

FURTHER CATEGORIES OF ENGLISH

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VERBS

Verbs are the 'action' words and as such relatively easy to recognise, whether they are compound as in *have to realise*, copulative as in 'he is late' or just simple as in *take, walk*, and many more. However, the easiness all but disappears when the *moods* (indicative, subjunctive, optative, etc), *tenses* (present indefinite, past perfect, continuous, gnomic praeterite, and worse), and *voices* (active plus and only passive) are broached.

In so far as the modes of the verb are concerned it is easy to remember that all ordinary expressions are in the indicative mode, the usual mode for stating facts, which is what financial and legal reports and documents are hopefully all about. In Great Britain and the dominions (which formerly included South Africa) the subjunctive was on the wane and would possibly have become almost extinct had our American cousins not started to revive the manner. The preceding sentence is written in the subjunctive – *would* and *had ... started* – and would have read as follows in the indicative mood: *The subjunctive will possibly have become almost extinct if our American cousins did not start to revive it.*

In an essay such as this on the categories of English, the personal pronoun with its emotional and perhaps prejudicial content should not be allowed to obtrude. In the case of the subjunctive mood in English, however, I am none too happy with the term *subjunctive* which is bandied about so haphazardly. As there are no separate grammatical forms for the subjunctive (separate from the indicative forms, that is), I suspect that, with the exception of a few examples, any sentence in the so-called subjunctive can just as easily be understood, explained, and categorised by looking at it within the framework of the indicative mood. The sentence referred to above as being in the subjunctive can be regarded as cast in the indicative mood if the sequence of tenses after 'was' is borne in mind: 'In Great Britain and the

dominions (which formerly included South Africa) the subjunctive *WAS* on the wane and *WOULD* possibly *HAVE BECOME* almost extinct *HAD* our American cousins not started to revive the manner'.

The few exceptions referred to include certain usages of 'shall', 'should', and 'might'. 'Might' is best avoided while 'should' is a more idiomatic substitute for 'must' in the following sentence: 'If a person voting at the meeting does so by proxy proof of his authority to do this must be submitted to the company at least twenty-four hours before the meeting proceeds to business'. He 'must' not do it but 'should' do it if he wants to vote. Admittedly the distinction does not amount to more than a hair-line, but idiomatic usage (and perhaps the long and free tradition of English speech and the English press) requires 'should' where the more Germanic use of 'must' is virtually *VERBOTEN*. If the writer really wants to communicate the 'must' on pain of death, 'shall' will still be more idiomatic than 'must', which in South Africa has the added complication of being made to sound more *kosher* by the frequent use of its Afrikaans equivalent 'moet'. Similarly, it would be idiomatically incorrect to translate 'should' in the above sentence as 'behoort'.

The use of 'shall' in legal documents is still quite common as in: 'The committee shall consist of three members, of whom three shall be elected...'. In South African legal usage, particularly in legal documents emanating from banks, 'will' is increasingly replacing 'shall'. Whether this is due to – dare one so phrase it – ignorance or whether this is a quite natural development in the discarding of the subjunctive is yet too early to say with any fair measure of certainty. (By the way, this cavorting makes translation into Afrikaans decidedly difficult, since the present indefinite subjunctive *shall consist of* is rendered by the present indicative *bestaan uit* while the future indefinite indicative *will consist* will have to be rendered by the future indicative *sal bestaan uit*. Linguistic congruence is almost impossible, but other methods of translation such as 'dynamic equivalence' and 'logistic coherence' see to it that even the English *the committee will consist* remains idiomatically *die komitee bestaan uit*. To be on the safe side and to avoid any possibility of confusion a compiler of legal documents should be like J.S. Bach and always rather write good, if perhaps at times boring, music and not like Haydn, always entertaining but sometimes bad or wrong. The main objective of a legal or, for that matter, a financial document is to be correct and not to entertain. Leave that to the poets and the Scottish gentlemen in the joke about the English lake. Use 'shall' in all legal contexts.

Before the subjunctive is left for more practical aspects of the verb, such as the tenses, it suffices to say that perhaps so-called English subjunctives were better described as not being subjunctives at all but specialised uses of the indicative such as in *men were deceivers ever*, where *were* is not a subjunctive but an example of a tense called the gnomic praeterite.

This brings us to the uses of the tenses of the English verb. When the tenses indicate time (past, present or future), the usages are clear and even easy, but when relations in time or periods of time or conditions of time are being indicated the trouble starts. To illustrate this a time-line will serve admirably.

FIGURE 1 : TIME

PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
I saw	I see	I shall see

There are three categories: the indefinite past, the indefinite present, and the indefinite future; hence the names of the tenses – past indefinite, present indefinite, and future indefinite.

'I saw' does not state exactly when but only indicates that the action took place at some indefinite stage in the past. 'I saw', 'I see', and 'I shall see' therefore indicate time in its widest sense: past, present or future.

FIGURE 2: RELATIONS IN TIME

PAST		PRESENT	FUTURE	
14h00	15h00		14h00	15h00
had seen, spoke		have seen, speak	shall have seen, shall speak	

After I had seen him at two o' clock yesterday, I spoke to you about it at three.

Every day after I have seen him, I speak to you about it.

After I shall have seen him tomorrow, I shall speak to you about it.

The relations in time are clear in so far as one action obviously precedes the other in all three cases – first the seeing then the speaking – but in *After I had seen him at two o' clock yesterday, I spoke to you about it at three* a third relation in time should also be borne in mind; to wit, the joint relation of 2 o'clock and 3 o'clock yesterday to the moment of speaking about yesterday's events, which is in the present. In the above cases this relationship is dormant, but when periods of time are being indicated it becomes of paramount importance.

actual present duration of writing to an implied present duration of thinking about something that happened in the indefinite past. I am writing for a few moments, then my thoughts spring back suddenly after which occasion I am thinking of the past.

Short-term rates will be rising while I shall not be able to benefit from this owing to the large amounts of money I have tied up in long-term fixed-interest securities.

The above sentence should be clear from figure 3 and the foregoing explanations. It is perhaps just as well, by way of further explanation, to add that during all the time while rates will be rising I shall not benefit at certain indefinite points in future time, whereas this would have been the case had I the funds available to invest when *I shall in fact benefit from interest rates that will be rising for the next month or so.*

Regarding the verb, the categories of time, relations in time, and periods of time have now been covered, which leaves conditions of time to be treated. This brings us once more to the gnomic praeterite and others of its kind which do not concern the report writer or compiler of legal and financial documents.

What does remain to be treated, however briefly, is the matter of the active and passive voice. Because the passive voice usually presents a more roundabout way of saying something than the active voice, the passive should be avoided whenever possible unless there is good reason to use it. Two good reasons immediately spring to mind: when the instigator of the action wishes to remain unknown as in *It has been decided to terminate your services forthwith* and when, owing to the complex nature of the facts to be communicated, a communication would be clearer, as in *The capital amount (principal) of the stock is to be redeemed in accordance with the amounts specified under the columns marked (B) on the reverse side of this certificate in respect of each unit of R100 initial nominal value of stock issued.* In contrast, *The company will redeem the capital amount (principal) of the stock in accordance with the amounts that the directors of the company specified under the columns on the reverse side of this certificate which the drafters of this certificate have marked (B) on the reverse side of this certificate in respect of each unit of R100 initial nominal value of the stock that the company issues through the agency of its merchant bankers* is longer, provides more useless information and is generally looser and sloppier in construction.

The sloppy example can, however, be used to illustrate the difference in category between 'specified' and 'have marked' in 'the amounts that the directors of the company specified under the columns on the reverse side of this certificate which the drafters of this certificate have marked (B) on the reverse side of this

certificate'. 'Specified' is easy, since it should be clear that the directors specified certain amounts at some indefinite point of time in the past, but what about 'have marked'? Haven't the drafters completed the document yet or had they completed it before it was printed?

The problem arises when 'have marked' is taken as indicating a certain category of time, namely the present, which is of course not what the tense is doing here. The action of the verb is complete but its effect is still being experienced in that the mark on the reverse side is present to a stockholder who turns the certificate over to consult column (B) in order to determine how much money he will receive on certain dates in the future. The categories that come into play here are therefore those of cause and effect and not time, and this obviously has untold legal uses.

ADVERBS

An adverb does not qualify a verb only, as the *strangely effective method*-example in the section on adjectives showed. The problem with *single-word* adverbs is twofold. The fact that an *ly*-ending is usually tacked onto adverbs (exceptions are 'it smells sweet', 'it looks good', and other actions concerned with the senses) means that one can easily recognise correctly used adverbs when reading. One has to be careful to use them properly when writing: *it is quite readily available*, in which *quite* and *readily* are both adverbs, should of course serve as a warning that there are a fair number of adverbs that do not sport an *ly*-ending. In South African English the tendency is to insert the adverb after the verb rather than before it, and unfortunate as this may sound it is the best rule-of-thumb method on offer. Rather write *He asked me to investigate the matter thoroughly* than *He asked me thoroughly to investigate the matter* if the investigating and not the asking is thorough. Never split the infinitive by writing *He asked me to thoroughly investigate the matter* unless convinced that there is just no way of avoiding this, or when splitting should be preferred to the kind of ambiguity presented by *He asked me thoroughly to investigate the matter*.

Two kinds of adverbial clauses are quite often found in legal and financial writing: that expressing a certain intent, and that expressing a certain result. To avoid mixing these categories it would be well if the intent-clause is introduced by 'so that' and the result-clause by 'with the result that'. *The Minister will impose a levy on all such articles so that he can recover at least some of the revenue already lost* provides an example of an intent-clause; *The Minister imposed a levy on such articles so that their sales dropped*

dramatically presents a result-clause that would have been clearer had the writer written *The Minister imposed a levy on such articles, with the result that their sales dropped dramatically*, where the category of result is announced at the start of the clause. In a rather involved legal document all such little pointers can be of immense help in getting the intended meaning across properly. If *with the result that* is reserved solely for result-clauses it follows that *so that* will always prepare the reader for an intent-clause. Adverbial intent can, however, also be expressed in another way – by employing an adverbial phrase: *The Minister will impose an additional levy on these items with a view to recovering partially the revenue already lost on other items of a similar nature*. Although this kind of writing is usually more concise and to the point, it can also become monotonous and something of a learned trick. Be that as it may, its legal uses are obvious, and if such succinct phrasal writing can be balanced with the somewhat more spun-out clausal manner of getting ideas across, a stylistic mean may be found which will not bore or confuse the reader.

PREPOSITIONS

Some guidance as to the correct choice of prepositions may be given by 'categorising' the uses of this important category of English, if that is not going too far. Apparently there are three kinds of relationships indicated by prepositions, for a preposition always indicates some or other relationship, whether implicit or explicit. Firstly a preposition can indicate a relationship between things, secondly between ideas, and thirdly between words. The first category would be expected to be found mainly in technical writing, the second in financial and legal documents, and the third in poetry and philosophy. Obviously most writing will contain all three to a greater or lesser extent. The first chapter of *Utilitarianism*, a technical, philosophical and literary essay by the English economist, philosopher, and man of letters, John Stuart Mill, will serve to illustrate the varying categories of the preposition in English and provide some guidance as to their correct use:

There are a few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge, more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on(1) the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong. From the dawn of philosophy, the question concerning

the *summum bonum*, or, what is the same thing, concerning the foundation of morality, has been accounted the main problem in speculative thought, has occupied the most gifted intellects, and divided them into sects and schools, carrying on a vigorous warfare against one another. And after more than two thousand years the same discussion continues, philosophers are still ranged under the same contending banners, and neither thinkers nor mankind at large seem nearer to being unanimous on the subject, than when the youth Socrates listened to the old Protagoras, and asserted (if Plato's dialogue be grounded on a real conversation) the theory of utilitarianism against the popular morality of the so-called sophist.

It is true that similar confusion and uncertainty, and in some cases similar discordance, exist respecting the first principles of all the sciences, not excepting that which is deemed the most certain of them, mathematics; without much impairing, generally indeed without impairing at all, the trustworthiness of the conclusions of those sciences. An apparent anomaly, the explanation of which is, that the detailed doctrines of a science are not usually deduced from(2a), nor depend for their evidence upon(2b) what are called its first principles. Were it not so, there would be no science more precarious, or whose conclusions were more insufficiently made out, than algebra; which derives none of its certainty from what are commonly taught to learners as its elements, since these, as laid down by some of its most eminent teachers, are as full of fictions as English law, and of mysteries as theology. The truths which are ultimately accepted as the first principles of a science, are really the last results of metaphysical analysis, practised on the elementary notions with which the science is conversant; and their relation to(3a) the science is not that of foundations to(3b) an edifice, but of roots to a tree, which may perform their office equally well though they be never dug down to and exposed to light. But though in science the particular truths precede the general theory the contrary might be expected to be the case with a practical art, such as morals or legislation. All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose must take their whole character and colour from the end to(3c) which they are subservient. When we engage in a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing would seem to be the first thing we need, instead of the last we are to look forward to. A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it.

The difficulty is not avoided by having recourse to the popular theory of a natural faculty, a sense or instinct, informing us of right and wrong. For — besides that the existence of such a moral instinct is itself one of the matters in(4a) dispute — those believers in(4b) it who have any pretensions of philosophy, have been obliged to abandon the idea that it discerns what is right and what is wrong in(4c) the particular case in(4d) hand, as our other senses discern the sight or sound actually present. Our moral faculty, according to all those of its interpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers, supplies us only with the general principles of moral judgements; it is a branch *of* our reason, not *of* our sensitive faculty: and must be looked to for the abstract doctrines *of* morality, not for perception of it in the concrete. The intuitive, no less than what may be termed the inductive, school of ethics, insists on the necessity *of* general laws. They both agree that the morality of an individual action is not a question of direct perception, but of the application of a law to an individual case. They recognise also, to a great extent, the same moral laws; but differ as to their evidence, and the source from which they derive their authority. According to the one opinion, the principles of morals are evident *à priori* requiring nothing to command assent, except that the meaning of the terms be understood. According to the other doctrine, right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood, are questions of observation and experience. But both hold equally that morality must be deduced from principles; and the intuitive school affirm as strongly as the inductive, that there is a science of morals. Yet they seldom attempt to make out a list of the *à priori* principles which are to serve as the premises of the science; still more rarely do they make any effort to reduce those various principles to one first principle, or common ground of obligation. They either assume the ordinary precepts of morals as of *à priori* authority, or they lay down as the common groundwork of those maxims, some generality much less obviously authoritative than the maxims themselves, and which has never succeeded in gaining popular acceptance. Yet to support their pretensions there ought either to be some one fundamental principle or law, at the root *of* all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order *of* precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident. To inquire how far the bad effects of this deficiency have been mitigated *in practice*, or to what extent the moral beliefs of mankind have been vitiated or made uncertain by the absence

of any distinct recognition of an ultimate standard, would imply a complete survey and criticism of past and present ethical doctrine. It would, however, be easy to show that whatever steadiness or consistency these moral beliefs have attained, has been mainly due to the tacit influence of a standard not recognised. Although the non-existence of an acknowledged first principle has made ethics not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments, still, as men's sentiments, both of favour and of aversion, are greatly influenced by what they suppose to be the effects of things upon their happiness, the principle of utility or as Bentham latterly called it, the greatest happiness principle, has had a large share in forming the moral doctrines even of those who most scornfully reject its authority. Nor is there any school of thought which refuses to admit that the influence of actions on happiness is a most material and even predominant consideration in many of the details of morals, however unwilling to acknowledge it as the fundamental principle of morality, and the source of moral obligation. I might go much further, and say that to all those *à priori* moralists who deem it necessary to argue at all, utilitarian arguments are indispensable. It is not my present purpose to criticise these thinkers; but I cannot help referring, for(5) illustration, to a systematic treatise by one of the most illustrious of them, the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, by Kant. This remarkable man, whose system of thought will long remain one of the landmarks in the history of philosophical speculation does, in the treatise in question, lay down a universal first principle as the origin and ground of moral obligation; it is this:— 'So act, that the rule on which thou actest would admit of(6) being adopted as a law by all rational beings'.

But when he begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rule of conduct.

All he shows is that the *consequences* of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur.

On the present occasion, I shall, without further discussion of the other theories, attempt to contribute something towards the understanding and appreciation of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory, and towards such proof as it is susceptible of. It is evident that this cannot be proof in the ordinary and popular meaning of the term. Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. Whatever can be proved to be good,

must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof. The medical art is proved to be good by its conducing *to* health; but how is it possible to prove that health is good? The art of music is good, for the reason, among others, that it produces pleasure; but what proof is it possible to give that pleasure is good? If, then, it is asserted that there is a comprehensive formula, including all things which are in themselves good, and that whatever else is good, is not so as an end, but as a mean, the formula may be accepted or rejected but is not a subject *of* what is commonly understood by proof. We are not, however, to infer that its acceptance or rejection must depend on blind impulse, or arbitrary choice. There is a larger meaning of the word proof in which this question is as amenable to it as any other of the disputed questions of philosophy. The subject is within the cognisance of the rational faculty; and neither does that faculty deal with it solely in the way of intuition. Considerations may be presented capable of determining the intellect either to give or, withhold its assent to the doctrine; and this is equivalent to proof.

We shall examine presently of what nature are these considerations; in what manner they apply to the case, and what rational grounds, therefore, can be given *for* accepting or rejecting the utilitarian formula. But it is a preliminary condition of rational acceptance or rejection, that the formula should be correctly understood. I believe that the very imperfect notion ordinarily formed of its meaning, is the chief obstacle which impedes its reception; and that could it be cleared, even from only the grosser misconceptions, the question would be greatly simplified, and a large proportion of its difficulties removed. Before, therefore, I attempt to enter into(7) the philosophical grounds which can be given for assenting to the utilitarian standard, I shall offer some illustrations of the doctrine itself; with the view of showing more clearly what it is, distinguishing it from what it is not, and disposing of such of the practical objections to it as either originate in, or are closely connected with, mistaken interpretations of its meaning. Having thus prepared the ground, I shall afterwards endeavour to throw such light as I can upon the question, considered as one of philosophical theory.

(1) The first preposition to be considered is 'on' in 'speculation on the most important subjects'. Here speculation and subjects can both be said to be ideas of which the relation to each other is expressed by the preposition 'on'. This preposition seems to indicate that the thought process of speculation is poised above the

subjects touched upon by the roving mind, which is quite logical and clear.

(2a+2b) The second set of prepositions indicates relations between doctrines and evidence. 'Deduced from' implies that doctrines may be subordinate to evidence, while 'depend upon' illustrates roughly the same by showing that doctrines may need evidence to rest on. The 'on' of (1) and the 'from' of (2a), while indicating relations on an abstract plane, can be reasoned out according to logic, since on a concrete plane (one thing above the other in 'on' and one thing coming from another in 'from') the prepositions would have been the same. This is not the case with 'depend upon', for literally speaking 'depend' means 'hang from' and one would therefore expect one thing to depend from another. This is true on a concrete plane as in *the drapery that depends from his shoulders*. Even though 'depend on' is sometimes found in the literal meaning too, in the example from Mill the idea of one thing being subordinate to and hence below another predominates, with the result that the category of the idea determines the type of preposition used.

(3a+3b) Not much need be said except that the relation of the truths to the science is in the category of the 'idea' while foundations to an edifice are in the category of 'thing'.

(3c) *The end to which they are subservient* presents more of a problem, for is the relation here between ideas or things, and if so what ideas and things implied or stated? Literally speaking one would have expected *the end 'under' which they are subservient* to have been used and, ideally speaking, *the end 'from' which they are subservient* may have been acceptable. 'To', here, appears merely to posit a relation between the word 'end' and 'subservient' with the idea of 'relation to' quite prominent in the writer's mind. Be that as it may, it is becoming increasingly clear that the correct preposition is either known to the writer or has to be looked up and can certainly not always be reasoned out categorically. This is especially so if it poses a relation between words, for which kind of relationship the rules – if there are any – have either not been researched thoroughly enough or just do not exist at all.

(4a+4b+4c+4d) *Matters in dispute*: 'in' links the two words, with 'the matters in the process of dispute' perhaps at the back of the writer's mind where 'in' has the almost literal function of indicating 'in the midst of processional happenings'. 'Believers in it' seems to defy description until one is made aware of the fact that 'believe in' is most probably synonymous with 'to place faith or trust in someone' who holds or has one's faith or trust just as a concrete receptacle has or holds liquids. So 'believers in' seems to be in the category of idea, presenting a relationship between the

believer and what he believes. 'In the particular case' would also appear to be on the plane of ideas; 'in hand' clearly has a literal derivation although it is used figuratively here. The reader would do well to reflect along the lines suggested.

(5) The 'for' in 'for illustration' has already been touched upon in the section on adverbs and clearly links the words 'referring' and 'illustration' in a manner of intent.

(6) 'Admit of' can be best described as a traditional phrase in which constituent words are linked in a set way. The 'of' in 'admit of' may relate to an implied word such as 'truth' that has been left out of 'admit the truth of', but in this particular instance really does not seem to do so.

(7) The 'into' here serves to emphasise that no one is literally entering on or just entering concrete grounds but is as it were entering into a sphere of a certain abstract activity.

What all this is in aid of will become clear when it is borne in mind that in legal and financial writing the category in which prepositions operate is usually the category of idea. The choice between 'shareholders in the company', 'shareholders of the company', and 'shareholders to the company' becomes easier. 'To' seems to relate 'shareholders' and 'company' to each other merely as words, a perfectly legitimate way of linking in philosophy or poetry, but not quite *kosher* here. 'Shareholders in the company' is either a misdirected attempt at literalness, for they may very well hold *shares* in the company but need not themselves be in the company; they need not even be in the country, judging by the persistent rumours of a non-resident shareholders' tax. If 'shareholders in the company' is intended as a play on 'shares in the company' then 'in' relates primarily the two words 'shareholders' and 'shares' to each other, which may add some bounce to a tired sonnet, but is best avoided here where the abstract relationship of belonging the one to the other, shareholders and company, is best expressed by 'of'. One should stick to one's chosen category, even when writing English. By a similar token 'shareholders' loan accounts to the company' or 'shareholders' loan accounts in the company' is 'shareholders' loan accounts of the company' and not some vaguer way of indicating 'shareholders' shares *in* the company' or 'shareholders' loans *to* the company'.

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