

Introduction to English  
Linguistics (Part 1)

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Phrases, clauses, sentences

Session 9, Syntax

## Terminology

**parts of speech (word classes):** noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, determiner, preposition, conjunction

**grammatical categories:** tense, aspect, voice, mood, person, number, gender

**constituent:** the structural parts of a sentence from a syntactic perspective

**phrase:** a constituent consisting of one or more words that is usually headed by a noun, verb, adjective, adverb or preposition

## Terminology

**clause:** a structural unit that combines a noun phrase and a verb phrase

**sentence:** a structural unit consisting of one or more clauses

**syntactic roles:** subject, direct object, indirect object, complement, adverbial

## Phrases, clauses, sentences

1. **sentences** contain one or several
2. **clauses** contain one or several
3. **phrases** contain one or several
4. **words** contain one or several
5. **morphemes**

We've already talked about morphemes (sessions 6 and 7) and words/word classes (session 8). Phrases, clauses and sentences are today's topic.

## Functional and grammatical relationships

*John likes pizza*

### **grammatical relationship**

*John* = noun phrase (NP)

*likes pizza* = verb phrase (VP)

### **functional relationship**

*John* = referring expression

*likes pizza* = predicate

**All languages** have noun phrases and verb phrases

## Constituents: noun phrase and verb phrase

*Mary died*

*I want candy*

*The arrogance of the vice president has lead to disaster*

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*Mary died*

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Referring Expression / NP = *Mary*

Predication / VP = *died*

Referring Expression / NP = *I*

Predication / VP = *want candy*

Referring Expression / NP = *The arrogance of the vice president*

Predication / VP = *has lead to disaster*

## Noun phrases as constituents

\_\_\_ *want candy*  
could be  
We *want candy*  
Bob *wants candy*  
All sorts of people *want candy*  
Nobody *wants candy*

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\_\_\_ *want candy*  
could be  
We *want candy*  
Bob *wants candy*  
All sorts of people *want candy*  
Nobody *wants candy*  
but not  
\*The *wants candy*  
\*Tall *wants candy*  
\*And *wants candy*  
\*Walk *wants candy*  
ergo **a noun phrase is a constituent that has a noun as its head**

## Verb phrases as constituents

*The arrogance of the vice president*         
could be

*The arrogance of the vice president* persisted

*The arrogance of the vice president* amused everyone

*The arrogance of the vice president* made Bob angry

but not

\**The arrogance of the vice president* funny

\**The arrogance of the vice president* Bob

\**The arrogance of the vice president* but

ergo **a verb phrase is a constituent that has a verb as its head**

## Phrase structure

Phrases can be broken down into smaller units  
(phrases/words/morphemes)

*The old man's cat slept*

NP

VP

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*The old man's cat slept*  
NP            VP

The NP *the old man's cat* contains an NP inside another NP:

*The old man's cat*  
NP            N

This can be tested by replacing the embedded NP with another NP,  
e.g. *The funny woman's cat, Bob's cat*

## Phrase structure

Slightly more elegantly, we can describe the sentence like this:

*The old man's cat slept*

=

(S (NP (NP The old man 's) cat) (VP slept) )

## Verb arguments

The syntactic roles of **subject** and **object** are used to describe the **arguments** of a verb. As these examples illustrate, objects can be **direct** or **indirect**.

*Mary died*  
S V

*They rented a DVD*  
S V O(d)

*I gave Michael the money*  
S V O(i) O(d)

## Verb transitivity

*Mary laughed / fell / died / ...*

**intransitive verb**, does not take an object

-> \**Mary laughed Steven* / \**Mary fell the stairs* / \**Mary died the puppy*

*They like pizza / rented a DVD / bought a car*

**monotransitive verb**, takes a direct object

-> \**They like* / \**They rented* / \**They bought*

## Verb transitivity

*I gave Michael the money / this girl the scare of her life / myself a pinch in the arm*

**ditransitive verb**, takes a direct and an indirect object

-> \*I gave / \*I gave Michael

however: *I gave everything* - even with a verb that is frequently ditransitive the indirect object may be optional in some cases

## Adverbials

*I gave Michael the money*

S V O(i) O(d)

*I gave the money to Michael*

S V O(d) Adverbial (A)

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*I gave Michael the money*

S V O(i) O(d)

*I gave the money to Michael*

S V O(d) Adverbial (A)

*I gave the money with significant pride*

S V O(d) A

*He was bleeding severely*

S V A

An **adverbial** is an optional constituent that is usually headed by a preposition, adverb or adjective

## Complements

Complements are constituents that are obligatory and predicate the subject or object of a sentence without themselves being the subject or object.

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### **Subject complement**

*We are old friends*

S V C

### **Object complement**

*They called him a hero*

S V O(d) C

## Passification

How are structure and meaning of a sentence affected if its voice changes from active to passive?

**Active:** *Laura ate the banana*

**Passive:** *The banana was eaten by Laura*

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**Active:** *Laura ate the banana*

S V O(d)

**Passive:** *The banana was eaten by Laura*

S V A

**movement:** the direct object becomes the subject, the subject becomes an adverbial

**auxiliary:** a form of BE is inserted in front of the main verb

**preposition:** a preposition heads the adverbial

**inflection:** the main verb inflection changes

## Clauses

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- **main** or **subordinate** clauses

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*I like pizza and Jane likes pasta*

Clause 1 (main clause)

*I like pizza* (NP + VP + NP)

+ Clause 2 (main clause)

*and Jane likes pasta* (coordinating conjunction + NP + VP + NP)

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*I like the house that John and Sally bought.*

Clause 1 (main clause)

*I like the house* (NP + VP + NP)

+ Clause 2 (subordinate clause)

*that John and Sally bought* (relative pronoun + NP + VP)

## Relative clauses

The guy that I talked to was not sure.

We wanted to see the movie that Kim liked.

Our friend who was in Vegas sent us a postcard.

Note: *that* can also act as a demonstrative determiner, e.g.

*That* guy over there just yawned.

-> clearly not a relative clause

## Types of subordinate clauses

### subject clause

Whoever wants that book can have it.

### object clause

I know that you lied.

### complement clause

Liz can be whatever she wants to be.

### time adverbial

Everyone slept while it was raining outside