NOTES ON WORDS, PHRASES, SENTENCES AND CLAUSES

In English, as in many other languages in the world, individual words can function as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and so on.

Nouns and pronouns\(^1\) usually perform the following grammatical functions:

a) As subjects of sentences. For example:

Dogs are good friends. Children usually love them. We love other animals, too.
(subj.) (subj.) (subj.)

b) As objects of (transitive) verbs. For example:

My father sells cars. He sold Mary one. Mary visited him yesterday.

c) As subject complements. For example:

They are teachers; they are not doctors. Look at this picture. This is me.
(subj. compl.) (subj. compl.) (subj. compl.)

d) As objects of prepositions. For example:

Young men like women with money, especially if they are from Mérida..
(obj. prep.) (obj. prep.)

A friend of mine brought these sweets for us.
(obj. prep.) (obj. prep.)

e) As noun modifiers (i.e., adjectival function). For example:

Mr. Jones works in a book store. He lives in a country house.
(noun modif.) (noun modif.)

My father bought a he-goat.
(noun modif.)

\(^1\) A chart with a typology of English pronouns has been given on page 8 of this study sheet.
Adjectives usually modify nouns. For example:

I want a **beautiful** house. It must have a **large** bathroom.

(Adj.) (Adj.)

Adverbs usually modify the verbs of sentences, adjectives or other adverbs. For example:

My father walks **fast**. He **always** leaves us **behind**. He also speaks **very quickly**.

(Adv.) (Adv.) (Adv.) (Adv.) (Adv.)

John made a **very good deal**. I’m sure he’ll be **quite successful**.

(Adv.)

As we can see, words are not often used alone. They are usually combined into larger syntactic units called **phrases**. That is to say, a word used in combination with one or more other words is a phrase. For example: *a book, the man, fine day, very well, to go, do not know, can swim, in the morning, etc.*

From a grammatical point of view, **phrases can be:**

a) **Noun (or nominal) phrases** if they function as nouns. For example:

My father gave that boy a book about the oceans. It is an interesting book.

(noun phr. ⇒ subj.) (I.O.) (D.O.) (obj. prep.) (noun phr. ⇒ subj. compl.)

Mary’s house is beautiful.

(noun phr. ⇒ subj.)

b) **Adjective (or adjectival) phrases** if they function as adjectives. For example:

His story about the origin of dinosaurs is **very interesting**.

(adj. phrase)

Mary bought a **very beautiful** house in Margarita.

(adj. phrase)

c) **Verb (or verbal) phrases** if they consist of a verb, preceded or followed by other words. Verbal phrases can be of two types: finite and nonfinite. If the verb is conjugated for person, number or tense, the verb phrase is considered to be **finite**. If the verb is not conjugated but it is in the infinitive, gerund, present participle or past participle, the verb phrase is considered to be **nonfinite**. Verb phrases can function as the predicates of sentences (if they are finite), as nominal phrases, as adjectival phrases and as adverbial phrases (if they are nonfinite). For example:
c.1. As predicates (The verb must be conjugated): The time has come. We must act quickly.

(c.2. As nominal phrases: To err is human. Swimming in the morning is fun.

(c.3. The man to go is you. The man sitting there is my brother.

(c.4. John walks shaking his head to the sides. The computer will run connected to a printer.

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d) **Prepositional phrases** if they consist of a preposition followed by a single noun, a noun phrase or a pronoun. Prepositional phrases can act as adjectives and as adverbs. For example:

The woman in the red dress is an actress. She is the wife of my neighbor.

Mary wakes up at six o’clock. She speaks in a careful way because she works in a toy store.

In turn, words and phrases can be combined into much larger syntactic units called **sentences** and **clauses**. Both sentences and clauses usually consist of **subjects** (which are generally nouns or noun phrases), and of **predicates** (which are generally **conjugated verbs** or verb phrases). However, clauses are almost always introduced by relative pronouns (e.g., who, what, which, that, etc.) or subordinating conjunctions (how, where, when, if, before, etc.). For example:

**Sentences:**

I love children. My daughter does not like dogs. Where do you live?

Would you like some coffee? Come back tomorrow. Don’t go away.

**Clauses:**

What annoys me is bullies. That he likes children is a fact.

(Noun Clause ⇒ subj.) (Noun Clause ⇒ subj.)

Who he saw was Mary. I know when he is coming

(Noun Clause ⇒ subj.) (Noun Clause ⇒ D.O.)
Can you tell me what time it is? I have always lived where I was born.
(Noun Clause ⇒ D.O.) (Adv. Clause of place)

That is the teacher who lives near my house. I saw the woman who you lent the money to.
(Adj. Clause) (Adj. Clause)

Notice that there are several types of sentences:

a) **Statements (of facts)** (or **declarative sentences**): they are affirmative and negative sentences. E.g.,

   The government has raised the employees’ salaries. I do not believe what you say.

b) **Yes/No questions**: they are those questions which begin with an auxiliary. For example:

   Do you speak English? Can you help me, please? Are you busy?

c) **Information (or Wh-) questions**: they are those questions which begin with a question word (such as who, what, where, when, how, etc.). For example:

   Who is that woman over there? What’s your name? Where do you live?

d) **Imperative sentences**: they are those sentences whose subjects are understood or omitted, such as commands, orders, requests, etc. For example:

   Pass me the sugar, please. Close the door. Don’t be lazy. Let’s study English.

Notice that sentences are always self-sufficient (i.e., independent) linguistic units; that is to say, they can express complete ideas, notions, or thoughts all by themselves. However, clauses may or may not be self-sufficient; i.e., they may not express complete ideas, notions or thoughts all by themselves. Generally, clauses express incomplete meanings; therefore, they are called **subordinate (or dependent) clauses**. Those clauses that express complete meanings are called **free, independent or main clauses**.

Subordinate clauses can perform (a) functions similar to those of nouns, in which case they are called **noun (or nominal) clauses**; (b) functions similar to those of adjectives, in which case they are called **adjective (or adjectival) clauses** (also known as **relative clauses**)²; c) functions similar to those of adverbs, in which cases they are called **adverb (or adverbial) clauses**. For example:

**Noun Clauses**:

²Notice that adjectival prepositional phrases and adjective clauses are put right after the noun they modify.
Who broke the window was John.  
Noun Clause ⇒ subj.)

Who I love is children.  
(Noun Clause ⇒ subj.)

That I love children is a fact.  
(Noun Clause ⇒ subj.)

What makes me angry is noises.  
(Noun Clause ⇒ subj.)

I know what John wants.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ D.O.)

He told me (that) Mary was here.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ D.O.)

The club will give whoever wins a price.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ I.O.)

Think about what I told you.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ obj. prep.)

This is what I want.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ subj. compl.)

She knows why I sold the car.  
(Noun Cl. ⇒ D.O.)

Notice that:

1) Noun clauses are usually introduced by relative pronouns (e.g., who, whoever, whom, whose, what, whatever, what kind of, which, whichever, etc.) and subordinating conjunctions (e.g., that, how, however, how long, how often, how much, how many, when, whenever, where, wherever, whether, why, etc.)

2) If a noun clause does not have a subject, the relative pronouns who or what can act as subjects.

   For example:

   Who came was John.  
   subj. of cl.  
   Noun Cl. ⇒ subj. of sent.

   What annoys me is noise.  
   subj. of clause  
   Noun Cl. ⇒ subj. of sentence

3) In informal speech, the subordinate conjunctions that and who can be omitted when the subordinate clause already has a subject, as in the following cases.

   I know (that) John told us the truth.  
   (Noun Clause ⇒ D.O.)

   I understand (that) that is true.  
   (Noun Cl. ⇒ D.O.)

Relative (or Adjective) Clauses:

The man (who) was here is my teacher.  
↑ (Adj. Clause)  
[modifying ]

I saw the man (that) he hit.  
↑ (Adj. Clause)  
[modifying ]
The man (who) you met is my teacher.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adj. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

He is the boy who broke the window.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adj. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

She is the girl (who) John saw.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adj. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

I know the lady whose house burned.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adj. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

Notice that adjective clauses are usually introduced by the relative pronouns who, whom, whose, which and that or by the subordinating conjunctions when, where and why. Examples:

People still speak of the day when the explosion occurred.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adjective Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

I know the place where the ball fell.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adjective Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

Give us the reason why the accident happened.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adjective Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

Relative clauses can be:

a) **Essential (or restrictive or defining):** If the relative clause is necessary to identify the noun it modifies. E.g., *The professor who teaches chemistry is an excellent lecturer.* In this case, no commas are used because the relative clause is necessary to identify which professor is meant.

b) **Nonessential (or nonrestrictive or nondefining):** If the relative clause simply gives additional information and it is not necessary to identify the noun it modifies. E.g., *Professor Wilson, who teaches chemistry, is an excellent lecturer.* In this case, commas are used because the relative clause is not necessary to identify the noun; we already know who the person is.

**Adverbal Clauses:**

He went home as soon as he could.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adv. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]

Mary passed out when she saw her injuries.  
\[\uparrow\text{(Adv. Clause)}\]  
\[\_\text{modifying}\_\]
Abraham Lincoln read while he conducted cabinet meetings.

I’ve always lived where I was born.

Notice that adverbial clauses are usually introduced by the subordinating conjunctions although, as, as if, as long as, as soon as, because, before, after, in order that, provided that, that, since, than, though, until, unless, when, whenever, where, wherever, whether, while, if, etc.

**Adverb(ial) clauses** can be of the following types:

a) Adverbial clauses of place; e.g., I’ve always lived where I was born.

b) Adverbial clauses of manner. These in turn can be of the following kinds:
   b.1. Cause; e.g., John stayed here because it was raining.
   b.2. Comparative; e.g., John is taller than I thought.
   b.3. Concession; e.g., John spoke even though he was angry.
   b.4. Conditional; e.g., I’ll call you if I hear something about it.
   b.5. Purpose; e.g., I’ll stay with the children so that she can go to the party.

c) Time: John left when I was arriving.
## ENGLISH PRONOUNS

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<th>Possessive Adjectives</th>
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3 The pronouns (and adjectives) to the right of the slash (/) are liturgical Old English forms.