Clause Structure

Tallerman: Chapter 3
Sentences and Clauses

• A clause contains a subject (not always overt!) and a predicate (often a V, sometimes an A or N, along with modifiers and/or phrases selected by the V, A, or N).
  – The old car was a horrible drain on the student’s finances.
  – My whole family might go to Hawaii for spring break.
  – Al-bet  da  nadif katir (Chadian Arabic)
      DEF-house this:M:SG clean very
    ‘This house is very clean.’  →  Chadian Arabic has no copula

• A sentence may contain one clause (simple sentence) or more than one clause (complex sentence).

• Independent clauses can stand alone (could be simple sentences on their own).
Finiteness and Auxiliaries

• An independent clause in many languages must contain a finite verb.

• Finite verbs are marked for grammatical categories associated with verbs: e.g. tense, aspect, person-number agreement.

• In some languages (e.g. Walpíri) both the main verb and the auxiliary carry grammatical information.

• Some languages only have finite verbs (e.g. Mohawk, Nahuatl, Nunggubuyu, Ainu).
• A finite verb can be a main verb or an auxiliary verb.
  – An auxiliary always co-occurs with a main verb.
    • Kim reads books.
    • Kim hasn’t read this book but Bill has. [main verb elided/understood]
  – In English only one verb per clause (the first) can be finite.
    • John doesn’t like coffee. *John doesn’t likes/liked coffee.
    • Sue may have studied. *Sue may has/had studied.

• A main verb typically has more semantic content than an auxiliary.
  – ‘Auxiliaries are words that express the tense, aspect, mood, voice, or polarity of the verb with which they are associated.’ [Schachter 1985]
Auxiliary Verbs in English

- **Modal auxiliaries**
  - Express permission, necessity, ability, etc.
  - English modals don’t take present tense 3:SG marker -s
    - *Kim *mays come over tonight.
  - English modals do show non-past/past distinction:
    - *Can/could, may/might, shall/should, will/would, must*
  - Modal auxiliaries are always finite verbs.
  - Modals precede the bare uninflected form of the verb.
    - *You could be* happy.
• **Aspectual auxiliaries:** *be, have*
  – Main verb uses: *Kim is happy, I had a cold*
  – Aspectual auxiliary uses:
    • **Progressive:** Lee *is* singing.
      – Some form of *be* precedes the present participle
    • **Perfect:** Mary *has* eaten.
      – Some form of *have* precedes the past participle
  – Main verb *have* and *be* can co-occur with auxiliaries:
    • Kim *has had* a cold.
    • Jack *is being* obstinate.
• Main verb appears at the end of a string of auxiliaries.
• Only the first verb in a string of verbs can be finite.

  – Jack may have been working late.

\[
\text{may} \\
\text{MODAL + BARE INFINITIVE} \\
\text{have} \\
\text{HAVE + PAST PARTICIPLE} \\
\text{been} \\
\text{BE + PRESENT PARTICIPLE} \\
\text{working} \\
\text{MAIN VERB}
\]
Auxiliary Verbs Cross-linguistically

• Many Indo-European languages (+ Basque) use the equivalent of ‘have’ and ‘be’ as auxiliaries.

• Some languages have auxiliaries not found in English:
  – Bi dukuwun-ma duku-ca-w (Evenki)
    I letter-obj write-past-1sg
    ‘I wrote a letter.’
  – Bi dukuwun-ma ∂-∂-w duku-ra
    I letter-obj neg.aux-past-1sg write-participle
    ‘I didn’t write a letter.’

• Some languages express aspect with inflections on the main verb:
  – yaharika nu-tikuwá-ni; i-tíkua-na (Bare)
    now 1sg-lie-prog; 3sg-lie.down-perf
    ‘I am lying down now’; ‘He has lain down already.’
Non-finite Verbs

• Non-finite verbs are (usually) not marked for grammatical categories.

• **Infinitives:**
  – Some languages have infinitival morphology:
    • French *-er, -ir, -re*
  – In English, we have to identify an infinitive by its distribution
    • *to* is an infinitive marker
    • The verb *be* has a special infinitive form (*be*)
      – I want *to be* in Paris.
    • Modals require a following bare infinitive
      – He *might be* in Paris.
• The present participle in English:
  – Used in the progressive construction, with auxiliary *be*:
    • Kim *was laughing* loudly.
  – Also other functions:
    • Kim kept on *laughing*.
    • *Laughing* loudly, Kim rushed into the room.
    • I found Kim *laughing* in the corner.
  – Present participles can modify nouns, where it can be debated whether they are adjectives or verbs:
    • A very *uninteresting* idea
    • A (*very) *sleeping* child
  – *-ing* forms used as nouns are called ‘gerunds’:
    • Their *singing* was beautiful.
**The past participle in English**

- Used in the perfect construction, with auxiliary *have*:
  - Kim *has eaten* squid.
- Many irregularities: *eaten, swum*
  Regular verbs use the past tense form: *talked, earned*
- The past participle is also used in passives with auxiliary *be*:
  - This book *was written* last year.
- Past participles have other functions:
  - *Beaten* soundly, the team sadly returned home.
  - We found the vase *broken* into pieces.
- Past participles can modify nouns, where it can be debated whether they are adjectives or verbs:
  - A *written* report
  - An *unwritten* rule
### Verb Forms in English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bare infinitive</th>
<th>work</th>
<th>drive</th>
<th>be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td>to work</td>
<td>to drive</td>
<td>to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3SG present tense</td>
<td>works</td>
<td>drives</td>
<td>is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past tense</td>
<td>worked</td>
<td>drove</td>
<td>was/were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present participle</td>
<td>working</td>
<td>driving</td>
<td>being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past participle</td>
<td>worked</td>
<td>driven</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-finite Verbs Cross-linguistically

- Cross-linguistically, infinitives and participles are used in different contexts:
  - Meddyliodd Aled [i Marir weldy gêm] (Welsh) thought:3sg Aled to Mair see:infin the game ‘Aled thought [that Mair had seen the game.]’
  - Huomaan [pojan osanneen suome] (Finnish) realize:1sg boy:gen know:past.part Finnish ‘I realize that the boy knows Finnish.’
- Wakiman has a finite verb class with only ~35 verbs, but participles are an open class of verbs!
Complex Sentences

• Simple sentences have one predicate.
• Multiple predicates may be *coordinated* with conjunctions:
  – VGH is located in Vancouver, *and/but/yet* it also provides services to residents of Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey.
• In clausal coordination, each clause can stand alone as an independent clause, they have equal syntactic status.
• Coordinating conjunctions:
  – *and, but, for, so, or, nor, yet*
• Many complex sentences have (only) one main/matrix clause and (at least) one subordinate clause: a clause embedded within another clause.
  – [When you are ready to increase the distance you’re running,] never increase your weekly mileage by more than 10 percent at a time..
  – Officials say that they are satisfied with the progress [the city is making].
  – These days, the flooding is thought [to be caused by global warming patterns].

• Technically, the whole sentence is the main clause (but we often refer to just the non-embedded parts as the matrix).
Subordinate clauses can have different functions in the main clause.

- Sometimes the subordinate clause is selected by the verb in the main clause as an object complement clause:
  - John expects that Mary will leave.
- Sometimes the subordinate clause functions as the subject of the main clause:
  - For Mary to leave surprised John.
- Sometimes the subordinate clause has an adverbial function:
  - John arrived before Mary left.
- Sometimes the subordinate clause modifies a noun:
  - The news that Mary left surprised John.
  - The news that I reported surprised John.
• The main clause does not have to precede the subordinate clause(s).
  – [As the incursion was happening], Iraqi officials denied [that American forces were in the city]. [New York Times, 4/5/03]

• Each sentence has just one main clause, but a potentially infinite number of subordinate clauses.
  – I believe [that John expected [Bill to arrive [before his parents returned home [after they took their trip to Italy] ] ] ].
  – Recursion is generally thought to be found in all human languages.

• ‘Main clause’ does not equate to ‘main verb’.
  – All clauses (except for those with no verbal predicate) have a main verb and maybe auxiliaries.
Distinguishing English Main and Subordinate Clauses:

• All main clauses contain a finite verb; subordinate clauses may contain a finite verb too, but not all do.
  – [We just wanted [to let [them know [we are here]]]]
    [New York Times, 4/5/03]

• Only embedded clauses can have a complementizer in English.
  – The fact [that Sue was late] surprised Peter.
  – [For John to leave early] would upset Mary.
  – I wonder [whether Jack will come].
• Complementizers can’t introduce main clauses in English:
  – *Whether it will rain today.
  – *That my friend claimed Sue liked chips.
• However, languages with complementizers in main clauses are widespread.
  – Aya Ali ketab darad? (Persian)
    Whether Ali books has
    ‘Does Ali have any books?’
  – Qu’elle est bavarde (French)
    that she is talkative
    ‘What a chatterbox she is’

[Examples from Radford 1988]
• Only main clauses have subject-auxiliary inversion to form yes-no questions.
  • As the incursion was happening, **did Iraqi officials** deny that American forces were in the city?
  • *As the incursion was happening, Iraqi officials denied that **were American forces** in the city?

• Only main clauses have tag questions.
  • As the incursion was happening, Iraqi officials denied that American forces were in the city, **didn’t they**?
  • *As the incursion was happening, Iraqi officials denied that American forces were in the city, **weren’t they**?
Cross-linguistic Variation

• Not all languages use subordination.
• Some languages use coordination.
  – Ku-ita-ya ba na-laku la Umalulu
    1SGSU-see-3SGOBJ CONJ 3SGSU-go to Melolo
    ‘I saw him going to Melolo.’
    Lit.: ‘I saw him and he went to Melolo.’ (Kambera)
Some languages use nominalization.

– A verb is turned into a noun, c.f. English gerunds:
  – Louise hated [Marguerite's losing her job]
  – [Marguerite's losing her job] shocked Louise.

– Nda ku-mbuti-nya [na tàka-mu]
  NEG 1SGSU-expect-3SGOBJ the arrive-2SG
  ‘I did not expect you to arrive.’ (Kambera)
• Some languages use serial verb constructions
  – Musa bé lá èbi (Nupe)
    Musa came took knife
    ‘Musa came to take the knife.’
  – Zhang-san shang-lou shui-jiao (Mandarin)
    Zhang-san go.upstairs sleep
    ‘Zhangsan goes upstairs to sleep.’

[Li & Thompson, 1981]