

# UNIT 1

## LINGUISTIC FORMS AND SYNTACTIC FUNCTIONS

Sentences are built of single words, phrases, and clauses. Linguistic **form** denotes how something looks - its shape or appearance, and what its *structure (pattern)* is. For example, the following sentence:

*My best friend David, who is enthusiastically talking to John, has just returned from Canada.*

consists of a lot of words that are grouped into phrases and clauses. If we carry out formal analysis, we say that the phrase *my best friend David* is a noun phrase, *enthusiastically* an adverb phrase, *is talking to* and *has just returned* are verb phrases, *from Canada* is a prepositional phrase, *who is enthusiastically talking to John* is a dependent (subordinate) clause, etc.

When dealing with phrases, it is important to point out that phrase types differ not only in their internal phrase *structure* but also in their syntactic *roles (functions)*. The syntactic roles are crucial for the interpretation of the phrases. It is important to notice that a phrase type characteristically has a number of different functions within the clause.

We can also look at constituents from another angle; we can examine the **functions** which they perform in the larger structures which contain them (their *use* in actual communication).

Then, *my best friend David* is the *subject* of the sentence, the prepositional phrase *from Canada* functions as *adverbial* of place. However, the same noun phrase, in sentence *I met my best friend David* functions as the *object* of the sentence. Thus, it is very important to realise that one form can have different functions and vice versa, the same function can be expressed by different forms.

<b>Example</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>Function</b>
<i>The</i> police interviewed all the witnesses.	article	determiner
<i>The police</i> interviewed all the witnesses.	NP	Subject
The police <i>interviewed</i> all the witnesses.	VP	Predicate
The police interviewed <i>all the witnesses</i> .	NP	Object
The police interviewed all the witnesses <i>at the police station</i> .	PP	Adverbial
The police interviewed all the <i>scared</i> witnesses.	Adj.P	premodifier
He visited me on his way <i>back</i> .	Adv. P	post modifier
<i>To go</i> there is a stupid thing to do.	Inf. P	Subject
I avoid <i>swimming</i> in cold water.	Ger. P	Object
<i>Walking about 5 miles</i> Tom got tired.	Part. P	Adverbial-reason
<i>What I need</i> is a long holiday.	Finite clause	Subject
The children <i>are playing</i> in the garden.	Present	action in progress
He <i>is meeting</i> her tomorrow at five.	progressive	future arrangement
Alice <i>is</i> always <i>complaining</i> .	tense	frequently occurring action

The form - function distinction is crucial in language teaching and language description. We need to distinguish functional from formal categories also within larger structures than words and phrases, which are clauses and sentences. **Form** refers to the grammatical structure of clauses/sentences as part of the language system. **Function** refers to the use to which we put

utterances in communication. For example, there are syntactically four basic clause types - **formal categories** of simple sentence:

- **Declarative** (S, V, O ... word order)  
*I like this city.*
- **Interrogative** (subject - operator inversion, introduced by a Wh- element, question mark)  
*Do you like it?*
- **Imperative** (lack of grammatical subject, the verb in its base form)  
*Open the door.*
- **Exclamative** (introduced by What or How, exclamation mark)  
*What a nice day is today!*

Typically, but not always, these clause types (*forms*) express the following **functions**:

Declarative – *statement*

Interrogative – *question*

Imperative – *command*

Exclamative – *exclamation*

In any communication, we can distinguish various types of communicative act, or **speech (illocutionary) act**, the meaning intended by the speaker in the context, by which people communicate with each other: making statements, asking questions, giving directives with the aim of getting the hearer to carry out some action, making an offer or promise, thanking or expressing an exclamation (Downing, Locke, 1992). The *illocutionary force* of an utterance is the most important component of speech act, which is in fact its *pragmatic meaning*. Illocutionary forces are roughly equivalent to *functions*. There are a great many of potential speech (illocutionary) acts (e.g. *apologising, complaining, suggesting, advising, declaring, denying, instructing, requesting* etc.). Some speech acts are quite explicitly marked by the presence of what is known as a **performative verb**, such as in:

*I promise to come.*

*He warned his friend to leave.*

*They advised him to be there.*

In most cases the illocutionary force is not so straightforward - the speech act is less explicit. On many occasions we may fail to understand what someone intended by uttering a sentence.

Most speech acts, then, do not have any overt marking of illocutionary force. In order to interpret illocutionary force reliably, we need full access to the context of the utterance and the cultural background. For example, *I've got a headache* can be an apology, an announcement, or a warning. Only access to the context enables us to understand the function of the utterance. Simply said, the illocutionary force (function, pragmatic meaning) of the utterance can be revealed only if we consider the context in which communication takes place. Therefore, the four basic structural patterns of the clause can also have other functions than their basic ones.

**Example**

I'd take an umbrella.

The plate is hot.

Won't you have some more?

Why don't you stop it?

Have a nice time.

Take some more.

**Form**

Declarative

Declarative

Interrogative

Interrogative

Imperative

Imperative

**Function**

advice

warning

offer

command

wish

offer

## EXERCISES 1-8

### 1. What is the possible form and function of each of the words or phrases in heavy type?

1. I **have lost** my keys. present perfect - recent action of current relevance
2. **Let's have** a cup of coffee. \_\_\_\_\_
3. It's cold in this room, **isn't it**? \_\_\_\_\_
4. They **moved** to Huston five years ago. \_\_\_\_\_
5. He turned off the radio **so that he could hear** what they were talking about. \_\_\_\_\_
6. **Would you mind opening** the window? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Susan opened the fridge **and** took out a bottle of wine. \_\_\_\_\_
8. We **are taking** the 5 o'clock bus.
9. I don't like sweets; **however**, I had a piece of her cake. \_\_\_\_\_
10. **It was Peter who wrote** the message, not me. \_\_\_\_\_
11. Look! His car is in the garage. He **must be at home**. \_\_\_\_\_
12. You **ought to** have a rest. \_\_\_\_\_
13. **If only I had** more time. \_\_\_\_\_
14. **Mind** the steps. \_\_\_\_\_
15. **Come in** for a drink. \_\_\_\_\_
16. The train **is due to** leave at 5. \_\_\_\_\_
17. The witness was interviewed at the **police** station. \_\_\_\_\_
18. The boys **are playing** in the garden. \_\_\_\_\_
19. We **used to** go there by bus. \_\_\_\_\_
20. **To pay** in advance is not a good idea. \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. State whether the word in heavy type in these utterances are VERBS, ADJECTIVES or NOUNS

1. **Seeing** is **believing**. noun noun
2. He's **waiting** for a taxi. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The children are **playing** a **waiting** game. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Few people like **going** to the dentist's. \_\_\_\_\_
5. "I hope you don't mind my **asking**..." \_\_\_\_\_
6. David watched her **crossing** the street. \_\_\_\_\_
7. They've just done a **listening** exercise. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The school is **being** redecorated. \_\_\_\_\_
9. **Being** a doctor, he was able to help. \_\_\_\_\_
10. She went upstairs **cursing** and **grumbling**. \_\_\_\_\_
11. **Learning** English is not easy for me. \_\_\_\_\_
12. He didn't catch the bus, so he missed today's **reading** lessons. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Jean apologised for **being** late. \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Replace the words in heavy type in these utterances by a different word (not ending in -ing) which would fit in grammatically. (The meaning is irrelevant)**

Example: Thomas likes **playing** cards.

Thomas likes **coke**.

1. This is Granny's **walking** stick. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The story was **interesting**. \_\_\_\_\_
3. 'I'm looking forward to **seeing you soon**.'" \_\_\_\_\_
4. We had chicken breast, fried potatoes and **sprouting** broccoli for dinner on Monday.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. I'm afraid of **being alone** in the dark. \_\_\_\_\_
6. "Stop **screaming**." \_\_\_\_\_
7. **Speaking** is what I like, not **listening**. \_\_\_\_\_
8. This **terrifying** experience made her move from Windsor.

**4. Look at these groups of utterances. What do they have in common (form or function) and what distinguishes them (form or function)?**

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|--|--|
| <p><b>A</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tom goes to school by bus.</li> <li>2. Pamela is a pretty girl.</li> <li>3. John used to smoke.</li> <li>4. He is in the habit of biting his finger nails when he is nervous.</li> <li>5. Martin is always coming late to school.</li> </ol> | <p><b>B</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. She is getting fatter and fatter.</li> <li>2. It's raining.</li> <li>3. We're taking a taxi to the party tonight.</li> <li>4. My little brother is always asking me silly questions.</li> <li>5. Some students don't pay attention when Mrs Pearson is lecturing.</li> </ol> |
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**common** Function- all the utterances express routine/habitual actions

- different**
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

**common** Form – all the utterances contain verbs in the present progressive

- different**
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Look at the uses of the simple present tense. Pair the uses in 1-8 with the examples in A-H.**

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|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expresses habits. _____</li> <li>2. Expresses action happening at time of statement. _____</li> <li>3. Expresses general truth. _____</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A I take a bus to school every day.</li> <li>B Water boils at 100 degrees.</li> <li>C The IC train leaves at 6.30 a.m.</li> </ol> |
|--|--|

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 4. Expresses predictable, regularly occurring events in the future. _____ | D Kate drinks cocoa before going to bed.            |
| 5. Expresses routine. _____   | E Ken speaks Spanish fluently.                      |
| 6. Expresses recent past events (used in newspaper headlines) _____       | F Bradley announces his resignation from the Board. |
| 7. Expresses facts about the present. _____                               | G Ronaldo passes to Messi.                          |
| 8. Expresses the future after certain time expression. _____              | H I'll let you know as soon as Jill arrives.        |

**6. Look at questions 1-10 and the list of functions a-j below. Decide on a function for each question.**

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. What time is it? _____                          | a/asking someone to distinguish   |
| 2. Is that a turtle or a tortoise? _____           | b/expressing inability to believe |
| 3. He's back rather early, isn't he? _____         | c/ offering assistance            |
| 4. What do you mean <i>too expensive</i> ? _____   | d/ asking for assistance          |
| 5. <i>Must</i> you make such a fuss? _____         | e/ asking for information         |
| 6. Shall I give you a hand with it? _____          | f/ expressing irritation          |
| 7. Would you mind holding this for a minute? _____ | g/ asking for an opinion          |
| 8. Why is the kitchen in a mess? _____             | h/ expressing mild surprise       |
| 9. What does his new girlfriend look like? _____   | i/ asking for an explanation      |
| 10. What do you think of her new plan? _____       | j/ asking for description         |

**7. Complete the gaps in the table below**

FORM (Clause Type)	FUNCTION	EXAMPLE
DECLARATIVE	1. STATEMENT	George is my best friend.
	2. REQUEST	
	3. WISH	
	4. COMMAND	
	5.	This dog will bite you.
	6.	You must call her immediately.
	7.	If I were you, I wouldn't do i.
IMPERATIVE	8. COMMAND	Stop it.
	9.	Turn the cap ninety degrees.
	10. OFFER	
	11.	Mind the steps.
	12. WISH	
INTERROGATIVE	13. QUESTION	What are you doing here?
	14. COMMAND	
	15.	Why don't we listen to him?
	16.	Won't you take some more?

**8. Write sentences of different forms (structures) that express the following functions:**

**Form - Function**

1 declarative – advice

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2 imperative – offer

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3 interrogative - polite request or suggestion

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4 interrogative – command

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5 declarative - suggestion

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