English Grammar
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Week 6:
The Simple Sentence

Lecture No. 17:
- ## Aphoristic Sentences
- ## Block Language

Aphoristic Sentences 1

What is aphorism?

Aphorism is a statement of truth or opinion expressed in a concise and witty manner. The term is often applied to philosophical, moral, and literary principles.

The aphoristic sentence structure is found in many proverbs. The common structural feature is the balancing of two equivalent constructions against each other:

Aphoristic Sentences 2

(i)   *The more, the merrier.*
      The sooner, the better.
      The less said, the better.

(ii) *Least said, soonest mended.*
   Easy come, easy go.
   Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
   Here today, gone tomorrow.
   Once bitten, twice shy.
   First come, first served.

(iii) *Spare the rod, and spoil the child.*
    Marry in haste, repent at leisure.
    Love me, love my dog.
    Waste not, want not.

(iv) *More haste, less speed.*
    In for a penny, in for a pound.
    No work, no money.
    Out of sight, out of mind.
    So far, so good.

All are to some extent anomalous. Items in set (i) appear to be elliptical. Thus, the first example may be considered elliptical (depending on the context) for something like *The more there are of us, the merrier we are.*

In (ii) the verb is nonfinite; the first part is semantically subordinate (mostly conditional). In (iii) the verbs may be analyzed as imperatives, the two clauses being in a conditional relationship similar to that in the regular structure exemplified in Spare the rod, and you (will) spoil the child
In (iv) both parts are verbless.

Block Language

Block language appears in such functions as *labels, titles, newspaper headlines, headings, notices, and advertisements*. Simple block language messages are most often non-sentences, consisting of a noun or noun phrase or nominal clause in isolation; *no verb is needed*, because all else necessary to the understanding of the message is furnished by the context.

Some forms of block language have recognizable clause structures. Those forms deviate from regular clause structures in omitting closed-class items of low information value, such as the finite forms of the verb BE and the articles, and other words that may be understood from the context.

Block Language /Signs 1

Learning the following four basic forms of deletion can give your tools in reasoning out the meaning of signs.

- *Be deletion* – The deletion of *be* in signs is easily noticed by proficient English speakers. When *be* is a copula (linking the subject to the complement), it is often dropped.

Ex. Elevator out of order. (The elevator is out of order)

Ex. Checkpoint ahead.   (A checkpoint is ahead)

Be is also dropped when it is used as an auxiliary verb in the progressive or the passive.

Ex. Paint drying. (This paint is drying)

Ex. Road blocked. (This road is blocked)

Block Language /Signs 2

- *Auxiliary deletion* – A sign like *"Use Front Stairs"* looks like an imperative construction, but it's really not. The sign is not commanding you to use the front stairs but suggesting it as an alternative. So, it can be interpreted something like, *"You can / may / should use the front stairs."*

- *Article/Demonstrative deletion-* articles and other determiners are often dropped from the language of signs.

Ex. Ministry of Health (This is the Ministry of Health)

Ex. Theatre closed.   (The theatre is closed)

Block Language /Newspaper Headlines 1

  Newspaper headlines commonly contain block language because of pressure on space. They can generally be analyzed in terms of clause structure.

- *Film star marries ex-priest*   *[S V O]*
- *Coronavirus threat increasing*   *[S V]*
- *Protesters call for justice*   *[S V O]*
- *Meat prices rise again*   *[S V A]*
- *Study links hair dye to breast cancer*   *[S V O A]*
- *Three civilians wounded*   *[S V]*

Block Language /Newspaper Headlines 2

In addition to those mentioned for signs certain other syntactic features are characteristic of newspaper headlines:

(i) The simple present is used instead of the present perfective:

Meat prices rise again ['Meat prices have risen again.']

(ii) To is commonly used to express the future or a predicted arrangement:

Trump to seek reelection [Trump is to seek reelection]

(iii) Asyndeton (omission of conjuncteon)

Woman claims drug caused cancer, sues [A woman has claimed that a drug had caused her cancer, and she has sued somebody]

(iv) Verbs that are generally transitive are used intransitively:

Watford victory surprises [Watford victory has surprised spectators]