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A DESCRIPTION of SOME LANGUAGE FEATURES

CLAUSES

In discussing and analysing grammar, the notion of the clause is often used. It is a fundamental unit in the structure of the grammar. We can say from the outset that a clause is built around a 'verb' or 'verbal group'. Some examples of clauses (with the verbal groups in **bold green**) are the following. Where there is more than one clause, the symbol // is used to indicate the boundary.

- a) The girl **ran** quickly across the yard
- b) The dog **was going to jump** on me.
- c) What **are** you **thinking of**?
- d) This **is** a teat-pipette.
- e) She just **loves** pizza // so she **eats** it twice a week.
- f) She **said** // she **was going to wait for** me.

Clauses can also be connected directly to each other in various ways to form clause complexes. In written English, clause complexes relate to sentences.

Dependent and Independent Clauses

Clauses can be dependent or independent. Simply put, an independent clause can form a sentence by itself whereas a dependent clause needs to be linked to an independent clause in some way to make a sentence, eg:

Independent clause	Dependent clause
I love it	when you smile
Dependent clause	Independent clause
Because I love you,	I'll walk a million miles.

Finite or non-finite clauses

Apart from issues of dependency, clauses can also be finite or non-finite. A finite clause is located in a specific time - in other words, you know whether it is in the past, present or future. A non-finite clause, however, is not located in any one specific time. It is also dependent on an independent clause. Examples of these clauses (in bold) are:

Pushing open the door, she saw the body slumped on the desk.

I made a dash for the office, **considering the time**.

I've got to save more **to afford an overseas trip**.

To be this good, she must've gone to classes.

You can test that a clause is non-finite by changing the tense in the independent clause and observing that the non-finite stays the same, eg:

Pushing open the door, she saw the body slumped on the desk.

Pushing open the door, she will see the body slumped on the desk.

To be this good, she goes to classes.

To be this good, she went to classes.

To be this good, she has been to classes.

To be this good, she will need to go to classes.

Embedded clauses

As the name suggests, embedded clauses are found within other clauses. But importantly, they don't have the same "status" as other clauses because they function, instead, like groups of words or phrases. The purpose for including an embedded clause is to define or qualify something so that we can distinguish that thing from something else. Embedding avoids breaking up information into many short sentences which may make it difficult to attribute the information provided to the correct thing. Embedded clauses can often be recognised by relative pronouns (eg who, which, that). Here are some examples [[in double brackets]]

All cars [[which have faulty tail-lights]] have to be sent back.

This is to distinguish between those cars that have and those that haven't got faulty tail-lights.

Does the woman [[(who lives) two doors down]] have an olive tree? No, the woman [[who lives at the end of the street]] does.

Each of the embedded clauses uses location to distinguish the women – one is two doors down while the other is at the end of the street..

Other types of embedded clauses occur when the clause has the function of a participant, eg:

[[Withdrawing money from an ATM]] can be a risky thing.

[[All she did]] was [[to buy a few things for herself]].

Interrupting (Included) clauses

An interrupting or included clause is a clause that functions to provide extra information about a participant and "interrupts" another clause, eg:

My mother, **who lives at the end of the street**, has an olive tree in her backyard.

The interrupting clause (**bold italics**) is not used to distinguish my mother since I have only one, it is simply put there to give extra information. Interrupting clauses are non-defining clauses in contrast with embedded clauses. Also in contrast with embedded clauses, which do not have commas around them, included clauses are separated from the rest of the clause complex with commas.

ELLIPSIS AND SUBSTITUTION

Ellipsis is the leaving out of words while still conveying the correct meaning of what is said. In the following examples, what has been left out is in brackets and **bold**. Examples are:

(Have you) Seen Jolanta?

I'm damned if I do and **(I'm)** damned if I don't.

You'll need a hammer and **(a)** chisel.

What sort of milkshake do you want? - **(A)** Chocolate. **(milkshake)**.

She promised she'd call but she hasn't **(called)**.

The time **(which was)** taken for the students to arrive was over ten minutes.

Substitution involves replacing a word or words yet still conveying correct meaning. In the following examples, what has been substituted is in purple and the substituting word is in bold, eg

Which **milkshake** do you want? - I'll have that **one**.

Has he done his homework yet? I don't think **so**.

The time was **added on** for you but it wasn't **done** for me.

TENSES

There are many tense choices available to us as speakers of English. The 3 primary tenses — past, present and future — are combined to form these tense choices. It is clear then that there would be problem talking about these many different choices if we had to come up with a different label for them, eg present perfect, past perfect, pluperfect etc. Halliday has a naming system which uses only the words for the primary tenses to describe these choices and the above descriptions have introduced you to several of them, eg present in present. Simply put, the naming goes from right to left, starting from the verbal element furthest right. See also the summary table at the end.

Primary tenses

Present tense

The (simple) present tense is used to express habitual actions, eg:

She **plays** tennis and **smokes** cigars.

The simple present is referred to as 'timeless' where it expresses generalised statements, eg:

Water **freezes** at 0°C.

A triangle **is** a 3-sided figure.

Past tense

The past tense is used to express action completed at a definite time, eg:

Pasteur **died** in 1895.

I **caught up** with her last night.

She **worked** at Adelaide Primary School for ten years.

I **lived** in Santiago // until I **was** fourteen.

Sometimes a **time element** is added but it is still a completed action, eg:

She **always wore** a hat.

I **often went** for a walk in the evening.

It is also able to express a completed action that took place at a definite time and place in the past but without mentioning the time explicitly. However, the fact that the action is completed is understood, eg:

I **bought** this car in Sydney.

The car **drove up** // and **parked** in the garage.

Future tense

The future tense is identified by the use of auxiliaries such as “will” and “going to”.

I **am going to study to be** a pilot.

I **will do** it next week.

Secondary tenses

Present in Present tense

The present in present expresses an action happening now (at the time of speaking), eg:

It's **raining**.

What **are** they **doing**? ... They're **playing** soccer.

It expresses an action happening about this time but not necessarily at this moment, eg:

I'm **reading** a book by Halliday and I'm **studying** German at TAFE.

It expresses a definite arrangement typically in the near future (the usual way of expressing immediate plans), eg:

I **am graduating** next week.

I **am seeing** her tonight.

I'm **seeing** my shrink tonight before **leaving** on the 20.10 train.

Present in Past tense

The present in past is often used together with the past tense. When this happens, the past (**bold**) usually refers to a shorter action or event that happened in the middle of or interrupted a larger ‘background’ action or situation, ie the present in past (**bold and italics**) eg:

When I **got up** this morning, // the sun **was shining** // and the birds **were singing**.

She **was having** her bath // when the phone **rang**.

Future in past tense

Some meanings are expressed as if the speaker were in the past talking about the future, eg

I **was going to sit** for my pilot's exam // but I changed my mind.

Present in future tense

Some meanings are expressed as if the speaker is already present in the future event, eg:

I **am sitting** for my pilot's exam next week.

Summary of tenses

<i>It is raining.</i>	<p>Present in present</p> <p>“raining” expresses present tense and “is” expresses the present tense of “to be”</p>
<i>It was raining</i>	<p>Present in past</p> <p>“raining” expresses present tense and “was” expresses the past tense of “to be”</p>
<i>It has rained</i>	<p>Past in present</p> <p>“rained” expresses past tense and “has” expresses the present tense of “to have”</p>
<i>It had rained</i>	<p>Past in past</p> <p>“rained” expresses past tense and “had” expresses the past tense of “to have”</p>
<i>It had been raining</i> eg <i>“I walked out of the science lab and stepped in a puddle - it had been raining!”</i>	<p>Present in past in past</p> <p>“raining” expresses present tense and “been” expresses the past tense of “to be” and “had” expresses the past tense of “to have”</p>
<i>I am sitting for my pilot’s exam tomorrow.</i>	<p>Present in future</p> <p>“am sitting” expresses present tense</p>

Tenses could be represented diagrammatically. For example, “present in past in past” (see above) could be represented as:

