

Unit 6

VERB COMPLEMENTATION

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning the grammar of a language (to put it simply) is mainly learning about **what kinds of words or phrases go with what other kinds of words or phrases to form sentences.**

For example, what kinds of words would go with a **noun**? From what you have seen so far, they would include:

Determiners (like *a, the, this, that, my, her*)

Adjectives (like *good, bad, noisy, political*)

Prepositional phrases (like *on the table, in Hong Kong, at the ceremony*)

Relative clauses (like *who hates grammar, which I saw yesterday, smiling at me*)

We can ‘build up’ a noun phrase with one or more of the above parts attached to a noun, as in:

1. [The bad student who hates grammar] is going to regret it.
2. [The noisy protesters at the ceremony] were removed by the police.

Beneath the surface, there are actually quite a lot of similarities between the grammars of different languages, like English and Chinese. For example, in both English and Chinese, all the ‘parts’ mentioned above can go with a noun to form a noun phrase. Of course, there are some differences in word order -- e.g. in Chinese the relative clause precedes (rather than follows) the noun head, as in:

1. [那討厭文法的壞學生] 考試不及格了 ([The hate grammar bad student] failed the exam)

What you’ll need to do in learning English as a second language is to understand these differences and get them ‘into your system’. This book helps you to focus on them better.

To refresh your memory a bit, in the last three units, we have been looking at what goes with **verbs**. First, there are **auxiliaries** that go with a verb to form a verb group, as in [*may have been sleeping*]. Then, we saw that certain verbs – i.e. **transitive verbs** – are followed by **objects**, as in [*eat durians*].

In this Unit, we will look at verbs which need to be ‘completed’ by something else other than objects. A thing which completes something else is called a ‘**complement**’. Objects are the most common type of complement. Now we’ll see what other types of complements there are. There exist a number of patterns in English, so let’s explore them one by one.

II. PATTERN ONE

Consider the following question:

QUESTION 1:

The following sentences are incomplete. How would you complete each of them? Try to keep it brief and simple. (Note: In case some of the verbs can be completed by an object, avoid using an object and try something different, just to see how it works).

1. He decided _____.
2. He agreed _____.
3. He promised _____.
4. He wanted _____.
5. He intended _____.
6. He tried _____.
7. He pretended _____.
8. He attempted _____.

In trying to complete the above sentences after these verbs, you will probably have discovered two things:

- (i) A second verb is normally needed to complete the first verb, e.g.:
 1. He decided to resign.
 2. He agreed to repay the money in full.
- (ii) The second verb is in the **infinitive** form and normally begins with the ‘infinitive marker’ *to*. It would be wrong to leave out the marker, or to use a finite second verb, e.g.:

1. * He decided resign.
2. * He agreed to repaid the money in full.

QUESTION 2:

Think of three other verbs which are like the ones in Question 1, and make a sentence with each of these verbs:

1.
2.
3.

QUESTION 3:

The following sentences are taken from students' writings. Correct any errors that you may find.

1. Blackburn wanted Tom left DigiCom.

ANSWER:

2. Kevin wanted Angela marry him.

ANSWER:

3. Angela decided not see her.

ANSWER:

4. She told him don't look back.

ANSWER:

5. The heat made the mud becoming rock.

ANSWER:

The above exercise shows that some students are still unsure of the form of the second verb in completing the first verb. Let's study this a bit further.

III. PATTERN TWO

Look again at the first verbs in Question 1. There is another important point that we can make about them. Some of these verbs can take an **object** in addition to the complement, e.g.:

He wanted his son to be home before midnight.

But some others cannot take an object, e.g.:

* He decided his son to be home before midnight.

QUESTION 4:

Which of the verbs in Question 1 can take an object + a second verb as complement (like 'want')? Think of three other verbs which can also take an object + a verb complement, and make a sentence with each of these verbs.

1.

2.

3.

You will find a lot of verbs which take an object before the second verb. Besides the ones you have chosen above, just think of how many verbs there are like the following (the verbs are in bold and the objects are underlined):

1. He **persuaded** me to see the movie.
2. The captain **ordered** the soldiers to shoot.
3. The teacher **forced** the students to repeat the exercise.

What can we generalize about such verbs? It is quite obvious: these are verbs which normally require an **object** – i.e. they are transitive. Recall our discussion in Unit 5 about transitive vs. intransitive verbs. Take, for example, *persuade* or *force*. The act of persuading or forcing necessarily involves two participants: (i) the ‘persuader’ or ‘forcer’, and (ii) someone who is persuaded or forced. So these verbs require an object: ‘The teacher persuaded/forced the students to take the test’. It would thus be ungrammatical to leave out the object:

4. * He persuaded to see the movie.
5. * The captain ordered to shoot.
6. * The teacher forced to repeat the exercise.

In contrast, take the verbs *decide* and *try*. They involve only one central participant, the ‘decider’ or ‘trier’. So these verbs do not take objects: ‘The teacher decided/tried to give the students a test’.

IV. PATTERN THREE

So far, the patterns of verb complementation that we’ve been looking at, i.e. verb (+ object) + verb, all take an infinitive verb with *to*. That’s the pattern in sentences 1-4 of Exercise 3 above. Sentence 5, however, shows that things may be a little more complicated than that. Let’s find out more from the following question.

QUESTION 5:

Are there any mistakes in the way the verbs in the sentences below are completed? If so, correct the mistakes.

1. I will allow him to go home early.
2. I will let him to go home early.
3. I saw him to pull the trigger.
4. I expected him to pull the trigger.
5. I heard him to say that you are his hero.
6. His father will make him to go to school.
7. No one can force him to go to school.

ANSWER:

You will have found that some of the above verbs (e.g. *let*) takes a second verb without the infinitive marker *to*. It is hard to make a simple, easy-to-understand generalization about which verbs require *to* and which do not. Meaning is not a reliable guide here. For example, sentences (1a) and (1b) below, and (2a) and (2b), are very similar in meaning, and yet (a) requires the infinitive marker *to* but (b) does not:

- 1a) I allowed him to go.
- 1b) I let him go.
- 2a) I forced him to go.
- 2b) I made him go.

Fortunately, the (b) type of verbs (those that don't take *to*) are much fewer in number, and so it is not difficult to remember them all (e.g. *let, make, hear, see, watch*). Notice that verbs that deal with perception (most commonly *see* and *hear*) normally take a verb without *to*: 'I saw/heard/watched him cry', etc.

To summarise what we've done so far, we have noted three patterns of verb complementation:

- i) **Verb + *to* Infinitive** (e.g. *I decided to go*)
- ii) **Verb + Object + *to* Infinitive** (e.g. *I persuaded him to go*)
- iii) **Verb + Object + Infinitive** (e.g. *I let him go*)

Generally, if the first verb is intransitive, it will take no object (as in (i)), and if it is transitive, it will take an object (ii-iii). One important thing to notice is that the object of the first verb also serves as the logical subject of the second verb. For example, in (1) below, 'me' is the object of the first verb 'persuaded', but it is also the logical subject of the second verb 'see' (i.e. I am the one to see the movie):

- 1. He **persuaded** me to see the movie.
- 2. The captain **ordered** the soldiers to shoot.
- 3. The teacher **forced** the students to repeat the exercise.

Likewise, 'the soldiers' is the object of 'ordered' but the subject of 'shoot', and 'the students' is the object of 'forced' and the subject of 'repeat'.

You may have noticed that a few verbs, like *want*, may or may not have a surface object, e.g.:

- 1. He wanted to become a doctor.
- 2. He wanted his son to become a doctor.

When there is no surface object (as in 1), what do you think is the 'understood' object? (1) can only be interpreted as: 'he wanted (himself) to become a doctor'. Thus, the

subject of the sentence, 'he', is understood to be both the object of the first verb ('want') and the subject of the second verb ('become').

QUESTION 6:

All the verbs in the following sentences are capable of taking an object (underlined below). In which cases can the object be left out and be understood as the same as the subject of the sentence?

4. He persuaded me to see the movie.
5. The captain ordered the soldiers to shoot.
6. The teacher forced the students to repeat the exercise.
7. He likes his employees to be on time.
8. He convinced the enemy to surrender.
9. I prefer my children to have short hair.

ANSWER:

V. PATTERN FOUR

Most verbs that are needed to 'complete' another verb (e.g. *escape* in 'He tried to escape'), will be in the infinitive form. However, with some verbs, this is not the only possible form.

QUESTION 7:

In the following sentences, the second verb is either in the **infinitive** or the "**-ing**" (**present participle**) form. Decide which forms are correct or acceptable.

1. He tried to break the window with his bare hands.
2. He tried breaking the window with his bare hands.
3. He wanted to give me a birthday present.
4. He wanted giving me a birthday present.
5. She prefers to play the guitar.
6. She prefers playing the guitar.
7. She convinced him to marry her.
8. She convinced him marrying her.
9. She heard him sing a Japanese song.
10. She heard him singing a Japanese song.

ANSWER:

So you've noticed that some verb complements can take either the infinitive or the present participle form. An interesting question is, do the two forms mean exactly the same thing?

QUESTION 8:

Given below are pairs of sentences, in which the verb complement (which is underlined for you) takes either the infinitive or the present participle form. Can you detect any differences in meaning? Think carefully, as some of the differences may be rather subtle.

1. I have seen him cry only once.
2. I saw him crying at the funeral.
3. He tried to lock the door.
4. He tried locking the door.
5. He stopped to see her.
6. He stopped seeing her.
7. The audience started to applaud.
8. The audience started applauding.

Infinitive form:

Present participle form:

For an explanation of the differences, refer to the Notes for Students.

VI. PATTERN FIVE

Finally, there are some verbs which need to be completed not just by another verb, but by a whole **clause**. For example:

1. He said that the future of Hong Kong was rosy.
2. The headmaster announced that the school would be closed on account of the typhoon.
3. He asked his parents whether he could have his own apartment.
4. He does not know how the money could have disappeared so quickly.

QUESTION 9:

Complete the following sentences:

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Chief Executive declared that _____.2. He assured his parents that _____.3. He doubted whether _____.4. He wondered when _____.5. The officer informed him that _____.

You will notice that the verbs which need to be completed by a clause, like *say*, *announce*, *know*, etc., generally have to do with communication or thought. The proposition which is communicated or thought of is naturally best expressed by means of a clause rather than a word or phrase.

VII. SUMMING UP

The focus of this lesson is on verbs that need to be 'completed' by other verbs – in other words, on verbs that occur in a 'series'. In Chinese, you are familiar with verbs that occur in a series, e.g.:

- 他想去看電影 ('He want go see movie')
她決定不嫁他 ('She decide not marry him')
他上樓睡覺 ('He go upstairs sleep')

In Chinese, this is relatively easy -- just 'string' the verbs together, as long as they make sense! There is no need to worry about the form of the verb, since verbs in Chinese don't change their form anyway.

In English, however (as you have seen in previous units), a verb may assume different forms. The first verb in a series of verbs is finite, but the second verb is non-finite, and can take more than one possible form. In this unit, we have identified five main patterns. Some of these are more common than others. When you are in doubt about how to use a verb, be sure to consult a dictionary.

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ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

Fill in the blanks with the correct form of the verbs in brackets. There may be more than one correct answer.

TEXT 1:

Before the invention of radio and television, people spent much of their leisure time (1) _____(do) activities that required (2) _____(do) or (3) _____(make) something. They practiced (4) _____(play) a musical instrument or studied (5) _____(sing).

Most people learned (6) _____ (keep busy) by (7) _____ (try) (8) _____(improve) their abilities in some way or by (9) _____(practice) a skill. People who couldn't afford (10) _____ (spend) much money on hobbies often started (11) _____(collect) simple objects, such as matchbook covers or stamps, or even things like buttons or bottle caps. Of course, most people spent a lot of time (12) _____(read), and (13) _____(write) letters to friends.

Children played games in which they pretended (14) _____(be) pirates or cowboys or people they remembered (15) _____ (read about) in books. Many women were extremely clever at (16) _____ (make) and (17) _____ (decorate) articles of clothing. Men often kept busy by (18) _____(make) toys for children or (19) _____(carve) small sculptures out of wood.

TEXT 2:

Eliza Doolittle was a common flower girl who wanted (1) _____(be) somebody. But she had a horrible accent, which prevented her (2) _____ (be) accepted by society. So she went to see Professor Higgins, a famous phonetician. She wanted him (3) _____(teach) her to speak proper English, like a lady. He tried (4) _____(get) rid of her at first, but when he saw how great a challenge it would be, he decided (5) _____(take) her on as a pupil. He hoped (6) _____(turn) her from a flower girl into a duchess, to win a bet with his friend Pickering. He promised (7) _____(give) her free lessons. But he gave her a hard time. He forced her (8) _____(say) the alphabet hundreds of times. He made her (9) _____(speak) with pebbles in her mouth. He did not let her (10) _____(eat) or (11) _____(sleep) until she got it right. After a while she decided (12) _____ (quit), but he told her not (13) _____(give up) so easily. In the end she helped him (14) _____(win) his bet.

TEXT 3:

The education secretary yesterday denied _____(interfere) with the autonomy of two leading universities by _____(voice) support for them to merge.

Secretary for Education and Manpower Arthur Li Kwok-cheung refused _____(apologise) for _____(say) on Friday that he would act as a "matchmaker" to speed the merger of the Chinese University and the University of Science and Technology (HKUST).

"What have I done wrong?" he asked. "What I had done was discuss _____(raise) the standards of higher education with their vice-chancellors. It is up to universities now _____ (consult) the views of their staff and students on the merger. I will not be interfering with the autonomy of the institutions."

Chinese University vice-chancellor Ambrose King Yeo-chi, who supported the idea, said yesterday the two universities had yet _____(reach) an agreement on the merger, adding no timetable for the move had been suggested.

Professor Li said he had discussed the merger with Professor King and HKUST president Paul Chu Ching-wu after joining the government in August. "We share the

same view - that a merger between the two institutions could help _____
(develop) a world-class university."

He said he had expected his earlier remarks _____ (prompt)
criticism. "Some people at the institutions may have conflict of interests and self-interests
at heart," he said.

Professor King supported amalgamation yesterday in a letter to staff and students at
the Chinese University.

"A merger with the HKUST is likely _____ (speed) up the
process for our university to develop as a world-class university," Professor King said.

But he insisted that the two institutions had not reached any agreement. "It should be
decided after _____ (consult) staff and students," he said.

Text 4:

The United States yesterday accused five Asian nations - China, Vietnam, North Korea,
Laos and Myanmar - of severely _____ (repress) religious freedom as part
of calculated bids to prop up totalitarian regimes.

The State Department named four other states in Asia - Pakistan, Turkmenistan,
Sudan and Uzbekistan - as _____ (be) hostile to minority or non-approved
religions.

The report's gallery of worst offenders targeted regimes which it said branded some
or all religious groups as "enemies of the state" because of the threat they posed to
dominant ideology.

China was accused of _____ (scrutinize) spiritual groups and in
some cases of "harsh repression".

Vietnam was criticised for _____ (restrict) religious groups it deems
in contravention of state policies. Some ethnic Hmong Protestants had been forced
_____ (recant) their faith, the report said.

In North Korea the government continued _____ (suppress) groups
not recognised by the state, the report said.

Myanmar was accused _____ (deploy) its "pervasive internal
security apparatus" to infiltrate meetings of religious groups and the report cited credible

reports that the armed forces had forcibly converted hundreds of Christian tribal Nagas to Buddhism.

The only non-Asian state in the same category was Cuba, where authorities were accused _____(mount) surveillance operations against worshippers and of harassing unregistered religious groups.

