

# Portraying The Sentences In One Of The Best Short Stories

Wa'özisökhi Nazara\*

*Wa'özisökhi Nazara is a staff member in the Department of English Language and Literature at STBA (School of Foreign Language) Prayoga in Padang, Indonesia.*

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## I. Introduction

Two of key features of human language are discreteness and compositionality. The first refers to the fact that there are distinct units, which speakers can identify and use in their language. The second has to do with our perception that smaller units combine as building blocks of larger units. Three of the units are words, phrases, and sentences. Among these three, words are smallest units, phrases are intermediate units, and sentences are largest unit. It follows then that words are building blocks of phrases, and phrases in turn are building blocks of sentences. (Quirk et al., 1985; Cruz-Ferreira & Abraham, 2011)

As building blocks of larger units, words are of paramount importance. However, as O'Grady et al. (2001) observe, "Not much can be said with a single word". Phrases, usually defined as groups of interrelated words, are also important language units needed to convey thoughts and ideas. However, not much more can be expressed with a single phrase. This is due to the fact that a phrase cannot fully express a complex and idea. To convey complex thoughts and ideas, we use sentences.

Sentences, which are used to convey complex thoughts and ideas, are generally characterized by what Jacobs (1995) calls "basic properties of sentence structure". One of the basic properties is that the smaller units constituting the sentences stand one after another as a linear sequence. The second fundamental key feature is concerned with hierarchy. By hierarchy we mean that the concatenations are not simply combinations of individual words. Rather, the concatenations are made up of groups of interrelated words. The third characteristic is that the parts constituting the sentences belong to different categories.

As Burton-Roberts (2016) observes, sentences can be within other sentences. This occurs in two ways. First, one sentence combines with one or more other sentences having the same amount of propositions. For instance, *The man likes the woman* combines with *The woman likes the man*. The second way is by incorporating one sentence into another sentence.

Sentences, which are characterized by linearity, hierarchy, and categoriality, are unlimited in number. Their speakers can combine words in novel ways to form them as needed. However, the sentences are rule-governed. Sentences which are rule-governed fulfil what Bresnan et al. (2016) call well-formedness conditions. This reveals that words cannot simply be juxtaposed to form sentences. In other words, accepted sentences are constructed according to established principles/rules of the language in question.

Research entitled *Portraying the Sentences in One of the Best Short Stories* aims (1) to identify the constructions of the sentences in *The Gift of the Magi* (one of the best short stories) and (2) to explain the constructions by syntactic theory. Designation and explanation of the constructions of the sentences in the short story will portray the sentences in the story, reflecting a living language.

## II. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Sentences by Number of Full Predication

One way to classify sentences is by number of full predication. By number of full predication, sentences can be classified into three types. The first type is called simple sentence. A simple sentence has only one full predication. For example, *My parents love me very much*. The second type is called compound sentence. A compound sentence has two or more full predication. For instance, *The man likes the woman but the woman does not like the man*. The third type is called complex sentence. A complex sentence, as the name implies, has complex predication in the sense that the predication within a complex sentence have subordination relation. For example, *The man will marry the woman if the woman likes the man*. (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1972; Frank, 1993)

By the same token, sentences can be classified into two main types. As such, the first main types is simple sentence. A simple sentence is the one containing an independent clause, which is commonly defined as a syntactic unit comprising a noun phrase (NP) plus a verb phrase (VP). The second main type is multiple sentence. There are two types of multiple sentence. The first is multiple sentence which contains two or more independent/main clauses. This type of multiple sentence is generally labelled compound sentence. The second type is multiple sentence comprising an independent/main clause and one or more dependent/subordinate clauses. (Quirk et al., 1985; Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002; Finegan, 2014; Burton-Roberts, 2016)

## 2.2 Sentence Constructions

Sentences can also be classified in terms of constructions. In this way, some sentences have copula construction. Copula construction is the construction of the sentence whose main verb is BE. Some others have non-copula construction. Non-copula construction is the construction of the sentence whose main verb is not link verb. Both copula and non-copula constructions can be declarative, interrogative, or imperative. (Miller, 2008)

Sentence constructions can be further specified into several types. The first type is SV. This is the case with the sentence whose main verb is intransitive. The second type is SVO, which is the basic pattern of the sentence whose main verb is mono-transitive. The third type is SVC or SVA, the basic pattern of the sentence whose main verb is copula/intensive. The fourth type is SVOO, the basic pattern of the sentence whose main verb is ditransitive. The fifth type is SVOC or SVOA, which is the pattern of the sentence whose main verb is complex-transitive. (Quirk et al, 1985; Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002; Burton-Roberts, 2016)

## 2.3 Grammatical Functions within Sentences

As linguists like Burton-Roberts (2016), Sportiche et al. (2014), Cruz-Ferreira and Abraham (2011), and Carnie (2008) observe, sentences basically comprise two immediate constituents. One of them is verb phrase. VP functions as predicate. The head of VP can be intransitive, intensive, mono-transitive, ditransitive, complex-transitive, or prepositional.

The other is noun phrase (NP). The NP functions as subject. In terms of distribution, NP functioning as subject precedes VP, agrees with finite verb in person and number, controls reflexives as well as *all* and *both* floating, and functions as pivot in infinitives and coordinate constructions. In terms of case marking, NP functioning as subject is in the nominative case. (Miller, 2008: 102)

Noun phrase can occupy object position. NP which functions as comes after the verb. It is in the accusative case. It can be promoted to subject position in corresponding passive construction. It does not function as pivot in the infinitives and coordinate constructions and it does not agree with verb in person and number. (Miller, 2011: 103)

Other grammatical functions complements and adjuncts. There are two kinds of complements. One is subject complement. This kind of complements can occur alone after the verb and follow the verb. Other is object complement. This kind of complements must occur with a direct object to which it is adjacent. (Cruz-Ferreira and Abraham, 2011: 175)

Still other grammatical function is adjunct. Unlike other grammatical functions such as subject and object, the presence of adjunct in a sentence is optional. The presence or absence of adjuncts does not affect the grammaticality of the sentences in which they occur. This is due to the fact that the verb does not subcategorize for adjunct. Besides, adjunct may be freely multiplied. (Cruz-Ferreira and Abraham, (2011: 169; Kroeger, 2004:10-11)

## III. Material and Method

This brief analysis of the sentences in O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi* is qualitative in nature. In this inquiry, the researcher functions as the key instrument, the data analyzed are qualitative, with inductive approach. Through this qualitative inquiry, the author sheds light on the types of the sentences found in the best short story authored by O. Henry. More specifically, this inquiry concerns with the types of sentences (simple, compound, complex) used in the short story and their constructions.

The data collected through observation were analyzed through qualitative procedures. The author began this stage by simplifying and organizing the data in such a way, in line with the research questions. Simplified and organized data were analyzed further using several relevant techniques, such as substitution, transposition, extension, and deletion. (Creswell, 2009; Sudaryanto, 2015; Mahsun, 2017). These analyses resulted in portray of the sentences used in the short story *The Gift of the Magi* authored by O. Henry.

## IV. Finding and Discussion

In the research entitled *Portraying the Sentences in One of the Best Short Stories*, it was found that the sentences in O. Henry's best short story *The Gift of the Magi* vary in terms of constructions. In general, more or

less forty-six of the sentences have copula constructions. These sentences are about twenty-five percents out of the total amount of the sentences identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. More or less 134 sentences have non-copula constructions. These sentences constitute about seventy-five percents of total amount of sentences identified in *The Gift of the Magi*. Examples are presented and analyzed below.

Most of the sentences having copula constructions have the verb *be*. Examples of such sentences are presented as (1a-g) below. Notice that even though all of the sentences have *be* as link verb, not all of them are alike.

- (1) a. That was all.
- b. The next day would be Christmas.
- c. It should perhaps have been "Mr. James D Young."
- d. She is Della.
- e. And now they were hers.
- f. Isn't it perfect, Jim?
- g. Be good to me.

These sentences are of three types. Sentences (1a-c) are all declaratives, sentence (1f) is interrogative, and sentence (1g) is imperative. The three types have different entities occupying the slot for the grammatical function subject. The complements, which come after the link verbs, also vary. In spite of the differences, all sentences (1a-g) are simple.

A few sentences having copula constructions have verb other than *be*. The sentences presented as (2a-d) below are examples of such copula constructions.

- (2) a. His name became very short indeed.
- b. Her head looked a little better.
- c. He seemed not to feel sure he knew
- d. In the hall below was a letter-box too small to hold a letter.

The copula verbs in sentences (2b-d) are different lexical items, but they are all in the past forms. The verbs all link the subjects and the complements. In (2a), copula verb *became* links the noun phrase (NP) *his name*, which functions as the subject, with the adjective phrase (AP) *very short indeed*, which functions as the complement. Similar function is also the case in (2b) as well as in (2c) and (2d). In each of the two sentences, the copula verb links the subject with the complement.

Data (1) and (2) presented above reveal that the sentences having copula constructions are basically constituted by the subject, link verb (copula), and complement. The subject slot is occupied by noun phrase (NP). The complement (C) can be adjective phrase (AP), noun phrase (NP), or prepositional phrase (AP). The complement which a PP, for instance, can be observed in (2d). Complement which is an NP can be seen in (1d). Complement which is an AP can be seen in (2a).

Non-copula constructions, which have ordinary verb and are more or less 134 (about 75%) of the total amount of sentences identified in *The Gift of the Magi*, have several types of basic patterns. One of the basic patterns is SV (subject plus verb). Examples of simple sentences (independent clauses) whose basic pattern is SV are presented as (3a-b) below.

- (3) a. It always happened like that.
- b. She stood at the looking-glass for a long time.

Sentences (3a-b) consist of several words. However, only two of the words are the basic (obligatory) elements of each of the sentences. The basic (obligatory) elements of (3a) are S (it) and V (happened). Similar thing is the case with sentence (3b). The basic (obligatory) elements of the sentence are S (she) and V (stood).

The second basic pattern of the sentences in *The Gift of the Magi* is SVO. SVO is the basic pattern of a sentence whose main verb is mono-transitive. As a matter of fact, a mono-transitive verb subcategorizes for noun phrase functioning as object, besides NP which occupies subject position. Sentence examples are presented as (4a-c) below.

- (4) a. From inside the coat, Jim took something tied in paper.
- b. Jim had not seen yet his beautiful gift.
- c. Will you buy my hair?

Sentence (4a), which is positive declarative, has three basic constituents. The first is the verb took, which is a mono-transitive verb, standing between two grammatical functions it requires. The grammatical function *Jim*, which comes before the verb *took*, is the subject. The grammatical function of *something tied in paper*, which follows the verb, is the object.

Sentence (4b) is also composed of three obligatory constituents. The first constituent is the mono-transitive verb *seen*, which is in the form of past participle, preceded by *had* and *not*. *Jim*, whose grammatical function is subject, appears before the verb phrase *had not seen*. The negative declarative sentence places *his beautiful gift*, whose syntactic role is object, after the main verb *seen*.

Similar phenomena to those in (4a-b) are shown by sentence (4c). The interrogative sentence places mono-transitive verb *buy* between personal pronoun *you*, whose syntactic role is subject and noun phrase *my hair*, whose syntactic role is object. Auxiliary verb *will* appears before the subject.

Sentences whose basic pattern is SVOO were also found in *The Gift of the Magi*. The sentences which are presented as (5a-b) below exemplify this basic pattern. Sentence (5a) is declarative; sentence (5b) is imperative.

(5) a. Someone may give you an answer.

b. Give me your watch.

Sentence (5a), which is declarative, has four basic constituents. The first is ditransitive verb, which is the head of the sentence. The ditransitive verb determines the amount and the type of noun phrases which come before and after it. The verb *give* subcategorizes for three noun phrases. One of the three noun phrases, which functions as the subject, comes before the ditransitive verb *give*. The second noun phrase, functioning as the indirect object, follows the verb *give*. The third noun phrase, which functions as the direct object, comes after the noun phrase functioning as the indirect object. The noun phrase which functions as the subject and the one functioning as the object are both animate.

Sentence (5b) also has ditransitive verb *give*. However, it only has two overt noun phrases. One of the two overt noun phrases, which immediately follows the verb *give*, functions as the indirect object. The noun phrase whose position is before the verb *give* is covert. The noun phrase is not overt due to the fact that sentence (5b) is an imperative sentence. As a matter of fact, an imperative sentence in English does not allow the noun phrase occupying the subject position to be overtly expressed.

Sentence having SVC/SVA pattern was also found in *The Gift of the Magi*. The sentence presented as (6) below exemplifies this type. *Put* in sentence (6) is a complex transitive verb. This verb requires the noun phrase whose syntactic function is the subject, noun phrase functioning as the object, and prepositional phrase as the complement.

(6) He put his arms around his Della.

Besides constructions and basic clause patterns, whose examples were presented and briefly portrayed above, types of sentences based on whether the sentences contain one independent clause (simple sentence), two or more independent clauses (compound sentence), one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses (complex sentence), and sentence fragment. A few examples are presented/discussed below.

More or less 98 sentences in *The Gift of the Magi* are simple sentences. Each of the sentences contains one independent clause. More than fifty percents of the sentences identified are simple sentences, and more than fifty percents of the constructions. Sentences (1a-g) and (6) above can be observed as examples.

About thirteen sentences identified in *The Gift of the Magi* are compound sentences. Examples of the compound sentences are presented as (7a-d) below.

(7) a. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$ 1.87 with which to buy Jim a gift.

b. There was no other like it in the shops, and she had looked in every shop in the city.

c. Her eyes were shining brightly, but her face has lost its color.

d. "Maybe the hairs of my head could be counted," she said, "but no one could ever count my love for you."

Complex sentences found in *The Gift of the Magi* are about sixty-three. Examples of the complex sentences are presented as (8a-e) below. Most of them contain one independent clause and one dependent clause.

(8) a. While the lady of the home is slowly growing quieter, we can look at the home.

b. However, if he was very thin and moved very quickly, he might be able to get a good view of himself.

c. Though the watch was so fine, it had never had a fine chain.

d. Because it was so plain and simple, you know that it was very valuable.

e. But if you'll open that, you may know what I felt when I came in.

Besides the three types (simple, compound, and complex sentences), in *The Gift of the Magi*, sentence fragments were found. About six sentence fragments were found in the short story. Examples of the fragments are presented as (9a-c) below.

(9) a. ONE DOLLAR AND EIGHTY-SEVEN CENTS.

b. Only \$ 1.87 to buy a gift for Jim.

c. Her Jim.

The sentence fragments in (9a-c) are phrases. Such phrases can fill in one slot in sentences. Other phrases are not overtly stated for efficiency consideration. This is in line with the principle of economy of expression set out by Bresnan et al. (2016): "All syntactic structure nodes are optional and are not used unless required by independent principle (completeness, coherence, semantic expressivity).

## V. Conclusion

As discussed in section 4, the sentences presented as examples of the sentences identified show that some sentences in O. Henry's best short story *The Gift of the Magi* have copula constructions. Some others have non-copula constructions. The sentences having non-copula constructions have basic pattern SVC/SVA. Unlike the sentences with copula constructions, those sentences with non-copula constructions tend to vary. Some have basic pattern SV, some have SVO, some have SVOO, and still some have SVOC/SVA.

Some sentences identified are simple, some are compound, and some others are complex sentences. More than one half of the total amount of sentences identified are simple. About one third of the total amount are complex. Compound sentences, which contain two independent clauses come third in number. Besides the simple, compound, and complex sentences, a small amount of linguistic units found are sentence fragments. They are probably used for efficiency consideration, in line with the principle of economy of expression.

Above all, the sentences identified in O. Henry's best short story *The Gift of the Magi* tend to portray the sentences used in everyday communication, which vary in constructions, in terms of predication and basic patterns as well as the portion of each variation which may occur.

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