

Topic 1: The Simple Sentence - Handout

According to the type and number of obligatory clause elements (sentence constituents) **seven clause types** can be distinguished:

SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, SVOO, SVOC and SVOA

Any number of optional clause elements can be added without changing the clause type:

I'm speaking. I'm speaking now. (SV)

He is at home. He is probably at home now. (SVA)

They will be late. Surely they will be late again tonight. (SVA)

Clause types are closely connected with verb classes:

verb classes	clause types	examples
intransitive verbs	SV	<i>He is working.</i>
transitive verbs	SVO (monotransitive)	<i>He'll get a present.</i>
	SVOO (ditransitive)	<i>He'll get us some tickets.</i>
	SVOC (complex-transitive)	<i>He got his hat wet.</i>
	SVOA (complex-transitive)	<i>He got his friends into trouble.</i>
copular verbs	SVC	<i>It's getting dark.</i>
	SVA	<i>He got through the window.</i>

multiple class membership - e.g. the verb *to get* can belong to different classes (see above)

Sometimes different interpretations are possible:

She is preparing her family dinner. (SVO or SVOO)

complementation of the verb - comprises any clause/sentence element that is needed in order to form a **grammatically acceptable sentence** (O, C, and A).

The milk tastes. (incomplete structure) x *The milk tastes sour.* (SVC)

syntactic characterization of clause elements

verb - realized by VP, normally present in all clauses, determines what other elements must occur, in simple sentence always finite verb phrase;

subject - typically NP, determines the number and person of the verb, subjective form of pronouns;

object - typically NP, normally follows S and V, if two objects, then usually the indirect one precedes the direct one, O can become S of the corresponding passive structure, objective form of pronouns;

complement - typically NP or AdjP, subject complement (relates to the S) x object complement (relates to the O), does not have a corresponding passive subject:

adverbial - can be realized by AdvP, PP, NP or clause

e.g. *I'm coming tonight/in the evening/this afternoon/when I finish my work.*

can occur in more than one position, frequently optional except in SVA and SVOA

Note on **middle verbs**:

They seem transitive but normally occur only in the active voice:

e.g. *They have two sons.* *It doesn't fit you.*

Three times seven equals twenty-one.

semantic roles of clause elements

Some examples of the most frequent semantic roles follow:

subject: agentive participant (*I'm preparing breakfast.*)

direct object: affected participant - animate or inanimate - directly involved in the action expressed by the verb (*We've sold **our** car.*)

indirect object: recipient participant - animate - passively involved
(*We've bought **them** a car.*)

subject or object complement:

attribute - identification or characterization

Peter is my brother.

Peter is a student.

They named their son Peter. *They considered Peter a good student.*

attribute - current or resulting:

He is happy. *The milk turned sour.*

We consider him happy. *The heat turned the milk sour.*

Subject - verb concord

- most important is **concord of 3rd person number** between S and V

- clauses, PPs, adverbs functioning as subject count as singular for **number concord**

e.g. *Smoking is dangerous.* *In the evening is best for him.*

Note: A S which is not clearly semantically plural requires a singular verb.

Exceptions: singular nouns ending with -s (e.g. *measles, mathematics, physics*) and

plural nouns lacking inflection (e.g. *cattle, people, vermin, clergy*)

grammatical concord x notional concord (agreement according to the idea of number rather than the presence of the grammatical marker) - **collective nouns**

The audience were enjoying the whole match. (collection of individuals)

The audience was enormous. (a single undivided body)

coordinated subject When using *and*, it is necessary to distinguish between coordination and coordinate apposition:

e.g. *His brother and the editor of his papers was/were with him when he died.*

(*was* - brother and editor have the same reference; *were* - two different people)

either ... or, neither ... nor:

When conjoins differ in number, the **principle of proximity** is applied, i.e. the number of the second conjoin determines the number of the verb, as in:

Either your brakes or your eyesight is at fault.

Either your eyesight or your brakes are at fault.

concord of person: *I am/He is your friend. I was/He was/You were a good student.*

subject-complement and object-complement concord

My son is a student. x *My sons are students.*

I consider my son a good student. x *I consider my sons good students.*

pronouns and determiner reference

The agreement between a pronoun or a determiner and its antecedent is **coreference** rather than grammatical concord: e.g. *He injured himself. He/John hurt his hand.*

The pronoun *they* is used as a 3rd person singular pronoun that is neutral between masculine and feminine (*everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody*) -

e.g. *Every student has to pass their test today.*

vocatives are either **calls**, drawing attention of the person(s) addressed, or **addresses**, expressing the speaker's relationship or attitude to the person(s) addressed: usually NPs in any clause position (I,M,E), separate tone unit, intonation - usually fall-rise

Vocatives can be: names, standard appellatives, terms for family relationships, titles of respect, markers of status, personal pronouns, nominal clauses, etc.

negation - clause negation (*not* between the operator and the predication: *They are not here.*)

words negative in form and meaning (e.g. *That was no accident.*)

words negative in meaning but not in form (e.g. *seldom, rarely, scarcely, barely, hardly, little, few* (e.g. *I seldom get any sleep, either.*))

nonassertive items - clause negation is frequently followed by one or more nonassert. items (determiners, pronouns, adverbs), e.g. *He doesn't ever visit us. He is not at school any longer. I don't like her much.*

scope of negation - stretch of language over which the negative item has a semantic influence; normally extends from the negative item itself to the end of the clause;

focus of negation (the placement of nuclear stress), **local negation** (e.g. *not long ago*),

negation of modal auxiliaries (auxiliary negation x main verb negation)