THE SENTENCE AND ITS PARTS

A GRAMMAR OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The subject matter of this book is grammar in the broad sense of the term, including word formation, phonology, spelling, and punctuation. The central interest is in grammar in the narrow sense: syntax, of which inflection is here regarded as a division. The central interest in syntax gives shape to the whole book.

The book is organized around the patterns of grammatical form which English now employs, not around meanings. Meanings that are fundamentally identical can be expressed by different grammatical structures, as when we say now *we hope we'll get back by summer* and now *we hope to get back by summer*. On the other hand, a single grammatical structure can express very different meaning relationships, as when the subject is now responsible actor as in *Smith makes a great deal of trouble* and now simply "involved" as in *Smith has a great deal of trouble.*

But meanings are not ignored. When matters of grammatical patterning are noted, their usual contributions to meaning are taken into account. This is the reason that sentences as unlike in form as *what convincing excuses does Dora give?* and *who gives convincing excuses?* are classified together as interrogatives, while *what convincing excuses Dora gives!* and *not one convincing excuse does Dora give* are put together in another category. When such a phrasal verb form as *is smoking* is identified, its special contribution to meaning is similarly taken into account: sequences such as *George is smoking* are distinguished from sequences such as *George smokes* not only in form but in characteristic meanings. The primary function of language is to convey meaning: grammatical structures exist for this purpose. Often a word follows different patterns of syntactic behavior as it expresses different meanings.

Thus the *get* of *be sure to get your coat dry* has two complements and the *get* of *be sure to get your dry coat* has only one, and the difference in construction is obviously bound up with a difference in meaning. Contexts are of extreme importance in our understanding of language. When *they're ready to eat* is spoken in a situation in which it is clear that "they" is some children, *they* suggests the subject of *eat;* when the same sentence is spoken in a situation in which it is clear that "they" is some baked potatoes, *they* suggests not the subject but the complement of *eat. His sister is buying antiques* will always be understood to have *is buying* as predicator and *antiques* as complement; *his hobby is buying antiques* will always be understood to have *is* as predicator and *buying antiques* as complement. We know something about sisters and about hobbies; our analysis takes this into account.

This grammar begins with relatively large units—clauses and their nucleuses, and words—not with relatively small units such as phonemes. Attempts to base syntax in phonemics have not been successful. No single syntactic function and no single part of speech can be defined in terms of anything phonemic. No single category of clauses can be set up on the basis of anything phonemic. In particular uses *what convincing excuses does Dora give?* is without real question force: it is equivalent to such a declarative as *Dora gives no convincing excuses at all.* Intonation, manner, and situation are of decisive importance in matters such as these; but classification of clauses cannot be based on criterions of these types. *What convincing excuses does Dora give?* remains an interrogative, intent of the speaker notwithstanding, because it employs a grammatical pattern whose ordinary function is to elicit information. Similarly, *you'll give convincing excuses* can have the force of an order or of a question, but the sentence remains a declarative in syntactic patterning. Our sentences can be whispered, chanted, or sung without change in their grammar. They can be written and read by people who lack both hearing and speech.

English can be regarded as primarily an instrument used in the formulation and expression of thought. All languages can be regarded as collections of molds and patterns, extremely conventional in form, within which thought can be shaped. "Language and our thought-grooves are inextricably interrelated, are, in a

sense, one and the same," wrote Sapir. We can listen and talk, unless we are deaf and dumb, and can read and write, unless we are illiterate; and we can work out problems in our minds in consciously verbal ways. The "thought" which we formulate is often no more than expression of emotion, or of desire to influence the actions of others. Feelings find expression in words, and we can speak these words to others or to ourselves or leave them unspoken. Words are more than combinations of sounds, as people are more than flesh and blood: words are more, even, than ghosts of sounds. However it is used, language is primarily an activity of the human brain, not of the human mouth and throat or of the human hand.

For a grammar which begins with clause structure, the concept of the morpheme is of little value. To describe *reactions* as a cluster composed of four morphemes is grammatically less significant than to say that it is the plural form of a complex noun whose components are the prefix *re,* the word *act,* and the suffix *ion.* Whether the complex was put together in English or not is of historical importance only. The relation of the *act* of *reaction* to the *ag* of *reagent* is of more than historical importance: we can most conveniently consider *ag* a stem which functions as a variant of *act.* When we start with clause structure, we are able to postpone the enormously intricate problems morphological analysis faces. It is a curious fact that those who insist that morphological analysis must precede syntactic cannot even agree on procedures for identifying morphemes. Phonemic identification results in such things as dividing *thermometer* into *ther* and *mometer,* since the clearest phonemic division parallels that in *the monitor.* Identification of morphemes on the basis of meaning runs into the fact that children learn words as units in the main, and division of as common a word as *thermometer* is inevitably somewhat sophisticated and is based in part on knowledge of spellings and history. Even for the linguistically sophisticated, when *thermometer* is divided into *thermo* and *meter* there remains the question of what view to take of the *o* of *thermo* and the *er* of *meter.* Syntactically derived morphemes are naturally of great interest to the grammarian, but when the *wh* of *who* (where no /w/ is pronounced) and of *which* is said to have the *that* of *a flower that had dropped* as a variant, followed by a zero

variant of the *ich* of *which*, the analysis seems unrealistic. It is not the use of *wh* or /hw/ or /w/ that marks clauses of certain types, for *wh* occurs also in such words as *whack*, *wheel*, and *whip*. The clause markers of modern English are words and phrases, not fractions of words. And it seems simpler to say that the *'d* of *I'd be ready* and that of *I'd been ready* are reduced forms of two words which occur in their full forms in negated *I wouldn't be ready* and *I hadn't been ready*, than to say that they are the same morpheme following zero variants of *will* and *have*. Words are easier to deal with than morphemes, in spite of the obvious problems compounds, mergings, and fixed phrasings confront us with. Bloomfield called the word the smallest unit of speech "for the purposes of ordinary life." Grammar should begin as close as possible to the purposes of ordinary life—not with single words, many of which do not ordinarily occur alone, but with the most usual combinations in which words occur.

Assignment of decisive grammatical importance to inflection and "function words" seems unjustified for contemporary English. Uninflected words are to be found in all the part-of-speech categories: examples are *ought*, *machinery*, *extinct*, *now*, *each*, and *ouch*. Such a sentence as *people always spread bad news* is entirely clear in its structure, and yet *people* is a plural without characteristic plural inflection, *always* has an old inflectional ending not clearly felt in modern times, *spread* is the basic form of a verb that employs its basic form as both a present and a past, *bad* is an adjective whose comparative and superlative forms are strikingly unlike it and unlike most such forms, and *news* is an old plural form that is now felt as quantifiable—and the sentence contains no function words. Actually, the inflectional endings of contemporary English are not even recognizable except in combination with the words to which they are attached. In the sentence *forsaken oxen often sadden Helen* every word ends in *en* and yet is different in grammar from every other word. The spoken language does even less than the written to make inflectional endings genuinely distinctive. Thus the final inflectional /z/ of *trees* is identical with the final noninflectional /z/ of *breeze*, so that though in *the trees are very fine* the subject has plural force we cannot say that the /z/ of /triz/ carries this force apart from the rest of the word. Even the inflectional ending of

trees is not unambiguous. *Trees* can be a third-person-singular verb form, as in *our dog trees too many cats*, as well as a plural noun. Attempts to distinguish "function" words and "content" words in modern English have been made by many grammarians, including Sweet at the end of the last century, and have never been successful. The truth is that almost all words have both grammatical and semantic value. Thus, *poetry* and *furniture* are learned as grammatically alike in that ordinarily they are both quantifiable (*much*) nouns, and *poetry* and *poem* are learned as semantically alike. Very few words are really semantically empty. *That* and *yourself* are semantically empty in *I knew that you'd enjoy yourself*, but if *hurt* is substituted for *enjoy* the reflexive *yourself*, now used much more characteristically, can no longer be called semantically empty. It is absurd to call prepositions semantically empty simply because sometimes the native speaker has difficulty defining them. The *to* of *what nature hasn't done to us will be done by our fellow man*, for example, is semantically of major importance to its sentence, so that if *for* is substituted there is a very considerable change in meaning. In this sentence it is true that *has*, *will*, and *be* are auxiliaries of tense and voice rather than full verbs, and so do express meanings that can be described as grammatical. It does not seem possible to accept a procedure which results in calling *that* a function word in *that concert* but a noun (or "Class I word") in *that small*, and in calling *had* a function word both in *the students had moved* and in *the students had to move* but a verb (or "Class II word") in *we had a perfectly wild time last night*. It would seem much better to say that *that* is a determinative pronoun used in two different ways in *that concert* and *that small* and in a third in *that's the new secretary*, and that *had* is the past form of *have* used as a full verb, with complements of different types, both in *we had a perfectly wild time last night* and in *the students had to move*, and as an auxiliary of tense in *the students had moved*.

Grammars of English have usually paid more attention to written English than to spoken. There are obvious reasons for this. The sentences of spoken English are often poorly constructed—and this is not a purist judgement—both when they are the products of rapid, spontaneous conversation and when they are the products of much more careful expression, as, for example, at a conference

in which specialists in linguistic structure itself debate their problems while recording apparatus preserves what they say. What are generally regarded as satisfactory sentences appear much more regularly in the written language. Furthermore, once it is put in a book spoken English is written English. Methods of recording and reproducing actual spoken English are relatively new, and even yet bits of spoken English cannot be inserted in books in the midst of written English. Even worse, the spoken language cannot stand still. The written language does: the reader can take it at his own speed, skimming or pondering at will. Phonemicists and phoneticians find the usual written forms of English unsatisfactory for their purposes and employ their own written forms. Grammarians find the usual forms relatively satisfactory at most points. Though the ordinary written forms do not represent pitches and stresses accurately, they do give fairly adequate representation to the units with which syntax deals. Much of the time they provide extremely convenient representations, too, for phonemically variable formatives with which morphology must deal: for example, the *tele* of *telegraph* and *telegraphy*, the *hibit* of *exhibit* and *exhibition*, and the *gon* of *pentagon* and *trigonometry*.

There are strong arguments for employing the usual written forms in analysis wherever possible. They are established ways of using the language, precisely as the spoken forms are, and so require attention in themselves. In the schools of earlier generations, two of the "three R's" were concerned with written language and none with spoken. Recorders and television notwithstanding, it seems safe to predict that in the foreseeable future complex thought will still be communicated most satisfactorily by the written language. In everyday life also, the ordinary written forms are holding their own: indeed, they are put to more and more uses in supermarkets, for example, where the storekeeper of the past is no longer always at hand, and on superhighways, where increasingly complex directions must be given silently to all who drive by. The usual written forms are easily read; precise phonetic or phonemic transcriptions are much harder to read. The usual written forms do not call attention to matters of regional or personal pronunciation that are irrelevant to grammatical analysis: the ordinary written language is a broadly unifying instrument

with a minimum of involvement in the local and individual. The usual written forms both represent and shape the native speaker's view of the structure of his language at many points. Thus the *used* of *I used to like him* is indistinguishable in speech from the *use* of *I didn't use to like him*, but the difference in spelling is jealously maintained for grammatical reasons.

It is obviously not possible for a short grammar to deal satisfactorily with very many varieties of a language. Here all that is attempted is a description of standard American English of the present time. Standard American English is the English most widely useful in the New World. Social considerations make it standard, not linguistic ones. Its patterns are complicated at some points by the existence of what can best be called styles. We will need to deal with three main categories of styles, which we can call informal, careful, and formal. Each kind of style has its appropriate sphere of usefulness. Informal styles are suitable in conversation and in a great deal of writing. There is a very considerable place for somewhat more carefully ordered prose that is neither notably informal nor notably formal. Formal styles, like formal clothing, are the least useful, though they sometimes seem the most beautiful. It is in "formal" styles that archaisms of various kinds, and echoes of the literature of the past, appear most often.

At some points the line between what is standard and what is nonstandard can be located only tentatively. Even where it seems fairly clear how the line should be drawn, those who use the language most effectively do not always confine themselves to standard locutions. Correctness is one of the less important of the linguistic virtues. Nonstandard phrasings sometimes have an aptness or a vigor that makes them very attractive, at least for the moment. Moreover, as has been said, rapid comfortable speech leaves many syntactic patterns unfinished, and carefully thought out speech commonly is felt to need revision and "correcting" when it is copied from an exact mechanical recording. Even in careful and formal written use, lapses occur: Homer was not alone in nodding occasionally. In the end, what we are calling standard American English is normalized English. A rigid dogmatism is obviously out of place under such circumstances.

This grammar is written primarily for teachers and prospective

teachers of English. There is an effort at every point to avoid sharp breaks with the analysis of English that has been taught in the schools. New terminology is avoided and terminology in general is kept to a minimum. But this grammar is written against a background of widespread dissatisfaction with the school analysis of the language. It is written, too, in the conviction that every branch of human learning requires constant reformulation as the generations go by and that nothing has ever been finished once and for all. Samuel Butler remarked that it is a mercy of God that every generation does its work badly enough to leave something for the next generation to do.

I have put twenty years of steady work into the making of this grammar. I have collected examples both from my miscellaneous reading and from what I have heard: only a fraction of these could go into this volume. I have written and rewritten, and term after term I have used preliminary versions of this grammar with considerable numbers of students who were themselves teachers of English grammar, the great majority of them in the English-speaking United States but many of them in very different linguistic situations. I have learned a great deal from my students. I must acknowledge a heavy underlying indebtedness to the standard grammarians of Latin, Greek, and the older Germanic languages, and to the grammarians of modern foreign languages. They were my first teachers, and I have not forgotten the lessons I learned from them. I have a very great indebtedness to the Old World grammarians of English, and especially to Palmer and Poutsma. My indebtedness to such American students of language as Sapir, Bloomfield, Kenyon, Pike, Bolinger, Harris, and Chomsky is considerable. In the last chapter the pronunciations are based on material in *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English,* copyright 1953 by G. and C. Merriam Co., publishers of the Merriam-Webster Dictionaries. The lines by Conrad Aiken on page 414 are from his *Collected Poems* (Oxford University Press, 1953). For my title I am indebted to Rodolfo Lenz, whose *La Oración y Sus Partes* is known by all serious students of Spanish grammar. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Dwight L. Bolinger and Dorothy R. Long for critical reading of the grammar.

CHAPTER I

SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

Sentences are linguistic units of a certain magnitude. In written discourse they are ordinarily the most clearly marked units smaller than paragraphs and larger than words: capital letters begin them, periods or equivalent marks end them, and there is characteristic spacing before and after. Sometimes a single word can be a sentence, and even a paragraph; but the distinction in magnitudes is a real one nevertheless. Most sentences are dependent on the context of preceding sentences or of situation for some of their meaning. Thus such a sentence as *we got Phelps in* is syntactically complete, and yet neither *we* nor *Phelps* has adequate effective meaning apart from context, the time of *got* must be indicated by context, and some kind of completer for *in* must be implied by context. In unnormalized material, such as the unpunctuated twenty-five-thousand-word reverie at the end of *Ulysses*—and comparable stretches of spoken English—we cannot always be sure where the boundaries between sentences come. Analysis of sentence structure had better begin with sentences whose boundaries are not in doubt. It can best begin with sentences in which sequences of simple familiar words combine in familiar patterns to express readily understood meanings through a symbolism which, as Sapir said, "can be transferred from one sense to another, from technique to technique." An underlying assumption is that, in normal uses of language, words which follow each other without decisive breaks have syntactic relationships to each other or are parts of larger units that do.

We can begin the analysis of sentences by noting the syntactic functions found in them. These can be divided into three groups, which we can call major functions, contained functions, and sec-

ondary functions. We can draw our examples almost entirely from clausal sentences of a single type: the main declarative. The main declarative is the basic pattern for statements of fact and opinion. Examples of minimal main declaratives—declarative "nucleuses" to which nothing is added—can well begin with everyone's commonest name for himself, the pronoun *I*.

I am Ake.	I call him Butch.
I am sad.	I make him sad.
I am here.	I put work off.
I have time.	I snore.
I like soup.	I travel.

We will need to pay attention to nonclausal sentences also.

Ouch!	Thanks.
Yes.	Well!

We will, of course, need to look beyond minimal structures such as these very quickly, since not even all our major functions find illustration in them. And we will need to note part-of-speech distinctions.

Predicators.—The key to main declaratives and to clauses of every type is what we can call predicators: *am*, *have*, *like*, *call*, *make*, *put*, *snore*, and *travel* in the declaratives given above. We can define predicators as second major components in declarative nucleuses. From the point of view of part-of-speech classification, predicators are normally verbs, and the verbs are the most easily identifiable of the parts of speech; but we will need to distinguish syntactic functions from part-of-speech classifications. The subject matter of predicators is occurrences: actions, events, states of affairs. All predicators should be regarded as heads within their clauses. Even such an inconspicuous and variable form as the merged *am* of *I'm Ake*—which can be phonemically indistinguishable from *I make*—is what makes a clause of the sequence in which it is contained. Yet predicators are sometimes implied, or partially implied, rather than stated. Thus in reply to the question *where's James?* what is said may be only *here*, but *here* is then a main declarative and a sentence as truly as the full main declarative *James is here*. If the response to the main declarative *I've raised ducks* is *Harry has too*, the predicator *has* of the response is

obviously a reduction of the full form *has raised,* and *ducks* is implied also.

Subjects.—All predicators have subjects, expressed or implied. We can define subjects as first major components in declarative nucleuses: *I* in *I am Ake, I am sad, I am here, I have time, I like soup, I call him Butch, I make him sad, I put work off, I snore,* and *I travel.* Meaning relationships are obviously varied. It will not do to say that subjects are "topics" in their clauses: what is topic and what comment in such a sentence as *I regret to inform you that your services are no longer needed,* where the syntactic main subject is *I?* Subjects can refer to something that is identified or classified or described or located, or to something that acts or is affected by action, or to something that is simply involved in an occurrence of some kind.

Sometimes it is possible to put into a subject the same content that can be put into a predicator.

Our *conversation* continued till midnight.
We *talked* till midnight.

One-word subjects are generally nouns or pronouns: the function of subject can be regarded as nounal, just as the function of predicator can be regarded as verbal. The person-and-number force of subjects is often reflected in the forms of their predicators, so that if the *I* of *I like soup* is changed to *he* then *like* is changed to *likes* also. Word order is of extreme importance and determines the subjects in such pairs as the following.

My worst day is Monday.
Monday is my worst day.
His eyes are his chief problem.
His chief problem is his eyes.
We've been given a better schedule.
A better schedule has been given us.

A somewhat artificial division of subjects occurs when *it* and *there* are employed in subject positions as representatives of words or longer units which embody the real content of the subjects but are postponed.

It's fortunate *that you came.*
It's hard *to understand Phelps.*

It's fifteen miles *to Parkersburg.*
There are *seats* now.
For your information *there* are inclosed *copies of all pertinent documents.*

Divided subjects not employing *it* and *there* are of less frequent occurrence.

No one was present *that I'd ever seen before.*

Main declaratives with expressed predicators normally have expressed subjects also. *Thank you* is an exception. In informal styles other exceptions are not hard to find.

Looks like rain.
He never does anything. Just talks.
Drove over to Akron yesterday, and did some shopping.

Complements.—We can define complements as third, fourth, and (rarely) fifth major components in declarative nucleuses: *Ake, sad, here, time, soup, him,* and *work* in *I am Ake, I am sad, I am here, I have time, I like soup, I call him Butch, I make him sad,* and *I put work off;* and *Butch, sad,* and *off* in *I call him Butch, I make him sad,* and *I put work off.* In *I put work off* the two complements *work* and *off* meet normal requirements of the predicator *put* just as the subject *I* meets another normal requirement. Both *I put* and *I put work* are less than minimal sequences; *I put work off* has the minimal adequacy nucleuses have. The function of complement, unlike those of predicator and subject, cannot be related characteristically to any single part of speech: it is sometimes nounal, sometimes adjectival, and sometimes adverbial.

Though all verbs normally require expressed subjects when they are used as predicators in declaratives, some verbs never take complements and many verbs do not take complements when they express particular turns of meaning.

I snore.
I travel.
You're trembling.
Mr. Hayes is dying.
George is sleeping.
Sickness exists.

Sometimes a shift in meaning results in use with complements.

George is sleeping the hours away.
George is sleeping his headache off.
The trailer sleeps six.

Some verbs sometimes have expressed complements and sometimes leave complements implied.

We usually eat *lunch* at the cafeteria.
We usually eat at the cafeteria.
Sylvia married *an engineer*.
Sonia never married.
I don't care *whether you go or not*.
I don't care.
Yes, I'm *from Pennsylvania*.
Yes, I am.
They met *each other* in Mexico City.
They met in Mexico City.
He shaves *himself* on Sundays.
He shaves on Sundays.

Some verbs take two complements. The one that comes first in the basic order can be called a first complement and the other a second complement. Second complements are italicized in the following sentences.

I call him *Butch*.
I make him *sad*.
I put work *off*.
The manager has turned us *down*.
Harris locks his dog *in the car*.
James puts up *with us*.

In each of these sentences the predicator has only its normal necessities, for the meaning expressed, attached to it. Second complements often become first, in effect, when more fundamentally first complements are implied rather than stated.

He generally gets himself home.
He generally gets home.
I give the whole thing up.
I give up.

Second complements sometimes precede first complements. Substitution of personal pronouns for nouns or nounal units generally reveals the basic order: the syntactically "second" complement then follows the first.

Jack's lending *Mary* his car.
Jack's lending it *to her*.
The editorial takes *up* the subject of taxes.
The editorial takes it *up*.

Three complements occur much more rarely than two.

He has it in for us.

Meaning relationships between predicators and complements are extremely varied.

They make electric fans.
I hear an electric fan.
George has an electric fan.
I need an electric fan.

In *they make electric fans* we have an actor-action-product sequence, but the meaning relationships are different in the other three sentences. Some complements seem semantically empty.

He lords *it* over us.
We always enjoy *ourselves*.

Often, on the other hand, predicators are quite general in meaning and complements contain meanings that could be expressed by more exact predicators.

He's taking part.
He's participating.
He's made his escape.
He's escaped.
He always lets out a whoop.
He always whoops.
I put work off.
I postpone work.
My wife gets it clean.
My wife cleans it.

In combinations such as these the complements have a strict control over the writer or speaker's choice of predicator. Parts are taken, escapes are made, whoops are let out—or sometimes given. In complex sentence structure the use of general predicators often makes clearer modification possible.

Most people enjoy watching television a great deal.
Most people get a great deal of enjoyment out of watching television.

The President tipped the boys who carried his bags generously.
The President gave generous tips to the boys who carried his bags.

If the first of these sentences is intended to mean what the second one means, it is not very well constructed, since *a great deal* is likely to seem to attach to the nearer *watching* rather than to the more distant *enjoy*. Similarly, in the third sentence *generously* is likely to seem to attach to *carried*.

Adjuncts.—Subjects and complements are normal necessities for their predicators, though (like predicators) they are sometimes implied rather than stated. Predicators, subjects, and complements make up nucleuses. Predicators also take modifiers which are not parts of nucleuses, and these can be called adjuncts.

Certainly I'm Ake.
I *certainly* am Ake.
I'm sad *now*.
I'm *always* unhappy.
We wait for Marian *long enough*.
We wait *hours*.
He's kissed her *goodby*.
Tuesdays George is very busy.
Fortunately Harry's girl friends are *never* clever.
Harrison turns me down *gracefully*.

The function of adjunct can be regarded as adverbial. But it must be said at once that many kinds of words and multiword units function as adjuncts. Such a unit as *this week*, for example, can function as subject, complement, or adjunct.

This week is Jack's last week here.
We're wasting *this week*.
This week everything is different.
Everything is different *this week*.

In *letters and parcels come at ten* the unit *letters and parcels* is pretty clearly the subject; in *Wednesday and Thursday come at ten* the unit *Wednesday and Thursday* is pretty clearly not the subject but an adjunct, and the clause is an imperative rather than a declarative. In *the police stopped three cars* it is clear that *three cars* is a complement and the predicator *stopped* means *brought to a stop;* in *the police stopped three times* it is clear that *three times* is