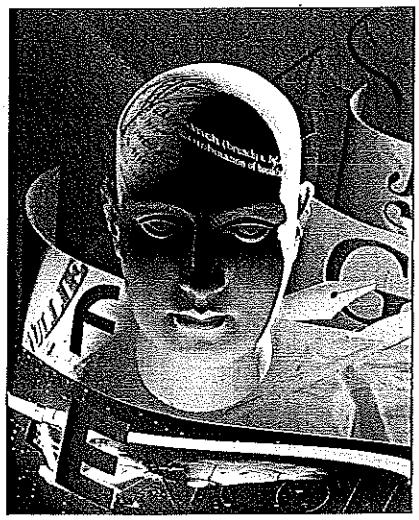
THE CAMBRIDGE
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE



THE MAIN BRANCHES OF GRAMMAR

The field of grammar is often divided into two domains: *morphology* and *syntax*. The former focuses on the structure of words, dealing with such matters as inflectional endings and the way words can be built up out of smaller units (§14); the latter focuses on the structure of sentences (§16).

Modern grammars display a major shift in emphasis from that found in traditional grammars. A large part of a traditional grammar was devoted to aspects of morphology – though not using this label, which is a term from linguistics. The traditional term was *accidence* (from Latin *accidentia*, 'things which befall'), defined in Nesfield's *Grammar* as 'the collective name for all those changes that are incidental to certain parts of speech'. Thus, accidence dealt with such matters as the number, gender, and case of nouns, and the voice, mood, number, person, and tense of verbs, as well as the question of their classification into regular and irregular types.

Most of a traditional grammar was given over to accidence, following the Latin model. Although in Nesfield syntactic matters are to be found throughout the book, only two chapters are officially assigned to the subject, and these are largely devoted to the techniques of clause analysis and the parsing of parts of speech. By contrast, most of a modern grammar of English is given over to syntax. There is relatively little in the language to be accounted for under the heading of inflectional morphology, and in some grammars the notion of morphology is dispensed with altogether, its concerns being handled as the 'syntax of the word'.

WHY?

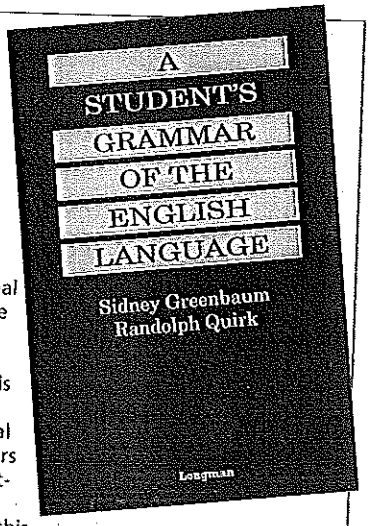
SYNTAX: from Latin *syntaxis*, and earlier from Greek *syn* + *assein* 'together + arrange'. The term is quite often used in a figurative way. Article titles encountered in the 1990s include 'the syntax of cooking' and 'the syntax of sex'.

MORPHOLOGY: ultimately from Greek *morphē* 'form' + *logos* 'word'. The term is also used in other contexts; in biology, for example, it refers to the form and structure of animals and plants.

NEW GRAMMAR...

The chapter headings in S. Greenbaum & R. Quirk's *A Student's Grammar of the English Language* (1990).

1 The English language.
2 A general framework.
3 Verbs and auxiliaries.
4 The semantics of the verb phrase.
5 Nouns and determiners.
6 Pronouns.
7 Adjectives and adverbs.
8 The semantics and grammar of adverbials.
9 Prepositions and prepositional phrases.
10 The simple sentence.
11 Sentence types and discourse functions.
12 Pro-forms and ellipsis.
13 Coordination.
14 The complex sentence.
15 Syntactic and semantic functions of subordinate clauses.
16 Complementation of verbs and adjectives.
17 The noun phrase.
18 Theme, focus, and information processing.
19 From sentence to text.



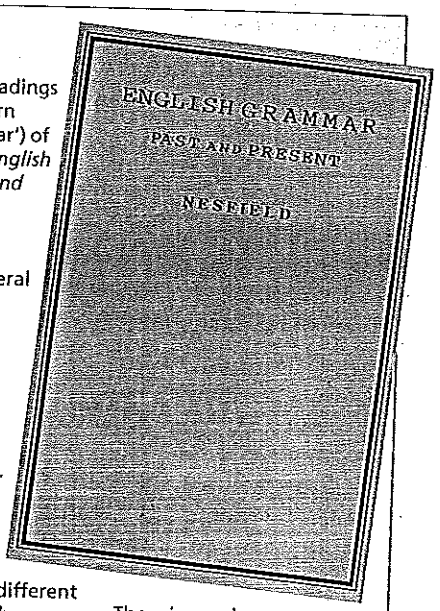
There are some clear parallels with traditional grammar, especially the opening treatment of word classes (Chs. 1–9), but over half the book is explicitly devoted to syntax, and a substantial part of the early chapters deals with syntactic matters too.

The approach which this grammar represents falls well within the European tradition of grammatical analysis, but it would be a mistake to think that all modern grammars look like this. In particular, many grammars which show the influence of contemporary linguistic theory reverse this order of treatment, beginning with a systematic exposition of syntactic matters, leaving matters of word classification and morphology to the end.

...FOR OLD

The chapter headings in Part I ('Modern English Grammar') of J. C. Nesfield's *English Grammar Past and Present* (1898).

1 Analytical outline: general definitions.
2 Nouns.
3 Adjectives.
4 Pronouns.
5 Verbs.
6 Adverbs.
7 Prepositions.
8 Conjunctions.
9 Interjections.
10 Analysis of sentences.
11 The same word used as different parts of speech.
12 Syntax.
13 Punctuation, or the right use of stops.



The minor role played by syntax is to be noted, by comparison with its major role in modern grammars.

PARSING

Parsing played an important role in traditional grammar teaching. The procedure involved stating the part of speech (Latin *pars*) to which a word belonged, and giving certain details about it. Latin grammars used to ask *Quae pars orationis?* 'What part of speech?' (See further, §15.)

- *Noun*: state the number, gender, and case, and say why the noun is in that case.
- *Adjective*: state kind of adjective, degree, and what word it qualifies.
- *Pronoun*: state kind of pronoun, number, person, gender, and case, and why it is in that case.
- *Verb*: state kind of verb (whether weak or strong, p. 21), transitive or intransitive, voice, mood, tense, number, person, the subject with which it agrees, and the object it governs.
- *Adverb*: state kind of adverb, degree, and what word it modifies.
- *Preposition*: state the word it governs.
- *Conjunction*: state kind (coordinating, subordinating) and what it joins.
- *Interjection*: state that it is an interjection.

AN EXAMPLE

I go would be parsed as follows (after L. Tipping, 1927):

I Personal pronoun, first person, singular, nominative case, subject of verb *go*.

go Verb, strong, intransitive, indicative mood, present tense, first person singular, agreeing with its subject *I*.

Well done, Mary Anne! (p. 191)

The categories reflect the way Latin grammar worked, with its complex inflectional morphology, and also the method used in learning it (translation to and from English). As very few of these types of word-ending remain in English, the technique of parsing is no longer seen as having much relevance. More sophisticated forms of sentence analysis have replaced it (§16).

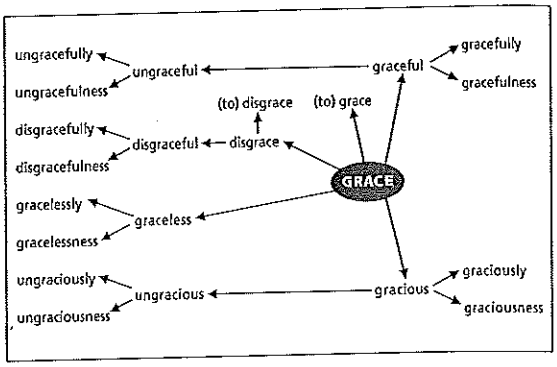
14 · THE STRUCTURE OF WORDS

Morphology, the study of the structure of words, cuts across the division of this book into Lexicon (Part II) and Grammar (Part III). For English, it means devising ways of describing the properties of such disparate items as *a, horses, took, indescribable, washing machine,* and *antidisestablishmentarianism.* A widely-recognized approach divides the field into two domains: *lexical* or *derivational morphology* studies the way in which new items of vocabulary can be built up out of combinations of elements (as in the case of *in-describ-able*); *inflectional morphology* studies the way words vary in their form in order to express a grammatical contrast (as in the case of *horses,* where the ending marks plurality). The processes of lexical word-formation are described in §9. In the present section, we examine the processes of inflection.

An essential first step is to be able to describe the elements (or *morphemes*) out of which words can be constructed.

- Many words cannot be broken down into grammatical parts: *boy, a, yes, person, elephant, problem.* These words are said to consist only of a *base* form (some grammars refer to this as the *root* or *stem*). All we can do, in such cases, is describe what the words mean (see Part III) and how they are pronounced or spelled – such as the number of syllables they have, or the pattern of vowels and consonants they display (see Part IV).
- English permits the addition of meaningful, dependent elements both before and after the base form: these are called *affixes.* Affixes which precede the base are *prefixes;* those which follow it are *suffixes.* The possibility of affixes occurring within the base (*infixes*) is considered on p. 128.
- Prefixes in English have a purely lexical role, allowing the construction of a large number of new words: *un-, de-, anti-, super-,* etc. They are described as part of word-formation on p. 128.
- Suffixes in English are of two kinds. Most are purely lexical, their primary function being to change the meaning of the base form: examples of these *derivational suffixes* include *-ness, -ship,* and *-able.* A few are purely grammatical, their role being to show how the word must be used in a sentence: examples here include plural *-s,* past tense *-ed,* and comparative *-er.* Elements of this second type, which have no lexical meaning, are the *inflectional suffixes* (or simply, *inflections*) of the language.

The derivational field of a single word (from J. Tournier, 1985).



Inflections are a quite distinct group, always occurring at the very end of a word (*graces, disgraced*), and following the derivational suffixes if there are any. If there were several instances of *gracelessness* to be talked about, we could say (admittedly, not with any great elegance) *gracelessnesses.*

Tournier's detailed study also includes extremely full listings of the derivational affixes in English. There are a surprisingly large number of them: excluding variant forms, he gives 386 prefixes and 322 suffixes. The latter total includes dozens of forms which are rare in everyday conversation (except among specialists), such as *-acea, -ectomy, -gynous, -mancy,* and *-ploid.*

Affixes of this kind come and go: *-nik,* for example, is a development in English which became highly productive in the late 1950s, following the launch of *Sputnik 1,* and such subsequent operations as the launch of a dog into space (*pupnik, woofnik, muttnik,* etc.) and the failure of a US satellite (*Yanknik, dudnik, stallnik,* etc.). This usage seems to have died out in the early 1960s. A related suffix, with citations since the 1940s, and seen in *beatnik* and similar uses (*beachnik, filmnik, jazznik,* etc.), was productive into the early 1970s, but seems to have since died out (after L. Bauer, 1983).

Inflectional suffixes, by contrast, do not come and go. There have been no changes in the system since the Early Modern English period (§5).

TYPES OF SUFFIX

This table shows the commonest English suffixes, though not all the variant forms (e.g. *-ible* for *-able*). The list of inflectional categories is complete; the list of derivational suffixes has been limited to 50.

Inflectional suffixes
noun plural, e.g. *-s* (p. 201)
genitive case, e.g. *-'s* (p. 202)
3rd person singular, e.g. *-s* (p. 204)
past tense, e.g. *-ed* (p. 212)
contracted negative *-n't* (pp. 205, 212)
contracted verbs, e.g. *'re* (p. 205)
objective pronoun, e.g. *him* (pp. 203, 210)
-ing form or present participle (p. 204)
-ed form or past participle (p. 204)
-er comparison (pp. 199, 211)
-est comparison (pp. 199, 211)

Derivational suffixes
Abstract-noun-makers (p. 209)
-age frontage, mileage
-dom officialdom, stardom
-ery drudgery, slavery
-ful cupful, spoonful
-hood brotherhood, girlhood
-ing farming, panelling
-ism idealism, racism
-ocracy aristocracy
-ship friendship, membership

Concrete-noun-makers
-eer engineer, racketeer
-er teenager, cooker
-ess waitress, lioness
-ette kitchenette, usherette
-let booklet, piglet
-ling duckling, underling
-ster gangster, gamester

Adverb-makers (p. 211)
-ly quickly, happily
-ward(s) northwards, onwards
-wise clockwise, lengthwise

Verb-makers (p. 212)
-ate orchestrate, chlorinate
-en deafen, ripen
-ify beautify, certify
-ize/-ise modernize, advertise

Adjective-/noun-makers (p. 211)
-ese Chinese, Portuguese
-(i)an republican, Parisian
-ist socialist, loyalist
-ite socialite, Luddite

Nouns from verbs
-age breakage, wastage
-al refusal, revival
-ant informant, lubricant
-ation exploration, education
-ee payee, absentee
-er writer, driver
-ing building, clothing
-ment amazement, equipment
-or actor, supervisor

Nouns from adjectives
-ity rapidity, falsity
-ness happiness, kindness

Adjectives from nouns
-ed pointed, blue-eyed
-esque Kafkaesque
-ful useful, successful
-ic atomic, Celtic
-(i)al editorial, accidental
-ish foolish, Swedish
-less careless, childless
-ly friendly, cowardly
-ous ambitious, desirous
-y sandy, hairy

Adjectives from verbs
-able drinkable, washable
-ive attractive, explosive

ADJECTIVES

lections provide one of the ways in which the ality expressed by an adjective (p. 211) can be mpared. The comparison can be to the same gree, to a higher degree, or to a lower degree.

he base form of the adjective is called the *absolute* m: *big, happy.*

e inflections identify two steps in the expression of igher degree.

Adding *-er* produces the *comparative* form: *bigger, ppier.*
Adding *-est* produces the *superlative* form: *biggest, ppiest.*

ere are no inflectional ways of expressing the same lower degrees in English. These notions are pressed syntactically, using *as... as* (for the same gree: *X is as big as Y*) and *less* or *least* for lower grees (*X is less interested than Y, Z is the least interd of all*).
There is also a syntactic (often called a *iphrastic*) way of expressing higher degree, ough the use of *more* (for the comparative) and *st* (for the superlative): *A is more beautiful than B* d *C is the most beautiful of all.*

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

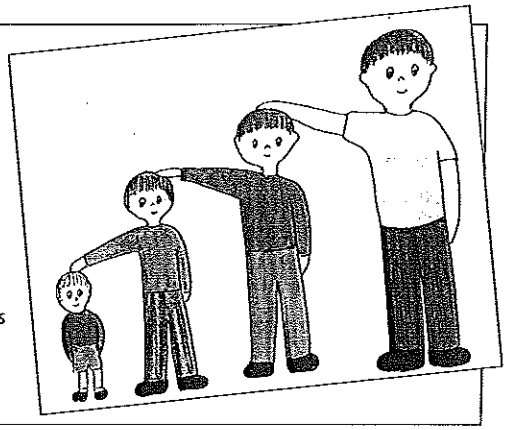
The availability of two ways of expressing higher legree raises a usage uestion: which form hould be used with any articular adjective? The nswer is largely to do ith how long the djective is.

Adjectives of one syllable sually take the inflecional form: *big, thin, mall, long, fat, red.* But here are exceptions: *real, ight,* and *wrong* do not llow **realler, *wrongest,* tc. Nor do participles p. 204) allow an inflection hen they are used as djectives: *That's the most urnt piece of toast I've ver seen* (not **the urntest*).

Adjectives of three llables or more use only he periphrastic form: we o not say **beautifuller* or *interestingest.* But here o there are exceptions: or example, a few threellable adjectives which begin with *un-* do allow the inflection, as in the case of *unhealthier* and *unhappiest.*

• The chief problem arises with two-syllable adjectives, many of which permit both forms of comparison: *That's a quieter/more quiet place.* A few, such as *proper* and *eager,* are straightforward: they do not allow the inflection at all. Others, such as many adjectives ending in *-y, -er,* and *-le,* favour it: *happier, cleverer,* and *gentlest* are commoner than *more/most happy,* etc., but the choice is often made on stylistic grounds. In the previous sentence, for example, there is little to choose between *commoner* and *more common* except the rhythm and the immediate context (*commoner* avoids an inelegant clash with the use of *more* two words later).

TESTING COMPARISON



An item from a screening test designed to assess the language ability of 3- to 5-year-old children. This particular item tries to elicit the child's awareness of comparative and superlative forms. The speech and language therapist uses a structured prompt, while pointing appropriately to the picture:

This boy is little, this one is big, this one is even – and this one is the – .

(After S. Armstrong & M. Ainley, 1990.)

IRREGULARS

There are very few irregular comparative forms, but the ones there are do occur quite frequently.

• *Better* and *best* are the comparison forms of *good*; *worse* and *worst* are the comparison forms of *bad.*
• *Far* has two forms: *further/furthest* and *farther/farthest* (the latter pair being less common, and mainly used to express physical distance, as in *farthest north*).
• *Old* has regular forms (*older/oldest*) and also an irregular use (*elder/eldest*) when talking about family members.
• Some adverbs (p. 211) also allow inflectional comparison (e.g. *soonest*), but most adverbs are compared periphrastically: *more frankly, most willingly.*

POETICAL SUPERLATIVES

In his *Sketches by Boz* (1836–7), Charles Dickens notes a popular use of the superlative form by 'the poetical young gentleman'.

When the poetical young gentleman makes use of adjectives, they are all superlatives. Everything is of the grandest, greatest, noblest, mightiest, loftiest; or the lowest, meanest, obscurest, vilest, and most pitiful. He knows no medium: for enthusiasm is the soul of poetry; and who so enthusiastic as a poetical young gentleman? 'Mr Milkwash,' says a young lady as she unlocks her album to receive the young gentleman's original contribution, 'how very silent you are! I think you must be in love.' 'Love!' cries the poetical young gentleman, starting up from his seat by the fire and terrifying the cat who scampers off at full speed, 'Love! that burning consuming passion; that ardour of the soul, that fierce glowing of the heart. Love! The withering blighting influence of hope misplaced and affection slighted. Love did you say! Ha! ha! ha!'

With this, the poetical young gentleman laughs a laugh belonging only to poets and Mr O. Smith of the Adelphi Theatre, and sits down, pen in hand, to throw off a page or two of verse in the biting, semi-atheistical demoniac style, which, like the poetical young gentleman himself, is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

WHITER THAN WHITEST

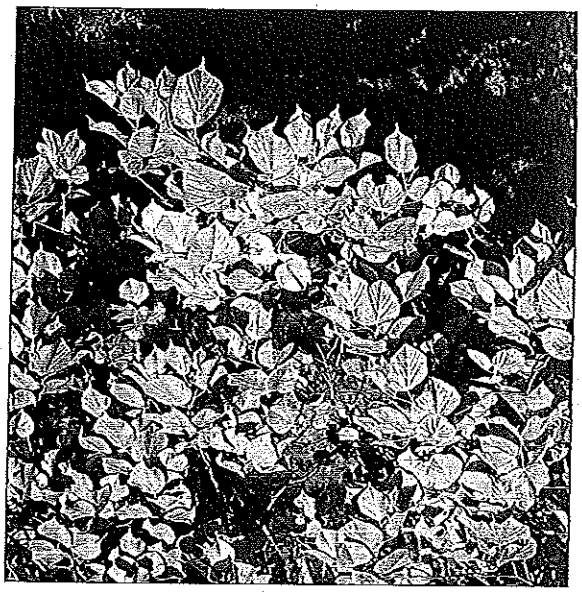
Commercial advertising provides fertile soil for adjective inflections.

NOUNS: NUMBER

Most nouns (p. 208) have both a singular and a plural form, expressing a contrast between 'one' and 'more than one', and these are known as *variable* nouns. A small group of cases do not have a number contrast – the *invariable* nouns (p. 201). Most variable nouns change from singular to plural in a wholly predictable way, usually described simply as 'adding an *-s*' (though the reality is not so straightforward). This is the *regular* plural form, as seen in *cats, oboes, eggs, pterodactyls, grammars,* and thousands more words. By contrast, there are only a few hundred nouns with an *irregular* plural form – though it is these which attract the interest of the grammarian, as they are the ones which lead to difficulties in language learning, and cry out for explanation. Why *doesn't* Standard English (SE) say *mouses, childs,* and *foots*?

ONE OR MORE THAN ONE?

In most cases, the distinction between singular and plural corresponds to that between 'one' and 'more than one', but there are exceptions. The picture shows a large number of objects growing on a tree: if we describe what we see as *foliage*, we use a singular; if we say we see *leaves*, we use a plural. But the number of objects is the same in each case. Similarly, *wheat* is grammatically singular and *oats* is grammatically plural, but the distinction is not apparent to the combine harvester.



ADDING AN -S?

In speech

The *-s* ending is pronounced in any of three possible ways, depending on the nature of the sound at the end of the singular noun. (An identical set of rules applies to other uses of an */-s/* inflection: pp. 202, 204.)

- If the noun ends in an */s/*-like sound (a *sibilant*, p. 262) – /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ʧ/, and /ʤ/ – it is followed by an extra syllable, /ɪz/, as in *buses, phrases, dishes, beaches, sledges,* and (for /ʒ/, some pronunciations of) *mirages*.
- All other nouns ending in a voiceless consonant add */s/*, as in *cups, pots, sacks, scruffs, growths*.
- All other nouns ending in a voiced consonant or a vowel (including *r*-coloured vowels, p. 237) add */z/*, as in *cubs, rods, bags, graves, tithes, farms, guns, rings, pools, cars, players, bees, foes, zoos,* etc.

In writing

The spelling rules are more complex. The vast majority of nouns in the language simply add an *-s*. This includes those nouns where the singular form ends in a 'silent *-e*', such as *plate*. But there are several types of exception (p. 272).

- The ending is *-es* if there is no silent *-e*, and the noun ends in *-s, -z, -x, -ch,* and *-sh* (all sibilants), as in *buses, buzzes, boxes, bitches, bushes*.
- If the noun ends in *-o*, the plural is spelled *-os* in most cases (as in *studios, zoos, pianos, solos, radios, kilos*), but there are a few nouns which require *-oes* (as in *potatoes, dominoes, heroes, tomatoes*), and some allow both (as in *volcano(e)s, cargo(e)s, motto(e)s*), though modern usage seems to be slowly moving towards the *-os* norm.
- If a common noun (p. 208) ends in *-y*, with a preceding consonant, the *-y* is replaced by *-i*, and *-es* is added, as in *skies, flies*. If there is only a preceding vowel, the *-y* stays (as in *ways, boys*), as it does in proper nouns (*old and new Germanys, the three Marys*).
- There are several unusual cases, such as consonant doubling (*quizzes, fezzes*), the use of apostrophes after a letter name (*cross your t's*) or a number (*3's*), especially in British English, and doubling a letter in some written abbreviations, as in *pp.* ('pages'), *exx.* ('examples'), and *ll.* ('lines').

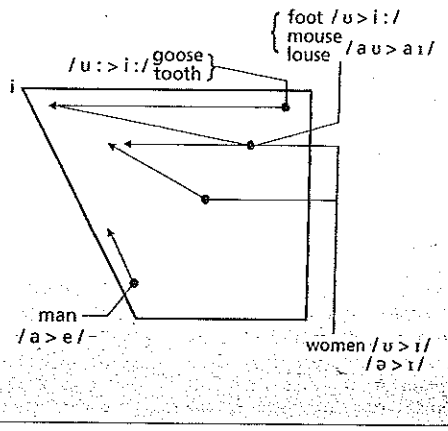
EXCEPTIONAL PLURALS

There are several groups of native English words which display exceptional plural forms. Although we cannot say why these particular words did not follow the regular pattern, it is at least often possible to see why they have their distinctive form by referring to the types of plural formation found in Old English or Germanic (p. 8).

- Seven nouns change their vowel (a process known as *mutation*, or *umlaut*, p. 19): *man > men, foot > feet, goose > geese, mouse > mice, woman > women, tooth > teeth, louse > lice*. The change does not take place when there is a derived sense, as when *louse* refers to a person (*you louses!*) or *mouse* to a character (*we've hired three Mickey Mouses this month*).
- Four nouns add *-en*, in two cases changing the vowel sound as well: *ox > oxen, aurochs > aurochsen, child > children, brother > brethren*. The use of */-n/* as a plural marker was a feature of an important class of Old English nouns. Several other family words showed this ending in Middle English, such as *doughtren* ('daughters') and *sustren* ('sisters'), both found in Chaucer.
- A few nouns change their final fricative consonant (p. 243) as well as adding */z/*. Some change */-f/* to */-v/*, as in *wives, loaves,* and *halves*. The spelling reflects a change which took place in Old English, where */f/* was voiced between vowels (the plural of *hlaf* 'loaf' was *hlafas*). Some change */-θ/* to */-ð/*, as in *paths, booths,* and *mouths*. *House* is unique, with */-s/* changing to */-z/* in *houses*.

In several cases, usage is uncertain: *dwarf, hoof, scarf,* and *wharf* will be found with both */-fs/* and */-vz/*, and spelled accordingly (e.g. both *scarfs* and *scarves*); *truth, oath, sheath, wreath,* and (especially in American English) *youth* will be found with both/*-θs/* and */-ðz/*, but both spelled in the same way, *-ths* (much to the frustration of the foreign learner). Exceptions to the exceptions include *still lifes* and the Toronto ice-hockey team, the *Maple Leafs*.

A vowel diagram (p. 238) showing the way the high front position of the tongue (in the vowel of the hypothetical Germanic plural suffix */-iz/*) once 'pulled' the vowel of the associated noun in its direction (p. 19). The effect can still be seen relating the singular and plural forms of the surviving nouns. Several other nouns were also affected at the time (such as *bēc*, plural of *bōc* 'book' in Old English), though the mutated forms have not survived in Modern English.



NOUNS OF FOREIGN ORIGIN

Nouns which have been borrowed from foreign languages pose a particular problem. Some have adopted the regular plural ending: *They sang another two choruses* (not **chori*). Some have kept the original foreign plural: *More crises to deal with* (not **crisises*). And some permit both: *What lovely cactuses/cacti!*

There are no rules. People have to learn which form to use as they meet the words for the first time, and must become aware of variations in usage. Where there is a choice, the classical plural is usually the more technical, learned, or formal, as in the case of *formulas* vs *formulae* or *curriculums* vs *curricula*. Sometimes, alternative plurals have even developed different senses, as in the case of (spirit) *mediums* vs (mass) *media*, or *appendixes* (in bodies or books) vs *appendices* (only in books). The table (right) shows the main types of foreign plural formation.

Source / ending	*Native plural*	*Foreign plural*	*Both plurals*
Latin *-us*	+ *-es* apparatus, campus, circus, sinus, virus	> *-i* stimulus, bacillus, locus, alumnus	focus, fungus, cactus, terminus, syllabus, radius
Latin *-a*	+ *-s* area, dilemma, drama	> *-ae* alumna, alga, larva	antenna, formula, nebula, vertebra
Latin *-um*	+ *-s* album, museum, premium	> *-a* bacterium, erratum, desideratum	aquarium, maximum, medium, podium, referendum, forum
Latin *-ex, -ix*	+ *-es* suffix, prefix	> *-ices* codex, spadex, fornix	index, appendix, apex, vortex, matrix
Greek *-is*	+ *-es* metropolis, clitoris, glottis	> *-es* analysis, basis, crisis, oasis, synopsis	
Greek *-on*	+ *-s* electron, proton, neutron, horizon	> *-a* criterion, entozoon, phenomenon	automaton, polyhedron
French *-eau*	+ *-s* Cointreau	> *-eaux* gateau	bureau, tableau, plateau, chateau
Italian *-o*	+ *-s* solo, soprano, portico, piccolo, supremo	> *-i* timpano, graffito, mafioso	virtuoso, tempo, libretto, allegro, scherzo
Hebrew nouns	+ *-s/-es*	> *-im* moshav, midrash	kibbutz, cherub, seraph

INVARIABLE NOUNS

Many nouns do not show a contrast between singular and plural: the *invariable* nouns. These are usually classified into two types: those used only in the singular, and those used only in the plural.

Singular-only nouns

- Proper names (p. 208), such as *Francis* and *York*. SE does not allow (except possibly in jest) **Yorks are nice places.*
- Names of subjects, diseases, and games, such as *physics, mumps, billiards*. SE does not allow **Physics are fun*. These nouns can mislead, because their *-s* ending makes them look plural. Some have singular and plural uses: compare *Darts is easy* and *Your darts are broken.*
- Nouns in a noncount use (p. 209): *music, homework, snow*. SE does not allow **I like musics*. If the noun is used in a countable way, a plural is normal: compare *They make beer* and *They had two beers.*

Plural-only nouns

- Names of 'two-part' items, such as *scissors, binoculars, jeans*. SE does not allow **Your jeans is dry.*
- A few dozen nouns ending in *-s*, such as *amends, annals, auspices, congratulations, dregs, outskirts, remains, thanks, tropics*. In such cases, either there is no singular form in SE (**An outskirt of the city*) or the singular gives a different sense (as in *dregs of beer* vs *He's a dreg!* – British slang, 'worthless person').
- A few nouns which look singular but are always plural: *vermin, livestock, cattle, poultry, people, folk*, and *police*. SE does not allow **The police is outside.*

Double-plural nouns

Several animal names have two plurals. There is the regular plural, adding an *-s*, and there is a 'zero' plural form, with no ending at all.

I have two *rabbits*.

They've been shooting *rabbit*.

There is a clear difference in meaning. If the animals are being thought of as individuals, the plural form is used. If they are a category of game, they have a zero plural. The professional hunter goes *shootin' duck*, never *ducks*. And visitors to the local pond *feed the ducks*, never *feed the duck* – unless, of course, the pond contains only one.

Words without end

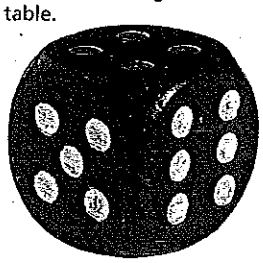
A few nouns have the same form for both singular and plural, even though they are semantically variable, allowing a difference between 'one' and 'more than one'. In such sentences as *I like your sheep*, only the context enables us to know which meaning is intended. *That sheep* or *those sheep* would resolve the matter, as would observation of the relevant field. Like *sheep* are the names of some animals (e.g. *deer, salmon*) and nationalities (e.g. *Portuguese, Swiss*), several nouns expressing quantity (e.g. *quid* – British slang, '£', *p* 'pence'), and a few others (e.g. *aircraft, offspring, series, species*).

SOME CONTROVERSIAL NOUNS

- *Data* causes a usage problem. This word was once found only as a plural, but is now often used as a singular, especially in computing and other scientific contexts: *Much of this data needs to be questioned* (rather than *Many of these data need to be questioned*). This use continues to attract criticism from those who were brought up on the older pattern. The singular function is still not totally established, in fact, as many who say *this data* baulk at saying *a data* or *two data*. American English seems to be ahead of British, in this respect.

- With a small group of nouns usually ending in *-s*, people sometimes argue over whether they should be used as singulars or plurals: *The headquarters is nearby* vs *...are nearby*. In such cases, either form is possible depending on the intended meaning. The singular suggests the idea of a single entity, whereas the plural emphasizes that the entity is made up of individual units. Other such nouns include *barracks, steelworks*, and *kennels*.

- *Dice* (meaning 'a marked cube used in games of chance') is now used (like *sheep*) both as a singular and a plural: *The dice is on the table* refers to one, *... are on the table* refers to more than one. The singular usage, known from the 14th century, is now found only in the idiom *The die is cast*. However, purists anxious to preserve the original distinction continue to recommend the use of a *die* whenever a single cube is on the table.



NOUNS: CASE

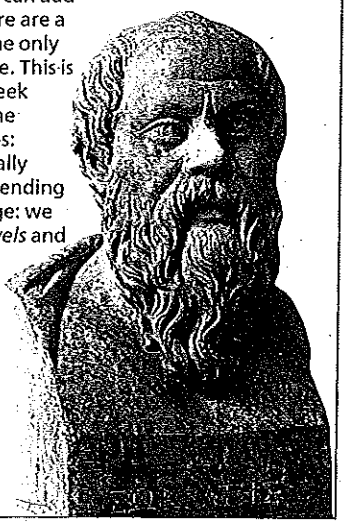
There are only two cases left in Modern English (p. 21): a *common* case, where the noun has no ending at all, and the *genitive*. The genitive is formed by adding an *-s* to the singular form of the noun. In writing, this appears with a preceding apostrophe (p. 283, the 'apostrophe *s*'): *the cat's food*. With most plural forms, an *-s* ending is already present, so the written form just adds a following sign (the 's apostrophe'): *the cats' food*. In a few irregular plural instances, *'s* is used (as in *the men's books*). In speech, there is no difference in pronunciation between *cat's* and *cats'*.

The chief meaning of the genitive case is possession: *the cat's food*. But the case is used to express several other meanings too. The notion of origin is present in *the traveller's story*. There is description in *a summer's day*. A period is measured in *three months' leave*. And the form can express the idea of the noun either doing the action or receiving the action: in *the hostage's application*, the hostage is the one who applies; in *the hostage's release*, the hostage is the one who is released.

There is a close similarity between a noun in the genitive case and the same noun preceded by *of* (the *of-genitive*): *the ship's name* = *the name of the ship*. The choice is largely based on factors of gender and style. Personal nouns and the higher animals (p. 209) tend to take the genitive ending; inanimate nouns take the *of-* genitive. Thus we find *Hilary's book* rather than **the book of Hilary*, but *a part of the difficulty* rather than **the difficulty's part*. The genitive case is also used with many nouns of special human relevance (*my life's aim*, *the body's needs*). But the *of-* form is used for titles (*The Duke of Kent*) – always allowing for cases of contrived informality (*England's Queen*).

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONES'(S)

Not all singular nouns can add a genitive ending. There are a few instances where the only signal is the apostrophe. This is what happens with Greek names of more than one syllable and ending in -s: *Socrates' bust*, not usually *Socrates's bust*. Names ending in /-z/ vary in their usage: we find both *Dickens's novels* and *Dickens' novels*, *Jesus's name* and *Jesus' name*. With the shorter form, the implied extra syllable can still be pronounced: *Dickens'* could be /'dɪkɪnz/ or /'dɪkɪnzɪz/.



POSSESSIVE POETRY

'The Possessive Case', a poem by Lisel Mueller (1977), in addition to its intriguing semantic juxtapositions, provides an interesting corpus for testing hypotheses about the use of the two forms of genitive.

Your father's mustache
My brother's keeper
La plume de ma tante
Le monocle de mon oncle
His Master's Voice
Son of a bitch
Charley's Aunt
Lady Chatterley's Lover
The Prince of Wales
The Duchess of Windsor
The Count of Monte Cristo
The Emperor of Ice Cream
The Marquis de Sade
The Queen of the Night
Mozart's Requiem
Beethoven's Ninth
Bach's B-Minor Mass
Schubert's Unfinished
Krapp's Last Tape
Custer's Last Stand
Howards End
Finnegans Wake
The March of Time
The Ides of March
The Auroras of Autumn
The winter of our discontent
The hounds of spring
The Hound of Heaven
Dante's Inferno
Vergil's Aeneid
Homer's Iliad
The Fall of the City
The Decline of the West
The Birth of a Nation
The Declaration of Independence
The ride of Paul Revere
The Pledge of Allegiance
The Spirit of '76
The Age of Reason
The Century of the Common Man
The Psychopathology of Everyday Life
Portnoy's Complaint
Whistler's Mother
The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi
The whore of Babylon
The Bride of Frankenstein
The French Lieutenant's Woman
A Room of One's Own
Bluebeard's Castle
Plato's cave
Santa's workshop
Noah's ark
The House of the Seven Gables
The Dance of the Seven Veils
Anitra's Dance
The Moor's Pavane
My Papa's Waltz
Your father's mustache

VERBS

The forms of a *regular* lexical verb (p. 212) can be predicted by rules. An *irregular* lexical verb is one where some of the forms are unpredictable. There are thousands of regular verbs in Modern English, but less than 300 irregular ones. The irregular forms are the surviving members of the highly developed system of 'strong' verb classes found in Old English (p. 21).

Regular verbs appear in four forms, each playing a different role in the clause (p. 220).

- The *base form* – a form with no endings, as listed in a dictionary (sometimes called the *infinitive form*): *go, see, remember, provide.*
- The *-s form*, made by adding an *-(e)s* ending to the base (sometimes with a spelling change), used for the third person singular in the present tense: *he/she/it sees.* The pronunciation of this ending varies, depending on the preceding sound, as already described with reference to nouns (p. 200): */-s/*, as in *looks, chops*, and *jumps*; */-z/*, as in *tries, goes*, and *reminds*; and */-ɪz/*, as in *passes, rushes*, and *buzzes. Does* and *says* are exceptions, in that they change their pronunciation when the ending is added: /dʌz/ not */duːz/ and /sez/ not */seɪz/ (except sometimes in reading aloud).
- The *-ing form*, or *-ing participle*, made by adding *-ing* to the base (often with a spelling change): *running, jumping, going.* In traditional grammar, this would be called the *present participle*, but as the form is by no means restricted to expressing present time (as in *He was going*), this term is not used by many modern grammarians.
- The *-ed form*, made by adding *-ed* to the base (often with a spelling change). This ending is found in the *past form* and in the *-ed participle form.* The past form has just one use: to express the past tense, as in *I kicked the ball.* The *-ed* participle form has four uses: to help express a past aspect (as in *I've kicked the ball*, p. 225); to help express the passive voice (as in *The ball was kicked*, p. 225); in certain types of subordinate clause and to begin a clause (as in *Kicked and battered, I hobbled off the field*, p. 226); and as an adjective (as in *the cooked meal*, p. 211). The *-ed* participle form would have been called the *past participle* in traditional grammar, but as its use is not restricted to past time (as in *I will be asked*) this label also tends to be avoided in modern grammar.

Irregular verbs make their *-s* form and *-ing* form by adding an ending to the base, in the same way as regular verbs do. But they have either an unpredictable past tense, or an unpredictable *-ed* participle form, or both. Many irregular verbs therefore appear in five forms, instead of the usual four.

THE IRREGULAR VERBS

There are two main features of irregular lexical verbs, both of which pose routine problems for young children and foreign learners (p. 428):

- Most irregular verbs change the vowel of the base to make their past or *-ed* participle forms. This process is known as vowel *gradation* (p. 21): *meet > met* (not **meeted*), *take > took* (not **taked*).
- The *-ed* ending is never used in a regular way, and is often not used at all, as in *cut, met, won*: *I have cut* (not **I have cutted*), *It was won* (not **It was winned*).

Using these features, it is possible to group irregular verbs into seven broad classes.

Class 1
About 20 verbs whose only irregular feature is the ending used for both their past and *-ed* participle forms: *have > had, send > sent.*

Class 2
About 10 verbs whose past tense is regular, but whose *-ed* participle form has an *-n* ending, as well as a variant form in *-ed*: *mow > mown* or *mowed, swell > swollen* or *swelled.*

Class 3
About 40 verbs which have the same ending for the past and *-ed* participle forms, but this is irregular; they also change the vowel of the base form: *keep > kept, sleep > slept, sell > sold.*

Class 4
About 75 verbs which have an *-n* ending for the *-ed* participle form, and an irregular past form; they also change the vowel of the base form: *blow > blew > blown, take > took > taken, see > saw > seen.*

Class 5
About 40 verbs which have the same form throughout, as in *cut, let, shut*: *I shut the door* (now), *I shut the door* (last week), *I have shut the door.*

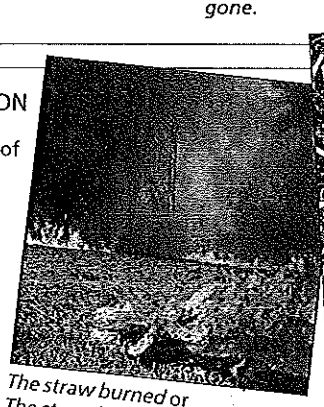
Class 6
About 70 verbs which have no ending, but use the same form for both past tense and *-ed* participle; they also change the vowel of the base form: *spin > spun, sit > sat, stand > stood.*

Class 7
About 25 verbs, forming the most irregular type. There is no ending; the past and *-ed* participle forms differ; and the vowels change with each form: *swim > swam > swum, come > came > come, go > went > gone.*

A BURNING QUESTION

Several irregular verbs (of Class 2) have alternative *-ed* forms, one regular (with *-ed*), the other irregular (with *-t*). They include:

burned	burnt
learned	learnt
smelled	smelt
spelled	spelt
spilled	spilt
spoiled	spoilt



The straw burned or The straw burnt?

Burnt straw or burned straw?

The *-t* ending is rare in American English (p. 441). In British English, however, there is a great deal of usage variation, and it makes an interesting question to ask whether some of this could be patterned, expressing a subtle difference in meaning between the two forms.

The close comparison of examples suggests that the *-ed* form may be more likely when the duration of an action is being emphasized. Something which has happened once, which has taken up very little time, or which focuses on the result of a process rather than on the process itself may be more likely to attract the *-t* ending. The following examples can be used to test this hypothesis. Do they feel different?

The heather burned for days.
The burnt heather looked awful.

The torturer burned my arm.
I burnt my arm against the stove.

We've always burned wood in that stove.
I saw a piece of burnt wood in the shed.

The drink burned in my throat.
(It was whiskey.)
The drink burnt my throat.
(It was acid.)

Sometimes the context does not bear one or other of the above interpretations, which could explain why in this next example (which seems to require a long period of time) the first sentence is more likely than the second.

They burned with desire for each other.
?They burnt with desire for each other.

However, on many occasions the choice may well be random, because the verb or context does not motivate the drawing of such semantic distinctions, as in the case of *I spelled/spelt it with an e.* And at the other extreme, there are some collocations (p. 160) which permit little or no variation, as in the adjectival *burnt sienna, burnt almonds, burnt offering, burnt toast*, and T. S. Eliot's poem *Burnt Norton.*

ADDING AN *-ED*?

In speech

The *-ed* ending of regular verbs is pronounced in any of three possible ways, depending on the nature of the sound at the end of the base form. (A similar set of rules applies to way the */-s/* inflection is pronounced: see p. 200.)

- If the verb ends in a /t/ or /d/ (an *alveolar*, p. 243), it is followed by an extra syllable, /ɪd/, as in *wanted, boarded*. This form has several pronunciation variants around the world; for example, it is pronounced /əd/ in South Africa.
- All other verbs ending in a voiceless consonant add /t/, as in *stopped* /stɒpt/, *boxed* /bɒkst/.
- All other verbs ending in a voiced consonant or a vowel (including *r*-coloured vowels, p. 237) add /d/, as in *robed, died, barred*.

In writing

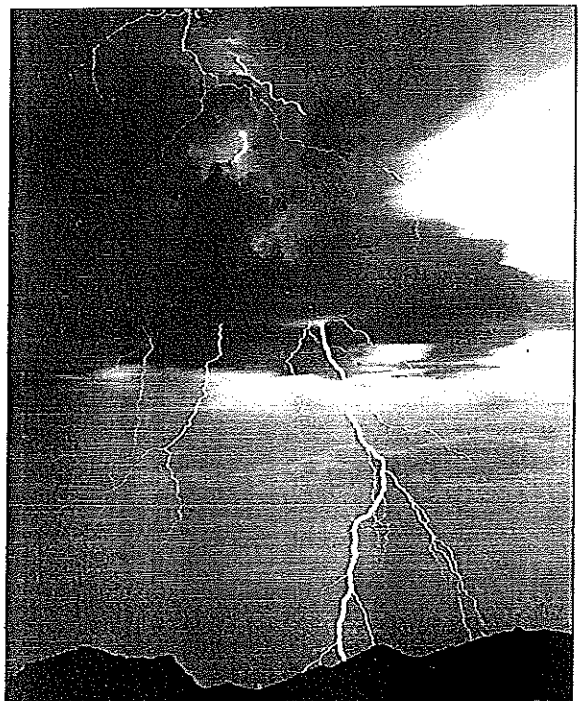
The spelling rules are more complex, and show several regional variations between British and American English. The chief patterns are as follows:

- If the base form ends in a 'silent *-e*', this *-e* is dropped before *-ed* (and also before the *-ing* ending), as in *typed*, not **typeed* (or **typeing*). Most verbs ending in *-ye, -oe, -ie, -nge*, and a few others, lose the *-e* before *-ed* (but keep it before *-ing*), as in *dyed* (but *dyeing*), *singed* (but *singeing*). This allows such contrasts as *singing* and *singeing* to be distinguished.
- A single consonant letter at the end of the base is doubled before *-ed* (and also before *-ing*), if the preceding vowel carries a stress and is spelt with a single letter: *jogged* (*jogging*), *permitted* (*permitting*). This doubling does not usually happen when the preceding vowel is unstressed (*enter* > *entered, entering*) or is written with two letters (*greet* > *greeted, greeting*).
- Some final consonants are exceptions to this rule, allowing a double consonant even when the preceding vowel is unstressed. This is normal practice in British English, but American English also permits the use of a single consonant (though frequency varies, in the following cases). The chief instances are *-l, -m(me)*, and some verbs in *-p*:

Always in BrE, often in AmE	*Never in BrE, often in AmE*
signalled	signaled
diagrammed	diagramed
kidnapper	kidnaper

Verbs ending in a vowel + *-c* spell the doubling with *-ck*, as in *panicked*. However, when the base ends in a vowel + *-s*, there is great variation in usage, with some publishers insisting on a double consonant, and others avoiding it: *focussed* vs *focused*, *biassed* vs *biased*. The present book uses a single *-s-* in such words.

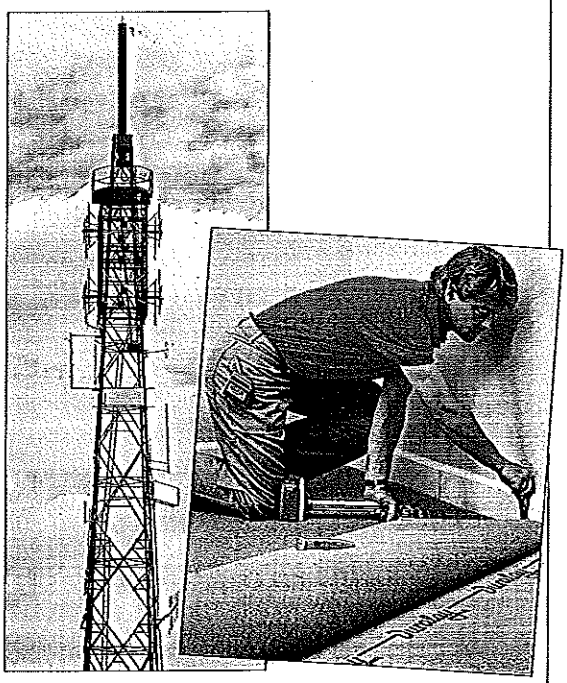
- As with nouns (p. 200), if the verb ends in *-y*, with a preceding consonant, the *-y* is replaced by *-i*, and *-ed* is added, as in *cried, tried*. If there is a preceding vowel, the *-y* usually remains (as in *stayed*). The same rule applies to the *-s* ending too: *cries, tries*. One difference from nouns is that the *-y* stays in cases where an *-ing* ending is used: *crying, trying*.
- Even more than with nouns, there are exceptions to the exceptions. So, if a *-y* verb is preceded by *-a-*, the *-y* is replaced, as in *paid* and *laid*. And if a verb ending in *-ie* adds *-ing*, the *-ie* changes to *-y*, as in *dying* and *tying*. When a word ends in a silent consonant, it is not doubled, as in *crocheted* and *hurrahed*. In the present tense, there are such exceptions as *does* and *goes*, where an *-e-* has been added. And there are a few forms which present variation in usage, such as *ageing* and *aging*, *arcked* and *arced*, or *verandahed* and *verandah'd* (see further, p. 274).



TO LIGHTNING

Lightning used as a verb (*It thundered and lightninged all night*) seems to be the only exception to the rule that *-ing* can be added to the base to produce an *-ing* form. We do not say **It was thundering and lightninging all night*, but keep the verb unchanged: *It was thundering and lightning all night*. However, this is such an unusual form for English that many people find it uncomfortable, and prefer to rephrase their sentence rather than say it or write it.

RELAYING CARPETS AND MESSAGES



relayed or *relaid*?

relaid or *relayed*?

Spelling can be a critical factor in distinguishing verb meanings. A message is *relayed*, but a carpet is *relaid*. The first is a verb, to *relay*, which has been derived from the noun *relay*; the second is a verb based on *lay*. The first uses the regular *-y* spelling, but the second shares the exceptional *-ed* spelling of *lay* (*laid*).

n't

The contracted form of the negative word *not* is used as an inflection with some verbs. The ones which allow this are the auxiliary verbs (p. 212), most of which can thus appear in two negative forms:

does not	doesn't
is not	isn't

In some cases, the form of the verb is altered:

will not	won't
shall not	shan't
were not	weren't
do not	don't /dəʊnt/, not /duːnt/

Some auxiliaries do not permit the ending in Standard English, notably **amn't* (though it will be heard in Irish English, for example). Some usages are dated (*mayn't, usedn't*). But the major contrast is with lexical verbs, which never allow the contracted form: **sitn't*, **walkedn't*.

15 · WORD CLASSES

Traditional grammars of English, following an approach which can be traced back to Latin (§13), agreed that there were eight parts of speech in English: the noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection. Some books paid separate attention to the participle; some additionally mentioned the article. But none was in any doubt that the definition of the parts of speech was an essential first step in learning about English grammar.

Why is it necessary to talk about parts of speech at all? The main reason is to be able to make general and economical statements about the way the words of the language behave. It is only a matter of common sense to generalize, when we notice that a set of words all work in the same way. In a simple case, we observe such sentences as

It is in the box.
It is near the fence.
It is on the horse.
It is by the table.
It is under the car.
It is for the book.

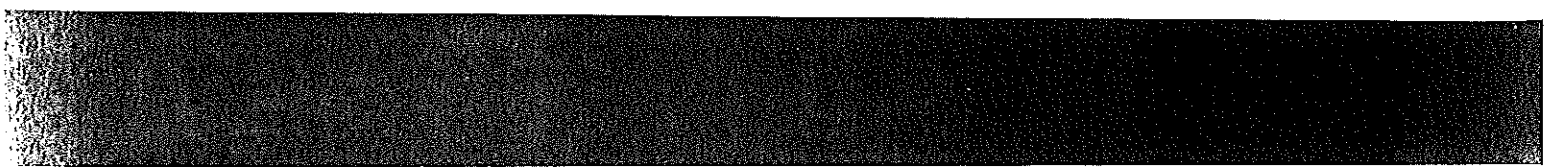
and note the identity of structure. In each instance, there is an item preceding *the* which seems to have the same sort of function, expressing some kind of proximity relationship between *it* (whatever that is) and the following words. Rather than talk about each of these items individually, it makes sense to group them together into a single category. Latin had words with the same function, which the grammarians called *prepositions* (from *prae* + *positio* 'placing in front' – that is, in front of a noun), and modern English grammars have happily continued to use the term.

Modern grammarians are happy because this is one of the areas where Latin and English grammar seem to behave in a similar way. The notion of preposition is a particularly useful one for describing English (p. 213). However, there is less happiness when people try to apply the old part-of-speech labels to English words that do not have a clear counterpart in Latin (such as *the, shall,* or the *to* in *to go*), or when they use definitions of the parts of speech that prove difficult to work with. Indeed, when linguists began to look closely at English grammatical structure in the 1940s and 1950s, they encountered so many problems of identification and definition that the term *part of speech* soon fell out of favour, *word class* being introduced instead. Word classes *are* equivalent to parts of speech, but defined according to strictly linguistic criteria.

THE TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS

The definitions found in traditional grammars vary between authors, but they share a vagueness and inconsistency of approach which has not endeared them to modern linguists. A set of definitions and examples (from Nesfield, 1898: see p. 197) is given below, along with a note of the chief difficulties they present to anyone wanting to make a precise description of English grammar. The general intent behind the traditional definitions is clear enough; but several are insufficiently general to apply to all instances, and the lack of formal detail about their morphology (§14) or syntax (§16) makes them difficult to apply consistently.

Definitions	Comments
A noun is a word used for naming some person or thing. Examples: *man, house, Paris, height*	The notional definition is difficult to work with; some grammars add a separate reference to places, but even that excludes many nouns which could not easily be described as 'persons, places, and things', such as abstract qualities (*beauty*) and actions (*a thump*). No reference is made to morphology or syntax (see p. 208).
An adjective is a word used to qualify a noun...to restrict the application of a noun by adding something to its meaning. Examples: *fine, brave, three, the*	The definition is too broad and vague, as it allows a wide range of elements (e.g. *the, my, all*) which have very different grammatical properties, and even nouns in certain types of construction (e.g. *her brother the butcher*) do not seem to be excluded. No reference is made to morphology or syntax (see p. 211).
A pronoun is a word used instead of a noun or noun-equivalent [i.e. a word which is acting as a noun]. Examples: *this, who, mine*	The definition is almost there, but it has to be altered in one basic respect: pronouns are used instead of noun *phrases* (p. 222), not just nouns. *He* refers to the whole of the phrase *the big lion*, not just the word *lion* (we cannot say **the big he*). Nothing is said about morphology or syntax (see p. 210).
A verb is a word used for saying something about some person or thing. Examples: *make, know, buy, sleep*	On this definition, there is little difference between a verb and an adjective (above). Some grammars prefer to talk about 'doing words' or 'action words', but this seems to exclude the many *state* verbs, such as *know, remember,* and *be*. No reference is made to morphology or syntax (see p. 212).
An adverb is a word used to qualify any part of speech except a noun or pronoun. Examples: *today, often, slowly, very*	This is an advance on the more usual definition, in which adverbs are said to qualify (or 'modify') verbs – which is inadequate for such words as *very* and *however*. Even so, the definition leaks, as it hardly applies to interjections, and examples such as *the very man* and *slovenly me* have to be thought about. Nothing is really said about morphology or syntax (p. 211).
A preposition is a word placed before a noun or noun-equivalent to show in what relation the person or thing stands to something else. Examples: *on, to, about, beyond*	This is a good start, as it gives a clear syntactic criterion. The definition needs tightening up, though, as prepositions really go before noun phrases, rather than just nouns, and may also be used in other parts of the sentence (p. 213). As with nouns above, more than just persons and things are involved.
A conjunction is a word used to join words or phrases together, or one clause to another clause. Examples: *and, before, as well as*	This captures the essential point about conjunctions, but it also needs some tightening up, as prepositions might also be said to have a joining function (*the man in the garden*). A lot depends on exactly what is being joined (p. 213).
An interjection is a word or sound thrown into a sentence to express some feeling of the mind. Examples: *Oh!, Bravo!, Fie!*	This is vaguer than it need be, for elsewhere Nesfield acknowledges the essential point, that interjections do not enter into the construction of sentences. Despite the emotional function of these words, they still need to be considered as part of sentence classification (p. 213).

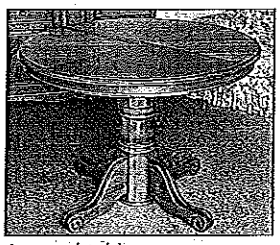


CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

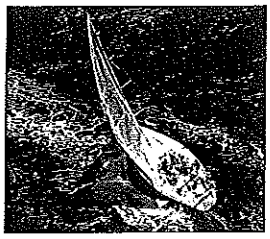
It is not possible to tell which word class a word belongs to just by looking at it. We need to look carefully at how it behaves in a sentence. The word *brown*, for example, has three grammatical uses:

- As an adjective, when it is used in such contexts as *I bought a brown car* and *My arms are brown.*
- As a noun, when it is used in such contexts as *I pocketed the brown.*
- As a verb, when it is used in such contexts as *The toast has browned nicely.*

Some words have even more uses. *Round* has five, as adjective, noun, verb, adverb, and preposition.



A round table.



The yacht rounded the buoy.

It's your round.

Walking round to the shops.

Round the corner came a fire engine.

IDENTIFYING WORD CLASSES

A word class is a group of words which, from a grammatical point of view, behave in the same way. In theory, this means two things.

- The words are the same morphologically (§14): they show which class they belong to by using the same endings. For example, verbs add such inflectional endings as *-ing* and *-s* (p. 204); they can also be identified by various lexical endings, such as *-ize* and *-ify* (p. 198).
- The words are the same syntactically (§16): they show which class they belong to by being used in the same way within a sentence. For example, adjectives can appear between *the* and a noun, or immediately after a form of *be*: *the happy cat, the cat is happy.*

The task of word class identification is an interesting one for linguists, as it is not always obvious which are the best criteria to use. For example, when trying to decide what can be called a noun in English (p. 208), there are several possible criteria, each of which identifies a particular group of words. One criterion is the use of a plural ending. This includes *cats, dogs, horses,* and thousands of other words; but it excludes many words which do not have a plural form, such as *sheep, police, information,* and *John*. Another possible criterion is the use of a distinctive noun-making suffix, such as *-hood* or *-tion*. This includes *information, boyhood,* and thousands of words; but it excludes thousands of others which do not have such an ending.

At the same time, we sense that certain criteria have nothing to do with nouns at all. For example, the use of a comparative or superlative ending (p. 199) does not seem relevant in dealing with such words as *cat* and *dog*: we do not say **catter* or **doggest*. A different group of words can be identified using that criterion – those we call adjectives.

Some criteria, although in principle applicable to nouns, seem to identify such a limited group of words that they are of little real value. An example is the use of the genitive case, which has a marked preference for animate nouns (p. 202), as in *the boy's back* but not **the house's back*. Although it is a relevant criterion, which contributes to our sense of what makes a 'typical' noun, it is not a very useful distinguishing feature, because it excludes so many words that are definitely nouns according to other criteria.

Traditional grammar did not have the same interest in studying the actual linguistic behaviour of word classes. It assumed that the criteria which worked well for Latin would also work for English (p. 192), and it used definitions of the parts of speech which related more to their supposed meaning than to the way they worked in sentences. Neither of these practices has proved to be of much help in the description of English.

SOME NEW WORD CLASSES

When we look carefully at the way words behave in sentences, the differences can strike us as much as the similarities. Many words, indeed, turn out to be unique. For example, there is no other word in the language which has exactly the same formal properties as *house*, with its idiosyncratic way of forming a plural (p. 200). Likewise, there are features of the formal behaviour of *children, good, lightning, say, will,* and *do* (all identified in §14) which no other word in the language shares. Idiosyncrasies of this kind are usually disregarded when dealing with word classes. *House* is still classified as a noun, albeit a slightly individual one.

This approach brings to light several important groups of words in English which are syntactically so distinctive that they demand separate recognition – which means finding a new name for them. Here are three examples of these 'new' word classes.

- *Determiners* A group of words which can be used instead of *the* and *a* in the noun phrase, expressing such notions as quantity, number, possession, and definiteness. Examples include *some, much, that,* and *my*. Traditional grammars would call these adjectives.
- *Conjuncts* A group of words whose function is to relate (or 'conjoin') independent grammatical units, such as clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. Examples include *however, meanwhile, otherwise,* and *namely*. Traditional grammars would call these adverbs.
- *Auxiliaries* A group of words whose function is to assist the main verb in a clause to express several basic grammatical contrasts, such as of person, number, and tense. Examples include *have, can, do,* and *was*. Traditional grammars sometimes recognized these as a separate class of 'defective verbs'.

HOW NOUN-LIKE IS *PARIS*?

Modern grammars recognize that the largest word classes are convenient fictions, to some degree. All the words in a proposed class are seen to be sharing some features, but few share all of them. For example, there are four important features often suggested for nouns (p. 208):

A They are words which can be the head of a noun phrase.
B They are words which can be the subject of a clause.
C They are words which can have a plural form.
D They are words which display a suffix such as *-tion* or *-hood*.

The more criteria a word satisfies, the more 'noun-like' it is.

Deprivation is an 'excellent' noun, because it satisfies all four criteria:

A I hate the terrible deprivation.
B Deprivation is increasing.
C The deprivations were awful.
D deprivation

On the other hand, *Paris* is much less typical.

A Unlikely (apart from cases where it becomes a common noun, as in *The Paris I used to know*: see p. 208).
B Paris is a capital city.
C Unlikely (again, apart from special cases, such as *How many Parises do you know?*).
D None.

THE CLASS OF NOUNS

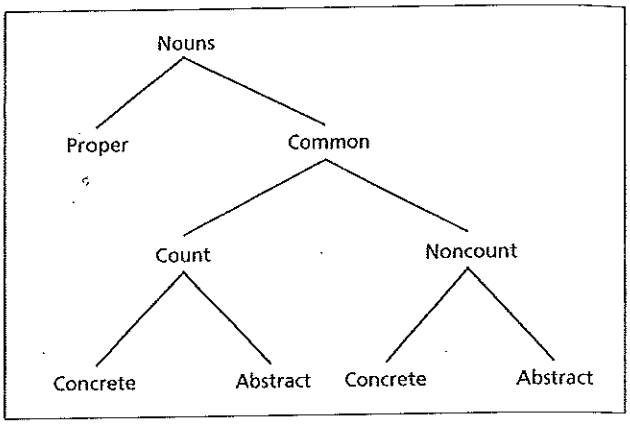
When we look at the way nouns behave, we find that the following factors are involved:

- *Syntactic structure* (§16): a noun is the chief item (or 'head') of a noun phrase (p. 222), as in *the new **telephones***. It is often preceded by one of a small class of determiners (p. 207), such as *the* or *some*.
- *Syntactic function* (§16): a noun functions as the subject, object, or complement of a clause (p. 220), as in ***Apples** are popular, I like **apples**, Those objects are **apples***.
- *Grammatical morphology* (§14): a noun can change its form to express a contrast in singular/plural number or to mark the genitive case (p. 202), as in *cat/cats/cat's/cats'*.
- *Lexical morphology* (§14): a noun can be formed by adding one of a small list of suffixes (e.g. *-age, -ment, -tion*) to a verb, an adjective, or another noun.

In parsing nouns (p. 197), traditional grammar insisted on noting gender as well as number and case. Modern grammars disregard this criterion, recognizing that gender has no grammatical role in English. They do however find good grammatical reasons for respecting the importance of several other traditional contrasts, especially *proper* vs *common*, and *abstract* vs *concrete*, and have developed the contrast between *mass* and *count* nouns into a major dimension of subclassification.

THE MAIN SUBCLASSES

Nouns can be grouped into six main classes. The first division is into *proper* and *common* nouns. Common nouns can then be divided into *count* and *noncount* types. And both of these can be further divided into *concrete* and *abstract* types.



SUFFIXES THAT FORM NOUNS

Abstract nouns			Concrete nouns		
Suffix	*Add to*	*Example*	*Suffix*	*Add to*	*Example*
-age	Noun	mileage	-ant	Verb	contestant
-age	Verb	wastage	-ee	Verb	referee
-al	Verb	refusal	-eer	Noun	profiteer
-(a)tion	Verb	exploitation	-er	Noun	villager
-dom	Noun	kingdom	-er	Verb	writer
-(e)ry	Noun	slavery	-ese	Noun/Adj.	Chinese
-ful	Noun	spoonful	-ess	Noun	waitress
-hood	Noun	boyhood	-ette	Noun	kitchenette
-ing	Noun	carpeting	-(i)an	Noun/Adj.	Parisian
-ing	Verb	building	-ist	Noun/Adj.	loyalist
-ism	Noun	idealism	-ite	Noun/Adj.	socialite
-ity	Adjective	rapidity	-let	Noun	booklet
-ment	Verb	amazement	-ling	Noun	duckling
-ness	Adjective	kindness	-or	Verb	survivor
-ocracy	Noun	democracy	-ster	Noun	gangster
-ship	Noun	friendship			

PROPER AND COMMON NOUNS

***P**roper nouns* are names of specific people, places, times, occasions, events, publications, and so on. They differ from common nouns in three main ways.

- Proper nouns can stand alone as a clause element (p. 220, as in *I like London, Fred is here, Today is Tuesday*), whereas only certain common nouns can (*Chess is fun*, but **Egg is bad, *Book is red, *I see cat*, etc.).
- Proper nouns do not usually allow a plural (**Londons, *Freds, *Everests*), whereas most common nouns do (*books, eggs, pens*, but **musics*).
- Proper nouns are not usually used with determiners (p. 207) (**a London, *the Fred, *some France*), whereas common nouns are (*a book, the music, some bread*).

In some circumstances, proper nouns can behave like common nouns:

Look at all those Smiths.
I used to know a Mary Jones.
I hate Mondays.

Proper nouns are written with an initial capital letter. But not all words with initial capitals are proper nouns – as in the ironic *That's a Big Deal!* (p. 278). Also, there is sometimes uncertainty as to whether a word should be considered proper or common: is it *the moon* or *the Moon*? This issue has important consequences when it comes to deciding the size of the lexicon (p. 122).

THE THE HAGUE

A proper noun is a single word, but many proper names consist of more than one word: *John Smith, King's College*. In these cases, the words work together as a single unit.

Names like *The Hague* look as if they are being used with the definite article, but *The* is part of the name in such cases. It cannot be omitted, changed, or separated: we cannot say **Hague, *A Hague, *The The Hague*, or **The beautiful Hague*.

COUNT AND NON-COUNT NOUNS

Common nouns can be divided into two types. *Count* nouns refer to individual, countable entities, such as *books, eggs,* and *horses. Noncount* nouns refer to an undifferentiated mass or notion, such as *butter, music,* and *advice.* Noncount nouns are also known as *mass* nouns. There are clear grammatical differences between them.

- Count nouns cannot stand alone in the singular (**Book is red*); noncount nouns can (*Chess is fun*).
- Count nouns allow a plural (*books, eggs*); noncount nouns do not (**musics*).
- Count nouns occur in the singular with *a* (*a book*); noncount nouns with *some* (*some music*). Both types can occur with *the* (*the book / the music*).

Some nouns can be either count or noncount, depending on their meaning. *Cake,* for example, is a count noun in this sentence:

Would you like a cake?

but a noncount noun in this one:

Do you like cake?

There are many such pairs.

The lights were amazing.
Light travels very fast.

I've bought some bricks.
It's built of brick.

I've had some odd experiences.
I've not had much experience.

A — OF KITTENS

Many noncount nouns have an equivalent countable expression using such words as *piece* or *bit* (*partitive* or *collective* nouns) followed by *of*:

luck — a piece of luck
grass — a blade of grass
bread — a loaf of bread

A common quiz question is to find the special collective term which describes such groups of things: *a flock of sheep, a pride of lions.* English has some highly specialized (but nowadays rarely used) collective nouns, especially for animals. The item which fills the gap above is one of them — *a kindle of kittens.* Other colourful collectives are:

an exaltation of larks
a muster of peacocks
a plump of waterfowl
a rout of wolves
a skulk of foxes

ABSTRACT AND CONCRETE NOUNS

Both count and noncount nouns can be divided further into *abstract* and *concrete* types (p.198). Concrete nouns refer to entities which can be observed and measured, such as *book, car, elephant,* and *butter.* Abstract nouns refer to unobservable notions, such as *difficulty, idea, certainty,* and *remark.* The distinction seems straightforward, but in fact it can be quite difficult deciding whether a word is being used in a purely abstract or concrete way. Nouns such as *structure, version,* and *music* permit both abstract and concrete interpretations.

GENDER

In many languages (such as Latin and French), nouns can be grouped into types, based on the kind of endings they have, or on the way they pattern with other words in the noun phrase, and these types are known as *gender classes.* For example, in German, when nouns appear as subject of a clause, one type is preceded by *der* ('the'), and these are called *masculine.* Another type is preceded by *die* ('the'), and these are called *feminine.* Those preceded by *das* ('the') form a third type, and these are called *neuter.* This is a classification of *grammatical gender:* it may or may not reflect the biological sex of the entities involved (their *natural gender*). For example, in German one word for 'girl' (*das Mädchen*) is neuter.

English has nothing like this. It has no grammatical gender; but it does have ways of identifying natural gender. We can distinguish *animate* beings from *inanimate* entities, *personal* from *nonpersonal* beings, and *male* from *female* sexes. It is chiefly done by using pronouns, which correlate with nouns in precise ways:

- *Inanimate* nouns (*box, advice*) pattern only with *it* and *which.*

Here is a box. *It* is the box *which* was in the street.

- *Animate* nouns make varying use of *he/she* and *who,* and are divided into personal and nonpersonal types.

Here is a man. *He* is the man *who* was in the street.
Here is a woman. *She* is the woman *who* was in the street.

- *Personal* animate nouns refer to males and females, and pattern with *he/she/who,* as in the above examples, and also in such pairs as *host/hostess* and *prince/princess,* where the noun ending makes the gender clear. Some nouns can be either 'he' or 'she' (they have *dual gender*), such as *artist, cook, cousin,* and *singer.*

Your cousin is a singer, isn't he/she?

- *Nonpersonal* animate nouns refer to animals. Most take *it/which,* but those with a special place in human society take *he/she/who,* and some even have distinct male/female forms: *bull/cow, dog/bitch, tiger/tigress.* The 'lower animals' (*ant, cod,* etc.) do not normally take *he/she,* though an enthusiast for ants (or cod) might well exclaim:

Isn't he/she lovely?

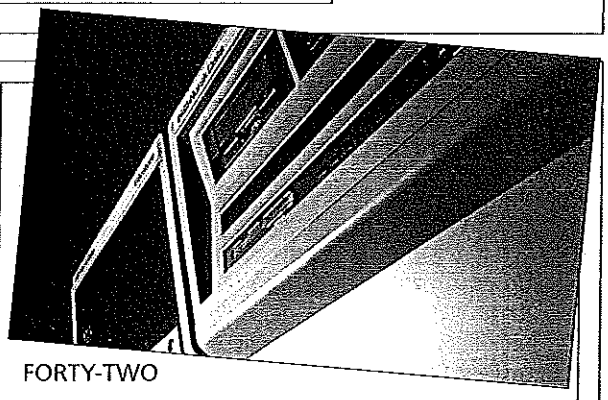
This is invariably an emotional identification, of course, given the difficulty of identifying the true sex in such cases.

- In British English, *collective* nouns, such as *committee, government, team, army,* and *family,* can take either *it/which* or *they/who,* depending on the point of view involved. The singular stresses the impersonal unity of the group; the plural the personal individuality of its members (p. 201).

The committee which has met...It is concerned...
The committee who have met...They are concerned...

Plural forms are far less common in American English: *government,* for example, almost always takes a singular verb in the USA.

The topic of gender raises sensitive usage questions that go beyond grammatical issues; these are discussed on pp. 368–9.



FORTY-TWO

Many nouns are given variable gender, depending on whether they are thought of in an intimate way. Vehicles and countries are often called *she* as well as *it* (*She can reach 60 in 5 seconds; France has increased her exports*). Pets are often *he* or *she.* A crying baby may become *it.*

It is not obvious why some entities are readily personified while others are not. Nor is it obvious why most entities are given female personifications. It is not simply a matter of feminine stereotypes, for *she* is used in aggressive and angry situations as well as in affectionate ones: guns, tanks, and trucks which won't go remain *she.* The only consistently male trend in personification which the author has heard in recent years is in computing, where word processors and other devices are widely given male pet names and pronouns. Why this should be so is beyond him, though the reason is doubtless somewhere within the answer given by the (male) super-computer Deep Thought to the Ultimate Question, and quoted above as the heading to this item.

'There is an answer?' said Fook with breathless excitement.
'A simple answer?' added Lunkwill.
'Yes,' said Deep Thought. 'Life, the Universe, and Everything. There is an answer. But,' he added, 'I'll have to think about it.'
(Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy,* 1979.)

THE CLASS OF PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words which stand for a noun (Latin *pro* = 'for'), a whole noun phrase (p. 222), or several noun phrases. They can also refer directly to some aspect of the situation surrounding the speaker or writer. In each case, the meaning expressed is much less specific than that found in phrases containing nouns.

- Replacing a noun: *I've got a red **hat** and Jane's got a brown **one**.*
- Replacing a noun phrase: ***My uncle Fred's** just arrived. **He's** quite tired.*
- Referring to a very general concept which includes the meaning of many possible noun phrases: *I can see **someone** in the distance* (where *someone* includes men, women, boys, girls, soldiers, etc.).
- Referring to some unspecified event of the situation: (pointing) *Look at **that**! **He's** going to crash.*

Pronouns carry out a similar range of functions to nouns and noun phrases (p. 208) – for example, they can appear as subject, object, or complement of the clause (***She** saw **me**, **That's** **you***). However, they differ from nouns chiefly in not usually permitting modification (*a big car*, but not **a big it*), and in expressing a distinctive set of contrasts.

- Some pronouns have separate cases for subject and object functions, as in *I* vs *me*, *who* vs *whom* (p. 203).
- Some show a contrast between personal and nonpersonal gender and between male and female (p. 209): *he/she* vs *it*, *who* vs *which*. (For the issues raised by gender, see p. 368.)
- Some distinguish singular and plural number, but not by adding an *-s* (p. 200), as in *I* vs *we*, *he* vs *they*.
- Some have different persons: *I* vs *you* vs *he/she/it*.

TYPES OF PRONOUN

There are many kinds of word which can act as a pronoun, but they express different kinds of meaning, and they do not all follow the same grammatical rules. This means that different subclasses of pronoun have to be recognized. The first three subclasses below are sometimes grouped together as the *central* pronouns, because they all express contrasts of person, gender, and number.

- *Personal pronouns* are the main means of identifying speakers, addressees, and others: *I, you, he, she, it, we, they.*
- *Reflexive pronouns*, always ending in *-self* or *-selves* (*myself*, etc.), 'reflect' the meaning of a noun or pronoun elsewhere in the clause: *They washed **themselves**.*
- *Possessive pronouns* express ownership, and appear in two forms. *My, your*, etc. are used as determiners (p. 207) in the noun phrase, as in *my car, her bike. Mine, yours*, etc. are used on their own, as in *This is mine, Hers is over there.*

There are several other subclasses.

- *Reciprocal pronouns* are used to express a 'two-way' relationship: *each other, one another.*
- *Interrogative pronouns* are used to ask questions about personal and nonpersonal nouns: *who?, whom?, whose?, which?, what?*
- *Relative pronouns* (*who, whom, whose, which, that*) are used to link a subordinate clause (p. 226) to the head of the noun phrase, as in *That's the book **which** caused the trouble.*
- *Demonstrative pronouns* (*this/these, that/those*) express a contrast between 'near' and 'distant', as in *Take **this one** here, not **that one** over there.* They also have a range of extended uses: for example, *this* may be used to introduce a new topic in familiar speech (*I saw **this** girl . . .*), and *that* may express a negative attitude (*That Roger!*).
- *Indefinite pronouns* express a notion of quantity. There are two main types. *Compound pronouns* consist of two elements: *every-, some-, any-*, or *no-* + *-one, -body*, or *-thing*, as in *someone* and *anything*. *Of-pronouns* consist of several forms which may appear alone or be followed by *of* (*I've eaten **all** the cake / **all of** the cake*). Their meanings range from the 'universal' sense of *all* and *both* to the 'negative' sense of *none* and *few*. Other items in this class include *each, much, many, more, most, less, fewer, some*, and *neither*.

WHICH WAY

What and *which* permit a contrast between definite and indefinite meaning.

What road shall we take? (indefinite: an open choice)

Which road shall we take? (definite: we are choosing from a small number of alternatives)

ME, MYSELF, I

If people know anything at all about pronouns, it is usually about the personal pronouns, which occur more frequently than any other type. They are called 'personal' because they refer to the people involved in the act of communication.

- The *first person* involved refers to the speaker(s) or writer(s) of the message: *I, me, my, mine, myself; we, us, our(s), ourselves*
- The *second person* refers to the addressee(s), excluding speaker(s) or writer(s): *you, your(s), yourself/-selves*
- The *third person* refers to 'third parties', i.e. excluding the speaker(s), writer(s), and addressee(s): *he, him, his, himself; she, her(s), herself; it, its, itself; they, them, their(s), themselves. It* is included, even though it refers to nonpersonal entities, because it behaves in the same way as the others.

There are a few additional personal pronouns. A *thou* series (*thee, thy, thyself, thine*) is still sometimes found in religious use (p. 371), and in some rural British dialects. There are also some nonstandard forms, such as *youse* in northern USA, Ireland, and parts of Britain (e.g. Liverpool, Glasgow). Southern USA has the plural *you-all* or *y'all*.

Special uses

The above roles are the usual ones; but there are also a few special uses.

- *We* can refer to a single person in the 'royal' or 'editorial' *we*: *We are not amused.*
- *We* can refer to the addressee, especially when talking 'down': *How are we today?* (nurse to patient).
- *We* can refer to a third party: *We're in a bad mood today* (secretary about boss).
- *You* and *they* can refer to people in general, or to some group within society: *You never can tell, They keep putting fares up.*
- *It* can be used to refer in a general way to time, distance, or life in general: *Isn't it a shame? It's lovely out.*

THE CLASS OF ADJECTIVES

Words which express some feature or quality of a noun or pronoun are traditionally known as adjectives. To decide if a word is an adjective, several criteria are available.

An adjective can occur immediately before a noun: *a big house*. This is called the adjective's *attributive* function.

An adjective can occur alone after forms of the verb *be*: *The house was big*. This is the adjective's *predicative* function.

An adjective can be immediately preceded by *very* and other *intensifying* words: *very big, terribly nice*.

An adjective can be compared (p. 199): *bigger/biggest, more/most beautiful*.

Many adjectives permit the addition of *-ly* to form an adverb (see below): *sad > sadly*.

To count as an adjective, a word must be able to function in both attributive and predicative positions. The vast majority of adjectives are like this, and these form the *central* class of adjectives. Words which can appear in only one or other of these positions are *peripheral* adjectives. They include *utter* and *loath*: we can say *utter nonsense*, but not **the nonsense is utter*; and *the man was loath to leave*, but not **the loath man*.

ADJECTIVE SUFFIXES

Many adjectives (e.g. *big, thin*) have no distinctive ending, but there are a few suffixes (p. 198) which typically signal that a word is an adjective.

Suffix	*Add to*	*Result*	*Suffix*	*Add to*	*Result*
-able	Verb	washable	-less	Noun	restless
-al	Noun	musical	-like	Noun	childlike
-ed	Noun	ragged	-ly	Noun	friendly
-esque	Noun	romanesque	-ous	Noun	desirous
-ful	Noun	hopeful	-some	Noun	bothersome
-ic	Noun	heroic	-worthy	Noun	praiseworthy
-ish	Noun	foolish	-y	Noun	sandy
-ive	Verb	effective			

ADJECTIVE OR NOT?

The adjective is a good example of a word class with fuzzy edges. Some words are much more adjective-like than others.

- *Numerals*, such as *four* and *forty*, share some of the properties of central adjectives, but not others. They can occur before a noun and after *be* (*the four cats, She's four*), but cannot compare or take *-ly* (**fourer, *fourly*).
- Words ending in *-ed* or *-ing* could be either an adjective or a form of a verb (p. 204). In *the interesting problem*, we see an adjective; in *We are interesting them in the problem*, we see the *-ing* form of a verb. Sometimes there is ambiguity: *She is calculating*.
- Words which are normally used as nouns may appear in the position associated with adjectives: *the garden party*. They are no longer strictly nouns, because (for example) they have lost their capacity to pluralize: we cannot say **the gardens party*. On the other hand, they are not strictly adjectives either, because (for example) they cannot compare: we cannot say **the gardenest party*. They form a 'mixed' word class.

THE CLASS OF ADVERBS

The adverb is the most heterogeneous of all the word classes in English grammar. Over the years, words have been assigned to it which perform a wide variety of functions within the sentence. Traditional grammar (§13) included under this heading not only such items as *quickly* and *soon*, which are representative of large groups of words, but also such idiosyncratic items as *no, not*, and *the* (as in *the sooner the better*) – largely, one supposes, because there was no other class to which they could easily be assigned. Modern grammars try to make adverbs less of a 'dustbin' class by identifying their main functions and setting up subclasses to handle the most divergent types.

Adverbs have two chief uses. Most can act as an element of clause structure (an *adverbial*, p. 220), usually relating directly to the meaning of the verb (as in *We're leaving tonight*), but often to some other element of the clause or to the clause as a whole (as in *Totally, he should resign*). Some adverbs affect the meaning of an adjacent word or phrase by attaching themselves to it, as in *very anxiously* and *quite a party* or *the day before* and *someone else*. These clausal and phrasal functions are discussed further on pp. 221–2.

TYPES OF ADVERB

Most adverbs are fairly easy to recognize because they are formed by adding an *-ly* suffix to an adjective, as in *quickly* and *happily*. Less obvious are the following:

- Adverbs which have no distinctive element, such as *just* and *soon*, or compound adverbs, such as *somehow* and *whereby*.
- A few other endings which mark a word as an adverb, used especially in informal speech: *new-style, earthwards, clockwise, sideways, sailor-fashion*. Coinages such as *physics-wise* are very common in American English.

Because adverbs work along with adverb phrases and clauses to perform their range of functions, they are discussed under the heading of adverbial on p. 221.

AND IT'S THERE!

Now Smith passes *beautifully* to Gray, who heads it *very firmly* and *deliberately* to Pritchard, who pushes it *nimbly* towards the post...

Sports commentary is one of several varieties which greatly rely on adverbs for their effect. In this football match between Wimbledon and Blackburn Rovers (29 March 1994), Wimbledon's Dean Holdsworth and John Scales watch the ball go past Blackburn's keeper Tim Flowers.

THE CLASS OF VERBS

A sentence may contain a single verb, or it may use a cluster of verbs which work together as a verb phrase (p. 224): *I saw an elephant, You **didn't see** one, They **couldn't have seen** one.* The last two examples show a *main verb* (a form of *see* in each case) accompanied by one or more *auxiliary verbs.* There can be up to four auxiliaries, all going in front of the main verb, though constructions using all four are unusual: *They **must have been being** advised by the government.*

Three classes of verb can occur within the verb phrase.

- *Lexical verbs* (also called *full verbs*) are those with a meaning that can be clearly and independently identified (e.g. in a dictionary), such as *run, jump, walk, want, cogitate.* They act as main verbs.
- *Modal verbs* convey a range of judgments about the likelihood of events; they function only as auxiliary verbs, expressing meanings which are much less definable, focused, and independent than those of lexical verbs. There are nine verbs in this subclass: *can, could, may, might, will, would, shall, should,* and *must,* with *dare, need, ought to,* and *used to* having a very similar function.
- *Primary verbs* can function either as main verbs or as auxiliary verbs. There are just three of them: *be, have,* and *do.*

Main verb use:
They ***are*** happy. She ***has*** a dog. They ***do*** sums.
Auxiliary verb use:
They *are going.* She ***has*** *seen* it. ***Do*** they *go*?

AUXILIARY VERBS

Auxiliary (or 'helping') verbs assist the main verb in a clause to express several basic grammatical contrasts, such as in person, number, and tense. They do not follow the same grammatical rules as main verbs, which is why they must be considered as a separate class.

- Auxiliaries can be used before the word *not*; main verbs (in modern English) cannot. We can change *I might go* into *I might not go*, but we cannot change *I saw it* into **I saw not it.*
- The contracted form *n't* (p. 198) can be attached to almost all auxiliaries; this is never possible with main verbs. We can say *can't* and *won't*, but not **walkn't* or **jumpn't.*
- The first auxiliary in a verb phrase has a distinctive role, as it can be used before the subject in order to ask a question; this is not possible with main verbs. We can say *Have they gone home?*, but not **Saw they a car?*

The auxiliary class can itself be divided into two subclasses:

- The primary verbs have -s forms; the modals do not. We find *is, has,* and *does,* but not **mays, *wills,* or **musts.*
- The primary verbs have nonfinite forms; the modals do not. We find *to have, having,* and *had,* but not **to may, *maying,* or **mayed.*

Finite and nonfinite

The forms of the verb (p. 204), and the phrases they are part of, are usually classified into two broad types, based on the kind of contrast in meaning they express. The notion of *finiteness* is the traditional way of classifying the differences. This term suggests that verbs can be 'limited' in some way, and this is in fact what happens when different kinds of endings are used.

- The *finite* forms are those which limit the verb to a particular number, tense, person, or mood. For example, when the *-s* form is used, the verb is limited to the third person singular of the present tense, as in *goes* and *runs.* If there is a series of verbs in the verb phrase, the finite verb is always the first, as in *I was being asked.*
- The *nonfinite* forms do not limit the verb in this way. For example, when the *-ing* form is used, the verb can be referring to any number, tense, person, or mood:

I'm *leaving* (first person, singular, present)
They're *leaving* (third person, plural, present)
He was *leaving* (third person, singular, past)
We might be *leaving* tomorrow (first person, plural, future, tentative)

As these examples show, a nonfinite form of the verb stays the same in a clause, regardless of the grammatical variation taking place alongside it.

Auxiliary verbs					Main verb
					advise
				is	*advising*
			has	*been*	*advising*
		must	*have*	*been*	*advising*
(rare)	*must*	*have*	*been*	*being*	*advised*

TRANSITIVITY

The choice of the verb actually determines, to a large extent, what other elements can be used in the clause (p. 220). Once we have 'picked' our verb, certain other things are likely to happen.

- If we pick *go*, we can stop the clause there, without fear of being ungrammatical: *The cat's going.* Verbs of this type, which can be used without an object, have long been called *intransitive verbs.*
- If we pick *enjoy*, another element has to follow. We cannot say **The cat's enjoying.* It has to be *The cat's enjoying something,* with the object present.

SOME COMMON TRANSITIVES

bring	keep
carry	like
desire	make
find	need
get	use

SOME COMMON INTRANSITIVES

appear	happen
die	lie
digress	matter
fall	rise
go	wait

Verbs which require an object are traditionally known as *transitive verbs.*

FINITE CONTRASTS

The finite forms of the verb are the *-s* form, the past form, and some uses of the base form (p. 204). The nonfinite forms show no variation.

Finite forms

- Show a contrast in tense: *She works in London* vs *She worked in London.*
- Show a contrast in number and person: *he works* vs *they work; I am* vs *you are.*
- Allow the expression of facts, possibilities, wishes, and other contrasts of mood: *They suggested that the papers be delivered by hand. They were.*

Nonfinite forms

There are three nonfinite forms of the verb:

- The *-ing* participle: *I'm leaving.*
- The *-ed* participle: *I've asked, They were asked.*
- The base form used as an infinitive: *They might see, He wants to see.*

MULTI-WORD VERBS

Some verbs consist of more than one word (and are thus better described as lexemes (p. 118). The most common type consists of a verb followed by one or more *particles*: *come in, sit down, drink up, put up with.* The particles are either spatial adverbs (e.g. *aback, ahead,* and *away*), prepositions (e.g. *at, for, from*), or words which in other contexts can act either as adverbs or as prepositions (e.g. *by, down, in*).

Verbs which use adverb particles are often called *phrasal verbs,* with those taking prepositional particles being distinguished as *prepositional verbs.* In some grammars, however, the term *phrasal verb* is used for both. Whatever the terminology, one fact is clear: the number of multi-word verbs in the language has grown remarkably, especially in the present century (p. 118), and constitute one of the most distinctive features of English syntax.

THE CLASS OF PREPOSITIONS

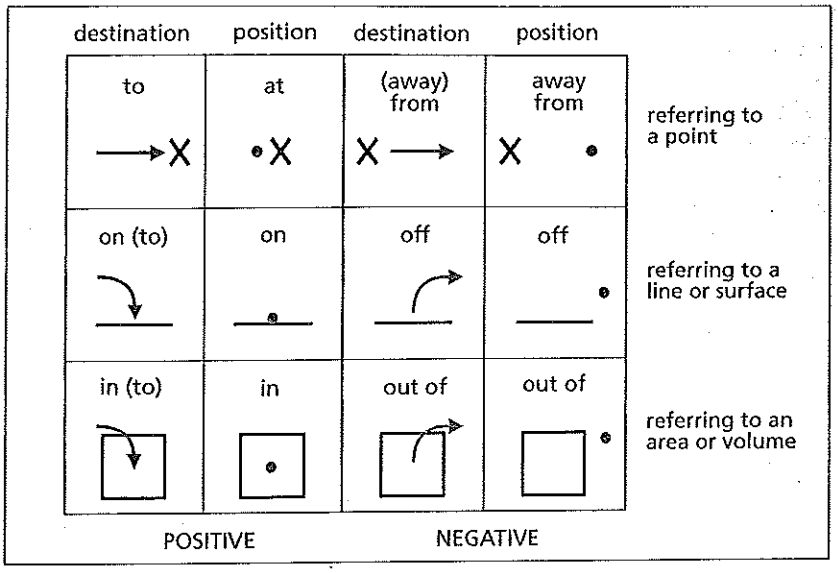
A preposition expresses a relationship of meaning between two parts of a sentence, most often showing how the two parts are related in space or time: *We sat on the bench, They left at three.* Most of the common prepositions consist of only one word; they have no distinctive ending, and do not vary. Several prepositions consist of more than one word.

Single-word prepositions include: *about, at, before, by, down, for, from, in, of, on, out, over, round, since, through, to, under, up, with.*

Multi-word prepositions include: (two words) *ahead of, because of, due to, instead of, near to*; (three words) *as far as, by means of, in accordance with, in spite of, on behalf of.* The words in these prepositions do not vary freely, as they would in other circumstances. *In spite of,* for example, cannot change to **out spite of* or **in spite for.*

Several prepositions are restricted in their frequency of use, especially such foreign borrowings as *anti, circa, versus,* and *vis-à-vis. Unto* is archaic, and used only in religious contexts. There are also some dialect uses, such as *towards* (British) vs *toward* (American), *outwith* Scots, 'except'), and *while* (Yorkshire, 'until').

PREPOSITIONAL MEANINGS



Most prepositions can be used in several different ways. *Over,* for example, is found in the sense of position (*The picture was over the door*), movement across (*They climbed over the wall*), accompanying circumstances (*We'll talk over dinner*), orientation to the speaker (*They live over the road*), and other meanings. Other types of meaning include time (e.g. *during the night*), cause (e.g. *because of the fog*), method (e.g. *with a spoon*), and possession (*a pianist of talent*). In addition, there are many figurative uses involving prepositions: *He's in a hole* may literally mean what it says, or it may not. The diagram shows the chief prepositions which express spatial meanings (after R. Quirk, *et al.,* 1985).

THE CLASS OF CONJUNCTIONS

Conjunctions are items which join clauses or parts of clauses together. There are two ways in which this can be done: through *coordination* and *subordination* (p. 226). There are thus two types of conjunction:

Coordinating conjunctions link units which have the same status in the sentence, such as two clauses, two noun phrases, or two adjectives. The chief items are *and, or,* and *but,* and there are a few 'pairs', such as *neither... nor.* These conjunctions signal such meanings as addition and sequence (*and*), the expression of alternatives (*or*), and contrast (*but*). Coordination with *and* and *or* could continue indefinitely: *We were wet and dirty and tired and hungry and...*

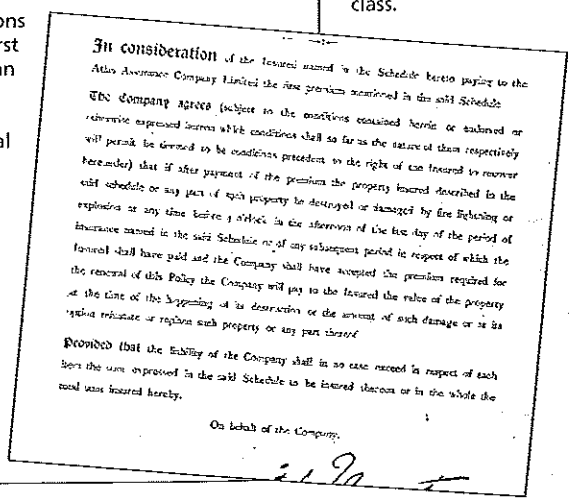
Subordinating conjunctions join units which do not have the same grammatical status in the sentence. The typical case is when one clause is subordinated to another, as in *We went out when the rain stopped.* Here, the main clause (*We went out*) is joined to the subordinate clause (*the rain stopped*) by the conjunction *when.* Subordinating conjunctions far outnumber coordinating ones, and several consist of more than one word.

SOME SUBORDINATE MEANINGS

There are over a dozen types of meaning expressed by subordinating conjunctions. Here are some of them.

- Time: *I stayed until you left.*
- Place: *I'll know where you are.*
- Condition: *We'll get wet if it rains.*
- Concession: *He was there, though the bus was late.*
- Purpose: *She wrote in order to get her money back.*
- Reason: *I can't buy it because it's expensive.*

The compound subordinating conjunctions boldly introducing the first and last paragraphs are an important means of identifying the linguistic structure of complex legal documents.


In consideration of the Insured named in the Schedule hereto paying to the Atlas Assurance Company Limited the first premium mentioned in the said Schedule

The Company agrees (subject to the conditions contained herein or endorsed or otherwise expressed hereon which conditions shall so far as the nature of them respectively will permit be deemed to be conditions precedent to the right of the Insured to recover hereunder) that if after payment of the premium the property insured described in the said schedule or any part of such property be destroyed or damaged by fire lightning or explosion at any time before 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the last day of the period of insurance named in the said Schedule or of any subsequent period in respect of which the Insured shall have paid and the Company shall have accepted the premium required for the renewal of this Policy the Company will pay to the Insured the value of the property at the time of the happening of its destruction or the amount of such damage or at its option reinstate or replace such property or any part thereof

Provided that the liability of the Company shall in no case exceed in respect of each item the sum expressed in the said Schedule to be insured thereon or in the whole the total sum insured hereby.

On behalf of the Company,

AND INTERJECTIONS?

We can make a wide range of emotional noises which stand in for sentences, such as *Eh?, Oy!, Huh?, Tut-tut!, Coo!,* and *Yuk!* The important point to note is that they are standing in for *sentences,* not words, as the punctuation marks indicate. They are therefore better treated as a type of sentence (a minor sentence, p. 216) rather than as a word class.

16 · THE STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES

The study of sentence structure is called *syntax*, and because there is so little variation in the grammatical structure of English words (§14), a syntactic analysis forms the dominant element in a modern English grammar. The area thus provides the main point of contrast with traditional grammars (§13), which because of their Latinate origins paid little attention to the syntactic properties of sentences.

Sentences

The sentence is probably the most familiar of all grammatical terms. We are introduced to it in our early school years, if not before, and it quickly becomes part of our linguistic awareness. We imagine we speak in sentences, and we teach children to write in them, making sure that they put in all the periods. It might therefore be thought that sentences are easy things to identify and define. The opposite turns out to be the case.

Those who learned some traditional grammar will remember the old definition of a sentence as 'a complete expression of a single thought'. Unfortunately, this *notional* approach is too vague to be of much help. There are many sentences which seem to express a single thought, but which are not complete, by traditional standards:

Lovely day! Taxi! Nice one! Tennis?

There are also many sentences which are complete, but express more than one thought:

For his birthday, Ben wants a bike, a computer game, and a visit to the theme park.

The *formal* approach to English grammar, by contrast, tries to avoid these kinds of difficulty by describing the way in which sentences are constructed – the patterns of words they contain. It is an approach which can lead to some surprises, especially when we look carefully at what happens in everyday speech.

SPOKEN AND WRITTEN SYNTAX

One of the legacies of traditional grammar is the view that the spoken language has 'less' grammar because it does not 'follow the rules' which are found in writing (p. 192). There are indeed many differences between the two types of communication (p. 291), and some of the most important of these are to do with the notion of a sentence. Putting it at its simplest: Do we speak in sentences? The answer is that we do, but the kind of sentence organization we find in speech is rather different from that found in writing, as the first transcript below shows.

When we are writing, we usually have time to make notes, plan ahead, pause, reflect, change our mind, start again, revise, proofread, and generally polish the language until we have reached a level which satisfies us. The reader sees only the finished product. But in everyday conversation, there is no time for such things to happen. We do not have the opportunity to plan what we want to say, and we have to allow for false starts, interruptions, second thoughts, words on the tip of the tongue, and a host of other disturbances which take place while we are in full flow.

Extracts of informal spoken conversation look weird in print, because it is not possible to show all the melody, stress, and tone of voice which made the speaker sound perfectly natural in context; but it does show how spoken grammar differs from written. Punctuating the material in such a transcript is not easy, as can be seen by the second version below, where an attempt has been made to cut out hesitations and false starts, and to identify possible sentences. The use of *and* in particular makes it difficult to work out where one sentence ends and the next begins. Readers who doubt the seriousness of this problem might care to pencil in their own impressions about where the sentences end, and then compare their decisions with those shown below. There will be several discrepancies.

Find the sentence

As this is a transcript of speech, there are no capital letters. Major pauses are shown by –, and units of rhythm by /. (After D. Crystal & D. Davy, 1975.)

we had our breakfast in the kitchen / - and then we sort of did what we liked / and er got ready to go out / we usually went out quite soon after that / - erm the children were always up / at the crack of dawn / with the farmer / - and they went in the milking sheds / and helped him feed the pigs / and all this / you know we didn't see the children / – and er then we used to go out / we - we had super weather / – absolutely super / - and so we went to a beach / usually for er but by about four o'clock it we were hot and we had to come off the beach / - so we'd generally go for a tea somewhere / just in case supper was delayed you know / and then we'd get back / and the children would go straight back on to the farm / and have ponies / their own children had ponies / and they'd come up and put them on the ponies' backs / and er - and the milking it was milking time / and really we were committed to getting back for milking time /

We had our breakfast in the kitchen, and then we did what we liked, and got ready to go out.
We usually went out quite soon after that.
The children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer, and they went into the milking sheds and helped him feed the pigs.
We didn't see the children.
And then we used to go out.
We had super weather, absolutely super.
And so we went to a beach, but by about four o'clock we were hot and we had to come off the beach.
So we'd generally go for a tea somewhere, just in case supper was delayed.
And then we'd get back, and the children would go straight back on to the farm, and have ponies.
Their own children had ponies, and they'd come up and put them on the ponies' backs.
And it was milking time, and really we were committed to getting back for milking time.

WORD ORDER

Word order is at the heart of syntax, and most of English grammar is taken up with the rules governing the order in which words, and clusters of words, can appear. The importance of this domain can be seen from the following set of examples, where the meaning of the sentence alters fundamentally once the order varies.

Dog chases postman. / Postman chases dog.
They are outside. / Are they outside?
Only I saw Mary. / I saw only Mary.
Naturally, I got up. / I got up naturally (*not awkwardly*).
Show me the last three pages (*of one book*). / Show me the three last pages (*of three books*).
The man with a dog saw me. / The man saw me with a dog.

There are also many rules forbidding us to put words in a certain order. Mother-tongue speakers never think twice about them, because they unconsciously learned these rules as children. But the rules are there, nonetheless, making us use the first of the following alternatives, not the second (the asterisk shows that the sentence is unacceptable).

I walked to town. / *I to town walked.
Hardly had I left... / *Hardly I had left...
That's a fine old house. / *That's an old fine house.
John and I saw her. / *I and John saw her.
She switched it on. / *She switched on it.

Mother-tongue speakers instinctively know that the first is correct, and the second is not; but explaining why this is so to anyone who asks (such as a foreign learner) is a specialist task, which requires a professional approach if it is to succeed.

Three general points apply to any English sentence.

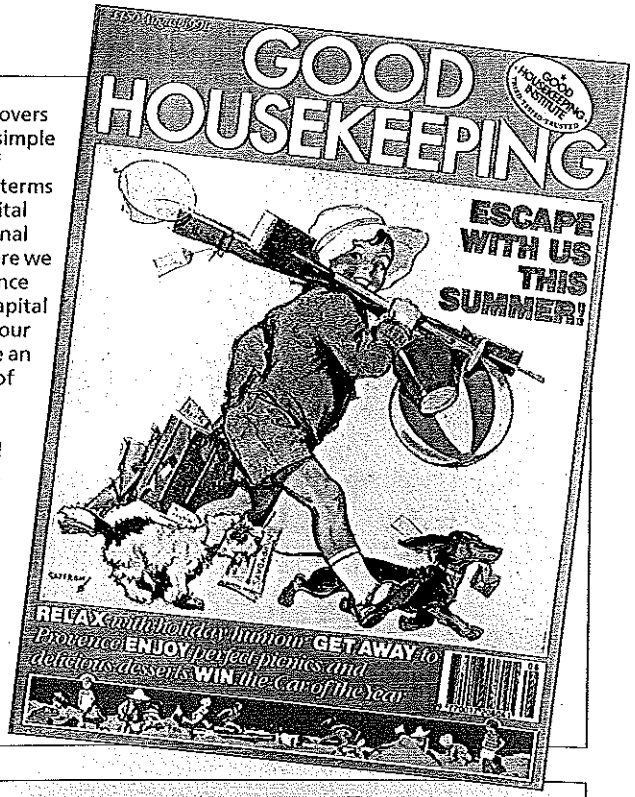
- Sentences are constructed according to a system of rules, known by all the adult mother-tongue speakers of the language, and summarized in a grammar. A sentence formed in this way is said to be *grammatical.*
- Sentences are the largest constructions to which the rules of grammar apply. (The formation of larger units, such as paragraphs, is discussed on p. 232.) This means that, before we can satisfactorily carry out the task of identifying sentences, we need to know something about grammatical analysis. Once we have worked our way through a good English grammar, we know what the possible sentences are, because the grammar has told us.
- Sentences are constructions which can be used on their own – units of meaning which seem to 'make sense' by themselves. This is an ancient and plausible criterion, but it is never a straightforward one. For example, if we apply it to the sentences in the extract opposite, we find that we need to do some editing to make it work. *We didn't see the children* poses no problem; but *We usually went out quite soon after that* does, for we have to 'fill out' the meaning of *that* with reference to what has gone before. Also, to make the sentences in the extract sound truly 'self-contained', we have to find a way of dealing with the conjunctions which appear at the beginning of several of them – perhaps by analysing some as dispensable 'thinking' noises rather than as true conjunctions with a genuine linking function (p. 227). The problem turns out to be quite a complex one – and typical of the intriguing questions which arise when we begin the investigation of syntax.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

A sentence is something which begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop? This traditional definition, which applies only to the written language, is faulty on three counts.

- We have to allow for question marks and exclamation marks as well (as in the first sentence of this caption).
- Punctuation is often not used in writing, and yet we still know when a construction is a sentence. Many advertisements, public notices, newspaper headlines, and legal documents lack punctuation marks.
- People disagree about the best way to punctuate a text. In particular, some manuals of style say we should never end a sentence before such words as *and* or *but*, and this rule is often taught in schools. Its source lies in the uncontrolled way in which young children use *and* in their early written work, reflecting its frequency in natural conversation. But there are other manuals which accept that authors often do begin sentences in this way (usually to emphasize a contrast in meaning), and these do not condemn the usage. It is a regular feature of the style of the present author, who finds it on occasion a much more dramatic and rhythmical way of drawing a contrast than to use the various alternatives available. To replace *but* by *however* two sentences above, for example, would be to slow down the movement of the paragraph quite noticeably – in his view an unnecessary change of pace in a piece of text which wishes to make its point quickly and economically.

Magazine covers destroy any simple definition of sentences in terms of initial capital letters and final full stops. Here we have a sentence which is all capital letters, and four others where an unusual use of capitals has replaced conventional punctuation.



THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Winston Churchill, according to the Chambers *Biographical Dictionary*, 'the last of the classic orators with a supreme command of English'.

The quotation is from the end of the third and the opening of the fourth paragraph of Book 1 of *The History of the Second World War*. The succinct, dramatic effectiveness of the contrast should silence for ever those who unthinkingly condemn the use of a sentence-initial conjunction as 'bad style'. But it won't.

To those Frenchmen – and there were many in high authority – who had fought and suffered in 1870 it seemed almost a miracle that France should have emerged victorious from the incomparably more terrible struggle which had just ended. All their lives they had dwelt in fear of the German Empire. They remembered the preventive war which Bismarck had sought to wage in 1875; they remembered the brutal threat which had driven Declassé from office in 1905; they had quaked at the Moroccan menace in 1906, at the Bosnian dispute of 1908, and at the Agadir crisis of 1911. The Kaiser's 'mailed fist' and 'shining armour' speeches might be received with ridicule in England and America: they sounded a knell of horrible reality in the hearts of the French. For fifty years almost they had lived under the terror of the German arms. Now, at the price of their life-blood, the long oppression had been rolled away. Surely here at last was peace and safety. With one passionate spasm the French people cried 'Never again!'

But the future was heavy with foreboding...

TYPES OF SENTENCE

It is obvious, as we look through the pages of a novel, or a daily newspaper, that there must be a large number of sentence patterns in English. What is less obvious is that these can be grouped into two main types, on the basis of whether they are formed in a regular or an irregular way. Regular sentences are often referred to as *major sentences*; irregular ones as *minor sentences*.

Major sentences

The major sentences are in the vast majority. All the sentences in this book, apart from the headings and some of the examples, are of this type. Essentially, they are sentences which can be broken down into a specific and predictable pattern of elements. The following examples show some of the possibilities.

The visitor	brought	a book	for you.
I	gave	the letter	to Mary.
Mary	saw	Jane	today.

We need a term to describe 'patterns of elements' of this type, and many grammars use *clause* for the purpose. Sentences which consist of just one clause (pattern of elements) are said to be *simple sentences*. Sentences which can be immediately analysed into more than one clause are *multiple sentences* (described further on p. 227).

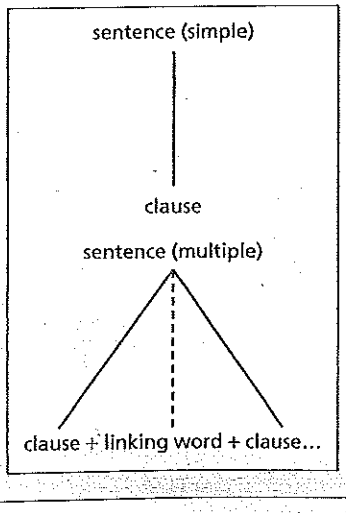
SIMPLE AND MULTIPLE SENTENCES

The difference between simple and multiple sentences can be seen in the following two examples:

A book has fallen on John's foot.
A book has fallen on John's foot and a book has fallen on Mary's foot.

The same clause pattern turns up twice in the second sentence; the only difference between them is the lexical change (the change of name). Indeed, it is possible to imagine a sentence in which this clause pattern is used repeatedly, with innumerable books falling on innumerable feet, and just the name changing each time. As long as the speaker kept adding *and...and ...and...*, or some other linking word, the sentence could continue indefinitely.

The diagram summarizes the two possibilities.



MINOR SENTENCES

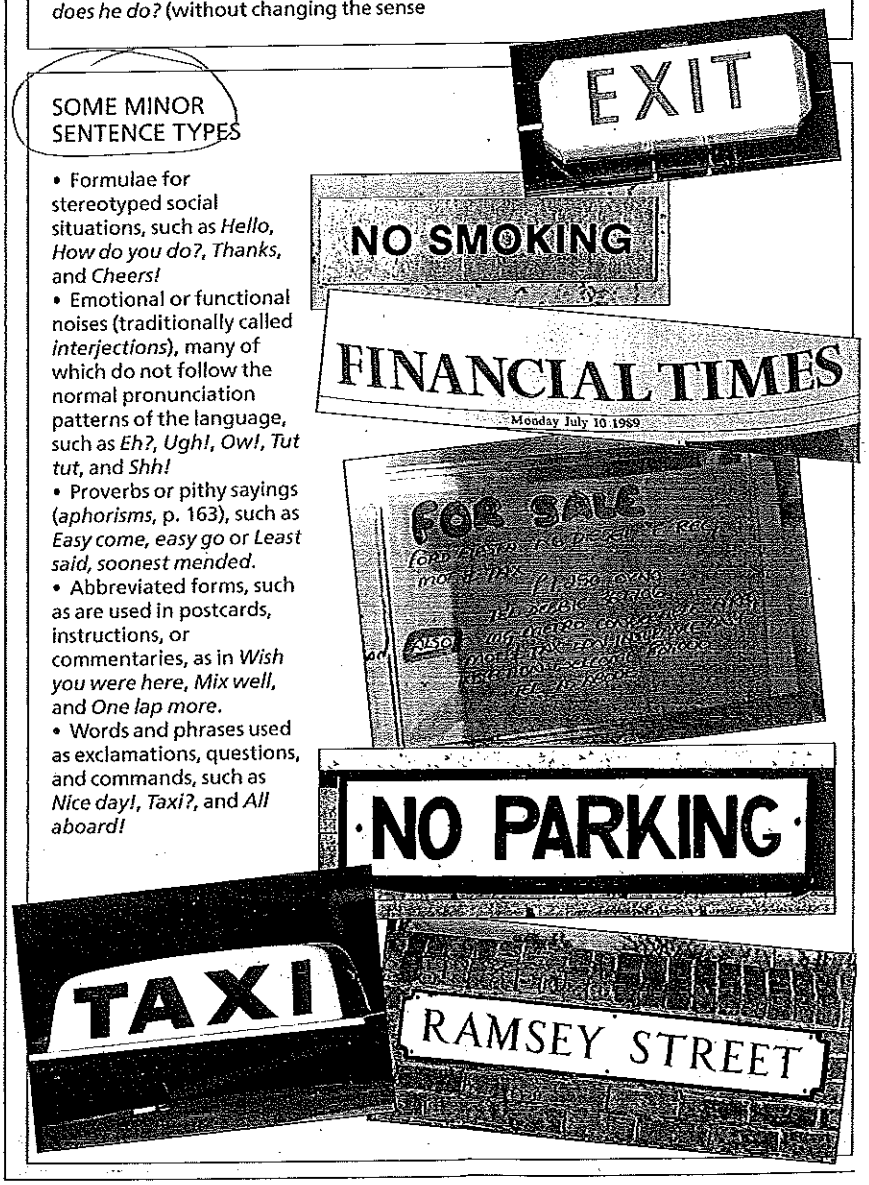
Minor sentences are not constructed in a regular way. They use abnormal patterns which cannot be clearly analysed into a sequence of clause elements, as can major sentences. There are only a few minor sentence types, but instances of each type are frequently used in everyday conversation and when conversations are represented in fiction. They are also common in certain types of written language, such as notices, headlines, labels, advertisements, subheadings, and other settings where a message is presented as a 'block'.

Minor sentences do not follow all the rules of grammar. For example, in a major sentence the verbs can change their persons: *How do you manage?* > *How does he manage?* But the greeting *How do you do?* is a minor sentence, and we cannot change the person to **How does he do?* (without changing the sense into something quite different). Nor can we change the tense and ask **How did you do?* The sentence has to be learned as a whole, and used as an idiom (p.162).

It will be seen from this example that some types of minor sentence look quite complex – so much so that on a first impression they might be thought to be displaying a major pattern. But in each case there is something 'odd' about them. For example, one type uses an archaic verb form (the subjunctive) to express wishes, as in *God save the Queen!* and *Heaven forbid!* Another type uses question words idiosyncratically: *How come she's gone out?* These are minor sentences because it is not possible to introduce the full range of normal grammatical changes into their structure, to produce such forms as *God saves the Queen* or *God doesn't save the Queen*. Only major sentences allow systematic variations of this kind.

SOME MINOR SENTENCE TYPES

- Formulae for stereotyped social situations, such as *Hello, How do you do?, Thanks,* and *Cheers!*
- Emotional or functional noises (traditionally called *interjections*), many of which do not follow the normal pronunciation patterns of the language, such as *Eh?, Ugh!, Ow!, Tut tut,* and *Shh!*
- Proverbs or pithy sayings (*aphorisms*, p. 163), such as *Easy come, easy go* or *Least said, soonest mended.*
- Abbreviated forms, such as are used in postcards, instructions, or commentaries, as in *Wish you were here, Mix well,* and *One lap more.*
- Words and phrases used as exclamations, questions, and commands, such as *Nice day!, Taxi?,* and *All aboard!*



LEVELS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE

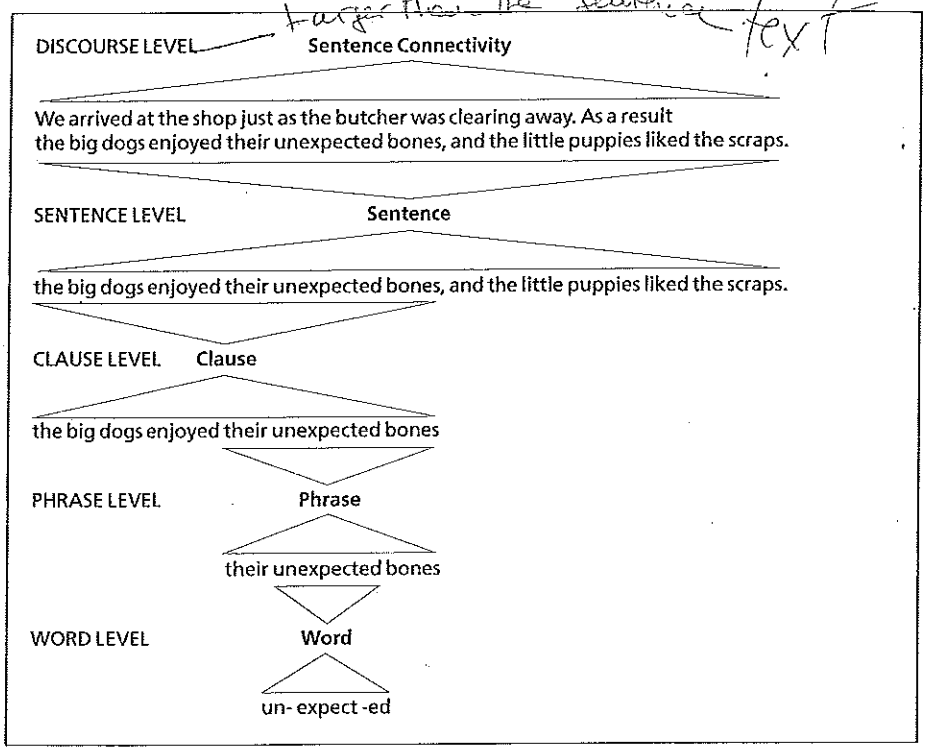
Major sentences can be very simple (*I love you*), but they have the potential to contain a great deal of grammatical structure, as is evident from almost every instance on this page. Literature, oratory, and other sophisticated forms of communication provide particularly striking examples of sentence complexity (p. 70). To demonstrate the order which controls this complexity, all grammars work with the idea of 'levels' of organization.

A 'level' is a way of recognizing the fact that a sentence is not a simple linear string of items. Rather, items are grouped together into units, which then work as wholes in relation to other units. Adult native-speakers do not have to be told that these units exist: they 'know' that they do, subconsciously, as a result of learning the language. (They may not be able to describe the elements they sense to be present, of course, for that is a more conscious task – the difference between 'knowing about' rather than just 'knowing' language, p. 191.)

The sentence *The big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones* quickly yields evidence of a hierarchy of levels of organization. The smallest level of this hierarchy hardly needs an explanation. If asked to divide this sentence into its parts, most people would immediately identify the seven words. But this is not the whole story.

- Four of these words contain smaller units: *dog* + *-s*, *enjoy* + *-ed*, *un-* + *expect* + *-ed*, and *bone* + *-s*. The use of suffixes and prefixes shows that there is a level of structure within the word (the *morphological* level, §14).
- The first three words, and the last three, both combine into larger units: *the big dogs* and *their unexpected bones*. These larger units are called *phrases*, and they show that there is a level of structure between the word and the sentence.
- It would be possible to make the sentence bigger by linking it to a similar sequence of words: *The big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones, and the little puppies liked the scraps*. The sentence now consists of two clauses (p. 216), showing that there can be a further level of structure between the phrase and the sentence.

These four levels – word, phrase, clause, sentence – comprise the grammatical hierarchy summarized in the figure (above), which also gives further examples of the units which operate at each level. The figure also suggests the possibility of a level of grammatical organization which is larger than the sentence: this is discussed on p. 232 and in §19.



FINDING GRAMMATICAL UNITS

The following sentences are taken from the regularized monologue on p. 214.

We usually went out quite soon after that. The children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer, and they went into the milking sheds and helped him feed the pigs. We didn't see the children. So we'd generally go for a tea somewhere, just in case supper was delayed.

Clause level

The conjunctions and other linking words have been omitted below. Note that the subject of *helped* has to be understood from the previous clause, as has the subject of *feed*. *Helped him feed the pigs* presents a problem of analysis, as some grammarians would take this construction as a single clause.

we usually went out quite soon after that
the children were always up at the crack of dawn with the farmer
they went into the milking sheds
helped him
feed the pigs
we didn't see the children
we'd generally go for a tea somewhere
just in case supper was delayed

Phrase level

Only multi-word phrases are listed below. However, it is important to note that in this approach the notion of *phrase* also extends to single words, as long as they are potentially expandable into a larger unit: for example, *supper* is considered an example of a *noun phrase* (p. 222) because it could be expanded into *our supper*, *the big supper*, etc. Grammarians can spend hours debating the merits and demerits of such decisions. The point shows that even a simple instruction as 'find the phrases' raises interesting questions of analysis. Similarly, there are issues over the analysis of clauses (see above) and words (see below).

went out
quite soon
after that
the children
were...up
at the crack of dawn
with the farmer
into the milking sheds
the pigs
didn't see
'd...go
for a tea
in case
was delayed

Word level

The existence of several irregular forms makes the analysis of word structure more complex than may appear at first sight: *went*, for example, is the past tense of *go*, and can thus be analysed as *go* + *-ed*.

usually (a derivational suffix, p. 211)
went (an irregular past tense form, p. 204)
children (the changed vowel of *child* is not apparent in the written form)
were (another irregular past tense form)
milking (a derivational suffix, p. 208)
sheds (*milking sheds* can also be analysed as a compound word, p. 129)
helped
him (objective form of *he*, p. 203)
pigs
didn't (*did* is another irregular past tense form)
we'd
generally (another derivational suffix)
somewhere (a compound form, p. 129)
was (another irregular past tense form)
delayed

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS

Traditional grammars recognized four types of sentence function: *statement*, *question*, *command*, and *exclamation*. Some modern grammars, especially those which work within a framework of speech acts (p. 290), recognize a much larger range of functions. Even if we restrict ourselves to the four 'classical' types, though, there are certain refinements which need to be introduced. In particular, the notion of 'question' covers several different kinds of construction; the sentences called 'commands' express other kinds of meaning in addition to commanding; the notion of 'exclamation' is unacceptably vague; and there is an important sentence type (the 'echo' utterance) which fits into none of these four categories.

STATEMENTS

Almost all the sentences used in this book are statements. A statement is a sentence whose primary purpose is to 'state' – to convey information. Two criteria usually apply:

• The clause contains a subject (p. 220) – though in informal conversation this is sometimes omitted.

(I) Beg (your) pardon?
(I) Told you so.
(It) Looks like rain.

• The subject precedes the verb. Here too there are a few exceptions, such as when the clause begins with *hardly*, *barely*, or other 'negative' words.

Hardly had we left when it started to rain. (*not* *Hardly we had left...)

These sentences are traditionally said to have a *declarative* structure – a structure which 'declares' or 'makes something known'.

QUESTIONS

Questions are sentences which seek information. They fall into three main types, depending on the kind of reply they expect, and on how they are constructed. Sentences formed in these ways are said to have an *interrogative* structure – a structure which 'interrogates'.

• *Yes–no questions* allow an affirmative or negative reply – often just 'yes' or 'no'. The subject follows the auxiliary verb (p. 207).

Are they ready?
Is the plumber here?

In addition, a questioning tone of voice (p. 248) can turn a statement into a *yes–no* question. These questions have the structure of a declarative sentence, and only the question-mark shows their function in writing.

Mary's outside?
You've bought a new car?

• *Wh-questions* allow a reply from a wide range of possibilities. They begin with a question word, such as *what*, *why*, *where*, or *who*.

Where are you going?
Why don't they answer?

• *Alternative questions* require a reply which relates to the options given in the interrogative sentence. They always contain the connecting word *or*.

Will you be travelling by train or by bus?

EXCLAMATORY QUESTIONS

Some sentences resemble questions in their structure, but are actually being used as exclamations. They express the speaker's strong feelings, and ask the hearer to agree. Despite the presence of a negative element, they are strongly positive in meaning.

Hasn't she grown!
Wasn't it marvellous!

Often, both positive and negative forms of the sentence can be used, with very little difference in meaning. In such cases, the auxiliary verb and the subject are usually strongly stressed.

Wasn't he angry!
Was he angry! (I'll say he was!)

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

These sentences also resemble questions in their structure, but they are used as if they were emphatic statements. The speaker does not expect an answer.

Who cares?
How should I know?
What difference does it make?

Public speakers, politicians, poets, and all who give monologues quite often use rhetorical questions as a means of making a dramatic point.

Is man an ape or an angel? (Disraeli)

There is always the risk, of course, in a public speech, that a member of the audience will choose to reply, in the pause which follows.

Poets tend to self-question more than others:

Do I wake or sleep? (Keats)

but we are all prone to it:

Now, shall I stop here or add another sentence?

TAG QUESTIONS

Sometimes the interrogative structure is left to the end of the sentence, in the form of a *tag question*, which expects a *yes/no* kind of reply.

It's there, isn't it?
She's not in, is she?

The *n't* ending of some tag questions is replaced by *not* in formal English. In legal cross-examination we might hear:

They left early, did they not?

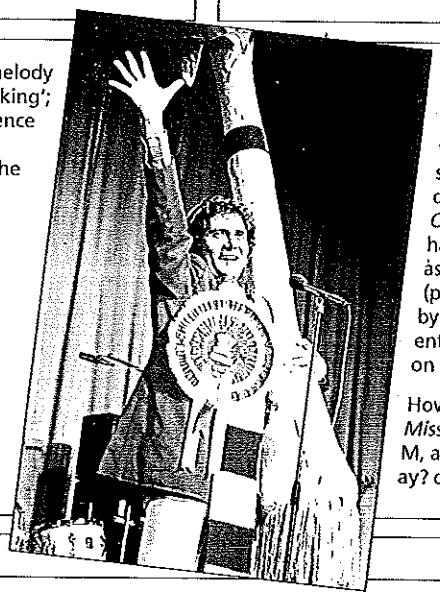
This usage is conversationally normal in some regional dialects, such as northern British and Irish.

If we change the intonation (p. 248), we alter the meaning of a tag question. In many dialects, when the melody is rising, the sentence is 'asking'; when it is falling, the sentence is 'telling'. In writing, the punctuation can indicate the difference:

They're not in, are they?
(I really want to know)
They're not in, are they!
(I told you so)

But in speech this contrast can be unclear, prompting the complaint 'Are you asking me or telling me?'

Tag questions are illustrated further on p. 299.



TAGS, EH?

Informal English uses a few words which perform the same function as tag questions. They include *eh?*, *OK?*, and *right?* Dialects often have a distinctive form, such as Canadian *eh?* or Welsh *ay?* (pronounced [aɪ]). A joke told by Welsh singer and entertainer Max Boyce relies on this last example:

How do people in Bangor spell *Mississippi*?
M, ay? double s, ay? double s, ay? double p, ay?

DIRECTIVES

Directives are sentences which instruct someone to do something. They are often called commands, but this term is misleading. Commanding is just one of the many uses of directive sentences.

- Commanding: Sit down!
- Inviting: Have a drink.
- Warning: Mind your head!
- Pleading: Help me!
- Suggesting: Let's walk.
- Advising: Take an aspirin.
- Instructing: Turn left.
- Permitting: Help yourself.
- Requesting: Open the window, please.
- Meditating: Let me see.
- Expressing good wishes: Have a nice day!
- Expressing an imprecation: Go to hell!

In each case, the verb is in its basic form, with no endings (p. 204), and there is usually no subject element present. Structures of this type are called *imperatives* – from Latin *imperare* 'to command'.

Some directives do not use the basic pattern:

- They allow a subject, with a strong stress:

You be quiet!
Nobody move!

- They begin with *let*, followed by a subject:

Let me see.
Let us pray.
Let's go.

- They begin with *do* or *don't*:

Do come in.
Don't laugh.
Do not leave.

BUY NOW! PAY LATER!

Advertisements rely a great deal on imperative sentences. But not every verb can be used in a directive way, and there are several restrictions on the use of those which can. In particular, many verbs which express a state, rather than an activity, cannot be used as directives: we can say *Buy a new car* but not **Need a new car*. Nor may we use an imperative form of a verb along with a past time reference: we can say *Buy tomorrow!* but not **Buy yesterday!*

EXCLAMATIONS

Exclamations are sentences which show that a person has been impressed or roused by something. They often take the form of a single word or short phrase – a minor sentence (p. 216) such as *Gosh!*, *Oh dear!*, or *Of all the nerve!* But exclamations can have a major sentence status too, with a structure which differentiates them from statements, questions, and directives.

- Their first element begins with *what* or *how*, and is followed by a subject and a verb, in that order:

What a lovely day it is!
What a mess they've made!
How nice they look!

- They also occur frequently in a reduced form, using only the first element:

What a lovely day!
What a mess!
How nice!

Sentences of this kind are said to possess an *exclamative* structure.

Exclamatives with subject and verb inverted are possible, but rare. They can sometimes be found in literary or mock-dramatic contexts:

How often have I cursed that terrible day!

The abbreviated exclamation, with its succinct and punchy style, is highly favoured in dramatic newspaper headlines.

ECHOES

The traditional classification of major sentences into statements, questions, commands (or directives), and exclamations ignores one other type of sentence: the *echo sentence*. It is used only in dialogue, and its purpose is to confirm, question, or clarify what the previous speaker has just said.

The essential feature of an echo utterance is that it reflects the structure of the preceding sentence, which it repeats in whole or in part. All types of sentence can be echoed.

Statements
A: John didn't like the film.
B: He didn't what?

Questions
A: Have you got my knife?
B: Have I got your wife?

Directives
A: Sit down here.
B: Down there?

Exclamations
A: What a lovely day!
B: What a lovely day, indeed!

Echoes sometimes sound impolite, unless accompanied by an apologetic 'softening' phrase, such as *I'm sorry* or *I beg your pardon*. This is most noticeable with the question *What did you say?*, which is often shortened to *What?* A common parental plea to children focuses on this form, which adults consider to be bad manners: *Don't say 'What?', say 'Pardon (me)'.*

INTELLIGENT ECHOES

In the film version of the novel *Being There*, by Jerzy Kosinski, Peter Sellers played the role of a simpleton gardener who repeats (in a slow, almost meditative style) what other people say to him. The result is that he is thought to be highly intelligent.

A similar strategy is not uncommon in life off the screen. For example, if we find ourselves out of our depth in a conversation, it is possible to convey an intelligent impression by occasionally echoing parts of what the other people are saying. Once, the present author was even congratulated by a town councillor for having such sensible ideas, when all he had been able to do was repeat, at irregular intervals, fragments of what had emerged in the councillor's own monologue.

CLAUSE ELEMENTS

All clauses are made up out of elements, each expressing a particular kind of meaning. Traditional grammars recognized two main elements, which they called the *subject* and the *predicate*. These make a useful starting-point for sentence analysis, but the predicate heading needs to be analysed further, in order to distinguish several very different kinds of construction. The present grammatical analysis recognizes five types of clause element, all of which appear in the following sentence:

That cyclist / has called / Dave / a fool / twice.

- The first element in this clause is the subject (S). The subject usually identifies the theme or topic of the clause. We are evidently talking about a cyclist.
- The second element is the verb (V). The verb expresses a wide range of meanings, such as actions, sensations, or states of being. Here we are talking about the action of calling, performed by the cyclist.
- The third element is the object (O). Objects identify who or what has been directly affected by the action of the verb. Here we are talking about Dave, who is the object of the cyclist's attention.
- The fourth element is the complement (C). Complements give further information about another clause element. Here, *a fool* adds to the meaning of *Dave* – Dave *is* a fool (according to the cyclist).
- The fifth element is the adverbial (A). Adverbials usually add extra information about the situation, such as the time of an action, its location, or its manner of being performed. Here, we are talking about the frequency of the calling. The cyclist was plainly very upset.

In Modern English, in about 90 per cent of the clauses which contain a subject, verb, and object, the subject precedes the verb, and the verb precedes the object. The language was not always like this (p. 44), and there are several important types of exception, notably in questions (p. 218).

ELEMENTS AND WORDS

As the examples on this and the previous page suggest, a clause element is not the same as a word. An element may be a single word, or several words. The following sentences each contain a subject, verb, and object, but there are varying numbers of words.

I	saw	Fred.
My uncle	has seen	Fred.
All the kids	know	dear old Fred.

VOCATIVES

A vocative (from Latin *vocare* 'to call') is a name used for the person(s) to whom a sentence is addressed. It may be there to attract attention (as in *Mike, phone for you*), or to express a particular social relationship or personal attitude (as in *Doctor, I need a tonic* or *Leave it alone, imbecile!*). In traditional grammar (p. 192), it was claimed to be a distinct noun 'case', and glossed by the word *O* – a usage now found only in religious contexts (*O God, who...*).

- The vocative is an optional element: it can be added to or removed from a sentence without affecting the rest of the construction.
- It may occur in various positions in a sentence, as in *(John) I'd like auntie (John) to be here (John).*
- It is not an element of clause structure like subject or verb.

A vocative belongs to a whole sentence, however many clauses it contains, as in *Mary, come in, sit down, and tell me what happened.*

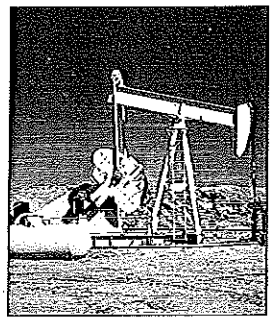
MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN...

Vocatives can be of several kinds.

- Names, with or without titles: *David, Mrs Smith.*
- Family labels: *mum, uncle.*
- Markers of status or respect: *sir, my Lord.*
- Labels for occupations: *waiter, nurse.*
- Evaluative labels: *darling, pig, dear.*
- General labels: *lads, ladies and gentlemen.*
- The pronoun *you* (an extremely impolite use): *You, where's the phone?*
- Certain kinds of clause: *Come out, come out, whoever you are!*
- Some vocatives can be expanded: *old man, you fat fraud!*

ANALYSING COMPOUNDS

sunrise
'the sun rises' (S + V)



oil well
'the well contains oil' (S + O)

scarecrow
'it scares crows' (V + O)

Compounds are an important part of the lexicon (p. 129), but they can be usefully classified into types based on the kind of grammatical meaning they represent. *Popcorn*, for example, can be paraphrased as 'the corn pops', and the relation of *corn* to *pops* is that of subject to verb. The order of the elements (as in this example) does not necessarily correspond to that found in a grammatical sentence. A list of the chief grammatical relations involved follows.

Nouns

Subject + verb
sunrise, headache, hangman, popcorn, washing machine, working party, dancing girl

Verb + object
haircut, tax-payer, scarecrow, crime report, chewing-gum, window-cleaner, sightseeing

Verb + adverbial
living-room ('live in a room')
playgoer ('go to a play')

Subject + object
motorcycle, windmill, oil well, gaslight, doorknob, table leg, postman, chairperson

Subject + complement
('X is Y' or 'X is like/for Y')
oak tree, handyman, darkroom, flypaper, goldfish, birdcage, tissue paper, blackboard

Adjectives

Verb + object
man-eating, breathtaking

Verb + adverbial
law-abiding, handmade, typewritten, widespread

Verbless
homesick, camera-ready, rock-hard, Franco-German

CLAUSE TYPES

Clause-elements combine into a very small number of patterns. In fact, most sentences can be analysed into one of only seven basic clause types, each minimally consisting of two, three, or four elements:

S + V: I / yawned.
S + V + O: I / opened / the door.
S + V + C: I / am / ready.
S + V + A: I / went / to London.
S + V + O + O: I / gave / him / a pen.
S + V + O + C: I / got / my shoes / wet.
S + V + O + A: I / put / the box / on the floor.

There are a few other kinds of construction which can be derived from these basic types. They include directives (p. 219) and various kinds of elliptical sentences (p. 228).

S

• The subject usually appears before the verb in statements, and after the first verb in questions.
The boy yawned.
Are *you* going?
• The subject controls whether the verb is singular or plural in the third person of the present tense (p. 204).
She looks fine. *They* look fine.
• The subject controls the form of certain objects and complements:
I shaved *myself*. *They* shaved *themselves*.
• Some pronouns (p. 203) have a distinctive form when used as a subject:
I can see *her*. *She* can see *me*.
• Subjects can be noun phrases (including single nouns), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
The train was late. *Mary* went home.
Beer, crisps, and cheese are for sale.
I like fishing. *What he said* was funny. (i.e. *It* was funny.)
• In this analysis, a series of noun phrases is analysed as a single clause element, not as a sequence of different elements. There is only *one* subject recognized per clause.

O

• Object elements usually follow the subject and verb in a clause. There are two types: *direct* and *indirect*. The direct object is the common one, typically referring to some person or thing directly affected by the action expressed by the verb.
The child lost *her ball*. I remember *the occasion*.
• The indirect object typically refers to an animate being which is the recipient of the action. In these cases, a direct object is usually present in the clause as well.
She gave *the dog* a stroke. I told *them* my news.
In these constructions, the indirect object precedes the direct. In such clauses as *I gave my paper to the boy*, the order is reversed.
• Some pronouns (p. 203) have a distinctive form when used as an object:
She saw *him*. They asked *me*.
• Objects can be noun phrases (including single nouns), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
I saw *our new house*. We asked *Fred*. Now hear *this*.
She said *I'd been foolish*. (i.e. She said *this*.)
• As with subjects, a set of connected noun phrases is analysed as a single element, in this analysis: *He saw a cat, a dog, and a cow* is S + V + O.

V

• The verb plays a central role in clause structure. It is the most obligatory of all the clause elements, as can be seen from such clauses as

That farmer drinks beer by the bucketful.
S V O A

We can omit the adverbial (*That farmer drinks beer*), the object (*That farmer drinks by the bucketful*), and even the subject, in casual style (*Drinks beer by the bucketful*, nodding in his direction), but we cannot omit the verb (**That farmer beer by the bucketful*). There is just one type of exception – 'verbless' clauses such as *If possible* (i.e. if it is possible), *arrive early*.
• The verb element must be a verb phrase (including a single verb):
The bus *is coming*. The dog *ate* the crisps. *I'm* sorry.
In this analysis, only one verb element is allowed per clause, though this may consist of a sequence of auxiliary verbs as well as a main verb (p. 207), all of which combine to express a single grammatical meaning.
• The choice of verb largely determines what other elements are used in the clause, such as whether an object is present or not (p. 212).

C

• Complements express a meaning which *adds* to that of another clause element – either the subject (the *subject complement*) or the object (the *object complement*).
• A subject complement usually follows the subject and verb. The verb is most often a form of *be*, but it may also be one of a few other verbs that are able to link complements to their subjects in meaning. These are called *copular* ('linking') verbs.
She *is* a doctor. The bull *became* angry. (i.e. It *was* angry.)
The tune *sounds* lovely. (i.e. It *is* lovely.)
• An object complement usually follows the direct object, and its meaning relates to that element. The basic identity between them is shown in parenthesis.
They elected Clinton *president*. (i.e. He is president.)
It made me *angry*. (i.e. I was angry.)
• Complements can be noun phrases (including single nouns), adjective phrases (including single adjectives), pronouns, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
She is *a journalist*. They became *students*.
Arthur is *very happy*. The car's *ready*.
Where's *that*? That's *what I said*.
• When the complement is a noun phrase, it agrees in number with its corresponding element:
The *child* is an *angel* > The *children* are *angels*.
I find your *child* an *angel* > I find your *children angels*.

A

• Adverbials differ from other clause elements chiefly in that there can be an indefinite number of them in a single clause:
She arrived on the bus / on Thursday / in the rain ...
• Adverbials can be used in several possible positions in the clause, though they are most common at the end:
Twice I asked him. I *twice* asked him. I asked him *twice*.
• Adverbials express a wide range of meanings, such as manner, place, and time:
I stayed *quietly at home all day*.
• Adverbials perform diverse roles in sentence construction. Some add information about an event; some link clauses together; and some add a comment about what is being expressed.
I walked *quietly*.
The bus was full. *However*, I found a seat.
Frankly, I think it's wrong.
• Adverbials can be adverb phrases (including single adverbs), prepositional phrases, some nouns and noun phrases, or certain kinds of subordinate clause (p. 226):
They ran *very quickly*. They walked *home*.
We walked *in the garden*. She phoned me *this morning*.
I laughed *when I saw you*.
• Some verbs require an adverbial to complete their meaning. These are the S + V + A and S + V + O + A constructions.
The path goes *around the field*. (We cannot say **The path goes*.)
I put the book *on the table*. (We cannot say **I put the book*.)

PHRASES

A phrase is a syntactic construction which typically contains more than one word, but which lacks the subject–predicate structure usually found in a clause (p. 220). Phrases are traditionally classified into types based on the most important word they contain: if this is a noun, for example, the phrase would be called a *noun phrase*; if an adjective, an *adjective phrase*; and so on. Six word classes (§15) – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions – are found as the identifying elements (or *heads*) of phrasal constructions. However, there are considerable differences between the syntactic patterns which can occur within each type of phrase, ranging from the very limited possibilities of pronoun phrases to the highly variable patterns found within noun phrases.

- *Pronoun phrases* are restricted to a small number of constructions, and tend not to be recognized as a productive type in English. Examples include *Silly me!, You there!, she herself, we all, nearly everyone*, and such relative clause constructions as *those who knew Fred* ...They are usually analysed as a minor type of noun phrase.
- *Adverb phrases* are typically found as short intensifying expressions, such as *terribly slowly* and *very happily indeed*. Also common are such time phrases as *quite often* and *very soon*, and constructions of the type *as quickly (as I could)*.
- *Adjective phrases* are usually combinations of an adjective and a preceding intensifier, such as *very happy* and *not too awkward*. Other types include *cold enough* and a wide range of constructions which complement the adjective, such as *easy to please* and *loath to do it*.
- *Verb phrases* display very limited syntactic possibilities: a main verb preceded by up to four auxiliaries (p. 207), as in *may have gone* and *won't have been listening*. However, this limitation does not prevent the verb phrase from expressing a wide range of meanings to do with time, mood, and manner of action.
- By contrast, *noun phrases* allow an extremely wide range of syntactic possibilities, from such simple constructions as *the hat* to such complex phrases as *not quite all the fine new hats which were on sale*. They need to be described separately (see right).
- *Prepositional phrases* are combinations of a preposition plus a noun phrase: *in the back garden, beneath the hedge*. They typically perform the role of adverbial in a clause: *I saw it* ***in the garden*** = *I saw it* ***there***. They are also adjectival: *the linguist* ***with the red beard***.

NOUN PHRASE STRUCTURE

The noun phrase (NP) is the main construction which can appear as the subject, object, or complement of a clause (p. 221). It consists essentially of a noun or noun-like word which is the most important constituent of the phrase: *a fat cat, the horses in the stable, the poor, ten Chinese*. Sometimes the noun appears alone in its phrase (*Cats are nice*). More often, it is accompanied by one or more other constituents, some of which are themselves fairly complex syntactic units in their own right. As a result, noun phrases are more varied in their construction than any other kind of phrase in English.

The parts of a noun phrase

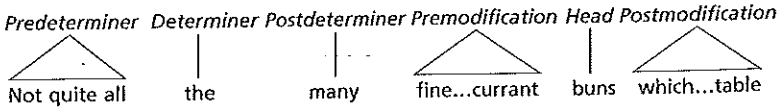
No matter how complex a noun phrase is, it can be analysed into one or more of the following four constituents:

- The *head* is the most important constituent, around which any other constituents cluster. It is the head which controls any agreement with other parts of the sentence. Thus we have *His new* ***book is interesting*** alongside *His new* ***books are interesting***, and *The* ***girl*** *in the garden saw* ***it herself*** alongside *The* ***boy*** *in the garden saw* ***it himself***.
- The *determiner* appears before the noun. This constituent decides ('determines') what kind of noun is in the phrase – in particular, whether it is definite or indefinite, proper or common, count or noncount (pp. 208–9). Words such as *a, those, some*, and *any* are determiners. It is not essential for a noun phrase to have a determiner (for example, proper nouns do not take one), but most noun phrases do, and the commonest determiners (*the* and *a*) are among the most frequent words in the language.

  The determiner can be the centre of its own cluster of words which share in the expression of quantity. In the present approach, those which appear before the determiner are called (logically enough) *predeterminers*; they include ***all*** *the people,* ***twice*** *the cost,* ***half*** *the money*. Those which immediately follow the determiner, preceding any adjectives which may occur, are called *postdeterminers*; they are chiefly the numerals (*my* ***three*** *fat cats, the* ***second*** *big party*) and a few other quantifying words (such as *many* and *several*).
- The *premodification* comprises any other words appearing between the determiner and the head noun – mainly adjectives or adjective-like words. In the phrase *those lovely old French wooden spoons*, everything between *the* and *spoons* is said to 'premodify' the noun. (In some grammars, the notion of premodification is broader, and includes *everything* in the noun phrase which appears before the head, including the determiner and its satellites.)
- The *postmodification* comprises everything which appears in the phrase after the head. The chief types are prepositional phrases (*the car* ***in the garage***), finite clauses (*the film* ***that I saw***), and nonfinite clauses (*the new car* ***parked outside***). Adverbs and adjectives are also sometimes used to 'postmodify' the noun, as in *the journey* ***home*** and *something* ***different***.

GROWING NOUN PHRASES

Buns	are for sale.
The buns	are for sale.
All the buns	are for sale.
All the currant buns	are for sale.
Not quite all the currant buns	are for sale.
Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns	are for sale.
Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns on the table	are for sale.
Not quite all the hot buttered currant buns on show on the table	are for sale.
Not quite all the many fine interesting-looking hot buttered home-made currant buns which grandma cooked on show on the table	are for sale.



This postcard message shows a number of 'bare minimum' NPs, consisting of a noun only, as well as several Determiner + Noun constructions. The longest example also shows one NP (*the boat*) being used as part of the postmodification of another.

POST CARD

Dear Mum — Friday

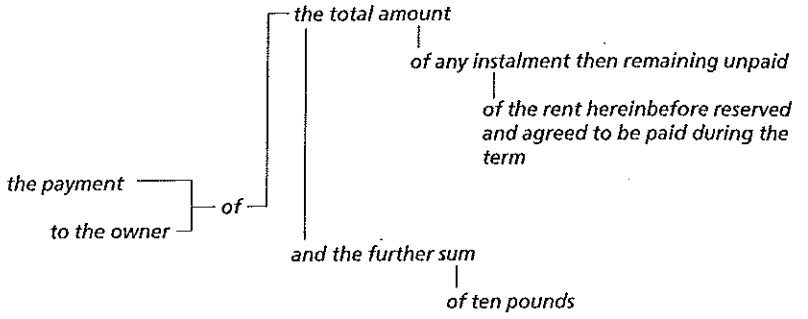
We're having a smashing time, though the weather's not brilliant. Paul's bought a new jacket to replace the blue monstrosity that (luckily) was pinched on the boat. You'll love the colour this time! And it was half the price!! Now we're off to see some Roman ruins — with brollies, of course. We'll try and phone Sunday morning. Hope you're all well. Paul sends his love,

Kate XX

Aspects of noun phrase structure

There are so many facets to the structure of the noun phrase that it is not possible to refer to all of them in a general book. No other syntactic unit in English presents such possibilities for structural variation. One consequence of this is that distinctive noun phrase patterns are often part of the stylistic identity of a text, as can be seen in such varieties as popular journalese (p. 380) and scientific writing (p. 372). Another is that several of the meanings expressed by the noun phrase are extremely subtle, requiring a careful consideration of many examples before their function can be consciously appreciated. And even in the 1990s, not all of the rules governing the way noun phrases work are fully understood.

Legal English displays a marked preference for postmodification in the noun phrase, as can be seen in this extract from an insurance agreement. When the structure is presented visually in this way, the meaning is fairly easy to grasp. Without such assistance, the language becomes dense and confusing – and a target of Plain English campaigns (p. 376).



THE ARTICLES

The article system is a good example of the subtle meanings which the noun phrase can express. The contrasts are not easy to define – despite the fact that most features of the system have been intuitively grasped by the time a child is 5 years old.

Three concepts are involved, two of which are familiar from traditional grammar: the *definite article* (*the*), the *indefinite article* (*a* or *an*), and the absence of an article (the *zero article*). The use of these forms affects the meaning of the noun phrase – in particular, allowing us to think of nouns in a *specific* way, referring to individuals (*A / the dog is eating*) or in a *generic* way, referring to a general class or species (*A / the dog is an interesting animal, Dogs are nice*).

The definite article

• *The* can refer to the immediate situation or to someone's general knowledge:

Have you fed *the dog*?
He was wounded in *the war*,...

• *The* can refer back to another noun (what is sometimes called *anaphoric reference*):

She bought a car and a bike, but she used *the bike* more.

• *The* can refer forward to the words following the head noun (*cataphoric reference*):

I've always liked *the wines* of Germany.

• *The* can refer to human institutions that we sporadically use, attend, observe, etc.:

I went to *the theatre*.
I watched *the news* on TV.

The indefinite article

• *A(n)* does not presuppose that a noun has been mentioned already. In *The book arrived*, the speaker assumes we know which book is being referred to. In *A book arrived*, no such knowledge is assumed.

• *A(n)* often expresses a general state of affairs, or a notion of quantity:

I'm training to be *a linguist*.
He's scored *a hundred*.
Take this six times *a day*.

The zero article

The article is often omitted in idiomatic usage when talking about human institutions and routines, means of transport, periods of time, meals, and illnesses:

go to bed	in winter
travel by car	have lunch
at dawn	caught pneumonia

A common error of non-native learners of English is to introduce an article in those cases where it is impossible or inappropriate, as in **I shall go to the bed now*, **I have caught a pneumonia*.

THE ORDER OF PREMODIFIERS

Why do you think we make Nuttall's Mintoes such a devilishly smooth cool creamy minty chewy round slow velvety fresh clean solid buttery taste?

This advertising caption from the 1960s probably holds the record for number of adjectives in a single noun phrase. It is of course a highly unusual example – not just because of its length and its use of unexpected word combinations (e.g. *taste* being described as *round* or *solid*, p. 162), but because the adjectives do not display any restrictions on their order. They could be shuffled and dealt out again, and the result would probably be just as acceptable.

The following example shows that not all adjectives can be used in this random kind of way.

a nice big cardboard box

not

*a big nice cardboard box
*a cardboard nice big box
*a nice cardboard big box

or any of the other possible sequences. This is the kind of grammatical rule that most people never think twice about. However, working out the factors which make one sequence acceptable and others not is an intricate business, and one that is still not entirely understood.

ADJECTIVE ZONES

Examples such as the following suggest that there are four main 'zones' within the premodifying section of a noun phrase, here labelled I, II, III, and IV.

I've got the same big red garden chairs as you.
I II III IV

IV Words which are usually nouns, or closely related to nouns, are placed next to the head. They include nationality adjectives (*American, Gothic*), noun-like adjectives which mean 'involving' or 'relating to' (*medical, social*), and straightforward nouns (*tourism brochure, Lancashire factory*). Thus we say:

an old Lancashire factory *not* *a Lancashire old factory
a bright medical student *not* *a medical bright student

III Participles and colour adjectives are placed immediately in front of any in zone IV: *missing, deserted, retired, stolen, red, green*. Thus we say:

an old red suit *not* *a red old suit
the red tourism brochures *not* *the tourism red brochures

I Adjectives with an absolute or intensifying meaning come first in the sequence, immediately after the determiner and its satellites: *same, certain, entire, sheer, definite, perfect, superb*. Thus we say:

the entire American army *not* *the American entire army
the perfect red suit *not* *the red perfect suit

II All other adjectives (the vast majority in the language) occur in this zone: *big, slow, angry, helpful*, and all those in the advertising caption above. Thus we say:

a superb old house *not* *an old superb house (with a zone I item)
an old stolen car *not* *a stolen old car (with a zone III item)
an old social disease *not* *a social old disease (with a zone IV item)

There are also signs of 'zones within zones'. For example, we tend to say *a beautiful new dress* not *a new beautiful dress*, suggesting that evaluative adjectives in zone II precede other kinds of adjectives there. We also tend to say *a recognizable zig-zag pattern* not *a zig-zag recognizable pattern*, suggesting that more abstract adjectives precede more concrete ones. But, as the word 'tend' suggests, the rules are not hard and fast.

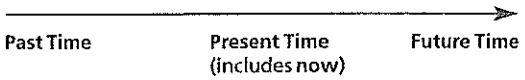
VERB PHRASE MEANINGS

With only a few verb endings to take into account (p. 204) and a very limited range of auxiliary verbs and sequences (p. 212), the verb phrase would seem to provide the linguist with an easy task of syntactic description. But appearances are deceptive. It is true that the possible patterns of constituents can be described quite quickly, but the meanings which each pattern can convey are extremely difficult to state, being influenced by what else is happening in the sentence, and even by the meaning of particular types of verb. For example, an accompanying adverbial (p. 221) can dramatically alter the period of time to which a verb form refers: *I'm leaving tomorrow* is hours away from *I'm leaving* (said while going through the door). And a verb which expresses a specific action works differently from one which expresses a state of awareness: we can say *I was kicking it* but not **I was knowing it.* Teasing out the various meaning contrasts of tense, aspect, mood, and voice makes the verb phrase one of the most intriguing areas of English syntax.

TENSES

One of the important functions of the verb is to indicate the time at which an action takes place. The term *tense* is traditionally used to refer to the way verbs change their form to express this meaning. On this definition, English has only two tenses – present and past – though traditional grammars would extend the notion to include various kinds of auxiliary verb usage as well (p. 196).

Time is often shown as a line, on which the present moment is located as a continuously moving point. But there is no identity between tense and time. Present and past tenses can refer to all parts of the time line.



PRESENT TENSE

Three uses refer to present time.

- The *state present* is used for timeless statements or 'eternal truths': *Oil floats on water, Two and two make four.*
- The *habitual present* is used for repeated events. There is usually an accompanying adverbial of frequency: *I go to town each week.*
- The *instantaneous present* is used when the action begins and ends approximately at the moment of speech. It is common in demonstrations and sports commentaries: *Smith passes to Brown.*

Three uses refer to other times:

- The *historic present* describes the past as if it were happening now: *I hear you've resigned.*
- In jokes and imaginative writing, a similar use promotes *dramatic immediacy*: *We look outside (dear reader) and we see an old man in the street.*
- With some time adverbials, the present tense helps to refer to a specific course of action in *future time* (see above right): *We leave tomorrow.*

PAST TENSE

Most uses refer to an action or state which has taken place in the past, at a definite time, with a gap between its completion and the present moment. Specific events, states, and habitual actions can all be express-ed with this tense: *I arrived yesterday* (event), *They were upset* (state), *They went to work every day* (habitual).

The past tense is also used for present or future time.

- The *attitudinal past* reflects a tentative state of mind, giving a more polite effect than would be obtained by using the present tense: *Did you want to leave?* (compare the more direct *Do you want to leave?*)
- The *hypothetical past* expresses what is contrary to the speaker's beliefs. It is especially used in *if*-clauses: *I wish I had a bike* (i.e. I haven't got one).
- In indirect speech (p. 230), a past tense used in the verb of 'saying' allows the verb in the reported clause to be past tense as well, even though it refers to present time: *Did you say you had no money?* (i.e. you haven't any now).

FUTURE TENSE?

English has no future tense ending (unlike Latin, French, and many other languages). Rather, future time is expressed by a variety of other means. One of these – the use of *will* or *shall* – is often loosely referred to as the 'future tense'. But this usage changes the meaning of the word 'tense' so that it no longer refers only to the use of verb endings. There are in fact six main ways of referring to future time.

- *Will, shall,* or *'ll* followed by the infinitive without *to* (*I'll see you then*) or the progressive form (*I'll be seeing you*). This is by far the commonest use.
- *Be going to,* followed by the infinitive: *I'm going to ask him.* This common informal us (often pronounced *gonna*) usually suggest that the event will take place very soon.
- The present progressive (p. 225), stressing the way a future event follows on from an arranged plan: *The match is starting at 2 p.m.* The happening is usually imminent.
- The simple present tense, often implying definiteness: *I leave soon, Go to bed.*
- The use of *be to, be about to, have to,* and a few others, all expressing a future action at various removes from the present: *She's to sit here, She's about to leave.*
- The modal verbs (p. 212), which also convey a future implication: *I may/might/could/should travel by bus.*

SHALL OR WILL?

Traditional grammars drew a sharp distinction between the use of *will* and *shall* (p. 194).

- To express *future time*, they recommended *shall* with first persons, and *will* with second and third persons: *I/we shall go, You/he/she/it/they will go.*
- To express an *intention to act*, they recommended *will* with first persons, and *shall* with the others: *I/we will go, You/he/she/it/they shall go.*

On this basis, sentences such as *I will be 20 soon* were condemned as wrong, because (it was said) we cannot 'intend' to be a certain age.

Modern usage does not observe this distinction. Indeed, it may never have existed in the language, but only in the minds of grammarians anxious to impose order on a 'messy' area of usage. The issue is of less relevance today, as *shall* has come to be increasingly replaced by *will* in several varieties. Even in conservative southern British English, it is now rare to find *shall* in the second and third person (*Shall you go?, Mary shall sit there*), and it is becoming less common in the first person. Nonetheless, usage variation remains, as shown by these headlines, both appearing on the same day and ostensibly reporting the same royal remark.

MULTIPLE SENTENCES

Up to this point in Part III, most of the sentences illustrated contain only one clause (p. 220): they are *simple sentences.* But many sentences can be immediately analysed into more than one clause: they are *multiple sentences.* In fact, multiple sentences form the majority of the sentences in formal writing, and are common in everyday conversation too. The kind of monologue reported on p. 214, although presenting several problems of analysis, makes it plain that much of the spontaneous character of conversational speech is due to the way it uses multiple sentence constructions. These constructions are often classified into two broad types, both recognized in traditional grammar (p. 192): *compound sentences* and *complex sentences.*

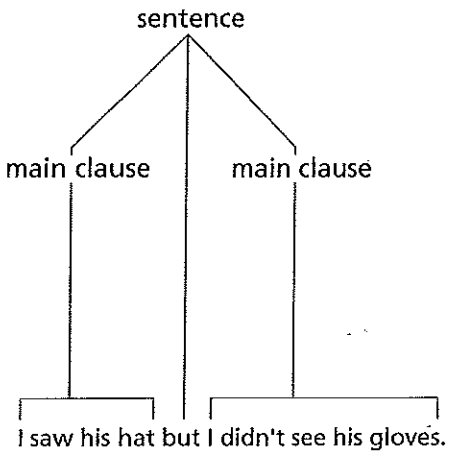
Compound sentences

In compound sentences, the clauses are linked by *coordination* – usually, by the *coordinating conjunctions* (p. 213) *and, or,* or *but.* Each clause can in principle stand as a sentence on its own – in other words, act as an *independent clause,* or *main clause.* Tree diagram A (above right) shows the 'balance' between two clauses linked in this way. The same analysis would be made even if one of the clauses had elements omitted due to ellipsis (p. 228). In *I cycled as far as Oxford and Mary as far as Reading, Mary as far as Reading* can – once the ellipsis has been 'filled out' – stand as a main clause: *Mary cycled as far as Reading.* 'Main', in this context, has a purely grammatical sense, and does not have its everyday general meaning of 'most important'.

Complex sentences

In complex sentences, the clauses are linked by *subordination,* using such *subordinating conjunctions* as *because, when,* and *since* (p. 213). Here, one clause (called the *subordinate clause*) is made dependent upon another (the main clause). This can be seen in tree diagram B (below right). The subordinate clause cannot stand as a sentence on its own. *When Mike dropped the plates* needs some other clause before it can be used.

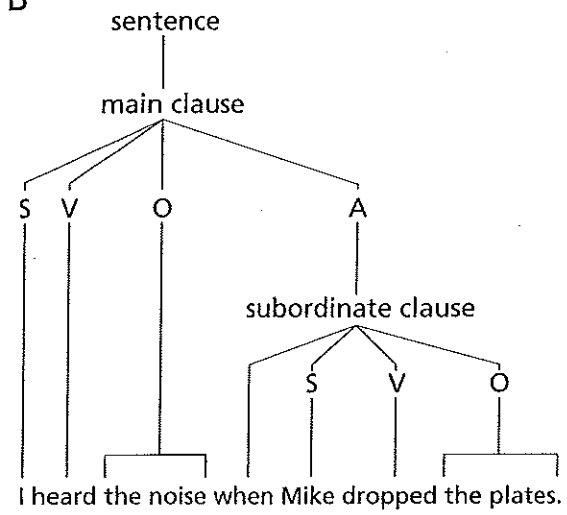
A



The adverbial identity of the subordinate clause can be tested using the technique of substitution. The clause *when Mike dropped the plates* can be replaced by an adverb of time, such as *then: I heard the noise then.*

This example shows the importance of clause elements in carrying out the analysis of complex sentences. If one is unable to distinguish between subjects, verbs, objects, complements, and adverbials in single clauses (see p. 221), the prospects of carrying out a successful analysis of a multiple sentence are slim.

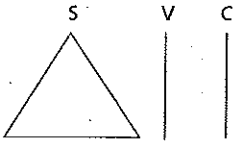
B



ELEMENTS AS CLAUSES

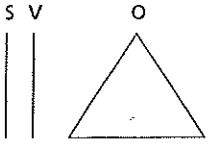
Subordinate clauses can replace the whole of any clause element except the verb. Their grammatical function can always be tested by replacing the clause with a simpler unit whose identity is known, such as a pronoun, adjective, adverb, or noun phrase. A clause as adverbial has already been illustrated above. Here are examples of clauses as subject, object, and complement.

Clause as subject



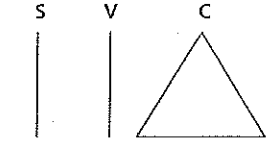
(i.e. *It* was a shame.)

Clause as object



(i.e. I said *something.*)

Clause as complement



(i.e. The result was *good.*)

SENTENCE INFORMATION

There are many ways in which we can organize the information contained in a sentence, as can be seen from these alternatives:

A mechanic is fixing a car.
There's a mechanic fixing a car.
It's a mechanic that's fixing a car.
It's a car that a mechanic is fixing.
A car is being fixed by a mechanic.

These sentences all express the same basic meaning, but they convey several important differences of style and emphasis. The analysis of these differences is also part of the study of grammar.

Given and new information

There are usually two kinds of information in a sentence. One part of the sentence tells us something *new*. The other part tells us something that we were aware of already (either from previous sentences or from our general knowledge) – in other words, its information is *given*. The distinction between given and new information can be clearly seen in this dialogue:

A: Where did you put your bike?
B: I left it / at my friend's house.

The first part of B's sentence is 'given' (by A); the second part is new.

Given information tells us what a sentence is about; it provides the sentence *theme*. Because the information it contains is familiar, this part of the sentence is not likely to be spoken with any extra prominence (p. 248). New information, on the other hand, provides the point where we expect people to pay special attention, or *focus*. The part of the sentence containing the focus is always spoken in a prominent way.

In most sentences, the theme appears first, and the focus of the message last. But it is possible to bring the focus forwards, so as to emphasize an earlier part of the sentence. This especially happens when we want to state a contrast, as in ***The plates** are new, not the cups.* Conversations make frequent use of emphatic contrasts of this kind.

VARYING THE INFORMATION STRUCTURE

There are several ways in which special attention can be drawn to the theme of a sentence.

Fronting

Fronting occurs when we move to the beginning of a sentence an item which does not usually belong there. This item then becomes the theme, and in such cases it carries extra prominence:

Across the road they ran.
David I said my name was.

Inversion

Here the subject and verb appear in the reverse of their normal order:

Here's Johnny.
Down came the rain.
They were happy and so *was I*.

The verb must be in its simple form (p. 225); we cannot say **Down was coming the rain*.

Cleft sentences

Another way of altering the normal emphasis in a simple sentence is to split ('cleave') the sentence into two clauses, giving each its own verb. The first clause consists of the pronoun *it* and a form of the verb *be*. The second clause begins with a pronoun such as *that* or *who*. These constructions are called *cleft sentences*:

Ted broke the plate.
It was Ted who broke the plate.
It was the plate that Ted broke.

Extraposition

Where the subject or object element is a clause (p. 220), it is possible to change the sentence around so that the clause comes later. The original element is then replaced by the pronoun *it*, which 'anticipates' the following clause:

What you say doesn't matter.
It doesn't matter what you say.

I find reading comics fun.
I find it fun, reading comics.

In examples like these, the clauses have been moved *outside* their normal position in the sentence. The effect is thus said to be one of *extraposition*.

Existentials

Sometimes we want to bring the content of a whole clause to the attention of our listener or reader, making it all new information. To do this, there is a construction in which the first words have no meaning. They seem to act as a theme, because they appear at the beginning of the sentence, but it is a 'dummy' theme. The main means of achieving this effect is to use the word *there* (without giving it any stress) followed by the simple present or past tense of *be*:

Many people are in danger.
There are many people in danger.

Such sentences express the general existence of some state of affairs, and are thus called *existential sentences*. *Be* is not the only verb capable of being used in this way, but others (such as *exist* and *arise*) are rarer and more literary:

There exist several alternatives.
There arose a great cry.

FROM MOSCOW, OUR CORRESPONDENT...

News reporting frequently makes use of variations in information structure in order to capture attention and avoid monotony. The following extracts from radio broadcasts illustrate the use of these techniques.

It was in June that Horace Williams, an unemployed labourer, first met the Smiths.

There were cheers inside the court today when a verdict of not guilty was returned...

In the West Indian city of Georgetown, the final day of the Fourth Test between the West Indies and England has been washed out by rain.

PART IV

Spoken and Written English

A message constructed in English grammar and vocabulary may be transmitted in either of two main ways: through speech or through writing. Part IV investigates the technical resources provided by the language under each of these headings. (Stylistic differences in the way spoken and written language are used are considered separately, in Part V.)

We begin with spoken English, the more natural and widespread mode of transmission, though ironically the one which most people find much less familiar – presumably because it is so much more difficult to 'see' what is happening in speech than in writing. Chapter 17 works systematically through the sound system, after providing some general perspective about the subjects of phonetics and phonology and the nature of phonetic transcription. It introduces and classifies vowels and consonants, emphasizing the differences between the way in which these notions appear in speech and in writing. It then goes on to review the way sounds combine into syllables, words, and sentences, and outlines the prosodic resources of the language, which convey such important effects as intonation, emphasis, and tone of voice. The chapter surveys some of the everyday domains in which a knowledge of pronunciation can be useful or illuminating, and includes a detailed examination of the way sounds can be used symbolically, in a range of contexts which link the poet Keats, breakfast cereals, and the British cartoon character Desperate Dan.

Chapter 18 adopts a similar approach to the writing system, beginning with the topic which is widely regarded as its central domain – the alphabet. Here too some methodological preliminaries are in order, as writing is a subject studied by several fields, including linguists, psychologists, typographers, and graphic designers, and terms and approaches vary greatly. After looking at the history of each letter of the alphabet, we turn to some of the interesting statistical and symbolic properties of letters, paying particular attention to the approach associated with graphologists, and to different kinds of graphic variety and deviance. We then grapple with what is undoubtedly the most notorious aspect of the English writing system: its spelling. The section reviews the reasons for the complexity, discusses the sources of irregularity, and examines possible solutions, including some of the proposed attempts at spelling reform. The chapter then concludes with a close look at the history and present-day use of one of the most neglected aspects of the writing system: punctuation.

Letters from an early alphabet book, *The Amusing Alphabet*, a popular educational approach in Victorian times, promising 'easy steps' to literacy (see also p. 407).

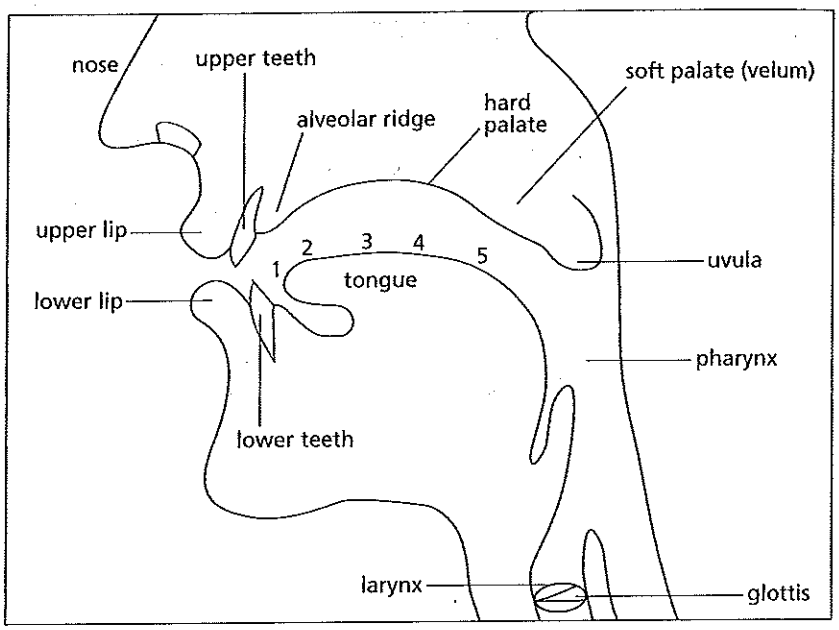
17 · THE SOUND SYSTEM

We are used to seeing the written language as a sequence of letters, separated by small segments of space. This is how we were taught to write. We formed our letters one at a time, then slowly and painstakingly brought them together in 'joined-up' writing. We learned to call five of these letters 'vowels' (A, E, I, O, U), and the others 'consonants'. We may also have learned that letter Y is also 'sometimes' used as a vowel.

Everyone born with the normal capacity to learn acquires the ability to listen and speak long before the ability to read and write. Moreover, when the English alphabet was first devised (p. 258), its letters were based on a consideration of the nature of the sounds in Old English. The origins of the written language lie in the spoken language, not the other way round. It is therefore one of life's ironies that traditionally in present-day education we do not learn about spoken language until well after we have learned the basic properties of the written language. As a result, it is inevitable that we think of speech using the frame of reference which belongs to writing. We even use some of the same terms, and it can come as something of a shock to realize that these terms do not always have the same meaning.

THE ORGANS OF ARTICULATION

The diagram shows the anatomical location of the vocal organs involved in the description of English vowels and consonants. It is not a complete representation of all the vocal organs – the lungs, for example, are not shown.



Key

1 tongue *tip*
2 *blade* of the tongue (the tapering part, opposite the alveolar ridge)
3 *front* of the tongue (opposite the hard palate)
4 *centre* of the tongue (opposite where the hard and soft palate meet)
5 *back* of the tongue (opposite the soft palate)

A BASIC PERSPECTIVE

Pronunciation can always be studied from two points of view: the *phonetic* and the *phonological*.

Phonetics

Phonetics is the study of the way humans make, transmit, and receive speech sounds. It is divided into three main branches, corresponding to these three distinctions:

- *articulatory phonetics* is the study of the way the vocal organs are used to produce speech sounds
- *acoustic phonetics* is the study of the physical properties of speech sounds
- *auditory phonetics* is the study of the way people perceive speech sounds

This section gives details of the articulation of vowels and consonants, and makes only passing mention of their acoustic characteristics and the mechanisms of audition. The auditory perspective is more in evidence in the section on prosody (p. 248).

Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sound systems of languages, and of the general properties displayed by these systems. By contrast with phonetics, which studies *all* possible sounds that the human vocal apparatus can make, phonology studies only those contrasts in sound (the *phonemes*) which make differences of meaning within language. When we listen carefully to the way people speak English, we will hear hundreds of slight differences in the way individuals pronounce particular sounds. For example, one person may pronounce /s/ in a noticeably 'slushy' manner, while another may pronounce it in a 'lisping' manner. A phonetician would be interested in describing exactly what these differences of articulation are. A phonologist, however, would point out that both articulations are 'types of /s/': /set/, no matter how the /s/ varies, it continues to contrast with /bet/, /met/, and other words. There is just one basic unit, or phoneme, involved.

When we talk about the 'sound system' of English, we are referring to the number of phonemes which are used in a language, and to how they are organized. To say there are '20 vowels' in a particular accent means that there are 20 units which can differentiate word meanings: /e/ is different from /i:/, for example, because there are pairs of words (such as *set* and *seat*) which can be distinguished solely by replacing one of these vowels by the other. All the vowels in the list on p. 237 (and all the consonants on p. 242) owe their existence to this principle.

Brackets

To help separate the two ways of looking at pronunciation, the practice has grown up in linguistics of using different kinds of brackets for the two approaches. Square brackets – [ ] – are used when sounds are being discussed from a phonetic point of view – that is, purely as sounds, and regardless of their role in the sound system of the language. Slant brackets – // – are used when sounds are being discussed from a phonological point of view – that is, purely as part of the sound system, and regardless of the particular way they are articulated. For the most part, transcriptions in this book are phonological: they show the phonemes, and use slant brackets, as in /pen/ *pen* and /skru:/ *screw*. When the discussion focuses on points of articulatory detail, however, as in the description of regional differences of pronunciation, we will need to rely as well on a phonetic transcription.

THE VOWELS

A good example of the speech–writing difference is the way we have to re-think the idea that 'there are five vowels' when we begin to discuss speech. There are in fact some 20 or so vowels in most accents of English (the exact number often depending on the way the system is analysed), and their sound qualities can vary enormously from accent to accent. The vowel sounds of American English, for example, are clearly different from those of British or Australian, and the vowels typical of one locality in any of these countries can differ appreciably from those of another. Indeed, vowel differences make up most of the distinctiveness which we associate with a particular accent (p. 298).

The table on this page shows the set of vowels found in English, along with some common transcriptions (for their place of articulation, see p. 240). The most striking feature of a list of this kind is the number of special symbols (part of the *phonemic transcription*) which have to be devised in order to identify each vowel unambiguously. With only five (or six) vowel letters available in the traditional alphabet, extra symbols, combinations of symbols, and diacritic marks are needed to capture all the units in the system, as well as all the variations in vowel quality which distinguish different accents (pp. 240–1).

The vowels in	*Gimson*	*Jones*	*F&R*	*Variants*
sea, feet, me, field	iː	iː	i	
him, big, village, women	ɪ	i	ɪ	ɩ
get, fetch, head, Thames	e	e	ɛ	
sat, hand, ban, plait	æ	æ	æ	a
sun, son, blood, does	ʌ	ʌ	ʌ	
calm, are, *f*ather, car	ɑː	ɑː	a	
dog, lock, swan, cough	ɒ	ɔ	a	
all, saw, cord, more	ɔː	ɔː	ɔ	
put, wolf, good, look	ʊ	u	ʊ	ʊ
soon, do, soup, shoe	uː	uː	u	
bird, her, turn, learn	ɜː	ɜː	ʌ (+ r)	ɜ˞ (+ r)
the, butter, sof*a*, *a*bout	ə	ə	ə	ə˞ (+ r)
ape, waist, they, say	eɪ	ei	e	
time, cry, die, high	aɪ	ai	ay	
boy, toy, noise, voice	ɔɪ	ɔi	ɔy	
so, road, toe, know	əʊ	ou	o	
out, how, house, found	aʊ, ɑʊ	au	aw, æw	
deer, here, fierce, near	ɪə	iə	(i + r)	
care, air, bare, bear	eə	ɛə	(ɛ + r)	
poor, sure, tour, lure	ʊə	uə	(u + r)	

TYPES OF VOWEL

• *Monophthongs* (or *pure vowels*) are vowels with a single perceived auditory quality, made by a movement of the tongue towards one position in the mouth. The first 12 vowel qualities in the above table are all monophthongs.

• *Diphthongs* are vowels where two vowel qualities can be perceived. The remaining eight vowel qualities in the table are all diphthongs. In /aɪ/, for example, the sound begins with an open /a/-type quality and ends with a close /i/-type quality. It is important to note that here we are talking about phonetic diphthongs, not graphic ones: the sounds in *my, so,* and *how,* for example, are diphthongs, even though each has only a single vowel letter.

Triphthongs are vowels in which three vowel qualities can be perceived. The vowels in such words as *player* /pleɪə/, *fire* /faɪə/, *royal* /rɔɪəl/, *tower* /taʊə/, and *lower* /ləʊə/ can all be analysed in this way. No new symbols are required, however, as each can be seen as a combination of a diphthong +/ə/.

Often, in the history of English, a vowel has changed its quality. There are two chief possibilities. When a diphthong becomes a monophthong, the sound is said to be *monophthongized*; conversely, when a monophthong becomes a diphthong, the sound is *diphthongized*. An example of the former is the Southern US pronunciation of *my man*, which has become something more like *ma man* (i.e. *my* /maɪ/ has become /ma/). An example of the latter is the British mock-pronunciation of *yes* /jes/ as *yays* /jeis/. Indeed, an even more exaggerated form can sometimes be heard, /jeiəs/, in which case we might say that the vowel has been *triphthongized*.

TRANSCRIBING VOWELS

Several authors have devised sets of symbols for identifying English vowels. The system used in this book is the one introduced by British phonetician A. C. Gimson in *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (1st edn, 1962), which has been particularly influential in the field of teaching English as a foreign language.

• The Gimson system is given in the first column, after a selection of words which illustrate each sound. In several cases there is a wide range of spellings for the same vowel quality – a consequence of the mixed nature of English orthography (p. 274).

Two other vowel transcriptional systems are shown in the table.

• The system used by the British phonetician, Daniel Jones in his pioneering description of Received Pronunciation (p. 365). Gimson (a student of Jones) modified this system in an attempt to show vowel qualities more accurately. The Jones list does not include the use of /ɔə/, which in Jones's day was a common pronunciation in such words as *four*, and distinct from the vowel of *bought*.

• The system used by Victoria Fromkin & Robert Rodman (F&R) in *An Introduction to Language* (1st edn, 1974), a widely used teaching textbook in the USA. It is a simplified version of the influential system devised by John S. Kenyon & Thomas A. Knott in *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English* (1953), which aimed to provide a standard transcription for the vowels of the main dialects of American English.

• The final column in the table lists a few other symbols which are often seen representing certain vowels. Some are simply typographic variants; some represent a particular sound effect, such as the presence of *r* 'colouring' (p. 245); and /a/ is often used as a simpler alternative to /æ/.

Possible confusibles

The transcriptions use the same symbols in different ways, partly because of different views about the best way to analyse the vowel system, and partly because of the differences between British and American English.

• /a/ in the British systems does not appear as a separate phoneme. In F&R it is used in such words as *dog*, reflecting more directly the way this vowel is articulated further forward in the mouth. This is a major point of possible confusion for British-trained students casually reading an American transcription, for they risk interpreting /lag/ as *lag* instead of *log*. In addition, the same /a/ symbol is used by F&R in such words as *father, calm,* and *car,* again reflecting the typical sounds of these vowels in American English, whereas the British systems use /ɑː/ – an important difference between the two sound systems.

• /e/ in F&R refers to the vowel in such words as *say*, whereas the British systems show the diphthongal nature of this sound (p. 239) as /eɪ/ or /ei/. Thus, /met/ refers to *met* in Gimson, but to *mate* in F&R.

• /ʌ/ in the British systems refers only to the vowel in such words as *sun*. In F&R it is also used for the vowel in such words as *bird* (along with a following /r/ consonant).

• /o/ in F&R refers to the vowel in such words as *so*. British students used to a diphthongal transcription would therefore be likely to interpret /kot/ as *cot* rather than *coat*.

• F&R do not have separate symbols for the sounds in such words as *deer, care,* and *poor*. These words are analysed as combinations of vowel + /r/, and their different status shown in the table by the use of parentheses.

Describing vowels

All vowels have certain properties in common, which distinguish them from consonants (p. 242).

• From a phonetic point of view (p. 236), vowels are articulated with a relatively open configuration of the vocal tract: no part of the mouth is closed, and none of the vocal organs come so close together that we can hear the sound of the air passing between them (what phoneticians call *audible friction*). The most noticeable vowel quality is therefore [a], said with the mouth wide open. Consonants have a very different method of articulation.

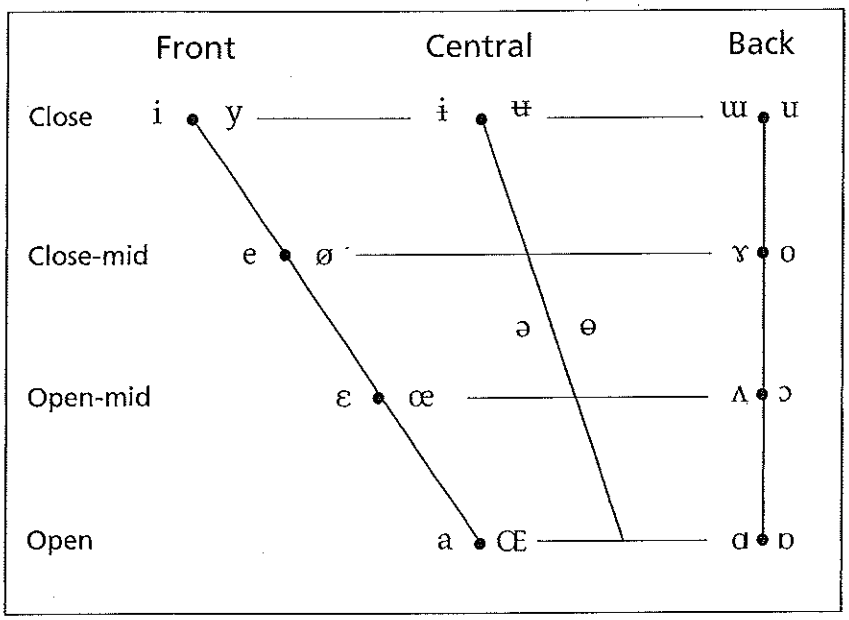
• From a phonological point of view (p. 236), vowels are units of the sound system which typically occupy the middle of a syllable (the nucleus, p. 246), as in *cat* /kat/ and *big* /bɪg/. Consonants, by contrast, are typically found at the edges of syllables, shown also by these examples. (It is reasoning of this kind which explains why letter Y can be described either as a consonant or as a vowel (p. 236). In such words as *yet*, it acts as a consonant, occupying the same position as other consonants (*met*, *set*, etc.). In such words as *my* and *tryst*, it acts as a vowel, occupying the same position as other vowels (*trust*, *me*, etc.).)

• Vowels typically involve the vibration of the vocal cords (*voicing*), and their distinctive resonances are made by varying the shape of the mouth, using the tongue and lips. In English, there are no vowels whose chief characteristic is the use of nasal resonance (*nasal vowels*) – unlike, say, French or Portuguese. English vowels are all *oral vowels*, and take on a nasal quality only when they are being influenced by an adjacent nasal consonant, as in *no*, *long*, and *man*.

The chief task in describing the articulation of vowels, accordingly, is to plot the movements of the tongue and lips. The most widely used method of doing this was devised by Daniel Jones, and is known as the *cardinal vowel* system.

THE CARDINAL VOWEL SYSTEM

The cardinal vowel (CV) diagram was devised to provide a set of reference points for the articulation and recognition of vowels. Its dimensions correspond to the 'vowel space' in the centre of the mouth where these sounds are articulated. The positions of the front, centre, and back of the tongue (p. 236) are represented by vertical lines.



• At the front of the mouth, [a] represents the lowest point that it is theoretically possible for the body of the tongue to reach, and [ɑ] represents the correspondingly lowest point at the back of the mouth. Vowels in the region of [a] or [ɑ] are called *open* or *low* vowels.

• [i] represents the highest point at the front that the body of the tongue can reach while still producing a vowel sound (anything higher, and the tongue would come so near to the roof of the mouth that a consonant sound would result). [u], similarly, represents the highest point at the back of the mouth. Vowels in the region of [i] and [u] are called *close* or *high* vowels.

• Two horizontal lines divide the space between [i] and [a] into equal areas. Vowels made in the region of the higher of these lines, represented by [e] and [o], are called *mid-close* or *half-close*. Vowels made in the region of the lower of these lines, represented by [ɛ] and [ɔ], are *mid-open* or *half-open*. The term *mid* is often used to describe the whole of the area between these two lines.

• The CV diagram also includes information about lip-rounding. In most vowel positions, it is possible to hear a difference in vowel quality depending on whether the lips are *rounded* or *unrounded* (*spread*), and some languages (though not English) exploit this dimension of contrast quite considerably. Thus, [i] is the high front unrounded vowel, heard in such words as *see*, while [y] is its rounded equivalent, heard often in French (*tu*), and sometimes in regional English (e.g. Scots). The rounded member of a vowel pair is always the symbol on the right in the diagram.

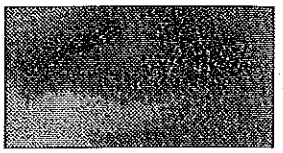
It is important not to confuse the phonetic symbols used to identify the 'cardinal' points in the CV diagram with the phonological symbols used in the actual description of English. Most of the time the symbols correspond quite well, but sometimes they do not. For example, in Received Pronunciation the /iː/ of *see* is very near the [i] point of the diagram (p. 240), and the /uː/ of *shoe* is very near [u]. But the /e/ of *set* is in fact articulated half way between the cardinal values of [e] and [ɛ]; and the /ʌ/ symbol, when it represents the vowels in such words as *does* and *cup*, is reflecting a sound that is much further forward in the mouth than the quality shown in the CV diagram.

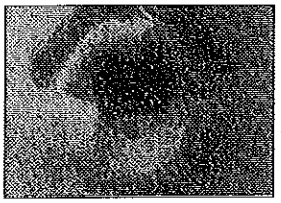
THE LIPS

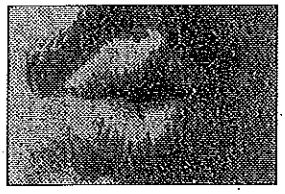
Lip position is an important factor in the description of vowels, and three main types are recognized.

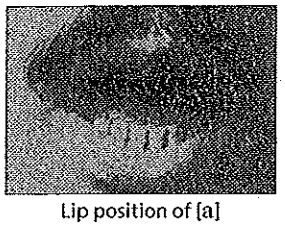
- *Rounded*, where the lips are pushed forwards into the shape of a circle.
- *Spread*, where the corners of the lips are moved away from each other, as in a smile.
- *Neutral*, where the lips are not noticeably rounded or spread.

The lip positions of a selection of cardinal vowels are shown below. These photographs were taken over 50 years ago: the mouth belongs to Daniel Jones.


Lip position of [i]


Lip position of [ɔ]


Lip position of [u]


Lip position of [a]

The vowel system

A long list of vowels, such as that given on p. 237, is not as informative as a classification which groups them into types, draws attention to the common properties of each type, and notes the features which distinguish one type from another. Becoming aware of the difference between a pure vowel, a diphthong, and a triphthong is a start (p. 239), but there is much more to be said about the way vowels work in English. (The following examples are all from Received Pronunciation (RP, p. 365); regional variants are shown on pp. 240–1.)

A particularly important factor is length (symbolized by [ː]). When we listen to the 12 pure vowels, it is evident that five of them are relatively long in duration, and seven are relatively short. Moreover, in several cases length seems to relate pairs of vowels which are articulated in roughly the same part of the mouth. In the following examples, pairs of words are followed by the same consonant. If each word is given the same amount of emphasis, there is no doubt that the vowel in /siːt/ *seat* is much longer than that in /sɪt/ *sit;* and similar effects can be heard in /fuːd/ *food* vs /gʊd/ *good*, /dɔːn/, *dawn* vs /dɒn/ *don*, and /lɑː(r)d/ *lard*/vs læd/ *lad*. There is also a length difference between /ɜː/ and /ə/, though as the former occurs only in stressed syllables in RP (*bird, servant*), and the latter only in unstressed syllables (*above, butter*), this is not a contrast which enables a difference of meaning to be expressed.

The contrast between long and short vowels is not just one of length (*quantity*); a different place of articulation (*quality*) is involved. This is why Gimson, for example, in his transcription gives different symbols to these pairs of vowels (/iː/ vs /ɪ/, etc.) – drawing attention to the quality differences between them (p. 237). If length were the only factor, a transcription of /iː/ vs /i/ would suffice.

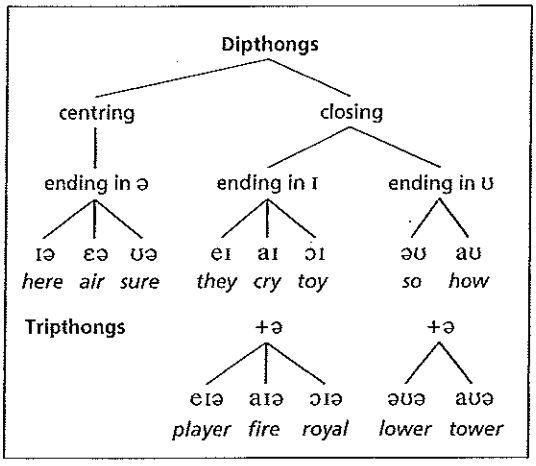
TYPES OF DIPHTHONG

From the point of view of length, the diphthongs (p. 237) are like long vowels; but the first part of a diphthong in English is much longer and louder than the second. When we listen to the diphthong in /haʊ/ *how*, for example, most of the sound is taken up with the /aʊ/ part, the glide to /ʊ/ being quite short and rapid.

The eight diphthongs are usually grouped into three types, depending on the tongue movement involved.

- The first group ends with a glide towards the [ə] vowel in the centre of the mouth, and are called *centring* diphthongs. They are heard in the words *here* /ɪə/, *air*/eə/, and *sure* /ʊə/. The remainder end with a glide towards a higher position in the mouth, and are called *closing* diphthongs.
- One type of closing diphthong moves in the direction of an [i] quality at the front of the vowel area. These sounds are heard in the words *they* /eɪ/, *cry* /aɪ/, and *toy* /ɔɪ/.
- The other type of closing diphthong moves in the direction of an [u] quality at the back of the vowel area (and thus adds some lip rounding). These sounds are heard in the words *so* /əʊ/ and *how* /aʊ/.

The possibilities are shown in the diagram below. This also shows the two types of triphthong, formed by adding a central glide to the closing diphthongs.



VOWEL FREQUENCY

A study of the frequency of vowels in a sample of conversational RP gave the following results:

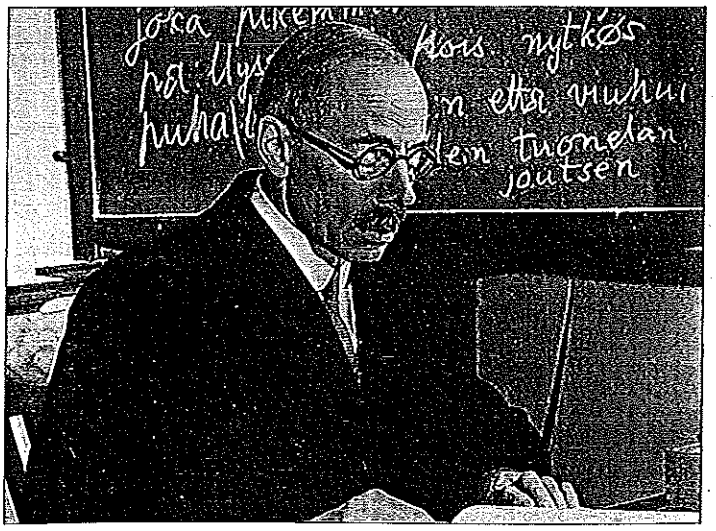
	%
/ə/	10.74
/ɪ/	8.33
/e/	2.97
/aɪ/	1.83
/ʌ/	1.75
/eɪ/	1.71
/iː/	1.65
/əʊ/	1.51
/æ/	1.45
/ɒ/	1.37
/ɔː/	1.24
/uː/	1.13
/ʊ/	0.86
/ɑː/	0.79
/aʊ/	0.61
/ɜː/	0.52
/ɛə/	0.34
/ɪə/	0.21
/ɔɪ/	0.14
/ʊə/	0.06

The total for all vowels was 39.21 per cent. Consonant figures are given on p. 242. (After D. B. Fry, 1947.)

DANIEL JONES (1881–1967)

'DJ', as he was known within the profession, originally studied mathematics at Cambridge, and trained as a lawyer, but never practised. He first became interested in language when he took a course in conversational French at the age of 17, and found he had 'some aptitude for getting the pronunciation of French right'. He encountered phonetics after a visit to a language institute in Germany in 1900, studied the subject under Paul Passy in Paris, and gave his first course in phonetics at University College London, in 1907. He built up the Department of Phonetics there, becoming professor in 1921.

Although he researched the phonetics of many languages, his name was chiefly associated with two books, both on English: *An English Pronouncing Dictionary* (1917) and *An Outline of English Phonetics* (1918), both of which (in revised editions) are still used today. The cardinal vowels concept was also developed at that time. By the 1920s, DJ was being recognized as the British authority on phonetics. He served on the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English from its foundation (1926), and from 1909 was a strong supporter of the Simplified Spelling Society (becoming its president in 1946). He also served as secretary of the International Phonetics Association from 1927 to 1949, when he retired from university teaching, and was president of the Association from 1950 until his death.



CONSONANTS

The difference between the number of letters and sounds found in English, so dramatic in the case of vowels (p. 237), is far less significant in the case of consonants. There are 21 consonant letters in the written alphabet (B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, Q, R, S, T, V, W, X, Y, Z), and there are 24 consonant sounds in most English accents. The difficulty of transcribing speech is therefore less serious, as most of the written symbols can be assigned individual phonetic values, and the resulting transcription thus looks much more immediately readable than that of vowels. However, because of the erratic history of English spelling, there is no neat one-to-one correlation between letters and sounds. In several cases, one consonant sound is spelled by more than one letter (e.g. *th* in *this*) or one consonant letter symbolizes more than one sound (e.g. *x* in *fox* /fɒks/). There are thus two answers to the question, 'How many consonants are there at the beginning or end of the word *thick*?': 'Two' (in writing); 'One' (in speech, /θɪk/).

Describing consonants

All consonants have certain properties in common, which identify them in contrast to vowels (p. 238).

- From a phonetic point of view (p. 236), they are articulated in one of two ways: either there is a closing movement of one of the vocal organs, forming such a narrow constriction that it is possible to hear the sound of the air passing through; or the closing movement is complete, giving a total blockage. The closing movement may involve the lips, the tongue, or the throat, but in each case the overall effect is very different from the relatively open and unimpeded articulation found in vowels.
- From a phonological point of view (p. 236), they are units of the sound system which typically occupy the edges of a syllable (the margins, p. 246), as in *dogs* /dɒgs/ and *glad* /glæd/. They may also appear in sequences (*clusters*), as these examples show. In fact, up to three consonants may be used together at the beginning of a spoken word in English (as in *string*), and up to four consonants at the end, though not always very comfortably (as in *twelfths* /twelfθs/ and *glimpsed* /glimpst/).
- Some consonants involve the vibration of the vocal cords: these are the *voiced* consonants, such as /b/ and /m/. Others have no vocal cord vibration: these are the *voiceless* consonants, such as /p/ and /s/. The distinction is not absolute: depending on where in a word a consonant appears, there may be degrees of voicing. At the end of a word, for example, a voiced consonant typically loses a great deal of its vibration (it is *devoiced*). The /z/ sound at the beginning of *zoo* /zuː/ is much more vibrant than the one at the end of *ooze* /uːz/ (to voice this fully would produce an unnatural buzzing effect at the end of the word).
- An alternative way of capturing the difference between such consonant pairs as /p/ and /b/ is to compare the force with which they are articulated. Voiceless consonants are produced with much greater force than their voiced counterparts, and the terms *fortis* ('strong') and *lenis* ('weak') have come to be used to identify the two types. Thus, /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /θ/, /s/, /ʃ/, and /ʧ/ are all fortis consonants; /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /ð/, /z/, /ʒ/, and /ʤ/ are all lenis.
- Unlike vowels, some consonants are primarily identified through their use of the nasal cavity. Normally, in English, when we speak we keep the soft palate (p. 236) raised, so that it presses against the back of the throat and allows no air out through the nose. With the three nasal consonants, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/, however, the soft palate remains lowered (as it is when we breathe), and the result is a series of sounds with a distinctive nasal resonance.

Consonant or vowel

The distinction between consonant and vowel is fundamental, but some sounds sit uneasily between the two, being articulated in the same way as vowels, but functioning in the language in the same way as consonants. /j/ as in *yes* and /w/ as in *we* are like this. /j/ is formed like a very short [i] vowel (as can be heard if we draw out the *y* of *yes*), but it occurs at the beginning of the word, as do other consonants (*yes, mess, best*). Similarly, /w/ is formed like a short [u] vowel, but acts as a consonant (*we, me, see*). These two consonants are therefore sometimes described as *semi-vowels.*

Certain other consonants are also somewhat vowel-like, in that they can be sounded continuously without any audible friction: the three nasals, /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/, /l/ as in *lie*, and /r/ as in *red.* These can all be classed together as (frictionless) continuants or sonorants, within which the four oral items (/l/, /r/, /w/, /j/) are often recognized as forming a distinct group.

CONSONANT FREQUENCY

A study of the frequency of consonants in a sample of conversational RP gave the following results:

	%		%
/n/	7.58	/b/	1.97
/t/	6.42	/f/	1.79
/d/	5.14	/p/	1.78
/s/	4.81	/h/	1.46
/l/	3.66	/ŋ/	1.15
/ð/	3.56	/g/	1.05
/r/	3.51	/ʃ/	0.96
/m/	3.22	/j/	0.88
/k/	3.09	/ʤ/	0.60
/w/	2.81	/ʧ/	0.41
/z/	2.46	/θ/	0.37
/v/	2.00	/ʒ/	0.10

The total for all consonants was 60.78 per cent. Vowel figures are given on p. 239. (After D. B. Fry, 1947, with latercorrections incorporated.)

It should be noted that this particular study did not take word frequency into account in the sample analysed. All sounds in the sample were counted, regardless of how many times a particular word was used there. This is why /ð/, in particular, has such a high place in the table: it is largely due to the high frequency of this sound in the definite article (*the*) and demonstratives (*this, that*, etc.).

TRANSCRIBING CONSONANTS

A British and an American transcription system for consonants:
A. C. Gimson (1962) and V. Fromkin & R. Rodman (1974) (details on p. 237).

The consonants in	*Gimson*	*F&R*	*The consonants in*	*Gimson*	*F&R*
pie, up	p	p	so, us	s	s
by, ebb	b	b	zoo, ooze	z	z
tie, at	t	t	shoe, ash	ʃ	š
die, odd	d	d	genre, rouge	ʒ	ž
coo, ache	k	k	he	h	h
go, egg	g	g	me, am	m	m
chew, each	ʧ	č, tš	no, in	n	n
jaw, edge	ʤ	ǰ, dž	hang	ŋ	ŋ
fee, off	f	f	lie, eel	l	l
view, of	v	v	row, ear (not RP)	r	r
thigh, oath	θ	θ	way	w	w
they, booth	ð	ð	you	j	y

TYPES OF CONSONANT

All English consonants are made with an air-stream from the lungs moving outwards (unlike certain consonants in some other languages, which use other types of air-stream). To differentiate the 24 consonants from each other, phoneticians use a classification based on the place and manner of articulation, in addition to the criteria of whether they are voiced or voiceless and oral or nasal, as described on the facing page. (For the names and locations of the vocal organs, see the diagram on p. 236. For a full description of each individual consonant, see pp. 244–5.)

Place of articulation

We need to know *where* in the vocal tract the sound is made, and which vocal organs are involved. The important positions for English are the following:

- *Bilabial*: using both lips, as in /p/, /b/, /m/, /w/.
- *Labio-dental*: using the lower lip and the upper teeth, as in /f/, /v/.
- *Dental*: using the tongue tip between the teeth or close to the upper teeth, as in /θ/ and /ð/.
- *Alveolar*: using the blade of the tongue close to the alveolar ridge, as in /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /n/, /l/, and the first elements of /tʃ/ and /dʒ/.
- *Post-alveolar*: using the tongue tip close to just behind the alveolar ridge, as in /r/ (for some accents).
- *Retroflex*: using the tongue tip curled back to well behind the alveolar ridge, as in /r/ (for some accents).
- *Palato-alveolar*: using the blade (and sometimes the tip) of the tongue close to the alveolar ridge, with a simultaneous raising of the front of the tongue towards the roof of the mouth, as in /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, and the second elements in /tʃ/ and /dʒ/.
- *Palatal*: raising the front of the tongue close to the hard palate, as in /j/.
- *Velar*: raising the back of the tongue against the soft palate, as in /k/, /g/, and /ŋ/.
- *Glottal*: using the space between the vocal cords to make audible friction, as in /h/, or a closure, as in the glottal stop (in some accents).

Manner of articulation

We need to know *how* the sound is made, at the various locations in the vocal tract. Four phonetic possibilities are recognized.

Total closure

- *Plosive*: a complete closure is made at some point in the vocal tract, with the soft palate raised; air pressure builds up behind the closure, which is then released explosively, as in /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, the first elements of /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, and the glottal stop.
- *Nasal*: a complete closure is made at some point in the mouth, with the soft palate lowered, so that air escapes through the nose, as in /m/, /n/, /ŋ/.
- *Affricate*: a complete closure is made at some point in the mouth, with the soft palate raised; air pressure builds up behind the closure, which is then released relatively slowly (compared with the suddenness of a plosive release), as in /tʃ/ and /dʒ/.

Intermittent closure

- *Roll* or *Trill*: the tongue tip taps rapidly against the teeth ridge, as in the 'trilled /r/' heard in some regional accents; a trill in which the back of the tongue taps against the uvula is also sometimes heard regionally and in some idiosyncratic 'weak *r*' pronunciations.
- *Flap*: a single tap is made by the tongue tip against the alveolar ridge, as in some pronunciations of /r/ and /d/.

Partial closure

- *Lateral*: a partial closure is made by the blade of the tongue against the alveolar ridge, in such a way that the air stream is able to flow around the sides of the tongue, as in /l/.

Narrowing

- *Fricative*: Two vocal organs come so close together that the movement of air between them can be heard, as in /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, and the second element in /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. The consonants /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/ have a sharper sound than the others, because they are made with a narrower groove in the tongue, and are often grouped together as *sibilants*.

CONSONANT COMBINATIONS

The 24 consonants found in RP and many other accents may be used singly or in combination in syllables and words – but only a fraction of the millions of possible combinations actually occur. The table shows the possibilities for three-consonant combinations at the beginning of a word, using data derived from the *English Pronouncing Dictionary*. These are:

s + p + l, r, j
s + t + r, j
s + k + l, r, j, w

In other words, the sequence is /s/ + a fortis plosive + one of the continuants (see above). Outside of this system, there is, in addition, a single example of /sm̩j-/ – the name of a bird, the *smew*. However, of the 12 possible CCC sequences, three (/spw-, stl-, stw-/) do not occur, and /CCj/ and /skl-/ are highly restricted, appearing only with certain vowels.

It is the consonant–vowel combinations which make the table particularly interesting. Is there really no word in the language (using an RP accent) beginning with three consonants and followed by /ɔɪ/? No /splɔɪ-/? /sprɔɪ-/? /strɔɪ-/? Or again, is there no /splaʊ-/? No /skwɑː/? It is fairly easy to check out the possibilities intuitively fo short words, though even here it is surprising how many technical or rare words can be found with unusual initial clusters, such as *squamous* and *sclerosis*. Proper names also extend the range somewhat; for example, there seems to be nothing for /straʊ/ except *Stroud* (and thus *strouding*) and *Strauss*. The uncertain status of new loan words (p. 126) and the existence of mixed accents with variant pronunciations (§21) also make it difficult to be absolutely definite that a particular consonant combination does not exist.

(After A. C. Gimson, 1970, 2nd edn of Gimson 1962.)

	ɪ	e	æ	ʌ	ɒ	ʊ	ə	iː	ɑː	ɔː	uː	ɜː	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ	əʊ	aʊ	ɪə	eə	ʊə
spl	+	+	+	+	+		+	+				+	+	+						
spr	+	+	+	+	+			+		+	+		+	+			+			
spj											+									+
str	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+		+	+		+	+			
stj											+									+
skl		+	+				+											+		
skr	+		+	+	+			+		+	+		+	+		+	+			
skj											+									+
skw	+	+			+			+		+		+	+	+				+	+	
smj											+									

It is an interesting exercise to try to find examples of all the words marked as possible in the table.
A crib is provided on p. 250.

GAPS? SCHMAPS!

Traditionally, there is no /ʃn-/ initial word cluster in English, but the situation has changed in recent years with the arrival of a number of loan words from German and American Yiddish, and several other /ʃC-/ combinations are now often heard.

schnapps	schlemiel
schnitzel	schmuck
schnorkel	schmaltz
schnauzer	schmo
schnozzle	schlock

A Schnauzer

SYLLABLES

Vowels and consonants typically do not act alone; there are very few words or word-like noises which consist of only one sound (they include *I, eye, oh, m*). The vast majority of English words contain a combination of vowels (V) and consonants (C), such as CV (*go*), VC (*up*), CVC (*cat*), CCVCC (*stops*), and CCCV (*screw*, p. 243). The combined units are called *syllables*. In the above examples the words each contain only one such unit, and are thus often called *monosyllables*, or *monosyllabic words*. This notion contrasts with words that contain more than one syllable (*polysyllabic words*) – most of the words in the language, in fact. The present sentence contains instances of a two-syllable (disyllabic) word, *despite* /dɪspaɪt/ (CVCCVC), and a three-syllable (trisyllabic) word, *instances* /ɪnstənsɪz/ (VCCCVCCVC), and the previous sentence has a five-syllable word, *polysyllabic* /pɒlɪsɪlabɪk/, which despite its length has a simple syllabic structure (CVCVCVCVCVC).

People know about syllables. 'Not another syllable!' we may say to someone who is protesting too much. And if we want to emphasize a point, or speak plainly, we may well try to 'put it in words of one syllable'. People are also able to count the number of syllables in a word, by beating out its rhythm. The rule is basically simple: each syllable contains one vowel or vowel-like nucleus. The word *despite* has two such nuclei, so there are two syllables. The word *polysyllabic* has five nuclei, so there are five syllables. However, there are several types of word (notably, those which contain diphthongs or triphthongs, p. 239) where it can be difficult deciding just how many syllables there are. Is *meteoric* four syllables (*me–te–o–ric*) or three (*me–teo–ric*)? Is *several* three syllables or two (*se–ve–ral* or *sev–ral*)? Is *being* two syllables (*be–ing*) or one? Regional accent, speed of speech, level of formality, and context of use can all influence these decisions. For example, the number of syllables we assign to such words can depend on whether they are being spoken spontaneously or read aloud, and on whether they are being said with emphasis, emotion, or equanimity.

A speech bubble from *Comic Cuts*, popular among young British children in the 1940s. The writers have introduced a system of syllable division, presumably believing that this will help children to read.

SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

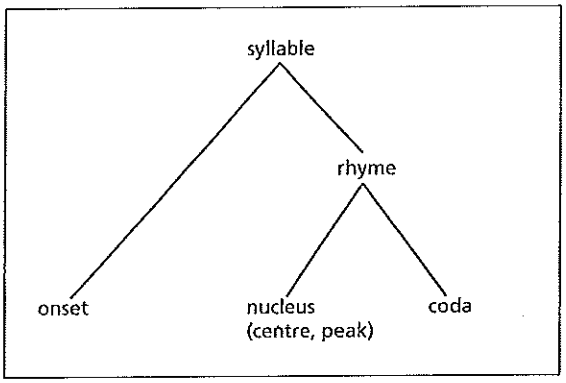
The structure of English spoken syllables can be summarized as follows:

- Minimally, a syllable consists of a vowel, or a vowel-like sound (see below), which acts as the *nucleus, centre*, or *peak* of the syllable: *I, or, ooh*. Very rarely, a syllable can consist of a consonant: *m, shh*.
- Many syllables have one or more consonants preceding the nucleus. These make up the syllable *onset*: *me, so, play*. Traditionally, they are known as 'open syllables'.
- Many syllables have one or more consonants following the nucleus. These make up the syllable *coda*: *am, ants, eel*. They are traditionally known as 'closed syllables'.
- Many syllables have both an onset and a coda: *cat, jump*.
- The combination of nucleus and coda has a special significance, making up the *rhyming* property of a syllable: *cat, sat; jump, clump*.

In analysing syllable structure in this way, it is important to look for the pronunciation behind a word's spelling. Although *ooze* ends in a written vowel, it ends in a spoken consonant, and its structure is VC. Similarly, *all* is VC (not VCC), *jumped* is CVCCC (not CVCCVC), and *fox* is CVCC (not CVC).

Syllabic consonants

There is one exception to the rule that a syllable must have a vowel as its nucleus. This occurs when certain vowel-like consonants – /l/, /r/, or a nasal – act as the centre of the syllable, as in *bottle* /bɒtl̩/, *bottom* /bɒtm̩/, *button* /bʌtn̩/, and (in those accents which pronounce /r/, p. 245) *perhaps* /pr̩haps/. In each case, the syllabic consonant is shown by a small vertical mark beneath the symbol. In a very slow articulation of these words, the vowels would re-appear, and the consonants would revert to their normal coda value (such as /bɒtəl/); but these pronunciations are highly artificial, and would never be heard in usual conversational speech. (However, there are a few regional accents – in some parts of Wales, for example – where the avoidance of syllabic consonants is normal.)



SYLLABLE BOUND·A·RIES / BOUN·DA·RIES

It is one thing to be able to count the number of syllables in a word. It is quite another to decide where the boundaries between the syllables should go. English is full of cases where alternative analyses are possible.

- There are two syllables in *extra* /ekstrə/, but where should the boundary between them fall? It is unlikely that people would opt for a division between /e/ and /kstrə/, because there are no syllables in English which begin with the consonant sequence /kstrə/. Similarly, a division between /ekstr/ and /ə/ would feel unnatural. But /ek/ +/strə/, /eks/ + /trə/, and /ekst/ + /rə/ are all possible. People usually prefer either of the first two options here, but there is no obvious way of deciding between them.
- There are two syllables in *standing*, but is the division to be made between *stan* and *ding* or *stand* and *ing*? If we follow our phonetic instinct, and go for two evenly balanced CVC syllables, we will prefer the former analysis. If we follow our grammatical instinct, and divide between the base form and the inflection (p. 204), we will prefer the latter.
- There are three syllables in *boundary*, but again we have the choice of a division on phonetic grounds (after *n*) or on grammatical grounds (after *d*), preserving a semantic link with *bound*.

Hyphenation points

Some dictionaries add a mark to recommend where a printed word may be hyphenated if it appears at the end of a line. However, these points do not necessarily correspond to syllabic boundaries in speech. The following examples come from *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, where the editor is reflecting general publishing practice.

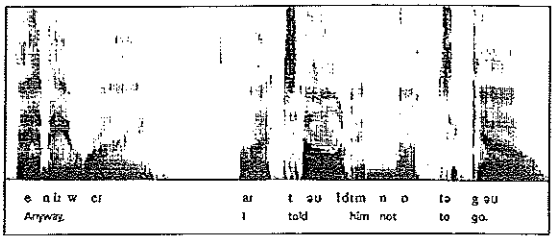
aber·deen·shire
ab·er·rance
abey·ance
ab·er·do·ni·an
abet·tor

There is no division after the *a* or *ab* of *abettor*, for example, because publishers would be unlikely to insert a line-break at those points in the word.

CONNECTED SPEECH

Vowel and consonant segments combine into syllables; syllables combine into words; and words combine into phrases and sentences. But the process of producing connected speech affects the pronunciation of several of these segments in a number of interesting ways. Certain segments have a tendency to run together; extra segments may be added to ensure smoothness of speech; some segments adopt a less clearly defined phonetic form; and some completely disappear. Each of these possibilities has an associated technical label from the domain of phonetics. (Pronunciations shown are those of Received Pronunciation, or RP, p. 365.)

ACOUSTIC EVIDENCE



Several features of connected speech can be seen in this acoustic display of a sentence, using a machine known as a speech spectrograph. Time is displayed horizontally: the utterance lasts for just over two seconds. The acoustic frequency of the speech sounds is displayed vertically, and their intensity is shown by the relative darkness of the marks. The vowels and vowel-like sounds are darkest, and the different vowel qualities can be clearly seen in the changing pattern of black bands (*formants*), which represent varying concentrations of acoustic energy in the vocal tract.

- There is a perceptible pause after *anyway*, but otherwise the words have no silences between them. This is *connected* speech.
- There is elision of /h/ in *him*, and a very rapid running together of sounds at that point. It is difficult to see any vowel in *him*.
- The two /t/ sounds of *not* and *to* have fused into one.
- The vowel of *to* is very short and weak.

ASSIMILATION

Adjacent sounds often influence each other so that they become more alike, or *assimilate*. These effects are more common in rapid speech, but some degree of assimilation will be found in all spoken styles.

- In *anticipatory* (or *regressive*) assimilation, a sound is influenced by the sound which follows it. In the phrase *ten balloons*, /ten/ is likely to be pronounced /tem/, anticipating the following bilabial consonant. In the greeting *good night*, /gʊd/ is usually pronounced /gʊn/, as sometimes shown in writing: *g'night*.
- In *progressive* assimilation, a sound is influenced by the sound which precedes it. The second word in *bridge score* would typically emerge (in RP) as /ʃkɔː/, because of the influence of the palatal element in the preceding affricate (p. 245). Similarly, the second word in *Church Street* would be found as /ʃtriːt/.
- A third possibility is *coalescence* – a reciprocal influence, where two sounds fuse into a single new segment. In *won't she*, the final /t/ and initial /ʃ/ mutually assimilate to produce /ʧ/, resulting in the fused unit, /wəʊnʧiː/.

STRONG AND WEAK FORMS

Nearly 50 words in English can be pronounced in two distinct ways, depending on the degree of force with which they are uttered. They are all words which perform a grammatical function – determiners, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and particles. *Strong* (or *full*) forms are used when the word is said in isolation or is being emphasized. *Weak* forms are normal in connected speech: peripheral vowels (those which are articulated towards the edge of the vowel area in the mouth, p. 238) are replaced by those of a more central quality, and some consonants may be elided. Weak forms are sometimes represented in writing, though not usually very accurately (*bacon 'n eggs, cup o' coffee*).

In the following examples, the strong forms are given on the left and the weak forms on the right.

and	ænd	ən, n
that	ðæt	ðət
his	hɪz	ɪz
from	frɒm	frəm
of	ɒv	əv, v, ə
to	tuː	tʊ, tə
some	sʌm	səm, sm
there	ðɛə	ðə
have	hæv	əv, v, ə
were	wɜː	wə
do	duː	də, dʊ
must	mʌst	məs, məst

In many cases, we need to take note of context. For example, *there* as an adverb of place (*Look over there*) is always strong; but at the beginning of an existential sentence (p. 231) it is always weak (*There's no place like home*). Also, different forms may appear before consonants and before vowels: compare *I must go* (/məs/) and *I must eat* (/məst/), or *for tea* (/fə/) and *for Ann* (/fər/).

ELISION

As speech speeds up, sounds are likely to be left out, or *elided*. This is especially so when clusters of consonants occur. Indeed, some sequences are impossible to articulate naturally without elision. Try *Henry the Sixth's three advisers*. Tongue twisters capitalize on these difficulties.

- Vowels in weak syllables are often elided in informal speech. It is unusual to hear the first vowel in such words as *police, tomato*, and *correct*, which routinely appear as *p'lice*, etc. A tip for novice public speakers is to give extra weight to the vowels of their unstressed syllables.
- Consonants in clusters are commonly simplified. We are unlikely to hear all three consonants articulated at the end of the first word in *Acts of Parliament*: /aks/ is normal. Similarly, we will find *next day* /neks deɪ/, *government* /gʌvəmənt/, and *mashed potatoes* /maʃ pəteɪtəʊz/.
- Whole syllables may be elided, especially when there is a repeated consonant, as in British English pronunciations of *library* and *particularly*: /laɪbriːi/, /pətɪkjʊliː/.
- Some words are especially prone to elision, such as *of* before consonants (*cup o' tea, lots o' people*). Other examples include *gonna* (=*going to*), *wanna* (=*want to*), and the weak forms of auxiliary verbs (p. 212).

LIAISON

A sound may be introduced between words or syllables to help them run together more smoothly. The chief example of this in English is the pronunciation of word-final /ɹ/ in RP (and other non-rhotic accents, p. 245). RP speakers pronounce the /ɹ/ in such words as *clear* and *mother* only when there is a following vowel: we find /klɪə/ in *clear question* but /klɪər/ in *clear answer*. This is usually called *linking r*.

Similarly, RP speakers regularly link adjacent vowels with an /ɹ/ even when there is no *r* in the spelling, as in *India(r) and Pakistan* or *media(r) interest*. This *intrusive r* can attract ferocious criticism from conservative RP speakers, when they notice it, on the grounds that there is nothing in the spelling to justify its use (p. 366). It is especially disliked after an open back vowel, as in *law(r) and order, flaw(r) in the argument*, or *draw(r)ing*. (It is hardly ever noticed after a schwa vowel, as in the other examples above, and even the most tub-thumping critic will be heard using an intrusive *r* in such cases.) The BBC is one of several institutions which have become so sensitive about public reaction to the usage that it warns its presenters of the risks of liaising with *Laura Norder*.

Got one

In Robert Burchfield's *The Spoken Word: A BBC Guide* (1981), there is a clear recommendation about *r* liaison:

> In the formal presentation of the news or of other scripted speech:
>
> Avoid the intrusive *r*.

Some presenters evidently took this advice very seriously, as is seen in this extract from a radio script, where the reader has spotted a case in advance, and has marked his copy of the script so that he does not forget about it.

PRESENTER: One of the questions we'll be dealing with in today's programme is the future of martial law in Poland. The issue facing the Poles is complex, and to help us debate it we have in the studio two people who have

PRONUNCIATION IN PRACTICE

The study of the sound system of English is in principle no more difficult than the study of its writing system, but two factors complicate the task. Most people are unfamiliar with the phonetic terminology required to describe vocal effects; and even after this terminology is understood it is not always easy to relate these descriptions to recognizable sound qualities. Matters are not helped by the fact that we have little conscious recollection of how we learned to talk (unlike the tasks of reading and writing, p. 236), so that the process of speaking and listening seems totally natural and unproblematic. We tend to take pronunciation completely for granted, and notice it only when it becomes distinctive in some way, or when something goes wrong.

One way of sharpening our phonetic sense is to pay particular attention to the special cases where features of pronunciation are drawn to our attention. There are several areas where this is likely to happen. We may notice a child with immature articulation, an adult with a speech handicap, a foreign learner with a marked accent, or a native speaker with a pronunciation idiosyncrasy. A great deal of spoken humour relies on our ability to hear or manipulate sound effects, both verbal and non-verbal (p. 248). We may also find ourselves able to identify specific changes which are taking place in the pronunciation of words, and we will regularly hear letters read out on the radio from people who have made it their responsibility to complain about them. We may also see distinctive pronunciations reflected in the written language, especially when an author has tried to convey the regional or idiosyncratic speech of a character. The examples on this and the facing page illustrate a range of contexts which focus on pronunciation in this way.

CHANGING HABITS

It is curious how fashion changes pronunciation. In my youth everybody said 'Lonnon' not 'London'.... The now fashionable pronunciation of several words is to me at least very offensive: ***contemplate*** – is bad enough; but ***balcony*** makes me sick.
(Samuel Rogers, 1763–1855.)

The earlier pronunciation had the stress on the second syllable in each case.

For other illustrations of pronunciation in practice, see pp. 86, 91, 406, and 414.

TONGUE-SLIPPING

Analysing slips of the tongue can sharpen our sense of syllable structure (p. 246) and sound categories. The sounds which 'slip' are usually from the same part of the syllable: an onset consonant swops with another onset consonant in *mell wade* (for *well made*); coda consonants are involved in *wish a brush* (for *with*); nuclei are affected in *fool the pill* (for *fill the pool*). Several other such effects can be seen in this children's poem by Rod Hull (1989). They are often referred to as *Spoonerisms*, after William Archibald Spooner (1844–1930), Warden of New College, Oxford, who had many such tongue slips attributed to him (such as *you have hissed all my mystery lessons*).

Ronald/Donald

Ronald Derds (or was it Donald Rerds?)
Was a boy who always wixed up his merds.
If anyone asked him; 'What's the time?'
He'd look at his watch and say, 'Norter past quine.'

He'd spoken like that ever since he was two.
His parents at first didn't know what to do.
In order to understand what he'd said,
His father would get him to stand on his head.

But this didn't work, something had to be done,
So Pa and Ma Derds learnt to speak like their son.

'Mood gorning,' he'd cry, as he chat in his sair.
'Gorning,' they'd answer, without hurning a tair.
And Ron's Mum would say, 'Get a nice brofe of led,'
For Ron to return with a loaf of fresh bread.

Then one special day, young Ronald's voice broke.
He found it affected the way that he spoke.
'Good morning,' he said as he sat in his chair.
'Gorning,' said the others and started to stare.

From that moment on, things just got worse.
The harder they tried, they just couldn't converse.

Ron said to his parents, after a week,
'It's driving me mad, the way that you speak.
I can't understand a word that you say.
You leave me no option, I'm leaving to-day.'

So Ron joined the Navy and sailed to the Barents,
To get as far away as he could from his parents.
And although this story all seems rather sad,
Ron occasionally visits his Dum and his Mad.

ORDERING WORDS

The prosody of the drill sergeant is ingeniously captured in this poem for children by Ray Mather (1989).

Attention all
you words,
GET INTO LINE!
I've had enough of you
Doing what you w
ill,
STAND STILL!
There are going to be a few changes
Around here.
From now on
You will do
What I want.
THAT WORD!
You heard,
Stay put.
Youcomeouttoofast
Or per ulate
amb
GET IT STRAIGHT!
You are here to serve me.
You are not at ease
To do as you please.
Whenever I attempt to be serious
You make a weak joke.
Always you have to poke
fun.

AS YOU WERE!
Don't stir.
If ever I try to express
My feelings for someone
You refuse to come out
Or come out all wrong
So sense make none they can of it,
Yet you're so good once they've gone!
Well,
I'm in charge now
And you will say what I tell you to say.
No more cursing
Or sarcasm,
Just state my thoughts clearly
Speak what's on my mind.
Got it?
Right,
F
A
L
L OUT.

PRONUNCIATION IN PRINT

The novels of Charles Dickens (p. 89) provide the best literary collection of data for anyone wishing to examine pronunciation idiosyncrasy. In *Pickwick Papers* (1836–7, Ch. 16), Mr Pickwick describes the speech of Sam Weller as 'somewhat homely and occasionally incomprehensible'. The homeliness can be illustrated from his use of *Wellerisms*, as they have been called – everyday phrases applied to imaginary situations. The incomprehensibility is largely a result of his idiosyncratic use of bilabial and labio-dental consonants.

He wants you particklar; and no one else'll do, as the Devil's private secretary said ven he fetched avay Doctor Faustus. (Ch. 15)

Werry sorry to 'casion any personal inconwenience, ma'am, as the housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire. (Ch. 26)

Weller also has an interesting prosodic characteristic (which several other Dickensian characters share) of delaying a syllable in a polysyllabic word: *col-lecting, hex-traordinary* (both Ch. 13). The hyphen probably represents a lengthened consonant or vowel, but could also be marking a brief pause.

18 · THE WRITING SYSTEM

Through the normal educational process, the chief features of the English writing system become familiar and readily identifiable in a way that the elements of the sound system (§17) are never likely to be. Many children, before they are 3, have been given some informal tuition in letter shapes and sounds, often in the form of a colourful alphabet book (p. 407) bought as a festival or birthday present; and in societies where levels of literacy are high, almost all will have had some systematic teaching – whether from parents, through the media, or in school – by the time they are 5.

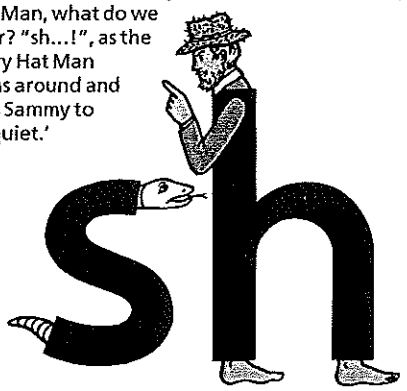
Letters attract most of the attention in these early years. This is as it should be, for letters are the main units available for conveying meaning when writing in English. But there is far more to the writing system than learning to recognize individual letter shapes – both 'big' and 'small' – and their associated sounds: punctuation and features of graphic design are important elements of the meaning and identity of a written text; handwriting and typography provide subtle but pervasive dimensions of interpretation; and the rules governing letter combinations ('spelling') promote a standard of intelligible and acceptable communication (p. 272) – though at the expense of presenting young children with a long-term and unprecedented exercise in conscious memorization.

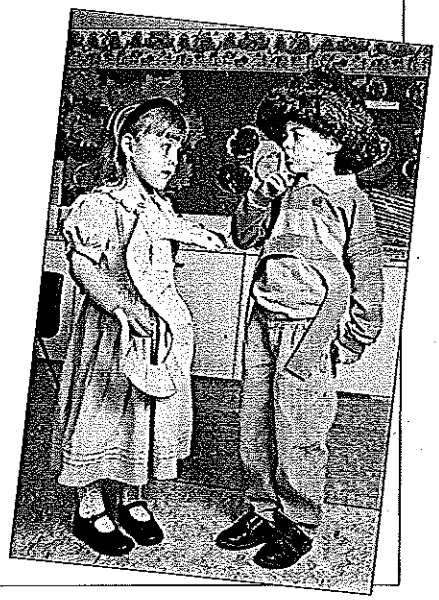
LETTERLAND

Two of the characters from Letterland, an alphabetically populated world devised by British teacher Lyn Wendon to help children learn sound–letter relationships. In Letterland, letter shapes appear as pictographic body shapes, and take on life as people and animals. Through story-telling, the characters talk about the sounds they make, and why their sounds vary in different contexts. Teachers who have used the system report that the children themselves also begin to talk about the sound–letter correspondences, and thus make progress in their metalinguistic skills – an important step in early first language acquisition (p. 426).

A Letterland encounter

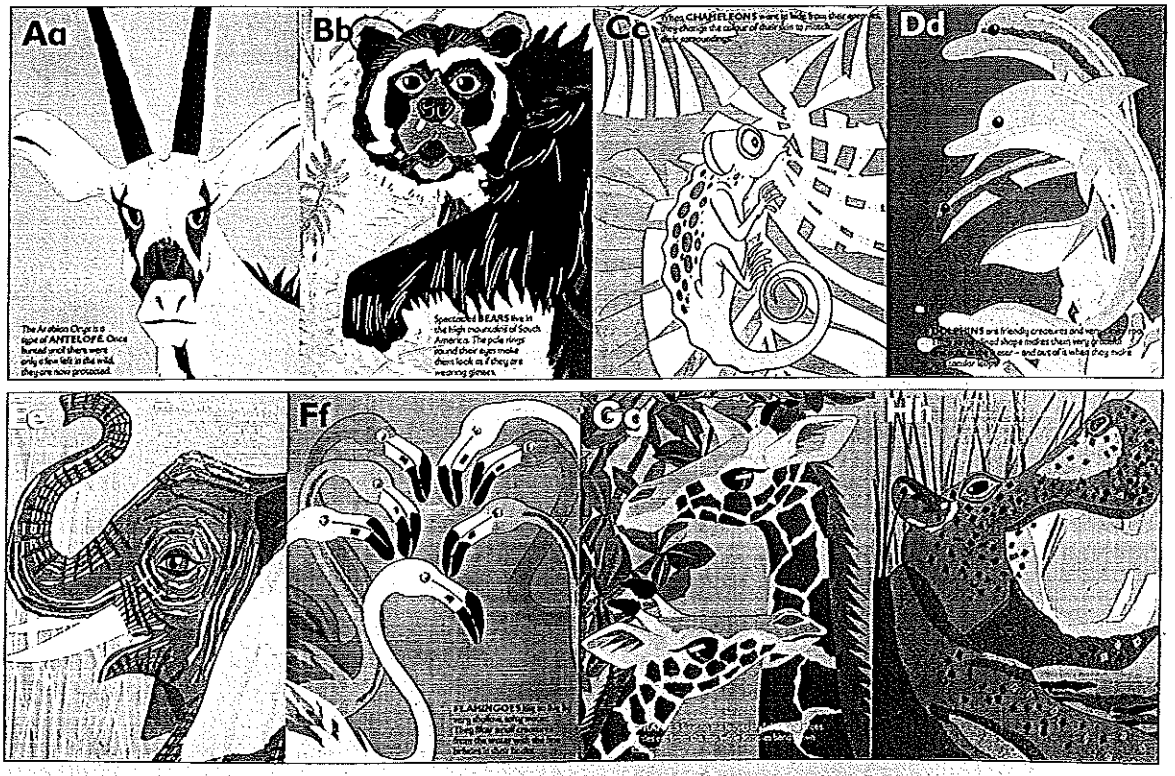
'The Hairy Hat Man hates noise, so he never speaks above a whisper.'
'Sammy Snake loves making a hissing sound – there aren't many hisses he misses!'
'So... whenever Sammy Snake is next to the Hairy Hat Man, what do we hear? "sh...!", as the Hairy Hat Man turns around and tells Sammy to be quiet.'





LETTER FRIEZES

The first eight letters of an alphabet frieze published by the World Wide Fund for Nature in 1993: *My Rare Animal ABC Frieze*. A variant of the alphabet book, friezes are better able to capture at a glance the notion of alphabetic sequence, as well as to convey the impression that the alphabet is a fixed and finite set of letters. Designs are invariably eye-catching and imaginative, and in the present case the linguistic content additionally conveys an important environmental message. (Marcus Davies, 1993.)



A BASIC PERSPECTIVE

The study of the linguistic properties of the written language has lagged somewhat behind the study of the sounds of speech. Nonetheless, the efforts of typographers, graphic designers, linguists, psychologists, and others have introduced a number of useful distinctions and terms, some of which are designed to avoid the ambiguity inherent in the apparently simple term, *writing*.

This ambiguity arises in several ways:

- *Writing* can refer to either a process or a result: while we are actively engaged in the process, we are said to be 'writing'; and when we have finished, the product (our composition, or text) is also called (a piece of) 'writing'.
- *Writing* can refer to either an everyday or a professional activity. All literate people, by definition, can write; but only a tiny minority are 'writers' (i.e. *authors*).
- *Written language*, when contrasted with speech, refers to *any* visual manifestation of spoken language – whether handwritten, printed, typed, or electronically generated – and this is how the term is used in the present book. In this sense, private letters, bus timetables, teletext, and books are all examples of 'written text'. On the other hand, when people say 'I can't read your writing', they are referring only to handwritten (not printed or typed) text.

The writing system

Most obviously, writing is a way of communicating which uses a system of visual marks made on some kind of surface. It is one kind of *graphic expression* (other kinds include drawing, musical notation, and mathematical formulae). In an alphabetic system, such as is found in English, the graphic marks represent, with varying regularity, individual speech sounds (or phonemes, p. 236).

The standardized writing system of a language is known as its *orthography*. English orthography consists of the set of letters (the alphabet) and their variant forms (e.g. capitals, lower-case), the spelling system, and the set of punctuation marks. The linguistic properties of the orthographic system can be studied from two points of view, analogous to the distinction used in spoken language between phonetics and phonology (p. 236).

- *Graphetics*, a term coined on analogy with *phonetics*, is the study of the way human beings make, transmit, and receive written symbols. However, unlike phonetics, where a comprehensive methodology for describing the properties of speech sounds has been developed, there is as yet no sophisticated graphic classification, though typographers and printers have developed a limited terminology to handle the most salient features of letter shapes.
- *Graphology*, coined on analogy with *phonology*, is the study of the linguistic contrasts that writing systems express. In particular, it recognizes the notion of the *grapheme*, on analogy with the *phoneme* – the smallest unit in the writing system capable of causing a contrast in meaning. For example, because *sat* and *rat* have different meanings, <s> and <r> emerge as different graphemes; on the other hand, the contrast between *sat* and *sat* is not graphemic, because the graphic difference does not correlate with a change of meaning.

Graphemes are usually transcribed in angle brackets. Punctuation marks (such as <.> and <? >) are graphemes also, as are such units as <2>, <&>, and <$>.

GRAPHS

Graphemes are abstract units, and appear in a variety of forms. The grapheme <e>, for example, may appear as E, *E*, e, e, or in other forms, depending on such factors as handwriting style and typeface. Each of these possible forms is known as a *graph*. There are thousands of possible physical variations in the shape of graphs.

40 forms of the grapheme <a>.

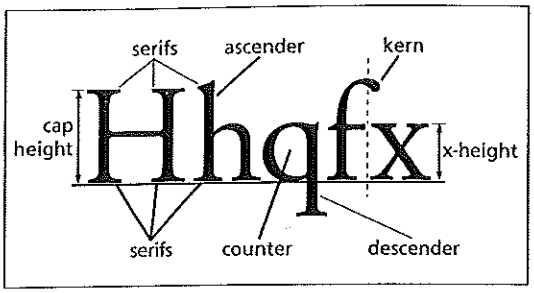
DIGRAPHS

When two letters represent a single sound, the combination is called a *digraph*. Consonant digraphs include *sh* in *ship* and *gh* in *trough* (*h* is by far the commonest second element); vowel digraphs include *ea* in *bread* and *oa* in *boat*. Some digraphs may be physically joined (*ligatured*), as in *æ*, *œ*, *ff*, though this is unusual in modern practice. There is also the interesting 'split' or discontinuous digraph used to mark long vowels and diphthongs (p. 272), as in *rate* and *cone* (which also illustrate the 'magic e', so-called because its effect operates at a distance, changing a short vowel into a long one: *rat* – *rate*).

Digraphs are an important part of the English writing system, because there are far more phonemes in speech than there are letters in the alphabet (p. 237). There have been many proposals to increase the number of letters so that they are in a one-to-one relationship with phonemes (p. 236), but historically the deficit has been made good by combining the 26 letters in various ways, especially to capture the range of vowel distinctions which exist.

Trigraphs also exist – three letters representing a single sound. Examples include *tch* (*watch*/wɒʧ/) and the UK spelling of *manoeuvre*, where the *oeu* represents /uː/.

TYPOGRAPHIC TERMS



A limited terminology exists to describe the many kinds of typeface and typesetting in regular use. Among the important terms are the following:

ascender A part of a letter which extends above the height of the letter *x*, as in *d* and *h*. It contrasts with a *descender*, a part of a letter which extends below the foot of the letter *x*, as in *y* or *p*.

bold A type with very thick strokes, as seen in **boldface**.

fount The set of characters of the one size of the same typeface, including capitals, lower case, punctuation marks, and numerals; also spelled *font*.

italic Characters that slope to the right, as in *italic*.

justification The arrangement of lines of text so that there are even margins. *Left-justified* setting is standard practice. In *right-justified* setting, the typesetter makes the last character of each line reach the right-hand margin at the same point (by adjusting the spaces between the letters and words). *Unjustified* setting has a 'ragged-edge' right-hand margin (as in this column).

kern The part of a letter which overhangs the body of the type, as in the top part of *f*.

leading /'ledɪŋ/ The spacing between lines of type. The term derives from the former printing practice of separating lines of metal type by inserting strips of lead between them.

ligature Two or more letters joined together as a single character, as in *æ* and *ff*.

lower case Small letters, as opposed to any kind of capital letters (*upper case*). (The 'cases' were originally two containers placed one above the other in a printing house: the type for capital letters came from the higher container; the small letters from the lower.) Upper-case letters are divided into *large capitals* and *small capitals* (*B* vs *ʙ*). Small capitals are similar in weight and height to a lower-case x. Large capitals are the height of an ascender.

serif A small terminal stroke at the end of the main stroke of a letter. A serif typeface is used in the main text on the facing page. A typeface with no serifs is called *sans serif* /'san 'serɪf/ (as in this column).

sort A single character of type. A *special sort* is one which the typesetter does not have routinely available in a fount, and which must be formed specially, such as a phonetic character.

superscript A small letter or figure set beside and above the top of a full-size character, as in x^2; also called a *superior*. It contrasts with *subscript*, a small letter or figure set beside and below the foot of a full-size character, as in 3_n; also called an *inferior*.

x height The height of the printing surface of a small letter *x*.

These features would all form part of a graphetic analysis of printed language.
(After J. Butcher, 1992.)

ENGLISH SPELLING

The two texts on the facing page represent conflicting views about the spelling system. The first is a Victorian saga which suggests that there is so little predictability in English spelling conventions that it is unreasonable to think of them as comprising a 'system' at all. The linguistic ingenuity of this work is so impressive that it is reprinted here in its entirety. The second is an extract from the highly successful *Dr Seuss* series of children's readers, which suggests that there is indeed a highly predictable spelling system, with just a small number of irregular forms causing a disturbance. Supporters of each view would condemn the other text as irrelevant. To chaos theorists, phonic texts are so oversimplified as to be no guide to the realities of reading. To order theorists, poems full of irregularities are no more than a spelling freak show, exercising a ghoulish fascination, but telling us nothing about what is normal.

The truth, evidently, is somewhere in between. But we must not expect to arrive at a definite figure for the amount of irregularity in English spelling. If we include proper names of people and places, and rare foreign loan words (as does the poem opposite), the proportion of irregularity will dramatically increase. If we include lengthy technical terms (such as *trichloroethane*), the proportion will decrease, as most of their syllables are spelled according to quite regular rules. Even if we restrict the question to everyday vocabulary, there are conflicting answers. There seem to be less than 500 words in English whose spelling is wholly irregular; but several of them are among the most frequently used words in the language. Because they are constantly before our eyes, English spelling gives the impression of being more irregular than it really is.

The notion of regularity

Much depends, also, on how the notion of regularity is defined. With only 26 letters to handle over 40 phonemes, the criterion of one letter – one phoneme is plainly too strong. English has never been a 'phonetic language', in that sense. A system which systematically used two letters to write a given sound would also be regular, and English employs this kind of convention a great deal – most clearly in such cases as *sh* for /ʃ/ and *ng* for /ŋ/. Less obvious is the 'magic *e*' rule (p. 42) which lengthens the preceding vowel (*rate* vs *rat*). Though the two vowel letters are, unusually, separated by a consonant, there is a rule here nonetheless, for thousands of words have their vowels lengthened in this way.

Regularity implies the existence of a rule which can generate large numbers of words correctly. A rule which works for 500 words is plainly regular; one which works for 100 much less so; and for 50, or 20, or 10, or 5 it becomes progressively less plausible to call it a 'rule' at all. Clearly, there is no easy way of deciding when the regularity of a rule begins. It has been estimated that only about 3 per cent of everyday English words are so irregular that they would have to be learned completely by heart, and that over 80 per cent are spelled according to regular patterns. That leaves some 15 per cent of cases where we could argue the status of their regularity. But given such statistics, the chief conclusion must be that we should not exaggerate the size of the problem, as some supporters of reform are prone to do. Nor minimize it either, for a great deal of confusion is caused by that 3–15 per cent, and some 2 per cent of the literate population never manage to resolve it (p. 426).

A RULE WITH DEFICIENCIES

One of the most famous spelling rules – '*i* before e except after *c*' – is itself famous for its exceptions. The rule was devised as a mnemonic for such words as *receive* and *deceive*, and it also helps in *conceit* and *ceiling*, as well as in a handful of rarer words (*ceilidh, enceinte, orcein*); but it is far outnumbered by words where *c* is followed by *ie* and words where a letter other than *c* is followed by *ei*.

- *c+ie* ancient, conscience, deficient, efficient, financier, glacier, hacienda, juicier, nescient, science, scient, society, species, sufficient
- *Other+ei* beige, buddleia, cepheid, codeine, deicide, deictic, eider(down), eight, either, foreign, height, heir, leisure, neighbour, neither, protein, reign, seize, seizure, their, weigh, weir, weird.

There are well over 100 such exceptions. The only way to impose a degree of order on this muddle is to relate spellings to grammar and pronunciation. One type of exception involves affixes (*agencies, seeing, niceish, absenteeism, nucleide*); another involves proper names (*Einstein, O'Neill, Leicester*); another involves the way *ie*/*ei* sequences are sounded – all the words in the first category, for instance, have the *ie* in an unstressed syllable or with a sound other than /i:/, and in the second category, such diphthongs as /eɪ/ play an important role.

WHY THE PROBLEM?

If the spelling system contains such regularity, why is there a problem? The answer is complex, but a major factor is that children are rarely taught *how* to spell. They are made to learn spellings by heart, and are rigorously tested on them, but few attempts are made to explain what it is they have learned. They are not generally told why spellings are as they are, or about how these spellings relate to the way words are pronounced. Without such a perspective, spelling becomes a vast, boring, and time-consuming memory task.

It comes as a surprise to many to realize that there is no simple correlation between reading and spelling ability. Spelling involves a set of active, conscious processes that are not required for reading. It is possible to read very selectively, as when we 'skim' a newspaper. It is not possible to spell selectively: it is a letter-by-letter act. And more things can go wrong when we try to spell. Faced with the word *feep*, there is really only one possible way to pronounce it; but faced with the sounds /fi:p/, there are several possible spellings (such as *feep, feap, fepe, pheep*). The task facing a speller is always greater than that facing a reader.

Learning about the predictable links between spelling and pronunciation is the key to understanding the spelling system. It is never enough to rely on the written language alone. An integrated approach can then act as a framework for the task of mastering the exceptions that history has imposed on the language – but this task seems less formidable once it is accompanied by understanding. If there is a daily battle being fought over spelling in our classrooms, as some suggest, it will be won only if children learn (as wartime generals did) to 'know their enemy'.

match		June	picking
catch		July	picked
patch		September	learned
watch		November	reached
fetch	ditch	snatch	everyone
care		infant	tender
careless		darling	gentle
useless		cradle	weak
useful		young	dull
purse	nurse	fur	beak
hammer		too	lunch
bench		tool	buy
blade		stool	beef
wire		fool	cloth
blood	goose	geese	cheese

Some of the words from a page in Group 3 of F. Schonell's *The Essential Spelling List* (1932), which continues to be widely used in schools. The words are those that Schonell found often used in children's writing. The bringing together of words related in grammar or meaning (*care/careless*) is helpful; but it is not possible to see the spelling system when working through words in this way. Regular and irregular spellings (*geese, cheese*) are put side by side with no apparent order.