

# Cuerpo de Profesores de Enseñanza Secundaria

## Inglés



TEMARIO  
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# OPOSICIONES



## **TEMA 23**

**ESTRUCTURA DE LA ORACIÓN:  
AFIRMACIONES, NEGACIONES,  
PREGUNTAS Y EXCLAMACIONES.**

## **TEMA 23: ESTRUCTURA DE LA ORACIÓN: AFIRMACIONES, NEGACIONES, PREGUNTAS Y EXCLAMACIONES.**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The topic under consideration is a very complex one as it can be approached in different ways. When we talk about positive statements, negations, questions and exclamations, we have to establish a distinction between:

- 1) Linguistic structures used to form sentences which are positive statements, negations...etc. In other words, we are talking about patterns of language.
- 2) Discourse functions, we would be considering here how we can convey information in different ways: we may wish to give information, seek information...etc.

The main difference between these two approaches is that when we consider syntactic structures, we talk about patterns irrespective of the pragmatic meaning they convey. Example: “Isn’t he stupid?” would be considered a question. If on the contrary, we analyse a sentence paying attention to discourse functions, focus of concern would be the meaning conveyed by an utterance irrespective of its syntactic structure, and the above utterance would probably be considered an exclamation.

As the title of the unit only includes the word “structure”, our focus of concern will be the patterns available in the English language to form positive statements, negations, questions and exclamations, but it will be impossible to forget meaning completely.

## II.SENTENCE STRUCTURE

### 2.1 DEFINITION

It is very difficult to give a satisfactory definition of a sentence but we could say, following Huddleston’s definition, that it is “...the largest stretch of language forming a syntactic construction”. However, a few remarks should be added in order to improve this definition. So, we could replace the term “largest” by that of “most inclusive”, for we talk about inclusiveness rather than about size of sentences, since some sentences can be of only one or two words such as Imperatives and Exclamations, as long as they follow certain rules, for instance:

Go away! (Sentence because it follows certain rules)  
Hi, Mary (Not a sentence)

“Sentence” includes a lot because it stands at the top of the grammatical hierarchy. Besides, Jespersen points out the ability of a sentence, as a construction, to occur on its own, as a complete utterance. This definition should suffice in most cases, yet Allerton suggests a new point by saying that a sentence is a unit capable of occurring alone provided that there is no change in accentual, prosodic pattern, as can be seen in the following examples:

I warned Tom/that /I was late  
I warned Tom. I was late

If there is no terminal intonation in the first example, then it is not a sentence because we expect something else after “Tom”. However, if there is terminal intonation, as in the second example, then it is a sentence.

## 2.2 SIMPLE, COMPLEX AND COMPOUND SENTENCE

A sentence must have at least one clause, therefore if we have a simple clause as the only clause in a sentence, the sentence will be simple too.

I like Mary (one sentence-one clause)

On the other hand, if the clause is complex, the sentences as a whole will also be complex, as in the following example:

I told you to go away (one complex sentence –one main clause plus one subordinate clause)

These examples about simple and complex sentences seem to suggest that sentence and clause are the same level. Nevertheless, this is not so and we know that sentence is higher in rank than clause as we can see in compound sentences, in which we find two or more clauses at the same level, coordinated, but only one sentence.

She likes coffee but she doesn't like tea  
(one sentence –two clauses)

So a compound sentence is that which consists of two or more clauses, none of which is a constituent of, or is subordinate to, the other (s).

## 2.3 SENTENCE ELEMENTS

There are five main elements within the sentences: Subject (S), Verb (V), Object (O), Complement (C) and Adverbial (A). However, not all of them appear together in every sentence, their occurrence depending both on the kind of sentence and the kind of verb.

### A) Subject

Semantically, this involves the person or thing which performs the action denoted by the verb. On the other hand, syntactically, the subject usually goes before the verb in statements, after the operator in questions, and determines the number and person of the verb when necessary, as in the following examples:

He likes coffee  
Do they drink coffee?

Their subject requires the subjunctive form of pronouns if there is a finite verb and finally it can also be realized by a Noun Phrase (NP). For instance:

Did the house have windows?  
The tall man drinks tea

## B) Verb

This is usually realized by a Verb Phrase (VP) and it is present in very nearly all clauses. The verb determines what other elements must or might occur in the clause. For example:

I have found her (VP)

## C) Object

Generally a Noun Phrase (NP), it can perform two syntactic functions: Indirect Object (Oi) and Direct Object (Od). They normally follow the subject and verb, but if both objects appear together, the (Oi) usually precedes the (Od). Finally, if finite clauses they are expressed by the objective form of pronouns. For instance:

I sent Mary (Oi) a card (Od)  
I sent her a card

## D) Complement

This is usually a Noun Phrase or an Adjective Phrase. It normally follows subject and verb, if Subject Complement (Cs), and the Direct Object, if Object Complement (Co). For example:

He is stupid (Cs)  
The jury found her guilty (Co)

## E) Adverbial

It can be an Adverb Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, Noun Phrase or Clause. An adverbial (A) can occur in different positions within the clause, though it usually takes final position. It is optional except for those clause types in which it is required (SVA and SVOA) as in the following examples:

The book is on the table (A)  
Tomorrow I will go shopping (A)

## III. POSITIVE STATEMENTS

Regarding positive statements, semantically they are used in order to convey information, whereas structurally speaking, the subject usually goes before the verb (as long as it is a finite verb phrase). Thus, depending on the verb we come across, we find several clause types in declarative sentences:

SV.....The boy (S) is eating(V)  
SVO....That guy (S) helped (V) me (O)  
SVC....Your books(S) are (V) rubbish (C)  
SVA....My office (S) is (V) in the next building (A)  
SVOO.I (S) must send (V) my parents (O) a card (O)

SVOC. Most students (S) have found (V) her (O) helpful (C)  
SVOA. You (S) can put (V) the dish (O) on the table (A)

#### IV. NEGATION

As far as negation is concerned, the process of negating a clause may be achieved in several ways, although the most common one is that of verb negation.

##### 4.1 CLAUSE NEGATION THROUGH VERB NEGATION

A positive clause can be negated by inserting the participle “not” between the operator and the predication as we can see in the following examples:

I have finished....I have not finished  
I am ready.....I am not ready

In those cases in which the operator is not present in the positive clause, we introduce one operator or another depending on the tense of the verb, and then the participle “not” is added, for example:

I like coffee...I do not like coffee  
They knew you.....They did not know you

Another feature of clause negation is the ability of the negator to occur as an enclitic, which is, attached to the preceding word, in the contracted form “n’t”, for instance:

I haven’t finished  
They don’t know you

##### 4.2 SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF CLAUSE NEGATION

One of the most significant syntactic features of clause negation is that of negative clauses can usually be followed by positive tag questions, whereas positive clauses cannot, as we can see in these examples:

They aren’t ready, are they?  
They are ready, aren’t they?

Negative clauses can also be followed by negative tag clauses, but then they involve additive meaning, for example:

They aren’t ready, and neither are you

Furthermore, negative clauses can be followed by non-assertive items such as “yet, any, either” and so on. For instance:

He won’t notice any change in you either

### 4.3 OTHER KINDS OF CLAUSE NEGATION

One way to express negation would be the use of words which are negative both in form and meaning. This kind of negation is a choice we sometimes have, besides that of verb negation. For example:

An honest man would not lie...No honest man would lie  
 He wouldn't say a word.....He would say not a word

Moreover, there is a device in formal English by which we can shift the negative element to initial position, but this involves the subject and operator, word order being changed by inversion. For instance:

I wouldn't say a word.....Not a word would I say

On the other hand there are words which are negative in meaning but not in form such as “seldom, hardly, little, few, rarely” and so on. These expressions are usually followed by non-assertive items and if they are positioned initially, the adverbs normally cause subject operator inversion too, as we can see in the following examples:

They never go shopping, do they?  
 Rarely did we go to the cinema?  
 I'm against going out anywhere today

### 4.4 SCOPE AND FOCUS OF NEGATION. MODAL AUXILIARY NEGATION

The scope of negation is usually said to be “the stretch of language over which the negative item itself has a semantic influence”, according to Quirk and Greenbaum. Therefore, the scope of negation normally extends from the negative item itself to the end of the clause, and contrast may arise between apparently similar sentences, as in:

She definitely didn't speak to him (It's definite that she didn't)  
 She didn't definitely speak to him (It's not definite that she did)

Not only do we have to pay attention to this contrast when we write, but also when uttering something, since the focus of negation lies at a phonological level and it is signalled in speech by the placement of nuclear stress over a particular spot, implying that the rest of the clause can be understood in a positive way, for example:

I didn't leave home because I was afraid of my father  
 (Because I was afraid of my father, I didn't leave home)

I didn't leave home because I was afraid of my father (I left home, but it wasn't because I was afraid of my father)

Finally, a distinction should be made when negating modal auxiliary verbs, since we can have both Auxiliary negation and Main Verb negation in which there is a clear need for context in order to see what the utterance means, for instance:

You may not go swimming (you are not allowed) AUXILIARY

They may not bother to come (It's possible that they will not bother) MAIN  
VERB

In terms of focus, we should look at how the emphasis on a sentence can change the part of it that it is negated. In the following sentences we can put the stress on any of the elements, changing the meaning of the sentence by altering the focus of negation:

I didn't speak to her

- If we stress "I", the implication is "not me, but somebody else"
- If we stress "didn't", the effect is a reinforcement of the negation
- If we stress "speak", the implication may be "not speak, but write"
- If we stress "to", the implication may be "not to, but maybe at"
- If we stress "her", the implication is "not her, but some other person"

## V. QUESTIONS

### 5.1 DEFINITION AND USE

Regarding questions, they are usually used so that the speaker can get some information. So, they are primarily used to seek information on a specific point, as Quirk and Greenbaum suggest. However, there are some cases in which the speaker does not intend to seek information but rather wants to affirm or even express a conviction, as in rhetorical and exclamatory questions, which will be dealt with in later sections.

### 5.2 CLASSES OF QUESTIONS

There are three main classes of questions according to the reply expected: Yes-No Questions, Wh-Questions, Alternative Questions and Minor Types of Questions:

#### a) Yes-No Questions

Yes-No questions expect either affirmation or negation and they are usually formed by placing the operator in front of the subject and giving the sentence a rising intonation:

The boat has left...Has the boat left?

Again, as with negation, in those instances where we lack an operator, the operator of the tense of the sentence verb phrase is introduced:

They live in Sydney...Do they live in Sydney?

As with negation, we also find in questions the use of non-assertive items such as "any, ever, yet" and the like:

Someone called last night...Did anyone call last night?

Another characteristic of yes-no questions is the fact that there is a strong sense of conduciveness, that is, the question expects a particular answer which the speaker is

predisposed towards. This is a common device and it may be reinforced by the occurrence of assertive items instead of the usual non-assertive ones:

Did someone call last night?  
Hasn't the boat left already?

Conduciveness is more easily recognized in negative yes-no questions, but when it is most easily recognized is in tag questions. Conduciveness appears at its maximum when a tag question follows a statement, either negative or positive, as long as the tag question is opposite to the sense of the statement.

Joan recognized you, didn't she?  
The boat hasn't left, has it?

Moreover, the tag must have a rising intonation, otherwise the speaker does not expect the hearer to decide upon the truth value of his question, but rather he expects confirmation of his statement, having the force of an exclamation.

#### B) Wh-questions

Wh-questions expect a reply from an open range of replies and they require the occurrence of a wh-element at the beginning of a sentence. The formation of a wh-element is carried out by a wh-word ("how, what, which, when, where, who, whom, whose" and "why") and, when necessary, a noun phrase, a prepositional complement or both at the same time are added, for example:

What did you buy?  
Where did you come from?  
Whose car did you take?

Unlike yes-no questions, wh-questions usually have falling intonation. As we can see, the wh-word always goes at the beginning of the wh-element. Yet, in formal English the preposition may precede the complement, whereas in more informal English the complement comes first and the preposition is deferred to the end of the sentence:

On what did you base your prediction?  
What did you base your prediction on?

#### C) Alternative Questions

Alternative questions are those which expect as a reply one of two or more options presented in a given question. There are two types of alternative questions:

Would you like chocolate, vanilla or strawberry?  
Which ice-cream would you like? Chocolate, vanilla or strawberry?

The first one resembles a yes-no question but not in intonation, since it carries falling instead of rising tone. The second type is quite similar to a wh-question followed by an elliptical alternative question.

Which ice-cream would you like?  
(Would you like..?)

#### D) Minor types of questions

Finally, there are other ways of making questions, although their meaning is not that of seeking information, such as Exclamatory, Rhetorical and Echo questions. These types of questions share an interrogative structure but, unlike normal questions, their goal is not to get information on a specific point but rather to express an exclamatory assertion, with final falling tone in the case of exclamatory questions:

Hasn't she grown!  
Wasn't it a marvellous concert!

Unlike exclamatory questions, rhetorical questions have the normal rising tone of a yes-no question, but both share an interrogative structure with the force of a strong assertion. Besides, if the rhetorical question is positive, the assertion is negative, and vice-versa.

Isn't that a reason for despair?  
Isn't the answer obvious?

The last minor type of question is that of echo questions, whose main function is to repeat part of the previous in order either to have it confirmed, in replicatory echo questions, or to ask for clarification, in explicatory echo questions. For instance.

The browns are emigrating –Emigrating?  
Take a look at this? –Take a look at what?

## VI EXCLAMATIONS

### VI.1 Definition and Use

According to Quirk and Greenbaum, exclamations are usually used in order to express the extent to which the speaker is impressed by something. Exclamations are very common in everyday speech and therefore there are many different ways of expressing them, both in regular and an irregular pattern.

### VI.2 TYPES OF EXCLAMATION

#### A) How

This wh-word appears in initial position in exclamations and it can be followed by adverbials, adjectives and also by a statement, as in:

How quickly you eat!  
How I used to hate geography!

Unlike wh-questions, the fronting of the wh-word does not involve subject-operator inversion.

### B) What

The same applies to this wh-word, although “what” can only be followed by a noun phrase as the wh-element.

What a nice time we´ve had today!

### C) Such and So

Unlike “what” and “how” these two terms do not usually occur in initial position but rather following the verb phrase, since they generally behave as complements.

She is such a nice girl!

They are so kind!

### D) Exclamatory Utterances

Regarding these utterances, we can say that there are so many exclamatory expressions that a whole unit could be devoted to their study. Thus, we will just mention a few:

Damn!

Oh, my God!

God Heavens!

Shit!

Really!

## VII: IRREGULAR SENTENCES

Having dealt with sentence structure in English, we should focus on some sentences which do not present a clear pattern or structure and therefore they are treated as irregular sentences:

### a) The Formulaic Subjunctive

This phenomenon is brought about by the use of the base form of a given verb and it can be found both with subject-verb inversion, if there is an adverb in initial position, and without inversion, for example:

Long Live The III Republic!

God shave the Queen!

### b) Irregular wh-questions

Sometimes, we may come across some of these questions which present an irregular pattern, particularly in an oral discourse, as in:

What about another kiss?

Why listen to him?

### c) Proverbs

Many proverbs have an aphoristic sentence structure, and we find two short constructions which are balanced against each other. For instance:

The more, the merrier

### d) Block Language

Finally, block language can be found, particularly in writing, in labels, titles, headings, notices and advertisements, which often consists of a single noun phrase in isolation, as in the following examples:

Entrance  
The New York Times  
For Sale

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we might say that what we have looked in this unit is the basic way in which the English language is used to make statements (both positive and negative), questions, exclamations and directives, in structural terms, we have looked at assertion, negation, interrogation, exclamation and imperatives.

In addition, we have touched on some of the areas (such as rhetorical questions and tag questions) where the divisions between these categories become blurred, or where a structure is used in order to fulfil a discourse function other than the one it is normally associated with.

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