

SYNTAX FIVE ASSIGNMENT TWO

DUE DATE: FRIDAY JANUARY 29TH

1 PRELUDE

Chomsky's monograph *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* was published (by Mouton) in 1964. It was one of the important early roadmaps for the new way of thinking about and doing linguistic theory. Among the observations made there (p. 44) is the observation that the example in (1) (Chomsky's (8 iii)) has three distinct interpretations (presumably reflecting three distinct syntactic structures):

(1) Mary saw the boy walking towards the railroad station.

Say as clearly as you can, to begin with, what those three interpretations are. Comment as appropriate. However, Chomsky goes on to point out (p. 45) that the examples in (2) are not similarly ambiguous:

- (2) a. Which station did Mary see the boy walking towards?
 b. The station which Mary saw the boy walking towards (is about to be demolished).

Only one of the interpretations of (1) survives in the context of (2)—which one?
Why are the other two readings unavailable in the examples of (2)?

2 THE MAIN BUSINESS

With that much under your belt and firmly in mind, the assignment asks you to study the complement structure of some classes of verbs in English, verbs which are very frequent indeed in ordinary usage. It should be said in advance that this is not the kind of assignment in which there is a single and beautiful solution to be found for all of the problems. Quite a bit of stipulation will (probably) be required to capture the full range of facts presented. The challenge for you is to devise a system which will in the first place let you capture the core property or properties that all of the verbs have in common and in the second place give you the ability to formulate in a reasonable way all of the kinds of stipulations that are necessary to capture the full range of messy observation. We'll organize the discussion by verb-types.

TYPE ONE

The first class (which have been of great interest to philosophers) is the class of verbs which describe perceptions of various kinds:

- (3) a. I saw them smoking cigarettes.
b. I heard Owen playing a drum solo.

A way to organize your investigation (here and throughout) is to aim to be able to:

- o define selectional features for the verbs in question (*see* and *hear* in this initial case), and to:
- o provide trees for the initial examples

In trying to meet those challenges, bear the following observations in mind:

- (4) a. I watched Harry succeeding and Robert failing.
b. Different people saw George arriving and Paul leaving.
c. I couldn't hear the musicians playing their music or the poets reciting their poems.
- (5) QUESTION: What did you see in the streets?
ANSWER: Demonstrators attacking the police.

And notice the interesting ambiguity in (6):

- (6) I saw only young people peacefully making their point.

This much should give you an initial sense for what the syntax is here. Now consider:

- (7) a. I watched the demonstrators being attacked by the police.
b. I heard wonderful music being played.

What is going on in these examples?

An additional possibility is seen in (8):

- (8) a. Robert was seen smoking cigarettes in the yard.
b. Sally was heard playing the piano.

And then of course:

- (9) He was seen being dragged out of his car by the kidnappers.

((9) is, needless to say, ambiguous. Can you explain why?)

TYPE TWO

The class of Type Two verbs is very small. In fact it contains just one verb—*get*. *Get* is an omni-purpose verb in English, with many different uses and interpretations. Focus here exclusively on the ones illustrated here.

- (10) a. I got Jim arrested (by the campus police).
 b. I got the students arrested and the faculty released.
 c. I didn't get the faculty arrested or the TA's released.
- (11) a. *I got Jim explain the homework.
 b. *I got the students complete the assignment.
 c. *We got Jim explaining the assignment.
 d. *We got Jim explained the assignment.

Interestingly, alongside the use in (10), we have:

- (12) a. Jim got arrested (by the campus police).
 b. The faculty got released at the end of the day.
 c. The assignment got completed just in time.
 d. Jim got fined for syntactic cruelty.

How does the type in (12) relate to the type in (10)—in terms of selectional properties and syntax?

TYPE THREE

The verb *have* is also of course an omni-purpose verb in English; presumably in fact there are many different verbs which happen to share this form. We focus here on just one of those verbs (or just one of these uses), one in which *have* has a causative interpretation. Typical examples are given in (13):

- (13) a. I had the students complete the assignment in a week.
 b. I had the cavalry attack on the right flank.
 c. I had the engineers edit the recording.

Note once more:

- (14) a. I had the faculty take the exam and the students grade it.
 b. I never had the guitarists play solos or the saxophonists play chords.

But:

- (15) a. I had Jim arrested by the campus police.
 b. I had all my friends promoted.
 c. The president had all his children taken to prison.

But unlike some of the other verbs we've examined:

- (16) a. *The students were had complete the assignment (by me).
 b. *The cavalry were had attack on the right flank (by me).
 c. *The engineers were had edit the recording (by me).

And as if that wasn't bad enough ...

TYPE FOUR

In this final class we have two verbs, also causatives in some sense—*make* and *let* in the use in (17):

- (17) a. I made the students complete the assignment.
 b. I made the cavalry attack on the right flank.
 c. I made the engineers edit the recording.
- (18) a. I let the students complete the assignment.
 b. I let the cavalry attack on the right flank.
 c. I let the engineers edit the recording.

But:

- (19) a. *I made the assignment completed (by the students).
 b. *I made the enemy attacked (by the cavalry).
 c. *The president made all his children taken to prison (by the royal guard).

Things are made yet more complicated by an interesting divide among contemporary dialects of English. In dialects spoken east of the Atlantic Ocean, the examples in (20) and (21) are fully grammatical. In dialects spoken west of the Atlantic Ocean (e.g. those spoken by you, in all likelihood), the same examples are completely impossible¹:

- (20) a. The students were made complete the assignment.
 b. The cavalry were made attack on the right flank.
 c. The engineers were made edit the recording.
- (21) a. The students were let complete the assignment.
 b. The cavalry were let attack on the right flank.
 c. The engineers were let edit the recording.

Can you construct an analysis of both groups of dialects?

3 CONCLUSION

We began by warning that you would see much messy detail and a lot of apparently random heterogeneity in the observations you were asked to think about in this assignment. And there has surely been a great deal of that. However there is in fact one property which all of the uses of all of the verbs featured in this discussion share. What is it?

¹Though, to be honest, we are not entirely sure where Canadian varieties of English fall with respect to this split.