

This is the first of two chapters on the structure of the clause. The focus of this chapter is on complements of the verb, while Ch. 8 is mainly concerned with adjuncts. We exclude from consideration here complements with the form of subordinate clauses: these are dealt with in Ch. 11 (finite clauses) and Ch. 14 (non-finites).

1 Elements of clause structure: an overview

The major functions in the structure of the clause are the **predicator (P)**, **complements of the predicator (C)**, and **adjuncts (A)**, as illustrated in:

[1] *He | always | reads | the paper | before breakfast.*
 C A P C A

The predicator is a special case of the head function. Complements are more central to the grammar than adjuncts: they are more closely related to the verb and more clearly differentiated by their syntactic properties. Those in this example are, more specifically, subject and object respectively, two sharply distinct syntactic functions. Adjuncts, on the other hand, tend to be differentiated primarily by their semantic properties – *always* is an adjunct of frequency, *before breakfast* an adjunct of temporal location, and so on. Complements are dependents of the verb (or VP), while adjuncts may be dependents (modifiers), as in this example, or supplements, elements that are more loosely attached to the clause (see Ch. 15, §5).

Many grammars restrict the term ‘complement’ to non-subject elements. The view taken here is that although subjects do have special properties, they also have important affinities with the object and other complements.

It is a common practice to use V rather than P in representing clause structure, with V therefore used for both a function and a category. Such a dual use of V is unlikely to create problems, but we nevertheless prefer to maintain here the distinction between function names and category names that we systematically draw elsewhere, and hence we follow the also quite widespread practice of using P for the function and restricting V to the category.

In clauses containing an auxiliary verb, such as *She may like it*, some grammars analyse auxiliary + lexical verb as forming a ‘verb group’ unit realising (in our terms) a single P function. Under the analysis presented in this book, *may* is the predicator of the main clause, and *like* that of a subordinate clause functioning as complement of *may*. The contrast between these two analyses is discussed in Ch. 14, §4.2. In this chapter we will for the most part avoid the issue by concentrating on examples without auxiliary verbs.