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Part A

Grammatical Description

PROOF

1 Introduction

1.1 Grammar and the Description of Language

What is grammar and where does it fit into the description of a language? According to most contemporary linguists, we can divide the description of any language into three major areas: grammar (comprising two sub-fields, morphology and syntax), phonology and lexicon. Sometimes grammar is understood to encompass all three areas.

Grammar

Morphology	deals with the form of words
Syntax	deals with the arrangement of words to form sentences
Phonology	deals with the sound system (involving sounds, stress and intonation)
Lexicon	provides information about the individual items of the vocabulary (words, and idioms such as *kick the bucket*)

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

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

tense verb form *decided* in:

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

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

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

Here the past tense form *decided* indicates a time which is not in the past, but a possibility in the future.

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

How do your instruments stand up? [F]

However, the 'meaning' associated with the following interrogatives is quite different (respectively 'complaint' and 'offer'):

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

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

1.2 Defining Grammatical Categories

One of the reasons why modern grammarians have reacted against traditional grammar is that traditional grammarians commonly invoke meaning rather than form when defining grammatical categories. When you attempt to use meaning-based definitions (sometimes called 'notional' definitions) to identify the items associated with a particular category, you will often obtain results that are misleading, or even plainly wrong.

Consider as an example the category of 'subject'. There are in fact two types of meaning-based definition that one finds applied to the subject in traditional grammar. One is that the subject represents the 'doer' or 'actor', and the other is that the subject represents the 'topic'

or 'what the sentence is about'. There are problems with both definitions. Consider:

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

In both sentences we would presumably want to analyse *the man* as the subject, but it is only in the second sentence that he is understood to have performed an action. The first sentence does not express an activity performed by the man, but rather something that happens to him. Consider another pair of sentences:

The rain was pouring down
It was raining

Here we would presumably want to treat *the rain* and *it* respectively as subjects. However, while we may regard *the rain* as the topic of the first sentence, what it is about, it would be odd to say that the second sentence is about *it*, since *it* is here merely a grammatical item which does not convey any meaning. Presumably, a sentence can only 'be about' something that has an existence, real or imaginary.

In order to reliably identify the subject of a sentence we must invoke formal grammatical properties rather than meaning. For instance, one important formal property of subjects is their role in the formation of question tags: the subject of a sentence in English is the element which is either 'proformed' (i.e. replaced by a pronoun) or copied in a question tag, as in:

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

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

Tom was telephoned by Mary

The traditional definition of the subject as actor would suggest, counter-intuitively, that *Mary* is the subject. However, we can confirm that *Mary* is not in fact the subject, but rather it is *Tom* (even though Tom is not the performer of the action) by applying the 'tag-test':

Tom was telephoned by Mary, wasn't he?

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

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

1.3 Grammatical Categories and 'Prototypes'

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

Thus the most typical nouns of English are precisely those that refer to people and things. For example, *car*, *tree* and *girl* are prototypical

nouns, whereas the abstract noun *deafness* is not (notice that it differs from prototypical nouns in not having a plural form: **deafnesses* is ungrammatical). Prototypical nouns are the most frequently occurring in the language. They include the first nouns to be learnt by most children, and they share the same properties that are relevant to defining the category of nouns across the world's languages.

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

We shall thus conceive of grammatical categories as indeterminate or 'fuzzy'. Each category comprises a central core of instances, which share a number of grammatical properties and can generally be identified via a traditional meaning-based definition, and shades off into non-central members which exhibit some, but not all of the properties.

1.4 Morphology: Words and Lexemes

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

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

The only difference between *qualify* and *qualifies* is that *qualifies* has a suffix (*-es*) not present in *qualify*. Similarly, the only difference between *qualify* and *qualifier* is that *qualifier* has a suffix (*-er*) not present in *qualify*. And yet the two pairs are not quite the same. Whereas most people would probably regard *qualify* and *qualifies* as in some sense 'forms of the same word', *qualify* and *qualifier* would be regarded by most as different words.

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

The words associated with a lexeme are said to be related to each other by means of **inflection**: in this case, *qualify* is the 'infinitive' and *qualifies* (which carries the present tense *-es* inflection) is related to it as a present tense form. The words associated with a lexeme are sometimes said to constitute a 'paradigm'. The paradigm for the verb lexeme *qualify* contains the words *qualify*, *qualifies*, *qualified* and *qualifying*.

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

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

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

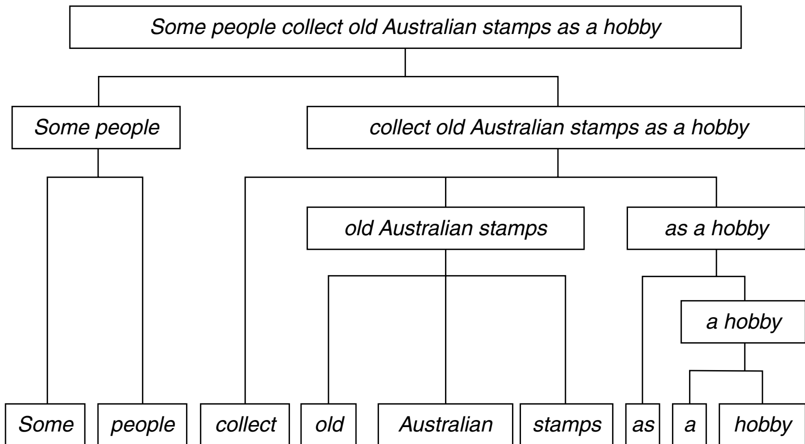
I have forgotten your name

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

Lexical morphology is dealt with in the lexicon, and is thus, strictly speaking, outside the concerns of grammar. It deals with the processes by which lexical items (the basic units of the vocabulary, or 'lexicon') are derived (such as *qualify* > *qualifier*). These processes include **affixation** (the addition of *prefixes* to a stem, as in ***un**equal*, ***dis**agree* and ***extra**marital*; and of suffixes, as in *equal**ity***, *inform**ant*** and *care**less***), **compounding** (the adding together of stems, as in *blackberry*, *fireplace* and *postmodern*), and **conversion** (the change of a word from one part of speech to another, as in the conversion of the adjective *even* to the verb *even*, and of the verb *act* to the noun *act*).

1.5 Constituent Structure

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

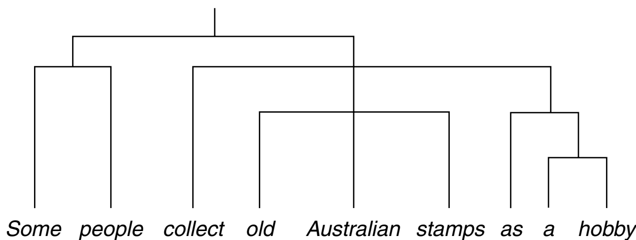


Each unit that is at the end of a line, or 'branch', and thus is part of a higher unit is called a **constituent** (so there are 14 phrase and word constituents: *some people*, *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *old Australian stamps*, *as a hobby*, *a hobby*, *some*, *people*, *collect*, *old*, *Australian*, *stamps*, *as*, *a* and *hobby*). Complementary to the notion of constituent is that of **construction**. For example, *some* and *people* are constituents

of the construction *some people.* In the tree diagram above there are six constructions: *some people collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *some people*, *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*, *old Australian stamps*, *as a hobby* and *a hobby.* Thus constituents make up constructions and, conversely, constructions are made up of constituents. It follows that the topmost unit, the whole sentence, can only be a construction and not a constituent since it is not a part of a higher grammatical unit, and that the bottom-most units can only be constituents since they are not made up of further constituents. *Some people* will be both a constituent and a construction: it is a constituent of the sentence and it is also a construction since it is made up of the constituents *some* and *people.*

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

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



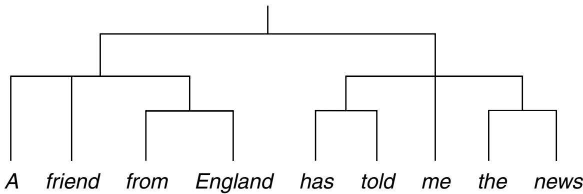
How do we know how to analyse a sentence into its constituents? Ultimately the answer to this question will depend on the sort of grammatical knowledge about sentence structure that this book seeks to provide you with. At this stage, suffice it to say that there are several rules of thumb which will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

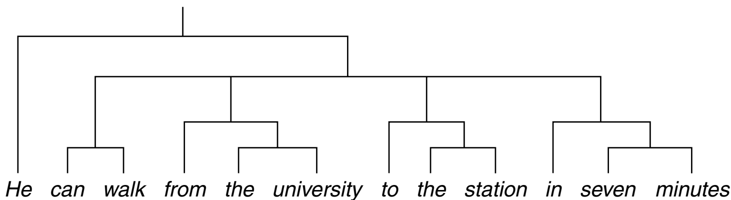
- 'Substitution' is one such rule of thumb. If a sequence of words can be substituted by a single word, then it can generally be assumed that the sequence is a constituent. For instance the status of *some people* as a constituent is suggested by the possibility of

substituting a single word for it, such as *they* (*They collect old Australian stamps as a hobby*). It is possible to apply a similar test to confirm the status of *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby* as a constituent. Notice, for example, that if someone had queried the proposition, asking *Is it really true that they collect old Australian stamps as a hobby?*, and in reply you sought to affirm it, saying *They do!*, then *do* would be a substitute for the constituent *collect old Australian stamps as a hobby.*

- 'Movement' – the possibility of moving a constituent to another position – is a second test for constituency. Thus there is evidence for the status of *old Australian stamps* as a constituent in the fact that it can be moved to another position as in *What they collect is old Australian stamps.* Consider several further examples. We can confirm that *in late July* is a constituent of the sentence *Aunt Gertrude arrived in late July* by noting the possibility of moving it as in *In late July Aunt Gertrude arrived.* Again, we can confirm the status of *the American stockmarket* as a constituent of *The American stockmarket is very robust*, by comparing it with *Is the American stockmarket very robust?*

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



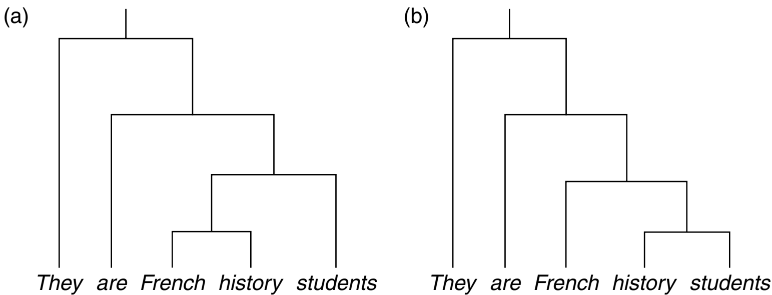


As a final point in this section, it may be noted that the type of constituent structure analyses we have been discussing can

sometimes be used to shed light on ambiguous sentences, each different interpretation corresponding to a separate constituent analysis, as in:

They are French history students

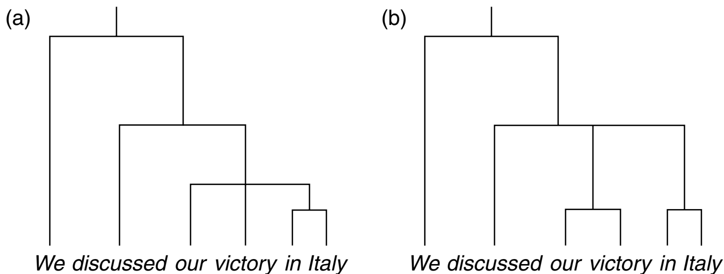
This sentence can mean either that 'They are students of French history' (as reflected in (a) below, where *students* and *French history* are constituents), or alternatively, 'They are history students of French nationality' (as reflected in (b), where *French* and *history students* are constituents).



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

We discussed our victory in Italy

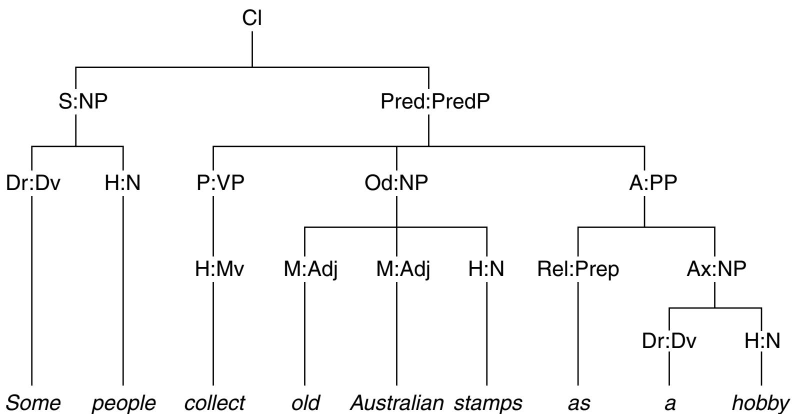
This sentence can mean either 'We discussed our victory that took place in Italy' (as reflected in (a), where *our victory in Italy* is a single constituent), or 'It was in Italy that we discussed our victory' (as reflected in (b), where *our victory* and *in Italy* are separate constituents).



1.6 Classes and Functions

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

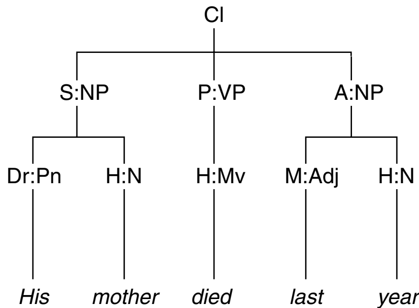
The syntactic class of a unit is determined by the grammatical properties that it shares with other forms, while the syntactic function is the grammatical role of a unit within the construction that contains it. The labelled tree diagram below demonstrates how we can assign a syntactic class and function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



Some people and *old Australian stamps* belong to the class of 'noun phrases' ('NP'), grammatical units with a noun as the 'head' element (the head of *some people* is the noun *people*, and the head of *old Australian stamps* is the noun *stamps*). Further evidence that *some people* and *old Australian stamps* belong to the NP class is their function within the clause: *some people* is the subject (notice that it can be proformed in a tag, as in *Some people collect old Australian stamps as a hobby, don't they?*); *old Australian stamps* is the object (notice that it can be substituted by *them* but not by *they*, as in *Some people collect them as a hobby*). In turn *people* and *stamps* are classed as nouns because of the properties that they share with other members of that class (such as the capacity

to express contrasts of number – *person* vs. *people* and *stamp* vs. *stamps* – and to take adjectives as dependents), and because they have the 'head' function within their NPs. Notice that the topmost unit, the clause, has no function assigned to it because it is not a constituent here, not part of any larger grammatical unit.

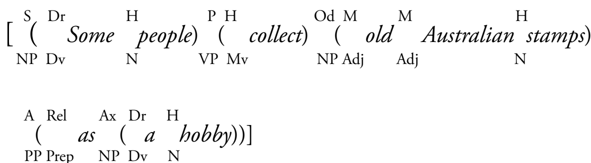
Note that in order to reduce the amount of 'vertical complexity' in our constituent analyses we will from this point onwards omit the predicate as a constituent. Below is another sentence analysed in this way. Notice that P and A are now immediate constituents of the clause.



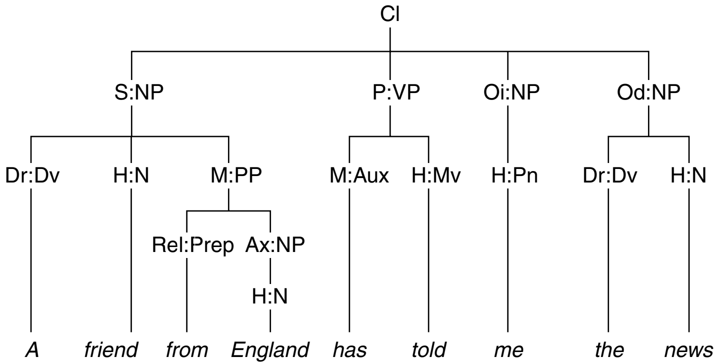
Finally, we note that an alternative method of notation to the tree diagram that we shall sometimes use is **labelled bracketing**. While bracketing does not show constituent structure as transparently as do tree diagrams, its 'flatness' gives it an advantage if you are engaged in analysing a succession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

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

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



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



$$[\,{}^{S}_{NP}(\;{}^{Dr}_{Dv}\textit{A}\;\;{}^{H}_{N}\textit{friend}\;{}^{M}_{PP}(\;{}^{Rel}_{Prep}\textit{from}\;{}^{Ax}_{NP}(\;{}^{H}_{N}\textit{England})))\;\;{}^{P}_{VP}(\;{}^{M}_{Aux}\textit{has}\;\;{}^{H}_{Mv}\textit{told})$$

$${}^{Oi}_{NP}(\;{}^{H}_{Pn}\textit{me})\;\;{}^{Od}_{NP}(\;{}^{Dr}_{Dv}\textit{the}\;\;{}^{H}_{N}\textit{news})]$$

1.7 Descriptive and Prescriptive Grammar

A popular view of the role of grammar, one which is reflected in many school grammars, is that it should present a set of rules for speaking and writing 'correctly'. This approach may be described as **prescriptive**; that is, concerned with prescribing the ways in which – according to the grammarian – language should be used. Modern linguistics is, by contrast, **descriptive** in orientation: its concern is with describing how language *is* used rather than prescribing how it *should* be used. Thus, for example, we may find a 'rule' in a traditional prescriptive grammar of the type: 'A sentence should not end with a preposition', (according to which, sentence (1) below would be considered 'incorrect', the 'correct' version being (2)).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mary has handed all the goods currently in her possession over

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

Using language effectively is a skill that can be developed and improved. An increased knowledge of the grammatical resources of the language will provide the language user with conscious mastery over a range of possibilities for constructing sentences effectively. This is undoubtedly one of the most important reasons for learning about grammar.

1.8 Grammar and the Description of Texts

The first section of this introductory chapter is entitled 'Grammar and the description of language'. The language most of us use in 'real life', outside grammar books explicitly concerned with the apparatus that grammarians

use to describe language, involves concepts 'above' the word, phrase and sentence level. We need to see how those 'bricks and mortar' of language are combined together to produce texts, and how we vary them according to the circumstances in which the texts are produced. Part B of this book will be concerned with the use of language in 'real life' texts, and with some of the many variables which affect this. In this section we shall provide a preliminary answer to the question: What is a text?

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

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

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

Most readers will assume that the sequence of sentences in (1) constitutes a text; that is that speaker B's utterance is not a *non sequitur*, even though its relationship to speaker A's utterance is indirect and relies heavily on inferences being drawn by the two speakers.

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

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

PROOF

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

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

While cohesion is an internal property of texts – an objective matter, capable of automatic recognition – coherence recognises the fact that linguistic communication takes place in an extra-linguistic environment. What is felt to be a text must be so because it has a recognised function and form in some 'real life' situation. Given a little imagination, we must be able to provide or invent some plausible, potential, extra-linguistic context for the stretch of language in question. As speakers, we tend to assume that any sequence must 'make sense' and will draw on a number of possible resources to make it so. We will use the immediate context in which we find ourselves, our socially and culturally 'shared' knowledge, and any inferences which seem viable. Our implicit knowledge of what H. P. Grice called the 'co-operative principle',[1] will predispose us to thinking that *I'm washing my hair* in (7) above is indeed intended as a sensible response under the circumstances.

1.9 Grammar and Language Variety

In the previous section we defined a text as 'a product of communication', a piece of language which not only exhibits systematic text-internal

1. The 'co-operative principle', first proposed by H. P. Grice, an American philosopher, in 1975, is characterised by the following maxims: in any conversation the speaker will typically be truthful and relevant, contribute to the conversation as much material as is necessary and appropriate to the purposes of the conversation, and avoid the expression of this information in an obscure or ambiguous manner.

> Another area where we must take into consideration the apparent inconsistencies between grammatical structure and language use is that of so-called indirect speech acts. For instance, it is generally considered more polite in English to express requests and commands in the form of interrogatives, or even as declaratives with embedded interrogatives, rather than as imperatives. Thus *Close the door!* is less polite than *Would you please close the door* or *I was wondering if you'd mind closing the door.* And what adult has not been frustrated by a typical teenage response to indirect requests such as *Do you have the time? – Yes*.

links (cohesion), but which must also make sense within itself and must be appropriate in its context (coherence). This section will begin to describe those factors of the text-external context which are relevant to the production of texts. They will be discussed in detail in Chapters 10 and 11.

As humans, we use language to accompany and facilitate virtually all our interactions with each other. We use language to inform and to deceive, to cajole and to insult, to express our deepest feelings and to amuse ourselves and others. We do not have to have training in linguistics to recognise the various ways in which the pronunciation of words and choice of words and constructions differ from day to day, from person to person, from activity to activity. Australians are amused by the New Zealanders' pronunciation of 'six' as 'sux', children are often disturbed by 'mummy's telephone voice' and they seem to know intuitively that certain 'naughty' words are best not said in front of their grandmother. We can usually recognise whether we are listening to a casual conversation or a prepared after-dinner speech, and to some extent can tell from the language alone whether it has been produced by a man or a woman, a young person or an older one, someone with a great deal of education or someone with very little. We shall discuss these aspects of language variation in greater detail shortly. But first, let us see how language use may vary in the life of an imaginary person, Jane Smith.

Jane Smith is a tall, 38-year-old redhead. Born in a small country town, she has lived half her life in a capital city, having gone to university there and married a student boyfriend who now teaches linguistics at a major university. They have two young children. Jane is a consultant cardiologist with a private practice. She is involved in research and is on the board of a large local hospital. In what spare time she has she

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loves to read and to play games with her children, sings with the university choir and shares with her children their love of horses. During their holidays she loves to 'muck around' on a friend's farm. Jane leads a very busy life and although she is not particularly vain, she has an extensive wardrobe of clothes. She needs a white coat for hospital ward rounds, formal suits for board meetings, a long black skirt for choir performances and a range of other clothes suitable for work and relaxation.

What place does all the above have in a book on English grammar, you may well ask? The metaphor of clothes is not uncommonly used by linguists to account for our use of different linguistic patterns to suit different social situations. Jane does not normally wear a nightgown to go horse riding or a hospital gown to a dinner party; in similar fashion she modifies her language, both deliberately and intuitively, to fit the circumstances of its use. It is not that some of her clothes are wrong, unacceptable or improper in themselves, any more than slurring or abbreviating words, using slang or jargon or conducting a conversation in disjointed, incomplete sentences are wrong, unacceptable or improper in their place. It is just that there are times when you wear your tracksuit and times when only your 'Sunday best' will do, and so it is with your use of language. In her private life Jane loves puns, jokes and all sorts of linguistic play; she restrains herself at the public board meetings, though not always with her patients and colleagues. The terminology she uses to discuss medical issues with her colleagues needs to be made less technical and more everyday when she explains these issues to her patients. As a doctor, she needs to be particularly aware of the special sensibilities of some of her patients, to adjust her language according to their age, sex and regional background, and to be on the alert for various verbal cues to hidden problems and delicate matters. In her professional communication with other doctors Jane can make a quick phone call or send a fax or an e-mail. Occasionally, she will write a long, formal letter and have it typed by her secretary. She must, however, always remember to send handwritten thank-you letters to her great-aunt; the old lady is rather old-fashioned and does not consider a telephone call to be appropriate.

The variety of names to which Jane answers are a good indication of her relationship with different people. Most of her patients address her as Dr Smith, but she is not a particularly formal person and many patients, as well as her secretary, call her by her first name. To her family she is 'Mum', 'Sweetie', 'Janey', 'Jennikins'; her siblings call her 'E. J'., 'Jano' or 'Pud'(for pudding face); the school secretary often addresses her by her married name as 'Mrs Jones'.

The only aspects of our description of Jane that are not likely to be relevant to the issue of language variation are those involving her physical characteristics – her height and the colour of her hair.

The fictional Jane Smith, like every individual speaker of a language, can be said to have a separate **idiolect**, a way of using language which, like our other mannerisms, reflects both the core linguistic features we share with many other speakers of the language and our own personal and familial favourite expressions. It is likely that every speaker of a language can be said to have, at least to some extent, a separate, individual idiolect, and being able to create a character with a credible distinctive idiolect is a valuable skill for writers of fiction. For a broader, descriptive analysis of language, however, the common core background features that contribute to our idiolect can be separated into two categories, 'dialect' and 'register'.

The term **dialect** is used to describe language varieties determined by fairly permanent characteristics of the language 'user': the region they come from, their age, sex and social class. **Register** is a term many modern linguists use to describe what is also known as 'style', that is, the variations in language which reflect such factors of 'use' as whether the language under consideration is spoken or written, formal or informal, general or belonging to a particular occupation. While most speakers habitually use only one dialect, they will typically control a considerable **repertoire** of registers.

1.9.1 Dialect

The original nineteenth-century work on dialectology concentrated on providing detailed descriptions of regional dialects, for example the distinctive features of the English used in different rural and urban communities, such as West Yorkshire or New York, and extending to broader distinctions such as American, Australian, Indian or Irish Englishes. The association of **dialect** with regional spoken language only has led to some confusion with the term **accent.** The difference is that while the term 'accent' describes only phonological features, dialects show distinctive patterns in all areas of language: phonology, grammar and lexis. For example the distinctiveness of the American accent is reflected in the fact that, among other things, in the pronunciation of most speakers the vowel in words such as *can't* rhymes with that of *can*, whereas for most British and Australian speakers it rhymes with that of *car*. The fact that American English is a distinct dialect of

English is reflected in, additionally, such grammatical features as the use of *to hospital* (compare British English *to the hospital*) and *Australia has won the Davis Cup* (compare British *Australia have won the Davis Cup*), and in such lexical features as the use of *cookies* (compare British *biscuits*) and *gas* (compare British *petrol*).

In the second half of the twentieth century sociolinguists turned to study the effects of social variables on language use. For example, young people tend to use language less conservatively and their innovativeness influences the direction of language change. A number of differences in the language use of men and women have also been proposed, suggesting that men and women may employ some different communicative strategies, that women show a preference for the use of more prestigious forms in all areas of language, and that there are some predictable differences in vocabulary choice.

While all dialects in principle serve the common needs of their community, none being less correct, proper or pleasant-sounding than any other, in all language communities one dialect is singled out for further development, standardisation and prestige status. This dialect, known as the **standard**, begins life as an ordinary regional variety, but comes to be accepted (often as an accident of fate, such as its use in the capital city and in centres of education and government) as the appropriate variety for written communication, education, official use and in the mass media, evolving to suit the changing needs of the whole country, and cutting across regional and register differences. Sometimes standardisation is undertaken deliberately, for example as part of a country's process of attaining nationhood, and one dialect becomes standardised in dictionaries and grammar books. Through its association with the dominant groups in society, this dialect often comes to be considered as representing an absolute standard of correctness for that language (see also Section 1.7 above). The standard variety is often spoken with an associated accent (e.g. 'RP', or Received Pronunciation, in England), although it is now more common for users of the standard dialect to retain their local way of speaking.

(It must be noted at this stage that, not without a touch of irony, the terms 'dialect' and 'accent' are themselves subject to dialectal variation. In England, the term 'dialect' tends to exclude 'accent', as many English people speak an English that is standard in their use of grammar and lexis, but with a regional accent. In the USA, however, the term dialect tends to subsume all three aspects of language.)

The standard, prestige, dialect is typically used by the wealthier and better-educated members of the community, irrespective of their

regional roots. On the other hand, some regional and social dialects, especially where their speakers belong to the lower socioeconomic classes, become stigmatised (e.g. dialects like African American English). Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (such as those of African or Spanish descent in the USA) often have considerable problems at school, where Standard English tends to be promoted and their use of stigmatised dialects may be identified with low intelligence and potential ineducability. Such children will often find it difficult to forsake the language of their normal home environment for a dialect with which they do not identify and which appears to devalue their background and group identity. The children who come to school speaking the standard prestige variety do not experience this discontinuity and doubtlessly find this to their advantage.

At this stage, we should perhaps introduce another term in use, particularly in sociolinguistics. The term is 'sociolect' – a 'sociolect' is identified with communities united not by their geographical provenance but by particular demographic distinctions. The typical demographic selections made here will be on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic disadvantage. Feminist linguistics, for example, has endeavoured to provide descriptions of a particularly female conversational style and the lexis more typically used by women, and to suggest the reasons for the linguistic differences and, most importantly, the consequences to women of using these different language styles. A well-known British sociologist, Basil Bernstein, has studied the problems that children from lower socioeconomic families in Britain have in adjusting to the expectations of predominantly middle-class teachers and schools.

1.9.2 Register

Register varieties are defined according to their social and occupational origins; for instance, we can speak of a register of religious writing, a register of advertising, or a formal register. The term is a useful abstraction which serves to correlate patterns of distinctive linguistic features with the dimensions of their immediate context or situation. One strategy used to identify and define registers is in terms of the following three dimensions: **field** (broadly speaking the subject matter of the text), **tenor** (the social roles filled by the people

taking part and the personal relationships between them) and **mode** (the channel or medium of communication, that is primarily spoken or written). These three dimensions of register will be discussed in detail in Chapter 10; however, at this stage two points need to be made:

- Although it is convenient for the purposes of analysis to separate the three dimensions of field, tenor and mode, the division is an artificial one. All three dimensions operate simultaneously; they are mutually constraining and mutually determining. A change in one dimension, for example from a spoken mode to written mode, will have the effect of producing greater formality and distance in the tenor and a selection of different lexis and grammatical structures in the field. Text analysis exercises often attempt to keep two of the three dimensions 'constant', varying only the category under analysis, but we must bear in mind that 'real' language always incorporates all three dimensions.
- If one has some acquaintance with a type of register, it may be possible to predict a number of its linguistic features and to identify some aspects of the non-linguistic context in which the text is situated (for example, the use of *aforesaid* will almost certainly indicate a legal register). Mostly, however, register analysis must be kept relatively open-ended, especially since what is expected and considered appropriate in a particular register may change over the course of time. For example, guidelines for **Plain English** (i.e. the use of simple, direct, clear and unpretentious language in legal and official documents and in medical, technical and business usage) are now being developed in many English-speaking countries. Moreover, we must keep in mind that the categories of description, for instance describing tenor as formal or informal, are based on the two extremities of what is, in fact, a continuum. Not only can the actual text select features of formality from any point within the possible spectrum, but 'inappropriate' choices can also be made deliberately, usually for a parodic or humorous effect.

It is advisable as early as possible in your study of grammar to become adept at noticing various grammatical features about the texts before you, and to try to understand what textual and register needs they relate to. A list of many such grammatical features is provided in

The two categories of dialect and register intersect in a number of ways. In many language communities there is strong division of labour between dialects, with only the High variety (standard and prestige) or the Low variety (colloquial and local) being considered appropriate for use with certain registers. This situation is known as **diglossia**. The term **code-switching** is often applied where register differences are associated with a number of completely separate languages, for example English and Welsh in Wales, or English and Spanish in the USA, or English, Chinese, Tamil and Malay in Singapore.

Chapter 11. For example, you will notice that some texts have a preference for very long and complex NPs, or the S–P–PCs structure, or non-finite clauses. In Part B of this book you will be required to make use of this newly acquired grammatical knowledge in order to judge how texts are constructed to be effective in the context for which they are designated.

Exercises

1a. For each lexeme (boldfaced), write out all the inflectional word forms that are possible in the given context.

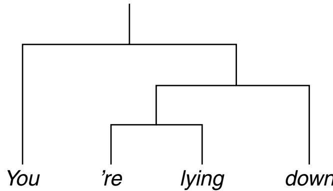
Example:

He	***be***	*the*	*one*	***who***	*I*	***want***	*to* ***come***
	is			*who*		*want*	*come*
	was			*whom*		*wanted*	
	isn't						
	wasn't						

1. *Our* ***friend*** *will be* ***leave*** *on the 3 o'clock train*
2. *We* ***have be*** t*rying to find a* ***good*** *price*
3. *Some of* ***they be*** *in the mood for a party*
4. *We were* ***encourage*** *to find a* ***simple*** *solution*
5. *Mary* ***be be*** *harassed by her boss*
6. ***Do*** *you support the local* ***team****?*

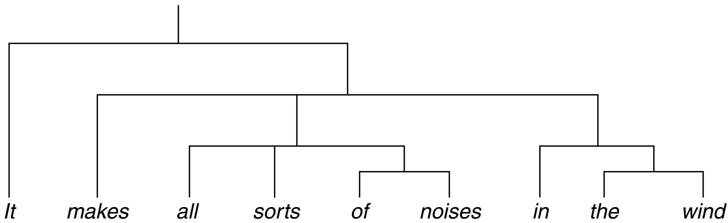
1b. Answer the questions based on the following constituency 'tree diagrams'. (You should assume that the analysis given is correct.)

1. *You 're lying down* [G]



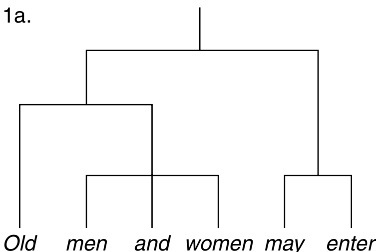
a. Is *'re lying down* a constituent?
b. Is *You're lying* a constituent?
c. What are the immediate constituents of *You're lying down?*

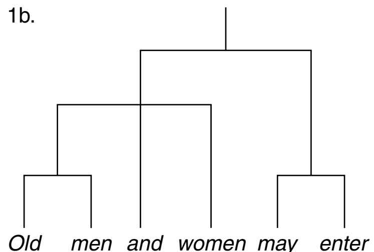
2. *It makes all sorts of noises in the wind* [G]

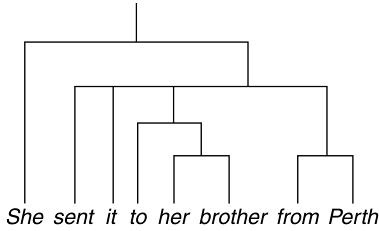


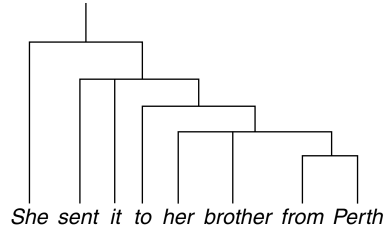
a. Is *noises in the wind* a constituent?
b. Is *of noises* a constituent?
c. What are the immediate constituents of *makes all sorts of noises in the wind?*

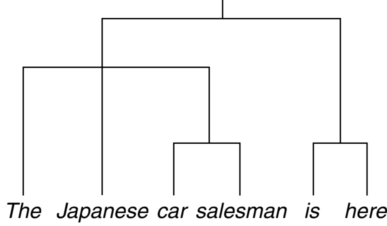
1c. Each of the sentences analysed below has two structural interpretations, as represented in the two tree diagrams provided. In each case explain the ambiguity, indicating which interpretation corresponds to which tree diagram.

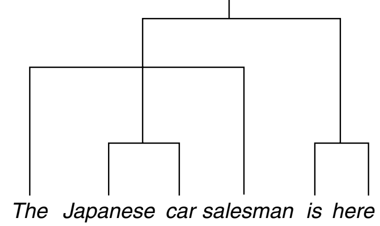






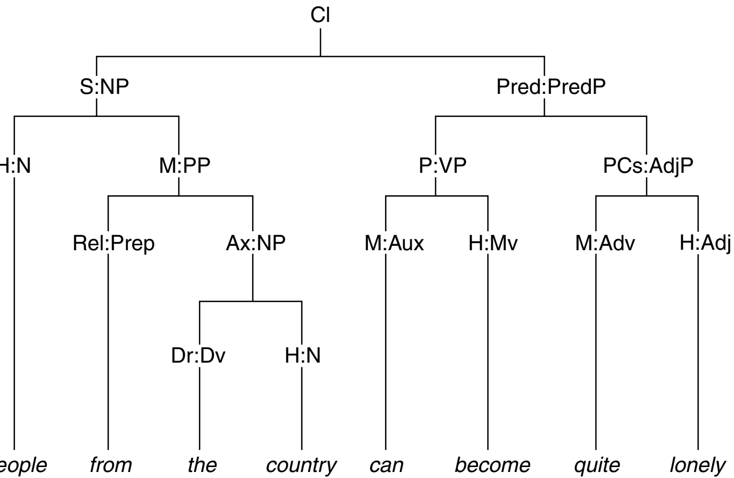






1d. Convert the following labelled tree diagram into a labelled bracketing.

Note: this is merely a mechanical exercise; you are not required to understand the labels in order to complete it.



1e. Convert the following labelled bracketing into a labelled tree diagram.

Note: this is merely a mechanical exercise; you are not required to understand the labels in order to complete it.

$$[\,{}^{\mathrm{S}}_{\mathrm{NP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{Dr}}_{\mathrm{Dv}}\textit{The}\ {}^{\mathrm{H}}_{\mathrm{N}}\textit{teacher})\ {}^{\mathrm{Pred}}_{\mathrm{PredP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{P}}_{\mathrm{VP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{M}}_{\mathrm{Aux}}\textit{has}\ {}^{\mathrm{H}}_{\mathrm{Mv}}\textit{given})\ {}^{\mathrm{Oi}}_{\mathrm{NP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{H}}_{\mathrm{Pn}}\textit{her})$$

$${}^{\mathrm{Od}}_{\mathrm{NP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{Dr}}_{\mathrm{Dv}}\textit{the}\ {}^{\mathrm{M}}_{\mathrm{Adj}}\textit{highest}\ {}^{\mathrm{H}}_{\mathrm{N}}\textit{mark}\ {}^{\mathrm{M}}_{\mathrm{PP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{Rel}}_{\mathrm{Prep}}\textit{in}\ {}^{\mathrm{Ax}}_{\mathrm{NP}}(\,{}^{\mathrm{Dr}}_{\mathrm{Dv}}\textit{the}\ {}^{\mathrm{H}}_{\mathrm{N}}\textit{class}))))]$$

1f. The following sentences would be rejected by some speakers as breaking various ‘rules’ of prescriptive grammar. Try to find out what the rule is in each case. Do you consider that the rule has any validity in Modern English?

1. *None of the children have finished their homework*
2. *There should be no ill feeling between you and I*
3. *We were surprised at them being absent*
4. *It would be unwise to completely ignore him*
5. *Which room were you hiding in?*
6. *They have been monitoring our progress more closely than it has ever been before*
7. *Sonia is taller than him*

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