FIVE
ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS

Characteristics of the adjective

5.1

We cannot tell whether a word is an adjective by looking at it in isolation: the form does not necessarily indicate its syntactic function. Some suffixes are indeed found only with adjectives, *eg: -ous* (App I.20), but many common adjectives have no identifying shape, *eg: good, hot, little, young, fat.* Nor can we identify a word as an adjective merely by considering what inflections or affixes it will allow. It is true that many adjectives inflect for the comparative and superlative, *eg: great, greater, greatest.* But many do not allow inflected forms, *eg: disastrous, *disastrouser, *disastrousest* (5.36). Moreover, a few adverbs can be similarly inflected, *eg: (He worked) hard, harder, hardest* (5.38). It is also true that many adjectives provide the base from which adverbs are derived by means of an *-ly* suffix, *eg:* adjective *happy*, adverb *happily* (App I.22). Nevertheless, some do not allow this derivational process; for example, there is no adverb **oldly* derived from the adjective *old.* And there are a few adjectives that are themselves derived from an adjective base in this way, *eg: kindly*, an item functioning also as an adverb.

5.2

Most adjectives can be both attributive and predicative (5.3), but some are either attributive only (5.13*ff*) or predicative only (5.18).

Two other features usually apply to adjectives:

(1) Most can be premodified by the intensifier *very, eg: The children are very happy.*

(2) Most can take comparative and superlative forms. The comparison may be by means of inflections, *eg: The children are happier now, They are the happiest people I know*, or by the addition of the premodifiers *more* and *most* (periphrastic comparison) *eg: These students are more intelligent, They are the most beautiful paintings I have ever seen.*

An ADJECTIVE PHRASE is a phrase with an adjective as head, as in (*He was*) *so very happy*, or as sole realization, as in (*He was*) *happy*. Adjectives function syntactically only in adjective phrases, but since it is the adjective that generally determines the function of the adjective phrase, we have often found it convenient to use adjectives alone to illustrate the functions of adjective phrases and we have often referred to adjectives as a shorter way of referring to adjective phrases.

5.3 Syntactic functions of adjectives

Attributive and predicative

The major syntactic functions of adjectives are attributive and predicative.

Adjectives are attributive when they premodify nouns, *ie:* appear between the determiner (4.5) and the head of the noun phrase:

the *beautiful* painting
his *main* argument

Predicative adjectives can be

(a) subject complement:

Your daughter is *pretty*

(b) object complement:

He made his wife *happy*

They can be complement to a subject which is a finite clause (11.3):

Whether he will resign is *uncertain*

or a non-finite clause (11.3):

Driving a bus isn't *easy*

Similarly, adjectives can be object complement to clauses:

I consider {what he did / playing so hard} *foolish*

The adjective functioning as object complement often expresses the result of the process denoted by the verb (7.9):

He pulled his belt *tight* (As a result, his belt was then tight)
He pushed the window *open* (As a result, the window was then open)

Postpositive

5.4

Adjectives can sometimes be postpositive, *ie* they can sometimes follow the item they modify. A postposed adjective (together with any complementation it may have) can usually be regarded as a reduced relative clause.

Indefinite pronouns ending in *-body, -one, -thing, -where* can be modified only postpositively:

I want to try on something larger (*ie* 'which is larger')

Postposition is obligatory for a few adjectives, which have a different sense when they occur attributively or predicatively. The most common are probably *elect* ('soon to take office') and *proper* ('as strictly defined'), as in

the president *elect* the City of London *proper*

In several compounds (mostly legal or quasi-legal) the adjective is postposed, the most common being: *attorney general, body politic, court martial, heir apparent, notary public* (AmE), *postmaster general.*

Postposition (in preference to attributive position) is usual for a few *a*-adjectives (5.42) and for *absent, present,* and (esp BrE) *concerned, involved,* which normally do not occur attributively in the relevant sense:

The house *ablaze* is next door to mine
The people *involved* were not found

Some postposed adjectives, especially those ending in *-able* or *-ible,* retain the basic meaning they have in attributive position but convey the implication that what they are denoting has only a temporary application (13.4). Thus, *the stars visible* refers to stars that are visible at a time specified or implied, while *the visible stars* refers to a category of stars that can (at appropriate times) be seen.

5.5

If an adjective is alone or premodified merely by an intensifier, postposition is normally not allowed:

The (*rather*) *timid* soldiers } approached their officer
*The soldiers (*rather*) *timid* }

However, if the noun phrase is generic and indefinite, coordinated adjectives or adjectives with a clause element added can be postposed, though such constructions are not very frequent:

Soldiers *timid or cowardly* don't fight well
A man *usually honest* will sometimes cheat

More commonly, we find

Timid or cowardly soldiers
Soldiers *who are timid or cowardly* } don't fight well

A man *who is usually honest* will sometimes cheat

It is unacceptable to prepose the whole of an adjective phrase in which there is complementation of the adjective:

*The *easiest to teach* boys were in my class

Postposition is normally possible:

The boys *easiest to teach* were in my class
They have a house *much larger than yours*
Students *brave enough to attempt the course* deserve to pass

though it is more usual to prepose the adjective (and its premodifiers, if any) and postpose the complementation:

The *easiest* boys *to teach* were in my class
They have a *much larger* house *than yours*

But if the adjective is modified by *enough, too,* or *so,* the modified adjective normally cannot be separated from its complementation:

**Brave enough* students *to attempt the course* deserve to pass
*A *brave enough* student *to attempt the course* deserves to pass
**Too/So easy* boys *to teach* were in my class
*A *too/so easy* boy *to teach* was in my class

Note

[*a*] An adjective modified by *enough, too,* or *so* can be separated from its complementation if the modified adjective is positioned before the indefinite article of the noun phrase:

He is (*not*) *brave enough* a student *to attempt the course*
He thought him *too difficult* a boy *to teach*

But with *enough* and *too,* this construction seems to be possible only if the adjective phrase is part of the subject complement or object complement, and with *enough* it is more common if the adjective is premodified by *not.* With *so,* the construction is also possible if the adjective phrase is part of the subject or object:

So easy a boy *to teach* deserves to pass
I have never met *so difficult* a man *to please*

[*b*] *Aplenty* (AmE) and *galore* (both informal) are postposed obligatorily, *eg: There were presents galore.*

Head of a noun phrase

5.6

Adjectives can often function as heads of noun phrases. As such, they do not inflect for number or for the genitive case and must take a definite determiner. Most commonly, such adjectives have personal reference:

The extremely old need a great deal of attention
We will nurse *your sick* and feed *your hungry*
The young in spirit enjoy life
The rich will help only *the humble poor*
The wise look to *the wiser* for advice
The old who resist change can expect violence

These adjectives have generic and plural reference. It is often possible to add a general word for human beings such as *people* and retain the generic reference (in which case the definite determiner is normally omitted) but the use of the adjective as head of the noun phrase is probably more common. The adjective can itself be modified, usually by restrictive modification (13.3).

Note

Although adjectives functioning as noun-phrase heads generally require a definite determiner, they can be without a determiner if they are conjoined (*cf* 'Parallel Structures', 4.21):

He is acceptable to *both old and young*.

5.7

Some adjectives denoting nationalities can be noun-phrase heads:

You British and *you French* ought to be allies
The industrious Dutch are admired by their neighbours

The adjectives in question are virtually restricted to words ending in *-(i)sh* (*eg: British, Spanish*), *-ch* (*Dutch, French*) and *-ese* (*eg: Chinese, Japanese*), and the adjective *Swiss*. As with the previous type, these noun phrases have generic reference and take plural concord, but they cannot be modified by adverbs. They can be modified by adjectives, which are normally non-restrictive, *ie: the industrious Dutch* is interpreted as 'the Dutch, who are industrious,. . .' (13.3).

Note

[*a*] Postmodifying prepositional phrases and relative clauses can be either restrictive or non-restrictive:

The Irish (who live) in America retain sentimental links with Ireland
The Polish, who are very rebellious, resisted strongly

[*b*] These adjectives are sometimes used not to refer to the nation as a whole but to some part of it; for example, troops:

The British have control of the bridge

5.8

Some adjectives can function as noun-phrase heads when they have abstract reference. These take singular concord. A few are modifiable by adverbs. They include, in particular, superlatives:

The latest (*ie* 'the latest news, thing') is that he is going to run for election
The very best (*ie* 'the very best part, thing') is yet to come
He ventured into *the unknown*
He went from *the sublime* to *the extremely ridiculous*

Note

There are a number of set phrases in which such an adjective is complement of a preposition, *eg: (He left) for good, (He enjoyed it) to the full, in short.*

Verbless adjective clause
5.9

An adjective (alone or as head of an adjective phrase) can function as a verbless clause. The clause is mobile, though it usually precedes or follows the subject of the superordinate clause:

(*By then*) *nervous*, the man opened the letter
The man, (*by then*) *nervous*, opened the letter
The man opened the letter, (*by then*) *nervous*

The implied subject is usually the subject of the sentence. Thus, while we have

The man restrained the woman, *who was aggressive*

we do not have as its equivalent

*The man restrained the woman, *aggressive*

However, if the clause contains additional clause constituents, its implied subject can be other than the subject of the sentence:

She glanced with disgust at the cat, *quiet* (*now*) *in her daughter's lap*

Other examples of verbless adjective clauses:

Long and untidy, his hair played in the breeze
Anxious for a quick decision, the chairman called for a vote

The implied subject of the adjective clause can be the whole of the superordinate clause. For example,

Strange, it was she who initiated divorce proceedings

is semantically equivalent to: *That it was she who initiated divorce proceedings is strange.*

An adverb may sometimes replace, with little difference in meaning, an adjective functioning as a verbless clause:

Nervously, / *Nervous*, } the man opened the letter

The adjective refers to the subject without explicit reference to the action, and unless otherwise stated, the characterization is only temporary in its application. But if an explicit time indicator is introduced, the application of the adjective is extended in time. For example, when we insert *always*, the man's nervousness becomes a permanent characteristic, and is not specifically connected with the action:

Always nervous, the man opened the letter

Note

When the implied subject is the whole clause, a corresponding adverb can replace the adjective with little or no difference in meaning, as with *strangely* for *strange:*

Strangely, it was she who initiated divorce proceedings

The adjective, unlike the adverb, allows a *that-* or *how-* clause to follow:

Strange { that it turned out that way / how she still likes him }

In such cases, *It's* is ellipted (9.6) and the adjective is not separated from the clause by a comma.

5.10

CONTINGENT ADJECTIVE CLAUSE

A contingent adjective clause expresses the circumstance or condition under which what is said in the superordinate clause applies. A subordinator is often present but can be omitted.

Enthusiastic, they make good students (= When enthusiastic, . . .)
Whether right or wrong, he always comes off worst in an argument because of his inability to speak coherently
When ripe, these apples are sweet

The implied subject of the contingent adjective clause is normally the subject of the superordinate clause, but it can also be the object:

We can drink it *hot*
You must eat it *when fresh*

The adjective then usually comes finally and could be regarded as a complement (*cf* 12.26*f*).

The implied subject can be the whole of the superordinate clause:

If (it is) *possible*, the dog should be washed every day

5.11

Exclamatory adjective sentence

An adjective as head of an adjective phrase or as its sole realization can be an exclamation:

How good of you! How wonderful! Excellent!

Syntactic subclassification of adjectives

5.12

Adjectives can be subclassified according to whether they can function as:

(1) both attributive and predicative, *eg:* a *hungry* man ~ the man is *hungry*; these are the majority and constitute the central adjectives
(2) attributive only, *eg:* an *utter* fool ~ *the fool is *utter*
(3) predicative only, *eg:* *a *loath* woman ~ the woman is *loath* to admit it

The restrictions of adjectives to attributive or predicative use are not always absolute, and sometimes vary with individual speakers.

Attributive only

5.13

In general, adjectives that are restricted to attributive position or that occur predominantly in attributive position do not characterize the referent of the noun directly. For example, *an old friend* ('one who has been a friend for a long period of time') does not necessarily imply that the person is old, so that we cannot relate *my old friend* to *my friend is old. Old* refers to the friendship and does not characterize the person. In that use, *old* is attributive only. On the other hand, in *that old man*, *old* is a central adjective (the opposite of *young*) and we can relate *that old man* to *that man is old.*

Adjectives that characterize the referent of the noun directly are termed INHERENT, those that do not are termed NON-INHERENT.

Some non-inherent adjectives occur also predicatively. For example, both *a new student* and *a new friend* are non-inherent, though the former can be used predicatively:

That student is new
*My friend is new

Note

A few words with strongly emotive value are restricted to attributive position, *eg: you poor man, my dear lady, that wretched woman.*

5.14

INTENSIFYING ADJECTIVES

Some adjectives have a heightening or lowering effect on the noun they modify. Two semantic subclasses of intensifying adjectives can be distinguished for our present purpose (*cf* 8.12*ff*): emphasizers and amplifiers. Emphasizers have a general heightening effect: amplifiers scale upwards from an assumed norm, denoting the upper extreme of the scale or a high point on the scale.

Emphasizers are attributive only. Examples include:

a certain ('sure') winner	pure ('sheer') fabrication
an outright lie	a real ('undoubted') hero

Amplifiers are central adjectives when they are inherent:

a complete victory ~ the victory was complete
their extreme condemnation ~ their condemnation was extreme
his great folly ~ his folly was great

But when they are non-inherent, they are attributive only:

a complete fool ~ *the fool is complete
a perfect idiot ~ *the idiot is perfect

Other examples of amplifiers that are attributive only:

a close friend	utter folly	a strong opponent
his entire salary	the very end	a great supporter

Several intensifiers have homonyms that are central adjectives, *eg:*

Those are real flowers ~ Those flowers are real ('not artificial')

Note

[*a*] Certain intensifying adjectives are always attributive only, in particular *mere, sheer, utter.*

[*b*] Many adjectives can be used as intensifiers, usually with restrictions on the nouns they modify, *eg: a great/big fool* ('very foolish'), *a great/big baby* ('very babyish'), *a great friend*, but not **a big friend* ('very friendly'). These are also restricted to attributive position.

5.15

LIMITER ADJECTIVES

Limiter adjectives particularize the reference of the noun (*cf* 8.8). Examples include:

the main reason	the precise reason
the only occasion	the same student

Some of these have homonyms. For example, *certain* in *a certain person* is a limiter ('a particular person'), while in *a certain winner* it is an intensifier ('a sure winner'). In *John is certain that he will win*, it is semantically related to the intensifier, but it is equivalent to *sure* in the sense of 'confident' and is limited to predicative position.

Note

Notice the use of *very* as a limiter adjective in *You are the very man I want.*

5.16

RELATED TO ADVERBIALS

Other adjectives that are attributive only can be related to adverbials. These non-inherent adjectives include:

my *former* friend ~ formerly my friend
an *occasional* visitor ~ occasionally a visitor

Some require implications additional to the adverbial:

the *late* president ~ till lately the president (now dead)

If the adjectives premodify agentive nouns, the latter suggest as well a relationship to the verb base:

a *hard* worker ~ a worker who works hard
a *big* eater ~ someone who eats a great deal

There are also instances where the noun normally lacks a corresponding verb but where the adjective (not always attributive) refers to the process part of the noun's meaning:

an *excellent* pianist ~ a pianist who plays the piano excellently

The implied process can be associated with an inanimate object:

a *fast* car ~ a car that one drives fast
a *fast* road ~ a road on which one can drive fast

Some of these adjectives have a temporal meaning. We might include with them *acting* ('for the time being') as in *the acting chairman.*

5.17

DENOMINAL ADJECTIVES

Some adjectives derived from nouns (5.20 (h)) are attributive only, *eg:*

criminal law ~ law concerning crime
an *atomic* scientist ~ a scientist specializing in atomic science
a *medical* school ~ a school for students of medicine

Note

The same item may also be a central adjective. For example, *a criminal law* can be a law which seems criminal, in which case *criminal* is a central adjective. For positional differences between these two in the adjective phrase, see 13.40*f*. With particular noun phrase heads, an attributive noun may be an alternative to the denominal adjective, *eg: criminal detection/crime detection,* or may be used exclusively, *eg: law school,* not **legal school; cf* the converse in *medical school,* not **medicine school.*

5.18

Predicative only

Adjectives that are restricted or virtually restricted to predicative position are most like verbs and adverbs. They tend to refer to a (possibly tem-

porary: 13.4) condition rather than to characterize. Perhaps the most common are those referring to health or lack of health: *faint, ill* (esp BrE), *well, unwell.* However, some people use *ill* and (to a lesser extent) *unwell* as attributives too.

A larger group comprises adjectives that can or must take complementation (12.11), *eg: afraid (that, of, about), conscious (that, of), fond (of), loath (to).*

Many closely resemble verbs semantically:

He is *afraid* to do it ~ He *fears* to do it
They are *fond* of her ~ They *like* her

Some have homonyms that can occur both predicatively and attributively, *eg: the conscious patient ~ the patient is conscious.*

Note
Sick (esp AmE) is the exception among these 'health' adjectives in that its attributive use is very common:

The sick woman ~ The woman is sick

Semantic sub-classification of adjectives

5.19

[A] Stative/dynamic

Adjectives are characteristically stative, but many can be seen as dynamic (2.16). In particular, most adjectives that are susceptible to subjective measurement (5.20) are capable of being dynamic. Stative and dynamic adjectives differ in a number of ways. For example, a stative adjective such as *tall* cannot be used with the progressive aspect or with the imperative: **He's being tall, *Be tall.* In contrast, we can use *careful* as a dynamic adjective: *He's being careful, Be careful.*

Adjectives that can be used dynamically include: *awkward, brave, calm, careless, cruel, extravagant, foolish, funny, good, greedy, impudent, irritable, jealous, naughty, noisy, rude, timid.*

[B] Gradable/non-gradable

Most adjectives are gradable, that is to say, can be modified by adverbs which convey the degree of intensity of the adjective. Gradability (5.33) includes comparison:

tall	taller	tallest
beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful

and other forms of intensification:

very young *so* plain *extremely* useful

All dynamic adjectives are gradable. Most stative adjectives (*tall, old*) are gradable; some are non-gradable, principally 'technical adjectives'

like *atomic* (*scientist*) and *hydrochloric* (*acid*) and adjectives denoting provenance, *eg: British* (*cf.* 5.20).

[C] Inherent/non-inherent

Most adjectives are inherent (5.13), and it is especially uncommon for dynamic adjectives to be other than inherent; an exception is *wooden* in *The actor is being wooden*, which is both dynamic and non-inherent.

Note

Whether or not an adjective is inherent or non-inherent, it may involve relation to an implicit or explicit standard. *Big* is inherent in *a big mouse*, the standard being the relative size of mice; contrast *a little mouse*. *Big* is non-inherent in *a big fool*, the standard being degrees of foolishness; contrast *a bit of a fool*. The relative standard is to be distinguished from gradability as well as from the inherent/non-inherent contrast. For example, *perfect* and *good* are non-inherent in *a perfect mother* and *a good mother*, the standard being motherhood, but only *good* is gradable (*a very good mother*, **a very perfect mother*). Similarly, though the inherent *big* in *a big elephant* is gradable (*a very big elephant*), the inherent adjective in *an enormous N* is not gradable (**a very enormous N*).

5.20

Semantic sets and adjectival order

Semantic sets have been proposed to account for the usual order of adjectives and for their co-occurrence (13.40*f*):

(a) intensifying adjectives (5.14), *eg: a real hero, a perfect idiot*
(b) postdeterminers (4.10), and limiter adjectives (5.15), *eg: the fourth student, the only occasion*
(c) general adjectives susceptible to subjective measure, *eg: careful, naughty, lovely*
(d) general adjectives susceptible to objective measure, including those denoting size or shape, *eg: wealthy, large, square*
(e) adjectives denoting age, *eg: young, old, new*
(f) adjectives denoting colour, *eg: red, black*
(g) denominal adjectives denoting material, *eg: a woollen scarf, a metallic substance*, and denoting resemblance to a material, *eg: metallic voice, silken hair, cat-like stealth*
(h) denominal adjectives denoting provenance or style, *eg: a British ship, a Parisian dress*

Characteristics of the adverb

5.21

The most common characteristic of the adverb is morphological: the majority of adverbs have the derivational suffix *-ly*.

There are two types of syntactic function that characterize adverbs, but an adverb need have only one of these:

(1) adverbial
(2) modifier of adjective and adverb.

In both cases the adverb functions directly in an ADVERB PHRASE of which it is head or sole realization. Thus, in the adjective phrase *far more easily intelligible*, *intelligible* is modified by the adverb phrase *far more easily*, *easily* is modified by the adverb phrase *far more*, and *more* is modified by the adverb phrase *far*, in this last case an adverb phrase with an adverb as sole realization. In this chapter we have often found it convenient to refer to the syntactic functions of a particular adverb or type of adverb, since it is generally the adverb that dictates the syntactic functions of an adverb phrase (*cf* 5.2).

5.22
Adverb as adverbial

An adverb may function as adverbial, a constituent distinct from subject, verb, object, and complement (2.5).

Three classes of adverbials are established and discussed in Chapter 8: adjuncts, disjuncts, conjuncts.

ADJUNCTS are integrated within the structure of the clause to at least some extent. *Eg:*

They are waiting *outside*
I can *now* understand it
He spoke to me about it *briefly*

DISJUNCTS and CONJUNCTS, on the other hand, are not integrated within the clause. Semantically, DISJUNCTS express an evaluation of what is being said either with respect to the form of the communication or to its content. *Eg:*

Frankly, I am tired
Fortunately, no one complained
They are *probably* at home

Semantically, CONJUNCTS have a connective function. They indicate the connection between what is being said and what was said before. *Eg:*

We have complained several times about the noise, and *yet* he does nothing about it
I have not looked into his qualifications. He seems very intelligent, *though*
If they open all the windows, *then* I'm leaving

Adverb as modifier
5.23
Modifier of adjective

An adverb may premodify an adjective:

That was a *VERY funny* film
It is *EXTREMELY good* of you
She has a *REALLY beautiful* face

One adverb – *enough* – postmodifies adjectives, as in *high enough.*

Most commonly, the modifying adverb is an intensifier (*cf* 5.14). The most frequently used intensifier is *very*. Other intensifiers include *so/pretty/rather/unusually/quite/unbelievably* (*tall*). Many are restricted to a small set of lexical items, *eg: deeply* (*anxious*), *highly* (*intelligent*), *strikingly* (*handsome*), *sharply* (*critical*). Many intensifiers can modify adjectives, adverbs, and verbs alike.

Adverbs as premodifiers of adjectives may also be 'viewpoint' (*cf* 8.7), as in *politically expedient* ('expedient from a political point of view'), *technically possible, theoretically sound.*

Note

[*a*] Viewpoint adjuncts that appear after the noun phrase are related to the premodifying adjective within the phrase:

A *good* paper *EDITORIALLY* can also be a *good* paper *COMMERCIALLY*

more usually,

An *EDITORIALLY good* paper can also be a *COMMERCIALLY* good paper

[*b*] *All*, as an informal synonym of *completely*, premodifies certain adjectives, mostly having an unfavourable sense: *He is all upset, Your brother is all wrong.*

5.24
Modifier of adverb

An adverb may premodify another adverb, and function as intensifier:

They are smoking *VERY heavily*
They didn't injure him *THAT severely* (informal)
I have seen *SO very* many letters like that one

As with adjectives, the only postmodifier is *enough*, as in *cleverly enough.*

A few intensifying adverbs, particularly *right* and *well*, premodify particles in phrasal verbs:

He knocked the man *RIGHT out*
They left him *WELL behind*

5.25
Modifier of prepositional phrase

The few adverbs that premodify particles in phrasal verbs also premodify prepositions or (perhaps rather) prepositional phrases:

The nail went *RIGHT through* the wall
His parents are *DEAD against* the trip

5.26

Modifier of determiner, predeterminer, postdeterminer

Intensifying adverbs can premodify indefinite pronouns, predeterminers, and cardinal numerals:

NEARLY everybody came to our party
OVER two hundred deaths were reported
I paid *MORE THAN ten* pounds for it

The indefinite article can be intensified when it is equivalent to the unstressed cardinal *one:*

They will stay *ABOUT a* week

With ordinals and superlatives, a definite determiner is obligatory:

She gave me *ALMOST the largest* piece of cake

Modifier of noun phrase

5.27

A few intensifiers may premodify noun phrases: *quite, rather* (esp BrE), and the predeterminers *such* and exclamatory *what*. The noun phrase is normally indefinite, and the intensifiers precede any determiners. *Rather* requires the head to be a singular count noun and gradable (4.3 Note):

He told SUCH { *a (funny) story* / *(funny) stories* }
I have never heard *SUCH wickedness*
It was *RATHER a mess*
He was *QUITE some player*
WHAT a (big) fool he is!

So and interrogative and exclamatory *how* also precede the indefinite article, but they require the noun phrase to contain a gradable adjective and the head of the noun phrase to be a singular countable noun. In this use, they cause the adjective to move in front of the article:

I didn't realize that he was *SO big a fool*

HOW tall a man is he? *HOW tall a man* he is!

Note

[*a*] In superficially similar noun phrases, *rather* may be intensifying the adjective, in which case it may precede or follow the determiner:

*It is rather a table
It is rather a big table
It is a rather big table

[*b*] *Kind of* and *sort of* (both informal) usually follow the determiner:

He gave a SORT OF *laugh*

but may sometimes precede it: *That was sort of a joke.*

Other *of* phrases precede a determiner:

I had A BIT OF *a shock*

[c] In informal or familiar style, *wh*-interrogatives can be intensified by *ever* and by certain set phrases, *eg:*

Where *ever* did I leave my keys?
Who *on earth* opened my letter?
What *in heaven's name* are you doing? (familiar)
Who *the hell* are you? (familiar)

Those intensified by *ever* are to be distinguished from *wh*-subordinators (11.6 *ff*), which are written as one word with *ever:*

Wherever I park my car, I get fined

[d] For anaphoric *such* ('like that'), see 10.39.

5.28

Some adverbs signifying place or time postmodify noun phrases (13.24):

PLACE: *the way ahead, the neighbour upstairs, the sentence below*
TIME: *the meeting yesterday, the day before*

Note

Indefinite pronouns, *wh*-pronouns, and *wh*-adverbs are postmodified by *else: someone else('s), all else, who else, what else. Else* also postmodifies compounds with *where: somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, nowhere.*

5.29

In some of the phrases in 5.28 the adverb can also be used as a premodifier: *his home journey, the above photo, the upstairs neighbour.*

A few other adverbs are also used as premodifiers: *the away games, the then president, in after years. Then* and *above* are probably the most common.

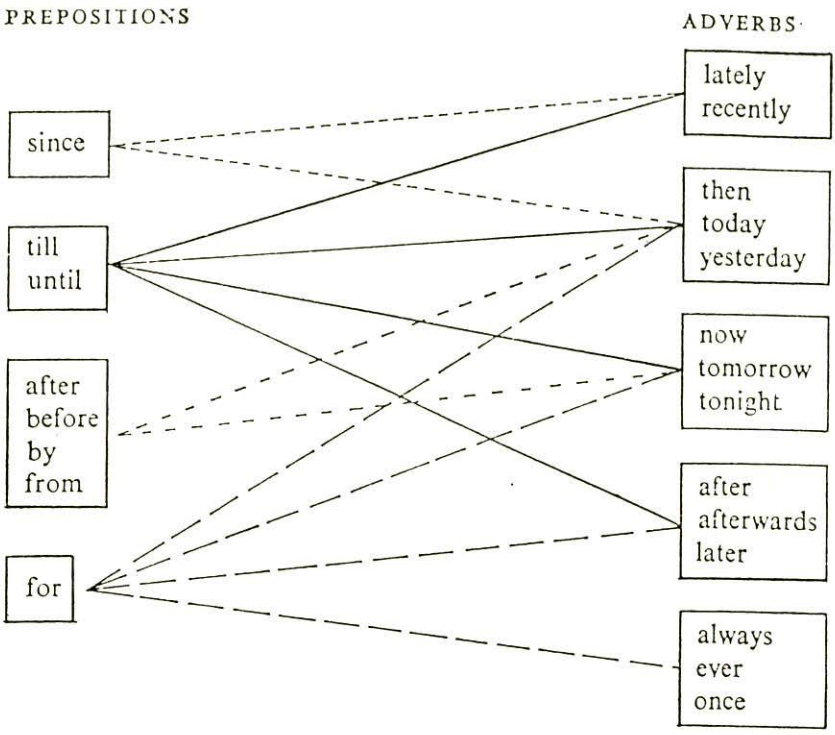
5.30

Adverb as complement of preposition

Some place and time adverbs function as complement of a preposition. Of the place adverbs, *here* and *there* take the most prepositions: *along, around, down, from, in, near, on, out (of), over, round, through, under, up. Home* can be the complement of the prepositions *at, from, near, toward(s).* Others are restricted to the preposition *from:*

above, abroad, below, downstairs, indoors, inside, outdoors, outside, upstairs, within, without

Time adverbs most commonly functioning as complement of prepositions are shown in the diagram.



Comparison and intensification

5.31

There are three degrees of comparison:

ABSOLUTE: *young/easily*

COMPARATIVE: *younger/more easily*

SUPERLATIVE: *youngest/most easily*

The comparative is used for a comparison between two, and the superlative where more than two are involved. The superlative is sometimes used for a comparison between two, 'He is the youngest (of the two brothers)', but this is considered loose and informal by many.

Comparison (*cf* 11.37 *ff*) is expressed by

(1) the inflected forms in *-er* and *-est*,
(2) their periphrastic equivalents in *more* and *most*,
(3) the forms for equational, lesser and least degrees of comparison, notably *as*, *less*, *least*.

Too in the sense 'more than enough' might also be mentioned here, *eg: It's too long* ('longer than it should be').

Note

[*a*] *More* and *most* have other uses in which they are not equivalent to the comparison inflections, as the paraphrases of the following sentences show:

He is more than happy about it (= He is happy about it to a degree that is not adequately expressed by the word *happy*)
He is more good than bad (= It is more accurate to say that he is good than that he is bad)

In BrE, the sentence *She is most beautiful* can mean only that she is extremely beautiful and not that she is more beautiful than all others. This absolute sense of *most* is common in AmE too.

[*b*] *Too* is also commonly used (esp in AmE) as a synonym of *very* in negative sentences, as in *I don't feel too good.*

5.32
Basis of comparison

We can make the basis of comparison explicit. The most common ways of doing so include correlative constructions introduced by *than* (correlative to *more, less*) and by *as* (correlative to *as*), and prepositional phrases with *of:*

John is *more/less* stupid *than Bob* (*is*) [1]
John behaves *more/less* politely *than Bob* (*does*) [2]
John is as stupid *as Bob* (*is*) [3]
John behaves as politely *as Bob* (*does*) [4]
John is the stupider *of the* (*two*) *boys* [5]
Of the (*two*) *boys*, John behaves the more politely [6]
John is the most stupid *of the* (*three*) *boys* [7]
Of the (*three*) *boys*, John behaves the most politely [8]

The basis of comparison can also be shown by the noun which the adjective premodifies:

John is the more stupid *boy* (formal; more commonly 'John is more stupid than the other boy')
John is the most stupid *boy*

Note

[*a*] The prepositional phrases in [5–8] can be either initial or final. Final position is more frequent, especially when the comparison involves an adjective rather than an adverb.

[*b*] A basis of comparison may be implicit in the use of the absolute form, and in such cases the basis of comparison can also be made explicit (6.44):

He is stupid *for a child of his age*

5.33
Gradability

Amplifiers and comparatives can modify gradable adjectives and adverbs. The range for emphasizers and those downtoners not expressing

degree (*eg: virtually*) is much wider, as we can see from their co-occurrence with a non-gradable adjective such as *non-Christian:*

He is definitely/virtually/*more/*very non-Christian

cf He is very unchristian.

There are also restrictions on the use of particular intensifiers, and these can sometimes be stated in semantic terms:

most { happy ('subjective', *cf* 5.20)
       *tall ('objective', *cf* 5.20)

utterly { wrong ('negative')
          *right ('positive')

Amplifiers and comparatives are available for adjectives that refer to a quality that is thought of as having values on a scale, and for adverbs that refer to a manner or to a time that is thought of in terms of a scale. Thus, in *John is English* the adjective *English* does not allow amplifiers or comparatives if it refers to John's nationality, but admits them if it refers to his behaviour:

John is { very English
          more English than the English

We can also achieve an intensifying effect by repeating attributive adjectives or degree intensifiers:

an old, old man ('a very old man')
very, very good ('extremely good')

Note

There are exceptions to the co-occurrence of a particular intensifier with a semantic class of adjectives. For example, though *utterly* tends to co-occur with 'negative' adjectives, *utterly reliable* and *utterly delightful* are common. People vary in the exceptions they allow.

5.34

Unmarked term in 'How' questions and measure phrases

How is used as a pro-form for degree intensifiers of the adjective or adverb in questions and exclamations:

How *efficient* is he? How *efficiently* does he work?
How *beautiful* she is! How *beautifully* she dances!

'Measure' adjectives that cover a scale of measurement and have a term for each end of the scale use the upper extreme as the 'unmarked' term in *How* questions and with the measurements:

A: How old is your son? B: He's three months (old)

How old is he? is equivalent to *What is his age?*, and *He's three months old* is equivalent to *His age is three months.*

Adjectives that are used as the unmarked term in *How* questions and with measurements are listed, with the marked term given in parenthesis:

deep (shallow)	old (young)	thick (thin)
high (low)	tall (short)	wide (narrow)
long (short)		

Other adjectives are used as the unmarked term for premodification by interrogative *How* (*How heavy is it?*) but are not used with measurements (**It is two pounds heavy*). They include:

big (small)	fat (thin)	large (little)
bright (dim)	heavy (light)	strong (weak)

Some adverbs also use an unmarked term in *How* questions, *eg:*

How *much/often/quickly* did they complain?

Note

If we use the marked term, as in *How young is John?* we are asking a question that presupposes that John is young, whereas the unmarked term in *How old is John?* does not presuppose that John is old. Notice that neither term is neutral in exclamations:

How young he is! ('He is extremely young')
How old he is! ('He is extremely old')

Inflection of adjectives for comparison

5.35

The inflectional suffixes are *-er* for the comparative and *-est* for the superlative: *young ~ younger ~ youngest.* A small group of highly frequent adjectives have their corresponding comparatives and superlatives formed from different stems:

good ~ better ~ best bad ~ worse ~ worst
far ~ further/farther ~ furthest/farthest

Old is regularly inflected as *older, oldest,* but in a specialized use, restricted to human beings in family relationships, the irregular forms *elder, eldest* are normally substituted, but only attributively or as noun phrase head:

My *elder/eldest brother* is an artist John is *the elder*
*My brother is *elder* than I am

The regular inflections sometimes involve changes in spelling or pronunciation.

CHANGES IN SPELLING

(1) Final base consonants are doubled when the preceding vowel is stressed and spelled with a single letter (*cf* 3.7):

big ~ bigger ~ biggest

(2) In bases ending in a consonant + *y*, final *y* is changed to *i* (3.8):

early ~ earlier ~ earliest

(3) Final *-e* is dropped before the inflections (3.9):

brave ~ braver ~ bravest *free ~ freer ~ freest*

CHANGES IN PRONUNCIATION

(1) Syllabic /l/, as in *simple*, ceases to be syllabic before inflections.

(2) Whether or not speakers pronounce final *r*, as in *poor*, the *r* is of course pronounced before the inflections.

Note

Well ('in good health') and *ill* ('in bad health', esp BrE) are inflected like *good* and *bad* respectively for the comparative:

He feels better/worse

5.36

Monosyllabic adjectives can normally form their comparison by inflection. Many disyllabic adjectives can also do so, though like most monosyllabic adjectives they have the alternative of the periphrastic forms:

My jokes are { funnier/funniest / more funny/most funny }

Common disyllabic adjectives that can take inflected forms are those ending in an unstressed vowel, syllabic /l/, or /ə(r)/:

(1) *-y: funny, noisy, wealthy, friendly*
(2) *-ow: hollow, narrow, shallow*
(3) *-le: gentle, feeble, noble*
(4) *-er, -ure: clever, mature, obscure*

Common adjectives outside these four categories that can take inflectional forms include *common, handsome, polite, quiet, wicked.*

Other adjectives can take only periphrastic forms:

We are { *reluctanter / *reluctantest / more reluctant / the most reluctant (of all) } to say anything

Note
Adjectives of participle form do not take inflections:
**tiringer, *woundeder*

5.37
Most adjectives inflected for comparison seem to be able to take periphrastic forms more easily when they are predicative and are followed by the basis of comparison:

He is *more* wealthy than I thought

Periphrastic forms are, however, abnormal with a number of monosyllabic adjectives, including those listed in 5.35 as forming their comparison irregularly.

5.38
Inflection of adverbs for comparison
For a small number of adverbs, the inflected forms used for comparison are the same as those for adjectives. As with adjectives, there is a small group with comparatives and superlatives formed from different stems:

well ~ better ~ best — badly ~ worse ~ worst
little ~ less ~ least — much ~ more ~ most
far ~ further/farther ~ furthest/farthest

Adverbs that are identical in form with adjectives take inflections, following the same spelling and phonetic rules as for adjectives, *eg: early, late, hard, slow, fast, quick, long. Soon*, which has no corresponding adjective, is frequently used in the comparative (*sooner*), but is not common in the superlative (*soonest*).

5.39
Modification of comparatives and superlatives
The comparatives of both adjectives and adverbs can themselves be premodified by amplifying intensifiers – certain noun phrases (most of them informal) and adverbs. In the following examples we parenthesize intensifiers of these intensifiers:

(that) / (so) (very) } much
(all) the
far
a good bit/a lot
a good deal/a great deal
lots
} better
sooner
more / less } careful / carefully

Similarly, many downtoners may premodify the comparatives:

rather	better	
somewhat	sooner	
a little	more	careful
a (little) bit	less	carefully

The inflectional superlative may be premodified by *very: the very best.* If *very* premodifies the superlative, a determiner is obligatory, as in *She put on her very best dress.* Comparatives and superlatives can also be postmodified by intensifying phrases, the most common of which is *by far, eg: He is funnier/funniest by far.*

Correspondence between adjective and adverb

5.40

Adverbs are regularly, though not invariably, derived from adjectives by suffixation (App I.22). In addition, a correspondence often exists between constructions containing adjectives and those containing the corresponding adverbs. The simplest illustration is with adverbs equivalent to prepositional phrases containing a noun phrase with the corresponding adjective:

He liked Mary *considerably*
He liked Mary *to a considerable extent*
He spoke to John *sharply*
He spoke to John *in a sharp manner*
Politically, it is a bad decision
From the political point of view, it is a bad decision

Sometimes, either the adjective or the adverb forms may appear, with little or no semantic difference (5.9, 5.43). But normally, the adjective and its corresponding adverb appear in different environments:

her *incredible* beauty: her beauty is *incredible* ~ she is *incredibly* beautiful

5.41

There are many cases where a construction with the adverb form seems basic to an understanding of the corresponding construction with the adjective form.

(1) There are regular correspondences between sentences with an adverb and noun phrases with an adjective:

He loved her *deeply* ~ his *deep* love for her
He writes *legibly* ~ his *legible* writing

(2) The adjective-noun sequence may imply a process or a time relationship, with a corresponding noun phrase containing an adverb (5.16). For example, in the second of the following two interpretations of *a beautiful dancer*, the adjective refers to the process part of the agentive noun:

(a) a dancer who is beautiful
(b) a person who dances beautifully

(3) Most intensifying adjectives (5.14) can be seen as related to adverbs:

a real idiot ~ he is really an idiot

(4) Many limiter adjectives (*cf* 5.15) can be seen as related to adverbs:

the main reason ~ it was mainly the reason

The adjective and other word-classes

Adjective and adverb

5.42

Certain words beginning with *a-* have a predominantly predicative use. With respect to their ability to be used predicatively with both *be* and another intensive verb such as *seem*, we can contrast an *a-* adjective such as *asleep* with an *a-* adverb such as *abroad:*

The patient was { *asleep* / *abroad* } The patient seemed { *asleep* / **abroad* }

A- adjectives are unacceptable as part of the predication after verbs of motion. *A-* adverbs, however, are acceptable and denote direction after such verbs. Notice the contrast between the *a-* adverbs in *He went aboard/abroad/around/away* and the *a-* adjectives in **He went afraid/alert/asleep/awake.*

Common *a-* adjectives are: *ablaze, afloat, afraid, aghast, alert, alike, alive, alone, aloof, ashamed, asleep, averse, awake, aware.*

Note

[*a*] *Alert* and *aloof* are freely used attributively. Some of the other *a-* adjectives occasionally function attributively, though normally only when they are modified: *the half-asleep children, a somewhat afraid soldier, a really alive student* ('lively'), *a very ashamed girl.*

[*b*] Some *a-* adjectives freely take comparison and premodification by *very, eg: afraid, alert, alike, aloof, ashamed, averse.* Others do so marginally, *eg: asleep* and *awake. Alive to* in the sense 'aware of' can be premodified by *very* and compared. Some of the *a-*adjectives, like many verbs, can also be premodified by *very much* (particularly *afraid, alike, ashamed, aware*), and *aware* can be premodified by *(very) well* too.

5.43
Certain items that function as adjectives are also used to define in some way the process denoted by the verb; this is a typical use of adverbs, *eg: loud* and *clear* in *He spoke loud and clear.* If in its adverbial use the item is not restricted to a position after the verb or (if present) the object, it undoubtedly belongs to both the adjective and adverb classes. For example, *long* and *still,* which commonly function as adjectives, are adverbs in pre-verb position in the following sentences:

Such animals have *long* had to defend themselves
They *still* can't make up their minds whether to go or not

Furthermore, the item clearly represents two different words if there is a semantic difference in the two uses, as with *long* and *still.*

In some cases, the adjective form and a corresponding *-ly* adverb can be used interchangeably, with little or no semantic difference, except that many people find the adjective form objectionable:

He spoke *loud* and *clear/loudly* and *clearly*
Drive *slow* (esp AmE)/*slowly*
She buys her clothes *cheap/cheaply* (*cf* 12.26 *f*)

In other cases, there is no corresponding adverb form of the same lexical item, so that only the adjective form is available:

We returned *early/fast/late* today

Only a limited number of adjectives have adverbial uses: **We returned rapid today.*

The principal syntactic difference between the use of the adjective and adverb forms is that the adjective form, if admissible at all, is restricted to a position after the verb or (if present) the object:

He *slowly* drove the car into the garage
He drove the car *slowly* into the garage
*He *slow* drove the car into the garage
(?)He drove the car *slow* into the garage

Note
For adverbs as postmodifiers and as premodifiers in noun phrases, see 5.27 *ff.*

Adjective and noun
5.44
Some items can be both adjectives and nouns (*cf* also 5.6 *ff*). For example, *criminal* is an adjective in that it can be used both attributively (*a criminal attack*) and predicatively (*The attack seemed criminal to us*).

But *criminal* also has all the characteristics of a noun; for example, in

having number contrast and the capacity to be subject of a clause, as in *The criminals pleaded guilty to all charges.*

Criminal is therefore both an adjective and a noun, and the relationship between the adjective *criminal* and the noun *criminal* is that of conversion (App I.25). Examples of other converted nouns:

There was only one *black* in my class
He is investigating the *ancients'* conception of the universe
The king greeted his *nobles*

5.45

Nouns commonly function as premodifiers of other nouns (13.34 *f*):

the city council	a love poem
a stone wall	August weather

In this function, the attributive nouns resemble adjectives. However, the basically nominal character of these premodifiers is shown by their correspondence to prepositional phrases with the noun as complement:

the council of the city	a poem about love
a wall (made) of stone	weather (usual) in August

Such a correspondence is not available for attributive adjectives:

the urban council	a long poem
a thick wall	hot weather

though we can sometimes use a postmodifying prepositional phrase with a related noun as complement, *eg: a long poem ~ a poem of considerable length.*

Some nouns can even function both attributively and predicatively. Moreover, these nouns are like adjectives in that they do not take number variation. The nouns denote material from which things are made or refer to style (*cf* the corresponding classes of adjective, 5.20):

that concrete floor ~ that floor is concrete (= is of concrete)
Worcester porcelain ~ this porcelain is Worcester

Some nouns can appear in predicative noun phrases after *seem*. In this, they resemble adjectives:

He seems a fool
His friend seems very much an Englishman
Your remark seems nonsense to me

These are indeed very close semantically to adjectives (*foolish, English, nonsensical*). The closeness is of course greatest for non-count nouns such as *nonsense* and *fun*, since, like adjectives, they do not have number

variation and can appear without an overt determiner. But, unlike adjectives functioning as heads of noun phrases (5.6*ff*), these non-count nouns take the zero article when they function (say) as direct object:

I like *nonsense* He experienced *bliss*

Adjective and participle

5.46

There are many adjectives that have the same form as participles (*cf* 13.29*ff*):

His views were very *surprising* The man seemed very *offended*

These adjectives can also be attributive: *his surprising views, the offended man, the downhearted children.*

The *-ed* participle of intransitive verbs can also be used attributively: *the escaped prisoner* ('the prisoner who has escaped'), *a grown boy* ('a boy who has grown (up)'). Only with some of these is the predicative use allowed:

*The prisoner is *escaped*
Her son is *grown* (dubious in BrE, but *full-grown* or *grown-up* is fully acceptable)

As with *downhearted*, there may be no corresponding verb, and sometimes a corresponding verb has a different meaning. We can therefore have ambiguous sentences where the ambiguity depends on whether we have a participle or an adjective:

They were (very) *relieved* (to find her at home) – adjective
They were *relieved* (by the next group of sentries) – participle

5.47

Often the difference between the adjective and the participle is not clear-cut, and lies in the verbal force retained by the latter. The verbal force is explicit for the *-ing* form when a direct object is present. Hence, in *His views were alarming his audience*, the *-ing* form is a participle. Similarly, the verbal force is explicit for the *-ed* form when a *by* agentive phrase with a personal agent is present, indicating the correspondence to the active form of the sentence, as in *The man was offended by the policeman.*

For both participle forms, modification by the intensifier *very* is an explicit indication that the forms have adjective status:

His views were very *alarming* The man was very *offended*

We might therefore expect that the presence of *very* together with an explicit indicator of verbal force would produce an unacceptable sentence. This is certainly so for the *-ing* participle form:

*His views were very *alarming* his audience

However, with the *-ed* participle form, there appears to be divided usage, with increasing acceptance of the co-occurrence of *very* with a *by* agentive phrase containing a personal agent:

?The man was very *offended* by the policeman

And there is certainly no problem of co-occurrence if the agent is non-personal:

I'm very *disturbed* by your attitude

Note

[*a*] A participle is sometimes made fully adjectival by being compounded with another element:

He is *looking* (at a painting)	He is (very) *good-looking*
It is *breaking* (his heart)	It is (very) *heart-breaking*

[*b*] It is not only participles allowing the intensifier *very* that can be attributive (13.29): *the winning team, his published work, the captured prisoner.*

[*c*] A few adjectives are differentiated from participles by taking the *-en* suffix where participles with the same base have the *-ed* suffix (*shaved*) or are without a suffix (*drunk, shrunk*): *shaven, drunken, shrunken.* For a few others, there is no difference between adjective and participle in spelling, but there is in pronunciation. Whereas the vowel of the participle suffix *-ed* is not pronounced, the suffix is treated in the adjective as a separate syllable pronounced /ɪd/: *blessed, crooked, dogged, learned, ragged.* The adjective *aged* is disyllabic when it is a synonym of *elderly* (*my aged father*), but is monosyllabic in such a sentence as *My father is aged seventy.*

The adverb and other word-classes

5.48

Conjunct and conjunction

A few conjuncts, *eg: so, yet,* resemble coordinators both in being connectives and in having certain syntactic features (*cf* 9.10 *ff*). In particular, unlike clauses introduced by subordinators, those introduced by conjuncts cannot be moved in front of the preceding clause. Thus, the order of the following two clauses (with the conjunct *so* in the second clause) is fixed:

We paid him a very large sum. *So* he kept quiet about what he saw.

If we change the order of the clauses, the relationship is changed and *so* must now refer to some preceding clause. However, the conjuncts differ from coordinators in that they can be preceded by a coordinator:

We paid him a very large sum, *and so* he kept quiet about what he saw.

5.49

Reaction signal and initiator

Certain other items must be positioned initially. They are important be-

cause of their high frequency in spoken English and some are restricted to the spoken language.

(1) *reaction* signals, *eg: no, yes, hm*
(2) *initiators, eg: well, oh, ah*

Reaction signals normally serve only as response utterances. Initiators can serve both as response utterances and as initiators of conversations.

Bibliographical note

On adjectives in general, see Vendler (1968). On the position of adjectives, see particularly Bolinger (1967b); on stative and dynamic adjectives, see Schopf (1969); on the intensification of adjectives and adverbs, see Bolinger (1972); on adverbs in general, see Chapter 8 below.

SIX

PREPOSITIONS AND PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

6.1

In the most general terms, a preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement. Of the various types of relational meaning, those of PLACE and TIME are the most prominent and easy to identify. Other relationships such as INSTRUMENT and CAUSE may also be recognized, although it is difficult to describe prepositional meanings systematically in terms of such labels. Some prepositional uses may be best elucidated by seeing a preposition as related to a clause; *eg: The man with the red beard ~ The man who has the red beard; my knowledge of Hindi ~ I know Hindi* (4.70, 6.37).

6.2

The prepositional phrase

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is characteristically a noun phrase or a *wh*-clause or V-*ing* clause:

PREPOSITION	PREPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENT
at	the bus-stop
from	what he said
by	signing a peace treaty

That-clauses and infinitive clauses, although they frequently have a nominal function in other respects, do not occur as prepositional complements. Alternations between the presence and absence of a preposition are observed in cases like:

{ He was surprised at { her remark / her saying this / what she said
{ He was surprised that she said this

Further examples of verbs and adjectives which can have either prepositional complements or *that*-clauses are:

decide (on), inform (of), insist (on), afraid (of), aware (of), sorry (about), sure (of): see 12.11 *f.*

Note

[*a*] Exceptionally (mainly in idioms), an adverb (5.30) or an adjective may function as prepositional complement: *at once, before long, in there, until now, since when, at least, at worst, in brief.* Prepositional phrases can themselves be prepositional complements: 'He crawled from *under the table.*'

[*b*] *That*-clauses can often become in effect prepositional complements through the use of the appositive construction *the fact that:*

She became aware of *the fact that* I had deceived her

6.3
Postposed prepositions

Normally a preposition must be followed by its complement; but there are some circumstances in which this does not happen, either because the complement has to take first position in the clause, or because it is absent:

WH-QUESTIONS: Which house did you leave it *at?* (7.52 *f*)
At which house is he staying? (formal)

RELATIVE CLAUSES: The old house which I was telling you *about* is empty (13.6 *ff*) (*about* which I was telling you: formal)

WH-CLAUSES: What I'm convinced *of* is that the world's population will grow to an unforeseen extent (11.16)

EXCLAMATIONS: What a mess he's got *into!* (7.63).

PASSIVES: She was sought *after* by all the leading impresarios of the day (14.8)

INFINITIVE CLAUSES: He's impossible to work *with* (12.13)

A prejudice against such postposed prepositions remains in formal English, which offers (for relative clauses and for direct or indirect questions) the alternative of an initial preposition:

It was a situation *from which* no escape was possible

This construction is often felt, however, to be stilted and awkward in informal English, especially in speech, and indeed in some cases (7.53 Note *a*) the postposed preposition has no preposed alternative.

Note

In formal style, *notwithstanding* is sometimes postposed:

His intelligence *notwithstanding*, he was not successful in the examination

In addition there are several idiomatic usages such as *all the world over, all the year round, search the house through* (*cf: search through it*).

6.4
Simple and complex prepositions

Most of the common English prepositions, such as *at, in,* and *for,* are

SIMPLE, *ie* consist of one word. Other prepositions, consisting of more than one word, are called COMPLEX. Most of these are in one of the following categories:

[A] ADVERB or PREP+PREP: *along with, as for, away from, out of, up to*, etc
[B] VERB/ADJECTIVE/CONJUNCTION/etc+PREP: *owing to, due to, because of*, etc
[C] PREP+NOUN+PREP: *by means of, in comparison with, in front of*, etc

In [C], which is by far the most numerous category, the noun in some complex prepositions is preceded by a definite or indefinite article:

in *the* light of; as *a* result of

Note
Monosyllabic simple prepositions are normally unstressed; polysyllabic prepositions (whether simple or complex) are normally stressed. In complex prepositions, the stress falls on the word (adverb, noun, etc) preceding the final preposition.

6.5
Prepositions and prepositional adverbs

A prepositional adverb is a particle which behaves like a preposition with ellipted complement:

A car drove past the door (*past* is a preposition)
A car drove past (*past* is a prepositional adverb; *ie: past* something or someone identified in the context)

In the examples below, the adverb is respectively (a) an adjunct, (b) a postmodifier:

(a) Despite the fine weather, we stayed *in* all day (place adjunct)
He hasn't been here *since* (time adjunct)
(b) The day *before*, I had spoken to him in the street (postmodifier)

Note
Prepositions normally unstressed are accented when they are prepositional adverbs:

He 'stayed in the 'house
He 'stayed 'in

6.6
Syntactic functions of prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases may function as:

(*a*) *Adjunct* (8.2):
The people were singing *on the bus*
(*b*) *Disjunct* (8.2):
To my surprise, the doctor phoned

(*c*) *Conjunct* (8.2):
On the other hand, he made no attempt to help the victim or apprehend her attacker

(*d*) *Postmodifier in a noun phrase* (13.19 *ff*):
The people *on the bus* were singing

(*e*) *Complementation of a verb* (12.10, 12.29):
We depend *on you*

(*f*) *Complementation of an adjective* (12.11):
I am sorry *for his parents*

Note

[*a*] Prepositional phrases may occasionally have a nominal function, *eg* as subject of a clause:

Between six and seven will suit me

[*b*] In (*e*) and (*f*) the preposition is closely related to and is determined by the preceding verb or adjective.

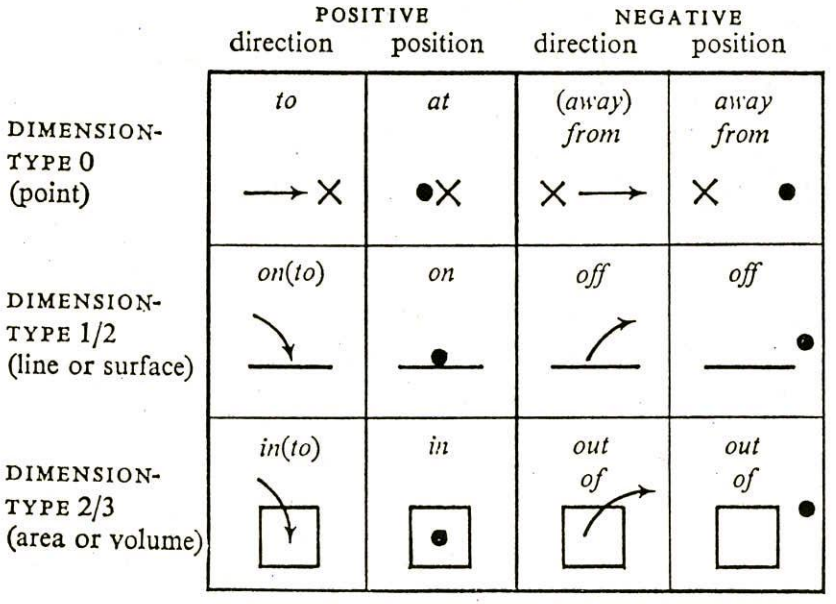


Fig 6:1 Place and dimension

Prepositional Meanings: Place

6.7 Dimension

When we use a preposition to indicate place, we do so in relation to the dimensional properties, whether subjectively or objectively conceived, of the location concerned. Consider the following examples:

My car is *at* the cottage
There is a new roof *on* the cottage
There are two beds *in* the cottage

The use of *at* makes *cottage* a dimensionless location, a mere point in relation to which the car's position can be indicated. With *on*, the cottage becomes a two-dimensional area, covered by a roof, though *on* is also capable of use with a one-dimensional object, as in 'Put your signature on this line'. With *in*, the cottage becomes the three-dimensional object which in reality it is, though *in* is capable of being used with objects which are essentially two-dimensional, as in 'The cow is in the field', where *field* is conceived of as an enclosed space (contrast 'We walked on the beach'). *Fig* 6:1 sets out the dimensional orientation of the chief prepositions of place.

Note

Some of the prepositions in *Fig* 6:1 can be replaced by other prepositions with the same meaning: *upon* is a formal equivalent of *on; inside* and *within* can substitute for *in*, and *outside* for *out of*.

6.8
Positive position and direction: *at, to,* etc

Between the notions of simple position (or static location) and direction (movement with respect to a destination) a cause-and-effect relationship obtains:

DIRECTION	POSITION
Tom went *to* the door	*as a result:* Tom was *at* the door
Tom fell *on*(*to*) the floor	*as a result:* Tom was *on* the floor
Tom dived *in*(*to*) the water	*as a result:* Tom was *in* the water

A prepositional phrase of 'position' can accompany any verb, although the meaning of 'direction' generally (but by no means always – see 6.16) requires a dynamic verb (3.35) of 'motional' meaning, such as *go, move, fly*, etc.

The contrast between *on* (='surface') and *in* (='area') has various implications according to context, as these examples show:

on the window: The frost made patterns on the window (window = glass surface)
in the window/mirror: A face appeared in the window/mirror (window, mirror = framed area)

on the island: Robinson Crusoe was marooned on an uninhabited island
in the island: He was born in Long Island (the island has an institutional identity)

The opposition between *at* (dimension-type 0) and *in* (dimension-type 2/3) can also cause difficulty. *In* is used for continents, countries, provinces, and sizeable territories of any kind; but for towns, villages, etc, either *at* or *in* is appropriate, according to point of view: *at/in Stratford-upon-Avon*. A very large city, such as New York, London, or Tokyo, is generally treated as an area: *He works in London, but lives in the country*. But one could treat it as a point on the map if global distances were in mind: *Our plane refuelled at London on its way from New York to Moscow*.

With buildings, also, both *at* and *in* can be used. The difference here is that *at* refers to a building in its institutional or functional aspect, whereas *in* refers to it as a three-dimensional structure:

He's { at school (BrE) / in school (AmE) } (='He attends/is attending school')

He's in school (=(in BrE) 'He's actually inside the building – not, *eg* on the playing fields')

So too, *at/in Oxford*.

Note

[*a*] In many cases (especially in colloquial English), *on* and *in* may be used for both position and destination: *He dived in the water; He fell on the floor*.

[*b*] In addition to the prepositions mentioned, *against*, *about*, and *around* are commonly used as prepositions of simple position or destination: *against* in the sense 'touching the side surface of' (*He's leaning against the wall*); *about* and *around* in the sense of 'in the vicinity of' (*He's been snooping about/around the place all day*).

[*c*] Two additional meanings of *on* as a preposition of position are 'attached to':

the apples *on* the tree

and 'on top of'

Humpty Dumpty sat *on* the wall

6.9

Negative position and direction: *away from*, *off*, etc

There is a parallel cause and effect relation with the negative prepositions *away from*, *off*, *off of* (informal AmE), *out of*:

DIRECTION	POSITION
Tom went *away from* the door	Tom was *away from* the door (=Tom was *not at* the door)

The negative character of these prepositions is shown by the parenthesized paraphrase. *Cf: off*='not on', *out of*='not in'.

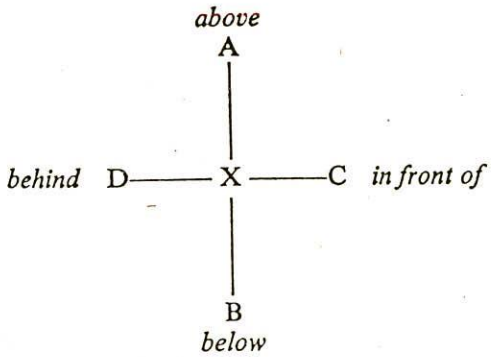
6.10

Relative position: *by*, *over*, *under*, etc

Apart from simple position, prepositions may express the RELATIVE POSITION of two objects or groups of objects:

He was standing *by* his brother (='at the side of')
I left the keys *with* my wallet (='in the same place as')

Above, over, on top of, under, underneath, beneath, below express relative position vertically whereas *before, in front of, behind, after* represent it horizontally. The diagram depicts the relations expressed by 'A *is above* X', 'D *is behind* X', etc. The antonyms *above* and *below, over*



and *under, in front of* and *behind* are not positive and negative, but converse opposites:

The picture is *above* the mantelpiece=The mantelpiece is *below* the picture
The bus is *in front of* the car=The car is *behind* the bus

Over and *under* as place prepositions are roughly synonymous with *above* and *below* respectively. The main differences are that *over* and *under* tend to indicate a direct vertical relationship and/or spatial proximity, while *above* and *below* may indicate simply 'on a higher/lower level than':

The castle stands on a hill above (*rather than* over) the valley
The doctor and the policeman were leaning over (*rather than* above) the body when we arrived

Underneath and *beneath* are less common substitutes for *under*/ *beneath* is formal in style. *Underneath*, like *on top of*, generally indicates a contiguous relation.

Note
Other prepositions of relative position are *beside, near (to), between, amid(st)* (formal), *among, amongst* (esp BrE).

6.11
Relative destination: *by, over, under,* etc

As well as relative position, the prepositions listed in 6.10 (but not, generally, *above* and *below*) can express RELATIVE DESTINATION:

The bush was the only conceivable hiding-place, so I dashed *behind* it
When it started to rain, we all went *underneath* the trees

This use is distinct from that denoting passage behind, under, etc (6.12).

6.12

Passage: *by, over, under,* etc

With verbs of motion, prepositions may express the idea of PASSAGE (*ie* movement towards and then away from a place) as well as destination. With the prepositions listed in 6.10, this occurs in sentences like:

He jumped *over* a ditch
Someone ran *behind* the goal-posts

In sentences like the last, or like *The ball rolled underneath the table*, there is an ambiguity: we can supply either the meaning of 'passage' (='the ball passed under the table on the way to some other destination') or the meaning of 'destination' (='the ball rolled under the table and stayed there').

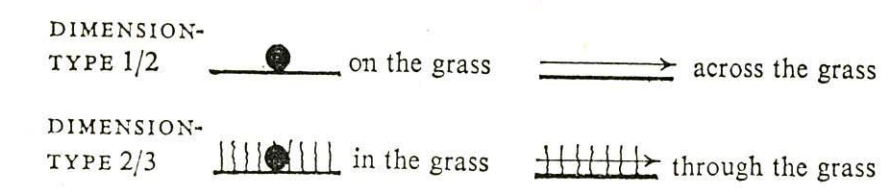
Note

A triple ambiguity may in fact arise with the above sentences, or more clearly with *A mouse scuttled behind the curtain*, which may be interpreted not only in the senses of 'passage' and 'destination', but also in a positional sense, implying that the mouse stayed (scuttling back and forth) behind the curtain all the time.

6.13

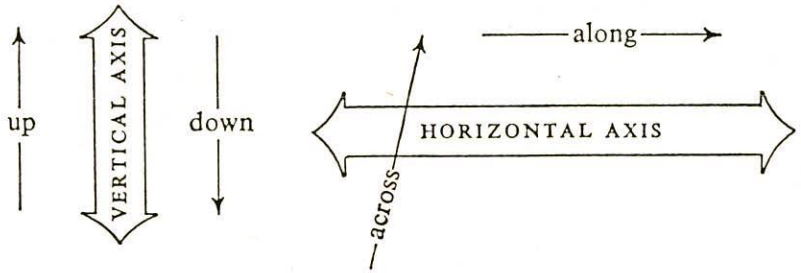
Passage: *across, through, past*

The sense of 'passage' is the primary locative meaning attached to *across* (dimension-type 1/2), *through* (dimension-type 2/3) and *past* (the 'passage' equivalent of *by* which may also, however, be substituted for *past* in a 'passage' sense). Note the parallel between *across* and *on*, *through* and *in* in the diagram:



The upper pair treat the grass as a surface, and therefore suggest short grass; the lower pair, by treating the grass as a volume, suggest that it has height as well as length and breadth – that is, that the grass is long. There is a meaning of *over* corresponding to *across* in this sense: *The ball rolled over/across the lawn.*

6.14
Direction: *up, down, along,* etc
Up, down, along, across (in a slightly different sense from that of 6.13), and *(a)round*, with verbs of motion, make up a group of prepositions expressing movement with reference to an axis or directional path. *Up* and *down* contrast in terms of vertical direction, while *along* (='from one end towards the other') contrasts with *across* (='from one side to another') in terms of a horizontal axis.



But *up* and *down* are also used idiomatically in reference to a horizontal axis:

I walked up and down the platform

Up and *down* here express the notion of 'along', and need not have any vertical implications.

With *(a)round*, the directional path is an angle or a curve:

We ran up the hill
We ran (a)round the corner

Toward(s) is in a category of its own, having the meaning 'in the direction of'.

6.15
Orientation: *beyond, over, past,* etc
Most prepositions listed in 6.10 and 6.14 can be used in a static sense of orientation. This brings in a third factor apart from the two things being spatially related: *viz* a 'point of orientation', at which (in reality or imagination) the speaker is standing. *Beyond* (='on the far side of') is a preposition whose primary meaning is one of orientation; furthermore, *over* (BrE), *past, across,* and *through* can combine the meaning of 'beyond' with more specific information of dimension-type, etc, on the lines described in 6.13:

He lives *across* the moors (*ie* 'from here')
The village *past* the bus-stop/*through* the wood, etc

Up, down, along, across, and *(a)round* (see 6.14) are used orientationally with reference to an axis in

The shop *down* the road (*ie* towards the bottom end of . . .)
His office is *up/down* the stairs (*ie* at (or towards) the top/bottom of . . .)
There's a hotel *across/along* the road (*ie* on the other side/towards the other end of . . .)
He lives *(a)round* the corner

6.16
Resultative meaning
All prepositions which have motional meaning can also have a static resultative meaning indicating *the state of having reached* the destination:

I managed to get { *over* the fence / *across* the river } (*ie* so that I was then on the other side)

So too with the verb *be:*

The horses are *over* the fence (*ie* are now beyond)

Resultative meaning is not always distinguishable out of context from other static meanings; its presence is often signalled, however, by certain adverbs: *already, just, at last, (not) yet,* etc.

6.17
Pervasive meaning: *all over, throughout,* etc
Over (dimension-type 1/2) and *through* (dimension-type 2/3), especially when preceded by *all,* have pervasive meaning (either static or motional):

That child was running *all over* the flower borders
Chaos reigned *all through* the house

Throughout, substitutable for *all through,* is the only preposition whose primary meaning is 'pervasive'. Occasionally the 'axis' type prepositions of 6.14 are also used in a pervasive sense:

There were crowds (all) *along* the route
They put flowers (all) *around* the statue

6.18
Seven senses of *over*
Let us now see how one preposition (*over*) may be used in most of the senses discussed:

POSITION:	A lamp hung over the door
DESTINATION:	They threw a blanket over her

PASSAGE:	They climbed over the wall
ORIENTATION:	They live over (='on the far side of') the road
RESULTATIVE:	At last we were over the crest of the hill
PERVASIVE (STATIC):	Leaves lay thick (all) over the ground
PERVASIVE (MOTION):	They splashed water (all) over me

6.19
Verbs containing prepositional meaning

When a verb contains within it the meaning of a following preposition, it is often possible to omit the preposition; the verb then becomes transitive, and the prepositional complement becomes a direct object. For example, *climb (up)*, *jump (over)*, *flee (from)*, *pass (by)*: 'He climbed (up) the hill'.

6.20
Metaphorical or abstract use of place prepositions

Many place prepositions have abstract meanings which are clearly related, through metaphorical connection, to their locative uses. Very often prepositions so used keep the groupings (in terms of similarity or contrast of meaning) that they have when used in literal reference to place. This is often true, for example, of temporal usage (6.21).

One may perceive a stage-by-stage extension of metaphorical usage in such a series as:

(i) *in shallow water* (purely literal)
(ii) *in deep water* (also metaphorical='in trouble')
(iii) *in difficulties* (the preposition is used metaphorically)
(iv) *in a spot* (='in a difficult situation'; both the preposition and the noun are metaphorical, since literally *spot* would require *at:* 6.7)

Examples in relation to the literal meanings are:

IN/OUT OF; AMID (rare)/AMIDST (formal)
position → state, condition:
in/out of danger; amidst many troubles
enclosure → abstract inclusion:
in stories/plays; in a group/party; in/out of the race

ABOVE/BELOW/BENEATH
vertical direction → abstract scale:
such behaviour is beneath (not *below*) *him; he's above me in salary*

UNDER
vertical direction → subjection, subordination:
under suspicion/orders/compulsion

UP/DOWN
movement on vertical axis → movement on list or scale:
up/down the scale; up/down the social ladder

FROM/TO
starting point/destination → originator/recipient:
a letter/present from Browning to his wife (6.29–30)

BEYOND/PAST/OVER
resultative meaning; physical → abstract:
beyond/past endurance; we're over the worst

BETWEEN/AMONG, AMONGST (esp BrE)
relative position → abstract relation between participants:
a fight between two boys; they agree among(st) themselves

Note
A few prepositions (chiefly *in* and *out of*) can operate in an apparently converse relationship. For example:

The horse is *in* foal (= The foal is *in* the horse['s womb])
The office is *out of* envelopes (= There are *no* envelopes *in* the office)

Cf also (*a ship*) *in ballast, out of breath.*

Time

6.21

Time *when: at, on, in*

At, on, and *in* as prepositions of 'time *when*' are to some extent parallel to the same items as positive prepositions of position (6.7), although in the time sphere there are only two 'dimension-types', *viz* 'point of time' and 'period of time'.

At is used for points of time, chiefly clock-time (*at ten o'clock, at 6.30 pm, at noon,* etc); also, idiomatically, for holiday periods (*at the weekend* (BrE), *at Christmas, at Easter*); and for phrases *at night, at the/that time,* etc.

On is used with phrases referring to days (*on Monday, on the following day, on May (the) first*); otherwise *in* or, less commonly, *during* is used to indicate periods of time: *in the evening, during Holy Week, in August, in the months that followed, in the eighteenth century,* etc.

Note
On Monday morning, on the following evening, etc illustrate an exceptional use of *on* with a complement referring to a part of a day, rather than a whole day. But with phrases like *early morning, late afternoon* it is normal to use *in: in the late afternoon.*

6.22

Duration: *for,* etc

Duration is expressed by *for*; contrast:

We camped there { *for* the summer (*ie* all through) / *in* the summer (*ie* at some time during the summer)

So too in idiomatic phrases like *for ever* and *for good* ('for ever').

Over, all through, and *throughout* have a durational meaning parallel to their pervasive meaning in reference to place (6.17): *We camped there throughout the summer. Over* normally accompanies noun phrases denoting special occasions (such as holidays and festivals), and so generally refers to a shorter period of time than *all through* or *throughout.*

From . . . to is another pair of prepositions whose locative meaning is transferred to duration. The AmE alternative expression *(from) . . . through* avoids the ambiguity as to whether the period mentioned second is included in the total span of time:

We camped there (*from*) June *through* September (AmE)
(= up to and including September)
We camped there *from* June *to* (or *till*) September
(= up to [?and including] September)

Note

[*a*] Except with verbs like *stay, during* refers to a point or period within duration rather than to duration itself: *He spoke during the meeting.*

[*b*] Particularly with negatives and superlatives, *for* or (esp informally) *in* expresses exclusive duration: *I haven't seen him for/in years.*

6.23
Before, after, since, and *until/till*

As prepositions (but *cf* 11.21), these occur almost exclusively as prepositions of time, and are followed by either (a) a temporal noun phrase (*eg: before next week*), (b) a subjectless V-*ing* clause (*eg: since leaving school*), or (c) a noun phrase with a deverbal noun (App I.13, I.16, I.24) or some other noun phrase interpreted as equivalent to a clause:

until the fall of Rome (='until Rome fell')
before the war (='before the war started or took place')

Until specifies a terminal point with positive and a commencement point with negative predications:

We slept until midnight (=We stopped sleeping then)
We didn't sleep until midnight (=We started sleeping then)

6.24
Between, by, and *up to*

Other prepositions of time are *between, by,* and *up to:*

I'll phone you *between* lunch and three o'clock
By the time we'd walked five miles, he was exhausted
Up to last week, I hadn't received a reply

By specifies a commencement point; contrast:

By that time he was exhausted (=He was then exhausted)
Until that time he was exhausted (=He was then no longer exhausted)

This means that *by*-phrases do not co-occur with verbs of durative meaning:

He lay there $\left\{\begin{matrix}*\text{by} \\ \text{until}\end{matrix}\right\}$ midnight

Absence of prepositions of time

6.25

Prepositions of time *when* are always absent from adjuncts having the deictic words *last*, *next*, *this*, and *that;* the quantifying words *some* and *every;* and nouns which have 'last', 'next', or 'this' as an element of their meaning: *yesterday/today/tomorrow*. *Cf* 8.31 *ff*. For example:

I saw him *last Thursday*
I'll mention it *next time I see him*
Plums are more plentiful *this year*
Every summer she returns to her childhood home

The preposition is usually optional with deictic phrases referring to times at more than one remove from the present, such as (*on*) *Monday week* (BrE), (*in*) *the January before last*, (*on*) *the day before yesterday*. So too with phrases which identify a time before or after a given time in the past or future: (*in*) *the previous spring*, (*at*) *the following weekend*, (*on*) *the next day*. On the whole, the sentence without the preposition tends to be more informal and more usual.

Note

Informally, we also have omission of the temporal preposition in sentences such as *I'll see you Sunday*, where the preposition *on* is omitted before a day of the week standing on its own. Another informal type of omission is in initial position preceding a plural noun phrase:

Sundays we go into the country

6.26

The preposition *for* is often omitted in phrases of duration:

We stayed there (for) three months
The snowy weather lasted (for) the whole time we were there
(For) a lot of the time we just lay on the beach

The omission almost invariably takes place with phrases which begin with *all*, such as *all day, all (the) week:*

We stayed there all week (*not* *for all week)

In other cases, however, the omission is impossible: for example, where the action of the verb is clearly not continuously co-extensive with the period specified:

I lived there three years	I lived there for three years
*I taught him three years	I taught him for three years

Initial position in the clause also seems to discourage omission: *For 600 years, the cross lay unnoticed.*

Prepositional phrase chiefly as adjunct

Cause ~ purpose

6.27

CAUSE, REASON, MOTIVE: *BECAUSE OF*, etc

At one end of the spectrum of cause ~ purpose, we have prepositions expressing either the material cause or the psychological cause (motive) of a happening:

Because of the drought, the price of bread was high that year
On account of his wide experience, he was made chairman
I hid the money, *for fear of what my parents would say*
The survivors were weak *from exposure and lack of food*
Some people support charities *out of duty*

Phrases of cause, reason and motive answer the question 'Why . . . ?'

6.28

PURPOSE, INTENDED DESTINATION: *FOR*

He'll do anything *for money*
Everyone ran *for shelter*
He died *for his country*

The notion of 'purpose' can be seen from the possibility of paraphrase by a clause (*in order*) *to* . . . (see 11.31): *for money* = 'in order to gain money'.

Phrases of purpose or destination answer the questions 'Why . . . ?', 'What . . . for?', 'Where . . . for?', or 'Who . . . for?'. They frequently occur as postmodifiers as well as adverbials: *the scenery for the play*, etc.

6.29

RECIPIENT, GOAL, TARGET: *FOR, TO, AT*

He made a beautiful doll *for his daughter*

So used for 'intended recipient' (his daughter may or may not have actually received the doll), the *for* phrase can often be equated with an indirect object (7.6, 12.28): *He made his daughter a beautiful doll.* In contrast, a *to* phrase usually expresses the 'actual recipient':

He gave a beautiful doll *to his daughter*

(which entails that his daughter actually received the doll). Here again there is a transformational relationship with the indirect object construction (7.9):

$$\text{I} \left\{\begin{matrix}\text{gave}\\\text{lent}\\\text{sold}\end{matrix}\right\} \text{the book } \textit{to my friend} \leftrightarrow \text{I} \left\{\begin{matrix}\text{gave}\\\text{lent}\\\text{sold}\end{matrix}\right\} \textit{my friend} \text{ the book}$$

At, in combinations such as *aim at* (where the prepositional phrase is complementary to the verb), expresses INTENDED GOAL or TARGET:

After aiming carefully *at the bird*, he missed it completely
A vicious mongrel was snapping *at his ankles*

As the first sentence shows, the intended goal need not be achieved. A contrast in many cases (*kick at, charge at, bite at, catch at, shoot at, chew at*) may be drawn between this use of *at*, in which some idea of 'aim' is implied, and the direct object construction, which indicates attainment of the goal or consummation of the action as planned. In other cases, *to* must be used if the attainment of the goal is to be stressed: *He ran at me/He ran to me.* Similarly, *point at/to, throw at/to.*

Note

There is a comparable difference between *at* and *to* when combined with verbs of utterance such as *roar, bellow, shout, mutter, growl: He shouted at me* suggests that I am being treated merely as a target (*eg* of abuse), while *He shouted to me* implies that the shouter is communicating with me, *ie* that I am the recipient of the message. *At* here usually suggests hostility.

6.30

SOURCE, ORIGIN: *FROM*

The converse of *to* (='goal') is *from* (='source'):

Bill lent the book *to me* ↔ I borrowed the book *from Bill*

From is also used with reference to 'place of origin':

He comes from Austria (=he is Austrian)

This type of prepositional phrase occurs not only as an adjunct, but as a postmodifier: *the man from Mars; a friend of mine from London.*

Means ~ agentive

6.31

MANNER: *WITH, IN . . . MANNER, LIKE*

We were received *with the utmost courtesy*
The task was done *in a workmanlike manner*
The army swept through the city *like a pestilence*

Note that *like* with intensive verbs, as in *Life is like a dream*, refers not to manner but to resemblance.

Note

As distinct from *like*, prepositional *as* refers to actual role:

He spoke { like a lawyer ('after the manner of . . .')
as a lawyer ('in the capacity of . . .')

6.32

MEANS, INSTRUMENT: *BY, WITH, WITHOUT*

By can express the meaning 'by means of':

I usually go to work *by bus/train/car*
The thief must have entered and left the house *by the back door*
By working the pumps, we kept the ship afloat for another 40 hours

With, on the other hand, expresses instrumental meaning:

He caught the ball *with his left hand*
Someone had broken the window *with a stone*

There is a correspondence between these sentences (which normally require a human subject and a direct object) and sentences containing the verb *use: He used his left hand to catch the ball; Someone had used a stone to break the window.* There is also an alternative construction in which the noun phrase denoting the instrument becomes the subject: *His left hand caught the ball; A stone had broken the window.* (On 'instrumental' subjects, see 7.10.)

For most senses of *with*, including that of instrument, *without* expresses the equivalent negative meaning: *I drew it without a ruler* (*ie* 'I did not draw it with a ruler').

Phrases of means and instrument answer the question 'How . . .?':

A: How did he do it? B: By working hard.

Note

[*a*] Mode of transport is expressed by *on* as well as *by: on the bus/the train/a ship/a plane.* These are not purely locative phrases (location in such cases would be expressed by *in* rather than *on:* 6.7), but rather indicate the condition of being 'in

transit'. Thus, *I go to work on the bus* can be an alternative to *I go to work by bus*. *On* is used instead of *by* in the phrases *on foot, on horseback*.

[*b*] *Of* is used with *die* in expressions like *He died of hunger*.

6.33

INSTRUMENT, AGENTIVE: *WITH, BY*

While the 'instrument' is the inert and normally inanimate cause of an action (the ball that breaks a window), the 'agentive' is its animate (normally human) initiating cause (the boy who threw the ball). In a passive sentence, the agentive or instrument can be expressed by a *by*-phrase, but only the instrument can be expressed by a *with* phrase:

The window was broken { by a ball/by a boy
with a ball/*with a boy

The agentive *by*-phrase also occurs as a postmodifier to signify authorship or the like: *a novel by Tolstoy, a picture by Degas*, etc.

6.34

STIMULUS: *AT*

The relation between an emotion and its stimulus (normally an abstract stimulus) can often be expressed by *at* or by the instrumental *by:*

I was alarmed at/by his behaviour

Both of these can be treated as passive equivalents of *His behaviour alarmed me*, and the noun phrase following *at* may be treated as a 'quasi-agent'. See further 12.11. Other prepositions introducing stimuli are illustrated in the examples *resentful of, disappointed with, sorry about.*

Note

[*a*] A number of other prepositions may introduce 'quasi-agents' after certain participles:

I'm worried *about this* (~ This worries me)
He's interested *in history* (~ History interests him)
Cf also: His plans were known *to everyone* (Everyone knew his plans)

[*b*] In BrE, *with* rather than *at* is used when the 'stimulus' is a person or object rather than an event: *I was furious with* (not *at*) *John; I was delighted with* (not *at*) *the present*. But in AmE, *I was furious/angry/livid at John* is quite usual. With abstract nouns, *at* is unrestrictedly acceptable: *I was furious at John's behaviour.*

6.35

Accompaniment: *with*

Especially when followed by an animate complement, *with* has the meaning 'in company with' or 'together with':

I'm so glad you're coming *with us*
Jock, *with several of his friends*, was drinking till 2 am

In the second sentence, the *with* phrase serves a function very close to coordination with *and:* 'Jock and several of his friends were . . .'.

An example of a phrase of accompaniment as postmodifier is:

Curry *with rice* is my favourite dish

In this as in most other senses (but *cf* 6.36) *without* is the negative of *with: They're going without us; You never see him without* (*ie* 'unaccompanied by') *his dog.*

6.36

Support, opposition: *for, with, against*

Are you *for* or *against the plan?* (*ie* Do you support or oppose the plan?)

It is prudent to go *with* rather than *against the tide of public opinion*

For conveys the idea of support, *with* that of solidarity or movement in sympathy; *against* conveys the contrary idea of opposition. In this use, there is no negative *without* contrasting with *with.*

6.37

Prepositional phrase chiefly as postmodifier

'Having': *of, with, without*

Beside the following examples:

	(1)	(2)
(a)	a man of courage	the courage of the man
(b)	a man with large ears	the man's large ears

a comparable relation exists paraphrasable with *have:* 'The man has courage', 'The man has large ears'. The two columns differ in that (1) makes *a man* the centre of attention, while (2) makes something about him the centre of attention. They also differ in the definiteness attributed to *man* (4.20), such that column (2) presupposes previous specification. The preposition *of* in (1a) is normally used with abstract attributes, while *with* in (1b) is more general and is especially common with concrete attributes. The correspondence of the *of-* and *-s* genitive in column (2) is also to be noted (4.69 *ff*).

The negative of *with* is again *without:*

women *without children* ('childless women')
the house *without a porch* ('. . . which has no porch')

The correspondence between phrases with *with* or *without* and relative clauses with *have* applies also to clauses in which *have* is followed by a quasi-clausal object (13.19):

the girl with a boy friend in the navy
(~. . . who has a boy friend in the navy)

6.38

Prepositional phrase chiefly as disjunct or conjunct

Concession: ***in spite of, despite, for + all, with + all, notwithstanding***

I admire him, *in spite of his faults*
He lost the fight, *for all his boasting*

In spite of is a general-purpose preposition of concession; *despite* is rather more formal and *notwithstanding* is formal and rather legalistic in style. The combinations *for all* and *with all* (*all* being an obligatory predeterminer with this meaning) are chiefly colloquial.

6.39

Reference: ***with regard to, with reference to*** **(formal),** ***as to*** **(BrE),** ***as for***

With reference to your letter of April 29th, I confirm . . .
As for the burglar, he escaped through the attic window

As to and *as for* (= 'returning to the question of . . .') are less formal than the other complex prepositions in this group. Other prepositions within the same general area of meaning are *regarding, in regard to, with respect to, in respect of*, and *on the matter of*. Most can be used in postmodifying phrases as well as in disjuncts: *I'd like to know your opinion as to/with regard to the burglar's behaviour.*

6.40

Exception: ***except for, but,*** **etc**

All the students *except/but* John passed the test

Commonly the complement is itself a prepositional phrase:

The weather is good today, except *in the south-east*

Except, excepting, and *but* function generally (in the case of *but* exclusively) in postmodifying phrases. Thus *but* cannot occur initially as a preposition: **But me, everyone was tired.* The prepositional phrase, in such constructions, is often separated from its noun head, and postponed to the end of the clause (*cf* 14.30):

Everyone *but me* was tired ~ Everyone was tired *but me*

Except for, with the exception of, and *apart from* are used primarily in disjuncts.

Note

The resemblance and the contrast between *but* as a preposition and *but* as a conjunction (10.36) are brought out in:

{All the students had a good time *but* John
{Most of the students had a good time {*but not* John / *but* John *did not*

6.41

Negative condition: *but for*

It is to be noted that *but for* is not used in the sense of exception, but rather that of 'negative condition': *But for Gordon, we should have lost the match* (*ie* 'If it hadn't been for Gordon . . .', 'If Gordon hadn't played as he did . . .', etc).

Prepositional phrase chiefly as complementation of verb or adjective

6.42

Subject matter: *about, on*

He told me *about his adventures*
He's lecturing *on new techniques of management*

With the meaning 'on the subject of, concerning', *about* and *on* can combine with a considerable range of verbs and adjectives, including:

speak about/on silent about/on

On tends to refer to deliberate, formal linguistic communication (speaking, lecturing, writing, etc), and is therefore inappropriate for verbs like *chat* or *quarrel.*

This difference of meaning occurs also with postmodifying phrases:

a book about/on butterflies a story about a princess

Note

[*a*] *Of* is a somewhat rarer and more literary alternative to *about* in *tell . . . of; speak of; talk of; inform . . . of;* etc. Both *about* and *of* are possible with *think*, but with a difference of meaning: *He thought about the problem* = 'He pondered/considered the problem'; *He thought of the problem* = 'He brought the problem to his mind'.

[*b*] A less usual alternative to *about* and *on* is *concerning*, which is formal to the point of being rather stilted: *a dispute concerning land rights.*

6.43

Ingredient, material: *with, of, out of*

After verbs of 'making', *with* indicates an ingredient, whereas *of* and *out of* signify the material or constituency of the whole thing:

You make a cake *with eggs* (*ie* 'eggs are one of the ingredients')
He made the frame (*out*) *of wood* (*ie* 'wood was the only material')

The same contrast of meaning is seen with *build* and *construct:*

The terminal was built/constructed *with reinforced concrete*
The terminal was built/constructed (*out*) *of reinforced concrete*

With also enters into expressions such as *paved with brick, filled with water, loaded with hay.*

Of (used with nouns denoting 'material') is found in a postmodifying function as well as in adverbials: *a bracelet of solid gold, a table of polished oak* (*ie* 'made/consisting of polished oak'); here it may also be used metaphorically: *a man of steel; a heart of stone.*

6.44
Respect, standard: *at, for*
A gradable adjective implies some standard or norm (5.19): *big* means something different in *This elephant is big, This cat is big*, since 'big for an elephant' presupposes a larger scale, and a larger norm, than 'big for a cat'. We can make the norm explicit by a *for* phrase:

He's not bad *for a youngster* (*ie* considering he is a youngster)
That dog is long-legged *for a terrier*

A further way in which a prepositional phrase may specify the meaning of a gradable adjective is to use *at* to introduce the respect in which the adjective is appropriate to its noun phrase:

He's bad/hopeless/terrible *at games*

These two prepositional uses are not restricted to adjectival complementation:

I'm a complete dunce *at mathematics*
For an Englishman, he speaks foreign languages remarkably well
It's a dreadfully expensive toy *for what it is*

6.45
Reaction: *to*
Instead of regarding *John's blunder* in *my surprise at John's blunder* as the stimulus of the surprise (as in 6.34), we can regard the surprise as the reaction to the blunder. If we make the main clause represent the event acting as a 'stimulus', we can express the REACTION by the preposition *to* followed by an abstract noun of emotion: *To my annoyance, they rejected the offer. To my annoyance* in this context is an attitudinal disjunct, comparable with adverbs such as *annoyingly, surprisingly* (8.50 *ff*).

Alternatively, we can use a *to*-phrase to identify the PERSON REACTING: *To me, their rejection of the offer was a surprise.* In this last sense, *to* is not limited to emotive reactions; it applies equally to intellectual or perceptual responses:

To a mind based in common sense, his ideas are utterly absurd
It looked *to me* like a vast chasm

6.46
Modification of prepositional phrases

It is worth noting that prepositional meanings (particularly of time and place) are subject to modification as regards degree and measure, and that prepositions may therefore (like many adjectives and adverbs) be preceded by intensifiers. For example:

He had wandered *right* (='completely') off the path
Now their footsteps could be heard *directly* above my head

There is doubt in such cases as to whether the intensifier should be treated as applying to the whole prepositional phrase, or to the preposition alone. Occasionally, the possibility of placing the intensifier after the phrase suggests that it is the phrase as a whole that is qualified:

Few people are against public ownership *completely*

Bibliographical note

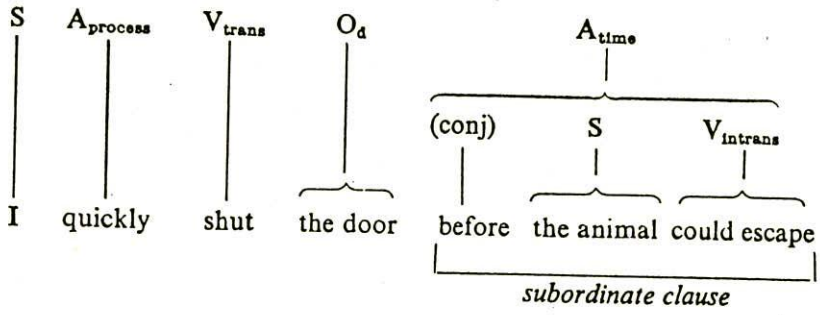
For some theoretical discussion of prepositional roles, see Fillmore (1968). On English prepositions, see Aksenenko (1956); Close (1962); Leech (1969a), Chapter 8, on prepositions of place; Quirk (1968), on complex prepositions.

SEVEN
THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

Clause patterns

7.1
Simple and complex sentences

It was pointed out in 2.4 that elements such as V(erb) and O(bject) were constituents of sentences and also of clauses within sentences. From now on, we shall speak of *clauses* and *clause structure* whenever a statement is true both for sentences and for the clauses of which it is composed:



In the present chapter, however, we shall be dealing only with simple sentences: that is, sentences consisting of only one clause.

7.2
Clause types

Concentrating on those elements that are normally obligatory, we can usefully distinguish seven clause types which we may designate in italics with the abbreviations explained in 2.4–10:

(1) *SVA* S V_{intens} A_{place}
Mary is in the house

(2) *SVC* S V_{intens} C_s
Mary is {kind / a nurse}

(3) *SVO* S $V_{monotrans}$ O_d
Somebody caught the ball

(4) *SVOA* S $V_{complex\ trans}$ O_d A_{place}
I put the plate on the table

(5) *SVOC* S $V_{complex\ trans}$ O_d C_o
We have proved him {wrong / a fool}

(6) *SVOO* S $V_{ditrans}$ O_i O_d
She gives me expensive presents

(7) *SV* S $V_{intrans}$
The child laughed

Note

[*a*] Most obligatory adjuncts are A_{place}, but there are many cases in which the term 'place' applies only in a broad metaphorical sense:

He is *without a job* We kept him *off cigarettes*

while some are not A_{place} at all: 'They treated him *kindly*'

[*b*] Among the relatively minor patterns not accounted for here, we might mention S V O_i C_s: *John made Mary a good husband* (*ie* 'John was a good husband to Mary').

7.3
Complementation

The elements O_d, C, and A in the above patterns are *obligatory* elements of clause structure in the sense that they are required for the complementation of the verb. By this we mean that, given the use of a particular verb in a particular sense, the sentence is incomplete if one of these elements is omitted: **I put the book* (Type *SVOA*) and **He resembled* (Type *SVO*) are unacceptable. In some cases, however, a direct object or object complement in one of these patterns may be considered grammatically optional:

He's eating – *cf* He's eating an apple (Type *SVO*)
He made her career – *cf* He made her career a success (Type *SVOC*)
He's teaching – *cf* He's teaching German (Type *SVO*), He's teaching the boys (German) (Type *SVOO*)

Our approach, however, will be to regard these as cases of conversion (App I.30), whereby a verb such as *eat* is transferred from the transitive to the intransitive category. Thus *He's eating* is an instance of clause-type *SV* rather than of *SVO* (with optional deletion of the object).

7.4
Optional adverbials

The patterns of 7.2 can be expanded by the addition of various optional adverbials; *cf* 2.10. For example (optional adverbials are bracketed):

SV: (A) S V (A)
(Sometimes) she sings (beautifully)

SVA: (A) S V (A) A
(In America) most students are (now) on vacation

SVOO: S (A) V O O
She (kindly) sent us some photographs

7.5
Transformational relations

One way of distinguishing the various clause types is by means of 'transformational' relations, or relations of grammatical paraphrase.

Clauses containing a noun phrase as object are distinguished by their ability to be converted into passive clauses, the object noun phrase assuming the function of subject (V_{pass} = passive verb phrase), the subject appearing (if at all) in an optional *by*-phrase, symbolized here as [A]:

Many critics disliked the play (S V O_d) ↔ The play was disliked (by many critics) (S V_{pass} [A])

Where the passive draws more attention to the result than to the action or agency, the 'resulting' copula *get* (12.8) frequently replaces *be*, though chiefly in rather informal usage:

The window *was* broken by my younger son
I know how the window *got* broken

A more gradually achieved result can be sometimes expressed by *become:*

With the passage of time, the furniture *became* covered in dust

The following examples illustrate the passive with other clause types:

Queen Victoria considered him a genius (S V O_d C_o) ↔ He was considered a genius by Queen Victoria (S V_{pass} C_s [A])
An intruder must have placed the ladder there (S V O_d A_{loc}) ↔ The ladder must have been placed there by an intruder (S V_{pass} A_{loc} [A])
My father gave me this watch (S V O_i O_d)
↔ I was given this watch by my father (S V_{pass} O_d [A])
↔ This watch was given me by my father (S V_{pass} O_i [A])

As Type *SVOO* clauses have two objects, they often have two passive

forms, as shown above – one in which the direct object becomes subject, and another (more common) in which the indirect object becomes subject.

There is sometimes equivalence between Types *SV*, *SVC*, and *SVA* as is shown by occasional equivalences of the following kind:

S V ↔ S V C_s
The baby is sleeping ↔ The baby is asleep
Two loaves will suffice ↔ Two loaves will be sufficient

S V ↔ S V A
He hurried ↔ He went fast

S V C_s ↔ S V A
He is jobless ↔ He is without a job

On the whole, English prefers to avoid the plain *SV* pattern where alternatives are available (14.33).

7.6
Intensive relationship

An *SVOC* clause is often equivalent to a clause with an infinitive or *that*-clause (12.20 *ff*):

I imagined *her beautiful* ↔ { I imagined *her to be beautiful* / I imagined *that she was beautiful*

This equivalence shows that the O and the C of an *SVOC* clause are in the same relation to one another as the S and C of an *SVC* clause. The relation is expressed, wherever it is expressed at all, by an intensive verb. The intensive relationship is important in other aspects of grammar apart from clause patterns. It underlies, for example, relations of apposition (9.45 *ff*).

Further, we may extend the concept of intensive relationship to the relation of subject to adverbial and object to adverbial in *SVA* and *SVOA* patterns respectively. (For *SVOA* patterns, see 8.29, 8.44.)

SVOO clauses can be transformed into *SVOA* clauses by the substitution of a prepositional phrase for the indirect object, with a change of order (12.28):

She sent *Jim* a card ↔ She sent a card *to Jim*
She left *Jim* a card ↔ She left a card *for Jim*

To and *for*, in their recipient senses (6.29), are the prepositions chiefly involved, but others, such as *with* and *of*, are occasionally found:

I'll play *you* a game of chess ↔ I'll play a game of chess *with/against you*
She asked *Jim* a favour ↔ She asked a favour *of Jim*

7.7
Multiple class membership of verbs

It must be borne in mind that one verb can belong, in various senses, to a number of different classes (App I.30), and hence enter into a number of different clause types. The verb *get* is a particularly versatile one, being excluded only from Type *SV* (and not even from this universally):

SVC: He's getting angry
SVA: He got through the window
SVO: He'll get a surprise
SVOC: He got his shoes and socks wet
SVOA: He got himself into trouble
SVOO: He got her a splendid present

Through the multiple class membership of verbs, ambiguities can arise: *I found her an entertaining partner*, like *She called him a steward*, could be interpreted either as *SVOC* or as *SVOO*.

7.8
Clause elements syntactically defined

A SUBJECT
(a) is normally a noun phrase (4.1) or a clause with nominal function (11.13 *ff*);
(b) occurs before the verb phrase in declarative clauses, and immediately after the operator (2.3) in questions (but *cf* 7.53, 14.12 *ff*);
(c) has number and person concord, where applicable (7.18, 7.26), with the verb phrase.

An OBJECT (direct or indirect)
(a) like a subject, is a noun phrase or clause with nominal function;
(b) normally follows the subject and the verb phrase (but *cf* 7.53, 7.63, 14.11);
(c) by the passive transformation, assumes the status of subject (7.5), but *cf* 12.16.

An INDIRECT OBJECT, where both objects are present, precedes the DIRECT OBJECT (except in rare instances like BrE *Give it me*), and is semantically equivalent to a prepositional phrase (7.6).

A COMPLEMENT (subject or object)
(a) is a noun phrase, an adjective phrase, or a clause with nominal function, having a co-referential relation with the subject (or object);
(b) follows the subject, verb phrase, and (if one is present) object (but *cf* 7.53, 14.11, 14.28);
(c) does not become subject through the passive transformation.

An ADVERBIAL (see 8.1)

(a) is an adverb phrase, adverbial clause, noun phrase, or prepositional phrase;
(b) is generally mobile, *ie* is capable of occurring in more than one position in the clause;
(c) is generally optional, *ie* may be added to or removed from a sentence without affecting its acceptability, but *cf* the obligatory adverbial of the *SVA* and *SVOA* patterns (7.2).

Clause elements semantically considered

7.9

Agentive, affected, recipient, attribute

The most typical semantic role of a subject is AGENTIVE; that is, the animate being instigating or causing the happening denoted by the verb:

John opened the letter

The most typical function of the direct object is that of the AFFECTED participant; *ie* a participant (animate or inanimate) which does not cause the happening denoted by the verb, but is directly involved in some other way:

Many MPs criticized *the Prime Minister*

The most typical function of the indirect object is that of RECIPIENT; *ie* an animate participant being passively implicated by the happening or state:

I've found *you* a place

The role of the subject complement is that of attribute of the subject, whether a current or existing attribute (with stative verbs) or one resulting from the event described by the verb (with dynamic verbs).

CURRENT ATTRIBUTE: He's *my brother;* He seems *unhappy*
RESULTING ATTRIBUTE: He became *restless;* He turned *traitor* (12.8 *f*)

The role of the object complement is that of attribute of the object, again either a current or resulting attribute:

CURRENT ATTRIBUTE: I ate the meat *cold;* I prefer coffee *black*
RESULTING ATTRIBUTE: They elected him *President;* He painted the wall *blue* (12.26 *f*)

Note

Although *I've found a place for the magnolia tree* and *I've found a place for Mrs Jones* appear to be grammatically equivalent, only the second can be transformed into a clause with indirect object:

I've found Mrs Jones a place
*I've found the magnolia tree a place

This is because a tree is inanimate and cannot adopt a recipient role. With the verb *give*, however, there can be exceptions (*cf* 7.16):

I've given the bathroom a thorough cleaning

7.10
Agentive and instrumental subject

Apart from its agentive function, the subject frequently has an instrumental role; that is, it expresses the unwitting (generally inanimate) material cause of an event:

The avalanche destroyed several houses

With intransitive verbs, the subject also frequently has the AFFECTED role that is elsewhere typical of the object:

Jack fell down
The pencil was lying on the table

We may also extend this latter function to subjects of intensive verbs:

The pencil was on the table

It is now possible to see a regular relation, in terms of clause function, between adjectives or intransitive verbs and the corresponding transitive verbs expressing CAUSATIVE meaning:

$S_{affected}$ V	$S_{agent/instr}$ V $O_{affected}$
The door opened	John/The key opened the door
The flowers have died	The frost has killed the flowers
$S_{affected}$ V C	$S_{agent/instr}$ V $O_{affected}$
The road became narrower	They narrowed the road
I got angry	His manner angered me
$S_{agentive}$ V	$S_{agentive}$ V $O_{affected}$
My dog was walking	I was walking my dog

7.11
Recipient subject

The subject may also have a recipient role with verbs such as *have*, *own*, *possess*, *benefit* (*from*), as is indicated by the following relation:

Mr Smith has bought/given/sold his son a radio → So now his son has/owns/possesses the radio

The perceptual verbs *see* and *hear* also require a 'recipient' subject, in contrast to *look at* and *listen to*, which are agentive. The other perceptual

verbs *taste, smell,* and *feel* have both an agentive meaning corresponding to *look at* and a recipient meaning corresponding to *see:*

Foolishly, he tasted the soup
*Foolishly, he tasted the pepper in the soup

The adverb *foolishly* requires the agentive; hence, the second sentence, which can only be understood in a non-agentive manner, does not make sense.

Verbs indicating a mental state may also require a recipient subject:

I thought you were mistaken (*cf* It seemed to me . . .)
I liked the play (*cf* The play gave me pleasure)

Normally, recipient subjects go with stative verbs (3.35). Some of them (notably *have* and *possess*) have no passive form:

They have a beautiful house ↔ *A beautiful house is had by them

7.12
Locative, temporal and eventive subjects

The subject may have the function of designating place or time:

This path is swarming with ants (=Ants are swarming *all over this path*)

The bus holds forty people (=Forty people can sit *in the bus*)

Unlike *swarm*, the verbs in such sentences do not normally admit the progressive (**The bus is holding . . .*) or the passive (**Forty people are held . . .*).

Temporal subjects can usually be replaced by the empty *it* (7.13), the temporal expression becoming adjunct:

Tomorrow is my birthday (=It is my birthday *tomorrow*)
The winter of 1970 was exceptionally mild (=It was exceptionally mild *in the winter of 1970*)

Eventive subjects (with abstract noun heads designating arrangements and activities) differ from others in permitting intensive complementation with a time adverbial (*cf* 12.10):

The concert is on Thursday (*but* *The concert hall is on Thursday)

7.13
Empty *it* subject

Finally, a subject may lack semantic content altogether, and consist only of the meaningless 'prop' word *it*, used especially with climatic predications:

It's raining/snowing, etc It's getting dark It's noisy in here

Note

The 'prop' subject *it* as discussed here must be distinguished from the 'anticipatory' *it* of sentences like *It was nice seeing you* (14.24 *ff*), where the 'prop' subject is a replacement for a postponed clausal subject (= *Seeing you was nice*).

Locative and effected object

7.14

We turn now to roles of the DIRECT OBJECT. Apart from the AFFECTED OBJECT (7.9), semantic types of direct object are the LOCATIVE OBJECT and the EFFECTED OBJECT. An example of the 'locative object' is:

The horse jumped the fence ('. . . jumped *over* the fence')

There are similar uses of such verbs as *turn, leave, reach, surround, penetrate, mount, cross, climb* (see also 6.19).

An effected object is one that refers to something which exists only by virtue of the activity indicated by the verb:

Baird invented television I'm writing a letter

With agentive subject and an affected object, one may always capture part of the meaning of a clause (*eg: X destroyed Y*) by saying 'X did something to Y'; but this does not apply to an effected object – *Baird invented television* does not imply 'Baird did something to television'.

One may include in this category also the type of object (sometimes called 'cognate') which repeats, partially or wholly, the meaning of the verb, as in *sing a song*.

Note

A more dubious category of object consists of phrases of extent or measure, as in

He ran *a mile* It costs *ten dollars* It weighs *almost a ton*

As these clauses do not generally permit the passive transformation, there is reason to analyse them as *SVA* rather than *SVO*. However, the final element behaves at least marginally like a direct object, as is shown by question forms with *What* alongside *How much:*

What does it weigh? How much does it weigh?

The ambiguity of sentences such as *We ate a lot*, which may be *SVO* or *SVA*, is discussed in 8.18.

7.15

A third type of effected object takes the form of a verbal noun preceded by a common verb of general meaning, such as *do, make, have, take, give.* This construction is often more idiomatic, especially in colloquial English, than an equivalent construction with an intransitive verb (see further 14.33):

He did little work that day ('He worked little that day')
He made several attempts to contact me ('He attempted several times to contact me')

The prisoner made no comment
He's having a bath/a holiday (BrE)/a smoke
He took a rest/a vacation (AmE)/a dislike to her/a dive into the water
He gave a jump/a yell, etc

Have and *take* in these examples have agentive subjects (*have* being the typical British, and *take* the typical American form), while *give* usually has an involuntary force and therefore accompanies an 'affected' subject.

Note

Have can more easily have an affected subject than *take* (*The baby had/*took a bath*), but *cf: He took a beating.*

7.16

Affected indirect object

There is only one exception to the rule that the indirect object has the role of 'recipient': this is when *give* (or sometimes related verbs like *pay*, *owe*) has an 'effected' object as direct object and an 'affected' object as indirect object:

I paid her a visit ('I visited her')
I gave the door a couple of kicks ('I kicked the door a couple of times')

These clauses, as the paraphrases make clear, are equivalent to clauses with a direct object as 'affected' object.

7.17

Summary

Although the semantic functions of the elements (particularly S and O) are quite varied, there are certain clear restrictions, such as that the object cannot be 'agentive' or 'instrument'; that a subject (except in the passive) cannot be 'effected'; that an indirect object can have only two functions – those of 'affected' and 'recipient'. The assignment of a function to the subject seems to have the following system of priorities:

If there is an 'agentive', it is S; if not,
If there is an 'instrument', it is S; if not,
If there is an 'affected', it is S; if not,
If there is a 'locative' or 'temporal' or 'eventive', it may be S; if not,
The prop word *it* is S.

Naturally, where the passive transformation applies, it transfers the role of the direct or indirect object to the subject.

Note

The above treatment of sentence elements does not include discussion of clauses as S, O, and C.

Concord

7.18
Subject-verb concord

The most important type of concord in English is concord of number between subject and verb. Thus (3) and (4) are ungrammatical:

(1) The window is open (sing + sing)
(2) The windows are open (plur + plur)
(3) *The window are open (sing + plur)
(4) *The windows is open (plur + sing)

A clause in the position of subject counts as singular for purposes of concord: *How they got there doesn't concern me* / *To treat them as hostages is criminal.* The same is true of prepositional phrases, etc, acting as subject: *After the exams is the time to relax*, etc. Nominal relative clauses on the other hand, since they are equivalent to noun phrases (11.13), may have plural as well as singular concord: *What were once human dwellings are now nothing but piles of rubble.*

Note

[*a*] In fact, it is possible to generalize the rule as 'A subject which is not definitely marked for plural requires a singular verb'. This would explain, in addition to clausal and adverbial subjects, the tendency in informal speech for *is/was* to follow the pseudo-subject *there* in existential sentences such as *There's hundreds of people on the waiting list* (14.19 *ff*).

[*b*] Apparent exceptions to the concord rule arise with singular nouns ending with the *-s* of the plural inflection (*measles, billiards, mathematics*, etc, 4.32), or conversely plural nouns lacking the inflection (*cattle, people, clergy*, etc, 4.35):

Measles *is* sometimes serious Our people *are* complaining

[*c*] Plural words and phrases (including coordinate phrases, see 7.21) count as singular if they are used as names, titles, quotations, etc (see further 9.57):

Crime and Punishment is perhaps the best-constructed of Dostoyevsky's novels; but *The Brothers Karamazov* is undoubtedly his masterpiece.
'The Cedars' has a huge garden
'Senior Citizens' means, in common parlance, people over sixty

The titles of some works which are collections of stories, etc, however, can be singular or plural: *The Canterbury Tales exist/exists in many manuscripts.*

7.19
Notional concord, and proximity

Two factors interfere with concord as presented in 7.18. 'Notional concord' is agreement of verb with subject according to the *idea* of number rather than the actual presence of the grammatical marker for that idea. Thus *the government* is treated as plural in *The government have broken all their promises* (BrE), as is shown not only by the plural verb *have*, but also by the pronoun *their*.

The principle of 'proximity' denotes agreement of the verb with whatever noun or pronoun closely precedes it, sometimes in preference to agreement with the headword of the subject:

No one except his own supporters *agree* with him
One in ten *take* drugs

7.20
Collective nouns
In BrE, collective nouns, notionally plural but grammatically singular, obey notional concord in examples such as the following where AmE usually has the singular:

The public are tired of demonstrations [1]
The audience were enjoying every minute of it [2]

Although singular and plural verbs are more or less interchangeable in these contexts, the choice is based, if on anything, on whether the group is being considered as a single undivided body, or as a collection of individuals (*cf* 4.62). Thus plural is more likely than singular in [2], because consideration is being given to the individual reactions of members of the audience. Contrastingly, singular has to be used in sentences like *The audience was enormous.*

Coordinated subject
7.21
When a subject consists of two or more noun phrases coordinated by *and*, a distinction has to be made between appositional and non-appositional coordination. Under NON-APPOSITIONAL COORDINATION we include cases that can be treated as an implied reduction of two clauses. These have a verb in the plural:

Tom and Mary *are* now ready (↔ Tom is now ready and Mary is now ready)
What I say and what I think *are* my own affair (↔ What I say is . . . and what I think is . . .)

A singular verb is used with conjoinings which represent a single entity:

The hammer and sickle *was* flying from a tall flag pole

Conjoinings expressing a mutual relationship, even though they can only indirectly be treated as reductions of clauses in this way, also take a plural verb:

Your problem and mine *are* similar (↔ Your problem is similar to mine and mine is similar to yours)

With the less common APPOSITIONAL COORDINATION, however, no such reduction is possible at all, for the coordinated structures refer to the same thing. Hence a singular verb is used:

This temple of ugliness and memorial to Victorian bad taste
was erected at the Queen's express wish

The two opening noun phrases here both refer to the same thing. The following example, however, is ambiguous and could have either a singular or plural verb according as the brother and editor are one person or two:

His younger brother and the subsequent editor of his collected
papers *was/were* with him at his death-bed

Some latitude is allowed in the interpretation of abstract nouns since it is not always easy to decide if they represent one quality or two:

Your fairness and impartiality *has/have* been much appreciated

7.22
A single noun head with coordinate modifiers may imply two separate sentences (*cf* 9.33), with the result that a plural verb may follow a singular non-count noun subject quite legitimately:

Good and bad taste *are* inculcated by example
(↔ Good taste is . . . and bad taste is . . .)

A similar collapsing of coordinate subjects into a single structure is observed when the subject is a clause:

What I say and think *are* no business of yours
(↔ What I say is . . . and what I think is . . .)

where the alternative with *is* would mean

That which I say and think is no business of yours

7.23
Concord involving (*either* . . .) *or* is illustrated as follows:

Either the Mayor or his deputy *is* bound to come	[1]
Either the strikers or the bosses *have* misunderstood	[2]
?Either your brakes or your eyesight *is* at fault	[3]
Either your eyesight or your brakes *are* at fault	[4]

No problem arises with [1] and [2], but with [3] there is divided usage, neither singular nor plural seeming right. So too: 'He asked whether one

lecture or two *?was/?were* to be given'. With [4], the principle of proximity intervenes and the plural phrase determines the number of the verb.

Note

[*a*] The negative correlatives *neither . . . nor*, although disjunctive in meaning, behave in colloquial speech more like *and* than like *or* as regards concord (*cf* 9.19):

Neither he nor his wife *have* arrived

is more natural in spoken idiom than the form preferred by some:

Neither he nor his wife *has* arrived

[*b*] Grammatical concord is usually obeyed for *more than:*

More than a thousand inhabitants *have* signed the petition
More than one person *has* protested against the proposal

Thus although *more than one person* is notionally plural, a singular verb is preferred because (*one*) *person* operates as head of a singular noun phrase.

Indefinite expressions of amount

7.24

Another area of ambivalence is that of indefinite and negative expressions of amount. For example, in

I've ordered the shrubs, but none (of them) have/has yet arrived

grammatical concord would suggest that *none* is singular; but notional concord (we might paraphrase as '*they* have not arrived') invites a plural verb. *Has* is therefore more conventionally 'correct', but *have* is more idiomatic in speech. These comments may be extended to *neither* and *either* as indefinite pronouns:

I sent cards to Mavis and Margery but neither (of them) has/have replied; in fact, I doubt if either (of them) is/are coming.

If a prepositional phrase with a plural complement follows the indefinite construction, a plural verb is favoured not only because of notional concord but because of the proximity rule:

none of *them* are . . . either of *the girls* are . . .

7.25

The same proximity principle may lead to plural concord even with the indefinites *each*, *every*, *everybody*, *anybody*, and *nobody*, which are otherwise undoubtedly singular:

?Nobody, not even the teachers, were listening
?Every member of that vast crowd of 50,000 people were pleased to see him

Although these sentences might well be uttered in casual speech, or inadvertently written down, most people would probably regard them as ungrammatical, because they flatly contradict grammatical concord.

Other, more acceptable, instances of 'attraction' arise with singular nouns of kind and quantity:

A large number of people have applied for the job
Those kind/sort/type of parties are very enjoyable (informal)

The latter illustrates an idiomatic anomaly: there is lack of number concord between the noun and the determiner *those*, as well as with the verb. The awkwardness can be avoided by rephrasing as *Parties of that kind...*

Note
The proximity principle, if taken to mean that agreement is determined by whatever immediately precedes the verb, can explain a singular verb in cases of inversion or of an adverbial quasi-subject: *Where's the scissors?; Here's John and Mary; There's several bags missing.* As what precedes the subject here is not marked for plural (7.18 Note *a*), the singular verb follows by attraction. These are colloquial examples; in formal English *are* would be substituted.

7.26
Concord of person

As well as concord of number, there is concord of person between subject and verb:

I am your friend (1st PERSON SINGULAR CONCORD)
He is ready / He knows you } (3rd PERSON SINGULAR CONCORD)

Following the principle of proximity, the last noun phrase of a coordinate subject (where the coordinator is *or, either... or*, or *neither... nor*) determines the person of the verb:

Neither you, nor I, nor anyone else knows the answer
Either my wife or I am going

Because many people find such sentences unacceptable, they often prefer to use a modal auxiliary, which is invariable for person, *eg: Either my wife or I will be going.*

Note
In cleft sentences (14.15*f*), a relative pronoun subject is usually followed by a verb in agreement with its antecedent: *It is I who am to blame.* But 3rd person concord prevails (in informal English) where the objective case pronoun *me* is used: *It's me who's to blame.*

Other types of concord

7.27

SUBJECT-COMPLEMENT CONCORD

Subject-complement concord of number (but not of person) exists between S and C in clauses of type *SVC*; thus:

The child was an angel / The children were angels } *but not* { *The child was angels / *The children were an angel

This type of concord arises naturally from the denotative equivalence in the intensive relationship. There are, however, exceptions:

What we need most is books
They turned traitor (*but* They became traitors)
Good manners are a rarity these days

There is an equivalent type of concord between object and object complement in *SVOC* clauses; *eg: He thinks these girls the best actors.*

Note

We sometimes find the verb in agreement with the complement: *What we need most are books; Good manners is a rarity these days.* Such sentences are probably ascribable to the workings of notional concord, the idea of plurality being dominant in the first and that of singularity in the second.

7.28

SUBJECT-OBJECT CONCORD

Subject-object concord of number, person, and gender is necessary, as well as subject-complement concord, where the second element is a reflexive pronoun (4.84*f*):

He injured *himself* in the leg
You should give *yourself* another chance.

The same concord relation holds when the reflexive pronoun occurs in other functions (*eg* as prepositional complement), or when the reflexive genitive *his own*, etc is used:

She's making a sweater for herself
They're ruining their own chances

In BrE, collective noun subjects permit plural concord: *The navy congratulated themselves on the victory.*

7.29

PRONOUN CONCORD

Personal pronouns in the 3rd person agree with their antecedents both in number and (with the singular pronouns *he*, *she*, and *it*) in gender:

John hurt his foot — John and Beatrice hurt their feet
Beatrice hurt her foot — The climbers hurt their feet

By contrast, *John hurt her foot* would mean that John hurt someone else's foot (the someone else having been previously mentioned).

7.30

English has no sex-neutral 3rd person singular pronoun, and so the plural pronoun *they* is often used informally, in defiance of number concord, as a substitute for the indefinite pronouns *everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody.*

Everyone thinks *they* have the answer [1]
Has *anybody* brought *their* camera? [2]
No one could have blamed *themselves* for that [3]

The plural pronoun is a convenient means of avoiding the dilemma of whether to use the *he* or *she* form. The same dilemma can arise with co-ordinate subjects and with some indefinite noun phrase subjects, but here, resort to the evasive device of the plural pronoun is perhaps not so acceptable:

? *Either he or his wife* is going to have to change *their* attitude
? *Not every drug addict* can solve *their* problem so easily

The use of *they* in sentences like [1–3] is frowned upon in formal English, where the tendency is to use *he* as the 'unmarked' form when the sex of the antecedent is not determined. The formal equivalent of [1] is therefore:

Everyone thinks *he* has the answer [1a]

There is a still more pedantic alternative, the rather cumbersome device of conjoining both masculine and feminine pronouns:

Every student has to make up *his or her* own mind

Note

On concord involving relative pronouns, see 13.5.

The vocative

7.31

A vocative is a nominal element added to a sentence or clause optionally, denoting the one or more people to whom it is addressed, and signalling the fact that it is addressed to them:

JŎHN, I WÀNT you (voc S V O_d)
It's a lovely DÀY, Mrs JÓHNson (S V C_s voc)
YÒU, my FRÍEND, will have to work HÀRDer (S voc V A)

These three sentences show how a vocative may take an initial, medial, or final position in the sentence; in its optionality and freedom of position, it is more like an adverbial than any other element of clause structure.

Intonationally, the vocative is set off from the rest of the clause, either by constituting a separate tone-unit or by forming the post-nuclear part of a tone unit (App II.7). The most characteristic intonations are shown above: fall-rise for an initial vocative; rise for a medial or final vocative.

7.32
In form, a vocative may be

(1) A single name with or without title: *John, Mrs Johnson, Dr Smith*
(2) The personal pronoun *you* (markedly impolite); *eg: Behave yourself, you.* Or an indefinite pronoun; *eg: Get me a pen, somebody.*
(3) Standard appellatives, usually nouns without pre- or postmodification (not even the possessive pronoun):

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: *mother, father, uncle:* or more familiar forms like *mom(my)* (AmE), *mum(my)* (BrE), *dad(dy), auntie*
ENDEARMENTS: *(my) darling/dear/honey* (AmE)*/love*
TITLES OF RESPECT: *sir, madam, My Lord, Your Excellency, Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen*
MARKERS OF PROFESSION OR STATUS: *doctor; Mr/Madam Chairman; Mr President/ (Mr) Prime Minister; Father* (for priest)*; Bishop*

(4) A nominal clause (very occasionally): *Whoever said that, come out here.*
(5) Items under (1), (2), or (3) above with the addition of modifiers or appositive elements of various kinds:

(1) *My dear Mrs Johnson; young John*
(2) *You with the red hair; you over there* (impolite); informal but not impolite: *you boys; you (young) fellows; you guys* (AmE)
(3) *Old man/fellow* (familiar); *young man/woman*

One obvious function of a vocative in English is to seek the attention of the person addressed, and especially to single him out from others who may be within hearing. A second function, less obvious but certainly no less important, is to express the attitude of the speaker towards the addressee. Vocatives are generally used as a positive mark of attitude, to signal either respectful distance or familiarity (varying from mild friendliness to intimacy).

Negation

7.33
The negation of a simple sentence is accomplished by inserting *not, n't* between the operator and the predication:

The attempt has succeeded ~ The attempt has not succeeded
We may win the match ~ We may not win the match
He is coming ~ He isn't coming
We have been defeated ~ We have not been defeated

In these instances, there is an item in the positive sentences that can serve as operator. When this is not so, the auxiliary *do* is introduced and this, like modal auxiliaries, is followed by the bare infinitive:

She sees me every week ~ She doesn't see me every week
They understood the problem ~ They did not understand the problem

Sentences with lexical *be* behave exactly as when *be* is auxiliary: *She is a teacher ~ She isn't a teacher.* Lexical *have* usually has *do* as operator (though in BrE it often need not, and informally *got* is often added):

He has enough money { He doesn't have enough money (esp AmE)
He hasn't (got) enough money (esp BrE)

7.34
Abbreviated negation

In circumstances where it is possible to abbreviate the operator by the use of a contracted form enclitic to the subject (usually only a pronoun), two colloquial and synonymous forms of negation are possible (3.19–21):

He isn't coming ~ He's not coming
We aren't ready ~ We're not ready
They haven't caught him ~ They've not caught him
She won't miss us ~ She'll not miss us
He wouldn't notice anything ~ He'd not notice anything

Note

[*a*] As there is no contracted form of *am not*, *I'm not coming* has no alternative of the kind given in the left-hand column above. Another consequence of this gap is that there is no universally accepted colloquial question form corresponding to the stiltedly formal *Am I not correct?* The contraction *aren't* is sometimes substituted: *Aren't I correct?* In AmE, *ain't* has considerable currency in both declarative and interrogative use.

[*b*] Restrictions on certain negative forms, especially *mayn't*, *mustn't*, *oughtn't*, *daren't* and *needn't*, are noted in 7.42.

7.35
Non-assertive forms

There are numerous items that do not naturally occur outside negative, interrogative, and conditional clauses; for example:

We haven't seen *any* soldiers
*We have seen *any* soldiers

These items (which may be determiners, pronouns, or adverbs) are the non-assertive forms (*cf* 4.93), and the following examples will illustrate their range:

We've had *some* (lunch)	~ We haven't had *any* (lunch)
I was speaking to *someone*	~ I wasn't speaking to *anyone*
I saw him *somewhere*	~ I didn't see him *anywhere*
She was *somehow* surprised	~ She wasn't *in any way* surprised
They *sometimes* visit us	~ They *rarely/never/don't ever* visit us
He helped *to some extent*	~ He didn't help *at all*
They've arrived *already*	~ They haven't arrived *yet*
John is coming *too*	~ John isn't coming *either*
They ate *too* many (cakes)	~ They didn't eat *very* many (cakes)
He's *still* there	~ He isn't there *now/any longer*
I like her *a great deal*	~ I don't like her *much*
He's been *a long way*	~ He hasn't been *far*
She was away *a long time*	~ She wasn't away *long*
He saw *one or other* of them	~ He didn't see *either* (*one*, AmE) of them

In several of the negative sentences, the negative particle and the non-assertive form can combine to produce a negative form (*ever* ~ *never*) or can be replaced by a negative form (*He hadn't anything* ~ *He had nothing*).

Note

Non-assertive forms cannot normally be subject in a negative sentence (but *cf* 4.93):

John didn't see anyone ~ { No one was seen by John / *Anyone wasn't seen by John

7.36
Negative intensification

There are various ways of giving emotive intensification to a negative. For example, *by any means* and (informally) *a bit* are common alternatives to *at all* as non-assertive expressions of extent. Negative determiners and pronouns are given emphasis by *at all, whatever: I found nothing at all the matter with him/ You have no excuse whatever. Never* is repeated for emphasis, or else combined with an intensifying phrase such as *in (all) his/her etc life: I'll never, never go there again; I've never in all my life seen such a crowd.* The combinations *not one* and *not a* (*single*) are emphatic alternatives to *no* as determiner with a count noun.

7.37
Alternative negative elements

Instead of the verb, another element may be negated:

An honest man would not lie	I didn't see any birds
No honest man would lie	I saw no birds

The scope of negation (7.40) is however frequently different, so that

Many people did not come

does not mean the same as

Not many people came ('Few people came')

When negative adjuncts are made initial there is inversion of subject and operator:

I will never make that mistake again
Never again will I make that mistake (formal)

7.38

More than one non-assertive form

If a clause contains a negative element, it is usually negative from that point onward. This means that the non-assertive forms must normally be used in place of every assertive form that would have occurred in the corresponding positive clause:

I've never travelled *anywhere* by air *yet*
I haven't *ever* been on *any* of the big liners, *either*
No one has *ever* said *anything* to *either* of us
Not many of the refugees have *anywhere* to live *yet*

The non-assertive forms even occur in positive subordinate clauses following a negative in the main clause:

Nobody has promised that *any* of you will be released *yet*
That wouldn't deter anyone who had *any* courage

Assertive forms, however, are equally likely in such cases; and more generally, assertive forms do occur following a negative, so long as they fall outside the scope of negation (7.40).

Note

[*a*] Occasionally two negatives occur in the same clause: *I can't not obey* ('I have to obey'); *Not many people have nowhere to live* ('Most people have somewhere to live'); *No one has nothing to offer to society* ('Everyone has something to offer to society').

[*b*] In substandard English, there is an entirely different kind of 'multiple negation', where more than one negative form is used, but the meaning is that of a single negative: *No one never said nothing* (Standard English, *No one ever said anything*).

7.39

***Seldom, rarely*, etc**

There are several words which are negative in meaning, but not in appearance. They include:

seldom and *rarely*
scarcely, hardly, barely
little and *few* (in contrast to the positive *a little* and *a few*)
only

They have the following similarities to the ordinary negative items:

(1) They are followed by non-assertive rather than assertive forms:

I seldom get *any* sleep
I've spoken to hardly *anyone* who disagrees with me
Few changes in government have *ever* taken so many people by surprise
Only two of us had *any* experience at sailing

(2) When in pre-subject position, some of them can cause subject-operator inversion:

Rarely does crime pay so well as Mr Jones seems to think
Scarcely ever has the British nation suffered so much obloquy
Little need I dwell upon the joy of that reunion

The inversion, as before, is literary or rhetorical in tone.

(3) They are followed by positive rather than negative tag-questions (7.48*f*):

She scarcely seems to care, does she?

In addition, there are verbs, adjectives, or prepositions with negative meaning that take non-assertive forms:

He *denies* I ever told him
I *forgot* to ask for any change
Unaware of any hostility
Without any delay
Against any changes

7.40
Scope of negation

A negative form may be said to govern (or determine the occurrence of) a non-assertive form only if the latter is within the SCOPE of the negation, *ie* within the stretch of language over which the negative meaning operates (shown here with a horizontal bracket). The scope of the negation normally extends from the negative word itself to the end of the clause, or to the beginning of a final adjunct. The subject, and any adjuncts occurring before the predication, normally lie outside it. (The operator is sometimes within, and sometimes outside, the scope: 7.42.) There is thus a contrast between:

I definitely didn't speak to him ('It's definite that I did not')
I didn't definitely speak to him ('It's not definite that I did')

When an adverbial is final, however, it may or may not lie outside the scope (*cf* 8.8):

I wasn't LĬstening all the TÌME (*ie* I listened none of the time)
I wasn't listening ĂLL the time (*ie* I listened some of the time)

If an assertive form is used, it must lie outside the scope:

I didn't listen to some of the speakers (*ie* I listened to some)
I didn't listen to any of the speakers (*ie* I listened to none)

As we have seen (7.38), the scope can sometimes extend into a subordinate clause: *I didn't know that anyone was coming.*

7.41
Focus of negation

We need to identify not only the scope, but the FOCUS of negation. A special or contrastive nuclear stress falling on a particular part of the clause indicates that the contrast of meaning implicit in the negation is located at that spot, and also that by implication the rest of the clause can be understood in a positive sense:

HÀRry didn't attack the Labour GÓvernment
(*ie* '*Someone* attacked . . ., but it wasn't Harry')
Harry didn't *attÀCK* the Labour GÓvernment
(*ie* 'He did *something* to the Labour Government but he didn't attack it')
Harry didn't attack the *LÀBour* GÓvernment
(*ie* 'He attacked *some* government, but it wasn't the Labour one')

Scope and focus are interrelated such that the scope must include the focus. From this it follows that one way of signalling the extent of the scope is by the position of the focus. Indeed, since the scope of the negation is often not otherwise clearly signalled, we can indicate it by where we place the information focus. One example of this is when, atypically, the scope of the negation is extended to include a subordinate clause of reason, with a contrastive fall + rise to emphasize this:

I didn't leave HÓME, because I was afraid of my FÀther
(='Because I was afraid of my father, I didn't leave home')
I didn't leave home because I was afraid of my FÀther
(='I left home, but it wasn't because I was afraid of my father')

Intonation may be crucial also in marking the extension of the scope backwards to include the subject: an occasional phenomenon found in subjects which contain one of the 'universal' items *all* or *every:*

All cats don't like WÀter (*ie* 'All cats dislike water')
ÀLL cats don't like WÁter (*ie* 'Not all cats like water')

7.42
Negation of modal auxiliaries

The negation of modal auxiliaries requires some attention, in that here the scope of the negation may or may not include the meaning of the auxiliary itself. We therefore distinguish between AUXILIARY NEGATION and MAIN VERB NEGATION:

AUXILIARY NEGATION:
may not (='permission')
You may not go swimming ('You are not allowed . . .')
cannot, can't (in all senses)
You can't be serious ('It is not possible that . . .')
You can't go swimming ('You are not allowed . . .')
She can't ride a bicycle ('She is not able to . . .')
need not, needn't
You needn't pay that fine ('You are not obliged to . . .')
It needn't always be my fault ('It is not necessary that . . .')

MAIN VERB NEGATION:
may not (='possibility')
They may not bother to come if it's wet ('It is possible that they will not bother to come . . .')

will not, won't (all senses)
Don't worry, I won't interfere ('I'm willing not to interfere')
He won't do what he's told ('He insists on not doing . . .')
They won't have arrived yet ('I predict that they've not arrived yet')
shall not, shan't (all senses)
Don't worry, you shan't lose your reward ('I'm willing to see that you don't lose your reward')
I shan't know you when you return ('I predict that I shall not know . . .')
must not, mustn't (='obligation')
You mustn't keep us all waiting ('You'll oblige me by not keeping us all waiting')
ought not, oughtn't (both senses)
You oughtn't to keep us waiting ('obligation')
He oughtn't to be long ('necessity')

Certain auxiliaries (*can* and *need*) follow the pattern of auxiliary negation, while others (*will, shall, must*) follow that of main verb negation. *May* belongs to the former group in its 'permission' sense, but to the latter group in the sense of 'possibility'. *Mustn't* is not used at all (and *must not* only rarely) in the 'necessity' sense; instead, we can use *can't* in the sense of 'impossibility'. Thus the negation of *You must be telling lies* is *You can't be telling lies*. A common auxiliary negation of *must* is *needn't*, which has the two meanings of non-obligation and non-necessity:

A: Must we pack now? B: No, we needn't till tomorrow.

Because of the diametric opposition of meaning between 'permission' and 'obligation', an odd-seeming equivalence exists between *may not* ('non-permission') and *mustn't* ('obligation-not-to'):

You may not go swimming today
You mustn't go swimming today

On the whole, the past tense negative auxiliaries (*mightn't, couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't*) follow the same negative pattern as their present tense equivalents, subject to the provisions described in 3.48 *ff*.

Statements, questions, commands, exclamations

7.43

Simple sentences may be divided into four major syntactic classes, whose use correlates with different communicative functions:

(1) STATEMENTS are sentences in which the subject is always present and generally precedes the verb:

John will speak to the boss today

On exceptional statements not containing a subject, see 9.6.

(2) QUESTIONS are sentences marked by one or more of these three criteria:

(a) the placing of the operator immediately in front of the subject:

Will John speak to the boss today?

(b) the initial positioning of an interrogative or *wh*-element:

Who will you speak to?

(c) rising intonation:

You will speak to the BÓSS?

(3) COMMANDS are sentences which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb is in the imperative (3.2):

Speak to the boss today

(4) EXCLAMATIONS are sentences which have an initial phrase introduced by *what* or *how*, without inversion of subject and operator:

What a noise they are making!

We use the following adjectives for these four types: (1) DECLARATIVE, (2) INTERROGATIVE, (3) IMPERATIVE, and (4) EXCLAMATORY.

Note

There is an important exception to (2a) above. It is only in relatively formal use that negative questions (7.47) have the subject immediately after the operator: *Did John not send the letter?* Normally the negative particle comes between operator and subject, but almost invariably with contraction: *Didn't John send it?* (*?*Did not John send it?*). Focusing adjuncts (8.8 *ff*) can also appear between operator and subject, and they make it possible for a preceding *not* to remain uncontracted: *Did not even a single student come to the lecture?* (formal).

Questions

7.44

Questions can be divided into three major classes according to the type of answer they expect:

(1) those that expect only affirmation or rejection (as in *Have you finished the book?*) are YES-NO questions;
(2) those that expect a reply supplying an item of information (as in *What is your name? How old are you?*) are WH- questions;
(3) those that expect as the reply one of two or more options presented in the question are ALTERNATIVE questions; for example

Would you like to go for a WÁLK or stay at HÒME?

7.45
Yes-no questions

Yes-no questions are usually formed by placing the operator before the subject and giving the sentence a rising intonation:

The boat has LÈFT ~ Has the boat LÉFT?

If there is no item in the verb phrase that can function as operator, *do* is introduced as with negation (7.33):

He likes Mary ~ Does he like Mary?

Again as with negation, lexical *be* acts as operator; in BrE this is often true for *have* also and informally *got* is added:

John was late ~ Was John late?

He has a car ~ { Does he have a car? (esp AmE) / Has he (got) a car? (esp BrE) }

Note

By placing the nuclear stress in a particular part of a *yes-no* question, we are able to 'focus' the interrogation on a particular item of information which, unlike the rest of the sentence, is assumed to be unknown (*cf* focus of negation, 7.41). Thus the focus falls in different places in the following otherwise identical questions:

Was he a famous actor in THÓSE days?
('I know he was once a famous actor – but was it then or later?')
Was he a FÁmous actor in those days?
('I know he was an actor in those days – but was he a famous one?')

7.46
Positive orientation

Another typical characteristic of *yes-no* questions is the use of the non-assertive forms *any, ever,* etc that we have already seen in operation in negative statements (7.35):

Someone called last night	Did *anyone* call last night?
I suppose *some* of the class will be *already* here	Do you suppose *any* of the class will be here *yet?*

Like the use of the *do* auxiliary, non-assertive forms point to common ground between questions and negative statements. This ground is not hard to explain: clearly a question has neutral polarity, in the sense that it leaves open whether the answer is positive or negative. Hence questions, like negatives, belong to the class of 'non-assertions' (2.20).

On the other hand, a question may be presented in a form which is biased towards a positive or negative answer. A question has positive orientation, for example, if it uses assertive forms rather than the usual non-assertive forms:

Did *someone* call last night? ('Is it true that someone called last night')
Has the boat left *already?*
Do you live *somewhere* near Dover?
Would you like *some* cake?

These questions indicate that the speaker thinks that the answer is yes: he merely asks for confirmation of that assumption.

7.47
Negative orientation

Negative orientation is found in questions which contain a negative form of one kind or another:

Can't you give us any hope of success? ('Is it really true that you can't . . . ?') [1]
Isn't your car working? [2]
Does no one believe me? [3]

Negative orientation is complicated, however, by an element of surprise or disbelief which adds implications of positive meaning. Thus [2] means 'Is it really true that your car isn't working? I had assumed that it was.' Here there is a combining of a positive and a negative attitude, which one may distinguish as the OLD ASSUMPTION (positive) and NEW ASSUMPTION (negative). Because the old assumption tends to be identified with the speaker's hopes or wishes, negative-oriented questions often express disappointment or annoyance:

Can't you drive straight? ('I'd have thought you'd be able to, but apparently you can't')
Aren't you ashamed of yourself? ('You ought to be, but it appears you're not')
Hasn't the boat left yet? ('I'd hoped it would have left by now, but it seems that it hasn't')

A second type of negative question combines *not* (the formal signal of

negative orientation) with the assertive items which are the formal signals of positive orientation:

Didn't someone call last night?
Hasn't the boat left already?

Such questions are similar in effect to type [I] tag questions (7.48) and to statements showing disbelief: 'Surely someone called last night!'

Tag questions
7.48

The tag question consists of operator plus pronoun, with or without a negative particle (10.29); the choice and tense of the operator are determined by the verb phrase in the superordinate clause:

The boat hasn't left, *has it?*
Joan recognized you, *didn't she?*

As these examples illustrate, if the superordinate clause is positive, the tag is negative, and vice versa. The nuclear tone of the tag occurs on the operator and is either a rise or a fall. Four main types of tag question emerge from the observance of these rules:

	RISING TONE	FALLING TONE
POSITIVE+NEGATIVE	[I] He likes his JÒB, DÓESn't he?	[III] He likes his JÒB, DÒESN'T he?
NEGATIVE+POSITIVE	[II] He doesn't like his JÒB, DÓES he?	[IV] He doesn't like his JÒB, DÒES he?

The meanings of these sentences, like their forms, involve a statement and a question; each of them, that is, asserts something then invites the listener's response to it. Sentence [I], for example, can be rendered 'I assume he likes his job; am I right?'. [II] means the opposite: 'I assume he doesn't like his job; am I right?'. Clearly, these sentences have a positive and a negative orientation respectively. A similar contrast exists between [III] and [IV]. But it is important, again, to separate two factors: an ASSUMPTION (expressed by the statement) and an EXPECTATION (expressed by the question). On this principle, we may distinguish the four types as:

[I] Positive assumption + neutral expectation
[II] Negative assumption + neutral expectation
[III] Positive assumption + positive expectation
[IV] Negative assumption + negative expectation

The tag with the falling tone, it will be noted, invites confirmation of the

statement, and has the force of an exclamation rather than a genuine question. In this, it is like (though perhaps not so emphatic as) exclamatory *yes-no* questions with a falling tone (7.56): *Isn't it gorgeous WÈAther!*

7.49

Among less common types of tag question, one may be mentioned in which both statements and question are positive:

Your car is outsIDE, ís it?
You've had an Accident, HÁVE you?

This tag always has a rising nucleus, and the situation is characteristically preceded by *oh* or *so*, indicating the speaker's arrival at a conclusion by inference, or by recalling what has already been said. The tone may sometimes be one of sarcastic suspicion:

So THÀT's your little game, ís it?

7.50

Declarative questions

The declarative question is an exceptional type of *yes-no* question identical in form to a statement, except for the final rising question intonation:

You've got the explósive?
They've spoken to the ambÁssador?
You realize what the RÍSKS are?
Boris will be THÉRE, I suppose?
He didn't finish the RÁCE?

Notice the occurrence of *I suppose*, impossible in normal questions. Declarative questions show their assertive character in the inadmissibility of non-assertive forms:

The guests have had {nothing / something} to eat?

*The guests have had anything to eat?

They are similar in force to type [I] or type [II] tag questions, except for a rather casual tone, which suggests that the speaker takes the answer *yes* or *no* as a foregone conclusion.

7.51

***Yes-no* questions with modal auxiliaries**

The formation of *yes-no* questions with modal auxiliaries is subject to certain limitations and shifts of meaning. The modals of 'permission' (*may*, esp BrE, and *can*) and of 'obligation' (*must*, esp BrE, and *have to*) involve

the speaker's authority in statements and the listener's authority in questions:

A: {May / Can} I leave now? ('Will you permit me . . .')
B: Yes, you {may / can}. ('I will permit you . . .')

A: {Must I / Do I have to} leave now? ('Are you telling me . . .')
B: Yes, you {must / have to}. ('I am telling you . . .')

A similar switch from listener to speaker takes place with *shall* ('volition') which (especially in BrE) implicates the speaker's will in statements, but the listener's will in questions:

You shall suffer for this! ('I intend to make you suffer . . .!')
Shall I switch off the television? ('Do you want me to . . .?')

The direct-question use of *shall*, however, is virtually restricted to first person subjects. With *we*, it has both exclusive and inclusive senses:

Shall we carry your suitcases? ('Would you like us to . . .?')
Shall we have dinner? ('Would you like us [including you] to . . .?')

May ('possibility') is not employed at all in questions; *can* (or more commonly, in AmE, *could*) takes its place:

A: {Can / Could} they have missed the bus? B: Yes, they {may have. / might have.}

Need (in BrE) is a non-assertive auxiliary in clauses where the corresponding positive form is *must*. Hence in questions:

A: Need it happen? (*cf* AmE/BrE: Does it {need to / have to} happen?)

B: Yes, it {must. / has to.}

If, on the other hand, *must* had occurred in A's question, it would have had 'positive orientation': 'Is it a fact that it must happen?' Compare *Need it ever happen?* with *Must it always happen?*, where the assertive form has to be retained.

_Wh_-questions

7.52

Wh-questions are formed with the aid of one of the following interrogative words (or Q-words):

who/whom/whose, what, which
when, where, how, why

As a rule,

(1) the Q-element (*ie* clause element containing the Q-words) generally comes first in the sentence;
(2) the Q-word itself takes first position in the Q-element.

The only exception to the second principle is when the Q-word occurs in a prepositional complement. Here English provides a choice between two constructions, one formal and the other less so. In formal style, the preposition precedes the complement, whereas in colloquial style, the complement comes first and the preposition retains the position it has in a declarative sentence:

On what did you base your prediction? (formal)
What did you base your prediction *on?*

We may perhaps express this difference more neatly by saying that colloquial English insists that the Q-word comes first, while formal English insists that the Q-element as a whole comes first.

7.53

The following are sentences in which the Q-element operates in various clause functions:

Who opened my LÈTter? (Q-element: S)
Which books have you LÈNT him? (Q-element: O_d)
Whose beautiful anTÌQUES are these? (Q-element: C_s)
How wide did they make the BÒOKcase? (Q-element: C_o)
When will you come BÀCK? (Q-element: A_{time})
Where shall I put the GLÀSses? (Q-element: A_{place})
Why are they always compLÀINing? (Q-element: A_{reason})
How did you MEND it? (Q-element: $A_{process}$)
How much does he CÀRE? (Q-element: $A_{intensifying}$)
How long have you been WÀITing? (Q-element: $A_{duration}$)
How often do you visit New YÒRK? (Q-element: $A_{frequency}$)

As the examples indicate, falling intonation, not rising intonation, is usual for *wh*-questions.

We see above that normal statement order of elements is upset in *wh*-questions not only by the initial placing of the Q-element, but by the inversion of subject and operator in all cases except that in which the Q-element is subject, where the rule of initial Q-element takes precedence over the rule of inversion.

Subject-operator inversion is the same in its application to *wh*-questions

as in its application to *yes-no* questions; if there is no auxiliary in the equivalent statement, *do* is introduced as operator in the question. Lexical *be* (and sometimes, in BrE, *have*) acts as an operator: *How are you? Who have we here?*

Note

[*a*] Adjuncts of instrument, reason, and purpose are normally questioned by the prepositional constructions:

What shall I mend it *with?* *What* did you do that *for?*

Although the latter could be replaced by *Why did you do that?*, it has no alternative with a preposed preposition: **For what did you do that?* In this respect it is like informal questions with *be* followed by a final preposition: *What was it in?* (but not **In what was it?*).

[*b*] Abbreviated questions consisting of Q-word and final preposition (which in this construction bears nuclear stress), *Where to? What for/with? Who with/by?*, are as popular in colloquial speech as questions consisting of the Q-word only: *Where? Who? Why?* There is a common abbreviated negative question *Why not?* (10.36).

[*c*] Although there is no Q-word for the verb, the content of the predication can be questioned by *what* as the object of the generalized agentive verb *do:*

A: What are you doing? B: I'm reading.
A: What have you done with my book? B: I've hidden it.

[*d*] An indirect object cannot act as Q-element: instead of **Who(m) did you give the present?*, the equivalent prepositional complement construction is used: *Who(m) did you give the present to?* or *To whom did you give the present?*

Alternative questions

7.54

There are two types of alternative question, the first resembling a *yes-no* question, and the second a *wh*-question:

Would you like CHÓcolate, vaNÍLla, or STRÀWberry (ice-cream)? [1]
Which ice-cream would you LÌKE? CHÓcolate, vaNÍLla, or STRÀWberry? [2]

The first type differs from a *yes-no* question only in intonation; instead of the final rising tone, it contains a separate nucleus for each alternative: a rise occurs on each item in the list, except the last, on which there is a fall, indicating that the list is complete. The difference of intonation between alternative and *yes-no* questions is important, in that ignoring it can lead to misunderstanding – as the contrast between these replies indicates:

alternative: A: Shall we go by BÚS or TRAÌN? B: By BÙS.
yes-no: A: Shall we go by bus or TRAÍN? B: No, let's take the CÀR.

The second type of alternative question is really a compound of two separate questions: a *wh*-question followed by an elliptical alternative question of the first type. Thus [2] might be taken as a reduced version of:

Which ice-cream would you LÌKE? Would you like CHÓcolate, vaNÍLla, or STRÀWberry?

Any positive *yes-no* question can be converted into an alternative question by adding *or not?* or a matching negative clause:

yes-no: Are you CÓMing?

alternative: Are you CÓMing or NÒT?
Are you CÓMing or ÀREn't you (coming)?

The alternative variant, by spelling out the negative aspect of the question, is rather petulant in tone, but is otherwise indistinguishable in meaning from the *yes-no* question.

7.55
The structure of alternative *yes-no* questions follows the pattern of clausal coordination (9.21 *ff*); that is, two or more separate questions are collapsed together, wherever convenient, by ellipsis (shown here by parentheses):

Did ITaly win the World Cup or (did) BrazÌL (win the World Cup)?

Often the elliptical part of an alternative question is placed within the first question:

Did ITaly or BrazÌL win the World Cup?
ÁRE you or ÀREn't you coming?

Where there is no repeated structure, no ellipsis is possible, and so the second question appears in its full form:

Is it RÁIning or has it STÒPPED?

Minor types of question

7.56

EXCLAMATORY QUESTION

The exclamatory question is a question in form, but is functionally like an exclamation (7.63). The most characteristic type is a negative *yes-no* question with a falling instead of rising tone:

Hasn't she GRÒWN!
Wasn't it a marvellous CÒNcert!

These invite the listener's agreement to something on which the speaker has strongly positive feelings.

A positive *yes-no* question, also with a falling tone, is another (but very informal) way of expressing a strong positive conviction:

!Am !I HUNGry! !Did !he look anNÒYED! !Has !she GRÒWN!

Both operator and subject usually receive emphatic stress.

7.57

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The rhetorical question is one which functions as a forceful statement. More precisely, a *positive* rhetorical question is like a strong *negative* assertion, while a *negative* question is like a strong *positive* one.

POSITIVE:

Is that a reason for desPÁIR? ('Surely that is not a reason . . .')
Can anyone doubt the wísdom of this action? ('Surely no one can doubt . . .')

NEGATIVE:

Is no one going to deFÉND me? ('Surely someone is going to defend me')

Unlike exclamatory questions, these rhetorical questions usually have the normal rising intonation of a *yes-no* question.

There is also a rhetorical *wh*-question, which is equivalent to a statement in which the Q-element is replaced by a negative element:

Who KNÔWS? ('Nobody knows')
What DÍFference does it make? ('It makes no difference')

Again, the intonation is that of an ordinary *wh*-question, except that a rise-fall tone is likely.

Commands

7.58

Commands without a subject

We begin with the most common category of command, that which differs from a statement in that

(1) it has no subject,
(2) it has an imperative finite verb (the base form of the verb, without endings for number or tense).

Otherwise the clause patterns of commands show the same range and ordering of elements as statements; for example:

SV: Jump (V)
SVC: Be reasonable (V C)
SVOA: Put it on the table (V O_d A_{place})

The imperative verb, however, is severely restricted as to tense, aspect, voice, and modality. There is no tense distinction or perfect aspect, and only very rarely does the progressive form occur:

Be preparing the dinner when he comes in

A passive is equally rare, except when the auxiliary is some verb other than *be*, as in *Get washed.* These restrictions are connected with the understandable incongruity of combining an imperative with a stative non-agentive verb: **Sound louder!* Modal auxiliaries do not occur at all in imperative sentences.

Commands are apt to sound abrupt unless toned down by markers of politeness such as *please: Please eat up your dinner; Shut the door, please.* Even this only achieves a minimum degree of ceremony; a more tactful form of request can only be arrived at if one changes the command into a question or a statement: *Will you shut the door, please? I wonder if you would kindly shut the door; I wonder whether you would mind shutting the door;* etc.

Note

Stative verbs can be interpreted as dynamic, however, in special contexts: *Know the answer by tomorrow!* (= 'Get to know ...', 'Learn ...').

7.59
Commands with a subject

It is implied in the meaning of a command that the omitted subject of the imperative verb is the 2nd person pronoun *you.* This is confirmed by the occurrence of *you* as subject of a following tag question (*Be quiet, will you*), and by the occurrence of *yourself* and of no other reflexive pronoun as object: *Behave yourself,* not **Behave himself.*

There is, however, a type of command in which the subject *you* is retained, differing from the subject of a finite verb in always carrying stress:

You be quiet!
You mind your own business, and leave this to me!

These commands are usually admonitory in tone, and frequently express strong irritation. As such, they cannot naturally be combined with markers of politeness, such as *please: *Please, you be quiet!* They may be used, however, in another way, to single out (by pointing) two or more distinct addressees: *You come here, Jack, and you go over there, Mary.* A 3rd person subject is also possible:

Somebody open this door
Everybody shut their eyes
Jack and Susan stand over there

It is easy to confuse the subject, in these commands, with a vocative noun phrase (7.31). Whereas the subject always precedes the verb, the vocative (as we saw earlier) is an element that can occur in final and medial, as well as initial, positions in the sentence. Another difference is that the vocative, when initially placed, has a separate tone-unit (typically fall-rise); the subject merely receives ordinary word-stress:

VOCATIVE: MÁRY, play on MỲ side
Play on MỲ side, MÁRY
SUBJECT: ¹Mary play on MỲ side

The distinctness of vocative and imperative subject is confirmed by the possibility of their co-occurrence: *JÓHN, ¹you listen to ME!*

7.60
Commands with let
First person imperatives can be formed by preposing the verb *let*, followed by a subject in (where relevant) the objective case:

Let us all work hard (more usually: *Let's . . .*)
Let me have a look

The same applies to 3rd person subjects:

Let each man decide for himself
If anyone shrinks from this action, let him speak now

7.61
Negative commands
To negate 2nd and 3rd person imperatives, one simply adds an initial *Don't*, replacing assertive by non-assertive forms where necessary:

Open some windows ~ *Don't* open *any* windows
You open the door ~ *Don't you* open the door
Someone open the door ~ *Don't anyone* open the door

1st person imperatives, on the other hand, have two possibilities:

Let's open the door ~ { *Let's not* open the door / *Don't let's* open the door (informal and esp BrE) }

and the second of these is available for 3rd person imperatives:

Don't let anyone fool himself that he can get away with it

7.62
Persuasive imperatives
A persuasive or insistent imperative is created by the addition of *do* (with a nuclear tone) before the main verb:

Do have some more sherry Do let's go to the theatre

Note
[a] *Do*, like *don't* and *let's*, acts as an introductory imperative marker, and is not identical with the emphatic *do* of statements (14.35). To see this, notice that neither *do* nor *don't* in commands fulfils the conditions of the *do* construction in questions and negations; they are not introduced to make good the lack of an operator and can

indeed be used with the verb *be: Do be seated; Don't be silly.* (Contrast the unacceptability of **He doesn't be silly!*) This peculiarity of imperative *do* is also found in the quasi-imperative *Why don't you* construction: *Why don't you be careful!*

[*b*] *Do, don't,* and *let's* are used in isolation as elliptical commands:

A: Shall I open the door? B: {Yes, do. / No, don't.

A: Shall we watch the game? B: Yes, let's.

7.63
Exclamations

In discussing exclamations as a formal category of sentence (but *cf* 7.56), we restrict our attention to exclamatory utterances introduced by *what* (plus noun phrase) or *how*. These express an extreme degree of some variable factor (*How beautiful!*), but the variable may be left implicit. Thus *What a book!* could refer to a very bad or to a very good book.

Exclamations resemble *wh*-questions in involving the initial placement of an exclamatory *wh*-element (the X-element). The syntactic order is therefore upset to the extent that the X-element (which may be object, complement, or adverbial, as well as subject) may be taken from its usual (statement) position and put into a position of initial prominence. On the other hand, in contrast to *wh*-questions, there is generally no subject-operator inversion:

X-element as subject: *What an enormous crowd* came! (S V)
X-element as object: *What a time* we've had today! (O_d S V A)
X-element as complement: *How delightful* her manners are! (C_s S V)
X-element as adverbial: {*How* I used to hate geography! (A S V O_d) / *What a long time* it lasted! (A S V)

The X-element, like the Q-element of the *wh*-question, can also act as prepositional complement, the preposition normally being postposed:

What a mess we're in!

7.64
Formulae

There are some sentences which, though appearing to belong to one of the major classes, in fact enter into few of the relations of substitutability that are common to members of those classes. For instance, the greeting formula (appropriate to a first meeting) *How do you do?* cannot be subordinated as an indirect question (**They asked him how he did*) or answered in a corresponding statement form (**I do very well*). Two slightly less restricted kinds of *wh*-question are the question without an auxiliary *why* (+*not*) + predication:

Why get so upset? *Why not* enjoy yourself?

and the *how/what about* type of question:

What about the house? *How about* joining us?

These are not formulaic in the previous sense, but are irregular in that they lack some of the elements normally found in a *wh*-question.

There are also patterns which are defective in terms of regular clause or sentence structure, such as the verbless imperatives:

Off with the lid! *Out with* it! *Down with* the bosses!

To this we may add a number of exclamatory types:

If only I'*d* listened to my parents! (with modal past: 3.47, 11.48)
To think I was once a millionaire!
Oh for a drink! *Oh to* be free! (archaic except when jocular)
You and your statistics! *John and his* ideas!
Now for some fun!

Apart from such cases, there are sentences which contain fossilized elements no longer productively used in present-day English: for example, the subjunctive combined with inversion in

Far be it from me to (spoil the fun)
Suffice it to say (we lost)
Long live (anarchy)! (archaic except when jocular)

and without inversion in

God save the Queen! (God) Bless you!

A slightly less archaic formula for expressing a wish is *may*+subject+predication: *May the best man win! May you be happy!*

Note
In very familiar style we find the question formula *How come (you missed the bus)?* Also familiar is the greeting formula *How goes it?*, without *do*-periphrasis.

7.65
Aphoristic sentences
Among other minor sentence types is the aphoristic sentence structure found in many proverbs:

The more, the merrier [1]
Least said, soonest mended [2]
Handsome is as handsome does [3]
Easy come, easy go [4]

These all have one structural feature in common: the balancing of two

equivalent constructions against each other. While they must all be considered grammatically anomalous, example [1] has a fairly productive pattern which will be dealt with under proportional clauses (11.34).

7.66
Block language

In addition to the formulae of colloquial conversation, there is a whole realm of usage where, because of its rudimentary communicative role, language is structured in terms of single words and phrases, rather than in terms of the more highly organized units of clause and sentence.

Language so used may be termed 'block language'. It appears in such functions as labels, titles, headings, notices, and advertisements. Simple block-language messages most often consist of a noun or noun phrase or nominal clause in isolation: no verb is needed, because all else necessary to the understanding of the message is furnished by context. Examples are:

<table>
<tr><td>ENTRANCE</td><td>ENGLISH DEPARTMENT</td><td>DANGER: FALLING ROCKS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">PURE LEMON JUICE
FRESH TODAY</td><td>HIGHLY RECOMMENDED</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">A GRAMMAR OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH</td><td>WHERE TO GO IN LONDON</td></tr>
<tr><td>HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE</td><td colspan="2">THE FIRST LUXURY BOUND COLLECTOR'S EDITION OF AGATHA CHRISTIE'S WORK TO BE AVAILABLE IN THIS COUNTRY</td></tr>
</table>

In newspaper headlines, abbreviated clause structures have been developed:

(1) FILM-STAR MARRIES EX-PRIEST (S V O_d)
(2) ELECTION A LANDSLIDE FOR SOCIALISTS (S C_s)
(3) NIXON TO MEET ASIAN PREMIERS (S V O_d)
(4) SHARE PRICES NOW HIGHER THAN EVER (S A C_s)
(5) JACKLIN BEATEN BY BONALLACK (S V A)
(6) CHANCES OF MIDDLE-EAST PEACE IMPROVING (S V)

These differ from orthodox clause structures in having different tense conventions, and in omitting closed-system words of low information value, such as the articles and the finite forms of the verb *be*.

Note

Prohibitions on notice boards often assume the special block-language form of a noun phrase introduced by *No*. For example, *No smoking; No entry; No unauthorized entry after dark.*

Bibliographical note

On clause elements, see Anderson (1971); Fillmore (1968); Halliday (1967–8); Huddleston (1971); Lyons (1968), especially Chapter 8. On negation, see Klima (1964). On questions, see Bolinger (1957); Malone (1967). On commands, see Bolinger (1967a); Thorne (1969).