Modern English Syntax

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New edition of *An Advanced English Syntax,* prepared from the author's materials by

B. D. H. Miller

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Preface

Charles Talbut Onions, last surviving editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, editor of *A Shakespeare Glossary* (1911), the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1933), and the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966), and long *facile princeps* of English lexicographers, died in January 1965, aged 91. For many years, almost up to the time of his death, he had been making notes for a revised edition of *An Advanced English Syntax*; among his literary remains were six copies of the book more or less heavily annotated, a number of sections apparently in final draft, and more than 500 scraps of paper, of every shape and size, each containing anything from one to several dozen memoranda of words, phrases, or constructions.

From this bulk of largely undigested material I have tried to make, within the limits prescribed, something approximating to the book that Dr Onions might himself have produced; to allow room for new material I have omitted the final sections, on parataxis and hypotaxis. In this undertaking I have been helped by Dr Onions's executors, who kindly gave me unrestricted use of the manuscript material, and by the publishers, who readily acceded to my suggestions; to both I offer my thanks.

Brasenose College   B. D. H. Miller
Oxford

Original preface to *An Advanced English Syntax*

The object of this short treatise is to present the main facts of current English syntax in a systematic form in accordance with the principles of the Parallel Grammar Series. The introduction is designed to provide a full scheme of sentence analysis. The rest of the book—the syntax proper—is arranged in two parts. Part I contains a treatment of syntactical phenomena based on the analysis of sentences. Part II classifies the uses of forms. Cross references indicate how the two parts of syntax supplement one another. . . .

While dealing mainly with the language of the present day, I have endeavoured to make the book of use to the student of early modern English by giving an account of some notable archaic and obsolete constructions. Historical matter has been introduced wherever it was considered necessary for the understanding of important points in syntax-development or seemed to add interest to the treatment of particular constructions.

Of the existing grammars which I have consulted, Dr Sweet's has proved the most enlightening and suggestive.

My connexion with the *Oxford English Dictionary* has given me facilities for research which I should otherwise not have had, and I wish to thank the editors of that work for the assistance which they have, directly or indirectly, afforded me in my task.

To Dr Henry Bradley I am especially indebted for valuable suggestions and emendations, in both the manuscript and the proof stages of the book.

To Dr Sonnenschein, my former professor, I am grateful for his constant help and stimulating criticism throughout my work.

Oxford,   C. T. Onions
10th September, 1903

It is customary to recognize

Three main periods of English

Old English (abbreviated OE.), from about AD 700 to about AD 1100. Period of full vowels in the endings, e.g. far*a*n, sun*u*, wulf*a*s.

Middle English (abbreviated ME.), from about AD 1100 to about AD 1500. The full vowels in the endings are weakened to one uniform unstressed *e*, e.g. far*e*n, son*e*, wolv*e*s.

Modern English (abbreviated ModE.), from about AD 1500 to the present day. The unstressed *e* in the endings has become silent, and has often disappeared from the written word, e.g. far*e*, son, wolv*e*s.

Introduction

Analysis of sentences

1 Speech is made up of sentences.

A **sentence** [Latin *sententia* 'meaning'] is a group of words, or sometimes a single word, which makes—

    (i) a **statement**; e.g. I am an Englishman.

or (ii) a **command** or an **expression of wish**; e.g.

      Open the window.   Let us go.

or (iii) a **question**; e.g. How do you do?

or (iv) an **exclamation**; e.g. How it thunders! What a blow!

Compare §§48–57.

Many single words or self-contained groups of words, of any size, may perform the work of a sentence; e.g. Speaking; Thanks; Down!; Sh!; Out with it!; Farewell; Goodbye; What?; Murder!; Nonsense!; Splendid!

'Yes' and 'no' are long-established sentence-words; they are words *equivalent* to sentences; e.g. 'Will you come?'—'Yes' (= I will come). Other words which may be equivalent to sentences will be mentioned below (§4).

2 **Analysis** means *breaking up* [Greek *ana* 'up' and *lysis* 'breaking'], and is the name given to the process of breaking up a sentence into its parts. On pp. 1 to 22 it will be shown how to *analyse* sentences.

There are sentences in English and other languages which it is very difficult, or impossible, to analyse grammatically. But analysis may be applied to the majority of sentences and without it we should be unable to recognize the peculiarities of those sentences which cannot be analysed.

3 The first stage in the analysis of a sentence is into:

    1 the **subject**   2 the **predicate.**

The **subject** denotes **the person or thing about which something is said** by means of the predicate.

The **predicate** is **what is said** about the person or thing denoted by the subject.

In the following examples of sentences the part printed in roman type is the subject; the part printed in italics is the predicate.

> The few *are happy. Long live* the Queen!
> Who *knows*? Who *goes there*?
> *Be* it *so.*
> *How beautiful* she *looks*!
> Fools *rush in where angels fear to tread.*—POPE
> *Uneasy lies* the head that wears a crown.—SHAKESPEARE
> He *laughs best* who laughs last.
> A terrible accident *has happened.*
> Whatever is, *is right.*—POPE
> *Listen.* ⎱(The subject 'thou', 'ye', or 'you' is not
> *Do not go.*⎰ expressed.)

4 Some sentences lack some part or parts that are ideally necessary to the full form of a sentence as defined above. These are called *elliptical* sentences, and an **ellipsis** is said to occur. Ellipsis plays a great part in English as in many languages. It is common to all styles of speaking and writing. In poetical and rhetorical language it often lends dignity and impressiveness, with something of an archaic flavour; to colloquial speech it gives precision and brevity, and saves time and trouble. It is especially appropriate to exclamations and abrupt commands. Examples:

> To err is human, to forgive divine.—POPE (Supply 'is')
> One murder makes a villain, a million a hero. (Supply 'make')
> This house to be let or sold. (Supply 'is')
> Students must be able to help, and we hope will. (Supply 'help')
> Go and see what the boy's doing, and tell him not to. (Supply 'do it')
> Rest assured that everything will be done that can be. (Supply 'done')
> You are more likely to quarrel with me than I with you. (i.e. than I am likely to quarrel with you)
> Well roared, Lion: well run, Thisbe.—SHAKESPEARE

Thy name well fits thy faith; thy faith thy name.—
SHAKESPEARE (Supply 'well fits')
Thank you. (=I thank you: cf. German *danke*)
Your name and address, please. (i.e. Give me your name)
What if he dies? (=What will happen, *or* What will you do
or say if he dies?)
I could, but I won't. (e.g. do it)
Is the venture a success, and if not, why not?
(At the railway booking office) Oxford, second, single.
One master or many.
Easier said than done.
Once an actor, always an actor.
Here goes! Never again.
Fire, fire! Silence!
Hats off! What a pity!
Well, I never!

Ellipsis is very common in answers where the complete form of
the answer reflects that of the question and is therefore sufficiently
obvious not to require full expression. Examples:

Who did it?—I. (i.e. did it)
How many were saved?—Twenty. (i.e. were saved)
Have you ever been abroad?—Never. (i.e. have I been
abroad)
We will send somebody.—Whom? When? Where to?
(i.e. will you send?)

Similarly with all interrogative words.
Ellipsis is common also in wishes, as 'good morning'; 'bless
you'; 'all good wishes'.
Ellipsis enters into the development of various conversational
or unstudied formulas; e.g. all right; not at all; no doubt; half a
minute; one moment, please; all the same . . .; let alone . . .;
no matter who (what, when) . . .; no wonder; . . . and no
mistake; far from it; and a good thing too.
Numerals are used in many kinds of elliptical constructions:
e.g. a child of *five* [years of age]; between *a quarter* [of an hour]
and *ten* [minutes] to *five* [o'clock]; from *four* [o'clock] to
half [an hour] *past* [four]; the *first* [day] of April; a *tenth*
[part] of a pound; a coach and *four* [horses].
Single words like 'Good!' 'Right!' 'Now!' 'Really?' 'Cer-
tainly'; 'Granted'; 'True'; 'Quick!' 'Enough!' are often equiva-
lent to sentences.

Instances like the following, where a verb of motion in the infinitive is omitted, belong to older stages of the language:

> I must to Coventry.—SHAKESPEARE, *Richard II*
> He to England shall along with you.—*Hamlet*
> I shall no more to sea.—*Tempest*
> I wylle to morowe to the cowrte of Kyng Arthur.—MALORY

This usage is regular in OE. with the so-called 'auxiliaries': *Ic tō sǣ wille* = 'I to sea will [go]'.

5   The five forms of the predicate

Most predicates contain a verb, which is the medium by which the predication is normally conveyed.

The predicate may consist of—

1   a verb only
2   a verb together with some other word or words.

Sentences are classified according to the form of the predicate, which may assume any of *five* principal forms.

First form of the predicate

Subject	Predicate
Day	dawns
He	died
My hour	is come
The shades of night	were falling

In such sentences the predicate consists of the **verb alone.**

6   *Second form of the predicate*

Subject	Predicate	
	verb	*predicative adjective* or *predicative noun* or *predicative pronoun*
Croesus	was	rich *or* a king
Many	lay	dead
I	am	he
Thought	is	free
Seeing	is	believing
To err	is	human
The meeting	stands	adjourned
We	are getting	ready