# Types of sentences and constructions in French 

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## ARTICLEINFO.

## Key words:

construction, type, grammar, text, sentence, neutral, simplest order, characteristic, function.

> ANNOTATION
> : In grammar, a sentence can be considered as an autonomous unit, bringing together syntactic units organized according to different networks of more or less complex relationships called subordination, coordination or juxtaposition. When we want to study the grammar of the sentence, that is to say what happens in the sentence, we come up against a difficulty: there is not one sentence in French, but multiple forms.

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In grammar, a sentence can be considered as an autonomous unit, bringing together syntactic units organized according to different networks of more or less complex relationships called subordination, coordination or juxtaposition.

From an acoustic or visual point of view, however (that is, both orally and in writing), the sentence appears as a succession of words (just as a train appears like a succession of wagons).

- The sentence has a semantic unit (or communication unit), that is to say, a content transmitted by the message (meaning, meaning, etc.). This content emerges from the relationship established between the signs of the sentence, and depends on the context and the situation of the discourse: each sentence has its reference. This reference results from the connection with a situation, even imaginary, of discourse. According to Roman Jakobson, the word alone is nothing. It is only defined in relation to the other elements of the sentence.
- The meaning does not depend only on the words (lexical aspect). Grammatical organization is also very important: this is the syntactic aspect. Normally, syntax never exceeds sentence boundaries.
- Beyond the sentence, however, there is text grammar. This studies statements (writings, words, speeches, etc.) composed of several linked sentences, with, in particular, their connectors (adverbs allowing the logical transition between the sentences of a statement) and their textual representatives (words referring to other words in the statement). On the border of morphosyntax, text grammar provides access to other disciplines beyond the framework of strict grammar: literature, stylistics, rhetoric, philology, etc.
- It is necessary to clearly differentiate the sentence from the statement. The sentence has a
meaning (always the same, whatever the situation of enunciation), that produced by lexical and syntactic choices (it is more on the grammar side). The statement has a meaning, which, depending on the situation of utterance, may turn out to be different from the meaning of the sentence. Consequently, the statement is more on the side of pragmatics (branch of linguistics). This is why a sentence taken from its context, that is to say, outside the situation of enunciation, retains its meaning but can lose its meaning:

The weather is nice.
The sentence above, whatever the situation of utterance, means that the weather is nice. Nothing more, nothing less. As a statement, however, it can have different meanings. If the weather is really nice, the meaning of the statement above matches the meaning of the sentence. If, on the contrary, the weather is not nice, and the speaker expresses himself ironically, the meaning of the statement will be: "The weather is really not nice!", while the meaning of the sentence will remain unchanged: "The weather is nice".

- It is necessary to determine three things: first, where the sentence begins and ends, then, what is its internal structure, and finally, what are the possible elements which escape its syntax.


## THE PHRASE

- Previous page: definition, recognition
- II - THE MODEL SENTENCE
- When we want to study the grammar of the sentence, that is to say what happens in the sentence, we come up against a difficulty: there is not one sentence in French, but multiple forms. So :
- Le petit chien est mort. / Mes amis, notre nouveau chef ! / Pas bien frais, ta creme !/ Et ton estomac? / Un seul mot : cool ! / Montez ! / Défense de fumer dans le salon.
- Only the firstst sentence is approximately "normal", and the penultimate is also verbal, but only contains an imperative. A complex sentence can contain a certain number of subordinate clauses and be quite long (see Proust).
- It is therefore necessary to establish a framework which allows all these forms to be grouped together and analyzed in the same way: this is that of the canonical sentence.
-1) The canonical sentence
- The canonical sentence is a simple sentence (no subordinates), assertive (declarative: no questions, etc.), neutral on all levels (not negative, without highlighting procedures, etc.), with the words in the simplest order, the most characteristic of their function. The order will be as follows:
- subject - verb - complement(s) / attribute
- With possibly one or more circumstantial, optional and mobile additions; in total
- (CC) - subject - (CC) - verb - complement(s) / attributes - (CC)
- In some cases, the sentence studied conforms to this form. If it is not, it must be modified so that it is, of course losing all the effects specific to the expression:
- Je vous présente notre nouveau chef. / Ta creme est fraishe. / Ton estomac va bien. / Je vous dis mille fois ; c'est cool. / Tu peux (dois) monter. / On peut fumer dans le salon.
- This transformation can reverse the meaning of the sentence, particularly when a negative is removed. Without going that far, we can always make a transformation which preserves the meaning and simply modifies what is not analyzable: we will particularly add weak verbs like "être" or "il y a" which disappear in adverbal sentences, like the third sentence.
- Roughly canonical sentences are relatively common in oral or written discourse. But the
canonical sentence is not, as has been said, a starting point in the learning of language or the constitution of thought: children do not necessarily learn to speak like this. It is a theoretical framework, which is a sort of meeting point for all sentences, and which allows the content of sentences to be analyzed. This therefore represents an effort at abstraction in the study of language.
-2) The minimal sentence
- Beyond the canonical sentence, and constituting an even more theoretical framework, always intended to allow analyses, is the minimal sentence. This is what we refer to when we have to study a function: the subject, the COD, the attribute fall within the framework of the minimal canonical sentence. The complement of the noun, the apposition, the circumstantial complements do not fall within this framework.
- We reduce the sentence as much as possible, and we observe what is essential, which cannot be deleted without risking making the sentence ungrammatical, incorrect, or significantly modifying the message. Example given by Riegel in the Methodical Grammar of French:
- Pendant des années, l'affreux gros chien noir de l'ancienne concierge de l'immeuble effrayait tous les enfants qui passaient plusieurs fois par jour devant la loge.

Phrase minimale : Le chien effrayait les enfants.

- The minimal sentence is therefore also, and even more so, a theoretical framework for studying what happens inside the sentence. It shows that any canonical sentence is reducible to a sequence which is summarized in:
- Nominal group - Verbal group (NG - VG) [group, or phrase]
- This in order. The NG corresponds to the subject function. The verbal group contains, if there are any, the essential complement(s) or attribute.
- Contrary to what we see in a traditional analysis, we see that the subject (NG) is not to be placed on the same level as the object complement, simply because it occupies the opposite place, the verb being the pivot. There are relations of solidarity between the subject and the verb, a reciprocal dependence. The minimal sentence includes two constituents; the COD does not do the 3rd, it enters the 2nd, despite the appearance of symmetry with the subject.
- We generally use the term predicate to express the function, the both syntactic and semantic role of the verbal group; it is a term which alludes to the necessary and reciprocal relationships between the subject and the VG.
- In a sentence that is not necessarily minimal or canonical, we talk about theme and purpose: what we talk about, and what we say about it. The theme is not necessarily the subject, it can be a highlighted element:
- Ma moto, je l'ai vendue. (COD) Le cinema, j'y suis allé souvent. (CC lieu)
-3) Beyond the model sentence
- Finally, we speak of an extended sentence when we add one or more expansions. Alongside the NG and the VG there can be mobile and optional elements which are circumstantial complements; and in a nominal group, we can add adjectives or other equivalent elements.
- The extended sentence can be a complex sentence if it contains sentence elements. That is to say, the complex sentence can consist of at least one main and one subordinate clause, but also of coordinated independent clauses. This is what the official nomenclature says, although we can contest this definition when we are simply in coordination. This should be known, for example, when you find yourself in front of a CAPE, CAPES or other jury...


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