Sentence Structure/Sentence Types (Greek) HANDOUT

This handout is designed to give you a very brief (and, of necessity, incomplete) overview of the different types of sentence structure and how the elements of sentences can fit together syntactically. All sentences in a language have grammatical structure; elements within the sentence combine to form units that combine to form larger units (and so forth) until a sentence is formed. First, we need a few definitions.

I. Definitions and explanations

Constituent: an element within the hierarchy of the sentence, filling a grammatical function slot.

Function slot: The various grammatical ways that nouns (or nominals--anything that can function as a noun) and verbs can function in a sentence. Consider these exx.:

Robin	knows	Batman.
Lois	kisses	Clark.

The words *Robin* and *Lois* are filling the Subject (S) function slot. *Batman* and *Clark* are filling the Direct Object (DO) function slot. *Knows* and *kisses* are filling the Verb (V) function slot.

Transitive: A characteristic of verbs indicating that they take a direct object.

Intransitive: A characteristic of verbs indicating that they take cannot take a direct object. Consider the two sentences "Batman killed Superman" and "Superman died." The verb *killed* takes a DO and so is transitive. The verb *died*, on the other hand, cannot take a DO and is intransitive. [Note: sometimes a verb can either transitive or intransitive, depending on its use and conception/meaning. Consider the following pair:

I exercise daily.	*exercise* = intransitive (no DO)
I exercise my right to vote.	*exercise* = transitive (DO)

Linking Verb (also called "copular" verb, or a copulative): Linking verbs are neither transitive nor intransitive; rather, they are used to predicate (assert) something about the subject--a quality of the subject, a classification of the subject, the location of the subject, etc. The most common linking verb in English is the verb "to be" (in Greek, εἰμί/γίνομαι): "Bruce Wayne *is* quirky" and "Joker *was* a villain." However, many other verbs are linking verbs and serve to predicate something about the subject (usually verbs of perception): *to be, to appear, to seem, to become, to look, to sound*. The

following sentences are saying something *roughly* like "Bruce *is* wealthy": "Bruce *appears* wealthy"; "Bruce *seems* wealthy"; "Bruce *becomes* wealthy"; "Bruce *looks* wealthy"; "Bruce *sounds* wealthy."

Obligatory : Traditionally in linguistics constituents can be *obligatory* in particular sentences, given the verb's semantic structure; these so-called *obligatory constituents* are frequently described as *complements*. If a phrase is a complement, that means that you can't remove it and still retain a grammatical sentence. For ex., if a verb is transitive, then the DO must be present for the sentence to be grammatical. The sentence "I viewed" is missing the DO and would be ungrammatical, if "to view" is conceived as transitive. Thus the DO is obligatory (and so is a complement). Likewise, if a sentence contains an indirect object (IO) marking the recipient, the DO would be an obligatory constituent. For ex.,

I gave John a wedgie

The DO *wedgie* is obligatory since the sentence contains an IO, *John*. What happens if we omit the DO? **I gave John*.[1] This renders the sentence ungrammatical.

What about constituents that are not obligatory given the verb's semantic structure? These are called *adjuncts*, and they typically tell us things about the verbal action like time, place, or manner. For ex., in

I gave John a wedgie <u>last night</u> <u>in the copier room</u>.

the adjunct phrases *last night* and *in the copier room* are both very interesting bits of information, but they are not obligatory constituents. Were we to omit one or the other (or both!), the sentence would still be grammatical and we would not feel like we were missing any information:

I gave John a wedgie … <u>in the copier room</u>.
I gave John a wedgie <u>last night</u> ….
I gave John a wedgie.

Phrases: Sentence constituents can be individual words, but they can also be larger units like phrases (or even whole clauses). For ex., in "John stole a kiss" the Subject (S) slot is filled by *John*, an individual noun. However, S could be a larger *noun phrase* (NP) like "the black knight," as in "*The black knight* stole a kiss." Or, S could be an even longer noun phrase a noun modified by both adjectives and prepositional phrases: "*The pathetic, poor black knight of the round table of King Arthur* stole a kiss." Single nouns

[1]The asterisk is conventionally used in linguistics to indicate a sentence that is not grammatically well-formed.

or whole noun phrases can fill any noun function slot of the sentence. Consider the chart as an ex.:

Function Slot	Single Noun	Noun Phrase
Subject	*Warriors* killed missionaries.	*The warriors from the jungle* killed missionaries.
Direct Object	Warriors killed *missionaries*.	Warriors killed *the missionaries from the station*.
Object of the Preposition	A band *of warriors* killed missionaries.	A band *of warriors from the jungle* killed missionaries.

II. Main Sentence Types

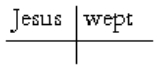
A. **S V**

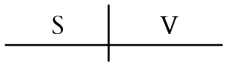
Such sentences will contain intransitive verbs. Exx.:

Jesus wept.
S V

Lazarus died.
S V

The lame leapt.
S V





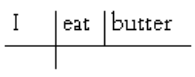
B. **S V DO**

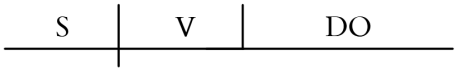
Such sentences will contain transitive verbs. Exx.:

I eat butter.
S V DO

John called Mary.
S V DO

Martha smells the olives.
S V DO





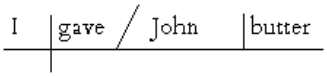
Note: some label the DO simply as "object" (O); consequently, they would label this type of sentence S V O.

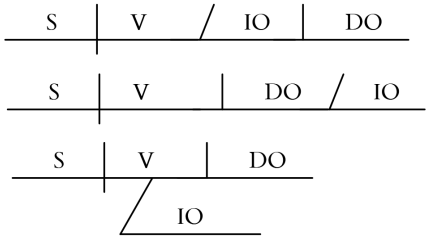
C. S V IO DO

Such sentences will contain transitive verbs, since these types of sentences require a DO. The IO (indirect object) receives or is the beneficiary of the verbal action affecting the DO.

Exx.:

I gave John butter.
S V IO DO





Martha made Jesus a meal.
S V IO DO

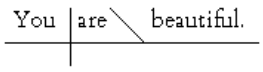
Bert sent me a letter.
S V IO DO

Note: some label the IO simply as "object" (O), just like they do the DO; consequently, they would label this type of sentence S V O O. I have not followed this scheme simply for the sake of clarifying the *functions* of the two different objects.

D. S V SC (A or N)

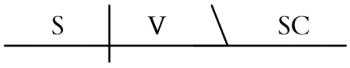
Such sentences will contain a linking verb. SC = subject complement; it tells you what is being predicated about the S. [Note: grammarians also label the SC as a predicate nominative or a predicate adjective.] Structurally, in English the linking verb most often comes between the S and the SC. The "(A or N)" notation above indicates that the SC can be either an adjective or a noun. Exx.:

You are beautiful. [SC = adj.]
S V SC



You are a woman. [SC = noun]
S V SC

We are the world. [SC = noun]
S V SC



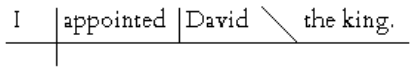
E. S V DO OC (A or N)

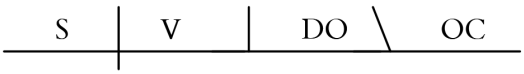
Such sentences will contain a transitive verb (since there is a DO). OC = object complement; it tells you what is being *implicitly* predicated about the DO. [Note: grammarians also label the OC as a predicate accusative--if that's helpful to you!] The "(A or N)" notation above indicates that the OC can be either an adjective or a noun. In these types of sentences, there is an implied copular relationship between the DO and the OC. Exx.:

I appointed David the king. [OC=noun]
S V DO OC

I made my dog pretty. [OC=adj.]
S V DO OC

I dub thee knight. [OC=noun]
S V DO OC





In each of these exx., the result of the verbal action is such that the DO "is now" (copular idea!) what the OC indicates: David *is now* king; my dog *is now* pretty; you *are now* a knight.

III. Some Problems of Ambiguity

A. Appositional Phrases. Sometimes sentence structure can be clouded by the presence of *apposition*, usually nouns in apposition.[2] Nouns are in apposition when two nouns fill the same function slot and share the same referent (i.e., they refer to the same entity). The second noun is the one said to be in apposition to the first noun, and it has the semantic function of modifying the first noun in some way. Exx.:

"Charlie, my brother, kicked the can." [*Charlie* is the subject noun, and the noun phrase *my brother* is in apposition to *Charlie*. Both fill the subject slot; both refer to the same entity. Thus, in this sentence, there are not two different subjects of the verb *kicked*; rather, there are two noun phrases constituting one subject, the second noun phrase restating the first one as a way of further explaining or modifying it.]

Compare the prior sentence with this one: "Charlie and my brother kicked the can." What's the difference? [In this sentence, *Charlie* is a subject noun, and *my brother* is also a subject noun phrase! They are joined (coordinated) by the conjunction *and*, indicating that they form a compound subject of the single verb *kicked*. Even though both *Charlie* and *my brother* are in the S slot, they do not refer to the same entities; they are two *different people*. This is therefore NOT an example of apposition.]

HINT: If you see two nouns (or noun phrases) that might be in apposition, one test to try is to place the expression "namely" or "who is" between the two noun phrases to see if it makes sense. If so, you probably have apposition. For ex., "Charlie, my brother, kicked the can" can be rephrased as "Charlie, *namely* my brother, kicked the can" and "Charlie, *who is* my brother, kicked the can." These rephrasings accurately capture the sense of the first sentence and indicate the presence of an appositional phrase.

[2]Verbs can stand in apposition to each other theoretically, although it is rare: "John *ate, scarfed down*, a hog!" In the discussion above, however, we shall only concern ourselves with apposition in nouns/noun phrases.

B. Ambiguity between Appositional Phrases and Object Complements.

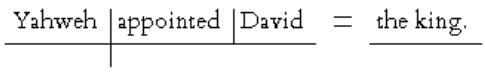
Sometimes the structure of a sentence is ambiguous and can be understood to convey two different conceptual situations. One such sentence is

Yahweh appointed David the king.

This sentence is ambiguous between two possible scenarios:

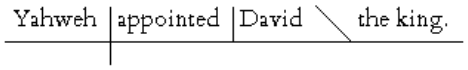
1. David is already the king. The speaker intends to convey that Yahweh has appointed David to some other office (besides king), and *the king* is in apposition to the DO *David*, specifying some information about the David who has received an appointment. It could be rephrased as "Yahweh appointed David, *who was* the king." It's a S V DO sentence:

Yahweh appointed David the king.
S V DO



2. David was not yet the king. The speaker intends to convey that Yahweh has appointed David to bear the office of king now. *David* is the DO, and *the king* is the OC, indicating what the DO has become. It could be rephrased as "Yahweh appointed David *to be* the king." It's a S V DO OC sentence:

Yahweh appointed David the king.
S V DO OC



C. Ambiguity between Indirect Objects, Appositional Phrases, and Object Complements.

Here is another example of a situation where the structure of a sentence is ambiguous and can be understood to convey three different conceptual situations:

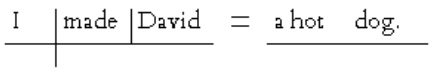
I made David a hot dog.

This sentence is ambiguous between three possible scenarios:

1. Perhaps David is already known to be a proverbial "hot dog" (slang for someone who shows off by performing risky stunts). The speaker intends to convey that the subject (I) created David, whom everyone considers already to be a hot dog. The noun phrase *a hot dog* is in apposition to the DO *David*, specifying some

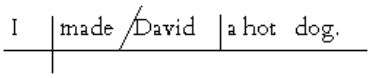
information about the David whom I have made. It could be rephrased as "I made David, *who is* a hot dog." It's a S V DO sentence:

I made David a hot dog.
S V DO



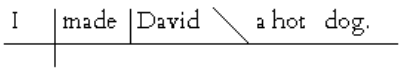
2. Or, perhaps *hot dog* refers to a real piece of food, and *David* is the IO. The speaker intends to indicate *for whom* the subject (I) has made this hot dog. Its sentence structure is S V IO DO:

I made David a hot dog.
S V IO DO



3. Or, finally, perhaps David was not yet a proverbial "hot dog." The speaker intends to convey that I have somehow turned David into a proverbial "hot dog." [Perhaps we played Truth-or-Dare one too many times!] *David* is the DO, and *a hot dog* is the OC, indicating what the DO has become. It could be rephrased as "I made David *to be* a hot dog." It's a S V DO OC sentence:

I made David a hot dog.
S V DO OC



As you can see, three different scenarios can be expressed by the exact same string of words. How you understand the assertion of the sentence depends on how you understand the constituents to function, and drawing a sentence diagram is a helpful tool that can help you (or force you!) to make those syntactic and interpretive choices. Notice, for example, that the diagrams are *different* for each of the possible scenarios in the ambiguous sentences above.