

## **ASSINGMENT - 2**

**Grammar (5657)**

# **THE HIERARCHY OF LINGUISTIC UNITS**

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## 1. Introduction

This research paper illustrates the point that a hierarchical study makes clear the difference between units such as sentence, clause, group, word and morpheme. It also explains the different types of sentences on the basis of their structure and purpose. Mention has also been made of the clause and its different types. A text-analysis, in terms of grammatical units has been made.

## 2. Literature Review

The hierarchy of units better explains the relationship between units such as sentence, clause, group, word and morpheme.

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, hierarchy means, ‘a system by which the members of an organization are grouped and arranged according to higher and lower ranks, especially official ranks.’

In grammatical hierarchy, morphemes are the smallest units (of grammar) and the sentences are the highest in rank. Morphemes combine to form words, words combine to form groups, groups combine to form clauses, and clauses combine to form sentences. In other words, a sentence consists of clauses, which consist of groups, groups consist of words and words are formed by the combination of morphemes. In other words, this relationship is a ‘consists of’ relationship if one is thinking downward along the scale, and a ‘constituency relationship’ if one is thinking upwards along the scale. Each unit consists of units of lower rank, or which are next down the scale, and each unit provides the constituents of the unit next above.

Words, phrases, clauses and sentences constitute what is called the ‘Grammatical Hierarchy’, which can be represented systematically as :

### **Sentences**

consist of one or more

### **Clauses**

consist of one or more

### **Phrases**

consist of one or more

### **Words**

consist of one or more

### **Morphemes**

consist of one or more phonemes.

By looking at this hierarchy of units, one can have a better understanding of what constitutes the English language.

## **2.1. Types of Sentences:**

**2.1.1.** The term sentence has been defined in several ways. A few definitions have been listed below:

“A sentence is a word or set of words followed by a phrase and revealing an intelligible purpose.” (Gardiner, *The Theory of Speech and Language*, p.98)

“A sentence is a grammatical form which is not in construction with any other grammatical form: constitute which is not a constituent.” (Hockett, *A Course in Modern Linguistics*, p.199)

“A sentence is an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form.” (Bloomfield)

**2.1.2.** Sentence, the highest unit in the grammatical hierarchy, may also be defined in orthographic terms, that is, as anything which is contained between a capital letter and a full stop. For instance, the opening of Charles Dickens’ novel *Bleak House* begins with the following three sentences:

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather.

The first sentence consists of one word, a proper noun, the second sentence has only a finite verb. The third is a single nominal group. Obviously, only an orthographic definition encompasses this variation.

**2.1.3.** A sentence can include words grouped meaningfully to express a statement, question, exclamation, request, command or suggestion. Sentences, hence can be divided into four types:-

**2.1.3.1. Declarative sentences** make statements or assertions. A statement conveys information. For example:-

I shall arrive at two.

You are not the only applicant.

We must not forget that day.

**2.1.3.2. Imperative sentences** give orders, make requests and usually have no overt subject. For example:-

Come here.

Don't do that.

Try to help.

Don't walk on the grass.

**2.1.3.3. Interrogative sentences** ask questions. For example:-

Did you see your sister yesterday?

Can't you hear that awful noise?

When did he arrive?

Why don't they play cricket here?

There are two types of interrogative sentences: Those which expect the answer 'Yes' or 'No', e.g., Can you sing? Are you going to the wedding? Those which begin with the question words like What?, Where?, Which?, Who?, Whom?, Why?, or How? And which expect an answer other than 'Yes' or 'No'.

**2.1.3.4 Exclamatory Sentences** are used to express surprise, alarm, indignation or a strong opinion. They are differentiated from other sentences by taking an exclamation mark:

He's going to win!

You can't be serious!

I've never heard such rubbish in all my life!

**2.1.4** In a traditional scheme for classifying English sentences, we can also classify sentences on the basis of their structure, i.e. by the number and types of clauses.

**2.1.4.1 A simple sentence** consists of only one finite verb:

Water boils at 100°C.

You must not say such things.

The finite verb may be composed of up to four auxiliaries plus a head verb:

He may have been being followed all the time.

The term simple refers to the fact that the sentence contains only one finite verb. In other words a simple sentence consists of a single clause, the main clause, with no subordinate clauses.

A simple sentence has only one subject and one predicate. The subject part names whom or what the sentence is about and the predicate part tells what action the subject does. Sometimes it also tells what the subject is or is like. E.g. S|A group of students| P|registered for classes in communication|.

**2.1.4.2.** A compound sentence consists of two or more simple sentences linked by the coordinating conjunctions: and, but, so, either, or, neither, nor, then and yet. e.g He ran out and he fell over the suit case. She arrived at nine, went up to her room and did not come down until now.

**2.1.4.3** A complex sentence consists of one simple sentence and one or more subordinate clauses. e.g. In, She became queen when her father died because she was the eldest child; we have one clause, ‘She became queen’ and two subordinate clauses: ‘when her father died’ and ‘because she was the eldest child.’ It is to be noticed that in this example each clause has a finite verb, ‘became’, ‘died’ and ‘was’, and each subordinate clause begin with a subordinating conjunction. The commonist subordinate conjunctions in English are: after, although, though, as, because, before, if, since, until, till, when, where, whether.... or not, which/that, while. A complex sentence contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses. e.g. News traveled by letter until Morse invented the telegraph.

News traveled more quickly after Morse invented the telegraph.

**2.2 Clause** is “...a group of words that forms a part of a sentence and has Subject and a Predicate of its own...” (Wren & Martin, English Grammar & Composition, p.152). A clause is a group of words which contains a finite verb. Only an independent clause also called a main clause, can occur in isolation. Whereas,a dependent or a subordinate clause can not occur in isolation. e.g.

He believed that the earth was round.

In each complex sentence we have at least one main clause and at least one subordinate clause. “A subordinate clause is a group of words that has a subject part and a predicate part, but it cannot stand alone. It does not express a complete thought. It is always combined with an independent clause.” (Thoburn Tina, Macmillan English,, p. 385).

**2.2.1** The following **types of subordinate clauses** are found:-

**2.2.1.1** A **noun clause** is group of words containing a finite verb and functioning like a noun. **e.g.**

He said that he was tired.

What you said was not true.

The fact that earth moves round the Sun is well known.

“A noun clause is group of words which contains a subject and a predicate of its own and does the work of a noun.” (Wren & Martin, English Grammar & Composition, p.155)

**2.2.1.2.** An **adverb clause** functions like a adverb in giving information about when, where, why, how or if an action occurred e.g.

When he arrived we were all sleeping.

Put it where we can all see it.

They won the match because they were the best players.

If you want it any more you will have to get it yourself.

**2.2.1.3.** An **adjective clause** is often called a relative clause because it usually relates back to a noun whose meaning it modifies: e.g

The man who taught my brother French is now the headmaster.

“An adjective clause is a group of words which contains a Subject and a Predicate of its own, and does the work of an Adjective.” ((Wren & Martin, English Grammar & Composition, p.154)

### 3. Selected Text

Once a king and a Persian slave were sailing in the same boat.| The slave had never been at sea, and never experienced any calamity.| After some time the boat was hit by a storm and started tossing.| It was very inconvenient for the passengers.| All remained quiet except the slave who in fear of being drowned began to cry and tremble, and created inconvenience for others.| The others tried to pacify him by kindness and affection but he didn't hear anybody.| When the uneasiness lasted longer the king also became displeased.|

In that boat there happened to be a sergeant, who said, “With your permission, may I quieten him.”|

“It will be a great favour”, the king said.| The sergeant ordered the slave to be thrown into the water, so that he could have experienced the true danger of life.| Two persons threw him in the

sea and when he was about to be drowned they pulled him back to the boat, and he clung the stern with boat of his hands. Then he sat down and remained quiet. This appeared strange to the king, who could not comprehend the wisdom in the action taken by the sergeant, and he asked for it. The sergeant replied: “Before he had experienced the danger of being drowned, he knew not about the safety of the boat. A man does not realize the worth of safety from the misfortune until he has tasted it.” (The Gulistan of Sa’di, English Book-I for Intermediate Classes, p. 51)

#### 4. Grammatical Analysis

4.1. Once a king and a Persian slave were sailing in the same boat.

(a) **Clause:** The sentence is a main clause.

(b) **Groups:** a king - a **noun** phrase

a Persian slave - a **noun** phrase

were sailing - a **verbal** group

in the same boat - a **prepositional** phrase

(c) **Words:** once - a content word, an **adverb**

a – a structural word, an **indefinite article**

king – a content word, a **noun**

Persian – a content word, an **adjective**

slave – a content word, a **noun**

were – a structural word, an **auxiliary verb**

sailing – a content word, a **verb**

in – a structural word, a **preposition**

the – a structural word, a **definite article**

same – a content word, an **adjective**

boat – a content word, a **noun**

(d) **Morphemes:** Once | a | king | and | a | Persia|n | slave | were | sail|ing | in | the | same | boat |.

4.2. The slave had never been at sea, and never experienced any calamity.

(a) **Clauses:** The slave had never been at sea - **Main Clause**

and never experienced any calamity - **Coordinate Clause**

- (b) **Groups:** The slave - **noun phrase**  
 had never been – **verb phrase**  
 at sea – **prepositional phrase**  
 never experienced – **verb phrase**  
 any calamity – **noun phrase**
- (c) **Words:** The – **definite article**  
 slave – **content word, noun**  
 had never been – negative form of **auxiliary verb**  
 at - **structural word, preposition**  
 sea - **content word, noun**  
 and – **structural word, conjunction**  
 never - **content word, adverb**  
 experienced – **content word, verb**  
 any – **structural word, determiner**  
 calamity – **content word, noun**
- (d) **Morphemes:** The | slave | had | never | be|en | at | sea | and | never | experience|d |  
 any | calamity |.

**4.3.** After some time the boat was hit by a storm and started tossing.

- (a) **Clauses:** After some time the boat was hit by a storm – **Main Clause**  
 and started tossing – **Coordinate Clause**
- (b) **Groups:** After some time – **adverbial phrase**  
 the boat – **noun phrase**  
 was hit – **verb phrase**  
 by a storm – **prepositional phrase**  
 (and – **coordinating conjunction**)  
 started tossing – **verb phrase**
- (c) **Words:** After - **content word, adverb**  
 sometime – **structural word, determiner**  
 the – **structural word, definite article**  
 boat – **content word, noun**



was – **content word, verb**  
hit – **content word, verb**  
by – **structural word, preposition**  
a – **structural word, indefinite article**  
storm – **content word, noun**  
and – **structural word, conjunction**  
started – **content word, verb**  
tossing – **verb participle**

(d) **Morphemes:** After | some|time | the | boat | was (is+past tense morpheme) | hit (hit+past tense morpheme) | by | a |storm | and | start|ed | toss|ing.

4.4. It was very inconvenient for the passengers.

(a) **Clauses:** It..... passengers – **Main Clause**

(b) **Groups:** it – **noun phrase**

was – **verb phrase**

very inconvenient – **adverb phrase**

for the passengers – **prepositional phrase**

(c) **Words:** it – **structural word, pronoun**

was – **content word, verb**

very – **content word, adverb**

inconvenient – **content word, adverb**

for – **structural word, preposition**

the – **structural word, definite article**

passengers - **content word, noun**

(d) **Morphemes:** It | was (is + past tense morpheme) | very | in|convenient| for | the | passenger|s|.

4.5. All remained quiet except the slave who in fear of being drowned began to cry and tremble, and created in convenience for others.

(a) **Clauses:** All .....slave – **Main Clause**

who in fear of being drowned began to cry and tremble – **Subordinate Clause**

and .....others – **Coordinate Clause**

(b) **Groups:** All – **indefinite determiner** acting as a **pronoun**

remained quiet – **verb phrase**  
the slave – **noun phrase**  
in fear – **prepositional phrase**  
of being drowned – **prepositional phrase**  
began to cry and tremble – **verb phrase**  
created inconvenience – **verb phrase**  
for others – **prepositional phrase**

(c) **Words:** All – **indefinite determiner**

remained – **verb**  
quiet – **adverb**  
except – **determiner**  
the – **definite article**  
slave – **noun**  
who – **pronoun**(relative)  
in – **preposition**  
fear – **noun**  
of – **preposition**  
being – **auxiliary verb**  
drowned – **verb**  
began – **verb**  
to – **preposition**  
cry – **verb**  
and – **conjunction**  
tremble – **verb**  
created – **verb**  
inconvenience – **noun**  
for – **preposition**  
others – **pronoun**

(d) **Morphemes:** All | remain|ed | quiet | except | the | slave | who | in | fear | of | be|ing |  
drown|ed | began (begin + past tense morpheme) | to | cry | and | tremble |, and | creat|ed |  
in | convenience | for | other|s|.

- 4.6.** The others tried to pacify him by kindness and affection but he didn't hear anybody.
- (a) **Clause:** The others tried to pacify him by kindness and affection – **Main Clause**  
but he didn't hear anybody – **Coordinate Clause**
- (b) **Groups:** The others – **noun phrase**  
tried to pacify – **verb phrase**  
by kindness and affection – **prepositional phrase**  
he – **noun phrase**  
didn't hear – **verb phrase**  
anybody – **noun phrase**
- (c) **Words:** The – **structural word, definite article**  
others – **structural word, pronoun**  
tried – **content word, verb**  
to – **structural word, preposition**  
pacify – **content word, verb**  
him – **structural word, pronoun** (accusative)  
by – **structural word, preposition**  
kindness – **content word, adjective**  
and – **structural word, conjunction**  
affection – **content word, adjective**  
but – **structural word, conjunction**  
he – **structural word, pronoun**  
didn't – **contracted negative of auxiliary verb (do)**  
hear – **content word, verb**  
anybody – **structural word, pronoun**
- (d) **Morphemes:** The | other|s| tried (try+past tense morpheme)| to | pacify | him | by |  
kind|ness| and | affection | but | he | did|n't | hear | any|body|.

- 4.7.** When the uneasiness lasted longer the king also became displeased.
- (a) **Clause:** When the uneasiness lasted longer – **Subordinate Clause**  
the king also became displeased - **Main Clause**

**(b) Groups:** the uneasiness – **noun phrase**  
lasted longer – **verb phrase**  
the king – **noun phrase**  
became displeased – **adjective phrase**

**(c) Words:** when – **content word adverb**  
the – **structural word, definite article**  
uneasiness – **content word, adjective**  
lasted – **content word, verb**  
longer – **content word, adverb**  
king – **content word, noun**  
also – **structural word, determiner**  
became – **content word, verb**  
displeased – **content word, adjective**

**(d) Morphemes:** When | the | un|easi|ness| last|ed| long|er| the | king | also | became  
(become+past tense morpheme)| dis|please|d|.

**4.8.** In that boat there happened to be a sergeant, who said, “With your permission, may I quieten him.

**(a) Clause:** In that boat there happened to be a sergeant – **Main Clause**  
who said, “With your permission, may I quieten him – **Subordinate Clause**

**(b) Groups:** In that boat – **prepositional phrase**  
there happened to be – **verb phrase**  
a sergeant – **noun phrase**  
who said – **adjective (relative) phrase**  
with your permission – **adverb phrase**  
I – **noun phrase**  
quieten – **verb phrase**

**(c) Words:** In – **structural word, preposition**  
that – **structural word, determiner**  
boat – **content word, noun**

there – **content word, adverb**  
 happened – **content word, verb**  
 to – **structural word, preposition**  
 be – **structural word, auxiliary verb**  
 a – **structural word, indefinite article**  
 sergeant – **content word, noun**  
 who – **structural word, pronoun**  
 said – **content word, verb**  
 With – **structural word, preposition**  
 your – **structural word, pronoun**  
 permission – **content word, noun**  
 may – **structural word, auxiliary verb**  
 I – **structural word, pronoun**  
 quieten – **present participle of quiet**  
 him – **structural word, pronoun**

**(d) Morphemes:** In | that | boat | there | happen|ed | to | be | a | sergeant |, who | said| ,  
 “With | your | permission | , may | I | quiet|en | him |

**4.9.** It will be a great favour”, the king said.

**(a) Clause:** It will be a great favour – **Main Clause**  
 the king said – **Subordinate Clause**

**(b) Groups:** It – **noun phrase**  
 will be – **verb phrase**  
 a great favour – **complement**  
 the king – **noun phrase**  
 said – **verb phrase**

**(c) Words:** It – **structural word, pronoun**  
 will – **structural word, auxiliary verb**  
 be – **structural word, auxiliary verb**  
 a – **structural word, indefinite article**  
 great – **content word, adjective**  
 favour – **content word, noun**

the – **structural word, definite article**

king – **content word, noun**

said – **content word, verb**

(d) **Morphemes:** It | will | be | a | great | favour |”, the | king | said (say+past tense morpheme).

**4.10.** The sergeant ordered the slave to be thrown into the water, so that he could have experienced the true danger of life.

(a) **Clause:** The sergeant ordered the slave to be thrown into the water – **Main Clause**  
so that he could have experienced the true danger of life – **Subordinate Clause**

(b) **Groups:** The sergeant – **noun phrase**

ordered – **verb phrase**

the slave – **noun phrase**

to be thrown into the water – **prepositional phrase**

into the water – **adverb phrase**

so that – **adverb phrase**

he – **noun phrase**

could have experienced – **verb phrase**

the true danger – **noun phrase**

of life – **prepositional phrase**

(c) **Words:** The – **structural word, definite article**

sergeant – **content word, noun**

ordered – **content word, verb**

slave – **content word, noun**

to – **structural word, preposition**

be – **structural word, auxiliary verb**

thrown – **content word, verb**

into – **structural word, preposition**

water – **content word, noun**

so – **structural word, conjunction**

that – **structural word, demonstrative**

he – **structural word, pronoun**

could – **structural word, auxiliary verb**

have – **structural word, auxiliary verb**

experienced – **content word, verb**

true – **content word, noun**

danger – **content word, noun**

of – **structural word, preposition**

life – **content word, noun**

(d) **Morphemes:** The | sergeant | order|ed | the | slave | to | be | throw|n | into | the | water |  
so | that | he | could (can+past tense morpheme) | have | experience|ed |  
the | true | danger | of | life |

## 5. Conclusion

A hierarchical analysis of sentences into their constituent parts gives us a better understanding of the relationship among them. Functional grammar relates grammatical categories to the communicative functions which they serve. These functions are seen to operate at different levels of organization in the language. This implies segmental principle of organization, in which larger units may be seen as being formed from smaller units and smaller units being combined to form the larger units.

It can be seen from the above analysis that words and groups perform different functions at different levels. A group, at times, functions as a word. Sometimes addition of a morpheme ‘en’ causes a word to behave in a way which is quite different to its characteristic behaviour of the class to which it belongs, .e.g., the word sunken. The phenomenon whereby a group actually functions as a word is known as Rankshift or Embedding. This means that a unit of a certain complexity behaves in terms of its function in the total structure of the sentence as if it were a unit of a “lower” rank. Rankshift embedding is very common in English language, and there are many instances where groups of words may function as a single item. There are many phrases such as “out- of- the way”, “ready -to- wear”, “made to measure” etc. which can be interpreted as single items.

There are many approaches to grammar. The **prescriptive approach** to grammar categorizes words into different classes. The **descriptive approach** attempts to describe the regular structures of the language as it is used, not according to some point of view of how it should be

used. It is the descriptive approach to grammar which has led the grammarians to concentrate on the functions performed by different structures in a sentence.

Having a better understanding of the functions of different structures in a sentence, helps us improve our grammatical competence which in turn improves the communicative competence of a speaker. Functional grammar hence, a key to communicative success. “Communicative competence can be defined, in terms of three components, as the ability to use the L<sub>2</sub> accurately, appropriately, and flexibly. The first component is **grammatical competence** which involves the accurate use of words and structures in the L<sub>2</sub>.” (Yule, The study of language, p. 197)

### **References**

1. Thouburn Tina (Macmillan English)
2. Wren and Martin (English Grammar and Composition)
3. Yule George (The study of language, p. 197, Cambridge University Press)
4. The Gulistan of Sa'di, English Book-I for Intermediate Classes, p. 51