Chapter 2

The Parts of Speech

Reader, please take it easy!

If you are new to sentence analysis, you are about to encounter a hailstorm of terminology. Do not let it batter you. There is no need for you to memorise all in one go. Be content simply with getting a feel for the linguistic concepts they present. Taking it easy in this way, you will be on top of it all by the time you have read to the end of Chapter 4.

What are the parts of speech?

'Parts of speech' is the general name for the various syntactic units that perform the sense-making functions of the sentence. They are the nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbials (verb, copula, copular verb), and adverbs:

- If the function of a word or of a group of words in a sentence is to **name**, we have a **noun**, noun phrase or pronoun.
- If the function of a word or group of words is to **describe a noun**, noun phrase or pronoun, we have an **adjective** or adjective phrase.
- If the function of a word or of a group of words is to **denote** the **activity** of the subject upon the object, or of the object upon the subject, we have a **verb**.
- If the function of a word or a group of words is to **assign** a description, definition or location to the subject, we have a **copula**.

- If the function of the complement is to name a **characteristic of the subject's act**, we have a **copular verb** or a copular-verb phrase.

- If the function of a word or group of words is to **describe** the time, place, manner, reason for or degree of intensity of the activity denoted by a **verb or copular verb**, we have an **adverb**.

Minor parts of speech are the articles and the particles. The articles are the definite article 'the' and the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'. (Chapter 11 of this work discusses article usage.) The particles are the little words that function as prefixes (e.g.: indefinite, precondition, non-conformist) and suffixes (happiness, departure), and as prepositions: 'in', 'towards', 'under', *etc*.), or are prepositions. Prepositions are not in themselves parts of speech. Rather, they perform various parts-of-speech functions, depending on their contexts.

The verbs

Verbs denote the activity that forges the dynamics of the subject-object relationship. The characteristic of the verb sentence is action, either (i) of the subject upon the object, or (ii) of the object upon the subject:

(i) William Adams *might well have ignored* the spectacle [ACTIVE VOICE].

(ii) (ii) The spectacle *might well have been ignored* by him [PASSIVE VOICE].

The copula

The copula is formed from the infinitive 'to be', or from a combination of it with the infinitive 'to have'. The basic forms of the infinitive 'to be' are:

am/was/is/are/were/be/been/shall/will.

The permutations of the infinitive 'to be' are many. We use them to serve our meaning-making purposes:

am, was, is, are, were, were being, shall/has/had been/will have been, should/might/can be/ought/used to be, etc.

Our meaning-making purposes when we use parts of the infinitive 'to be' are infinite. Here are just two of them:

We *were being* ignored.
By this time tomorrow, Susan *will have been* married for a year.

The copula sentence has a complement, not an object

The copula has what we call a 'complement'. It does not have an object. Only the verb sentence has an object.

There are statements (usually of principle, and typically aphorisms) that are copula sentences, but they hide the copula. It is not immediately apparent in this sentence, for instance, that the copula 'is' is hidden:

What goes up must come down.

But it is there, albeit hidden: Quite simply, *what* in the above sentence has displaced the noun-phrase header *that which*. (We shall see in a moment that *what* can be the header of a noun phrase. It cannot, however, be the header of an adjective phrase.)

The complement of this sentence, *must come down* defines the subject *What* [*That which*] *goes up*. But the copula, *is*, which connects the subject and the complement by defining it, has been ghosted: it is not visible in this sentence. And the noun-phrase header *that which*, which logically leads the noun-phrase complement *must come down*, is also ghosted. Putting back the ghosted copula, the displaced noun-phrase header and the ghosted

noun-phrase headers, we have the full meaning-template of this sentence:

> What [*That which*] goes up [*is*] [*that which/what*] must come down.

The other upshot of this discussion is that the words *goes* and *come* **only appear to be verbs** in the sentence *What goes up must come down*. But they are not verbs. They are each parts of the noun phrases *What goes up* and *[What] must come done.*

Distinguishing the copula

A part of the infinitive 'to be', or a phrase that consists of several parts of the that infinitive working in combination with parts of the infinitive 'to have', is a copula only when it alone is the element that connects the subject and complement of a sentence. When the parts of the infinitives 'to be' and 'to have' occur as the helpers (auxiliaries) of an activity-denoting word, they are either verbs or copular verbs.

It is easy to determine whether the parts of the infinitives 'to be' and 'to have' are copulas or auxiliaries. The determinant is this: If the predicate of the sentence contains an object that acts upon its subject, or upon which the subject acts, then that sentence is a verb sentence. If the predicate contains no object, then the sentence is a copula sentence. In this sentence:

> Mary *is constructing* the argument to impress John
> [ACTIVE VOICE],

the subject *Mary* perpetrates the act denoted by the verb *is constructing* upon the object *the argument*. In the next sentence:

> The argument *was constructed* by Mary to impress John
> [PASSIVE VOICE],

the object *Mary* perpetrates the act denoted by *was constructed* upon the subject *the argument*. In both these sentences, the parts of the infinitive 'to be': *is* and *was*, are auxiliaries in the verb phrases *is constructing* and *was constructed*. On the other hand, in this sentence:

> The argument **was** impressive
> [COPULA SENTENCE]

no subject nor object is performing any act. Rather, the subject *The argument* is assigned the description *impressive* by the copula *was*. Similarly in:

> The argument **was** constructed to please John,
> [COPULA SENTENCE]

the copula *was* assigns the description *constructed to please John* to the subject *The argument*. (Clearly, the subject did not act upon an object in this sentence: there is no object in it. There is instead the predicate adjective *constructed to please John*: The subject this sentence raises is 'the constructed-to-please-John argument'.)

Some Traditional Grammar analysts will try to argue that *was constructed* is a verb in this sentence, and *to please John* is the adverbial phrase of reason that describes it. This is therefore a verb sentence. But this argument founders on the absence from this sentence of a subject that acts upon the object, or an object that acts upon the subject. Given that absence, this cannot be a verb sentence.

The copular verb

There are two kinds of copular verb. One kind is <u>like the copula in that it does not denote activity:</u>

> This water **tastes** good.

The meaning in this sentence is clearly not that the subject *the water* is perpetrating the act *tastes*. Obviously, *water* cannot perpetrate the

act *tastes*. Rather, *tastes* in this context is effectively equi-meaning with 'is', and it is therefore a copular verb. Similarly, in:

> That dress *felt* wet

it is not the subject *that dress* that did the feeling. Dresses cannot feel. *Felt* in this sentence is equi-meaning with 'was' or 'seemed to be', and is therefore a copular verb. Like the copula, *felt* attributes the predicate adjective *wet* to the subject *that dress*.

The other kind of copular verb

The other kind of copular verb is <u>like the verb in that it denotes the subject's activity</u>. But it always denotes only the subject's activity. And that activity is never perpetrated upon an object. That is necessarily so because the copular verb does not have an object. Instead, it has a complement that works upon the subject to describe, locate or specify it. In doing this, it is like the copula. In this sentence:

> The waiter *refused* service,

the subject *the waiter* certainly **did not** perpetrate the act denoted by *refused* upon the noun *service***.** Rather, the noun *service* names the content of the subject's act, *refused*: So the waiter performed an act of service refusal.

Distinguishing the verb and the copular verb

In this sentence:

> The waiter ***refused to serve*** the drunkard,
> [VERB SENTENCE]

the subject *the waiter* perpetrated an act, denoted by the verb phrase *refused to serve*, upon the object *the drunkard*. Clearly then, *refused to serve* is a verb.

However, in the next sentence, something more complicated happens:

> She *refused* the drunkard permission to enter.
> [COPULAR VERB SENTENCE]

In this sentence, it might at first seem that the subject *she* perpetrated an act, denoted by the verb *refused*, upon the object *the drunkard*. But *She refused the drunkard* cannot be said to be the basic sentence of this sentence, for the simple reason that it does not make an independent sense. In fact, for this basic sentence to make sense, the noun phrase *permission to enter* is needed to name the content of the subject's act *refused*. So *refused* has a complement, not an object. It is therefore a copular verb.

But then, someone might argue, is not *the drunkard* nevertheless the object of the copular verb *refused* of which the content is named by *permission to enter*? The obvious answer is that it is not. Once one admits that in this sentence *refused* is a copular verb of which the content is named by the noun-phrase complement *permission to enter*, it cannot then be also be a verb. (It has already been established that *She refused the drunkard* does not make the independent sense required of a basic sentence.) So how to account for the noun *the drunkard*? Well, that is simple: It names **the direction of the subject's act** denoted by the copular verb *refused*.

The reader will recall the following analysis offered in Chapter 1. 'What is a Sentence':

> The boy *taught* his grandmother Mathematics.
> The boy *taught* his grandmother to suck eggs.
> [VERB SENTENCES]

The subject *the boy* perpetrated the act denoted by the verb *taught* on the object, *his grandmother*. The content of the subject's act,

taught, is named by the noun *Mathematics* in the first sentence, and by the infinitive-noun phrase *to suck eggs* in the second.

That reader might well put this very valid question: Why is *taught* in this context not also a copular verb, since its content is named by a noun-phrase complement? Yet again, the answer is fairly simple: The basic sentence in this sentence, *The boy taught his grandmother* makes an independent sense. That basic sentence does not have to import the noun complement to achieve a sense, as was the case in the basic sentence <u>She **refused** the drunkard</u> *permission to enter*. That is, the complement *permission to enter* had to be 'imported' to inform us of the content of the act *refused*. But in *The boy **taught** his grandmother*, the subject-object relationship is unequivocal.

No verb is inherently a copular verb.

'Tastes' and 'felt' were used as copular verbs in the sentences we discussed above. They were distinguished as copular verbs because, like the copula, they do not denote activity. However, they are verbs in the following sentences because they **do** denote the activity that the subject perpetrates upon the object *the bump* and *the food*:

> <u>He **felt** the bump</u> on his head.
> <u>The employee **tastes** the food</u> for his master.
> [VERB SENTENCES]

There are problematic sentences that look as if they contain a subject and an object, and therefore, a verb. One such sentence is this:

> He **felt** the wind in his hair.
> [COPULAR-VERB SENTENCE]

The subject *He* certainly perpetrates the act denoted by *felt*: he did the feeling. But *he* did not perpetrate that act upon *the wind*. (In fact, logically, it is the wind that acted upon him.) *The wind* is therefore not the object in this sentence. We must conclude that *felt* is a

copular verb because the complement *the wind in his hair* names the content of the activity (*felt*) it denotes.

The copular verb and the 'that'-headed noun-phrase complement

There is an awkward copular-verb sentence construction that must be discussed. (The reader will have to refer to the concept 'subjunctive mood', below.) Such a construction occurs in this sentence:

> I ***must suggest*** to her that she cover her windows with curtains.
> [COPULAR-VERB SENTENCE, SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD]

The sequence *must suggest* might at first glance seem to be a verb. In fact it a copular verb. The subject *I* is **not** perpetrating the act *must suggest* upon *her*. The subject's act is merely the contemplation of the perpetrating of an act of suggesting. So *to her* is not the object in this sentence. Rather, *to her* names the direction of the contemplated activity *must suggest*. And *that she cover her windows with curtains* names the content of that contemplated activity.

We speak of 'contemplated activity' because there is no actual perpetration of an act in this sentence. Also, the tense of *must suggest* is indeterminate: it has a present-tense form, but its sense can be either future or present, depending on the meaning it intends to make. (It can be intended to mean either: 'my constant thought ***is*** to suggest to her that she cover her window ...' or 'I ***shall have to suggest*** to her that she cover her windows ...'.)

The noun phrase *that she cover her windows with curtains* names the content of the activity denoted by *must suggest*. Since the tense of *must suggest* is indeterminate, its subjunctive mood is presumed by default. Therefore, the noun phrase that names its content must

'fit in' with the presumed subjunctive mood by making an explicit subjunctive of the verb-like element in the content-naming noun phrase. So any verb-like element in the content-naming part of the complement must take a subjunctive-mood form.

We can construct the subjunctive mood with a noun phrase headed by 'that'. We cannot construct it with a gerund phrase. For that reason it is entirely ungrammatical to give the content-naming noun phrase a gerund form: 'I ***must suggest*** to her ***to cover*** her windows with curtains'.

You will see the difference in this sentence:

> I ***shall tell*** her to cover her windows with curtains.
> [VERB SENTENCE]

Here, *shall tell* is a verb inasmuch as *her* is its object. And the tense of this verb is clearly 'future'. Given this clarity of tense, there is no demand for the subjunctive mood in the phrase that names its content. So the infinitive 'to cover' can head the noun phrase that does that naming.

Finally on the verb/copular verb distinction: The reader should keep in mind that the content of a verb can be named by a complement, even when that verb is a proper verb that has a subject and an object. Such a naming of verb content occurs in the sentence above, in which the subject *I* perpetrates the act denoted by the verb *shall tell* upon the object *her*.

The reader should review the discussion of the verb sentence in the Chapter 1, 'What is a Sentence?', where examples of other verb-content naming noun complements are discussed. A two basic facts to remember about sentence analysis are these:

1. A verb always has an object (unless it is a 'subject + verb' sentence, e.g., 'He preaches'). But it can have a complement

as well, so long as the basic sentence that contains it makes an independent sense that establishes the subject-object relationship. (Please refer to: section 4, 'The activity between subject and object is named by the predicate noun complement**,** in Chapter 1, 'What is a Sentence?'.)

2. A copular verb and a copula can have only a complement (and never an object).

Tense

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in the time past.
TS Eliot

Apart from writing magnificent poetry, Eliot alerts us to the complexity of the concept 'time'. Because of that complexity, tense is a very difficult concept indeed, at least when we want to describe it. Otherwise, we 'know' tense intuitively. That is, when we speak or write, we cast our sentences in the present, past, future or conditional tense pretty much automatically, for we know where we want to locate our meaning in terms of time. Problem arises, however, when we attempt to describe the tenses we use. That is why we have a plethora of tense terms that make very little sense to anyone. So what is tense?

The tense of a verb is achieved by the word form that locates action in time. That is true of the tense of a verb, a copula or a copular verb. The problem with verb tense is not that its formation is governed by any complex syntax, but rather, it is that approaches to expressing time concepts are very diverse. There is, for instance, little similarity in how tense is expressed in Germanic, Slavic and Latinate languages. Modes of the tense expression of languages differ from

one to another every bit as much as the mode of any of them differs from the English mode.

A vast body of tense terminology exists in Traditional Grammar, but sadly, much of it is nonsensical: 'present perfect continuous', 'pluperfect', 'future perfect conditional', *etc*. I propose that discussion of English tense formation should be thoroughly spring-cleaned, with the intention of consigning its useless terminology to oblivion. To this end, only some tense paradigms are commended here as useful ones.

The tense concepts 'present', 'past', 'future', 'conditional'

'Past', 'present', 'future' and 'conditional' are the indispensable time concepts. They each have several tense forms. Examples of these forms are rendered in bold italics:

Present

I *eat* fish. He/She *eats* fish. We/you/they *eat* fish.

I *am eating* fish. He/She *is eating* fish. We/you/they *are eating* fish.

Past

I *ate* fish. He/She *ate* fish. We/you/they *ate* fish.

I *have eaten* fish. He/She *has eaten* fish. We/you/they *have eaten* fish.

I/He/She/We/You/They *had eaten* fish.

Future

I/We *shall eat* fish. He/She/You/They *will eat* fish.

I/We *shall be eating* fish. He/She/You/They *will be eating* fish.

Conditional

> I/We ***should eat*** fish if it <u>were</u> safe. You/He or She/They ***would eat*** fish if it <u>were</u> safe.
>
> I/we ***should be eating*** fish if it <u>were</u> safe. You/He/She/They
>
> ***would be eating*** fish if it <u>were</u> safe.

Permutations of these structures make all the other tense forms. The particular form we choose depends on the sense we want to make:

> I ***have been eating*** fish even though I know it is not safe**.**
>
> He/She ***might be eating*** fish despite my rule that forbids it.
>
> He/She ***might have eaten*** fish while I was away**.**
>
> They ***will have eaten*** all the fish they bought before I came home.
>
> You ***would have been eating*** fish if I had agreed to serve you some.

Aspects

It is not only tense forms of verbials that locate in time. For instance:

> The poor man *dies* tomorrow

is a sentence that uses the present-tense form *dies*, yet the operative time concept is clearly a future time, *tomorrow*. This adverb is responsible for giving this sentence a 'future' aspect.

A verb's tense form can reveal whether the act it denotes is 'perfective' (finished) or 'imperfective' (unfinished). In this sentence:

> He ***has eaten*** pies all his life

the act is clearly unfinished, or 'imperfective'. That is, the act denoted by *has eaten* is not a terminated act but a continuing one: *He* is still eating pies. But then, the same can be said of this sentence:

He ***had eaten*** pies all his life.

The auxiliary *had* does not, of its own strength, give a sentence a perfective aspect. Please note this fact in this compound sentence:

He ***had eaten*** pies all his life and ***was still eating*** them when we ***met*** him.

Since the act *had eaten* is shown by the subsequent (compound) sentences to be a continuing act, *He had eaten pies* is for that reason a sentence with an imperfective aspect.

Aspect in the verb sentence

An interesting thing about aspect in a verb sentence is that the terminating adverb of time that conjoins a sentence with the lead sentence determines that the past-tense form *had* is the appropriate auxiliary of the verb in the lead sentence. We might observe this in the following way: There is no terminating adverb of time in the two foregoing sentences. But there is in the next one:

He ***had eaten*** pies all his life until we ***warned*** him of the possible adverse health consequences of eating them.

Here, *until* is the terminating adverb that conjoins the sentence *we warned him of the possible adverse health consequences of eating them* with the lead sentence *he had eaten pies all his life*. It is this terminating (and conjoining) adverb of time that enforces the tense form *had eate*n. It is, therefore, this adverb of time that is primarily responsible for giving this sentence a 'perfective' aspect. In so doing, it insists that 'had' and not 'has' is the appropriate auxiliary for the lead sentence. (We cannot possibly say 'He ***has eaten*** pies until we ***warned*** him ...' because we would be proposing a chronologically illogical time concept.)

Aspect in the copula sentence

Aspect in the copula sentence is just as interesting. As in the verb sentence, it is the sentence-compounding and terminating adverb of time that determines when the appropriate copula is 'was' and not 'is', and when the appropriate auxiliary is 'had' and not 'has'. In this sentence:

This ***is*** the most beautiful flower I <u>have ever seen</u>,

the most beautiful flower I have ever seen is, and continues to be, true of the subject *This*. (Alternately, *This* represents *the most beautiful flower I have ever seen*.) So the aspect of this copula sentence is imperfective (i.e. no truth in it has been made obsolete). Hence the appropriateness of the present-tense copula *is* and the present-tense auxiliary *have*.

On the other hand, in the next sentence:

This ***was*** the most beautiful flower I <u>had ever seen</u> before you ***showed*** me yours.

This again represents *the most beautiful flower I had ever seen*. But now there is a terminating adverb of time, *before*, and it compounds the lead sentence *this was the most beautiful flower I had ever seen* with *before you showed me yours.* That compounding enforces the past tense *This was*, for *This is* is no longer true. The possibility of its truth is terminated. A once-true representation of *This* as *the most beautiful flower I have ever seen* has become obsolete. Aspect here is therefore perfective.

Instinct and forming tenses

There is a formidable array of tense terminology, not all of which is even passingly perspicacious. There is no need, therefore, to bother with it. Fortunately, native speakers form tenses more or less

instinctively. It is much more important, for the purposes of sentence analysis, to learn to recognise a verbial phrase.

Verbial phrases

Parts of the infinitive 'to be', it has already been noted, act either alone as the copula in a sentence, or are aided by auxiliaries that are parts of the infinitive 'to have'. Infinitives themselves can also be parts of a verb phrase:

> They ***had been trying <u>to become</u>*** friends.

The present participle is the verbial form that ends in *-ing*. It can itself be part of a verbial phrase, as the sentence above shows. When infinitives and present participles are parts of a verbial phrase, they are always accompanied by at least one auxiliary (rendered in red font below).

> The dog ***is <u>eating.</u>***

> The dog ***might have been <u>eating</u>*** at the time.

> The dog ***had been <u>eating</u>*** its dinner.

> The dog ***could/would have been <u>eating</u>*** for some time.

The past participle is the verbial form that ends in *-ed* or *-en* or *-n*:

> He ***should have <u>worked</u>*** harder.

> He ***might have <u>eaten</u>*** more.

> They ***had <u>tried</u>*** hard.

> The dog ***might have <u>been</u>*** there.

> We ***could/should/might/ought to/ have <u>known</u>*** about it.

When 'not' or an adverb accompanies the verbial phrase:

> John ***will <u>not</u> cook*** lunch

I *can <u>hardly</u> hear* you

those words are part of that verbial phrase. This is so for the obvious reason that a verb phrase such as the one in 'I *can hear* you' denotes an act quite different from the one in 'I *can <u>hardly</u> hear* you'. It would not be sensible to claim that an adverb or the negative marker 'not' is not part of the sense it is responsible for achieving.

Caution about advice

Knowing that the foregoing sorts of formations are the ones capable of constituting a verbial phrases, one is well on the way to being able to recognise one. Indeed, people new to sentence analysis are often advised to 'find the verb' in the sentence before them. That, however, is not wonderful advice. For one thing (this was noted in the discussion on distinguishing the verbials (verb, copula and copular verb), words that look as if they are functioning as verbs are not necessarily verbs in the sentence under analysis. A much safer procedure is to determine first of all whether the sentence under examination is a subject/object or a subject/complement sentence. That also identifies the basic sentence, which always contains the only functioning verbial in a soundly constructed sentence.

Moods

The moods of verbials are **indicative, interrogative, imperative and subjunctive**. Apart from 'subjunctive', these are not very exciting distinctions. Quite simply:

- the indicative mood makes a statement (this is the mood this book is largely concerned with);
- the interrogative mood asks a question;
- the imperative mood gives an order.

There really is very little point in remembering these terms, since the words 'question', 'order' and 'statement' exist without them as perfectly serviceable terms.

The subjunctive mood

The subjunctive mood of a verbial is distinct from its indicative mood (its statement form) in that it is not located in time, and is therefore without tense. It sets a notional, as distinct from a real or a chronological, time.

The 'be' construction of the subjunctive

The 'be' construction of the subjunctive mood of a verbial is often suggestive of the eternal, and is used in a mood of adulation:

God <u>be</u> <u>praised.</u>

Colloquially, the 'be' construction accompanies a present-tense, indicative-mood statement:

Be that as it may, I am not changing my mind.

We have a plan, *albeit* a crude one.

Maybe we can beat them.

They rejected us. So *be* it.

Blessed *be* Thy name.

The 'were' construction of the subjunctive

The 'were' construction of a verbial's subjunctive mood expresses a wish:

I wish I <u>were</u> a princess,

or a hypothesis:

If he <u>were to ring</u> I should eat my hat.

The more complex 'were' construction hypothesises a state of being or activity, and postulates its real-time, imperfective aspect with a conditional-tense verbial in the statement about an expected consequence. (The latter is rendered in bold in this sentence):

> <u>Were</u> Mary <u>to move</u> to England, she ***would miss*** Australia.

The still more complex 'were' construction adds a conditional (*would wonder*) and a present (*am*) consequence:

> If I <u>were **to read**</u> this book on a beach, people ***would wonder*** who I ***am.***

Adverbs

Adverbs describe verbs. They describe the time (when), the manner (how), the place (where), the degree of intensity, the direction, and the reason for the activity that the verb denotes. Naturally then, adverbs occur only in verb sentences.

Time (when)

> We ***arrived*** <u>early</u>.
> The plan ***was abandoned*** <u>prematurely</u>.
> <u>Three months later</u>, I ***met*** a post-trauma psychologist.

Manner (how)

> *He **spoke*** <u>slowly</u> .
> The rain ***came*** <u>teeming down</u>.
> We ***travelled*** <u>by bus</u>.
> They ***arrived*** <u>screaming for revenge</u>.

Place (where, or in what direction, either physically or psychologically)

> This gadget ***moves*** <u>upwards</u>.
> They ***watched*** us <u>in disbelief</u>.
> The child ***talks*** <u>in her sleep</u>.

Degree of intensity

> He <u>hardly</u> **spoke** <u>at all</u>.

I ***shall insist*** <u>vehemently</u> that he give up smoking.
She <u>really</u> ***likes*** iced coffee.

Reason

They ***separated*** <u>because of their political difference</u>.
The reminder ***was issued*** <u>out of kindness</u>.
He ***eats*** <u>to sustain his energy</u>.

Direction

She ***gossiped*** <u>about the neighbours</u>.

The teacher ***spoke*** <u>against bullying</u>.

The stevedoring company ***tried to break*** the power of union<u>s by bringing in foreign workers</u>.

Adverbs often head noun phrases that expound a comparison or a metaphor, Such an adverb-headed adverb phrase is underlined in this sentence:

Milton ***crafts*** his tale <u>like a pirate plucking gems from a treasure chest</u>.

NB: Where there is a verb there can also be an adverb. There is no verb in copula or copular-verb sentences. There cannot, therefore, be an adverb in copula and copular-verb sentences.

Nouns

Nouns name people and things and abstractions. They name in single words (singular or plural nouns) and in sequences of words (noun phrases). A name is every bit as much a noun when it names the concepts 'will to live' and 'nationalism' as it is when it names the person 'Mary' or the group 'the endangered'. Simply, if the effect of a word or sequence of words is that it names, then that word is a noun, and that sequence a noun phrase. (Noun phrases are underlined, and verbials are rendered in italic ***bold italic*** font in the following sentences.)

Church leaders ***have been*** <u>a powerful influence</u> <u>on public attitudes</u>.

There is no sense at all in trying to claim that the 'place' concept implicit in 'on public attitudes' makes it function as an adverb: The only verbial in this sentence is the copula *have been*. A copula cannot, by nature, denote activity. So it makes no sense to say that a phrase in a sentence describes activity when there is no verb in it to denote activity. Rather, the copula ***has been*** assigns the definition <u>a powerful influence on public attitudes</u> (two noun phrases) to the subject *Church leaders*.

Noun Case

At one time in the life of Traditional Grammar, nouns were classified with Latin noun-declension terminology. The two subjective cases were:

Nominative [the subject namer]: <u>John</u> has arrived.

Vocative [the addressee namer]: <u>Mary</u>, John has arrived.

The three predicative cases were:

Accusative [the object namer]: John read the children <u>a story</u>.

Dative [the indirect-object namer]: John read <u>the children</u> a story.

Ablative [the orientation namer]: John is <u>under a cloud</u>. John talked <u>about Philosophy</u>.

The two case that were both nominative [subject namer] and accusative [object namer] were:

Locative [the place namer]: Living <u>in London</u> caused John to appreciate living <u>in Melbourne</u>.

and

> **Genitive** [the possession indicator]: <u>John's cats' collars</u> are pink. <u>The collars of the cats belonging to John</u> are pink.

Shortage of case namers

A quick count of the broadest categorisation of noun functions in the complement (see the discussion in Chapter 2, 'What is a Sentence', 'copular-verb model of the basic sentence') will show that the six Latin noun-case names are not enough to name all of them. What case, for instance, might we say that *Mathematics* is in the sentence 'Mary teaches Mathematics'? Clearly, *Mathematics* is not accusative [the object namer]: it is not the object in this sentence. (*Mary* does not perpetrate an act upon *Mathematics*, nor vice versa. Rather, *Mathematics* is the noun that names the content of the activity denoted by the verb *teaches* in this verb + subject sentence.)

This state of being stuck for a case name is the least of our problems. The big one came when, at another time in the life of Traditional Grammar, some linguists giggled into their palms and told us that grammarians, the dopes, are running around giving names to English nouns that are in fact the names of Latin case forms. That gave the kibosh to naming English noun-case functions in the classical manner, until the distinguished linguist Charles Fillmore wrote his *Case Grammar* in 1962, pointing out that though it is true that modern **English nouns do not have case forms**, it is also true that **they do have case functions**. He commended a case-centred grammar and called for much better efforts at naming noun-case functions exhaustively. Today, grammarians by and large still baulk at the prospect of discussing noun case, mostly, one suspects, for fear of those who remember that doing so is supposed to be silly.

The pity of it is that, having turned against noun-case distinctions, Traditional Grammar decided that the old Latin objective-case

functions are going to be called 'adverbs' in its system of analysis. Now, adverbs describe verbs. Nouns can name the properties of actions they denote. The two functions are quite dissimilar. Traditional Grammar is remiss in having attempted to fudge this. The result of the fudging cannot be anything other than a source of confusion in its system of analysis.

The genitive-case nouns

The genitive-case noun is the only modern English noun that has a case form. It is either the apostrophe before or after a final-letter *s*, or the 'of/for +noun' construction. Traditional Grammar has settled upon calling this the 'possessive case'. This is none too perspicacious a word, for the genitive case names quite a bit more than possession. It names the existence of these relationships between nouns:

> ***the owner and the owned:*** the girl's doll; the doll of the girl [THE GIRL IS AN OWNER; THE DOLL IS AN OWNED ITEM.]

> ***the performer and the performance:*** the boys' cooking; the cooking by the boys/of the boys [THE BOYS ARE THE PERFORMERS, COOKING IS THE PERFORMANCE.]

> ***the custodian and the custody:*** soldiers' orders; orders of/for soldiers (THE SOLDIERS ARE CUSTODIANS; THE ORDERS ARE IN THEIR CUSTODY.)

> ***valuer and the evaluated:*** a year's sentence; a sentence of one year (THE VALUER 'A YEAR' EVALUATES 'SENTENCE' IN TERMS OF ITSELF).

> ***category and the sub-category:*** a teachers' college/a college for teachers (The category is 'college'; the sub-category, teachers', describes the category 'college'.)

One genitive is forced on us by idiom. The idiom itself has an 'of' structure – 'for the sake of', 'in the name of':

In the <u>name of all that is holy</u>, muzzle that howling dog!
For <u>goodness' sake</u>, stop that racket!
For <u>the sake of your children</u>, save your money.
Hold your tongue, for <u>Pete's sake</u>!

(There is a discussion about placing the apostrophe before or after the *s*, in Chapter 10, 'The Apostrophe'.)

Noun classification

Instead of looking to classifying nouns in terms of their case functions, Traditional Grammar has been busy with a set of appallingly boring, all-too-obvious categories: **Proper nouns** name people (John Smith, the Prime Minister), places (Melbourne, Victoria, Auburn Road), edifices (the House of Parliament, Westminster Bridge) and visual and literary publications *(The Terminator, The Sydney Morning Herald)*. **Common nouns** are somehow ordinary nouns: dog, street, people, governments, invitation. **Abstract nouns** name abstractions: humanity, love, beauty, eagerness, democracy. **Collective nouns** name class-groups rather that item: flock, pair, gathering, audience. Nouns are said also to have number. That simply means that they are **singular** (dog, woman, pair) or **plural** (dogs, women, pairs). And nouns and verbials have **agreement**, which means that there is a consistency in the singularity or plurality of nouns and verbs that occur in association: John <u>goes</u>; the people <u>go</u>.

Noun + adjective naming units

It is often necessary to include adjectives in a naming sequence: For instance, the noun 'publishing' names something other than 'literary publishing', and 'American literary publishing' names something other than 'mainstream American literary publishing'. In the following sentences, adjectives are rendered in red font, and the naming sequences of which they are a part are underlined:

> Recently, the Mulgar Press, a publishing company, *was refused Literature Board funding.*
>
> Mainstream Australian literary publishing *seems to take* funding for granted.

It is practical in sentence analysis to call a phrase by the name of the function it performs in a sentence, without our being concerned with how the parts of the phrase itself function upon one another. When a phrase performs a noun function and adjectives are part of its naming function (as in the two sentences above), we call that phrase a noun phrase, because the whole phrase acts as a noun.

'That' and 'what' in the noun phrase

'That' heads the ordinary (not relative) noun phrase. That ordinary noun phrase is italicised in the next set of sentences. The basic sentences are underlined. Their verbial are rendered in **bold** font.

> *That there is a long tradition of democracy in this country does not deter his efforts* to secure dictatorial powers for himself.
> [VERB BASIC SENTENCE]

> His problem *is that he cannot disguise his contempt* for the will of the majority.
> [COPULA BASIC SENTENCE]

'What', too, can head the ordinary (not relative) noun phrase:

> What you see *is* what you get.
> [COPULA BASIC SENTENCE]

> What you don't know [*is what*] won't hurt you.
> [COPULA BASIC SENTENCE]

Pronouns

(See also the discussion in Chapter 3, 'The Simple Sentence'.)

Pronouns simply represent nouns. Unlike most nouns, pronouns retain their case forms. That means that when a pronoun represents

a noun that is the subject in a verb sentence, it has a **subjective-case** form:

I, she, he, we, you, they.

When a pronoun represents a noun that is the object in a verb sentence, it takes the **objective-case** form:

me, her, him, you, them.

'It' is the neutral pronoun that represents genderless singular nouns. 'It' does not have a case form.

Personal pronouns in verb basic sentences

When a sentence raises a subject that is a person and represents it instead of naming it, the representation is done by the personal pronouns: I, she, we, you, they. These pronouns are the subjects in a basic sentence. That is why they are called the 'subjective-case pronouns'. The person or persons who are the objects in the sentence are represented by the personal pronouns: me, her, him, us, them. Hence their name 'objective-case pronouns'. 'You' has the same form in both its case roles.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
He/She	loves	him/her/me/them/us/you.
They	spoke	to him/her/me/them/us/you.

Personal pronouns in the copula basic sentence

There cannot be a subject-object relationship in a copula sentence: There is no object in it. Because personal pronouns in a copula sentence are either the subject or they represent the subject, their forms are always subjective: I, she, he, we, they:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	*COMPLEMENT*
It	is	I who matter more than you/she/he/they.

Personal pronouns in the preposition-led phrase

It was perfectly possible in the foregoing discussion to give a logical account of the use of the subjective and objective case forms of personal pronouns . However, no such logical account is available for why we use their OBJECTIVE forms in the prepositional phrase that introduces a sentence, be it a verb, copula or copular-verb one. The only available account, quite simply, is that we just do! (The preposition-led phrases are underlined in the examples below.) However, the pronouns that begin the sentence itself retain their subjective forms. (In the 'subject' column, the objective pronouns are highlighted in green, and the subjective ones in yellow.)

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
Between you and me, the two of us, she	prefers	him/her/them/us.
	COPULAR VERB	*COMPLEMENT*
In the light of what happened to them, we	urge	caution to all of them/us.

The reflexive pronouns

The reflexive pronouns are:

     myself, yourself, himself, herself, themselves, itself

have **only objective-case forms**, for they feature only as the object in verb basic sentences. Their template of meaning is: 'The subject perpetrated the act denoted by the verb upon the object' which is necessarily 'himself/herself':

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
I	cut	myself.
They	rewarded	themselves.

The relative pronouns 'who' and 'whom''

Who

The relative pronouns 'who' and 'whom' relative pronouns perform special adjectival and nounal functions. In these sentence, 'who' does nothing more than head the adjective phrase that describes a noun. (The sequence it heads is rendered in red font):

> The kindergarten *is run* by an experienced teacher who lives locally.
> The man who loves dogs *visited* yesterday.

Yet the next sentences show the 'who'-headed phrase performing exactly the same function as the noun phrase that names alternately. Like the alternately-naming noun phrase, it is demarcated by commas. The phrases at issue are underlined in the next sentences:

Andrew, <u>who is my son</u>, [*relative adjective phrase*] *does not hold* opinions dispassionately.

> Andrew, <u>my son</u>, [*alternately-naming noun*] *does not hold* opinions dispassionately.

> Dr Charles Cooper, <u>who led a discussion on how to create partnerships between industry and research institutions</u>, *said* that people should take risks.

> Dr Charles Cooper,<u> leader in a discussion on how to create partnerships between industry and research institutions</u>, *said* that people should take risks.

Whom

'Whom' inevitably leads a relative-adjective phrase:

> The man whom Mary married *won* the jackpot.

> This author, whom you know well, *will address* the meeting.
>
> We *talked* about the girl whom he had met at the party.

(There is a more detailed discussion of 'who' and 'whom' in Chapter 3, 'The Simple Sentence'. That discussion provides the easy way to never failing to use 'who' and 'whom' correctly.) Relative phrases and the meaning-making comma that demarcates them, or does not demarcate them, are discussed in Chapter 8, 'The Comma'.)

Adjectives

An adjective is any word or phrase that describes a noun. There are two adjective types: 'attributive' and 'predicate'. The ways they describe nouns are markedly different:

Attributive adjectives

An adjective is attributive when it describes a noun in the same part of the sentence (subject or object/complement) as itself. The attributive adjectives in the following sentences are underlined:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
The man on the bridge	is eating	a green apple.
	COPULA	*COMPLEMENT*
He	was	a neat dresser.

Predicate adjectives in the copula sentence

The last sentence above shows that for an adjective to be a predicate adjective, it is not enough for it to be part of the complement of a copula sentence. Indeed, the predicate adjective has a singular function: It is a description assigned by the copula from the predicate (the complement) to the noun subject. It stands alone in the complement. That is, it does not describe a noun in the complement.

In the following sentences, the predicate adjective *rich* describes the noun subject *the man*; the predicate-adjective phrase *worse than I expected* describes the noun-phrase subject *doing time in prison*; and the predicate-adjective *prohibited* describes the noun-subject *smoking*:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	COPULA	*COMPLEMENT*
The man	used to be	rich.
Doing time in prison	was	worse than I expected.
Smoking	is	prohibited.

The predicate adjective in the copular-verb sentence

The copular verb is party to the description that a predicate-adjective performs. A template of meaning (i.e. not an alternative natural sentence) characterising this feat of joint description appears alongside each of the following copular-verb sentences (The basic sentence is underlined, the predicate adjective is rendered in red font, and the noun-subject it describes is rendered in green font.):

> Military honours ***come*** cheap in some countries ([*the come-cheap military honours*].

> The man ***married*** young [*the young-married man*].

> He ***acted*** angry to intimidate them [t*he angry-acting he*].

> The tutor ***goes*** easy on hard workers [*the goes-easy tutor*].

> We ***sit*** pretty on our fortune [*the pretty-sitting we*].

A curious thing about predicate adjectives and adverbs

When the predicate adjective is used with any part of **the one inherently copular verb** (any part of the infinitive 'to become', which is itself a derivative of the infinitive 'to be'), nobody is tempted to make an adverb of it: Nobody will turn 'angry' into

'angrily' in 'He became angry'. But when the predicate adjective is used with other copulas, many people are tempted to turn the adjective into an adverb. So 'crisp' in this sentence is often turned into 'crisply'. This is quite wrong:

> The chicken was fried crisply
> [DEFECTIVE SENTENCE].

No doubt, people do this because they think, wrongly, that 'was fried' is a verb here. But can one fry crisply? Hardly. We can speak crisply, and we can perform some actions crisply (e.g., a salute, a nod, a checking in). But we cannot fry crisply: frying can, with luck, turn out a crisp fowl or, luck having failed us, a crisp steak. But the process of frying cannot, by nature, be crisp. So let us be logical her:

> The chicken *was* fried crisp
> [COPULA SENTENCE].

A description of the verb 'was fried', properly adverbial, occurs only in a sentence where 'was fried' actually is a verb:

> The chicken *was fried* hastily
> [VERB SENTENCE].

'What' cannot be the header of an adjective phrase.

In this **defective** copula sentence:

> Something what I like *is* a burn upon my bike,
> [DEFECTIVE SENTENCE]

what I like tries to describes the noun *Something*. But it cannot do that happily, for one of the very few constants (one might even hazard 'rules') in English usage is that 'what' cannot head an adjective phrase: An adjective phrase header can be only 'that' or 'which' or nothing. So:

> Something *that I like* is a burn upon my bike,

or

Something I like is a burn upon my bike.

For a further discussion of 'that' and 'which', please read the relevant section in Chapter 3, The Simple Sentence.

The formations

There is Traditional Grammar terminology to name a variety of formations. Formations are not parts of speech; they are simply formations. All formations perform parts-of-speech functions:

The infinitive

The infinitive is the 'to' base of any verbial, e.g.: *to be, to sleep, to try, to fly, to entertain*. When an infinitive heads a phrase, that phrase is an infinitive phrase. Infinitives phrases perform as nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. The sentences that follow will illustrate this. The underlined sequences are the infinitive phrases. Note that these sequences perform various part-of-speech functions:

To try to do that [*noun-phrase subject*] **is** more than a little foolhardy.

That **was** a dress to beat all dresses [*adjective phrase*].

I **was** **trying** **to renovate** [*part of a verb phrase*] my house.*****

She **wore** the dress to please her grandmother [*adverb phrase: reason*].

Identifying the verb phrase when an infinite is part of it

This identification often poses problems. Indeed, I recall with an improper tough of glee a long public argument on this subject with quite a prominent grammarian. The sentence under analysis was:

I am trying to paint my house.

That prominent grammarian insisted that the verb here is *am trying*, and its object is *to paint my house*. 'No, no!,' I howled. 'We have a

verb phrase here that contains an infinitive!' Well, we do. It is *am trying to paint*. But first: *to paint my house* cannot possibly be the object of *am trying* here. If *am trying* is all there is to the verb, then it has to be a copular verb, for it denotes no activity of subject on object, nor vice-versa. Then one might try to argue that *to paint my house* is the complement that somehow clarifies the content of the copular verb *am trying*. (Please recall the discussion under the leading 'Copular-verb model of the basic sentence', in Chapter 1, 'What is a Sentence?'.) But that argument has to fail, for quite clearly, in the sentence to hand, the subject 'I' is perpetrating an act upon the object 'my house'. So this is unequivocally a verb sentence, not a copular-verb one. An easy demonstration of this fact follows.

Take the sentence:

I ***am painting*** my house.

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
I	am painting	my house.

My prominent grammarian opponent accepted this analysis. But she argued that 'am painting' denotes an activity different from 'am trying to paint'. And there I had her! For, if 'am trying to paint' denotes an activity, then it is a verb phrase. And it does denote an activity, every bit as much as 'am painting' does:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*OBJECT*
I	am trying to paint	my house.

It is essential to learn to recognise the verb phrase that includes an infinitive!

The trouble is that some proponents of Traditional Grammar are quite sure that a verb phrase is nothing other than the verb and its

auxiliaries: *have gone, had been gone, etc*. That position has it that a verb phrase is nothing more that a verb and the auxiliaries that determine their tenses. But a verb phrase is in fact much more than that: A verb phrase denotes the activity of the subject upon the object (active voice), or the object upon the subject (passive voice). An activity that derives from the infinitive 'to paint' is 'am panting'. And an activity that derives from the infinitive 'to try to paint' is 'am trying to paint'.

The next sentence has a construction similar to that of the one above, inasmuch as it contains a verb phrase:

> I ***like to pack*** the night before I travel.

Here is its analysis:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE	
	VERB	*ADVERB*
I	like to pack	the night before I travel.

The difference between this and the foregoing sentence is that this one is a not verb basic sentence in which the subject acts upon the object and vice-versa. Instead, it is a 'subject + verb' sentence' in which the verb phrase is described by an adverb of time (when) phrase.

The present participle

The present participle is the *-ing* ended word:

> playing, speaking, walking, editing, swearing, *etc*.

Present participles function as any part of speech. They are underlined in these sentences:

> Skiing [*noun subject*] **is** what I do best.

> I ***bought*** some pretty playing [*attributive adjective*] cards.

Listening [*header, noun-phrase subject*] to the dawn chorus is an inspiration.

We ***were playing*** [*part of verb phrase*] hockey.

The child ***ran*** crying *adverb describing the subject's action 'ran'* to his mother .

The past participle

The past participle is the *-ed* or *-en* ended form of regular verbs:

eaten, slapped, woken, played, aroused, forsaken, *etc*.

Irregular verbs tend to end with *-t*:

spoilt, hoist, slept.

They function as nouns, adjectives and as parts of verb phrases:

The privileged [*noun subject*] ***are being*** too hard on the poor.

Those broken [*attributive adjective*] promises ***left*** him defeated [predicate adjective].

The burglar ***had eaten*** [*verb phrase*] the chocolate cake.

The braggart ***was hoist*** [*verb phrase*] by his own petard.

Gerunds and gerundives

The term **'gerund'** names the **nouns** that have an infinitive construction:

To play the fool (*noun phrase*) is not my favourite game,

or a present-participle construction:

Playing the fool (*noun phrase*) is fun sometimes.

or a past-particle construction:

The **stricken**/the **maimed** (*nouns*) are well cared for.

The **gerundive** names the **adjectives** that have an infinitive or a participle construction:

> The dress **to die for** (*adjective phrase: infinitive construction*) is too expensive for me.
>
> This is the best **ironing** (*adjective, present-participle construction*) board I have ever owned.
>
> His must be the worst-**written** (*adjective, pat-participle construction*) book ever.

(There is not a great deal to be gained with the gerund and gerundive distinction. It is useful only for making sure that we do not mistake gerund-formed nouns and gerundive-formed adjectives for verbs.)

Prepositions and the transitive/intransitive verbs

Prepositions are the short 'pointer' words:

> to, with, by, in, on, against, over, etc.

that attach to a variety of syntactic units. They are interesting chiefly for the fact that they always accompany intransitive verbs and never transitive verbs:

> Transitive verbs: Bob *likes/met/prefers/* Susan.
>
> Intransitive verbs: Bob **spoke** *to*/ **dined** with/ **voted** *against* Susan.

English verbs are said to be inherently transitive or intransitive. This is not a rule of any kind. Rather, the purport of the activity that a verb denotes is bound by logic to be self-sufficient (transitive) or preposition-dependant (intransitive) verb. An intransitive verb cannot make the transition between itself and its object without the help of a preposition. Clearly, it is logically possible to '*like* Susan' (*like* here is a self-sufficient, or transitive, verb that does not need a preposition). But it is logically impossible to 'spoke Susan'. 'Spoke ' is an intransitive verb and needs a preposition to connect with, or transit to, its object: Hence, 'He *spoke to* Susan' (intransitive verb), not 'He spoke Susan', and 'He *likes* Susan' (transitive verb), not 'He

likes to Susan'. So 'transitive' and 'intransitive' are the characteristics of verbs. And importantly, they have a meaning-making function:

> (i) I <u>met</u> Mary.

> (ii) I <u>met with</u> an accident.

In (i) there is a transitive verb, and in (ii) an intransitive verb. The intransitive verb in (i) derives from the infinitive 'to meet' and has the sense of planned or accidental meeting up/getting together.

The intransitive verb in (ii) derives from the infinitive 'to meet with', which means 'come upon/encounter a situation'.

Which preposition we choose to accompany a transitive verb depends on the meaning-making purpose for which we use a verb. For instance, we choose 'with' to go with 'deal' when we want to say that we have dealings with someone or something:

> I <u>deal with</u> autistic children.

But if we are specifying what 'dea'' denotes in our use of it, such as in this sentence:

> I <u>deal out</u> punishment as I see fit,

we cause 'deal' to mean 'give out', or 'distribute'.

Proficient speakers of English do not have difficulty with the transitive and intransitive verb usage. The only exception arises with the infinitive 'to meet'. There is a strong contemporary inclination to say 'I met with Mary', especially when the meeting is somehow a formal context, such as in a work place. The idea here is that 'met with' is somehow more democratic than 'met'. But this is not an issue of syntax. It is rather syntax abused by ideological zealotry.

The myth of 'word classes'

There is an unfortunately wide-spread belief that English words are willing to lend themselves to division into 'classes' on ground that they look like nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives. They do not lend themselves to that: English words are a classless society. Efforts to pretend that they exist in class-confines inevitably leads to confusion. That is evident in a work that means to teach grammar to primary-school students. (Before the vicious barrage that follows, it is wise to advise the reader that no particular author is under its attack: the work under fire is the output of a government-appointed committee. As with all committee-designed products, this one is no doubt the camel that was meant to be a horse.)

The work proposes the concept 'verb chains', and illustrates it with a text in which certain words are rendered in bold type. Those words, allegedly, form the verb chain. Well, some of them are verbs (*was raining*, *sat*, *stared*); the others are not. And one verb, *stayed*, is not rendered in bold, and it is thus declared not a verb, never mind that it is a verb.

> At playtime it **was raining** so they stayed in. Mrs Johnson **sat** at her desk, frowning. She **sipped** her mug of coffee slowly, **taking** each sip into her mouth and **swilling** it around, then **sucking** it back through her teeth with a sharp intake. Chris **stared** at his teacher.
>
> *Grammar For Writing,* Department for Education and Employment, UK, 2000, p. 35.

(One wonders why *frowning* was not highlighted too, since every other present-participle that is not functioning as a verb is highlighted along with the verbs.) Given that the idea 'verb chains' is proposed, and that the foregoing text is an illustration of what verb chains are, why were students not told that *frowning* describes how

Mrs Johnson *sat*, and that *swilling it*, and *sucking it* each describe how she *sipped*? Such information would have achieved a neat illustration of how *-ing* words attach to verbs to function as adverbs. This would have been firm ground for the further instruction that verbs denote actions, and adverbs describe them.

Grammar for Writing did nothing like that. Instead, it perpetrated the gross error of tagging several adverbs as verbs. Then the concluding paragraph of the text quoted above claims that the adjective phrase *for blushing* is the verb *blushing*. (It, too, is highlighted to 'show' that it is a verb):

I **could win** prizes for **blushing**, he **thought.**

Had students been told that *for blushing* describes the noun *prizes* (i.e., what kind of 'prizes' are at issue), and is therefore an adjective, a nice lot of information would have been conveyed about the capacity of some *-ing*-ending words (the present-participles) to describe nouns and verbs. But none of that happened. Instead, students were enveloped in the obfuscating fog of erroneous parts-of-speech taggings, for no better reason than that somebody somewhere had the nutty idea that *-ing* words belong to the word class 'verbs'.

This sort of thing is not just an error of mistaking one part of speech for another. It is far more pernicious: *Grammar for Writing* proposes that present participles are always verbs, or that they are verbs because they are present participles. Not only is this proposition palpably erroneous but it works to knee-cap even the very keenest students' best efforts to understand English syntax.

* * *