I. INTRODUCTION

As you know, the chief aim of learning grammar is to be able to put words together to form 'grammatical sentences. (It is of course no less important to be able to write not only isolated sentences but whole texts – but for the purposes of this course, we’ll start at the more basic level of sentences.)

So far, we’ve been looking at parts of sentences, such as the noun or noun phrase and the verb or verb group, because they have their own internal structures and it’s important to understand them properly.

The noun (or noun phrase) and the verb (or verb group) can be said to be the basic ‘building blocks’ of the English sentence. Even the simplest sentence will have at least a noun—functioning as the subject—and a verb, e.g.:

1. People left.
2. The concert ended.

You can’t have a complete sentence which is without either a subject or a verb – e.g. *’Left’ or *’The concert’. [NB. For the time being, we’ll exclude ‘imperative’ sentences like ‘Go!’; and sentences which are ‘truncated’ or cut short.]

A sentence is a very complicated thing to analyse, because it can be very, very long, consisting of an enormous number of clauses, e.g.:

‘This is the dog that chased the cat that caught the rat that ate the cheese that Jim bought from the store that… etc. etc.’

Or it can be very short, consisting of only one little clause (e.g. ‘People left’). Though the number of possible sentences in English is infinite (we can sit here and continue making up sentences and more sentences until we die of old age!), it can be seen that they fall into a relatively small number of patterns. Understanding these patterns can help us to make grammatical sentences more easily, and this is what we are going to do in the next four units.

Since a sentence is made up of one or more clauses, let’s first analyse the structure of the clause in English, and then the structure of the sentence will become clearer. A sentence
which consists of only one clause is called a ‘**simple sentence**’. In this unit, we’ll explore the structure of the clause (or simple sentence), i.e. the parts that it is made up of.

### II. PATTERN ONE: SV

(Note: $S$ = Subject and $V$ = Verb)

The simplest type of clause consists of a Subject followed by a Verb. Here are a few examples of this type of clause:

- [Time]$S$ [flies]$V$
- [The war]$S$ [has ended]$V$
- [The new millennium]$S$ [is beginning]$V$
- [What he said]$S$ [will be remembered]$V$

As we have said earlier, the subject is most commonly a noun (or noun phrase). But it is not the only possibility (as you may have noticed in the last sentence).

**QUESTION 1:**

In each of the following sentences, can the underlined group of words function as the Subject? From this evidence, can you explain what types of words or phrases – other than nouns – can serve as Subjects? [NB. In case you don’t know what to call the underlined groups in (7-9), they are ‘subordinate clauses’.]

1. Poor are always with us.
2. The poor are always with us.
3. Loudly are here.
4. The loudly are here.
5. Some are here.
6. On the table is tiring.
7. Standing on the table is tiring.
8. That oil floats on water is well-known.
9. What he does is well-known.

The following types of words or phrases can be Subjects:
Notice that, while a number of different forms can function as the Subject (though nouns and noun phrases are by far the most common), only a verb can function as the Verb. This may be obvious, but some students still wrongly produce sentences without a Verb, e.g. *‘Her father very rich’, *‘My friend very angry with me’, etc.

III. PATTERN TWO: SVO

In Unit 5, you saw that certain verbs, called transitive verbs, require an object, without which the sentence would be incomplete. For example, *‘He likes’ and *‘He hates’ are incomplete, as opposed to ‘He likes classical music’ and ‘He hates heavy metal’. ‘Classical music’ and ‘heavy metal’ are objects of the verbs ‘like’ and ‘hate’ respectively.

Here then is our second clause pattern: SVO (where O = Object).

QUESTION 2:
Complete the following sentences with an Object only where necessary (otherwise leave it blank).

1. My friend repaired ___________.
2. My friend snored ___________.
3. He caught ________________.
4. He died ________________.
5. The economy has deteriorated ________________.
6. Workers’ salaries will fall ________________.
7. The building of Disneyland will stimulate ________________.
8. The earthquake destroyed ________________.

To test whether the ‘object’ you’ve added is really an object, try turning the sentence into the passive voice. Only true objects can be passivised.

IV. PATTERN THREE: SVOO

In a SVO clause, there is only one Object. But there are certain verbs that take not one but two objects. The most common example is the verb ‘give’. In terms of meaning, the action of giving involves not only a ‘giver’, but also something which is given (the Direct Object), and someone who receives it (the Indirect Object). For example:

1. She gave him [IO] an expensive present [DO]
2. The university gave the Chief Executive [IO] an honorary degree [DO]

(where IO = Indirect Object, DO = Direct Object)
Notice that the Indirect Object *precedes* (comes before) the Direct Object – it would be wrong to reverse the order, as in *"She gave an expensive present him"*. In this sense, English is just like Mandarin. However, there is another way of putting it, where the Direct Object comes first, and the Indirect Object comes next, preceded by a **preposition** (usually ‘to’):

3. She gave an expensive present to him.
4. The university gave an honorary degree to the Chief Executive.

Again, this is like Mandarin -- ‘她給一件貴重的禮物 (DO) 給他 (IO) ’, as opposed to the more common ‘她給他 (IO) 一件貴重的禮物 (DO) ’.

Is it true that any sentence like (3-4) above can be re-written as (1-2), with the Indirect Object preceding the Direct Object? This is a small but interesting question.

**QUESTION 3:**
Some of the following sentences can be re-written in the form Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object, and some cannot. Identify and re-write those that can. Do you see anything in common among them? [Clue: Look for any special characteristics of the Indirect Object in a S-V-IO-DO sentence.]

1. I sent a letter to my best friend.
2. I sent a letter to Japan.
3. She baked a cake for her boyfriend.
4. She baked a cake for the party.
5. He bought a car for his parents.
6. He bought a car for transportation.
7. He gave a thousand dollars to everyone.
8. He gave a thousand dollars to charity.

The sentences that can be re-written as S-V-IO-DO are:
V. PATTERN FOUR: SVC
(where \(C=\text{Subject Complement}\))

We have seen that a sentence must have a Subject and Verb, and that some Verbs need to be completed by an Object. But are Objects the only things that are needed to complete a sentence?

**QUESTION 4:**
Complete the following sentences with whatever words you find appropriate (nouns, adjectives, and so on, but don’t use another verb here). If you use a noun to complete it, do you think it is the Object of the Verb? If not, why?

1. My neighbour is ____________.
2. In the 1950’s, Hong Kong was _______________.
3. China will be ________________.
4. He became ________________.
5. These apples are ________________.
6. The students seem ________________.

Types of words used to complete the above sentences:

You will notice that the sentences above are different from the SVO sentences that we looked at earlier. In the SVO pattern, the verb is ‘completed’ by an Object, and an object has all the properties that we described in Unit 5 – i.e. it is usually a noun (or noun phrase), it can be passivised (i.e. moved to the subject position of a passive sentence), and in terms of meaning, it is the ‘target’ at which the action is directed.

In the pattern in Question 4 above, on the other hand, the Verb is completed by something which is clearly not an Object. It’s usually called a ‘Subject Complement’, and we’ll see why in a moment.

A Subject Complement is different from an Object firstly because it is not necessarily a noun (or noun phrase) -- it may also be an adjective or prepositional phrase or subordinate clause, e.g.:

1. The economy became very bad. [adjective phrase]
2. The book is on the table. [prepositional phrase]
3. This is what I’ve always wanted. [subordinate clause]

Secondly, even if the Subject Complement is a noun, it can never be passivised like an object, e.g.:

4. He became a stockbroker.
4a. * A stockbroker was become by him.

Thirdly, unlike an Object, a Subject Complement is not the ‘target’ of any action aimed at it by the Subject. In fact, it refers back to the Subject itself:

1. The economy became very bad. (the economy 4 very bad)
2. The book is on the table. (the book 4 on the table)
3. This is what I’ve always wanted. (this 4 what I’ve always wanted)
4. He became a stockbroker. (he 4 a stockbroker)

That’s why verbs like be, seem, become, etc. are sometimes called ‘linking verbs’ or ‘copula verbs’, because they ‘link’ the Subject to the Subject Complement. The term ‘Subject Complement’ suggests that it ‘completes’ the Subject in some way.

One common mistake made by students is to omit a linking verb, especially the verb be, as in *My friend very angry’. This is partly due to the influence of Chinese, where the linking verb (shi is) is usually omitted unless you want to emphasise the subject complement.

**QUESTION 5:**
Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with an appropriate verb. Some of them can only be filled by a **linking verb**, and some only by a transitive verb, so be careful. If a blank can be filled by either a linking or a transitive verb, then provide both, but note the differences in meaning.

1. He a doctor.
2. The driver a man.
3. My classmates very hard-working.
4. During the trip, he ill.
5. During the trip, he a fever.
7. My teacher a singer.
8. The truth that he had an affair with the intern.
VI. PATTERN FIVE: SVOC

In Section V, we saw that, in the SVC pattern, the ‘Subject Complement’ is needed to refer to and ‘complete’ the Subject. As you can see, this is a very common pattern -- there are lots of sentences like ‘He is rich/young/handsome/ an actor/a teacher/at home/in the shower’ etc.

There is a less common pattern where a complement is needed to refer to the Object, for otherwise the sentence would be incomplete. That’s why we call this type of complement an ‘Object Complement’, to distinguish it from a ‘Subject Complement’.

QUESTION 6:
There’s something incomplete about some of the following sentences. Complete these sentences with an appropriate word or phrase. (For sentences which do not really need to be completed, do not fill in the blanks.) The Objects are underlined for you.

1. The committee appointed him ____________________.
2. The committee welcomed him ____________________.
3. The students voted Professor Lee ____________________.
4. The students liked Professor Lee ____________________.
5. His war experience made him ____________________.
6. His war experience scared him ____________________.

The last pattern, SVOC, is the least common of all the five that we’ve seen so far, and involves a relatively small number of verbs (like appoint, make, elect, etc.) Still, it’s important to know that such sentences would be incomplete and ungrammatical without an Object Complement where it’s needed.

VII. ADVERBIALS

So far we have not said anything about a very common part of a clause or sentence. Consider the underlined parts in the following sentences:

1. He suddenly left Hong Kong yesterday.
2. He left Hong Kong for a conference in Tokyo.
3. He slept soundly on the plane all the way from Hong Kong to Toronto.
4. He cried because his sister took his teddy bear.
We’ll call the underlined phrases **Adverbials** – because they provide additional information such as the time, place, manner, reason, etc. (Note that the term ‘adverbials’ includes not only adverbs, but all other words or phrases (like the above) which have the same function as adverbs.)

The important point about Adverbials is that they are generally optional rather than compulsory, and can be left out without making the sentence ungrammatical. All the other parts which we discussed earlier – Subject, Verb, Object, Complement – are compulsory (depending on the type of verb), and if any of them are left out, the sentence would be ungrammatical.

Another grammatical feature of Adverbials is that, unlike Subjects, Objects and Complements, they can be moved around much more easily. E.g., sentence (1) can be re-written as ‘Yesterday he left Hong Kong suddenly’ or ‘He left Hong Kong suddenly yesterday’, etc.

**QUESTION 7:**
Which of the bracketed parts in the following sentences are **Adverbials**? Can you explain how you know?

1. He lent [her] [the book].
2. He bought [the book] [from the university bookshop].
3. The boss made [him] [the general manager].
4. The boss scolded [him] [all the time].
5. The light went out [all of a sudden].
6. The light blinded [the intruder].

The following are Adverbials:

They are Adverbials because:

As we’ve said, there is a huge variety of Adverbials, and they are optional – i.e. not strictly required by the grammar. Therefore, we’ll not say too much about them in this book.
VIII. COORDINATION

From the next unit onwards, we’ll go beyond the single-clause, simple sentence and look at more complex sentences. One of the most common errors made by students is to combine two or more main clauses (or simple sentences) into one sentence without any attempt to connect them. For example:

1. The economy deteriorated, many people lost their jobs.
2. I called yesterday, he was not home.

This may be due to the influence of Chinese writing. Just remember that in English, you cannot keep putting main clauses (or simple sentences) one after another in a series, separated only by commas. You will need to join them with coordinating conjunctions, like and, or, but.

1. The economy deteriorated, and many people lost their jobs.
2. I called yesterday but he was not home.

If you don’t do that, you should at least separate the two main clauses into separate sentences, with a full stop:

1. The economy deteriorated. Many people lost their jobs.

QUESTION 8:
The following sentences are taken from students’ writings. Correct any mistakes that you may find:

1. Vitamin A is also called retinol, occurs naturally in carrots.
2. The lower part was vegetation, this vegetation was very thick.
3. Coal is the most important fuel in our daily life, it has been used for a long time.
4. The baby was very clean, did not need a bath.
5. The giant plants died many years later, thus the plants decomposed gradually.

ANSWER:
ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

Fill in the blanks in the following texts with appropriate words:

**Text 1:**
I have read with amusement about ______ attempts of the Hong Kong government ______ control the littering public by _______ $600 on-the-spot fines.

As we have all seen by ________ reports about beach littering, this system _______ completely useless as it is.

I _______ like to propose a new three-phase scheme ________ would surely deter littering. Phase one ________ the same, an on-the-spot fine, but ________ to $1,000. Phase two would be ________ use the money to purchase a ________ refuse container to be placed on ________ near the spot of the crime. ________ this container would be a small ________ bearing the name of the offender ________ wording such as "This bin was ________ for by (offender's name) as a ________ of littering." Phase three of this ________ would be to make the offender ________ for one day cleaning the streets ________ the area where the offence took ________.

Surely this would deter littering in ________ of the punishment and I am ________ that it would also severely reduce ________ likelihood of a repeat offence.

Such ________ plan would demonstrate just how serious ________ government is about trying to make Hong Kong ________ a clean city, if indeed it ________ serious about a cleaner Hong Kong.

**Text 2:**
The Chinese government will not let just anybody gather ________ 30,000 people, mostly students, in one place for an ________ or two for often emotional motivational speeches. Li Yang ________ clearly an exceptional case.

Mr Li is the inventor ________ Crazy English, a language learning method that requires students ________ shout in order to overcome their inhibitions, and he ________ more of a proselytiser than a teacher.
He once _____________ to 100,000 people in a single day, at three _____________ seminars in Chengdu, and to date as many as _____________ million people are believed to have heard him speak _____________ person or on tape. In perhaps the ultimate official _____________, he was granted the privilege of holding a seminar _____________ the hallowed grounds of the Forbidden City.

But it _____________ not be surprising that government officials would support Mr Li, China's _____________ English-learning guru. He is singing their song, and it _____________ something like this: learn English because it is necessary _____________ your life and your country, and in return you _____________ be rewarded with a higher salary, a stronger China _____________ eventually a future in which people around the world _____________ be required to learn Putonghua just as they need _____________ learn English today.

Text 3:
I hope that I am not the _____________ Hong Kong citizen to feel profound shame _____________ the reaction, or rather lack of it, _____________ our community to the bomb disaster _____________ Bali.

The island is a popular tourist _____________ for Hong Kong people, so it was _____________ from the outset that some of the _____________ would be SAR residents. Yet the only _____________ from our city when the news was _____________ was a rather bland announcement on the _____________ of Cathay Pacific that it would send _____________ larger plane than usual to accommodate residents _____________ wanted to return early. While the Australians _____________ sending in medical teams and supplies, we _____________ not even bother to donate as much _____________ a box of bandages.

Are we so _____________ up in the never-ending debates on _____________ economy and negative equity that we have _____________ all sense of our moral and social _____________? Even when it became apparent that a _____________ of fellow residents were missing, no member _____________ our accountable government was dispatched to the _____________ to represent our community and to ensure _____________ everything possible was being done to find _____________.
The Hong Kong community seems to have sunk __________a spiritual vacuum. We must examine the __________ for this and try to recover our __________of humanity and compassion for others.