

"The production of language is a bodily action, which always evokes, forms
and expresses the body's emotional drives.
The making of sentences is a passionate, exhausting business."

Don Cupitt, *Creation out of nothing*

Unit 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Clause, Sentence and Utterance
- 1.2. Clause constituents
- 1.3. Syntactico-semantic relations: events, participants, circumstances

1.1. Clause, Sentence and Utterance

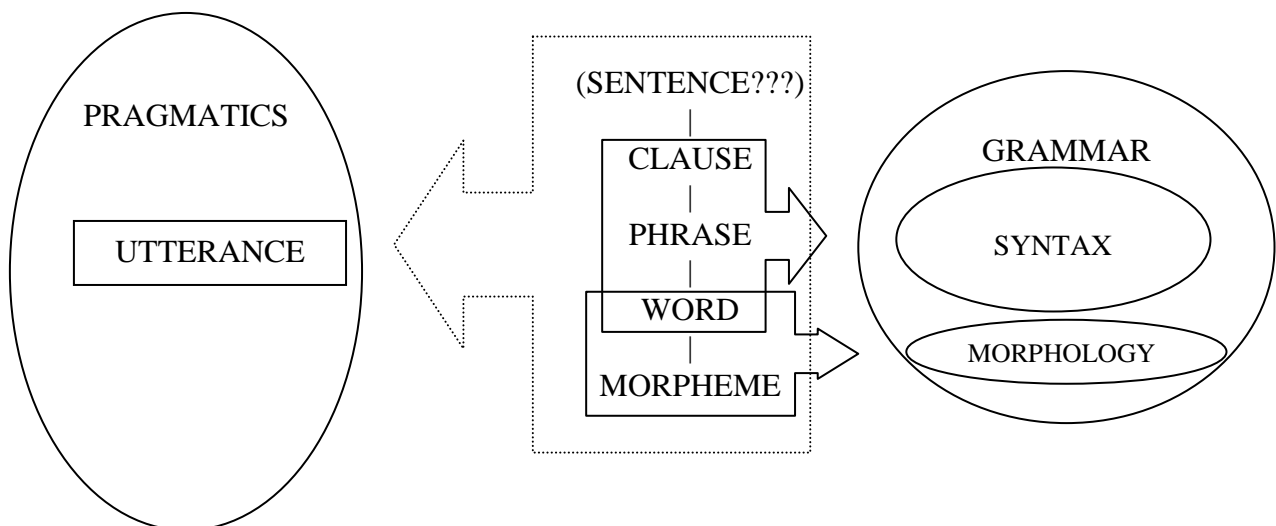


Fig. 1. The hierarchy of grammatical units and their relationship with pragmatics

“August Bank Holiday. A tune on an ice-cream cornet. A slap of sea ana a tickle of sand. A fanfare of sunshades opening. A wince and whinny of bathers dancing into deceptive water. A tuck of dresses. A rolling of trousers. A compromise of paddlers. A sunburn of girls and a lark of boys. A silent hullabaloo of balloons.

I remember the sea telling lies in a shell held to my ear for a whole harmonious, hollow minute by a small wet girl in an enormous bathing-suit marked ‘Corporation Property’.

I remember sharing the last of my moist buns with a boy and a lion. Tawny and savage, with cruel nails and capacious mouth, the little boy tore and devoured. Wild as seed-cake, ferocious as a hearth-rug, the depressed and verminous lion nibbled like a mouse at his half a bun, and hiccupped in the sad dusk of his cage.”

Dylan Thomas, *Quite Early One Morning*

The **clause** can be defined as a grammatical unit consisting, in the central cases, of a subject and a predicate, both typically realized by units of the immediately lower rank, ie, phrases. As such, the clause is the largest unit of grammatical analysis, ie, the largest unit to which a grammatical structure can be assigned. [See Discussion # 1 on separate page]

For reasons of economy and simplicity, we will base our description of the clause on what we will call **basic clauses** (sometimes called ‘kernel’ or ‘canonical’ clauses), whose properties are listed and explained below ; later on, we will introduce different types of non-basic or **derived clauses** and explain how they differ from the basic type.

- Basic clauses are **structurally simple**. This means two things. On the one hand, basic clauses do not contain other (subordinate) clauses realizing any of its immediate constituents. Thus, *I like your T-shirt* is a basic clause, while *I hope that you like my T-shirt* is not, since it contains the subordinate clause *>that you like my T-shirt=* as realization of its Object constituent. On the other hand, basic clauses do not contain any external constituents depending on the clause as a whole. Thus, *The Prime Minister has resigned* is a basic clause, while *Curiously enough, the Prime Minister has resigned* is rather what we will later define as an Aextended clause@ since it contains the external modifier *curiously enough* depending on the (simple) clause *the Primer Minister has resigned*.
- Basic clauses are **structurally complete**, i.e., they are not reduced by ellipsis and contain, at least, a Subject and a Predicate. Thus, in an example like *I have read that novel but John hasn=t*, the first clause (*I have read that novel*) is basic, but the second (*John hasn=t*) is not since part of the predicate (*read that novel*) has been deleted. Similarly, in *Whether right or wrong, he will always defend his views passionately*, only the second clause is basic, while the first one lacks a subject and a predicator and it is thus non-basic.
- Basic clauses are **syntactically independent**, ie, they stand by themselves and are not subordinated to other clauses or phrases. Thus, *She lives in Berlin* is a basic clause when it stands alone, but not when it is part of another clause, as in *I think she lives in Berlin*.
- Basic clauses are **finite**, rather than non-finite. This is closely related to the preceding point since only finite clauses can be syntactically independent, whereas non-finite clauses are always syntactically subordinate or dependent on another clause. Notice, however, that not all finite clauses are independent and, thus, they are not all basic.
- Basic clauses are **declarative**, rather than interrogative, imperative or exclamative; this distinction has to do with the so-called A mood system@ or A clause type@ and is related to the communicative or functional purpose of clauses (see 3.3.). Thus, *John is a brave man* is basic, while *Is John a brave man?*, *Be a brave man*, and *What a brave man John is* are all non-basic.
- Basic clauses are unmarked for polarity, ie, they are **positive** (*I like your shoes*), rather than negative (*I don=t like your shoes*).
- Finally, basic clauses present an unmarked or neutral word-order, ie they are neutral with respect to all the thematic or information systems of the clause. Thus, a clause like *My father bought the newspaper* is basic, whereas clauses like *The newspaper was bought by father* (Passive), *It was the newspaper that my father bought* (Cleft), or *The newspaper, my father bought* (Fronting), are non-basic, since they present marked word-orders intended to highlight certain pieces of information within the clause.

Summary: Basic (‘Canonical’) and Non-basic (‘Non-canonical’, ‘Derived’) Clauses

| Basic | Non-basic | Dimension of Contrast |
|--|---|--|
| <i>This war is illegal</i> | <i>This was is not illegal</i> | Polarity: Positive vs Negative |
| | <i>Is this war illegal?</i> | Clause Type: Declarative vs Interrogative |
| | <i>I think that History will judge this President</i> | Grammatical status: Simple/Main vs Complex/Subordinate |
| <i>History will judge this President</i> | <i>This President will be judged by History</i> | Voice: Active vs Passive |
| | <i>It is innocent people that they are killing</i> | Theme/Information structure: Non-cleft vs cleft |
| <i>They are killing innocent people</i> | <i>Innocent people they are killing</i> | Non-extraposed vs extraposed |
| <i>That is the question</i> | <i>To have or not to have</i> | Finiteness: Finite vs non-finite |

DISCUSSION # 1. “CLAUSE” VS “SENTENCE”

Most grammars make a distinction between ‘clause’ and ‘sentence’, being the sentence the one traditionally considered as the largest grammatical unit. We consider this distinction unnecessary, at least from a grammatical point of view. Consequently, most of the properties that are traditionally studied in relation to sentences will be treated here as properties of clauses.

Definitions of ‘sentence’ abound, ranging from the vague notional definitions of traditional grammars (the sentence as the ‘expression of a complete thought’), to formal characterizations which describe (rather than define) the sentence as the largest grammatical unit (ie a unit not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic unit), to purely orthographic definitions according to which a sentence is any stretch of language delimited by an initial capital letter and a final full-stop. None of these definitions is particularly satisfactory or useful from a grammatical point of view.

The clause, on the other hand, is a more clearly-defined unit than the sentence. The reason why grammars tend to identify the sentence as a higher unit than the clause is that clauses can combine with each other in various ways producing units - sentences - that are structurally more complex than the clause itself. However, there are principled reasons to believe that the concept of ‘sentence’ is not strictly necessary when describing the hierarchy of grammatical units:

- ‘Sentence’ is a different kind of notion from ‘clause’ and ‘phrase’. We say that clauses typically ‘consist of’ phrases, meaning that clauses can be analyzed into syntactic constituents (subject, predicate, object, etc) each one of which is realized by phrases. Similarly, we say that phrases typically ‘consist of’ words, meaning that phrases can be analyzed into syntactic constituents (head, modifier, complement, etc.) each one of which is realized by words. On the other hand, even though most grammars will say that sentences ‘consist of’ clauses, this is not exactly true, since sentences can not be analyzed into immediate constituents or syntactic functions such that each of these constituents is realized by clauses (but see below). Perhaps, it would be more appropriate (less misleading) to say that sentences have (or may have: see below) the form clauses, not that they ‘consist of’ clauses, at least not in the technical sense in which we are using this expression here. This clearly shows that the term ‘Sentence’ - as traditionally defined - does not refer to a ‘grammatical unit’ but rather to a purely formal, orthographic or rhetorical unit.
- Although most grammars tend to define/characterize sentences in terms of their relationship with clauses (so that a simple sentence is one consisting of just one clause, a compound sentence one consisting of two coordinated clauses, and so on), in actual fact sentences - in their formal-orthographic-rhetorical sense - need not even be structurally represented by clauses: they can also be represented by any of the remaining grammatical units, most typically phrases and words. (See D.Thomas’ text).
- Finally, we may notice that not only clauses can combine with other clauses to form complex structures. Phrases and words, for instance, can also be combined in what has been called ‘unit complexes’:

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. | the book <i>on the table</i> | ☞ | a PP subordinated within a NP |
| 2. | over the wall and into the garden | ☞ | two coordinated PPs |
| 3. | <i>head</i> hunter | ☞ | a N subordinated within a N |
| 4. | (We had) feared or suspected | ☞ | two coordinated Vs |

In 1. a PP is subordinated within a ‘main’ NP but the unit they form together is still described as a **phrase** or, more exactly, a ‘complex phrase’; in 3. the noun *head* can be said to be subordinated to the other noun *hunter* and they together still constitute a noun, a ‘compound’ noun. In 2. and 4. we have cases of coordination or phrases and words, respectively; there is no standard term to describe the unit formed by two coordinated units, so that most grammars would simply speak of ‘two coordinated phrases/words’ but no grammar introduces a higher unit to refer to the result of coordination; most grammars, in fact, assume that the unit resulting from coordination has the same rank than the coordinated units: that is, two coordinated verbs are grammatically equivalent to a verb, two coordinated NPs are equivalent to a NP, and so on.

Correspondingly, when two clauses get combined either by coordination or by subordination, there is no need to introduce a new term to refer to the resulting structure: we can simply talk about ‘complex clauses’ for those clauses containing other (subordinate) clauses and ‘compound’ or ‘coordinated clauses’ for those clauses linked at the same level of structure, ie, without one being subordinated to the other.

An alternative view: The unit ‘Sentence’ might be an appropriate and useful solution to the problem of ‘external’ dependents, that is, elements (such as so-called ‘Disjuncts’ and ‘Conjuncts’) that seem to depend on the clause that follows them, but are not structurally integrated within it. Thus, if the sentence is accepted as a higher grammatical unit than the clause, two functional/syntactic constituents could be identified: *Main/Head* and *Dependent/Subordinate*: ‘Main’ contains the central proposition within the sentence, it is always present (ie, it is obligatory) and it is typically realized by a finite clause; ‘Dependent’, on the other hand, expresses the viewpoint from which Main must be interpreted or provides an explicit mark of the logical connection between the current sentence and the preceding context, it is an optional and syntactically dependent element and can be realized by clauses (*Although... Unless... If...*, etc.), phrases (*Curiously enough... To my surprise...*), or words (*However..., Nevertheless...*).