



Functions of Grammatical Uses and Lexis in the Sentence

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Abstract: *This article describes the role of grammatical uses and structures in the sentence, discusses how grammatical structures are used to convey meaning. The article also highlights the role of lexis in learning foreign languages.*

Key words: *grammatical structures, written language, prefixes and suffixes, individual words, grammatical terms, figurative meaning, imaginative meaning, context, vocabulary item, basic words, parts of speech.*

There are many grammatical terms to describe different grammatical structures. We find grammatical structures not just in different forms of the parts of speech but also at the level of sentences, phrases and clauses. We can also talk about how words are formed through word building. One important way in which English forms words is through the use of two kinds of affixes (a group of letters added at the beginning or end of a base word which change its meaning): prefixes and suffixes. Affixes can give grammatical information, showing whether a verb is singular, for example, or marking a tense, parts of verbs, the plural of nouns, possessives, for example, talked, goes, going, books, girl's. Many other prefixes and suffixes are used in English to make new words, by changing their part of speech and adding a meaning to the base word, for example disappear, careful, friendly.

Grammatical uses refer to how grammatical structures are used to convey (or communicate) meaning. A particular grammatical structure, for example, the present continuous (or progressive), does not always have the same meaning. Its meaning or use comes from the context in which it is used. For example, "She is doing her homework" might mean:

- a) she is doing her homework now/at the moment: the present continuous used for actions at the moment of speaking.
- b) she has decided to do her homework at a specific time in the future. The reader or listener understands from the context that this refers to an arrangement for the future, for example, "What is she doing this evening?" Here, the present continuous used for plans and intentions.
- c) she has improved her study habits and regularly does her homework, which she didn't do before: around the time of speaking.

Grammar rules describe the way that language works, but language changes over time, so grammar rules are not fixed. They change, too. But grammar rules and grammar books don't always change as quickly as the language, so they are not always up-to-date. For example, some grammar books say that we should use whom rather than who after prepositions.



Grammar rules traditionally describe written language rather than spoken language. For example, repetition, exclamations and contractions (two words that are pronounced or written as one, e.g. don't, isn't, won't) are common features (important parts) of spoken language, but they are not always described in grammar books. Some grammar books are now available which describe spoken language, too.

Lexis refers to individual words or sets of words, for example: "All's well that ends well", example units of vocabulary which have as specific meaning. We often speak of the meaning of words. In a fact, words have different kinds of meaning. Firstly, there is the meaning that describes the thing or idea behind the vocabulary item, e.g. a tree is a large plant with a wooden trunk, branches and leaves. This meaning is called 'denotation', and we speak of 'denotative meaning.' Then there is figurative meaning. We speak, for example, of the tree of life' or 'a family tree.' This imaginative meaning comes from, but is different from, a word's denotative meaning.

There is also the meaning that a vocabulary item has in the context (situation) in which it is used. For example, "We couldn't see the house because of the tall trees in front of it' we understand how tall the trees are" partly from knowing the meaning of tall and partly from knowing how tall a house is. The meaning of some vocabulary items can also come from their form, e.g. from prefixes, suffixes or compounds (nouns made from two or more separate words). Adding prefixes or suffixes to base words (the basic words or parts so far word from which other words can be made) can, for example, give them an opposite meaning (e.g. unsafe, illegal) or a comparative (e.g. easy-easier), or superlative meaning (e.g. new-newest). It may also change their part of speech (e.g. instruct-instruction, quick-quickly). The process of adding affixes is called affixation. Compound nouns get their meaning from being together (e.g. telephone number, bookshop). They have a different meaning from the individual words they are made up of.

There are also words that regularly occur together, such as collocations, fixed is partly defined by the context. expressions and idioms. There are many words which collocate in a language, and the degree of collocation can vary. For example, what touch is a very strong collocation as these words very often occur together, whereas watch a video is less strong and what the postmen is not a collocation. The words in watch the postmen can occur together but don't do so often enough to make them a collocation.

Fixed expressions are expressions which can't be changed (e.g. to tell you the truth, new brown it's up to you) Idioms are a kind of fixed expression as they can't be changed, but their meaning is usually different from the combination of the meaning of the individual words they contain (e.g. to eb under the weather, to have green fingers, once in a blue moon). Collocations, fixed expressions and idioms are all different kinds of chunks. 'Chunks' refers to language that occurs in (semi-)fixed units and that we usually learn as one piece. Have a good trip, I would like ... how about ... , my name's... are further examples of chunks.

Words also have different relationships with one another. They may, for example, be synonyms (words with the same or similar meanings) or antonyms (words with opposite meanings). They may be part of the same lexical set (groups of words that belong to the same topic area, e.g. *family, furniture, food*). They may also belong to the same word family (words that come through affixation from the same base word. e.g. *real, really, realistic, unreal*).

Fully knowing a word involves understanding its form and meaning, e.g. what part of speech it is, how it is pronounced and spelt, all the meanings it can have. This cannot take place the first time a learner meets a new word. It takes learners a long time to fully understand and use a word. At first they will probably just learn its most frequent denotative meaning, its spelling and pronunciation.



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