

Ling 203 Workshop Week 9

Complex sentences — basic patterns

I. Summarise B&B (2001), Ch.8.

II. Questions directly related to the lecture

A few years ago the American writer Dave Eggers was asked by Nick Hornby (of About A Boy and High Fidelity fame) to write something for a collection of short stories he was editing. Eggers thought of a story written from the viewpoint of an Irish setter named Steven, and at the same time decided to start sending letters written from this perspective to CEOs of large multinational companies. Last month Esquire (which I only read for research purposes) printed a few of these letters; the text on the right hand side of this handout is an example. I'm not sure how effective Eggers' letters were in getting his point across to these CEOs — or even whether there was a point to begin with. But they're pretty funny.

1. *I have read Mr. Capote's book and liked it a great deal* consists of 2 clauses. What are the LEXICAL verbs around which these clauses are built? Are there any AUXILIARY verbs?
2. What are the subject NPs of the two clauses of the sentence given in question (1)? (Note: this is a bit of a trick question.) And what are the predicate VPs?
3. *I feel that other people feel it's a problem, which becomes, for me, a problem.* How many subclauses does this sentence contain? How do you count them? How would you label the subclauses? (Pay especial attention here to Börjars & Burridge's (2001) discussion of the difference between relative clauses and *that*-clauses, p.226f.) Explain why you label them the way you do.
4. Moving on now to tree structure analysis, we saw in the lecture that B&B recognise three structural types (categories) of subclauses: S', S and VP. Consulting your handout or the book (B&B 2001, e.g. p.244) decide which category *it's a problem* belongs to.
5. You're now going to draw a tree structure diagram for the sentence *I feel that other people feel it's a problem.* To make this easier, before drawing a diagram for the *whole* sentence, you could first draw one for *I feel something*. Then you could expand that diagram to represent *I feel that other people feel something*. The last step will be to draw the diagram for *I feel that other people feel it's a problem*.

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Dear Mr. Bijur,

Greetings. I am a resident of Austin, Texas, who is writing to you under the guise of a dog named Steven. Steven is an Irish setter. This here is Steven:

Before we lived in this house a family of four did. They were named the Clutters, and were of course disturbed by the book of Truman's. I asked once if they were related but they ignored me. I have read Mr. Capote's book and liked it a great deal.

I sometimes bark. Sometimes I talk to people about my barking; I feel that it's a problem. Or rather, I feel that other people feel it's a problem, which becomes, for me, a problem. When I see headlights in the rear view window I feel menaced. My brother's name is Jonathan and he barks more than I do, but we never bark at the same time because why would we both need to be barking at the same time? I've bitten him so hard I tasted his alkaline blood. Hooo!

I once ate a pizza. I'm not supposed to eat pizza, because I am a dog, but I don't know who makes rules like this, who can eat what. I ate pizza and was fine. I looked at a solar eclipse and was fine. I jumped from the roof once and was hardly hurt at all. Maybe I'll never die. I'm a fast dog!

I bark all night at least once a month. In cars I'm quiet. I run around trees like a stick in a current around rocks that are smooth. Hoooo! Hooooo! Yeah you got me now, yeah! Man I wish you could have seen all this.

Mr. Bijur, you are too kind. Keep up the work.

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III. Linguistic analysis

1. Generally speaking, relative clauses are a very common type of subclause. Börjars & Burridge (2001) show that there are other kinds of subclause as well, and Dave Eggers' letter contains many instances of these other kinds. In fact in this text relative clauses are not common at all.

- a. How many relative clauses can you find?
- b. Now identify:
 - i. Two adverbial subclauses (i.e. subclauses that function as adjuncts).
 - ii. One example of a subclause that functions as the direct object?
 - iii. One relative clause?
 - iv. One subclause (performing whatever function) with a zero complementiser?

2. How many coordinate clauses can you identify in this text?

3. Draw tree diagrams for the following sentences:

- a. *Maybe I'll never die.*
- b. *I wish you could have seen this.*
- c. *You are too kind.*

IV. Mini-investigation

This exercise focuses on verbs whose complements are (or at any rate may be) entire clauses (so-called complement clauses, which are a type of subordinate clause). Börjars and Burridge talk about different types of complement clauses, but only in terms of how they differ *structurally*. They say nothing about how they differ in terms of *meaning/function*, yet linguists have argued that the meaning of a sentence containing a certain verb changes depending on the type of complement clause it takes. Consider the cartoon passage on the right hand side of the page, and then study the following two sentences:

- (1) Albert saw Harry come out of prison.
- (2) He saw that his brother had changed.

Both sentences include the verb *see* but in (1) the complement is a so-called bare infinitive clause (see B&B 2001:228-230), whereas in (2) it is a *that*-clause (B&B 2001:215-218, 226-227). These aren't even the only two possibilities, see for instance:

- (3) Albert saw Harry coming out of prison.
- (4) Albert saw his brother to be impolite.
- (5) Albert saw his brother be impolite.

Sentence (5) again has a bare infinitive clause, but (3) has an *-ing* participle clause (B&B 2001:233-235) and (4) contains a *to*-infinitive clause (B&B 2001:230-233). Now here's your task: how would you describe the differences in meaning between the various types of complements of the verb *see*? Hint: try to relate the structural differences to the concept of iconicity (which we talked about in the week 2 workshop). Specifically, you should try to relate the *linguistic* distance between the perception verb (*see*) and the complement clause verb (e.g. *come*) to the *conceptual* distance between the events. You may find it useful to consult Givón, Talmy (1993) *English grammar: a function-based introduction*, Vol.II, Ch.7, 2 copies of which are available — for photocopying purposes only — from

the 203 folder next to my office door. (This chapter also discusses so-called causative verbs, e.g. *cause*, *make*, where we also see variation: *cause someone to do something* vs. *make someone do something*. The explanation for the variation in causatives is parallel to that for perception verbs like *see*, though it's of course not exactly the same, since causation isn't the same as perception.) In addition, you may find it useful to read something more general on iconicity in general, and the so-called PROXIMITY PRINCIPLE in particular (the tendency for linguistic distance to mirror conceptual distance). Some references were given on the worksheet for the week 2 workshop; see also dictionaries or encyclopedias of linguistics, e.g. Brown, Keith (2006) *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Amsterdam: Elsevier (which is in the library).

