

5 Grammar: Structure

5.1 Structures: Their Places And Elements

At the level of grammar, the patterns along the axis of chain are called *structures*. Structures involve likeness and repetition. The sentences

Ex. 5.1 *Theodore opened the door politely*

Ex. 5.2 *Some people sing operatic arias in their bath*

are alike. Something observable in the first sentence recurs in the second. Because they are alike, because something from the first sentence is repeated in the second, we can say that they have the same pattern. The sentences are alike in three main ways.

- Firstly, they are alike in that each can be divided into four parts. Because they can be divided into four parts, they have a structure which consists of four *places*.
- Secondly, they are alike in the things which fill these places in structure; that is, in the *elements* of their structure. *Theodore, some people, the cat* and *these mistakes* are alike in that each is playing the same part in its respective sentence. Each is acting as the *subject* of its sentence. The sentences are alike in that the structure of each consists of the elements: subject, predicator, complement and adjunct.
- Thirdly, they are alike in that the structure of each contains only one *occurrence* of each of its elements.

Structures consist of places which are filled by occurrences of elements. By saying this we can account for three different kinds of likeness between different sentences.

1. The subject, predicator, complement and adjunct kind of structure is one kind of English grammatical structure.
2. Another kind of English grammatical structure is exemplified by the underlined stretches of the sentences

Ex. 5.7 *The boys nextdoor are friends of my niece*

Ex. 5.8 *Old houses nearby were destroyed by the fire*

Ex. 5.9 *The mistakes were very common indeed*

Ex. 5.10 *John couldn't swim quite quickly enough.*

Each underlined stretch can be divided into three parts; each has a structure consisting of three places. In each underlined stretch the places are filled by the elements *modifier*, *headword* and *qualifier*.

3. Another kind of English grammatical structure is exemplified by the underlined stretches of the sentences

Ex. 5.13 *Peter swam just beyond John*

Ex. 5.14 *He got nearly to France*

Ex. 5.15 *The cat jumped right over it*

Ex. 5.16 *Soon after that Theodore said farewell.*

Each underlined stretch can be divided into three parts; each has a structure consisting of three places. In each underlined stretch the places are filled by the elements *before-preposition*, *preposition* and *completive*.

4. A fourth kind of English grammatical structure is exemplified by the underlined stretches of the sentences

Ex. 5.17 *Theodore's Jaguar has run down a cat*

Ex. 5.18 *The books we were expecting have turned up at last*

Ex. 5.19 *Bill had rung up Mary every night that week*

Ex. 5.20 *The assistant secretary has taken over the secretaryship.*

Again the structure of each of these stretches of language has three places and again the places are filled by one occurrence of each of these elements. The elements of this kind of structure are *auxiliary verb*, *verb* and *extension of verb*.

5. A fifth kind of English grammatical structure is exemplified by the underlined stretches of language in the sentences *Debunkers* and *unkindnesses* each have a structure consisting of four places. The first place in each is filled by the element *prefix*, the second place by the element *base*, the third by the element *suffix*, and the fourth by the element *ending*. *Paintings* has a structure of three places filled by the elements *base*, *suffix*, *ending*. *Paintpots* has two occurrences of the *base* element and one occurrence of the element *ending*. *Geese* has a *base* element which we find also in *goose*. It also has a change of vowel indicating plurality. We could perhaps describe this change of vowel as an *infix*. *Goings-on* has a *base*, a *suffix* and an *ending* and then something else tacked on. We could perhaps call this something else an *addition*. *Sisters-in-law* would then have the structure: *base*, *ending*, *addition*.

6. A sixth kind of English grammatical structure is exemplified by the sentences

Ex. 5.31 *After she had been scratched by the cat, Aunt Jemima shooed it away*

Ex. 5.32 *Since time is pressing, we'd better go* Ex. 5.33 *If you like, I'll call for you.*

Each of these sentences has a structure of two places, the first being filled by a *subordinate* element of structure and the second being filled by a *main* element of structure.

Formal Items

The first kind of ‘simple’ pattern to be considered is the kind which consists of *formal items* occurring in sequences. Formal items are actual bits of language which represent elements of structure.

The sentences

Ex. 5.1 *Theodore opened the door politely* Ex. 5.2 *Some people sing operatic arias in their bath* Ex. 5.3 *The cat scratched Aunt Jemima by accident* Ex. 5.4 *These mistakes were very common last year*

each have an s element. In Ex. 5.1 the element s is represented by the formal item *Theodore*; in Ex. 5.2 it is represented by the formal item *some people*; in Ex. 5.3 by the formal item *the cat*; and in Ex. 5.4 by the formal item *these mistakes*

