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TYPICAL ENGLISH SENTENCE PATTERNS

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According to the book of Marjolijn Verspoor and Kim Sauter, 2000, in English, there are five basic, prototypical sentence patterns. Most sentences you will come across, no matter how complex, will be somewhat similar to one of these. However, they are usually much more complex because often the constituents are very complex and long. Because the pattern that can be used is very much dependent on the meaning of the verb in the predicator, the patterns are named after very typical verbs for that pattern. The first three patterns are most common in everyday language; the last two occur much less frequently. This paper shows that the precise lexicon information on basic verbs and constructional constraints sensitive to the presence of the verb can play important roles in predicting various related properties.



THE RUNNING PATTERN (INTRANSITIVE VERBS)



S P (A)
Tim is talking fast.

Here, the parentheses indicate that the constituent is optional. In other words, this constituent may be left off.

Sentences with the running pattern consist of a subject and predicator, often (but by no means always) followed by an adverbial. For this pattern you need a verb that expresses an action involving only one main participant. There are many verbs like run that express a pure action, for example, swimming, running, cycling, listening, and so on. This sentence pattern may have one or more adverbials, but no direct object nor subject attribute. Also, verbs like running are called intransitive verbs.

THE BEING PATTERN (COPULA VERBS)

Sentences with the being pattern consist of a subject and predicator followed by a subject attribute. The subject attribute gives information about the subject only, not about the predicator. For the being pattern, you need a verb that does not have much meaning, but expresses the sense of the mathematical equal sign (=). The meaning of such a verb is merely to point out a link between the first participant and an attribute or a category. In the example below, fast expresses an attribute of John, and the runner indicates to what category John belongs.

S	P	SA	(A)
Maria	is	fast	(in the game).
Maria	is	the runner	(as usual).

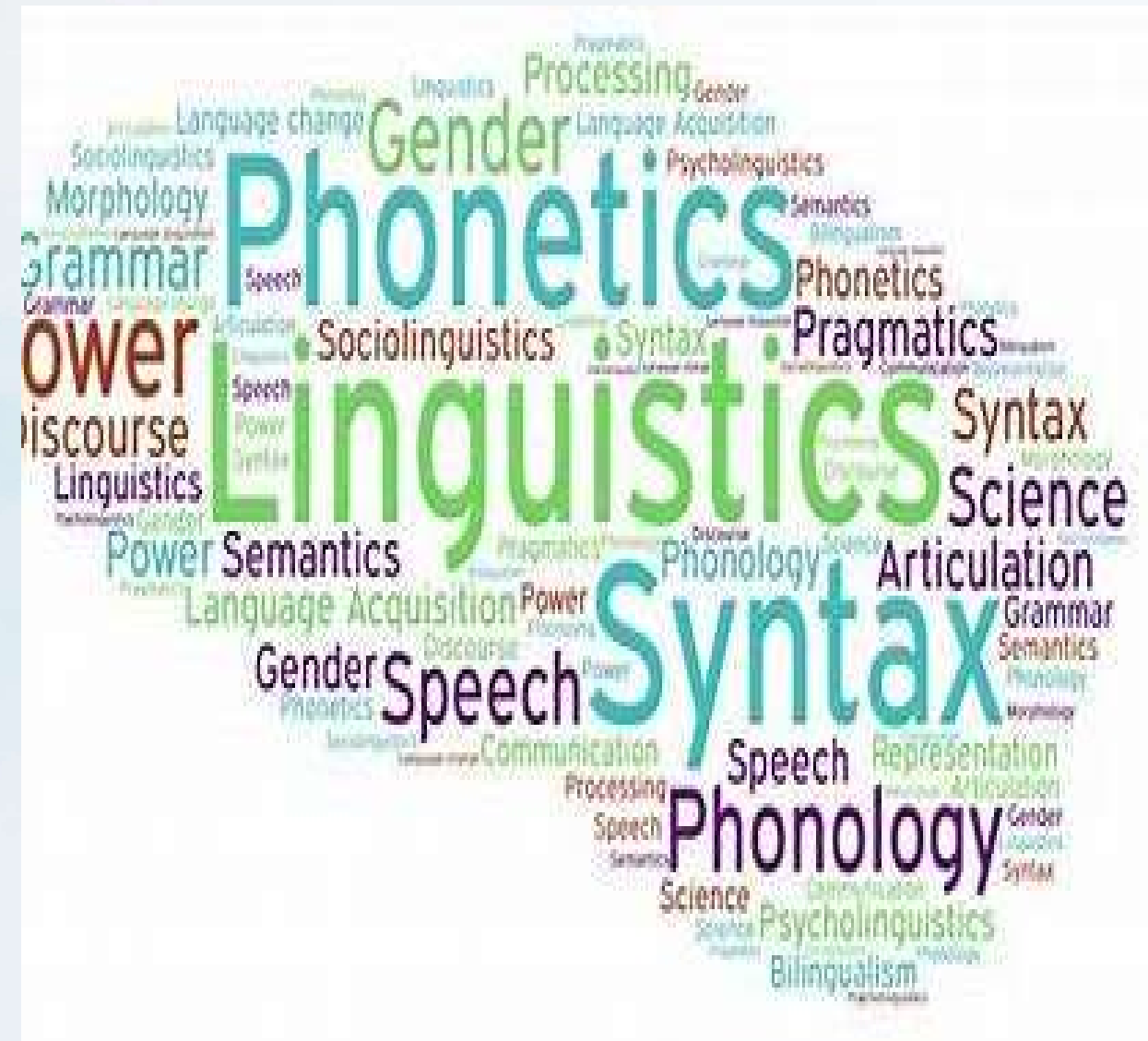


By far the most common verb for this pattern is the lexical verb be, called a copula verb, but bolded words show a few more verbs that may be used with this pattern.

appear **grow** **seem** **look** **be** **make** **smell** **sound** **become**
prove **taste** **feel** **remain** **turn**

Remember, though, that words may have different senses in different contexts. So, for example, in a sentence like She appeared suddenly, the verb appear expresses an action, and this sentence has the running pattern.

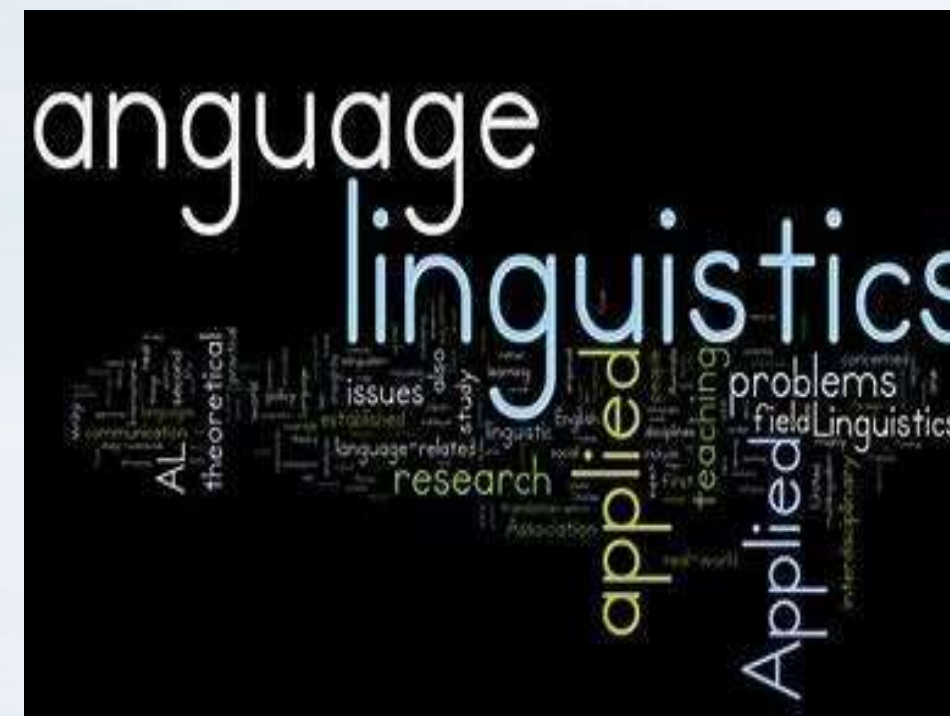
But in She appeared sad the verb appear has a sense somewhat similar to be and this sentence has the being pattern. Also, the verb be when followed by an adverbial expressing a place as in He is in the room is not used in the being pattern but the running pattern.



THE DOING/SEEING PATTERN (MONOTRANSITIVE VERBS)

Sentences with the doing/seeing pattern consist of a subject and predicator followed by a direct object. For this pattern, you need a verb that expresses an action or a (mental) experience such as perception involving two participants, one who does the acting or experiencing and one who is acted upon or perceived. There are many verbs like doing, for example, holding, counting, building, kicking, and many verbs like seeing that express (mental) experience like feeling, hearing, believing, thinking and so on. As you will see the verbs used in this pattern are called monotransitive verbs.

S	P	DO	(A)
Bill	kicked	the ball	(when it was thrown by Peter).
Bill	saw	the ball.	



THE GIVING/BUYING PATTERN (DITRANSITIVE VERBS)

Sentences with the giving/buying pattern consist of a subject, predicator, indirect or benefactive object, and direct object. Therefore, for this pattern to occur, there must be an event involving at least three participants, a person who gives something to someone or does something for someone (the subject), then the thing that is given or done (the direct object), and the receiver (the indirect or benefactive object). Very few verbs can be used in such patterns. The most common ones are give, pass, send, tell, make, buy, and offer.

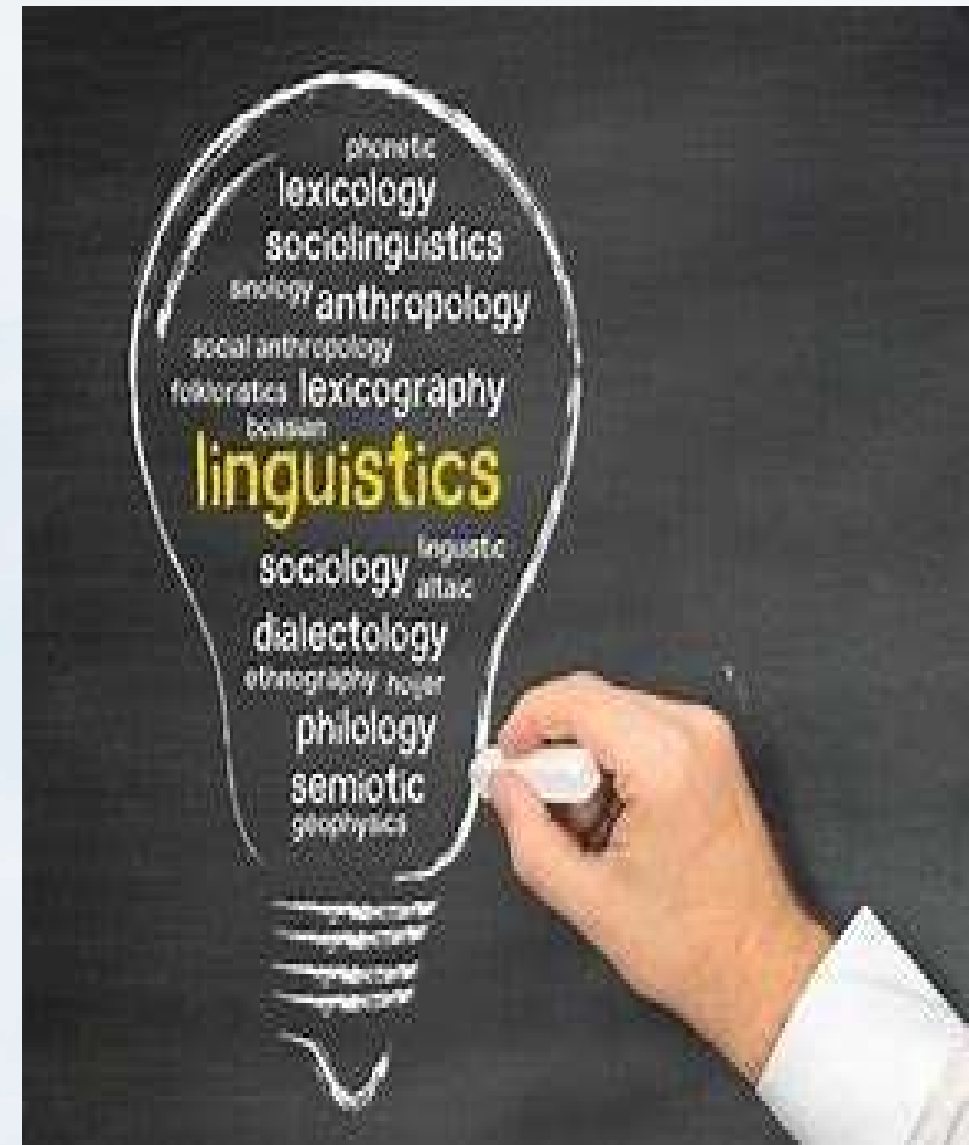
S	P	IO	DO	(A)
Nela	gave	Noa	the ball	(for his birthday).
Nela	bought	Noa	the ball	(for his birthday).

The difference between an indirect object and a benefactive object is that an indirect object has the thing given in hand after the transfer, whereas the benefactive object does not.

(In many books, the distinction between indirect and benefactive object is not made. Both can be called indirect object.)

Nela gave Noa the ball. This sentence implies that Noa now has the ball in his possession.

Nela bought Noa the ball. This sentence does not necessarily imply that Noa now has the ball in his possession.



THE MAKING/CONSIDERING PATTERN (COMPLEX-TRANSITIVE VERBS)

Sentences with the making/considering pattern, which can occur with only a very limited number of verbs, consist of a subject and predicator followed by a direct object. This direct object, in turn, is followed by an object attribute describing only the direct object.

S	P	DO	OA	(A)
They	made	John	the umpire	
John	considered	the ball	out	(as it went past the line).

When used with this pattern, a verb like make has a sense of 'doing something' and thus causing the 'direct object' to belong to a new category. For example, a sentence like We made him king expresses something like 'we did something to him and this caused him to be king'.

Other verbs like make are wipe, drive, call, crown, name, or elect.

A verb like consider, when used with this pattern, expresses that in the subject's mind the 'direct object' belongs to a certain category. For example, a sentence like We consider him king expresses that in the subject's mind 'he is king'. Other verbs like consider are assume, prove, declare, certify, regard, or deem. The following are some more examples of this pattern.

Examples:

The judge declared him guilty. The judge thought something: he was guilty.



Sentence constituents: A complete overview

