

# Unit 9

## Sentences and Grammar

### Instructional Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, you will learn to:

1. explain how syntax and structure relate to grammar;
2. define a sentence;
3. identify the functions of the main components of a sentence.

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### BASIC DEFINITIONS

This unit shall start by looking at the meaning of two concepts that are fundamental, namely **grammar** and **sentence**.

#### What Is Grammar?

There are three words that are confusing or sometimes used interchangeably. What are they?

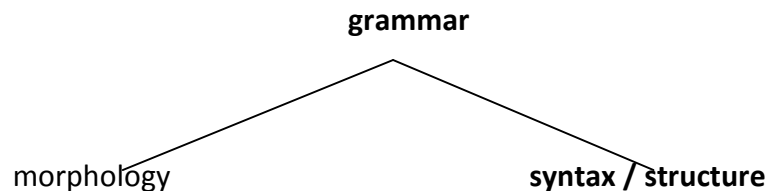
Grammar

Structure

Syntax

The term 'grammar' is probably familiar to most students who use the term 'structure' in similar way. But, about the term 'syntax'?

All the three terms are actually related: they all concern the way that words combine to form sentences. However, it is argued that the terms relate to different aspects of the language system. The word 'grammar' is often used as an umbrella term (**superordinate**), while syntax and structure are members of this category (hyponyms). Their relationship can be represented as follows:



Strictly speaking, grammar is a broad term. It is about the rules of a language: morphology (the grammar of words) and syntax or structure (the grammar of sentences). At the moment, our concern is with word order and sentence structure.

### Task 9-1

Check your understanding by answering the following questions:

1. What word is commonly used to refer to linguistic rules (i.e. the rules of a language)?
2. What are the two main aspects of a language into which grammar can be divided?
3. Briefly explain the two aspects that have been identified above?
4. Here is a sentence spoken by a student learning English as a foreign language: *I don't know where is Ramma and Shinta?* This sentence has two grammar problems.
  - a. What is the morphological error?
  - b. What is the problem with the word order?

### What Is a Sentence?

Classically, a sentence is probably defined as 'a unit of language which has at least a **subject** and a **verb**. It begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. This kind of definition is very suitable for teaching purpose, but it is inadequate in some circumstances. For example, in each of the following dialogues, do you think that B's replies are sentences?

- A. Would you like some coffee?
  - B. Yes, please.
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- A. Whoops! I am late, aren't I?
  - B. Only a little.

It is traditionally argued that B's replies are not sentences, because these replies do not have either a subject or a verb. However, they function as sentences—actually they are short versions of sentences, such as *Yes, (I would like some coffee) please.* And *(Don't worry, you're) only a little (bit late).* Thus, it is evidently proved that spoken English lacks grammaticality, but they are meaningful and correct.

Even, the traditional view of a sentence has created a problem, that is teachers teach the student to use language in unnatural ways—especially if the teachers are teaching in a foreign language, and rely heavily on the rules in grammar books. Many teachers and many books mostly designed to help students to learn a language, insist that students must give full 'grammatical' sentences. Of course, it may be a useful approach in order to develop students' ability to manipulate grammatical forms, but it does not necessarily help them to help them to develop skills for the main function of language—which is communication. In the past, school grammars have tended to focus on written language and rigid grammatical rules.

This is called **prescriptive grammar** which says ‘These are the rules and you have to obey them). And very often, they forgot about spoken language altogether.

In this unit the word “sentence” will be generally used to refer to the larger unit of language which is going to be examined in terms of both written and spoken language. But, it is also possible to use the word “utterance” in this context.

### Task 9-1

Though not described explicitly in this unit, what is the difference among a sentence, a clause and a phrase? Consult your grammar book. Give examples to clarify your answer.

### SENTENCE COMPONENTS

Most sentences are made up of more than one word. Words can be combined to form **phrases**, and **clauses**, and phrases and clauses into **sentences**. In this respect, it is important and useful to be able to identify the components of a sentence. There are two main areas involved in the identification of these sentence components.

- the word level, where individual words belong to different word classes; and
- sentence elements, combine the word to perform a certain function in a sentence.

### Word Classes

Despite the fact that word classes belong to the study of morphology, they are useful for a start to study sentence components. It is assumed that you have learned them at school.

### Task 9-2

From the list of terms underneath the table, choose the term for the word class which matches the definition in the second column.

Word class	Definition
1.	Specifies the time, place or manner of the verb, or functions as an intensifier or as a connector
2.	a word that can substitute for a noun
3.	used in front of a noun to express a number or quantity
4.	Names things, people, places, objects, activities, feeling, ideas, etc.
5.	relates nouns to other elements, for example establishes the relation of time and place
6	join one clause to another, or one word to another
7.	a word to express an event, process, or state
8.	a word that typically identifies an attribute of a noun

noun	pronoun	verb	adjective
adverb	preposition	determiner	conjunction

**Sentence Elements**

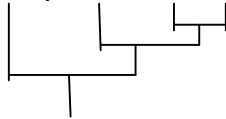
In sentence analysis, it is more important to know the sentence elements than the word classes. A sentence element is a word or a group of words that forms a certain part of a sentence. For example:

*Tommy kicked the ball.*

This example is a simple structure. It has a subject (Tommy), a verb (kicked) and an object (the ball).

The above sentence can also be analyzed using immediate relational analysis<sup>1</sup>

*Tommy kicked the ball.*

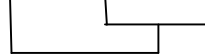


What are the sentence elements in the next example?

*The three girls were chasing the handsome man.*

There is still a subject (the three girl), a verb (were chasing) and an object (the handsome man). Can you also perform an immediate relational analysis? The object has been done for you as an example.

The three girls were chasing the handsome man.



Apart from the three sentence elements (subject—verb—object), there are also two other sentence elements, (complement and adverbial).

**Task 9-3**

From the list of terms underneath the table, choose the ‘sentence element’ which matches each ‘function’ in the second column.

Sentence element	Definition
1.	gives further information (or completes what is said) about some other element
2.	identifies what or who is the topic of the clause and /or the agent of the verb

<sup>1</sup> Some linguists call it Immediate Constituent Analysis (IC Analysis)

3.	Adds extra information about the time, manner, or place etc. of the situation
4.	identifies who or what is affected by an action
5.	the clause element that typically expresses an event, action or state.

subject                  verb                  object                  complement                  adverbial

#### Task 9-4

For each word or phrase below, put a tick (✓) in the column if it can perform the function listed, and a cross (x) if it can't perform that function. If you are not sure of the answer, put a question mark (?). The first row has been completed for you as an example.

	subject	noun	verb	complement	adjective	object
e.g. tigers	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓
the quite night life						
open						
later in the day						
pretty						
word classes and phrases						
the books on the shelf						
has been working						
swimming						

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF WORD ORDER

Observe the following sentences

Ali wakes up early everyday.

\*Wakes up early everyday Ali

What is wrong with the second sentence? Individually the words are fine, but there are rules about what happens when they fit together with other words. The order of words is an important element of grammar (or syntax) of a language.

In English, when we are making a simple statement such as the one above about Aliitasi. We put the name of the person in a particular place in the sentence. Where is that place? Look at two other acceptable ways of making the same statement.

Early every day Ali wakes up.

Every day Ali wakes up early.

From these examples, we can make a rule about where to put the word *Ali* it must come before the word *wakes*. That is in English the subject (in this case *Ali*) usually goes in front of the verb (in this case *wakes*). But note that we say that the subject **usually** goes there---there are always exceptions. Can you think of some instances where the verb does not follow the subject? For example, what happens when you turn the sentence about Ali into a negative statement? What about if you turn it into a question? What happens if you want to use the word *always* in sentence?

Now, the rule that subject comes before the verb is definitely an English rule. But, does it apply to other languages as a general rule? Observe the following examples from some different languages.

<b>English</b>	: The man typed the letter		
<b>Tongan</b>	: Na 'e taipe 'e	he tangata	'a e tohi
(literally)	: Typed	the man	the letter
'grammar'	: <i>verb</i>	<i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>
<b>Indonesian</b>	: Laki-laki itu	mengetik	suratnya
(literally)	: The man	type	the letter
'grammar'	: <i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>

<b>English</b>	: Tommy kicked the ball.		
<b>Bauan Fijian</b>	: A caqeta	na polo	ko Tommy
(literally)	: Kicked	the ball	Tommy
'grammar'	: <i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>subject</i>
<b>Javanese</b>	: Tommy	nendang	bal
(literally)	: Tommy	kicked	the ball
'grammar'	: <i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>

<b>English</b>	: Vishnu climbed the tree.		
<b>Hindi</b>	: Vishnu	per pe	charah
(literally)	: Vishnu	the tree	climbed
'grammar'	: <i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>verb</i>
<b>Javanese</b>	: Vishnu	menek	wit
(literally)	: Vishnu	climbed	the tree
'grammar'	: <i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>

The examples above prove that the syntax—or word order—of a very simple sentence can be quite different indifferent language. But, look! Indonesian and

Javanese have exactly the same word order as English. Fortunate? Can you possibly predict the kind of problem that Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language may have with respect to ‘grammar’ of English?

Grammar is not that simple. We have to think of grammar in wider terms than word order. It also concerns the **relationship** that words have with each other when they combine together within a group of words.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORDS

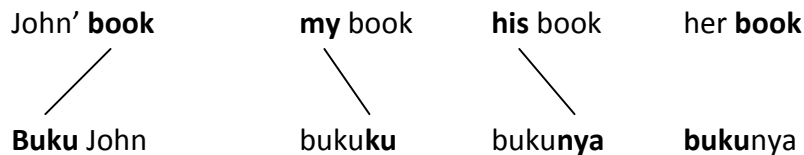
e.g. *John’s book*

What is the relationship between *book* and *John*? It is called ‘possessive’ (that is, one thing belongs to or is owned by another person or thing). The important features which help to show this relationship of possession are:

- the order of words;
- the way the apostrophe s (‘s) is used

In many other languages, people would translate the above phrase literally as something like the *book of John*. Therefore, it is logical to assume that ‘possession’ as an aspect of syntax. That is, when *book* and *John* are put together, an apostrophe s is required to show the relationship between the two words; this is an important aspect of English syntax. The concept of ‘possession’ exists in all languages, but different languages use a variety of syntactical form to express the relationship.

Below is a description of Indonesian ‘possessive’ construction



#### Task 9-5

As above, identify the syntactical forms of Javanese (or your first language) in comparison to English

#### Some Other Relationships between Words

Table 9-1 below gives a few example of these relationships, as well as examples of the unacceptable forms indicated with an asterisk (\*) at the beginning of the sentence. Such unacceptable forms are sometimes called ‘broken relationships’—the sort of thing that users of English might say or write.

**Table 9-1 Examples of correct and ‘broken’ relationships in English**

Relationships	Examples
<b>Number</b>	The <b>women</b> took <b>their</b> vegetables to the market. *The women took her vegetable to the market.  The <b>bananas</b> <b>were</b> very heavy to carry. *The bananas was very heavy to carry
<b>Person</b>	<b>Siska</b> <b>wakes</b> up early everyday. *Siska wake up early everyday.  <b>The birds</b> <b>wake</b> her up with their singing. * The birds wakes her up with their singing.
<b>Time</b>	I <b>went</b> to the cinema <b>last night</b> . *I go to the cinema last night.  She <b>is going to</b> the cinema <b>tomorrow</b> . *She went to the cinema tomorrow.
<b>Space</b>	The cow jumped <b>over</b> the <b>river</b> . ?The cow jumped <b>above</b> the <b>river</b> .  Please put my book <b>on</b> the <b>table</b> . *Please put my book in the table.

#### WHY STUDY GRAMMAR

You should be aware that that there is much more involved in the study of language than learning the grammar. However, there is no logical reason to leave out grammar from your language teaching program. The prevalent mistake about studying grammar is that sometimes we overemphasize accuracy. This may result in the lack of confidence in practicing the four language skills. Thus, it is the approach to teaching grammar which should be reformed.

Grammar is very important. It consists of limited rules by means of which you can construct unlimited utterances. Following Chomsky, the set of rules is **finite**, but the number of sentences is **infinite**. We can say anything we want if we know the rules.



### Mini Projects

1. Observe how people speak Indonesian or Javanese, jotting down the kinds of broken relationships between words, yet the forms have become accepted as 'correct'. As a language educator, with respect to your first language, what would you do? Would you let those 'acceptably' wrong forms to become fossilized as 'correct'?
2. Get a text (of your first language), underline all the verbs in the text. Based on the context of situation, decide which verbs that should be translated in :
  - a. Simple past tense
  - b. Simple present tense
  - c. Present continuous
  - d. Past continuous
  - e. Present perfect
  - f. Past perfect

Present your mini project (2) in a table as exemplified below

Verb	a	b	c	d	e	f
e.g. telah menemukan tertembak	v				v	

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

The problem with grammar at school is that we have been dealing with **prescriptive** grammar, that is to rule what people should say or write. That is what most grammarians have in mind. Linguists, however, set a different view. What a language school has to offer is the so-called **descriptive** grammar, that is to rule what people say or write. Which one is better? Prescriptive or descriptive grammar? Give your reasonable reasons.