

Week 8: Complex sentences — basic patterns

1. Recap

- (1a) Q: What is your date of birth?
A: July fifteenth.
Q: What year?
A: Every year.
- (1b) Q: All your responses must be oral, OK? What school did you go to?
A: Oral.
- (1c) Q: Were you present when your picture was taken?
- (1a-b) 1 lexical verb → SIMPLE; (1c) 2 lexical verbs → COMPLEX sentence
 - different types of constructing complex clauses
 - cognitive basis: different ways to combine our thoughts about situations/events

2. Coordination v. subordination of clauses; foregrounding v. backgrounding of information



- the face/vase illusion → FIGURE v. GROUND asymmetry
 - universal cognitive ability → adaptive?
 - distributing attention in language:
- (2a) The lamp is above the table.
(2b) The table is under the lamp.
- example of what cognitive linguists refer to as differences in CONSTRUAL, the way a speaker *looks at* a situation (see e.g. Croft & Cruse 2004, Ch.3)
 - there are also differences between the extent to which clauses in a complex sentence may be the focus of attention → different types of complex sentences

3. Coordination

- (3) Q: Was it you or your brother that was killed in the war?
- two coordinated NPs, i.e. elements of equal grammatical status (and similar importance in the discourse) → two figures
 - COORDINATOR (COORDINATING CONJUNCTION) *or* presents two ideas as alternatives:
- (4) Q: You don't know what it was *and* you didn't know what it looked like, *but* can you describe it?
- *and* → adding one idea to a previous one
 - *but* → similar to *and* but some conflict between the conjoined elements
 - COORDINATED CLAUSES can stand on their own:
- (5a) You don't know what it was [actually contains another clause within it!]
(5b) You didn't know what it looked like. [this one too]
(5c) Can you describe it?
- compare:
- (6) Though you don't know what it looked like, can you describe it?
- first clause in (6) backgrounded relative to second clause → some extra details (i.e. a sort of concession, a circumstance despite which the action of describing may still take place) → SUB(ORDINATE) CLAUSE (aka DEPENDENT, EMBEDDED)
 - reminiscent of adverbials (adjuncts, week 4) → ADVERBIAL SUBCLAUSE
 - “lesser” status of the subclause → can't form grammatical sentence on its own:
- (7) *Though you don't know what it looked like.
- compare (5a-c)
- one might argue that in this test the SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION / SUBORDINATOR / COMPLEMENTISER *though* should be omitted, because in considering (5a-c) we also dropped the coordinators, BUT:
- (8) Can you describe it, though you don't know what it looked like?
(9a) You don't know what it was *and* you didn't know what it looked like.
(9b) *And you didn't know what it looked like you don't know what it was.
(9c) You didn't know what it looked like and you don't know what it was.
- (8) → move subclause → subordinator/complementiser moves with it

- (9b) → move coordinators with clause → ungrammaticality → complementisers are part of subclauses while coordinators are not part of the clauses they conjoin
- subclauses with complementisers: like sentences but with something added to it (i.e. COMP) → don't label them S, but S'
- sometimes coordinated clauses called COMPOUND sentences; COMPLEX sentences → subordination

4. Subordination

4.1 Sub-clauses functioning as adverbials (adjuncts)

- meaning: as adverbials generally, i.e. extra, info (*when? how often? why? how?*)
- (10) Q: What gear were you in *at the moment of the impact*?
A: Gucci sweats and Reeboks.
- (11) Q: So you were gone *until you returned*?
- returned* is finite (past tense *-ed*) → a *finite* subclause; now compare:
- (12) I waited *until returning from vacation*.
- until returning from vacation* → adverbial clause
- BUT *returning* not marked for tense → NON-FINITE SUBCLAUSE
- also: no overt subject in (12) (recoverable from the context *I*) → non-finite subclauses in English may appear without an explicit subject
- tree structure → subclauses without COMP and subject not analysed as S or S', but simply as VP (see e.g. the analysis of ex. (19), below)

4.2 Subclauses performing other functions

- can sub-clauses carry out other functions (verb, S, O_d/O_i, S/O complement)?
- (13) Q: I show you Exhibit 3 and ask you *if you recognize that picture*.
A: That's me.
- Q: Were you present when that picture was taken?
- (14) Q: Did you ever sleep with him in New York?
A: I refuse *to answer that question*.
- Q: Did you ever sleep with him in Chicago?
A: I refuse *to answer that question*.
- Q: Did you ever sleep with him in Miami?
A: No.
- (13) → subclause *if you recognize that picture* = direct object

- (14) → *to answer that question* = direct object of the verb *refuse*
- (14) → lexical verb non-finite like in (12), here *to*-infinitive

(15) *Whether the suspect recognised the picture* was unclear.

(16) *To answer that question* would be inconceivable.

- the subclauses — finite in (15), non-finite in (16) — are the subjects

(17) Q: Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?

A: No.

Q: Did you check for blood pressure?

A: No.

Q: Did you check for breathing?

A: No.

Q: So, then it is possible *that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy*?

A: No.

Q: How can you be so sure, Doctor?

A: Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.

Q: But could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?

A: It is possible *that he could have been alive and practising law somewhere*.

- underlined *it* dummy subjects — true subjects: the *that*-clauses (EXTRAPOSED)

(18) Exhibit 3 is not *what I expected*.

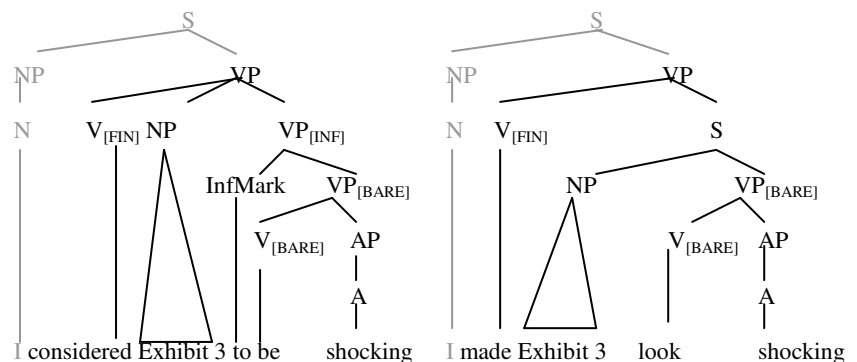
(19) I considered Exhibit 3 *to be shocking*.

→ subclauses can also be predicative complements

- NB in (19) O_d is only *Exhibit 3* (= what is being considered) → now compare:

(20) I made *Exhibit 3 look shocking*.

→ speaker doesn't make Exhibit 3 but makes [Exhibit 3 look shocking] → O_d



- in (18) the VP subclause = object complement; in (19) S subclause = O_d
- so far, we've seen that subclauses can perform all functions → for meaning of these subclauses see remarks on semantics of subject, objects, etc. in handout/.reading for week 4
- what about the function of the verb element? → *no*

4.3 Subclauses as parts of clause elements (subject, object, etc...)

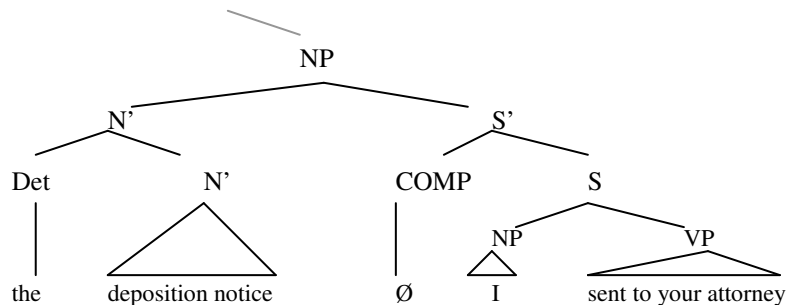
(21) Q: Is your appearance here this morning [CompSubj]pursuant to the deposition notice [which I sent to your attorney]?

A: No, this is how I dress when I go to work.

- relative subcl *which I sent you your attorney* → **part of** subject complement
- complementiser *which* connects the subclause to the antecedent: *deposition notice* (it's COREFERENTIAL with it)
- also (often) possible → omit relative pronoun (see further B&B 2001:225-6)

(22) ...the deposition notice *I sent to your attorney*

- analysis: zero complementiser if it could've been there:



- meaning of subclauses performing functions clear, but meaning of relative clauses?
- being a clause, *which I sent you your attorney* describes an event — but not just any old event; instead it portrays an event that involves the antecedent of the relative pronoun → *deposition notice* (Givón 1993:109); now compare:

(23) I need to see the deposition notice which I sent to your attorney.

(24) I need to see the deposition notice, which I sent to your attorney.

- intonation, punctuation
- meaning difference RESTRICTIVE vs NON-RESTRICTIVE relative clauses:

- restrictive: speaker assumes that hearer is aware of the referent, but is not yet entirely certain of the exact identity of that referent (Givón 1993:108ff)
- nonrestrictive: identity of referent not at issue; speaker simply wishes to provide some extra, new information about that referent (see Givón 1993:117ff)

5. Concluding remarks

- a universal aspect of human cognition is the ability to divide one's attention in such a way that of all the things we perceive at the same time, certain things are foregrounded, at the expense of other things, which are backgrounded
- coordination is the reflex in grammar of 2 (or more) situations receiving equal attention; in subordination the situation portrayed by the subclause is backgrounded relative to the main clause event (esp. clear in adverbial subclauses)
- subclauses come in many different varieties → variation both in form (e.g. finite vs. non-finite, with complementiser vs. without overt complementiser (= zero complementiser) and in function (e.g. subject, object, adverbial, relative)

References

- Ballard, Kim. 2001. *The frameworks of English*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, §§6.8-6.15 (not §6.16!).
- Börjars, Kersti & Kate Burridge. 2001. *Introducing English grammar*. London: Arnold, Ch. 8.
- Croft, William & D. Alan Cruse. 2004. *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Givón, Talmy. 1993. *English grammar: a function-based introduction*. Vol. II. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, Chs. 9, 13.