

PETER COLLINS
CARMELLA HOLLO



AN ENGLISH

GRAMMAR

AN INTRODUCTION

3rd Edition

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

English Grammar

An Introduction

Third edition

PETER COLLINS AND CARMELLA HOLLO



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Symbols and Conventions</i>	xi
Part A Grammatical Description	1
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Grammar and the Description of Language	3
1.2 Defining Grammatical Categories	4
1.3 Grammatical Categories and ‘Prototypes’	7
1.4 Morphology: Words and Lexemes	8
1.5 Constituent Structure	10
1.6 Classes and Functions	14
1.7 Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar	16
1.8 Grammar and the Description of Texts	19
1.9 Grammar and Language Variety	21
Exercises	28
2 A Preliminary Overview	32
2.1 The Parts of Speech	32
2.2 Words and Phrases	36
2.3 The Open Classes	38
2.4 The Closed Classes	42
2.5 Basic and Non-basic Clauses	44
2.6 The Structure of Basic Clauses: A Preview	46
Exercises	51
3 Nouns and Noun Phrases	55
3.1 Subclasses of Nouns	55
3.2 Proper Nouns	60
3.3 Pronouns	60
3.4 Noun Phrase Structure	67
3.5 Pre-head Dependents	67

3.6	Post-head Dependents	70
3.7	Nominalisation	73
	Exercises	73
4	Verbs and Verb Phrases	77
4.1	Verbs	77
4.2	Auxiliary Verbs	82
4.3	Verb Phrase Structure and Meaning	85
	Exercises	93
5	Adjectives, Adverbs, Prepositions and Associated Phrases	96
5.1	Adjectives	96
5.2	Adjective Phrase Structure	99
5.3	Adverbs	100
5.4	Adverb Phrase Structure	102
5.5	Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases	102
	Exercises	105
6	Clause Structure and Clause Type	108
6.1	The Structure of Basic Clauses	108
6.2	Five Major Complementation Patterns	110
6.3	Non-central Types of Complement	111
6.4	Clause Type: Mood	117
6.5	'The Sun Rising': A Text-based Demonstration	122
6.6	Negation in the Clause	124
	Exercises	128
7	Subordination and Coordination	131
7.1	Sentences and Clauses	131
7.2	Subordination and Coordination	132
7.3	Subordinate Clauses	135
7.4	Non-finite Clauses	143
7.5	Verbless Clauses	148
7.6	Coordination	148
7.7	'Flattened' Tree Analysis	150
	Exercises	156
8	Information Structure in the Clause	160
8.1	Information Structure	160
8.2	Active and Passive Clauses	161
8.3	Subject-complement Switch	163
8.4	Extraposition	164
8.5	Existential Sentences	165

8.6	Cleft Sentences	168
8.7	'Reordering'	169
	Exercises	173
Part B	Looking at Language in Context	177
9	From Separate Sentences to Connected Text	179
9.1	Some Preliminary Considerations	179
9.2	Reconsidering Sentences	180
9.3	Cohesion	186
9.4	Analysis of Cohesion in Sample Texts	198
	Exercises	205
10	Text and Context	207
10.1	Dimensions of Register: Field, Mode and Tenor	207
10.2	Further Dimensions: Functions and Genre	224
	Exercises	227
11	Text Analysis: Putting It All Together	230
11.1	'Top-down' Approach	230
11.2	'Bottom-up' Approach	232
11.3	Demonstration Analyses: 'The Scope of Linguistics' and 'Mysteries'	236
	Exercises	247
<i>Appendices</i>		
<i>A</i>	<i>anyone lived in a pretty how town</i>	250
<i>B</i>	<i>Recipe</i>	252
<i>C</i>	<i>Seaview advertisement</i>	253
<i>D</i>	<i>Army recruitment advertisement</i>	254
<i>E</i>	<i>Extract from 'Creature Features'</i>	255
<i>F</i>	<i>Interview with Sydney band FourPlay</i>	256
<i>G</i>	<i>Mysteries</i>	259
<i>H</i>	<i>The Sun Rising</i>	261
<i>I</i>	<i>When Arnie speaks, there's no going back</i>	263
<i>J</i>	<i>The rising levels of debt that stop workers clocking off</i>	265
<i>K</i>	<i>The Scope of Linguistics</i>	268
	<i>Answers to Exercises</i>	270
	<i>Glossary</i>	285
	<i>Some Useful References</i>	299
	<i>Index</i>	301

Preface

This book is intended as an introduction to English grammar for secondary and tertiary students. It is divided into two sections. **Part A**, Grammatical Description, begins by locating the study of grammar within its broader context and explaining general aspects of the approach adopted in this book, and then presents in step-by-step fashion the various categories that are used in analysing the grammatical structure of sentences. **Part B**, Looking at Language in Context, applies the methods developed in Part A to the analysis of texts of various kinds, found in the Appendices.

The aim is not only to equip students with a set of tools for critically analysing texts, but also to make students aware that there are often different ways of analysing a set of grammatical data. In various places throughout the book, we shall pause to draw attention to, and argue against, analyses that have been adopted by a number of grammarians, but which we have decided not to follow.

The type of grammatical analysis used is influenced strongly by the structuralist model of grammar, developed by Rodney Huddleston and his colleagues (Huddleston 1984, 1988; Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 2006), but it also draws insights from the work of Randolph Quirk and associates (Quirk et al. 1972, 1985; Leech et al. 1982; Greenbaum and Quirk 1990). While the approach we adopt builds on the work of contemporary linguists, it nevertheless retains the familiar terms and categories of traditional grammar wherever possible. Recognising that there will be a number of users of this book who will have some knowledge of traditional grammar, we shall draw attention to aspects of our description that differ significantly from those found there.

Exercises are presented at the end of each chapter, and answers are provided at the end of the book. Following the answers you will find a Glossary and a list of books and articles for further reading.

In this third edition, we have elaborated a number of the grammatical explanations in order to make them more accessible. These include the relationship between subject and topic, relator-axis constructions, basic and non-basic clauses, the copula, peripheral dependents, genitive case,

the distinction between pronouns and determiners, tensed verb forms, adjective comparison, relative clauses, and active and passive clauses. We have also included a considerable amount of information on the inflectional morphology of nouns and verbs.

You will find some new entries in *Some Useful References*, and a large number of new entries in the *Glossary*. A number of new exercises have also been included, focusing mainly on the communicative role of grammar and based on the texts in the *Appendices*. While we have not added any new texts to this edition, we have expanded the discussion of most of the texts both in the relevant chapters and also as guidelines and hints in *Answers to Exercises*.

Acknowledgements

Ruth Wajnryb wrote a regular weekend language column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. ‘When Arnie speaks, there’s no going back’ (Appendix I) appeared on 25 October 2003, available at www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/10/24/1066631624596.html.

Professor Sharon Beder’s article, ‘The rising levels of debt that stop workers clocking off’ (Appendix J), appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Wednesday 20 August 2003, available at www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/08/19/1061261151596.html.

G. H. Widdowson’s ‘Experience and explanation’ (Appendix K) is the introductory section of [Chapter 2](#), ‘The Scope of Linguistics’, from *Linguistics*, OUP, 1996.

Christopher Koch’s essay ‘Mysteries’ (Appendix G) was originally published in *Crossing the Gap* (Chatto & Windus, 1987).

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Tim Flannery for an extract from ‘Creature Features’ (Appendix E), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 December 1997.

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Symbols and Conventions

Many of the symbols and notational conventions are as used by Huddleston, *English Grammar: An Outline* (1988), and Leech et al., *English Grammar for Today: A New Introduction* (1982).

Bold is used for technical terms when they are first discussed; their definitions are provided in the Glossary

Italics are used for citing words, sentences and other expressions

() parentheses are used to enclose phrases

[] square brackets are used to enclose clauses

┌──────────┐ a horizontal line is used to link discontinuous elements

(e.g. *Have you been there?*)

< > angle brackets are used to enclose a coordination of elements
(e.g. *She ran <down the road and over the bridge>*)

+ a plus symbol is used to represent any coordinator

* an asterisk is used for an ungrammatical expression

? a question mark is used for an expression of questionable grammaticality

Abbreviated labels

Function labels

A Adjunct
Ax Axis

C	Complement
Cx	Non-central complement
Dr	Determiner
H	Head
M	Modifier
O	Object
Od	Direct object
Oi	Indirect object
P	Predicator
PC	Predicative complement
PCo	Objective predicative complement
PCs	Subjective predicative complement
PD	Peripheral dependent
Pred	Predicate
Rel	Relator
S	Subject

Class labels

ACl	Adverbial clause
Adj	Adjective
AdjP	Adjective phrase
Adv	Adverb
AdvP	Adverb phrase
Aux	Auxiliary verb
CCl	Comparative clause
Cl	Clause
Clen	Past-participial clause
Cl _i	Infinitival clause
Cling	Present-participial clause
Coord	Coordinator
Dv	Determinative
DvP	Determinative phrase
GP	Genitive phrase
MCl	Main clause
Mv	Main verb
N	Noun
NCl	Noun clause
NP	Noun phrase
Pn	Pronoun

PP	Prepositional phrase
PredP	Predicate phrase
Prep	Preposition
RCl	Relative clause
SCL	Subordinate clause
Se	Sentence
Subord	Subordinator
Ved	Past tense form of verb
Ven	Past-participial form of verb
Vi	Infinitival (base) form of verb
Ving	Present-participial form of verb
Vo	General 'other' present form of verb
VP	Verb phrase
Vs	Third person singular present tense form of verb

Where **examples** are cited from the texts in the Appendices, this is indicated by means of a capital letter in square brackets representing the Appendix concerned.

Part A

Grammatical Description

1 Introduction

1.1 Grammar and the Description of Language

What is grammar and where does it fit into the description of a language? According to most contemporary linguists, we can divide the description of any language into three major areas: grammar (comprising two subfields, morphology and syntax), phonology and lexicon. For some linguists, grammar is understood to encompass all three areas, a conceptualisation that we do not endorse in this book:

Grammar:

Morphology

deals with the form of words

Syntax

deals with the arrangement of words to form sentences

Phonology

deals with the sound system (involving sounds, stress and intonation)

Lexicon

provides information about the individual items of the vocabulary (words, and idioms such as *kick the bucket*).

In each of the three major areas we may distinguish between the study of form and the study of meanings – the term **semantics** often being applied to the latter, the study of linguistic meanings. Thus, for example, the study of grammatical form will deal with grammatical categories such as past tense and interrogative clause, while the study of grammatical meaning will be concerned with the meanings associated with these categories (past time, question and so on).

Traditional grammarians have tended to assume that the relationship between form and meaning is straightforward. However, in many cases it is not. For example, traditional grammars commonly describe the past tense simply as a form of the verb that expresses the meaning ‘past time’. Such a claim accurately captures the meaning of the past tense

verb form *decided* (which refers to the making of a decision at some time in the past) in the following example (where [F] refers to the text in [Appendix F](#)):

*One day we **decided** to play Purple Haze* [F]

However, the relationship between form and meaning would be less direct if we changed the clause to:

*It would be interesting if we **decided** to play Purple Haze*

Here, the past tense form *decided* indicates a time that is not in the past, but a possibility in the future ('... if we were to make a decision at some time in the future').

As a second example, consider the familiar traditional definition of interrogative clauses as clauses that are used to ask questions. This definition is valid for a clause such as:

How do your instruments stand up? [F]

Here, the speaker uses an interrogative clause, with *how* and the auxiliary verb *do* preceding the subject *your instruments*, to seek information about the addressees' musical instruments. However, in the following examples, while the interrogative clause form is similar, the meanings expressed are quite different. In the first the speaker is not asking a question but making a complaint, and in the second the speaker is making an offer:

How can we rely on him!
How would you like another sandwich?

In the next section we shall explore further the complexity of the relationship between form and meaning as we begin to explain the type of approach adopted in the present grammar.

1.2 Defining Grammatical Categories

One of the reasons why modern grammarians have reacted against traditional grammar is that traditional grammarians and writers of school grammars commonly give priority to considerations of meaning

rather than form when defining grammatical categories. The problem with this is that when you attempt to use meaning-based definitions (sometimes called ‘notional’ definitions) to identify the items associated with a particular category, you will often obtain results that are misleading, or even plainly wrong.

Consider as an example the grammatical category of ‘subject’. There are, in fact, two types of meaning-based definition that one finds applied to the subject in traditional grammar. One is that the subject represents the ‘doer’ or ‘actor’, and the other is that the subject represents the ‘topic’ or ‘what the sentence is about’. There are problems with both definitions. Consider:

But after a time the man grew some vegetables
But after a time the man grew homesick [G]

In both sentences we would presumably want to analyse *the man* as the subject, but it is only in the first sentence that the ‘doer’ definition can be applied, where the man is understood to have performed an action. The second sentence does not express an activity performed by the man, but rather something that happens to him. Consider another pair of sentences from the perspective of the topic-based definition of the subject:

The rain was pouring down
It was raining

Here, we would intuitively want to treat *the rain* and *it* respectively as subjects. However, while we may regard *the rain* as the topic of the first sentence, what it is about, it would be odd to say that the second sentence is about *it*, since *it* is here merely a grammatical item that does not convey any meaning. Presumably, a sentence can only ‘be about’ something that has an existence, real or imaginary. One test for such topic-hood is the possibility of formulating an ‘as for x’ phrase with the putative subject as x. Not surprisingly, we can say *As for the rain, it was pouring down*, but not **As for it, it was pouring down* (where the symbol * means ‘ungrammatical’).

In order to reliably identify the subject of a sentence, we must invoke formal grammatical properties rather than meaning. For instance, one important formal property of subjects is their role in the formation of question tags: the subject of a sentence in English is the element that is

either ‘pro-formed’, that is, replaced by a pronoun, as in the first example below, or copied in a question tag, as in the second example:

The man grew homesick, didn't he?
It was raining, wasn't it?

Notice that this formal criterion clearly reveals the weakness of the traditional definition in some cases. Consider:

Tom was telephoned by Mary

The traditional ‘doer’ definition of the subject as actor would suggest, counterintuitively, that *Mary* is the subject. However, we can confirm that *Mary* is not, in fact, the subject, but rather it is *Tom* (even though Tom is not the performer of the action) by applying the ‘tag test’ (whereby the male Tom is the only possible person to whom *he* can refer):

Tom was telephoned by Mary, wasn't he?

As a second illustration of the inadequacy of notional definitions, consider the familiar traditional treatment of nouns in English. Traditional grammars generally define a noun as ‘the name of a person, place or thing’. This definition in terms of semantic categories is unproblematical when applied to words denoting concrete objects such as *tree*, *ocean* and *bicycle*. Unfortunately, however, there are many words that we readily recognise as nouns, but which are not covered by the traditional notional definition, including such intangibles as *stupidity*, *rejection* and *deafness*. Some may seek to argue that the latter would be covered by the definition if we simply allowed the meaning of the word ‘thing’ to be extended so that it applied not simply to concrete objects, but also to abstractions. But such an interpretation of the word ‘thing’ would surely make the traditional definition of nouns unacceptably circular. For instance, the word *stupidity*, which refers to something intangible, a property or characteristic, would legitimately be classified as a noun, but why then should we not apply the same criterion and treat the adjective *stupid* as a noun? Why should we accept *suggestion* but not the verb *suggest*? Why accept *deafness* but not the adjective *deaf*? The problem would be that in order to know whether or not a word fitted the traditional definition, we would need to know in advance whether or not that word was a noun.

As in the case of the subject, so with nouns, it seems clear that we need to appeal to formal grammatical criteria in order to provide an adequate definition. For instance, nouns are distinctive in the types of dependent expressions they may take, such as *such* and *his* (compare *such stupidity* and **such stupid*; *his deafness* and **his deaf*), and in their capacity to function as the subject of the clause (compare *Stupidity is unforgivable* and **Stupid is unforgivable*). For more information on the definition of nouns, see [Chapter 3](#).

1.3 Grammatical Categories and ‘Prototypes’

We have demonstrated that semantically based definitions are inadequate, and that if we are to correctly identify the parts of speech, we shall need to consider how they differ in terms of their formal properties rather than in terms of their meanings. Does this mean that the traditional definitions have no role to play in a grammar? No, not at all. The traditional meaning-based definitions do have an important role to play, in so far as they may be applied to the **prototypical** members of a category – those that share a common core of mutual properties.

Thus, the most typical nouns of English are precisely those that refer to people and things. For example, *car*, *tree* and *girl* are prototypical nouns, whereas the abstract noun *deafness* is not (notice that it differs from prototypical nouns in not having a plural form: **deafnesses* is ungrammatical). Prototypical nouns are the most frequently occurring in the language. They include the first nouns to be learnt by most children, and they share the same properties that are relevant to defining the category of nouns across the world’s languages.

Similarly, the most typical subjects of English are precisely those that represent the actor and topic, and, not surprisingly, these notions also tend to be associated with the subject in those languages of the world that have such a category. Those subjects in English that are associated with only one of the two notions of actor or topic (or with neither, such as the *it* in *It is raining*) are more peripheral members of the category. For more information on the definition of subjects, see [Section 2.6](#).

Similarly, prototypical interrogative clauses are those used to ask questions, and past tense verb forms are those used to express past time.

We shall thus conceive of grammatical categories as indeterminate or ‘fuzzy’. Each category comprises a central core of instances, which share a number of grammatical properties and can generally be identified via

a traditional meaning-based definition, and shades off into non-central members that exhibit some, but not all of the properties.

1.4 Morphology: Words and Lexemes

In this section we shall attempt some clarification of what is meant by the term ‘word’, and introduce some basic concepts of morphology, the study of the forms of words. Consider the following:

*If he seeks to **qualify**, and **qualifies** fairly, then you must accept him as a legitimate **qualifier***

The only difference between *qualify* and *qualifies* is that *qualifies* has a suffix (-es) not present in *qualify*. Similarly, the only difference between *qualify* and *qualifier* is that *qualifier* has a suffix (-er) not present in *qualify*. And yet the two pairs are not quite the same. Whereas most people would probably regard *qualify* and *qualifies* as in some sense ‘forms of the same word’, *qualify* and *qualifier* would be regarded by most as different words. This information would be confirmed if we were to consult a dictionary: in most English dictionaries *qualify* and *qualifier* would be assigned to different entries, but not *qualify* and *qualifies*.

It is helpful to have a term other than ‘word’ to clarify the differences between the two pairs: we shall say that *qualify* and *qualifies* are different words, but that they are associated with a single **lexeme** (a more abstract unit than a word). By contrast, *qualify* and *qualifier* are associated with different lexemes.

Lexemes are abstract units, but they correspond in form to the most morphologically unmarked forms, the base forms of words. In the case of verbs this is the infinitive form (e.g. *be*, but not *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *being*, or *been*); for nouns it is the singular form (e.g. *tree*, but not *trees*); for adjectives and adverbs it is the ‘absolute’ form rather than the ‘comparative’ or ‘superlative’ form (e.g. *wide*, but not *wider* or *widest*; *slow*, but not *slower* or *slowest*). For more information on the morphological properties of nouns see [Chapter 3](#), for verbs see [Chapter 4](#), and for adjectives and adverbs see [Chapter 5](#).

The words associated with a lexeme are said to be grammatically related to each other by means of **inflection**: in this case, *qualify* is the ‘infinitive’ and *qualifies* (which carries the present tense *-es* inflection) is related to it as a present tense form. The words associated with a lexeme are sometimes said to constitute a ‘paradigm’. The paradigm for the verb lexeme *qualify* contains the words *qualify*, *qualifies*, *qualified* and *qualifying*, which are differentiated in terms of such grammatical properties as tense and aspect (see [Chapter 4](#)). By contrast, the addition of the suffix *-er* to the verb *qualify* results in the formation of the noun *qualifier*, ‘one who qualifies’. As a noun, *qualifier* has a different kind of paradigm, one that contains the words *qualifier*, *qualifiers*, *qualifier’s* and *qualifiers’*.

Consider some further examples: the paradigm for the adjective lexeme *slow* contains *slow*, *slower* and *slowest*; that for the noun lexeme *uncle* contains *uncle*, *uncles*, *uncle’s* and *uncles’*; that for the demonstrative *this* contains *this* and *these*. The most complex paradigm is that for the verb *be*: it consists not only of the positive forms *be*, *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *been* and *being*, but also the negative forms *isn’t*, *aren’t*, *wasn’t* and *weren’t*.

Notice that in treating *isn’t*, *aren’t*, *wasn’t* and *weren’t* as single inflectional forms of *be* (compare *don’t* as an inflectional form of *do*, *won’t* of *will*, and so on), we are interpreting them differently from forms such as *he’ll* and *we’ve*, which behave grammatically as two-word sequences. Whereas the latter can always be replaced by the uncontracted sequences *he + will* and *we + have*, this is not the case with the negative forms; for instance, *isn’t* cannot be replaced by *is not* in *Isn’t your sister coming?*

We close this section by noting that there are two main branches of morphology: inflectional morphology and lexical morphology. When, in introducing morphology in the prelude to this chapter, we treated it as a subfield of grammar, we were oversimplifying matters. It is actually only the first branch of morphology, **inflectional morphology**, that falls within the domain of grammar. Inflectional morphology deals with the processes that give rise to inflectional forms, and it interacts with syntax, in so far as it is the rules of syntax that determine whether a lexeme can or must carry a particular inflectional property. Consider the verb form *forgotten* in:

I have forgotten your name

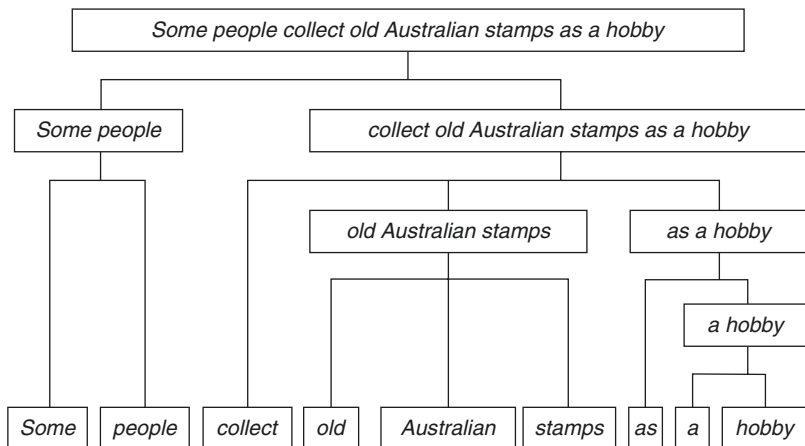
It is a rule of syntax which dictates that the verb following *have* must carry the past participial inflection, while the rules of inflectional morphology determine that the past participle form of *forget* is *forgotten* (see Chapter 4).

Lexical morphology is dealt with in the lexicon, and is thus, strictly speaking, outside the concerns of grammar. It deals with the processes by which lexical items – the basic units of the vocabulary, or ‘lexicon’ – are derived, such as *qualify* > *qualifier*. These processes include:

- **affixation** – the addition of *prefixes* to a stem, as in *unequal*, *disagree* and *extramarital*; and of *suffixes*, as in *equality*, *informant* and *careless*
- **compounding** – the adding together of stems, as in *blackberry*, *fireplace* and *postmodern*
- **conversion** – the change of a word from one part of speech to another, as in the conversion of the adjective *even* to the verb *even*, and of the verb *act* to the noun *act*.

1.5 Constituent Structure

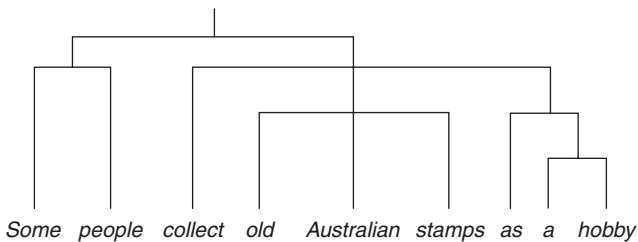
Syntax, we have said, is concerned with how words combine to form sentences. Sentences have a hierarchical structure, with the larger units consisting of successively smaller units. Thus, we might analyse the sentence *Some people collect old Australian stamps as a hobby* informally as follows, in the form of what is generally called a ‘tree diagram’:



Each unit that is at the end of a line, or ‘branch’, and thus is part of a higher unit is called a **constituent**; so there are 14 phrase and word constituents: *some people*, *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *old Australian stamps*, *as a hobby*, *a hobby*, *some*, *people*, *collect*, *old*, *Australian*, *stamps*, *as*, *a* and *hobby*. Complementary to the notion of constituent is that of **construction**. For example, *some* and *people* are constituents of the construction *some people*. In the tree diagram above there are six constructions: *some people collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *some people*, *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *old Australian stamps*, *as a hobby* and *a hobby*. Thus, constituents make up constructions and, conversely, constructions are made up of constituents. It follows that the topmost unit, the whole sentence, can only be a construction and not a constituent since it is not a part of a higher grammatical unit, and that the bottom-most units can only be constituents since they are not made up of further constituents. *Some people* will be both a constituent and a construction: it is a constituent of the sentence and it is also a construction since it is made up of the constituents *some* and *people*.

One further term that we shall introduce is **immediate constituent**. The immediate constituents of a construction are those that are directly below it in the hierarchy, those that it is firstly – ‘immediately’ – divided into. For example, *as* and *a hobby* are the immediate constituents of *as a hobby*: *a* and *hobby* are constituents – but not the immediate constituents – of *as a hobby*; *a* and *hobby* are the immediate constituents of *a hobby*.

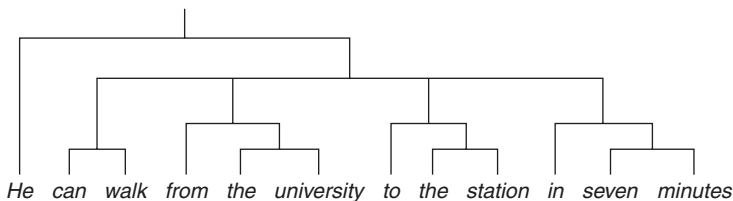
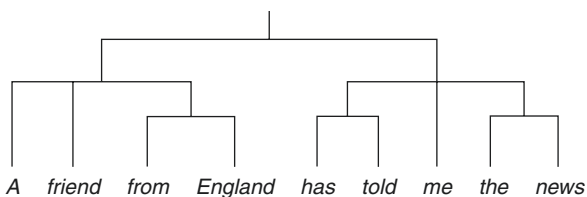
There is a good deal of redundancy in the tree diagram above. A more economical way of representing the same constituent structure information is presented below:



How do we know how to analyse a sentence into its constituents? Ultimately, the answer to this question will depend on the sort of grammatical knowledge about sentence structure that this book seeks to provide you with. At this stage, suffice it to say that there are a couple of rules of thumb that will be of assistance.

- *Substitution* is one such rule of thumb. If a sequence of words can be substituted by a single word, then it can generally be assumed that the sequence is a constituent. For instance, the status of *some people* as a constituent is suggested by the possibility of substituting a single word for it, such as *they* (*They collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*). It is possible to apply a similar test to confirm the status of *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby* as a constituent. Notice, for example, that if someone had queried the proposition, asking *Is it really true that they collect old Australian stamps as a hobby?*, and in reply you sought to affirm it, saying *They do!*, then *do* would be a substitute for the constituent *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*.
- *Movement* – the possibility of moving a constituent to another position – is a second test for constituency. Thus there is evidence for the status of *old Australian stamps* as a constituent in the fact that it can be moved to another position as in *What they collect is old Australian stamps*. Consider several further examples. We can confirm that *in late July* is a constituent of the sentence *Aunt Gertrude arrived in late July* by noting the possibility of moving it as in *In late July Aunt Gertrude arrived*. Again, we can confirm the status of *the American stock market* as a constituent of *The American stock market is very robust*, by comparing it with *Is the American stock market very robust?*

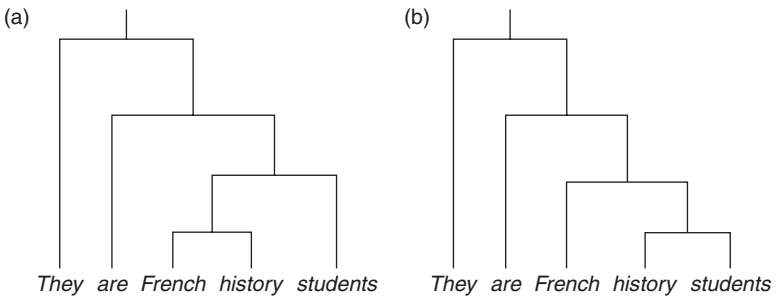
Below are several further examples of sentences analysed in terms of their constituent structure:



As a final point in this section, it may be noted that the type of constituent structure analyses we have been discussing can sometimes be used to shed light on ambiguous sentences, each different interpretation corresponding to a separate constituent analysis, as in:

They are French history students

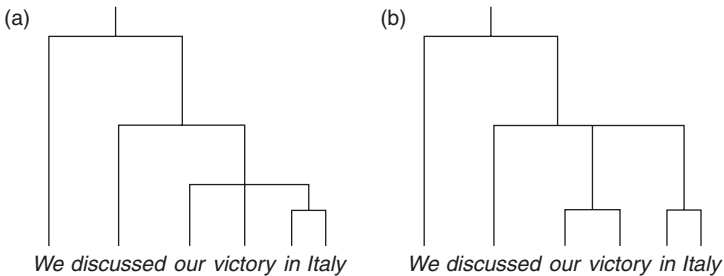
This sentence can mean either that ‘They are students of French history’, as reflected in (a) below, where *students* and *French history* are constituents, or alternatively, ‘They are history students of French nationality’, as reflected in (b), where *French* and *history students* are constituents.



As a second example of an ambiguous sentence, consider the two interpretations of:

We discussed our victory in Italy

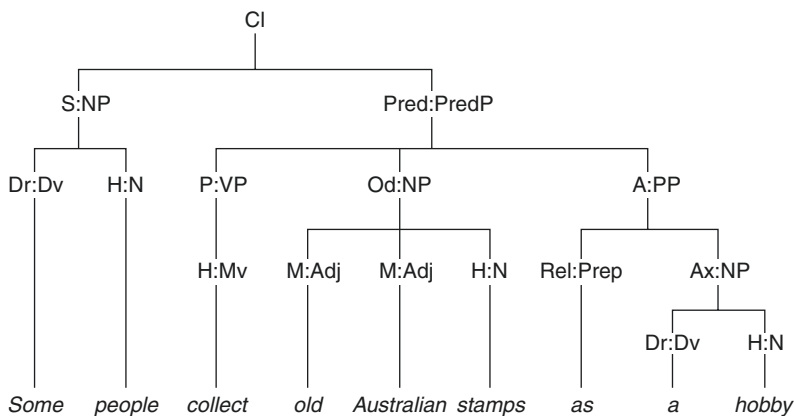
This sentence can mean either ‘We discussed our victory that took place in Italy’, as reflected in (a), where *our victory in Italy* is a single constituent, or ‘It was in Italy that we discussed our victory’, as reflected in (b), where *our victory* and *in Italy* are separate constituents.



1.6 Classes and Functions

The tree diagrams that we have presented so far identify the syntactic units in a sentence, but they do not supply any descriptions of these units. For each unit, we may assign two types of description, one relating to its **syntactic class**, and the other to its **syntactic function**.

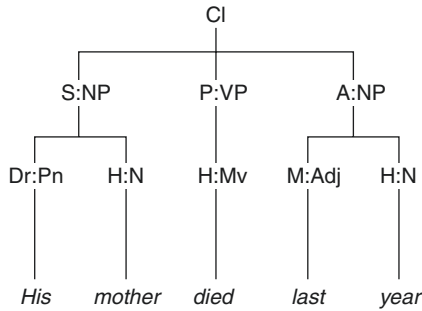
The syntactic class of a unit is determined by the grammatical properties that it shares with other forms, while the syntactic function is the grammatical role of a unit within the construction that contains it. The labelled tree diagram below demonstrates how we can assign a syntactic class and function to every constituent of a sentence, with the function label presented first, followed by the class label, and the two labels separated by a colon. It would be putting the cart before the horse to attempt to explain every label here: this is the task of subsequent chapters. We shall merely make some selective comments.



Some people and *old Australian stamps* belong to the class of **noun phrases** (NPs), grammatical units with a noun as the ‘head’ element (the head of *some people* is the noun *people*, and the head of *old Australian stamps* is the noun *stamps*). Further evidence that *some people* and *old Australian stamps* belong to the NP class is their function within the clause: *some people* is the subject (notice that it can be pro-formed in a tag, as in *Some people collect old Australian stamps as a hobby, don't they?*); *old Australian stamps* is the object (notice that it can be substituted by *them* but not

by *they*, as in *Some people collect them as a hobby*, but not **Some people collect they as a hobby*). In turn, *people* and *stamps* are classed as nouns because of the properties that they share with other members of that class (such as the capacity to express contrasts of number – *person* vs. *people* and *stamp* vs. *stamps* – and to take adjectives as dependents), and because they have the ‘head’ function within their NPs. Notice that the topmost unit, the clause, has no function assigned to it because it is not a constituent here, not part of any larger grammatical unit.

Note that in order to reduce the amount of ‘vertical complexity’ in our constituent analyses we will from this point onwards omit the predicate as a constituent. Below is another sentence analysed in this way. Notice that P and A are now immediate constituents of the clause.



Finally, we note that an alternative method of notation to the tree diagram that we shall sometimes use is ‘**labelled bracketing**’. While bracketing does not show constituent structure as transparently as do tree diagrams, its ‘flatness’ gives it an advantage if you are engaged in analysing a succession of sentences in **discourse**. The main features of this method are:

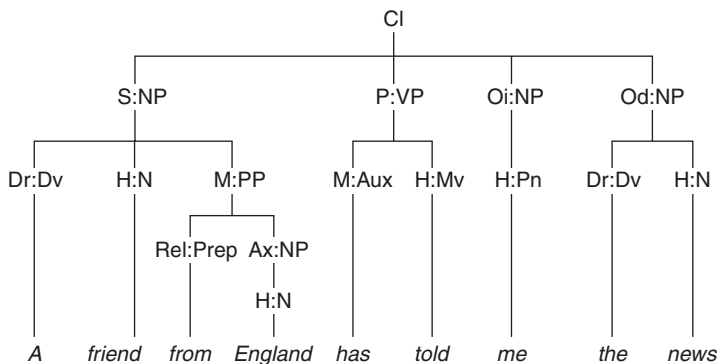
- clauses are enclosed in square brackets []
- phrases are enclosed in round brackets ()
- function labels are represented as superscripts placed before brackets and individual constituents
- class labels are represented as subscripts placed before brackets and individual constituents.

Here is a labelled bracketing analysis that presents the same information as in the labelled tree diagram above:

S Dr H P H Od M M H
 [(*Some* *people*) (*collect*) (*old* *Australian* *stamps*)
 NP Dv N VP Mv NP Adj Adj N

 A Rel Ax Dr H
 (*as* (*a* *hobby*))]
 PP Prep NP Dv N

Below is a labelled version of the tree diagram we presented earlier, along with the corresponding version with labelled bracketing; again, we have simplified the analysis slightly by omitting the predicate:



S Dr H M Rel Ax H P M H
 [(*A* *friend* (*from* (*England*))) (*has* *told*)
 NP Dv N PP Prep NP N VP Aux Mv

Oi H Od Dr H
 (*me*) (*the* *news*)
 NP Pn NP Dv N

1.7 Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar

A popular view of the role of grammar, one which is reflected in many school grammars, is that it should present a set of rules for speaking and writing ‘correctly’. This approach may be described as **prescriptive**; that is, concerned with prescribing the ways in which – according to the grammarian – language should be used. Modern linguistics is, by contrast, **descriptive** in orientation: its concern is with describing how language *is* used rather than prescribing how it *should* be used. Thus, for

example, we may find a ‘rule’ in a traditional prescriptive grammar of the type: ‘A sentence should not end with a preposition’; according to which, sentence (1) below would be considered ‘incorrect’, the ‘correct’ version being (2):

1. *This is the house which he lives in*
2. *This is the house in which he lives*

Such a rule would not be found in a descriptive grammar, where the grammarian’s interest lies in the question of whether sentence-final prepositions do or do not occur in modern English and, more specifically, if they do, what types of contexts favour their occurrence. In this particular case, it would be important for the descriptive grammarian to distinguish between formal contexts, which are more likely to favour the occurrence of a sentence such as *This is the house in which he lives*, and informal contexts, where *This is the house (which) he lives in* is more likely.

Whereas prescriptive accounts tend to operate with a simple contrast between correct and incorrect, descriptive accounts recognise the existence of different varieties of language: formal vs. informal, written vs. spoken, standard vs. non-standard and so on. The point is that both *This is the house in which he lives* and *This is the house he lives in* are constructed according to valid principles of grammar: the first sentence is not inherently better than the second and, in fact, it would create an effect of aloofness or stiffness if produced in an informal context.

Prescriptive grammar and descriptive grammar are not necessarily in conflict: they simply have different goals. Prescriptive grammarians present rules that they intend their readers to follow, while descriptive grammarians aim to account for the grammatical system that underlies our use of language. Prescriptive grammar is in a sense logically dependent on descriptive grammar: only prescriptive rules that are based on a sound description of the facts should merit our attention. This is the problem with, for instance, the traditional prescriptive rule forbidding the ‘splitting’ of infinitives, that is, the interposing of a word or phrase between the infinitival marker *to* and its verb, as exemplified in:

*She used **to** deliberately **annoy** the neighbours*

Despite the prescriptive rule, such a sentence is more likely to be heard in contemporary usage than *She used to annoy the neighbours deliberately* and *She used deliberately to annoy the neighbours*: the rule is out of step with what a descriptive grammar would recognise to be the facts of usage.

Or again, it seems unreasonable to insist on the prescriptive rule that *may*, rather than *can*, should be used in requesting and granting permission, in view of the fact that (1) below is a more natural-sounding interchange than (2), at least in a typically informal, family environment.

1. *Can I have a lemonade please? Yes, you can*
2. *May I have a lemonade please? Yes, you may*

An important distinction that it is relevant to invoke in this section is that between *rules of grammar* and *rules of style*. Sentences that conform to rules of grammar are sometimes referred to as ‘well formed’, while those that do not are referred to as ‘ill-formed’. Sentences that conform to rules of style – those which dictate whether sentences are stylistically acceptable; in other words, easy to follow, unambiguous and clear – are said to be ‘acceptable’, while those that do not are said to be ‘unacceptable’. A sentence may be grammatically well formed and yet stylistically unacceptable. For example:

Did you see the man near the table with the hairy legs?

This sentence does not break any rule of grammar, but is stylistically flawed in so far as it allows for an unintended interpretation in which it is the table rather than the man that has hairy legs. Further examples of stylistically awkward – but not ungrammatical – sentences are:

Here is a photograph that a boy who my sister met in France last year took

Mary has handed all the goods currently in her possession over

These sentences do not break any grammatical rule of English, but they do contravene the principles of effective communication. The first is difficult to follow, and may require several readings before the message is understood; it could be more felicitously expressed as *Here is a photograph taken by a boy that my sister met in France last year*. In the second, the position of *over* disrupts the balance of the sentence, a problem that could be solved by moving it closer to the verb *handed*, as in *Mary has handed over all the goods currently in her possession*.

Using language effectively is a skill that can be developed and improved. An increased knowledge of the grammatical resources of the language will provide the language user with conscious mastery over a range of

possibilities for constructing sentences effectively. This is undoubtedly one of the most important reasons for learning about grammar.

1.8 Grammar and the Description of Texts

Section 1.1 of this introductory chapter is entitled ‘Grammar and the Description of Language’. Traditionally, grammarians are concerned with terms and structures at the level of words, phrases and sentences. However, language as used in ‘real life’ does not stop at the full stops that mark off the ends of sentences. We need to see how those ‘bricks and mortar’ of language are combined together to produce **texts**, and how we vary them according to the circumstances in which the texts are produced. **Part B** of this book will be concerned with the use of language in ‘real-life’ texts, and with some of the many variables that affect this. In this section we shall provide a preliminary answer to the question: What is a text?

Unlike inflections, words, phrases and sentences, a text is not a unit of grammar. It is defined as a product of communication, a piece of language whose shape is motivated by its semantic purposes and pragmatic roles. A text may be spoken or written, spontaneous or prepared, produced by one person or by many. It may be as long as a 12-part television series or as short as a one-word notice, *Danger!* This book, a poem discussed in this book, a journal review of this book, or a radio interview with one of the authors of this book are each an example of a text.

What gives a random collection of sentences, or even a single isolated word, the property of textuality is a combination of text-internal links and text-external relevance. Linguists commonly refer to these two factors respectively as **cohesion** and **coherence**. Cohesion is the type of organisation in a text that is created by the presence (or absence) in each sentence of distinctive, recognisable linguistic items that relate it to preceding and/or following sentences. These items, which include pronouns, coordinators, subordinators and repeated lexical items, will be discussed in detail in **Chapter 9**. It is important to note, however, that the absence of formal cohesion may not in itself prevent a stretch of language from being identified as a text. Consider the following example, an interchange between a husband and his wife:

1. A: *The phone's ringing*
B: *I'm washing my hair*

Most readers will assume that the sequence of sentences in (1) constitutes a text; that is, that speaker B's utterance is not a *non sequitur*, even though its relationship to speaker A's utterance is indirect and relies heavily on inferences being drawn by the two speakers. A's statement is presumably intended as a directive to his wife to answer the phone, while the wife's response is presumably to be interpreted as providing the reason for her inability or unwillingness to comply with his directive.

Nor does the presence of formal cohesion guarantee a collection of sentences the status of a text. The following examples contain ostensibly cohesive features, but they lack coherence:

2. I bought an old *Ford*. The car which President *Ford* used was black. Black English has been recently in the *news*. The latest news is that the drought will break next *week*. A *week* has seven days. *Yesterday* I found a *cat*. The fat *cat* sat on the *mat* ...

3. Fire engines sit 6 in the front and 6 in the back
 6 and 6 makes 12
 12 inches is a ruler
 Queen Elizabeth ruled the seven seas
 Seas have fish
 Fish have fins
 The Finns fought the Soviets
 The Soviet flag is red

However, consider example (3) again, this time prefaced by the question *Hey, do you know why fire engines are red?* and concluded by the clincher *And that's why fire engines are red!* It will now be recognised by most people as an example of a joke, specifically a 'shaggy-dog' riddle, where the humour is derived precisely from the mismatch between the text's obvious cohesiveness and its apparent lack of coherence: it contains clearly identifiable lexical connections, yet it is hard to tell where the whole progression is leading.

While cohesion is an internal property of texts – an objective matter, capable of automatic recognition – coherence reflects the fact that linguistic communication takes place in an extralinguistic environment. What is felt to be a text must be so because it has a recognised function and form in some 'real-life' situation. Given a little imagination, we must be able to provide or invent some plausible, potential, extralinguistic context for the stretch of language in question. As speakers, we tend to assume that any sequence must 'make sense' and will draw on