

# Chapter 1

## Traditional Components of Grammar

### THE BASICS

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- ✓ Sounds
- ✓ Words
- ✓ Phrases
- ✓ Clauses
- ✓ Sentences

## 1.1 Sounds

### 1.1.1 Phonemes

Sometimes we think of the “sounds” of a language as the alphabet. But many letters of the alphabet, in different combinations, can make different sounds. Each of these possibilities is called a **phoneme**. For example, the word “cat” is made up of three letters of the alphabet and usually refers to a household pet. Each of the letters in “cat” is a phoneme and has a particular sound (ignoring regional differences, of course), yet with other combinations of letters, each might make a *different* sound (cf. the sound of *c* in “city,” the sound of *t* in “pithy,” or the sound of *a* in “a”).

This grammar does not propose to determine precisely how Greek phonemes were pronounced in the New Testament period (even if this were possible). Instead we will present a particular pronunciation and tip our hats to scholars who insist that our pronunciation is wrong. The nature of the debate can be learned and fretted over later. At this stage you want to read Greek . . . and you *will*.

### 1.1.2 Morphemes

A sound that has a possible grammatical meaning is called a **morpheme**. The letter *s* in “cats” is not a word, but it is a morpheme because it signals plurality (“cats”). Some morphemes are combinations of letters, such as *-ed*, which signals past action:

I *loved* cats yesterday, and I will love them tomorrow.

When the letter *a* is attached to the front of a word, it becomes more than a meaningless phoneme; it becomes a morpheme and might signal a negation of the word's meaning:

I once was a theist, but I am now an *atheist*.

### 1.1.3 Affixes

When morphemes are attached to the beginning of a word, they are called **prefixes**. Take, for example, the morphemes *dis-*, *un-*, and *pre-*:

<i>disobey</i>	<i>unkind</i>	<i>predisposed</i>
<i>disillusion</i>	<i>unravel</i>	<i>prehistory</i>
<i>disengage</i>	<i>undeserved</i>	<i>premeditate</i>
<i>discontinue</i>	<i>uncut</i>	<i>prescript</i>

A morpheme added to the middle of a word is called an **infix**; one added to the end of a word is called a **suffix** or simply an **ending**. Prefixes, infixes, and suffixes may be referred to generally as **affixes**.

## 1.2 Words

Anyone who has played word games such as Scrabble knows that, to a certain extent, the speakers of a language are able to recognize what is and is not a word. Furthermore, according to the rules of Scrabble, there are certain kinds of words that cannot be used, such as proper nouns (names). We all recognize, then, that there are different kinds of words, that proper nouns such as “Jessica” are different from, say, nouns such as “window” or adjectives such as “green.”

Kinds of words or **parts of speech** can be variously listed. In a sampling of grammars, for example, the lists varied from six items to twelve items! All of the different parts of speech belong, however, to one of four word systems:

1. **Nominal** (*entities*: nouns, pronouns)
2. **Verbal** (*activities*: verbs, participles, infinitives)
3. **Abstracts** (*characteristics*: adjectives, adverbs)
4. **Structural** (*relations*: prepositions, particles, conjunctions)

The recognition of similar categories is as ancient as the earliest known Greek grammarians, who spoke of category 1 as “the naming,” category 2 as “the speaking,” and category 4 as “the binding.” Category 4 contains words that, for the most part, occur in only one form (e.g., you cannot add an *s* to “therefore”). They are called **func-**

**tion words** because they have no substantial meaning by themselves but are, rather, **the joints** in a sentence, paragraph, or discourse that provide relationship with the other words (which we will call **content words**). Consider the following sentence, with function words italicized:

When I got thirsty, I slowed down to take a drink; *but in order to* stay in the race, I kept jogging *because* I am a fierce competitor.

Learning the function words is critical for a beginner, and they will be emphasized in this grammar. But first let us look at the content words.

### 1.2.1 The Nominal System (Entities)

*Nouns.* A **noun** is a word that stands for a person, place, thing, or idea. It can be the subject of a sentence (*Regina* loves books) or the object of a verb (Mike reads *books*), among other functions. It can be singular (*The boy* is shy), plural (*The boys* caught frogs at the river), or collective (*Boys* can be messy). Plurality in English is most often signaled by a final *-s* (boy / boys) or *-es* (church / churches), but in some English nouns, the **stem** changes (*mouse* / *mice*; *goose* / *geese*). Other nouns do not change at all (*moose* / *moose*), and still others add a suffix *-en* (*ox* / *oxen*). These changes in the words are called **inflections**.

The noun system in Greek is even more **inflected** than in English. The inflection of the Greek noun system is called **declension**. So a declension is a set of endings added to the stem of a noun to indicate the function of the noun in a sentence (ch. 5). Nouns in a declension are distributed according to their gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter), their number (singular or plural), and their case (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, and vocative). The meanings of these grammatical categories will be explained in ch. 5.

*Pronouns.* A **pronoun** is a word used in place of a noun, *as the italicized examples below illustrate*:

I love Annette; *she* is a faithful friend.

I love Maya, *who* just adores me.

Missy is my dog's name. *She* is a Labrador.

Steve and I got into trouble because *we* skipped school together.

Each of the pronouns above has a clear **antecedent**, which is the person, place, thing, or idea that the pronoun refers back to (e.g., Annette-she; Maya-who). Sometimes, however, the antecedent is not explicitly stated in the immediate context, but must be discerned from the broader context. There are several types of pronouns:

- **personal pronouns:** I, you, he, she, it, we, they, etc.
- **possessive pronouns:** my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs
- **reflexive pronouns:** myself, himself, herself, ourselves, themselves
- **reciprocal pronouns:** one another
- **relative pronouns:** who, whom, whose, which, etc.
- **interrogative pronouns:** who?, which?, whose?, etc.
- **indefinite pronouns:** someone, something, anyone, etc.
- **demonstrative pronouns:** this, that

### 1.2.2 The Verbal System (Activities)

*Verbs.* **Verbs** are action words; they express an act, an occurrence, a state of being, a command, or a question. They are a fundamental part of **the predicate** of a sentence—that part of the sentence (normally the verb and its object) that predicates (asserts) something about the subject. Greek verbs are highly inflected. The inflection of the Greek verb system is called a **conjugation**.

#### (a) Transitive, Intransitive, Copulative

Some verbs need nothing more than a subject to complete them, such as “Greek rocks!” or “Jesus *wept*.” These are **intransitive verbs**. But most verbs are **transitive**, which means that they are incomplete without a **direct object**. For example, “Ellen loves *Steve*” or “Books impart *knowledge*.” The latter sentence could be enlarged with an **indirect object** to “Books impart knowledge *to students*.” The indirect object is usually a person or thing that is indirectly influenced by the action of the verb.

Some verbs have different qualities and needs, such as the verb “is” or “to be,” which is called a **copulative** (from Latin *copula*, meaning “link” or “join”) or **equative** verb. The copulative verb is **intransitive**—it cannot take a direct object. It links the subject of the verb to **adjectives** or **noun phrases** that qualify the subject:

Shaine is *happy*.

Angelique is *a creative artist*.

Jesus is *the good shepherd*.

Maya is *agile*.

We will learn more about this kind of sentence later; it is enough to say that the italicized words in these sentences are not direct objects but **subject complements**.

*(b) Tense and Aspect*

Verbs may look simple, but they can be indicators of complex information about action. They can indicate **time of action** and **kind of action (aspect)**, with shades of nuance depending upon their **forms**, how they are used in a sentence or phrase, and how they function in a wider context. In each sentence below, the verb “to love” has a different form that indicates **tense** or **time of action** (past, present, and future).

*I loved* that dog. She *loves* this dog. They *will love* this dog.

Grammatical constructions can suggest other things about action, such as whether an action is viewed as just beginning or as complete. In the sentence “I had just begun eating when the earthquake struck,” the action of eating is viewed as just beginning, but the action of the earthquake is viewed as complete. The Greek verb system is especially rich in connoting aspect.

*(c) Voice*

If the subject is doing the action, the verb is said to be in the **active voice**; if the subject is being acted upon, it is in the **passive voice**. Consider these two sentences:

*I love* my wife very much.

*I am loved* by my wife very much.

In one sentence I do the loving; in the other sentence I receive it. In Greek there is yet another voice, called **middle voice**. If the middle voice is used, the subject is doing the action but is in some way in the middle of the action as well. For example, in a Greek equivalent to the sentence “I studied my notes for the exam,” the verb “studied” could be placed in the middle voice to infer the personal benefit derived by the subject, “I,” from studying.

*(d) Mood*

A verb form can occur in and signal different **moods** or **manners of affirmation**. A verb may express an assertion as a reality, a wish, a desire, or a command. Consider these sentences:

We *ate* breakfast this morning.

We *should eat* breakfast this morning.

“*Eat* your breakfast!” Mom always said.

The **mood** of the verb in sentence 1 is stating a simple fact, and the verb in Greek would be in the **indicative** mood. Sentence 2 is stating what *should* or *might* occur, and the verb would therefore be in the **subjunctive** mood in Greek. The subjunctive is the mood of potentiality, uncertainty, prediction, obligation, and desire. Sentence 3 reports that my mom commanded me to eat breakfast, and the verb in Greek would therefore be in the **imperative** mood. A fourth Greek mood is the mood of wish; it is called the **optative** mood. It is a mood of even more doubtful certainty than the

subjunctive. In Hellenistic Greek the optative is rarely used, but we will discuss it in ch. 24.

Enough has been said here to show how important the verb can be in a sentence and how broad it can be in its shades of nuance.

*Participles.* **Participles** are often defined as verbal adjectives—verbs functioning as adjectives. Yet participles most often serve as adverbs, modifying or qualifying other verbs. Consider the italicized participles in the following examples:

Stephanie and Brian could almost hear the corn *growing*.

The *hated* finals week was upon them.

While *studying*, Steve remembered to walk his dog Maya.

English participles usually end in either *-ing* (active) or *-ed* (passive). When used as adjectives, they typically qualify a noun, much like normal adjectives do: “the *living* book”; “the *beloved* friend.” When used as adverbs, they commonly provide additional information about the circumstances under which the action of the modified verb takes place: After *sleeping*, she rose and ate breakfast. Adjectival participles, like adjectives, agree with the noun they qualify in **gender**, **number**, and **case**. Adverbial participles normally agree with the subject of the qualified verb in gender, number, and case.

Beside these adjective-like qualities, the participle also has qualities of a verb, such as **tense** and **voice**, and has a **subject** (implied or stated). All of these qualities are indicated by morphemes, and so the participle is a highly-inflected class of Greek words belonging to both the nominal and verbal system. Furthermore, the versatile Greek participle is used in numerous syntactical arrangements, many of which we will study.

*Infinitives.* The Greek **infinitive** is defined as a **verbal noun** because it has qualities of both a verb and a noun. As a verb, an infinitive has tense and voice, can take a subject or object, and can be qualified by adverbs. As a noun, it can be used as the subject or the object of another verb and can be qualified by an adjective, a preposition, and a definite article.<sup>1</sup> Infinitives also commonly express purpose or intention. Consider the italicized infinitives in the following examples:

*To forgive* is divine. (infinitive as subject)

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<sup>1</sup>A *finite* verb is a verb in one of its limiting (hence, finite) moods (such as indicative, subjunctive, imperative) and time references (past, present, future). An *infinitival* verb is the verbal idea in an abstract, general, or infinite sense (hence, infinitive).

Missy loves *to explore*. (infinitive as object)

He came *to free* the slaves. (purpose infinitive)

Although the infinitive is a single word in Greek, it is often translated into English by inserting the word “to” before the verbal idea, as in “to go.” Some infinitives are best represented by the English gerund, as in “I crave *skiing*.” As we will learn in ch. 23, the Greek infinitive has very **limited inflection** (unlike the participle) but a broad range of uses.

### 1.2.3 The Abstracts System (Characteristics)

*Adjectives.* **Adjectives** are words that qualify or describe nouns. For example, the following blanks can be filled with adjectives, such as “good,” “big,” “long,” “heavy,” or “boring”: “the \_\_\_\_ book”; “The book is \_\_\_\_.” Occasionally, adjectives can function on their own as nouns, as in Socrates’ trinity of virtues: the *good*, the *true*, and the *beautiful*.

In English, as in Greek, most adjectives can be inflected so as to show comparison. Regular comparison inflection includes words such as “big, *bigger*, *biggest*,” which indicate the **positive**, **comparative**, and **superlative** forms (or “degrees”) of comparison respectively. Irregular inflection is seen in adjectives that have completely different positive, comparative, and superlative forms, such as “good, better, best.” Still other adjectives have no comparative and superlative forms and need to be used in conjunction with the adverbs “more” and “most” to express comparison: “evil, *more* evil, *most* evil.”

*Adverbs.* An **adverb** is most simply defined as a word that qualifies or modifies a verb. However, adverbs can also modify other adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, phrases, clauses, or complete sentences. Adverbs express some relation of manner or quality, place, time, degree, cause, and so forth. They typically answer one of four questions: How? Where? When? or To what extent? Adverbs can also express comparison: for example, “quickly, more quickly, most quickly,” or “well, better, best.”

In English, adverbs are often formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective.

Pumpkin *quickly* drank the water. (How?)

Annette hung the picture *there*. (Where?)

Regina *immediately* fell asleep. (When?)

The student learned the paradigm *completely*. (To what extent?)

*Fortunately*, Steve remembered to study his Coptic. (adverb modifying a sentence)

### 1.2.4 The Structural System (Relations)

In addition to **content words** (the nominal, verbal, and abstracts systems), there is a class of words we will refer to as **function words**. These are words that organize and meaningfully connect content words but bear little content themselves. In other words, they have little to no **lexical** (dictionary) **meaning**, but they have **grammatical meaning**. Although we are introducing these words last, and they are small, *mastering them is imperative* for the student because they are signals of structure. Consider this pair of sentences:

Christina swam hard *in order to* win the race.

Missy, Pumpkin, *and* Maya were restless *because* they were hungry.

The italicized words signal relationships between content words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Even if some content words were unknown to you, some sense could be made of the sentences if you could perceive its structure.

Christina \_\_\_\_ hard *in order to* \_\_\_\_ the race.

Missy, Pumpkin *and* \_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_ *because* they were \_\_\_\_.

The words in this class are alike in another way in that they are **uninflected**, meaning that they normally occur in the same form. There are three categories of these uninflected words: adverbs, prepositions, and particles. Discussion of them will take us naturally into a discussion of phrases, clauses, and sentence structure, or **syntax**.

*Prepositions.* **Prepositions** are words that signal a relationship between the object of the preposition (normally a noun or pronoun that follows the preposition) and another word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase is composed of the preposition, its object, and its object's modifier(s). Some prepositions can function alone (i.e., without an object), as in the sentence, "He walked *in*." Prepositional phrases most often function like adverbs, further describing the action of a verb, but they can also function adjectivally, modifying a noun. Consider the italicized prepositional phrases in the following sentences:

Annette put the pictures *into the scrapbook*.

Merv wrote a letter *on his computer*.

Jennah was like a fish *in the water*.

The prepositions in these sentences are "into," "on," and "in." The noun that follows each preposition is the **object of the preposition**: "the scrapbook," "his computer," "the water." The preposition *modifies* the words of its object by establishing a relationship between the object and another word in the sentence. In the first sentence,

the adverbial prepositional phrase connects the verb “put” with “scrapbook” as the location where the pictures were placed. The third sentence has an adjectival prepositional phrase that connects the noun “fish” with its environment, “the water.”

Other prepositions include “beside,” “behind,” “upon,” “into,” “around,” “over,” “under,” “with,” “without,” “out of,” and “through.” Some linguists count nearly a hundred different prepositions in English. These words very often have a basic, spatial sense, but they can often signify abstract relationships as well. Consider the difference in the meaning of the preposition “under” in the phrases “under the bridge” and “under the impression.”

*Conjunctions.* A **conjunction** is a connector that joins words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. A coordinating conjunction joins two independent clauses. A subordinating conjunction joins two clauses or sentences by making one clause dependent on another. Consider these sentences:

Steve went to school to teach, *but* Ellen went to church to sing. (coordinating)

Regina stopped at the shoe store *while* on her way to school. (subordinating)

Examples of coordinating conjunctions are “and,” “also,” “but,” and “for.” Examples of subordinating conjunctions are “because,” “in order that,” “when,” and “while.”

**Correlative conjunctions** join words or phrases that are paired either for a reciprocal relation or for some other correspondence. They occur in pairs such as “either/or,” “neither/nor,” and “both/and.”

*Either* study your Greek *or* get some sleep.

*Neither* fishing *nor* golfing will fix the lawnmower.

*Both* reading *and* writing must be learned in school.

### 1.3 Phrases

The most basic unit of grammar above the word is the **phrase**. A phrase is a word cluster that has a single grammatical function and is not a complete sentence by itself (it lacks a predicate). There are five basic types of phrases:

1. The *noun phrase* normally includes a central noun and all the words that modify that noun, as in “a certain racing car.”
2. The *adjectival phrase* consists of a key adjective and any words that modify it, as in “unusually well-equipped.”
3. The *verb phrase* contains a main verb, any verbal auxiliaries, and any words that modify the verb, as in “has occasionally been driven.”

4. The *adverbial phrase* contains a central adverb and any words modifying it, as in “more feverishly than ever.”
5. The *prepositional phrase* consists of a preposition, its object, and any words modifying that object, as in “into a nearby pond.” Prepositional phrases can function either adverbially or adjectivally.

It is not difficult to see that a sentence is really just a stringing together of various kinds of phrases: “A certain well-equipped racing car has occasionally been driven more feverishly than ever into a nearby pond.” Consider the following examples:

*the boy* (noun phrase)

*the dog and cat* (noun phrase)

the *extremely mangy* dog (adjectival phrase)

The dog and cat *are eating*. (verb phrase)

Stephanie laughed *quite gleefully*. (adverbial phrase)

The book *with many pages* was boring. (prepositional phrase functioning adjectivally)

The grandchildren love traveling *in the car*. (prepositional phrase functioning adverbially)

## 1.4 Clauses

A **clause** is a cluster of words and phrases that makes a proposition and includes a subject (perhaps implied), a verb, and a predicate. There are many varieties of clauses:

- Causal clause: Lemuel cried *because he was sad*.
- Comparative clause: Kids learn faster *than adults do*.
- Conditional clause: Rachel laughs *if she is happy*.
- Noun clause: Jesus said *that he was the good shepherd*.
- Place clause: Children eat *wherever there is food*.
- Purpose clause: Cassandra practiced *in order to be the best*.
- Relative clause: Steve organizes things *that are messy*.
- Result Clause: Nathan worked so hard *that he got sick*.
- Temporal clause: Children eat *whenever they get hungry*.

## 1.5 Sentences

### 1.5.1 Types of Sentences

A **sentence** is a word cluster composed of one or more clauses. There are, of course, an infinite number of possible sentences in any language, but the sentence as a grammatical unit has a very manageable number of basic structures. The six basic types of sentence should be learned and remembered. You may notice that the key to distinguishing these types lies mostly with the predicate.

1. Subject (S) + Intransitive Verb (IV):  
*Kyle ran.*
2. Subject (S) + Intransitive Verb (IV) + Subject Complement (SC):  
*Jesus is the Christ.*
3. Subject (S) + Transitive Verb (TV) + Direct Object (DO):  
*Josiathe loves dinosaurs.*
4. Subject (S) + Transitive Verb (TV) + Direct Object (DO) + Indirect Object (IO):  
*Paul wrote a letter to the Romans.*
5. Subject (S) + Verb (V) + Direct Object (DO) + Direct Object Complement (DOC):  
*Sydney makes people happy.*
6. Subject (S) + Verb (V) + Direct Object 1 (DO) + Direct Object 2 (DO):  
*Jesus taught people the truth.*

The **constituents** of these sentences (S, IV, SC, TV, DO, IO, DOC) can be as simple as a single word (the subjects “Kyle,” “Jesus,” “Josiathe,” “Paul,” “Sydney”), or they can be expanded into a phrase. “Kyle ran” is a noun plus a verb, but “Kyle” could be replaced with a noun phrase such as “The boy,” and “ran” could be replaced with a verb phrase such as “was running.” Thus, each of these sentence types can be expanded into more detailed and more complex forms.

### 1.5.2 Syntactic Rules

People whose native language is English instinctively know most of the rules of syntax that can be used to make a good sentence. Even a child would know that “Sydney makes people happy” is a good sentence but that “Happy Sydney people make” is not. In this case, the reordering of the words has turned the sentence into a mere string of unrelated words. The syntactic rules of English have been violated, and the grammatical relations between the words have been lost. It does not take a linguist to know this. But it does at least illustrate that there are syntactic rules operating that a

person must know in order to understand the meaning of utterances or to produce utterances with meaning. These syntactic rules are not the same for every language. In Greek, for example, changing the order of words in a sentence is a much smaller matter than it is in English, where word order is extremely important.

There is also a big difference between “Sydney makes people happy” and “Sydney bakes people happy.” Somehow we know that it is odd to speak of baking people and that the activity would probably not make them happy. But I can say either “Let’s make a cake” or “Let’s bake a cake” with little or no difference in meaning. In the production of cakes, cookies, and cupcakes, “make” and “bake” are interchangeable and therefore have the same **semantic** (pertaining to meaning) relationship to the other words in the sentence.

*So clearly, grammatical and semantic relationships between words in a sentence may or may not be acceptable.* Sentences might be syntactically correct but semantically incorrect or deviant. Learning a language, then, also means learning which words can be meaningfully joined together and how they may be meaningfully joined together. This brief discussion illustrates how complex languages are but also how predictable they are to those who know their grammatical and syntactic rules. The next chapter will prompt you to think a little about words and meaning.