraph belong to? (e) Why do you think the *will* future is appropriate for that/those genre(s)/domain(s)? (f) There are several clauses/sentences that do not refer to future time. Identify those clauses/sentences and identify their tense(s). Discuss why the writer(s) of this text used those tenses where they did.

You will earn 2 Reward Dollars for each \$1 of net purchases made directly from Southwest Airlines, including flight purchases and Southwest Airlines Vacations package purchases. You will earn 2 Reward Dollars for each \$1 of net purchases at participating Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards Preferred Hotel and Rental Car Partners. You will earn 1 Reward Dollar for each \$1 of all other net purchases. Each year you will receive 2,400 Reward Dollars (2 Rapid Rewards credits) after your Anniversary. “Anniversary” means the year beginning with the date of your account opening through the first statement after the anniversary of the date of your account opening, and each twelve months thereafter. Once you earn \$1,200 Reward Dollars you will receive 1 Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards credit.

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**REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR *APPENDIX***

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- Lanchester, John. 2000. *Mr Phillips*. New York: Penguin.
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