Syntax

Syntax

Language is the means by which thought is communicated from one mind to another, the means by which one mind is able to think with another.[1] Language is accomplished in the spoken form, sometimes referred to as the vernacular and the written form identified by a system of written symbols grouped together that form thought. Language is not designed in some happenstance, loose, set of rules, it has a universal set of fundamentals; laws that govern its use. If these laws are broken, then the thought does not get transmitted, it does not make sense and the meaning lost. God created language so that He could communicate with His creation, so that He could reveal Himself to mankind via special revelation. Adam was formed mature both physically and mentally there was nothing he lacked – including complex language. Archeology reveals the earliest written documents as having all the complexity, all the complex forms of any modern language. In fact, it seems that the newer languages are less complex. The idea of the evolutionist that man started language by grunting and drawing pictures just does not harmonize with the archeological record. How does one explain the complex syntax of the earliest of documents we have available today? Syntax has to do with grammatical relations between words. Syntax deals with the forms that thought may take in the process of expression.

At the heart of the construction of a complete thought is the sentence. For example, "the disciples went to sea" expresses a complete thought made up of a group of words. There are two basic elements that make up the sentence, the designation of the object – "the disciples", and the assertion about the object – "went to sea." The first element we call the subject, and the second the predicate. There are two basic elements required, the noun and the verb.

The Phrase

A phrase is the basic unit of thought. There are noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases and adjective phrases. For example, the following are noun phrases:

- Disciples!
- the disciples
- the Jewish disciples
- the twelve Jewish disciples

---

[1] Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto:Macmillian, 1957), p. 60

Examples of verb phrases are:

- went to the sea
- ate bread and drank wine
- read from the Scriptures

The Clause

A clause is a group of phrases that includes at least one verb phrase and one predicate phrase. The following examples include the phrases from above:

Noun Phrase	Verb Phrase
The disciples	went to the sea
The Jewish disciples	ate bread and drank wine
The twelve Jewish disciples	read from the Scriptures

Sentence Structure

The sentence can be structured as simple, compound, complex, and compound/complex.

A Simple Sentence

A simple sentence contains a single clause. For example, "Joe hit the ball" is a complete simple sentence. It contains the subject – Joe; the verb – hit; and the object – the ball. A complete sentence can contain only a verb and the noun. For example, the shortest sentence in the Bible is "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

A Compound Sentence

A compound sentence contains two or more clauses linked by a coordinate conjunction. For example, "Jack hit the ball, and Jill watched." The distinctive feature of a compound clause is

that no clause is subordinate to another. The clauses are coordinate or *paratactic* (arranged alongside)[2].

A complex sentence

A complex sentence contains a main clause and at least one subordinate clause. For example, "Joe ran fast because he saw a snake." This subordinate relation is called *hypotactic* (arranged under).

Sentence Structure
There are four main sentence structures in English.

1. Subject   **2. Verb**   **3. Other Stuff[3]**

Action Verbs

1. Subject	+	*Transitive[4] Verb (active)*	+ *Direct Object*
John		Hit	the ball.
Subject		*Transitive Verb (passive)*	*Actor Phrase*
The ball		was hit	by John.
2. Subject	+	*Intransitive[5] Verb*	*Adverb or Phrase*
The ball		Sailed	over the wall.

No-Action Verbs

3. Subject	+	*To be*	+ *Predicate Adjective*
The pitch		Was	fast.
			+ Predicate Noun
The pitch		Was	a curve ball.
			+ Adverb or Phrase
The ball		Is	in the catcher's mit

---

[2] Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto:Macmillian, 1957), p.269

[3] This table adapted from C. Edward Good, *Whose Grammar Book is this Anyway?* (New York:MJF Books, 2002), p. 26. This is an excellent resource to have on hand for English grammar.

[4] A Transitive verb is an action verb that is capable of having a direct object. The test for a transitive verb is to ask "can I [verb] somebody or something?"

[5] An intransitive verb needs a preposition or other word to go-between the verb and the noun. The words usually show where, when, how, or why the action took place (e.g. John *runs* across the field).

4. Subject	+	Linking Verb	+	Predicate Adjective
John		Feels		nervous.
			+	Predicate Noun
John		Seems		a natural hitter.
			+	Adverb or Phrase
John		Looks		out of sorts.

Nouns

Greek nouns, as English nouns, are words used to name a person, place, or thing. The Greek noun contains case, gender, and number.

The Case

Case has to do with the function of the noun as it relates to the verb or to other parts of the sentence. Greek has eight distinctive cases, but of these eight cases, one only has to remember four inflectional forms (or five when the vocative form is different from the nominative).

Inflectional Form	Case Name	Root Idea
First	Nominative Vocative	Designation Address
Second	Genitive Ablative	Description Separation/Origin
Third	Dative Locative Instrumental	Reception Location/Position Means/Instrument
Fourth	Accusative	Limitation

1. *Nominative*. The nominative is the case of designation. It is the "naming" case. The nominative serves as the subject of the sentence or clause. It is translated as υιός "a son," or when used with the article ὁ υιός "the son."
2. *Genitive*. The genitive is the case of description. The genitive specifies or qualifies the word it modifies. It expresses possession and is translated as υιόυ "of a son," or when used with the article του υιόυ "of the son."

3. *Ablative*. The ablative is the case of separation or origin. It uses the same form as the genitive and is translated υιόυ "from a son," or when used with the article του υιόυ "from the son."
4. *Dative*. The dative is the case of reception. It is translated as υιόω "to a son," or when used with the article τω υιόω "to the son."
5. *Locative*. The locative is the case of location or position. It uses the same form as the dative and is translated as υιόω "in a son," or when used with the article τω υιόω "in the son."
6. *Instrumental*. The instrumental is the case of means or instrument. It uses the same form as the dative and is translated as υιόω "with or by a son," or when used with the article τω υιόω "with or by the son."
7. *Accusative*. The accusative is the case of limitation. The action extends to and is limited to the object. Its main usage is with the direct object of the phrase. It is translated as υιόν "son," or when used with the article τον υιόν "the son."
8. *Vocative*. The vocative is the case of address. In the plural the case always has the same form as the nominative, but in the singular the forms are often different. It is translated as υίέ "Son,…"

Nominative

The nominative is the case of designation. It is referred to as the naming case and has two major functions, the subject nominative and the predicate nominative. The primary use of the nominative is to identify the subject of the phrase. In Greek, the verb expresses its own subject so when a noun subject is supplied it is in apposition[6] with the subject supplied. In other words, a phrase does not need a nominative noun; the subject may be supplied with the verb. In the New Testament approximately thirty percent of the nouns are in the nominative case making it the dominate case.

Subject Nominative

The chief use of the nominative is to specify that which produces the action or presents the state expressed by a finite verb. Another way of saying this is that the subject is the topic of the sentence. The subject noun phrase can be constructed in different ways using the nominative case. The following are examples of subjects of the noun phrase[7]:

1. Using a noun, with or without an article present.

   Mark 1:13: **οἱ ἄγγελοι** διηκονουν αὐτῷ "**the angels** were ministering to him."

2. Using an adjective, with or without an article present.

   Matthew 11:5: **τυφλοι** αναβλεπουσιν "**blind people** receive their sight."

3. Using a participle, with or without an article present (but usually with the article).

   John 3:36: **ὁ πιστευων** εἰς τον υἱον ἔχει ζωην αἰωνιον "**The one believing** in the Son has eternal life."

4. Using an article (without the noun present) and δε.

   Matthew 16:14: **οἱ** δε εἶπαν "and **they** said"

---

[6] Apposition means construction in which two elements are placed side by side, with one element serving to define or modify the other. For example, in the phrase "John loves," the name "John" is in apposition to "he loves," but one could write "John, he loves," it is just not as smooth.

[7] See Richard Young, *Intermediate Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville:Brodman & Holman, 1994), p. 11 for a full description.

5. Using an article (without the noun present) and a prepositional phrase.

   Matthew 24:16: οἱ εν τῇ Ιουδαια φευγετωσαν εἰς τα ὄρη "let **the ones** in Judea flee to the mountains."

6. Using a relative pronoun clause.

   Matthew 10:38: ὅς οὐ λαμβανει ψον σταυρον αὐτοῦ και ἀκολουθεῖ ὀπισω μου, οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος "**The one who** does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me"

Predicate Nominative

The predicate nominative will either identify the subject (John is the boss) or qualify the subject (John is a boss). The verb is usually a state of being verb like the "to be" verb ειμι, as in 1 John 4:8: ὁ θεος ἀγαπη ἐστιν "God is love"; sometimes γινομαι, as in John 1:14: ὁ λογος σαρξ ἐγενετο "the word became flesh"; and occasionally ὑπαρχω, as in Luke 8:41: οὗτος ἄρχων τῆς συναγωγῆς ὑπῆρχεν "This one was a ruler of the synagogue."[8]

When two nominatives appear in a sentence one is usually the subject nominative and the other is the predicate nominative. In this case the noun with the article will be the subject; in English, this is the one placed first. For example, John 1:1: θεος ἦν ὁ λογος "the Word was God," not "God was the Word."[9]

Distinguishing the Subject from the Predicate

The general principle for distinguishing the subject from the predicate nominative is summarized as follows:

1. The subject can be a pronoun (whether contained in the verb or not).

   Matthew. 3:17: **οὗτος** ἐστιν ὁ υἱος μου ὁ ἀγαπητος "**this** is my beloved Son".

2. The subject will be the nominative with the article (called articular).

   John 4:24: πνεῦμα **ὁ θεος** "**God** is spirit".

3. The subject will be a proper name.

---

[8] Richard Young, *Intermediate Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville:Brodman & Holman, 1994), p. 11
[9] Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1996), p. 41

Luke 11:30: ἐγενετο Ἰωνᾶς τόις Νινευιταις σημέιον "**Jonah** became a sign to the Nivevites"

Nominative Absolute

The nominative absolute is called the *independent nominative* in the older grammars. By calling this nominative independent the sense is apparent since grammatically it is unrelated to other elements in the sentence. Dana and Mantey write, "When an idea is conceived independent of any particular verbal relations, the expression of it may be left standing alone in the nominative, with some descriptive or explanatory phrase added. Thus employed the nominative names an *idea* rather than an *object*."[10] Examples are as follows:

1. *Exclamations*. Exclamatory interjections function to call attention to something or to express emotion. Mark 3:34: Ἴδε ἡ μητηρ μου και οἱ ἀδελφοι μου "Behold, My **mother** and **brothers**".

2. *Titles*. Nominative used to designate books. Matthew 1:1 βιβλος γενεσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ "**The book** of the genealogy of Jesus Christ".

3. *Salutations*. Nominatives used in salutations are used in the personal letters. Col. 1:1-2: Παῦλος ἀποστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ … χαρις ὑμῖν και εἰρηνη ἀπο θεοῦ πατρος ἡμῶν "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ … grace and peace to you from God our Father."

Other Uses of the Nominative

Some authors identify more uses of the nominative than others but in general there are identified four additional uses.

Nominative of Apposition. When one nominative is followed by another which explains or identifies additional information about the first. A good example is Mark 2:7: τις δυναται ἀφιέαι ἁμαρτιας εἰ μη εἷς ὁ θεος "Who is able to forgive sins except one, God?" This is identified by the number εἷς in the nominative case followed by the nominative of apposition ὁ θεος (cf., Mark 15:14; Luke 1:24; Rev. 1:5).

Nominative of Exclamation. When it is desired to stress a thought the nominative is used without the verb. This usage is like an emotional outburst. Notice Rom. 7:24: ταλαιπωρος ἐγω ἄνθρωπος "O wretched man [that] I am!" See also Mark 3:34; Rom. 11:33.

---

[10] Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto:Macmillian, 1957), p. 70

Nominative of Address. The nominative of address is used to designate the person addressed. It functions like the vocative. An example is Luke 8:54: Ἡ παῖς, ἔγειρε "Child, arise." See also Eph. 5:25; Mark 9:19.

Nominative of Appellation. When a proper name or title is mentioned, it is not unusual to find it in the nominative case instead of the case expected by the construction. Since the nominative is the naming case, it is not unusual to put proper names in this case regardless of contextual relations. For example, Luke 2:21: ἐκληθη το ὄνομα αὐτῦ Ἰησῦς "His name was called Jesus." In this example Jesus is in the nominative case rather than the accusative as would be expected. See also Luke 19:29; 21:37; John 1:6; 3:1; Act. 7:40; 2 Cor. 12:18; Rev. 9:11.

Proverbial Expressions. Occasionally, the writer uses the nominative in proverbial expressions that have no finite verb. This use looks like a fragment but the saying has a fixed history, an idiom. For example, 2 Peter 2:22: κυων ἐπιστρεψας ἐπι το ἴδιον ἐξεραμα "a dog returns to its vomit."