English Linguistics Learning Modules

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SQUIRES41

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GOALS FOR STUDYING GRAMMAR

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1. What is a language?

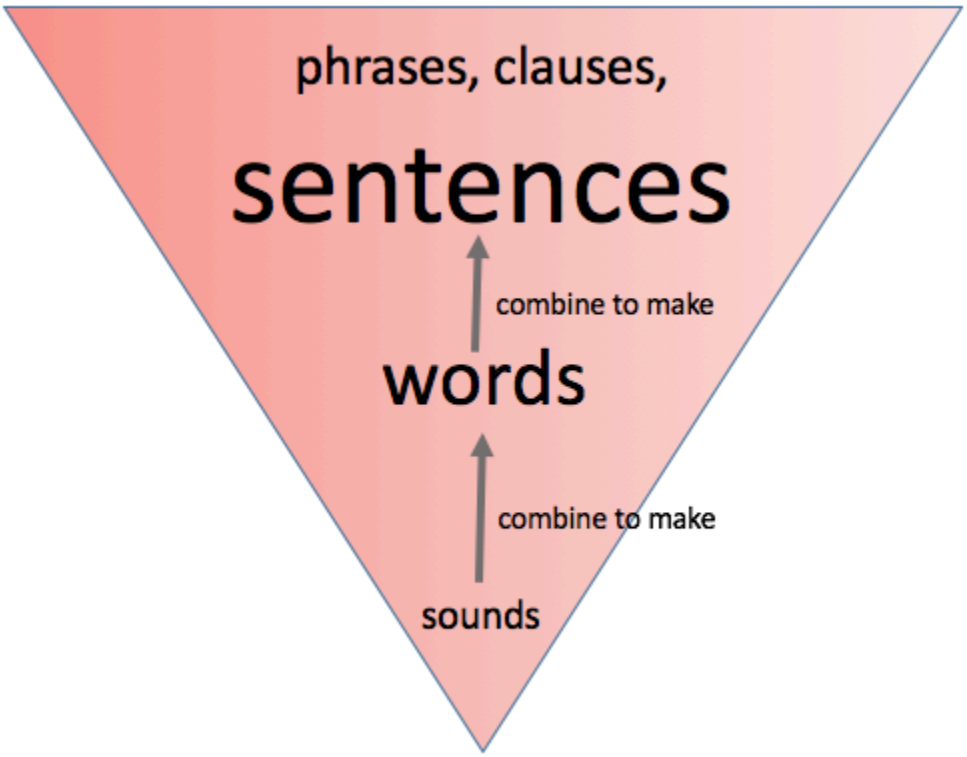
A **language** is a system of symbols used by humans to communicate. The system of a language consists of interlocking sub-systems. Linguists often divide the task of understanding language structure into three basic sub-systems:

- **phonetics/phonology**: how the sounds used in a language are produced and perceived
- **morphology**: how meaningful symbols, i.e. words, are created from sounds
- **syntax**: how meaningful combinations of symbols, i.e. phrases and sentences, are created from words

KEYWORDS

- **phonetics/phonology**: study of sound structures
- **morphology**: study of word structures
- **syntax**: study of sentence structures

We can think of these sub-systems as progressing in size from smaller units (sounds) up to larger units (sentences), as in the triangle figure below. One fundamental structural property of language is that it is **hierarchical**: larger units are formed from the combination of smaller units. Our task, in trying to analyze a language, is to understand the patterns that determine how those smaller units fit together.



The hierarchical structure of language: larger units formed from combinations of smaller units

What does it mean to be concerned about any of these three primary levels of language structure, from a *hierarchical perspective*?

If we want to understand the structure of **sounds** (phonetics/phonology), we want to know a) how individual sounds are formed from combined movements by the tongue, lips, teeth, and other parts of the vocal tract; and b) which sounds and multi-sound combinations are present in English and which ones are not. English has some sounds that other languages do not have, and vice versa. English uses the sound represented by the letters "th" but German does not; Spanish uses a "trilled" or "rolled" "r" sound that English does not have. And, while *flaks* is an allowable sequence of sounds for an English word, the rearrangement of those sounds into the sequence *ksafl* is not. The sounds of English, and allowable sound combinations of English, are part of its phonological sub-system.

Moving up a level, if we want to understand the structure of **words** (morphology), we have to know which sounds can combine together to create words in English, so we cannot fully understand words without also understanding sounds. That's the hierarchical structure! But we also need to understand the different ways in which sequences of sound can carry meaning (because a word *means* something, which makes it different from just a sound), and which units of meaning are able to combine with each other.

For example: the sequence of sounds "v-o" as in *vo* carries no meaning in English. By contrast, the sequence of sounds "d-e" as in *de* does carry a meaning. What is the meaning of *de*? Think about where *de* occurs at the beginnings of words like *deactivate* and *debase*).

Suppose I tell you right now, "To 'vo' a song is to turn it into a worse song than it already is." You are now able to also understand a sentence containing the word *devo* as the combination of *de-* and *vo.* As in:

Limp Bizkit voed *this George Michael song; I wish Devo would* devo *it*.

Based on the meaning of *vo* and the meaning of *de-*, they can combine to create a word whose meaning you can understand as the sum of its parts. Limp Bizkit made a George Michael song worse than it already was; Devo can undo the damage. The new words *vo* and *devo* follow the patterns of English's morphological sub-system.

Finally, consider for our purposes the "highest" level in the hierarchy, **sentences** (syntax). To understand English sentences, we need to understand the combinations of words that English speakers use to express meaning. Which combinations of words are allowable, and which are not? To get you thinking about this, complete a little survey linked below, then read on.

CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY. It will be fun, I promise!

DID YOU TAKE THE SURVEY????

Among the examples you read, I suspect that you found (1) to be a much "better" sentence than (2):

(1) Something fell on her head.

(2) Her started running circles in.

How can you explain this? How would you "fix" this sentence so that it was grammatical? Your answers will reflect your knowledge of the rules of English and its sub-system of syntax.

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2. Grammaticality

In this course, we will talk about **grammaticality**: whether a sentence (or phrase, or word) is well-formed according to the rules that make up the English language. What does this mean? If someone is a native speaker of English, they have internal, implicit knowledge of the rules of the English language. They follow the rules each time they generate a sentence, and they apply the rules in interpreting the sentences of other English speakers. But what kinds of rules are these?

KEYWORD

grammaticality: whether a sentence (or phrase, or word) is well-formed according to the rules that make up the language it comes from (in our case, English)

I said that native speakers have "internal, implicit knowledge" of the rules of English. This means that speakers do not need to be explicitly instructed in the rules. All typically developing humans acquire language naturally as children, as long as they interact with other humans speaking language. If someone grows up in a Japanese-speaking household and community, they will acquire Japanese; if they grow up in an English-speaking household and community, they will acquire English. And if they grow up in a bilingual English-Japanese household and community, they will likely acquire both languages.

Nobody has to sit children down and give them language lessons; at some point they just start producing single words (for my son, it was around 16 months), then two-word combinations (around 20 months for us), then three-word combinations (around 22 months), and so on. As they produce these words and eventually phrases, they are acquiring the rules that adult English speakers already know. Like that *ksafl* can't be a word, and that "de-" can attach to the front of another word, and that *Monkey the do food eat* is not a well-formed sentence. Children learn these things in stages, but at all stages, the learning is implicit, a function of input and interaction.

Typically-developing human babies acquire the language of the community they grow up around

Some approaches to language study are focused on a different kind of rules: rules that people are taught in school in order to speak or write in a certain way. Consider the two sentences in (3-4), both of which describe the picture below.

(3) That's the cat the baby was lying next to.

(4) That's the cat next to which the baby was lying.

A baby lying next to a cat

At some point in your life, someone may have told you a "rule" about English: "You can't end a sentence with a preposition." But I just did! In sentence (3), *to* is a preposition, and it's at the end of the sentence. Does this sentence sound *bad* to you? Does it sound like it's *not English*? I doubt it.

Sentence (4) is the "correct" version of this sentence according to the can't-end-sentence-with-preposition rule. Which sentence sounds more natural? To my ear, (4) sounds awkward and super-formal, while (3) sounds just...normal. Moreover, if I were going to describe the cat pictured above, I would automatically produce sentence (3), not sentence (4). Clearly, English speakers (like me) have some kind of rule that allows for sentences like (3).

What kind of rule, then, is "Never end a sentence with a preposition"? It's a rule about how someone thinks English *should* be spoken; about what kinds of structures in English are supposedly *better* or *worse* than others. We call these **prescriptive rules**. They describe some idealized state of English, which someone decided was better than others. But the fact that someone had to tell you never to end a sentence with a preposition illustrates precisely the fact that *you have a rule in your head that allows you to end a sentence with a preposition*! If no English speakers ended sentences with prepositions, there would be no need for anyone to tell them not to do it!

The prescriptive rule is meant to *correct* what English speakers *naturally do*. Why is it "bad" or "wrong" to

end a sentence with a preposition? Can you think of any good reasons other than that someone told you so? I'll wait...

In contrast, our approach to grammar will be **descriptive**: we want to know what patterns English speakers actually produce when they generate English sentences. By definition, a "native English speaker" has acquired the rules of English; those are the rules we need to describe in order to describe English.

KEYWORDS

- **prescriptive**: prescribing how language should be
- **descriptive**: describing how language actually is

Prescriptive rules can have their place—namely, if you are trying to impress someone who cares about following them! But they are not especially useful for a descriptively adequate approach to grammar. To illustrate the difference between prescriptive and descriptive rules, consider an analogy. How would you describe what happens in a human during the physical act of *chewing*? Here is a definition from Wikipedia:

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"Mastication" from Wikipedia.

This is the key bit: "During the mastication [chewing] process, the food is positioned by the cheek and tongue between the teeth for grinding. The muscles of mastication move the jaws to bring the teeth into intermittent contact, repeatedly occluding and opening."

In a nutshell, you move your jaw open and shut in order to use the teeth to grind down food. Crucial question: Is your *mouth* open or shut while you chew? Probably, at least if you have been raised in the US, you will have been taught to keep your mouth closed while you chew. But the description above doesn't say anything about it. That's because the act of chewing can be done either way, with the mouth open or closed, and the chewing still gets done.

In what sense, then, is "Chew your food with your mouth closed" a rule? It's a rule about manners, etiquette—social evaluation. It's not a rule that describes anything inherent or fundamental about the anatomical act of chewing. And considering all the scolding that goes into enforcing this "rule," it's probably safe to assume that the *natural* state for humans to chew in involves an open mouth. If everyone naturally chewed with their mouths closed, why would we have to make such a big deal out of it?

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Coming back to language: violating prescriptive rules of English means you're just speaking English in a way that's different from the way someone else wants you to speak. Violating descriptive rules, on the other hand, means you're probably not speaking English at all.

Now come back to grammaticality, and our example sentences in (3-4) above, concerning the position of the preposition "to." Both (3) and (4) are grammatical sentences in English: they follow the descriptive rules of English grammar. A native speaker could say either, and upon hearing either, a native speaker wouldn't be left thinking, "But that person isn't speaking English!" Maybe one could say, "But it's incorrect! It ends a sentence with a preposition!" **Please discard, for the purposes of this class, the notion of a sentence being "correct" or "incorrect"**. These are terms typically applied within prescriptive frameworks. Chewing with your mouth open is not "incorrect" any more than sneezing without covering your nose is, or speaking English instead of Chinese is. Might it fail to accomplish some social goals, or garner some negative social evaluations? Perhaps. But that is about society's impression of chewing, **not chewing itself**. So it is with language.

A descriptive approach is so important for us because we want to be able to describe the English language in all of its many manifestations–including **English's many dialects**. Consider the following sentences:

(5) Don't be mad once you see that he want it.

(6) Don't be mad once you see that he wants it.

(5) is a popular lyric by Beyoncé ("Single Ladies"). Would you say that this sentence is "correct"? Would you say that it is "grammatical"? If not, how is it possible that Beyoncé produced it? Is Beyoncé not a native speaker of English? This sentence contains a feature of African American English, a well-documented dialect of English that has structural differences from "Standard American English." Sentences containing African American English are often called "incorrect," but they are perfectly grammatical to speakers of African American English. What makes (5) any less "correct" than the version in (6)? They are both produced by native speakers of English, and interpretable by native speakers as being English.

Consider another more recent example, this one from Childish Gambino:

(7) You can feel it in the street / on a day like this, the heat / it feel like summer

This is the same feature as in the Beyoncé example–it's a regular, systematic feature of AAE. Just as we would

not say that speaking English is “correct” while speaking German is “incorrect,” it doesn’t make sense to say that speaking one dialect of English is “correct” while speaking others is “incorrect.” There is no scientific basis on which to say that AAE, or any other dialect, is “incorrect.” Instead, the question for us is: is the sentence grammatical? If so, we want to be able to account for it in our description of English.

Now, consider the sentences below in (8-9).

(8) Mad be don’t you that once want he it

(9) Mad be don’t you that once wants he it

(8) contains the same words as (5), while (9) contains the same words as (6). But these sentences are ungrammatical to *all speakers of English*, regardless of dialect. No speaker of any dialect of English would produce either sentence. If one were in a Beyoncé song, we would think she was taking extreme artistic license with English!

Dialect differences highlight the fact that intuitions about what is grammatical or ungrammatical differ across speaker groups—what is grammatical for a speaker of Standard American English may seem ungrammatical to a speaker of Appalachian English. One group’s “normal” is another group’s “odd.” Intuitions can also differ across individual speakers—the use of a verb that sounds perfectly good to me may sound not-so-great to you. Here’s an example of something I thought sounded “normal”:

You’ll have five homeworks this semester.

I’ve had students say that this sounds weird to them. They said that “homework” cannot be plural in this way, and instead I should say “homework assignments.” Well, for them this may be ungrammatical, but it sounds great to me—otherwise I wouldn’t have said it! In this class we will often probe our own intuitions about what is and is not grammatical in English, but we will not always agree—and that is okay. The English language is not a cut-and-dry system with clear-cut answers, because no one sat down and had a meeting to create it that way. As a natural system, it is constantly changing, it differs from group to group and person to person, and we will never achieve a “perfect” analysis of it. Lucky for us, this makes our task much more interesting!

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3. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 1, Basic Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 1: Advanced Unit

GOALS FOR STUDYING GRAMMAR

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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1. Tools for grammatical description

We have established that our goal is a descriptive account of the grammar of English: the rules that native speakers know as part of their internal knowledge, which govern their production and interpretation of sentences. In this unit, we'll talk a little more about what it means to have a grammatical description, and introduce some of the tools we will use to conduct that description.

How many sentences do you think are possible in English?

Trick question! There are an infinite number of possible unique English sentences. This is in fact one of the features that distinguishes human language from animal forms of communication: it is possible to generate an uncountable number of novel sentences to express an uncountable number of meanings. How can we possibly begin to describe, then, all the sentences an English speaker could produce?

Just as when describing any complex system, we will focus on patterns and abstractions. Rather than developing a rule that describes one single sentence, we want rules that will account for any possible sentence in English—and that will rule out the sentences that aren't possible.

I bet you can do this for a very simple rule right now, with only the existing knowledge you have about grammar. Write a rule that explains why (1-3) are grammatical in English, but (4-5) are not. Note that the asterisk means something is *ungrammatical*; this is a convention within linguistics.

(1) the dogs

(2) the dog

(3) the cat

(4) *cat the

(5) *dogs the

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Write-a-Rule Activity

(1-5) all contain different combinations of words. How can one rule explain them all? I bet that your rule did not include the word *cat, dogs,* or *dog*; rather, I bet you lumped all these items under the same category NOUN (or something similar based your previous schooling). The system of a language is made up of patterns, and to explain them, we want abstract rules. Any given phrase or sentence can be seen as an instantiation of abstract rules involving abstract categories.

Ultimately, we want to be able to explain the maximum number of possible sentences with the minimum number of possible rules. There will always, however, be exceptions—please do not be frustrated by this!

So one tool that we will use to talk about language at an abstract level are **categories**, like the category introduced above, NOUN. We will deal with categories at the level of words, phrases, verbs, and other grammatical units. It is important to keep in mind that these categories always represent generalizations: our attempts as humans to analyze the natural system of language in an efficient way. As said earlier, languages do not come with ready-made analyses, and everything doesn't always "fit" as neatly as we might like. This is all part of the fun of exploring language through a descriptive, explanatory lens.

Another tool that we will use are visual diagrams of sentence structure. We will use a system of sentence diagramming called **phrase structure trees**, though because of the title of this textbook, you are free to call them **ELLM trees**! Trees are a way of showing visually our analysis of a sentence and its hierarchical structure. We'll introduce trees that represent specific rules later on; for now, I just want you to have some sense of why trees are useful modes of representation.

Consider the following sentence:

(6) I ate the pizza with broccoli.

What is the meaning? You will probably get two different possible interpretations of this sentence, represented by the two pictures below.

"I ate the pizza with broccoli," one interpretation

"I ate the pizza with broccoli," one interpretation

In one interpretation, the broccoli is on the pizza. In the other, the broccoli is a side dish. Both are plausible, linguistically and gastronomically. This is an example of linguistic **ambiguity**, and illustrates why we need to think of language hierarchically: If sentences were interpreted simply as a matter of the linear order of words, it should not be possible to derive two different meanings from the same sequence of words.

Now consider the two ELLM trees below. Don't worry about the labels yet, just focus on the *structure*. What do you think is different between them? See if you can match them to the meanings from the pictures above. (These trees are drawn with the excellent tree-drawing online tool created by Miles Shang and available here: http://mshang.ca/syntree/)

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The first tree means the broccoli was a topping on the pizza; the second tree means the broccoli was a side dish. The crucial issue is what unit *with broccoli* relates most centrally to: *the pizza,* or *ate the pizza*? I hope you can see how the trees show a difference between these, and how they illustrate the hierarchical relationships between grammatical units.

There are ways to diagram sentences that aren't tree-like, and I would be remiss if I did not at least mention them. Aside from trees, probably the most popular is a **Reed-Kellogg diagram**. Here is a very detailed explanation of them from the textbook *Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers* (Brock Haussamen et al.), in case you are interested (looking at this is totally optional):

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Reed-Kellogg diagrams from “Grammar Alive!”

I am not trained in how to diagram sentences this way. I tried to diagram the two versions of our test ambiguous sentence about pizza and broccoli and came up with these. Can you tell which diagram is supposed to represent which interpretation?

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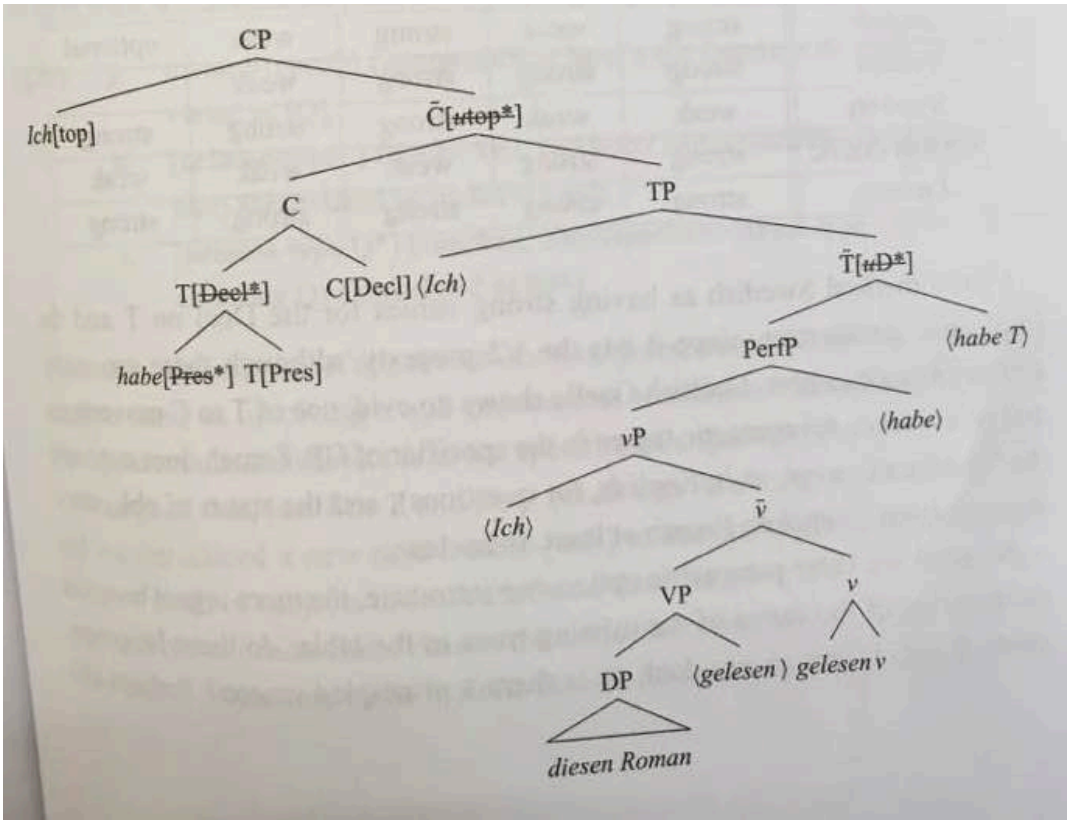
I leave it to you to investigate these diagrams more if you are interested (there are plenty of grammar textbooks that use them). As far as I can tell, there are certain things R-K diagrams and trees do equally well: representing the subject and predicate (as it is traditionally called), for instance. There seem to be other things R-K diagrams do less well, like showing at a glance the internal structure of complex noun phrases. There may be some things R-K diagrams do better, like representing clearly the head of a phrase (we’ll talk about all of this soon!). The point is just that using either system is a choice; there is nothing inherent about studying grammar that requires either. If you are ever going to teach your own grammar class, you will have to choose to one of these systems, another diagramming system, or no diagramming at all. All have benefits and limitations.

I choose phrase structure trees because they reflect my own training as a linguist, because reading the linear order of a sentence from them is clear (I find reading R-K diagrams to be a headache!), and because they encode what I believe is the fundamentally hierarchical property of language: that smaller units of meaning join together to form larger units of meaning.

However, if you ever take a formal/theoretical syntax class, you may be surprised by some of the trees you see there, compared to our trees. For example, the following tree comes from David Adger’s textbook, *Core Syntax: A Minimalist Approach* (p. 331).



Tree from David Adger's textbook (look closely: is this English?!?!)

Formal syntacticians are trying to do something related to our goals, but slightly different. In addition to being able to describe the set of patterns that makes up English grammar, they are also trying to account for a) the computational apparatus in speakers' minds that allows *all language* to be possible, which means b) universal patterns of grammar that cut across all languages. Theoretical syntax trees thus represent attempts to go beyond what is found in the surface of English sentences, and move to a deeper level of hypothesized structures that all humans share. This approach is rooted in the insights of linguist Noam Chomsky in the 1950s, and much (but certainly not all) of modern linguistics shares some of his assumptions.

Once we get to more complicated sentence structures, we will also start to see some of the limits of trees to describe English using only what's on the surface. We will talk about these issues, and the assumptions underlying how we use trees for these more complicated structures, as they come up.

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2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 1, Advanced Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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MODULE 2: WORDS AND MORPHOLOGY

Module 2: Table of Contents

WORDS AND MORPHOLOGY

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WORDS AND MORPHOLOGY

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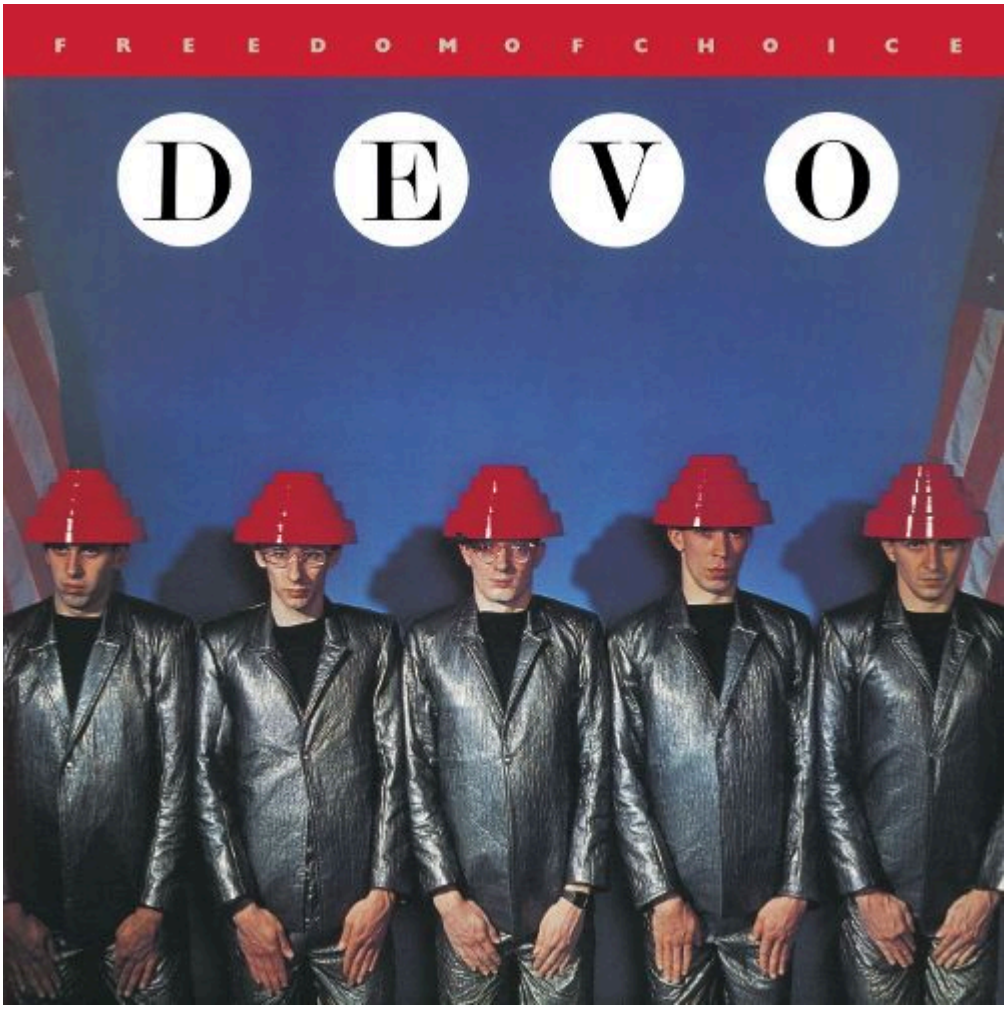
1. *Defining “word”*

Recall the example from the previous module, involving the non-word *vo*, which I made up a meaning for, as in: *Limp Bizkit* voed *this George Michael song; I wish Devo would* devo *it*.



Devo it!

Once you know the word *vo*, you are able to understand a related word, *devo*, based on your existing knowledge of English morphology. Specifically, the prefix "de"—what it means, and what it typically attaches to.

Morphology is the study of how sounds are put together to carry meaning. Put more casually, it's the study of word formation. What is a "word," though? Let's check out the definitions given by a popular dictionary, Merriam-Webster.

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Merriam-Webster definition of "word"

Definition 1a: "something that is said" – wow, how's that for vague? And is a word on a page that is not spoken aloud not actually a word?

Definition 2a is a little more precise, but let's look more closely. Is it true that most words are not "divisible into smaller units capable of independent use"? What about the following words?

suitcase *workhorse* *elsewhere* *wordsmith* *speakeasy* *backfire*

Can't each of these be "divided into smaller units capable of independent use"? And isn't each of them a word? This definition doesn't seem to cover all of the things we think of as "words"!

For our purposes, consider "words" to be correspondences between linguistic **forms**—sequences of sounds—and **meanings**—what those sounds represent. When one English speaker utters a sequence of sounds, how does another English speaker recognize the linguistic meaning that it carries? How do they even know when they've heard an English word (instead of a word from another language, or an utterance with no linguistic meaning)? English speakers share knowledge of sound-meaning relationships.

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2. Word meaning and compositionality

Not only do speakers share knowledge of words, but they also share knowledge of smaller units of meaning that can combine to form words—and the rules that govern which units can combine or not. Of course, most of this knowledge is implicit and subconscious—it is simply part of what someone knows when they "know a language."

To talk about this precisely, though, we need to talk about a unit of meaning that is somewhat different from a "word." Consider that the following are all "words":

suitcase *suit* *workhorse* *horse* *speakeasy* *backfire*
silly *silliness* *word* *electrification* *unsophisticated*

You will probably intuit that some of these words are "smaller" or "bigger" than others—you probably have a sense that some of them are composed of multiple internal units, while others are not. A fundamental property of word meaning is **compositionality**—the meaning of a word comes from the composition of its parts. This is in fact how we are able to make new words from old ones. For example, *hashtag* is a compound word formed from *hash* (referring to the # symbol) and *tag* (referring to an annotation of some sort). A *hashtag* is the use of the # symbol in order to annotate something. The meaning of the word *hashtag* is therefore **composed** from the meaning of its two parts. Its meaning is **compositional**. (This is also an example of **hierarchy** in language—the larger unit's meaning relies on that of the smaller units.)

KEYWORD

compositionality: the meaning of a word comes from the composition of its parts (also true of a sentence!)

Words have internal composition in less obvious cases, too. Consider the words *vase* and *vases*. One has an *–s* (which sounds like "z") on the end and one doesn't. (Make sure to say them aloud to hear this difference, rather than just reading it: remember that speech, not writing, is the basis of the English language.) *Vase* and *vases* are different word forms with slightly different meanings. Similarly, consider *walk* and *walked*. One has an *–ed* on the end and one doesn't. *Walk* and *walked* are different word forms with slightly different meanings. *Vases* and *walked* are more complex words than *vase* and *walk*—they are composed internally of more than one meaningful unit.

Take a quick survey below before you continue reading!

CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY. It will be fun, I promise!

DID YOU TAKE THE SURVEY???

In the activity you just did, you were guessing from one form of a word what its other forms would be. How

did you know, without ever having seen these words before, which new word form would make sense in each sentence? You used grammatical clues from the surrounding words to figure out what form would fit naturally in each blank. I'm willing to bet that you did NOT generate the following sentences:

*This party needs more **gilpret**. Let's **gilpretted** it!
*I tried to **jedi** the glass but failed. I guess the glass is **jediness**.

These sentences are marked with an asterisk. In linguistics, an asterisk indicates that a phrase or sentence is **ungrammatical**: it would not be produced or understood by a native speaker of the language, because it violates the rules underlying the linguistic system. These word forms don't fit in these slots because the meanings they signal are somehow inappropriate for their sentence positions.

These differences in word forms—with one form being appropriate in one sentence position but not others—are **morphological** differences. Remarkably, you don't even have to know the meaning of a new word to know what form it should appear in! Define *gilpret*...

How did you perform the task above? By following the **abstract rules** you know about English morphology. You recognize that some of the same sound sequences are used in lots of different words to signal the same meaning. When given a new word, you can deduce how its form will change given where it is in a sentence, or given a slightly different meaning it needs to express. Consider the following sets of words. Which component do you think is shared across each set?

devalue	*luminous*	*amoral*
deaccent	*anonymous*	*atonal*
debug	*cancerous*	*asexual*
deflea	*fibrous*	*anaerobic*

Words are composed from smaller units called **morphemes**. A morpheme is a sequence of sound(s) that carries a linguistic meaning and cannot be broken down into smaller sequences of sound(s) that carry their own meanings. Every word contains at least one morpheme, and a word can consist of a single morpheme. Examples of single-morpheme words:

word *a* *the* *you* *our* *fish* *towel*

However, most words contain more than one morpheme, and hence we can analyze how they are composed internally, from multiple morphemes.

KEYWORD

morpheme: sequence of sound(s) that carries a linguistic meaning and cannot be broken down into smaller sequences of sound(s) that carry their own meanings

Different forms of the "same" word are composed from different morpheme combinations. For instance, *cat* contains one morpheme: {cat}. In contrast, *cats* contains two morphemes: {cat} and {-s}. Note that when we are writing, we can use curly brackets to indicate morphemes. What we call "compound" words typically have two morphemes, as in *hashtag*: {hash} and {tag}; or *workhorse*: {work} {horse}.

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A morpheme has three important properties:

1. it cannot be broken down into smaller units of meaning,
2. it carries a meaning—though that meaning may not be easy to define,
3. it carries that same meaning into different words, or on its own as a word.

For instance: *word* only contains one morpheme. It cannot be broken down into smaller units that have their own meaning. The composition of this word is simply {word}.

However, *words* has two morphemes: {word}, which carries the main meaning, and {-s}, which lets us know we are talking about more than one word. This {-s} also occurs on another word in the list above: *wordsmiths.* If I use this word in a sentence, you will picture multiple wordsmiths (at least two), not just one.

How many morphemes do you think *wordsmiths* has? If you said three, you're getting it! {word} {smith} and {-s}. What other words can the morpheme {smith} occur in?

Before moving on, take this little quiz to check your understanding of morphemes:

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3. Lexical v. grammatical meaning

Not all morphemes carry the same kind of meaning. Neither do all words: though we think of words as things you can look up in a dictionary and maybe even draw a picture of, not all words are so easily defined! How would you draw a picture to represent the word *of*? How about *before*? *Yet*? *Therefore?*

We divide the types of meanings morphemes carry into two categories: **lexical meaning** and **grammatical meaning**.

Lexical meaning is also called **semantic meaning**—it is what the word refers to, whether that is a concrete entity or abstract concept or relationship.

A question about lexical meaning is, "What do I mean when I say *silly* v. *silliness*?" These two words refer to different things. *Silly* refers to a state of being ("She's awfully silly today!") whereas *silliness* refers to an entity ("Her silliness is really annoying me!"). {silly} is a morpheme that carries lexical meaning. {-ness} is also a morpheme that carries lexical meaning, because it changes the concept that {silly} refers to.

Grammatical meaning pertains to a word's function in a sentence, and the type of meaning it conveys relative to other words in a phrase or sentence. This definition can feel very vague but should make more and more sense as we explore different grammatical patterns over the course of this semester.

A question about grammatical meaning is, "When would I say *wags* versus *wagged*?" These two words refer to the same thing—the act of moving back and forth in a peculiar manner. But they are used under different syntactic circumstances. *Wags* is used when I am talking about something currently or regularly happening ("Her tail wags constantly" but not "*Her tail wags last night"). *Wagged* is used when I am talking about something that happened in the past ("Their tails wagged last night" but not "*Their tails wagged right now"). The reference of *wags* and *wagged* is not different, but their use in a sentence is.

KEYWORDS

lexical meaning: what the word/morpheme refers to

grammatical meaning: type of meaning the word/morpheme conveys relative to other words in a phrase or sentence

One way to think of this difference is that lexical meaning has clear signification outside of a particular sentence context, whereas grammatical meaning is only relevant to the interpretation of a particular sentence.

Both words *wag*s and *wagged* carry both lexical and grammatical meaning. The lexical meaning is expressed by the component they share in common: {wag}. Whether I say *wags* or *wagged*, you probably envision the same image: a tail moving back and forth. That's the lexical meaning—the reference. The grammatical meaning is expressed by the parts that are different: {-s} or {-ed}. If I am talking about the act of a tail moving back and forth that happened yesterday, I use the form *wagged*. If I am talking about the act of a tail moving back and forth that is happening currently, I use the form *wags*. The ending expresses a relationship to time, which is only necessary as part of interpreting a description of a specific event.

In this example, we see a shared morpheme that carries lexical meaning: {wag}. We see two morphemes that carry grammatical meaning: {-s} and {-ed}. {wag} provides the reference, and {-s} and {-ed} change what syntactic circumstances the word can be used in.

Some morphemes can occur freestanding as words; these are called **free morphemes**. Examples are {car}, {word}, {fill}, and {light}.

Morphemes that must attach to words in order to express their meaning are called **bound morphemes**.

Examples are {a-}, {-ness}, and {cran-}. We will talk specifically about **affixes**. Affixes attach to **root** morphemes, which carry the core meaning in a word. {word} is a root morpheme, and so is {wag}.

English has both **prefixes**, attaching at the beginning of a root, and **suffixes**, attaching at the end of a root. In *cats*, {cat} is the root morpheme and {-s} is a suffix. In *undo*, {do} is the root morpheme and {un-} is a prefix. Consider the following words, which are composed from a prefix, a root, and a suffix.

prefix	**root**	**suffix**
un-	*divide*	*-ed*
un-	*believe*	*-able*
in-	*defense*	*-ible*
de-	*regulate*	*-s*

We divide affixes into two classes of morphemes, depending on whether they carry lexical or grammatical meaning. Affixes that carry lexical meaning are called **derivational morphemes**. Affixes that carry grammatical meaning are called **inflectional morphemes**.

KEYWORDS

derivational morphemes: affixes with lexical meaning

inflectional morphemes: affixes with grammatical meaning

English has countless derivational prefixes and suffixes. These alter the reference of a word and often change the part of speech of the word as well (from noun to adjective, for instance). Though there is a core meaning that remains consistent when you add a derivational morpheme to an existing word, the overall reference changes.

For instance, *word, wordy,* and *wordily* all share the morpheme {word}. Reference associated with {word} is present in all three words. *Wordy* is a combination of {word} and a derivational suffix {-y}, which changes it from a noun to an adjective—from a thing to a quality. *Wordily* is further a combination of {word} {-y} and another derivational morpheme, {-ly}, which changes it from an adjective to an adverb—from a quality to a manner of doing. The addition of derivational morphemes changes how the word can be used in a sentence. They are not interchangeable! Note the asterisks meaning "ungrammatical" in the examples below.

3a) I read the word.
3b) *I read the wordy.
3c) *I read the wordily.

4a) The writer was wordy.
4b) *The writer was word.
4c) *The writer was wordily.

5a) The writer spoke wordily.

5b) *The writer spoke word.
5c) *The writer spoke wordy.

Can you explain why only the first sentence is grammatical in each trio of sentences?

English has only **8 inflectional morphemes**, and all are suffixes. Each inflectional suffix attaches to either nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs. These four word types constitute, not coincidentally, the major categories of *words* that carry lexical meaning, and which make up the "meat" of sentence meaning. For a very quick introduction to these categories, consider the sentence below.

Beautiful	ballerinas	dance	beautifully.
ADJECTIVE	NOUN	VERB	ADVERB

We will explore over the course of the semester these word categories, and the grammatical meanings the inflectional morphemes carry. For now, you should be able to recognize these endings *as* inflections. And when I say the word *inflection*, you should know that I am referring to the change in a word's ending that carries grammatical meaning. Start noticing when you see these endings on different words.

Morpheme	**Grammatical meaning / what we'll call the inflection**	**Attaches to**	**Example**
{-s} or {-es}	plural	nouns	*cats; pianos; boxes*
{-'s} or {-s'}	possessive	nouns	*cat's; piano's; plants'*
{-s}	third person singular present tense	verbs	*kicks; eats; wants*
{-ed}	past tense	verbs	*kicked; looked; wanted*
{-ed} or {-en}	past participle	verbs	*kicked; eaten; wanted*
{-ing}	present participle	verbs	*kicking; eating; wanting*
{-er}	comparative	adjectives/adverbs	*happier; sadder; slower*
{-est}	superlative	adjectives/adverbs	*happiest; saddest; slowest*

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3. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 2, Basic Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 2: Advanced Unit

WORDS AND MORPHOLOGY

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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1. Morphosyntax

Before moving on to word categories, let's ponder morphemes, and the meanings they contribute to a sentence, a little more. We've seen how a change in derivational morphemes can either change a sentence's meaning, or make a sentence ungrammatical. Consider the sentences below:

(1a) My friend likes pizza.
(1b) My friend dislikes pizza.

These mean different things, but the only difference is the presence of the derivational morpheme {dis-} in (1b). Now consider (2a) and (2b):

(2a) *My friend likens pizza.
(2b) *My friend likeness pizza.

The addition of derivational morphemes {-en} and {-ness} makes the sentences ungrammatical. While *likens* is still a verb, (2a) is missing something. But *likeness* is no longer a verb—it's now a noun—and hence it doesn't make sense in the same slot. This is what derivational morphemes do: they add/change lexical meaning, and often in the process they change the word category from noun to verb, adjective to adverb, etc. So swapping/changing derivational morphemes can change not only the meaning of a sentence, but also its grammaticality, since word categories might be altered.

Let's look a little at how this plays out with inflectional morphemes instead. Consider (3a-d):

(3a) My friend likes pizza.
(3b) *My friend like pizza.
(3c) *My friend liking pizza.
(3d) *My friends likes pizza.

In these cases, the referential content doesn't seem to have changed: we are still clearly using *like* as a verb, and it has a positive connotation. Rather, (3b-d) are ungrammatical for different reasons. Taking away the {-s} morpheme from {like} in (b) causes ungrammaticality. So does adding the {-ing} morpheme to {like} in (c), and

adding the {-s} morpheme to {friend} in (c). What information is changing in all these cases? Not the *reference* of *like* or *friend*, but their grammatical properties.

The structure and grammaticality of a sentence is sensitive to morphology, both derivational and inflectional. This is what we call **morphosyntax**: the interrelationship of morphological patterns and syntactic ones. Many of the patterns that help us describe English grammar pertain to connections between morphology and syntax. Check out these sentences:

(4a) The ballerina danced beautifully.
(4b) The choir sang loudly.
(4c) The joggers ran quickly.

Now, let's say I make up some new words using morphology rules I know as an English speaker:

balletishly *fakely* *fleekly*

Where would you put these words in the following sentences?

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You might have put these in the middle slot instead of the end, but I bet $20 you didn't put them in the first one! These words all share the same {-ly} morpheme we saw in action up above, and so we will naturally use them in a sentence in a way that resembles the patterns we already know. Just another example of how morphology and syntax are not really separate, but work together in the rules of English grammar.

One final note: if you've ever studied certain other foreign languages, you might have used the terms *declension* or *conjugation*. These are ways of referring to the paradigm of inflections in a language. Nouns (and sometimes other words that accompany them) are said to *decline* and verbs are said to *conjugate*. This just means they change inflections to signal different grammatical meanings. For nouns, this is typically number, case, and in some languages, gender. For verbs, it is typically tense, number, aspect, and mood. But the kind of grammatical meaning encoded in inflections varies widely across languages, and English's system is actually quite impoverished compared to many languages (remember, only 8 inflectional morphemes!).

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2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 2, Advanced Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

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MODULE 3: WORD AND PHRASE CATEGORIES

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WORD AND PHRASE CATEGORIES

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1. Introduction: Categories of words

As with morphemes, words can be divided into two broad categories based on the kind of meaning they carry. **Lexical** categories carry the primary referential meaning of a sentence. These are sometimes called *content* words. **Grammatical** categories are *function* words that express relationships between other words, create internal structure within a sentence, or specify the reference of lexical category words.

Lexical and Grammatical Categories

- Lexical categories are **verbs**, **nouns**, **adjectives**, and **adverbs**.
- Grammatical categories are everything else: **determiners**, **pronouns, prepositions**, **auxiliary verbs**, **conjunctions**, and **subordinators/complementizers**.

In this module we will give basic definitions of these word categories, but you will get a better feel for them as we work with sentence structure. These are not absolute categorizations: different grammars, textbooks, and teachers will put some words in different places (for instance, many people consider pronouns and prepositions to be lexical categories). I note this just to prepare you that you may find people using slightly different systems of categorization than we will use, and that is fine. We are all just humans trying to understand language!

2. Lexical categories

I'll start with a food analogy. Think of a burger. Lexical categories are the key ingredients in defining a burger

as a burger. What is the one *required* part of a burger? The patty. You can order a "burger" without the bun (like someone avoiding carbs), and you may just end up with a patty and condiments. But if you ask for a "burger" without the patty, you are just getting the bun, which is not actually a burger at all.

A burger: the patty is the most crucial part of making it a "burger"

The patty in a burger is like the verb in a sentence. **Every sentence in English contains at least one verb**. Therefore, every English sentence contains at least one lexical category word. And the smallest possible English sentences contain *just* this one category, a verb:

Go!

Dance!

Play!

Eat!

These words imply someone doing the action—*you*—and are equivalent in meaning to the following:

You go!

You dance!

You play!

You eat!

It is impossible for me to utter "*Go!*" and have you interpret me as meaning "*That person over there should go.*" This highlights one fact about sentences: we interpret there to be a *subject*, or something that is the actor or topic of the sentence, even when it is not explicitly pronounced.

Therefore, not only does every sentence have at least a verb, but most sentences also contain at least one noun. Consider the following two-word sentences:

Birds chirp.

Mushrooms stink.

Sheep baa.

Syntax rules.

Rock'n'roll lives.

If a verb is like the patty, a noun is like the bun: nearly all sentences will have one. You can have a bun-less burger with just a patty; it's rare, but you can order it. Likewise, you can have a noun-less "sentence" with just a verb—it serves a specific expression of meaning, but is still a sentence.

In contrast, the nouns standing alone in the below examples are *not* "sentences":

Syntax

Sheep

Birds

Mushrooms

Rock'n'roll

These nouns are just nouns, not sentences—like buns without a patty.

So a verb is necessary for a sentence, and most sentences also have a noun. What about everything else?

What if you wanted to add something to your patty, to increase its deliciousness? Maybe blue cheese? That would be like an adverb. Blue cheese modifies the patty; an adverb modifies a verb. And what about adding mustard to your bun? That would be like an adjective. Mustard modifies the bun; an adjective modifies a noun. In other words: the patty and the bun are still the most essential parts of the burger. The other categories of

items are modifying either the patty or the bun. You can't have a burger with just blue cheese and mustard; you can't have a sentence with just adjectives and adverbs.

Let's use these lexical categories to build the sentence we saw at the end of the last module. Start with a verb:

Dance.

Add a noun:

Ballerinas dance.

Add an adverb, which modifies the verb:

Ballerinas dance **beautifully**.

Add an adjective, which modifies the noun:

Beautiful ballerinas dance beautifully.

All together, we have the four lexical categories:

Beautiful	ballerinas	dance	beautifully.
ADJECTIVE	NOUN	VERB	ADVERB

The verb is essential; there would be no sentence without it. The noun is the subject, doing the dancing. The adverb tells *how* the ballerinas dance—it modifies the verb. And the adjective gives us a property of the ballerinas—it modifies the noun.

Aside from understanding their functions relative to each other, we can notice patterns that categories of words tend to exhibit in terms of a) their morphology, and b) their syntactic behavior. For instance, most nouns tend to act the same way when it comes to inflectional and derivational morphology; and, they tend to act the same way in sentences. Consider the following list of sentences, with their lexical category words; then consider why the second list is ungrammatical.

Beautiful ballerinas dance beautifully.

Ugly ducklings swim awkwardly.

Genuine diamonds glisten appealingly.

False lashes attach effortlessly.

*Beautiful dance beautifully ballerinas.

*Ugly swim awkwardly ducklings.

*Genuine glisten appealingly diamonds.

*False attach effortlessly lashes.

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Explain the Ungrammaticality Activity

We will explore in detail the morphological and syntactic patterns of different lexical categories in Modules 5-7.

You can see from the above that a very important relationship often formed between words is one of **modification**: adding information to a word, thereby changing its lexical meaning. As we have already seen, one major function of adjectives is to modify nouns:

beautiful ballerinas

ugly ducklings

genuine diamonds

false lashes

Put casually, adjectival modification adds information that answers the question, “What kind?”

Ballerinas! What kind? *Beautiful* ones.

Ducklings! What kind? *Ugly* ones.

Similarly, one major function of adverbs is to modify verbs:

dance *beautifully*

swim *awkwardly*

glisten *appealingly*

attach *effortlessly*

Adverbial modification of verbs usually adds information that answers a wh-question: “How/Where/When/Why?”

They danced. How? *Beautifully*.

They swam. Where? *There*.

They glisten. When? *Always*.

Adverbs can also modify adjectives or other adverbs:

extremely beautiful ballerinas

shockingly ugly ducklings

dance *incredibly* beautifully

swim *very* awkwardly

Usually this modification is about heightening or lowering the degree of the quality being attributed by the adjective, and hence we call these **degree adverbs**.

How beautiful? *Extremely*.

How beautifully? *Incredibly*.

Consider the difference in meaning between the adverbs *surprisingly* and *really* below:

It was *surprisingly* beautifully painted.

It was *really* beautifully painted.

While *suprisingly* carries content–the beautiful way in which the thing was painted was surprising–*really* doesn't quite carry content in the same way; all I'm saying is that the beautiful way in which the thing was painted is to a heightened degree. Do you think degree adverbs should be classified as content, or function words?

3. Grammatical Categories

A modification role is also the function of many of the grammatical categories of words, which we overview here.

Determiners serve to restrict the reference of a noun or noun phrase:

duckling

a duckling

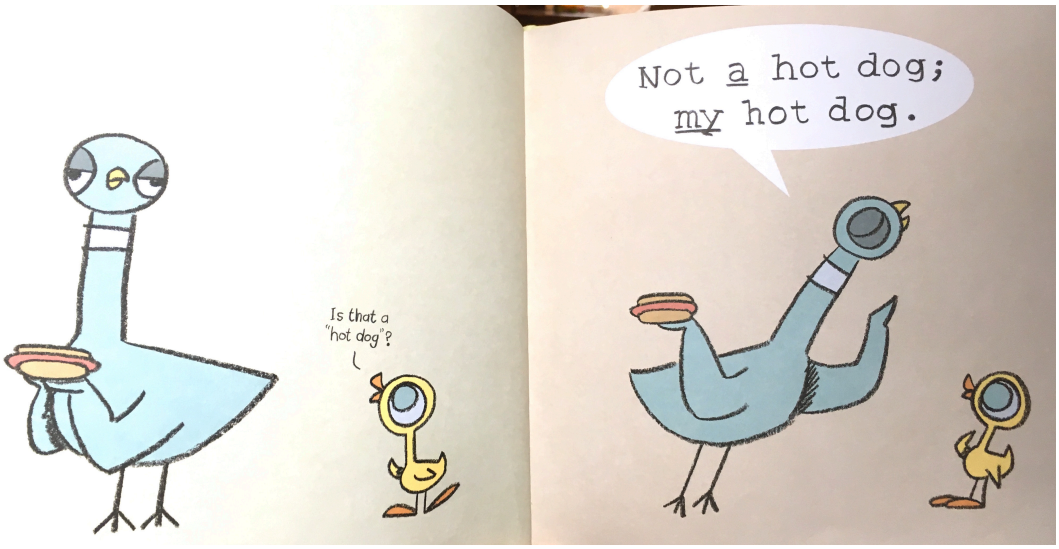
the duckling

these ducklings

five ducklings

my duckling

What information is added/changed by the addition of *a, the, these,* or *my*?
Consider the following pages from a popular children's book, *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog*, by Mo Willems:



The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog, by Mo Willems

What is the difference between *a* hot dog and *my* hot dog? That's the kind of grammatical meaning contributed by determiners. Try to identify determiners in the activity below.

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In the above poem, *my* and *that* are examples of **pronouns** being used as determiners, but many pronouns also occur independently. You have probably heard of pronouns as "words that substitute for nouns," but we'll see that this isn't quite right. Nonetheless, pronouns do function similarly to nouns in sentences—with the difference being that their reference is not fixed, but dependent on context (we call this contextual dependency *deixis;* pronouns are *deictic* elements of language).

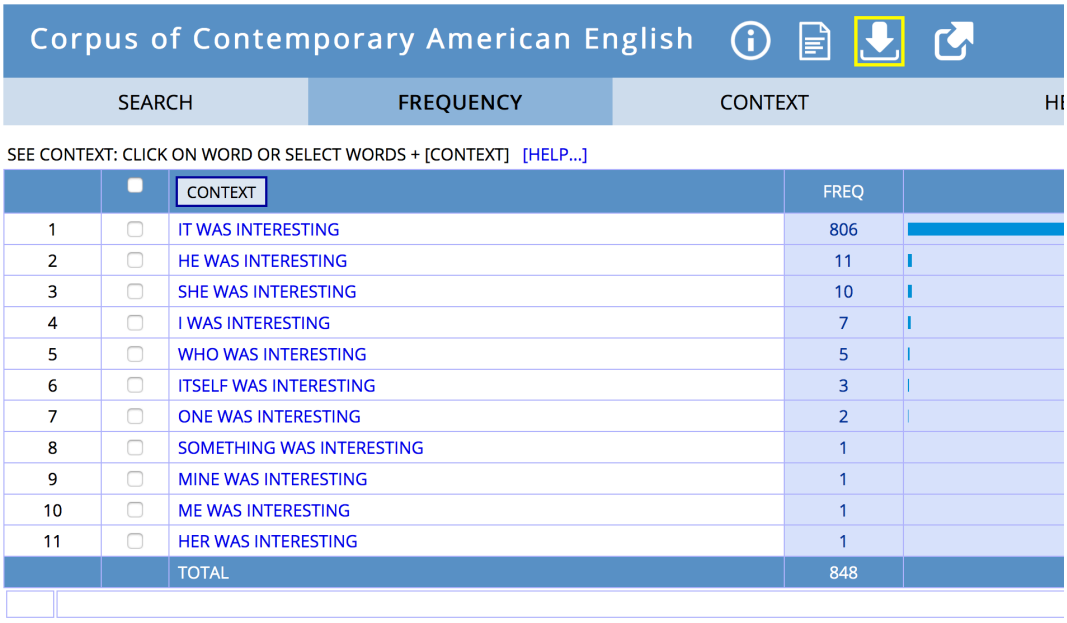
Mine is awesome.

I am awesome.

She is awesome.

You are awesome.

There are lots of different kinds of pronouns, with varying properties. I did a search in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for [PRONOUN *was interesting*], and these are the results I got:



Corpus of Contemporary American English

SEARCH | FREQUENCY | CONTEXT | HE

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD OR SELECT WORDS + [CONTEXT] [HELP...]

		CONTEXT	FREQ
1		IT WAS INTERESTING	806
2		HE WAS INTERESTING	11
3		SHE WAS INTERESTING	10
4		I WAS INTERESTING	7
5		WHO WAS INTERESTING	5
6		ITSELF WAS INTERESTING	3
7		ONE WAS INTERESTING	2
8		SOMETHING WAS INTERESTING	1
9		MINE WAS INTERESTING	1
10		ME WAS INTERESTING	1
11		HER WAS INTERESTING	1
		TOTAL	848

Corpus results for [PRONOUN was interesting], COCA

Do some of these seem to have more in common than others? How might you divide them into sub-categories based on their meanings or other properties?

Moving on to prepositions! **Prepositions** introduce nouns or noun phrases into a larger phrase or sentence, nearly always in order to modify another unit. In the examples below, prepositions are introducing phrases that modify nouns:

ducklings *in* the pond

ballerinas *from* the company

diamonds *on* your timepiece

tigers *at* the zoo

Prepositions are typically "little" words, and they often carry a spatial meaning. Did you ever hear that a preposition is "what a plane can do to a cloud" or "what a mouse can do to a clock"? The idea is on the right track, since many prepositions carry a spatial meaning:

the plane flew *through* the cloud

the plane flew *over* the cloud

the mouse ran *toward* the clock

the mouse ran *under* the clock

But many prepositions do not express a spatial relationship at all:

the book *by* J.K. Rowling

the ice cream *from* Jeni's

the present *for* his birthday

And how would you characterize the function of the prepositions in the below sentences? Note that the phrases they introduce all modify verbs, and are in this sense are...what's the word for things that modify verbs?...adverbial!

The ballerinas dance *in* companies.

Ducklings swim *in* ponds.

The diamonds flash *before* my eyes.

The lashes attach *over* the eyelids.

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Other grammatical word categories do not modify, but connect elements in another way. Two main such connective relationships are **coordination** and **subordination**.

Conjunctions form a coordinating function: they join together elements that carry equal status in a sentence or phrase. They are therefore often called **coordinators** (and I may sometimes use these term interchangeably). The primary conjunctions you might think of are *and, but,* and *or.* (See how I just used one to list items of the same type!)

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In each of these examples of coordination, you can reverse the order of the items and see little effect on the meaning of the sentence:

I made cookies *and* tea.

I feel cautious *but* optimistic.

You may run *or* walk the race.

In contrast, **subordinators—**which later we will call **complementizers**—connect elements that do not have equal status in a sentence. Classic subordinators are words like *because, if, although,* and *while.* Later we will see that one of the main subordinators we use in English is actually *that*. Relative pronouns *who, whose*, and *which* also function to introduce subordinate elements.

I want ice cream *because* it is hot outside.

I'll eat ice cream *if* it's over 70 degrees.

She ate ice cream *even though* it was snowing.

Unlike with conjunctions, trying to change the order of connected elements here leads to complete changes in meaning, and in some cases even ungrammaticality:

It is hot outside *because* I want ice cream.

*It's over 70 degrees *if* I'll eat ice cream.

It was snowing *even though* she ate ice cream.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=99

The final grammatical category is **auxiliary verbs**. We will talk more about these in module 6, but you can start to recognize that verbs often occur in series, and work together to form complex grammatical meanings. The verbs highlighted below are auxiliaries.

We have been eating.

We were eating.

We could be eating.

We have eaten.

The pizza was eaten.

Students do like pizza.

4. Phrases

Below the level of a full sentence, words enter into relationships with each other, constituting units of meaning that are still smaller than a sentence. A **phrase** is a group of words that functions together as a unit within a larger unit of grammatical structure.

Keyword

phrase: group of words that functions together as a unit within a larger unit of grammatical structure

We already saw some examples above, where some types of words modify other types of words. Each of these highlighted units is a phrase consisting of the modifier and the word being modified:

Beautiful ballerinas dance beautifully.

Ugly ducklings swim awkwardly.

Genuine diamonds glisten appealingly.

False lashes attach effortlessly.

Each of these phrases consists of an adjective and a noun. Which word do you think is **more important**, the adjective or the noun? Is the unit "beautiful ballerinas" ultimately more nouny or more adjectivey? You probably have the intuition that it's the *ballerinas* who are more important: indeed, the function of *beautiful* is to modify the noun. The noun is the main part. If you take the nouns away, the sentences become ungrammatical. Whereas if you take just the adjective away, the sentences are still grammatical.

*Beautiful dance beautifully.

*Ugly swim awkwardly.

*Genuine glisten appealingly.

*False attach effortlessly.

Ballerinas dance beautifully.

Ducklings swim awkwardly.

Diamonds glisten appealingly.

Lashes attach effortlessly.

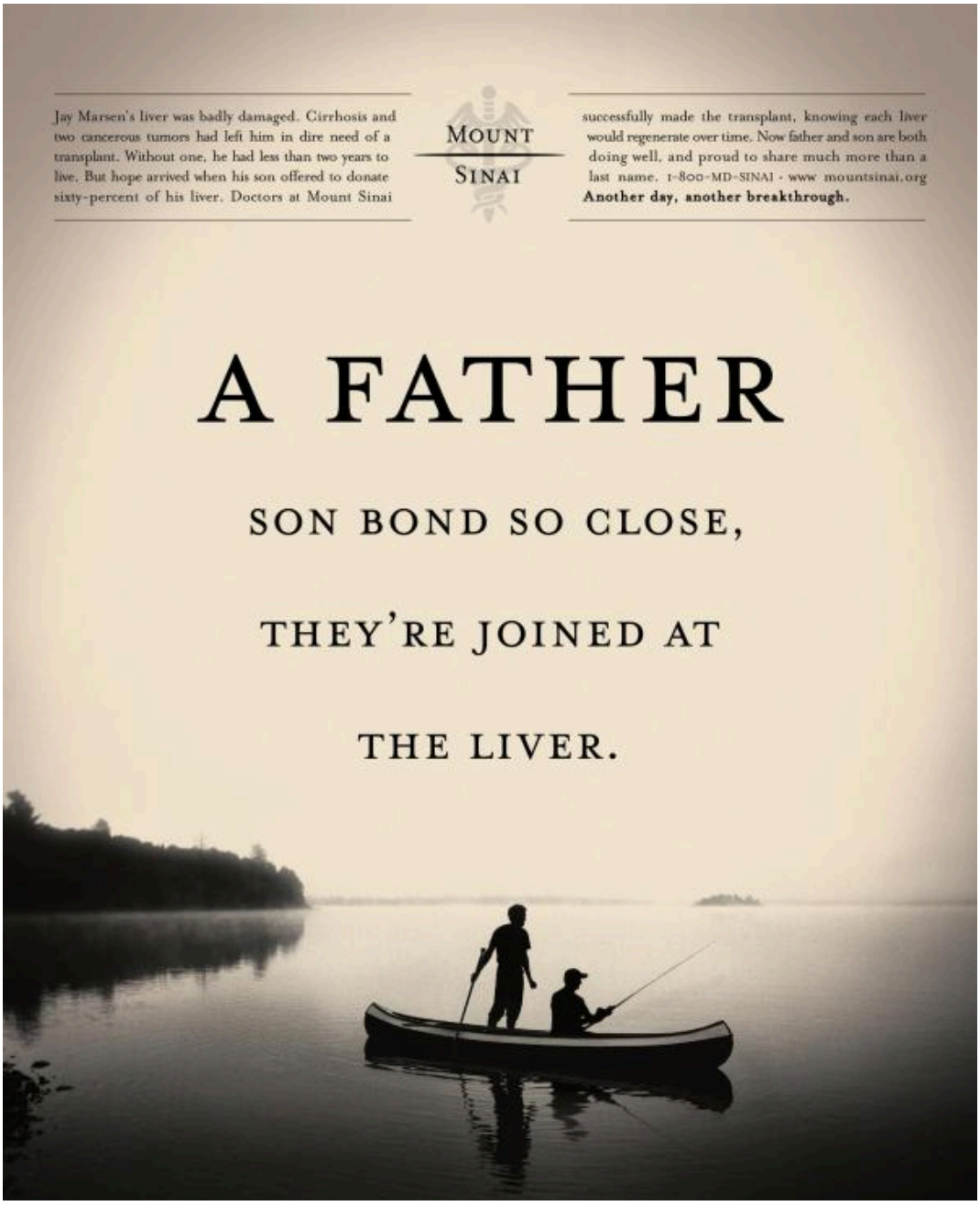
Congratulations, you've just discovered that the **head** of this phrase is the noun, not the adjective! (more on this in a bit)

Here, I will introduce some different ways of thinking about phrases, then introduce the major phrase types we need to talk about in English grammar.

Ways to think about phrases...

- mental units
- structural units
- functional units

First, we can think of phrases as **mental units**. They capture some intuitions we have that within a sentence, some words are more closely related to each other than to others. Consider the following advertisement, which I came across in the *New York Times Magazine* some years ago.



Advertisement from NYT Magazine

Does this layout seem odd to read at all? The page layout makes it seem as though the following are meaningful units of grammar:

> A father
>
> son bond so close
>
> they're joined at

the liver

You don't need technical terminology to understand that "son bond so close" is not a meaningful unit. How would you describe why these groupings of words are not phrases that function together? If you were going to reposition these words into units, it would probably be something like:

A father-son bond
so close
they're joined
at the liver

This is the intuition we're capturing with the notion of phrases: "a father-son bond" is a phrase, but "son bond so close" isn't. Your brain doesn't really know what to do with "son bond so close"—where would you put it in a sentence? Whereas you can probably think of lots of ways to use "A father-son bond" in a sentence:

A father-son bond is important.
They had a father-son-bond that was beautiful.
Theirs was a father-son-bond like no other.
They considered a father-son-bond to be a good thing.

Second, we can think of phrases as **structural units**. Consider the sequence of words:

a father-son bond

What do you think the most important, most essential word is? I'd guess you said *bond*. Without *bond,* there would be no need for any of the other words. Now, consider the role of *a*. Do you think it relates more closely with *father-son* or *bond*? I would again guess that you said *bond*: *a father-son* is meaningless, whereas *a bond* means something clear. This shows that within the sequence of words, *a father-son bond*, there is

some smaller structure of relationships between words. Namely, *father-son* modifies *bond*; then, *a* modifies or specifies *father-son bond*.

We can illustrate this kind of **internal structure** using bracketing notation, where brackets delineate meaningful groupings of words:

> [a [father-son bond]]

Phrases are therefore units that contain structure within them. They are also units that are part of larger structures—other phrases or sentences. Consider the sentence:

> A father-son bond is important.

What is the structure of this sentence? *Something* is being said to be important. It's not just *bond,* but the whole unit, *a father-son bond*. We can show this relationship with brackets again:

> [A father-son bond] is important

Here is a slightly more embellished version of this sentence:

> A father-son bond is extremely important.

Where does *extremely* fit in here? It modifies *important*, and in fact forms a phrase with it. We can again use brackets to show this relationship:

> A father-son bond is [extremely important]

So phrases are meaningful units of words that fit into the structure of a larger phrase or sentence. Here is bracket notation showing the internal structure of this sentence with both of our phrases:

[A father-son bond] is [extremely important]

Think about other sentences following this same pattern:

[Ugly ducklings] are [surprisingly common]

[Beautiful blue diamonds] are [exceedingly rare]

[The best ice cream flavor] is [summer corn with blackberry]

(Some of the bracketed phrases even have phrases within them!)

Third, we can think of phrases as **functional units**. Let's go back to our sentence:

[A father-son bond] is important.

We've established that *a father-son bond* has structure, and also that it is part of a larger structure. What is its **function** in this sentence? It's the entity to which "importance" is being ascribed; it's also what the sentence is about—its topic, roughly speaking. We call this function the **subject** of the sentence. What are the subjects in each of these sentences?

[Ugly ducklings] are [surprisingly common]

[Beautiful blue diamonds] are [exceedingly rare]

[The best ice cream flavor] is [summer corn with blackberry]

Subject is a **function** that phrases can play within a sentence. Note that individual words can also be subjects:

[Corn] is awesome.

[Ducklings] are cool.

[Diamonds] are rare.

There are other functions that can be played by phrases. For instance, a prepositional phrase can modify a noun:

corn [with blackberry]

people [from Mars]

the books [in the library]

But individual words can also function as modifiers! Remember adjectives and adverbs?

beautiful people

colorful books

extremely important

fully capable

So, phrases—like words—can function in different roles within a sentence or phrase. Phrases are mental, structural, and functional units of meaning.

5. Phrase types

We will talk about five basic phrase types in English; we will add phrase types later as needed. The five phrase types correspond to the **four lexical category words plus prepositions.**

Major Phrase Types in English

- Verb Phrase
- Noun Phrase

- Adjective Phrase
- Adverb Phrase
- Prepositional Phrase

Each phrase type consists of at least a **head**—the word that corresponds to the phrase type, and which determines the nature of the meaning of the phrase, as well as the function of the phrase.

VP – Verb Phrase

VP's have a verb as their head. Since every sentence has a verb, every sentence will have a verb phrase! More on this in module 4, and even more in Module 7! Examples of verb phrases:

walked

walked slowly

walked slowly around the block

walked the dog

She [walked the dog]

She [walked the dog slowly around the block]

NP – Noun Phrase

NP's have a noun as their head, and function as nouns typically do. They can fulfill the subject role, for instance. Examples:

ducks

blue ducks

big blue ducks

the big blue ducks

[The big blue ducks] are beautiful

I love [the big blue ducks]

AdjP – Adjective Phrase

AdjP's have an adjective as their head, and function as adjectives typically do. They can modify nouns, for instance. Examples:

beautiful

extremely beautiful

surprising

very surprising

very surprisingly good

[very surprisingly good] food

My meal was [good]

My meal was [very surprisingly good]

AdvP – Adverb Phrase

AdvP's have an adverb as their head, and function as adverbs typically do. They can modify adjectives or verbs. Examples:

surprisingly

very surprisingly

gracefully

so gracefully

She danced [so gracefully]

She danced [so gracefully]

She did a [gracefully] simple dance

PP – Prepositional Phrase

PP's have a preposition as their head, and function in various ways. See if you can pinpoint the function of some of the PPs below:

They flew [to the moon]

The girl [with the dragon tattoo] was fierce

She was certain [of the facts]

Notice that every PP above contains not just a preposition, but also a noun phrase. This NP is called the **object of the preposition**.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
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6. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 3, Basic Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 3: Advanced Unit

WORD AND PHRASE CATEGORIES

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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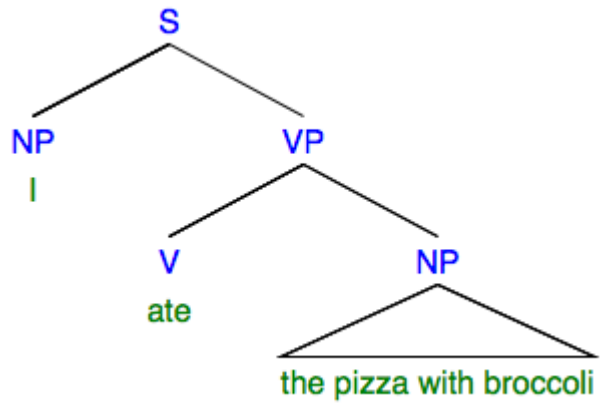
1. More on phrases as functional units

One of the ways I gave you to think about phrases was as *functional units* within a sentence—or within another phrase that is smaller than a sentence. A phrase is a unit of meaning that **serves some purpose relative to other units of meaning**. I want to revisit and expand on this idea, now connecting the notion of phrases as *functional units* to the notion of them as *structural units*—elements that have a smaller structure and that are part of a larger structure.

It's been a while since we saw a phrase structure tree. Consider this one from Module 1:



Syntax tree: pizza with broccoli

This sentence starts with a subject, the pronoun *I*. **Subject** is one function that phrases can play within a sentence. **A subject is the topic—the unit you are saying something about**.

Then we have a verb, *ate*, and an NP, *the pizza with broccoli.* How would you characterize the function of *the pizza with broccoli*? You might say, "it's the thing being eaten" or "it's what's having the action of eating done to it." In technical terms, it is the **object** of the verb *ate*. Object is another function phrases can play—this time, within the verb phrase. Since the NP [the pizza with broccoli] lies beneath the level of the VP in the sentence, we say that its function is one within the VP. Its relationship is directly to *ate*, not to *I*. This is one advantage of phrase structure trees: they clearly indicate the *locality* of phrasal relationships.

Now, what is the function of the VP? It tells us something about the subject. Consider the following verb phrases:

is delicious

contained broccoli

was eaten quickly

Each of these VPs can be used to say something about any number of subjects–the same one:

The pizza is delicious

The pizza contained broccoli.

The pizza was eaten quickly.

or different ones:

The pizza is delicious.

My salad contained broccoli.

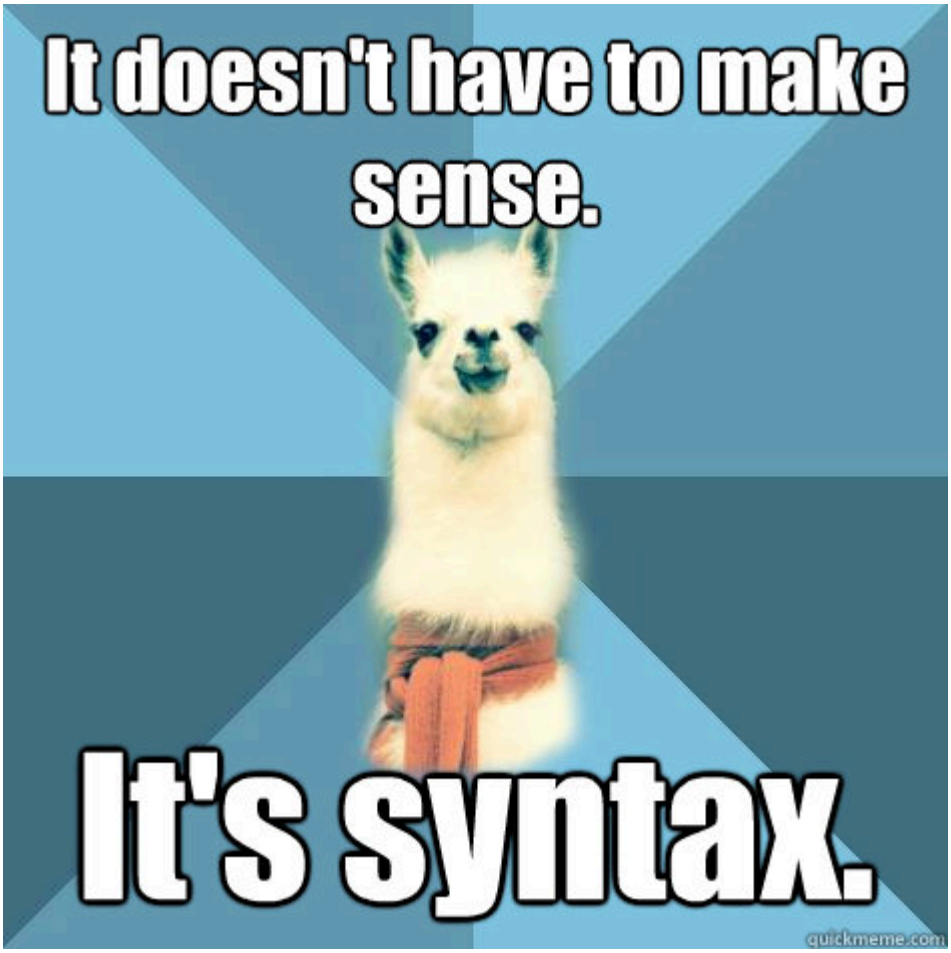
Our dessert was eaten quickly.

In more technical terminology, the components of a verb phrase *predicate something of the subject*. Much more on this in Module 7.

Note that the same NP could fulfill either the subject or object function—even in the same sentence!

The pizza ate the pizza.

This doesn't make much sense, but it is grammatical!



Linguist Llama on grammaticality versus sense-making

Can you identify the **subject** and **object NPs** in each of the following?

The pizza was delicious.

I ate the pizza.

Ugly ducklings swim quickly.

I love ugly ducklings.

My coffee cup is empty.

I should fill my coffee cup.

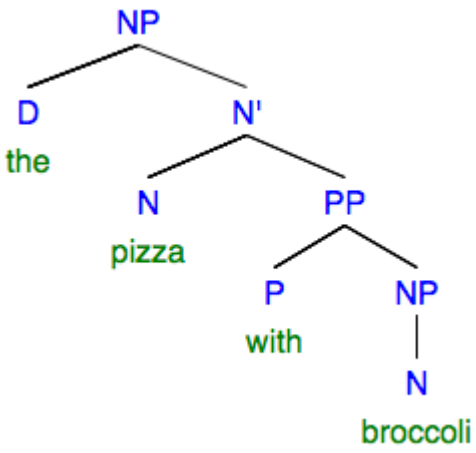
Back to *I ate the pizza with broccoli*. Let's look *inside* that VP, specifically inside the NP, *the pizza with broccoli*.

zooming gif:

zooming in to the pizza with broccoli

We have four different words. If we break it down into its internal structure, we have this tree:

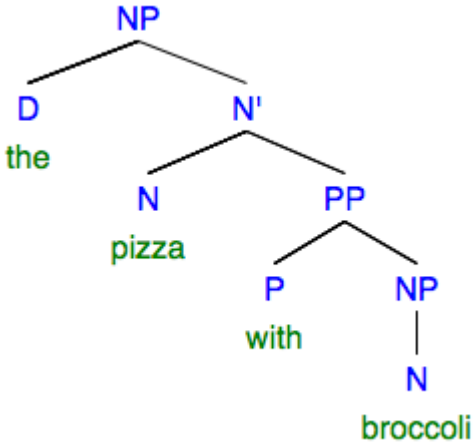
Break down the NP



What happened?! We went from a simple NP to an NP with a PP and NP, plus some weird N' thing, inside of it! Ack!

Don't panic. This is just another example of how language is structured **hierarchically,** as units within units. Sentences contain phrases, but phrases ALSO can contain other phrases.

Break down the NP



Start reading the tree from the bottom. What is the function of *broccoli*? It is the **object of the preposition** *with,* which connects *broccoli* to *pizza* in a way that means, roughly, "broccoli on pizza." The PP [with broccoli] functions as a **modifier** of the noun *pizza*. It could modify a different noun, like *salad*; it could also modify a

verb, like *ate*. In each case it is serving a **modification** function: it is not grammatically necessary, but adding information.

So we have already built up to [pizza with broccoli]. I have labeled this as an ***N'*** level in the tree. Pronounce this "N-bar" and **anytime you see the ' notation, think to yourself, "bar**." This notation is borrowed from theoretical syntax. A bar-level says, basically, "I'm a phrase in progress. There is more to me, so don't close me off yet!" (There's a joke in here somewhere, about a bar telling you not to cut it off...)

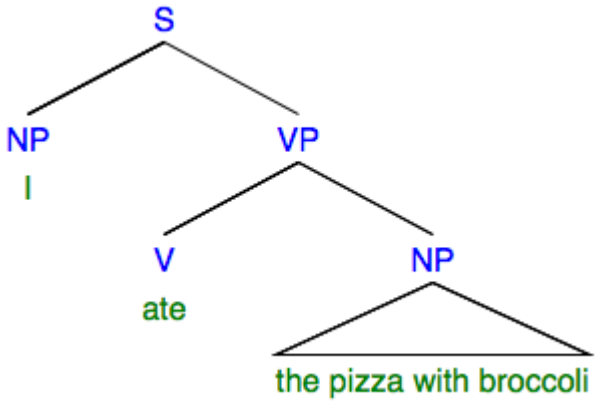
Think about it: [pizza with broccoli] is more than just a noun; it's a noun plus a PP modifier. And it *could* be a complete noun phrase, without the determiner *the*. It could function as an subject, or as an object:

> Pizza with broccoli is delicious.
>
> I love pizza with broccoli.

Yet, we know that NPs often *do* have determiners in them, and in this case our NP does have a determiner. Our N' level lets us show that [pizza with broccoli] is a unit, whose reference is being specified/restricted by the addition of the determiner *the*. [the pizza with broccoli] is a larger unit than [pizza with broccoli]. But importantly, they both have the properties of a noun phrase—that's why we label [pizza with broccoli] as N' rather than just ' or some other kind of phrase.

Hopefully you can start to see why the parts of [the broccoli with pizza] are labeled as they are in the tree.

There may be one part of the tree that still seems funky. Why is *broccoli* considered to be a whole NP, when it only consists of one word? This was also the case with the subject *I* in the original sentence:



Syntax tree: pizza with broccoli

Why is *I* labeled as an NP, when it is just one word? This brings us back to phrases as **functional** units. First let's consider the function of **object of preposition**. Check out all of the prepositional phrases below:

with broccoli

with some anchovies

with a five-cheese blend

There are three different units functioning as object of preposition:

broccoli

some anchovies

a five-cheese blend

You would probably have no problem identifying [some anchovies] and [a five-cheese blend] as noun phrases, since they each contain a clear noun head, *anchovies* and *blend*. What about [broccoli]? It is also a noun phrase! To understand how one word can be a noun phrase, we are going to need to introduce a more formal way of thinking about grammatical rules.

2. Phrase structure rules

Let's say that we wanted to describe the structure of prepositional phrases in English using a mathematical-type rule. Here are those three PPs again:

with broccoli

with some anchovies

with a five-cheese blend

If we wrote a rule based just on the words we see in each individual PP, we would actually need *three* different rules:

PP = P + N

PP = P + D + N

PP = P + D + Adj + N

Each of these rules says "Prepositional Phrase equals ...." In the first, it's the combination of a preposition and a noun. In the second, a preposition, determiner, and noun. Etc.

We can imagine **an infinite number** of such rules being possible! All of the PPs below would have yet different (and longer) rules:

for your favorite pizza that contains broccoli

for the pizza you got from the store down the street

for the pizza with the cheese from Italy which the magazine rated #1

Rules specific to each phrase we actually find in English are not useful for the purpose of understanding the *abstract patterns of English.* Imagine if we had to write an individual rule in order to understand each English sentence! What are we even doing here?!

Rather, we want **descriptive economy**: to be able to describe the maximum possible number of sentences with the least possible number of rules/patterns/structures. **Thinking about function at the phrase level—rather than the word level—is one way we accomplish descriptive economy**.

So, if I consider **object of preposition** to be a function served by NPs, I can account for all three of my seemingly-different PPs below:

with broccoli

with some anchovies

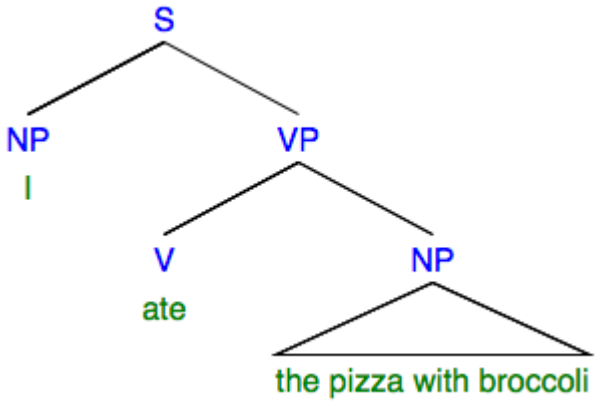
with a five-cheese blend

with just one rule:

PP = P + NP

The question then is only what is possible as part of an NP. We know that an NP has to have a **head**, which is a noun. Additionally, we know that NPs can have modifiers, such as adjectives; and, we know that NPs can have determiners. But an NP that consists *only of a noun* is no less good as an object of a preposition than a more complex NP with other stuff in it. One word or ten; if it's the object of a preposition, it's an NP.

Consider another function of NPs we've seen: subject. Back to our sentence.



Syntax tree: pizza with broccoli

I called *I* an NP. *I* is just a pronoun, but it has noun properties, and critically, it *functions* just like any other NP, in the subject position:

> I ate the pizza
>
> The students ate the pizza
>
> All the faculty members ate the pizza
>
> Everybody who was in Denney Hall ate the pizza

Again, calling all of these subjects NPs recognizes that a) they all have noun-like qualities, and b) they all function in the noun-like role of subject. I don't have to account for every single possible NP as a possible subject; I just say "Subjects are usually NPs." And then we can talk about what all can be in an NP. Neat, huh?

Here's an analogy I like to use. Imagine a three-course meal in a typical "American" restaurant. What do you call the three courses?

A meal from "the legendary White Spot restaurant" in Canada

The "appetizer, entrée, dessert" lineup is standard in many restaurants and in some traditions of American home cooking. Now, consider that you have a choice between the following two menus:

	Menu A	**Menu B**
Appetizer	cheese and bread	grilled shrimp
Entrée	linguine with red sauce and clams and broccoli	steak and asparagus
Dessert	chocolate cake and raspberries	vanilla ice cream

Menu A has an appetizer consisting of two items, while Menu B's appetizer contains just one. Menu A has an entrée with three items, while Menu B has an entrée with two items. And dessert is two items on Menu A, but just one item on Menu B.

When a course only has one item, you don't say "that's no longer an appetizer!" or "hey, ice cream isn't dessert unless it has apple pie with it!" You still consider shrimp a possible appetizer and ice cream a possible dessert, because they are serving those **functions within the meal**. Compare to phrases completing the functions in two different sentences:

	Sentence A	**Sentence B**
NP-subject	the committed students	they
verb	read	read
NP-object	the too-long chapter	it

Sentence A has a 3-word subject and a three-word object. In Sentence B, these functions are served by single-word entities. **But they are all phrases; phrases serve functions.**

To sum up, here are the important takeaways:

- A phrase serves a function in a larger phrase (or a sentence)
- A phrase may be instantiated by an infinite number of word combinations
- Every phrase has a head
- A phrase can consist solely of its head, therefore...
- A single word can be a phrase

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3. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 3, Advanced Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
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MODULE 4: CLAUSES

Module 4: Table of Contents

CLAUSES

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CLAUSES

Contents of Basic Unit:

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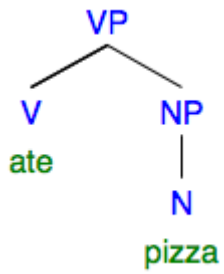
1. Basic structure of clauses

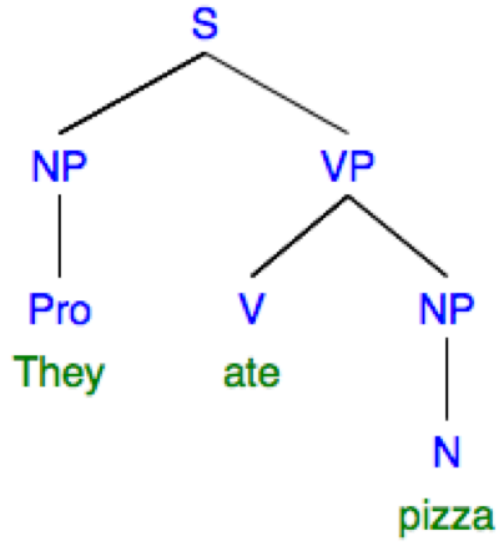
In Module 3, we introduced the basic components of sentences. In this module we will explore the basic structure of sentences in a little more depth.

Even more specifically, we will talk about the structure of **clauses**. In some ways, a **sentence** is the same as a **clause**. But the relationship is sort of like one between a square and a rectangle: a square is a rectangle (four flat sides at 90-degree angles), but not every rectangle is a square (four sides of equal length). Likewise, a sentence is a clause, but not every clause is a sentence.

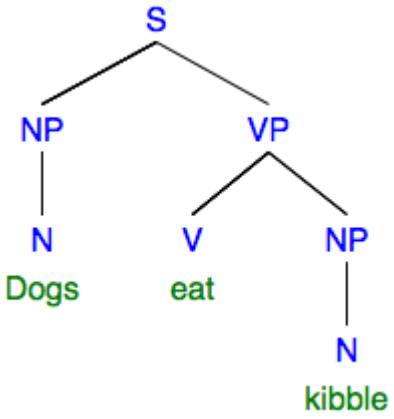
Clauses and sentences have roughly the same *internal structure*, but differ in terms of their relationship to *other structures*. We have learned that every sentence will have a verb, so every sentence will have a verb phrase. Let's see a VP as a syntax tree diagram:

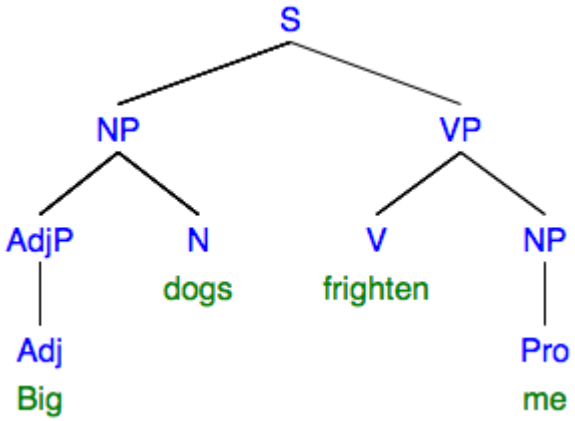


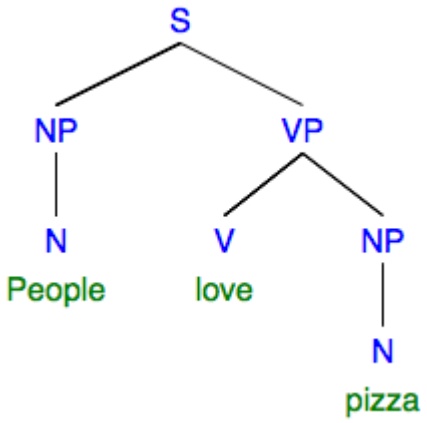
For this to be an independent *sentence*, what is missing? Recall our sentence functions from the last module...it's a subject! We'll place the subject—usually an NP, as we've seen—next to the VP, and say that these two units together form a sentence, an S.



This is the internal structure of every sentence, and of every clause: a **subject** and a **verb phrase**. The subject function is typically (but not always) served by an NP. The verb phrase always consists of a verb, and usually other things too (we'll get to that later). Here are examples of more sentences, using our tree diagrams.

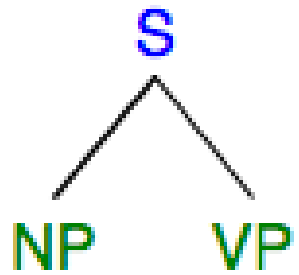




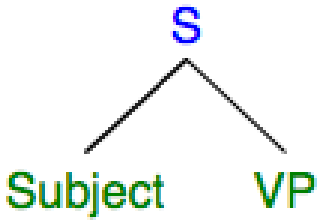


Note how these sentences ALL share the same internal structure at the first level of hierarchy below the S. That is, they ALL have an NP and a VP. What constitutes those NPs and VPs is different (i.e. the internal structure of the NPs and VPs differs), but at the level just below the S, they are identical:

S = NP + VP



S = Subject + VP



I will use the term **sentence** to refer to what is traditionally called an **independent clause**: a unit containing a subject and VP, and which "stands alone" to express a "complete thought." That is, it does not depend on any larger unit for its meaning to be interpretable. All of the examples above are sentences:

They ate pizza.

People love pizza.

Dogs eat kibble.

Big dogs frighten me.

By contrast, I will use the term **clause** to refer to what is traditionally called a **dependent clause**. A clause has the same internal structure of a sentence, but is *subordinate* to some larger structure: it is dependent on another unit in order to be interpretable. Consider the following clauses:

because they ate pizza

that they ate pizza

while they ate pizza

What do you notice about these? You may notice that each of them seems to *contain* what looks like a sentence, but with an additional word. Consider:

because they ate pizza
that they ate pizza
while they ate pizza

They're all the same! Yes! This is an example of a **clause**: there is a sentence—something with a subject (*they*) and a predicate (*ate pizza*)–but the "sentence" does not stand on its own. It has to be interpreted relative to a larger unit, such as...

They were full because they ate pizza
They could not believe that they ate pizza
They drank soda while they ate pizza

The unit *they ate pizza* contains a subject and a VP, but there is also more...and the bigger unit cannot stand on its own, so we won't call it a sentence. This is what we use the term *clause* for: a unit with the same internal structure as a sentence, but that does not stand on its own.

We will explore clauses more later on; for now we will focus on sentences. But just keep in mind as we discuss, that all of the *internal structural properties of sentences also apply to clauses*.

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2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 4, Basic Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 4: Advanced Unit

CLAUSES

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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1. Phrases and functions

In the remaining modules we will discuss in-depth each phrase type, including what its internal structure is like and what kinds of external structures it tends to be included within. In the rest of this module, we will preview those discussions by returning to the notion of phrases as *functional units* within a larger unit.

We have already seen two primary phrase functions within the larger unit of a sentence: **subject** and **verb phrase**.

Some people call the verb phrase the "predicate," a term you may have learned before. In our approach, I will use this term for something much more specific, introduced in Module 7.

But there is also a verb form of this word "predicate," which is useful for thinking about the *function of the VP*: the function of the verb phrase is to *predicate something* of the subject. That is, the verb phrase on whole ascribes some property, event, state of being, action, or quality to the subject. We will talk much more about *predication* in Module 7.

As we have seen, the subject is prototypically an NP. So what about all of the other types of phrases, then? What are their functions?

At a simple level, we have some idea already from the titles of two phrases: AdjP and AdvP. Adjective phrases "act like" adjectives, and adverb phrases "act like" adverbs. Let's look at some examples:

delicious pasta

super delicious pasta

super delicious green pasta

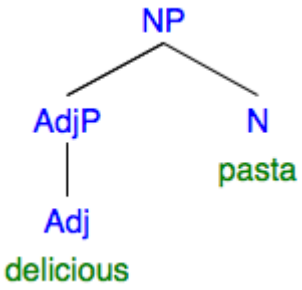
These are all examples of noun phrases; see how they could all serve as the subject of a sentence:

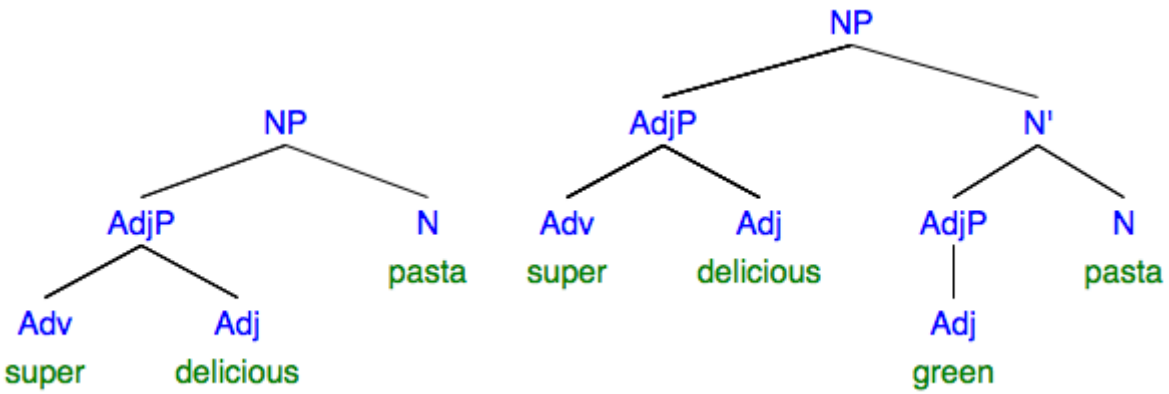
Delicious pasta is on the menu.

Super delicious pasta is the restaurant's specialty.

Super delicious green pasta sounds weird.

Yet each NP has a different internal structure, and they all include adjective phrases. Check out these trees:





In 1, *delicious* modifies the noun, *pasta,* and together they constitute an NP.

In 2, *super* is an adverb that modifies the adjective *delicious*, and together they form an AdjP, which in turn modifies the noun, *pasta*, to form an NP.

In 3, *green* modifies the noun, *pasta*; the AdjP *super delicious* modifies the unit *green pasta* (we are calling this intermediate unit an N' – remember?), and together they all form an NP.

So here we see all three different AdjPs all functioning to modify nouns—which is what we already learned that adjectives do.

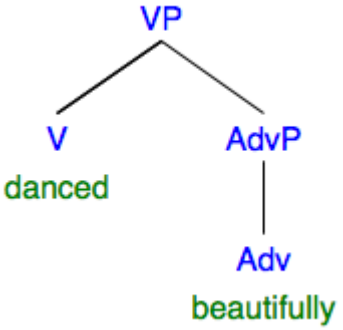
Let's also explore **adverb phrases**. Consider the following verb phrases:

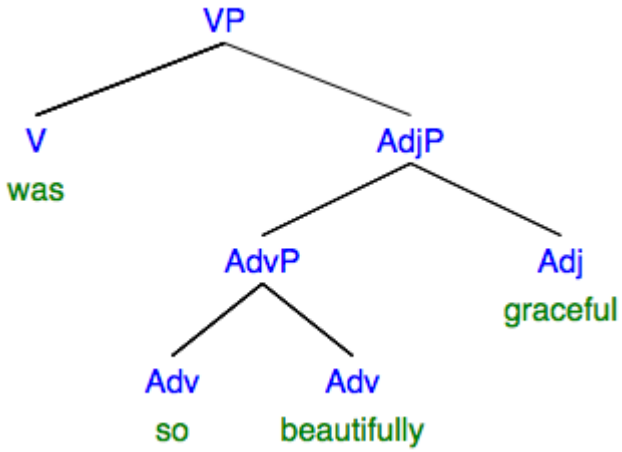
danced beautifully

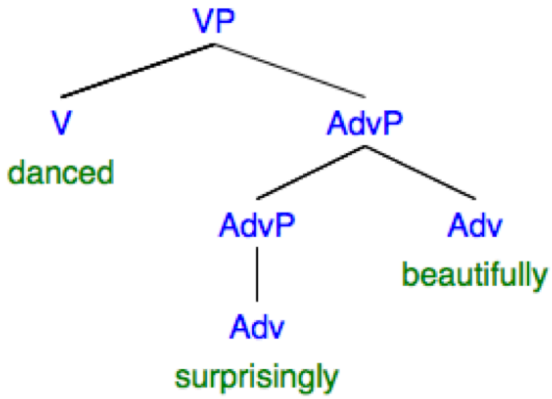
danced surprisingly beautifully

was so beautifully graceful

Recall the functions of adverbs: modifying verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Here we have adverb phrases doing the same thing. Check out the trees. What do you think each AdvP is functioning as?







In 1, *beautifully* modifies the verb, *danced*. It tells "how." The AdvP is part of the VP.

In 2, *so* modifies the adverb *beautifully,* and *so beautifully* modifies the verb *danced*. The AdvP is still part of the VP.

In 3, *so beautifully* modifies the adjective, *graceful,* and is part of the AdjP.

So, just like adverbs, AdvPs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

Note that adverbs being modified by other adverbs are often modified by a sub-set of adverbs called *degree adverbs*. Degree adverbs cannot be the heads of an AdvP and so I never call them an AdvP phrase on their own (we could label them "deg" if we wanted to).

*She was gracefully very

*She danced incredibly really

Prepositional phrases are interesting. Think for a second: what was our definition of "preposition"?

"**Prepositions** introduce nouns or noun phrases into a larger phrase or sentence, to modify another unit."

Prepositional phrases are *usually* functioning as modifiers. Typically, they modify nouns or noun phrases (like AdjPs do), or they modify verbs or verb phrases (like AdvPs do). Consider the following:

super delicious pasta

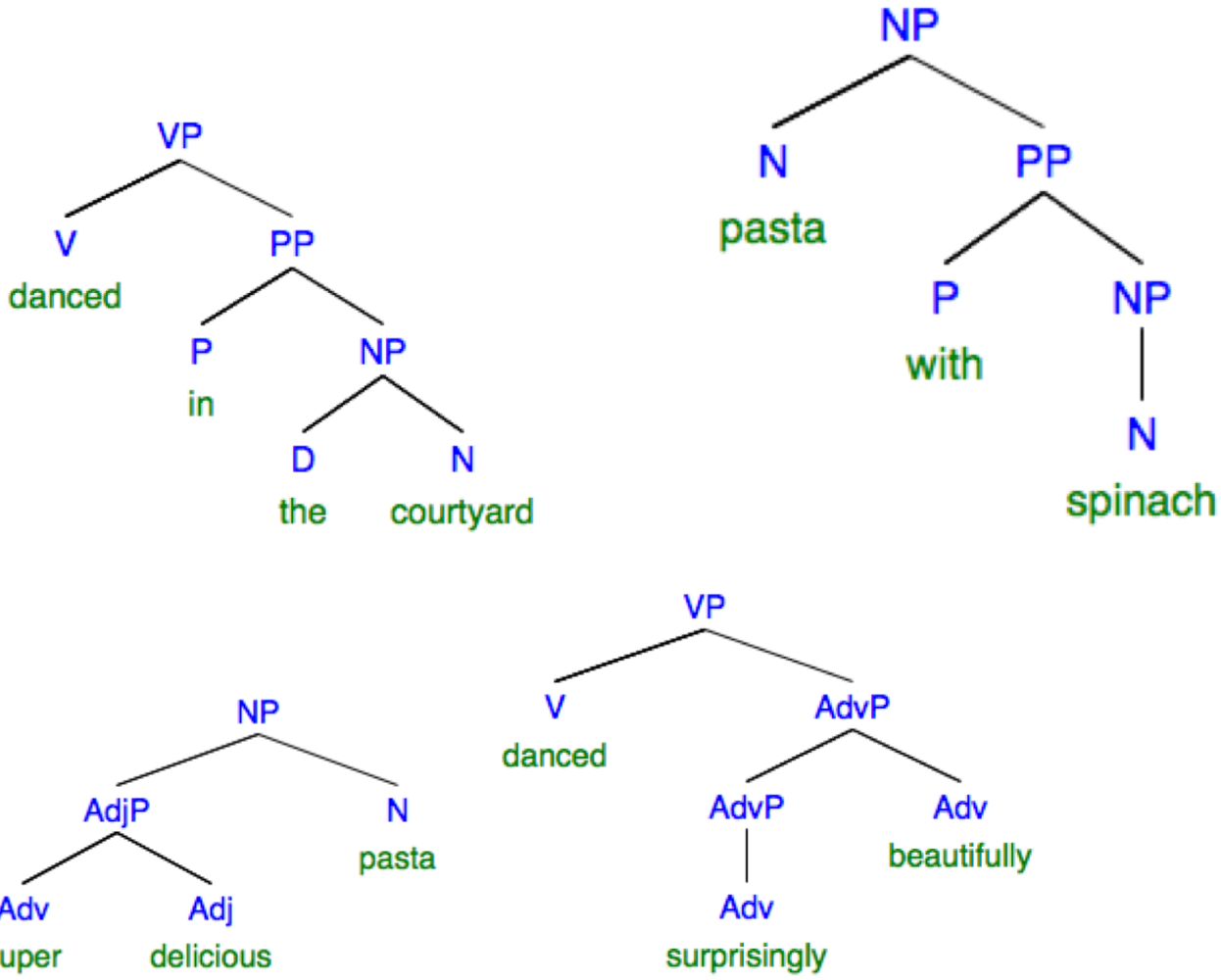
pasta with spinach

The PP *with spinach* functions to modify *pasta*, just like *super delicious* functions to modify *pasta*. Here, the PP has an **adjectival function**: modifying a noun, and constituting part of the noun phrase. Likewise:

danced surprisingly beautifully

danced in the courtyard

The PP *in the courtyard* functions to modify *danced*, just like *surprisingly beautiful* functions to modify *dance*. Here, the PP has an **adverbial function**: modifying a verb, and constituting part of the verb phrase. Here are the tree diagrams for each of these phrases.



In this module we introduced some basic functions that phrases play in sentences: subject, verb phrase, and adjectival, adverbial. Subject is usually an NP. Adjectival function is often served by AdjP or PP. Adverbial function is often served by AdvP or PP.

I say “usually” and “often” because as we’ll see in future modules, things are slightly more complicated than this. But if you think in terms of these basic functions, it will be easier to extrapolate to different phrase types fulfilling them, later on.

2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 4, Advanced Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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MODULE 5: NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUFF

Module 5: Table of Contents

NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUFF

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Module 5: Basic Unit

NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUFF

Contents of Basic Unit:

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1. Sub-categories of nouns

By now, you should feel comfortable with the basics of what a *noun* is. In this module we'll explore some of the more complex features of nouns, adjectives–which function as noun modifiers, and some of the other grammatical elements that relate closely to nouns.

One way of identifying a noun, as you've seen, is that it can serve the *subject* (casually, the *topic*) function of a sentence. One trick for this is to use the frame "_____ is/are good." (You could substitute another adjective for *good*.)

> Dogs are good.
>
> Rainbows are great.
>
> Columbus is good.
>
> Water is great.

However, this frame doesn't *exactly* work in every case, because some nouns—alone, by themselves—don't make grammatical subjects.

> *Dog is good.
>
> *Rainbow is good.

*Child is good.

*Noun is good.

What do you notice about all three of these examples? These are all **singular nouns**. What would make each of these sentences grammatical? Let's try:

That dog is good.

Any rainbow is good.

My child is good.

The noun is good.

Adding a **determiner** to the noun "fixes" the subjects. But what about the previous examples, where *Columbus* and *water* were fine subjects on their own? Consider also the following:

Jazz is good.

Tofu is good.

Music is good.

Food is good.

There is some grammatical difference between a singular noun like *dog* and a singular noun like *jazz*. Let's turn to some visual aids to sort this out. How would you label these pictures?

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I bet you labeled the first set DOGS and DOG. One shows multiple *dogs* and the other shows a single *dog*, right?

But what about the second set? I bet you labeled the two pictures the same: TOFU. You may have put a phrase in each case: something like, BLOCK OF TOFU and PIECES OF TOFU, or maybe TOFU and TOFU SLICES. But I bet that you did NOT write TOFUS, with a plural {-s} morpheme. Why does *dog* get the {-s} morpheme but *tofu* doesn't?

It's because *tofu* is not a noun that typically has a plural usage; rather, the singular form is used in all cases. Similarly, we don't say *jazzes* to refer to multiple jazz songs or styles; and we don't say *beefs* to refer to multiple pieces of beef.

The words *tofu, jazz,* and *beef* are all **mass nouns**, a type of **noncount noun**: nouns that do not represent countable items. Often these are nouns that refer to a super-set of a smaller set, i.e. a more general concept. For instance, *beef* encompasses all meat that comes from cows, whether it's in the form of a burger/burgers, hot dog/hot dogs, or steak/steaks. Likewise, *jazz* encompasses all instances of music (or dance) that has the quality of being jazzy.

Keywords

- **mass nouns / noncount nouns**: nouns that generally do not have plural forms because their reference cannot be divided into individual units

Many nouns have both count and noncount senses. You will notice that in the count sense, they are ungrammatical without a determiner. In the noncount sense, they are grammatical without a determiner.

noncount: Coffee is necessary.

count: *Coffee is the one I wanted.

noncount: Business is booming.

count: *Business is the best one in the neighborhood.

noncount: War is evil.

count: *War was the deadliest.

Each starred sentence requires us to interpret the subject as something specific, not general—as an instance of a concept, not the category of the concept. If we stick in a determiner in each case, we get something grammatical:

That coffee is the one I wanted.

That business is the best one in the neighborhood.

That war was the deadliest.

Note that we can typically come up with occasions to use the plural forms of these nouns too, though:

I drank five coffees.

The neighborhood has many new businesses.

Wars are bad.

So we've just discovered one of the rules of English noun phrases: **a singular count noun requires a determiner**.

Note that it isn't the inverse: it isn't that noncount nouns *can't* have determiners. They often do! However, some determiners (specifically quantifiers) that are grammatical with noncount nouns are ungrammatical with count nouns, and vice versa. Check it:

Some coffee was brewing.

Some coffees were brewing.

BUT

Little coffee was brewing.

*Little coffees were brewing. (means something different)

I've prepared a little experiment to elicit your intuitions about some of this. Take the experiment before moving ahead in the reading!

CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE EXPERIMENT!

DID YOU TAKE THE EXPERIMENT YET?!?!?!

There is one type of noncount noun that typically cannot take a determiner at all, however: **proper nouns**. Any of these would probably seem weird:

*The Columbus is a nice city.

*That Miles Davis was an incredible musician.

*A Michelle Obama is a good dancer.

*The The Ohio State University is the best damn school in the land.

Proper nouns inherently represent concepts of which there is one and only one instance. Even this rule is not 100% followed, however: we can think of rhetorical circumstances where using a determiner with a proper noun does make sense...

My Columbus is better than your Columbus.

This Thanksgiving was better than last Thanksgiving.

Everyone should have a Justin Timberlake in their life.

We've just discovered some rules related to the internal structure of noun phrases. Now try to build some noun phrases for yourself, before we move on.

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Make Some Noun Phrases!

2. Determiners

We just discussed a lot about determiners as they are relevant to different noun sub-categories. But back up: What is the function of determiners, actually? They restrict or specify the reference of the noun. Let's look a little more closely at what this means.

Go back to 2017, when Beyoncé gave birth to her twins. Now, imagine a person who does not know that Beyoncé had been pregnant at all, let alone with twins. Let's call this person *Becky*. Consider the following (hypothetical) exchanges between me and Becky:

Lauren: Beyoncé had twins.

Becky: Good for her.

Lauren: Beyoncé had the twins.

Becky: Oh? I didn't realize she was pregnant.

Why does the simple presence of a determiner *the* in the second version of my statement change Becky's response?

Beyoncé had twins.

Beyoncé had the twins.

The addition of *the* causes you to interpret the twins in question as being a specific set—a set that Becky is assumed to already know about. But Beyoncé's pregnancy is not already known by Becky, so Becky seems somewhat surprised: "the twins" presumes that Becky knows already *which twins*, when in fact she did not previously know there were any twins at all.

This difference between **new** and **old information** is part of what drives the use of different determiners.

The **definite determiner** *the* introduces old—already known—information, whereas the **indefinite determiner** *a/an* can introduce new information:

OLD INFORMATION – DEFINITE DETERMINER

Becky: Beyoncé just released the new album.

Lauren: YES! I've been waiting!

NEW INFORMATION – INDEFINITE DETERMINER

Becky: Beyoncé has a new album out.

Lauren: Cool, I didn't know she was working in the studio again.

Another referential difference signaled by determiners is **proximity**: whether the item in question is closer to or further away from the speaker. Consider:

I love this song by 21 Pilots.

I love that song by 21 Pilots.

In both cases, it is assumed that the speaker and listener are both already familiar with the song–it's old information. What is the difference between *this* song and *that* song?

This song means the song playing *right now*, whereas *that song* probably means a song not currently playing. Metaphorically, *this song* is closer to the speaker, whereas *that song* is farther away (here, in time, not physical distance). This (!) class of pronouns is called **demonstratives**: *this/these* are the **proximal** demonstratives; *that/those* are the **distal** demonstratives.

You might have noticed that these (darnit, I can't stop!) determiners are also sometimes used without a noun at all:

I love these.

That is mine.

THIS.

Indeed, many of the words that function as determiners (with a noun, as part of a noun phrase) can also function as pronouns (occurring independently). In these cases, the pronoun is the head of the noun phrase–and is the complete noun phrase, as we've already seen. Identify which pronouns are pronouns versus determiners in the following examples:

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3. Adjectives

We know that a noun phrase must have a **head**. We know that it could also have a determiner (and there are lots of different kinds of those). Another major lexical category that relates to nouns is **adjectives**. An adjective modifies a noun by attributing some property or quality to it. Consider the following:

the good hair

my best friend

his favorite animal

some delicious pizza

Can you identify a pattern for the order of determiners, adjectives, and nouns when they all occur together in a noun phrase? Why are the following ungrammatical?

*good the hair

*friend best my

*favorite animal his

*some pizza delicious

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Write-a-Rule Activity

Adjectives occasionally come after a noun instead of before; these can sound poetic in Modern English:

a story long-forgotten

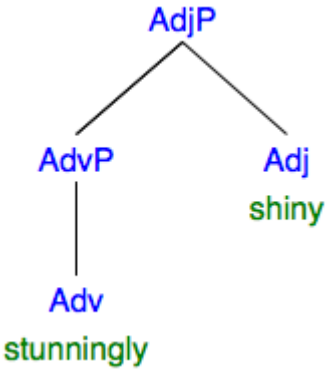
a smell so sweet

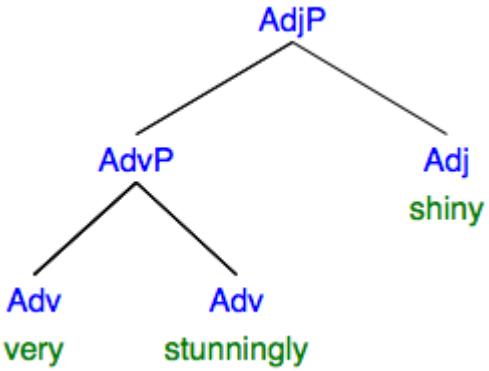
with hair brown and eyes blue

melodies pure and true

Remember too, that adjectives themselves head adjective phrases (AdjPs). So within an NP, when there is an adjective, there is actually an **AdjP**, which **functions to modify the noun**. What is the internal structure of

an AdjP? It could be just an adjective, or it could be an adjective modified by something else, like an AdvP (an adverb plus…). Here are some examples of AdjPs, with growing complexity:





Label the following tree! (And bring any questions you have about it to class with you.)

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4. Prepositional Phrases

A final element (in addition to determiners and adjective phrases) that often modifies nouns is a **prepositional phrase**. Because it has many different functions, we will discuss it in several of our modules. Prepositional phrases relate to nouns in two ways: internally and externally.

Internally, the composition of a prepositional phrase is always a **preposition plus a noun phrase** (which is called the **object of the preposition,** as you already know). Here is the "Schoolhouse Rocks!" description of "prepositions":

> Nine or ten of them
> Do most all of the work
> **Of, on, to, with, in, from**
> **By, for, at, over, across**
> And many others do their jobs,
> Which is simply to connect
> Their noun or pronoun object
> To some other word in the sentence.

Can you spot the mistake in this video?!

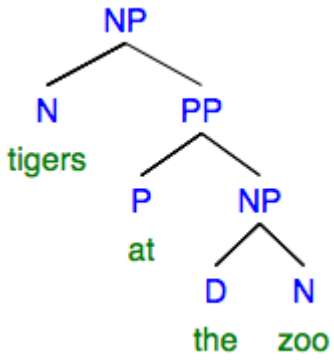
I want to rephrase this a bit for more accuracy: prepositions "express a relationship between their noun phrase object and another word or phrase." Consider the following, from Module 3:

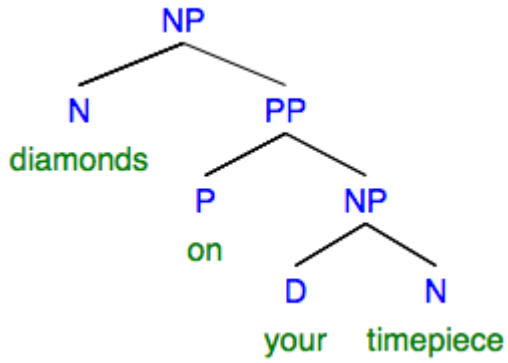
> ducklings **in** the pond
>
> ballerinas **from** the company
>
> diamonds **on** your timepiece
>
> tigers **at** the zoo

In (a), *in* connects *the pond* to *ducklings*, specifying a relationship between them. In (b), *from* connects *the company* to *ballerinas*, specifying a relationship between them. And so on.

Externally, as the above examples show, one of the functions of a PP is to modify a noun, forming a larger noun phrase—just like adjectives do. So *in the pond* attributes a property or state to *ducklings*; *on your timepiece* attributes a property or state to *diamonds*, and so on.

A PP modifying a noun will almost always come after the noun, as in the above cases. Here are two of the above phrase structure trees:





Can you draw trees for the remaining two NPs from above the above list? *From the company* and *in the pond*. Try it!

5. Conjunctions

The final element whose relation to nouns I want to discuss is (coordinating) **conjunctions**. They can join two nouns or two noun phrases together, just as they can do with every other kind of word and phrase.

I need sugar and flour.

I need some sugar and some flour.

I need sugar from the top shelf and flour from the bottom shelf.

We won't worry too much about drawing trees when it comes to coordinating conjunctions. Phew, right?!

To conclude...put these pieces together and we have *most of* the components of NPs. Can you identify each element of each NP below? First, label each word. Then, draw the tree for each full NP. **Bring your responses to class!**

computer

a computer

my old computer

my new computer from Apple

6. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 5, Basic Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 5: Advanced Unit

NOUNS, ADJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUFF

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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1. Thinking through complex NPs

We've now seen **noun phrases** with several different kinds of internal constituents: nouns, pronouns, determiners, adjectives, and prepositional phrases. Let's use this knowledge to think through the structure of some more complex NPs. Consider the following:

> their first draft of the bill about healthcare

How do you think you would draw a tree for this NP? This question is really: How would you analyze the relationships between all of the elements inside of this large NP?

It's always good to start with labeling the words in a phrase (or sentence). Fill in the blanks before proceeding:

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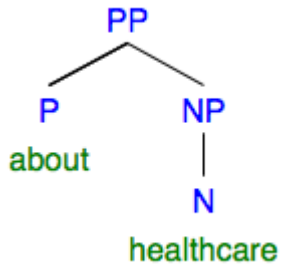
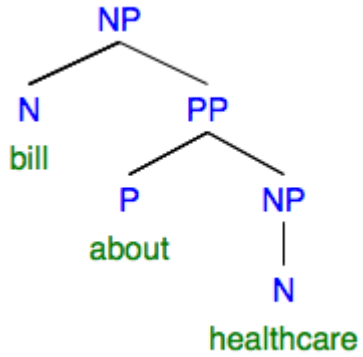
Now let's start to think about the internal structure of the NP. Given how many words there are, some of them probably form smaller phrases—perhaps NPs within the larger NP. Notably, there are two prepositions: *of* and *about*. What does this mean? If you said, "there are also two prepositional phrases," you are correct!

Let's start on the right-most side of the phrase: English tends to "add things on" in a leftward fashion, with the head of the phrase on the right–though this is NOT always true, as we've already seen with PPs where the head is the leftmost item. But it often helps to start on the right side.

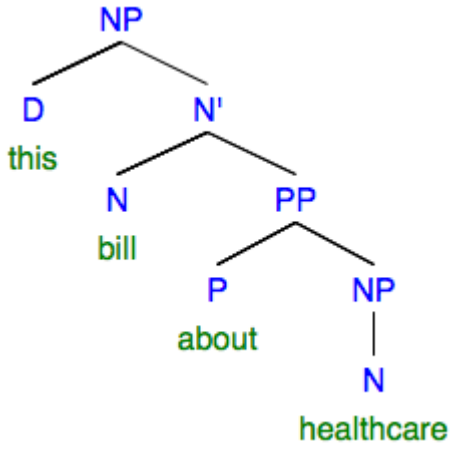
Since *about* is a preposition, you know that it will be the head of a PP. What is its object? The noun *healthcare*. This gives us:



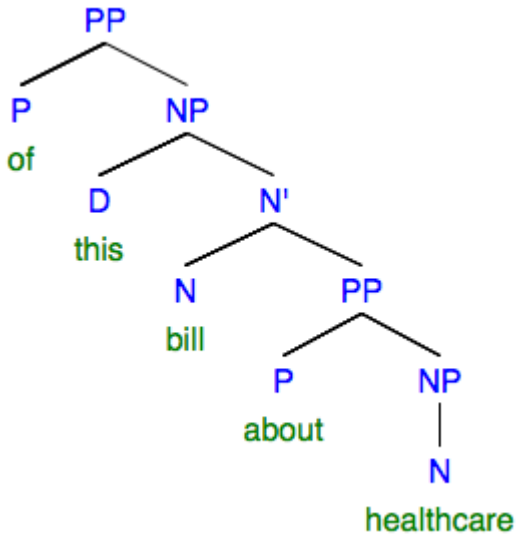
Now, if you know that *about healthcare* is a PP, you also know that it must be "connected" to some other element in the phrase. What does *about healthcare* have a relationship to? It tells which *bill* is being discussed: we are talking about a *bill about healthcare*. So we can attach this PP to the head noun *bill* and have:



However, this NP is actually not finished yet: *which* bill about healthcare? THIS bill about healthcare. There is a determiner, *this*. To accommodate this we can use our N' (N-bar) notation for an intermediate phrase level:



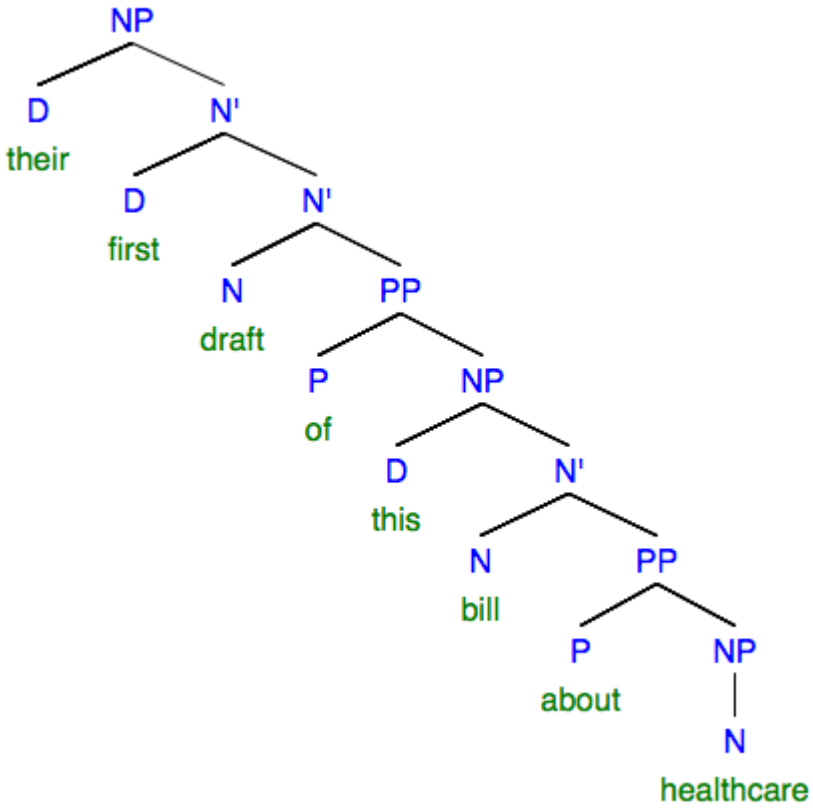
We're halfway there! What is the relationship of *their first draft of* to *this bill about healthcare*? Well, *of* is a preposition, therefore it should be the head of a PP. What is its object? The NP *this bill about healthcare*! Make the tree:



Now, what is this PP connecting to? I'll go ahead and draw out the rest of the phrase for you, with two options. What's the difference in what these two trees are "saying" about the structure of this phrase?

Here's the first tree:

Option 1



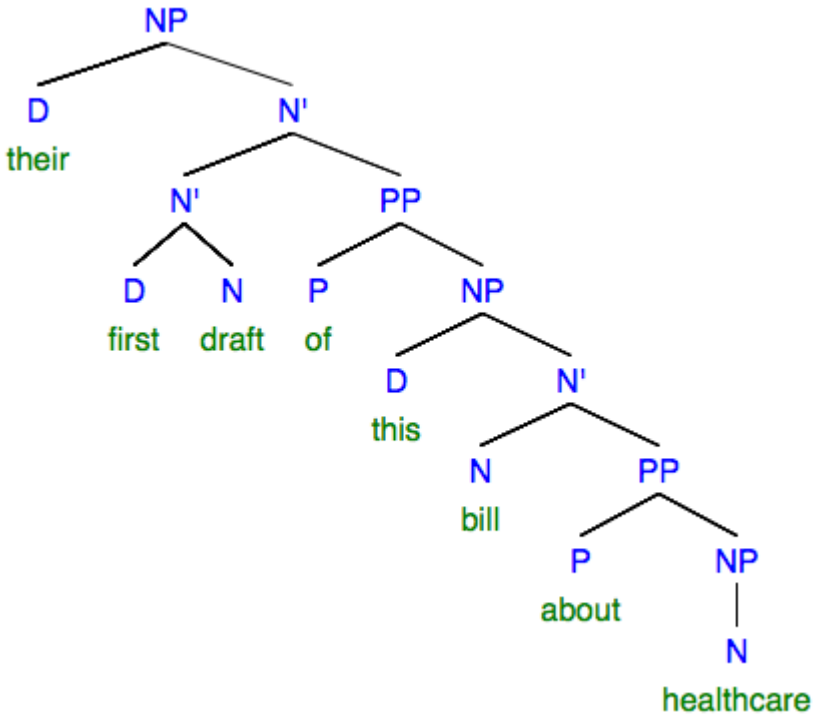
In this case, we are saying there's a *draft of this bill about healthcare*; it's the *first* of such drafts; and, it's *their* first draft of the bill.

One thing you might question with this would be whether [draft of this bill about healthcare] is really the right

unit to be specified by *first*. Is it the [first] [draft of this bill about healthcare], or is it the [first draft] [of this bill about healthcare]? I think either of these is a sensible position; it depends on how you think your brain works!

If you prefer the latter, then go with this tree:

Option 2



You should be able to understand and explain the differing internal structures being claimed by these two trees.

Try your hand at these phrases. Draw the trees!

his box-office smash movie about aliens

behind the scenes of the hit film of the summer

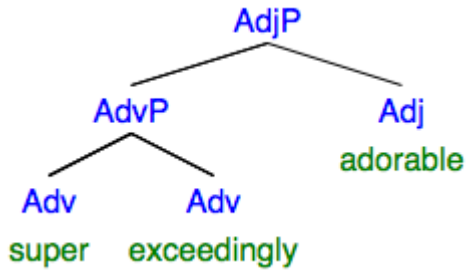
These are partly complex because of the presence of one or more PPs within the NP.

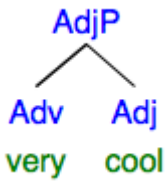
But there are other ways in which an NP can be more complex. What's going on with each of these?

my very cool toddler

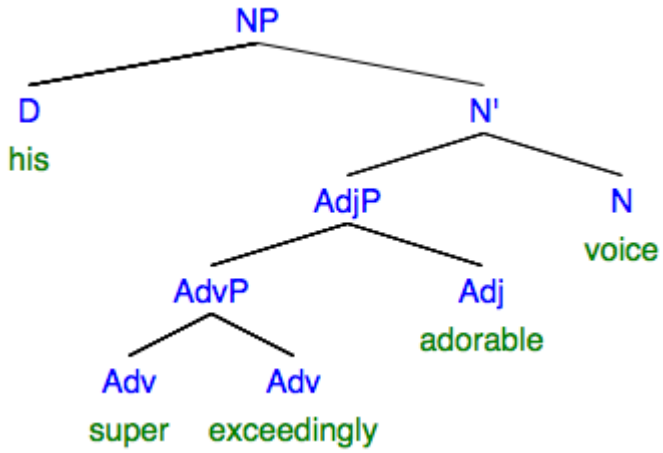
super exceedingly adorable voice

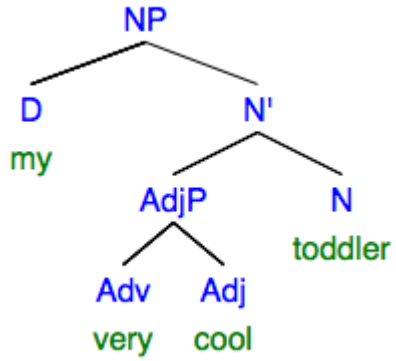
Each of the two above phrases contains not just an adjective, but additionally an adverb modifying the adjective: [very cool] and [super exceedingly adorable]. We've seen AdjPs like this before, of course! I would draw these adjective phrases as so:





And these would then each modify their head nouns; *toddler* and *voice*:





One other way that NPs could be more complex is by the presence of a whole clause inside! In each of the following, the underlined constitutes one NP.

I loved the song he wrote for me.

Songs that have a catchy melody are irresistible.

It's always the ones you least expect to like that you eventually end up loving.

We'll talk more about these kinds of things later!

2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 5, Advanced Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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MODULE 6: VERBS AND RELATED STUFF

Module 6: Table of Contents

VERBS AND RELATED STUFF

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Module 6: Basic Unit

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1. Re-defining ‘verb’

Nouns are one primary category of content words, to which **adjectives** (and adjectivals) relate functionally. The other primary category is **verbs**. In this short unit we’ll explore a little more about verbs and related things.

As you know by now, **verb phrases are required in a sentence (clause), and a verb phrase always has a verb as its head**. We often casually refer to verbs as “action words” or “words describing an activity,” but this isn’t really accurate. What is the “action” described by the following verbs?

Martin is great.

The movie seems interesting.

I believe you.

This tastes delicious.

She persists.

Here are a few alternative definitions of a verb, rooted in its function rather than its reference:

a) a word that takes the {-s}, {-ed}, {-ing}, and {-en} inflection

b) the head of a verb phrase

c) the core of a sentence (clause)

d) something that needs a subject and predicates something of that subject

We discussed (a) all the way back in our unit on morphology, but it’s worth recalling the difference here between the verb inflections. But here’s a handy trick to simplify all this: if there is an {-ing} form of a word, it is a verb! English shows variation in its other inflections, but not this one. So **every verb has a present participle {-ing} form** which is expressed as *–ing*.

Some examples of verbs and their inflections are given below. Remember, regular verbs have {-ed} ending for

both their past tense and past participle forms, but irregular verbs use different morphological forms. Which of the verbs below are **regular** and which are **irregular**?

Bare (present tense, non-third person singular; present tense plural; infinitive)	**Present tense, third-person singular**	**Past tense**	**Present participle**	**Past participle**
type	types	typed	typing	typed
listen	listens	listened	listening	listened
fall	falls	fell	falling	fallen
behave	behaves	behaved	behaving	behaved
know	knows	knew	knowing	known
catch	catches	caught	catching	caught

Here are some examples of these verbs in context. For practice, name the verb inflection in each one.

I typed the paper last night.

I have typed five papers this year.

The senator listens to her constituents.

The senator is listening to their concerns right now.

I falled! (just kidding; this is what my toddler says)

I fell off the seat.

Help, I'm falling!

The children behave like children.

They had behaved like babies when they were smaller.

I knew it all along.

I have always known it.

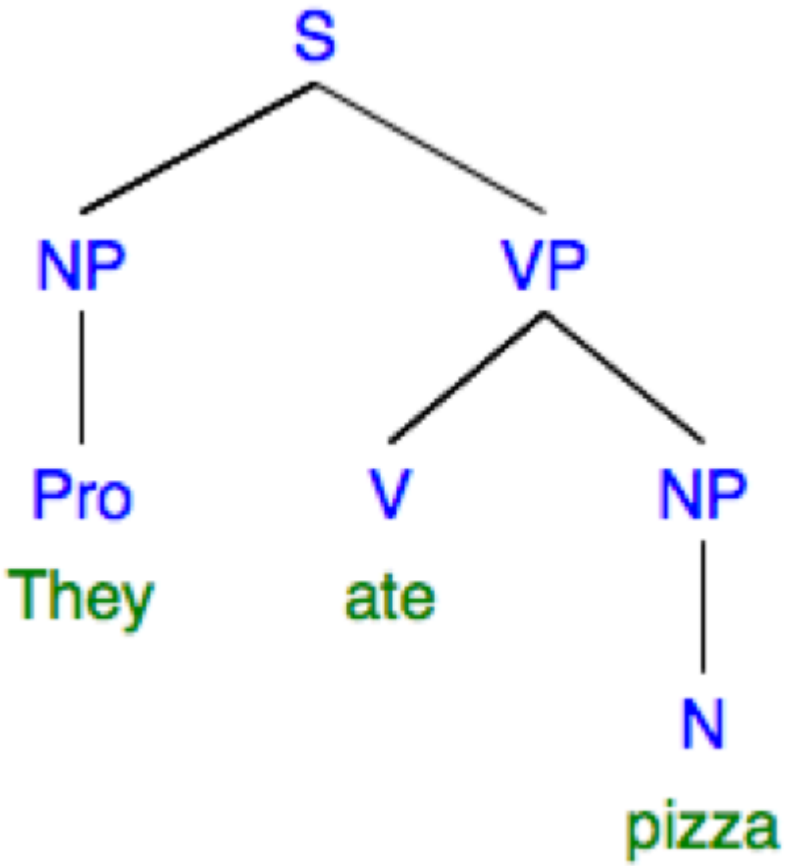
He caught the ball.

He is catching the ball!

He has caught the ball.

We will talk more about the differences in *grammatical meaning* when these different verb inflections are used, in Module 8.

The next two definitions, (b) and (c), are related: verbs are the head of a verb phrase, and the core of a sentence. In our example below from a previous module, *ate* is the head of the verb phrase *ate pizza:*



What do I mean by the "core of a sentence (clause)?" Well, without the verb *ate*, there would be no sentence at all. We would have *they* and *pizza*, but no way to understand the relationship between these two nouns. (It is possible that you could interpret "They pizza" as meaning "They ARE pizza"—maybe it's Halloween!—that sentence is grammatical in African American English, for instance. But, if what I mean is "they ATE pizza," the only way to understand that is by the presence of the verb EAT.)

Consider other examples: what happens if you remove the verb?

She left.

I want more coffee.

He gave me the pastry.

The following are not sentences:

She.

I more coffee.

He me the pastry.

Without the verbs, there is no syntactic reason for the nouns. So you can think of the verb as providing the *reason for the nouns to be there in the first place*.

left

want

gave

From these "kernels" of meaning more syntactic requirements arise: *somebody* left; *somebody* wants *something*; *somebody* gave *something to someone*. In a sense, the presence of a verb creates a template to be filled in to create the rest of a sentence/clause. We will go way more in depth with this in the next module! But here consider the difference between having just a noun and just a verb.

Just a noun:

- Sharon
- President
- streams

Just a verb:

- walk
- voted
- swims

Sharon could be playing *lots* of different roles in a clause: it could be the subject, but it could also be part of the verb phrase, or the object of a preposition:

Sharon dances.

I like Sharon.

I talked to Sharon.

Likewise with *president* and *streams*:

President seems like a hard job.

I want to be President!

I can't wait to vote for President.

Streams are beautiful.

I like running through streams.

I love streams.

Now consider just the verbs. If we have *walk*, there must be someone/something to do the walking:

Lions walk.

I walk to school.

If we have *voted*, there must be someone who did the voting; there might also be someone they voted FOR:

I voted.

She voted for me.

And if we have only *swims*, there will at least be someone/something doing the swimming, and possibly something being swum:

My neighbor swims.

My dad swims a mile every morning.

These examples all show one thing: syntactically, verbs create the requirement for a subject. And some verbs create the requirement or expectation for other units of meaning to be present as well. This what I mean by verbs being the "core" of a sentence.

This brings us to our last definition of *verb*:

d) something that predicates something of the subject

We have already seen (d) in action: verbs create the requirement for a subject; and, the verb *says something about*—in fancier terms, *predicates something of*—the subject. This could be ascribing the subject a property, declaring a state of being of the subject, or—as we commonly think of it—naming "an action" being done by the subject.

I want to be really clear about what I mean in using the term "predicate" this way. Here is the Merriam-Webster definition of "predicate"–make sure to look at the noun AND verb definitions:

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Merriam-Webster definition of "predicate"

[When we are using the verb form, we pronounce the final syllable with a "long A" sound: "a verb pred-uh-KATES something of a subject." When we are using the noun form, we pronounce it with a "schwa" or "short I" sound: "that's the pred-uh-KIT."]

A verb *predicates* something of a subject. For instance:

(a) Lions walk.

(b) Sharon voted for Trump.

(c) Steve campaigned for Clinton.

(a) *walk* predicates *walking* of *lions*.

(b) *voted* predicates *voting* of *Sharon*.

(c) *campaigned* predicates *campaigning* of *Steve*.

And so on. You have to think a little abstractly to get to this way of understanding a sentence, I think, but it is crucial!

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2. More on adverbs

The remaining content word category, *adverbs*, has the primary function of modifying a verb, to change something about *how* we understand whatever is predicated by the verb.

Examples:

Lions walk slowly.

Sharon voted enthusiastically.

Steve campaigned tirelessly.

In what sense do these adverbs modify the verbs before them? *Slowly* describes HOW the walking occurs. *Enthusiastically* describes HOW the voting occurred. And *tirelessly* describes HOW Steve campaigned. Adverbs' most common function is to modify verbs. But wait—they might modify a whole verb phrase instead!

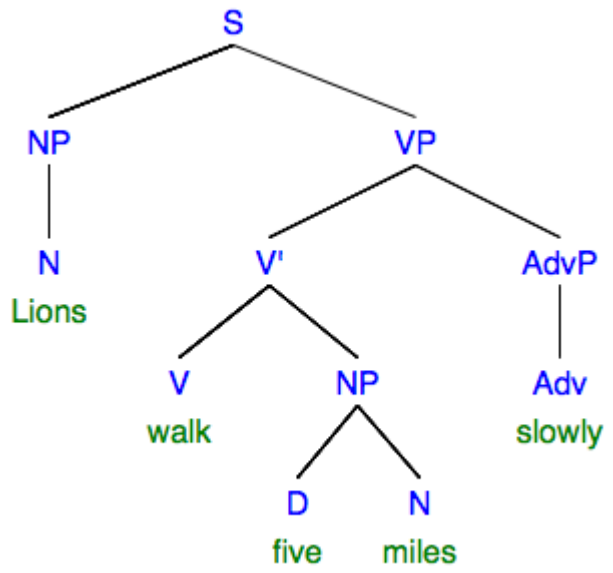
Lions walk five miles slowly.

Sharon voted for Trump enthusiastically.

Steve campaigned for Clinton tirelessly.

Now, *slowly* tells us not only how lions walk, but specifically how they walk five miles. *Enthusiastically* is not just how Sharon voted, but how she voted for Trump. And *tirelessly* is not just how Steve campaigned, but specifically how he campaigned for Clinton. Here, we say that the adverb modifies the verb phrase—yet it is also

part of the verb phrase! In our phrase structure trees, we can use our intermediate "bar" level of V' to note this relationship:

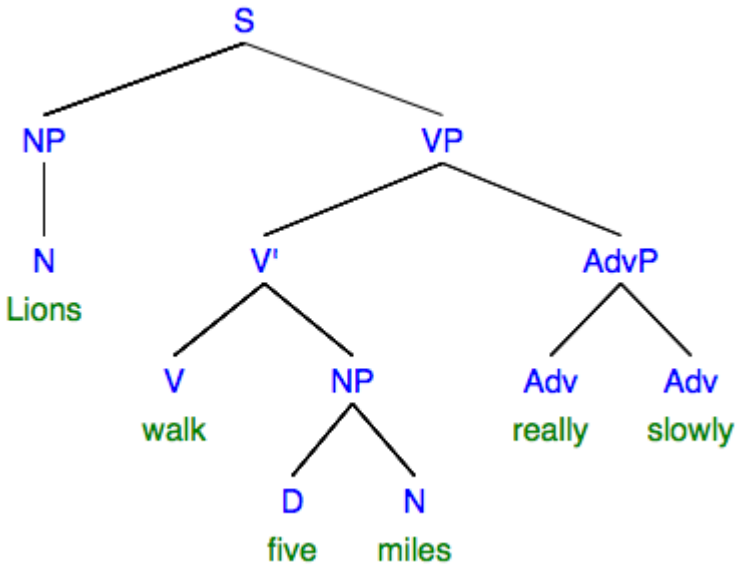


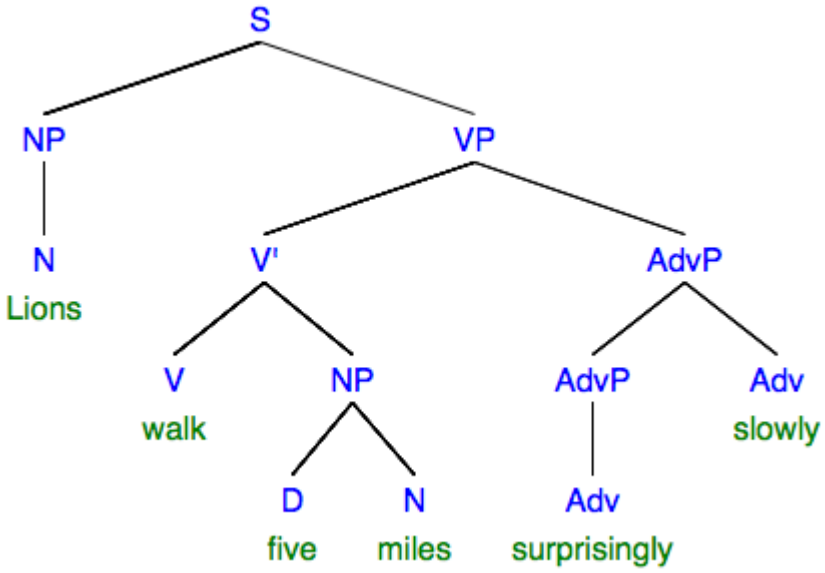
This means:

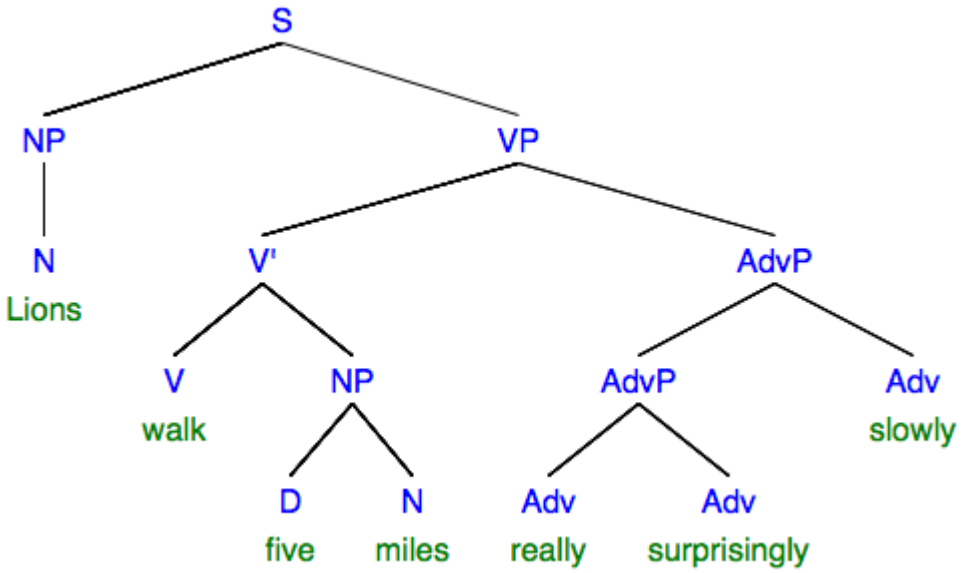
- *walking* is being predicated of *lions*
- *five miles* is what is being *walked*
- *slowly* is how *walk five miles* happens

Again, the V' ("V-bar") just says: *walk five miles* could be a complete verb phrase, but it is not yet, since there is an adverb phrase.

Now, why did I create an AdvP instead of just an Adv? Because **adverbs are heads of adverb phrases**, just like nouns are heads of noun phrases and adjectives are heads of adjective phrases. This adverb COULD be additionally modified by another adverb—either a content-ful adverb or a degree adverb. See if you can determine the reasoning behind the three trees below:


S
NP
VP
N
Lions
V'
AdvP
V
walk
NP
Adv
really
Adv
slowly
D
five
N
miles


S
NP
VP
N
Lions
V'
AdvP
V
walk
NP
AdvP
Adv
slowly
D
five
N
miles
Adv
surprisingly



Before class, use the Google form to enter three examples of Adverb Phrases you find "in the wild": an adverb modified by another adverb. (If I've returned HW2 to you by now, feel free to enter examples from your corpus searches.)

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Adverb Phrase Collection

3. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 6, Basic Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 6: Advanced Unit

Contents of Advanced Unit:

1. Adverbials

Just as we talked about *adjectives* and *adjectivals*—things that function like adjective phrases, in that they modify nouns or noun phrases—we can talk about *adverbs* and *adverbials*. We think of *adverbs* as single words that fit the definition of *adverb*: they modify verbs or adjectives, and they can be modified by degree adverbs; an AdvP has an adverb as its head. Some AdvPs:

quickly

surprisingly quick

really quickly

really surprisingly

What are *adverbials*, then? Phrases functioning adverbially, modifying a verb or verb phrase, or an adjective, by adding information about location, reason, manner, time, and so on. Often an adverbial is our old, multi-functional friend the prepositional phrase:

I walked with Sharon to class.

He ate pizza in the restaurant.

She voted at her polling location.

These prepositional phrases provide adverbial information, related to understanding the verb phrase. But importantly, none of these is *necessary* for the verb phrase or sentence to be grammatical. Instead–like regular AdvPs–they are "optional" or "extra." So removing them does not affect grammaticality (though of course it affects the meanings expressed):

I walked.

He ate pizza.

She voted.

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Noun phrases sometimes also function adverbially, especially to provide time or location information:

I walked home.

He ate pizza every day.

She only voted one time.

Words that seem at other times to be adjectives can also be used adverbially:

It was a fast car. (adjective)

She drove the car fast. (adverb)

In (a), *fast* is an adjective, modifying *car*. In (b), *fast* is an adverb, modifying *drive*. Sometimes adverbs like *fast* are called "flat adverbs"–because they lack the {-ly} characteristic of adverb morphology. And some people have prescriptive rules against them, but there is no good reason for such a rule! Really:

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Flat Adverbs

"Ask the Editor" at Merriam-Webster about flat adverbs.

Finally, a whole **clause** can function adverbially:

I walked with Sharon whenever we had class at the same time.

He ate the pizza because he was hungry.

She only voted to satisfy her mother.

We will deal with such **embedded clauses** later!

A final note: in all of the examples so far, adverbials have come at the end of a sentence. This need not be the case! In fact, one feature of adverbs and adverbials is that they often can be found in different parts of the sentence—highlighting the fact that they are "extra," not crucial to the overall structure:

Steve tirelessly campaigned.

Steve campaigned tirelessly.

Whenever we had class at the same time, I walked with Sharon.

I walked with Sharon whenever we had class at the same time.

Every day, he ate pizza.

He ate pizza every day.

2. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 6, Advanced Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit.

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MODULE 7: MEANING AND STRUCTURE OF/ IN VERB PHRASES

Module 7: Table of Contents

THE MEANING OF VERBS

Contents of Basic Unit:

Contents of Advanced Unit:

Module 7: Basic Unit

Contents of Basic Unit:

1. Predicates and arguments

By now you should be VERY familiar with the fact that verbs are an essential element of a sentence. In the last module we delved in a little bit to how verbs create the requirement for a subject, and they *predicate something of* that subject. This relates to the fact that every sentence must have a subject and verb phrase. In this chapter we will get a little more technical about what verbs do, and how verb phrases are structured. Much of the rest of the semester will be spent exploring different kinds of verbs and how they build differently-structured sentences.

We will begin by building on our understanding of **predication**.

First, let’s consider two different verbs: *cough* and *acknowledge*. What is the smallest, simplest sentence you might form with each of these verbs?

cough

acknowledge

Here are my sentences:

They cough.

They acknowledge me.

You may have gone even simpler and omitted the subject, to make commands:

Cough!

Acknowledge me!

But, in these commands–technically called **imperatives**–we say there is still a subject, it is just unexpressed: it's not just *anybody* who is being directed to cough or acknowledge; it is specifically the addressee ("you"). We can make this subject overt, and the meaning does not change:

You cough!

You acknowledge me!

Now, whether you included an overt subject in your sentences or not, I bet you did not come up with something like the following:

*They cough phlegm.

*They acknowledge.

These are (except in perhaps highly specific circumstances) not grammatical English sentences. Why?

While *cough* and *acknowledge* both need a subject, *they differ in their other semantic requirements*.

The meaning of cough requires just one entity: someone coughing.

The meaning of *acknowledge*, on the other hand, requires two entities: someone acknowledging, and someone being acknowledged.

There are many different ways that we can think formally about the requirements of different verbs, and some of them get extremely complicated (people spend years writing dissertations about single verbs). In this module I will introduce a simplified version of **predicate logic** to do the job, borrowing heavily from the notes of John Lawler, a now-retired and insanely smart friend of mine from the University of Michigan.

To understand the *structure* of sentences produced by different verbs, we will first be drilling down further into the *meanings* different verbs express. We'll then get back to thinking about how these meanings manifest in different structures. In other words, we'll start with an overview of the **semantics** of verb phrases, then get technical about their **syntax**,

In a simple declarative sentence (which is all we are going to worry about for now), the meaning expressed is a **proposition**. Consider the following:

Beyoncé birthed twins.

Taylor won her lawsuit.

Justin caused controversy.

The other Justin experienced a comeback.

Each of these sentences makes a proposition: a declaration about the state of the world.

Each of the above propositions consists of a *predicate* and two *arguments*.

You are already somewhat familiar with the notion of a **predicate**. **Argument** is a new term. It refers to the entities being predicated of.

You may have learned "predicate" as the term that refers to what I've been calling the "verb phrase": everything that isn't the subject. We are going to use the term in a more modern, theoretical way taken from formal logic: **the predicate asserts something of its argument(s).**

Let's list the **predicates** from the sentences above. They happen to all be verbs:

birth

won

caused

experienced

Though all of the example sentences above use past-tense verbs, I will begin writing predicates and arguments in SMALL CAPS and in their base (uninflected) forms. This is because we are reducing each sentence to what we call its **logical form**: the essential meanings expressed by a clause/sentence as it maps onto the "lexicon" of concepts in your mind.

Birth

Win

Cause

Experience

None of these verbs can form complete propositions on their own: they each need at least a subject. The subject is thus one **argument** of the predicate. But each of these predicates happens to take two *arguments*: a subject and an **object**. These arguments are all noun phrases, listed below:

Beyoncé birthed twins.

Birth: Beyoncé, twins

Taylor won her lawsuit.

Win: Taylor, her lawsuit

Justin caused controversy.

Cause: Justin, controversy

The other Justin experienced a comeback.

Experience: The other Justin, a comeback

To describe a sentence in its logical—or skeletal, as John Lawler puts it—form, we reduce every word to its basic morphology, and strip away non-essential items like determiners. An even more formal way to write these propositions' logical form is using parenthetical notation in the form of: **Predicate (Argument1,Argument2)**. Here is what our four sample propositions look like in this stripped-down, logical form:

Birth (Beyoncé, Twin)

Win (Taylor, Lawsuit)

Cause (Justin, Controversy)

Experience (Justin, Comeback)

By convention, the predicate goes on the outside and its arguments go in parentheses with the subject argument listed first. This basically says "here is the action and here are the entities involved in the action" (though, not all verbs refer to "actions" of course!).

Do you see how we are describing the proposition at a very abstract level? This idea of a sentence being a meaningful proposition, and a proposition consisting of a predicate and argument(s), is how we will understand the ***different types of predicates in English, and the different types of verb phrases they produce.***

2. Verbal predicates

Let's go back to our two verb examples from the beginning, and now consider them as predicates: **Cough** and **Acknowledge.** What do you think is the argument structure of these verbs?

Does Cough require one argument, or two (or more)?

Does Acknowledge require one argument, or two (or more)?

Recall our data from above, regarding what seems grammatical versus ungrammatical with these verbs:

They cough.

They acknowledge me.

*They cough phlegm.

*They acknowledge.

It seems that Cough wants one argument, while Acknowledge wants two. For example:

Cough (They)

Acknowledge (They, me)

What do you think the argument needs are of the following verbal predicates?

Chase

Sneeze

Spend

Give

English has three primary categories of verbal predicates, with three different argument requirements.

1. Verbs like Cough are one-argument predicates, which we'll call **intransitive verbs**.
    - *sleep, arrive, sneeze, jump, live, die*
2. Verbs like Acknowledge are two-argument predicates, which we'll call **transitive verbs**.
    - *kick, see, lift, help, scrape, bite*
3. Verbs like Give are three-argument predicates, which we'll call **ditransitive verbs**.
    - *buy, send, loan, cook, feed, offer*

3. Predicate nouns, adjectives, prepositions, and the copula

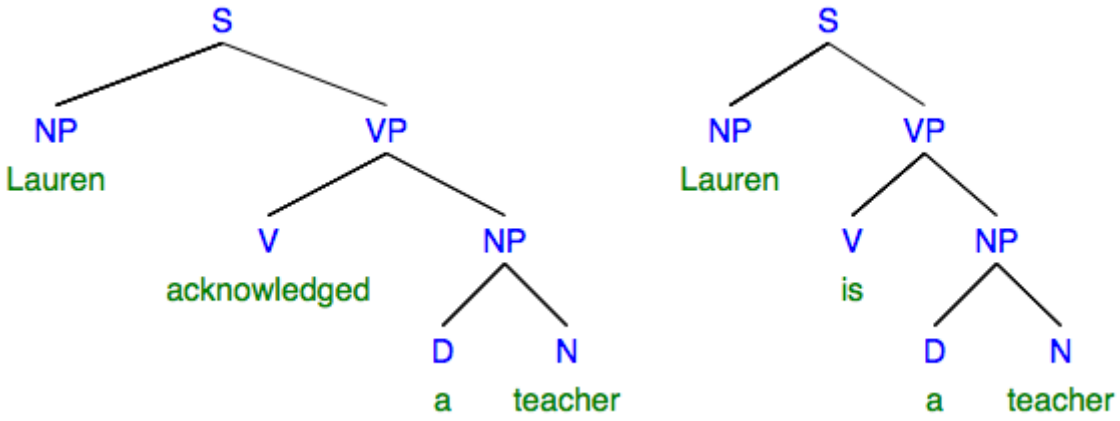
Verbs are not the only things that can function as predicates, asserting something about arguments. Nouns can also be predicates—and so can adjectives, and prepositional phrases. Consider the following sentences:

Lauren is a teacher.

The students were humans.

The book is in my office.

You'll notice that these sentences all contain the verb **BE**. This is the verb whose inflected forms include *is, were, are, am, been,* and so on. If we take a sentence with Acknowledge as its verb and a sentence with Be as its verb, their phrase structure trees might look identical in *structure*:



And yet, isn't the *meaning* of Be vastly different from the meaning of Acknowledge? Think here about the relationship between the subject NP, the verb, and the NP in the VP.

(a) Lauren acknowledged a teacher.

(b) Lauren is a teacher.

You can't really paraphrase (b) like you can (a): they have totally different relationships to the subject. In (a), Lauren is *doing something* to Teacher, while in (b), Lauren simply IS Teacher—the relationship is one of identity, not involvement or acting upon.

In (b), the quality *being a teacher* is what is predicated of *Lauren*. And it's really the noun Teacher that performs the predication, not the verb Be, which itself doesn't have much meaning. We call this a **predicate (or predicative) noun.** It will occur with the verb Be—known as a **copula**, or **copular verb** (*copula* comes from Latin and is cognate with *couple*; they share the sense of "connecting").

In traditional approaches to grammar, the copula is called a **linking verb**: it links the subject to the predicate. I may sometimes use this terminology too ?

Here are some other examples of the logical form of propositions that include the copula:

Teacher (Lauren)

Toddler (Warren)

Student (Human)

President (Obama)

President (Trump)

See if you can write the above propositions out as grammatical, real-world-matching English sentences in the form below.

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Translate logical form to sentences

The copula is also used with **predicate adjectives**:

The baby is hungry.

My shoes are dirty.

Fido was missing.

(Remember when we talked about the *attributive* v. *predicative* functions of adjectives? Here we are again, more formally!)

What is the logical form of each of the sentences above? See if you can "translate" them.

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Translate sentences to logical form

And what about sentences like the following?

Our house is by the park.

The worms are under the ground.

Her heart was in Manhattan.

We could consider these to be **predicate prepositions**: the preposition is predicating a relationship between the subject and the object of the preposition.

In all of these sentences, the **copula** is a purely *syntactic* unit, which satisfies the requirement that every sentence in English have a verb. It doesn't add any referential meaning like a "normal" (aka "lexical") verb

does. The existence of the copula also highlights one reason why the old "it describes an action or event" definition of VERB is inadequate! The copula does no such thing.

Note that **subject** is also a *syntactic* concept: we have sentences whose subjects are semantically meaningless, like:

It's a lot of food in there.

There's a lot of food in there.

It was raining.

It is evident that it rained.

In the above sentences, *it* and *there* carry no reference; they are not even context-dependent like normal pronouns. We call these **expletive subjects**, and they highlight how "subject" is a property of sentences as structural entities, not semantically meaningful expressions.

And with all of that in mind, we can state clearly generalizations, or "rules," about English sentences. Note: these work for clauses too, for the most part.

Generalizations about English sentences

- Every sentence has a predicate.
  - Every predicate has at least one argument.
    - An argument is typically a noun phrase.
  - A predicate is often a verb, but can also be an adjective, noun, or preposition.
    - (A verb is always a predicate, but a predicate is not always a verb.)
- Every sentence must have a verb.
  - The copula Be appears in sentences without a verbal predicate.
- Every sentence must have a subject.
  - If the subject is not an argument of the predicate, we use an expletive subject, It or There.

John Lawler nicely summarizes **predication** in a way that explains how verbs, nouns, and adjectives can all be used as predicates (he doesn't talk about prepositions!):

> And just what does 'to predicate' **mean**? Well, it's the basic abstraction in a sentence: it's what one says **about** the arguments. So, in *John is tired*, what one predicates of *John* is the state of **being tired**: TIRED

(JOHN)... In *Bill is a doctor*, what one predicates of *Bill* is the quality of **being a doctor**: DOCTOR (BILL).... In John kicked the ball, what one predicates of John and ball is the action of **kicking**: KICK (JOHN, BALL)...

Predication is an extremely general concept; it is at the basis of all human language, and is the first significant linguistic concept acquired by most children when they learn their native language. At the 'two-word' stage in 'bottom-up' language acquisition, when children learn to put together more than one word (eg. Doggie bye-bye), what they are in fact learning is predication. What is being predicated of the argument doggie in Doggie bye-bye is some concept of departure or absence, derived from the behavior label bye-bye, and used as a predicate in this proposition.

Bonus: Play this sound file to hear me saying "predicate" as a noun versus a verb!

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3. "Sense" verbs

If you have heard the terminology of the Be verb being a "linking verb," you probably also learned that Be is not the *only* "linking verb" in English. The following verbs all have some similarities to Be:

Pizza tastes delicious.

The baby looks hungry.

The cat's fur feels soft.

These verbs—Taste, Look, Feel—do something similar to the copula, in that they "link" the subject NP with a quality or state of being down in the VP. But these verbs *do* carry independent meaning, which the copula Be does not. So it seems that they must be involved in the proposition at the level of logical form. Yet, if we consider the only predicate in the sentence *Pizza tastes delicious* to be Taste, we would be stuck with an adjective Delicious as an argument, and we have not heretofore said that adjectives can be arguments (only nouns).

It seems we have two options in order to categorize these "sense" verbs within our running system: say that arguments to verbal predicates can be things other than nouns, or say that these sense verbs are somehow different from the other verbal predicates. Let's think through them both.

OPTION 1

If we went with the first option, things could be simple:

Taste (Pizza, Delicious)

Here, I've analyzed *Taste* as a verbal predicate with two arguments: one nominal, *pizza*, and one adjectival, *delicious*. However, with this option, we would lose two generalizations that we've seen so far: first, that arguments are nouns; second, that adjectives are predicates (not arguments).

Also, doesn't it seem like the relationship between Pizza and Delicious is basically the same as it would be in a simple copular sentence like *Pizza is delicious*? If you say pizza tastes delicious, aren't you predicating deliciousness of pizza??? This analysis doesn't acknoweldge that similarity in meaning. On the other hand, if we think of predication with two arguments as expressing a relationship between those two arguments, we could paraphrase this as "The relationship between Pizza and Delicious is one of Taste." I guess that kind of makes sense. What do you think?

OPTION 2

The second option is more complicated. How is the logical meaning of sense verbs different from that of "normal" verbal predicates? One possible analysis of these "sense" verbs is as predicates that contain further predicates as arguments (whoah, I know!):

Taste (Delicious (Pizza))

This says something like "It tastes that pizza is delicious." (This analysis comes from John Lawler directly, in a private message on Facebook!) That is, deliciousis predicating of the argument pizza ("pizza is delicious"), and taste is predicating of the argument pizza is delicious> (kind of like, "pizza is delicious (is what) tastes (to me)").

This representation accounts for the fact that as a set of verbs, these "sense" verbs share the quality of referring implicitly to a sensory experience of the speaker, who is not an entity in the syntactic structure of the sentence, but who *is* involved in the interpretation of the sentence's meaning.

Consider the other examples:

The baby looks hungry.

Look (Hungry (Baby))

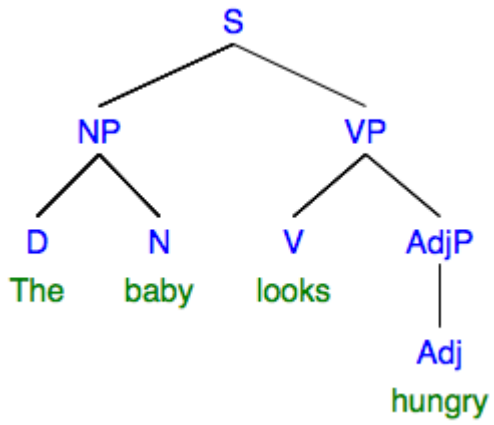
"It looks (to me) that the baby is hungry."

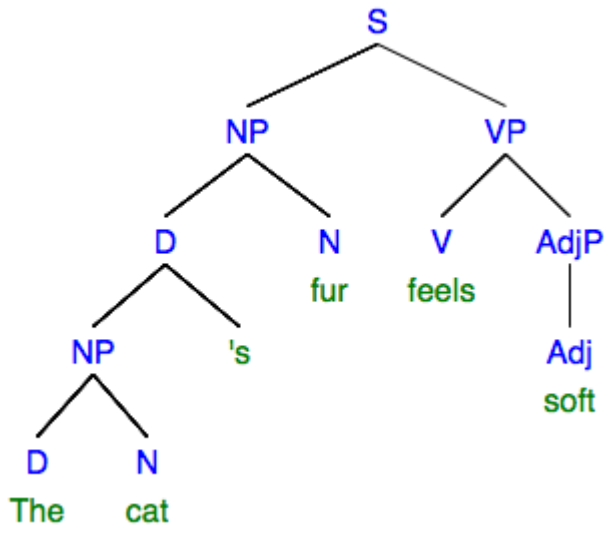
The cat's fur feels soft.

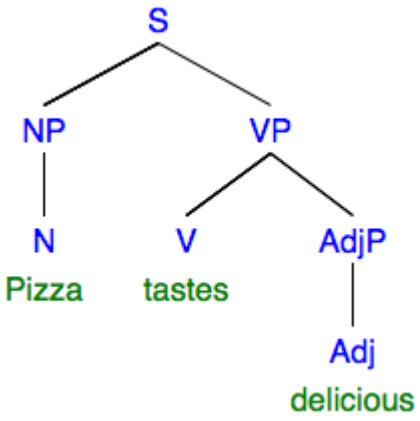
Feel (Soft (fur))

"It feels (to me) that the cat's fur is soft"

While this foray into complicated semantics was surely entertaining, you don't need to worry about logical form for these "sense" and "becoming" verbs! The trees look the same, and that's what we'll continue to use to represent the structure of the sentences. E.g.:







But it is worth thinking about how the meaning of these verbs is different from both "typical" verbs like Acknowledge, and the copula verb Be. The verbs carry actual meaning, therefore they must be included in the logical form of the sentences; yet, assigning a thematic role to the subject of one of these sentences seems odd: Pizza is not undergoing *tasting,* nor is it experiencing *tasting,* but nor does it directly bear the property of *delicious*.

In these examples of logical form, we also see one of the central features at work in language: **propositions can include propositions embedded within them**. So adjectives can't be arguments (unless they are acting nominally like *Blue is bad*), but clauses can. We will see later that clauses function very much like nouns in a range of syntactic environments! Sentences like *The baby looks hungry* don't have a surface form that shows a clause-within-a-clause, but in their logical form at the propositional level, they are like sentences like *I see that the baby is hungry*.

So which option do we prefer? It sort of doesn't matter, for our purposes (sorry!!!). But if we wanted to be fussy about it (or if you absolutely MUST have an answer), I would probably prefer **option 2**, and here's why. In option 1, we expanded "argument" possibilities to include adjectives. Option 2 expands them to include other propositions (predicates/clauses). Perhaps we'd prefer the simplicity of arguments only ever manifesting as one type of unit, but there is actually good reason to believe that clauses *can be arguments*, as noted above. That is, we MUST allow for clausal arguments if we want to account for embedded clauses as components of propositions. So, we already have a principled reason to say that arguments may also be clausal, whereas we don't have a reason to think arguments should be adjectives.

In this unit, we talked about different kinds of predicates, such as:

- Verbal predicates with one argument (intransitive)
- Verbal predicates with two arguments (transitive)
- Verbal predicates with three arguments (ditransitive)
- Predicate adjective with one argument (and copula)
- Predicate noun with one argument (and copula)
- Predicate preposition with one argument (and copula)
- "Sense" verb predicates with one argument (which is clausal in nature)

Remember, logical form is a way of understanding the *semantic meaning* of sentences (propositions). In the

next unit, we will talk more about semantics but also relate this more explicitly to the syntax–the structure of sentences.

4. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 7, Basic Unit

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=203

Module 7: Advanced Unit

Contents of Advanced Unit:

1. Thematic roles

Let's go *even further* into thinking about how predicates relate to their arguments, specifically when we have verbal predicates that take one, two, or three arguments (e.g., intransitive, transitive, or ditransitive verbs). WHY do some verbs want one argument, while others want two or three? It all comes down to the *meaning* of a verb.

Each **argument** plays a particular role in the meaning of the verb–it's involved somehow in the situation being described. We call this the argument's **thematic role**. Is it doing an action? having an action done to it? experiencing a sensation? receiving an entity? etc.

There is no single list of thematic roles accepted as standard among linguists, and different analyses use different categories. We will limit ourselves in this class to a list of the most-commonly-used thematic roles for English, and the ones that make most sense to me for our purposes. These are listed below, along with an example for each.

- **Agent**: making something happen, with sentience
  - *Beyoncé* sang the song.
- **Cause**: causing something, without sentience
  - *The wind* blew over the umbrella.
- **Instrument**: used to make something happen (typically non-sentient)
  - *The microphone* recorded the sound.
- **Theme**: bearer of a state; undergoer of change of state or movement/transfer, not necessarily due to another participant
  - *The window* broke.
- **Patient**: having something done to it by another participant (sometimes conflated with theme)
  - My child broke *the window*.
- **Recipient**: receives something or receives benefit of something

(sometimes called beneficiary/benefactive)
    - The administration gave *faculty* raises.
- **Experiencer**: undergoes psychological/emotional/sensory experience
    - *My friend* suffered.

[Note that you may also hear people call thematic roles “theta roles” or “semantic roles.”]

For each of the sentences above that have more than one argument, what is the thematic role of the argument that I did **not** use as the example?

the song: theme

the umbrella: patient

the sound: patient

my child: agent

the administration: agent

raises: theme

Whenever we have a predicate, it **selects for** one or more arguments to fulfill its necessary **thematic roles** in order to be interpretable. Different verbs select for different thematic roles, therefore they have different numbers of arguments. Whenever you hear someone talk about “different types of verbs,” they are most likely talking about a property of verbs that comes down to this: Which thematic role requirements does the verb’s meaning entail?

Let’s consider some of our sentences from earlier:

Beyoncé birthed twins.

Taylor won her lawsuit.

Justin caused controversy.

The other Justin experienced a comeback.

What do you think are the thematic roles of each of these arguments?

Birth (Beyoncé, Twin)

Win (Taylor, Lawsuit)

Cause (Justin, Controversy)

Experience (Justin, Comeback)

Make your best guess in the form below!

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=216

Guess the thematic role

2. Thematic roles and syntactic function

Thematic roles, like logical form, are about the underlying *meaning* of a proposition. Now let's connect all of this to the surface structure we see of sentences. The thematic role of an argument is not determined by its **syntactic function** (its position, function, and relationships within a grammatical sentence); rather, these functions and roles can shift in alignment. That is, a single thematic role does not always manifest in the same syntactic function/position.

We said that all predicates need at least one argument, which will be the subject of a sentence. Subject is an example of **syntactic function**. The subject could have any number of thematic roles though, depending on what the verb's meaning is. Let's understand a few sentences from the perspective of logical form, thematic roles, and syntactic function:

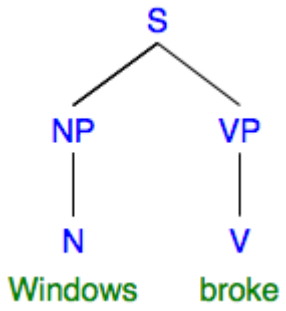
sentence: *Windows broke.*

logical form: Break (Window)

thematic role of Window*:* theme

syntactic function of *Windows*: subject

syntax tree:



sentence: *Sheila acknowledged Terry.*

logical form: Acknowledge (Sheila, Terry)

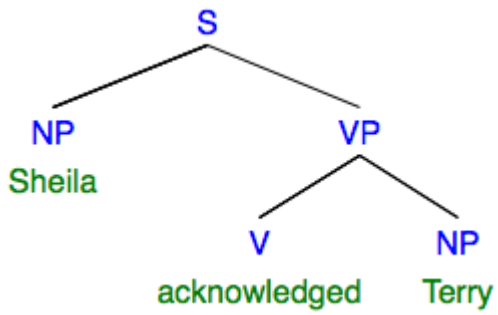
thematic role of Sheila: agent

thematic role of Terry: patient

syntactic function of *Sheila*: subject

syntactic function of *Terry*: direct object

syntax tree:



sentence: *The heat melted tires.*

logical form: Melt (Heat, Tire)

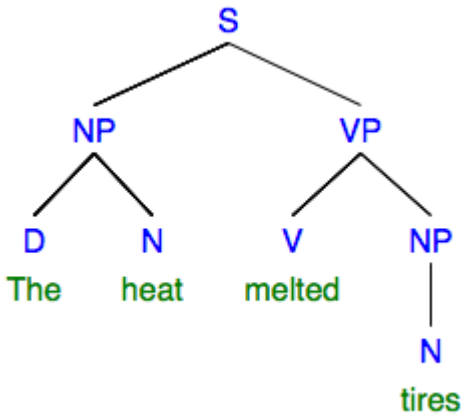
thematic role of Heat: cause

thematic role of Tire: theme

syntactic function of *The heat*: subject

syntactic function of *tires*: direct object

syntax tree:



sentence: *The baker gave me the bread.*

logical form: Give (Baker, Bread, Me)

thematic role of Baker: agent

thematic role of Bread: theme

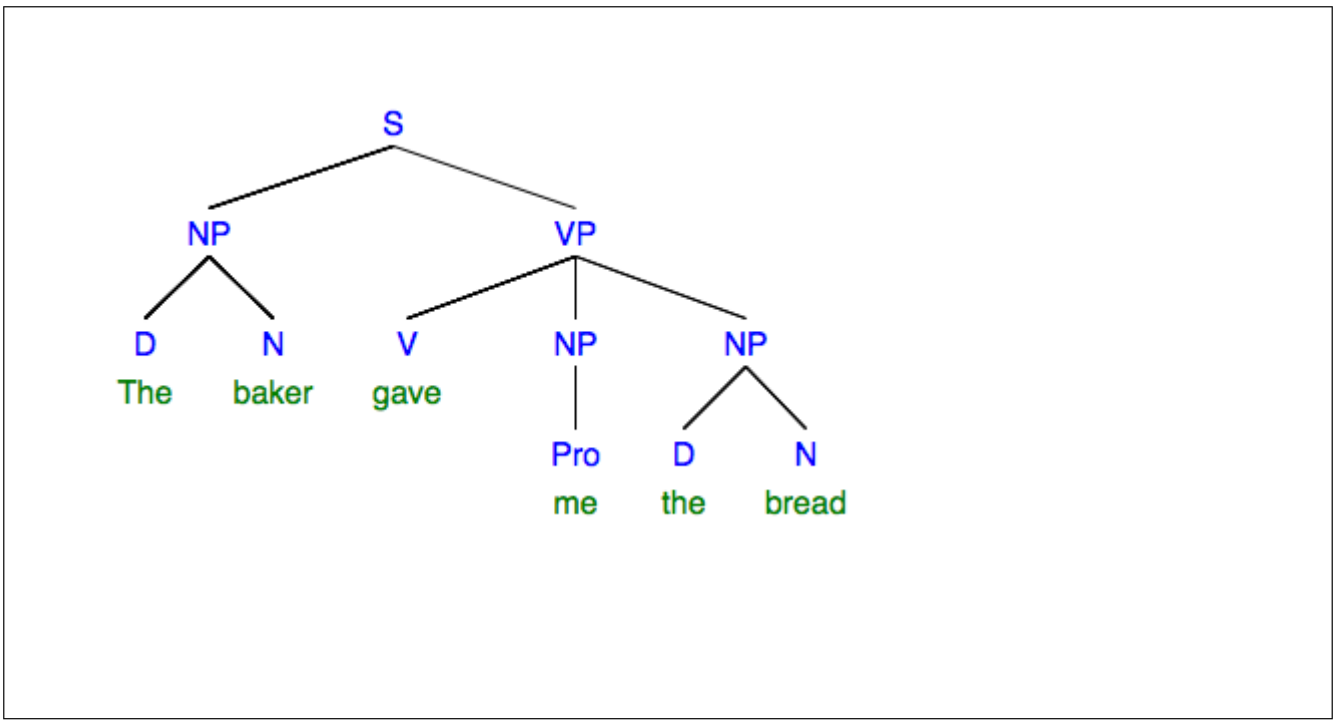
thematic role of Me: recipient

syntactic function of *The baker*: subject

syntactic function of *the bread*: direct object

syntactic function of *me*: indirect object

syntax tree:



I've introduced two new terms here, which describe the syntactic functions of non-subject arguments: **direct object** and **indirect object**.

The **direct object** is the argument most centrally involved in the meaning of a transitive or ditransitive verb: typically the patient or theme (but not always). See the similarities between these three direct objects:

Sheila acknowledged *Terry*.

The heat melted *tires*.

The baker gave me *the bread*.

Terry is being acknowledged. Tires are being melted. The bread is being given.

The **indirect object** is also involved in the meaning of a ditransitive verb, typically as a recipient. Each of these sentences has a direct and indirect object:

The baker made *me* the bread.

She sent *the company* an email.

They offered *her* a refund.

It's the bread that's being made, the email that's being sent, and the refund that's being offered. These are the direct objects. In thematic roles, they are themes or patients.

The other arguments—*me, the company, her*—are the indirect objects; in thematic roles, they are recipients of the items being transferred.

Notice that ditransitive sentences can be rewritten with the direct object appearing to be more central to the verb, and the indirect object displaced to a prepositional phrase:

The baker made the bread for me.

She sent an email to the company.

They offered a refund to her.

This is called the **ditransitive or dative alternation**: in English, we can alternate the expression of ditransitive verbs between structures where the direct object is first, and structures where the indirect object is first.

The baker made me the bread.

The baker made the bread for me.

She sent the company an email.

She sent an email to the company.

They offered her a refund.

They offered a refund to her.

(Historically, the argument occurring in the prepositional phrase took dative case-marking; English doesn't have separate dative case-marking anymore.)

There are many such **alternations** like this in English, actually:

They spread butter on the bread.

They spread the bread with butter.

They drained the swamp of bankers.

They drained bankers from the swamp.

Lauren conversed with Warren.

Lauren and Warren conversed.

Lava is oozing from the volcano.

The volcano is oozing with lava.

(For more verb alternations like this, see Levin (1993).)

It should be obvious from these examples that **there is no one-to-one alignment between thematic roles and syntactic functions**. Subjects are often agents, but they can also be themes, patients, causes, etc. Direct objects are often patients, but they can also be experiencers, themes, recipients, etc. Here is a pair of related verbs that more or less mean the same thing, but reverse the relationship between syntactic function and thematic role:

Warren fears the dragon.

The dragon frightens Warren.

Fear wants an experiencer as subject and a theme as direct object. *Frighten* wants an agent, or perhaps cause (if it's non-sentient), as subject and experiencer as direct object. Can you think of other verbs like this? (See more in David Pesetsky, *Zero Syntax: Experiencers and Cascades*, ch. 2, p. 18)

Thematic roles can also help explain why some sentences are nonsensical, even if they seem grammatical on the surface.

The email sent her the company.

Tires melted the heat.

Bananas suffered.

Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

Each of these is structurally identical to a sentence we have already seen, but the meanings don't work.

Specifically, the nouns I've placed into the argument slots don't match the thematic role requirements of the verbs.

Send requires a subject that is an agent, whereas *email* doesn't have agency. *Heat* cannot be a theme for *Melt*, since heat cannot be melted. And *Tire* cannot be an agent for *melt*–tires cannot melt things (unless we are talking about fantastical circumstances). Since bananas do not experience feelings like suffering (except in storybooks), *Banana* is not a good agent for *Suffer*. And *ideas* cannot experience *sleep*.

3. Selectional restrictions

The way you store verbs in your mental lexicon, they come equipped with these specifications for arguments and thematic roles. The fancy word for this is their **selectional restrictions**. Many verbs have different "versions," or what we would call different "lexical entries," such that they have more than one possible set of arguments. *Break* is a good example of this. Consider the following:

> Windows broke.
>
> My child broke the windows.

We could say that the first sense of *Break* selects for one argument—a theme—while the second sense of *Break* selects for two arguments—an agent and a patient. The first is intransitive; the second is transitive. It's actually difficult in English to find a verb that *can't* under at least some circumstances be transitive: even Cough, which I have been using a prototypical transitive verb:

> I coughed.
>
> I coughed a disgusting cough.

(This is kind of like how it's tough to find an adjective in English that truly can't be graded, if you try hard enough to come up with a specific context!)

And there are verbs that have intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive senses:

> She passed.

She passed the cupcakes.

She passed Larry the cupcakes.

I am reading.

I am reading a book.

I am reading my son a book.

4. Thematic roles with predicate nouns and adjectives

What about thematic roles with non-verbal predicates? Which thematic role do you think is most like the relationship between a subject in a copular structure and its adjective or noun predicate?

Teacher (Lauren)

Toddler (Warren)

Hungry (Baby)

Dirty (Shoes)

Lauren is being said to have the property of teacher; Warren is said to have the property of toddler, and so forth. The role that makes most sense here, to me, is *theme*. What do you think?

Another textbook makes the point that some adjectives even seem to be two-place predicates, taking two arguments:

Fred is fond of Fiona.

Kevin is keen on karate.

These predicates seem to want both an experiencer (Fred; Kevin) and a theme (Fiona; Karate). These examples come from Newson et al.

5. Typology of complements and clauses

Semantically, a clause consists of a predicate and its arguments: the predicate, a subject it is predicating something of, and other arguments of the predicate. We have seen that within the VP, these non-subject arguments may be realized as direct objects or indirect objects.

Syntactically, a clause consists of a verb, a subject, and the verb's **complement(s)**. **Complement** is a blanket term that refers to **an element in the VP that satisfies the semantic requirements of the verb**. In each sentence below, the complements are underlined.

The heat melted tires.

The baker gave me the bread.

Direct objects and indirect objects are complements; they are required, not optional. **If you remove a complement, the sentence becomes ungrammatical**:

*The heat melted

*The baker gave me

*The baker gave the bread

In addition to NPs acting as objects, we have complements in the form of adjective phrases, noun phrases, and prepositional phrases that are formed around adjective, noun, and prepositional predicates:

She seems happy.

Donald Trump is the President.

The dog is in the garden.

Note that these also become ungrammatical without the complement:

*She seems

*Donald Trump is

*The dog is

Complement types are at the crux of how traditional approaches tend to categorize the "basic clause types" in English. Here is a list of common clause types that puts together what we have been talking about in terms of predicates, sentence functions, and phrase types! *Note: all of these have subject arguments, which are outside of the VP.*

Predicate	**Complement in VP**	**Clause type is called...**
intransitive verb	–	intransitive
transitive verb	NP (direct object)	transitive
ditransitive verb	NP (direct object); NP (indirect object)	ditransitive
complex transitive verb; predicate adjective/noun/preposition	NP (direct object); AdjP/NP/PP	complex transitive
noun	NP	copular or complex intransitive
adjective	AdjP	copular or complex intransitive
preposition	PP	copular or complex intransitive

(This list reflects kind of a mish-mash of terms and approaches. I borrow the distinct terminology for the clause types themselves from Huddleston & Pullum 2002.)

Copular clauses are clauses with the copula, BE, and a predicate noun, adjective, or preposition:

They are troopers.
They are awesome.
They are in my class.

Complex intransitives are what we'll call clauses with predicate nouns, adjective, and prepositions that don't have the copula–like the "sense" verbs, or verbs of becoming:

They feel tired.

They became experts.

They remained against the legislation.

Think about *intransitivity* as being related to the lack of a direct object. These verbs have *complements*, but not *objects*. Calling them "intransitive" but also "complex" gets at this idea.

Of this list, there is one clause type I haven't given any examples of previously: the **complex transitive**. Here are examples:

The product made the inventors millionaires.

The referee ruled the play good.

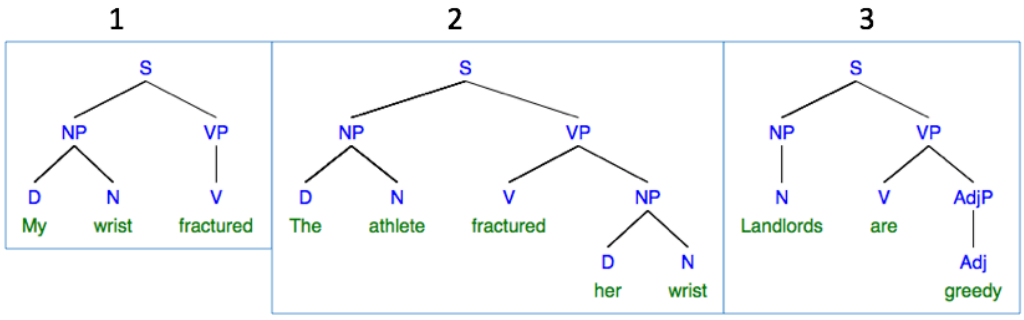
My boss put the paycheck in the mail.

Here, we have a direct object (NP), plus a predicative noun, adjective, or preposition. But the predicative element predicates of the direct object, not the subject! It is *the inventors* who are *millionaires*; *the goal* that is *good*, and *the paycheck* that is *in the mail*.

Think about this for a minute: you have an NP, which is being predicated of by something else. It's almost like these are themselves clauses! In fact, some people call them **small clauses** (e.g., van Gelderen 2002; Santorini & Kroch 2007).

6. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 7, Advanced Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!
Use the trees in the image below to complete the quiz.



Three syntax trees for Module 7 Advanced Unit Quiz.

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=216

BONUS: MY ANSWERS TO THE GOOGLE FORM QUESTION ABOUT THEMATIC ROLES!

Beyoncé: agent

Twin: patient

Taylor: agent

Lawsuit: patient

Justin: agent

Controversy: theme

Justin: experiencer

Comeback: theme

MODULE 8: GRAMMATICAL MEANINGS AND THEIR EXPRESSION

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GRAMMATICAL MEANINGS AND THEIR EXPRESSION

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GRAMMATICAL MEANINGS AND THEIR EXPRESSION

Contents of Basic Unit:

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1. Refresher on grammatical meaning

In this unit, we will explore the major categories of **grammatical meaning** expressed in English clauses. As we talked about in Module 2, we can think about two types of meaning expressed in language: lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. Here were our basic definitions:

Lexical v. Grammatical Meaning

lexical meaning: what the word/morpheme refers to

grammatical meaning: type of meaning the word/morpheme conveys relative to other words in a phrase or sentence

Now that we have a better understanding of the kinds of relationships words and phrases have in a clause, we are positioned to more rigorously talk about the grammatical meanings that are at play in those relationships. We'll start with some of the simpler categories we've already discussed, and then deal with more complex ones.

Grammatical meaning is often—but not entirely—expressed through the inflectional morphemes. Here is a reminder on those morphemes, which will be critical to our discussion:

Morpheme	Grammatical meaning / what we'll call the inflection	Attaches to	Example
{-s} or {-es}	plural	nouns	*cats; pianos; boxes*
{-'s} or {-s'}	possessive	nouns	*cat's; piano's; plants'*
{-s}	third person singular present tense	verbs	*kicks; eats; wants*
{-ed}	past tense	verbs	*kicked; looked; wanted*
{-ed} or {-en}	past participle	verbs	*kicked; eaten; wanted*
{-ing}	present participle	verbs	*kicking; eating; wanting*
{-er}	comparative	adjectives/adverbs	*happier; sadder; slower*
{-est}	superlative	adjectives/adverbs	*happiest; saddest; slowest*

2. Number

Number is a fairly simple category of grammatical meaning in English. It applies to nouns and noun phrases. We have singular nouns and plural nouns; the singular form of a noun is its "base" form, and the regular plural form includes the {-s} ending. Of course we have "irregular" plurals, too, as we've discussed.

One interesting note with regards to number is that **the head of a noun phrase dictates the number of the whole noun phrase**: an NP with a singular head will be treated syntactically as singular, while an NP with a plural head will be treated syntactically as plural. This is regardless of what else is in the NP. Consider the following NPs:

1a) the key to the door

1b) the key to the doors

2a) the keys to the doors

2b) the keys to the door

In 1a and 1b, the head is *key*, and the entire NP is singular—even though within the prepositional phrase, *doors* is plural in 1b. In 2a and 2b, the head is *keys*, and the entire NP is plural—even though within the prepositional phrase, *door* is singular in 2b. It is the head of the phrase that carries its number! So grammatical sentences would be:

1a) The key to the door is missing.

1b) The key to the doors is missing.

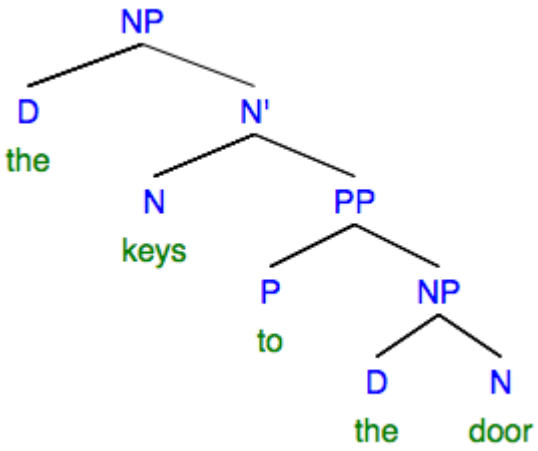
2a) The keys to the doors are missing.

2b) The keys to the door are missing.

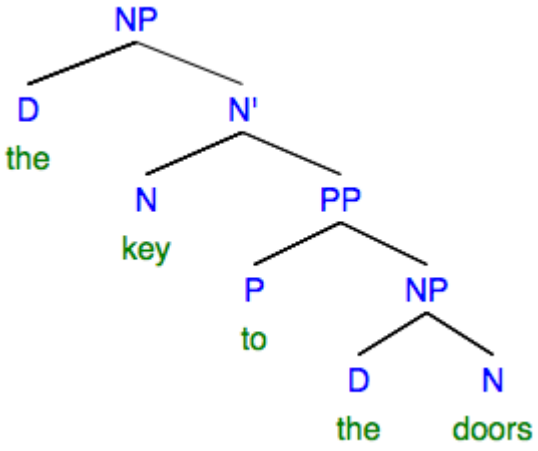
We see the number of the NP head reflected in the verb inflection: English has *subject-verb agreement*. In (1a) and (1b), the verb inflection is the third-person singular: *is*. That's because the head of the NP in both cases is singular *key*. In (2a) and (2b), the verb inflection is the third person plural: *are*. That's because the head of the NP is *keys*. More on subject-verb agreement below.

Remember what the structure of these NPs would be:

the keys to the door



the key to the door



This highlights again the importance of understanding relationships between words as being hierarchical:

the PPs are embedded *within* the larger NP headed by *key/keys*. Any NP within that PP doesn't affect the grammatical properties (in this case, number) of the whole NP.

3. Person

Person is a category of meaning that has to do with who is talking (or writing) relative to who they are talking (or writing) about:

Person distinctions

- **First person**: the speaker
- **Second person**: the addressee
- **Third person**: neither the speaker nor the addressee

We see person distinctions very clearly in our pronoun inflections:

First person singular	**Second person singular**	**Third person singular**
I	you	he/she/it

This is only a small fraction of our personal pronouns, though! Number is also reflected in our pronoun inflections; each of the *singular* pronouns above also has a *plural* counterpart:

First person plural	**Second person plural**	**Third person plural**
we	you/y'all/youse/yinz/you guys	they

This is still only a fraction of our personal pronouns, though! There is a third category represented in our pronoun inflections, called **case**—we'll get to that in a minute.

Since our pronouns inflect for both number and person, you'd think our nouns would too, but in English, nouns don't inflect for person. However, person differences *do* affect another part of the system—our **verbs**! Read on...

4. Subject-verb agreement

English, like many languages, has what is called **subject-verb agreement** (also sometimes called **concord**). This grammatical relationship is expressed **on the verb**, but it **reflects properties of the subject**: different subjects trigger different verb inflections.

In English, subject-verb agreement involves the grammatical categories of **person**, **number**, and **tense**. Subject-verb agreement is why you have a different verb inflection in 3a and 3b:

(3a) The key sits on the table.

(3b) The keys sit on the table.

In fact, for regular verbs in Standard English, the third-person singular {-s} form is the *only* verb inflection specific to subject-verb agreement. It is only when the clause is in present tense, and when the subject is third-person and singular that it appears. Consider the following paradigm:

singular

first person – I need the keys.

second person – You need the keys.

third person – She needs the keys.

plural

first person – We need the keys.

second person – Y'all need the keys.

third person – They need the keys.

The ONLY subject type that takes an inflection which, on the surface, differs from the uninflected verb form is third-person singular. English used to have way more verb inflections than this, but as goes history, so have gone our inflections.

4a. Agreement and BE

Remnants of a richer subject-verb agreement paradigm are still found with that most irregular of irregular verbs, BE. Unlike regular verbs, BE inflects to show distinctions in person, number, and tense across these different combinations of subjects. The table below summarizes:

person	number	present tense	past tense
first person	**singular**	*am*	*was*
	plural	*are*	*were*
second person	**singular**	*are*	*were*
	plural	*are*	*were*
third person	**singular**	*is*	*was*
	plural	*are*	*were*

As you can see though, even with BE, the paradigm is imbalanced. There are 12 possible combinations of person, number, and tense, yet we have only 5 distinct inflected forms of BE.

> *An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:*
> *https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=341*

4b. Agreement and dialect variation

It's important to note that subject-verb agreement is a big area of dialect differences between English varieties. To give just one example: African American English permits the entire present-tense paradigm to be leveled, such that the verb occurs in the base (uninflected) form regardless of the number/person of the subject. Consider, from Beyoncé:

> Don't be mad once you see that <u>he</u> <u>want</u> it.

There are other interesting differences, too. In most vernacular English dialects, the auxiliary verb DO can appear in its negated form without inflection, regardless of subject:

> 4a) I don't sing that song.
> 4b) You don't sing that song.
> 4c) <u>He</u> <u>don't</u> sing that song.

While Standard English would use *doesn't* in (4c), this use of **invariant *don't*** is prevalent in English dialects worldwide. Here it is in the lyrics of Justin Bieber:

> My <u>mama</u> <u>don't</u> like you, and she likes everyone.

And still other dialects use an {-s} verb inflection for *all subjects*—plural and singular—but only under certain

circumstances! Consider these attested examples from Northern English dialects, from the work of Lukas Pietsch:

The birds sings

They sing and dances

Them's the men that does their work best

This somewhat complicated pattern is called the Northern Subject Rule.

4c. Agreement and finiteness

Subject-verb agreement is also a crucial factor in the distinction between *clauses* and *sentences*. Every complete **sentence** will have at least one verb that we call **finite.** In the usual case of declarative sentences, a finite verb is one that is inflected for both tense and subject-verb agreement. Consider these:

5a) The dogs eat their food.

5b) The dog eats its food.

5c) That candle smells delicious.

5d) These candles smell delicious.

These are all complete sentences, right? But let's see what happens when we swap these verbs with a **present participle inflection**:

6a) *The dogs eating their food

6b) *The dog eating its food

6c) *That candle smelling delicious

6d) *Candles smelling delicious

The list in (6) is ungrammatical—what's going on? There is still a verb in the clause, expressing semantic meaning. We could still even say that these verbs have their argument needs / thematic roles fulfilled. In other words, the referential meaning seems solid.

What's wrong here is something purely syntactic: these verbs lack the inflection that carries tense, person, and number information. That is, they don't carry tense information, and *they lack subject-verb agreement*. Look at how adding an auxiliary verb fixes this, as long as the verb is inflected for agreement:

6a) The dogs were eating their food

6b) The dog was eating its food

6c) That candle is smelling delicious

6d) Candles are smelling delicious

(If you think 6c and 6d sound a little weird, you've just discovered something about different predicates and English aspect! Wait for the advanced unit!)

In any clause, we call *the verb that is inflected for tense and subject-verb agreement* a **finite verb**. Modal verbs are also inherently finite—we'll see that later on. In contrast, we call a verb that is not inflected for tense and subject-verb agreement a **nonfinite verb**. Present participles, past participles, and infinitive verb forms are always nonfinite.

Key Takeaways

Finite verb forms: present tense; past tense; modal verbs (*can, could,* etc.)

Nonfinite verb forms: present participle; past participle; infinitive (*to go, to eat,* etc.)

And here is one key difference between sentences and clauses: clauses can be finite or nonfinite, but sentences are always finite. This can be summarized as:

Finiteness

- Every sentence must have at least one finite clause.
- A finite clause includes a finite verb.

We will explore much more of this in the next module!

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5. Case

Case is a grammatical meaning that marks the syntactic role of a noun phrase in a sentence. Different languages mark different cases for different syntactic roles. Old English had an abundant case system (more like modern-day German, but not as complex as Russian!). Modern-day English, though, has very limited case-marking; only three categories of case are distinguished:

Case Distinctions

- **nominative case**: marks the subject (sometimes called *subjective* or just *subject* case)
- **accusative case**: marks the object of a verb or preposition (sometimes called *objective* or just *object* case)
- **genitive case**: marks a possessor (sometimes called *possessive* case)

Moreover, nominative and accusative case distinctions are not marked on regular nouns, only on pronouns. In (7) below, the nouns DOG and CAT remain in the same form regardless of whether they are functioning as subject or object:

7a) The dog saw the cat.

7b) The cat saw the dog.

Pronouns, on the other hand, exhibit case inflections for subject versus object:

8a) She saw him.

8b) He saw her.

8c) *Him saw she.

8d) *Her saw he.

Genitive case is still reflected on both pronouns and nouns in Standard English. (In African American English, there is often no genitive ending on nouns, e.g. “the dog tail”; read about it here). This is the “possessive” {-s} inflection on nouns, and the *my/your/her/his/its/their* forms of pronouns:

9a) The dog’s tail wagged.

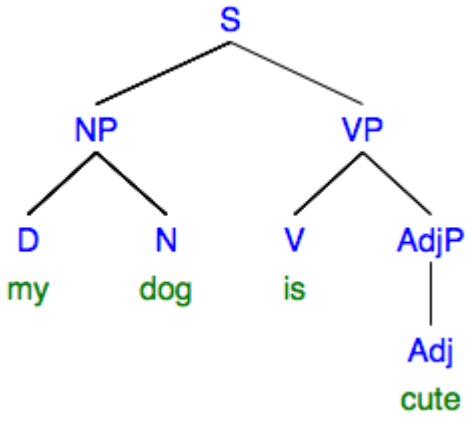
9b) The dog chased the cat’s tail.

9c) Her tail wagged.

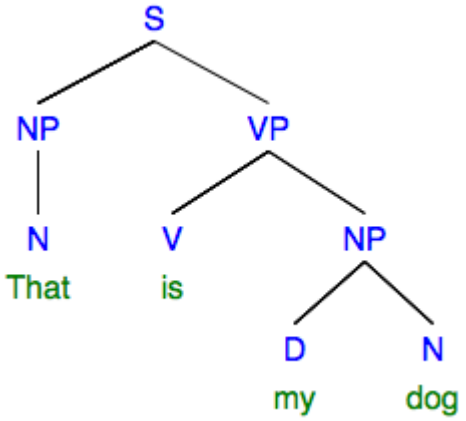
9d) The dog chased its tail.

Note that possessive nouns/pronouns function internally to a larger NP, and that larger NP could be functioning in any of the ordinary roles of an NP. In other words, the genitive inflection does not differ depending on whether the NP it is a part of functions nominatively or accusatively! Examples:

“my dog” as subject



"my dog" as predicate



Here, "my dog" is *my dog* in both subject and complement (predicate) position. The form of the pronoun *my* does not change.

Here are the genitive/possessive pronoun inflections:

	First person	**Second person**	**Third person**
singular	my/mine	your/yours	his/her/hers/its
plural	our/ours	your/yours	their/theirs

(What's the difference in function of *my* v. *mine* or *your* v. *yours*?)

By the way, case inflections mark the function of an NP in a clause, but case markings are not limited to nouns/pronouns—in Old English, determiners and adjectives also inflected to "agree" in case with the nouns they modified. (Something German still does.) Just another example of how grammatical meanings frequently operate at the *phrase* level, not just the *word* level.

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6. Gender

Grammatical meanings help us understand all the different inflections of pronouns we have, whereas our

inflections for full nouns are impoverished by comparison. The final category of grammatical meaning that is relevant to understanding pronoun inflections is **gender**.

As with other categories of grammatical meaning, the status of gender in English has changed over time. Many languages—including German, Russian, and Romance languages like French, Spanish, and Italian—categorize nouns according to what's called **grammatical gender**: a system of classifying nouns for agreement purposes. For instance, every German noun is either masculine, feminine, or neuter—those are German's three gender categories. (Check out the array of grammatical gender categories across languages—from zero to more than five.)

These grammatical gender categories *sometimes* map on to what is often called **natural gender**—the sex category related to biology in animals—but when thinking about humans, it is more appropriate to call this **social gender**—gender as a social construct. But once you start looking at examples it's clear that the mapping between grammatical and natural/social gender is not at all a regular one. (Here's a quick read on this issue.) Witness some German nouns and their genders:

feminine

die Fenster ('window')

die Frau ('woman')

die Bücherei ('library')

masculine

der Tag ('day')

der Norden ('north')

der Mann ('man')

neuter

das Mädchen ('girl')

das Museum ('museum')

das Gold ('gold')

(Note that the definite determiner preceding each noun is different—it *agrees with* the gender of the noun itself. This is something English used to have too.)

As you see from this short list, there is no reason to consider something like "north" to be masculine but something like "library" to be feminine—these are grammatical categories and do not line up neatly with social ideas about "gender." (That said, there is evidence that speakers associate natural/social gender with grammatical gender at a pretty deep level. Also, are you wondering whether any of this has an effect on gender equity? Have another article!).

But English doesn't have grammatical gender on its nouns anymore. Now, English *only* expresses gender differences in the sense of what is typically called **natural** or **social gender** (to contrast with **grammatical gender**). We often talk about *sex* as being a "natural" category (though even that is not entirely clear-cut), whereas *gender* is a "social" or "socially-constructed" category (though people may certainly *experience* their gender as "natural"). You can read more about these ideas here, or take one of the many Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies classes offered at Ohio State!

Anyway, the social category of gender is really what's encoded in modern-day English grammar, but once again, it only shows up in our pronoun system—and only in third person singular pronouns, at that: *he/she/it/they/his/her/hers/its/theirs*. And this is why pronouns are such a "hot" topic in conversations about sexism, as well as diversity and inclusion. Because pronouns encode gender, they are an important component of nonsexist language, and also a powerful way to acknowledge a spectrum of gender identities.

Interestingly, languages typically have *third-person* gender distinctions, but *first- and second-person* gendered pronouns are rarer, though Japanese arguably has both, and Hebrew has gendered second-person pronouns. Conversely, there are some English varieties—mostly contact languages, pidgins and creoles—that don't have a distinction in third-person either.

But, the majority of English varieties use third-person singular pronouns in a way that reflects a) the social gender of the referent, and b) the social gender of the pronoun's antecedent in a sentence. You may be familiar with one traditional prescriptive rule that relates to pronouns: that the only third-person singular pronouns that can refer to humans are the masculine *he/him/his* and the feminine *she/her/hers*. We do have a "neutral" pronoun *it/its*, but we cannot refer to a human as *it*.

It has now become common for *they/their* to be used in this "gender-neutral" way, though people have introduced other new pronouns into the paradigm as well to accomplish this same purpose, such as *ze* and *per*. (This Wikipedia discussion on the issue is epic.)

Some people still seem concerned that "singular *they*" will lead to the downfall of English, but this is just not true. Pronouns have been changing throughout the history of English, and they will continue to do so. And actually, *they* has been used as a singular, neuter pronoun for centuries. One of my former advisors at Michigan, Anne Curzan, is an expert on this topic and has a very good explanation of it.

That said, the incorporation of *they* as a singular pronoun is not a simple way to "solve" problems of gender in reference. Consider the discussion about pronouns had on one of my Facebook friend's walls recently. Fellow college instructors were discussing first-day-of-class business, and whether they would ask students to include their preferred pronouns as part of their introductions of themselves to their peers. The following is heavily paraphrased:

> PERSON 1: "I think we should have students include their preferred pronouns in their introductions, so everyone in class knows everyone's preferences."
>
> PERSON 2: "I disagree, because forcing students to introduce themselves with pronouns could force someone to 'come out' as nonbinary or transgender on the first day of class, which could be both traumatic and dangerous."
>
> PERSON 3: "I just default to using 'they' to refer to everyone until students have voluntarily communicated their own pronoun preferences to me."
>
> PERSON 4: "Please don't use 'they' to refer to everyone. As a male-identified person, if someone refers to me as 'they,' that person has mis-gendered me, which is hurtful."

There are two competing views here of what *they* does: Some people consider singular *they* to be totally gender-inclusive, referencing anyone and everyone regardless of gender. Yet others consider *they* to refer more narrowly to those with a nonbinary or transgender identity. These coexisting interpretations are a sign of change in progress in both the language and the society in which it functions. The pronouns we use to refer to ourselves and other people are one part of grammar that relates directly to personal identity.

7. Degree

Degree came up in our discussion of inflectional morphemes, which can grammatically encode the position of a quality on a scale from "less so" to "more so." We have two inflectional categories of degree in English: the ***comparative***, "more than," and the ***superlative***, "the most of." We know already that these are the {-er} morpheme for the comparative and the {-est} morpheme for the superlative. Here are some examples:

ADJ	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
fast	faster	fastest
good	better	best
blue	bluer	bluest

Some adjectives/adverbs seem to resist degree comparisons, though some people argue that it's just a matter of finding the right context in order to make any adjective/adverb "gradable" (subject to degree).

Aside from semantics, there are also phonological patterns in English dictating when the degree morphemes are used, versus the marking of degree in other ways—by the addition of other adverbs, specifically. So we don't find the following inflected forms:

ADJ	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
peaceful	peacefuler	peacefulest
elfish	elfisher	elfishest
integrated	integrateder	integratedest
ridiculous	ridiculouser	ridiculousest
educational	educationaler	educationalist
yellow	yellower	yellowest (?)

Can you identify some elements of word structure that make these forms unlikely, as compared to the following:

ADJ	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
glossy	glossier	glossiest
red	redder	reddest
funny	funnier	funniest
great	greater	greatest
soft	softer	softest
pretty	prettier	prettiest

We worked on examples like this in class earlier in the semester... can you remember the basic preferences for English speakers?

8. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 8, Basic Unit

Complete before moving on to the next unit!

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Module 8: Advanced Unit

GRAMMATICAL MEANINGS AND THEIR EXPRESSION

Contents of Advanced Unit:

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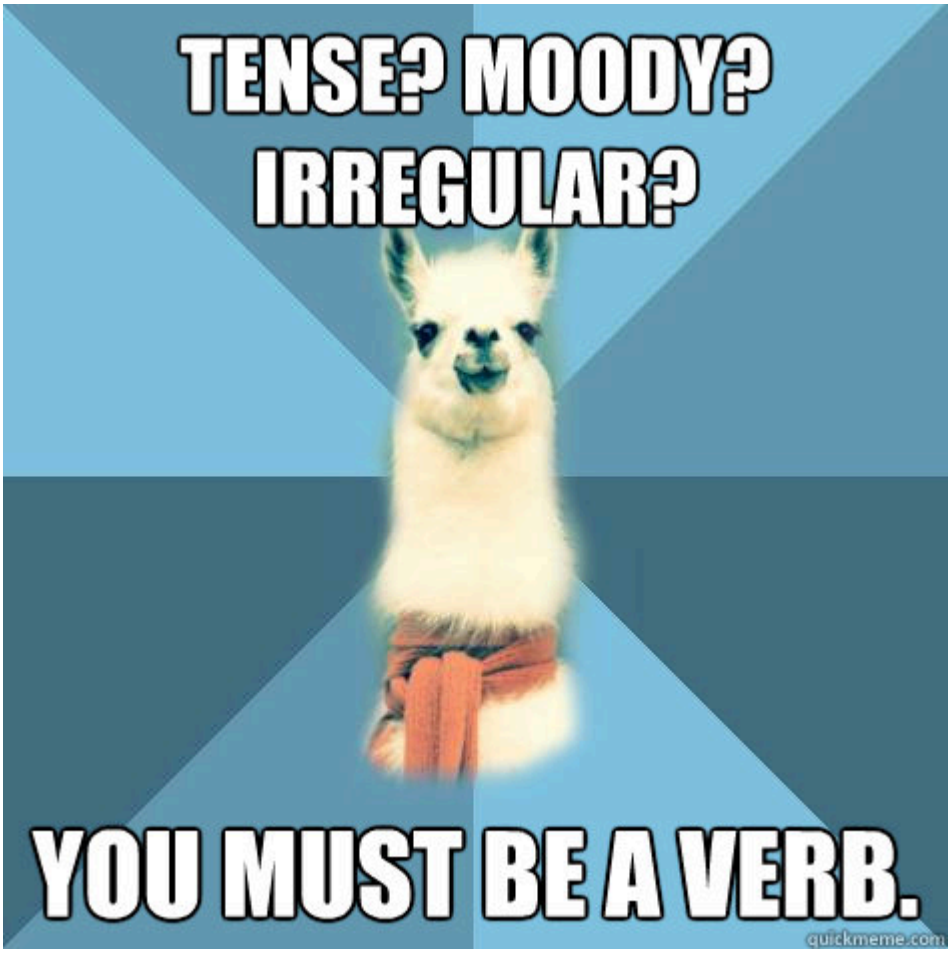
1. Tense

Tense is the first in a packaged set of grammatical meanings often referred to as the "Tense-Aspect-Mood" system of a language (i.e. "TAM"; also called "Tense-Mood-Aspect" or TMA). Together, these three categories of grammatical meaning cover the expression of concepts related to time (tense), the flow of time (aspect), and truth/veracity (mood). Definitions of these categories are not exactly unified across linguistics, so once again, I'll be using definitions that make sense to me.

Why are these three categories lumped together? Across languages they tend to all be expressed within the verb phrase. Thus, in most of this module, we'll be focusing on verbs more. I know you're glad to be thinking verbally again.



Linguist Llama knows.

English has **present tense** and **past tense**. The morphemes **third-person singular present-tense {-s}** and **past-tense {-ed}** show that verbs inflect to display tense. But let's get more formal about what's going on with a present versus past tense expression. Consider the following pictured event, which comes from *Reader's Digest*:

LICK (CAT, CAT)

Let's call this event abstractly, in logical form, LICK (CAT, CAT). How would you turn this into a concrete sentence/description? Tense is one of the things you have to "decide" about in order to make a sentence.

You could situate the event as happening at *the same time* as you are uttering the statement. That would be present tense:

> The cat licks itself.

Or you could situate the event as having happened at a time *prior* to when you utter the statement. That would be past tense:

> The cat licked itself.

And this is all that English tense, on its own, does: it situates the event under description in a temporal relationship either *before* (past tense) or *simultaneous with* (present tense) the utterance describing it. We can summarize those:

English Present v. Past Tense

present: E = U

past: E < U

E is Event; U is Utterance

Now, there's something interesting about English present tense. Imagine that you are in the Union talking on the phone with a friend, and you see something extraordinary: a dancing flashmob!

Flash mob in the Union

Let's say you want to tell the person on the phone what is going on. Would you describe the scene with the following?

Whoah! People dance!

I suspect you would not. But the event is happening *presently*, *right now* as you speak. It is simultaneous to the time of utterance. Why can't you just use present tense?

You could say this instead:

Whoah! People are dancing!

We basically "fixed" this sentence by adding an auxiliary verb (*are*) but also changing the inflection on the main verb (*dance > dancing*). More on this in the next section, as it pertains to aspect! (Notice that **People are dance* would be ungrammatical.)

The truth is, the simple English present tense is rarely used to describe events happening simultaneous with the moment of utterance (despite the implication and our basic definition of "present"), and its use is limited to certain kinds of events. Consider a context in which you *might* utter any of the following:

People dance

Misty Copeland dances ballet

I dance in my pajamas

The train leaves at 5 pm

The train arrives on time

The train runs smoothly

Babies drink milk

The baby eats solid food

The baby wakes up

To continue this little thought experiment: What kinds of adverbial phrases could you add or not add after each of these clauses? Can you add any of the following?

right now

at this moment

as I speak

These adverbial phrases indicate the simultaneity of an event with the time its description is uttered; in other words they emphasize the presentness. If you are using simple "present" tense, shouldn't you be able to use these phrases? Rate the following sentences for grammaticality:

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Rate these sentences

Of the sentences you just rated, a few don't sound impossible, but compare them to the following:

People are dancing right now

Misty Copeland is dancing ballet at this moment

I am dancing in my pajamas as I speak

The train is leaving right now at 5 pm

The train is arriving on time at this moment

The train is running smoothly as I speak

Babies are drinking milk right now

The baby is eating solid food at this moment

The baby is waking up as I speak

I am willing to bet $10 that you prefer this second list to the list above with the "bare" present tense.

So, what's the point? Rather than describing things that are actually happening *right now at this moment as we speak*, the simple English present tense instead is typically used to refer to habitual/repetitive actions or states of being; to future time; or to conditional statements. The following examples illustrate these contexts of use:

HABITUAL/REPETITIVE ACTIONS OR STATES OF BEING

Babies drink milk. (it's just a fact about the world)

Misty Copeland dances ballet. (it's her job)

The train arrives on time. (every day at 3 pm)

FUTURE TIME

The train leaves at 5 pm. (which is an hour from right now)

I dance in my pajamas in the show. (which is tonight, in five hours)

I teach at 9 am tomorrow.

CONDITIONAL STATEMENTS

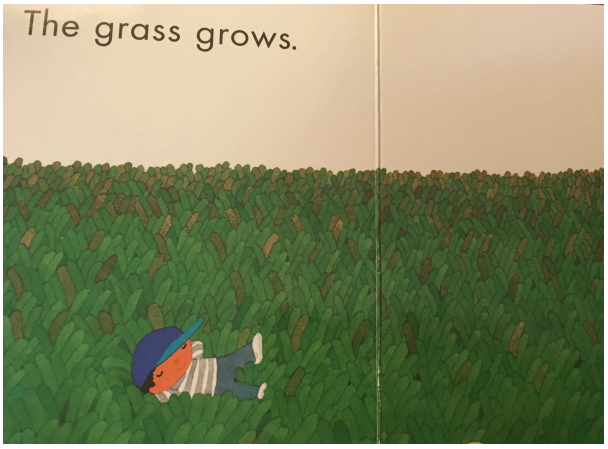
The baby eats solid foods if she's hungry.

The train runs smoothly when there is no precipitation.

People dance whenever they feel happy.

Simple present tense is also often used in narrative contexts, such as children's books:

"Spring is Here" by Taro Gomi



Simple present tense in narrative contexts.

More simple present tense in narrative contexts.

As you look through this list of uses of the simple present tense for things other than simple present time, you may be struck in particular by the use of *present tense* to reference *future time*. Isn't this just "future tense," you say? Wait a minute—why haven't you talked about future tense at all?!

Tense is a category of grammatical meaning that is expressed through specific grammatical elements. We can clearly see a distinction between present and past tense, because our verb inflections change to encode them. In contrast, **English does not have a grammatical future tense**: there is no verb inflection (or lack of one) that encodes a temporal relationship of futurity between an event under description and the time of utterance. Rather, we have other means of indicating futureness—we saw one above, which is the use of present-tense verb forms, with futurity indicated by adverbial phrases or just being interpretable from context.

This points to an important general linguistic distinction between *meanings languages can express* and *the grammatical elements used to express them*. All languages can express senses of past time, present time, future time, and gradations within them—but languages do so differently. English happens to not use verb inflections to indicate futurity, but other languages do. Finnish (like English) has a past tense and no future tense. Hindi has a past tense and future tense. Yagaria has a future tense but no past tense. Cantonese and Chamorro have no past tense *or* future tense. (Check out WALS, the World Atlas of Linguistic Structures, to search for languages with different grammatical features!)

The upshot: different languages (and dialects) do things differently. English has a present and past tense. Future time is expressed in other ways.

1. Introducing the verb group

Let's revisit the sentences with auxiliary verb BE from above:

People are dancing right now.

Misty Copeland is dancing ballet at this moment.

I am dancing in my pajamas as I speak.

The train is leaving right now at 5 pm.

The train is arriving on time at this moment.

The train is running smoothly as I speak.

Babies are drinking milk right now.

The baby is eating solid food at this moment.

The baby is waking up as I speak.

Each of these sentences contains an auxiliary verb in addition to the main verb (specifically a form of BE). And each sounds—generally—more grammatical as a description of something happening simultaneous with the utterance, compared to a sentence with *just* the simple present tense verb. But *why*?

We already knew, from our introduction of auxiliary verbs as a lexical category, that verb phrases can include more than one verb. Now, we will get specific about *why* sometimes there is more than one verb, and what grammatical categories of meaning are expressed by combinations of verbs. There's a lot to do here. Let's go!

In our approach, we will follow Elly van Gelderen's system of calling the entire combination of verbs the **verb group**, and we'll abbreviate the verb group with "VG." Observe the following verb groups:

is dancing

have danced

could have danced

has been danced

had been being danced

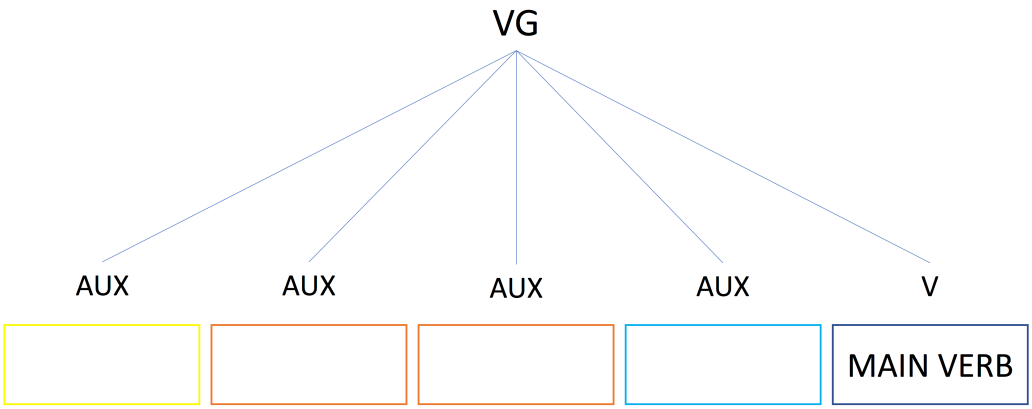
will have been being danced

In each, there is a main verb carrying lexical meaning: DANCE. In addition, each contains at least one auxiliary verb and in some cases more than one: BE, HAVE, COULD, WILL.

Every VG will contain at least **a main verb**, and optionally **between one and four auxiliary verbs**. That means a verb group can be as small as one verb, and as large as five!

Here is a schematization of the VG:

Schema for Verb Group



The presence of every auxiliary verb in combination with the main verb expresses one or more of three grammatical categories of meaning: **aspect**, **voice**, and **modality**.

Note: Before we proceed, you may want to review the verb inflections again. Understanding the VG will be much more difficult if you do not recognize the inflections right away.

3. Aspect

We begin with *aspect*, because like tense, it relates to time. In the sentences above, we actually "fixed" our simple present tense sentences by adding aspectual meaning.

3a. Aspectual meaning categories

Whereas tense locates an event relative to the time its description is uttered, **aspect** expresses the division or flow of time *within* a past or present temporal location.

In English, we have two grammatically-marked aspectual categories: **progressive** and **perfect**. I'll give definitions in a second, but their semantic meanings are really best grasped by considering how they are used in context. Consider the following:

People are dancing

People have danced

When would you say one versus the other? Can we do the "add an adverb phrase" trick to help us think about the contexts they could describe? These work for me:

People are dancing right now and they won't stop.

People have danced since the beginning of humanity.

Now, if we try to swap the adverbials between the two clauses, we end up with odd-sounding sentences:

People are dancing since the beginning of humanity.

People have danced right now and they won't stop.

Why do these sound odd? The first VG, *are dancing*, is **progressive aspect**. This signals a continuity to the event such that it's viewed as something in-progress. Importantly, it could be in-progress in the present, or it could have been in-progress in the past:

present progressive: People are dancing at this moment and they won't stop.

past progressive: People were dancing at that moment and they wouldn't stop.

In the present progressive, the event occurs at the time of utterance and it will continue occurring after the utterance: it is ongoing. In the past progressive, the event occurred prior to the utterance, and at the time it occurred, it was a continuously-occurring action.

The second VG, *have danced*, is **perfect aspect**. This signals a completion or "closedness" of the event, while also signaling a closeness to either present or past time. As with the progressive, perfect aspect can occur in either present or past tense:

present perfect: People have danced since the beginning of humanity.

past perfect: People had danced long before the birth of Christ.

In present perfect, the event is possibly still happening at the time of utterance. In contrast, in past perfect, the event is not still happening at the time of utterance, and in fact was completed by some past time.

Perfect aspect locates the occurrence of an event either very close to the time of utterance (present tense), or very close to some time prior to the time of utterance (past tense).

Personally, I think perfect aspect is much more nuanced and harder to understand than progressive, so let's look at some more examples of when you would/wouldn't use perfect aspect.

Consider these **present perfect** examples, with potential sentence completions that are either good or bad (e.g., sensical or nonsensical).

Sentence beginning	GOOD completion	BAD completion
We have eaten all the popcorn…	…and the movie is about to start	…by the time the movie started
They have danced all night…	…and they don't show any signs of stopping	…and they stopped

Perfect aspect describes something that occurred *prior to the moment of utterance*; the question is just how close to the moment of utterance. In the first example, if I say "we have eaten all the popcorn," it's true that the action of eating popcorn has already occurred and was completed prior to my utterance—but it has happened *very close in time* to my utterance, and it is *relevant to the present time*. So the past tense completion of "by the time the movie started" doesn't work.

In the second example, if I say "they have danced all night," it's ambiguous as to whether they are still dancing or not at the time of utterance—that interpretation depends on what follows, or perhaps just knowing the context. But what *must* be the case is that dancing has already occurred before the time of utterance. Yet the dancing is *relevant* to the time of utterance, and if it is completed, it likely only completed shortly before the utterance. So again, a simple past tense completion clause "and they stopped" doesn't work.

Now compare to statements in **past perfect.** I've swapped the same possible completions between GOOD and BAD:

Sentence beginning	GOOD completion	BAD completion
We had eaten all the popcorn…	…by the time the movie started	…and the movie is about to start
They had danced all night…	…and they stopped	…and they don't show any signs of stopping

With past perfect, the event occurred *and was completed* in the past, prior to the time of utterance. Thus, it doesn't make sense to tag on things that are about the same event in the present tense; hence the present tense completions now become bad.

Not only do we have present and past tense in combination with perfect and progressive aspect, but we also have both aspect markings possible in a single verb group—still with present or past tense! Check it out:

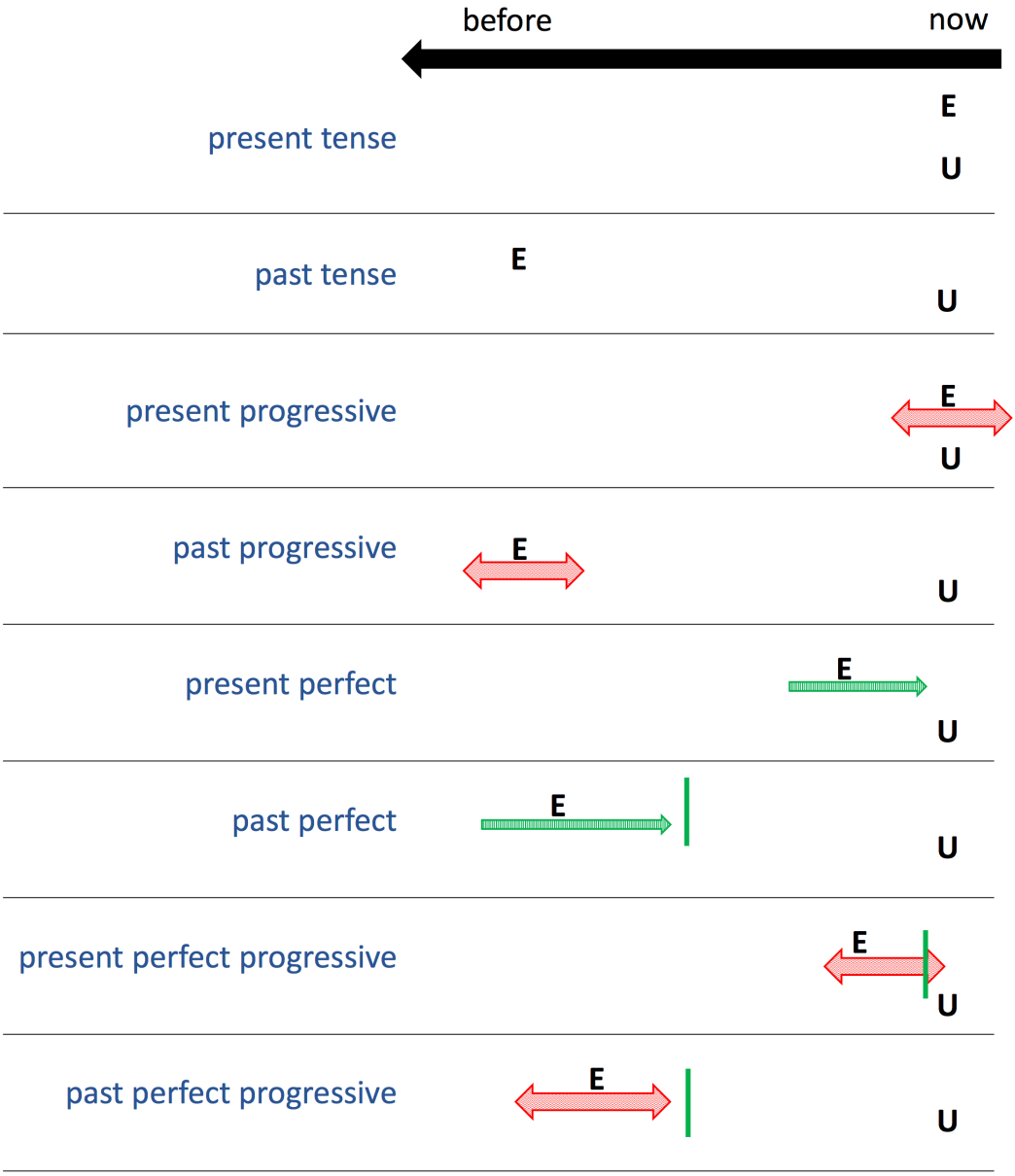
present perfect progressive: People have been dancing

past perfect progressive: People had been dancing

Can you articulate what the combined meanings of such VGs are?

Here's an attempt to illustrate the relations between present/past tense and perfect/progressive aspect. This schematic is inspired by material in Elly van Gelderen's textbook, *An Introduction to the Grammar of English*.

Trying to capture aspectual meanings



3b. Syntactic expression of aspect

Now that we have a little sense of what these combinations *mean*, let's deal with how they're structured in the VG.

The grammatical meanings of aspect, modality, and voice are each expressed in the VG involves a two-part

combination: a specific auxiliary verb, plus a specific inflection on the *next verb* in the series. We call this phenomenon **affix-hop**. It is as if the inflection is "packaged" with the auxiliary verb, but then "hops" from the auxiliary verb over to the next verb in the sequence.

Affix-hop in the VG

- Grammatical meanings of aspect, modality, and voice are expressed in the Verb Group are encoded by:
  - a specific auxiliary verb, plus
  - a specific inflection on the *next verb* in the VG

To understand affix-hop, see that the following are ungrammatical:

*People have dance

*People are dance

What's missing? In both cases, the verb after the auxiliary verb has the "wrong" inflection. We know this because to fix them, we only need to change the inflection on the main verb:

People have danced

People are dancing

Aspectual meaning is marked by a combination of a specific auxiliary verb *and* an inflection on the next verb. And it doesn't matter how many verbs there are in a VG: the inflection goes to the *next verb* down the line. So that could be the main verb, as above, but it might be another auxiliary verb.

Perfect aspect is expressed by a combination of the auxiliary HAVE plus the past participle {-en/-ed} inflection on the next verb. Here are examples:

PERFECT ASPECT EXAMPLES

HAVE	**+**	**{-en/-ed}**
have		eaten
had		bought
has		given
had		ridden
have		seen
has		warned
had		typed

Every verb after the auxiliary HAVE is in the past participle form. (In fact, this is the primary way we have of identifying that there are different past tense v. past participle forms in English: we say *I gave* but *I have given*, with *gave* in past tense but past participle *given* when auxiliary HAVE is there.)

What accounts for the differing forms of HAVE itself, though? Why sometimes *have, had,* or *has*?

First is tense: the auxiliary HAVE is carrying the tense inflection for present versus past perfect. Second is subject-verb agreement: *have* and *has* will be used with different subjects, though they are both present tense. In the cases above, HAVE is the finite verb: it inflects for tense and subject-verb agreement.

Progressive aspect is expressed by a combination of the BE verb plus a present participle {-ing} inflection on the next verb. Examples:

PROGRESSIVE ASPECT EXAMPLES

BE	**+**	**{-ing}**
are		eating
was		buying
is		giving
were		riding
am		seeing
is		warning
was		typing

Again, the form of the auxiliary BE is determined by tense (present or past) and subject-verb agreement. Here, BE is the finite verb.

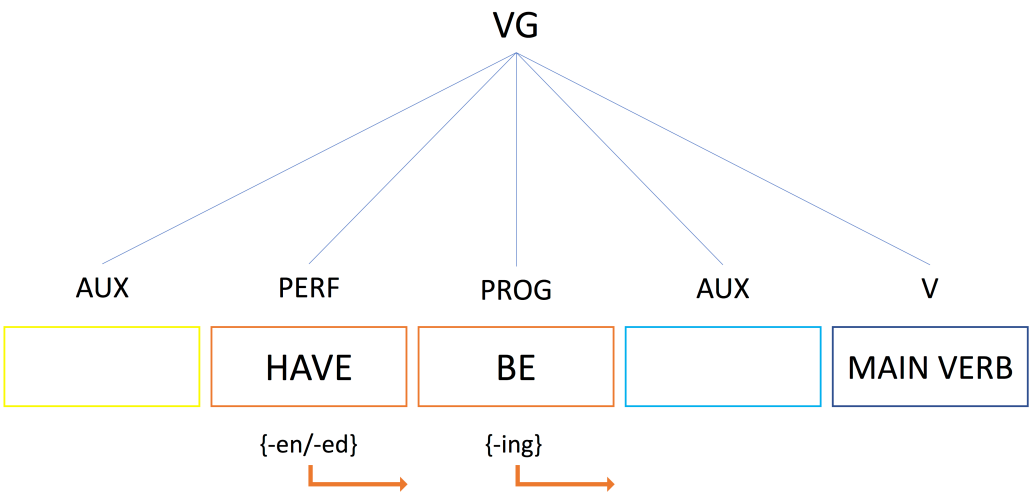
What if we have *both* perfect and progressive aspect? Then the auxiliary HAVE (perfect) comes first, and kicks its {-en/-ed} inflection over to the next verb—which is auxiliary BE (progressive). Auxiliary BE then kicks *its* {-ing} inflection over to the next verb. In the examples below, that's the main verb:

PERFECT +	**PROGRESSIVE**	
HAVE	**{-en/-ed}**	
	BE	**{-ing}**
have	been	dancing
had	been	eating
has	been	watching
have	been	kicking

To summarize the syntactic expression of aspect:

	auxiliary verb	**inflection on next verb**
perfect	HAVE	{-en/-ed} (past participle)
progressive	BE	{-ing} (present participle)

Now let's think about the whole VG. We said that a maximal VG includes four auxiliary verbs. **Perfect and progressive aspect account for two of those slots**. Let's start to fill in our schema, and include the affix-hop:



Auxiliaries signaling aspect in the Verb Group

Complete the following to check in on your understanding of tense and aspect:

An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:
https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/ellm/?p=371

4. Modality

Our next category of grammatical meaning is **modality**. Modality expresses different *stances* or *orientations* of the speaker toward the utterance, pertaining to its truth-value, certainty, conditionality, likelihood, desirability, and so on.

Linguists describing English grammar use a diverse set of definitions and categorizations of modal meaning, which we won't go too far into (take a semantics class if you want to learn more!). It will be enough for us to note that modality is expressed by the inclusion of **modal auxiliary verbs**, of which English has 9:

ENGLISH MODAL VERBS

can

could

will

would

may

might

must

shall

should

We can get into lots of fine-grained distinctions (and debates) about what each modal expresses and how it is used, but there are two uses that are unequivocally and clear-cut part of how English speakers use modals. First, we use modals to express **future time**. Primarily this is done through *will* which is a very straightforward future (along with the now-underused *shall*), but actually all of the modal verbs can have a future reading given the right context. Second—and relatedly—we use modals to express **conditionality**: things that are not certain to be the case, but are possible given some other factors.

Here are some examples of each of these meanings.

FUTURE TIME

We will eat at noon. (an hour from now)

The party tomorrow night should have dancing.

All tenants shall pay rent on time.

CONDITIONALITY

I might cut my hair, if it's long enough to donate.

They would have liked the class if it had been more exciting.

If your old clunker doesn't run anymore, you could donate it.

In the history of English, some of the modal verbs constituted more or less present+past tense verb pairs (e.g., *can/could*, *will/would*) and they were used as main verbs. But now, these verbs do not carry grammatical tense, and they actually take the place of tense-marking when they are present. The inflection a modal verb sends to the "affix-hop" process is a *zero* inflection—**the next verb after a modal verb occurs in its base, uninflected form**:

We would go.

She will go.

They can dance.

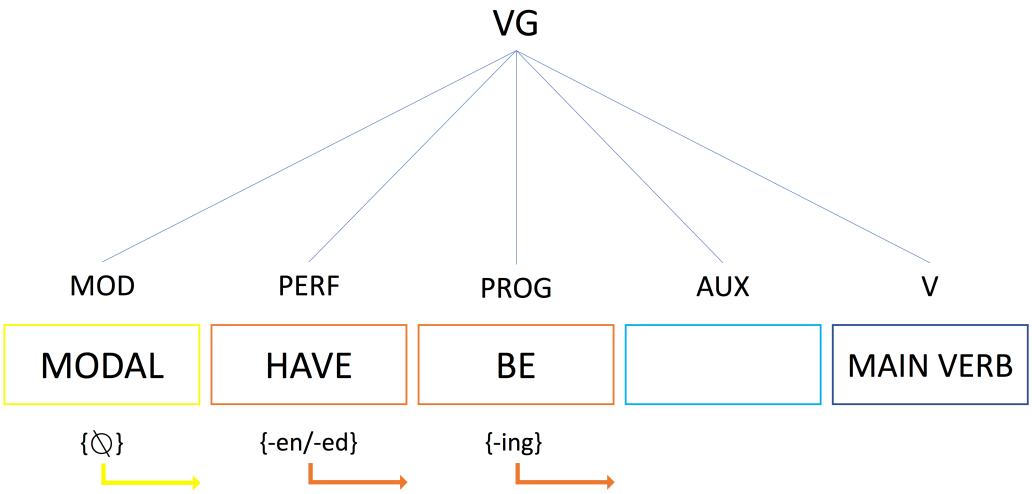
They could eat.

You should give.

I may give.

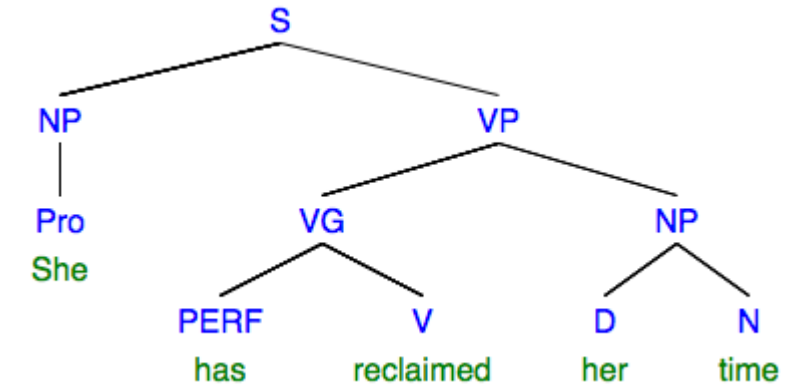
So, **modality** is expressed in the VG by a combination of **a modal verb plus a zero inflection on the next verb**. If a modal verb is present, it will always be the first verb in the VG. We can add this to our VG structure slots:

Auxiliaries signaling modality and aspect in the VG



Modal verbs are the only category of verbs that do not inflect at all based on subject-verb agreement or tense. But because modal verbs seem to "absorb" the need for a sentence to contain a tensed verb, we say that **modal verbs are inherently finite**.

Let's check out some examples of sentences with these meanings in the VG, so you can see how our trees will look from now on: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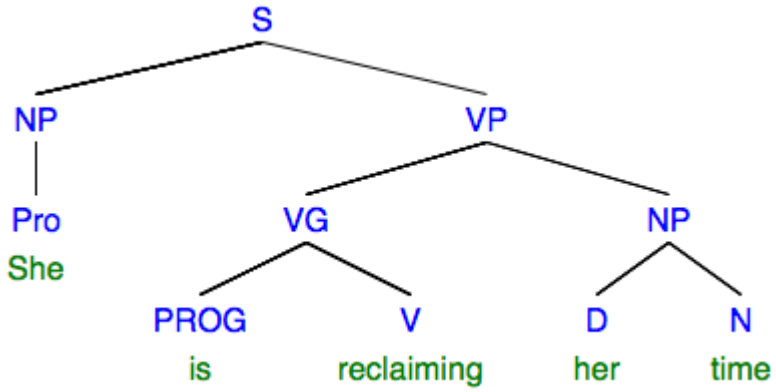
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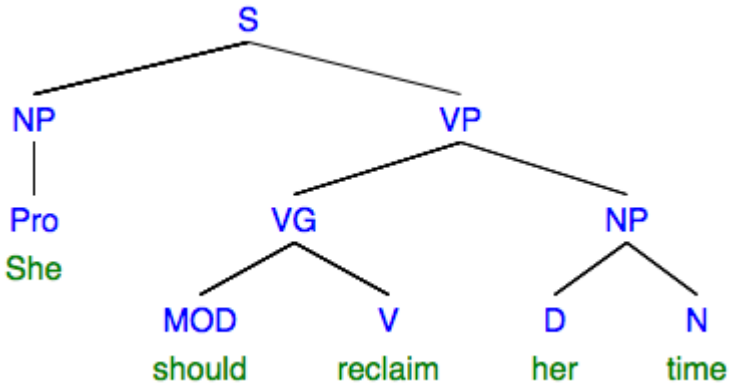
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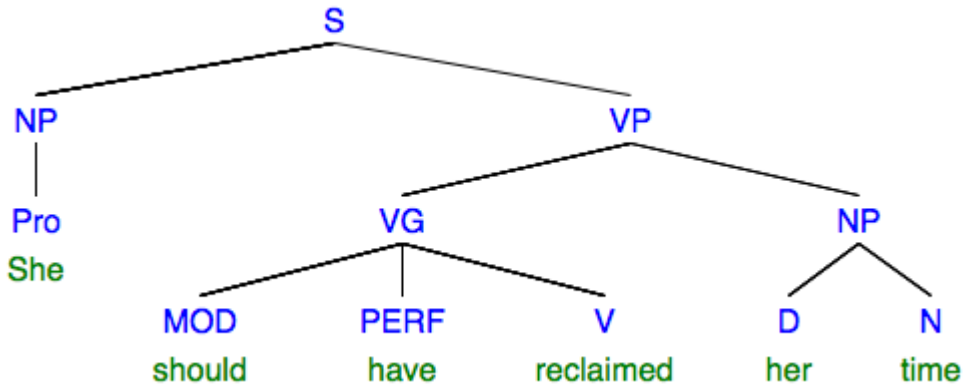
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5. Voice

If there is one prescriptive grammar "rule" that most students seem to come to my class having heard a lot, it's "Don't use passive voice!" I disagree completely with this rule, but whether you follow it or not is ultimately up to you—what I care about is that you actually understand what passive voice *is*, in order to better assess when you might (or might not) want to use it.

Voice encodes the alignment between the thematic roles (semantic meanings) and syntactic functions (positions in the clause) of NPs. It is expressed by both the position(s) of the NP(s), and a combination of auxiliary verb and verb inflection in the Verb Group.

To understand **voice**, we need to remember our thematic roles, and the way that different thematic roles can be mapped on to different syntactic functions. We also need to remember our different sentence types: **Voice distinctions are only relevant to transitive, ditransitive, and complex transitive sentences**. You should understand why by the end of this section.

Here is a simple transitive sentence:

> My son ate the sprinkle donut.

What are the *thematic roles* of SON and DONUT? I would consider SON to be AGENT, and DONUT to be PATIENT.

What are the *syntactic functions* of SON and DONUT? SON is the subject, and DONUT is the object.

That means that in this sentence, the AGENT is the SUBJECT, and the PATIENT is the OBJECT.

We can come up with lots of other simple sentences with this same alignment between thematic roles and syntactic functions:

> Rapinoe kicked the ball beautifully.
>
> Steffan stopped the ball.
>
> Barrett saved the game at the last minute.

These sentences are all in **active voice**: the agent—the one *acting*—is the subject.

Consider, though, that you wanted to express the exact same content as each of these sentences, but you wanted to **highlight the patient** by putting it first:

> The sprinkle donut was eaten by my son.

The ball was kicked beautifully by Rapinoe.

The ball was stopped by Steffan.

The game was saved at the last minute by Barrett.

What has happened here? Now the subject is the patient—the one *being acted upon*. The agent is not the subject. These sentences are in **passive voice**. Notice that in these passive sentences the agent is not syntactically required:

The sprinkle donut was eaten.

The goal was made beautifully.

The ball was stopped.

The game was saved at the last minute.

Sometimes people will say that passive voice is "bad" because "it removes the subject," or "passive sentences don't have subjects." This couldn't be more false! These sentences all have subjects—remember, subject is a *syntactic* position/function. That function is fulfilled in all of these sentences: *the sprinkle donut; the goal; the ball; the game*.

These people are probably confusing *subject* and *agent*: it is true that passive sentences often don't have *agents.* And this allows for people to obfuscate, or avoid taking or attributing responsibility:

Mistakes were made.

The papers were lost.

The bills were not paid.

But there are times when we simply don't *know* the agent, or when we'd rather not say, or when the agent simply isn't relevant. In these cases, passive voice can sound much better than active. Consider the following sentences:

Our house was robbed!

Trump was elected.

The senator is accused of fraud.

What do you think about these active voice alternatives?

Someone robbed our house!

Voters elected Trump.

Banks accuse the senator of fraud.

Passive voice provides a way of omitting unknown or unimportant information—and that can come in handy. Let's look at how the active/passive alternation plays out over different types of verbs/clauses.

5a. Transitives

With transitive verbs, the direct object in an active clause becomes the subject in the passive clause. Whatever was the subject in the active clause typically becomes optional, and can be expressed in a *by*-headed prepositional phrase.

In an active transitive clause the AGENT is the subject, whereas in a passive clause the PATIENT is the subject.

Active	**Passive**
Students protested the tax bill.	The tax bill was protested by students.
Apple funded new iPads.	New iPads were funded by Apple.
The weary professor taught the lesson.	The lesson was taught by the weary professor.

5b. Ditransitives

Active ditransitive clauses have both a direct and indirect object, and either of these may become the subject in a passive clause. That means that either the THEME/PATIENT or RECIPIENT may become the subject in the passive clause. Check it out:

Active	Passive
Apple gave the students new iPads.	The students were given new iPads. (RECIPIENT as subject)
Apple gave the students new iPads.	New iPads were given to the students. (THEME as subject)
The senator's office emailed me a reply.	I was emailed a reply. (RECIPIENT as subject)
The senator's office emailed me a reply.	A reply was emailed to me. (THEME as subject)
The chef baked cookies for the table.	The table was baked cookies by the chef. (BENEFICIARY as subject)
The chef baked cookies for the table.	Cookies were baked for the table. (PATIENT as subject)

5c. Complex transitives

Complex transitive clauses have both a direct object and a predicative NP/AdjP/PP. In the passive version of a complex transitive clause, the direct object from the active clause (typically THEME) again becomes the subject of the passive clause:

Active	Passive
The agent made the actor a star.	The actor was made a star.
They called her Mickey.	She was called Mickey.
The students accorded the professor respect.	The professor was accorded respect.

What grammatical expression does voice take in the verb group? What do you notice about all of the following passive clauses?

The actor was made a star.

The students were given new iPads.

The lesson was taught by the weary professor.

If you said, "They all include the BE verb," YOU ARE RIGHT!!! Bingo. Just as aspect and modality are expressed by a combination of auxiliary verb and inflection on the following verb (affix-hop), so is voice.

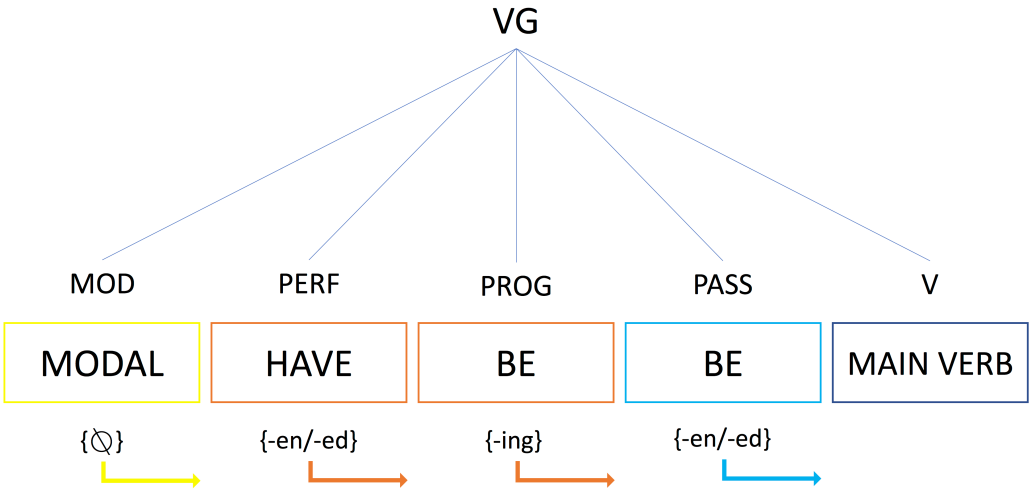
Passive voice is expressed by the combination of the BE auxiliary verb plus a past participle {-en/-ed} inflection on the following verb. Examples:

PASSIVE VOICE EXAMPLES

BE	**+**	**{-en/-ed}**
is		called
was		believed
were		elected
are		alleged
am		obliged
were		judged

In the series of auxiliary verbs, the passive "slot" is the final one, filling out our verb group:

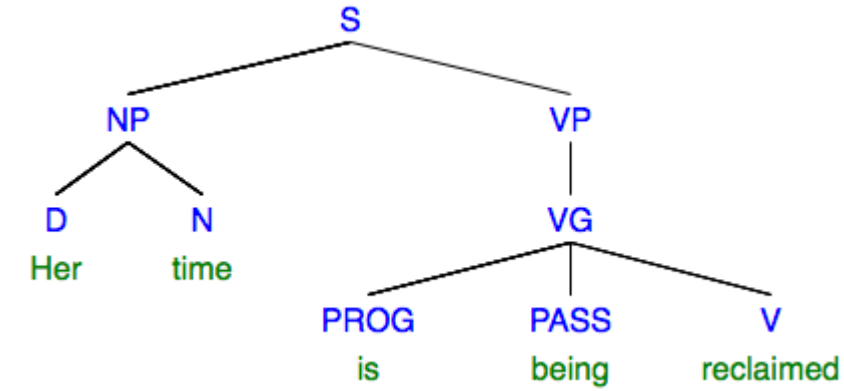
The full VG.

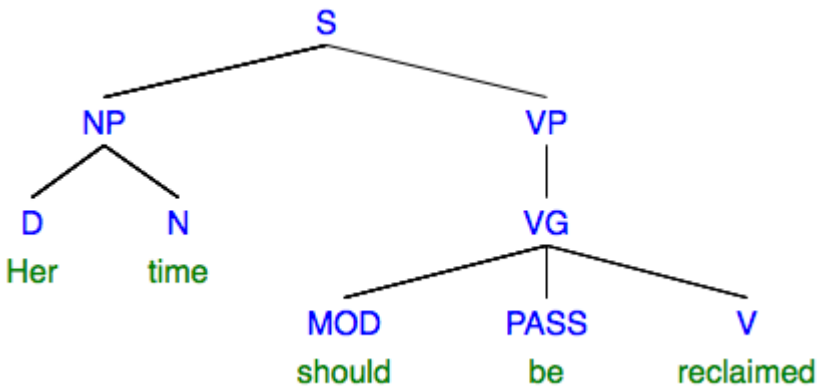


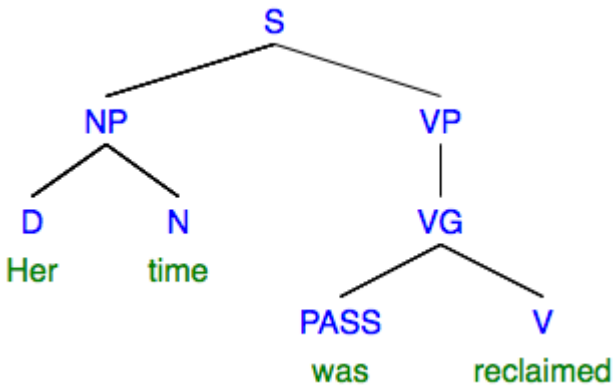
IMPORTANT NOTE: Any auxiliary that comes after another auxiliary will be inflected to reflect affix-hop. Thus, if the passive auxiliary comes after perfect HAVE, it will be in the past participle form *been*. If the passive auxiliary comes after progressive BE, it will be in the present participle form *being*. And if it's after a modal verb, it will be in the uninflected form *be*. The same applies to the other auxiliaries. Here are some example series of verbs:

MOD	PERF	PROG	PASS	V
should	have	been		taken
may			be	taken
	has	been		taking
		were	being	taken
can		be		taking
shall	have	been	being	taken

Here are some trees incorporating passive voice into the VG:







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Common misconceptions about passive voice

- Any sentence with the BE verb is passive
- Any sentence with any auxiliary verb is passive
- Any sentence with a past participle is passive
- Any sentence without an AGENT is passive
- Any sentence without a direct object is passive
- Passive sentences don't have subjects
- Passive sentences are "weak"
- Passive sentences are longer than active sentences
- Passive sentences obscure the meaning of a sentence

*You should be able to explain why each of these is a myth!

6. Mood

Grammatical mood overlaps a bit with modality, in that it involves something about the speaker's stance or orientation to the utterance. But mood is really about what *kind* of utterance one is making, and what its purpose is: a statement? a command? a wish? etc.

(Take a minute to look up "grammatical mood" in google and notice how widely different uses of this term are. Some people use it to refer to exactly what I am calling *modality*; some people use five categories of mood, some use three—it's all over the place!)

In Modern English we can talk about three distinct mood categories that correspond to different finite verb forms: **declarative**, **imperative**, and **subjunctive**. (Some people consider **interrogative** a mood, but it is distinguished grammatically by elements of structure different from the main verb itself, so we won't consider that here.)

Declarative mood corresponds roughly to statements (assertions; propositions). Nearly all of the sentence examples we've seen so far in class have been declaratives. In declarative mood, the verb inflects in the "normal" ways we've investigated—for subject-verb agreement, tense, and to combine with auxiliaries of various kinds:

The cat eats its food.

The cats eat their food.

The cat ate its food.

The cats are eating their food.

Imperative mood corresponds to command forms. We've seen a few examples of these. Grammatically, imperatives are distinguished by a) always using the base form of the verb, and b) carrying an implicit, non-overt second-person subject. Note that any inflection on the verb makes a command form ungrammatical.

Eat your food.

*Eats your food.

*Ate your food.

*Eating your food.

You cannot put any auxiliary verbs in an imperative:

*Could eat your food!

*Be eat your food!

Subjunctive mood corresponds to non-factual statements; subjunctive clauses often express wishes, desires, or hypotheticals. Subjunctives are also distinguished by specific verb inflections, ones that do not vary by subject properties. For non-BE verbs, subjunctive is expressed with the uninflected verb form:

I recommend that the cat <u>eat</u> its food.

I insist that the cat <u>eat</u> its food indoors.

It is essential that the cat <u>eat</u> all its food, or else it will starve.

Note that the subjunctive here occurs in an *embedded* clause, and if we extract the clause from the sentence, it's not grammatical—because the verb is not inflected to agree with the subject; in other words, *there is no finite verb*.

*the cat eat its food

It doesn't matter whether the main clause is in present or past tense—the subjunctive will still be the uninflected verb form. Here are the past tense versions of the clauses above:

I recommended that the cat eat its food.

I insisted that the cat eat its food indoors.

It was essential that the cat eat all its food, or else it would starve.

For BE verbs, "uninflected" *be* is used regardless of subject. Hence we have:

I insist that the cat be still for the shot.

I demand that my pets be adorable!

It is imperative that my cat be fluffy.

Again, the subjunctive occurs in each case in an embedded clause, which on its own would be ungrammatical because the verb is not inflected for the subject (is not finite):

*the cat be still for the show

*my pets be adorable

*my cat be fluffy

An important note! The subjunctive inflection appears on the finite verb. This means that, if the finite verb is

auxiliary BE, it will follow the rule of being in the uninflected *be* form, regardless of subject in the clause. If the finite verb is auxiliary HAVE, it will occur as uninflected *have*:

I insisted that the cat be given a shot.

I demand that my pets be eating by 3 pm.

It is imperative that my cat have eaten by 3 pm.

A final word on subjunctives... some people say English doesn't have a subjunctive anymore, but I think the above examples alone suffice to show that it does. I think what many people are referring to when they say this are examples like the following:

(a) If I were a rich woman, I'd give it all away.

(b) If I was a rich woman, I'd give it all away.

Many people consider (a) to be a subjunctive verb form—and because these days most people would produce (b) rather than (a), these folks argue that the subjunctive-declarative distinction is collapsed. But my go-to grammar experts, Pullum & Huddleston, hold that these special *were* forms are in fact not subjunctive at all, but a different category called **irrealis**. Food for thought.

Here's a subjunctive sentence you probably hear a lot:

Bless you!

7. Polarity

Here are two English sentences, which mean the opposite of each other:

I love pizza.

I do not love pizza.

The difference between the two sentences is one of **polarity**, with the second sentence including the particle NOT as a form of **negation**. The first sentence is affirmative, and has what is called *positive polarity*. The second has what is called *negative polarity*. Polarity expresses the difference between affirmative and non-affirmative propositions.

The primary thing to know about the expression of polarity in English is how negation works. And here we have to go back to the VG, which is where negation happens. **The negative particle NOT is inserted after the first verb: either BE or the first auxiliary verb**, if there is one:

It is not pizza.

I would not eat pizza

I have not eaten pizza

I am not eating pizza

The pizza has not been eaten

I have not been eating pizza

I could not have been eating pizza

You can't put the negative particle anywhere else:

*It not is pizza.

*I would eat not pizza

*I not would eat pizza

*The pizza has been not eaten

*I have been not eating pizza

*I could have not been eating pizza

*I could have been not eating pizza

Well...the last three may be marginally grammatical for you...do they mean something different from the earlier versions, though?

if there is no auxiliary verb, we insert what's called the **"dummy" auxiliary DO** before the negator:

*I not want pizza.

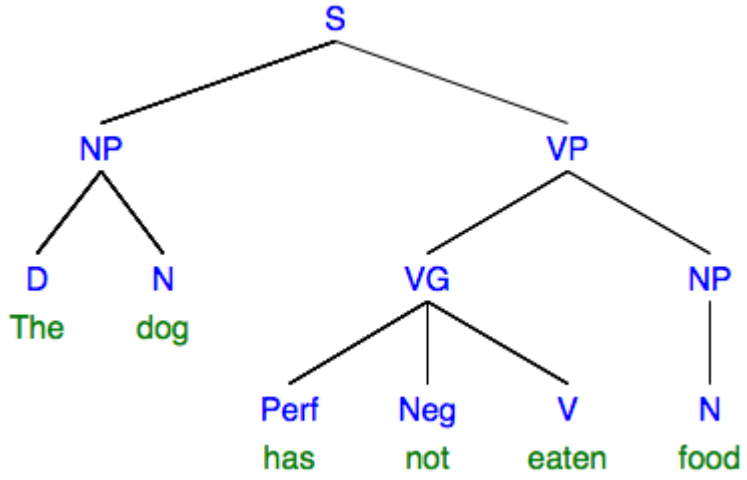
I do not want pizza.

*You not dance.

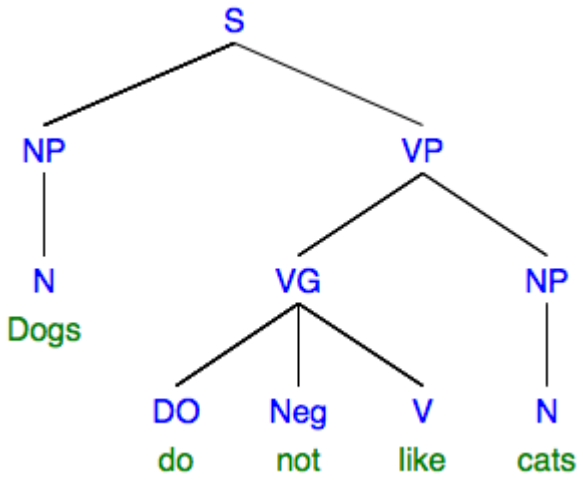
You do not dance.

(This is one of those rules that English learners of all types have to either acquire, in the case of native learners, or learn explicitly, in the case of nonnative learners: my son still, at age 3, sometimes omits the “dummy” DO auxiliary and produces sentences like, “Why you not like it?”)

We can incorporate the negator into our VG, just give it its own slot as below.



Negation with existing auxiliary



Negation by adding DO

There are a couple of other interesting things involving negation in English. First, there are certain words—typically with adverbial meaning—that can *only* be used in the context of a negator. These are called **negative polarity items (NPI)**. See examples:

Negative Polarity Items

I don't want to eat anything.

*I want to eat anything.

She doesn't eat gluten anymore.

*She eats gluten anymore.

The test shouldn't take long.

*The test should take long.

But there is dialect variation! For many speakers in Midland dialects, *She eats gluten anymore* is fine...you might well be one of these speakers, as this is common in Ohio.

Second, there is dialect/register variation regarding negation: double negatives, anyone?

It don’t mean nothing (Richard Marx)

I never said nothing (Liz Phair)

You don’t know nothing. (Brooklyn Funk Essentials)

8. Test Yourself: Quiz for Module 8, Advanced Unit

Complete this before moving on to the next unit!

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