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Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

Introduction and guidance

This free badged course, *Describing language*, lasts 24 hours and is comprised of eight weeks. You can work through the course at your own pace, so if you have more time one week there is no problem with pushing on to complete a further week. The eight weeks are linked to ensure a logical flow through the course. They are:

1. Making words
2. Nouns: naming things, places, people and ideas
3. Verbs 1: how we describe what we do
4. Verbs 2: how verbs work together
5. Adjectives: adding more information
6. All the bits in between
7. Putting it all together
8. Language in the real world.

Each week should take you around 3 hours. There are a number of activities throughout the course where you are asked to note down your response. A text box is provided for you to do this, however if you would prefer to record your answers in another way that is fine.

At the end of each week there is also a quiz to help you check your understanding. And, if you want to receive a formal statement of participation, at the end of Weeks 4 and 8 there is a quiz which you need to pass.

After completing this course, you should be able to:

- identify different types of words including nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions and prepositions
- understand how words pattern together in regular structures
- recognise different types of sentences
- describe how different structures can convey different meanings.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each week, you will find a link to the next week. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page (including links to the quizzes), to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Introduction to adolescent mental health* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational wellbeing of the community*. The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

Completing a course will require about 24 hours of study time. However, you can study the course at any time and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are available on The Open University's [OpenLearn](#) website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor, but you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course could encourage you to think about taking other courses.



How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each session of the course

- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Session 4 and Session 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the [OpenLearn FAQs](#). When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with [Week 1](#).

Week 1: Making words

Introduction



Figure 1 Words in the world.

What makes a language? We use language in all its forms – speech, writing, signing – all day, every day, but we don't often think about what language is and how it works. This week you'll have a chance to do just that. You'll start by thinking about how words work and how they are made and you'll consider whether something can be 'putdownable', just a 'guesstimate', or 'googlicious'.

You'll have an opportunity to examine words closely and think about how they work. Like any formal study, this course will involve a certain amount of technical vocabulary, but as the topics you'll cover are all parts of language, the terms you'll learn are essentially labels for things you have been using perfectly well all your life.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- give a simple answer to the question 'what is language?'
- understand how words are built
- identify different types of morphemes
- begin to analyse how language can be used creatively.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 What is language?

Think about how language fits into your daily life. It's there first thing in the morning when you listen to the radio, when you read the newspaper, or when you speak to your family over breakfast. It's there as you check or reply to texts, tweets and emails on your phone (if you have a clever one) or your computer. And it carries on throughout the day, whether

at work, while you study, or are at play. Language is such an important part of everyday life that it's easy to take it for granted.

In this course you will have a chance to stand back from all this and have a think about what language is, what it does and how it works. You'll start by carrying out a couple of activities to test what you already know.

Activity 1 What is language?

This activity should take around 5 minutes

Before you go any further, write down your own, brief definition of 'language'.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There are many aspects you could include in a definition of language, for example:

- a set of rules for speaking, writing or signing
- a means of communication
- a way of naming and describing things
- a tool to get things done.

More could be added to this list, and you may have included other things in your definition. You may have written down a list of several named languages and/or associated particular languages with different countries or people.

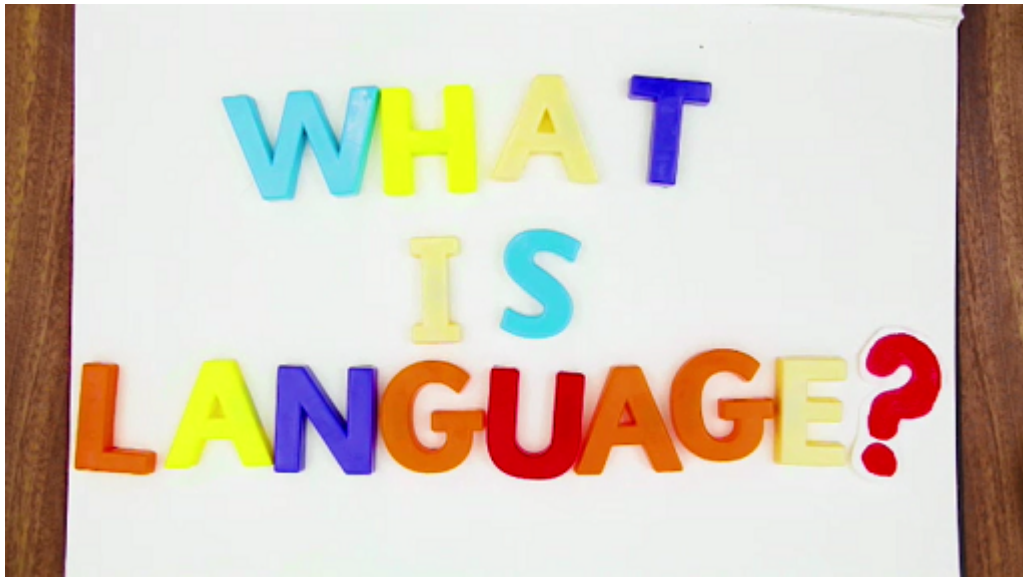
Activity 2 Beginning to learn about language

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Now you've considered your own ideas about what language is, watch this short video and note down what it includes in its definition of language. Does anything that is included in the video surprise you? Why do you think that is?

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1 What is language?](#)



Provide your answer...

Discussion

The video emphasises the importance of language in distinguishing human communication from animal communication. Many animals can communicate – dogs bark, cats hiss – but human language allows us to do this in much more complex ways. Language has helped us to cooperate with one another, to develop together in society and, as a species, to dominate the world.

You might also have noted that the video does not equate language with speech or writing – these are alternative channels for language, as are more recent technologies provided by computers and other digital systems, such as Twitter and WhatsApp.

Now 'language' in general, as a human capacity (or tool, resource, etc.) is one thing. What people actually do in daily life is use a particular language, such as English, French, Russian, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, and so on. These different languages are originally connected to a people, country or region, and may, for historical reasons, be more or less similar to other languages.

A vibrant, multi-colored graphic with a grid-like structure. It features various words and phrases in different fonts and colors, including 'Mertaba', 'OLA', 'SALUT', 'HEI HEI', 'ALOHA', 'HOLA', 'Ciao', 'Tubekem', 'Helo', and 'TERVE'. The background is a mix of bright colors like yellow, orange, and blue, with some text appearing in a stylized, bubbly font.

2.1 What is the biggest language in the world?

According to the *Ethnologue* language website (Eberhard *et al.*, 2020), the languages spoken by the largest number of people in the world are (in alphabetical order) English, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. The actual number of speakers of each language depends on who you count.

These definitions may shift over time as our knowledge about how people use language develops. There are ongoing debates about where to draw the boundary between first and second language speakers, which is related to the broader question about who has the power to draw such a boundary. Sometimes terms even fall out of favour: the terms **native speaker** and **non-native speaker** are now less commonly used in language research than they have been in the past.

Activity 3 The biggest language

This activity should take around 5 minutes

Think about your own perceptions of who speaks English, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Rank each of these languages in terms of the following.

1. The number of first language speakers you think they have.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

First language (millions of speakers):

1. Mandarin Chinese: 917
2. Spanish: 460
3. English: 379
4. Hindi: 341

(Source: Eberhard, Simons and Fennig, 2020)

2. The number of first language speakers plus everyone who speaks the languages as a second (or third, or fourth) language.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

All speakers (millions of speakers):

1. English: 1132
2. Mandarin Chinese: 1116
3. Hindi: 615
4. Spanish: 534

(Source: Eberhard, Simons and Fennig, 2020)

Mandarin Chinese has about twice as many first language speakers as Spanish, and almost two and a half times as many as English. However, an enormous number of people across the world speak English in addition to their first language (almost twice as many people as those who speak it as their first language). Adding all these speakers together puts English at the top of the list, just above Mandarin Chinese.

These figures are, of course, approximate, as it's not possible to survey everyone on the planet. You might also question who counts as a 'second language' speaker: someone who studied English at school but doesn't use it regularly, or only someone who uses it proficiently? But the overall picture is clear: speakers of Mandarin Chinese and English far exceed those for Hindi and Spanish.

Most speakers of Mandarin are in China. What makes English distinctive among these major world languages is the huge number of people (around 750 million) who speak it as a second, third or additional language, and the fact these speakers are found all across the world.

2.2 Where does English get its words from?

English didn't become the most spoken language in the world without being influenced by the other languages that it has come into contact with. This contact – the result of population movements, invasions, colonialism, and now global communications – has left an imprint on what English looks like in the twenty-first century. Table 1 shows just some examples of words that have been borrowed into English.

Table 1 Words borrowed into English

		First recorded in English
Freckle	from the Old Norse <i>freknur</i>	1386
Bamboo	from the Malay <i>bambu</i>	1563
Barbecue	from the Spanish <i>barbacoa</i>	1697
Ketchup	from the Chinese (Amoy dialect) <i>ketchiap</i>	1711
Ghoul	from the Arabic <i>ghul</i>	1786
Pyjamas	from the Urdu <i>paejamah</i>	1801
Tzatziki	from the Greek <i>τσατζίκι</i>	1960
Parkour	from the French <i>parcours</i>	2002

You can see even from this small (in fact tiny!) sample that words have come into English from languages all around the world. Once they get into English, they tend to conform to English rules (spelling and pronunciation) and can sometimes 'forget' their origins. The Spanish for 'the lizard', for example, is *el lagarto*, which has ended up as *alligator* in English. We have a number of words from Arabic beginning with *al-*, which is also the equivalent of 'the': *alcohol*, *algebra* and the very modern sounding *algorithm*, which originates in 'the man from Kwarizm', the nickname of a ninth-century Persian mathematician from what is now Uzbekistan.

Not all English words have such exotic histories, of course, but even the most mundane are made up of some pretty exciting bits and pieces. This is what you will turn to now.

3 Introducing morphology

In order to take a look at how words are built, we can draw on **morphology**, one of the technical terms you will learn in language study. It means the study of how words are put together, and the different shapes they take. For example, if you look in most English dictionaries, you will find entries for the following words:

- make
- fight
- easy

But there are other forms of these words which most dictionaries don't give separate entries for:

- **make:** makes, making, made
- **fight:** fights, fighting, fought
- **easy:** easier, easiest, easily

One part of morphology explains how these different forms of a word relate to each other. That is, how we can make *fighting* from *fight* and how we understand the relationship between these two forms.

Another part of morphology looks at how more complex words can be formed from simpler ones:

- **make:** remake, make-up, makeshift
- **fight:** fightback, firefight, firefighter
- **easy:** uneasy, uneasiness, speakeasy

Morphemes are the smallest meaningful unit of a language and they are the building blocks of words. For example, *uneasy* is *un-* + *easy*, and *firefighter* is *fire* + *fight* + *er*.

Activity 4 Let's make some words

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Take a look at the list of morphemes below and give yourself two minutes to make as many different words from them as you can.

-ing	child	-ness	sad
sing	un-	-s	dis-
feel	-ed	appoint	-ish
friend	bad	-ly	love
-ally	appeal	walk	-al
bottle	-ment		

Provide your answer...

When the two minutes are up, take a closer look at the words you have made. Do you notice any patterns? Could some morphemes stand on their own while others couldn't? Could some only go at the beginning of a word? Note down your findings.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

You may have come up with some of the following: *childish, badness, sadly, feelings, singing, appealing, appealed, bottles, friendly, friends, unfriendly, walked, lovely*, etc. You might have found several more.

Taking a closer look at the words, *child, sad, sing, appoint, friend, bad, love, appeal*, and *bottle* make sense on their own, while *-ing, -ly* and *un-* need to be attached to another morpheme. You can also see that morphemes like *un-* and *dis-* tend to occur at the beginning of words, while *-ment* and *-s* tend to occur at the end. This shows that how we combine morphemes is not random. You'll learn more about this in the next section.

4 Free and bound morphemes

You are now going to look at the different kinds of morphemes. Before going into the details, and in case the terminology starts to sound complicated, remember that the most basic definition of **morpheme** is 'word part'. Now, morphemes like *potato*, *happy*, *four* or *turquoise* can stand on their own as words. These are called **free morphemes**. If you use this type of morpheme in answer to a question, it tells us something specific:

Q: What's this white stuff on top of the pie?

A: Potato.

Q: How did Lucas seem to you this morning?

A: Happy.

Q: How many children do Andres and Gemma have?

A: Four.

Q: What colour did you paint the walls?

A: Turquoise.

There are other morphemes which don't do this. For example:

- a. anti-, dis-, pre-, un-
- b. -ed, -ful, -ing, -ly

This type of morpheme – also known as **bound morphemes** – can't be used to answer a question. They do have meaning, but only when we attach them to another word. Look at the difference the morphemes in list a) make when we add them to the following words:

depressant – **antidepressant**

agree – **disagree**

cooked – **precooked**

lucky – **unlucky**

In each case, adding these morphemes at the start of a word causes a significant change in meaning. Most of the words on the right are the opposite of the words on the left (and 'pre' means 'in advance').

The items in list b) have a different effect:

walk – **walked**

harm – **harmful**

play – **playing**

stupid – **stupidly**

Adding these morphemes doesn't change the basic meaning of the word on the left, but they do have an effect on how you can use the word.

4.1 More about morphemes

To summarise so far:

- Some morphemes can stand on their own as words: *potato*, *apple*, *idea*, *cat*, *Tuesday*. These are called **free morphemes**.
- Other morphemes like *un-*, *-ly*, *dis-*, *-ness* cannot be used on their own, and must be added to free morphemes. Using these **bound morphemes** changes the meaning or the grammatical properties of the word they are attached to.

It's possible to add more than one bound morpheme to a free morpheme. For example, *underestimation* is made up of the free morpheme *estimate* plus the prefix (a bound morpheme at the start of a word) *under-* and the suffix (a bound morpheme at the end of a word) *-tion* (under + estimate + tion). To give another example, *unsystematically* is made up of the free morpheme *system* plus the prefix *un-* and two suffixes *-atic* and *-ally* (un + system + atic + ally). You can also put two free morphemes together to create words like *hairbrush* (hair + brush) and *hangnail* (hang + nail).

Activity 5 Finding free and bound morphemes

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Take a look at the list of words below. Some are free morphemes and can't be divided any further. Others are made of a bound morpheme added to a free morpheme, either at the start (a prefix) or the end (a suffix).

Decide in which column each word should go. The first one has been done for you.

entertainment
friendship
bottle
butter
impossible
resistance
disengage
proudly
water
admirable
banana

Free morpheme

Provide your answer...

Prefix + free morpheme

Provide your answer...

Free morpheme + suffix

entertain + ment

Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

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Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Free morpheme Prefix + free morpheme Free morpheme + suffix

entertain + ment

friend + ship

bottle

butter

im + possible

resist + ance

dis + engage

proud + ly

water

admir[e] + able

banana

The '-ship' added to *friend* has nothing to do with boats, so it is not a free morpheme in this case. It is a very old part of English. Other examples of words including this bound morpheme are *fellowship*, *lordship*, *hardship* and *relationship*.

If you were tempted to find 'but' + 'er' in *butter*, you should ask yourself what connection there is between the yellow stuff you spread on bread and the word 'but'...

Apart from the coincidence in the first three letters, there really isn't any connection between them!

The bound morpheme '-ance' produces a noun from a verb. You'll learn more about nouns and verbs over the next three weeks. Other examples where adding a bound morpheme can turn a verb into a noun are *compliance* and *defiance* (from *comply* and *defy*).

4.2 Adding more morphemes

Words can quickly increase in size once more morphemes are added. Here is a diagram showing how the free morpheme *character* (9 letters long) adds three bound morphemes to become *uncharacteristically* (20 letters long).

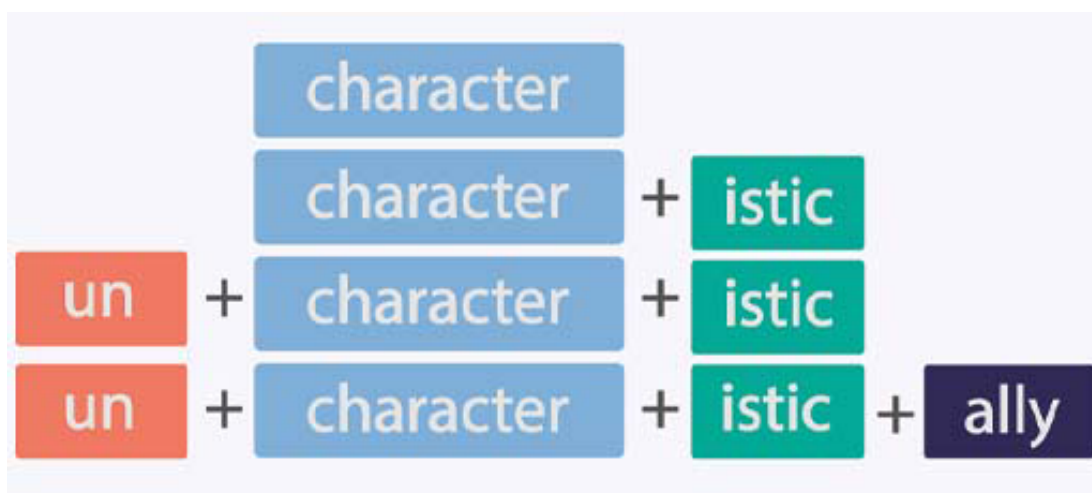


Figure 3 The building blocks of *uncharacteristically*.

Activity 6 Show me the morphemes

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Take a look at the examples below, each of which contains a new word made by combining morphemes in novel ways. First, identify which is the new word. Then break it down into its morphemes, before finally thinking about why the writer might have used this word and what effect it has on you as the reader. Do you know what each new word means?

1. We just had another nonversation stood at the bus stop.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Nonversation: The bound morpheme *non-* (as in *nonrefundable*) is added to *conversation* (which is itself formed by adding the bound morphemes *-ate* and *-ion* to the free morpheme *converse*). In fact *non-* replaces the *con-* at the start of *conversation*. The result is a word that means a conversation where nothing much is said (i.e. small talk).

2. Snickers: Get a degree in Snackonomics (Walsh, 2009)

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Two free morphemes *snack* and *economic* have been used here with the bound morpheme *-s* (*snack* + *economic* + *s*) to create a (supposed) new field of academic study. *Snackonomics* appeared on a printed advertisement for a chocolate bar that was being promoted on university campuses.

3. I'm quite good at spelling, but I'm so unkeyboardinated

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The new word *unkeyboardinated* can be defined as 'the inability to type on a computer keyboard without making mistakes'. It is a combination of the free morpheme *keyboard* (which has itself developed from *key* + *board*, but most people probably now think of this as its own word – indeed, it has its own entry in most dictionaries) plus the prefix *un-* and the two suffixes *-inate* and *-ed*. It has a comic effect because it sounds similar to *uncoordinated* which likely helped you to unpack its meaning.

4. He's always on his mobile phone; he's just so cellfish.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

This final example is a combination of two free morphemes *cell* (as in a mobile phone) and *fish*. The resulting word sounds like *selfish* and indeed it is supposed to mean someone who rudely ignores others because they are spending too much time on their mobile phone.

This activity shows that, even if you're not sure what a word means, and even if it's a brand-new word, you can often still identify its morphemes. This ability probably helped you work out more or less what the new words in the examples meant. In fact advertisers who create new words rely on this ability. Using morphemes to create new words like this is just one way we can get creative with language.

4.3 What are the morphemes telling you?

You saw at the start of Section 4 that suffixes (bound morphemes attached to the end of a word) can change the grammatical properties of a word. In this section you'll take a closer look at this feature of language.

One of the most important morphemes that we can add to nouns in English is *-s*. (You'll learn more about nouns next week.) Adding *-s* to a noun allows you to show that you're talking about more than one of something:

Singular	Plural
House	Houses
Table	Tables
Tree	Trees
Porcupine	Porcupines

Some adjustments are made for spelling:

Singular	Plural
Tomato	Tomatoes
Reply	Replies
Church	Churches
Knife	Knives

But there are only relatively few plurals that don't follow this general pattern in English, such as:

Singular	Plural
Foot	Feet
Child	Children
Man	Men
Mouse	Mice

With verbs (which you'll learn about in Weeks 3 and 4) the most important morpheme is probably *-ed*. When added to the basic form of the verb, it shows you are referring to the past, not the present: *walk* > *walked*, *laugh* > *laughed*, *watch* > *watched*. This is an important difference, and although there are some irregular verbs (*sing* > *sang*, *feel* > *felt*) most verbs use the *-ed* form.

Activity 7 Choose the right form of the word

This activity should take around 5 minutes

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

In 2006 I **lived** in a flat in the centre of town.

There are lots of **cows** in the field.

He **wants** to meet you.

How many **children** do they have?

That jacket **does** absolutely nothing for you!

Even if you've never heard or morphology before, your knowledge of English will probably have led you to the right answer without much hesitation. If you did choose a different answer, your meaning would probably still be understood by most English speakers, and some adult learners of English do say them.

5 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 1. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 1 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

6 Summary of Week 1

You began this week by considering the question ‘what is language?’ You saw that language is a fundamental part of what makes us human and distinguishes us from animals. Language has enabled us to make our society, and the world, the way it is today. And speaking of the world, you also took a closer look at which languages are spoken by the most people.

Having started with the huge concept of ‘language’ you then turned your attention to the smallest units of meaning: morphemes. You examined these building blocks of words, considered the different characteristics and functions of ‘bound’ and ‘free’ morphemes, and learned how they combine to make longer words. Armed with this knowledge, you could unpack just some of the ways people use their knowledge of morphemes creatively in advertising, or simply to be more expressive in everyday communication (creating words like ‘guesstimate’ or ‘googlicious’).

Now you’ve looked at the way all words are put together, next week you’ll consider one of the largest groups of words in English. These are the words we use to name things, places, people and ideas – the grammatical category called ‘nouns’.

You can now go to [Week 2](#).

Week 2: Nouns: naming things, places, people and ideas

Introduction



Figure 1 A man behind a counter in a market.

Imagine you are in a shop in a country where you don't speak the language. Picture a shop (not a supermarket) with a counter and a shopkeeper behind it. You have a list of things you need to buy. Unless you are the world's best mime (try 'tinned pineapple chunks'!), you are also in need of the names (in the local language, of course) for the things you want to buy.

This week you will be looking at this part of the (English) language – the part we need to name things, places, people and ideas. These are the **nouns**, which are sometimes called 'naming words'. Nouns are just one type of **word class**. The word classes are the basis of grammatical description of any language, and forms the main content of the rest of this course.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- describe what a noun is
- identify different types of noun
- begin to know the difference between different classes of word.

1 Different kinds of words

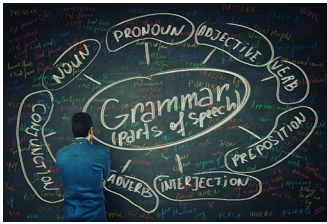


Figure 2 Parts of speech.

We can all talk, write or sign in our own language without having to think very much about what words we use or the order we put them in. When we want to talk *about* the language we use and how it works, however, we might find it more challenging – it's a bit like the difference between driving a car, and explaining how its engine works.

One thing you'll need as you learn to talk about language is a set of terms to identify and label different kinds of words. You'll also need a way to sort words into groups that do the same sort of thing. This is the first step to explaining the grammar of a language. Names for sets of words are part of everyday language: 'days of the week', 'months', 'numbers', 'colours' and so on. The set you'll be learning are the 'parts of speech'. Some of the terms in this set may be familiar to you from school or from learning another language, or they may be mostly new. What you'll already know depends on when and where you went to school, as fashions in education change. What is important to remember is that even if the terms are new, you have been using the words they refer to all your life, without thinking about it too much.

To illustrate the knowledge you've already got, you'll take a look at how different types of words can be grouped together.

Activity 1 Different types of words at work

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read the dialogue below then sort the **bold** words into the categories given in the table. Are they:

- a 'naming word' (for a thing or person)
- a 'doing word' (something that happened or that someone did or is doing)
- a 'describing word' (saying what something or someone is like)?

Add the words to the relevant columns in the table.

A. I **brought** a **present** for **Amanda**.

B. Can you **afford** it?

A. Oh, it wasn't **expensive**. I **bought** it with some of the **money** I **saved** last year.

B. It's **beautiful**! She'll **love** it!

Naming words

Provide your answer...

Doing words

Provide your answer...

Describing words

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Naming words	Doing words	Describing words
--------------	-------------	------------------

present	brought	expensive
---------	---------	-----------

Amanda	afford	beautiful
--------	--------	-----------

money	bought	
-------	--------	--

	saved	
--	-------	--

	love	
--	------	--

This exercise is the first stage in sorting out the main classes of words which work together when we're using English in our everyday lives. These three classes will be the focus of Weeks 2–5 of the course. If you're still a little unsure of which word goes where, don't worry – things should become clear over the next few weeks.

1.1 Word classes

The video in the next activity discusses some of the major word classes in English. It gives you a look ahead at what you'll cover in the course.

Activity 2 The different word classes

This activity should take around 15 minutes

As you watch the video, consider the questions below. Don't worry if you don't get all the answers right at first, you can always watch the video again and return to this activity later in the course to refresh your memory.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1 Different sorts of words](#)



Word classes: different sorts of words

How many different word classes are mentioned in the video? How might you describe what each class does?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There are the three classes of words from the previous activity:

- Nouns – for naming things.
- Verbs – for talking about actions and feelings, and also (in the case of *be*) relations between things.
- Adjectives – for describing things.

There are also:

- Pronouns – for ‘standing in’ for people and things, so we don’t have to keep repeating nouns (as you saw with *it* and *she*). Pronouns are also used for referring to people involved in a conversation (*I* and *you*).

Pronouns will be a topic for later in the course, but they’ve been mentioned now as they’re very common. Like all the other word classes, even if you didn’t know the name for them (or have forgotten), pronouns are something you’ve been using with great facility all your life, if English is your first language, or at least from very early on if you learned English at school. Pronouns are usually some of the first words you learn in language classrooms as knowing how to refer to yourself and others is a key aspect of communication.

1.2 The word classes you will focus on

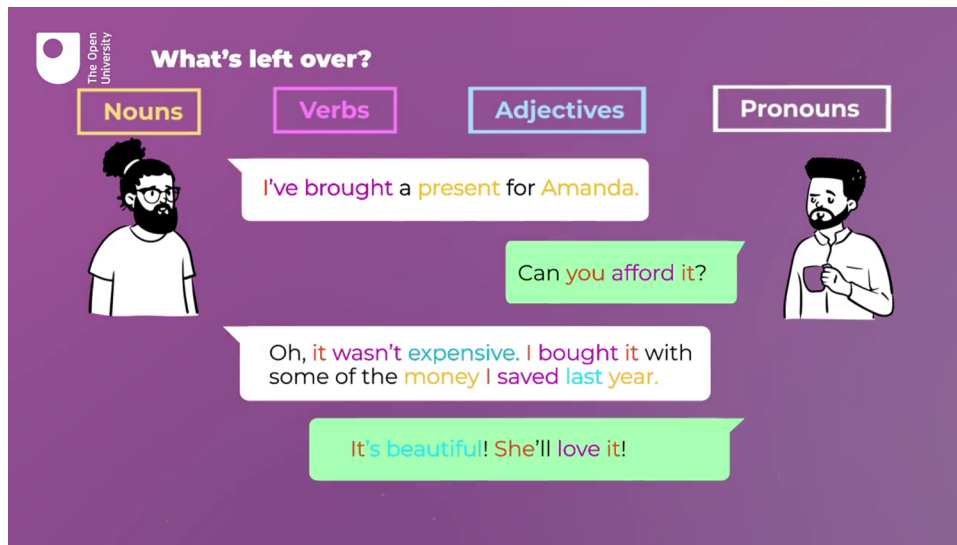


Figure 3 Examples of some word classes.

This course won't cover all the word classes in the same detail. You'll start with nouns, verbs and adjectives. In the second half of the course you'll look at how these major word classes are combined into sentences and texts. This is done using smaller classes of more grammatical words, like pronouns (*they* or *you*), prepositions (*in* and *under*) and conjunctions (*and* or *but*), which you'll be introduced to in Weeks 5–8.

2 This week's words

In some ways nouns are the most basic parts of a language – they're the 'labels' for things. You use them when saying:

- What there is – There are plenty of **carrots**.
- What you can see – Look at that **elephant** over there!
- What you want – Could I have the $\frac{3}{4}$ inch **spanner**, please?

If you didn't know the meaning of the bold word in one of these examples (*carrots*, *elephant*, *spanner*), it would be difficult to get the main idea expressed in these sentences across in another way.

Nouns are central to knowing and using a language. When you say someone speaks Greek/Thai/Xhosa/etc., you expect that they will be able (if they also speak English!) to answer questions like:

- What is the Greek word for *banana*?
- What do Thai speakers call a *rabbit*?
- How do you say *table* in Xhosa?

It's obviously not enough *just* to know the nouns (in addition to *carrot*, *elephant* and *spanner* there are at least four other types of words in the three example sentences above). But learning about nouns is a good place to start.

2.1 Different kinds of nouns

The next video explains some of the major categories of nouns. You'll test your knowledge of different types of noun in the activities that follow. If you find the activities difficult, remember that you can always return to this explanatory video.

Activity 3 Proper or common nouns?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

As you watch the following video, make note of how many different types of nouns are mentioned in the text box below. You might want to watch the video more than once and remember that you can return to it at any point in the course.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 2 Different kinds of nouns](#)



Different kinds of nouns

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The following types of nouns were mentioned in the video: proper nouns and common nouns, count nouns and non-count nouns, concrete and abstract nouns. You'll learn more about each type in the next activities.

2.2 Can you spot the different types of noun?

It's time to put your new-found knowledge of nouns to the test. The next set of activities are designed to allow you to practise classifying different types of nouns. Don't worry if you don't get them all right first time – practice is key and you can return to these activities whenever you need them.

Activity 4 Proper or common nouns?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read the following passage and highlight proper nouns in yellow, and common nouns in blue.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Discussion

As you may have noticed, the proper nouns do all begin with a capital letter.

Activity 5 Count or non-count nouns?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read the following passage, and consider the nouns shown in *italics>. Highlight count nouns in yellow and non-count nouns in blue. (As with the previous activity, if you find this activity difficult, you can rewatch the video in Section 2.1.)*

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Discussion

As you may have spotted, there are other nouns in the passage, such as:

activities, week, Saturday, butcher's, dinner, Sunday, grocery, days, week, market

But the focus here is on some of the ones that make the count/non-count point most clearly.

Some non-count nouns can also occasionally be used as count nouns. In these cases, it's usually clear from the context that the meaning is 'a single unit of' the item:

- I had **a yoghurt** after lunch. (a pot of yoghurt)
- He bought **a whole cheese** from the delicatessen. (a wheel of cheese)
- Can you pass me **a water**? (a bottle of water)

In these cases, you might also get a sense that some words are missing: *a yoghurt* is shorthand for 'a tub/pot of yoghurt', *a whole cheese* is a 'whole wheel of cheese', and *a water* is really referring to 'a bottle of water'. Importantly *tub/pot*, *wheel*, and *bottle* are all count nouns.

Activity 6 Abstract or concrete nouns?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read the following passage. Look at the nouns in *italics>. Highlight abstract nouns in yellow and concrete nouns in blue.*

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Some abstract nouns are 'big ideas', like *peace*, *freedom*, *progress* – so big, in fact, that they are sometimes written with a capital letter (especially in slogans): 'We want Peace, Freedom, Progress!'

Some concrete nouns are pretty obvious – they're solid and take up room, like a *table* and *chairs* or a *cow* or a *horse* or an *aeroplane*. Others are less clear: a *war* is a major event

involving lots of people, places and other events within it. It has a beginning, middle and (let's hope) an end, so it's definitely not just an idea somewhere up in the air. But if we're not thinking of a particular event, and we mean 'the absence of peace', then *war* can be used like an abstract noun ('We are against War and for Peace in every circumstance').

2.3 All the noun types together

Although so far you've focused on each category of nouns separately, nouns can be classified into more than one group. This should be clear if you look at how the categories relate to each other in the tree diagram below.

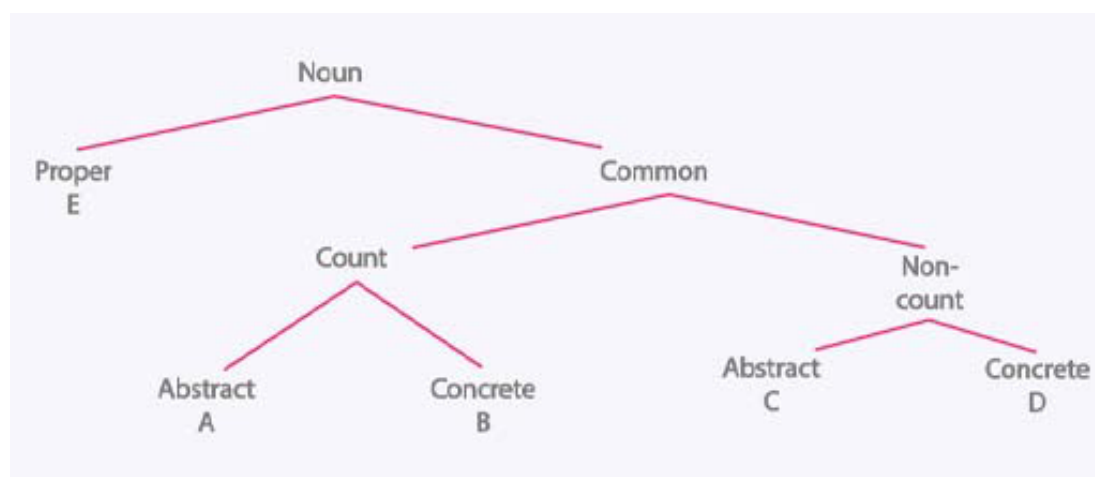


Figure 4 How nouns are categorised.

Activity 7 Where in the tree does the noun go?

This activity should take you around 5 minutes

Look at the tree diagram in Figure 4 and consider the following words:

banana, idea, Napoleon, petrol, revenge

Which word goes at A, B, C, D and E, and what categories does each fall under as a result? The first one has been done for you.

A. idea – a common, count, abstract noun B. C. D. E.

Discussion

A. idea – a common, count, abstract noun

B. banana – a common, count, concrete noun

C. revenge – a common, non-count, abstract noun

D. petrol – a common, non-count, concrete noun

E. Napoleon – a proper noun

3 Nouns make more nouns



Figure 5 Making a compound noun.

Now that you've learned about individual nouns, there's one other important characteristic of nouns that you need to get to grips with. Nouns can combine to form other nouns: *Cardiff + City = Cardiff City*, *birthday + party = birthday party*. In fact *birthday* is itself a combination of two other nouns: *birth + day*. In this way, many nouns are made up of other nouns, and form either a new word (*sales + person = salesperson*), or a phrase (*fishing + permit = fishing permit*).

It's not always clear how to write these combined nouns (which we call **compound nouns**). For example, you can find people writing *hair brush*, *hair-brush* and *hairbrush*. In general, the more everyday and frequently used a compound is, and the longer it has been used in the language, the more likely it is to be written as one word, rather than as two, or with a hyphen. You can look back at the history of compounds in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where you will find that a word such as 'toothbrush' was often written as *tooth-brush* or as two words until as recently as the 1920s.

Activity 8 Creating compound nouns

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Look at the two lists below, A and B. Can you form compounds (including phrases, single words and hyphenated words)? Make a list of as many as you can.

List A	List B
back	ache
head	cap
toe	paste
pay	check
health	care

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There is no definitive answer here, unless we decide on a particular dictionary as the judge, because words are being used in new and unusual combinations every day. It's the ability of nouns to be combined like this that makes it possible for us to talk about

new situations and say new things. However, here are some of the more common combinations that you might have listed:

- *Backache, headache* (*toe-ache* is not impossible, but not fixed)
- *Toe cap, pay cap*
- *Health care* (or *healthcare*) is quite common, and *toothcare* (or *tooth care*) is perfectly plausible. *Back care* could occur (for example in an advice leaflet for patients) but seems less fixed.
- *Health check, paycheck* (in American English – this would be *pay cheque* in British English)

You may have spotted that, in creating compound nouns, you were combining two free morphemes (which you learned about in Week 1). The open-ended nature of the noun word class demonstrated in this activity – we can always combine words or create new nouns – is an important feature of language. Language is not a fixed, unchanging code. There will always be more nouns on the way, whenever there is a new concept that needs defining or a new invention that needs a name. Language is always in flux!

4 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 2. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 2 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

5 Summary of Week 2

This week you have looked at nouns: the words we use to name things, places, people and ideas.

Think back to the shopkeeper you imagined at the start of this week. When thinking about how you would purchase the items you needed, you would still need to find out the actual words for what you wanted to buy in the local language, but you now know more about the type of words that you'd need. In most cases, the things on your shopping list would be common nouns, concrete nouns, and a mixture of count and non-count nouns, such as *pimientos rojos* (red peppers) and *leche* (milk).

An important part of this week has been starting to think about language as made up of a set of different classes of words that do different things. You've had an overview of the word classes you'll cover in the first part of the course (nouns, verbs and adjectives), and also a peek ahead to pronouns, which are covered later. There are also a few more classes that will come up later, but these will certainly do for the present.

You've had some practice in assessing and classifying nouns using some of the categories linguists and grammarians use and you're starting to build up the vocabulary you'll need to accurately describe language. You may have found that it's not always easy to apply the new labels you've come across to different nouns, but you've taken your first steps on the way to systematically analysing the language around us.

Next week you will consider another of the largest groups of words in English. These are the words we use to talk about actions, or what people and things are doing – the grammatical category called **verbs**.

You can now go to [Week 3](#).

Week 3: Verbs 1: how we describe what we do

Introduction

Mental health becomes a problem when it interferes with daily life.

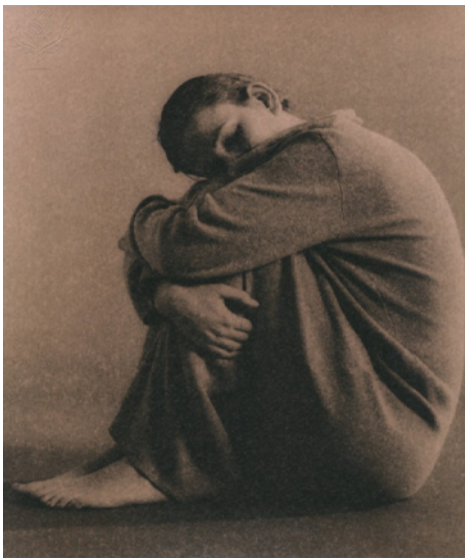


Figure 1

Although individuals vary, there are certain signs and behaviours that can signal that a young person is struggling with their mental health and in this session you'll learn about some of them. Mental health depends on social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. The causes of mental health problems are often a combination of biology (how the brain and body work, especially in response to stress), psychological traits (e.g. personality type), the social environment (life experience), and sometimes certain chemical substances (such as alcohol or marijuana). A tendency to develop mental health problems can run in families, although the reasons for this are complicated and may include inequalities and poverty that run between generations. There is still a great deal of debate among researchers about how these factors interact. However, most experts now agree that there is rarely a single cause.

To get started on understanding some of the different dimensions that can affect mental health, watch the video, which features a group of young people describing their own experiences of mental health problems.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1: Mental health in our own words](#)



This session will introduce you to four sets of common mental health problems, starting with anxiety and depression. Anxiety and depression are commonly used terms, and you will get below the surface to discover what they mean. Anxiety and depression can sometimes develop into other behaviours such as eating disorders and self-harm. On your journey through this session, you may encounter material that can be unsettling, although we hope that the knowledge and understanding you gain will help you to become a more effective supporter of young people who are struggling with their mental health. If you are affected by any of the course material please refer to our support notes at the [end of this session](#).

1 A doing word?

Let's start with the idea that verbs are 'doing words'. Lots of verbs certainly are about actions like someone or something moving or changing itself, or affecting or changing something or someone else. Look at the following examples:

- He *hit* his thumb with a hammer.
- They *ate* all the pies.
- I *shot* the sheriff.
- Pedro *reads* very quickly.
- She *bought* a new car.

And to show that it's not only people who do things:

- The rain *ruined* the picnic.

But verbs can also involve mental activity and emotions:

- We *want* another chance.
- I *hope* so!

- Everyone *expected* them to win.
- She *hates* that sort of attitude.
- Andrea *thought* he was taller.

Verbs help us to make a connection between the thing or person doing something and what they are doing. In all the examples given above, the first word (nouns and pronouns, which you'll learn about in Week 5) is called the 'subject' of the verb (who or what is doing the thing expressed by the verb). You'll learn more about the subject (and other parts of a sentence) in Week 6. Verbs can also tell us a lot about the person or thing that is affected by an action – the 'object' of the verb (which you'll also encounter in Week 6, but for now you'll just focus on the verbs themselves).

Activity 1 Spot the verbs

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read the following sentences and choose which word is the verb (there is only one verb in each sentence). Ask yourself: 'what action (or emotion) is taking place here?'

1. I never saw so many flies before.

- ☐ flies
- ☐ saw
- ☐ before
- ☐ never

2. They love everything new like that.

- ☐ like
- ☐ new
- ☐ that
- ☐ love

3. Move the piano into the hall.

- ☐ move
- ☐ piano
- ☐ hall
- ☐ into

4. Snow fell throughout the day.

- ☐ day
- ☐ snow
- ☐ fell
- ☐ throughout

5. They went away in the end.

- ☐ end
- ☐ went
- ☐ away
- ☐ they

6. Please request a form from the office.

- ☐ request
- ☐ form

- ☐ please
- ☐ office

Discussion

You may have noticed that some of the words in the examples above could be verbs or nouns, depending on the context. For example, 'flies' in 1) refers to a swarm of insects, so it is a noun, but you could also find the same sequence of letters used as a verb, as in 'She flies to Berlin several times a month'. There are usually plenty of clues in a sentence that help you identify when a word is a noun or a verb. If a word is used after *a*, *an* or *the*, or an adjective like *my* or *many*, it is likely to be a noun, as in *a run*, *my thoughts*. When a word comes after a noun or pronoun (*I*, *they*) or the word *to*, it is more likely to be a verb, as in *Jacques skis*, *she thought*, *to run*.

1.1 How verbs can shape meaning

Verbs are an incredibly important part of speech. Not only do they help us to structure our language, by allowing us to show who is doing what to whom, or who is experiencing a thought, feeling or emotion, they also add colour to the language we use and allow us to express shades of meaning. As such, verbs are an extremely useful resource for writers, advertisers and storytellers alike, and in the next activity you'll have a chance to put your creative writing skills to the test.

Activity 2 Change the verb, improve the story

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Read the following short story and then rewrite your own version of it in the box below. You can only change the verbs that have been *italicised* in the original.

The astronaut *stepped* out of the pod door and onto the planet's surface. She *looked* across the landscape to *see* the red hills. The astronaut *smiled* and *thought* about building a settlement. She *opened* her scientific equipment to *take* soil samples. As she *worked*, the astronaut *saw* three creatures *looking* at her from a few meters away. Heart *beating* quickly, the astronaut stood and *moved* towards the creatures and took a photograph. The creatures *ran* into the hills and the astronaut went back to her ship to *tell* her crewmates.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There are hundreds of possible answers for this activity. The original version of the text feels quite mechanical. The majority of the verbs used are quite common and do not necessarily convey the uniqueness of the situation that the story describes. One example of how changing the verbs could have made this story more engaging is given below. Here you'll see that everyday verbs like *looked* have been changed for less common words like *gazed* and the relatively neutral form *walked* is replaced with *tiptoed*, to convey more about exactly how the astronaut approached the creatures.

The astronaut *manoeuvred* out of the pod door and onto the planet's surface. She *gazed* across the landscape to *appreciate* the red hills. The astronaut *grinned* and *wondered* about building a settlement. She *unpacked* her scientific equipment to *collect* soil samples. As she *toiled*, the astronaut *spotted* three creatures *peering* at her from a few meters away. Heart *pounding* quickly, the astronaut stood and *tiptoed* towards the creatures and took a photograph. The creatures *zoomed* into the hills and the astronaut went back to her ship to *notify* her crewmates.

You may have also wanted to change some of the nouns, perhaps *alien* would have sounded more exciting than *creature*, or you might have changed the repetition of *astronaut* for other labels such as *scientist* and *explorer*. Further still, you might have wanted to add some adjectives like *scaly* and *purple* to describe the creatures and to increase how exciting the story was. In truth, all of these different parts of speech work together to achieve the overall effect of a text. But the important thing to take away from this exercise is just how much you could make a text seem more exciting simply by changing the verbs.

One thing you might have spotted when making your changes to this story is that, even though you changed some of the verbs, you didn't change their endings. Replacing *stepped* with *manoeuvred* or *smiled* with *grinned* still meant that you used an *-ed* ending to make the story make sense. The same is true for swapping *looking* with *peering*, where the *-ing* form is used. This is because of the different morphemes (see Week 1) that verbs can take. You'll take a closer look at morphemes in the next section.

2 Verbs and morphemes



Figure 2 To eat or 吃

You learned in Week 1 that in English we can use bound morphemes to change the meaning (or function) of a word: *walk* becomes *walked* or *walks*. But not all languages work in this way. In some languages (Mandarin Chinese, for example) the words don't change from the form you'll find in the dictionary. Virtually all the words in Mandarin Chinese are free morphemes and you don't add bound morphemes (like **-ing** or **-ed**) to them to make new words.

eat in Mandarin Chinese is chī, **!Warning! MS Mincho not supported**吃

This word is used in all cases, whereas in English we would change the word form depending on who was eating (I *eat*, she *eats*) and whether the action happened in the past (I *eat* becomes I *ate*).

In other languages (German, for example) words change their endings in many ways, much more than English does. German nouns change to show they are plural (like in English: door > doors), but nouns and adjectives (and the equivalent of *the*) can change to show who is 'doing' the verb and who is having something done to them.

der schwarze Hund beißt den dummen Mann	der dumme Mann beißt den schwarzen Hund
(the black dog bites the silly man)	(the silly man bites the black dog)

English has fewer changes than German, but it does have some. You saw last week that many nouns can be made plural by adding an -s, but verbs can also change too. For example, to show that a verb is referring to something in the past you add the bound morpheme **-ed** (or **-d**) to the dictionary form of the verb (live > lived; want > wanted). You can add the morpheme **-ing** to a verb to form what is known as the present participle (discussed in Section 3) (live > living; want > wanting). Even though this terminology might be new to you, chances are, you're still able to decide what morpheme you need to convey your message.

Activity 3 Add the missing piece

This activity should take around 10 minutes

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Discussion

1. -ed

2. -s
3. -ing
4. -
5. -ed
6. -ing (dropping the 'e' > 'phoning')
7. -
8. -ing

You may not yet know the rules you are following, but it should be possible to choose the correct morpheme (or none, if one is not required). If you puzzled over any of them, or got the wrong answer, try to imagine someone saying the relevant sentence in a natural context. Which version are you most likely to hear? In some cases, especially if your experience of English is as a second language speaker and/or you speak a particular dialect or variety of English, you may have opted for different answers. For now, just to keep things simple, you'll focus on the forms that would be expected in (standard) British English.

3 Verb + verb = verb

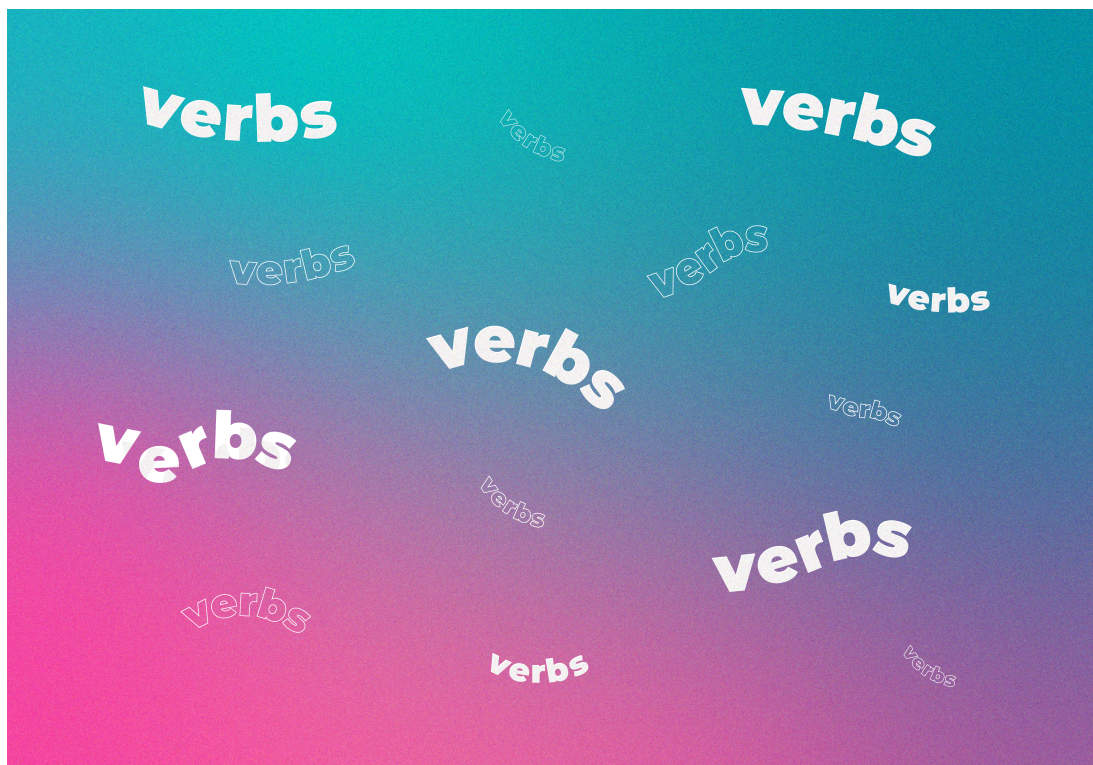


Figure 3 Verbs!

The example verbs so far have mostly been single words (*bought, sat, think*, etc.). But you've also seen that verbs can be made up of more than one word:

I've been working

He was phoning

You'll now look at these multi-word verbs more closely.

3.1 Auxiliary verbs

Verbs like *run, jump, think, ponder, love, hate*, etc. are probably quite familiar to you. But there are also three particularly special verbs in English that deserve the spotlight: *be*, *have* and *do*. As you can see from the table below, *be* is more varied than the other verbs – it has three different forms that refer to the present (*am, are* and *is*), while most verbs have only two (for example, *walk* and *walks*). And it is unique in modern standard British English in having two forms to refer to the past (*was* and *were*).

Table 1

	be		have	do
	present	past		
I	am	was	have	do

You	are	were	have	do
he/ she/it	is	was	has	does
We	are	were	have	do
You	are	were	have	do
They	are	were	have	do
past			had	did

All three of these verbs can be used on their own:

- I **have** a good idea what he meant. (Here *have* = 'possess' or 'own')
- The morning **is** my favourite time of day. (Sentences with *be* tell us something about the identity or characteristics of the subject: *Pierre and Marie are French; London is expensive; camping is boring.*)
- She **did** her homework on the train. (Here *do* = 'write' or 'complete')

But when they are used with other verbs, *be*, *have*, and *do* are called **auxiliary verbs**; they act as 'helpers' (or 'auxiliaries') to add (grammatical) meaning to a sentence.

- I had run at a consistent pace. (Here *had* + *run* = the action (*to run*) happened in the past)
- He is waiting at the bus stop. (*Is* + *waiting* = the action (*to wait*) is happening now)
- They do sell those new kitchen mixers. (*Do* + *sell* = to emphasise that the action (*to sell*) actually happens)

The box below summarises some of the ways auxiliaries 'help'.

Box 1

Be + -ing

A multi-word verb can involve *be* (*am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*) and the main verb, plus the bound morpheme *-ing*:

- Everyone **is wondering** what to do next.
- He **was sitting** by himself near the door.

These emphasise what is/was happening **ing** at a particular moment.

Have + -ed

Other multi-word verbs include *have*, *has* or *had* and the main verb in a past form:

- They **have lived** there all their lives.
- Elena **had seen** the film many times before.

These place the action within a particular period of time (up to now with *have*, or a point in the past with *had*).

Do/don't + verb

Do frequently combines with other verbs to form multi-word verbs. It is used to make sentences negative:

- Luis doesn't like spinach.
- They don't remember being here before.

It is also used to form questions:

- Do you speak Finnish?
- Doesn't he understand us?

You will look at this in more detail in Week 8.

3.2 Modal auxiliaries

There are other auxiliary verbs which play an important part in English. These are the **modal auxiliaries** (sometimes just called **modal verbs**). Using these verbs allows us to change a verb from a simple statement of fact (this *happened*) to indicate how likely we think it is, or whether it is a good idea or not.

Activity 4 Spotlight on modal auxiliaries

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Watch the video below, which gives an overview of what you can do with these verbs.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1 Exploring modal auxiliaries



While watching, fill in the modal verbs used in some of the examples (if you like, you can think of some possibilities before watching, then check to see if you were right:

1. I _____ go to the beach tomorrow.
2. You _____ take plenty of suncream.
3. They _____ use up all the milk.

4. He _____ be there by now – it only takes an hour.
5. They _____ be at home – I've called them three times and there's no answer.

Discussion

1. I **might** go to the beach tomorrow.
2. You **should** take plenty of suncream.
3. They **mustn't** use up all the milk.
4. He **should** be there by now – it only takes an hour.
5. They **can't** be at home – I've called them three times and there's no answer.

Notice that auxiliaries, when used in the negative, take the negative morpheme *-n't* directly instead of using auxiliary *do*:

Negative

I can hear you. I **can't** hear you.

They live here. They **don't live** here.

3.3 How modal auxiliaries can add nuance

Consider the difference between an advertisement that claims a new face cream *will help to reduce wrinkles* versus one that *may help to reduce wrinkles*. Which option is the company promoting the face cream more likely to use? Why might they choose to hedge their bets and go with *may help to*?

Language doesn't only deal with facts. It allows us to think and talk and write about things we're not sure about, things that might not happen, and about possibility and desirability.

Activity 5 What can modal auxiliaries tell us?

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Look at these sentences:

1. Robin Hood lived in Nottingham.
2. There is life on other planets.
3. The economy is going to crash.
4. People are kind to their neighbours.

They are written as if they are facts: each just states that something is the case. But each of those statements can be questioned. Add modal auxiliaries to the main verb to make them more plausible or realistic:

1. Robin Hood _____ **lived** in Nottingham.
2. There _____ **be** life on other planets.
3. The economy _____ **be** going to crash.
4. People _____ **be** kind to their neighbours.

Discussion

1. Robin Hood *may have* lived in Nottingham.
2. There *might* be life on other planets.
3. The economy *could* be going to crash.
4. People *should* be kind to their neighbours.

These are not the only possible answers. For example, *might* and *may* are interchangeable here with little difference in meaning. Again, depending on your point of view, *must* is a possible answer in sentence 4. Which modal auxiliary you choose depends a lot on opinion and point of view.

3.4 The range of functions of modal auxiliaries

To summarise, the main modal auxiliaries are *can*, *will*, *shall*, *might*, *must*, *dare*, *need*, *ought to*, *could*, *would*, *should*, *may*, *got to* and *have to*. Many modal verbs can be used in two ways, one indicating how far the speaker thinks something is likely, the other indicating how far they think something is desirable or necessary.

The table below shows how you can use the same modal auxiliary to express different ideas. You don't have to remember all of these; they are just here to show you some of the ways in which modal auxiliaries can be used to alter the meaning of a sentence or statement:

Table 2

Possibility/likelihood/certainty		Desirability/necessity/permission/obligation	
logically necessary	<i>He's not answering – I guess he must be out.</i>	compulsory	<i>Construction site: Hard hats must be worn.</i>
predictable	<i>Who's that at the door? Oh that will be Mariam.</i>	determined	<i>Whatever happens, I will wait for you.</i>
probable	<i>How long do the beans need? 20 minutes should be enough.</i>	desirable	<i>Some people think marijuana should be legalised.</i>
possible	<i>Careful – it could/might explode!</i>	desirable	<i>If you're going out, you could/might get some milk.</i>
possible	<i>Tarmac can/may get very hot during summer.</i>	permissible	<i>You can/may take photos as long as you don't use a flash.</i>

As is often the case with language, the difference between modals can be a 'grey area'. There is no firm dividing line between what *will* happen, what *may* happen, and what *might* happen, nor between what you *must*, *should* or *could* do.

4 Categorising verbs

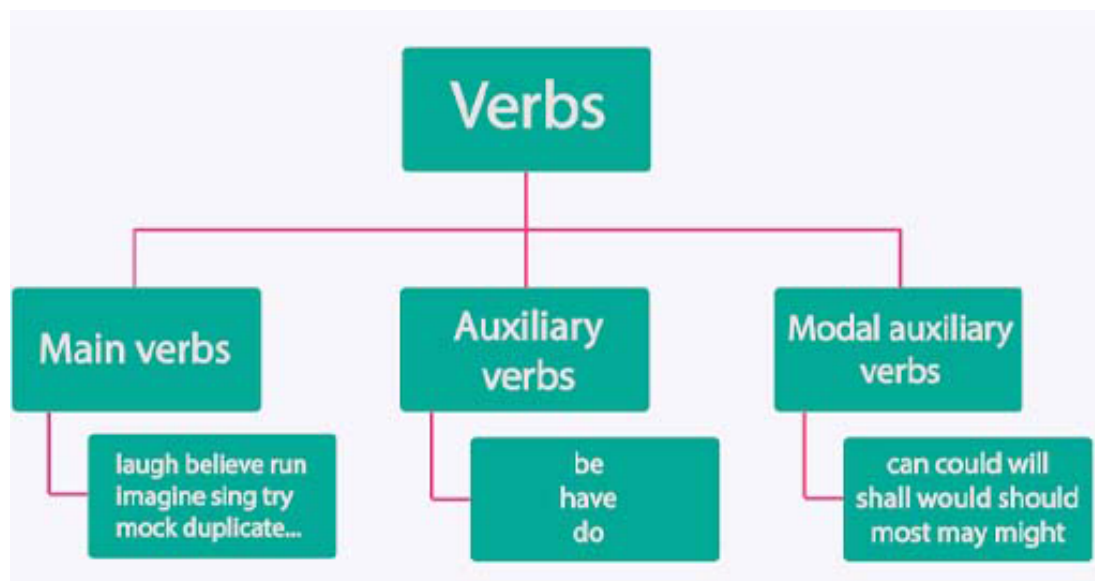


Figure 4 How verbs are related.

In order to put your knowledge about verbs to the test, the next activity gives you the chance to spot and categorise the different types of verbs that have been covered in this week's work. You'll need your knowledge of these verbs next week too, so spend some time making sure you can complete this activity. And remember, you can always revisit this week, or previous weeks' material.

Activity 6 Find the auxiliary verbs

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Read the following passage, written by someone who is not very adventurous about food. Highlight the auxiliary verbs (be, have and do) in yellow as well as modal auxiliaries (*can*, *could*, *might*, etc.) in blue.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



There are a few new things here. You may have noticed *do* being used for emphasis: *I do like a nice bit of haddock!* You may also have noticed that two auxiliaries (*will* and *be*) were combined in: *Most evenings I'll be tucking into something tasty.* It's also worth pointing out that the *will* here is referring to a *habit*, and not the future. This is a similar use of *will* to:

If you **will** keep leaving the door open, is it any surprise things get stolen?

When you start looking at how we actually use language, you often find things are more varied and complex than simple grammar rules suggest. That's why we use quite simple sentences as examples, but you should keep a look out for how the rules operate in the conversations and texts you engage with on a typical day.

5 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 3. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 3 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

6 Summary of Week 3

Think back to the pictures at the start of the week. Here are suggested descriptions:

- A woman is kicking/striking/booting a ball.
- Snow is running/streaming/racing/flooding down the mountain.
- A man is chopping/hacking/hitting wood with an axe.

This week has been all about verbs. You began by considering whether they can be classified as ‘doing words’. You saw that this is valid to an extent (we *run*, *jump*, *cook* and *eat*), but it only tells part of the story. Verbs also deal with thinking and emotions, and about what things *look* like, what they *are*, and how they *seem*.

You’ve also begun to examine the nuts and bolts of how verbs work. In next week’s material you’ll consider the difference between regular and irregular verbs and learn about the basic tenses (past and present). You’ll also continue to contrast how English verbs work with verbs in other languages.

You can now go to [Week 4](#).

Week 4: Verbs 2: how verbs work together

Introduction



Figure 1 Past or future?

You've looked at verbs of various different kinds, and the kind of things they express. They can tell us about actions, states of mind, qualities, changes and other things. This is all very useful and informative, but we want to know more than just how to spot different verbs. In order to accurately describe language, we need to understand who or what is doing the verb, whether anyone or anything else is involved, and whether we are talking about the past, present or future.

The issue of verbs and time is the main topic for this week. You'll look at how we deal with this in English, and compare how it's done in some other languages too.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- understand the difference between present and past tense
- compare how verbs work in different languages.

1 Present, past and future?



Figure 2 A horse walks into a bar.

There are occasions when it's not at all important *when* something happened:

A horse walks into a bar...

Two men are stranded on a desert island...

A man gets into a lift on the third floor...

These are the introductions for jokes, shaggy dog stories and riddles, and the main thing about them is the situation, the dialogue and/or the outcome. It doesn't matter what day, month or year these events happened (if they ever did). Most other types of story are different. We want to have the events situated in time – when did it happen, when did it finish, and so on.

If you want to show that something happened in the past in English, you change the form of the verbs you use. Most verbs indicate that something has happened in the past by adding the ending *-ed* to the basic verb (or just *-d* if it ends with 'e' already):

- I live in Colchester > I **lived** in Colchester.
- They want pizza for dinner > They **wanted** pizza for dinner.

Irregular verbs, which you'll take a closer look at later on this week, also change, but in a different way:

- We eat a lot of fish > We **ate** a lot of fish.
- Sean buys his clothes in the market > Sean **bought** his clothes in the market.

The past forms of verbs like *eat* and *buy* aren't predictable, so adult learners of English have to learn them one by one (with much heartache and sighing, no doubt!). If you grew up using English you didn't have to be taught these verbs explicitly, because habit will have drummed them into you. Irregular verbs tend to be some of the most commonly used verbs, which is partly why they have not been regularised to follow the pattern used by other verbs.

1.1 Tense in English

The way we change verbs to indicate time is called **tense**. English has only two tenses: present and past. We can refer to the future in many different ways, but English doesn't have a future tense in the same way that languages like French or Spanish do.

Here are just some examples of how we can refer to future events in English. The various ways give different shades of meaning to the verb, often about when you decided to do something, or how definite you think the future event is:

- I'll **do** it tomorrow. (A spontaneous promise – which you might even keep!)
- I'm **going to do** it next. (You've thought about it and decided)
- I'm **having a party** next Saturday. (Something 'on the calendar')
- I **leave** in November. (It's all planned, agreed and booked...)
- We **are to meet** soon. (It has been definitely arranged)

No doubt there are other possibilities. But none of them uses a form of the verb or a special morpheme which indicates the future, because there simply isn't one. We can contrast this with French, where present *je mange* (I eat) contrasts with the future form *je mangerai* (I will eat/am going to eat), or Spanish, where the equivalent forms of the verb *comer* are *como* (I eat) and *comeré* (I will eat).

Activity 1 Into the past

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Here is an extract from a letter where the writer, who has just moved to another country, describes their new situation:

We live in a small cottage near a lake. Every morning I am first up. I do the washing up from dinner and I prepare breakfast in the kitchen. After breakfast I walk directly to the nearby village. I buy things for lunch and dinner and walk back by a different route, usually along the lake shore. I watch the birds swimming on the lake and listen to the breeze blowing through the trees. It's very peaceful!

Now imagine the writer has moved house to a different place, and is describing what life used to be like living in the cottage. Rewrite the paragraph to explain what daily life was like:

We lived in a small cottage...

Provide your answer...

Discussion

There may be some slight variation in your answer, but you most likely wrote something similar to the following:

We lived in a small cottage near a lake. Every morning I was first up. I did the washing up from dinner and I prepared breakfast in the kitchen. After breakfast I walked directly to the nearby village. I bought things for lunch and dinner and walked back by a different route, usually along the lake shore. I watched the birds swimming on the lake and listened to the breeze blowing through the trees. It was very peaceful!

The simplest form of the past is used here ('I prepared breakfast...'), but there are alternatives which you can use to emphasise the routine:

I used to prepare breakfast...

I would prepare breakfast...

1.2 Participles: verbs without any tense

There are other forms of the verb which are not different tenses. They are called **participles** (which just means 'parts').

The **present participle** ends in *-ing* (e.g. *wanting*, *flying*). This is used when we want to emphasise that something is in the process of happening, either in the present:

Of course I'll bring it – I'm **putting** it into my bag as I speak!

Or the past:

I was **crossing** the street when a cyclist hit me.

The **past participle** will be discussed in the next section, on irregular verbs.

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<i>a</i>	into <i>e</i> .	
Awake,	awoke,	[<i>awaked.</i>]
<i>a</i>	into <i>as</i> .	
Forfake,	forsook,	forsoaken.
Shake,	shook,	shakén.
Take,	took,	taken.
<i>are</i>	into <i>ew</i> .	
Draw,	drew,	drawn.
<i>ay</i>	into <i>aw</i> .	
Slay,	flew,	flown.
<i>e</i>	into <i>a</i> or <i>i</i> ,	<i>a</i> .
Get,	got, or got,	gotten.
Help,	(helped.)	holpen.
Melt,	(melted.)	moltén.
Swell,	(swelled.)	swollen.
<i>es</i>	into <i>a</i> or <i>e</i> .	
Eat,	ate,	eatén.
		<i>a</i> .
Bear,	bore, or bore,	born.

* When *a* follows a Vowel or Liquid the *r* is dropped; as *drawn, flown, (or flew)*, are instead of *drawer, fower*; so *illustré drawn, born, ate* for *drawen, boren, aten*; in the German cases, *herve* : and so of the rest.

Break,

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Break,	brake, or broke,	broken.
Clear,	clave, or clove,	cloven.
Speak,	spake, or spoke,	spoken.
Swear,	sware, or swore,	sworn.
Tear,	tawe, or tore,	torn.
Wear,	wawe, or wore,	worn.
Hear,	hare, or here,	horn.
Shear,	sheere,	shorn.
Steal,	stole,	stolen, or stola.
Tread,	trade,	trodén.
Weir,	wove,	woven.
<i>ce</i>	into <i>a</i> .	<i>a</i> .
Creeper,	crope,*	[creept, accrept.]
Freeze,	frose,	frozen.
Scethe,	fed,	fadden.
<i>et</i>	into <i>aw</i> .	
See,	saw,	seen.
<i>i</i>	long into <i>i</i> short,	<i>i</i> short.
Ete,	bit,	bitten.
Chide,	chid,	chidden.
Hide,	hid,	hidden.
Slide,	slid,	slidden.

i long

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writing: but the placing of the Preposition before the Relative is more graceful, as well as more perspicuous; and agrees much better with the solemn and elevated Style.

Verbs are often compounded of a Verb and a Preposition; as, *to uphold, to outweigh, to overlook*: and this composition sometimes gives a new sense to the Verb; as, *to understand, to withdraw, to forgive*. But in English the Preposition is more frequently placed after the Verb, and separate from it, like an Adverb; in which situation it is no less apt to affect the sense of it, and to give it a new meaning; and may still be considered as belonging to

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the Verb, and a part of it. As, *to cast is to throw; but to cast up, or to compute, an account, is quite a different thing*: thus, *to fold us, to hear out, to give over*; &c. So that the meaning of the Verb, and the propriety of the phrase, depend on the Preposition subjointed.*

As

* Examples of impropriety in the use of the Preposition in Phrases of this kind: "Your character, which I, or any other writer, may nowise miswrite by [upon] drawing." *Bacon's Letter to the English Tongue*. "You have belittled your farmers [to upon] the small de-ferring portion." *Ibid.* "Upon such occa-sions as fell one [under] their experience." *Swift, Combe and Delaney into [in]* which we are still engaged." *Ibid.* Chap. 5. The small extent of power possessed [on] by the Commons." *Ibid.* Chap. 3. — "I defend the ministers [of of] hypocrisy the Dutch." *Swift, Four last years of the Queen, Book 2.* "Ovid, whom you credit [for for] the homogeneity of verse." *Dryden, on Dram. Poetry.* "Yet that the one ear the other shall make me see." *K.* (*twice*)

* With a composition retains the signification, which it hath among others in the Saxons, of *from and against*: as *to withhold, to withhold*. So also for has a negative signification from the Saxon; as, *to forbid, forbiden, to forgoe, forgien*.

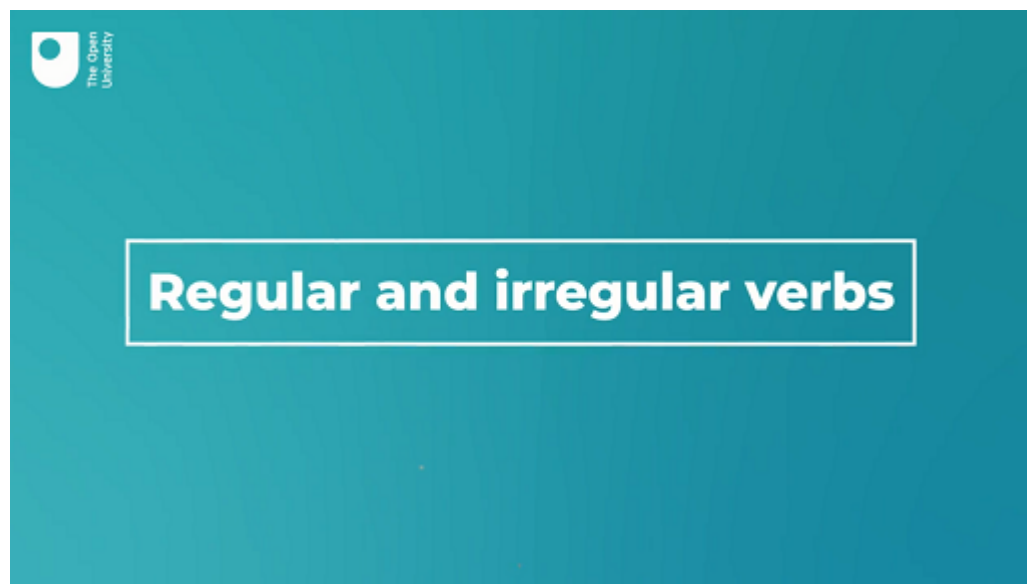
the

So far, you've been working with some fairly well-behaved verbs. However, there are a small number of verbs in English that don't always play by the rules. For example, we *sing* but we don't *singed*, we *run* but we don't *runned*, we *hide* but we don't *hided*. We call these special cases **irregular verbs**.

Watch the video below which explains what irregular and regular verbs are. After watching the video, complete the following activities. You can replay the video as necessary.

Video content is not available in this format.

Video 1 Regular and irregular verbs



Activity 3 Irregular past and present

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Fill in this table with the standard forms of the irregular verbs mentioned in the video. A regular verb has been included for comparison.

Remember:

- Present tense = the basic form of the verb you find at the start of a dictionary entry
- Past tense = the simplest form of the verb used to refer to past time
- Past participle = another past form used in multi-word verbs

Present tense	Past tense form	Past participle
walk	walked	had walked
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>
<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>	<i>Provide your answer...</i>

Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The forms in italics aren't specifically mentioned in the video, but you may have filled them in yourself.

Present/base form	Past tense form	Past participle
want	wanted	had wanted
hide	hid	<i>had hidden</i>
bring	brought	had brought
come	came	<i>had come</i>
go	went	<i>had gone</i>
be	was/were	<i>had been</i>
stand	stood	had stood
find	found	had found
bite	bit	had bitten
see	saw	had seen
throw	threw	had thrown
cut	cut	had cut
bet	bet	had bet

Activity 4 (Un)grammatical?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

What does the video say about sentences like 'I seen him' and 'I've went'?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

While ungrammatical in standard British English, these are grammatical in non-standard dialects of English, and are used in casual speech by many people.

Modern linguists and grammarians study language as it is actually used, rather than focusing on how people think it *should* be used. They don't generally find one form of a language better than others. This tolerant and permissive attitude makes little impression on many members of the general public, who hold strong opinions about the 'wrong' and 'right' way to speak (usually the way they do, of course). So despite what linguists say about all dialects being equally valid, many would feel that it may be safest to approximate more to a standard variety of English in, say, a job interview.

Having considered how the past tense is expressed in English, you're now in a position to look at a real text and consider how it is used in a (very famous) story.

2.1 Irregular verbs at work

As noted earlier, irregular verbs tend to be common ones, so almost any text is likely to contain at least some irregular verbs being used alongside regular ones.

Activity 5 Find the irregular verbs

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Here is an extract from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1847), in which the Ghost of Christmas Present shows the miser Scrooge how different people celebrate Christmas. Read through it and highlight the single-word verbs in the past which are *irregular* in blue and highlight the *regular* past tense forms in yellow.

Interactive content is not available in this format.



Discussion

Of course, there are other verbs in this extract, *live*, *labour*, *know*, *see*, and present participles, such as *passing*, *howling*, *singing*, etc. but the aim here was to find only those verbs that were single words and in the past tense.

If you want some extra practice at spotting verbs, you can go back through this text and try to highlight all the different forms of the auxiliary verbs (*be*, *have*, *do*) in pink as well as finding all the other main verbs.

2.2 What you know so far

In the past two weeks in particular you've come across a lot of important terminology that you'll need to describe language accurately. Learning this terminology and being able to apply your knowledge to the analysis of real texts will mean that you can explain why texts work in the way that they do. And, as you'll continue to explore in the next half of this course, you'll be able to use your new skills to show how language can be used creatively. As verbs can be quite complicated if you've never looked at language in this way before, here's a summary of all the important terms you need to know from the past two weeks.

Activity 6 Defining terms

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Interactive content is not available in this format.

Discussion

1. A main verb expresses the action or process in a sentence (*walk*, *sing*, *think*, etc.).
2. An auxiliary verb is a form of *be*, *have* or *do*.

3. A modal verb is a helping verb like *could*, *should*, *will*, *must*, etc.
4. To make a verb past tense we usually add an *-ed* morpheme.
5. To make a verb the present participle we usually add an *-ing* morpheme.
6. Some verbs are irregular, which means they take special forms for past tense (*bought*, *saw*, *ran*, etc.).

Having got all that under your belt, it should be admitted that English verb grammar is remarkably simple compared to many other languages. If you have studied or grown up with other languages, you may already know this, but it's worth looking at the differences in a bit of detail, which is what you'll do next.

3 Verbs in other languages

If you learned Spanish, German or French at school, you may remember toiling over complex verb forms that were very different from English. In fact, English verbs have a pretty limited number of forms compared to many other languages. Compare English with Spanish, for example.

In the present tense, most English verbs have only two forms:

	Singular		Plural	
First person	I	eat	we	eat
Second person	you (singular)	eat	you (plural)	eat
Third person	he/she/it	eats	they	eat

The table above shows which forms of the verb *eat* are used with different pronouns (you'll learn more about pronouns in Week 6). *Eat* stays the same when used with *I*, *you*, *we*, and *they*, and only changes when used with *he*, *she*, or *it*, where the morpheme *-s* is added. The more technical way of saying this is that most regular verbs use *-s* when they are used with the third person singular (*he walks*, *she jogs*, *it sings*, etc.). Despite all the terminology, the table above shows that things are pretty simple. In fact there are dialects of English where things are even simpler. For example, if you were in Cardiff, in Wales, you might hear *-s* added for all the different 'persons': *I lives*, *we lives*, etc. (Awbery, 2006, p. 333).

In Spanish, in contrast, there is a different form of the verb for each person:

	Singular			Plural		
First person	(yo)	como	= I eat	(nosotros)	comemos	= we eat
Second person	(tu)	comes	= you* eat	(vosotros)	coméis	= you** eat
Third person	(él/ella)	come	= he/she eats	(ellos/ellas)	comen	= they eat

*this 'you' = one person; **this 'you' = several people (Spanish, like many other languages, has a different word for each case)

One reason for this variety is that Spanish usually leaves out the personal pronoun (the equivalent of *I*, *you* etc), so the ending carries the information which in English is provided by *I*, *you*, *we*, *they* etc:

¿comes pescado? Do **you** eat fish?

¿comen pescado? Do **they** eat fish?

The contrast is even more marked in the past tense. English has one form for all persons, whether the verb is regular (I warned, you warned, he/she/it warned, we warned, they

warned) or irregular (eat > **ate**, swim > **swam**, find > **found**). Spanish again has a different form for each person:

	Singular			Plural		
First person	(yo)	comí	= I ate	(nosotros)	comimos	= we ate
Second person	(tu)	comiste	= you ate	(vosotros)	comisteis	= you ate
Third person	(él/ ella)	comió	= he/ she ate	(ellos/ ellas)	comieron	= they ate

If you think English looks simple compared to Spanish, some languages go even further. In Mandarin Chinese the equivalent of *eat* is a single unchanging form (chī, **!Warning! MS Mincho not supported** 吃). This goes with every person (*I eat, you eat, he/she/it eats, we eat, they eat*) but is also used for past, present and future. There are, of course, other parts of Mandarin grammar which make clear what time is being referred to.

Activity 7 Find the verb in other languages

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Look at the sentences below and see if you can tell (or guess!) which word is the verb. Even if you don't know the language at all, try using any clues you can find in the sentence. (This is not a test! It's just a chance for you to apply your newfound knowledge of verbs to other languages.)

1. Spanish. ¿De veras no quieres el puesto? (Do you really not want the job?)

- ☐ veras
- ☐ puesto
- ☐ quieres
- ☐ el

2. German. Wie viele Einwohner hat Deutschland überhaupt? (What population does Germany actually have?)

- ☐ hat
- ☐ überhaupt
- ☐ viele
- ☐ Einwohner

3. French. Nous vous souhaitons un bon voyage! (Have a good trip!)

- ☐ nous
- ☐ vous
- ☐ souhaitons
- ☐ bon

4. Mandarin Chinese. nǐ zhù zài nǎlǐ (Where do you live?)

- ☐ nǐ
- ☐ zài
- ☐ nǎlǐ
- ☐ zhù

Discussion

If you have little or no familiarity with the language(s) in question, it's a bit of a guessing game to try and choose the verb. But there are some clues. For example, you might guess that a short word like *e/* in Spanish is unlikely to be a verb (in fact it's the equivalent of 'the'). In French, the words *nous* and *vous* look similar, so might not be the verb (they're pronouns, equivalent to English 'we' and 'you'). As for Mandarin, unless you know some of the language, this probably has to be a pure guess! This is because Mandarin is not related historically in any way to English, so there are no similarities (even distant ones) to act as clues, unlike *voyage* (= 'trip') in French, *hat* (= 'has') in German, or *no* (= 'not') in Spanish.

This activity was, as noted at the start, not a test. It was to help you think about how languages are similar and different to each other. If you are a speaker or learner of any of these languages, you can think about other aspects where the language you speak or study is closer to or further away from English. And remember, you are not expected to learn any different languages for this course – this activity is just for fun!

4 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 4 badged quiz. It's similar to previous quizzes, but this time instead of answering five questions there will be fifteen.

[Week 4 compulsory badge quiz](#)

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window then come back here when you've finished.

5 Summary of Week 4

Over the last few weeks you've looked at nouns and verbs, the most fundamental parts of a language. These word classes allow us to talk about the world and the things in it, and allow us to communicate what action or processes are happening. Next week you'll consider a different group of words, the **adjectives**. These work closely with nouns, and are used to describe things in more detail. Without them our language would be colourless and not very precise, and in many circumstances it wouldn't be easy to make clear what we were talking about.

You are now halfway through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional [end-of-course survey](#), which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Week 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You can now go to [Week 5](#).

Week 5: Adjectives: adding more information

Introduction



Figure 1 Four different pictures of a dog.

You're now well on your way to working steadily through the main word classes. So far you've looked at **nouns** and **verbs**. You could get some way with communicating if a language only had nouns and verbs, but in order to communicate effectively, we need something more. For example, consider each of the pictures above. All of them are pictures of a dog.

If you were talking on the telephone to someone else who had copies of these four photos, how could you identify each one to them? Assuming you're not both experts on dog breeds, one way would be to use the words in bold:

- The **black** one
- The **small** one with **curly** hair
- The **perky** one with **fluffy** fur
- The **patient** one with **pointy** ears and a **short white** and **tan** coat

The emboldened words are **adjectives** and this week you'll look more closely at this very useful class of words.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- define and identify adjectives in simple sentences
- explain how nouns and adjectives work together
- write your own short text using adjectives creatively.

1 What are things like?

Adjectives are 'describing words'. One way to think of them is as the kind of word you use when someone asks:

- What's your new boss like?
- What's your home town like?
- What's their new house like?

If you had to answer questions like these in *one* word, what words might you use?

Here are some suggestions:

- intelligent, demanding, grumpy, inspiring ...
- busy, exciting, peaceful, polluted ...
- huge, old-fashioned, fancy, small ...

1.1 Finding the adjectives

As with nouns and verbs, you've been using adjectives almost as long as you've been using English. When learning the language as children we will, very early on, know the difference between a *red ball* and a *blue ball*. For second language learners, adjectives are also introduced quite early on. So before going into the technical vocabulary, see how good you are at spotting adjectives in the first place.

Activity 1 Which words are adjectives?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read these sentences. Which word in each one is the adjective? Ask yourself: 'what was it/he/etc. like?'

1. John's birthday party was boring.

- ☐ party
- ☐ boring
- ☐ birthday
- ☐ was

2. They need to buy new things for their flat.

- ☐ new

- ☐ flat
- ☐ buy
- ☐ need

3. They made us all delicious sandwiches.

- ☐ us
- ☐ all
- ☐ delicious
- ☐ sandwiches

4. I have met Melissa's scary flatmate.

- ☐ have
- ☐ met
- ☐ flatmate
- ☐ scary

5. We stayed in an utterly charming hotel.

- ☐ charming
- ☐ we
- ☐ stayed
- ☐ hotel

6. The lake is the most peaceful place I know.

- ☐ lake
- ☐ peaceful
- ☐ know
- ☐ place

Discussion

Again, if you're unsure, try the 'What's X like?' question: What was the birthday party like? What are the sandwiches like?

In 5) the answer to 'What was the hotel like?' could be two words: 'utterly charming', but the main one is *charming*. *Utterly* is there to make it stronger (like *very* or *totally*). You could say *the hotel was charming*. But it wouldn't make much sense to say *the hotel was utterly*. It's the same for *most peaceful* in 6). You could say *the lake was peaceful* but not *the lake was most*.

2 Types of adjectives

There are *lots* of adjectives in English. Like nouns and verbs, there are so many it wouldn't be possible to list them all. And as with nouns and verbs, new ones can always be invented.

Here are some entries for adjectives which were added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in January 2020, with their definitions:

awesomesauce: Extremely good; excellent.

guber: Of or relating to a governor or governorship.

hench: Of a person: having a powerful, muscular physique; fit, strong.

(OED, 2020)

Even if these are new to you, they must have appeared in print or recorded speech often enough for the dictionary makers to think they were worth including.

Box 1

There are some adjectives which form small sets. For example:

- those which identify the *owner* of the following noun: **my** pencils, **your** uncle, **our** ambitions
- those that *point out* which thing or person you mean: **this** door, **those** tomatoes
- those that *ask* which thing or person you mean: **which** omelette?, **whose** giraffe?, **what** money?

Because these adjectives form limited sets, they are discussed next week, as part of a group called 'determiners'.

If you like grammatical terminology – it is neat to have labels for everything! – you might like to know that some grammarians call these small sets of adjectives: a) possessive, b) demonstrative and c) interrogative adjectives. But you don't need to know all of these labels for this course.

2.1 What can adjectives tell us?



Figure 2 A chalk board in a café.

This week you'll focus on the larger categories of adjectives. These include adjectives that describe:

- **Size:** big, small, huge, minute, ginormous, tiny, humungous, microscopic, etc.
- **Colour:** from the basics like red, yellow, blue... all the way to ones which mainly feature in clothing catalogues, like taupe, cerise, teal, gamboge, etc.
- **Shape:** round, square, spherical, ovoid, bulky, lumpy, formless, curved, straight, bent, deep, wide, broad, long, etc.
- **Appearance:** tall, broad, skinny, plump, impressive, menacing, distinguished, hairy, shiny, wavy, spiky, etc.
- **Character:** honest, shifty, friendly, handy, boring, amusing, cynical, imaginative, creepy, picturesque, useless, unbearable, etc.

You could add more categories, and within each the list could go on and on... as far as your vocabulary stretches!

2.2 Where do adjectives go?

Typical adjectives can generally be used in two ways:

- before a **noun**:
a *green* **parrot**, some *tasty* **fish**, *antique* **furniture**, *desperate* **remedies**
- after a **verb**, referring back to the noun before it:
Hanna **is** *clever*, Lisbon **sounds** *interesting*, Jacobo **felt** *tired*

Most adjectives can be used in both positions, but some are more restricted. For example, *awake* and *asleep* only usually occur in the second structure. For example, *he felt awake* or *they were soon asleep*, but not *an awake person*, or *the asleep children*. On the other hand, some adjectives are only used before a noun, such as *an only child*, or *the occasional mistake*, but not *their child was only* or *the mistake was occasional*.

Activity 2 Add the adjectives

This activity should take around 15 minutes

After all those lists, it's now time to put some of those adjectives to work. Read the following passage, and choose from the adjectives below to fill in the blanks:

asleep
blue
bushy
closer
different
long
open
pet
right
shabby
still
strangest
thin
tired
thoughtful
wooden

I knew as soon as I saw him he was _____. He was _____, with a _____ beard, and was wearing a _____ suit made of _____ cloth. He had a _____ walking stick in his _____ hand. He was very _____, and at first I thought he had fallen _____, but when I got _____ I saw his eyes were _____. He had a _____ expression on his face, but he didn't seem _____. The _____ thing about him was his _____ snake.

Discussion

I knew as soon as I saw him he was **different**. He was **thin**, with a **long bushy** beard, and was wearing a **shabby** suit made of **blue** cloth. He had a **wooden** walking stick in his **right** hand. He was very **still**, and at first I thought he had fallen **asleep**, but when I got **closer** I saw his eyes were **open**. He had a **thoughtful** expression on his face, but he didn't seem **tired**. The **strangest** thing about him was his **pet** snake.

There are a few possible alternatives here ('a blue suit made of shabby cloth?'), but the main point here is to show examples of some of the different types of adjectives in context.

2.3 Comparing using adjectives

Because adjectives describe things, they are often used for comparing things. You could own a *large* house, while your neighbour owns a *larger* house, but your cousin owns the *largest* house in the world! In simple terms, to compare two things (i.e. *small* and *smaller* or *large* and *larger*) the morpheme *-er* is added to the adjective. However, some longer

adjectives, like *extensive* or *inspiring* add the word *more* beforehand to signal this comparison:

Paris is **bigger** than Lyon, and it's **more expensive** too

If you have the most extreme example of something, you can show this by adding *-est* to the adjective. With longer adjectives the word *most* is added beforehand:

It's the **fastest** car in the race, and the **most expensive**

Other ways of comparison include using *less* and *least*, or *not as*:

It's **less expensive than** the French one

I thought it was **the least interesting** of all the places we visited

They're **not as worried as** we are

Activity 3 Adjectives in comparison

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Put the adjective at the end of each sentence into the gap. Make sure you use the right form.

1. It's the ____ film I've ever seen. (strange)
2. The rain is ____ than yesterday. (heavy)
3. The deficit is a lot ____ than it was the last year. (big)
4. They bought the ____ house in the village. (expensive)
5. Filippo's disguise was the ____ of all, and he was soon arrested. (convincing)

Discussion

1. It's the **strangest** film I've ever seen. (strange)
2. The rain is **heavier** than yesterday. (heavy)
3. The deficit is a lot **bigger** than it was last year. (big)
4. They bought the **most expensive** house in the village. (expensive)
5. Filippo's disguise was the **least convincing** of all, and he was soon arrested. (convincing)

2.4 Just talking nonsense?



Figure 3 A clockwork orange.

Purely in terms of grammatical structure, it is possible to put almost any adjective in front of any noun. But this could easily produce nonsense: *a round square*, *heavy feathers*, *jealous parsnips*. Squares are, by definition, not round, feathers are proverbially light, and root vegetables don't have emotions (so far as we know!). But these examples are not ungrammatical – it's just that the meaning doesn't match up with the world as we know it. In fact with a bit of imagination we can probably think of a context in which the phrases work. A children's story about talking (and emotional) vegetables isn't too hard to imagine, and if someone in a science fiction story was shrunk to the size of a flea they probably would find feathers rather weighty. The *round square* still poses a challenge, but not necessarily because of grammar.

As you can see, apparent nonsense can challenge us to produce creative interpretations. This is something that has been exploited by writers down the ages. A famous example comes from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945):

All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

If things are *equal*, they are the same as each other (at least in some way), so how can something be 'more' the same? The ironic explanation is that some of the animals in Orwell's political parable are in fact more privileged than others.

Another example comes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

Parting is such sweet sorrow

How can something unpleasant (sorrow) also be pleasant (sweet)? It is, of course, all part of the crazy mixed-up experience of young love!

We can find further examples in everyday language: *a living death*, *a deafening silence*. These may once have been original and attention-grabbing, but repetition has long since turned them into the clichés.

Activity 4 Famous nonsense

This activity should take around 10 minutes

This is one of the most famous (and supposedly nonsensical) sentences in modern linguistics:

Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

What do you think it might mean? Why do you think it was written?

Provide your answer...

Watch the video to find out if you were right.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1 The meaning of colourless green ideas](#)



Famous nonsense

Discussion

The point of colourless green ideas sleep *furiously* was to create a sentence which was grammatically correct, but which had no possible meaning. However, our understanding of language isn't as simple as Chomsky suggested. If we try hard enough, we can start to imagine scenarios where this sentence might make some sense even though, at first, it might seem like nonsense. If you came up with any possible meanings for the sentence, you were not alone!

3 Adjectives working together

Just as nouns need verbs to help us communicate who is doing what to whom, adjectives need something to describe in order to make sense. If we were to stand in the street and shout *Red! Most Expensive! Faster!* our intended meaning would likely be lost. Thus adjectives' primary function is not to stand alone but to work with other word classes (most commonly nouns) to express shades of meaning.

Activity 5 Ugly old-fashioned house or beautiful modern house?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Consider these two sentences:

The building was ugly and old fashioned.

The building was beautiful and modern.

What sort of house do you think of when you imagine each one? Write some notes.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

In the first sentence the author evaluates the building in negative terms describing it as *ugly*, while in the second they use the positive term *beautiful*. The evaluative language is easy to identify because we understand the adjective *beautiful* to signal something that is aesthetically pleasing, and the adjective *ugly* to signal something that is unpleasant.

Each building is also described as *old fashioned* or *modern*. These terms are less explicitly evaluative on their own: *old fashioned* isn't always negative (old-fashioned courtesy), and *modern* isn't always positive (the hectic pace of modern life). But in the context of these sentences they reinforce particular evaluations. In the first sentence not only is the building *ugly*, it's also *old fashioned* and these two terms work together to increase the negative evaluation. Similarly, *modern* has positive connotations when used with *beautiful*, but you would picture a very different building if it was described as *ugly and modern*.

When considering how people, places, social groups, events, or objects are described using adjectives, you should consider how different words work together to produce cumulative evaluative effects.

4 New, improved! Adjectives and advertising

Advertising is designed to make you think that a product or service is better than alternative products/services. Whatever that 'something' is – a holiday, a car, a type of cheese, a large piece of furniture, or even a political party – adjectives can be used to try and sway your opinion.

If you look at adverts carefully and critically, you can start to work out what suggestions and associations advertisers are trying to suggest to their target consumers.

Activity 6 Advertise with adjectives

This activity should take around 15 minutes

What different sorts of product might be advertised using these adjectives? Jot down some products (or types of products) which come to mind.

unique
fast-acting
timeless
effective
gentle
exclusive
mellow
fascinating
natural
reliable
handy
distinctive
all-new
convenient
luxury

Provide your answer...

Discussion

While all of these adjectives are positive, some seem to be about whether a product is good at its job (*fast-acting*, *gentle*, *handy*), while others suggest that the product is special in a less specific, not necessarily practical way (*unique*, *exclusive*, *luxury*). What these latter adjectives might mean is hard to pin down.

How, exactly, would a *luxury soap bar* be different from an ordinary one? Could *luxury* be used to describe any product? There's certainly *luxury toilet tissue*, and *luxury chocolates*, but would you expect to find *luxury bleach* or *luxury pan scrubbers*?

A recent extensive survey of advertising for high-end brands found that, whether they were selling perfume, leather coats or watches, the most common adjectives were of the non-specific kind – the most frequently used of all was *exceptional* (Translate-Media, 2017).

This suggests that a fundamental decision has to be made before creating an advertisement – will the advertisers focus on the practical qualities of the product, or the reputation and aura of the brand? This probably depends a lot on the price of the product, and what sort of competition it faces. Whatever the decision is, it will almost certainly have an effect on the choice of adjectives used.

Look at adverts for products you are interested in (mobile phones perhaps? shoes? holidays abroad?) and compare the amount of emphasis on the practical aspects of the product and the amount of emphasis on the brand. How does this affect the adjectives used?

Activity 7 Analyse the adjectives in an advert

This activity should take around 30 minutes

Read through the advert below for the soft drink Fanta. List all the adjectives you can find.



Fanta LIKE A BURST OF SUNSHINE
through a cool wisp of wind,
IT'S *sweet* AND TANGY, **SURPRISING* AND *☀️ JUICY*.
IT TICKLES LIKE A *DELICIOUS* SECRET THAT YOU CANNOT BEAR TO SHARE.
**AND HOW LUSH IT FEELS AT EVERY SIP* like an instant whiff of a fresh
bouquet of flowers in spring! 🌸
With a quick, 🍊 and a sudden burst of
sharp jolt of tart and a sudden burst of
sugary-citrusy-sweetness,
IT LEAVES YOUR TONGUE TINGLING PLEASANTLY.
THEN, IT 🌺 CURLS DELICIOUSLY AROUND YOUR TASTE BUDS, 🐦
TANTALIZING YOUR IMAGINATION & ripples happily down your spine.
ARE YOU STILL WITH US? GREAT!
CAUSE WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO TRY FANTA'S *NEW*
TASTE, DELICIOUSLY ORANGE. 🍊 YES, RIGHT NOW!
**JUST TEAR OFF A
PIECE OF THIS PAGE
POP IN YOUR MOUTH
& ENJOY A FANTA BY TASTING THIS AD!**

Fanta is a registered trademark of The Coca-Cola Company. This edible paper contains potato starch, wheat flour, cross-linked starch, flavoring, food coloring, artificial sweeteners, saccharin and food-safe ink.

Figure 4 Advertisement by Memac Ogilvy for Fanta, 2018

Please note that, to make it easy to read, the text of the advertisement is reproduced below.

Fanta. Like a burst of sunshine through a cool wisp of wind, it's sweet and tangy, surprising and juicy. It tickles like a delicious secret that you cannot bear to share. And how lush it feels at every sip like an instant whiff of a fresh bouquet of flowers in spring! With a quick, sharp jolt of tart and a sudden burst of sugary-citrusy-sweetness, it leaves your tongue tingling

pleasantly. Then, it curls deliciously around your taste buds, tantalizing your imagination & ripples happily down your spine.

Are you still with us? Great! Cause we would like you to try Fanta's new taste, Deliciously Orange. Yes, right now! Just tear off a piece of this page, pop in your mouth & enjoy a Fanta by tasting this ad!

Fanta is a registered trademark of The Coca-Cola Company. This edible paper contains potato starch, wheat flour, cross-linked starch, flavouring, food colouring, artificial sweeteners, saccharin and food-safe ink.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

From the main advertisement text: cool, sweet, tangy, surprising, juicy, delicious, lush, instant, fresh, quick, sharp, sudden, sugary-citrusy, Great, new.

And from the 'small print': registered, edible, cross-linked, artificial, food-safe.

The advert text mostly uses short, punchy, positive adjectives. The one original item is *sugary-citrusy* which goes with *sweetness*. Together they form a phrase that extends across the whole width of the page, possibly to suggest the mouth-filling burst of flavour after that first *sharp jolt*. With this exception, the use of adjectives is relatively conventional, and the vibrant colour and varied lettering of the advert seem to make as much of an impact as the language here.

We can contrast the main advertisement with the administrative language of the small (in fact tiny!) print at the bottom of Fanta the advert, which lists the ingredients not of Fanta, but of the paper the advert is printed on. This is presumably a legal requirement, as *artificial* is unlikely to be something the manufacturers would want potential customers to associate with their product.

4.1 Write your own advert

The use of adjectives in advertisements is just one way that we can use language creatively. Taken to the extreme, we can consider the famous slogan first used by Pepsi in 1974 to describe its cola drink, where the creative potential of language is used to excess in a string of adjectives formed from present participles:

Lip smackin, thirst quenchin, ace tastin, motivatin, good buzzin, cool talkin, high walkin, fast livin, ever givin, cool fizzin

In the original, all the words were run together, but they have been separated here in the interests of readability!

In the next activity, you'll have a chance to put your own creative skills to the test and come up with your own slogan and advertising copy.

Activity 8 What will you sell?

This activity should take around 30 minutes

Look at the photos below and choose one to write an advertisement for. Decide what the photo is trying to sell, and write the text to go with the photograph. Remember to

attract the reader by suggesting attractive qualities through your choice of adjectives. You should decide how much emphasis you want to put on practical aspects, and how much on a more general desirable aura of exclusivity and quality.



Figure 5 Options for products to advertise.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

If you know another learner studying this course, you could agree to exchange your advertisements and compare what adjectives you have used. If you are studying alone, you could search online for advertisements for products similar to the one you've chosen (a pen, soap, fancy food or a yacht or cruise). Have you used similar adjectives to any of the adverts that you found?

5 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 5. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 5 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

6 Summary of Week 5

Adjectives are an incredibly useful word class. We can use them to:

- single out which particular item or idea you are referring to (which dog, house, subfield of quantum physics, etc.)
- say (or ask) what someone, something or some place is like
- make something sound more (or less!) attractive and interesting
- make people think (by using adjectives in a surprising or puzzling way).

You've now considered the three largest classes of words in English (nouns, verbs and adjectives) so you're well on your way to being able to describe language accurately. From now on the emphasis will increasingly be on how these and other word classes are combined in sentences and whole texts.

Next week you will look at the smaller sets of words which form the connections between words from the larger classes. Some of these words have already been mentioned in passing – pronouns and determiners, for example – but now you will give them more attention.

You can now go to [Week 6](#).

Week 6: All the bits in between

Introduction



Figure 1 Now how do these fit together?

You started this course by looking at the classes of words that make up the vast majority of the words you find in dictionaries: nouns (from *aardvark* to *zebra*) and verbs (from *abandon* to *zonk*). Last week, you saw how adjectives (from *abstract* to *zany*) add more information to nouns and can be used to make language more interesting, informative, and potentially persuasive. But these big chunky words for things that exist and happen out in the world are, of course, not all there is to language. They have to fit together to make sense, and there are other types of words that help us do this. This week, you'll learn about the smaller classes of words that help to connect words from the big classes. By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- explain the relationship between verbs and adverbs
- understand the difference between open and closed class words
- identify conjunctions, prepositions, determiners and pronouns.

1 Adverbs

An **adverb**, as you can probably guess, has something to do with verbs. Adverbs work with verbs in a similar way to how adjectives work with nouns. They make the verb more precise, or add detail to what the verb tells us. For example, *he talks fast*, *I ran slowly*, or *the cat miaowed loudly*.

In English, you can often make an adverb by adding the morpheme *-ly* to the end of an adjective.

Table 1

Adjective	Adverb
quick	quickly
slow	slowly
nice	nicely
easy	easily
sudden	suddenly
thoughtful	thoughtfully
close	closely
distant	distantly

Not every adverb ends in *-ly*, though (for example, *fast* or *hard*). The ones that do are mostly adverbs that tell us about how something was done or how something happened. But a few others, like *too* and *also*, can do this job as well.

Some adverbs tell us where and when the action of the verb took place: *here*, *there*, *everywhere*, *always*, *never*, *still*, *yesterday*, *today*, *tomorrow* are all adverbs.

1.1 Can you recognise an adverb?

Some words (including ones ending in *-ly*) can be an adjective **or** an adverb. You can tell which it is by seeing whether it gives you information about a noun (what is it like?) or a verb (how/where/when does/did it happen?).

Activity 1 Adjectives or adverbs?

This activity should take around 5 minutes

Take a look at the sentences below. Choose whether the word in bold is an adjective or an adverb *in this sentence*.

They caught the **early** train.

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Adverb

He **only** wanted an ice cream.

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Adverb

The **broken** glass was everywhere.

- ☐ Adverb
- ☐ Adjective

Jane was an **only** child.

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Adverb

The tarantella is a **lively** dance.

- ☐ Adjective

- ☐ Adverb

Marjorie decided to have a piece of cake **too**.

- ☐ Adverb
- ☐ Adjective

The train left **early**.

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Adverb

She expected she would **soon** be promoted.

- ☐ Adverb
- ☐ Adjective

Discussion

Some words that end in *-ly* are not adverbs. *Lively* is an example here (some others include *lovely* and *friendly*) as it is telling us more about the noun (*a dance*) than the verb (*is*) and so it is an adjective, not an adverb. Some words, like *only*, can be both an adverb and an adjective depending on whether they tell us more about a verb or a noun. So it is important to carefully consider both the structure and the meaning of an example before assigning labels to each word.

1.2 More things you can do with adverbs

Adverbs can do more than tell us how someone does (or did) something (*slowly*, *painfully*, *happily*, *expensively*). Sometimes we can use adverbs to give us more information about an adjective. Maybe we think *clever* or *hot* or *expensive* is going too far, so we can add *is quite clever*, *is fairly hot*, or *is somewhat expensive*. Or if the adjective on its own isn't strong enough, we can add *really clever*, *immensely hot*, or *extremely expensive*.

Another set of adverbs can show how often something happens: *never*, *rarely*, *seldom*, *occasionally*, *sometimes*, *regularly*, *often*, *frequently*, *always*. As you can see, a good number of these common adverbs don't end in *-ly*.

Of those that do take this morpheme, there are some adverbs that can be used to show your opinion about or attitude towards something: *understandably*, *unquestionably*, *arguably*, *basically*, *obviously*, *actually*, *naturally*. These adverbs are often used at the start of a statement, such as *obviously that was a mistake* or *understandably he was annoyed*.

Activity 2 Can you spot the adverbs?

This activity should take around 10 minutes

In the following passage, see if you can highlight all the adverbs (there are fourteen). Once you've found them all, put each one in a column of the table below, according to the information that it is adding to the passage.

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Frequency (how often?)

Provide your answer...

Manner (how?)

Provide your answer...

Modifying an adjective

Provide your answer...

Showing opinion

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Frequency (how often?)

regularly

often

frequently

sometimes

always

Manner (how?)

hard

early

suddenly

Modifying (a verb or adjective)

nearly

extremely

really

vitaly

Showing opinion

naturally

obviously

If you spotted them all, well done. If there were a few you missed, take a look at the text again. (Note the two very common adverbs which don't end in *-ly*, *often* and *hard*, and that *lonely* and *lovely* are both adjectives.)

2 How words work together

Adverbs are quite a small word class when we consider just how many nouns, verbs and adjectives there are (and how many we could potentially invent in the future), but there are some word classes in English that are even smaller than the adverbs. To show why these smaller word classes are important, we can start by taking a look at what English would be like without them. What would it be like if we only had nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to play with?

Activity 3 Little words that make a lot of sense

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Listen to the first recording which contains part of a short everyday conversation between two speakers. In this first version you will only hear nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs – the other words have been removed. Listen to this version of the conversation a few times to see how far you can understand the situation and what is being talked about. What do you think is going on?

Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio 1 Grammarless

Provide your answer...

When you're ready, you can now hear the full version of the clip to check if you were right.

How much of the conversation did you understand from the first version? What did you miss?

Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio 2 A full conversation

Provide your answer...

Discussion

After a couple of listens, you could probably work out most of what was being said and you probably got the gist of the conversation. You may also have been helped by the relative familiarity of the context (an accident during some domestic DIY, followed by a visit to hospital). But it probably took quite a bit of work for you to decide exactly what words were missing. Nevertheless, these little words that tie nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs together are crucial for allowing us to convey our meaning clearly.

2.1 Open and closed class words

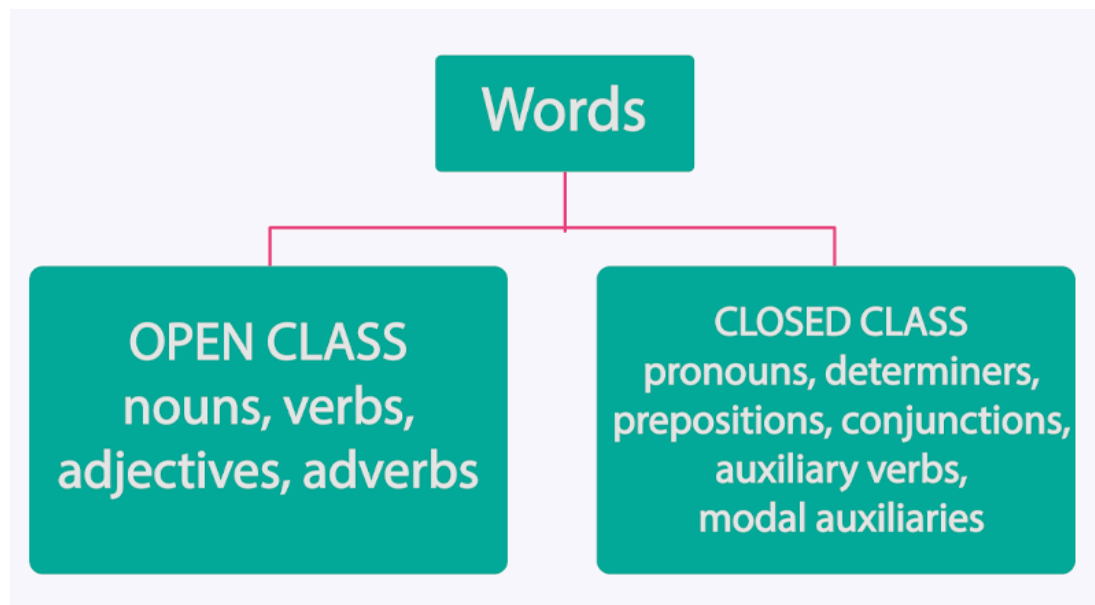


Figure 2 Open and closed class words.

You saw in Week 1 that we can create new words from bound and free morphemes. We can make new words using existing words as a model. It's relatively easy to create new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, with new ones being coined all the time as new products, gadgets and ways of doing things are invented and developed. Not all new words survive very long, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* adds about 400–600 new words, senses and revisions to its online edition every three months. The March 2021 update contained a bumper 700 new items, and 750 revised entries (Dent, 2021). This creative capacity of these word classes means they are categorised as **open class words**. These word classes are open to new members and people show no sign of stopping!

2.2 Not all word classes can be expanded

The word classes you've looked at since Week 1 are the open classes. You've touched on pronouns and determiners, and you met modal auxiliaries and auxiliary verbs in Week 3. These smaller word classes are examples of what we call **closed class words**. These words don't so much refer to things in the world, but rather act as a 'glue' to join the open class words together into phrases and sentences that mean something. You might also hear this type of word called **function words** or **grammatical words**.

Closed class words are small in number (and often in length), but they are very important in communicating meaning. Consider the difference made by the bold word in these sentences:

*That's **not** true!* (what if ...*not* wasn't there?)

*That's **my** money* (what if it was *his*, *her* or *their*?)

*She wants **that** one* (what if it was *this*?)

***You** have to stay here* (what if it was *I* or *we*?)

Closed classes don't change as readily as the open classes and they aren't receptive to new words. The stability of the closed classes is important for communication and for language teaching.

The closed class words are mainly **pronouns**, **determiners**, **prepositions**, **conjunctions** and **auxiliary verbs**. Some of the names for these classes may be new to you if you haven't studied grammar before, but you will soon see that the words they contain are very familiar.

2.3 Can you tell what class a word is from its shape?

There is often enough information in the form of a word, and its place in a sentence, to tell what word class it belongs to, even if the meaning is unclear or unknown. Nonsense poetry, as written by the Victorian writers Edward Lear (1812–88) and Lewis Carroll (1832–98), depends on this information to make it work. Let's look at an example, an extract from the poem *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

You shouldn't have a problem recognising *and*, *the*, *did*, *in*, *all* and *were* (they are all closed class words, which you'll take a closer look at in a minute). But what about the other ones: *brillig*, *slithy*, *toves*, *gyre*, and the rest? Can you guess what class of words they are? Try the following activity to find out.

Activity 4 Making sense of nonsense

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Select the correct word class for each word.

Brillig

- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Noun

Slithy

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Pronoun

Toves

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Noun

Gyre

- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Auxiliary verb

Gimble

- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Auxiliary verb

Wabe

- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Auxiliary verb

Mimsy

- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Preposition

borogoves

- ☐ Adjective

- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Verb

Mome

- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Verb

Raths

- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Preposition
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Auxiliary verb

outgrabe

- ☐ Auxiliary verb
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Adjective
- ☐ Noun
- ☐ Pronoun
- ☐ Determiner
- ☐ Preposition

Discussion

Your expanding knowledge of morphology probably helped you here. The -s at the end of *toves*, *borogroves* and *raths*, for example, probably suggested to you that these words were plural nouns. This deduction is supported by *the* being directly before the word (or before what could be an adjective: *slithy* and *mome*). We can use grammatical information like this to help us understand any difficult text. But even a writer as creative as Lewis Carroll, who found it easy to invent what look and sound like new open class words, couldn't come up with any useful new closed class words.

It's not possible to give an accurate number of how many open class words there are in English; new words are always being created, and old ones fall out of use. But we can estimate that they make up the vast majority of the 20–40,000 words known by an average speaker of English. Luckily, there are many fewer closed class words in English. You'll take a look at each main type in the next section.

3 Closed class words

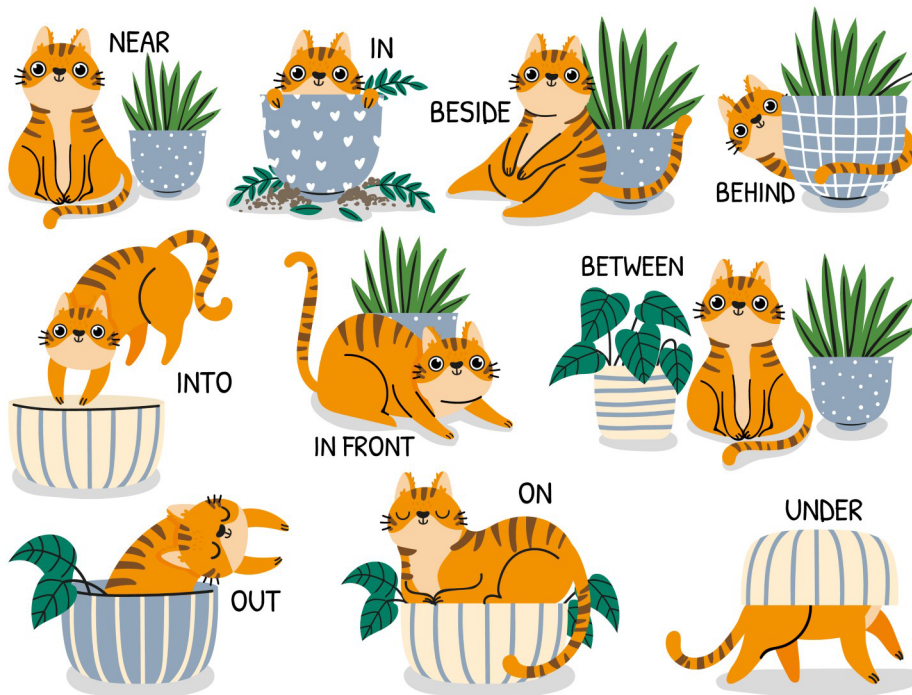


Figure 3 Some examples of closed class words.

You've met some of the closed class words before. In Week 3, you were introduced to the auxiliary verbs – *be*, *have* and *do* – which help to make multiword verbs (*they **were** waiting*, *we **have** seen*, *it **doesn't** matter*). You also considered modal auxiliary verbs (*can*, *must*, *should*, *might* etc), which are also a closed class. These words 'help' other verbs and can show that an action or process is (or is not) allowed (*you **mustn't** go there!*), advisable (*he **should** wear a warm coat*), likely (*it **might** rain later*) or possible (*they **can't** swim*).

3.1 Pronouns

You've also met the **pronouns** before (specifically what we call the personal pronouns). Their main function is to help us talk and write about nouns without having to repeat them all the time. It would sound and look quite odd to keep repeating the nouns in a sentence, see a), so we use pronouns in their place instead, as in b).

- Eleanor loved Eleanor's new coat. Eleanor thought Eleanor looked very fashionable in Eleanor's new coat.
- Eleanor loved her new coat. She thought she looked very fashionable in it.

In English, pronouns can be used in different ways:

- To talk about ourselves: *I* and *me*
- To talk directly with another person or group: *we*, *us*, *you*
- To talk directly about another person or group: *he*, *she*, *him*, *her*, *they*, *them*

- To talk about non-human nouns: *it, one, ones, them*

Pronouns can be singular (*I/me, you, he/him, she/her, it, one*) or plural (*we/us, you, they/them, ones*).

Box 1

We have said that closed word classes tend not to change. But that doesn't mean they never can. Notice that English does not distinguish between addressing one person (*you*) and more than one person (also *you*). English used to have a singular form (*thou*) but this is now only found in older, or old-fashioned texts. This is one example of a change in a closed word class, but it doesn't happen very often. One important change taking place right now is that **they** is being used more and more to talk about just one person, to avoid the awkward *he or she* or *he/she*.

Activity 5 Find the pronouns

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Read through this passage and highlight any pronouns you find:

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Discussion

There were 22 pronouns in the text. Well done if you managed to find them all. Notice there are only 7 different pronouns (*I, it, she, me, we, her* and *us*), but most of them used several times. Such a lot of pronouns in such a short text gives some idea of how important these small words are in helping us talk about nouns without constantly repeating them.

If there were any you missed, take a closer look at the text again. As you read, look for words that seem to be standing in for a person.

You might have highlighted *my* in the extract above, but this word acts more like an adjective than a pronoun as it doesn't take the place of a noun. In fact, because it's part of a small set of very specific words that denote possession, you'll classify *my* as part of the next closed class you're going to look at: determiners.

3.2 Determiners

Determiners are small words you put in front of a noun which tell you something about the thing (person, idea, etc.), but not as much as an adjective would. Determiners include *a/an, the; this, that, these, those; my, your, his, her, our* and *their*. You could put any of the determiners in the list in front of a noun like *car, house* or *family*, and it would tell you something about it, but it wouldn't give you a clearer idea of what the thing was like:

her car, their house, his family (determiner only)

*her **noisy** car, their **tiny** house, his **appalling** family* (determiner plus adjective)

We use *a* or *an* – known as the **indefinite articles** – when we're referring to something for the first time:

*I saw **a** squirrel outside the kitchen window this morning eating **an** orange.*

You use *an* when the next word starts with a vowel, as in **orange**. Notice that *the* (the **definite article**) is used before things that you know about already (such as *the kitchen window*). You would also use *the* if you were to refer to the squirrel (or the orange) again, as you've already introduced these things into conversation.

Determiners can also help you to identify which one(s) of a range of things you mean (*this restaurant, that mountain, those shoes*) and they can tell you who something belongs to (*my idea, our picnic, your nonsense*).

3.3 Prepositions

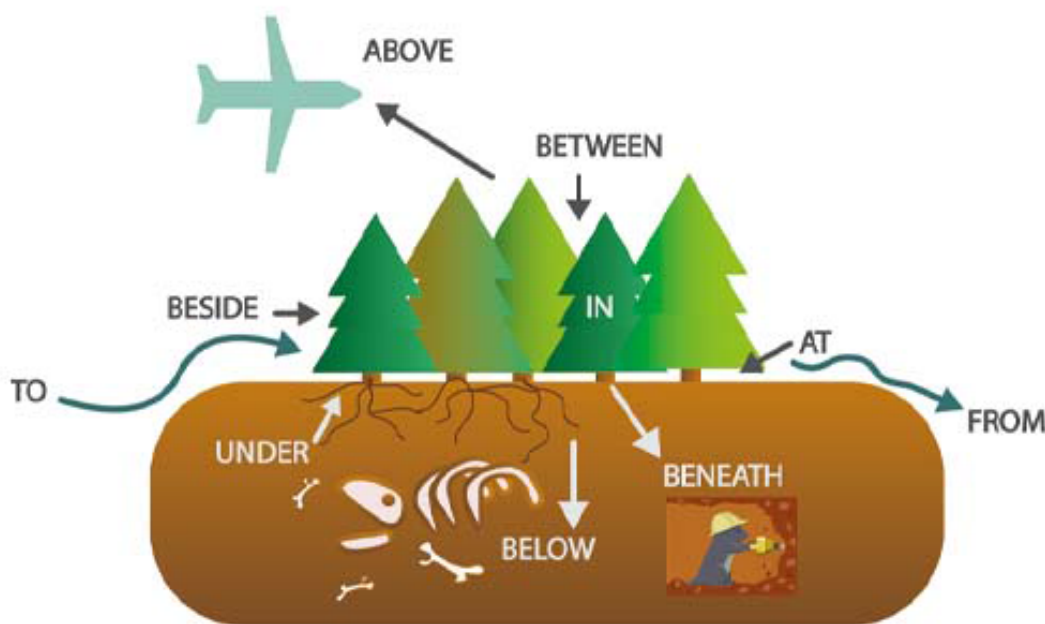


Figure 4 What prepositions can tell us.

Prepositions are words that indicate location or movement in physical space, mental space, or time. In other words, they tell you where (or when) something is, was, or will be. Examples include *to, from, of, for, on, off, in, out, over, under, above, below, around, in front of, behind, before, after, inside, outside*.

Activity 6 Add the prepositions

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Look at the sentences below. What prepositions from the list above would fill the gaps?
The correct number of letters is given.

1. Mary met John __ Paris **on** Tuesday.
2. **On** Tuesday we travelled __ Paris.
3. Mary drove **to** Paris ____ John.
4. John arrived __ the Louvre **before** Mary.
5. __ 5pm precisely John greeted Mary **with** a friendly smile **at** the Louvre.
6. **In** an instant the meeting changed ____ business **to** celebration.

Discussion

1. Mary met John **in** Paris **on** Tuesday.
2. **On** Tuesday we travelled **to** Paris.
3. Mary drove **to** Paris **with** John.
4. John arrived **at** the Louvre **before** Mary.
5. **At** 5pm precisely John greeted Mary **with** a friendly smile **at** the Louvre.
6. **In** an instant the meeting changed **from** business **to** celebration.

The parts of these sentences that begin with a preposition are examples of what we call **prepositional phrases**. They usually act as a single unit and we can move them around in the sentences quite a bit:

On Tuesday Mary met John in Paris

In Paris Mary met John on Tuesday

Mary met John on Tuesday in Paris

3.4 Conjunctions

The final closed class you'll consider here is the **conjunctions**. These are words which join things together. Conjunctions can join single words (*bread **and** butter, tea **or** coffee, naughty **but** nice*) or they can join short statements into longer sentences, such as *We ate the biscuits **and** drank the milk* or *He wanted to go for a walk **but** it started to rain*.

These conjunctions (*and, or, but*) are simple linking words. There are other conjunctions which are used to build up complex sentences, making logical and grammatical connections between the different parts. For example:

*People got angry **because** we ran out of biscuits*

*It's easy **when** you know the answer*

*I'll text you **if** I have any problems*

You'll learn more about this type of conjunction in Week 7.

4 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 6. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 6 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

5 Summary of Week 6

This week you have seen that nouns, verbs and adjectives need help to communicate meaning effectively. Some small but important classes of words are needed to help connect the 'big' words together. You'll need to know how to spot these smaller closed class words too if you're going to describe language effectively.

You also need to put the words you use in the right order. Next week, you'll see how words can be arranged in particular orders to express different ideas and communicate different kinds of meaning.

You can now go to [Week 7](#).

Week 7: Putting it all together

Introduction



Figure 1 A Jedi Master's language.

'Important the order of words in language is', as Yoda, the Jedi Master from *Star Wars* might put it. We can't just put the words we want into any order and expect our meaning to be clear; we build words into sentences in a regular order. If we don't follow this order, we might end up with sentences that people won't understand. (At the very least, we might sound a bit odd!) This week, you'll be looking at how to order words together so that we can use language effectively.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- explain that words do not occur in random sequences
- show how the ordering of words can change the meaning of a sentence
- find the subject and object of a sentence
- show how we build more than one idea into a more complex sentence.

1 The structure of language

As you saw from the Yoda example in the Introduction, it may be possible to make sense of oddly-ordered words if the idea they express is fairly short and simple. But if we are going to express complex topics in longer sentences, we have to put the words together into bigger groups, and combine those groups together, according to the rules of the language we are using.

In Week 6, you looked at grammatical words (the closed classes) and saw how they joined words from the bigger, open classes together. The closed classes add meaning and make communication more effective in various different ways:

- using pronouns (*he*, *she*, *they*, etc.) stops us repeating nouns
- using the indefinite (*a/an*) or definite articles (*the*) shows whether we're introducing new information or talking about something we've mentioned before

- conjunctions (*and*, *but*, etc.) let us join our ideas together, explore alternatives, or point out problems (*Chris **or** Jim will take you*)
- modal auxiliary verbs (*might*, *must*, etc.) let us express how likely something is (*it **may** rain later*) or whether it's a good idea (*you **shouldn't** talk with your mouth full*). They also show whether we're willing to do something (*I'll do the washing up*) or see it as an obligation (*we **must** tidy up*).

The main focus this week is to investigate how we combine open and closed class words in the right order to get the most out of them. Like all the grammatical knowledge in this course, this is something you already know. It's just a question of bringing that knowledge into focus.

1.1 How to build a language

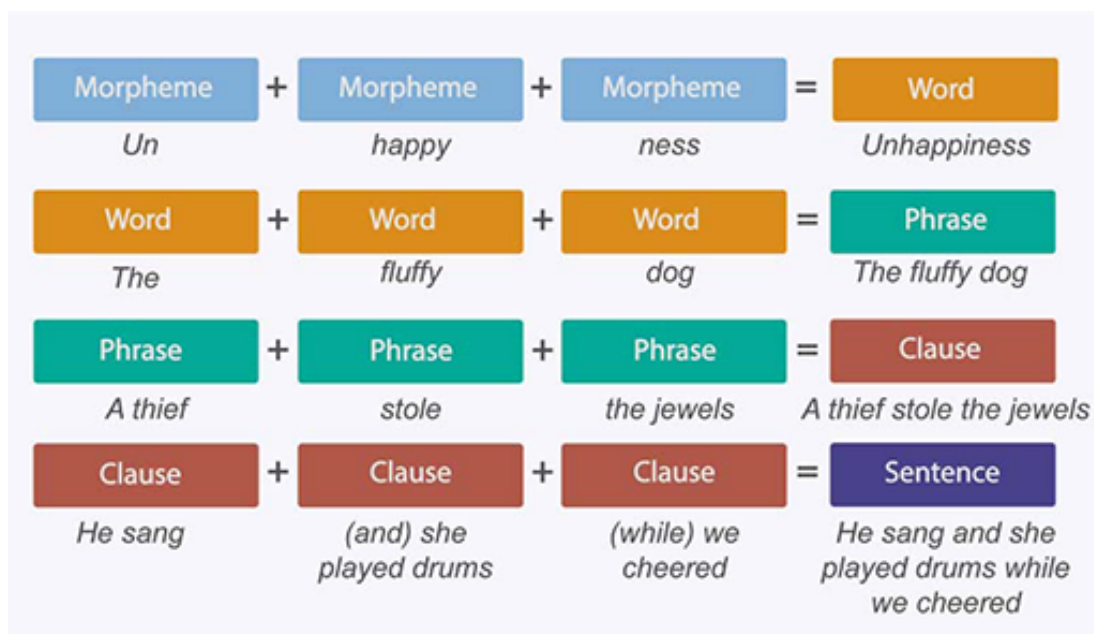


Figure 2 Different types of building blocks.

In order to explain how different parts of language fit together we're going to need some new vocabulary. You already know that morphemes can be combined to make words and that words can be combined to make phrases. In this week's work you'll also see that phrases can be combined to make clauses and clauses can be combined to make sentences. But even without knowing all of this technical terminology, you still have an underlying sense of how words fit together. Test your knowledge in the following activity.

Activity 1 Making the words make sense

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Rearrange the words in these examples so that they make sense as a sentence.

1. all they pies the ate

Provide your answer...

2. want chance another we

Provide your answer...

3. sheriff the shot I

Provide your answer...

4. expected win to everyone them

Provide your answer...

5. quickly very reads Pedro

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. They ate all the pies
2. We want another chance
3. I shot the sheriff
4. Everyone expected them to win
5. Pedro reads very quickly

Hopefully you found it relatively simple to unscramble these sentences. That's because you already have an underlying knowledge of English grammar. If you found this activity difficult, think about the exercise in terms of what patterns you can see in the way words can be arranged. For example, the first word in each sentence is the person/people doing (or thinking or feeling) whatever the sentence is about. If you felt that a particular word order was just 'right', even if you couldn't exactly say why, that was your grammatical knowledge at work behind the scenes. Let's bring that knowledge to centre stage.

1.2 Where do the words go?

The rules of grammar mean that, although there are many potentially different sentences, there are always similarities in the way words are ordered. Certain words (or rather word classes) go in certain places. Sometimes the place of the word actually tells us what the word means. Look at *can* in these examples:

You **can** see it from here

I bought a **can** of peas

It's not the spelling that tells you which one means 'be able to', and which one means 'a cylindrical, metal food container' – it's the grammatical context. Let's see if you can find any patterns in how we order word classes.

Activity 2 What word class goes where?

This activity should take around 15 minutes

This sentence is famous for being used as practice by people learning to type on a computer keyboard:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Here are four sentences with a similar structure. Compare each of the sentences and think back through all the terminology you've learned so far. Choose the right word class for each slot.

1. A small fierce dog barks at a frightened child.
2. An angry young man sits on our favourite seat.
3. Another really lovely plant grew from that tiny cutting.
4. The huge bay window looks over their beautiful garden.

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Discussion

You can see from the sentences above that words of the same type fit into the same slots. Notice that the pattern DET + ADJ + (ADJ +) NOUN occurs twice, once before the verb, and once after the preposition. You'll look at these repeating patterns throughout this week.

1.3 The order of words (in English)

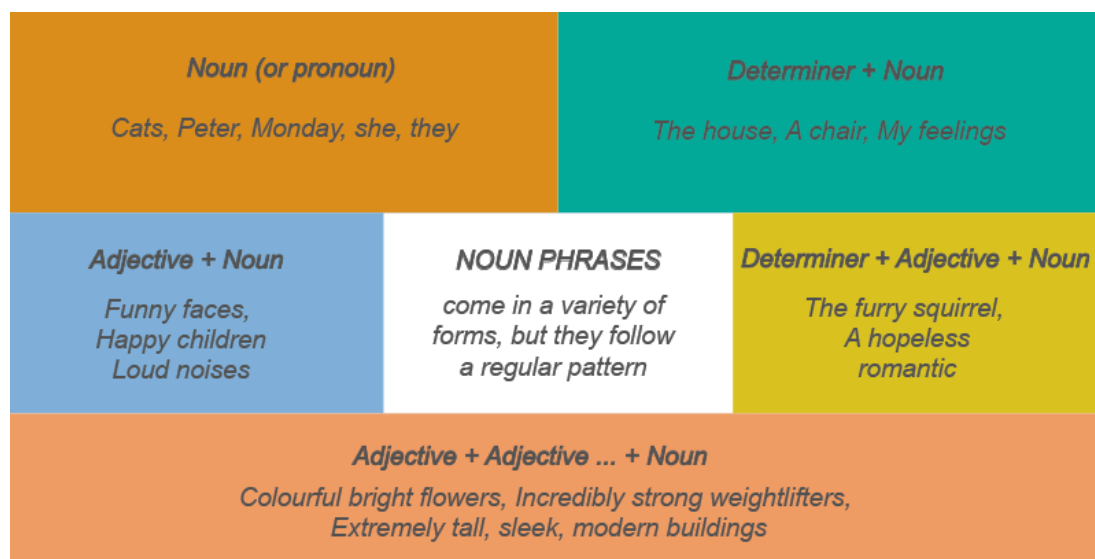


Figure 3 How to make a noun phrase.

Analysing the word order in *The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog*, we can make the following observations:

- **Determiners** (DET) go before nouns to make **noun phrases** – *those shoes*; *the cat*; *that house*

- **Adjectives** (ADJ) go before nouns (but after determiners) and are included in the noun phrase – *those **red** shoes; the **black** cat; that **enormous** house*

Based on what you've learned in earlier weeks, we might also add:

- **Pronouns** (PRO) can stand in for a whole noun phrase (see Figure 3 above)
- **Prepositions** (PREP) go before noun phrases, to form prepositional phrases – ***with** high heels; **in** the garden; **on** a leafy avenue*
- **Auxiliaries** (*do/be/have* and modal auxiliaries like *must, can, etc.*) go before other verbs – *I **do** like; he **could** swim; we **might** buy one; you **should** avoid them*

Don't worry about learning all these rules right away. This list is just here to remind you of what you've already come across in this course so far.

Of course, other languages can use different word orders. In French and Spanish, for instance, adjectives often come *after* nouns, though notice that in French that's not always the case*. In German, adjectives come before the noun, as they do in English (and as you can see, nouns start with a capital letter – a useful clue for learners!).

English	French	Spanish	German
red shoes	souliers rouges	zapatos rojos	rote Schuhe
the black cat	le chat noir	el gato negro	die schwarze Katze
a large house	une grande maison*	una casa grande	ein großes Haus
the British woman	la femme britannique	la mujer británica	die britische Frau
a strange man	un homme étrange	un hombre raro	ein fremder Mann

2 English sentence structure

Now you'll pull your knowledge of word classes, noun phrases and verbs together. Words form larger units, or **phrases**. And it's these whole phrases that fit together into sentences. Take the following examples (let's imagine they are said about the same person):

Maria likes holidays.

My daughter's best friend likes exotic and ridiculously expensive foreign travel.

In the first sentence we have just three words: a noun phrase (*Maria*), a verb (*likes*) and another noun phrase (*holidays*). In the second sentence there are more than three times as many words. But the words before and after *likes* in each sentence are doing similar things. They tell us who does the liking (*My daughter's best friend*), and what it is they like (*exotic and ridiculously expensive foreign travel*). We can swap the noun phrases around and still have acceptable sentences:

My daughter's best friend likes holidays.

Maria likes exotic and ridiculously expensive foreign travel.

So whether they contain only one noun (like *Maria* or *holidays*) or many words, these noun phrases are grammatically similar. Of course, as we're describing language, there is some specialist terminology that helps us to describe how we order phrases.

2.1 Subjects and objects



Figure 4 Man bites dog newspaper front page.

In English, the order in which we use different phrases is important. In the following example, the only way we know who is doing the asking is by looking at the word order. The words are the same, but the order of the phrases is different, and this influences the meaning of each sentence.

The journalist quoted the politician

The politician quoted the journalist

The person mentioned in the noun phrase before the verb is performing the action of 'quoting' while the person mentioned in the noun phrase after the verb is the one being quoted. We label these two components of the sentence the **subject** and the **object**, respectively.

We can use these two labels to explain why the famous example of a good newspaper story headline *MAN BITES DOG!* is a sensation, while the alternative *DOG BITES MAN!* won't sell newspapers.

In both these sentences the grammatical term for the first phrase is the **subject** of the sentence. The subject of a sentence is the person or thing the sentence is mostly about, and if any action takes place (for example, biting!), it's the subject who does it. In most simple English sentences the subject comes before the verb. This is true in other languages too, but not in every language. The other noun in the 'biting' examples is the person or animal who is affected by what the subject does (they get bitten). This is the **object** of the sentence.

Activity 3 Find the subject and object

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Let's see if you can identify the subjects and objects in some short sentences. Put the subjects and objects from each sentence into the table below.

1. Mary and Juan ate all the pies
2. The man who came to dinner brought a bottle of champagne
3. John recognised the man in the orange stripy suit
4. A girl called Susan Brown had answered the most questions
5. Several onlookers watched the highly anticipated tennis final
6. I lost my favourite pen
7. The owner of the little dog from two streets over likes to play the loudest music
8. The cat in the hat was fluffy

If you find this activity a little difficult, your first step should be to find the verb. Then work out what noun phrase comes before it (the subject) and what noun phrase comes after it (the object). Remember that noun phrases can be made up of several words. In order to help you, two answers have been completed for you.

Subject	Object
1 Mary and Juan	all the pies
2 The man who came to dinner	a bottle of champagne
3 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
4 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
5 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
6 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
7 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>
8 <input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>	<input type="text" value="Provide your answer..."/>

Discussion

Subject	Object
1 Mary and Juan	all the pies
2 The man who came to dinner	a bottle of champagne
3 John	the man in the orange stripy suit
4 A girl called Susan Brown	the most questions
5 Several onlookers	the highly anticipated tennis final
6 I	my favourite pen
7 The owner of the little dog from two streets over	the loudest music
8 The cat in the hat	[no object]

Some of the examples above were more difficult than others. While several sentences had very short and easy-to-spot subjects (*John*, *I*) some were a bit more complicated (*The owner of the little dog from two streets over*). You might also have spotted the different types of verbs used (main verbs like *ate*, auxiliaries like *was*, and some more complicated forms of verbs like *likes to play*).

The final example shows that not all verbs need an object. Sometimes, a person or thing just *does* something and the action doesn't involve anyone or anything else:

The cat in the hat was fluffy

The sun set slowly behind the mountains

Grammar rocks!

In the second example, all the sun did was 'set', the rest of the sentence tells us *how* and *where* it did this, not that it did anything *to* anything else.

2.2 A Latin headline

Not all languages depend on word order in the way that English does. Let's see what our newspaper headline *Man bites dog!* would look like in a language that marks subjects and objects a little bit differently.

Activity 4 Canis mordet hominem

This activity should take around 10 minutes

Watch the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1 Word order and inflections in Latin](#)



A Latin headline

Can you summarise the differences between Latin and English that are described?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

The difference is that English uses word order to show who does what, while Latin uses word endings to identify which noun is the subject and which noun is the object. This means word order in Latin can be very free, while in English it is much more fixed.

3 How sentences are built

Most of the sentences you've seen so far have been quite simple. But now you know the basics about how subject, verbs and objects fit together, you can start to take a look at some of the different ways in which we can arrange phrases to make meaning in English. The easiest way to do this is by using diagrams.

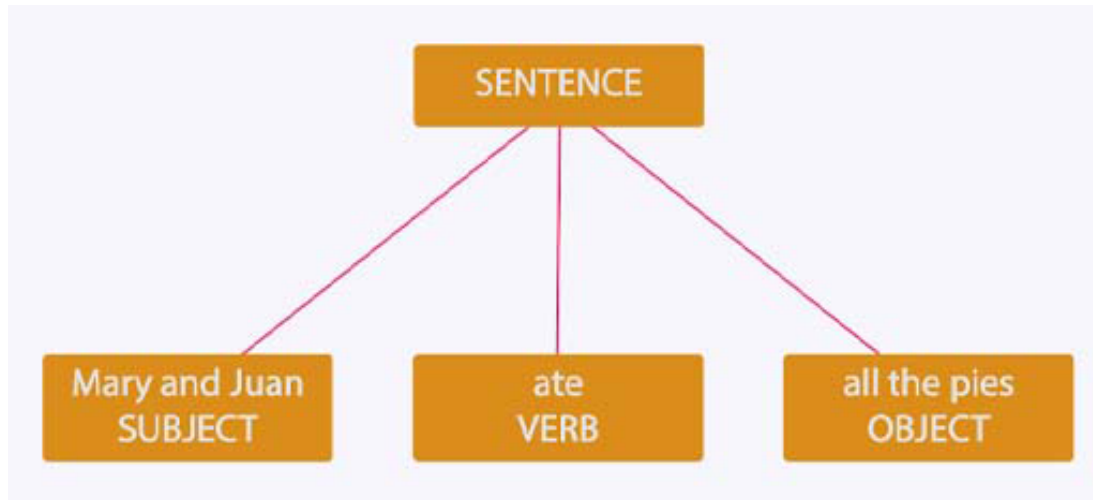


Figure 5 A simple sentence.

In this first diagram you can see the subject + verb + object structure that you've been looking at. This structure is the basic structure of English sentences and is known as SVO (subject, verb, object). We can use a similar structure to draw a sentence without an object. This structure is known as SV (subject, verb).

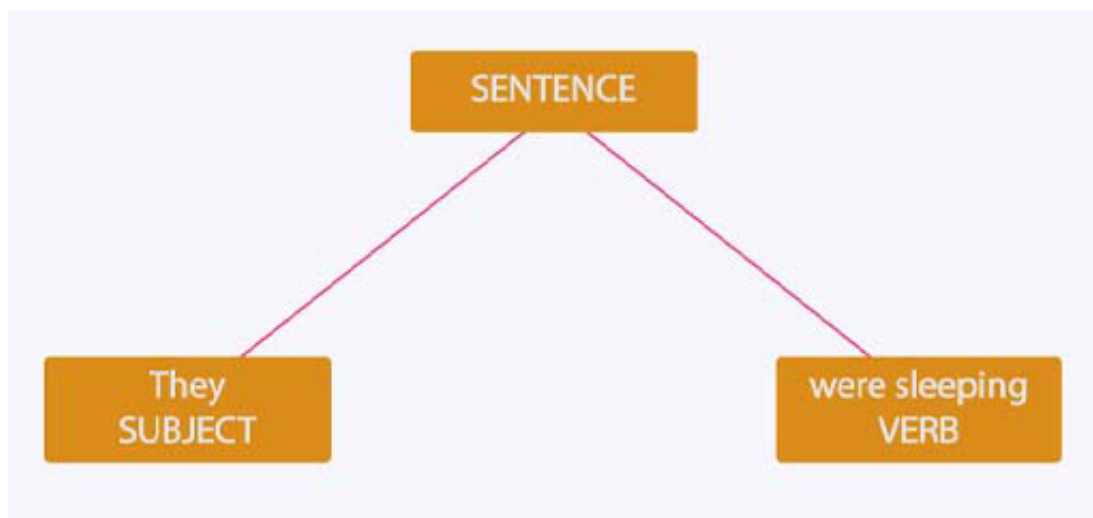


Figure 6 A sentence with no object.

There are also some sentences that can have more than one object, such as

Francesc gave his mother a cup of tea

I bought Gloria a vintage clock

Grandma told the children a bedtime story

The subjects are simple enough (*Francesc*, *I* and *Grandma*), but there are two objects in each example, which we would draw like this:

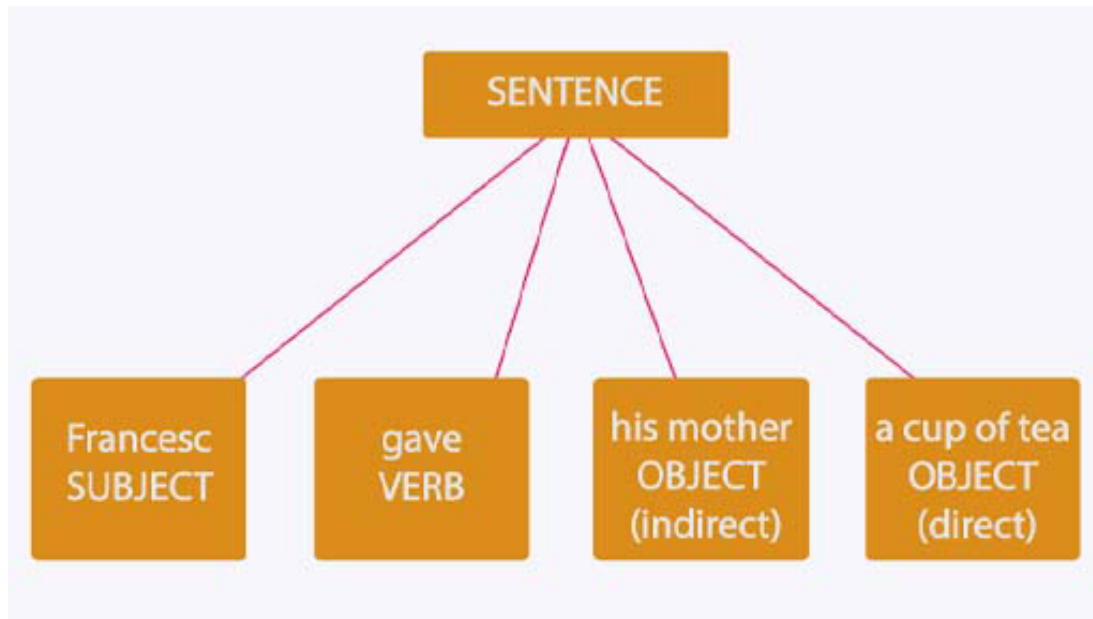


Figure 7 A sentence with two objects.

Many sentences that have two objects involve some form of giving and receiving. The subject (*Francesc*) gives the **direct object** (that which is directly acted upon, *a cup of tea*) to a recipient, known as the **indirect object** (his mother).

Finally, there are also sentences that tell us something about the subject although no action or process is taking place.

Stephanie is happy

I am hungry

The chinchilla is very fluffy

In these examples, we can't classify *happy*, *hungry* and *very fluffy* as objects because they aren't tangible things that the subject is acting upon. Rather, they simply give us more information about the subject and their experiences. These characteristics can be physical (*very fluffy*) or existential (*happiness*) and they can be permanent or fleeting. We call this component of the sentence a **complement** and you'll often find them used with a form of the auxiliary verb BE.

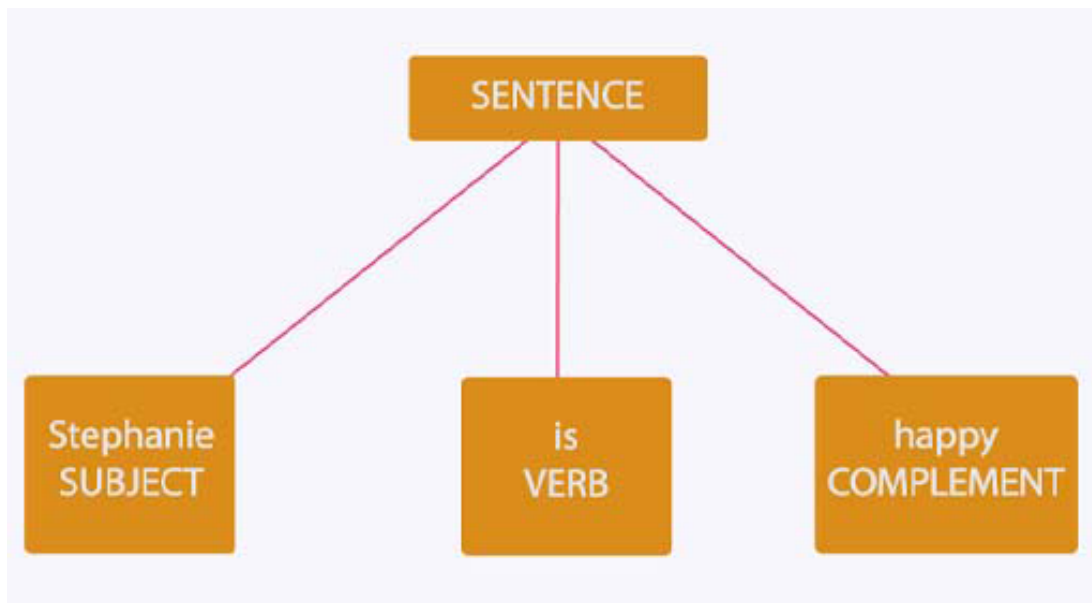


Figure 8 A sentence with a complement.

There are, of course, other grammatical structures used in English. We can add additional information to this basic structure about how, when, and where something happened. Now you've mastered the basics, you can take a closer look at how we can add more information to SVO.

4 Adding more information

Sentences are made up of different parts structured in a predictable and orderly way. Every sentence has at least a subject and a verb. Some sentences also have an object (or even two!). To this basic structure, we can add more information with additional phrases, and also combine short, simple sentences together into longer, more complex ones.

One way we can add more information to sentences is by including elements that tell us more about the context of an event or idea:

At the end of the day, you and your sisters made a delicious cake.

The former head of MI5 will give evidence **at the hearing**.

We can park **in the village**.

Toby is useful **in an emergency**.

In this episode Debbie is reunited with her long-lost twin.

These sentences go beyond the basic SVO or SV structures, as you can see in the table below.

	Subject	Verb	Object	
	The former head of MI5	will give	evidence	at the hearing
	We	can park		in the village
	Toby	is	useful	in an emergency
At the end of the day	you and your sisters	made	a delicious cake	
In this episode	Debbie	is reunited		with her long-lost twin

The words in the first and last columns of the table aren't subjects, verbs or objects. You might have noticed that they are all prepositional phrases. Their job is to add information such as where, when and how the action or event in the sentence took place. They can also be moved to another part of the sentence.

At the hearing, the former head of MI5 will give evidence.

In an emergency, Toby is useful.

Debbie is reunited **in this episode** with her long-lost twin.

We call these additions to the basic sentence structure **adverbials** (you might also find them referred to as **adjuncts**).

Activity 5 Find the prepositional phrases

This activity should take around 10 minutes

We can use prepositional phrases to make some really long sentences. How many different prepositional phrases can you find in the sentence below? Make a note of

them in the box. It will help you to find the subject, verb and object first. (If you need a reminder about prepositional phrases, go back to Week 6.)

On Tuesday at the office canteen in the middle of morning break Thomas ate Lisa's birthday cake from the box over in the corner out of sight.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

On Tuesday; At the office canteen; In the middle of morning break; From the box; In the corner; Out of sight.

In this example there is only a single subject (Thomas), a single verb (ate), and a single object (Lisa's birthday cake). All the other elements are prepositional phrases that we can change, move around, or delete entirely and the sentence will still be grammatical: *Thomas ate Lisa's birthday cake.*

While you have focused here on prepositional phrases, adverbials can take a variety of different forms. They can also include words like *yesterday* or *last week* to show the time of an event, as well as adverbs like *quickly* or *quietly*, which show the manner in which something took place.

4.1 SVOCA

You've now learned about all the different components of English sentences. We have specialist terminology to refer to who is performing the action or process expressed in a sentence (subject), what action, etc. is taking place (verb), who that action or process is affecting (object), or what characteristic the subject possesses (complement). Of course, there's two different types of object (direct and indirect) and we can always add more information to sentences using adverbials. It's time to put your knowledge to the test.

Activity 6 Spotting grammatical components

This activity should take around 20 minutes

For each of the following sentences, see if you can correctly identify the component in bold.

John saw **the man in the orange stripy suit** in his rear-view mirror

- ☐ Subject
- ☐ Object
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Complement
- ☐ Adverbial

Mary and Juan ate all the pies

- ☐ Subject
- ☐ Object
- ☐ Verb

☐ Complement

☐ Adverbial

The cat in the hat **was** fluffy

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Complement

☐ Adverbial

☐ Verb

I feel **content**

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Complement

☐ Verb

☐ Adverbial

I lost my favourite pen **yesterday**

☐ Object

☐ Adverbial

☐ Subject

☐ Verb

☐ Complement

Mary and Juan ate **all the pies**

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Verb

☐ Complement

☐ Adverbial

John saw the man in the orange stripy suit **in his rear-view mirror**

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Verb

☐ Adverbial

☐ Complement

The owner of the little dog from two streets over **likes to play** the loudest music

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Verb

☐ Complement

☐ Adverbial

The cat in the hat was **fluffy**

☐ Object

☐ Subject

☐ Complement

- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Adverbial

The man who came to dinner brought a bottle of champagne

- ☐ Object
- ☐ Verb
- ☐ Complement
- ☐ Adverbial
- ☐ Subject

Discussion

The easiest starting point when identifying the components of a sentence is to find the verb. Because of what you know about word order in English, once you've found the verb, spotting the subject and the object (or complement) should be easy. Any information that is not a subject, verb, object, or complement, must be an adverbial.

If you want more practice spotting the different components of sentences, you might like to draw out each of the examples above using the tree diagrams that you came across earlier this week. The first one has been done for you.

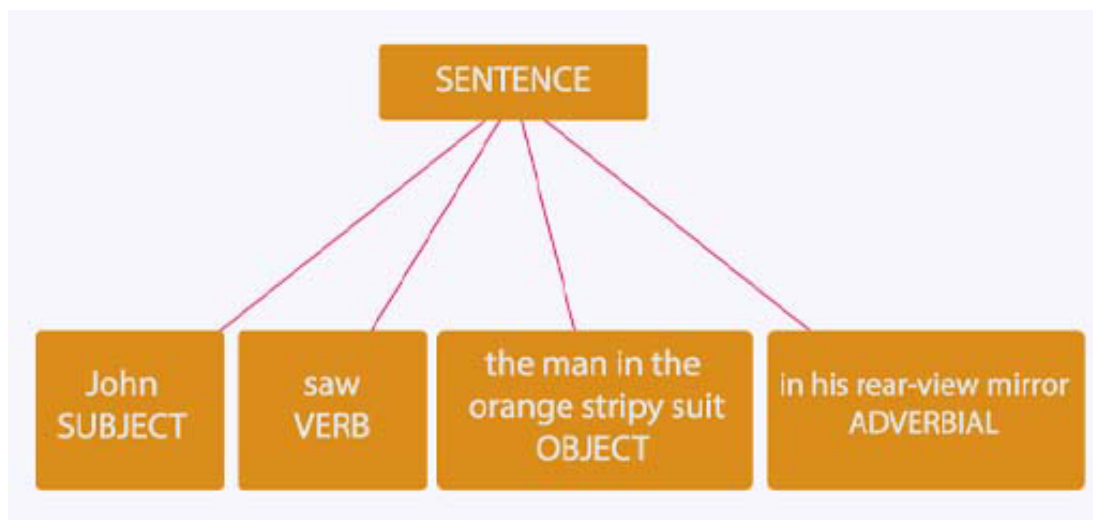


Figure 9 A sentence with an object and an adverbial.

5 This week's quiz

Well done – you have reached the end of Week 7. You can now check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

[Week 7 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

6 Summary of Week 7

You have now been through the basic rules of English sentence structure and are now in no danger of sounding like Yoda. There has been a lot of new information about the structure of English this week, and it's best to think about the different levels of structure that you've come across as building blocks. You already knew that we could add morphemes together to make words, but we can also add words together to make phrases.

In the next (and final) week, you'll learn that phrases come together to make clauses, and clauses can be added together to make sentences. You'll also focus on how we use sentences to ask questions, tell people what to do, and other useful things and you'll consider some creative uses of language in English and other languages.

You can now go to [Week 8](#).

Week 8: Language in the real world

Introduction



Figure 1 Questions and commands: 'When do we have to ...?' 'Do it now!'.

So far in this course you've seen how words are put together and how they need to be arranged in particular orders to make their meanings clear. But the majority of the sentences you've looked at so far have been rather simple. Most of them have just made statements: someone does something, something happened, something is a certain way. This would be enough if all we needed language to do was describe things. In practice, we use language for a lot more than that: to find information, to tell (or ask) people to do things, and to get things done. This week, you will see that sentences can do more than make a statement.

By the end of this week, you should be able to:

- explain the difference between different types of sentences
- explain the difference between form and function in English
- explain what an idiom is.

1 Sentence forms

Not all our language use is about making statements. Sometimes we need to seek out information. Sometimes we have to tell people what to do. You'll begin this week by taking a closer look at the most common sentence structures in English.

- We can make statements (known as **declaratives**)
- We can ask questions (called **interrogatives**)
- We can give commands (the technical term being **imperatives**)
- And we can make exclamations (known, rather helpfully, as **exclamatives**)

Most of the sentences that you've come across so far have been declaratives, which take the standard subject, verb, object (SVO) or subject, verb, complement (SVC) structure. You'll now consider what makes interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatives different from this well-established grammatical pattern.

1.1 Asking questions

Questions come in two main types. The first is **yes/no questions**, also known as a **closed question**, where you probably expect to hear *yes* or *no* as an answer.

Can we park here?

Is this hoomous home-made?

People might give longer answers to these questions, but fundamentally what the person asking is wanting here is a *yes* or a *no*. We make closed questions by swapping the order of the subject and verb. So the declarative *this hoomous is home-made* becomes the interrogative *is this hoomous home-made?* (When we write such questions down, we also use a question mark, which is another easy way to spot a question!) When we have an auxiliary verb or a modal auxiliary, it's that component that moves to the start of the sentence, so *we can park here* becomes *can we park here?* (rather than *park we can here?*, which would have us sounding like Yoda again!).

The other main type of question is called a **wh- question** or **open question**. These questions tend to start with one of the words *who*, *where*, *when*, *what*, *why* or *how*, which comes immediately before the verb:

Who told you that?

How do you make pancakes?

What these questions have in common is that they are looking for information – someone's name, an explanation, etc. You can't just grunt *yes* or *no* to these types of questions – you are expected to come up with more than that. That's why open questions are favoured by interviewers (on TV or in hiring panels).

You can also turn a declarative into a question by adding a form of auxiliary DO and (sometimes) changing the form of the main verb:

They like to host parties > Do they like to host parties?

They watched the sun rise > Did they watch the sun rise?

1.2 Questions in other languages

In French yes/no questions are formed from the verb by inverting the subject and verb (or auxiliary verb):

Declarative	Translation	Interrogative
<i>Vous aimez Londres.</i>	You like London.	<i>Aimez-vous Londres?</i>
<i>Il veut apprendre l'anglais.</i>	He wants to learn English.	<i>Veut-il apprendre l'anglais?</i>

In Spanish the verb usually appears without a pronoun: *I eat = como* (see Week 3). This means there is no way to swap the order of the subject and the verb. For this reason, the main way of forming a yes/no question from a declarative in Spanish is simply to ask it with rising (questioning) intonation:

Declarative	Translation	Interrogative
<i>Tiene dos casas.</i>	She has two houses.	<i>Tiene dos casas?</i>
<i>Quiere aprender el inglés.</i>	He wants to learn English.	<i>Quiere aprender el inglés?</i>

1.3 Giving commands and making exclamations



Figure 2 Stop thief!

Sometimes, when we want to get something done, we give **orders** or **commands**. This is the one time in English when we use the verb without a subject:

Put that book down
Go to your room
Stop thief!

Commands don't need a subject because there is no need to express who the command is referring to. It's always directed at *you*. If we want to make commands sound a little bit less abrupt, we can add something like *will you?*, or *could you?* at the end: *Make me a sandwich, will you?* This approach *might* get you a sandwich, but it's unlikely to slow down the thief!

When we've finished asking questions and shouting orders, we might also want to express surprise, delight, annoyance, outrage, or any other strong emotion. In this instance, we can exclaim something:

What a great idea that was!
How kind you are!
What an idiot I've been!

As you can see, such **exclamatives** often begin with *what* or *how*, but other sentence forms can also express emotions. For example, a declarative sentence could be written with an exclamation mark at the end to show it is functioning as an exclamation, rather than a plain statement of fact:

That's the fourth time this month he's been late!

In writing, the best indicator you'll have that something is an exclamative is the use of an exclamation mark at the end. When trying to spot exclamatives in speech, you can listen for the tone in which a sentence is delivered or whether particular words are emphasised.

I showed him not to do it **that** way!

She **knew** that was my milk in the fridge!

1.4 Spotting different sentence forms

When deciding if a sentence is a declarative, interrogative or imperative, the biggest clue is what order the subject and verb appear in (or whether there's a subject at all!). You can also look out for question words like *who* and *what* at the start of the sentence.

Activity 1 Select the sentence function

This activity should take around 5 minutes

Decide what label matches the form of each sentence listed below. Consider what word the sentence starts with, whether it has a subject, whether its emphatically expressing emotion, or whether it's merely stating something.

Can you see the tower from here?

- ☐ Interrogative
- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Imperative
- ☐ Exclamative

Hold the other end tight!

- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Imperative
- ☐ Interrogative
- ☐ Exclamative

I'm tired of all their ridiculous excuses!

- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Interrogative
- ☐ Imperative
- ☐ Exclamative

Why did she give you that funny look?

- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Imperative
- ☐ Interrogative

- ☐ Exclamative

How brave they are!

- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Interrogative
- ☐ Imperative
- ☐ Exclamative

I won't be coming with you.

- ☐ Declarative
- ☐ Exclamative
- ☐ Interrogative
- ☐ Imperative

Discussion

Note that the first exclamative – *I'm tired of all their ridiculous excuses!* – is grammatically a declarative sentence, but it would most likely be used to express frustration or annoyance. There's also an exclamation point at the end of the sentence for emphasis.

One other thing we can do to change the form of a sentence (and its broader meaning) is make it negative. If we make a declarative sentence negative, the SVO order stays the same. When there is a single verb, we add a form of DO + *not*. With more complex verbs like *will give*, we add *not* to the (modal) auxiliary.

They live in London > They **don't** live in London

The former head of MI5 will give evidence > The former head of MI5 **will not** give evidence

2 Structure and sentence functions

In most examples you'll come across, the grammatical form of a sentence will match the function it performs. A question will look like an interrogative, and a command will look like an imperative. But this relationship doesn't hold all the time. We can use a declarative to ask a question or give a command:

You expect me to believe that? (not *Do you expect...?*)

It's cold in here (in the right context, this could mean 'shut the window')

We can use a question to give a command:

Would one of you two like to do the washing up? (when spoken by a parent to two teens)

And, as with Spanish, we can use a statement to ask a question if we say it with rising intonation (or use a question mark):

Susan is a trained scuba diver?

3 Combining sentences



Figure 3 Subject + verb = clause.

Now you know all the different sentence types, you can start to look at more complex constructions. So far, we've been referring to the combination of a subject and a verb (and an object or complement) as a **sentence**. In some cases this is true, but the reality is a little bit more complicated than that. In linguistics, when we talk about the relationship between a subject and a verb, we talk about a **clause**. A clause is the simplest form of sentence, formed around one verb, and clauses can be combined into more complex sentences.

3.1 Making longer sentences

One way we can make longer sentences is to join more than one clause together. Most of the sentences you've looked at in the course have dealt with just one idea:

I brought a present for Amanda (Week 2)

Snow fell throughout the day (Week 3)

It's less expensive than the French one (Week 5)

This type of sentence says one thing about one person or thing, and as a result is called a **simple sentence**. It has a single clause in it – that is, just one verb and one subject.

You've seen that words can be joined together in phrases using conjunctions such as *and* or *but*. The same goes for simple sentences. When two or more are joined using **and**, **but**, or **or** they form what is called a **compound sentence**.

They went to France that summer **but** they put the trip to Italy off until later.

I might bake a cake **or** I might buy one, **and** I should get some wine, too.

My sister bought a red dress **and** I tried on some shoes **but** we decided not to bother with hats.

A compound sentence is made of two or more clauses, but each clause makes sense as a sentence on its own.

3.2 Making more complex sentences

Another way to make longer sentences is to combine clauses so the sense of one clause depends on another. For example, clauses can be connected to show that one of the clauses is the reason, result or condition of the other, or because they are related in time.

This is done by using **subordinating conjunctions**: *so (that), because, if, whether, while, when, then, since*, and others.

He'll do it **if** you ask him nicely enough.

I'll scream and scream **until** I'm sick!

They won't hear you **unless** you shout really loud.

She gave up the job, **although** it paid a lot.

Instead of just adding one simple sentence to another with *and* or *but*, these conjunctions put one part of the sentence (the **main clause**) in charge, while the other (the **subordinate clause**) is made dependent. For example, the subordinate clause *although it paid a lot* doesn't really make sense on its own. We need to attach it to the main clause *She gave up the job* to grasp the full meaning of the sentence. (By contrast, the main clause *she gave up the job* can stand on its own as a simple sentence.)

Activity 2 Sentence types

This activity should take around 10 minutes.

For each of the sentences below, decide whether it is a simple, compound or complex sentence.

1. I will wait for you in the gardens.

- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Complex

2. We'll go to Italy again next year if we can both get the time off.

- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Compound

3. Since he left university, he had stayed in the same house.

- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Complex

4. They studied archeology.

- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Simple

5. The children did the washing up and their parents went shopping.

- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Complex

6. You can ask Giorgio on Tuesday.

- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Complex

7. She washed her hair so he could cut it.

- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Compound

8. In the end they had a wasted trip.

- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Simple

9. I wanted the pizza but ordered the salad.

- ☐ Complex
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Compound

10. It was raining but we went anyway.

- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Compound
- ☐ Complex

Discussion

To decide if a sentence is compound or complex, look at the type of conjunction used. You can also ask yourself whether both clauses can stand alone as simple sentences. You might also have spotted that the *subordinate* clause can come at the start of the sentence, as long as the conjunction goes with it (compare with *He had stayed in the same house since he left university*).

The final thing to note about different sentence types is that we can combine compound and complex sentences (called **compound-complex** sentences):

If he wanted to stay he should have said something **and** I would have let him.

Here we have the subordinate clause *If he wanted to stay* and two main clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction: *he should have said something* and *I would have let him*.

4 Language in the real world

Because the focus of this course has been to teach you the terminology you'll need to describe language, the majority of the examples that you've interacted with have been invented. This has been to keep you focused on the feature of language under scrutiny and to reduce the 'noise' that can be found in everyday language use. In the real world, you'll likely find that, although the basic structures of language are present, people like to get creative with how they use morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences. But fear not! You can use your new-found knowledge of language and grammatical structures to be able to explain when people move off the beaten track and use language creatively. Let's test that knowledge now.

Activity 3 Getting creative

This activity should take around 15 minutes

Answer each question using as much language description terminology as you need.

1. What morphemes have been used to create the word *ungreenable* and what might this word mean?

Provide your answer...

2. What word class is *heart* in the sentence *I heart New York* and why might this be unusual?

Provide your answer...

3. What component of the clause appears to be missing in the slogan *Got milk?*

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The bound morphemes *un* and *able* have been added to the free morpheme *green* to create a new word. Potential meanings for this word (based on an understanding of what the different morphemes mean) include a garden that won't grow, an object that will not turn green, or even someone who will not adopt environmentally friendly habits. You may have thought of other meanings.
2. In this sentence the noun *heart* is acting as a verb. The meaning of this sentence can be taken to mean something similar to 'I love New York' with the meaning conveyed through the well-established relationship between the concept of love and the human heart.
3. There is no subject in this clause. This may be an example of English following the same pattern as a language like Spanish where the subject pronoun is not written or spoken. This slogan might also be interpreted as a question, asking the reader or hearer if they have any milk. You might also have noticed that the verb *got* might not be what is expected here as auxiliary *have* would seem a more likely candidate rather than the lexical verb that has been used.

4.1 Collocation



Figure 4 A cup of...

You've already seen how word classes come together in expected patterns to make phrases and sentences. But word meanings can also pattern in similar ways. If you were asked to complete the following sentences, you'd likely choose tea/coffee, sugars and hot, respectively.

Do you want a cup of ____?

Yes, milk and two ____ please

Watch out, the mug is ____

This is because words do not carry their meaning in isolation. In a British context, being offered a cup of tea is a cultural norm and the phrase *a cup of tea* is well established. Similarly, we don't understand each sentence we hear in isolation either; if you are familiar with making tea, you'll know that *milk* and *sugar* are often also mentioned in the same context, and so, hearing the first question we are able to surmise that *milk and two sugars* is a likely response, while *milk and two aubergines* is not. Furthermore, patterns of word use build up over time and, when used frequently, these patterns come to be expected. Once these patterns have been established, we can get really creative with language and flout expectations by deviating from the established norm (often for humorous or dramatic effect).

Activity 4 More than the sum of its parts

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Watch the video below which explains how the meaning of a phrase can be more than the literal interpretation of the words it includes.

Video content is not available in this format.

[Video 1 Collocation and idioms](#)



More than the sum of its parts

Activity 5 Complete the sentence

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Complete the following phrases by adding one of the following:

Bob's; the handle; hell; money; out of the bag.

1. They ran _____ for leather
2. I just have to switch the toaster on and _____ your uncle
3. My guess was right on the _____
4. I wanted it to be a surprise but his sister let the cat _____
5. He flies off _____ at the slightest thing these days.

Discussion

1. They ran **hell for leather**
2. I just have to switch the toaster on and **Bob's your uncle**
3. My guess was **right on the money**
4. I wanted it to be a surprise but his sister **let the cat out of the bag**
5. He **flies off the handle** at the slightest thing these days

Don't worry if you didn't get all of these right. Remember, people only learn the meaning of idioms by being exposed to them in some way.

5 Playing with language



"These meetings were a lot shorter
before we invented compound sentences."

Figure 5 Morphology and humour

In the last eight weeks you've learned a lot. You'll end with an activity that allows you to describe how language is used in the real world, but that might also make you laugh at the same time.

Activity 6 Why the long face?

This activity should take around 20 minutes

Explain what features of language make the following jokes funny. Think about the potential double meaning of words, but also about collocations, idioms and sentence structure.

1. I waited an hour for my starter so I complained: 'It's not rocket salad' (Lou Sanders)
2. I never lie on my CV...because it creases it (Jenny Collier)
3. I'm entering the world's tightest hat competition. Just hope I can pull it off (William Andrews)
4. People who ask, 'can I ask you a question?' Didn't really give me a choice there, did you sunshine? (Billy Connolly)
5. Behavioural psychology is the science of pulling habits out of rats. (Douglas Busch)

(Examples sourced from Greig 2019 (1–3) and Greig 2017 (4))

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The humour in the first joke lies in adapting the idiom *it's not rocket science* (meaning 'this should be an easy task') to a restaurant context where a *salad* including the leafy green vegetable *rocket* might be served.
2. There are two different potential interpretations of the word *lie* ('to not tell the truth' and 'to be horizontal on a bed or floor'). We expect that the first meaning will apply in this situation, but the subordinate clause *because it creases it* makes clear that the second meaning was intended. Here the person telling the joke is referring to physically lying on a piece of paper.
3. The idiom *pull it off* usually refers to succeeding at the last minute despite difficult circumstances. Here the phrasing is being used literally to refer to taking a small hat off one's head.
4. By using an interrogative to ask *can I ask you a question?* the speaker has already asked a question and, as such, has demonstrated that they do, in fact, have the ability to ask a question. (Similarly, if you interpreted the modal auxiliary *can* as referring to permission here, they have shown that they do not need the addressee's permission to perform the act of asking a question.)
5. The expected expression is *pull a rabbit out of a hat* – an idiom which suggests finding a surprising/last minute solution to a problem. Here, the initial sounds of *rabbit* and *hat* have been switched so the phrase applies (rather insultingly) to a branch of psychology which often involves animal experiments.

6 This week's quiz

It's now time to complete the Week 8 badged quiz. It is similar to the previous quizzes, but this time, instead of answering 5 questions there will be 15, covering Weeks 5–8.

[Week 8 compulsory badge quiz](#)

Remember that the quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time, you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new or window and come back here when you have finished.

7 Summary of Week 8

Congratulations on reaching the end of this course on describing language!

When you started this course the first question you came across was 'What makes a language?'. Over the last eight weeks, you've used English as a case study to start to answer this question.

You now know how to spot all of the key components of a language (from morphemes to clauses) and you've learned how all of these different building blocks can be put together. What's more, as you've seen this week in particular, now that you know how language is put together, you can spot where people flout the 'rules' and get creative with language. You finished this week by looking at how language is used in the real world, and you're encouraged to keep scrutinising the language you come across. You've mastered the basics and your journey into the wonderful world of language description has now begun ... take your new-found skills with you and keep exploring!

Next steps?

Now that you've mastered the basics, why not take a look at some of the other resources we have on offer.

- If you are interested in learning a language such as French, Spanish, German, Chinese or Welsh, check out our short courses in the [Open Centre for Languages and Cultures](#).
- Perhaps you want to know more about how English is used across time and space. In that case, our free short course on [English in the World Today](#) is the one for you. Or you might want to take a look at our materials on [Exploring the English Language](#).
- If you're ready to take the next step and undertake more formal study of English, you can take a look at all the English language courses we offer, including [BA \(Hons\) English Language \(R54\)](#), [BA \(Hons\) Language Studies \(Q30\)](#), [BA \(Hons\) English Language and Literature \(Q39\)](#), and [BA \(Hons\) Arts and Humanities \(R14\)](#).

Wherever your journey of discovery takes you next, you'll be able to use what you've learned in this course to continue to explore how English and other languages work in the real world.

Tell us what you think

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short [end-of-course survey](#) (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Week 4). We'd like to find out a bit about your experience of studying the course and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

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