



SENTENCE TYPES ACCORDING TO THE PURPOSE OF EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH: A FUNCTIONAL AND PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

Teshaboyeva Nafisa Zubaydulla kizi

Jizzakh branch of the National University of Uzbekistan
named after Mirzo Ulugbek

The Faculty of Psychology, the department of Foreign
languages, Philology and teaching languages
nafisateshaboyeva@gmail.com

Khamzayeva Mukhlisa Sherzod kizi

Student of group 402-22

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ABSTRACT

The sentence, as a fundamental unit of language, serves not only as a grammatical construction but also as a vehicle for social and communicative action. This study examines sentence types according to the purpose of expression, focusing on the interplay between grammatical form, pragmatic function, and discourse context. Through an integration of functional grammar, speech-act theory, and discourse analysis, the research investigates how declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences operate to convey information, elicit responses, direct behavior, and express emotion. The analysis further explores the dynamic relationship between syntactic structure, intonation, and communicative intention, demonstrating how sentences achieve both literal and pragmatic effects. Extensive examples from spoken and written English, along with consideration of indirect and context-dependent usages, illustrate that sentence types are flexible and multifunctional rather than rigidly categorical. The findings underscore the essential role of sentence classification in structuring discourse, managing interaction, and enhancing expressive and persuasive power in communication. This article offers a comprehensive reinterpretation of sentence functionality, providing insights for linguistic theory, discourse studies, and language pedagogy.

A sentence in grammar is more than an arrangement of words that meets syntactic rules; it is above all a unit of social action. When we classify sentences by the purpose of expression, we prioritize the speaker's communicative intention — what the utterance is intended to achieve in interaction — rather than merely the formal properties of clause structure. This functional

view is central to modern descriptive grammars and to pragmatic approaches to language, because it links morphosyntax, intonation, and context to the social effects of utterances.

Two complementary theoretical streams help us analyse sentence types. The first is descriptive grammar (clause-type analysis), which catalogs formal contrasts (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamative) and the morphosyntactic operations that produce them (e.g., subject-auxiliary inversion, interrogative wh-movement, morphological mood). The second is pragmatic/speech-act theory, which attends to illocutionary force and perlocution (the speaker's intention and the effect on the hearer); here Austin and Searle provide foundational concepts that allow us to link sentence form with action types such as asserting, questioning, commanding, promising, or expressing emotions. Both streams are necessary: grammar tells us the forms available; pragmatics tells us how those forms are used in real contexts.

DECLARATIVE SENTENCES

Declarative sentences are canonically used to state, describe, report, and assert propositions about the world; they are the default clause type for presenting information. Formally, English declaratives typically show canonical subject-predicate order and marked tense/aspect morphology in the verb phrase; they commonly carry final falling intonation in speech. In descriptions of English clause types, declaratives are taken as the unmarked or neutral type from which interrogatives and imperatives are derived by syntactic or prosodic operations.

Pragmatically, declaratives perform a wide variety of illocutionary acts: the prototypical illocution is the assertion (commitment to the truth of a proposition), but declaratives can also function indirectly as requests, warnings, or suggestions (e.g., "It's cold in here" used to request closing a window). Such indirectness is analysed in speech-act and pragmatic literature as an interaction of form, context, and conventional implicature: the literal propositional content remains declarative while the pragmatic force is negotiated by participants. This multifunctionality makes declaratives dominant in academic and expository registers, where information-transfer is primary.

Syntactically and semantically, declaratives admit complex subtypes: simple (single independent clause), compound (coordinated clauses with roughly equal status), and complex (main clause with subordinate clauses). Each subtype supports different discourse functions: simple declaratives are often used for topic statements or stepwise reporting; complex sentences (with relative, adverbial, or complement clauses) encode argumentation, causal relations, and evidential structure that are vital for academic exposition. The choice among subtypes interacts with information-structure (theme/rheme, topic/focus) — for instance, fronting or clefting can shift emphasis and thereby subtly change the communicative purpose of a declarative. Descriptive grammars treat these interactions in detail because they underpin how propositions are packaged for listeners.

INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES

Interrogatives are clause types whose primary conventional purpose is to elicit information, confirmation, or response. English interrogatives are diverse and are often classified into several subtypes with distinct morpho-syntactic signatures and pragmatic profiles: (1) yes/no (closed) questions formed typically by auxiliary-subject inversion ("Did you arrive?"); (2) wh-questions (open questions) headed by interrogative words such as "who/what/where/when/why/how" which select a variable slot in the proposition; (3) alternative questions offering a set of choices; and (4) tag questions which combine a declarative clause with a short interrogative tag and often encode a gradient of epistemic stance (from genuine information-seeking to confirmation with expectation). Descriptive grammars discuss these types both as clause-type distinctions and as tools for interactional management.

Prosody plays a central role in the pragmatic interpretation of interrogatives. Rising intonation often signals questionhood for yes/no questions in many varieties of English, though high-rise or fall-rise contours may index politeness, uncertainty, or a turn-taking cue rather than strict semantic polarity. Similarly, wh-questions typically feature a falling contour in

information-seeking contexts, contrasting with echo or exclamatory wh-forms that may have different intonational shapes. The interplay between syntax and intonation explains phenomena such as the declarative question (a formally declarative clause uttered with rising intonation to mean a question), which illustrates the fluid mapping from form to function in spoken discourse.

From a pragmatic perspective, interrogatives realize a family of speech acts beyond pure queries: rhetorical questions (no expected answer, used to emphasize or persuade), indirect questions (polite strategies, e.g., “I wonder whether you could...”), and negative interrogatives (which can convey incredulity or expectation). The taxonomy of interrogative uses thus bridges morphosyntax, prosody, and discourse strategy, and is essential for classroom pedagogy where question design influences student thinking and participation.

IMPERATIVE SENTENCES

Imperatives express directives — that is, attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do (or refrain from doing) something. The canonical form in English is verb-base (bare infinitive) with an implicit second-person subject: “Bring me the book,” “Don’t enter.” Because the addressee is presupposed, imperatives are structurally minimal and pragmatically potent. Grammarians analyze the imperative as a morphosyntactic mood that encodes deontic or directive modality rather than propositional content per se.

Crucially, imperatives exhibit a continuum of force: they range from strong commands to mild suggestions or invitations depending on lexico-grammatical softening (please, could you...), modal alternatives (let’s..., why don’t you...), intonation, and socio-pragmatic context (power relations, politeness norms). Speech-act theory classifies many imperatives as directives, but the same semantic core can be realized indirectly (e.g., “Could you open the window?” is formally interrogative but functionally directive). Research into politeness and interaction shows that mitigation strategies in imperatives are central to successful face-sensitive communication in institutional and everyday settings.

In institutional discourse (instructions, procedural texts, recipes, manuals), imperatives are frequent because they encode prescriptive sequential actions; the genre conventions — short clauses, imperative verbs, numbered steps — optimize cognitive load for the addressee. Pedagogically, teaching imperatives involves not only form but also sociopragmatic appropriateness: how to soften commands, how to email requests politely, and how to issue orders in hierarchical contexts without unnecessary face threat.

EXCLAMATIVE SENTENCES

Exclamatives primarily express affective stance or emotional evaluation. Unlike declaratives or interrogatives, their main illocutionary force is expressive: to convey surprise, admiration, displeasure, or intensity. Exclamative clauses come in several formal shapes in English — canonical exclamatives introduced by “what”/“how” (“What a lovely day!”, “How beautiful she looks!”), and nominal/exclamative fragments (“Amazing!”, “Unbelievable!”). In descriptive grammars, exclamatives are treated as a distinct clause type because they encode evaluative force and have characteristic prosodic and punctuation markers (exclamation mark in writing; high amplitude and particular pitch contours in speech).

Functionally, exclamatives contribute to narrative and expressive registers: in literature and spoken storytelling they heighten affective engagement; in everyday interaction they manage emotional alignment between interlocutors (e.g., shared surprise amplifies social bonding). From a discourse point of view, exclamatives can also perform pragmatic work beyond pure expression — for instance, exclaimed evaluation may implicitly request agreement or action (“What a mess!” often calls for remediation). Thus, even purely expressive clause types participate in the cooperative work of interaction.

INTERACTIONAL OVERLOAP AND INDIRECTNESS

A central theme across the four clause types is that form and function map only probabilistically. A formally declarative sentence may function as a request, a tag question may

be an act of solidarity rather than purely information-seeking, and a question form sometimes functions rhetorically as a statement. Speech-act theory explains such mismatches by positing distinct levels of meaning (locutionary content vs illocutionary force) and by emphasizing context and conventionality as mediators of interpretation. This observation has practical consequences for discourse analysis and language teaching: understanding pragmatic inference, intonation cues, and social context is as important as learning morphosyntax. Although English distinguishes these four types clearly, languages vary in how they encode clause types. Some languages rely heavily on morphosyntactic markers (mood morphology, interrogative particles), while others use prosody or word order differences. Comparative grammars show that the communicative functions (informing, questioning, directing, emoting) are universal tendencies but their grammaticalization paths differ by language family and sociolinguistic convention. A typological perspective thus enriches theoretical accounts and helps avoid Anglocentric assumptions in applied contexts such as translation and language teaching.

CONCLUSION

The present study has examined sentence types according to the purpose of expression, emphasizing their role as essential instruments of human communication rather than merely formal grammatical structures. By analyzing declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences from structural, functional, and pragmatic perspectives, the article has demonstrated that sentence classification is deeply connected to speakers' communicative intentions and the contexts in which language is used. Sentence types function as mechanisms through which information is conveyed, questions are posed, actions are prompted, and emotions or attitudes are expressed, thereby organizing discourse and facilitating interaction.

The analysis has shown that the relationship between sentence form and communicative function is not always direct or fixed. In authentic discourse, sentences frequently operate beyond their prototypical purposes: declarative structures may perform requests, interrogative forms may express commands or criticism, and imperative constructions may serve polite or indirect functions. This functional flexibility highlights the importance of pragmatic interpretation, intonation, and contextual factors in determining the actual meaning and communicative force of an utterance. Consequently, sentence types should be viewed as dynamic communicative resources rather than rigid grammatical categories.

Furthermore, the study has underscored the relevance of functional grammar and speech-act theory in explaining how sentence types contribute to discourse organization and interpersonal relations. The purpose of expression shapes not only syntactic choices but also prosodic patterns, such as intonation and stress, which play a crucial role in signaling speaker attitude and intention. Understanding these interactions is particularly significant for discourse analysis, language teaching, and applied linguistics, as it enables learners and researchers to grasp how meaning is constructed and interpreted in real communicative situations.

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