Chapter 5:

Interrogative and Imperative Clauses

Chapters 5 through 7 have two purposes: (1) to introduce a wide variety of new grammatical phenomena and (2) to model a method of critical analysis that you should learn to apply to any grammatical phenomena not covered in this book, whenever you might have the need to do so.

The issue is this: **How do we discover grammatical analyses as opposed to applying grammatical analyses** already discovered by someone else? There are basically two steps involved: (1) **Evaluate** any and all English sentences that you hear or read, asking whether you could analyze (diagram) them using the patterns and choices that you already know; i.e., ask yourself whether there are new parts of speech, phrase types, or clause types, or new functional positions for already-known parts of speech, or phrase types, or clause types. (2) If you do discover any such phenomena in sentences that you hear or read, then **invent** any appropriate functional patterns or new positions in old patterns, and **invent** any formal categories (parts of speech, phrase types, or clause types) that are needed to explain the new grammatical phenomena that you have discovered.

It might not be a bad idea to reread the Preface of this book before reading further in this chapter. In the Preface, I used an analogy comparing the study of grammar (a journey into the English language) with the study of plants in the Amazon Rain Forest of South America. You are now at the point in your journey into grammar where you need to pay less attention to me, the tour guide who has been pointing out various species for your observation from our grammatical tour boat. Now, you must go ashore and start looking for and classifying your own specimens. Let us begin by venturing beyond the safe and comfortable domain of the declarative clause, which has been the only type of clause that we have so far examined.

YES/NO INTERROGATIVE CLAUSES

Here is another way of looking at the issue: Ask yourself this question: “If my professor gave me the sentence in 5.1 to diagram as part of a test at the end of the Chapter 4, could I have diagrammed it? And if I couldn’t diagram it, what is it about it that I couldn’t diagram?” And then the question becomes “How should it be diagrammed? (What new formal and functional grammatical categories do we need to invent in order to be able to diagram it?)” Here is the sentence:

5.1

Has John taken the tapes?

Remember, the study of syntax is primarily (and in the end, most interestingly) about making up grammatical explanations, not just about learning what some book asserts about how words are arranged into phrases and clauses. Grammar as a practice (like the practice of law or the practice of medicine) is about these questions: What is form? What is function? What are the forms and what are the functions in the sentence We are now analyzing?

So, what is it about 5.1 that you cannot now explain? Are there any new parts of speech in the sentence? It would seem not. Here is the sentence with the part-of-speech label of each word written above it:
When we look at the sentence with the part-of-speech labels above the words, we immediately notice something most unusual about the ordering of the words: the noun John appears between the perfect auxiliary has and the verb taken. In fact, it does not take much effort to identify John as the SUBJECT and the tapes as the DIRECT OBJECT, but what has happened to the PREDICATER has taken? Well, it appears that there is an auxiliary (has) as the very first word in the sentence. And we have a question mark at the end of the sentence. We have not observed either of these facts in sentences discussed so far in this book. That’s part of what syntax is about: Why, in fact, do we put a question mark at the end of sentences like 5.1 but a period after other sentences? Remember, our guiding research question is always this: What do we (i.e., speakers of English) know about the meaningful relationships among the words in 5.1 that a grammar diagram needs to represent and thus explain? Let’s just look at some things that we do know about this sentence.

We do know that 5.1 has a SUBJECT noun phrase, with a HEAD noun John. And we do know that the tapes is a DIRECT OBJECT noun phrase with a DETERMINER definite article (the) and a HEAD noun (tapes). But we have this problem: the verb phrase seems to be split in two. Some grammarians have suggested analyzing sentences like this by saying, “The verb phrase is has John taken and the SUBJECT noun phrase John is inside that verb phrase.” But that is not the approach that most grammarians take. Most grammarians explain it by giving the perfect auxiliary (has) a special clause-level status; i.e., they make it a separate constituent of the clause and claim that its function (position) gives it the job of indicating that the sentence is in fact a question (a type of interrogative clause as opposed to a declarative clause). But even while the perfect auxiliary (has) is playing this important clause-level role, it is also playing the familiar functional role of PERFECT HELPING PREDICATER in relation to the MAIN PREDICATER verb taken -- the same role that it would have in the declarative clause (John has taken the tapes). Take a look at the diagram in 5.3 to see how we propose that we can represent these facts:

![Diagram](5.3)

There are several things to take note of in the above diagram: (1) The label at the top of the clause (ynintcl>) indicates that it is a yes/no interrogative clause (not a declarative clause). (2) The diagram has a functional position named OPERATE/PREFIX HELPING PREDICATER (O:/PERFHP:) that is attached directly to the clause and that contains the perfect auxiliary has. (3) The diagram includes a verb phrase whose MAIN PREDICATER verb is an –en participle (in declarative clauses, when verbs appear alone, they must have a present or past tense inflectional suffix attached).
As to (1), we assign the label (ynintcl>) because this type of clause has an obligatory position containing an OPERATER preceding the subject. We cannot call it a declarative clause, because declarative clauses have no such position. As to (2) we label the functional position occupied by the perfaux… has as an OPERATER because it has the clause function of indicating this clause is indeed a question and not a statement; however, we simultaneously label the perfaux… has as a PERFHP: because it retains the same meaningful relationship to the MP: v… taken that it would have in the declarative clause, John has taken the tapes. Conceivably, the English language could require us to add a word or phrase in order to indicate that a given clause is a question rather than a statement, but this type of interrogative clause is very efficient in English since no additional words are needed; only a change in word order is needed to signal that the speaker is asking a question rather than making a statement. As to (3), the fact that an –en participle can occur as the only constituent of a verb phrase is a phenomenon that eventually needs explaining (perhaps we might need to go so far as to posit the existence of an interrogative verb phrase with patterns and choices that are different from those of the verb phrase in declarative clauses).

The use of multiple function labels such as O:/PERFHP: is something that we have come up with to explain complex relational meanings like those manifested by the perfect auxiliary has in the sentence we are discussing. The British linguists who developed this system of analysis refer to it only as an OPERATOR (I have adopted that term from them). An even better term might be QUESTION INDICATOR. The important point is that the word order is different from that of a declarative clause, and we thus have a reason to say that this is a different kind of clause: an interrogative clause, not a declarative clause. In a declarative clause, there is a SUBJECT and an intact PREDICATER, in that order. In an interrogative clause like 5.1, an OPERATER (consisting of part of the corresponding declarative clause’s PREDICATER) precedes the SUBJECT.

In fact, there are two major types of questions in English. The first are the so-called “yes or no” questions like 5.1: You ask, Has John taken the tapes? we answer, Yes. Or we answer No. But if you ask, What did Bill build? What did Mary do? or Who did Harry marry?, we can’t answer Yes or No. So we’re going to call questions like 5.1 yes/no interrogative clauses. In every yes/no interrogative clause, there is an element preceding the SUBJECT that would be in a vp> or lvp> in a declarative clause. Here is a diagram, in 5.3, of the sentence in 5.1, and 5.4 through 5.7 contain diagrams of other such yes/no interrogative clauses.
INTERROGATIVE AND IMPERATIVE CLAUSES

5.3

Have John taken the tapes?

5.4

Hasn’t John taken the tapes?

5.5

Has John not taken the tapes?
In each of the above diagrammed yes/no interrogative clauses, there is an element preceding the SUBJECT that would be in a vp> or lvp> in a declarative clause. Since this element retains a functional connection to elements in the vp> or lvp>, we give it the same functional label that it would have in a declcl> (e.g., PERFHP: in 5.3), but since it is clearly in a different position than the label PERFHP: indicates, we have to show this. We do so by also labeling it an OPERATER (O:). This highlights the fact that it also functions as an indicator that such sentences are questions, not statements. (Note that in sentence 5.4 the contracted negative, -n't, is treated as a part of the word hasn't -- as if it were an inflectional suffix -- and not given its own branch and part-of-speech label.) In such sentences, the negative meaning is simply part of the word containing the contracted negative.
WH INTERROGATIVE CLAUSES

These questions are not answered by "Yes" or "No." They do not, like yes/no interrogative clauses, ask the listener to verify the truth of the declarative clause that corresponds to them; instead they ask the listener to supply a missing part. This missing part is signaled by a "wh" word that occurs first in the sentence (regardless of what its logical function is). Notice that the word what (an interrogative pronoun) in 5.8 stands in for a missing DO:, who (also an interpro...), in 5.9 stands in for a missing S:, why, an interrogative adverb (intadv...) in 5.10 stands in for a missing CC:, and whose, an interrogative possessive article (intpossart...), in 5.11 stands in for a missing D:.

5.8

5.9
Notice that wh interrogative clauses, like yes/no interrogative clauses, also have OPERATERS. Take special note that even in a sentence like 5.9, where the question word is the SUBJECT and the word order corresponds exactly to that of the declarative clause counterpart, the position of the first auxiliary is labeled an OPERATER. Notice also, that in all wh interrogative clauses, the phrase containing the question word has the additional functional label of WH: (for WH INTERROGATIVE MARKER) to show that it has the added function of signaling that the sentence is a wh interrogative clause.
TAG INTERROGATIVE CLAUSES

5.12

John has taken the tapes, hasn’t he?

5.13

The driver did not finish the race, did she?
IMPERATIVE CLAUSES

5.14

impcl>

P:                    DO:

vp>                  np>

MP:             D:            H:
v…            dart…      n…

Open            the          door.

5.15

impcl>

P:                    DO:

vp>                  np>

MP:             D:            H:
v…            dart…      n…

Open            the          door.

5.16

impcl>

P:                    DO:

vp>                  np>

PROHP:      SN:           MP:            D:                H:
proaux…     neg….       v…            dart…           n…

Do            not            open            the              door.
5.17

Don’t stop.

5.18 and 5.19

Open the door, will you?

Open the door, won’t you?

5.20

Be waiting at the station.
INTERROGATIVE AND IMPERATIVE CLAUSES

5.21

PRACTICE (DIAGRAMMING INTERROGATIVE AND IMPERATIVE CLAUSES)

Diagram the following sentences:

(a) When were those army generals testifying about the war?

(b) Shouldn’t you try to dedicate some time to that cause?

(c) Don’t allow me to stand in the way of electing Nancy president of the club.

FEEDBACK (DIAGRAMMING INTERROGATIVE AND IMPERATIVE CLAUSES)

(a)
Shouldn’t you try to dedicate some time to that cause?
Don’t allow me to stand in the way of electing Nancy president of the club.