

ING218

Week 10

Sentences as Arguments

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Our discussion today covers topics on different kinds of arguments which include:

- 1 Full statement clauses
- 2 Question clauses
- 3 Infinitive clauses
- 4 Gerund clauses
- 5 Non-factual clauses
- 6 Verbal nouns
- 7 Comparing types of clauses
- 8 Syntactic ambiguity

Consider these following sentences:

They KNOW (that) I opened the letter.
 Do you WANT me to open the letter?
 She WATCHED me opening the letter.
 Are you SURPRISED at my opening the letter?

Predicates that have embedded sentences as a theme include the following, those that express:

- (a) knowledge or ignorance of a possible fact

Ivan KNOWS (that) we are here.
 I DOUBT if the game will start on time.

- (b) an attitude or orientation toward a fact or possible fact
 David's parents are ANXIOUS for him to succeed.
 It SURPRISED everybody that Sanders appeared at the party.
Sanders' appearance at the party SURPRISED everybody.
 The children PRETENDED (that) they were asleep.
 The children PRETENDED to be asleep.

- (c) causing, allowing, or preventing the occurrence of a fact

Jerry HAD the barber trim his mustache.
 Mama LET Miriam hold the baby.
 Mama KEPT Miriam from holding the baby.

- (d) perception of a fact

I SAW Mr Hall come out of the garage.
 Ruth HEARD a baby crying.

- (e) saying something about a fact or possible fact

Lily SAYS (that) she'll be a little late.
 Please TELL us if you feel ill.
 Edward DENIED opening the letter.

- (f) the beginning, continuing, or termination of a possible event

Marilyn QUIT smoking.
 Suddenly it STARTED to rain.

1. Full statement clauses

Compare:

- 1a Ivan knows the answer.
 1b Ivan knows (that) we are here.
 2a Sally forgot her appointment.
 2b Sally forgot (that) Sara was waiting for her.
 3a The judges announced their decision to the eager contestants.
 3b The judges announced to the eager contestants that they had reached a decision.

See the discussion of these sentences on your reference book p. 157-8.

2. Question Clauses

Questions, as well as statements, are embedded in other sentences. They may be

o information questions

I wonder when the concert was. (When was the concert?)
 Robert doesn't know what time it is. (What time is it?)
 Do you remember where you put the tickets? (Where did you put the tickets?)

o yes-no questions

Please tell us if you feel ill. (Do you feel ill?)
 I wonder whether your friends will stay or leave.

3. Infinitive Clauses

I know (that) Sara waits for Sally.
 I expect Sara to wait for Sally.

Discuss about overt subject and tacit subject.....

4. Gerund Clauses

Consider the following sentences

I saw Mr Hall come out of the garage.
 I saw Mr Hall coming out of the garage.
 Ruth heard a baby cry.
 She heard a baby crying.
 Did you notice a pretty girl walk by?
 Did you notice a pretty girl walking by?

What makes the pair of the sentences different?

If you *saw, watched or heard something happening*, it was *happening*: you saw or heard it while it was going on. If you *saw, watched or heard something happen*, it *happened*: you saw or heard a complete action.

*I looked out of the window and **saw Mary crossing** the road.*
 (= She was in the middle of crossing the road.)
*I **saw Mary** step off the pavement, **cross** the road and disappear into the post office.*

5. Non-factual Clauses

Compare:

1. I insist that Ronald works very hard.
2. I insist that Ronald work very hard.
3. I insist that Ronald should work very hard.

Explain the difference.

No 1 → Factual clause

No.2 & 3 → Non-factual clause

6 Verbal nouns

Go to your reference book p.166-7

7 Comparing types of clauses

Different kinds of clauses can present different kinds of meanings, but this is obvious only when the same predicate can be accompanied by different kinds of clauses. The verb *agree*, for instance, can be followed by an infinitive clause and a full clause.

- 47a We agreed to meet again the next day.
 47b We agreed that we would meet again the next day.
 47c We agreed that prices are too high nowadays.

The verb *agree* followed by an infinitive clause indicates a commitment, on the part of the subject, to do something; 47a is about 'our' commitment to meet the next day. That is really all that can be expressed by the infinitive clause after *agree*. A full clause can express all kinds of facts and possible facts, including commitments on the part of the subject. There is not much difference between 47a and 47b; however, 47c is not about a commitment but about knowledge or a belief that 'we' hold in common. (Chapter 9 contains a larger discussion about verbs that express a commitment to do something.)

8 Syntactic ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity may be in the surface structure of a sentence: words can cluster together in different possible constructions. Syntactic ambiguity may also be in the deep structure: one sequence of words may have more than one interpretation, generally because the rules of sentence construction allow **ellipsis**, the deletion of what is 'understood.'

Examples of surface ambiguity:

- (a) Constructions containing the coordinators *and* and *or*.

- 51 John and Mary or Pat will go.
 52 We'll have bacon or sausage and eggs.
 ([John] and [Mary or Pat], [John and Mary] or [Pat]; [bacon] or [sausage and eggs], [bacon or sausage] and [eggs])

8 Syntactic ambiguity

Examples of surface ambiguity:

- (b) A coordinate head with one modifier:
 53 The only people left were old men and women.
 54 The postman left a letter and a package for Ellen.
 ([old men] and [women], old [men and women]; [a letter] and [a package for Ellen], [a letter and a package] for Ellen)
 (c) A head with a coordinate modifier:
 55 Your essay should contain four or five hundred words.
 ([4] or [500], [400] or [500])

8 Syntactic ambiguity

Examples of surface ambiguity:

- (d) A head with an inner modifier and an outer modifier:
 56 The sick pet was taken to a small animal hospital.
 ([small] [animal hospital], [small animal] [hospital])
 (e) A complement and modifier or two complements:
 57 Joe bought the book for Susan.
 58 The tourists objected to the guide that they couldn't hear.
 ([bought] [the book for Susan], [bought the book] [for Susan]; [objected to] [the guide that they couldn't hear], [objected to the guide] [that they couldn't hear])

8 Syntactic ambiguity

Examples of surface ambiguity:

- (f) Certain function words, including *not*, have possible differences in scope:
- 59 The tennis courts are open to members only on Thursdays.
 60 I'd like to find ten more interesting articles.
 61 They didn't leave because they were angry.
 ([members only] or [only on Thursdays]; [ten more] [interesting articles] or [ten] [more interesting articles]; [didn't leave] [because...] or [didn't] [leave because...])

8 Syntactic ambiguity

Examples of deep structure ambiguity:

- (a) Gerund+object or participle modifying a noun.
 62 Overtaking cars on the main road can be dangerous.
 ('Overtaking cars is dangerous' or 'Cars overtaking are dangerous')
- (b) Adjective+infinitive, tied to subject or to complement:
 63 The chicken is too hot to eat.
 ('Too hot to eat anything' or 'too hot for anybody to eat it')
- (c) Ellipsis in comparative constructions:
 64 I like Mary better than Joan.
 ('Better than I like Joan' or 'better than Joan likes Mary')

Summary

Languages express an infinite number of things with a limited number of resources—vocabulary resources and grammatical resources. Just as limited vocabulary resources lead sometimes to lexical ambiguity, we have syntactic ambiguity because grammatical resources are limited: the same sequence of lexemes can be grouped into different constructions (surface structure ambiguity) or a sequence of lexemes can result from ellipses in the representation of two different propositions (deep structure ambiguity). We may be aware of ambiguity and then seek to exploit it or to avoid it. Just as often, it seems, we rely on context to interpret utterances and fail to recognize that more than one meaning is there.