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SENTENCE STRUCTURE: FUNCTIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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- Understanding the structure of a sentence involves knowing not only what its constituents are, but also the category and the function of those constituents (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.7). Also, these three aspects of syntactic analysis are closely bound up with one another. This paper is mainly about syntactic functions, and about how function relates to category and constituency. A systematic sentence analysis is best begun, not by immediately considering the words in the sentence, but by first identifying the very largest phrases – those phrases which are immediate constituents, not of any other phrase, but of the sentence itself. So, the first illustration of the relationship between constituents, their categories and their functions, will concern the functions and categories of the immediate constituents of the sentence itself.

SUBJECT AND PREDICATE

To be sure of identifying only the largest (i.e. immediate) constituents of the sentence it is (wherever) possible, to divide the sentence into the fewest possible parts, i.e. into just two. An example of the simplest possible complete sentence structure is (Burton-Roberts, 2016, p.9):

Ducks paddle.

Other such examples are: *Simon coughed, Birds fly, Empires decline, and Mira retaliated.* In all such cases, there is no option but to analyze the sentence as consisting of two parts, as in:

Sentence

Ducks   paddle.
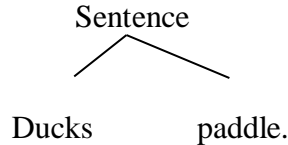
But, how the complicated sentences are going to be analyzed? A speaker's ability to recognize the structure of the sentences of her/his language is largely a matter of being able to perceive a similar pattern across a wide range of apparently different sentences.

For example:
        The ducks are paddling away.

1.1. SENTENCES VERSUS CLAUSES

According to Verspoor and Sauter (2000) a sentence is a group of words that in writing starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark. A grammatically complete sentence expresses at least one complete whole event or situation with a subject and predicate.

Some sentences consist of only one clause. A clause also expresses a whole event or situation with a subject and a predicate. In the following two examples, each is a simple sentence consisting of one clause.

Whales cannot breathe underwater.　　　　*They have lungs instead of gills.*
　　clause　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　clause
　　sentence 1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　sentence 2

However, a sentence may also consist of two or more clauses. Note how the two simple sentences above are combined in different ways to form longer sentences. Both examples below illustrate one sentence, each with two clauses.

<u>Whales cannot breathe underwater</u>　**for**　<u>they have lungs instead of gills.</u>　sentence
　　clause 1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　clause 2

<u>Whales cannot breathe underwater</u> **because** <u>they have lungs instead of gills.</u>
　　clause 1　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　clause 2　　　　　sentence

2) Compound sentences

A compound sentence consists of two or more main clauses. The sentence *Whales cannot breathe underwater for they have lungs instead of gills* is an example of a compound sentence because both clauses are independent and may stand on their own. The connecting word for, which expresses reason, connects these two clauses and expresses what these two situations have to do with each other.

One feature of a compound sentence is that the clauses have a fixed order, so they cannot be moved without changing their meaning. Note how turning the clause around results in a semantically anomalous sentence, marked with a question mark in front of the sentence.

Whales cannot breathe underwater, **for** they have lungs instead of gills.
?They have lungs instead of gills, **for** whales cannot breathe underwater.

There are just a few other conjunctions *like for*, called *coordinate conjunctions* that may be used to form a compound sentence. There are also a few variations on these coordinate conjunctions, consisting of a coordinate conjunction combined with another word or phrase, called correlative conjunctions. The term coordinator is going to be used to refer to both types at once. Table 2 shows a complete list of coordinators. Since these are the only coordinators, it may be useful to memorize them; all other connecting words like because, *if, who*, and so on are subordinators and introduce dependent clauses.

Table 3 Coordinators (Verspoor and Sauter, 2000, p.36)

Coordinate conjunctions		Correlative conjunctions
and	for	both … and
but	so	not only … but also
or	yet	either … or
nor		neither … nor

Another way to connect two main clauses and form a compound sentence is to put a semi-colon (;) between the main clauses.

Whales have lungs instead of gills; they cannot breathe under water.

To make the logical connection clear between two main clauses separated with a semi-colon, the semi-colon is often followed by a word like *therefore, besides*, or similarly called a **conjunctive adverb.**

3) Complex sentences

A complex sentence is a sentence that contains at least one full dependent clause with its own subject and predicate. A dependent clause is a clause that starts with a subordinator, a word like *because, although, if, who, where, when.*

The difference between a compound and complex sentence is that in a compound sentence, both parts are really just simple, independent sentences. In a complex sentence, the dependent clause cannot stand on its own and functions as a constituent (subject, object, adverbial, or attribute) of the main clause, or in some cases it is only a part of another sentence constituent. There are three different types of dependent clauses.

The first kind of dependent clause functions as adverbial. In the sentence below, the first clause can stand on its own, but the second one cannot because it starts with the connecting word *because*. The whole *because* clause answers the question *why whales cannot breathe* and is therefore not a sentence in itself but a constituent of the main clause: an adverbial. (Verspoor and Sauter, 2000, p.34)

sentence

Whales cannot breathe underwater *main clause*	because they have lungs instead of gills. *dependent clause functioning as adverbial*

4) Compound-complex sentences

It is also possible to have a compound sentence with complex parts, or a complex sentence with compound parts. Those types are called compound-complex sentences. The following example of a compound-complex sentence has two complete main clauses connected by the coordinate conjunction and. Each of these has a dependent clause.
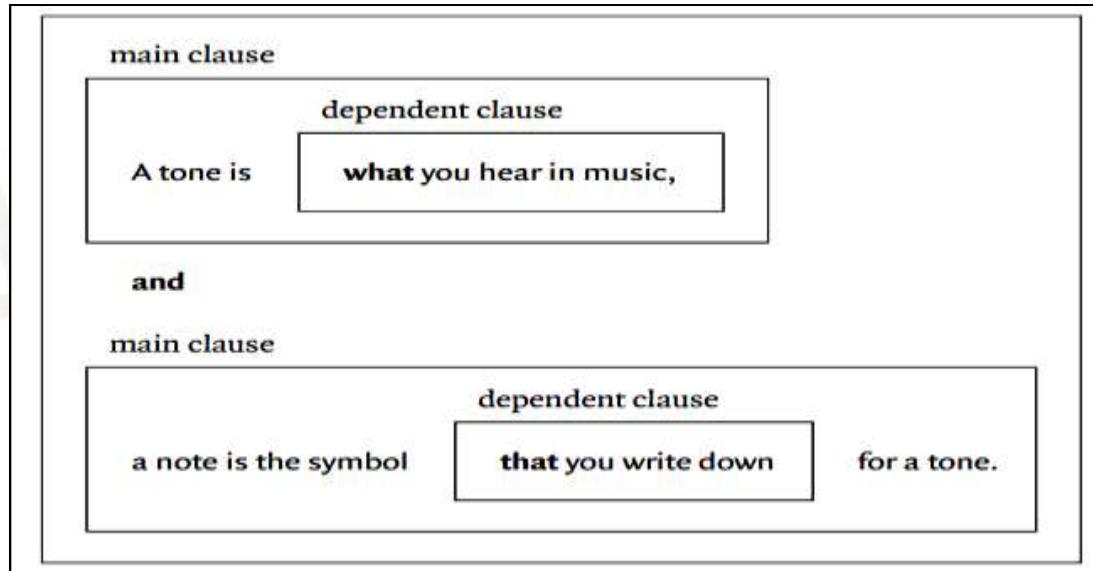

Figure 2.1 Compound-complex sentences (Verspoor and Sauter, 2000, p.42)

In the following example of a compound-complex sentence, there is only one main clause. The main word in the subject in this main clause is modified by two relative clauses which are connected to each other by and. Within the second relative clause there is another dependent clause, functioning as adverbial.