

# KERNEL CLAUSES

*This document discusses Huddleston's notion of 'kernel clauses'.*

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In the following:

Ed was using an electric drill yesterday

We can call *was using an electric drill* the predicaTE or extended verb phrase (EVP) and *was using* the predicaTOR or simply verb phrase (VP).

*An electric drill* is the complement of the VP. *Yesterday* is an adjunct. We can see that complements are more central (or nuclear) than adjuncts. In particular we note three differences:

- a. Verbs subclass for a complement but not an adjunct.
- b. Complements are normally obligatory and cannot be dropped. If we drop the complement from (1) it is rendered ungrammatical \**Ed was using yesterday*. Verbs that allow complements to be dropped normally go through a change in meaning viz: *He drove him crazy/ He drove him*. Some verbs however allow the complements to be dropped as in *He was reading a book/ He was reading*.
- c. Complements are usually selected from the classes AdjP and NP and adjuncts from AdvP and PPs although this is by no means mandatory
- d. Adjuncts have greater positional mobility.

## COMPLEMENTS

We can distinguish between complements termed *objects* (O) and those termed *predicative complements* (PCs). Object complements refer semantically to something whereas PCs tend to predicate.

1. Ed loves Mary
2. Ed is fond of Mary

In 1, *Mary*, the object, refers to an individual. In 2, however, the PC, *fond of Mary* rather than referring predicates something. We can write 1 as LOVE(Ed, Mary) where *love* is a two-place predicate with two arguments. *Fond* is a similar predicate but it is an adjective, not a verb and hence cannot take the tense inflection. The role of *is* in 2 can be thought of as carrying the tense only. It is semantically empty. The semantic predication is taken up in the complement.

Objects and predicative complements differ syntactically in the following ways:

1. Form-class. While NPs can function as objects or predicative complement, adjectival phrases only function as PCs.
2. Number - PCs tend to agree in number with the subject: *John was a lawyer/\*some lawyers* whereas objects do not: *John hired a lawyer/ some lawyers*. (But not all PCs agree in number)

3. S-V-O clauses can go through passivization whereas S-V-PC cannot.
4. Where case is apparent in English through use of pronouns, the object is normally accusative whereas the PC can be accusative or nominative. *John hired him*

There are a few borderline cases which can be analyzed as objects or verbs, typically verbs of measurement, *cost*, *weigh*. E.g., *It cost \$20*.

### Transitive Constructions

We have seen two complements so far, O<sup>d</sup> and PC<sup>s</sup>. In complex-transitive constructions PC<sup>o</sup> occur:

Ed made Liz angry

Ed considered Liz a great asset

Here *angry* is PC<sup>o</sup> in that it is predicating the object *Liz* and not the subject *Ed*. Syntactically, PC<sup>o</sup>s behave like PC<sup>s</sup> in that they have the same form-class restrictions, agree generally in number with the object, resist passivization etc.

In ditransitive constructions we get O<sup>i</sup>, the indirect object:

John gave Emma the key

Here *the key* is the indirect object. We also can have the parallel (dative) construction:

John gave the key to Emma

Some authors analyze *to Emma* as the dative or indirect object but Huddleston does not count it as the indirect object.

The majority of verbs actually have transitive/ intransitive counterparts:

She read

She read the book

We can either classify these verbs as two verbs with different lexical entries or the same verbs with different subcategorization frames.

### Prepositional Phrases as Complements

1. The cat is in the kitchen
2. Ed relied on the minister
3. Ed backed up the minister

We have three constructions containing complements that look like PPs. 1 is the most straightforward. *In the kitchen* is clearly a PP complement. The preposition does not rely on the verb and could be selected from a range of prepositions. In this type we can have complements of place, time (*The meeting is at 5:00*) and goal

In 2, the preposition is a little more tightly bound up with the verb. Traditionally, *relied on* is termed a phrasal verb and *the minister* would be analyzed as the object. However, the construction of relative clauses where the prep moves with the relative pronoun (*the*

*minister on who Ed relied*), the insertion of adjuncts between verb and prep and coordination lead us to analyze it as a PP complement (as Huddleston does).

In 3, *the minister* can be termed the oblique object where oblique means that the syntactic relation between verb and object is not direct but is mediated by the preposition. We can also have oblique subjects such as *She counts as a full member of society*.

Finally, in 3, we see that *backed up* is idiomatic and the verb and preposition are tightly bound. Thus we analyze the complement as an object, *the minister*.

### Objects and Predicative Complements

S	P	O	S	P	PC
Ed	engaged	a lawyer	Ed	was	a lawyer
Ed	shot	Kim's lover	Ed	became	Kim's lover

In the SPO case, the object (O) is semantically a separate entity to the subject. We can change the number of lawyers (some lawyers) and the sentence remains grammatical. In the SPPC construction however, the PC denotes some aspect of the subject. In other words, the PC is not a separate semantic entity. We cannot change the number of the PC without changing the subject \**Ed was some lawyers*.

Predicative complements are often called 'intensive complements' since the complement is in an 'intensive' relationship with the subject. That is, the complement is closely bound to the subject, unlike the subject-object case where the two items refer to semantically separate entities.

### Prepositional Object

According to Downing & Locke, the prepositional object is 'an object mediated by a preposition' (p48).

1. He agreed (wholeheartedly) to the change of plan
2. You can count on Jane to help make the sandwiches
3. They have dealt with the transport crisis

Note how we can insert an adverb between verb and preposition (as in 1) which indicates that the verb and prep are not closely bound to each other. Passivisation can occur with the Np of the PP phrase becoming subject while the preposition is stranded.

1. The change of plan was agree to

This passivisation distinguishes prepositional objects from predicator complements realized by prepositional phrases as below where the sentence cannot be passivised (D&L).

This land belongs to the National Trust

### Complex-Transitive

Verbs with a direct object and an intensive complement which predicates this object are known as complex-transitives (Downing & Locke).

I found the place empty  
They elected her Miss America  
He keeps the garden beautiful  
I prefer it with water

## ADJUNCTS

Adjuncts on the other hand are not subcategorized for. They are usually optional in a sentence and have higher mobility than complements.

- a. John swatted a fly with his book
- b. With his book, John swatted a fly
- c. John, with his book, swatted a fly

## SOURCES

Huddleston. R (1984) *Introduction to the grammar of English language*. CUP

A university course in English grammar By Angela Downing, Philip Locke (2006)