

LING 203 Workshop Week 5

Grammatical functions

I. Summarise B&B (2001), Ch. 4

II. Questions directly related to the lecture

1. Consider the following (short but true) story:

A teacher had a kindergartner come up to her; *he told her that he found a big frog*. The teacher asked if the frog was alive or dead. The student said it was dead. The teacher asked how he knew. The boy said, "I pissed in its ear." The teacher said, "You what?" He said, "You know, *I went to his ear* and said, 'PSST!' and it didn't move. *So it must be dead.*"

- What is the subject of the underlined sentence? What kinds of evidence can you give to support your answer?
- For the three italicised sentences draw tree diagrams similar to the ones on this handout, i.e. indicating the various grammatical functions of the constituents.
- What type of adverbial (i.e. adverbial complement, adjunct, disjunct, conjunct) are: (i) *to his ear* (ii) *So*? Explain your answers.

2. The following are real(!) answers to questions from the 2002 GCSE exams. Read them through then answer questions (a-c), below:

- Q: Explain one of the processes by which water can be made safe to drink.
A: Flirtation makes water safe to drink because it removes large pollutants like grit, sand, dead sheep and canoeists.
- Q: How is dew formed?
A: The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.
- Q: What guarantees may a mortgage company insist on?
A: If you are buying a house, they will insist you are well endowed.
- Q: What happens to your body as you age?
A: When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.
- Q: What is a seizure?
A: [A seizure is a] Roman emperor.
- Q: Give an example of a fungus. What is a characteristic feature?
A: Mushrooms. They always grow in damp places and they look like umbrellas.

(a) Identify the subjects in all the students' answers. Most of these are complex sentences, i.e. they consist of more than one clause. Since there's only one subject per clause, you'll have to specify two subjects for these (and in two cases even three).

(b) Subjects are prototypically agents, i.e. deliberate instigators of some action. Can you find examples of agent subjects among the ones you've just identified?

(c) In *it removes large pollutants like grit, sand, dead sheep and canoeists* what is the function of *large pollutants (...)* *canoeists*? How would you go about proving this?

III. Linguistic analysis

1. Consider the GCSE questions and answers given in question II.2, above.

(a) Draw a tree diagram for the whole sentence (clause) *Flirtation makes water safe to drink*, analysing it in terms of *grammatical functions* (as opposed to *syntactic categories*, i.e. use the labels Subj, Pred, Object, etc., not NP, VP, etc.)

(b) Draw tree diagrams for *You get intercontinental* and *They always grow in damp places*, but this time analysing the sentences in terms of syntactic categories (NP, VP, etc. not Subj, Pred, Object, etc.).

2. Recall the very important distinction between complements and modifiers.

(a) One of the headlines in today's *Sun* was (referring to Eva Longoria) *Eva flashes the flesh*. Is *the flesh* a complement or a modifier of the verb *flashes*? Why?

(b) Now using the verb *flash* compose a new sentence that contains both a complement and a modifier.

(c) Draw tree diagrams for the sentence *Eva flashes the flesh* as well as for the one you have just composed, analysing it (as you did in question (1a)) in terms of grammatical functions.

IV. Mini-investigation

We saw in the lecture that in Old English grammatical functions (Subject, Direct Object, Indirect Object, Subject Complement, etc.) were indicated to a large extent by means of case endings on the nouns (Nominative, Accusative, Dative, Genitive), and that in Middle English this function came to be taken over by more rigid word order and by the use of preposition. Most Germanic languages have not undergone the same morphological erosion as English. Go to the library (or onto the Internet), find yourself a good grammar of German and try to work out to what extent grammatical functions are indicated in the same way in that language as they were in Old English. To what extent are case endings important? Does word order play a role? Do prepositions? If you're feeling especially brave you may ask why it should be that English developed in such a different way than German (for this you'll have to consult descriptions of the history of English, such as:

Barber, C. 1993. *The English language: a historical introduction*. Cambridge: CUP.

Baugh, A. & T. Cable. 1993. *A history of the English language*. 4th edn. London: Routledge. [5th edn. (2002) also available in the library]

Blake, Norman F. 1996. *A history of the English language*. London: Macmillan.

Görlach, M. 1994. *The linguistic history of English*. Macmillan.

Hogg, R.M. (general ed.) 1992. *The Cambridge history of the English language*. 6 vols. Cambridge: CUP. [rather advanced and the most comprehensive overview available]

Smith, Jeremy. 1999. *Essentials of early English*. London: Routledge.

Strang, Barbara. 1970. *A history of English*. London: Methuen.