Clauses

Clause (part of the sentence): a sequence of words that cannot stand alone but depends on another clause defined ‘main clause’, and consisting of a subject (optional) and a predicator (compulsory) containing a finite or a non-finite verb form:
(1) after waiting half an hour (non-finite verb form)
(2) when he arrived (finite verb form)
Clauses are the building blocks of sentences, and can be combined in various ways to make complex sentences.

N.B. difference between form and function:
• N can be the head of a NP or a premodifier of the head:
   (1) computers (head)
   (2) computer screen (premodifier of the head)
• Adj can be a premodifier of a N, or a complement:
   (1) A beautiful morning (premodifier of N)
   (2) The morning is beautiful (complement)
In clauses, the various word-classes and phrases can have different syntactic functions.

Clause elements

There are 5 clause elements in English:
Subject (S)
Predicator (P)
Object (O)
Complement (C)
Adverbial (A)
These represent syntactic functions: a function refers to the role that a unit (word, phrase or clause) plays in a larger structure.

• Subject (O)
The subject is a syntactic function usually fulfilled by NP, and sometimes by a clause:
(1) My brother went to university in Wales.
(2) To perform at La Scala was her highest ambition.
The subject is always expressed in English clauses except for two cases:
a) imperative clauses: Go to bed immediately
b) subordinate clauses whose subject is the same as the one in the main clause:
(3) After Ø closing the curtains she turned on the TV.

• Predicator (P)
It is the only clause element where there is a one-to-one correspondence between form and function.
It is a syntactic function fulfilled only by a verbal element. All clauses contain a predicator:
(1) The lorry braked hard.
(2) None of the supporters had seen the goal.
(3) His grandparents are deaf.
The predicator is a non-finite verb form in subordinate clauses with no subject:
(4) after waiting half an hour he left the meeting.

- **Object (O)**
The object function is fulfilled by noun phrases and noun clauses.
It follows transitive verbs only.
(1) A fox crossed the path.
(2) I hope that he will remember me.
In (1)-(2), we find a **direct object**, but we can also find an **indirect object (IO)**,
which is usually a NP or a pronoun and precedes the direct object:
(3) John gave me (IO) a book (O).
(4) She sent her boss (IO) a postcard (O).

- **Complement (C)**
This syntactic function is fulfilled by a noun, NP, an adjective or AdjP.
Complements occur after particular types of verbs:
  - **Intensive verbs** (also called ‘linking verbs’): be, become, seem, appear
    (1) Sofia is tall.
    (2) He became a doctor
    (3) Sam seems a nice man
  - **Verbs of change**: make, paint, colour, rub
    (4) Mary made him successful
    (5) Sam painted/coloured the wall green
  - **Verbs of perception**: think, consider
    (6) I think Billy kind and generous

**N.B.** Look at the different structures of the following clauses:
(7) My mother made me (O) a tennis player (C)
(8) My mother made me (IO) a cup of coffee (O)

- **Adverbial**
The role of adverbial (also called ‘adjunct’) is played by adverbs, AdvP, PP, less
frequently by NP. Adverbials describe the circumstances in which the action of the
clause takes place. They are classified into:
  - **time adverbials** (they answer the question when?)
    (1) I practice every day of my life
  - **space adverbials** (they answer the question where?)
    (2) I met him at the station
  - **manner adverbials** (they answer the question how?)
    (3) The car started very slowly
  - **evaluative adverbials** (they express the speaker’s evaluation about the
    content of clause: unfortunately, probably, luckily)
    (4) Luckily, I am a good swimmer.

**Obligatory vs. optional adverbials**
Adverbs are optional when they can be omitted, as in (4) above.
Adverbials are obligatory when the verbs have a meaning that requires to specify time
or space:
(1) a. * The teacher put the book
    b. The teacher put the book on the shelf. (space adverbial)
(2) a. *The event will last
    b. The event will last all week. (time adverbial)
Form and function relationships

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Basic clause structures

- PO          Eat your cheese
- PA          Go to bed
- SP          Jane lied
- SPO         I forgot the book
- SPA         John went to London
- SPC         Mary is tall
- SPOO        I sent him (IO) a present (O)
- SPOC        My mother made me (O) an artist (C)
- SPOA        The man parked the car (O) in front of the house (A)

Sentences

The sentence is the largest syntactic unit consisting of one or more clauses. It is capable of standing alone, consisting at least of a clause: Subject (except for imperative sentences) + Predicator containing a finite verb form.

Sentence structures

- Simple sentence – one clause
  (1) Linguists are interested in words and structures
  (2) Look after yourself
- Complex sentence - 2 coordinated clauses: a main clause is conjoined to another main clause by means of a coordinator (and, but, or)
  (3) John painted the gate and I cleaned the windows.
  (4) It is cheap, but it is very nice.
  (5) Julia can make a cake or you can go to the baker’s.

N.B. there is also a phrasal coordination:
  (6) For dinner I had cheese and ham pie (NP and NP)

- Complex sentence – two clauses: main clause + 1 subordinate clause.
  (7) He is the man Ø I love (main clause + relative clause)
  (8) He gave me more copies than I needed (main clause + comparative clause)
(9) *Hidden by the ocean’s water*, *the canyon begins a few yards off the California coastline.* (past-participle clause + main clause)
(10) *He never wrote another book* after receiving the *Nobel Prize* (main clause + temporal clause)

- Complex sentence – three clauses: main clause + 2 subordinate clauses
  (11) *The nature of language is at the heart of the debate* // *since language teaches individuals* // *to act in a certain way.* (main clause + causal clause + infinitive clause)

**Subordinate clauses**

They can be introduced by a **subordinator** or Ø. They are of three kinds.

- **Relative clauses:** they function as a postmodifier of N, and are introduced by a relative pronoun, sometimes by Ø when the pronoun is the Object.
  (1) *This is the present* which my cousin sent me.
  (2) *The waiter* who served us was very professional.
  (3) *The book* whose cover is torn is mine.
  (4) *This is the worst thing* that can happen.
  (5) *The year* when I finished the book was 2012.
  (6) *It is one of the few countries* where people drive on the left.
  (7) *The film* Ø we saw last night was very boring.

- **Noun clauses:** they are clauses that take the place of a NP, and can function as Subject, Object or Complement.
  (8) *She stopped crying.* (Object)
  (9) *Singing with the band* was Mary’s greatest pleasure (Subject)
  (10) *Tell me why you did it.* (Object)
  (11) *That he had won first prize* amazed everyone. (Subject)
  (12) *The spokesman said* that the rumours were false. (Object)
  (13) *Her highest ambition was* to perform at the Opera House. (Complement)

- **Adverbial clauses:** they function as adverbials, and are usually introduced by a subordinator.
  (14) *He never wrote another book* after receiving the *Nobel Prize*.
  (15) *Although the weather is hot now*, you should take some warm clothes.
  (16) *Whenever she comes*, she brings a friend.
  (17) *I did it* because he told me to.

**Information structure**

Each clause presents **given information**, already known by the listener, and **new information**, which tends to occur at the end of clause.

- Standard word order (neutral, or unmarked information structure):
  (1) I met John at the theatre yesterday.
- Marked word order/structure: when the speaker wants to highlight a constituent, he places the constituent regarded as relevant, in a strange, unusual position. There are various ways to do this.
• **CLEFTING**

Every clause element can be put into the focal position:

(2) I baked a cake for John yesterday (unmarked construction)
(3) It was a cake that I baked for John
(4) It was for John that I baked a cake
(5) It was yesterday that I baked a cake for John.

• **FRONTING**

A constituent, which is normally found in post-verbal position, is put at the beginning of the clause.

(6) Three Van Gogh hung on one wall (unmarked construction)
    On one wall hung three Van Goghs marked
(7) The head injuries were more serious (unmarked construction)
    More serious were the head injuries marked

• **PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION**

(8) The dog (agent) ate my dinner (patient). active
    My dinner (patient) was eaten by my dog (agent). passive (be + past participle)

Such pairs of sentences are semantically equivalent. The passive construction is preferred for specific reasons: it can serve two pragmatic functions in discourse:

a) the demotion of the agent:
    (9) The man was killed by night.
    In ‘agentless passives’, like (9), the agent is omitted because it is unknown, redundant or irrelevant.

b) focalisation: it is used to focus on the action/event expressed by the verb, or on the ‘patient’, which is now the surface subject of the clause.

• Use of *do* + verb in order to focus on the verb:

(10) I do want to go!
(11) He does play tennis well.