CHAPTER 6: SUBJECT/LINKING VERB/SUBJECT COMPLEMENT PATTERN

SYNTAX

You are telling someone about a Vietnamese refugee that used to be a student with you, and you say, "Duc is now a teacher." Or you see your friend Nana sitting by herself with no sparkle in her eyes, and you say, "Nana seems sad today." In both of these situations, you are using the subject/linking verb/subject complement pattern. The word that comes after the **linking verb** is called a **subject complement** because it refers to the subject and it also completes the verb phrase just as the direct object completes the verb phrase in the S/V/DO pattern.

> Duc=teacher
> Nana=sad

S/LV/SC with Noun SC

Two parts of speech can occur in the SC position. One is a noun or some kind of word or phrase functioning as a noun. A noun SC in some way renames the subject.

> Duc is a teacher.
> Nana is my friend.
> My father is a lawyer**.**

S/LV/SC with Adjective SC

In the second variation, the word that comes after the verb is an adjective or something functioning as an adjective that describes the subject in some way.

> Nana seems sad.
> The guilty man became uneasy.
> The situation was dangerous.

Verbs That Function as Linking Verbs

Be.

The most common linking verb is the verb *be*. When it is used as the finite verb in the sentence, not as an auxiliary, it is almost always a linking verb. (See Chapter 4 for other functions of *be*.)

President Lincoln was melancholic.
Jerome has been sick all week.

Seem and *Become*

While *be* is the most common linking verb, it is not the only one. *Seem* and *become* always function as linking verbs.

You seem unhappy with my decision.
Gerald became the president of the organization.

Verbs of sense

Smell, taste, feel, look, and sound often function as linking verbs.

The hyacinth smells sweet.
Ham tastes salty.
The wool feels soft.
He looks good. (As opposed to *He looks well* which would be a statement about
his apparent health; it is also a S/V/SC pattern.)
His voice sounded tired.

These verbs of sense are not, however, always linking verbs. In "The woman smelled the roses," *smell* is a transitive verb and *roses* is the direct object.

Other Verbs Functioning as Linking Verbs

Other verbs which frequently function as linking verbs are *grow, get, turn, go, appear, remain, continue*. These verbs are linking verbs when they mean essentially the same as *be* or *become.*

The audience grew restless.
The workers are getting angry.

The important thing to notice here is that when the verb changes from one type to another, the relationship amongst all of the words changes and in fact, the verb, while it is the same word, does not mean exactly the same thing in the different patterns.

My son grew last year. S/IV
I grow roses. S/TV/DO
He grew uneasy. S/LV/SC

Diagramming the S/LV/SC Pattern

The diagram for both the noun subject complement (sometimes called the **predicate nominative**) and the adjective subject complement (sometimes called the **predicate adjective**) is the same. The slanted line between the linking verb and the subject complement points back toward the subject.

Duc is now a teacher.
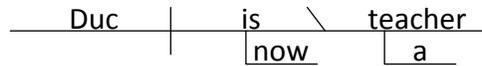
Maria was lively at the party last night.
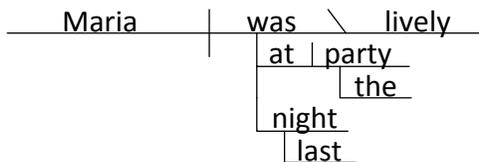
RHETORIC

How to Use *Be* Effectively

1. **Abuses of *be***

It is not uncommon for writing teachers to tell students to avoid verb *be* whenever possible. Some teachers even force students to eliminate any form of *be* from their essays. The reason for this contempt for *be* is that it functions like an equal sign; it carries no real action or even state of being in it, and usually writing is more interesting if it is more active. So teachers want you to choose active verbs. Another cause for the contempt for *be* comes from the overuse of the "there expletive" pattern. In that pattern, the subject is always followed by a form of *be,* and often what the subject is doing is included in a dependent clause or in the next sentence. Often this "there expletive" pattern is a prime candidate for elimination through sentence combining.

> There are many reasons to avoid excessive exposure to the sun. Scientists give these reasons.
> Scientists give many reasons for avoiding excessive exposure to the sun.

2. Uses of *be*

While *be* can be over-used, often we do want to and need to make simple statements that something equals something else. We also might need the simple pattern for force and variation in a paragraph. Once we get to dependent clauses and verbal phrases, we will also see that this simple pattern can become rather sophisticated when it is combined with those structures.

So, as with every other pattern, use the pattern wisely and use it well. Some of what your teachers have told you is true. You do not want to overuse *be* in either the S/V/SC or the "there expletive" pattern, but you do want to use it.

EXERCISES

A. Sentences to Diagram

1. After two beers, Juan became morose and testy.
2. Near the end of the chapter, the hero feels dejected.
3. The traffic is getting worse and worse.
4. The weather is certainly unstable this month.
5. He became irritated by the constant questioning of his integrity.
6. My carrots look arthritic this year.
7. The man near the water cooler is my father.
8. The butterfly appeared unaware of the cat under the bush.
9. The President's speech on television last night was interesting.
10. The little girl was afraid of the lions and elephants at the zoo.
11. Is Leon now the president of a large software company?
12. Puerto Vallarta was a small fishing village of 1200 people.
13. Now it is a city of 256,000 people.
14. The Pacific Ocean in Mexico is warm.
15. Puerto Vallarta has become a major tourist center.
16. Some of the hotels in the hotel zone north of town are seventeen stories tall.
17. Other hotels like the Krystal, the first major five-star hotel in the zone, are four stories tall.
18. The ground floor is not the first floor.
19. The native population has grown dependent on tourism.
20. The Mexican government seems content with this situation.

B. Sentence Combining

Use a subject/linking verb/subject complement pattern to combine sentences.

Example

> There are numerous explanations given for the collapse of the Mayan civilization.
> None of them is definitive.
>
> **None of the reasons given for the collapse of the Mayan civilization is definitive.**

1. There are beaches south of town.
   They are white and sandy.

2. There are numerous caves near the Columbia.
   They are all shallow.

3. The children were hungry.
   They were ready to eat.

4. There is a beer in the refrigerator.
   The beer is cold.

5. The man has a gray mustache.
   The man is a teacher.

6. I have a son.
   He is a lifeguard.

7. The man has a mother.
   She is a doctor in Guadalajara.

8. Mexico is a country.
   Mexico has many races.

9. There is a jungle outside Puerto Vallarta.
   In May the jungle is dry.

10. The beach has sand.
    The sand is white.

11. The weather is warm.
    The weather is humid.
    The weather is sunny.

12. There are sidewalks in Puerto Vallarta.
    They are high above the cobbled road.

13. Cinco de Mayo is celebrated as a holiday in the United States.
    However it is not celebrated as a holiday in Mexico.

14. There is a church.
    The church is at the heart of the city.
    The church is the church of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

C. Sentence Rewriting

Rewrite the following sentence using the SLVSC pattern in your rewrite. Think about the effects of each phrasing and in what context you might use each. The purpose of this exercise is not to get rid of the SLVC pattern in your writing, but to be conscious of it when you use it.

Example

Penelope epitomizes the patient, faithful wife.

Penelope is the epitome of the patient, faithful wife.

1. The Mexican government supports the tourist industry.
2. The beak of the toucan has many colors.
3. The brownness of the coconut means that the coconut is ripe
4. In July there is a lot of rain.
5. During the rainy season, there is dry weather in the mornings and rain in the afternoons.
6. There are many young people in Vallarta who are bilingual

D. On Your Own

1. Write three sentences that use *be* in the present tense as a linking verb.
2. Write three sentences that use *be* in the past tense as a linking verb.
3. Write three sentences that use *be* in the future tense as a linking verb.
4. Write three sentences that use three different verbs of sense as linking verbs.
5. Write three sentences that use a noun as the subject complement.
6. Write three sentences that use an adjective as the subject complement.