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
   - structural properties: Subj-Pred

2.2 Interrogative
   - the normal way to pose a question is by using a sentence with interrogative structure
   - 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
   - not all questions that include this kind of coordination are in fact alternative questions; sometimes they may be ordinary yes/no questions

2.2.2 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
   - not all questions that include this kind of coordination are in fact alternative questions; sometimes they may be ordinary yes/no questions

(1) This is Mr Schneebly.
(2) Mr S has never taught at Horace Green.
(3) It means I was drunk yesterday.
(4) Do you have any questions?
(5) Do you have any questions or not?
(6) Is your car registered and kept in Great Britain, Isle of Man, or Channel Isles?
(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?)

- 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

\[ S' \]

\[ \text{COMP} \]

\[ \text{S} \]

\[ \text{NP} \]

\[ \text{VP} \]

Who ø’s got food

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) Bindaþ 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

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?
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’t 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

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 Schneebly. [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
DF: The point is, you all can just chill today. We’ll start on this crappola tomorrow.
P4 raises hand] Yes, Tinkerbell.
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.