

Week 5: Sentence types: declaratives, interrogatives and beyond

1. Recap

- grammar is to a large extent not an abstract system of arbitrary rules but is instead based in our cognitive system and the way we use that system to communicate with other speakers
- syntactic categories (word class, part of speech) v. functions (grammatical relations, grammatical roles)
- apart from structural properties the semantic(-pragmatic) characteristics of word and phrase categories as well as functions have been identified
- ...but what about the level of the sentences as a whole?

2. Sentence functions & structures

- so far: focus on sentences describing situations, i.e. entities, and what happens to them (→ propositions)
- ... but in addition to providing the listener with information (the statement function) language has other functions as well → appendix
- SPEECH ACT THEORY (see e.g. Searle 1970) → language is not just about representing the world, but also about getting things done — in fact representing the world (statement) can be seen as a speech act as well, one's communicative goal in declaratives is informative
- function of QUESTIONS: seeking information
- function of DIRECTIVES: trying to get someone to do something (commanding, inviting, warning, suggesting, advising, instructing, etc.)
- function of EXCLAMATIONS: show strong emotional response to something

2.1 Declarative

- the normal way to convey a statement in language is by using a sentence with a declarative structure

- (1) This is Mr Schneebly.
- (2) Mr S has never taught at Horace Green.
- (3) It means I was drunk yesterday.

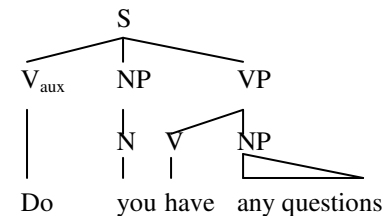
- structural properties: Subj-Pred

2.2 Interrogative

- the normal way to pose a question is by using a sentence with interrogative structure

- (4) Do you have any questions?

- structural properties: operator (=finite auxiliary)-Subj-rest of predicate
- various subtypes of interrogatives



2.2.1 Yes-no interrogatives

- aka POLARITY interrogative
- see ex. (4) above
- special subtype: ALTERNATIVE QUESTIONS
- structurally identical except the possible answers (2 or more) are listed and coordinated with the conjunction *or*

- (5) Do you have any questions or not?

- not all questions that include this kind of coordination are in fact alternative questions; sometimes they may be ordinary *yes/no* questions

- (6) Is your car registered and kept in Great Britain, Isle of Man, or Channel Isles?

- potential for misunderstanding:

- (7)
 - How may I help you?
 - I'd like a loaf of bread.
 - White or brown?
 - Yes.

- Yes, what?
- Yes, please.

- TAG QUESTIONS may be seen as another subtype of *yes-no* interrogatives

(8) Now you don't want me to have to call your parents, do you?

- structurally like *yes-no* questions, get tacked onto end of declarative sentence
- may be more or less compact/compressed; compare (8) to (9):

(9) I'm in charge now, OK?

- special function: often speaker seeks to confirm with hearer that the belief expressed by the declarative bit of the utterance (*You don't want me to call your parents*, etc.) is indeed correct
- alternatively: confirm that you have hearer's attention
- ...in addition, all kinds of emotional loadings are possible, e.g.:

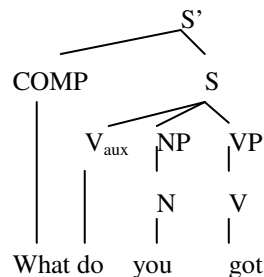
(10) You have some questions, do you?

- CONSTANT POLARITY TAG (as opposed to REVERSE POLARITY TAGS, (8)) → often expresses disapproval/scepticism

2.2.2 Wh-interrogatives

- aka CONSTITUENT INTERROGATIVES

(11) What do you got? (→ Br.E. What do you have?)



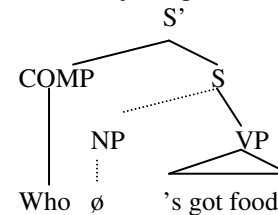
COMP = complementiser, cf. B&B (2001:137ff)

- function: speaker assumes that s/he and the hearer share between them some bit of knowledge concerning some situation, but s/he is missing one little bit of information

- the missing element is made the INTERROGATIVE FOCUS by using an interrogative word such as *what*, *who(m)*, *where*, *when*, *how*
- structure (normally): *Wh*-constituent-operator-Subj-Pred
- ...except when the interrogative focus is the subject:

(12) Who's got food?

→ no subject-operator inversion



2.3 Imperative

(13) Shut up!

- imperative
- structural properties: no overt subject necessary (because it's obvious from the situation: speaker addressing the hearer in order to get them to do something), though not impossible:

(14) You shut up!

(15) Shut up you!

- nonfinite:

(16) You be quiet!

(17) You are quiet.

- in verbs other than *be* you can't see that the imperative is nonfinite; compare (14) to (18):

(18) You shut up. [Could be e.g. past tense: *Last time I asked you, you shut up*]

- in OE, the imperative was a morphologically distinct form for all verbs:

(19) Bindest þone guman.
bind-ind-2Sg the man
'You bind the man'

- (20) Bind þone guman
bind-imp-Sg the man
'Bind the man!'

- in addition, there was a Sg v. Pl distinction:

- (21) Bindað þone guman
bind-imp-Pl the man
'Bind the man!' [more than one addressee]

- auxiliaries, including modals, don't generally have an imperative (*be* and *do* are exceptions):

- (22) *Can chill today!

- (23) *Should play!

- HORTATIVE IMPERATIVE (B&B 2001: IMPERATIVE PARTICLE):

- (24) Let's have recess all the time.

→ speaker includes him/herself among the people who should do something

2.4 Exclamative

- (27) *What a sick school* this is!

→ MAJOR SENTENCE EXCLAMATIVE

structure: *what/how* phrase-Subj-Pred

- (28) Yeah! [preceding *We did it!*]

→ MINOR SENTENCE EXCLAMATIVE (also e.g. *Cool! Shit!*, Crystal 1995:219)

3. Less prototypical form-function mappings

- prototypically, the statement function is performed by declarative sentences
- question function → interrogatives (of the various types)
- directive function → imperatives
- exclamation function → exclamatives
- ...but there are less prototypical patterns, which are often ways for speakers to perform the speech act in a somehow or other less direct way → INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS (Searle 1975)

3.1 Statement function

- (29) Would you like me to call your parents?

- structurally like an ordinary interrogative
- functionally very different:

- (30) Would you like me to call your parents
?Well, yes, I'd appreciate that very much.

→ the speaker is already certain of the answer; in fact s/he's not asking for information but stating something emphatically → RHETORICAL QUESTION

3.2 Question function

- (31) I heard she slipped in the bathroom?

→ structurally declarative but intonation signals question function

3.3 Directive function

- (32) Why don't you write your name on the board?

- (33) Why don' you all just call me Mr S?

- (34) You're excused.

- Givón: (1993:266) identifies a number of devices speakers may use to make directives less clearly manipulative, e.g.:
 - increased length
 - use of the interrogative form
 - use of irrealis modality
 - explicit mention of the addressee ('you'; though B&B suggest the opposite 2001:127)
- particularly many indirect ways of carrying out the directive function → directives are generally the most serious invasions of other peoples' territories
- the extension of interrogative sentences to cover this function is motivated by questions normally leaving the addressee more freedom than directives

3.4 Exclamation function

(35) What kind of a sick school is this?

- structurally interrogative but speaker doesn't expect an answer
- intonation slightly different from true question

4. Concluding remarks

- sentences, just like constituents, can be divided into types, with more or less well-defined structural and semantic-pragmatic functions
- the major functions (speech acts) are statements, questions, directives and exclamations → the communicative goals we typically use language for
- each of these functions is prototypically represented by a certain sentence-type (e.g. declarative, interrogative)
- ...but not always → there's no simple one-to-one mapping between linguistic form and linguistic function
- the non-prototypical mappings are not random → see e.g. the use of questions for directives: asking for information is usually less of an imposition than ordering someone to do something

References

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Appendix: Transcript *School of Rock*

Rosalie Mullins: Children, please take your seats. Everyone, I'd like to introduce Miss Dunham's substitute This is Mr Schneeibly.

[Turns to Dewey.] Why don't you write your name on the board?

Dewey Finn: Yes. Yes I will. You know what? Why don't you all just call me Mr S?

RM: Mr S has never taught here at Horace Green, so I want you all to be on your best behaviour. Sooo, the curriculum is on the desk, and do you have any questions?

DF: Yeah, when's lunch?

RM: The children just had their lunch. Is there anything else you need?

DF: Erm, I'm a teacher, all I need are minds for moulding.

RM: All right then, well thanks again, you saved the day.

DF: OK, who's got food in here? You're not gonna get in trouble. I'm hungry.

[Pupil1 raises hand.] You. What d'you got? Hmm-hmm. That's what I'm talking about. OK. Teach, teach, teach. All right, look, here's the deal: I've got a hangover. Who knows what that means?

P2: Doesn't that mean you're drunk?

DF: No! It means I was drunk yesterday.

P3: It means you're an alcoholic.

DF: Wrong!

P3: You wouldn't come to work hung-over unless you were an alcoholic. Dude, you've got a disease.

DF: Hmm, hmm. What's your name?

P3: Freddy Jones.

DF: Freddy Jones, shut up!

[pupils laugh]

P3: [To other pupil] Shut up.

DF: The point is, you all can just chill today. We'll start on this crappola tomorrow.

[P4 raises hand] Yes, Tinkerbelle.

P4: Summer. As class factotum, first I'd just like to say: welcome to Horace Green.

DF: Thank you.

P4: Do you have any questions about our schedule, 'cos usually now Miss Dunham teaches vocabulary, then gives us a pop quiz, the she'll split us up into our reading groups, ...

DF: [interrupts] OK, hey, hey, Miss Dumb Bum ain't your teacher today, I am. And I've got a headache and the runs, so I say: time for recess.

P4: But Mr. S. [points to wall] that poster charts everyone's performance. We get gold stars when we master the material covered in class. How do we get gold stars if we just have recess?

DF: What are these black dots here?

P5: Demerits.

DF: What kind of a sick school is this? Hmm? [Takes poster from wall and tears it up, Summer isn't happy] As long as I'm here there will be no grades or gold stars or demerits. We're gonna have recess all the time.

[P3 cheers and gives P2 a high five]

P4: But Miss Dunham only gives us recess for fifteen minutes.

DF: HEY! You're not hearing me girl, I'm in charge now, OK? And I say: recess. Go! Play and have fun, now! [Pupils get up]

[RM's office, RM is towering over a very scared pupil]

RM: Now you don't want me to have to call your parents, do you? It's all right Emily, don't cry, just try to be a bit more conscientious. Would you like a hug? [Pupil screams]

P6: I'll be good, I swear.

RM: All right. Well, that's fine Emily, you're excused. [pupil runs out]

[back in DF's classroom, DF's eyes are fixed on the hands of the clock as 3pm is approaching]

DF: Yeah! We did it! We did it! [runs to pupils, his hand raised for a high five] Come on, gimme some, gimme some, gimme some of that. Yeah! Whoo-hoo! I will see you cats on the flip-flop later.

[outside school, RM is talking to a parent about Miss Dunham]

Parent: I heard she slipped in the bathroom?

RM: Yes, yes, but we've got of course a wonderful new substitute, who comes very highly recommended.