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Function Word Classes

Function Words

- Function words can also be categorized in different classes: determiners, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, adverbial particles, coordinators, and subordinators. To distinguish these classes briefly, we will look at their semantic function and syntactic role, list their main forms, and consider their subclasses.

1- Determiners:

Determiners normally precedes nouns, and are used to help clarify the meaning of the noun. The most important are the following:

- The definite article 'the' indicates that the referent is assumed to be known by the speaker and the person being spoken to (addressee).
- The indefinite article 'a' or 'an' makes it clear that the referent is one member of a class (a book).

- Demonstrative determiners indicate that the referent are ' near to' or 'away from' the speaker's immediate context (this book, that book)

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- Possessive determiners: tell us who or what the noun belongs to (my book, your book, her book…etc).
- Quantifiers: specify how many or how much of the noun there is (every book, some books).
- There are also determiners- like uses of wh-words and numerals.

2- Pronouns:

pronouns fill the position of a noun or a whole noun phrase. The reference of a pronoun is usually made clear by it contexts. There are eight major classes of pronouns:

- Personal pronouns: refer to the speaker, the addressee(s), and other entities (I won't tell you how it ended). Personal pronouns are used far more frequently than the other classes of pronouns.
- Demonstrative pronouns: refer to entities which are 'near to' v. 'away from' the speaker's context, like demonstrative determiners. (This is Bay city) (I like those)

- Reflexive pronouns: refer back to a previous noun phrase, usually the subject of the clause. (I taught myself) (She never understood herself).
- Reciprocal pronouns: like reflexive pronouns, refer to a previous noun phrase, but indicate that there is a mutual relationship. (Yeah they know each other pretty well).

- Possessive pronouns: (such as mine, yours, his) are closely related to possessive determiners (my, your, his, ..etc), and usually imply a missing noun head. (Is this *yours*, or *mine*) (*Ours* is better than *theirs*). The possessive pronouns include the meaning of a head noun (yours might refer back to your book or your car).
- Indefinite pronouns: have a broad, indefinite meaning. Some of them are compound words consisting of quantifiers + general noun (everything, nobody, someone). Others consist of a quantifier alone (all, some, many)

- Relative pronouns (who, whom, which, that) introduce a relative clause. (I had more friends *that* were boys) (He's the guy *who* told me about this).
- Interrogative pronouns: ask questions about unknown entities. (*what* did he say) (I just wonder *who* it was).
- Most of relative and interrogative pronouns (e.g. who, which, what) belong to the class of *wh-* words.

3- <u>Auxiliary Verbs:</u>

There are two kinds of auxiliary verbs: Primary Auxiliary & Modal Auxiliary. Both are 'Auxiliary Verbs' in the sense of that they are added to a main verb to help build verb phrases. Auxiliary verbs precede the main or lexical verb in a verb phrase: (will arrive, has arrived, is arriving, may be arriving). Some common auxiliaries have contracted forms ----'s, 're, ---'ve, --'d, --'ll, used particularly in speech.

- **Primary Auxiliaries:** There are three auxiliaries: *be, have, and do*. They have inflections like lexical verbs, but normally unstressed. The same verbs *be, have, and do* can also act as main verbs. In various ways, the primary auxiliaries show how the main verb is to be understood:

- The auxiliary *have* is used to form perfect aspect (e.g. I've done that once).
- The auxiliary *be* is used for the progressive aspect or 'continuous' aspect(e.g. She *was* thinking about me).
- The auxiliary *do* is used in negative statements and in questions (known as do insertion (e.g. *Did* he sell it?) (This *doesn't* make sense).

- **Modal Auxiliaries:** There are nine modal auxiliary verbs. As their name suggests, they are largely concerned with expressing ' modality', such as possibility, necessity, prediction, and volition. The modals are:

will, can, shall, may, must, would, could, should, might. In practice the modals can be regarded as invariable function words, with no inflections such as –ing and –ed. The modal will and would have contracted forms ('ll & 'd), and most modals have a contracted negative form ending in (n't), such as wouldn't. Modals occur as the first verb in a clause, and are followed by the base form of another verb, usually the main verb. (I *can* live here quietly) (They *would* have a different view).

4- **Prepositions:**

are linking words that introduce prepositional phrases. The prepositional complement following a preposition is generally a noun phrase, so prepositions can also be seen as linking words that connect other structures with noun phrases. (Eleven fifty with the tip) (And she is in a new situation) (that picture of mother) (She's still on the phone).

- Most prepositions are short, invariable forms e.g. about, after, around, as, at by, down, for, from, into, like, of, off, on, round, since, than, to towards, with, without. In the following examples, the preposition is in bold, and the prepositional phrase it introduces is enclosed in [ ]. The noun phrase functioning as prepositional complement is underlined. He'll go [**with** <u>one of the kids</u>] . Prepositions can be linked to a preceding verb as 'rely on'. (you can't, you can't *rely on* any of that information).

- Complex prepositions consist of multi-word units (e.g. such as, as for, except for, apart from, because of, instead of, out of, regardless of, according to, due to, owing to, by means of, in spite of, in addition to, with regard to, as far as, as well as).

5- **Adverbial Particles:**

are a small group of words with a core meaning of motion. The most important are: about, across, along with, around, aside*, away*, back*, by, down, forth*, home*, in, off, on, out, over, past, round, through, under, up.

All of these forms except those marked * can also be prepositions. Adverbial particles are closely linked to verbs. The generally follow verbs, and are closely bound to them in meaning: go away, come back, put (something) on, etc.

They are used to build phrasal verbs, such as the following: (*Come on*, tell me about nick) (I *just broke* down in tears when I saw the letter) (Susan rarely *turned on* the television set). They are also used to build extended prepositional phrases, where a particle precedes thee preposition. (We were going *back to the hotel* when it happened).

6- **Coordinators:**

There are two types of words traditionally called Conjunctions in English:

Coordinators and subordinators. Coordinators are used to indicate relationship between two units such as phrases or clauses. The main coordinators are: and, but, and or. In the following examples, the coordinated elements are marked [ ] (e.g. [Mother] **and** [I] saw it) ([I don't want to speak too soon], **but** [I think I have been fairly consistent this season]) (Is this necessarily [good] **or** [bad]).

- Correlative coordinators (both   X   and   Y) (not only X   but also   Y)
(either   X   or   Y) (neither   X   nor   Y).

7- Subordinators:

are linking words that introduce clauses known as dependent clauses (clauses which cannot stand along without another clause, called the main clause: (You can hold her[*if* you want]). The subordinator shows the connection of meaning between the main clause and the subordinate clause. Subordinators fall into three major subclasses:

- The great majority of subordinators introduce adverbial clauses, adding details of time, place, reason, etc. to the main clause (e.g. after, as, because, if, since, although, while).
- Three subordinators introduce degree clauses: (as, than, that).
- Three subordinators introduce complement clauses: (if, that, whether).

8- Special Classes of Words:

A few classes of function words have special qualities: wh-words, existential there, the negator not, the infinitive marker to, and numerals.

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