X-Word Grammar for Public School Teachers

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Preface

This book is a manuscript for *X-Word Grammar for Public School Teachers* completed over the Fourth of July weekend, 2006. It is still unfinished. The remaining chapters, 11-13 will describe advanced, intermediate and beginner lessons, activities and techniques, including how to use rods, the X-Word Grammar Teachers' Kit and slot sheets.

As it stands, the current manuscript covers most of the basics of X-Word Grammar: the verb system, positions and construction types, function words, nominals and sentence combining. The chapter on nominals (called "boxes" here) is short because it was written in haste for the presentation of a paper. The chapter on the TAM system is very long because it incorporates material from my dissertation on the English modals. So is there a little caprice in this edition of a work in progress? Yes. Are there typos and perhaps some incorrect references because it was taken to the print shop just days before class began? Yes. Please know that your corrections and criticisms are most welcome. Actually using the book with teachers is the only way I know of finishing it. Please speak to me or e-mail me about improvements: xlakunz@Verizon.net.

Linda Ann Kunz
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Contents

1 What is grammar?

I. Definitions of grammar

The American Heritage Dictionary gives six definitions of the word *grammar,* as quoted below. The examples are my own additions.

1. a study: "the study of how words and their component parts combine to form sentences," e.g. *My field is grammar. I study and compare the structure of languages. This study can extend to things like pronunciation, meaning and linguistic history.*

2. a system: "the system of inflections, syntax and word formation of a language," *e.g. All languages have equally complex grammars that start with how words are inserted, changed, added to and arranged to give us universal information like singular and plural, past and present.*

3. a description of a system: "the system of rules implicit in a language, viewed as a mechanism for generating all sentences possible in that language," *e.g. Bloomfield is the main figure in American structural grammar; Chomsky challenged the structural approach with generative grammar.*

4. a set of usage rules: "a normative or prescriptive set of rules setting forth the current standard of usage for pedagogical or reference purposes," e.g. *Traditional English grammar says that we shouldn't say, "It's me" or "taller than me"—but we do. Why is that?*

5. a book: "a book containing the morphologic, syntactic, and semantic rules for a particular language," e.g. *Joseph Priestley wrote*

the first known grammar of English in 1761.

6. a group of principles: "the basic principles of an area of knowledge," e.g. *The grammar of music is just as precise and methodical, just as conducive to endless creativity, as the grammar of a language.*

Linguists are interested in numbers 1 through 3. They have gone deep into the Amazon jungle and high into the Himalayas to listen to, record and describe the nearly five thousand languages of the world. In Africa alone they have found and described more than a thousand languages! The key word here is *described.* Linguists simply describe what speakers of a language really say. If Spanish speakers (translated literally) say, "Me pleases the English, but speak only a little," and Japanese speakers say, "English I like, but only little speak," linguists are happy to report this information without prejudice. From this discipline we get the term **descriptive linguistics** and its derivative term **descriptive grammar**, both of which always ask, "What do native speakers of a language actually say? What do they write?"

In the next section, you'll have a chance to try out the basics of what a descriptive linguist does.

II. Speech began with words.

We do not know precisely when, where or how mankind came to have language, but we have physiological evidence that gives us an idea of when *speech* as we know it began.

Before the development of modern man—Homo sapiens sapiens—some 30- to 40,000 years ago, our ancestors had in common with all mammals the ability to take in food, drink and air at the same time without fear of choking because the passages for food and air were completely separate. This feature is especially important for infants, who suckle and breathe simultaneously, and even human infants have this capacity in the first months of their lives. But after that the human larynx—the "voice box"—drops, creating a perilous intersection of the breathing and ingesting passages. The drop also creates a resonating space. Thus we have our lifelong curse and blessing: we are the only animal that can choke to death; we are also the only animal that can produce beautiful, resonant speech.*

*A chimpanzee who was taught the word *cup* was able to produce the two consonants in the word, but the vowel was a gutteral sound with no vowel resonance at all.

So picture an ancestor who has the power of speech. He would be able to walk among us if he had modern clothes; he would just be rather short. He has our intelligence. His people make art. He has a family and rudimentary hunting skills. Human *language* undoubtedly began quite a long time before him, in the form of gestures, signs, grunts and calls, but we're going to give him precious *words.*

We'll call him Furst. He's on a hunting expedition with his son. He sees a wild boar in the grass, points and calls out, "Gaazh!" A **noun**. He is naming the animal both of them can see, and he is the first living being to do so. We humans are still the only creatures that name things, and nouns are one of our three big categories of **content words**: NOUNS, which name things; VERBS, which bring out nouns and set them in motion or in time; and ADJECTIVES, which add features and qualities to nouns. There is another category of content words called ADVERBS, which add meaning to verbs and adjectives the way adjectives add meaning to nouns, but most are derivative. They are formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective (e.g. *beautiful/beautifully, hot/hotly*), so we say *-ly* adverbs are also content words.

Returning, Furst has his kill. When he gets back to his encampment, he holds up the wild boar and says to his mate, "Gaazh!" She smiles. The speech community is now three people.

The next day Furst and his son are out again. The boy is walking a little heavily through the grass, so his father signals (Who knows? maybe with index finger to lips) and says, "Pishla!" A **verb**. He wants the boy to walk softly, to creep. The boy understands what to do, but he raises his eyebrows to know why. His father whispers, "Gaazh," and the boy nods.

Something extraordinary has happened. The wild boar is *not in their sight,* but the boy understands that his father thinks he hears the animal, which provides the reason to walk softly. This is part of the miracle of human language: that we can talk about things we can't see, things far away, things in the past and future.

Furst is mistaken. The animal he hears is a large rodent, not a wild boar. He kills it and takes it home in a grass sack. His mate sees the sack and says, "Gaazh?" with intonation rising. Furst frowns and shakes his head. "Fim gaazh," he says.

Our first **function word**—*fim*—has appeared. Function words are also called grammar words. *Fim* is a **negative**, and we'll hear it again

shortly. Meanwhile, Furst's mate can look into the sack and see that today's meal is not a wild boar, but in our analysis thus far, Furst's meaning could be either 'It's not a wild boar' or 'There are no wild boars today.'

Since we've jumped into grammar, we'll also take liberties with the size of Furst's speech community and with the complexity of his speech.

It's later in the same day. Furst is sitting in his shelter looking a little disgruntled. His friend Korno approaches and looks at him inquiringly. Furst says, "Fim gaazh" to explain his bad mood, and Korno touches his shoulder gently and says, "Fim dunla," which means something like 'Don't sulk' or 'Don't feel bad'. He offers Furst a piece of wild boar—*gaazh*—from his own fire and says, "Vin genla." Furst looks a little hopeful as he says, "Vin gaazh?" Korno nods. Furst takes it, eats and smiles. "Gaazh mur," he says, and Korno nods again. There was some generosity in the late ice age.

Do you think you heard an **adjective**? You did. The word *mur* means 'tasty' or 'delicious'. So we now have at least one example from each of the three main categories of content words. Furst and his kind will go on naming things, activating them and qualifying them with no limit except their own thoughts and experiences. This ability has to do with the nature of content words, which are also called **open list** words because of their unlimited numbers and possibilities. (Just think of the thousands of content words that have come into English recently via computers: *glitch, laptops, e-mail, download,* etc.)

Function words, in contrast, are called **closed list** words. They are limited in number, they change slowly, and they perform specific grammatical tasks. In Furst's language, for example, we know only one negative: *fim.* In English, there are about a dozen negatives: *no, not, never, none, no one, nobody, nothing, nowhere, neither, nor* and an oldie *naught.* English has close to thirty categories of function words, which are taken up in Chapter 7, "Little but Mighty."

But let's get back to Furst's language. If you look at the samples of his conversation, you can answer all these questions:

Do Furst's people have all three categories of content words?

Can they negate?

How do they make questions?

How do they make commands?

Do their adjectives come before the nouns (as in English or Japanese) or after the nouns (as in Spanish or French)?

As you answer these questions, you are doing the job of a descriptive linguist: you are simply describing Furst's language based on what he and his people say. You are not judging right or wrong, acceptable or objectionable.

You don't have to be a linguist in your classroom, but you do need to have the linguist's certainty that what you are hearing when you listen to a person's speech is *a systematic and accurate representative of a whole speech community,* not a "sloppy" or aberrant version of your speech. Just as there are many languages in the world, there are many **dialects** of English, French, Chinese–all major languages, in fact—and each dialect has its own complete, complex, well-formed set of rules. Usually only one dialect per language, like **standard English,** is acceptable for educational and occupational use and for writing, but people who started life with a different dialect can add standard English to their repertoire as effectively as they add a second language. The linguist's view is that all languages and dialects should be seen with respect and curiosity, the way we are looking at Furst's language.

A knowledge of grammar universals supports this point of view.

III. Grammar begins with opposites.

If speech began with big content words like nouns, verbs and adjectives, grammar began with, and continues with, a group of opposites that enable us to relate to one another and the world around us. Some are very familiar: one and many (which grammar calls singular and plural), negative and affirmative, past and present, active and passive, dependent and independent, question and answer. The grammar opposites are in every language even though they manifest themselves differently. And why not? We are all one species with similar communication needs, and we live in one world even as we experience it in different ways.

To get to the basic idea of opposites, I ask ESL students to look at their right hand. We see different colors and sizes, but the basic opposites are the same: one palm and many fingers, four vertical fingers and one horizontal; a hard fist that can punch and a soft open palm that can touch a cheek gently; the firmness we need for an American-style handshake and the flexibility we need to type, to strum, to put on an earring. All of these opposites are in all of our languages, their writing systems, their sound systems, their grammars.

In later chapters we'll look at the grammar opposites in detail. Here we'll take only one pair—singular and plural—to compare how they are expressed in Furst's language, which we'll call Kalese, and in English. Identify the animal in Figure 1 by writing one word in Kalese and three words in English.

SINGULAR AND PLURAL

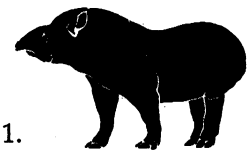


Figure 1.

Kalese _____ English _____ _____ _____

If you wrote the words *wild boar* in English, why did you need a third word?

In Figure 2 the number of animals has doubled. The word for 'two' in Kalese is *bik*. But why do you think the word *gaazh* has changed? And what change are you going to write in the corresponding English word or words?

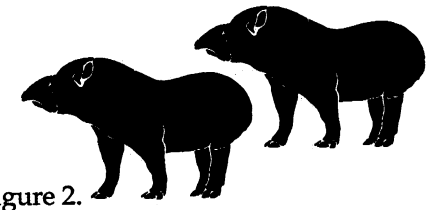


Figure 2.

Kalese English

bik igaazh _____ _____ _____

The letter 'i' in the word *igaazh* is more than a letter. It's a **morpheme**, which is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. It means 'plural' in Kalese. Many English words, like *boar, eat* and *taste,* are single morphemes, but as soon as you add endings, as in *boars, eats, tasty* and *tastier,* each word is composed of two morphemes: the original part, which is the root morpheme, and an ending. The ending *-s* or its variant *-es* tells grammatical information—plural for nouns and third person singular for verbs—so it's called an **inflection**. English, like Chinese, has very few inflections; it gives most of its grammar information in other ways. Kalese, like French and Spanish, is called "a highly inflected language" because it uses not only many endings, or suffixes, but prefixes as well to give grammar information.

Look at Figure 3 on the next page. All five language samples express the name, number and size of the animal, but look how various the function words and inflections are.

Kalese

ivin tel igaazh idin

'**these**' '**three**' '**pl**-wild boar' '**pl**-small'

Standard English

these three small wild boars

'**these**' '**three**' 'small' 'wild' 'boar-**pl**'

Spanish

estos tres jabalíes pequeños

'**these**' '**three**' 'wild boar-**pl**' 'small-**pl**'

Nonstandard English*

dese tree small wil' boar

'**these**' '**three**' 'small' 'wild' 'boar'

Japanese

kono sanbiki chiisana yasei no buta

'**this/these**' 'three-**animal**' 'small' 'wild' '**pertaining to**' 'pig'

Figure 3. 

Notice that Kalese and Spanish pluralize everything except the numeral itself. Japanese pluralizes nothing; it relies on the numeral alone to express plural. Both standard and nonstandard English have a plural function word *these,* but only the former pluralizes the noun with *-s.* Most standard English speakers would probably accept the phrase *three small wild boar* if pronounced as they expect, much as we would accept some other irregular animal plurals like *three small wild deer,* but if a word doesn't have an alternative plural, we notice the absence of the *-s* ending immediately as in **three small dog.* (The asterisk before a word or phrase means it is nonstandard or incorrect.) To test your linguistic analysis skills further, do **Worksheet 1** on page 13.

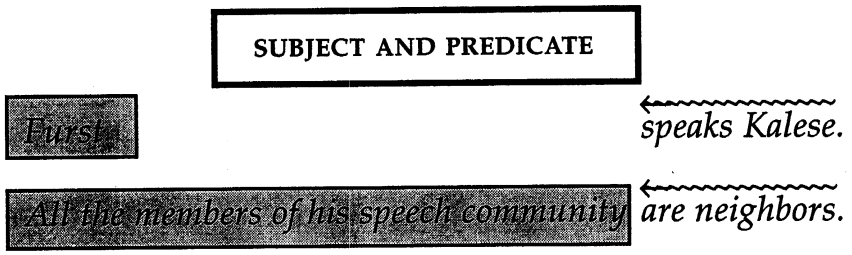
Language is a shibboleth. When we hear a person say something that varies from our usage, we make a swift judgment about his class background and education. We don't say to ourselves, "How interesting! He pluralizes without a noun suffix the way Japanese does!" Linguists welcome variation in languages and dialects for reasons already mentioned. Job interviewers, admissions officers, bosses and most ordinary people do not. We as teachers can take the best of both responses to our students' English wherever it does not represent the standard: we can be demanding, practical and accurate about what the standard is and why we need it while at the same time showing that we respect the logic, the system, the appropriateness in particular surroundings of every student's first language or first dialect.

*This is not a particular dialect of English but is representative of those that show plural in numerals and function words but usually not in inflections. Pronunciation is often different from standard varieties as well.

IV. And then there is syntax.

There is one more major feature linguists look at when they study the grammar of a language or dialect, and it is the most important grammatical feature of English. It is **syntax**: the way that words, phrases, clauses and even larger chunks of language are arranged. On the previous page, three of five language samples end their identification of Figure 3 with the noun 'boar' or 'pig'. Spanish and Kalese end with the adjective 'small'. This is a **syntactic variation**. When you hear terms like "position," "word order," "subordination," "embedding," "transformation," and the names of positions—"subject," "predicate," "object," etc.—you are in the field of syntax.

Chapter 5, "The Apartment" delves into syntax, but since syntax, like function words and inflections, expresses universal grammar opposites, we'll look at some samples here.



STATEMENT AND QUESTION

His people are hunters and gatherers.
Are his people hunters and gatherers?

DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

On a poor hunting day) Korno gave his friend meat.
Korno gave his friend meat (on a poor hunting day.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE

His friend's generosity touched Furst.
Furst was touched by his friend's generosity.

V. Why not traditional grammar?

The description of English called "traditional" or "Latinate" grammar goes back to the 18th century, when scholars were doing their best to make this rugged language seem equal to Latin, which was considered the queen of languages at the time. They gave English eight parts of speech, six tenses, several different cases and moods and a lot of other things it never had or had stripped away in the hands of common people during the French occupation of England.

English is not related to Latin at all. Or, at any rate, it is only a very distant second cousin to the Romance languages that evolved from Latin. But it wasn't until late in the 18th century that William Jones, an Englishman working in India, discovered the relation of Sanskrit to western languages and gave us the start of **comparative linguistics.** This field has shown English to be a branch of the Germanic languages that include German, Dutch, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.

English has struggled along for almost 300 years with a pedagogic grammar that describes Spanish, French and Italian very well. In *The Mother Tongue* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), Bill Bryson writes:

> English grammar is so complex and confusing for the one very simple reason that its rules and terminology are based on Latin—a language with which it has precious little in common. In Latin, to take one example, it is not possible to split an infinitive. So in English, the early authorities decided, it should not be possible to split an infinitive either. But there is no reason why we shouldn't, any more than we should forsake instant coffee and air travel because they weren't available to the Romans. Making English grammar conform to Latin rules is like asking people to play baseball using the rules of football. It is a patent absurdity. But once this insane notion became established, grammarians found themselves having to draw up ever more complicated and circular arguments to accommodate the inconsistencies. As Burchfield notes in *The English Language,* ...Visser found it necessary to devote 200 pages to discussing just one aspect of the present participle. That is as crazy as it is amazing.

English has now been described as the Germanic language it really is by linguists, if not by textbook writers. Linguists know, for example, that the English verb system has only two tenses and four inflections; it is economical in form even as it is rich in meaning. Textbooks are

gradually changing, but publishers tend to produce newer and more colorful versions of old grammars instead of adopting what linguists know about English. State syllabuses are even more conservative. Add to this the continuing debate over prescription and description ("Which is correct?" versus "What do people really say?"), and you can see why changes in the way we see the structure of English come slowly. Yet there are signs that change may soon be faster and more welcome.

VI. Grammar *evolves;* it doesn't deteriorate.

From the preceding section, you should have the broad impression that some things said to be true of English grammar were never true in the first place. But there have been changes over time as well. The next time you meet a mistake in student writing like *He was the most kindest person I ever met,* you might recall that Shakespeare thought this usage was just fine. He gave Marc Antony the words *This was the most unkindest cut of all* in Act III of *Julius Caesar.*

Instances abound of usages that were once socially acceptable and now are not—and vice versa. Some are just phrases. Have you noticed, for example, that when you thank someone who has done you a service commercially, they are more likely to answer, "No problem" than "You're welcome"? Some changes are authentically grammatical. Did you notice right in this paragraph that I used the word *they* to refer to the antecedent *someone?* We've done it for a long time in speech (*Would everybody hand in their papers?*), but recent research has shown that educated speakers of English use this form, the epicene pronoun, in writing as well. It occurs particularly where the gender of the antecedent is unknown.

Grammar changes much more slowly than vocabulary, but it does change, and the changes are adaptive, not deleterious. How we *feel* about them is another matter. Whatever grammar and usage we learned in toddlerhood is so deeply, unconsciously imprinted on our psyche that new forms can feel like an assault. In this section, we'll look at just one form that has gone through multiple changes.

Think of a New York gentleman of 1770 found packing a suitcase. His friend asks him why, and he replies, "I'm going to Boston." First, think about his pronunciation of these four words. It's essentially the same as a modern New Yorker's. Ask yourself, "Do I say, *"I'm gonna Boston"? I don't think so. But why not? Haven't you heard people say

that *gonna* is the spoken and/or sloppy and/or American way of saying *going to?*

It's not. It's something quite different from the words in *I'm going to Boston,* which is a combination of the main verb *going* and the prepositional phrase that tells where: *to Boston.*

Coming back to the New York gentleman. His friend says, "To Boston? Why there?" The gentleman replies, "I'm going to marry Miss Latham." He doesn't have to repeat the phrase *to Boston;* his friend has just said it. Instead, he expresses his purpose or intention, and in this sentence the word *to* begins an infinitive phrase. You and I often use such phrases to answer questions like *Why are you doing that? (To make it work.)* or *What did you go to Manhattan for? (To see a show.)*

The New York gentleman is still talking about going somewhere, but the structure of his sentence came, in time, to mean intention whether going somewhere was involved or not. His grandson, perhaps, said, "I'm going to marry Miss Pettiford, and my parents will just have to accept it." And here's the grammar evolution point: When intention superceded motion, the words *going to* changed from main verb and preposition to a new two-word function word called a **semi-modal**, an auxiliary verb we use most in speech. The semi-modal *gonna* means intention or expectation. When we say, "I'm going to enjoy this movie," or "Harry's not going to like this," our pronunciation identifies the semi-modal meaning, which is very different from the "going-to-Boston" meaning.

There are other semi-modals that share the pronunciation of *gonna: hafta, gotta, wanna, sposta* and *usta*. Read the sentences below out loud to compare the two different pronunciations:

*I'm **going to** Boston. I'm **going to enjoy** myself.*
*How many servants do you **have to** help you? I **have to** **ask** you this.*
*I **got to** sleep very late last night. I've **got to** **get** a nap today.*
*There's the man I **want to** paint my picture. I **want to** **hire** him now.*
*The fellow the police **supposed to** be the thief was innocent. They're **supposed to** **have** some evidence before they arrest somebody.*
*A colander is **used to** drain water from food. Colanders **used to** **be made** of metal.*

The semi-modals, including their current pronunciation, are neither sloppy nor casual; they have evolved over several centuries from other forms, like the ones illustrated in the six examples above, which coexist with them and have different meanings. Both manifestations, both pronunciations, are standard English.

Change future lesson 7, add review of semi-modals

where
I'm going to Boston.

INTENTION
I'm going to see my friend.
infinitive phrase

Semi modal.
have to Vb
have got to
Want to
are supposed to
used to
be going to

Gonna is evolving further. Some African-American vernaculars have a form of *I'm gonna* that is pronounced /amɔ̃/ and might be written *Amõn take 'im to school.* There's also a version pronounced /ama/, which might be written *Ama take 'im to school.* These two variations are not standard, but they are patterned. They are communicative and efficient. And who knows what the standard will be 100 or 200 years from now? We as teachers need to be very interested in what the standard is *now* and teach it rigorously but also be aware that it *changes.*

VII. Corpus linguistics

What can help us teach what educated users of English really do? It's the new field of **corpus linguistics,** which is getting attention even from *The New York Times.* John Rosenthal (*NYT,* 8/18/02) writes:

> For years, when it came to settling language disputes, the prescriptivists have held the upper hand. Their thick volumes contained unequivocal rules of grammar, which they could look up at any time. Descriptivists, meanwhile, typically have had to rely on what "sounds" more natural. They have used "the English you hear on the nightly network news" as their polestar.
>
> But with the advent of the computer, the balance of power is shifting. That's because the computer now makes it infinitely easier to track patterns of English usage and catalog them for use as reference material. Finally, the descriptivists have an empirical source of verbal ammunition: concrete examples of how the language is actually used.

Second, there are teacher resources like the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* that use huge bodies of real language to document what educated speakers of English say and write. Third, traditional (i.e. Latinate) grammar hasn't worked and has been disappearing from classrooms since the 60s. But these changes need to be accompanied by the adoption of a pedagogic grammar that doesn't abandon existing good practices and materials for helping young people improve their language skills but *connects* with the standard English we hear and see around us, *connects* with the grammar we learned unconsciously in babyhood.

In Chapter 2 we'll look at a description of English that arises from modern linguistics but has been developing and expanding in classrooms all over the United States for the past 50 years.

Worksheet 1: Glossing Kalese

Instructions: If you would like to test your descriptive linguistic skills, study the samples of Kalese below and their **glosses**—i.e. their approximate Engish meanings. Then use this information to write a single sentence in Kalese in the first blank space provided.

Sha fim benla. *Benla ichel o.* *O-no vendigan bat kria.*
'Don't listen to him.' 'Listen to my words.' 'I consider myself an honest man.'

Sha fim benla. *Benla ichel vo.* *Vo-no vendigan bat kria.*
'Don't listen to him.' 'Listen to your words.' 'You consider yourself an honest man.'

Sha fim benla. *Benla ichel oi.* *Oi-no vendigan ibat ikria.*
'Don't listen to him.' 'Listen to our words.' 'We consider ourselves honest men.'

Shai fim benla. *Benla ichel sho.* Sho-no vendigan bat Kria.
'Don't listen to them.' 'Listen to his words.' 'He considers himself an honest man.'

Instructions: Use the samples above to translate individual words.

don't: fim listen: benla consider: vendigan

him: sha them: shai yourself: Vo

Instructions: Once again, take educated guesses like you did with the first sentence you wrote.

How would you write the word for *word* in Kalese? chel

Which word—*bat* or *kria*—probably means 'man'? bat

If *ben* means 'listen', what is the *-la* for? to

How would you write the word for *their* in Kalese? shoi

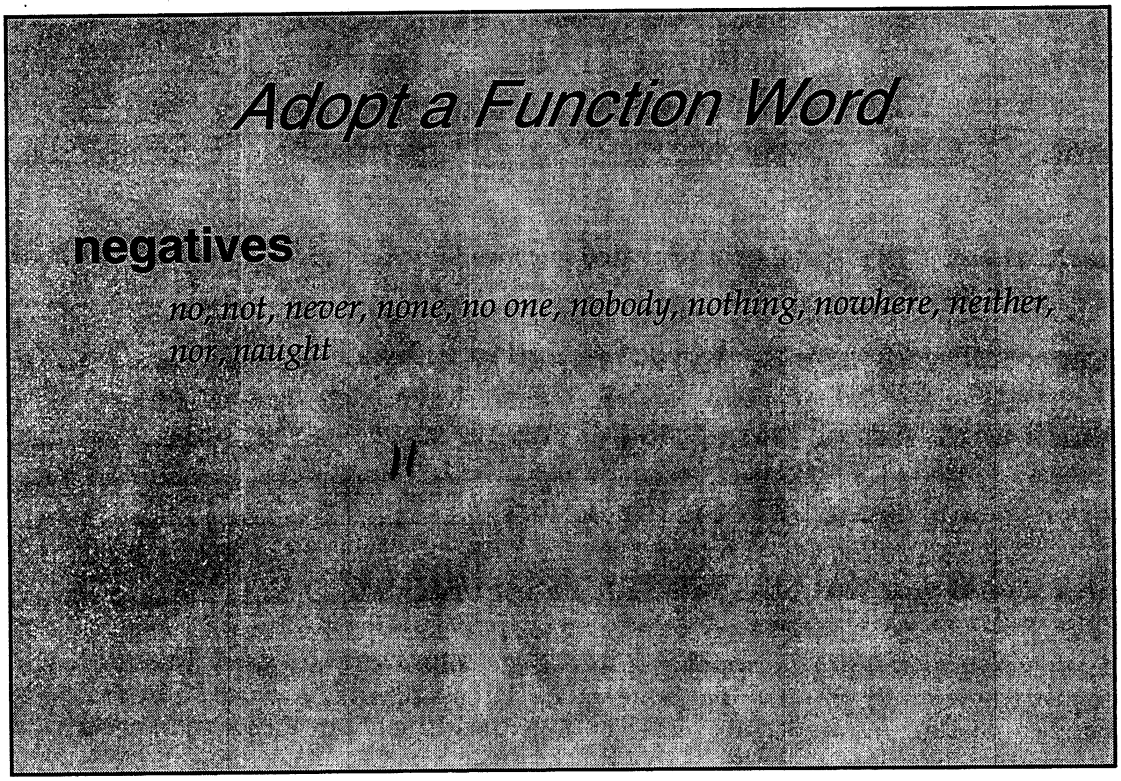
If you can answer these questions, your analytic skills are pretty good. This is the way linguists have analyzed all of the thousands of languages they've studied: by recording samples, looking for analogous patterns, hypothesizing about forms they haven't yet heard, then listening for them.

Guide Questions for Chapter 1

Here are questions you should be able to answer if you have absorbed key points in Chapter 1.

1. What are the main features of **descriptive linguistics**?
2. What are **content words**? What are the four categories of content words in English?
3. What is a **dialect** of a language?
4. What is a **morpheme**? How is it different from an **inflection**?
5. What is **syntax**?
6. What is the main weakness of what is generally called "traditional" grammar?
7. What is meant by the assertion "Language evolves; it doesn't deteriorate."?

Below is the first of a feature that appears in every chapter except Chapters 2, 9 and 10. In order not to face the more than 30 function word categories of English at the same time, you should try to familiarize yourself with one or two categories that relate to the chapter they follow. In Chapter 1, you met only one example of a function word category, the negatives.



2 What is X-Word Grammar?

I. What is X-Word Grammar?

X-Word Grammar is the classroom application of a modern analysis of English developed by Robert L. Allen of Teachers College, Columbia University. Allen called his system **Sector Analysis**, and his graduate students used it to describe dozens of languages in terms of their form/function relationships. Those of us who were teachers of English and ESL adapted it to our classroom needs. We wanted a consistent, easy-to-learn description of the English verb system. We wanted an emphasis on syntax over inflection; less terminology and more connection to the language we actually speak and write; fewer rules, no exceptions to the rules, and more discovery techniques; and above all, a description of English that even beginners (children, writing students, SESD—standard English as a second dialect learners—or ESL beginners) could grasp. We've gotten that in X-Word Grammar, and we have used it worldwide for more than four decades.

II. Its linguistic foundations

The 20th century saw tremendous advances in the field of linguistics generally and in the study of English in particular. European linguists, led by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), began to explore language as a system, not just a collection of words, and since they were writing for other scholars rather than for school children, many of their insights about English were innovative and controversial.

In the U.S., in contrast, the study of English had other roots and other purposes. Scholars intent upon describing the independence of American English from its British roots had produced many dictionaries following the model of Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* and emphasized American usage and spelling. British and continental linguistics had little influence; instead, a strong school tradition persisted in the U.S. Almost everything written about English came from teachers or former teachers and addressed school administrators and other teachers. Needless to say, conservatism was the rule. Well into the middle of the 20th century, for example, the process of diagramming sentences developed by Alonzo Reed and Brainerd Kellogg in 1877, was still a major feature in American elementary and high school classes. If you are interested in some of the ramifications of this history, do **Worksheet 2** on page 22.

Descriptive linguistics, in a form that came to be known as **structuralism**, began to flourish in the U.S. only in the 1920s and 30s. Edward Sapir and Leonard Bloomfield were serious scholars who brought the study of phonemes and morphemes to prominence and contributed greatly to the understanding that different features of a language—its sound system, its means of word formation and its syntax—were part of an integrated whole. For our purposes, a very important name among these structuralist pioneers was Kenneth Pike, head of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Pike trained linguists to go out into the field and analyze languages by using a system he called **tagmemics**, which is also called a "slot-filler" approach because it describes particular positions in a sentence and types of structures that can fill these positions.

II.a. Form and function

Sector Analysis is a tagmemic system. It begins with *the relationship between a form and its function* and looks at this relationship in context to arrive at meaning. For example, in the sentence—

A bear market is hard to bear.

the first *bear* is located between the words *a* and *market*, so it is a noun adjunct used adjectivally to describe *market*. The second *bear* follows the infinitive signal *to* and is, therefore, a verb. Context shows that the verb *bear* does not mean 'carry' but rather 'endure' or 'tolerate'.

The form-function relationship of an item is called a **tagmeme**, and

although the word *tagmeme* is a linguistic term, its like can be seen elsewhere. A musical note, for example, has a form that tells its duration, but it must be seen on a staff to determine its pitch. The numeral '3' is always itself, yet its value as part of a larger number changes when it is placed before one, two or three zeroes. A woman is a woman, but she generally gets more respect when she appears in court in her judge's robe. Each is an instance of form and function, where the relation of the two contributes substantially to meaning.

The tagmemic approach to analysis and ultimately to meaning is very different from traditional definitions like "A noun is the name of a person, place or thing," which start with the assumption that a noun is always a noun and always has the same function. As to the word *bear,* you might say, "Well, we know there are lots of homonyms in English, like *bear* and *bear, lie* and *lie, hit* and *hit.*" Take a very nouny word like *Saturday.* Look at it in the two sentences below:

Saturday is my favorite day.
Saturday I usually have an art or education class.

Both *Saturdays* are nouns, but they are in different positions in their sentences. The first is in a subject position telling what my favorite day is; the second is in an adverbial position telling when I have my art or education classes. And if we want to do what English can do so blithely, we'll make up a completely new use of *Saturday* just by changing its location once again. Odds are you understand the blues meaning of *Saturday* in the lines below:

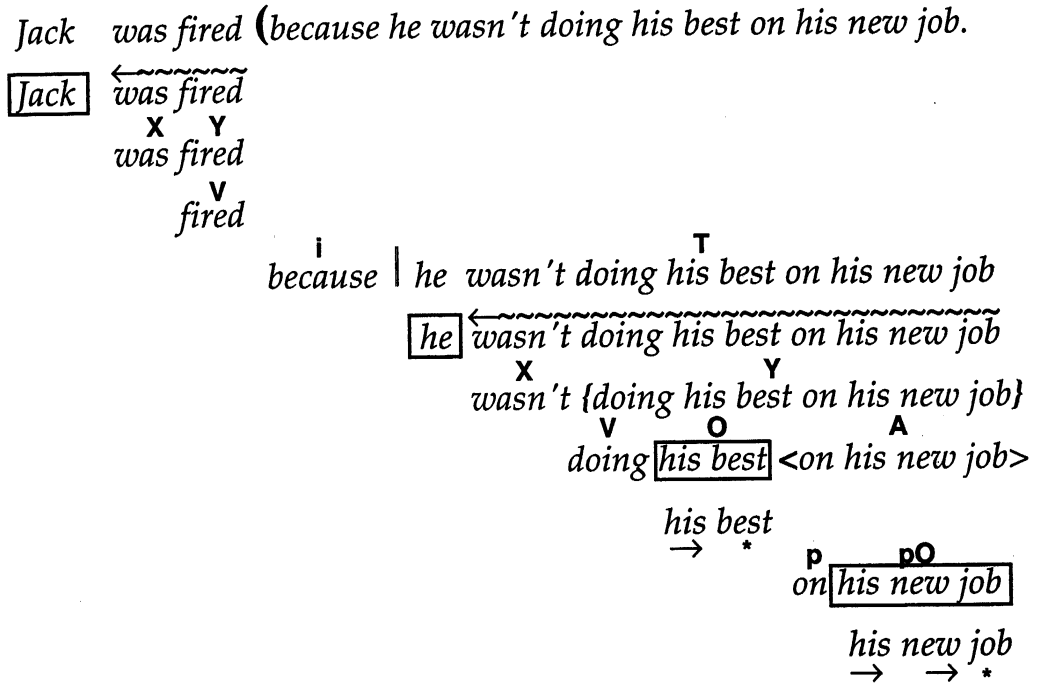
Honey, don't Monday or Tuesday me,
I need you to Saturday me tonight.

Nouns *do* name things, and even the second *Saturday* above can be said to be naming the day I have my art or education classes though it tells "when" rather than "what." But it simply won't work to call a word a noun or a verb *in isolation.* The third *Saturday* is a verb. The infinitive signal *to* says it is, the object *me* following it says it is, and common sense says it is. If you remember Nancy Sinatra singing *These Boots Are Made for Walking,* you also recall understanding exactly what she meant when she said, "You been lyin' when you shoulda been truthin'...You been samin' when you shoulda been changin'."

Sector Analysis is a study of relationships and its ongoing respect for both structure and meaning is one of the large things that has made it so appealing to the thousands of teachers who have studied it and who use it today.

II.b. Surface and depth

A second appealing feature of Sector Analysis is the fact that it is a "top-down" system. It starts with real sentences that you can see on a piece of paper and "peels them down" layer by layer to individual words. It looks like this:



II.c. The verb system

A third appealing feature of Sector Analysis is the way it sees the English verb system. It starts out looking at the system as typical of any Germanic verb system in that it has only two basic tenses, the ones we see in *eat-ate, walk-walked,* etc.; that it has only three basic verb forms—as in *eat, eating, eaten* or *walk, walking, walked;* and that most of the grammar information is carried by a fairly sophisticated system of auxiliary verbs, of which the first auxiliaries are called **x-words.** These 20 little words are so diverse and so powerful that they give their name to the classroom adaptation of the Sector Analysis description of English. If you want to find them on your own, do **Worksheet 3** on page 23. ESL writing students do the same thing when they begin learning X-Word Grammar and subsequently use the x-words to edit match-ups of verb forms (x-v), of subjects, verbs and referents (s-x-ref) and of tenses and time signals.

III. Its adaptations

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Sector Analysis has been used to analyze many languages. It is a serious linguistic tool. X-Word Grammar is English only and teacher-made. First among the teachers who made a Sector Analysis approach accessible to learners was Robert Allen himself. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, he had Columbia graduate students find the x-words, make yes-no questions to "open out" an English sentence and analyze authentic texts to find out what English writers really do. He created the *do-does-did* mice that show how x-words can "hide." Whatever works. That was and is the first X-Word Grammar principle.

III.a. Discovery techniques

Fundamental to X-Word Grammar is the idea that learners can use their "ear" for English to determine what sounds right. Even though it is primarily a grammar of written English, unnatural sentences don't "sound right" to a native speaker or to anyone who has heard standard English enough. (What's "enough" remains to be seen.) For example, when learners make yes-no questions in order to discover the x-words, no one suggests **Be you a student?* even though there is a whole family of *BE* x-words. When students try to shift a structure like *which didn't bother me at all* from the end of the sentence to the beginning, they screw up their faces with the oddness of it and decide that the structure can't be a shifter because it simply doesn't shift.

Discovery contrasts sharply with the learning of terms and rules because a sense of what's right comes from within, not from without. There's simply no way to convince students the word *married* is a "past participle" once we call their attention to a sentence like *Sara's going to get married next month.* They know there's nothing "past" about next month. Sector Analysis calls the *married* in this sentence a **d-t-n form**; X-Word Grammar compromises with Latinate grammar and calls it a **participle**. More important than the name, it says this form has *no time meaning at all.* Any discovery technique using authentic texts shows *all* the main verb forms of English appearing in all time contexts.

Perhaps the best spokesman for grammar discovery was a student at Eastern District High School in Brooklyn, New York. His teacher had just started using X-Word Grammar. In the middle of using one of the 24 Grammar Discovery Tasks, he called out, "Hey! This is like *my* English!"

III.b. Seven basic sentence patterns

Because it emphasizes the concept of "empty slots" or "empty positions," Sector Analysis says that there is only one basic sentence pattern in English, one long enough to accommodate all the possible "fillers" that can be placed in even the longest sentence. X-Word Grammar de-emphasizes the "empty slot" idea and says there are just seven basic sentence patterns. Teachers at several branches of the City University of New York came to these patterns in the 1970s and found that students could not only discover them in texts but could recombine and use them in their own writing right away and edit and improve the sentence variety of their work.

Sector Analysis posits only nine different **construction types,** structures that can be placed in sentence positions; gradually these nine came to be represented by the colored rods used originally to teach modern math and then to teach foreign languages via the Silent Way of Caleb Gattegno. The construction types are discussed in Chapter 6, "Building Blocks." Meanwhile consider this alternative to the old Reed-Kellogg sentence diagrams: a student starts with a blue rod to represent the core of a sentence (its trunk), adds an orange rod to the end to represent an adverbial clause (a shifter) and a lavender rod perpendicular to the blue one to represent an insert. The sentence is *Bob Marley, the great reggae artist, is hot again because his music has just been reissued on CDs.* This takes seconds to show. In color.

IV. Its expansions

Because it is so visual, X-Word Grammar has expanded into a new area, the teaching of deaf and hearing-impaired learners. Sue Livingston, author of *Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students,* has written an X-Word Grammar text for deaf children and has taught aspects of the grammar to deaf teachers and learners from middle school to college.

As X-Word Grammar reaches out into new fields, it also takes in, and is enriched by, concepts and approaches from other fields. The X-Word Grammar Chant, which, of course, begins "Find the x-words," takes its inspiration from Carolyn Graham's jazz chants. Student-centered activities underlying grammar discovery come from the Silent Way. And in my teaching, X-Word Grammar is the study of universal grammar opposites, as described by the philosophy the Aesthetic Realism of Eli Siegel. This philosophy is also my teaching method.

V. My teaching method

In the first grammar lesson in my advanced ESL writing class, I ask:

> *Can grammar, which is the structure of language, tell us something about the structure of the whole world—including ourselves?*

Students think not, so I tell them about my teaching method. It is the Aesthetic Realism of Eli Siegel, whose purpose is to have students like the world through seeing that it has a sensible, beautiful structure, a structure of opposites in an aesthetic relation.* English grammar has the same opposites we find in any object and in ourselves: one and many, rest and motion, past and present, active and passive, and more. I teach grammar not only as an editing tool, but as content: as a means of knowing and liking the world and ourselves more.

My course outline begins with this principle stated by Eli Siegel:

> *The purpose of education is to like the world through knowing it.*

I explain that the way to like the world is to see how it is made, how it has opposites in a beautiful relation to each other.

Every student understands the opposites. Ask even Level 1 ESL students for a few examples of pairs of opposites, then pair them up to write as many as they can think of in five minutes, and have them read their lists aloud. They have a great time. I ask them how they all know the opposites, especially given our many countries, cultures and languages. When and how did we learn them? Someone in the class always suggests "Because they're *there.*" We look at opposites in our languages and writing systems and in ourselves: hard and soft, angle and curve, separate and together, open and closed, etc. We do this visually and dramatically, rather than verbally, using the short sentence *Today is a beautiful day* written on the board in all of our languages, and students see how their languages and English are the same and different and how these systems are *beautiful.*

The opposites show the structure of the world to be orderly and beautiful, and grammar, having the opposites of the world, does this, too. In a 1976 letter giving me permission to use his thoughts in my work, Eli Siegel wrote, "Grammar can be a means to have the world kinder, greater, more sensible," and I am proud to be studying and trying to show how that is true.

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*For information about this teaching method, go to www.aestheticrealism.org

Worksheet 2: Have You Heard...?

Instructions: The statements and questions below are part of the confusion or frustration engendered by teaching English with a grammar not its own. Check off any you have heard or said.

1. *"I never understood English grammar till I studied French."* ☐
2. *"Well, there are rules, but we break them as soon as we speak."* ☐
3. *"English is a crazy language."* ☐
4. *"The rules of spoken and written English are very different."* ☐
5. *"American English is a lot more casual than British English."* ☐
6. *"You're an English teacher? I was never very good in grammar."* ☐
7. *"English grammar and usage are going down the tubes."* ☐
8. *"It's not that the rules are so bad. It's all the <u>exceptions</u>."* ☐
9. *"My grammar is very bad, especially my spelling."* ☐
10. *"But which <u>is</u> correct?*
    'It's I' or 'It's me?' '...taller than I' or 'taller than me?'" ☐

    'Everyone has his own space' or 'Everyone has their own space?'" ☐

    'Who do you want to speak to?' or 'Whom do you want to speak to?'" ☐

    'My neighbors don't like my practicing at night' or 'My neighbors don't like me practicing at night'?" ☐

Can you add any others to #10?

_____

_____

_____

Worksheet 3: Finding X-words

Instructions: Write 20 yes-no questions using a *different* first word for each one. Don't use negatives and don't use *need, ought* or *dare.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

If you're having trouble, look at the x-word chart on page 111 in the Appendix.

Guide Questions for Chapter 2

Here are guide questions to help you understand Chapter 2.

1. What is **Sector Analysis**?
2. What is **X-Word Grammar** and how did it grow out of Sector Analysis?
3. What are **tagmemes**? What are some examples?
4. What are some of the features of X-Word Grammar that make it appealing to teachers?

3 The elegant English verb phrase

I. What do verbs do?

Have you studied a Romance language like Spanish? If so, then you've met the beauty of a highly inflected verb system, where a single word can put together **form**, or grammar meaning, and **content**, or dictionary meaning. Take the verb *PAINT*: *pintar*. First of all, it says, "I'm a verb!" just by its *-ar* ending. Then it changes into 30 or 40 other forms to say, "I paint, you paint, he paints"—*Pinto, pintas, pinta*—to add plurals—*pintamos, pintáis, pintan*—to show past and future, imaginal and subjunctive—*pinté, pintaré, pintaría, pintara.*

Now think about the English verb *PAINT.* It has only three forms: **the base form** *PAINT,* **the *-ing* form** *painting, and* **the participle** (or *d-t-n* form) *painted.* We'll get to three related forms in a moment, but think of these three as the "primary colors" of the English verb system. I'm going to say something about these forms that is radically different from how they are generally seen: the three English verb forms have **no time or tense** of their own. They have **no number**—singular or plural. They have **no person**—*I, you, he, she,* etc. Instead, they have dictionary meaning: *paint, walk, love, prevaricate, intensify.* In fact, English, with a vocabulary of over 500,000 words, has the richest collection of verb meanings in the world.

The economy and richness of the verb forms appear in another way. Because we get meaning from an English word's *position* as well as its form, the three verb forms serve not only as verbs—*Paint your wagon!*—

but as nouns—*Where's the paint? Painting is fun.*—and as adjectives—*the painted desert.* This ability of English verb forms to be practically anything else *besides* verbs does not fit neatly into a grammatical description that tries to say, "That's a noun," or That's a verb," just by looking at an isolated word. But it does greatly extend their potential.

II. How do English verbs do grammar?

So where's all the grammar in an English verb phrase? Where are past and present, one and many, negative and affirmative, question and answer, active and passive that highly inflected languages can show right in the main verb? These features are in the x-words. As you might know already, x-words are the first auxiliaries of the English verb phrase. They fall into four families:

- the *DO* family (*do, does, did*), which gives us our only two real **tenses**, when combined with a main verb, and which we use to present things we take to be facts;
- the *BE* family (*am, is, are, was, were*) and the *HAVE* family (*have, has, had*), which give us **aspect**, or how we distribute events in time and relate different times; and
- the modals (*can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might, must*) which give us **modality**, or how we assess the possibility, probability, desirability, etc. of an event occurring in relation to how we see ourselves and the outside world at the moment of the event.

The x-words are little but mighty function words. They put together all the basic grammar opposites. We already have **questions**, and ESL students are always excited to see how the x-words turn up in **answers** as well: *Do you like merengue? Yes, I do. Can you teach me? Yes, I can. It's fun dancing, isn't it? It sure is!*

By themselves, x-words are **affirmative**. Add *not* or *-n't* and you have **negative**: *don't, doesn't, didn't; can't, couldn't, shan't,* shouldn't, won't, wouldn't, may not, mightn't, am not, isn't, aren't, wasn't, weren't, haven't, hasn't, hadn't.*

Concerning time reference, the x-words are **immediate**—*do, does, have, has, am, is, are, can, shall, will, may* and *must*—which means we typically use them for present or future time reference—and **remote**—

**Shall* is disappearing from American speech, and *shan't* is unfamiliar to most people.

did, had, was, were, could, should, would, and *might*—which we use for past or imaginal reference, as in *We were in Paris* and *I wish we were in Paris,* and also for social distance, as in *Did you want to ask a question? I would suggest we discuss this.*

For **singular** and **plural**, most of the x-words are blessedly neutral: *I will/they will, he can/they can,* etc. But there are five that are strictly singular. One—*I am*—seems to offer no problems, perhaps because it's about Numero Uno, the great "I." The other four are the real core of what teachers mean when they mark "subject-verb agreement" errors. The problem is really the matching of subjects with *does, is, was, has* and their "plural" counterparts *do, are, were, have.* Do you see something interesting about the first four? You can call them **"ssssssstrictly sssssssingular"** because all four end in *-s,* and no other x-words do.

And what about person? As mentioned before, many languages show person with verb endings; English does so only through the five strictly singular x-words that attach to *I* or *he/she/it.* But all the x-words are very attached to their subjects. The subject/x-word combination, is, in fact, the only completely obligatory part of a written English sentence. So if you see an x-word, you know there has to be a subject close by, and if one goes, the other one goes, too. That's why we can say *I hear he is practicing daily* and *I hear him practicing daily.* And we can substitute **SX** (subject and x-word) for a whole sentence as in *Who's ready to go? **I am!** Who has a car? **Sammy does!***

And here's something very satisfying. The match-up of the *DO* family and the modals with the base form and the *HAVE* family with the participle is 100%: *do paint, does paint, did paint; have painted, has painted, had painted; can paint, could paint,* etc. There are no exceptions whatsoever. These combinations give you active, finite (once called "conjugated") English verb phrases. The *BE* family does the same thing: *am painting, is painting,* etc. are active, finite verb phrases. But *BE* has a "crossover" possibility, too. The whole *BE* family can cross over to the participle to give us the passive forms *were painted, was painted, are painted, is painted* and *am painted.* Look at the x-word chart on page 111: all the horizontal match-ups of x-words and main verb forms are **active**, and the one diagonal match-up of *BE* + participle is **passive.**

In the 20 x-words and three main verb forms, we have *almost the entire English verb phrase:* twenty-five 100% reliable two-word verb phrases. Now we'll add just three more things to see all the verb phrase possibilities.

(1) The **middle auxiliaries.** Here they are, just four of them: *BE, HAVE, been* and *being*. Since they are, themselves, base forms, a participle and an *-ing* form of their respective verbs, they follow the x-words according to precisely the same sequencing rules as applied to two-word combinations, for example, *has been painted, should be painting, could have been painted.*

(2) The **hidden x-words.** Only *do, does* and *did* can be hidden or shown. Look at the three sentences below that seem to have no x-word:

My three brothers paint.
My niece paints.
My grandmother painted.

Make each sentence into a yes-no question—

Do my three brothers paint?
Does my niece paint?
Did my grandmother paint?

or a negative statement—

My three brothers don't paint.
My niece doesn't paint.
My grandmother didn't paint.

If you would like to try out the combinations possible with 20 x-words, four middle auxiliaries and three main verbs forms, do **Worksheet 4** on page 29.

and the hidden x-words show themselves. Is the concept of hidden x-words a construct? Yes. Does it have any basis in fact? Elizabethan English said of Eve that she "took of the fruit thereof and did eat," and some linguists have described the *did* as having "collapsed into the main verb." Students like the way the *DO family* x-words can all hide and show themselves—like we do—and once, again, what they meet in this construct is entirely consistent; it has no exceptions.

(3) The **semi-modals**. Especially in speech, *going to, have to, need to, have got to, be able to, 'd better, be supposed to, be willing to, 'd rather* and a few other semi-modals add their individual flavors to how we see events in light of our perceived relation to the outside world. In contrast to true modals, they all consist of more than one word, and all except *'d ~~rather~~* and *'d rather* use the **infinitive signal** *to*.

Finally we return to form and content. How does the human mind process the huge amount of information in a single verb phrase? It makes them one. When we hear or read the sentence *Picasso painted Guernica*, we know what happened, who did it, that he finished it and that the speaker or writer believes this statement to be true. It is a tribute to the human mind, to language in general and to the ordinary people who developed, enriched and streamlined English that we are able to do so effortlessly.

Worksheet 4: Expanding the Verb Phrase

Instructions: Write out different verb phrases using a form of *paint* as your main verb.

one-word verb phrases (3): Note: These verb forms have a hidden x-word.

I paint. He paints. Our ancestors painted.

two-word verb phrases: active (20):

Do you paint? Does he Paint? Did our ancestors paint?

____ you ____? ____ he ____? ____ they ____?

____ I ____? ____ he ____? ____ they ____?

____ I ____? ____ they ____?

____ you ____? ____ you ____? ____ you ____?

____ you ____? ____ you ____? ____ you ____?

____ you ____? ____ you ____? ____ you ____?

two-word verb phrases: passive (5):

Was I painted? Was he painted? Were they painted?

Am I painted? Are they painted?

three-word verb phrases: active (18) Write two using a different middle auxiliary:

We have been painted. We will be painted.

three-word verb phrases: passive (17) Write only two again:

We might be painted. We are being painted.

four-word verb phrases: (18) Write one active and one passive:

We might have been painted.

We could have been painting.

Guide Questions for Chapter 3

1. How many basic forms does an English verb have? 3 Base, Ving, Vpp
2. Do these basic forms have **tense**? **person**? **number**? No
3. How many **tenses** does English have? present past
4. What is **aspect**? how we distribute events in time
5. What is **modality**? possibility, probability, discernibility of an event
6. What are the four **middle auxiliaries**? be, been, being, have
7. Which three x-words can hide? do does did
8. What are some examples of **semi-modals**? are supposed to would rather have to

Adopt a Function Word

x-words

the *DO* family: *do, does, did*
the *HAVE* family: *have, has, had*
the *BE* family: *am, is, are, was, were*
the modals: *can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might, must*

semi-modals

going to, have to, need to, have got to, be able to, 'd better, be supposed to, want to, be willing to, be willing to, 'd rather
when they are followed by the base form of a verb

middle auxiliaries

be, being, been, have **when they are followed by a main verb**

infinitive signal

to **when it is followed by the base form of a verb**

4 The trunk: rest and motion

I. Subject and predicate = rest and motion

Among the opposites central to the structure of English, **finite** and **non-finite** are the most important in making the difference between a sentence and a non-sentence. The word *finite* means "time-oriented." A written English sentence takes a **subject**—like *the cranes*–and sets it in motion with a finite verb—*are flying*—or, at least, places it in time: *The cranes are graceful.* In either case, the part of the sentence that brings out the subject is called the **predicate.**

Look at the cartoon below. Which of the three structures on the left would make a sentence if you added a capital letter and period?

a woman walking her friend to the door
a woman was walking her friend to the door
as a woman was walking her friend to the door

All three structures have the same subject, *a woman*, and the same verbal information, *walking her friend to the door*. But only the second and third have a *finite* verb, a verb placed in time, and the finite quality is not in the word *walking* but in the word *was*. *Was* is an x-word, and it carries the time element of the sentence.

Every predicate starts with an x-word. A subject and predicate together make an independent unit called a **trunk**, so named because it is as stable and crucial to the life of a sentence as a trunk is to a tree. The trunk is known by other names—independent clause, T-unit, SP, NP + VP—but in all its guises, it consists of a subject and predicate, the essential quality of rest (identifying something or someone) and motion (bringing it out) in a written English sentence.

Trunks are at once simple and highly varied. The two sentences in the quotation below are trunks, each a single subject followed by a single predicate.

> *Nature is neutral. Man has wrested from nature the power to make the world a desert or to make the desert bloom.*
>
> —Adlai Stevenson, *Speech*, 1952

The difference between the two trunks above has to do with how much is packed into the subject and object positions. In each, there is only a single word in subject position: *nature* in one, *man* in the other. But the first has a two-word predicate and the second, an *eighteen-word* predicate. Since SUBJECT and PREDICATE, which we'll now indicate in small caps to represent positions, can be as empty as a broom closet with a single broom in it or as full as most people's hall closet, the trunk possibilities are endless. A trunk can be as short as *Jesus wept* (*John, 11:35*, the shortest verse in the Bible). In some languages, like Spanish, a trunk can be just *one* word because subject information is built into the verb, so the SUBJECT position doesn't always have to be filled. In a written English statement, the SUBJECT position does have to be filled, so a two-word trunk is the minimum. And if a sentence is pure action, like raining, we put a **filler** in the SUBJECT position:

It's raining.

The word *it* doesn't refer to anything. It just has to be there because the SUBJECT position must be filled. The same is true for this sentence:

There's a fly in my soup.

The word *There* is another filler. The sentence is really about the fly and the soup, but once again the SUBJECT position must be filled.

And how do we know the words *It* and *There* fill the SUBJECT position? We know because of the strongly patterned, "no exceptions" behavior of English trunks: (1) every written English statement will turn into a yes-no question using the x-word that begins the predicate; (2) that x-word, which appears on the left of the subject in the yes-no question, will appear on the right of the subject if the negative form of the same statement; and (3) the same x-word will also appear, along with the subject, when a tag question is added to the statement. Here's how these transformations look:

(1) ***Is there*** *a fly in my soup?*

(2) ***There isn't*** *a fly in my soup.*

(3) *There's a fly in my soup,* ***isn't*** *there?*

To test out this 100% technique for identifying a trunk, its subject and its x-word, do **Worksheet 5** on page 39.

II. Positions in the trunk

Every trunk can be put through the same three transformations you have just seen above. Every trunk has a subject and predicate, nothing more. These major positions are called **sectors**, and we will now look deeper into the SUBJECT and PREDICATE sectors to see what they, too, have in common from trunk to trunk.

II.a. The subject

This has already been said, but it bears repeating: a subject is just a position in a written English statement that has to be filled. We have already seen that the SUBJECT position can be filled with a word as short and seemingly meaningless as *it*, but it takes on meaning and size when the *topic* of the statement falls in the subject position, which is most of the time. Let's now look at some meaty structures in SUBJECT position.

Find an x-word that will turn each sentence below into a yes-no question, and assume that everything to the left of it is the subject. What do all these subjects have in common?

The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. —Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism,* 1895

The things that the flag stands for were created by the experiences of a great people. —Woodrow Wilson, *Address,* June 14, 1915

That the poor are invisible is one of the most important things about them. —Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, 1962

The denial that men may be arbitrary in human transactions is *the higher law...* —Walter Lippmann, *The Good Society*, 1937

Every subject above contains the word *that*, right? And the word *that* is followed shortly by an x-word (or hidden x-word) that does *not* turn the whole statement into a yes-no question. What does this mean?

It means that there are *other* trunks buried inside a position in the first trunk—somewhat like the painted Russian doll that is opened to reveal another painted Russian doll and another and another. Take the last of the examples above. Here are its three transformations:

(1) ***Is*** *the denial that men may be arbitrary in human transactions the higher law?*

(2) *The denial that men may be arbitrary in human transactions* ***isn't*** *the higher law.*

(3) *The denial that men may be arbitrary in human transactions is the higher law,* ***isn't*** *it?*

The word *it* in the tag question refers to the subject, *the denial that men may be arbitrary in human transactions*. And look at this exchange:

A: *Which denial?*
B: *That men may be arbitrary in human transactions.*

What "B" says identifies which denial. Technically, it **modifies** the word *denial* because, like an adjective, it adds to the meaning of that noun at the same time that it narrows it down. The word *that* is a connector that attaches the two and is a part of the modifier. As soon as you detach it, you have a trunk again:

(1) ***May*** *men be arbitrary in human transactions?*

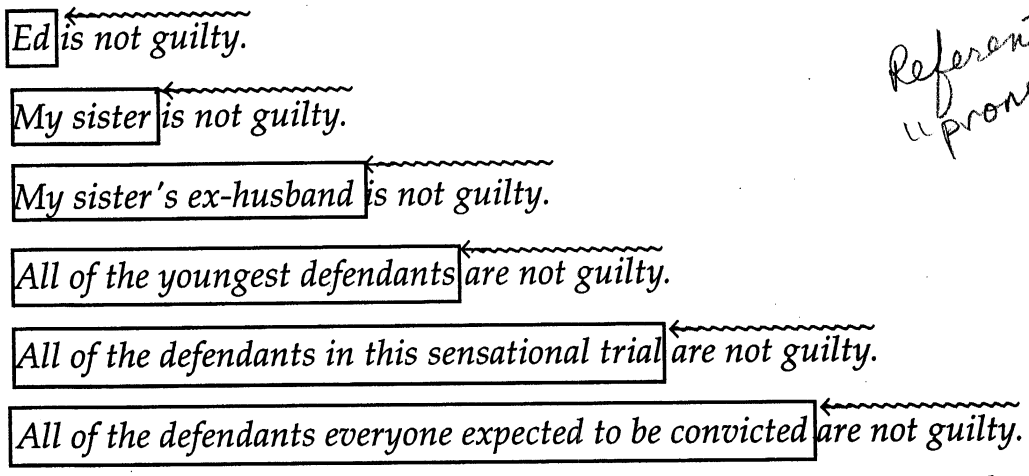
(2) *Men* ***may not*** *be arbitrary in human transactions.*

(3) *Men may be arbitrary in human transactions is the higher law,* ***may they not****?*

The two question transformations sound strained because the modal *may* is used only in some familiar questions like *May I help you?* Still, you can see the pattern that recurs every time you meet a trunk. So we can have trunks within trunks within trunks. Here is a deeply embedded example: four x-words, four subjects, three trunks inside one.

The man you said I told you was the thief is not guilty.

Most subjects are not so deeply embedded. Here is a more typical sequence of increasingly meaty subjects, each having a noun at its core, some with modifiers before or after or on both sides. The box and wavy arrow represent SUBJECT and PREDICATE.

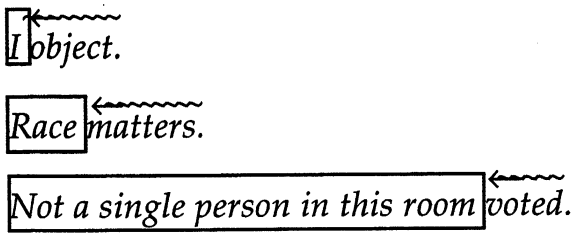


Referents "pronouns"

One of the other structures regularly found in SUBJECT position is the family of words that seldom occur first in a passage because they refer backward to something or someone whose identity is already established. In traditional grammar, they are called pronouns though they do not replace nouns but rather whole nominal structures like those above in the SUBJECT position: *he, she, he, they, they, they* respectively. X-Word Grammar calls them **referents** and includes other "backwards-pointing" items such as *This* and *That, myself, yourself, himself,* etc. All referents except *I* and *you* need something previously mentioned to point to. In Chapter 8, "Boxes," referents will be discussed more fully.

II.b. The predicate

The only thing you can be certain to find in the predicate sector is an x-word and one additional morpheme. Does this mean that a predicate has to have two *words*? No, you've already seen one example from the Bible where the entire predicate is the single word *wept.* In more everyday usage, one-word predicates look like this:



Turn each of these three sentences into a yes-no question, and you will see why one-word predicates are possible. Each has a hidden x-word which pops out when you make the question or the negative. The two morphemes are the x-word and the main verb.

Even a one-word predicate like those above is both finite and non-finite since the x-word is always finite and the main verb it hides in has no time element of its own. The finite and non-finite sectors in a predicate are called X and Y. Whereas X can only accommodate a single x-word, Y has many positions of its own, which may or may not be filled.

II.b.i The X sector

Though the X position is the first position in the predicate, it also has a close relationship to the SUBJECT. It appears, in a shifted version, on the other side of the SUBJECT so that an x-word can move around to make a yes-no question, as below:

X̃		X	Y
	The cranes	*are*	*flying.*
Are	*the cranes*		*flying?*

In speech, the **s-x** (or **x̃-s**) combination can make tag questions like *aren't they?* and *are they?* and short answers like *I do, She will, They are.* Though the variety of things that can be done with the X position (including leaving it empty) are somewhat limited, its syntactic power cannot be doubted. There is no predicate without it. There is no trunk without it. There are no written statements or questions without it.

II.b.ii The Y sector

The "cranes" sentences fills only one position in the Y sector, but look at the sentence below, which fills many more.

Lindbergh ← *flew The Spirit of St. Louis across the Atlantic alone*

X̃		X	Y
did			*{fly The Spirit of St. Louis across the Atlantic alone}*

V	O	A	A
fly	*The Spirit of St. Louis*	*across the Atlantic*	*alone*

Verbals

Fly the Spirit of St. Louis across the Atlantic alone is a verbal. It begins with a non-finite main verb and expresses a whole idea which could take the form of a command:

Fly The Spirit of St. Louis across the Atlantic alone!

Go ahead, just try it! All commands are verbals unless they have extra words added for emphasis. So the Y sector is filled by a verbal, which, in turn, has positions for a verb, an object and one or more adverbials.

III. SVO

English is called an **SVO language** because of the standard order of sectors in its most common sentence pattern: SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT. Other major SVO languages are Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish, but some of these, like Spanish, have more flexibility in the SVO arrangement than English does. Rare indeed is the English trunk that puts its subject after its verb (even though the sentence you are reading right now does exactly that as it starts "Rare indeed..."). Here are some SVO sentences.

> *This new development [automation] has unbounded possibilities for good and evil.* —Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*, 1948
>
> *Willy Loman never made a lot of money.*
>
> —Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 1949
>
> *They sank my boat.* —JFK to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. when asked how he became a hero, *A Thousand Days*, 1965

The O sector is filled by a **direct object**, which, in both traditional and modern grammar, means an object that carries on the meaning started just before it by a **transitive verb** like those above: *have, make* and *sink*. We can say, "has what?", "made what?" and "sank what?", and the answer in each case is a direct object.

Several less common sectors cling to the direct object and are necessary because of particular verbs. **Two-word separable verbs**, which are a combination of a verb and a **particle**, can be separated by a direct object, so we add a position that Sector Analysis calls the B sector.

V B O V O B
Turn off that radio! Turn that radio off!

V B O V O B
Put away your money. Put your money away.

V B O V O B
Take out the garbage. Take the garbage out.

A second object, traditionally called the indirect object, takes a position right before a direct object in sentences like this:

V O_1 O_2
Tell me your life story.

V O_1 O_2
Give her all my love.

V O_1 O_2
Send Charlie a really nice present.

IV. Complements and Adverbials

The remaining sectors in the predicate are for **complements** and **adverbials.** It *is* possible to fill O, C and A sectors all at once as the sentence below shows:

V O C A
The Supreme Court appointed George W. Bush President by a margin of one vote.

However, the most common occurence of a complement is after he *BE* family of x-words when they are used without a main verb just to provide the necessary finite element in a statement. When they do this, they are usually called the ***BE*-copula,** "copula" meaning 'joining' or 'linking' as in the sentences below where the subject is joined to something that describes it, a complement or an adverbial.

*I **am** disappointed.* (The complement is a verbal.)

*Ed **is** here.* (The word *here* is an adverbial.)

*We **are** polyglots.* (The complement is a noun.)

*Alice **was** happy.* (The complement is an adjective.)

*The ones to blame **were** themselves.* (The complement is a referent.)

There are several main verbs which share with the *BE*-copula the possibility of linking subject and complement or subject and adverbial: *appear, become, end up, feel, grow, look, prove, remain, resemble, seem, smell, sound, stay, taste* and *turn.*

Adverbials near the end of the trunk tell Where? How? What time? How often? Under what circumstances? etc., but they stay put. In Chapter 5, as you meet front and end shifters that also add adverbial information in a sentence but *outside* the trunk, we'll look at how this sentence can have two opposite meanings: *Jill didn't marry Phil because she loved him.*

Worksheet 5: Making Yes-No Questions

Instructions: Turn each sentence below into a yes-no question and then into a negative statement. Then draw a box around the subject in the negative statement.

1. The lions are restless tonight.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

2. The letter in the top righthand corner of the little box on the left of the big box should be 'A'.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   _____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

   _____

3. Tony left his heart in San Francisco.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

4. Last year was a great year.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

5. Last year fine reds were easy to find.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

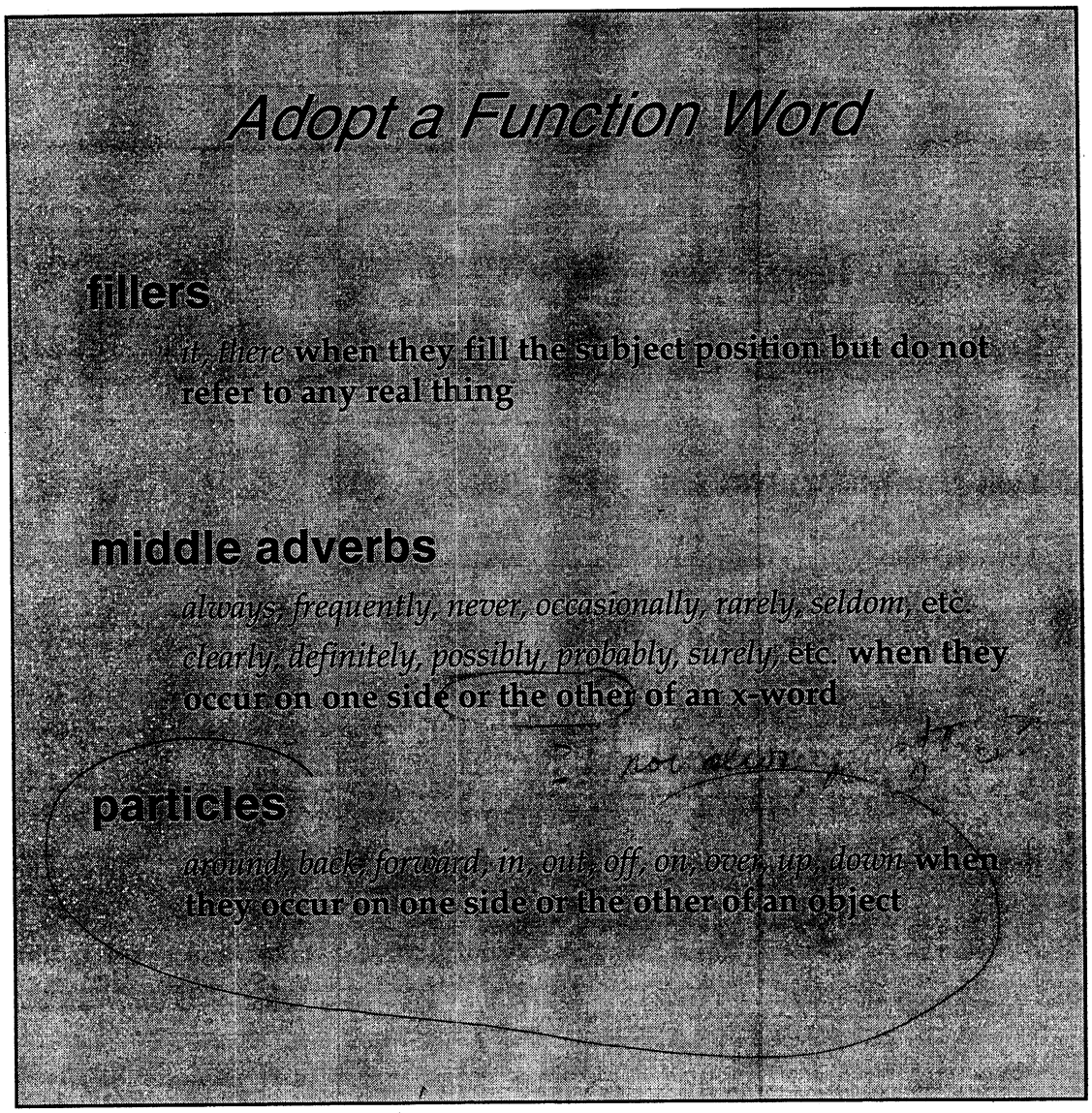
6. It's been fun going to class reunions.

   Yes-No Q.:_____

   Neg. Sta.:_____

Guide Questions for Chapter 4

1. What are the main features of a **trunk**?
2. How can a trunk be both simple and complicated?
3. Why does English need **fillers** like *it* and *there*?
4. What are the three transformations possible for a trunk?
5. What are **sectors**?
6. What are **tag questions?**
7. Why is English called an **SVO** language?
8. What are the main positions in a predicate?



5 The apartment: seven basic sentence patterns

I. The apartment metaphor

Intermediate and advanced ESL students get the idea of positions and construction types (slots and fillers) through picturing an apartment with a certain number of rooms and certain possibilities for furniture or fixtures that can fill those rooms.

When we say "apartment," we mean more than a dorm room or a room with a bathroom down the hall. We generally mean at least a studio with its own bathroom. So we start with the idea of a minimal accommodation, a couple of "must haves." From there, rooms can be added, each with its own degree of flexibility as to what we can put in it.

Sector Analysis posits a single sentence pattern—all the possible positions that can be filled—and describes real written sentences as consisting of one or more filled positions with all remaining positions empty. X-Word Grammar says, "No, we'll start with the sentences themselves and see what positions they fill," pretty much the same way we look at apartments big or small and see what they do have or can have in each room.

II. The trunk

You met the trunk in Chapter 4 and were asked to think of it as like the trunk of a tree, unmoving and essential. Now imagine the trunk as the

heart of a very minimal apartment: you have a roof over your head, and you don't have to share your bathroom. Your two rooms are as basic and necessary as a subject and a predicate are to a written English sentence. Your apartment is like a trunk. The rooms may be big or small, sparsely or richly furnished, but the whole apartment is still just two rooms. Turn to page 113 in the Appendix and look at the shaded position labeled 'trunk." If a real sentence fills only the two positions in a trunk—subject and predicate—we will use the letter T to represent its pattern. Remember that this trunk must turn into a yes-no question with no greater change than moving its x-word (whether hidden or shown) to the left around its subject.

III. Trunks with fanboys

Almost any part of a trunk can be duplicated with the little word *and*:

Ben and Jerry *created tasty ice cream.*

Ben and Jerry ***created and marketed*** *tasty ice cream.*

Ben and Jerry created and marketed ***tasty and original*** *ice cream.*

Ben and Jerry created and marketed ***tasty and original ice cream and a spirit of enterprise that seemed to elude some of capitalism's evils.***

The word *and* belongs to a small family of English function words that join two or more similar and equal structures rather loosely. The family name is **fanboys,** a word composed of the first initial of all the family members: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet* and *so*. Robert Allen called them **joiners** and included with them the semi-colon because it is the only punctuation that can do what fanboys do. There are other kinds of connectors in English, but only the fanboys and the semi-colon can join two whole trunks, which will, of course, make two whole yes-no questions. Try to make two yes-no questions out of each of the following sentences:

He licked my wounds, and all my wounds were mended.

—Elinor Wylie, *One Person*, 1928

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

—Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 1944

Every man desires to live long, but no man would be old.

—Jonathan Swift, *Thoughts on Various Subjects*, 1711

People have hesitated to call Whitman's poems poetry; it is useless to deny that they belong to sacred literature.

—Lewis Mumford, *The Golden Day*, 1926

Religion has made an honest woman of the supernatural, and we won't have it kicking over the traces again.

—Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, 1950

All of these examples are the pattern **Trunk + Trunk (T+T).** What do they all have in common?

(1) They can all make two yes-no questions, so they all consist of two trunks.

(2) They all have either a comma and a fanboy or a semi-colon between the two trunks.

(3) They all have two different but closely related subjects.

The main reason for using a **T+T** pattern is to keep two closely related ideas or events together in the same sentence even though each has its own subject and predicate. Often student writers will try to accomplish this with a comma; they have the right idea, but they don't know a comma by itself can't do the job. They get a paper back with the words "comma splice" or "run-on sentence" written next to the offending items. In a later chapter, we'll look at simple, practical ways to have students locate not only their run-on sentences but also their fragments and correct them.

The next group of examples differs from the **T+T** examples in each of the three ways listed above.

We have been moved already beyond endurance and need rest.

—John Maynard Keynes, *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, 1919

Nations are formed and are kept alive by the fact that they have a program for tomorrow.

—José Ortega y Gasset, *Invertebrate Spain*, 1922

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

—Omar Bradley, *Armistice Day Address*, 1948

No self can truly know itself and be ashamed.

—Eli Siegel, *Self and World*, 1982

Here is how they are different from **T+T**:

(1) They can make only one question because they have only one subject.

(2) They all have the fanboy *and*. None of them has a comma or a semi-colon.

(3) They don't need two subjects because their one subject goes with their two predicates.

This pattern is called a **Trunk with Two Parts (T=).** The main reason for using it is to relate two or more actions or events to a single subject rather than repeating the subject in a T+T pattern. The "two parts" may be two whole predicates with two different x-words (like the Keynes quote), two predicates with the same x-word (like the Ortega y Gasset quote) or two verbals introduced by a single x-word (like the Bradley and Siegel quotes). And the "two parts" can be "three parts": Caesar's *Veni, vidi, vici* could as easily—though perhaps less poetically—have been translated as *I came, saw and conquered.*

The "parts" are not just two nouns, two adjectives or two verbs joined by the fanboy *and*. If a person writes, "I long to hold you in my arms and kiss you," it may be romantic enough, but there's only one main verb *long* bringing out the subject; the two verbs *hold you in my arms* and *kiss you* are embedded a little deeper in the sentence, so they are part of a single trunk **T** instead of **T=**.

English is, on the whole, an economical language, especially in writing. Although it has to fill the subject position at least once in every sentence, it doesn't have to repeat the same subject or refer to it more than once in the same sentence. That's why **T=** is one of the most popular patterns in written English.

IV. Trunks with shifters

Verbal = Y sector?

Look at Chart 3 on page 113 in your Appendix again. You will see the trunk in the highest layer, the predicate in the next layer down and the verbal, or **Y sector**, yet another layer down. As shown in the section above, each of these can be duplicated. Two more sectors that can be filled or duplicated are the shifter sectors **F** and **E** outside of the trunk. **F** stands for **front; E** stands for **end.**

The word **shifter**, too, means just what it says: whatever you put in one of the two shifter positions outside the trunk has to be able to shift to the other end—and still sound right. This is important.

If it doesn't sound right,) *it isn't a shifter.*

It isn't a shifter **(***if it doesn't sound right.*

The single parenthesis sets off a shifter if you want to mark it. The first example above is the sentence pattern **FT** because the long *if*-shifter is at the front of the trunk. Notice that it has a comma. The second example is the pattern **TE** because the *if*-shifter is at the end of the trunk. Notice that it has no comma.

The shifter positions are places for sentence adverbials: constructions that tell things like when, where, why, how, under what conditions. The reason these constructions can be shifted is that they relate to the whole trunk, so the shift from front to end is just a change in emphasis. Student writers generally like shifters because they recognize them easily and feel they have a choice as to where to put them. When they decide where to put a shifter (or, to be more precise, "which shifter position to fill"), they are dealing with *style,* not just the usual correctness.

Look at the five examples below to see how rich the possibilities for using the shifter positions are. Imagine these sentences were written September 12, 2001.

Yesterday *the world changed.*
24 hours ago *the world changed.*
On September 11, 2001, *the world changed.*
While we were starting an ordinary Tuesday, *the world changed.*

The world changed yesterday.
The world changed 24 hours ago.
The world changed on September 11, 2001.
The world changed while we were starting an ordinary Tuesday.

The shifter positions can be filled by a number of different construction types, including a single word, a noun cluster, a phrase and a clause. A clause contains a subject and x-word and usually takes a comma when it is in the **F** position but not in the **E** position. The shorter constructions in F position offer you a choice of comma or no comma though a single word like *yesterday* seems not to need one. None of them needs a comma in **E** position because **TE** is the "natural" arrangement of things to an English speaker's ear: we state something and then give the when, where, why, etc. When we put an adverbial ele-

ment in front shifter position, it adds weight.

As long as there are sovereign nations possessing great power, war is inevitable.

—Albert Einstein on the atomic bomb, *Atlantic Monthly,* 1945

V. Trunks with inserts

Look at Chart 3 on page 113 again. So far we've looked at how major sectors can be duplicated in the sentence patterns **T+T** and **T=** and how we can add information about the whole trunk by filling the shifter positions in the patterns **FT** and **TE**. Now look at all the places *between* sectors where you see a new possibility, an **insert**. Inserts are the darlings of journalists and academic writers because they really condense information and place it exactly where the writer wants it. They add *extra* information between sectors, and they don't shift because they need to stay close to whatever it is they're adding extra information about.

Inserts do us the favor of bringing along their own markers: double commas (i.e. commas on each side of the insert), a comma and a period, a colon and a period, double dashes or a dash and a period, a pair of parentheses or even a capital letter and a comma in the rare instance that the insert starts the sentence. Very often an insert follows and embellishes a subject—

A regime, an established order, is rarely overthrown by a revolutionary movement...

—Walter Lipmann, *For Charles de Gaulle,* 1958

Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered...

—Tom Paine, *The American Crisis, no. 1,* 1776

but a writer is free to insert "extras" almost anywhere:

Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *War Message to Congress,* 1941

I want, by understanding myself, to understand others.

—Katherine Mansfield, *Journal,* 1922

The Roosevelt quote inserts *twice* before the trunk even begins, but the reason should be obvious. The Mansfield quote would be so much more "normal" if it were *I want to understand others by understanding myself.*

But it wouldn't be as good.

Insert sectors are ubiquitous. They can be filled by the greatest variety of construction types. The front page of a newspaper like *The New York Times* is filled with them. Here are ten of the first dozen sentences of a 10/7/02 article on an Israeli raid in Gaza:

> KHAN YUNIS, Gaza Strip, Oct. 7—**FTI:** In what it called a new strategy to place the Islamist group Hamas on the defensive, the Israeli Army sent dozens of tanks backed by helicopter gunships into this densely packed Gaza town early today, killing at least 13 people.
>
> **T:** Most of the dead were victims of a single missile fired into a crowded dirt road. **TI:** The raid drew an unusual rebuke from the Bush administration, which said Israel was endangering civilians.
>
> **T=:** The missile gashed the median strip of Gamal Abdel Nasser Street here and shattered windows three stories above it. **FT:** Hours later, patches of the gold-colored sand were still crimson mud.
>
> **TI:** Salaam Abu Salaam, 12, rushed up to a stranger with a jagged piece of shrapnel. **TI:** Asked why Israel had conducted the raid, he said, "They hate us."
>
> **FTI:** In Washington, Richard A. Boucher, the State Department spokesman, said: "We're deeply troubled by the reports of Israeli action in Gaza over the weekend that resulted in deaths and wounding of many Palestinian civilians..."
>
> **FT:** Unlike other recent Israeli attacks, this one did not have the specific aim of killing wanted men or destroying weapons factories. **FTI:** Calling Yunis Khan a Hamas stronghold, the army said the mission was part of a new strategy of putting pressure on Hamas, which has frequently launched crude rockets from the Gaza Strip.

And that's just the first article on the first page.

VI. The plus position

Look at the last sentence in the section above: *And that's just the first article on the first page.* How do you feel about the fact that it starts with the word *And?* In the old days, English teachers insisted that writers should not begin a sentence with *and.* However, newspapers regularly start sentences with fanboys, as illustrated in the *New York Times* ar-

ticle right next to the one quoted above:

> +**TI**: *But the court, without elaborating, declined to hear the New Jersey case.*

This additional position out at the front of an English sentence is called **the PLUS position**, and it is symbolized with a **+** sign.

The fanboys are just one of the function word categories that can appear in the PLUS position, out ahead of any shifters or inserts. Others are **linkers** like *However* and *In fact*, which relate the meaning of a sentence back to a preceding sentence, usually across sentence boundaries; **sequence signals** like *First* and *Then*, which order the events in sentences; and **sentence modifiers** like *Perhaps* or *Maybe*, which modify the whole sentence but don't shift. The thing they all have in common is that they don't appear in the *first* sentence in a text. Even the word *First* is likely to be preceded by some explanation of the ordering that is about to start.

The purpose of the PLUS position is to relate a sentence to something that has preceded it without actually attaching it to a previous sentence. The seventh and last of the basic sentece patterns is called **Linker and Trunk (LT)**. EFL/ESL writers, especially from Asian countries, tend to overuse this position: *I went to my sister's house in Brooklyn. However, she wasn't at home. As a result, I came home without seeing her.* Good writers actually *don't* use linkers very much; they create sentence-to-sentence meaning links through cohesion, subordinating, embedding, layers of generalization and detail, and many other devices. And they are more comfortable with good old *and, but* and *so*. of In a later chapter you will see how you can discourage student writers from overusing the PLUS position and teach them better alternatives.

*****

Worksheet 6 on page 49 illustrates all the sentence patterns taken up in this chapter.

Worksheet 6: The Redford Sentences

Instructions: The Redford Sentences give you your first chance to look at what X-Word Grammar calls "the seven basic sentence patterns." Here's how to mark them:

(1) Put a **T** over every trunk. You have to have at least one in each sentence, but you can have more than one, as in **T+T**. Make yes-no questions.

(2) If you find a sentence that doesn't quite make two yes-no questions but has two verbs, label it **T=** (which means 'trunk with two verbs').

(3) If, when you make a yes-no question, something drops out or shifts to the end of the sentence, decide if it's just a linker, which is a transitional word or phrase that links the meaning of this sentence to the one before it, and label it **L**; or if it's a whole adverbial in a shifter position, label it **F** (for 'front') and put a closing parenthesis where it ends: **)**.

(4) If you think there's a shifter at the end of a sentence, test it by shifting it to the front. (Remember that an end shifter does not have a comma.) Label it **E** (for 'end') and put an opening parenthesis where it begins: **(**.

(5) Finally, if you think you see an insert, label it **I**, but be sure it has something on *both sides* that sets it off: two punctuation marks, one capital and a punctuation mark, two dashes, two parentheses, etc.

1. It was the middle of the night, and the luxurious Fifth Avenue apartment was quiet.

2. Robert Redford and his wife were sleeping.

3. All of a sudden, Mrs. Redford heard a noise.

4. Two intruders, a couple of local teenagers, had entered the apartment.

5. Mrs. Redford chased them out and called the police.

6. Since the police came quickly, the youths were caught.

7. Mr. Redford missed most of the action because he was asleep.

8. His wife was clearly the star, which no one seemed to mind.

Guide Questions for Chapter 5

1. What's the difference between fanboys and joiners?
2. How are the patterns **T+T** and **T=** the same and different?
3. What kinds of things can fill a SHIFTER position?
4. Can the same structures be used in INSERT positions?
5. How do you distinguish similar-looking inserts and shifters?
6. How do you punctuate inserts?
7. What kinds of things can fill a PLUS position?
8. What is the main purpose of the PLUS position?

Adopt a Function Word

fanboys

for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

sentence modifiers

Perhaps, Maybe, Surely, Hopefully

linkers (40+)*

However, Therefore, Still, Nevertheless, etc.

sequence signals (20+)

After work, After school, etc.; At first, First, Second, etc; Then, Next, Soon, Later, After a while, Meanwhile, At the same time

*See p. 120 for a more complete list of linkers.

6 Building blocks: English construction types

I. A sampling of all construction types

Notwithstanding the danger of using too many analogies, we continue here one that began with the apartment in Chapter 5. The rooms of the apartment, if you recall, are like the positions in an English sentence. Some positions, like a kitchen or bathroom, are limited as to what you can put in them. The only thing you can put in a TRUNK position *is* a trunk; the only thing you can put in a PREDICATE position *is* a predicate. So those two terms—*trunk* and *predicate*—mean both a position and what we can put in that position.

A SUBJECT, OBJECT, SHIFTER or INSERT position, in contrast, is more like that spare room one person is eyeing for a study, another for a nursery or guest room. It can accommodate many different things. The "things" are **construction types**. They are like furniture in that they have their own identity in isolation, yet their purpose or function is not realized until they are placed in their proper location.

Take the word *yesterday*. It is just that: a word. **Word** is the name of the smallest construction type. *Yesterday* can fill different positions:

FRONT SHIFTER:	***Yesterday*** *we set the clocks back one hour.*
END SHIFTER:	*We set the clocks back one hour* ***yesterday.***
SUBJECT:	***Yesterday*** *was the end of Daylight Savings Time.*
OBJECT:	*I liked* ***yesterday*** *for the extra hour's sleep.*

Yesterday is always recognizable as a single word, but when we call it a

shifter, a subject or an object, we are talking about its position at the moment we're looking at it.

Let's look at a whole sentence built up construction type by construction type. We'll go from the end of the sentence to its beginning.

chair

There's our smallest construction type: word. Sector Analysis calls all individual words "word," but X-Word Grammar distinguishes content words and function words. *Chair* is a content word. Here's the next addition:

chair
***very wobbly** chair*

adj. cluster

Very wobbly is an **adjective cluster.** It has an adjective at its core, or nucleus—*wobbly*—and an intensifier *very*. Other examples of adjective clusters are *highly suspect, deeply sorry, widely known.* This is not a major construction type.

Now we're going to add a single word, the article *a*, and immediately get a whole new, very common construction type.

chair
very wobbly chair
a very wobbly chair

noun cluster

A very wobbly chair is a **noun cluster.** It has a noun as its nucleus and other words around it to establish or add to its meaning. Noun clusters can be found almost everywhere: in SUBJECT, OBJECT and COMPLEMENT positions, in SHIFTER and INSERT positions, as book, play, song and film titles—*A Man for All Seasons, My Left Foot, This Bitter Earth*—in fact, just about anywhere that a single noun is insufficient. To continue:

chair
very wobbly chair
a very wobbly chair
on a very wobbly chair

phrase

The addition of the preposition *on* gives us a **phrase** or "prepositional phrase." Almost as common as noun clusters, the phrase always consists of a preposition and its object: *on **what**? until **when**? to **whom**?* The object can be a whole noun cluster, a replacement for a noun cluster like *it* (traditionally called a pronoun)or a verb form used in a nouny way, as in *after eating* (traditionally called a gerund).

The next addition is like *eating;* it makes a construction type that can be very nouny and very verby at the same time:

chair
very wobbly chair
a very wobbly chair
on a very wobbly chair
balancing on a very wobbly chair

Balancing on a very wobbly chair has a Sector Analysis name, **predicatid**, which means a non-finite predicate or "predicate-minus-x-word." For fear of scaring teachers or students off, X-Word Grammar calls this construction type a **verbal** and says simply that it begins with a main verb. The alternatives to *balancing on a very wobbly chair* are *balance on a very wobbly chair, to balance on a very wobbly chair* and *balanced on a very wobbly chair*. These alternatives give us the three basic forms of the verb *balance* as well as the infinitive *to balance,* none of which has a time element (x-word). Look at all the positions these verbals can fill.

***Balancing on a very wobbly chair** is dangerous.*
*I don't like **balancing on a very wobbly chair.***
***Balancing on a very wobbly chair**, Señor Valdez looked quite calm.*
*Señor Valdez, **balancing on a very wobbly chair**, looked quite calm.*
*Go ahead! **Balance on a very wobbly chair**! Don't listen to me!*
***To balance on a very wobbly chair** is dangerous.*
*Señor Valdez plans **to balance on a very wobbly chair.***
***To balance on a very wobbly chair**, one needs a good deal of nerve.*
*We found a seal **balanced on a very wobbly chair.***
*A seal **balanced on a very wobbly chair** is quite a sight!*

The final option for a verbal is to add an x-word and turn it into a full-fledged **predicate**.

chair
very wobbly chair
a very wobbly chair
on a very wobbly chair
balancing on a very wobbly chair
is balancing on a very wobbly chair

What can you do with a predicate besides putting it in a PREDICATE position? Nothing. This is the nature of predicates. They are crucial but

static, utterly necessary to make a written English statement, yet limited in their function: they follow and bring out subjects. They can be very long. A sentence from Michael Lewis's *Liar's Poker* begins with the simple subject *you* and finishes with this deeply layered predicate:

> *You felt a chill in your bones that I imagine belongs to the same class of intelligence as the nervous twitch of a small furry animal at the silent approach of a grizzly bear.*

The only movement out of the stodgy predicate position that a predicate can make is the migration of its x-word to the left (around the subject) to make a question:

> *Did you feel a chill in your bones that I imagine belongs to the same class of intelligence as the nervous twitch of a small furry animal at the silent approach of a grizzly bear?*

And since the x-word *did* was hidden in the main verb *felt*, the predicate is now separated into *did* + *feel*, etc.

One of the three remaining construction types should be very familiar. It is the **trunk**, which you already know as a position. Like the predicate, which is found only in a PREDICATE position, the trunk is found only in a TRUNK position. It is always a combination of a subject and predicate. It will always turn into a yes-no question. Here is our "wobbly chair" sentence as a trunk:

chair
very wobbly chair
a very wobbly chair
on a very wobbly chair
balancing on a very wobbly chair
is balancing on a very wobbly chair
a seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair

We finally have enough to make a sentence. The addition of a capital letter and a period will make this trunk a written English statement.

A seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair.

The remaining two construction types are very closely related to the trunk. One is bigger, one smaller, but neither one will turn into a yes-no question the way a trunk does.

The larger and more common one simply adds an includer and becomes a **clause**. Here is the wobbly chair in various clauses:

when a seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair
if a seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair
why a seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair
that a seal is balancing on a very wobbly chair
where a seal is balancing
who is balancing on a very wobbly chair

Clauses are very versatile. The first two above are typically found in shifter positions (F and T), the next two in SUBJECT, OBJECT or COMPLEMENT positions (S, O and C), the last two in adjectival positions (←)following *a chair* or *a seal.* But they always consist of an **includer** (like *when, if, why, that, where, who*) and a trunk.

Finally, the smaller and rarer relative of the trunk and clause is a **clausid**, which is always a combination of a subject and *verbal* instead of subject and predicate. It is a trunk minus its x-word. Like the clause, it is versatile. Here it is in complete sentences:

*A **seal balancing on a very wobbly chair** is a funny sight to see.*
*I'd like to see **a seal balancing on a very wobbly chair.***

Clausids often look like big fat noun clusters, their subjects representing the nucleus of the cluster and their verbal representing an adjectival modifier of that nucleus. But unlike noun clusters, the thing you're talking about in a clausid can be a function word like *it, him* or *me.*

*My seal is delicate. I don't want **him balancing on a very wobbly chair.***
*You'll never catch **me balancing on a very wobbly chair.***

These two sentences are not saying "I don't want him" or "You won't catch me"; they're saying *the whole event* is what I don't want or what you won't find. Notice that clausids settle debate over *me* or *my.*

*My neighbors don't like **me playing the piano after 10:00 p.m.***

Maybe they like my playing well enough, but it's *the whole event* that bothers them. Note that without an x-word, the subject of the clausid is *me* rather than *I.* This is always true.

Watch for clausids. They are not as common or versatile as "the big four"—noun clusters, phrases, verbals and clauses—but they fill a particular need in English, and they are consistent.

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Worksheet 7 on pages 56-7 gives you a chance to identify all the construction types.

Worksheet 7: Peeling a Sentence Down

Instructions: The sentences below are "peeled down" layer by layer; each boldface letter represents a filled position (see Chart 4 on page 114 to review positions). Write the name of the construction type that fills each position. Use only the ten names you see in Chart 6, "English Construction Types" on page 116.

Percy tossed his hat on the table near the door. = a written sentence

Percy tossed his hat on the table near the door = **T:** Trunk

Percy = **S:** Word

tossed his hat on the table near the door = **P:** predicate

did = **X:** function word

toss his hat on the table near the door = **Y:** verbal

his hat = **O:** object

on the table near the door = **A:** phrase

the table near the door = **pO:** noun cluster + phrase

near the door = **:** Phrase

←

the door = **pO:** noun cluster

door = **:** word

*

Then he heard his wife talking on the phone. = a written sentence

Then = **+:** function word

he heard his wife talking on the phone = **T:** trunk

he = **S:** function word

heard his wife talking on the phone = **P:** predicate

did = **X:** function wd

hear his wife talking on the phone = **Y:** verbal

his wife talking on the phone = **O:** clausid

his wife = **S:** noun cl.

talking on the phone = **Y:** verbal

talking = **V:** content word

on the phone = **A:** phrase

the phone = **pO:** noun cluster

phone = *: content word.

Instructions: Now try to write both the position and the construction type.

What she was saying amazed him. = a written sentence

what she was saying = S: clause

what = ___: function word

she was saying Δ* = ___: clausid

she = ___: functionwd.

was saying Δ = ___: verbal?

was = X: function Wd

saying Δ ← TRACE = ___: verbal

amazed him = ___: predicate

did = X: funct Wd

amaze him = Y: verbal

amaze = Y: func wd

him = O: funct wd

*The triangle is called **trace**. It indicates a position left empty by the transformation of a statement into a *wh-* construction, i.e. a clause or a *wh-* question.

Guide Questions for Chapter 6

1. How is a **construction type** different from a position?
2. Are there any construction types that have the same name as positions? What are they? Trunk
3. What is the two-part division of the construction type **word** according to X-Word Grammar? function word / content word.
4. What do an **adjective cluster** and a **noun cluster** have in common?
5. What is a **phrase** always composed of?
6. How is a **verbal**, or predicatid, different from a predicate? minus the XWord
7. What is a **clause** always composed of? Clause word(S) Verb
8. What positions can a clause fill?
9. How is a **clausid** different from both a clause and a trunk?
10. Which construction types are the most versatile? Which are the most limited in where they can appear and what they can do?

Adopt a Function Word

articles

a, an, the

prepositions (approx. 150)*

after, against, along, around, as, at, before, behind, below, beside, between, beyond, but, by, concerning, despite, due to, during, except, for, from, in, in back of, inside, into, like, near, next to, of, off, on, opposite, out, over, per, since, than, through, till, to, toward, under, until, up, via, with, within, without, etc.

when they are followed by an object

includers (60+)*

after, although, before, because, even though, if, when, etc.

when they are followed by trunk in a clause

*See pp. 121-2 for more complete lists of prepositions and includers.

7 Little but mighty: the English function words

I. Content words and function words

Every language needs the content words introduced in Chapter 1 of this book—nouns, verbs, adjectives and *-ly* adverbs—because every language names things, sets them in motion or places them in time and describes their attributes. But if we spoke or wrote exclusively with content words, we would have a kind of "Tarzan language." For example—

Tarzan like Jane. Jane beautiful. Tarzan Jane make tree house.

A Chinese speaker doesn't need much more than this to make her meaning clear; her listeners will fill in the grammatical mortar between the bricks of dictionary meaning. Perhaps reading or listening to Chinese is like looking at a Picasso drawing, where a single line suggests a complex form, and the viewer fills in details mentally.

English is not as subtle. If it means two people, it will say so: *Tarzan **and** Jane.* If it means one tree house, it will say so: ***a** tree house.* If it means that Jane is alive, it will say so: *Jane **is** beautiful.* And if it's Tarzan complementing Jane and not some other tree guy talking *about* Tarzan, English will so stipulate: ***I** like Jane.* In fact, if Tarzan is speaking directly to Jane, standard English would have him say—

I like you. You are beautiful. You and I will make a tree house.

The original jungle proposal changes from ten unadorned content words to five while it adds *nine* little but mighty function words.

After word order, function words are the next most important grammatical device of English (i.e. carrier of grammatical information). And since English typically reuses the same word with very different meanings—e.g. *rose, rose, rose* or *hit, hit, hit*—function words are also a *lexical* device. Content words would be lost without them, their rich dictionary meaning compromised or ambiguous. In Chapter 2, you saw how the meaning of the word *bear* depends on its position in a sentence and the function words accompanying it—

A bear market is hard to bear.

Preceded by the determiner *a*, the content word *bear* has no chance of being a verb; preceded by the infinitive signal *to*, it has no chance of being anything *but* a verb. If you are still not sure why function words are called "little but mighty," do **Worksheet 8** on page 71.

II. Function word categories

Chart 8 on page 119 lists all (or most) of the English function word categories. Some have already been introduced in this book: fanboys *for, and, but, or, yet, so*; the infinitive signal *to*, linkers like *However, Therefore, In fact*; negatives *no, not, none,* etc.; numerals *one, two three* and *first, second third*; and, of course, x-words.

The total number of categories is between 30 and 40. Each closed list (i.e. limited number) has its own local function, often identified by its family name: **construction modifiers** modify whole constructions; **comparatives** compare things; **intensifiers** intensify the meaning of another word; **quantifiers** quantify things; ***wh-* words** begin *wh-* questions and exlamations and serve as includers in clauses as well.

Many function words appear on only one list. For example, you would have to work hard to make the word *and* anything but a fanboy. In the sentence you have just read, it's a noun because we were thinking about it as a word and called it "the word *and*." But that's stretching it, right? *But*, on the other hand, is easily two different things in the previous two sentences. It is a preposition where it says *anything but a fanboy* and means 'anything except a fanboy'. It is a fanboy in the + position of the sentence *But that's stretching it, right?* The point is that, like any content word, a function word is only a member of a certain category when it's doing the work of that category. So don't be surprised if you see *before* and *after, first* and *second, who* and *which, his* and *her* on two different closed lists.

III. Larger function word jobs

Function words have their consistent, local functions, but they also have larger syntactic and lexical jobs: introducing, connecting, modifying, expanding and referring or substituting. To understand why these are called "larger jobs," consider the words *a little.* No matter how they are used, they will retain some dictionary meaning of smallness. Here is a sentence with a little shock value to underscore its ambiguity.

When we visited friends in China, we ate ***a little*** *dog.*

If you are an American, you might feel a fleeting horror, then realize that *a little dog* is not that cute Chihuahua. You are unconsciously "tuned in" to the difference between an ordinary adjective, used to describe the Chihuahua's size, and a quantity of a dish not usually palatable to Westerners. Let's change to fish anyway.

A guppy is ***a little*** *fish.*

It's good to have ***a little*** *fish in the diet.*

I'll eat fish once in a while. ***A little*** *goes a long way with me.*

Keeping their related core meaning in mind, we are, nevertheless, first using an adjective *little* with a particular living being, and if we were to mark the fish part, it would look like this:

a little *fish*
→ → *

Then we have a quantifier with a food Westerners *do* eat, and it would be marked like this:

a little *fish*
⟶ *

And finally we have a two-word subject *A little* that relies on our just having mentioned fish. It would look like this:

A little *goes a long way with me.*

This example is a shortened version of *A little fish* and is part of the **cohesion**—the interdependent referencing—of grammatical elements within sentences and even across sentence boundaries. As we continue, you'll see that several function word categories can shorten like *a little* in the interests of economy.

Both introducing a construction and referring back to a previous one are representative of "larger syntactic jobs" because they have to do with function words' relationship to major sentence elements and often to more than one sentence at a time. Let's look at these jobs.

III.a. Introducers

Introducers are always the first item in a larger construction. They are part of that construction and usually define the construction type by their presence. Here are some examples:

a rose	The article *a* introduces a noun cluster.
of a rose	The preposition *of* introduces a phrase.
because I love roses	The includer *because* introduces a clause.

A is one of three words—*a, an, the*—traditionally called **articles**. Their presence or absence differentiates **countable** and **uncountable nouns**: *a pepper/pepper, a game/game, a man/man, a pot/pot, a lamb/lamb,* etc. The modern name for all the introducers that introduce noun clusters is **determiners**. There is a fairly complete list of them on page 121. Here are some of the other common ones:

my rose	and other **possessives**: *your rose, his rose, her rose,* etc.
this rose	and other **demonstratives**: *that rose, these roses,* etc.
a few roses	and other **quantifiers**: *several roses, a lot of roses,* etc.
seven roses	and other **numerals**: *one rose, two roses,* etc.
the best roses	and other **superlatives**: *the freshest roses,* etc.

All the determiners want first position in a noun cluster. Italian can say something like *il mio amore,* which means 'the my love', but in English the words *the* and *my* are both determiners, so they can't both be first. We'll examine noun clusters in more detail in Chapter 8, but in the meantime look at the list on page 120 and see if you can distinguish the various local functions of the members of this very important category.

The next group of introducers, **prepositions**, has kept its name for centuries. Even ESL beginners can continue the list if you start them with examples like *in, on, at, between...* A list of them can be found right next to the determiners on page 121.

Prepositions are lovely relational words. Consider the difference it makes to think about the things you find *in* a rock, *on* a rock and *under* a rock; all that happened to you *before* your birth, *during* your birth and *after* your birth; the treatment you receive *because of* your gender or *in spite of* it. Prepositions are important. They always have an object: for example, *according to* what? *according to* the Koran; *except for* what? *except for* my downstairs neighbor; *on behalf of* whom? *on behalf of* all defenseless animals. This combination of preposition and object makes a **prepositional phrase**, or just phrase.

If what looks like a preposition does not have an object, it is not a preposition. If I call out, "Come in!" or "Get up!" or "Butt out!", I'm using crucial preposition-like words to make my meaning clear, but my purpose is just that: to expand a verb meaning through the addition of a particle. It is not to establish a relation between the two things around a preposition, like *a picture of Sammy* as opposed to *a picture for Sammy.*

A few preposition-like words —*after, as, before, like, since, till* and *until*—can introduce whole clauses, so they appear on the list of includers, but we can't leave prepositions without the Winston Churchill story. It seems that the great orator ended a sentence with a preposition in one of his wartime speeches. An old lady (don't we always blame old ladies?) wrote a letter complaining about this usage, and Churchill replied, "Madam—This is the type of thing up with which I shall not put!"

Includers introduce clauses. The three types listed on page 113 are adverbial includers like *after, although, because, if, since, unless* and *until*; adjectival includers like *that, when, where, which, who, whose and why*; and nominal includers like *what, when, where, whether, who, why* and all the *-ever* words.

Adverbial includers are the simplest group. They have just one purpose: to add some important how-when-where-why-type information to a trunk, as in the examples below.

I'll take the job ***although*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

I'll take the job ***because*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

I'll take the job ***when*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

I'll take the job ***until*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

I'll take the job ***if*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

If you see a similarity between adverbial includers and fanboys, that's very reasonable: both can connect large units of meaning. The difference is that includers are *part of* one of the two things they connect. They are part of the dependent or subordinate part, the clause. The sentence pattern of all the examples above is **TE** with a clause filling the end shifter position. A clause is *composed of* an includer and a trunk, so the similarity of two sentences like the ones below is natural. Both of them describe cause and effect.

T+T *The job really pushes me to my limit,* ***so*** *I'll take it.*

TE *I'll take the job* ***because*** *it really pushes me to my limit.*

As you'll see in the next section, "Connectors," fanboys never become part of the constructions they connect. Students who like the apartment analogy for basic sentence patterns also like the husband and wife analogy for fanboys vs. the parent and child for includers. Includers *create* clauses, and clauses are always dependent on a trunk.

Adjectival and nominal includers also introduce clauses, but they have two purposes rather than one. Look at the two sentences below:

I don't know ***whose jacket this is.***

The man ***whose jacket this is*** *just ran out the door.*

They don't just attach a clause to a trunk in a nice **FT** or **TE** pattern. They *embed* a clause right into a trunk where nominal or adjectival information is needed:

NOMINAL: *You don't know* ***what?*** *His name.* ***Whose jacket this is.***

ADJECTIVAL: ***Which*** *man? The fat one. The one* ***whose jacket this is.***

They also stand for a part of the clause that has been deleted. The word *whose* in the clauses above stands for *his.* If we were to take apart the two trunks that gave us the second example, they would look like this:

A man just ran out the door. This is his jacket.

Chapter 9 will show more about how embedding works. It is an important feature of good written English, and students need to learn it systematically; it doesn't "come naturally."

III.b. Connectors

Connectors do come naturally to student writers. *And, but* and *so* are the most popular connectors, which you have already met as fanboys: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.* Fanboys and linkers, also introduced previously, like *Furthermore, However* and *Therefore,* are called connectors because they are independent of the structures they connect. They can both be replaced by a simple semicolon though generally they have enough dictionary meaning of their own to be useful.

When students are told they are overusing fanboys, they often switch to linkers—from the frying pan into the fire, you might say. Neither category should be overused. If fanboys are overused, a text runs along like speech with too many loose connections and not enough sentence depth. But linkers are not the answer. They are used very sparingly in good writing. What's needed is a good relation of *different* connecting words.

III.c. Modifiers

Adjectives and **adverbs** have always been credited with modifying. Traditionally, you put an adjective before a noun and call it a **pre-modifer.** It adds to the meaning of the noun:

a Jaguar

*a **sleek red** Jaguar*

It's lovely how the adjectives *sleek* and *red* simultaneously limit the Jaguar by excluding any that aren't sleek and red and enrich it by creating a picture of its color and form. An adverb can do the same for a verb or an adjective:

*A Jaguar performs **wonderfully**.*

*It has a **wonderfully** efficient engine.*

English, in fact, can pile up just about any content word in front of a noun and, just by virtue of position, modify it:

*The **ill-fated** XK-SS was a very **hairy-chested, almost-full-race** machine, but the **exciting 150-mph 1961 flat-dashboard** XKE is a **tractable, comfortable, high-speed sports-touring** car.*

But function words also modify. On page 120, every function word category marked by an arrow (→) modifies. All determiners, described earlier in this chapter as introducers, also modify:

a rose	and other articles: ***an** iris, **the** rose*
***my** rose*	and other possessives: ***your** rose, **his** rose, **her** rose,* etc.
***this** rose*	and other demonstratives: ***that** rose, **these** roses,* etc.
***a few** roses*	and other quantifiers: ***several** roses, **a lot of** roses,* etc.
***seven** roses*	and other numerals: ***one** rose, **two** roses,* etc.
***the best** roses*	and other superlatives: ***the freshest** roses,* etc.

By definition, determiners introduce noun clusters, so they are an important part of delimiting and embellishing the noun in the cluster.

Titles are also both determiners and modifiers. Much as they can raise or lower an individual's standing in society, they have no more linguistic power than the determiner/modifiers above.

***Mr.** Higginbotham, **Dr.** Higginbotham, **President** Higginbotham,* etc.

***Sister** Angela, **Mother** Angela, **Lady** Angela, **Queen** Angela,* etc.

Intensifiers modify. You see the most common one—***very***—in the Jaguar description above. Intensifiers modify modifiers—adjectives, adverbs and verbals—increasing or decreasing their power in differ-

ent registers. Do you hear different degrees of formality in the examples below?

My blind date was ***a little*** *egotistical.*
My blind date was ***somewhat*** *egotistical.*
My blind date was ***rather*** *egotistical.*
My blind date was ***kind of*** *egotistical.*
My blind date was ***pretty*** *egotistical.*

Almost anything can be modified. Whole sentences can be modified. Sentence modifiers were mentioned in Chapter 5 because they turn up in the plus position way out in the front of a sentence. Look how much the sentences below are changed by the addition of sentence modifiers.

We'll help you move after we get ourselves settled.
Maybe *we'll help you move after we get ourselves settled.*
You're not leaving.
Surely *you're not leaving.*

The examples sound like spoken language, don't they? Perhaps sentences modifiers are more common in speech, but you also see one—*perhaps*—at the front of the sentence you're reading right now.

Finally we have a modifier category that is still a pre-modifier but precedes a whole construction: **construction modifiers.** It could be argued that sentence modifiers are just one type of construction modifier since the term implies that virtually anything can be modified. Construction modifiers are marked with a curved arrow instead of a straight one, as in the first example below. The examples show the versatility of just three common construction modifiers:

not *now*
even *now* • construction modifiers with words
especially *now*

not *my family*
even *my family* • construction modifiers with noun clusters
especially *my family*

not *in my backyard*
even *in my backyard* • construction modifiers with phrases
especially *in my backyard*

not *standing on tiptoes* •construction modifiers
even *standing on tiptoes* with verbals
especially *standing on tiptoes*

not *when I stand on tiptoes* •construction modifiers
even *when I stand on tiptoes* with clauses
especially *when I stand on tiptoes*

Other words that can be construction modifiers are *only, just, all, both, half, about and merely*. But remember that you don't know what a word is up to until you see in *in its position.* Look at the two hats some of these common, useful words can wear:

Only *the lonely know how I feel.* (*Only* is a construction modifier.)
Don't be mad. I was ***only*** *asking.* (*Only* is a middle adverb.)
It costs ***about*** *a grand.* (*About* is a construction modifier.)
Don't tell anyone ***about*** *this.* (*About* is a preposition.)
All *the king's horses...* (*All* is a construction modifier.)
I gave you my ***all.*** (*All* is a noun.)
I found you ***just*** *in time.* (*Just* is a construction modifier.)
I ***just*** *need to borrow a dollar.* (*Just* is a middle adverb.)

The thing to notice about construction modifiers is how often they precede introducers—things that come first in a construction: *only the...only when...only in...*etc. Position is all. Or almost all.

Middle adverbs were used above to compare with construction modifiers, and indeed they share common features. Middle adverbs modify predicates, and predicates *are* specific construction types, so why not just include them with other construction modifiers? The reason is that they have a very particular position near the beginning of a predicate. They can occur on either side of an x-word (more commonly after it) or just before a main verb that has a hidden x-word in it.

I ***never*** *can meet deadlines. I* ***definitely*** *could use a push.*
I can ***never*** *meet deadlines. I could* ***definitely*** *use a push.*
I ***never*** *meet deadlines. I* ***definitely*** *need a push.*

Since they **so often** follow an x-word, they can **even** break up a verb phrase and **regularly** do so, as they are **certainly** doing in this very sentence.

The majority of middle adverbs tell the frequency of an event—*always, sometimes, usually, never,* etc.—or its probability—*possibly, prob-*

ably, certainly, surely, etc.—but the main thing to remember about them is their position. Once they move outside the predicate, they are something else:

*I **sometimes** feel like a motherless child.*	*(middle adverb)*
***Sometimes** I feel like a motherless child.*	*(front shifter)*
*You will **probably** like what I have to say.*	*(middle adverb)*
***Probably** you will like what I have to say.*	*(sentence modifier)*

III.d. Expanders

Expanders, like modifiers, augment the meaning of an item while at the same time narrowing it down, making it more specific. They are in their own category mainly because they work on individual verbs; in fact, they *merge* with verbs to create something new.

The most straightforward expanders are **particles**. Particles were mentioned earlier in this chapter in relation to prepositions because they look just like prepositions. But they don't have objects; their connection is to the verb that precedes them in a two-word combination. Take a verb like *get*, which is one of the top three verbs of English, along with *go* and *say*. *Get*, by itself, needs an object; we aren't likely to just call out, "Get!" But look at all the meanings that come from adding a particle: "Get **in**!" "Get **out**!" Get **up**!" "Get **down**!" "Get **on**!" Get **off**!" "Get **back**!" Add "Don't get **around** much anymore," and you have most of the particles that make the large number of English two-word verbs. Some languages, like Japanese, do not have two-word verbs at all and offer a new verb for all the meanings English expresses through recombining.

X-words and middle auxiliaries are also verb expanders. As you have seen, a language like Spanish can expand its verb meanings through the addition of thirty or more inflections; English, in contrast, has only four verb inflections, illustrated by *gets, getting, got* and *gotten*. Through the twenty x-words and four middle auxiliaries, however, two-, three- and four-word verb phrases can be created. Stretching a little, even a five-word verb phrase is possible: imagine a pre-women's lib boss saying, "I **should have been being** gotten my coffee by now!"

All by itself, the **infinitive signal *to*** greatly exands verb possibilities by allowing us to chain verbs together, as in "You're going **to have to want to get** to the top of the ladder." (Notice the final *to* is a preposition because it's followed by an object, not a verb.)

The last of the verb expanders is the negative *not*. We have already looked at *not* as a construction modifier, but when it attaches to an x-word, it negates a whole predicate:

*I like to get up at dawn. I **don't** like to get up at dawn.*
*We can get you a ticket. We **can't** get you a ticket.*

III.e. Pro-words and referents

Pro-words are substitutes for a whole idea. One woman says, "Sammy is working at Merrill Lynch now," and the other replies, "I didn't know that." The word *that* substitutes for the whole fact about Sammy. In writing, the word *this* turns up just as frequently.

We can use pro-words for other construction types and even individual content words. Here are some other examples.

*$1000! I didn't realize it cost **so much.***

*A dozen chairs? I didn't realize we needed **so many.***

*Seven feet tall! I had forgotten he was **that big.***

Like pro-words, **referents**, traditionally called pronouns, usually point backwards to a previously mentioned person, place or thing. "Well, yes, a noun, you say." Not really. Look at the example below with its error.

You promised me a brand new Jaguar. I want a brand new **it <u>now</u>.*

If the word *it* is a pronoun, it should refer back to the noun *Jaguar.* But it doesn't. It refers to the whole noun cluster *a brand new Jaguar.* Robert Allen called referents that refer to a whole noun phrase **pronominals,** but X-Word Grammar takes the easy way out and calls all referring words referents, even when, like the first two examples below, they refer directly to the speaker and listener rather than to a previously mentioned person, place or thing.

*I said I wanted a new car. **You** promised **me** **it**, and then you reneged.*
*We need to get our signals straight because we've been crossing **them** a lot lately. Your brother is a car dealer; **he** can get **us** a great buy for us, and **our** troubles are over! We can just enjoy **ourselves** again.*

You know all the rest of them, right? If you're anywhere near my age, you learned personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns (as distinct from demonstrative adjectives), possessive pronouns (first and second forms) and reflexive pronouns. Have I named them all? They all refer. Why not call them referents and be done with it?

Oh, and yes, there is one authentic **pronoun**. Here it is—

You promised me a Jaguar. I want a brand new ***one*** *<u>now</u>.*

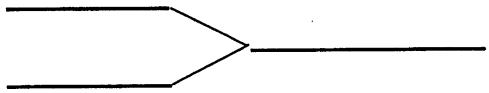
The words *one* and *ones* are authentic pronouns because we really can substitute them for a single noun.

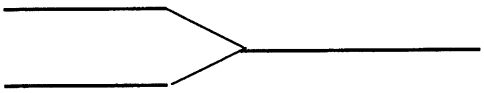
I don't want an old Jaguar. I want a new ***one****.*

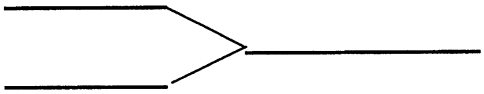
And don't even think about clunky, gas-guzzling SUVs. The ***ones*** *I've driven are bathtubs.*

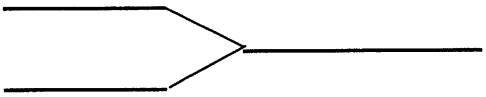
Worksheet 8: The Power of Function Words

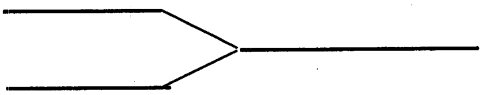
Instructions: In each longer space below, write the name of a part of the body that can be both a noun and a verb like the example *head*. Then write *different* pairs of smaller words—**function words**—for each of the other nine parts of the body. Don't reuse *a* or *to*. Make sure the upper word signals a noun (like *a head*) and the lower word signals a verb (like *to head*).

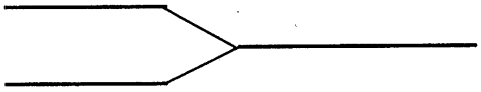
1. 

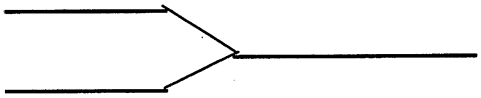
2. 

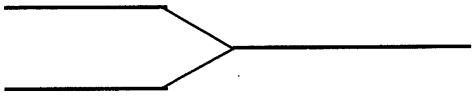
3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

Instructions: Now write a different function word in each blank space below making the overall story either very positive or very negative.

I _____ get what I want. Yesterday I went to see my boss _____ I had _____ reason to hope for a raise. She said, "I _____ give you what you want. Business has _____ been good lately, and your salary is _____ the average for our firm."

I went home feeling that _____ could dampen my spirits, _____ I felt turned _____ by my husband's response to the conversation with my boss. He congratulated _____ on being brave enough to tell _____ what _____ needed to hear: that I deserve _____ money than I'm making since my contribution to the firm is _____ great. After that I had _____ drink.

Guide Questions for Chapter 7

1. What are the main jobs of English function words?
2. What is **cohesion**?
3. What do articles, prepositions and includers have in common?
4. How can you tell if the words *before* and *after* are prepositions or includers in a given sentence?
5. What's the main difference between fanboys and includers when they join structures in a sentence?
6. What do all modifiers have in common?
7. How are pro-words and referents the same and different?

Adopt a Function Word

intensifiers

deeply, extremely, highly, marginally, slightly, truly, very, etc. **when they are followed by an adjective**

comparatives and superlatives

better /worse , more/less, etc., *the best, the worst, the most, the least,* etc. **when they are followed by a noun**

construction modifiers

especially, only, just, all, both, half, about, even, merely, no, etc. **when they are followed by a whole construction**

wh- words*

what, where, when, who, whom, whose, which, how, why, etc.

*See pp. 124-5 for a more complete list of *wh-* words.

8 Boxes: English nominals

I. What are boxes?

Boxes are the nouny structures of English, the ones that tell what or who. They can be as short and crisp as a proper noun—*Cher*—or long and deeply layered—*what the world needs most when ethnic or religious rivalries ignite*—or even nounless—*huffing and puffing*—but we recognize them because they appear only in 'what' or 'who' positions: SUBJECT, OBJECT and COMPLEMENT.

Perhaps you're asking, "But are they positions or construction types?" They're a relation of the two. Think of our apartment/furniture analogy one more time. A table is a table is a table because it has several legs and a top, but it's not a kitchen table until you put it in a kitchen and prepare or serve food on it. It's still a table when you put it in a workroom and make model airplanes on it, but it's no longer a kitchen table except in your memory. Boxes are like that. Take a noun cluster like *Last Sunday.* No matter where you put it, it remains a noun cluster because it's composed of a noun and its modifier. But look how it changes in different positions:

FRONT SHIFTER: ***Last Sunday*** *we set the clocks ahead one hour.*

END SHIFTER: *We set the clocks ahead one hour* ***last Sunday.***

In a shifter position, *Last Sunday* tells when, not what or who. In all the positions below, in contrast, *Last Sunday* identifies a particular day.

SUBJECT: ***Last Sunday*** *started Daylight Savings Time.*

OBJECT: *I liked* ***last Sunday*** *for the extra hour's daylight.*

OBJECT OF PREP: *Let me tell you about* ***last Sunday***

COMPLEMENT: *The strangest day of my life was* ***last Sunday***

The linguistic name for a box is a **nominal**. *Nominal* means nouny; we use nominals for naming. If you forget, think of a word like *nominate* to help you remember.

The word *boxes* comes from the classroom. Even beginning writers recognize boxed structures as whole units with their own order, agreement and modifiers. Here, for example, is an actual list of "box" errors from a Level One composition called "A Pepper and I."

head	*seed*
bottom	*many seed*
stem	*two part*
pepper	*different color*
human	*another dishes*
arm	*a skin smooth*
leg	*a person very sweet*
a different tops	*smooth a skin*
vegetable	*very nice a stem*
the salad	*different top bottom*
big body	*this seeds*

Since you know how important position is, you probably see words and phrases in the list above that would be correct in the right position—like *pepper* or *the salad—but not in this composition.* These students were not writing about ground pepper or a particular salad, and they certainly weren't using *head, bottom, stem, pepper, arm* or *seed* as verbs (though you and I could). They were trying to make correct boxes, mostly about concrete, countable nouns, and we would help them by treating their attempts as whole structures rather than the traditional grammar hodgepodge: countable and uncountable nouns, articles and plurals, quantifiers and demonstratives, premodifiers and post-modifiers, adjective order and more. Boxes unify and simplify both the teacher's marking task and the student's correcting task.

II. Most common boxes

Individual words and noun clusters are the construction types found most in boxes, but others can take on the needed nouny quality. Here is a group of subject boxes with similar meanings but different forms.

Word:	[*Chess*] *excites me.*
Noun cluster:	[*A good game of chess*] *excites me.*
Verbal:	[*Playing chess*] *excites me.*
Clausid:	[*Deep Blue playing chess*] *excites me.*
Clause:	[*What I know of computers playing chess*] *excites me.*

All six subjects answer the question, "What excites you?" and would, in fact, stand on their own in a real conversation. Boxes, by themselves, answer most 'what', 'who' and 'which' questions and even some that are looking for adverbials rather than SUBJECT, OBJECT or COMPLEMENT.

A: What are you making? (She's asking for an object.)
B: A chocolate cake.
A: Who for? (She's asking for an object of preposition.)
B: My students.
A: Which ones? (She's asking for an expanded box in oP position.)
B: The ones who are coming here tomorrow night.
A: Here? What are you going to sit on? (She's asking for another object.)
B: Whatever I can find.
A: What's the event? (She's looking for a complement.)
B: Nothing special. The end of the school year.
A: OK. Any entertainment? (She's asking for another complement.)
B: You doing your special imitation of Donald Rumsfeld?
A: Yeah, right! Who's going to make me? (She's asking for a subject.)
A: Me!

"B" answers entirely in boxes: three noun clusters, then a clause, then two more noun clusters, then a clausid and finally a single word.

The single word *me* is a box we looked at in Chapters 4 and 7, a **referent**. It refers to the speaker, who says *me* instead of *I* because there's no x-word following. If you remember what has been said thus far

abou referents, you know that they include all the words traditionally known as pronouns as well as several other deictics (pointers) like *this, that, here, there* and *when*. They are not nouns, but they refer to people and things when they are in SUBJECT, OBJECT and COMPLEMENT positions. This is a fundamental part of English cohesion, the grammatical and lexical connections between different items in a text. Look at the short passage below. It has a dozen boxes though the story includes only two people, a road, a bird, a look and a sum of money. What are the referents that point backwards to one of these items? What other cohesive devices are there in the passage?

> *A man was walking down a country road with a parrot on his shoulder when another man came along, then stopped and gave him an admiring glance. He asked, "How much is that fine animal?" The first man was about to speak when the parrot said, "$500!"*

III. Questions concerning boxes

Here are some of the questions teachers need to think about when dealing with boxes:

- What's the difference between *a* and *the*?
- Do all uses of *the* have something in common?
- What's the difference between singular and uncountable nouns?
- Do plural and uncountable nouns have anything in common?
- How do we know when to use *much* and when to use *many*?
- Which modifiers go before a noun and which go after? (See page 124 for samples of both pre-modifiers and post-modifiers.)
- How do modifiers go with nouns in my students' languages?
- Which of my students' languages have no articles?
- Which of my students' languages have possessives that agree with the thing possessed (e.g. Spanish: *sus ojos*) instead of the possessor (e.g. English: *his eyes* and *her eyes*)?
- How can I teach all the different kinds of referents? Is there a good order for *I, me, my, mine, myself?*
- How are subject boxes and object boxes different?
- How could the concept of boxes help students make their subjects and verbs agree?

*****

Do **Worksheet 9** on page 77. Also, to see how students work on boxes, do Chapter Five in *X-Word Grammar Intermediate.*

Worksheet 9: Boxes

Instructions: Study the list below and answer the questions following.

1. *rose*
2. *Rose*
3. *roses*
4. *a rose*
5. *my rose*
6. *the rose*
7. *The Rose*
8. *dying roses*
9. *a rose dying*
10. *a dying rose*
11. *a rose garden*
12. *a dozen roses*
13. *Rose's garden*
14. *me dying roses*
15. *my dying roses*
16. *what the rose is*
17. *a couple of roses*
18. *Guns and Roses*
19. *a bouquet of roses*
20. *the rose I gave you*
21. *the name of the rose*
22. *an American Beauty rose*
23. *a rose by any other name*
24. *Harold's best three pale pink, disease resistant, prize-winning Australian Cinderella roses*

Is there any number above that might be something *other than a box?* _____

Which of the numbered items are ambiguous? _____

Which ones are noun clusters? _____ Which are verbals? _____ Which are clausids? _____ Which are clauses? _____ Which contain post-modifiers? _____

Guide Questions for Chapter 8

1. What is the linguistic name for boxes?
2. What positions are typically filled by boxes
3. What construction types typically fill boxes?
4. Which referents can fill boxes?
5. What are some of the teaching questions that come up as students learn to identify and self-correct boxes?

Adopt a Function Word

demonstratives

this, that, these, those, **which can be followd by a noun or stand alone as pronominals**

numerals

cardinal: *one, two, three,* etc. **ordinal:** *first, second, third,* etc.

possessives

my, your, his, her, its, their; mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs

pronouns and pronominals

one, ones; he, she, it, they, him, her, them

quantifiers

some, a little, a lot of, a few, few, several, much, very much, etc.

titles

Ms., Mr., Miss, Mrs., Dr., President, King, Queen, etc. **when followed by a proper noun**

9 Embedding

I. How do ESOL writers relate events?

Here is a verbatim copy of an ESOL student's Writing Assessment Test, a 50-minute argument the City University of New York once used to determine student exemption from ESL classes. The first paragraph is a copy of the question.

> *The murder rate has reached staggering proportion in N.Y.C. The police, courts, and prisons just don't seem capable of controlling the problem. The only way to reduce the number of these violent crimes is to bring back the death penalty. Agree/Disagree.*
>
> *Bring back the death penalty*
>
> *There are many murders in the United States, especially in New York City. Moreover, the murder rate has reached staggering proportion in N.Y.C. As a result, the police, courts, and prisons just don't seem capable of controlling the problem. The only way to reduce the number of these violent crimes is to bring back the death penalty.*
>
> *New York City doesn't have enough police to protect citizens. As a result, they can't prevent murders. Moreover, they can't afford so many crimes and put the criminals in jail. Furthermore, the criminals seem not to be afraid to the police. For example, two weeks ago, two young men shot two boys in China Town at 4:30 p.m.. Everyone there was afraid and the men escaped easily. Moreover, one of the boys was dead. People could not find any police at once.*

Courts don't have enough time and lawyers to solve the problems. Therefore, they can't spend a lot of time on one case. In addition, there are many cases of murders, so each case may be waited a lot of time. For instance, a lawyer had enough evidence to support a man was the murder. However, that case was waited so much time to go to the court, so the man finally escaped and not put in jail.

Prisons are crowded of people indeed. Therefore, the staffs are hard to control quite a lot of people. In addition, prisons don't have the budjet to build more buildings or improve the environment. For example, people always fight together in jail because they are crowded of people. In addition, prisons don't have enough money and people to improve the situation.

In conclusion, New York City lacks people and money to reduce murders. In addition, the murder rate increases and the murders are so violent and evil. As a result, the only way to reduce the number of murders is to bring back the death penalty.

Eighteen linkers in 367 words. The first time I read this paper aloud to a group of CUNY teachers, they started to laugh after about the fifth linker. I said, "Don't laugh. Who taught this writer?"

ESOL students love linkers. They sound so much more sophisticated than *and, but* and *so*. They are an easy fix if you aren't being taught *from Level 1* how to relate and combine events.

ESOL teachers love linkers. If intermediate students are in the process of shifting to expository writing from descriptive and narrative, their ticket to ride is linkers. They're such a neat family. They're so easy just to tag on to the beginning of a sentence.

But they're so hard to use semantically. Teaching high intermediate or advanced ESL writers, I put a five-dollar bill on the table and tell the class to walk to the board and write any two sentences where the second one begins with the linker *On the contrary.* Almost everyone tries; they have nothing to lose and don't write their names. I've never lost a fiver. I *have* lost a few $3's for the next round, *After all, In fact,* and *As a matter of fact.* But I haven't lost much.

The chapter "Get Rid of Bad Linkers" in *X-Word Grammar Advanced* begins by looking at how good writers make sentence connections and proceeds to simply deleting all but one linker from a 300-400 word draft of a composition. The message is "Keep one if it's really precious and you know you're using it with its accurate meaning." Then students make better combinations by other means.

II. Do good writers use linkers?

What do the writers below have in common in their use of linkers?

> *Our lovely blue planet, the Earth, is the only home we know. Venus is too hot. Mars is too cold. But the Earth is just right, a heaven for humans.* ***After all,*** *we evolved here.*
>
> Sagan, *Cosmos*

> *Mankind is but a tiny detail in the vast biological system which controls all life on our planet. Man fancies himself the crown of creation, and believes that he can dominate and manipulate his biological surroundings at will. Around him, he sees multifarious biological threats. Animals and plants which have in some way disturbed or threatened the world of human beings have been vigorously decimated or eradicated.* ***Thus****—sometimes in an incredibly short time—man has succeeded in disturbing the finely tuned ecosystems that took nature eons to construct.*
>
> Nilsson, *The Body Victorious*

> *Chomsky proposed that the generative grammars of individual languages are variations on a single pattern, which he called Universal Grammar.* ***For example,*** *in English the verb comes before the object* (drink beer) *and the preposition comes before the noun phrase* (from the bottle). *In Japanese the object comes before the verb* (beer drink) *and the noun phrase comes before the preposition, or, more accurately, the postposition* (the bottle from). *But it is a significant discovery that both languages have verbs, objects, and pre- or post-positions to start with, as opposed to having the countless other conceivable kinds of apparatus that could power a communication system. And it is even more significant that unrelated languages build their phrases by assembling a head (such as a verb or preposition) and a complement (such as a noun phrase) and assigning a consistent order to the two. In English the head comes first; in Japanese the head comes last. But everything else about the structure of phrases in the two languages is pretty much the same. And so it goes with phrase after phrase and language after language. The common kinds of heads and complements can be ordered in 128 logically possible ways, but 95 percent of the world's languages use one of two: either the English ordering or its mirror image the Japanese ordering. A simple way to capture this uniformity is to say that all languages have the same grammar except for a parameter or switch that can be flipped to either the "head first" or "head-last" setting. The linguist Mark Baker has recently summarized about a dozen of these parameters, which succinctly capture most of the known variations among the languages of the world.*
>
> Pinker, *The Blank Slate*

Sagan leads sweetly to that final *After all.* Nilsson makes seven points about man and other living creatures before he gets to his *Thus.* Pinker uses a more common linker *For example,* but then builds on the example, then the generalization that arises out of the example, then the research done to test that generalization, then the iteration of the first idea in the passage. The point is that all three use only *one* linker and use it very precisely in a carefully chosen place. For linkers like *After all, Thus, Therefore, Still, Nevertheless, In short* and some obvious finishers like *In conclusion,* that place is generally at the end of a paragraph; that is to say, when there has been a substantial buildup to the conclusion, the caveat or other final thought. But how many grammar books instead present linkers in short, two-sentence combinations?

Linkers are almost wholly absent from conversation and fiction. They are rare in reportive writing, and only academic writing uses them to any significant degree. And since this book in itself is not "scholarly writing," I'll go ahead and bet that the better the academic writing, the fewer the linkers. We are not so different from our students.

III. Five ways to relate events

Recently, I asked low intermediate grammar students to write two paragraphs about a partner: basic information and reasons for coming to the U.S. and LaGuardia Community College. About half did not continue on the same line after a period. A handful clearly distinguished two paragraphs. Only one or two wrote sentences that were more than just trunks (*She...She...She* or *He...He...He...*) And one—my last term's Level 1 student—used four or five different sentence patterns including some with common sequence signals. Why? Because I'm such a great teacher? No. Because I teach syntactic devices from the getgo. Level 1 is the place to introduce **cohesion, compounding, including** and even some **embedding.** A fifth device, **inserting,** can be delayed.

III.a. Cohesion

Cohesion is the lexical and/or grammatical relationships among the elements of a text. Something as simple as *Buy a newspaper. Read it.* involves one of the primary cohesive devices, **pronoun reference.** This kind of relationship should be introduced in Level 1, Week 1, along with the beginnings of the sequencing of *a, the* and *he* or *she* that occur in a story like *A **man** and **a woman** knocked at a door. **The man** was wearing a wide hat, and **the woman** had a feather boa. **He** looked mysterious...*

When too much grammar work is done in itemized and unrelated sentences, cohesion is the first element of good writing to suffer.

Look at the syntactically simplified passage from page 1 of *David Copperfield*. Even in this bastardized rewrite, cohesion is indispensable.

> *Maybe I shall turn out to be the hero of* ***my*** *own life. Maybe* ***that station*** *will be held by* ***somebody else****. These pages must show* ***one*** *or* ***the other****. I shall begin with the beginning of* ***my*** *life. I shall record the facts of* ***my*** *birth. I have been informed of* ***them****. I believe* ***them*** *to be* ***as follows****. I was born on a Friday. I was born at twelve o'clock at night. Someone remarked. The clock began to strike. I began to cry.* ***The two things*** *happened simultaneously.*
>
> ***The nurse*** *considered* ***the day my birth****. She also considered* ***the hour of my birth****. She declared* ***two things*** *about me.* ***First,*** *I was destined to be unlucky in life.* ***Second,*** *I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits. Some sage women in* ***the neighborhood*** *declared* ***the same thing*** *about me.* ***They*** *had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of a personal acquaintance. They had a belief about certain unlucky infants of either gender. If* ***these infants*** *were born towards the small hours on a Friday night,* ***both these gifts*** *would inevitably attach to* ***them****.*

III.b. Compounding

A fluent speaker of English uses cohesive devices without thinking. The next syntactic device is almost as automatic: **compounding**. Look at the real Dickens passage, where he uses the word *and* to join two predicates in sentence 2, two whole trunks in sentence 3, and two nominals (twice) and two clauses in sentence 4. He also joins two clauses with *or* in sentence 1.

> [1]*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.* [2]*To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed* ***and*** *believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.* [3]*It was remarked that the clock began to strike,* ***and*** *I began to cry, simultaneously.*
>
> [4]*In consideration of the day* ***and*** *hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse,* ***and*** *by some sage women in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life;* ***and*** *secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts*

and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

Compounding—or **joining**, as X-Word Grammar calls it—was discussed on pages 42-44 as the fanboys *for, and, nor, but, or, yet* and *so* were introduced along with two of the seven basic sentence patterns: **T+T** (trunk + trunk) and **T=** (the trunk with two parts—usually two whole predicates joined by *and* like *I have been informed and believe*). *And* is the prince of fanboys; we use it four and five times as often in all registers as the next two fanboys *but* and *or*. It is our great connector at the surface level of sentences, where we can just take two or more items and hook them together loosely without them changing in form. Think of *and* as being like the holding of hands in a circle.

III.c. Including and inserting

In spite of all the criticism in this book of Latinate grammar, the old terminology is right on the nose with the terms "dependent clauses" or "subordinate clauses." The clauses that start with "subordinating conjunctions" like *if, because, when* and *although* or "relative pronouns" like *who, which* and *that* are indeed daughters to their parents, the independent clauses. Since Sector Analysis and X-Word Grammar call an independent clause a trunk, the single word *clause* is taken to mean a subordinate clause. Its addition to a trunk is called **including**, so you might also hear the term **included clause**. Look at the included clauses used as shifters in the Dickens passage.

[1]***Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life,*** *or* ***whether that station will be held by anybody else,*** *these pages must show.* [2]*To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.* [3]*It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.*

[4]*In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.*

These included clauses are found right on the outsides of trunks. They have already been discussed on pages 44-46 under the heading "Trunks with Shifters." There are other included clauses in the Dickens passage, but they are not in shifter positions; they are inserted right inside the trunk or inside another larger structure. Look at the two inserts in boldface below.

> [1]*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.* [2]*To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born* ***(as I have been informed and believe)*** *on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.* [3]*It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.*
>
> [4]*In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching,* ***as they believed,*** *to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.*

Inserts are not shy; they always show themselves with a pair of commas, parentheses or dashes or the combination of a capital letter and comma when they are inserted before a trunk or a comma and a period or acolon and a period when they are inserted right after a trunk.

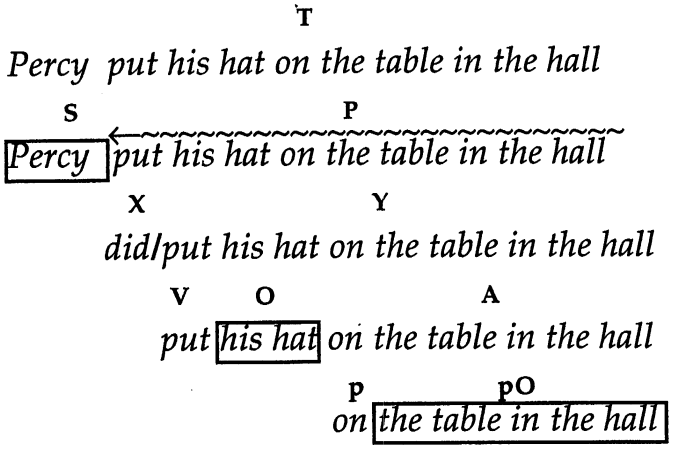
Shifters and inserts don't have to be finite. They can be phrases or nominals, too, but they do the same job of condensing and more closely relating the facts and events of a text. Here are the non-finite additions to the trunks in the Dickens passage.

> [1]*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.* [2]***To begin my life with the beginning of my life,*** *I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe)* ***on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.*** [3]*It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.*
>
> [4]***In consideration of the day and hour of my birth,*** *it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see*

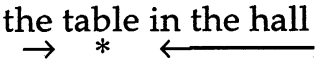
ghosts and spirits; ***both these gifts inevitably attaching,*** *as they believed,* ***to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.***

III.d. Embedding

Finally we get to the real subject of our chapter and to the deepest analysis of English syntax; **embedding**. Embedded structures are not found on the surface level of a sentence. Look, for example, at the layered analysis of the Percy sentence below.



The two phrases *on the table* and *in the hall* are similar only in form. The former is incomplete without the latter, which tells us which table. The latter is embedded as a **postmodifier** in the nominal structure *the table in the hall.* It looks like this.



Postmodifiers of nouns are the most common instances of embedding. The postmodifier can be any of four multi-word structures: a noun cluster, a phrase, a verbal or a clause, as you see below.

The dinner last Sunday	*was great.*
The dinner at Le Bernadin	*was great.*
The dinner given in Treacher's honor	*was great.*
The dinner the firm gave in Treacher's honor	*was great.*

The Dickens passage is filled with postmodifiers—14 in all; some cannot be shown because they are embedded in *other* postmodifiers.

[1]*Whether I shall turn out to be the hero* ***of my own life,*** *or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.* [2]*To begin my life with the beginning* ***of my life,*** *I record that I was born (as I have*

been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock ***at night.*** *[3]It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.*

[4]In consideration ***of the day and hour of my birth,*** *it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women* ***in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted,*** *first, that I was destined to be unlucky* ***in life;*** *and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants* ***of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.***

The other most common type of embedding is the *that*-clause, usually in object position. This is the clause that can delete its *that* connector and does exactly this in speech with great regularity. How often do we say things like the following?

I think/hope/know/suspect/doubt [that] he'll come.

I'm sure/certain/postive/afraid [that] he'll come.

He said/promised/swore [that] he'll come.

The last look at the Dickens passage shows several of these.

[1]Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. [2]To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record ***that I was born*** *(as I have been informed and believe)* ***on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night.*** *[3]It was remarked* ***that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.***

[4]In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighborhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, ***that I was destined to be unlucky in life;*** *and secondly,* ***that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits;*** *both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender born towards the small hours on a Friday night.*

*****

Worksheet 10 on page 91 will ask you to combine sentences in all of the ways taken up in this chapter.

IV. How do we do teaching embedding?

In a corpus linguistics paper given at San Antonio TESOL 2005, van Zante included the following in her handout:

Postmodifiers: Postmodifiers of nouns are modifiers that come after the noun in a noun phrase. In English, nouns can be postmodified in various ways. One way is with **relative**, or adjective, **clauses**, for example:

*The books **that you ordered** are here now.*

Another way is with **prepositional phrases**, for example:

*This book **of poetry** is for you.*

*The book **on the table** is mine.*

*Do you want a cup **of tea**?*

A.1. Think about ESL teaching materials that you are familiar with. At what level do they introduce the topic of **prepositional phrases as postmodifiers** of nouns?

a. beginning b. low-intermediate c. high-intermediate d. advanced

A.2. Of the space and attention given to postmodification of nouns in these materials, about what percentage of space and attention would you say is devoted to prepositional phrases as postmodifiers of nouns?

a. 15-20% b. 25-35% c. 40-50% d. _____%

B. Think about postmodification of nouns in English, both spoken and written. Of all postmodifiers, about what percentage would you say are prepositional phrases?

a. 5-15% b. 20-35% c. 40-55% d. 65-80%

The answers are c., a. and d. though many teachers in the audience said they teach prepositional phrases as postmodifiers in lower levels not as grammar but as vocabulary, as in *a cup of tea, a loaf of bread*, etc. The point is, there is not likely to be any systematic teaching of embedding until higher levels because we dance over shorter, more common postmodifiers and wait until students understand more of our metalanguage to hit them with things like "restrictive and non-restrictive adjective clauses." Which lots of *teachers* don't get.

I thought I was hot stuff because I *do* know the difference and wouldn't be caught dead with such clunky terminology. Here are my clever sentences; I got them from Robert Allen.

1. *Women who talk too much annoy me.*
2. *Women, who talk too much, annoy me.*

I read the two sentences aloud and ask the women in the class which is more insulting. Many answer #2, which gives itself away by the pair of commas. It's a trunk with an insert: the trunk is *Women annoy me,* which implies all women, and the insert, also implying all women, says they talk too much. Sentence #1, in contrast, will make a nice yes-no question because it's just a trunk—a subject and predicate. The clause *who talk too much* tells which particular women. That's what a postmodifier does.

Less clever are some of the textbook sentences illustrating the contrast above. Have you seen sentences like these?

1. *My sister, who lives in St. James, is a dentist.*
2. *I have two sisters. My sister who lives in St. James is a dentist.*

There are better sentences and worse, better lessons and worse, but when push comes to shove, students go back to syntactic devices they are comfortable with, as in the paper that opened this chapter, unless they feel a need to vary their sentence surface structure and collapse, condense, join, include, insert, embed as a means to express as much information as possibe in as few words as possible. In England and other countries, students did it via the précis. In the 70s American ESOL students did a lot of sentence combining. Controlled composition books like *Write Me a Ream* and *26 Steps* had specific embedding and other sentence-combining tasks. These are not bad exercises.

V. Are there functional ways to incorporate embedding?

The *cup of tea, loaf of bread* approach *is* a good way to start Level 1 writers using embedded structures, especially if students are learning animate possessives like *My Classmate's Routine* at the same time. Introduce a lot of *of* postmodifiers: materials like *a piece of chalk* and *a piece of paper,* contents like *a box of crayons* and *a bag of candy,* etc. Also introduce noun adjuncts (*hugely* underrepresented in textbooks) like *vegetable soup* and *pencil sharpener.* Then, when students latch onto possessives and overuse them (**my school's team, *Colombia's capital*), you have alternatives.

As soon as students use the word *the* for anything other than the sole item (*the sun, the moon, the earth*) or a second mention (*A man and a woman knocked at a door. The man...*), they will need postmodifiers. I have Level 1 students keep a Like Book, which they begin by writing daily one thing they like in general in the outside world plus a second sentence about the same thing for a little cohesion. The task gets more demanding when we move into the past tense and write a specific like for each day. This year we did it right after Valentines Day, and a student tried out the sentence *I liked the roses my husband gave me. They are beautiful.* Her first sentence contains a restrictive adjective clause as postmodifier. Can she repeat the structure in another context? Perhaps not, or, at least, not yet. But does she need it here? Will she use it again with tiny substitutions if the Like Book requires 50 entries? I think so.

Level 1 students can learn both of the main types of compound sentences (**T=** and **T+T)** in the first weeks of class. They can learn basic sequence signals—*Then, Later, After lunch, After school,* etc.—but no other linkers; instead, they should master the fanboys *and, but* and *so*. Some included clauses—those that start with *when* or *because*—are valuable. Inserting can wait. It's most needed for expository writing anyway.

Intermediate students can handle the metalanguage necessary—trunk, command, fanboy, shifter, semi-colon, linker—to analyze a good sample written for their reading level, like the Hakim passage below.

> *[Imagine you are an Anasazi child in the 13th century in what is now the American Southwest.]*
>
> *This year the skies have been generous with rain. A man-made reservoir is filled with water. The corn is heavy. Soon you will see your first harvest dances...The ceremony is meant to thank the gods for the harvest and to prepare for the hunts and harvests to come.*
>
> *While people in faraway Europe are building cathedrals and going on crusades, you are living in a stone castle tucked under a mountain roof. You Anasazi are like swallows nesting in the hollow of a hill; you are protected from heavy snows and from human enemies, too. But the stones are damp and the apartments cramped. As soon as you are grown, you will begin to feel the pains and aches of arthritis; you will die before you are 40.*
>
> *Still, it is a splendid home. The mountain site faces south and catches the sun's rays. In winter, with a roaring fire on the town's flat plaza and fires in each house, you are warm even on snowy days.*
>
> Hakim, *A History of Us: The First Americans*

Worksheet 10: Sentence Combining

Instructions: Combine the trunks below as *no more than 12* sentences using cohesion, joining, including, inserting and embedding. End up with both long and short sentences. Note: You can change the order of the elements somewhat.

I arrived in Kenya.
It was December 12, 1961.
I arrived by train.
It was the middle of the night.
We crossed the equator.
I put my head out the train window.
I could see my breath.
It was making little clouds of steam in the air!
We were 9,000 feet above sea level.
The air was clean.
The air was cold.
We were heading for the coast.
It was warmer there.
We reached Voi late at night.
It was a little town.
It was miserable.
It was dry.
No one was awake except the stationmaster.
There were also huge dung beetles.
The dung beetles were pushing big balls of dung around.
I thought, "Oh, my God!
This is ***it***!!??"
I asked the stationmaster about Wusi.
Wusi was the location of my school.
The stationmaster pointed to a van.
The van was sitting near the station.
The stationmaster said, "They will take you up the mountain."
The van driver spoke no English.
The van driver paid no attention.
I explained to the van driver.
I wanted to go to Wusi.
I hopped into the van.
I started toward my new life.
I hoped the van driver knew Wusi was the place.
My new life would begin in Wusi.

Guide Questions for Chapter 9

1. How do good writers use linkers?
2. What are five different ways to relate events in sentences?
3. Why is pronoun reference so important?
4. What two sentence patterns typify compounding?
5. What construction types are typically post-modifiers?
6. How do Sector Analysis and X-word Grammar approach "restrictive and non-restrictive adjective clauses?"
7. Which of the syntactic devices discussed in this chapter are appropriate for beginning and low intermediate ESL writers?

10 The TAM system: tense, aspect, modality

I. Is the TAM system mind numbing?

In a 2002 grammar book that will remain unnamed, there is this boldface note in the chapter on verbs:

> ***Achtung!* Grammar does not excite the senses of most normal people. So do not seek thrills on these pages. *Conjugation* is not what you think. Pay attention. This stuff is very, very important. And mind numbing.**

You already know the English verb system is elegant. And Chapter 3 was only about form. Now we get to the meaning system: placing events in time (i.e. **tense**), describing how they are spread over time and how one time is related to another (i.e. **aspect**) and the speaker's assessment of the possibility, probability, necessity of events coming to be (i.e. **modality**). The TAM system can tell us a lot about who we are as a people and as individuals because it shows how we see events in the outside world and because it puts together the same opposites we are trying to put together in ourselves.

And before you say, "Oy, I don't really get aspect, and modals are a dark pit I regularly fall into," let me state my purpose. I *do* want you to be thrilled by the TAM system. I want you to realize you know things about it that aren't in grammar books. I want you to feel that the solid knowledge you already have is backed up here, and the not-yet-solid is modified, clarified. I want to fan your curiosity about the verb system and have you see new things on your own.

We can start with an example of things-you-know-that-aren't-in-grammar-books. I owe this example to Frank Horowitz of Teachers College, Columbia University. He puts a bag in the middle of the floor and says these two sentences:

Don't touch that bag. It's going to explode.

Don't touch that bag. It'll explode.

Do you know the difference? I think you do. It's not in any grammar book I've read. Point 1: *Trust your own usage. Listen to what others say.*

II. Opposites in the TAM system

The first important opposites in the TAM system are **personal** and **impersonal, fact** and **opinion**. Take an event like raining, for example. The nine sentences below show this event first as a simple fact; then little by little, more of the speaker's feelings about the event appear.

Q: *What makes the Colombian forest so lush?* A: *It **rains** almost every day.*

Q: *What happened the first day your arrived?* A: *It **rained.***

Q: *How's the weather now?* A: *It's **raining**.*

Q: *Do you like the climate?* A: *It's always **raining**.*

Q: *What've you done so far?* A: *It's **rained** every day since I got here.*

Q: *Are you going out today?* A: *No...It's **going to rain**.*

Q: *What about tomorrow?* A: *No...It **may rain**.*

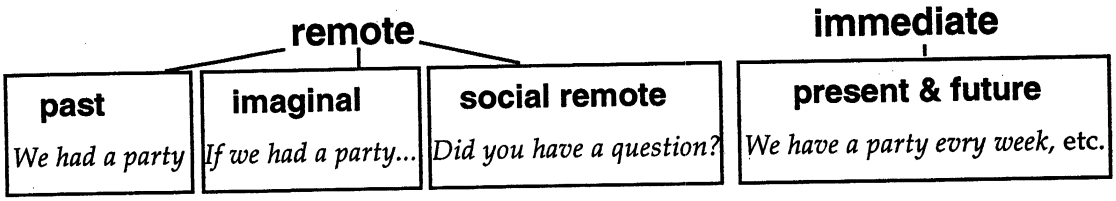
Q: *The next day?* A: *No...It **could rain**.*

Q: *Any day?* A: *No...It'll **rain**.*

Do you see a progression from fact to opinion, from less speaker involvement to more? In fact, is the last response something like *Don't touch that bag? It'll explode*? In other words, *If I go out, it'll rain.* That's pretty personal.

The second big pair of opposites in the TAM system is **immediate** and **remote**. English looks at events as being near or far, achievable or out of reach. Do you think it's interesting that English doesn't have a specific verb form for the future? We can say *We're having a party! C'mon over!* while the party is going on or *We're having a party next Saturday.* The time is different, but the grammar is the same; the speaker sees herself as involved in the parties—in the second one, at least in the planning process. *We had a party* is finished; it's further away. An event can be remote not only in time but in possibility, as in the difference

between *If we have a party,* (more immediate) and *If we had a party,* (more remote)or *I hope I have enough money to go to Paris this summer* (more possible) and *I wish I had enough money to go to Paris this summer* (less possible). Remote forms in speech create a little social distance, as in *You wanted to see me?* or *Did you have a question?* Here is a summary.



III. Start simple: the *BE* family by itself

Point 2—very good news: the TAM system is governed by x-word families almost as much as the basic forms of the verb phrase are. Each x-word family has a *specialty,* in fact. We'll start with the *BE* family.

Many languages don't need any verb at all to establish the existence of something. In Arabic, for example, when you point to a masculine person and say ذلك الرجل. */deliká arazhul/,* literally "That man," Arabic speakers know you mean 'That's a man.' English has to put in one of the *BE* family of x-words: *am, is, are, was, were.* And they *are* x-words, not main verbs. We can invert them to make questions, tag on *–n't* to make a negative and do other x-wordy things with them. And look at the two sentences below. You have an empty main verb sector in the first one, which can be filled to change the meaning of the sentence substantially.

S	X	V	C
The old gray goose	*is*		*dead.*
The old gray goose	*is*	*playing*	*dead.*

The *BE* family x-words by themselves just establish existence or describe. They can show tense: *was, were* for past and *am, is, are* for non-past, but that's about all. If you've heard them called "linking verbs," "stative verbs," "copular verbs," well, take your pick. I call them the **descriptive** *(am/is/are)* and **past descriptive** *(was/were)* when they are not accompanied by a main verb form.

IV. Just the facts, ma'am: the *DO* family

The **simple tense** (*do/does* + V) is used for events that the speaker or writer takes to be facts— either general facts like *Water boils at 100° c. I have a car. I don't have a skateboard.*—or habitual events, like *I drive to*

work every day. This tense is used with future time reference in sentences like *Our plane leaves at 5:00 on Friday* because the event is still just a fact, and, as mentioned earlier, English does not have a special verb form for future.

The simple tense is also used for events that are realized just in their expression, like *I object!* or *I propose a toast* or *I now pronounce you man and wife.* Also in speech, the simple tense can be used to add immediacy to a narrative, as in *So this guy comes up to me and says...*

The **simple past** (*did* + V) is the only other true tense in English. It is used for events that occurred at a definite time in the past. *The water just boiled. I had a skateboard as a child. Our plane left at 5:00.*

So there you are: the two big honest-to-God tenses of English summed up in less than half a page. But they *are* that straightforward once you teach students to deal with the hidden x-words *do, does* and *did* (see Chapter 3).

ESOL beginners should study only the simple tenses because they represent an enormous part of our spoken language (more than two-thirds of the MICASE corpus of academic speech), and these two tenses give a writer the verb material to write unlimited personal stories. Other "tenses" can be taught, but the teacher should make it clear which ones (like *We're having a party*) are more useful for speaking than writing.

I wish I could state the percentages of simple tense and simple past use in basic narrative writing and intermediate and advanced expository writing; I'm not sure those corpus studies have been done. But just thinking about their frequency and their use in different registers is a quantum leap from doggedly teaching one "tense" after the other the way some grammar books do.

V. Two aspects: the *HAVE* and *BE* families

Aspect is a lovely thing. It's just what it calls itself: a point of view, a way of looking at things. It says, "This is what I see from where I'm standing." In *The Language Instinct* (1994), Pinker defines aspect as "the way an event is spread out over time." So when my students learn the jazz chant *Jack! You're back! I haven't seen you for a long time,* the emphasis is on a time *period* rather than a point in time, and the perspective is from the present dipping back into the past: "any time up to now." This looking back leads Lewis in *The English Verb* (1986) to call what is tradtionally known as "the perfect" the **retrospective** instead. It is governed by the *HAVE* family of x-words (*have/has* +Ved).

The retrospective relates one time to another. We can't say **I have come to New York in 1964* because this is a single event that happened at a definite time in the past; the retrospective represents indefinite time related to the present. So we can establish a definite *period* of time coming up to the present as in *I have lived in New York since 1964.*

Various textbooks say that a *have/has* +Ved action must *continue* into the present. It doesn't have to. If, for example, an elderly man says *I've had many different jobs in my life,* he doesn't have to have one now or the possibility of taking one, but the way he *sees* these events as relating to his present is represented in his grammatical choice.

The **past retrospective** (*had* +Ved) looks back from the past to an earlier past: "any time up to then." IT IS RARE, especially in speech. It generally involves two events, one earlier than the other, but if context clarifies the sequence, simple past suffices, as in these examples:

> *Millie Benson died recently at 96. She wrote the 31 Nancy Drew mysteries under the name Carolyn Keene.*

Obviously the writing came first, so we need only the simple past to express both facts about Millie Benson. Another example—

> *We had to go to the police station because somebody stole our car.*

The cause and effect sequence is likewise obvious, so no *had* is needed.

> *After we saw London, we crossed the Channel to Paris.*

In this example, *After* tells that we saw London before going on to Paris.

The past retrospective is used only to clarify which of two events was earlier if it is not wholly clear. Look at the next two examples. The first sounds like a putdown of London. The second clarifies the writer's meaning via the past retrospective.

> *When we saw London, we crossed the Channel to Paris.*
>
> *When we* ***had seen*** *London, we crossed the Channel to Paris.*

Now we come to another one of my personal soapboxes, the so-called "present continuous tense," which, as far as I can see, is neither present nor continuous nor a tense. It's immediate (i.e. present *and* future), it's temporary, and it's an aspect. Pick the name you want—"continuous," "progressive," "durative," "*be* + *-ing*"—but be sure not to saddle it with the idea of present (intermediate ESOL students have real difficulty saying, *We're having a party Saturday* or *I'm going to my country over the break*), and make sure you teach it as SPEECH. It's rare in writing.

I know, the name I've given to this ornery aspect isn't a great one. The **temporal** (*am/is/are* +Ving) adds distribution in time or time relationship for one-shot events the speaker takes to have a beginning and end, often with a temporary implication. Note the difference between *I live in Queens* and *I'm living in Queens.* The temporal can be used with future time reference so long as there's some plan involved. The speaker can say *We're having a party Saturday* because she feels part of an event already in motion, at least in its planning stage. She cannot, however, say *It's raining Saturday* because there is no plan; she must guess or predict or imply some evidence.

The **past temporal** (*was/were* +Ving) provides background for the simple past: *As I was walking to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives.* It surrounds a past event—*I knew he was lying*—and, with sensory verbs, can be collapsed as follows: *I saw him putting the radio in his bag.* (But if the seeing and the putting both finished, use the base form of the second verb: *I saw him put the radio in his bag.*) As the main verb in a clause, the past temporal generally implies that the event did not take place—*I was hoping you'd remember our anniversary*—but in a subordinate clause, perhaps it did: *Harry said he was bringing the cake* (and he did).

VI. Combining aspects

Retrospective and temporal aspects can be combined. These are rare, rare, rare forms—under 1% of our usage—but they have their specialized meaning and usefulness. The **retrospective-temporal** (*have/has* + *been* +Ving) is used primarily in spoken English, often between people who have a history together. Three-quarters of the instances studied in a project reported by Celce-Murcia were found in simple sentences, primarily with action verbs, as in *What have you been doing with yourself?* and *I've been trying to reach him all afternoon.* Subjects are overwhelmingly animate—61% first person and 32% third person—and nearly half are accompanied by a time adverbial like *all week* or *up to this point* or a clause or phrase beginning with the word *since.*

The meaning of this form is more "here and now" than the retrospective. When a man says to a woman, *I've waited for you...,* she hopes he'll finish with the adverbial *all my life* whereas the annoyed husband sitting in the car says *I've been waiting for you for 45 minutes.*

Celce-Murcia says the retrospective-temporal can be used to end an event, as in *How long have you been waiting for me?* or to continue it, as in *How long have you been waiting for John?* I would add that the event

may even have finished earlier: a man is at work the next day when a colleague notices tiny white paint dots in his hair. The man says *I've been painting my apartment.*

Picture all the constraints just described plus those of the *past* retrospective, and you have the rarest of the rare: the **past retrospective-temporal**. Remember that you can just use the past temporal if there's no question about which of two events occurred first. So here's a situation: *After the fire, police arrested the tenants of the apartment when it was learned that they had been using illegal space heaters.*

VII. The unruly modals and semi-modals

The **modals** (*can, could, shall, should, will, would, may, might, must*) and **semi-modals** (*gonna, hafta, wanna, gotta, oughta, supposta, be able to, let's* and a few newcomers like *better*) offer the speaker many ways to assess the possibility, likelihood, desirability, etc. of events that usually haven't happened yet. Once again, immediate and remote are a main pair of opposites. Once the pairs of true modals—*can/could, shall/should, will/would* and *may/might*—were all immediate and remote (and they still are to some extent in British usage), but Americans have dropped *shall* almost altogether from speech, so *should* can be either immediate or remote as in the two sentences below.

*We women **should respect** men more.* (a cooperative suggestion)
*My consultants told me I **should respect** men more.*

The remaining remote modals—*would, could* and *might*—can express all three remote meanings.

past:	*I **thought** we **would go** to Paris this spring.*
imaginal:	*We'**d go** if we **had** the money.*
social remote:	*Who started this talk about Paris anyway?*
	*That **would be** me.*

A new pair of opposites appears with the modals: **intrinsic** and **extrinsic**. Each has core meaning, but this meaning is greatly modified by whether it arises from the speaker or from the outside world. *Should,* for example, which Eli Siegel described in his 1945 *Definitions and Comment* as "a word that says something is incomplete, and is better complete" has core meaning both intrinsically and extrinsically below.

*We women **should respect** men more.* (arising from the women)
*The roast **should be done** by now.* (a supposition based on the expected roasting time)

All modals have these two possibilities. Oprah Winfrey says to a guest—

*You **must have** great luggage.*

Is she giving advice to a new flight attendant? No. We RARELY look a person straight in the eye and say, "You must..." or if we do, it's from what we consider a superior vantage point. But our textbooks can't seem to give up the intrinsic (personal obligation) sense of *must* as its primary use: *You must do your homework, You must pay your taxes,* etc. Oprah is *inferring.* Her guest has just said that her husband's job has had them move four times already in their short marriage. It's the *extrinsic* meaning of *must,* and our students recognize it, as in—

*Lend you $100? You **must be** kidding.*
*You **must be** Hannah. Peter told me about you.*
*This **must be** the place. It's the right address.*

Do you have to teach the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic? Probably not. Do you need to know it yourself? Yes, because students hear the difference.

****

The next eight pages condense the conclusions of my study of the English modals in a sample of American talk. The corpus is from early 90s TV talk shows and is known as the Newman Corpus because Dr. Michael Newman gathered it and generously passed it on to me.

VII.a. Modal frequencies

Modals cluster into five meaning groups. Each group of percentages below equals 100% for that group of tokens in the Newman Corpus.

obligation and conclusion
have to (64%), *need to* (18%), *have got to* (13%), *must* (5%)
rightness
should ((73%), *ought to* (15%), *be supposed to* (10%), *'d better* (2%)
prediction, intention and expectation
will (40%), *be going to* (32%), *want to* (27%), *be willing to* (1%)
imaginal
would, including *would like to* and *would rather,* (76%), *could* (24%)
possibility and probability
can (56%), *could* (26%), *may* (7%), *might* (5%), *be able to* (5%), *get to* (1%)

And here are representative tokens ranked in order of frequency.

1. expectation *be going to*	*You* ***'re not going to like*** *this, James.*
2. imaginal *would*	***I would argue*** *for anybody.*
3. core possibility *can*	*You* ***can't wear*** *furniture...*
4. core *have to*	*And he said, "I* ***have to go*** *to school, Mom."*
5. prediction *will*	*The market* ***will find*** *the thing if it is worthwhile.*
6. assurance *will*	***I'll be*** *right there!*
7. imaginal *could*	*It* ***could happen*** *to anybody.*
8. past-of-can *could*	*Once I took his case, I* ***couldn't take*** *her case.*
9. advice/opinion *should*	*I think he* ***should be expelled*** *from the House of Representatives.*
10. potential *can*	*I think the average person* ***can have*** *a tremendous impact.*
11. suggestion *need to*	*I think we* ***need to break down*** *certain stereotypes.*
12. past habitual *would*	*He* ***would call*** *me* ***up*** *and he'* ***d say,*** *you know, "We need to talk."*
13. intention *be going to*	***I'm going to give*** *you some advice right now.*
14. actualized *can*	*I'm sorry. I just* ***can't hear*** *you.*
15. extrinsic *may*	*For every hundred men there* ***may be*** *what, twenty women?*
16. *be able to* (non-finite *can*)	*But he shouldn't* ***be able to get away*** *with that.*
17. obligation *have got to*	*You* ***'ve got to ask*** *yourself, Is God in this church?*
18. prediction *will*	*A lot of people* ***will talk*** *about making mistales.*
19. permission *can*	*OK, you* ***can have*** *the visitation rights.*
20. extrinsic *might*	*And you still* ***might take*** *the case, right?*
21. advice/opinion *ought to*	*I think it* ***ought to be*** *harder for people to get married than divorced.*
22. willingness *will*	***I won't testify.***
23. *be supposed to*	*You know, there* ***'s supposed to be*** *two sides to everything.*
24. *be willing to*	*They* ***'re willing to apply*** *it across-the-board.*
25. existential *can*	*Now, there* ***can be*** *two people with a sore throat.*
26. extrinsic *must*	*You* ***must be*** *upset that Sting got the rain forests.*
27. intrinsic *must*	*I mean, people* ***must do*** *with their money what they wish.*

VII.b. Modals put together self and world

How much and what kind of meaning do the modals draw from context? The answer is *Nearly all.* Modals have a tofu quality: they contribute a small core of meaning to a situation and absorb the remainder from context. The small core of meaning comes from the speaker; it is the "self" aspect of meaning; "world" is both the event spoken of and all the external forces affecting the event. Using a single event, *get a free meal,* I'll try to show how core meaning and context, self and world, work together in each of the modals.

First ***can,*** the "green light" among the modals. The core meaning is possibility. Two hungry people enter a church. The man says, "Why are we here?" The woman answers, "You can get a free meal" using *you* impersonal. The event is a general fact. But suppose a church worker looks at one person's ID and gives that individual permission with stress on a singular *you: You can get a free meal;* the other person doesn't eat. Or what if the worker simply points down a hall and says to the two people, "You

can get a free meal"? Is this the impersonal *you* again or *you* plural? Is it permission or possibility? And what if the woman says to the man, "You're more aggressive than I am. You can get a free meal"? She's introducing an element of ability, or, at least, what she thinks is her partner's ability. *Can* accommodates all these variations and more. And if the two people meet a fabulous spread and say, "This can't be real!", that is the existential *can.*

Second, ***be going to,*** the highest ranking semi-modal in the Newman Corpus. *I'm going to get a free meal.* Prefaced by a sentence like *I can't just sit around feeling hungry,* the sentence *I'm going to get a free meal* is a statement of intention. In contrast, a statement like *Look at this coupon I found! I'm going to get a free meal!* suggests expectation. The difference between these two meanings of *be going to* is the greater emphasis on "world" in the second: something is going to come to me. Often, one person's intention is another person's expectation, and *be going to* is regularly an intention in first person and an expectation in third person.

Third, ***have to,*** which Newman Corpus findings suggest is the main obligation modal in American English speech. First- and second-person subjects are equally frequent. *You* may be personal or impersonal. The two hungry people ask, "But how are we supposed to eat without money?" The answer is *You have to get a free meal.* Getting the free meal is a necessity imposed by hunger and bad economics, but the utterance can also be read as an obligation falling upon an agent, either the persons spoken to or hungry people in general. With a change to first person, "self" is both speaker and subject, the verb sounds dynamic, and the time reference is likely to be future: We *have to get a free meal.*

If the speaker is in a line, and she and her friend are handed plates, knives and forks, she might say, "We have to be getting a free meal," which distinguishes the extrinsic reading of *have to* because it's what she concludes from what's going on around her. She could also say, "We must be getting a free meal." But she is not likely to say, "We must get a free meal." As discussed earlier, Americans just don't use obligation *must* unless there's a particular superiority or authority involved.

Next ***will,*** the modal with the greatest potential for accenting self over world. *Will* expresses speaker confidence. With a first-person subject, assurances like *I'll get it!* (the phone) and *I'll get us a free meal* place responsibility for the realization of an event squarely on the speaker. World enters the picture as a condition in a sentence like *We'll get a free meal if we can get to the center before it closes.* (Do you remember *Don't touch that bag! It'll explode!?*) This condition or contingency is often implied: One person says, "Why should I go to the center?" The other says, "You'll get a free

meal." Or the utterance becomes a prediction when the subject changes to third person: *Don't worry about Bob. He'll get a free meal somehow.* The speaker is still very much involved; it is her view of Bob's capability or the world coming through for him, but she's expressing confidence that someone else can realize the event. There is another more cynical third-person prediction with *will*, as in *Look at these homeless people. They'll line up, get a free meal and just come back again the next day.*

May is the modal with the greatest potential for accenting world over self. Yes, there is the permission *may* found in our textbooks, but the majority of *may* examples are extrinsic. Our hard-pressed couple sees a Meals on Wheels truck parked outside a center, and one says, "We may get a free meal." It's a simple *maybe*, very much in the world's hands.

Another speaker can assess an event in process or already realized. Look at these three examples, spoken by an observer of a poorly dressed person inside or emerging from an expensive restaurant: *He may get a free meal* (regularly), *He may be getting a free meal* (now or regularly), *He may have gotten a free meal* (in the past or any time up to now). Because these examples are extrinsic, the event is something actually going on, but the *inference* is going on inside the mind of the speaker, and that's what the modality deals with. The speaker is saying, "I can't say for sure, but it looks to me like...."

Another use of *may* is as a concessive, as in *It may not be a free meal, but it's darned inexpensive* or *He may get a free meal, but he works hard for it.* The event in the concessive statement is a fact, but its implication is that the speaker makes it *sound* unreal for the sake of making a point.

Should most frequently represents cooperative suggestion: *Look, it's no use just sitting around talking about the fact that we have no money. We should get a free meal.* But it is also useful in a complaint. A waiter hits a customer in the head with a tray he is carrying and the customer says to her date, "We should get a free meal!" Both of these express intrinsic meaning. There is also the more calculated assessment of likelihood: *If we get to the center before 7:00, we should get a free meal.* This is extrinsic.

And what if the possibility of the free meal is more remote? *If we got to the center before 7:00, we* ***would*** *get a free meal. We* ***could*** *get a free meal. We* ***might*** *get a free meal.* All three of these are so much less likely than the sentences using the immediate modals *can, will, may* and *should.*

VII.c. How should we teach modals?

Findings of this study point to modal uses that are rarely or minimally represented in ESOL texts. At the same time, they do not back up the

widespread textbook emphasis on modals as part of particular tenses, as located on a "scale of probability," or, taken individually, as typically "the *can* of ability," "the *must* of obligation," "the *may* of permission," "the *shall* and *will* of futurity." Teachers can certainly use such information to modify their approach to the modals, but first there are more general changes teachers should consider, such as the place of the speaker, the role of grammar in teaching the modals and how the modals fit into the larger picture of the English verb phrase. These are some of the emphases the findings of this study support:

- **the centrality of the speaker** in all utterances, especially with regard to modal use
- **grammar as choice**—the fact that native speaker choices are motivated and that there are no "exceptions to the rules"; rather, that any rule must take into account marginal or uncommon uses
- **the two-tense verb system** governed grammatically by auxiliaries and unified notionally and functionally in all finite verb phrases
- the introduction, at least for ESOL teachers and possibly for advanced learners, of the idea of **the remote**, especially as expressed through *would* and *want to* to remove the speaker temporally or factively from an event (as in *I wish he would..., I would assume... I wanted to ask...*)
- **the x-words** as a coherent family of operators and, as a teaching device, the idea of **the hidden x-words** *do, does* and *did*
- modality as representing **the speaker's way of seeing herself in relation to the outside world.**

In lesson preparations and in the classroom, a teacher might give fresh thought to the following:

- a greater emphasis on **context** and an avoidance of single-sentence examples; the use, instead, of **prototypical examples**, emphasizing social and cognitive interaction with persons and information
- the granting of full status to **semi-modals** like *have to, going to* and *want to*, including their motivated pronunciation **/gənə/, /hæftə/** and **/wanə/**
- the caveat that *shall* rarely appears in spoken American English
- the placement of *be going to*, representing **intention** in first person and **expectation** in third person, as the closest thing spoken English has to a "future"
- the teaching of *will* from the standpoint of speaker **confidence** or **commitment**, including the understanding that the speaker has in

mind a presupposition and expects the listener to sense what it is through her use of *will*

- the placement of *have to* as the primary means of expressing speaker obligation
- the grouping of *may, might* and *must* as modals of **inference**
- with *can*, the shifting of emphasis from ability to wide **possibility** and specific **potential**
- the promotion of the **imaginal**, as in *I wouldn't like to live there*, over the conditional, which is merely an appendage to the imaginal, and the assertion that the former can occur without the latter.

Discussing whether the ESOL teacher's obligation is to present language in "authentic native-speaker contexts," Widdowson (1998) asserts that the classroom cannot duplicate the original context; it is a *new* context, and the teacher must localize meaning—and not semantic meaning, not "the meaning of sentences," but rather, the meaning of *people*, or realistic meaning in context. What we want in the classroom, he claims, is "pedagogical artifice," language samples that are appropriate rather than entirely "authentic" and provide a semantic resource for learners.

I believe it is possible to take the best modal examples found in this study and localize them, i.e. maintain their semantic, syntactic and phonological features while introducing them in classroom contexts that arise naturally. The "artifice" involved would be the practice and extensions, and probably timing, as the teacher is not likely just to "wait for something to come up."

I teach ESOL beginning, intermediate and advanced students. A useful classroom question for beginners is *Can I say* _____ *?*, which is a good starting point for modals and includes their ability as x-words to invert to form a yes-no question. Students seem to have no difficulty extending this example of a gradient between permission and possibility to true permission in *Teacher, can I leave class early today? Can I bring my child to school?* Here are some modal uses for beginning classes:

permission or approval *can:*	*Teacher, can I say, "I went to my house"?* *You can finish tomorrow.*
obstacle *can* (i.e. *can't*)	*I can't find my pencil.* *I can't hear you!*
shared possibility *can:*	*We can work it out.*
expectation *going to:*	*We're going to have a test (on) Monday.*

intention *going to:*	*I'm going to be absent on Wednesday.*
root obligation *have to:*	*I have to go to the doctor.*
requests with *want to* and *would like to*	*Do you want to read?* *Would you read, please?* *Would you like to read?*

My lower level classes are learning X-Word Grammar: the richness and economy of basic English syntax and the remarkable consistency of the 20 x-words, three main verb forms and two-tenses of the English verb phrase. I do not introduce the modals as a group. I introduce them one at a time, in context and, with the exception of *couldn't*, which students need for writing narrative, not in writing but in speech.

At all levels the emphasis should be on the modals in speech. The more interactive the language, the more we need modals; and the more invested we are in what we are saying, the wider the variety of modals we use.

Intermediate and advanced ESOL students show marked interest in modal meanings and especially in semi-modals, both their meanings and their pronunciation: *gonna, hafta, wanna, gotta* and *lemme*. Over the past year and a half, as I have cautiously introduced the concepts of remote and imaginal, I have been greatly encouraged by students' response. In the context of functions of American English and with the help of chants and pop songs, students seem willing at least to accept native speaker pronunciation and use of modals and semi-modals, even where such use differs notably from generalizations presented in their grammar books.

Here are some of the functions, songs and chants that are appropriate to intermediate and advanced classes. The suggestion to teachers is to try to avoid explanations but instead, to provide **hooks**: memorable examples that typify core modal meanings.

FUNCTIONS	INTERMEDIATE CHANTS	ADVANCED CHANTS OR SONGS
promising and assurance	*Don't worry, I'll Do It.*	*I'll Get It. Oh No, I'll Get It* The Beatles, *Can't Buy Me Love* (featuring *will*)
anticipating	*I Hope Jack'll Be There* *I Hope He Won't Be Homesick* *Are You Going to Go with Joe?* *Hurry Up, Kate!* (featuring *gonna*)	*We're Going to Miss You* *Do You Think It's Going to Rain?* *What Are You Going to Do?*

suggesting and giving advice	*Let's Try*	*Let's Have Lunch*
	Let's Go Out	*Let's Make a Date*
	What Do You Want to Do?	Tina Turner, *Better Be Good to Me*
	Your Cold Is Getting Worse (You ought to see the nurse.)	
	You Ought to Call Your Mother	
	What Should I Do?	
ordering		*What Are You Going to Have?* *I'd Like a Sandwich*
inviting, accepting, refusing	*Can You Come Over?*	
	We're Having a Party	
	Would You Like to Go to the Movies Tonight?	
regretting and criticizing	*I'm Sorry...I Shouldn't Have Done It*	
	Marvin Gaye, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*	
	I Can't Stay, Gotta Go	*I Can't Do It*
	Can't You Stay for a While?	*I Give Up*
	We've Gotta Get Going (featuring *couldn't*)	
	When Do We Have to Be Back?	*I'm Afraid I Won't Be Able to Go*
		Why Don't You Buy It?
		I Can't Afford It
obligations and difficulties	*What Are We Supposed to Do?*	
	The Beatles, *We Can Work It Out*	
	The Rolling Stones, *You Can't Always Get What You Want*	
inference	*This Can't Be Right*	

VIII. A TAM summary

Finally, over the page, we have a summary of the TAM system. For a more student-friendly summary which first appeared in *X-Word Grammar Intermediate*, see the appendix, p. 126.

The English TAM System

REMOTE

TENSE

simple past (did + V)
*I **had** a skateboard*

past descriptive (was/were)
*when I **was** little.*

ASPECT

past temporal (was/were + Ving)
*when we **were living** in Ohio.*

past-of-past (had + Ved)
*because my brother **had outgrown** it.*

MODALITY

past permission (could + V) past impossible (couldn't + V)
*He said I **could have** it. I **couldn't sleep** that night.*
past possible (be able to + V) *I **was able to use** it right away.*
past imaginal (could've + Ved) *I **could've kissed** him!*

past suggestion (should + V)
*My parents said I **should be** happy about the move.*
past imaginal (should've + Ved) *They **should've asked** me.*

past prediction (would + V) past habitual (would + V)
*I said I **would** never **like** NY. I **would complain** daily.*
past imaginal (would've + Ved) *I **would've gone back** to Ohio in a minute.*

past possible (might + V)
*My parents said I **might change** my mind.*
*They **might have known** it was just a matter of time.*
past imaginal (might've + Ved) *I **might've changed** sooner except for my stubbornness.*

past intention (be going to + V)
*I **was going to show** them a thing or two!*

past obligation (had to + V)
*I **had to apologize** when I came to love New York.*
past logically certain (must've + Ved)
*I **must've been** a pill as a teenager.*

counterfactual (wish/if ⇒ past forms*)
*I wish I **had** a skateboard.*
*If I **had** a skateboard, ...*

past counterfactual (wish/if ⇒ had+Ved)
*I wish I'**d had** a skateboard then.*
*If I'**d had** a skateboard, ...*

*The term "past forms" includes the last trace of the English subjunctive, e.g. *If I **were**...*

imaginal (would/could/might + V)
*I **could squeeze** between cars.*
past imaginal *I **could've squeezed** between cars.*

past imaginal (should + have + Ved)
*I **should have liked** that.**

imaginal (would/could/might + V)
*I **would zip** through traffic.*
past imaginal *I **would've zipped** through traffic.*

imaginal (would/could/might + V)
*I **might get hurt!***
past imaginal *I **might've gotten hurt!***

conditional (hope/if ⇒ immediate forms)
*I hope I **get** a skateboard for Christmas.*
*If you **have** one, **can** I **borrow** it? If I **get** one, I **will be able to squeeze** between cars; I **will zip** through traffic.*

**Should have Ved* is British only.

IMMEDIATE

simple tense (do/does + V)
*I **have** a car.*
*I **don't have** a skateboard.*

descriptive (am/is/are)
*I'**m** an adult. My needs **are** adult needs.*

temporal (am/is/are + Ving)
*but we'**re having** a block party Saturday,*
*and I'**m thinking** about skateboarding again.*

up-to-now (has/have + Ved & has/have +been + Ving)
*Actually, I've **never stopped** thinking about it,*
*and I've **been saving up** to buy one.*

INTRINSIC

possible/permission (can + V)
*You **can get** one on the internet.*
*You **can use** my computer.*

suggestion (should + V)
*We **should check out** E-bay.*

assurance (will + V)
*I'**ll help** you.*

permission (may + V)
*You **may apologize** now.*
Note: May for permission is very formal; it is used humorously here.

intention (am/are going to + V)
*I'**m going to do** it tonight.*

obligation (have to/gotta + V)
*We **have to do** it now.*
*I **gotta go**.**

**Gotta* is a spoken form that comes from *have got to*.

EXTRINSIC

logically impossible (can't + V)
*It **can't hurt** to try.*

logically reasonable (should + V)
*E-bay **should have** some bargains.*

prediction (will + V)
*That'**ll be** a first.*

logically possible (may + V)
*Sorry. You're right. E-bay **may save** us some money.*

expectation (is/are going to + V)
*It's **going to be** fun.*

logically certain (must/gotta + V)
*I **must have** rocks in my head.*
*You **gotta be kidding**! Now?*

Appendix

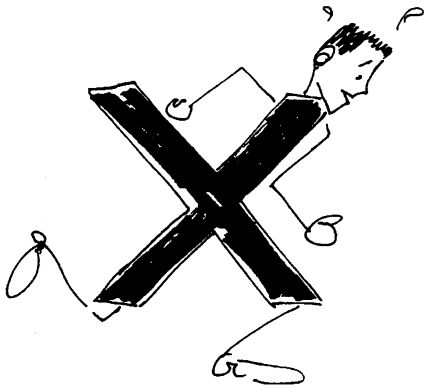
Chart 1

X-Words and Main Verbs

MAIN VERBS in English are a little complacent. They carry so much *content* (that is, meaning) in a sentence that they don't do much grammar work. By themselves—

(1) they have no time meaning;
(2) they have no singular or plural meaning;
(3) they have no person (*I, you, he, she,* etc.).

And as long as they have an x-word to do the work of the sentence for them, they don't even have to move out of their comfortable place in the predicate of the sentence. They can just sit around and be gorgeous.



X-WORDS are not in the least complacent. They carry all of the time meaning of an English verb phrase; they also show if a subject is singular or plural, first person, second person or third person. They can join with many subjects to make contractions like *I'm* and *she'll*. Almost all of them join with negatives in words like *aren't* and *wouldn't*. They move around the subject of a sentence to make yes-no questions, and they can tag onto the ends of statements to make so-called tag questions like, "It's a nice day, isn't it?" or "There are 20 x-words, aren't there?"

And above all, x-words dictate absolutely the form of a verb that follows them.

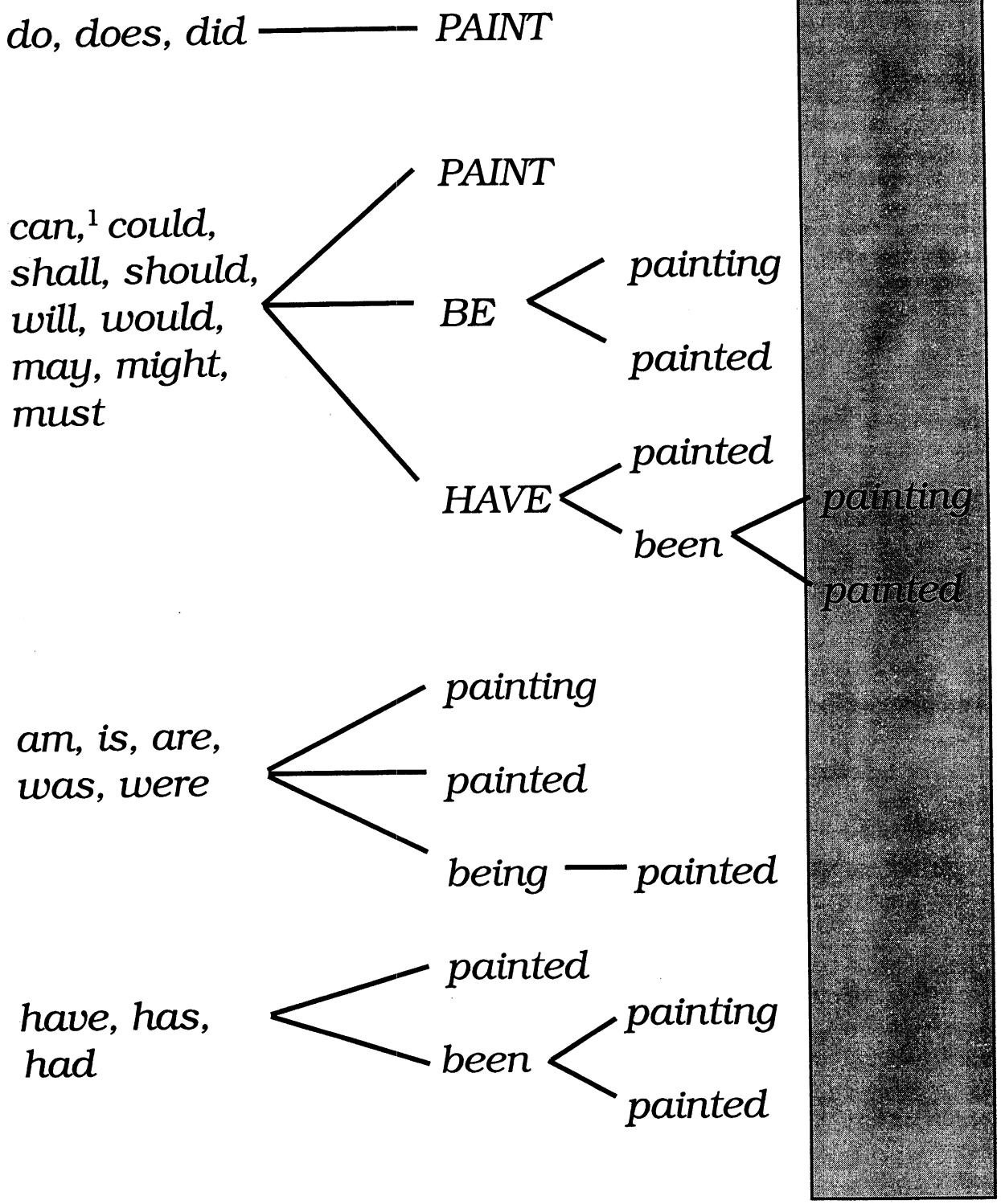
do, does, did
can, could, shall, should,
will, would, may, might, must → *PAINT*

am, is, are, was, were → *painting*

have, has, had → *painted*

Chart 2

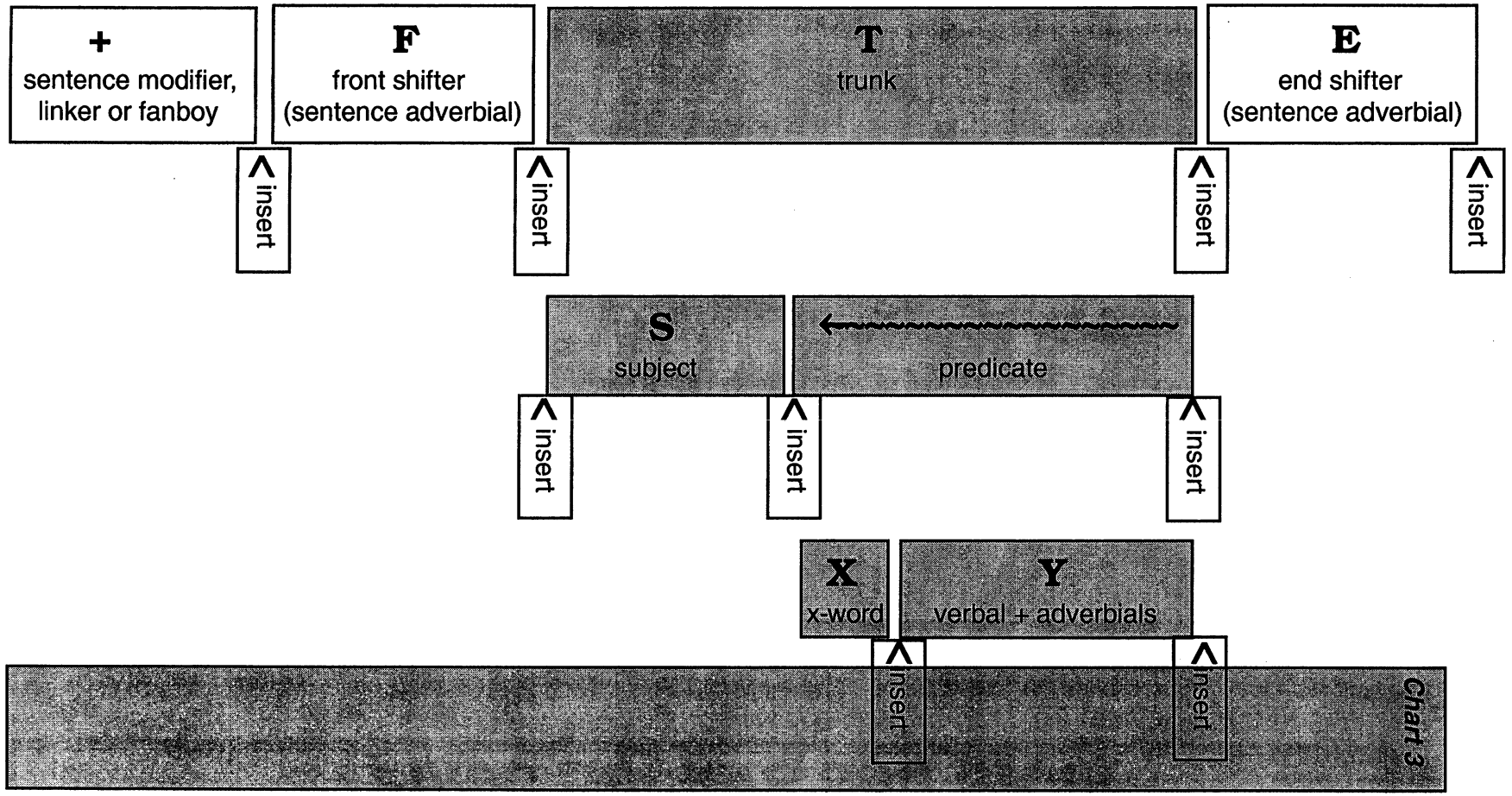
All Verb Form Match-Ups



[1]*Can* appears only as the negative *can't* with *have* and a participle.

Major Sectors in an English Sentence

The first three layers of a written English sentence contain only eight sectors plus possible inserts added between sectors. Shaded sectors are **obligatory**; they must be filled. White sectors are **optional**; they can be filled or remain empty. All sectors can be dupicated: two shifters in a row, two trunks joined by a fanboy, two predicates, etc.



Filled Sectors and Slots

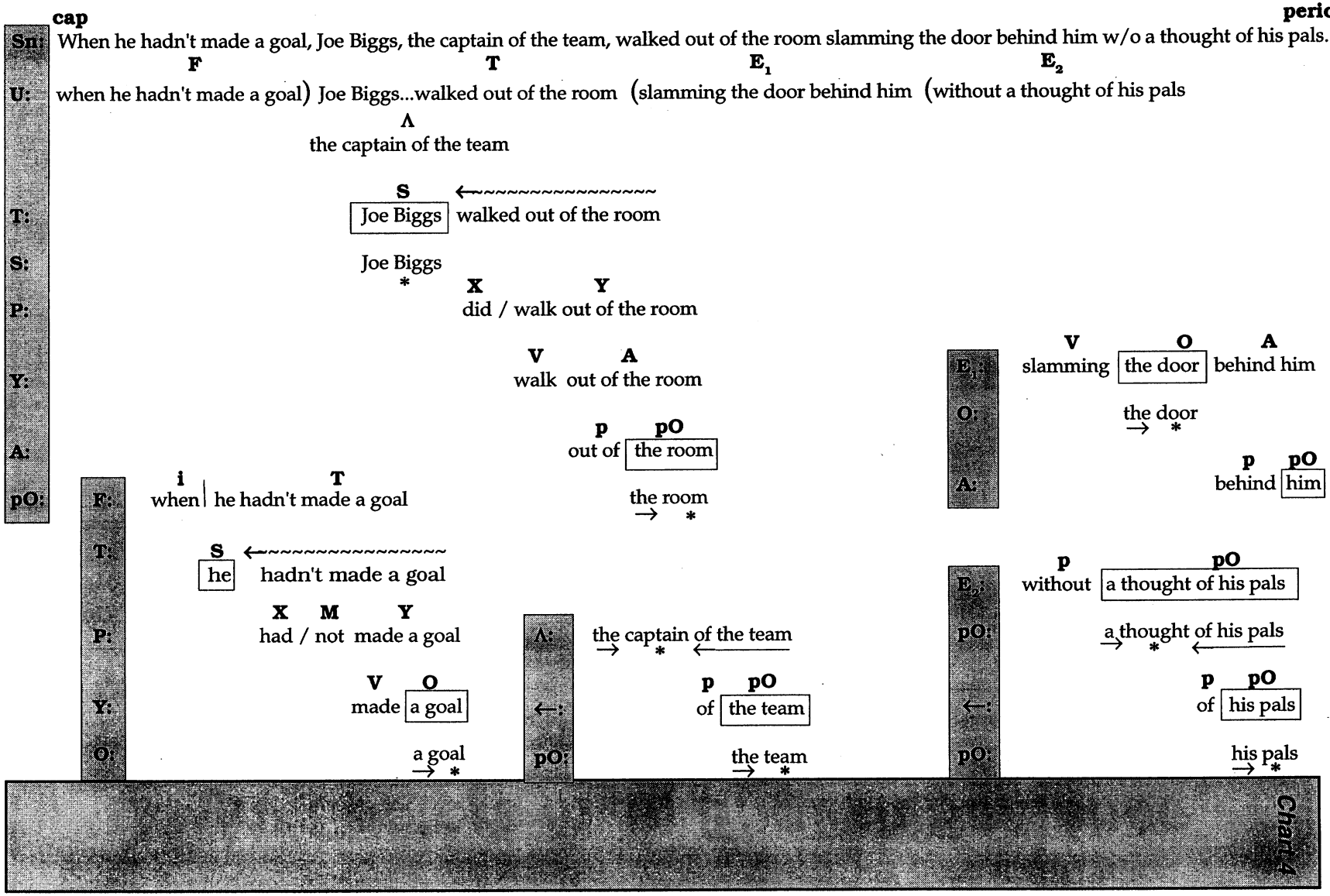


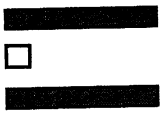
Chart 5

Basic Sentence Patterns

T

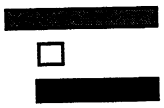
It was raining.
The ducks swam silently in the pond.

T+T



It was raining,
but
the ducks swam silently in the pond.

T=



The ducks swam silently in the pond
and
listened for hunters.

The ducks were swimming silently in the pond
and
listening for hunters.

FT *Although it was raining, the ducks swam silently in the pond.*

TE *The ducks swam silently in the pond although it was raining.*

TI

The ducks *swam silently in the pond,*
—mallards and pintails—

The ducks swam silently in the pond,
a favorite stop in their migration.

T
LT

It was raining.
However, the ducks swam silently in the pond.

Chart 6

English Construction Types

Rod and Color	Construction Type	Samples and Marks
w	function word	**single grammar word:** *a, an, the, do, does, did, etc.; in, on, at,* etc.; *this, that,* etc.; *my, your,* etc.; *and, but, so,* etc.; *if, when,* etc.
red	content word	**single noun, verb, adjective, -ly adverb:** *Jack, novel; write, wrote, writing, written; novel, good, mysterious; mysteriously*
light green	adjective cluster	**adjective with modifier(s):** *very good, too big, deeply mysterious, sick at heart* → * * ←
[illegible]	noun cluster	**noun with modifier(s):** *a very good novel, Jack's book, a writer with a flair for suspense* → * → * ←
yellow	phrase	p pO **preposition + object:** *for suspense, with a flair for suspense, at the bookstore*
dark green	verbal	Y **predicate minus x-word:** *write a book, to write a book, writing a book, written by Jack*
black	predicate	X/Y **x-word ± Y positions filled or empty:** *always writes, wrote a book, polished it off, is a writer, sent it to his editor*
blue	trunk	**subject + predicate(independent clause):** *Jack wrote a book, he is a writer, only respect for the reader makes a good book, it's obvious*
brown	clausid	Y **subject + verbal:** *Jack writing a book, me buying it, all the work done*
orange	clause	i | T **includer + trunk:** *while Jack was writing a book, who bought it, what it cost*

Chart 7

Patterns and Punctuation

Most punctuation in formal writing follows the basic sentence patterns.

A. Use one comma—

1. in the pattern **T+T,** that is, with two whole trunks and a joiner like *and, but, so* or *yet* in between:

   It was raining, ***but*** *the ducks swam silently in the pond.*
   It was raining, ***and*** *the raindrops made circles on the pond.*
   It was raining, ***so*** *the hunters wore rain gear.*

2. in the pattern **FT** if the front shifter is a clause—

   Although it was raining, *the ducks swam silently in the pond.*
   Since it was raining, *the hunters wore rain gear.*

   --but usually not if the front shifter is only a word or a phrase.

   Yesterday *the ducks swam silently in the pond.*
   Because of the rain *the hunters wore rain gear.*

3. in the pattern **LT,** that is, when the sentence starts with a linker—

   It was raining. ***However,*** *the ducks swam in the pond.*
   It was raining. ***Therefore,*** *the hunters wore rain gear.*

   --but not with sequence signals:

   First *the hunters found a good spot;* ***then*** *they waited.*
   Meanwhile *the ducks were aware of their every breath.*

B. Use two commas (or two of something else) in the pattern TT—

The ducks, ***mallards and pintails,*** *swam silently in the pond.*
*The ducks—****mallards and pintails****—swam silently in the pond.*
The ducks ***(mallards and pintails)*** *swam silently in the pond.*
The ducks swam silently in the pond, ***a favorite stop in their long migration.***
*The ducks swam silently in the pond—****a favorite stop in their long migration.***
The ducks swam silently in the pond ***(a favorite stop in their long migration).***

C. *Use no commas—*

1. in the pattern **T,** that is, with only a trunk even if that trunk is very long:

   The ducks that had been flying the longest time in their annual migration swam silently in the welcoming pond.

   —except if the trunk contains a **list** of things:

   ***The mallards, pintails and Canada geese** swam swam silently in the pond.**
   *The family in the farm nearby did not believe in hunting **rabbits, squirrels, ducks or any other animals.****

2. in the pattern **T=,** that is, when you have one subject but two predicates or two verbals:

   *The ducks swam in the pond **and listened for hunters.***
   *The ducks were swimming in the pond **and listening for hunters.***

3. in the pattern **TE,** that is, with a shifter at the end of the sentence:

   *The ducks swam in the pond **although it was raining.***
   *The hunters wore rain gear **because it was raining.***

D. *Use a semi-colon in the patterns T+T and TLT:*

It was raining; the ducks swam silently in the pond.
The hunters saw the ducks gliding by; one of the men fired.
*He was a pretty good shot; **nevertheless,** he missed by a mile.*
*The others missed as well; **meanwhile,** the ducks moved on.*

E. *Use a colon after a whole trunk when it precedes a list or explanation:*

*The hunters had three things to show for their day: **wet clothes, empty guns and empty baskets.***
*They told their wives a small lie: **that the ducks just hadn't been out because of the rain.***

*Notice there is no comma before the joiners *and* or *or* in a list.

Chart 8

English Function Words

Function words are highly specialized, but they appear on more than one list depending on how they are used—e.g. *who* as an includer or question word, *on* as a preposition or particle.

articles:*	→	*a, an, the*
comparatives, superlatives, and unique determiners:	→	*more, less, fewer, better, worse; the most, the least, the fewest, the best, the worst; the only, the main, the chief, the principle, the last, last, the next, next, the same, the right, the wrong*
construction modifiers:	↗	*especially, only, just, all, both, half, about, even, merely, no*
demonstratives:	→	*this, that, these, those*
fanboys:	+	*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*
fillers:		*it, there*
includers:	**i**	*although, because, if, when, who, which, that,* etc.
infinitive signal:		*to*
intensifiers:	→	*very, quite, rather, sort of, somewhat, a little, pretty*
linkers:	+	*however, therefore, in fact,* etc.
middle adverbs:	**m**	*already, often, never, ever, definitely, surely, clearly,* etc.
middle auxiliaries:	**aux**	*be, been, being, have*
negatives:	**n**	*no, not, none, no one, nobody, nothing, never, neither, nor*
numerals:	→	cardinal: *one, two, three,* etc.; ordinal: *first, second, third,* etc.
particles:	**b**	*in, on, up, down, out, off, around, back,* etc.
possessives:	→	*my, your, his, her, its, our, their, mine, yours, hers, ours, theirs*
prepositions:	**p**	*about, above, across, after, against, among,* etc.
pronominals:	☐	*he, she, it, they; him, her, them*
pronouns:	*	*one, ones*
quantifiers:	→	*some, a little, a lot of, a few, few, several, much, very much,* etc.
sentence modifiers:	+	*Maybe, Perhaps, Surely, Hopefully,* etc.
sequence signals:	+	*then, later, first, second, next, afterwards, finally,* etc.
titles:	→	*Ms., Mr., Miss, Mrs., Dr., President, King, Queen,* etc.
***wh-* words:**	**q**	*what, when, where, which, who, whose, whom,* etc.
x-words:	**x**	*do, does, did, have, has, had, am, is, are,* etc.

Chart 9

Connectors

Connectors are *not* part of the constructions they connect. They make looser relationships than introducers do. There are only two types of connectors, **joiners** and **linkers**, which have some meaning in common but are used in different ways syntactically.

Joiners

Joiners join two of the same kinds of things: two nouns, two verbs, two phrases, two verbals, two predicates, two whole trunks—but are not part of them. Note that the seven words below spell out **FANBOYS.** The semi-colon has the same syntactic power as the fanboy *and*.

for ***and*** ***nor*** ***but*** ***or*** ***yet*** ***so*** ***;***

Linkers

Linkers connect a large idea in one sentence to an idea in a previous sentence, usually after a period or a semicolon. By themselves, they cannot connect two trunks.

"and" LINKERS	*"but"* LINKERS	*"so"* LINKERS
Furthermore,	*However,*	*Therefore,*
In addition,	*Nevertheless,*	*As a result,*
Moreover,	*Nonetheless,*	*For this reason,*
Besides,	*Still,*	*Consequently,*
What's more,	*In contrast,*	*Accordingly,*
		Hence,
		Thus,

"same way" LINKERS	*"different way"* LINKERS
Likewise,	*On the other hand,*
Similarly,	*Otherwise,*
In the same way,	*Alternately,*
By the same token,	*Conversely,*

EXPLANATION LINKERS	AFTERTHOUGHT LINKERS
For example,	*Of course,*
For instance,	*After all,*
That is,	*Needless to say,*
In other words,	
Specifically,	

DETAIL LINKERS

Actually,
In fact,
As a matter of fact,
In effect,
In essence,
On the contrary,

SEQUENCE SIGNALS*

After work, After school, After lunch. etc.
At first
First, Second, etc.
Then
Next
Afterwards
Later (on)
After a while
Meanwhile
At the same time

*Sequence signals are a kind of linker but often appear with no comma.

Chart 10

Introducers

Introducers are *part of* the construction they introduce and usually identify the construction type. The exceptions are those like *before* and *after*, which can introduce either a phrase or a clause.

Determiners*

introduce noun clusters

a/an
a few
a little
a lot of
another
any
both
each
either
every
few
his
her
its
less
lots of
many
more
most
much
my
neither
no
NOUN'S
other
our
several
some
such
such a
that
this
the
the other
their
these
those
your

Prepositions

introduce phrases

aboard
about
above
abreast of
according to
across
across from
after
against
ahead of
along
alongside
alongside of
amid(st)
among(st)
apart from
around
as
as for
as to
as well as
astride
at
at sight of
athwart
atop
back of
bar(ring)
because of
before
behind
below
beneath
beside
besides
between
betwixt
beyond
but (='except')
by
by dint of
by virtue of
by way of
care of
concerning
considering
compared to/with
contrary to
despite
down
due to
during
except(ing)
except for
far from
for
for lack of
from
in
in accord(ance) with
in addition to
in back of
in behalf of
in care of
in case of
in company with
in conjunction with
in connection with
in consequence of
in consideration of
in event of
in front of
in lieu of
in need of
in opposition to
in place of
in preference to
in regard to
in spite of
in view of
inside
inside of
instead of
into
let alone
like
minus
near
next to
notwithstanding
of
off
off of
on
on account of
on behalf of
on top of
onto
opposite
opposite to
out
out of
outside
outside of
over
over against
owing to
past
pending
per
pertaining to
plus
regarding
relating to
relative to
respecting
round
save
since
than
through
throughout
till
to
toward(s)
under
underneath
unlike
until
unto
up
upon
versus
via
with
w/ an eye to
w/ a view to
w/ reference to
w/ regard to
w/ respect to
within
without
w/o regard to
worth

*The category "determiners" includes articles, demonstratives, possessives and quantifiers.

Adverbial Includers

introduce adverbial clauses, usually in **F**, **E** and **A** sectors

after
although
as
because
before
every time (that)
except
except that
however
if
if ever
if only
in case
in order that
in spite of the fact that
in that
in the event
in the event that
inasmuch as
insofar as
lest
never mind if/what, etc.
no matter if/what, etc.
now
now that
once
provided
provided that
since
so
so that
though
till
unless
until

Adjectival Includers

introduce adjectival clauses, usually in **I** sectors or modifier [←] slots

after
as
before
but
since ('time' only)
such as
such that
than
*that**
till
until
*when**
*where**
whether...or not
*which**
while
who
*whom**
whose
*why**

Nominal Includers

introduce nominal clauses, usually in **S**, **O**, **C**, **pO** and **PP** sectors

but what
if
how
*that**
what
whatever
whatsoever
when
where
whether
whether...or not
which
whichever
who
whoever
whosoever
whom
whomever
whomsoever
whose
whosever
whosoever
why

*These includers can be deleted so long as they are not the subject of the clause they include — for example, *the book which you lent me* or *the book Δ you lent me* but not *the book Δ cost so much.*

Chart 11

Wh- Words

Wh- words in questions and as nominal or adjectival includers have two functions--first to form the question or include a clause, second to substitute for a particular structure as shown below.

what = *wh-* + 'that'

What do you want? Do you want that?
I don't know what works = 'I don't know' + 'Δ [nominal: subject] works'
I don't know what you want = 'I don't know' + 'you want Δ [nom.: object]'

where = *wh-* + 'there'

Where do you live? Do you live there?
I don't know where you live = 'I don't know' + 'you live Δ [adverbial]'
...the place where I was born = 'the place' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]'
...the place Δ I was born = 'the place' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]'

when = *wh-* + 'then'

When do you leave? Do you leave then?
I don't know when you leave = 'I don't know' + 'you leave Δ [adverbial]'
...the time when I was born = 'the time' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]'
...the time Ø I was born = 'the time' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]'

who = *wh-* + 'he', 'she', etc.

Who is your wife? Is she your wife?
I don't know who your wife is = 'I don't know' + 'Δ [hum. subj.] is your wife'
...the doctor who delivered me = 'the doctor' + 'Δ [hum. subj.] delivered me'

whom = *wh-* + 'him', etc.

Whom do you want? Do you want him?
I don't know whom you want = 'I don't know' + 'you want Δ [hum. object]'
...the parent whom I resemble = 'the parent' + 'I resemble Δ [hum. object]'
...the parent Ø I resemble = 'the parent' + 'I resemble Δ [human object]'

whose = *wh-* + 'his', etc.

Whose hat is this? Is this your hat?
I don't know whose hat this is = 'I don't know' + 'this is Δ [possessive] hat'
...the person whose hat this is = 'the person' + 'this is Δ [possessive] hat'

which = *wh-* + 'this', 'it', etc.

Which hat do you want? Do you want this hat?
I don't know which hat you want = 'I don't know' + 'you want Δ [demonstrative: determiner] hat'
I don't know which is correct = 'I don't know' + 'Δ [demonstrative: subject] is correct'
...the hospital which has excellent care = 'the hospital' + 'Δ [non-human subject] has excellent care'
...the hospital in which I was born = 'the hospital' + 'I was born in Δ [non-human object of preposition]'
...the hospital which my doctor recommended = 'the hospital' + 'my doctor recommended Δ [non-human object]'
...the hospital Ø my doctor recommended = 'the hospital' + 'my doctor recommended Δ [non-human object]'

how = *wh-* + '(in) this way'

How do you take your coffee? Do you take your coffee (in) this way?
I don't know how you take your coffee = 'I don't know' + 'you take your coffee Δ [adverbial]'

why = *wh-* + 'for this reason'	*Why do you want this hat?* *I don't know why you want this hat* = *I don't know* + *you want this hat* Δ [adverbial]' *...the reason why I was born* = 'the reason' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]' *...the reason ∅ I was born* = 'the reason' + 'I was born Δ [adverbial]'
whether = *wh-* + yes-no Q this	*I don't know whether you want this* = 'I don't know' + 'Δ you want this'

Word Order in Boxes

Chart 12

premodifiers

determiner	number or quantifier	quality or superlative	color	source	noun adjunct	noun
Harold's	*three*	*best*	*pink*	*Australian*	*Cinderella*	*roses*
Those	*two*	*outstanding*		*French*	*soccer*	*players*
My	*several*	*favorite*		*New York*	*deli*	*sandwiches*

postmodifiers

clause: *that he raised especially for this flower show*
verbal: *waiting for the big game to begin*
phrase: *with a pickle on the side*

Index
Chapter Heads, Boldface Terms and Worksheets

Note: Adopt-a-Function-Word entries are in listed in italics. Section heads are in boldface. Chapter heads, worksheets and charts are in boldface and italics.