

The skeleton of the message

Traditionally, the clause (or simple sentence) is divided into two basic units, Subject and Predicate. The Subject tends to be quite a simple constituent, but the Predicate, the most informative part of the sentence, is normally made up of several other constituents.

These constituents may be obligatory or optional. In the sentence *Tom disappeared suddenly after the concert*, the groups *suddenly* and *after the concert* are optional, not essential for the completion of the clause. (By the way, they are called adjuncts)

In other cases what is predicated of the Subject must be made up by a Predicator together with one or more complements, without which the clause would be incomplete. Here there are some examples of complements:

All the men wore dark suits.	SPOd
She handed me the telegram.	SPOiOd
Your idea sounds great.	SPCs
They found the test difficult.	SPOdCo
He put the letter in an envelope.	SPOdCp

Adjuncts are not conditioned by any particular verb, its number is not limited (as it normally happens to complements) and are normally realised by AdvGs and PGs, while complements are typically realised by NGs and AdjGs (although there is no one-to-one correspondence between class of unit and function, just a tendency).

In order to distinguish between objects and other complements it has to be remembered that objects typically refer to participants in the event different from the subject; they extend the sentence. Due to that immediate relationship between verb and object they normally occur immediately after the verb in transitive clauses, and the Direct Object does so without any preposition. Objects can also become Subject in a passive clause and be substituted by object pronouns (me, you, him,...)

Basic syntactic structures of the clause

Here is a list of some of the possible relationships which can be established among the elements of the clause.

SP	Tom disappeared
SPOd	Tom hired a car
SPOiOd	I have sent them an invitation
SPOpr	You can rely on Tom
SPCs	My brother has become a ski instructor
SPOdCo	They appointed him First Secretary
SPOdCp	They charged him with robbery

There are some other optional elements which can be added to the clause structure:

Adjunct (A): an optional circumstance of the process expressed by the clause.

Tom disappeared suddenly after the concert.

Disjunct (D): a comment by the speaker on the sentence.

Obviously, he'll rely on you even more now.

Conjunct (C): element which serves to join together two utterances.

The hotel was rather noisy. On the other hand, it wasn't expensive.

Organising the message

Clauses express messages. Messages are organised units of information. When a speaker structures a message, the information is processed into units and ordered in such a way as to produce the kind of message that is desired. So, several syntactic alternatives exist for arranging information into a series of alternative messages.

For instance, the proposition "A waiter brought them cocktails" can be processed in English into different combinations such as the following:

1. A waiter brought them cocktails.
2. They were brought cocktails by a waiter.
3. Cocktails they were brought by a waiter.
4. It was cocktails that a waiter brought them.
5. What the waiter brought them was cocktails.
6. Bring them cocktails, the waiter did.
7. There was a waiter who brought them cocktails.

All of these clauses have the same propositional meaning, but not the same communicative significance. For this reason, these alternatives are not equally appropriate at any given point in the discourse.

Theme, rheme and topic

The Theme of a clause is what speakers or writers take as their "point of departure" in that clause. It is realised in English by the first clause constituent, and the rest of the message constitutes the Rheme. The initial element acts as a signal to the hearer, directing expectations regarding the structure that is likely to follow, or about the mental representation of what the message is likely to be. Here are some examples of the same propositional meaning and different themes:

Theme	Rheme
I	Can't stand the noise.
The noise	I can't stand.
It's the noise	I can't stand.
What I can't stand	Is the noise.
The noise,	I can't stand it.

Theme is to be distinguished from Subject and Topic. Theme, as Rheme, are elements of the thematic structure of the clause, that is, the way in which discourse is organized. Subject is a syntactic element, as well as Predicator or complements. They concern the way in which words and phrases are organized. Topic is a discourse category representing the notion "what the text, of part of the text, is about."

Coming back to Themes, we can distinguish unmarked and marked themes. Unmarked theme coincides with the first constituent of each type of sentence, subject in a declarative sentence, Auxiliary element or WH-element in an interrogative clause and Predicator or Let + Subject in an imperative clause.

Themes are marked when any other element of the structure but the expected one is brought to initial position. When this happens it is called thematic fronting. Compare the following clauses:

Unmarked theme	Marked theme
You'll never meet a nicer girl.	A nicer girl you'll never meet.
His name is Archibald.	Archibald his name is.
It made me very angry.	Very angry it made me.
The frightened villagers ran out of the fields.	Out into the fields ran the frightened villagers.

Sometimes fronting provokes inversion, especially with expression of direction (*home went Alice*), expressions with negative meaning (*Never have I seen such a sight*, *Seldom does one find such generosity*) and some particular units (*so*, *neither*, *nor* with elliptical clauses, *such* and *so* as modifiers of objects, complements or Adjuncts, and subordinate clauses of condition, as *Had I known the facts, I would not have employed him*).