



English Department

3rd year students

The Essay

3Lectuer

Word order and Common Mistakes

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Word order

Word order refers to the way **words** are arranged in a sentence. The standard **word order** in English is: Subject + Verb + Object /Qualifying Phrases; as closely as possible. Though there are certain exceptions, a subject may only be separated from its verb by an adverb of frequency. (See below.)

(Yesterday he, He yesterday) found (in his garden a coin, a coin in his garden.)

I received (from my cousin an invitation to a party, an invitation to a party from my cousin.)

Word Order

- You may remember from our first lesson that different languages have different orders for **subject**, **object** and **verb**

Subject—Verb—Object (SVO): **I saw them**

Subject—Object—Verb (SOV): **I them saw**

Verb—Subject—Object (VSO): **Saw I them**

Verb—Object—Subject (VOS): **Saw them I**

Object—Verb—Subject (OVS): **Them saw I**

Object—Subject—Verb (OSV): **Them I saw**

Word Order

- Most languages show a preference for having the **subject** before the **verb**, and having the **subject** before the **object**
- Why do you think this might be?
- The evidence suggests that these types of language are somehow ‘easier’
- However, we don’t yet have enough data to say what makes this easier, or in what way

Word Order

- Likewise, in some languages **adjectives** come before the noun, while in others they follow it

black coffee (English)

schwarzer Kaffee (German)

kurodesu kōhī (Japanese)

café **noir** (French)

caife **dubh** (Irish)

coffi **du** (Welsh)

Word Order

- We can say that in relation to their **objects**, **verbs** and **prepositions** are both heads
- The **verb** and the **object** that depends on it form a single unit, the verb phrase, with the **verb** as the head of the phrase
- The same is true for **prepositions** and prepositional phrases
- The patterns that we see in word order can then be expressed as a single statement
- In any given language, heads will tend to have the same order with respect to their dependants

Word Order

- So far, when we have talked about word order we have only been looking at a single, “basic” word order for each language
- However, many languages allow you to vary this basic word order for different reasons

Word Order

- Even in English, you can sometimes add emphasis just by changing the order of words

Mary's alright, but **John I hate**

- However, examples like this are unusual enough that we can still say the usual order for English is **SVO**

Word Order

- One very common use for different word orders is to distinguish different types of speech act

Mary is so happy. (statement)

How happy is Mary? (question)

How happy Mary is! (exclamation)

Questions

- In other languages, this is the only way of asking questions
- In Amharic (spoken in Ethiopia), all questions have the same word order as statements

Mariyami desitenya nati

‘Mary is happy’

Mariyami desitenya nati?

‘Is Mary happy?’

Sentence Structure

- What do these differences mean?
- Even though we see the same word orders in Arabic and Greek, the similarities are just on the surface
- There's a sense in which the verb in Arabic is actually in a "different" place from Greek, even if all you can see on the surface is that they are both before their subjects
- It almost seems that in Arabic the verb is somewhere where the subject can't_i "reach" it

Sentence Structure

- Studying these sorts of similarities and differences between languages can let us see patterns that exist “below the surface” of language
- When we look at these things, we are studying syntax
- Syntax is the system of rules that a language has for combining words into sentences



Common Mistakes

Writing and speaking in English as a non-native speaker has its own set of problems. Grammatical errors come in many forms and can easily confuse and obscure meaning. Some common errors are with prepositions most importantly, subject verb agreement, tenses, punctuation, spelling and other parts of speech.

Let's look at each one of these sentences .

Incorrect: I am having four brothers and three sisters.

Correct: I have four brothers and three sisters.

Present continuous tense cannot be used for pragmatic situations such as this. Simple present tense should be used.

Incorrect: He do not have a laptop.

Correct: He does not have a laptop.

Do not should not be used after the subject pronoun (He, She, It).

Incorrect: That only, she is very arrogant.

Correct: That was what I said. She is very arrogant.

Saying "That only" was the wrong way to emphasize what the speaker has already said.

Incorrect: He did not wrote the test last week.

Correct: He did not write the test last week.

The helping verb 'did' is followed by the present tense of the verb and not the past tense form.

Incorrect: I came to office by walk.

Correct: I came to office on foot.

We can say "by car", "by bike", "by bus", "by train" and "by flight". However, we cannot say "by walk", as it is the "foot" which is being used to travel and not "walk".

Incorrect: He has white hairs.

Correct: He has grey hair.

All the hair on one's head is considered uncountable and so, "hairs" is almost always