LEARNING ABOUT LANGUAGE

Fourth Edition

ANALYSING SENTENCES

An Introduction to English Syntax

Noel Burton-Roberts

ROUTLEDGE

Analysing Sentences

This highly successful text has long been considered the standard introduction to the practical analysis of English sentence structure. It covers key concepts such as constituency, category, and functions and utilises tree diagrams throughout to help the reader visualise the structure of sentences.

In this fourth edition, *Analysing Sentences* has been thoroughly revised and now features a brand new companion website with additional activities and exercises for students and an answer book for the Further Exercises for professors. The extra activities on the website give students practice in identifying syntactic phenomena in running text and will help to deepen understanding of this topic.

Accessible and clear, this book is the perfect textbook for readers coming to this topic for the first time. Featuring many in-text, end-of-chapter and Further Exercises, it is suitable for self-directed study as well as for use as core reading on courses.

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NOEL BURTON-ROBERTS

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Preface to the fourth edition

In this fourth edition, I have revised the text in ways that I believe make it clearer and, in many cases, simpler – and I hope more accessible. Sometimes this has meant changing examples, both in the text and in exercises. I've also corrected mistakes that readers have been kind enough to point out (and here I must particularly mention and thank Hazel Kirby and Hadeel Awad). There's a small analytical change in the early chapters: I've given up the fiction that determiners are modifiers, by using *two . . . jokes* as my illustration instead of *their . . . jokes*.

What's new about this edition is the accompanying website with separate sections for students and teachers. The students' section has Additional Exercises (with answers). Several of these take the form of text passages in which the reader is asked to identify examples of particular syntactic phenomena. These offer a way of engaging with the language other than by drawing phrase markers. The teachers' section consists of the answers to the Further Exercises set at the end of each chapter but it also includes some additional exercises (with answers), some of which develop the analysis further.

Preface to the third edition

The major substantive change in this edition concerns VERBS. I have abandoned the 'Verb Group'. The 'Vgrp' was pedagogically convenient but it did not do justice to the facts of how auxiliary verbs figure the structure of VP.

The treatment of auxiliaries is now more standard. Each auxiliary is treated as taking a VP complement. This allows me to maintain the idea that complements of lexical verbs are their sisters, combining with them to form a ('basic') VP. This also makes the use of the *do so* test for VP more consistent than in previous editions (it actually works now). And it allows me to acknowledge that adverbials can, and very naturally do, occur between auxiliaries and between auxiliary and lexical verbs.

Contrary to what I expected, this change has barely increased the complexity of the presentation. I have simplified some examples. I have kept the terminology of the previous editions (including MOD, PERF, PROG, PASS) insofar as it is consistent with the new analysis. In fact, Chapter 4 – now called 'The basic Verb Phrase' – is now simpler and more focused. The reader can concentrate on what really matters here – complementation of lexical verbs. True, this means there is more to discuss in Chapter 6 – now called 'More on verbs: auxiliary VPs' – but I've divided that chapter into two parts in what seems a fairly natural way. This gives teachers the option of spending two weeks on that material.

There are other, smaller, analytical changes:

(i) In Chapter 3, *now*, *then*, *when* and *here*, *there*, *where* are now categorised as prepositions, abandoning the previous traditional categorisation of them as adverbs. This means that PP can consist just of P, as well as P + NP.

(ii) The section 'Modification of pronouns' in Chapter 7 now maintains a more consistent distinction between pronouns and (pre-)determiners. The latter remain (pre-)determiners – i.e. they don't suddenly become pronouns – in NPs like *those at the back*. These are now analysed as having an ellipted head (*those* $[E]_N$ *at the back*).

(iii) The section 'More on Adjective Phrases' in Chapter 7 takes greater care than before in explaining complementation of adjectives – and why APs with complements must post-modify the head within NP.

(iv) In Chapter 8 of the last edition, I categorised *after*, *before*, *until*, and *since* as subordinating conjunctions but I had a Further Exercise inviting the reader to wonder if they weren't in fact prepositions. I now analyse them as

prepositions. *Since* is special: it is both a preposition (*since he became my friend*) and a subordinating conjunction (*since he is my friend*).

Other changes are mainly presentational. The presentation has been tightened up and it is, I hope, clearer and more user-friendly. There are a few more summaries. Chapter 10 is now divided into two more manageable parts. And there are some minor typographical changes:

(i) For NPs consisting of names, I've introduced 'name' as a node. Idiosyncratic perhaps but (together with 'pronoun' – which replaces 'PRO') I think it will help students to remember to distinguish these single-word NPs from NPs with empty determiner.

(ii) Where I have numbered VPs, the lowest (i.e. 'basic') VP is always 'VP1'.

(iii) 'Comp' has given way to 'C' – with lower C as 'C1' and the higher as 'C2'.

(iv) I now represent S-bar as *S′* and S-double-bar as *S″*. (For convenience, only S (not S′ or S″) is required in abbreviated clausal analyses.)

(v) I use '•' for gaps.

(vi) I now often indicate movements graphically in examples and in phrase markers.

When a third edition of *Analysing Sentences* was planned, the publishers solicited anonymous reviews of the second edition. A surprising number came in, all of them detailed. I am extremely grateful to those who responded so constructively. Those responses presented me with a bewildering variety of views about what was good or bad about the previous edition. (For example, some thought the Verb Group the best thing about the book, but the majority loathed it and regarded it as a blot on the landscape.) So I have been selective in following their suggestions. A few suggested I present a thorough-going X-bar analysis. I've not done that, since it would have completely changed the character of the book. If X-bar is what's needed, there are plenty of other texts to supply that need. And I have kept Chapter 11 unchanged. It may have a rather dated feel to it but I think it still does the job it was designed to do. Nor have I changed its position in the book. It is a *post-script* to what is intended as a practical, descriptive, introductory account of English.

For pointing out mistakes and making suggestions for improvement, I am grateful to strangers who have e-mailed me, to friends, colleagues, postgraduate tutorial assistants who have helped me teach first-year syntax at Newcastle and, last but not least, the students. One of those tutorial assistants, Laura Bailey, cast her eagle eye over the pre-final draft to great effect and she has my thanks for that.

I have prepared an Answer Book for the Further Exercises. Teaching Staff can ask for this by emailing n.burton-roberts@ncl.ac.uk.

Preface to the second edition

When I first wrote *Analysing Sentences*, I had in mind the kind of mixed audience that I taught (and still teach) in an introductory course at Newcastle. This included first-year undergraduates in linguistics and English language who would be going on to find out more about English syntax, syntactic theory, and argumentation in syntactic theory in later years. It also included many others who probably would not continue and whose purposes were different and quite varied. For these, the book had to provide a self-contained, systematic, and coherent introductory picture of English in its own right. They were less interested, perhaps, in syntactic theory than in forming a reasonably informed impression of the structural range of the language and a grasp of the vocabulary and concepts needed to describe it. So the aim was to strike a balance between providing both descriptive range and descriptive convenience on the one hand while, on the other, offering something of genuine use to someone about to embark more seriously on syntactic theory and argumentation.

Many of the changes in this second edition have been made with this balance in mind. Occasionally, in the first edition, I made decisions which, while pedagogically convenient, have come over the years to seem less and less defensible or useful in an introduction to syntax. So I have done something about them. For teachers familiar with the first edition who want an overview of more important changes, I have listed them below.

A more general change concerns the exercises. There are more of them and there are now 'Further Exercises'. These come without answers and can be used for seminar work. Some are designed (as before) to test comprehension, others to give practice in handling new data and to encourage thought. More than in the first edition, rather than give a phrase-marker in the text, I set the drawing of the phrase-marker as an exercise. It is always given in a 'Discussion' at the end of the chapter. This, I think, makes for more worthwhile and enjoyable reading, and it builds confidence. It seems essential the reader be encouraged to do these before consulting the Discussion.

One thing that has not changed is the 'Verb Group'. Much though I feel inclined to, I won't apologise for retaining this! I grant the evidence which suggests there is no such thing (and its incompatibility with X-bar). But there is less agreement on how verbs in English *are* to be treated. Some textbooks simply avoid the issues, by restricting their coverage of the possibilities I have gathered up under 'Vgrp'. I have kept it because it is convenient: it provides a

way of covering those possibilities (and introducing needed vocabulary, in a way beginners find intuitive) without immediately embroiling them in problems, lengthy explanations, and excuses. Besides, I have found it useful as an illustrative starting point in later courses on argumentation.

The following major changes of detail have been made, not only in aid of bringing the analysis a little more into line with common current practice, but also in the light of my own experience of teaching the first edition. This has made me think that I was sometimes a little over-cautious as regards what is teachable at this stage. Even so, many of the changes have actually had a simplifying effect.

(i) Chapter 2. Governors (first edition) are now explicitly referred to as 'heads' (not as 'governors').

(ii) Chapter 5. Adjunct adverbials are now, in addition, explicitly referred to as 'VP-adverbials'. This is more helpful, in my view. And, while the distinction between the 'conjunct adverbials' and 'disjunct adverbials' of the first edition is alluded to, this detail has been played down. Both are now explicitly referred to as 'Sentence-adverbials' ('S-adverbials').

(iii) Chapter 6. What in the first edition was called 'Subject-Auxiliary Inversion' is now more accurately 'Auxiliary fronting'. More importantly, the auxiliary is now fronted to the complementiser position (daughter of S-bar, sister of S). This is a major change and involves changes elsewhere – see below. It means that 'S-bar' is now introduced in Chapter 6 rather than Chapter 8. Auxiliary-fronting leaves a gap under AUX.

(iv) Chapter 6. It is more helpful to the student (to remember that passive verbs are not intransitive) to have a gap in the object position following a passive verb. Some students do this spontaneously, anyway. And it provides a better preparation for what is to follow, both in the book and elsewhere. So I now insist on a gap in object position.

(v) Chapter 7. The term 'zero article' has been abandoned in favour of 'unfilled DET'.

(vi) Chapter 7. The discussion of *one* in the first edition was unsatisfactory. It was not used to motivate any distinction, within NP, between complements and adjuncts and so never really worked. I have simplified here by postponing all mention of *one* to an Appendix in Chapter 7, where it *is* associated with the distinction between adjuncts ('NOM-modifiers') and complements ('N-modifiers'). The chapter can be read quite independently of that appendix, however (in my experience, beginners find the distinction between adjunct and complement difficult in the context of NP). Tutors can decide for themselves whether to insist that the distinction be respected in Chapter 7. Other changes (in Chapters 8 and 9) anyway mean that it does now eventually emerge, clearly and naturally, when really necessary.

(vii) Chapter 8. I now introduce the complementiser *whether* (and hence subordinate *yes/no* interrogative clauses) here, along with *that*.

(viii) Chapter 8. The representation of noun-complement clauses in the first edition was unsatisfactory. As complements, these are now more simply and accurately represented as sisters of N within NOM. See below for a consequent change to the structural position of restrictive relative clauses.

(ix) Chapter 9. The order of presentation has changed: the chapter now moves from wh-interrogative clauses (main and subordinate) to relative clauses. This is convenient if, as I do, one spends two separate weeks on this chapter (one on interrogatives, one on relatives). A further minor change from the first edition is that subject constituent questions are now presented as having a fronted auxiliary. (There is a 'Further Exercise' on this.)

(x) Chapter 9. Since auxiliaries are now fronted to the (S-bar) complementiser position (Ch. 6), which cannot be filled twice over, Wh-expressions are now fronted to a higher Comp position (Comp-2). Comp-2 is here defined as daughter of S-double bar, sister of S-bar.

(xi) Chapter 9. Since noun complement clauses are now sisters of N (Ch. 8), relative clauses are now represented as sisters of NOM. As explained there, this distinction between N-modifier (complement clause) and NOM-modifier (relative clause) parallels that between complement and adjunct in the VP. If interested (or required!), the student is now in a position to generalise this to all modifiers in NP, by turning back to the Appendix in Chapter 7.

(xii) Chapter 10 remains largely unchanged (apart from changes consequent on those in earlier chapters) though there is slightly more detail and discussion.

In preparing this second edition, I have benefited from the comments and advice of many people. They are too numerous to mention and thank individually here, but I must mention the help of Phil Carr and Siobhan Chapman. The students at Newcastle (whose responses have invariably been interesting and instructive) have taught me more than they know. I am especially grateful to Georgette Ioup, who I met in Morocco in 1983 when I had just started writing the first edition. Her detailed and insightful comments on it over the last ten years have been of great help, not to say indispensable. My wife Tessa has borne with grace my probings of her linguistic competence, and Julia, my daughter, has made the rewriting much more enjoyable by joining me in vandalising copies of the first edition, pasting, and stapling.

I would like to dedicate this second edition to my mother and the memory of my father.

Preface to the first edition

This book grew out of a longish pamphlet used with first-year undergraduates in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, which I wrote in 1979. I'd like to acknowledge the late Barbara Strang's encouragement when I wrote that pamphlet. Thanks, too, to Geoff Leech and Mick Short (the series editors) for their help and encouragement in producing the book as it now stands. Valerie Adams, painstakingly and to good effect, went through each chapter as it was completed and for this I am very grateful. This book has also benefited from comments made by Ewan Klein, Maggie Cooper, Rodney Huddleston, Michael Anthony, Phil Carr, Liz Smith, and Lesley Milroy. Herman Moisl's arbitrations between myself and the word processor are gratefully acknowledged. I owe a general debt of gratitude to Sir Randolph Quirk, who introduced me to the study of the English language in the first place. Finally, my thanks to Tessa for her support and patience.

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Introduction

Attempting to describe the language you speak is about as difficult as attempting to describe yourself as a person. Your language is very much part of you and your thinking. You use your language so instinctively that it is difficult to stand outside yourself and think of it as something that is independent of you, something which you know and which can be described. You may even feel inclined to say that your language is not something you know, you just speak it, and that's all there is to it. But as the native speaker of a language, there is an important sense in which you do know all that there is to know about that language. This is not to deny that there are almost certainly words with which you are not familiar. Perhaps you don't know the meaning of the word *lagophthalmic*. If so, your (understandable) ignorance of this is more medical ignorance than ignorance about the English language, and is anyway quickly remedied with the help of a dictionary. But there is much more to a language than its words. There is much more that you do know about your language which cannot so conveniently be looked up, and which you were never explicitly taught. And this is knowledge of a more fundamental and systematic kind than knowledge of the meanings of individual words. The more fundamental such knowledge is, the more difficult it is to become consciously aware of it.

We are brought up sharply against our own knowledge of the language when, for example, we hear a foreigner make a mistake. You may have had the frustrating experience of knowing that something is wrong but not being able to say precisely what it is, beyond saying 'We just don't say it like that'. The very deep-seated character of speakers' knowledge of their language makes it extremely difficult for them to explain what it is they know.

Here are some examples to illustrate the point. As a speaker of English, you will agree that [1] and [2] are good English sentences:

[1] Dick believes himself to be a genius.

[2] Dick believes he is a genius.

but that there is something wrong with [3] and [4]:

[3] Dick believes he to be a genius.

[4] Dick believes himself is a genius.

It's interesting that, simply on the basis of assuming you speak English, and knowing nothing else about you, I can predict that you will judge [1] and [2] to be good and [3] and [4] to be odd, even though these sentences are something you may never have considered before.

In attempting to answer the question 'Is this an example of a good English sentence or not?' we are obliged to go to speakers of the language and ask them whether they would accept it as such. (If we ourselves speak the language, then we may ask ourselves.) It's difficult to see how else we could decide what is and what is not a sentence of English. Yet, if this is so, our agreement about [1]–[4] constitutes a fact about the English language. In a real sense, then, all the facts about the language lie inside the heads of its speakers, be they native speakers or not.

But can you give an explanation for the oddity of [3] and [4] – beyond saying that we just don't say it like that?

Here's another example. If the negative of [5] is [6],

[5] They were jumping on it.

[6] They weren't jumping on it.

why isn't [8] the negative of [7]?

[7] They tried jumping on it.

[8] They triedn't jumping on it.

And another example: Since [9] is a good English sentence, why aren't [10] and [11]?

[9] Bevis mended his bike in the garage and Max did so in the garden.

[10] Bevis put his bike in the garage and Max did so in the garden.

[11] Bevis went to the circus and Max did so to the zoo.

Finally, compare [12] and [13]:

[12] The fact that I communicated to Mona is irrelevant.

[13] The fact that I communicated with Mona is irrelevant.

Superficially, the only difference might seem to be the different prepositions, *with* and *to*. So we might expect the difference to be exactly the same as that between *I went with Max* and *I went to Max*. In fact, though, your understanding of the difference between [12] and [13] goes way beyond your understanding of the difference between *with* and *to*. You can demonstrate this for yourself: try replacing the *that* in each sentence by *which*. How do you react? Do you agree that you can do it with [12] but not [13]? What's going on here? Why should the choice of preposition in one part of a sentence affect the choice of *that* or *which* in another part? You know it does, but what exactly is it that you know?

What exactly is wrong with *The fact which I communicated with Mona is irrelevant*? In a quite literal sense, there is more going on here than meets the eye.

These are just a tiny sample of a large body of facts, mysteries, and puzzles offered by the English language. Some of the puzzles have been solved (to our present satisfaction, at least). Others remain puzzles, or there's disagreement as to what the most appropriate explanation might be. And, as we find out more about the language, we can expect to discover further puzzles, and perhaps even find things puzzling which we thought we had understood.

The aim of this book is to encourage you to stand outside yourself and confront just one aspect of your largely unconscious knowledge of English. It doesn't discuss, let alone offer solutions to, all the puzzles known to exist, nor even to give very detailed accounts of intricacies like those above. But it will introduce you to a method of describing the language, and provide you with a vocabulary with which to start thinking about the language in terms of which the puzzles can at least be identified and solutions sought.

The chapters that follow are concerned with English SYNTAX. *Syntax* is traditionally the name given to the study of the form, positioning, and grouping, of the elements that go to make up sentences. In a word, it is about the STRUCTURE of sentences. In studying a language, there is of course a lot else to talk about besides its syntax. For example, we can investigate the form and grouping of the elements within words themselves (for example: *un-de-cod(e)-able*). The systematic study of word-structure is called MORPHOLOGY (the relevant elements are 'morphemes'). Or we can concentrate on the meaning of sentences and how their meaning relates to the meanings of the words they contain. This is called SEMANTICS. Or we can concentrate on how linguistic expressions are connected with the sounds of speech. This is called PHONOLOGY.

I'll say nothing about the phonology of English, and very little about morphology or semantics. It should become clear, though, just how closely the structure (syntax) and the meaning (semantics) of English sentences are related.

The book is an introduction to the practical analysis of English sentences rather than an introduction to linguistic theory. But since we will be concerned with a language and its syntax, some of the concepts, aims, and methods of linguistics are relevant. If you are interested in discovering more about linguistic theory, finding out something of the syntax of a language you know well seems an appropriate way to start. Chapter 11 is included with such readers in mind. It aims to place the description of English offered in the previous chapters in a wider context and raise a few questions about the general aims and principles of syntactic analysis.

Finally, a word or two about the description offered here. In a book of this length, it hardly needs pointing out that the description is not exhaustive. Nevertheless, the range of structures covered is intended to be comprehensive

enough for the book to serve not only as the basis for more exhaustive and specialised study but as a self-contained description for non-specialists who need a practical, and appliable, system of analysis for the major structures.

Since this last aim is important, I've concentrated on presenting a single, more or less traditional, analysis of each structure considered, without overburdening the reader with too much discussion of how that analysis might or might not be justified in the light of further evidence. This might give the misleading impression that there is just one possible analysis and that there is universal agreement that it is the one in this book! This is far from being the case. But sometimes the evidence that might support an alternative analysis is complex and indirect and its discussion would be inappropriate in such an introduction. The reader should bear in mind, then, that we are never irrevocably committed to a particular analysis but are free to amend it in the light of further evidence. Finding that evidence, and deciding between competing analyses on the basis of such evidence is, in the end, what 'doing syntax' is all about.

The organisation of the chapters

Chapters 1, 2, and 3 have a dual purpose: they introduce general ideas relevant to the analysis of sentences while simultaneously beginning the analysis itself.

Chapters 4 and 5 complete the general overview of the simple sentence.

Chapters 6 and 7 each go into more detail on certain aspects of the structure of simple sentences.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 deal with different kinds of subordinate clause in the complex sentence.

Chapter 11 is a more general discussion of the background to and purpose of the kind of analysis presented in Chapters 1 to 10.

How to read this book – the exercises

There are several kinds of exercises. The end-of-chapter 'Exercises' are followed immediately by answer/discussion sections. These should form an important part of your reading of each chapter. Most of these are designed to give you practice in applying the analyses discussed in the chapter, but some develop the discussion further. There are additional exercises like these (with answers) on the accompanying website.

In addition, there are end-of-chapter 'Further Exercises'. These come without answers or discussion. If you are using the book as part of a taught course, you may be asked to write these up for marking and discussion by your tutor.

Almost certainly, you're using this book because you know next to nothing about English syntax. If you've thought about it at all, you're probably wondering whether you can get your head around it. *Courage!* The book is

designed with you in mind. If you read it in the right spirit, you'll be amazed by how much you have achieved by the end. That's been the experience of the many students I've taught. To foster 'the right spirit', **there are lots of small exercises *within* the text of each chapter**. These form an integral part of the discussion. Try doing them as and when they occur, before reading further. As often as not, the discussion that follows depends on your having done the exercise. A line has been ruled at the point where it is suggested you stop and do it. You'll need to have pencil and paper to hand. Doing these exercises should make your reading of the book more productive and interesting – perhaps even enjoyable – than trying (in the wrong spirit) to absorb the material passively.

1 Sentence structure
Constituents

Structure

This book is about English SYNTAX. In other words, it's about the structure of English sentences. STRUCTURE is central to the study of syntax. But structure is a very general concept that applies to any complex thing, whether it's a bicycle, a commercial company, or a carbon molecule. When we say something is COMPLEX we mean, not that it is complicated (though of course it may be), but that

(a) it's divisible into parts (its CONSTITUENTS),

(b) there are different kinds of parts (different CATEGORIES of constituents),

(c) the constituents are ARRANGED in a certain way,

(d) and each constituent has a specifiable FUNCTION in the structure of the thing as a whole.

When anything can be analysed in this way, it has STRUCTURE. And it's important to note that, more often than not, the constituents of a complex thing are themselves complex. In other words, the parts themselves consist of parts, which may in turn consist of further parts. When this is so we're dealing with a HIERARCHY of parts and with HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE.

It's obvious, for example, that a complex thing like a bicycle isn't just a collection of randomly assembled bits and pieces. Suppose you gathered together all the components of a bicycle: metal tubes, hubs, spokes, chain, cable, and so on. Try to imagine the range of objects you could construct by fixing these components together. Some of these objects might be bicycles, but others wouldn't remotely resemble a bicycle – though they might make interesting sculptures. And there would probably be intermediate cases, things we'd probably want to say were bicycles, if only because they resembled bicycles more than anything else.

So, only some of the possible ways of fitting bicycle components together produce a bicycle. A bicycle consists not just of its components but – much more importantly – in **the STRUCTURE that results from fitting them together in a particular way**.