

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

- independent (not subordinate)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

- independent (not subordinate)
- non-coordinate (not a coordination of clauses)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

- independent (not subordinate)
- non-coordinate (not a coordination of clauses)
- positive (not negated)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

- independent (not subordinate)
- non-coordinate (not a coordination of clauses)
- positive (not negated)
- declarative (not interrogative or imperative or exclamative)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Describing English is easier if we **first** describe a set of clauses of rather basic form and **then** describe what elaborations are possible.

So, purely for descriptive convenience, we designate a class of clauses as **canonical** clauses: those that are

- independent (not subordinate)
- non-coordinate (not a coordination of clauses)
- positive (not negated)
- declarative (not interrogative or imperative or exclamative)
- ‘ordinary’ in their constituent order (no special stylistic rearrangements — preposing, existential, cleft, etc.)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

It is not a **finding** that canonical clauses are independent, non-coordinate, positive, and declarative, and have the ordinary 'Subject + Verb + Other stuff' order, without any special stylistic rearrangements.

We simply stipulate that only clauses with those properties will be called canonical.

The idea is not of theoretical import. It is just that later on it turns out to be easier to explain what negated or interrogative clauses are like if we can make reference to a prior account of what non-negated and non-interrogative clauses are like.

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Canonical clauses come in various types:

Simple intransitive: *Bears hibernate.*
Su V

Simple transitive: *Bears love honey.*
Su V O^d

Complex intransitive: *Bears look surly.*
Su V PC

Complex transitive: *Bears make me nervous.*
Su V O^d PC

Ditransitive: *Bears give me the creeps.*
Su V Oⁱ O^d

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Catenative complements of various sorts also occur in canonical clauses of the complex-intransitive and complex-transitive varieties:

Complex intransitive: *Bears are heading this way.*
Su V Catenative Comp

Complex intransitive: *Bears are hunted for sport.*
Su V Catenative Comp

Complex transitive: *Bears make me lose it.*
Su V O^d Catenative

Complex transitive: *Bears got me arrested.*
Su V O^d Catenative

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, chapter 1

ALICE was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice 'without pictures or conversations?'

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, 'Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!' (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Some canonical clauses from page 1 of *Alice*:

*Alice was beginning to get very tired
of sitting by her sister on the bank.* [complex intransitive]

*The rabbit took a watch out
of its waistcoat-pocket.* [complex transitive]

Alice started to her feet. [complex intransitive]

She ran across the field after it. [simple intransitive]

*The rabbit-hole went straight on
like a tunnel for some way.* [complex intransitive]

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Some non-canonical clauses from page 1 of *Alice*:

that she ought to have wondered at this [subordinate]

*once or twice she had peeped into the book
her sister was reading, but it had no
pictures or conversations in it* [coordinate]

*She had never before seen a rabbit with a
waistcoat-pocket.* [negative]

*What is the use of a book without pictures
or conversation?* [interrogative]

There was nothing so very remarkable in that. [existential]

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

CGEL treats passive clauses as **non-canonical** because of their **special information-packaging properties**.

Those properties related to **semantics** and **pragmatics** and **discourse organization**, not syntax.

(Syntactically, we shall see later, passives are very similar to certain canonical clauses — specifically, simple or complex intransitives with AdjP complements.)

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Interestingly, various non-canonical clause constructions have been targets for prescriptivist prejudice. Strunk & White condemn

- **existential clauses** (*There's a man outside*)
- **negative clauses** (p. 19: 'Put statements in positive form')
- other non-canonical clause types barred by Strunk's dicta 'keep related words together' (p. 18) and 'omit needless words' (p. 23).

Left dislocations (*My wife, she doesn't know this*) are occasionally claimed to be ungrammatical.

Canonical and non-canonical clauses

Interestingly, various non-canonical clause constructions have been targets for prescriptivist prejudice. Strunk & White condemn

- **existential clauses** (*There's a man outside*)
- **negative clauses** (p. 19: 'Put statements in positive form')
- other non-canonical clause types barred by Strunk's dicta 'keep related words together' (p. 18) and 'omit needless words' (p. 23).

Left dislocations (*My wife, she doesn't know this*) are occasionally claimed to be ungrammatical.

And just about **everyone** hates the **passive** (*He was attacked by a bear*). But more on that another day.