TWO

ELEMENTS OF GRAMMAR

2.1

The purpose of this chapter is to explore certain outstanding features of English structure in such a way as to provide, as it were, a small-scale map of areas that will be viewed in much greater detail in later chapters. As with any small-scale map, a great many features will be ignored and complicated contours will be smoothed out. The reader's attention will not be distracted even by forward references to the parts of the book in which the focus will allow such complication to become visible. But to compensate for the disadvantages in this degree of oversimplification, we have hoped to achieve the advantages of the geographical analogue as well. In other words, we have tried to provide enough broad information to enable the reader to understand – and place in a wider context – the more detailed discussion that subsequent chapters involve.

Parts of a sentence

2.2

Subject and predicate

In order to state general rules about the construction of sentences, it is constantly necessary to refer to smaller units than the sentence itself. Our first task must therefore be to explain what these smaller units are that we need to distinguish, confining our attention for the present to a few sentences which, though showing considerable variety, are all of fairly elementary structure.

Traditionally, there is a primary distinction between SUBJECT and PREDICATE:

John	carefully searched the room	[1]
The girl	is now a student at a large university	[2]
His brother	grew happier gradually	[3]
It	rained steadily all day	[4]
He	had given the girl an apple	[5]
They	make him the chairman every year	[6]

Although such a division obviously results in parts which are (in these examples) very unequal in size and dissimilar in content, it is of course by no means arbitrary. The subject of the sentence has a close general relation to 'what is being discussed', the 'theme' of the sentence, with the normal implication that something new (the predicate) is being said about a 'subject' that has already been introduced in an earlier sentence. This is of course a general characteristic and not a defining feature: it is patently absurd in relation to sentence [4], for example. Another point is that the subject determines concord. That is, with those parts of the verb that permit a distinction between singular and plural, the form selected depends on whether the subject is singular as in [2], *the girl is*, or plural as in [6], *they make*.

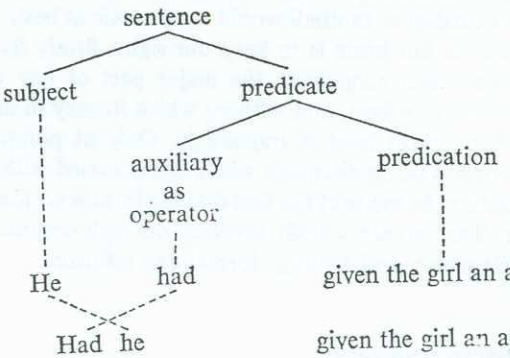
Furthermore, the subject is the part of the sentence that changes its position as we go from statement to question:

Had *he* given the girl an apple? [5q]

2.3

Operator, auxiliary, and predication

In contrast with the subject there are few generalizations that we can usefully make about the predicate since – as our examples have illustrated – it tends to be a more complex and heterogeneous unit. We need to subdivide it into its elements or constituents. One division has already been suggested; this distinguishes AUXILIARY as OPERATOR (as in [5q]) from what we may call the PREDICATION. The distinctions may be illustrated as follows:



This particular division of the sentence helps us to understand, for example, how interrogative and negative sentences are formed, how certain adjuncts are positioned, and how certain types of emphasis are achieved.

2.4
Range of operators

The verb expression may have several auxiliaries; *eg*

He *should have been questioned* by the police

In such cases, it is the first auxiliary that acts as operator:

Should he have been questioned by the police?
No, he *shouldn't* have been questioned by the police
Yes, he *should*

Where the verb expression has no auxiliary in the positive declarative sentence, *do* is introduced when an operator is required:

It *rained* steadily all day
Did it rain steadily all day?
No, it *didn't*

The verb *be* can act as operator whether it is an auxiliary, as in

John *is* searching the room ~ *Is* John searching . . . ?

or not, as in

The girl *is* now a student ~ *Is* the girl now . . . ?

The same is true to some extent (especially in BrE) for *have:*

He *has* a degree ~ *Has* he a degree?

2.5
Sentence elements

A sentence may alternatively be seen as comprising five units called ELEMENTS of sentence (or, as we shall see below, clause) structure: SUBJECT, VERB, COMPLEMENT, OBJECT, ADVERBIAL, here abbreviated as S, V, C, O, A:

John (S) carefully (A) searched (V) the room (O) [1]
The girl (S) is (V) now (A) a student (C) at a large university (A) [2]
His brother (S) grew (V) happier (C) gradually (A) [3]
It (S) rained (V) steadily (A) all day (A) [4]
He (S) had given (V) the girl (O) an apple (O) [5]
They (S) make (V) him (O) the chairman (C) every year (A) [6]

We shall see in 2.11 that considerable variety is possible in realizing each element of structure. Indeed S, O, and A can themselves readily have the internal constituents of sentences:

She (S) saw (V) that [*it* (S) *rained* (V) *all day* (A)] (O) [7]
His brother (S) grew (V) happier (C) when [*his friend* (S) *arrived* (V)] (A) [8]

That [*she* (S) *answered* (V) *the question* (O) *correctly* (A)] (S)
pleased (V) him (O) enormously (A) [9]

The italicizing is intended to emphasize the similarity between subordinate (or dependent) clauses and independent sentences. At the same time this and the bracketing can interestingly suggest that *when* in [8] and *that* in [7] and [9] operate as A, O, and S respectively (though this is only partly true) while more importantly being themselves 'expanded' by the dependent clauses.

2.6
Complements and objects

The relation between *the room* in illustration [1] and the other elements in that sentence is very different from the relation between *the girl* in [5] and its fellow elements, though both are labelled 'object'. Even more obviously, perhaps, the two elements labelled 'object' in [5] play sharply distinct roles in this sentence. We need in fact to distinguish two types of object and two types of complement in the sentences so far illustrated:

object { direct object (O_d) / indirect object (O_i) }

complement { subject complement (C_s) / object complement (C_o) }

The direct object is illustrated in

John carefully searched *the room* (O_d) [1]
He had given the girl *an apple* (O_d) [5]

The direct object is by far the more frequent kind of object, and (with certain outstanding exceptions) it must always be present if there is an indirect object in the sentence:

He had given *the girl* (O_i) an apple [5]

As here, the indirect object almost always precedes the direct object; it is characteristically (though by no means always) a noun referring to a person, and the semantic relationship is often such that it is appropriate to use the term 'recipient'. Loosely, one might say in most cases that something (the direct object) tends to be done for (or received by) the indirect object.

Turning to complements, we may illustrate first the subject complement:

The girl is now *a student* (C_s) at a large university [2]
His brother grew *happier* (C_s) gradually [3]

Here the complements have a straightforward relation to the subjects of their respective sentences such that the subject of [2] is understood as being a 'girl student' and the subject of [3] a 'happier brother'. The 'object complement' can be explained as having a similar relation to a direct object (which it follows) as the subject complement has to a subject:

They make him *the chairman* (C_o) every year [6]

That is to say, the direct object and object complement in this example, 'him the chairman', correspond to the subject and subject complement in

He is *the chairman* (C_s)

Categories of verb

2.7

There are different types of verb corresponding closely to the different types of object and complement. Sentences such as [2] and [3], which have subject complements, have INTENSIVE verbs and all other sentences have EXTENSIVE verbs. The latter are INTRANSITIVE if as in

It rained steadily all day [4]

they do not permit any of the four object and complement types so far distinguished. Extensive verbs are otherwise TRANSITIVE. All transitive verbs take a direct object; some, like *give* in [5], permit an indirect object, and these will be distinguished as DITRANSITIVE. A few verbs, like *make* in [6], take an object complement and these are among the verbs referred to as COMPLEX TRANSITIVE. The rest are MONOTRANSITIVE.

2.8

But distinctions between verbs need to be drawn not only in relation to object- and complement-types but also in relation to whether they themselves admit the aspectual contrast of 'progressive' and 'non-progressive'. Thus it is possible to say

John carefully *searched* the room [1]
or John *was* carefully *searching* the room

It *rained* steadily all day [4]
or It was *raining* steadily all day

But it is not possible to use the progressive in

The girl *is* now a student at a large university [2]
*The girl *is* now *being* a student . . .
John *knew* the answer [10]
*John *was knowing* the answer

When verbs (either habitually or in certain uses) will not admit the progressive, as in [2] and [10], they are called STATIVE. When they will admit it, as in [1] and [4], they are called DYNAMIC. It is normal for verbs to be dynamic and even the minority that are almost always stative can usually be given a dynamic use on occasion. See further, 2.16.

2.9

Categories of adverbial

Next we may take a preliminary look at adverbials, concerning ourselves only with such distinctions as are necessary to explain some of the chief restrictions in constructing the simplest sentences. We may begin by looking again at a sentence with two adverbials:

The girl is *now* a student *at a large university*

This might have had fewer elements:

The girl is a student *at a large university*
The girl is a student
The girl is *now* a student
The girl is *at a large university*

but the sentence could not have been formed initially as:

*The girl is *now*

On this evidence we may say that the adverbials *now* and *at a large university* belong to different classes and it seems natural to label them 'time' and 'place' respectively.

Consider now the fact that the adverbial *carefully* in illustration [1] could be replaced by many others, making acceptable sentences in each case:

John searched the room { carefully / slowly / noisily / sternly / without delay }

But if these same adverbials were inserted in sentences which had stative verbs, the sentences would become unacceptable:

The girl is now a student . . . / John knew the answer . . . { *carefully / *slowly / *noisily / *sternly / *without delay }