



Discerning Diverse Functional Roles of the Self-same Phrases in English Sentences

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Abstract:

Language becomes rich because of its diverse constituents. Phrases are some of the constituents that form a sentence when they are combined into a single string. A phrase in sentences can perform diverse functional roles. Similarly, a functional role can be realized by diverse phrases. The main objective of this article is to discern the diverse functional roles of selfsame phrases in English sentences. It primarily deals with selfsame phrases and their syntactic functional roles. The article writer has presented some categorical patterns in terms of phrases in the beginning, has given sentences that follow the pattern, has mentioned the structure of the phrase, and finally has discerned the functional roles of each phrase in the sentence. This article basically deals with the major functional roles realized by the selfsame phrases. The functional roles involve subject, direct object, indirect object, benefactive object, subject attribute, object attribute, predicator complement and adjunct. This article is noteworthy to those who are interested in teaching learning English grammar.

Keywords: *English, function, grammar, language, phrase*

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning grammar is very essential, because it provides us with rules of word formation, sentence construction, transformation of sentences and so on. Knowledge of grammar leads us to create novel and correct sentences in writing and speech. English grammar is taught to the students of schools as well as colleges in their courses in Nepal. English teachers need to have deep knowledge of grammar for teaching their students, because as English teachers, we have been recurrently asked more questions about grammar than any other facets of English. Most of the students are found to be weak in grammar in spite of being taught in the class. Therefore, they are discerned to be hesitant in constructing free writings. They depend on the guide books and their teachers' handouts for their examinations.

This article deals with one area of grammar. The area is phrases and their functions that are to be studied in the subject language and linguistics. The writer has tried to present some basic sentences based on the phrases to enable the students to discern the functional roles of the phrases. This article exhibits that the same phrase can accomplish various syntactic functional roles in English sentences. It is obvious that various constituents contribute to the formation or structure of a phrase. It further underscores that the selfsame phrases do not perform only one function but they are also capable for doing diverse functional roles such as subject attribute, object attribute, predicator complement and adjunct in sentences.

Language learning becomes easy if we start studying or teaching a small grammatical unit and keep on moving ahead to the larger units. These units are constituents of language. A sentence is a combination of constituents based on grammatical rules that make a complete meaning. Sentence constituents can have varied functions such as subject, predicator, direct object, indirect object, benefactive object, subject attribute, object attribute, predicator, predicator complement, apposition, premodifier,

postmodifier and adjunct. Achieving the knowledge about these constituents in sentence formations enhances our language skill to deliver our writing and speech precisely and efficiently.

The article covers a small area of grammar, but it will turn to be helpful to the English teachers, students and English language learners who retain enthusiastic curiosity in learning English grammar, especially in discerning diverse functional roles of selfsame phrases.

1.1 Objectives of the Article

The specific objective of this article is to discern the functional roles of selfsame phrase pattern in English sentences.

2. Theoretical Review of Literature

Theoretical review of literature involves definition of grammar, definitions and types of phrase, subject, direct object, indirect object, benefactive object, subject attribute, object attribute, predicator, predicator complement, apposition, determiner, premodifier and postmodifier.

2.1 Language and Grammar

English is a rich language, because it accepts variety of words, inclusion of new words, complexity of sentence patterns, texts of implicature, flexibility of forms and exceptions to rules or norms. Language is human property unique and eerie. Hockett (1958) assumes language to be “the most valuable single possession of the human race” (p.1). Human language is resourceful. It involves the ability to produce and understand an infinite number of novel utterances which have never been heard and said before. Yule (1997) asserts that language has “a feature of creating novel utterances” (pp.22-23). Krishnaswamy and Verma (1999) consider the language to be “structurally complex” (p.17). According to Doff (1997), learning a language “involves being exposed to samples of language that we can understand; from this we can acquire the rules of the language and apply them to make an unlimited number of original sentences” (p.185). Brown (1994) underlines language to be “systematic and generative” (p.5).

Grammar deals with study of rules for forming words and combining them into sentences. Carter and McCarthy (2006) view grammar to be “concerned with how sentences and structures are formed” (p.2). They further stress that a “descriptive approach to grammar is based on observation of usages: It states how people use the grammar of a language” (p.6). Yule (1997) reckons that one type of descriptive approach is called “structural analysis and its main concern is to investigate the distribution of forms in a language” (p.92). Tickoo (2009) highlights the importance of grammar and proclaims that it has “an important place in one’s knowledge of a second or foreign language. it can provide a sound knowledge of usable rules, especially when teaching focuses on aspects of grammar that constitute the basic building blocks of the language” (p.165).

The formation and functions of phrases is studied in grammar that is the study of rules for forming sentences. Cowan (2008) regards as grammar as “the set of rules that describe how words and groups of words can be arranged to form sentences in a particular language” (p.3). Understanding grammatical rules in English is the basic key to understanding the language. We need to use language to communicate the concepts, messages, information etc. to others among people.

2.2 Phrase

A phrase is a group of words which functions as a unit of grammar. Crystal (2008) defines phrase as “a term used in grammatical analysis to refer to a single element of structure typically containing more than one word, and lacking the subject-predicate structure” (p.367). There are mainly five types of phrase: Noun Phrase (NP), Verb Phrase (VP), Adjective Phrase (Adj P), Adverb Phrase (Adv P) and Prepositional Phrase (Prep P).

2.2.1 The Noun Phrase (NP)

A noun phrase is basically a group of words with a noun as its head word. Aarts and Aarts (1986) view a noun phrase as “a phrase which has a noun as its most important constituent” (p.60). For example: a cat, two boys, a very tall girl etc. A Subjective personal pronoun in a sentence can also be taken as a noun phrase. For example: he, *she, they, we* etc.

2.2.2 The Verb Phrase (VP)

A verb phrase is a group of words with a verb as the head word. Quirk and Greenbaum (1996) affirm that “the verb phrase consists of a ‘head verb’ preceded by one or more auxiliary verbs” (p.17). For Example: *will read, must be working, must have done* etc.

Sinclair (1992) defines a phrasal verb as “a combination of a verb and an adverb or a verb and a preposition, or a verb, an adverb and a preposition, which together has a single meaning” (p.504). For example: keep up, go down etc. Such a phrasal verb functions as a verb phrase.

2.2.3 The Adjective Phrase (Adj. P)

An adjective phrase is a phrase in which the head word is an adjective. Aarts (19970) mentions that “an adjective phrase is headed by an adjective” (p.274). For example: *very happy, extremely good, too bad* etc.

2.2.4 The Adverb Phrase (Adv. P)

An adverb phrase is a group of words which functions like an adverb. An adverb is the head word in an adverb phrase. Aarts (19970) mentions that “an adverb phrase is headed by an adverb” For example: *very slowly, so well, really carelessly* etc.

2.2.5 The Prepositional Phrase (Prep. P)

A prepositional phrase is a group of words that begins with a preposition and ends in a noun or a pronoun. Quirk and Greenbaum (1996) assert that the prepositional phrase consists of “a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is characteristically a noun phrase or a wh-clause or v-ing clause” (p.140). For example: *in the hall, on the desk, with him, on the wall* etc.

2.3 Determiners

Determiners are words placed in front of a noun to make it clear what the noun refers to. Articles, demonstratives, possessive pronouns, quantifiers, cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, distributives etc. are determiners. Huddleston (1996) affirms that determiners “play a major role in the NP contrasts singular vs. plural, count vs. mass and definite vs. indefinite” (p.87). Determiners determine or specify the reference of the noun. Aarts and Aarts (1986) state: The function determiner can be realized by a wide range of items, such as the definite article, the indefinite articles, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, numerals, etc. These items occur in a fixed order with respect to each other (p.105).

2.4 Premodification and Postmodification

Wales (2001) affirms that in modern grammar “pre-modification is used to describe all those elements in a noun phrase or nominal group which are subordinate to the noun and occur directly before it” (p. 316). Noun, adjective and adjective phrase can be the pre-modifiers in a non-phrase.

2.5 Function

Forms and functions are vital aspects in grammar. Grammatical function is the syntactic role played by a word or phrase in the context of a particular clause or sentence. It is called a function. Sentence constituents / phrases can play the functional role of subject, predicator, direct object, indirect object, benefactive object, subject attribute, object attribute, predicator complement, adjunct/ adverbial etc.

2.5.1 Subject (Sub)

The subject of a sentence is the person, place, idea or thing that does the action or that is being described. It is what performs the action. Every sentence must have a verb. Aarts (1997) defines a subject “as the entity that carries out the action expressed by the verb in a sentence” (p.283). The subject of a sentence is one of the basic parts of a sentence. The other basic part is the predicate. The subject in a sentence can be understood in the following ways:

1. The subject performs an action: *Ram* writes a letter. (Very basic)
2. The subject is described: *My car* is new. (When the subject is being described, the verb will be a linking verb.)
3. The subject is identified: *Her cat* is the one in the middle. (When the subject is being identified (which is just another way of being described), the verb will be a linking verb.)
4. The subject has an action done to it: *My dog* was taken to the vet. (When the subject has an action done to it, the sentence is called a passive sentence)
5. The subject indicates the authority. *Hari* has a new car. (It indicates whom the thing belongs to.)

2.5.2 Predicate

A predicate is a grammatical term that is part of a clause that includes the verb and the words that tell what the subject does. Aarts (1997) asserts that the predicate of a sentence is syntactically defined as “comprising all the linguistic material to the right of the subject” (p.281).

2.5.3 Predicator

The **predicator** is the central syntactic element in a sentence. It is the verb or verb phrase that functions as a predicator in a sentence. Aarts (1997) defines predicator as “a functional label applied to the verb in a sentence” (p.281). For Example: *eat, can eat, has been eating, will have been playing* etc.

2.6 Complement

A complement is a word, phrase or clause that is necessary to complete the meaning of an expression. A complement adds more information about the subject or object of the sentence. Aarts (1997) considers complement as “a functional label which denotes a constituent whose presence is required by a verb, noun, adjective or preposition” (p.275). There are six types of complement:

- Direct Object
- Indirect Object
- Benefactive Object
- Subject Attribute / Complement
- Object Attribute / Complement
- Predicator Complement

2.6.1 Direct Object (Do)

A direct object is the receiver of action within a sentence. Aarts (1997) assumes direct object as “a function label which denotes an entity that undergoes whatever it is that the preceding verb expresses” (p.275). A direct object answers the question "what?" or "whom?" It can occur in a passive sentence.

For example:

Mohan wrote stories. (Active) Stories were written by Mohan. (Passive)

She sells books. (Active) Books are sold by her. (Passive)

2.6.2 Indirect Object (IO)

An indirect object is the recipient of the direct object, or an affected participant in the event. There must be a direct object for an indirect object to be placed in a sentence. Aarts (1997) holds indirect object as “a function label which denotes an entity that expresses the goal of whatever it is that the preceding verb

expresses” (p.278). An **indirect object answers the question of “to whom”, “for whom” or “for what”**. For example:

Peter taught *us* English. (Active) or Peter taught English to *us*. (Active)

We were taught English by Peter. (Passive) English was taught to *us* by Peter. (Passive)

Someone gave *the boy* a book. (Active) Someone gave a book to *the boy*. (Active)

The boy was given a book. (Passive) A book was given to *the boy*. (Passive)

2.6.3 Benefactive Object (BO)

A benefactive object of a verb is the person, animal, or thing that benefits from the action of the verb. A benefactive object may occur with an intransitive verb. Aarts and Aarts (1986) view that a benefactive object “resembles the indirect; it immediately precedes the direct object constituent” (p.140). We use ‘for’ before a benefactive object if we put a direct object before it.

For example:

Can you call *me* a taxi?

Can you call a taxi for *me*?

I bought *my daughter* a car.

I bought a car for *my daughter*.

He brought *his wife* a sari.

He brought a sari for *his wife*.

2.6.4 Subject Attribute / Complement (SA)

The subject attribute completes the verb relating to the subject of the sentences. It adds more details about the subject of the sentence. Aarts and Aarts (1986) affirm that “the function subject attribute is associated with a constituent which complements the verb and is related to the subject of the sentence” (p.140). For example: He is *a new teacher*. Paul is *my nephew*. They are *happy*.

2.6.5 Object Attribute / Complement (OA)

Object attribute adds more details about the object of the sentence. Aarts and Aarts (1986) mention that there is a relationship between the direct object constituent and the object attribute constituent that “what is expressed by the object attribute is predicated of the direct object constituent” (p.141). For example:

She called Ram *a fox*. Everybody considers her *a good dancer*. We appointed him *the clerk*.

We made her *a lab boy*.

2.6.6 Predicator Complement (PC)

Predicator complement constituent resembles the direct object, but it cannot be used as the subject in the passive sentences. Aarts and Aarts (1986) remark that the predicator complement could be used “with reference to all those constituents that obligatorily complement the verb” (p.142). For example: This girl resembles *her sister*. That tin contains *sugar*. He has *two dogs*.

2.7 Adverbial / Adjunct (A)

This constituent generally answers the questions introduced by ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘how much’, and ‘how often’, ‘why’ etc. It is a part of a sentence that contains extra information; it is not necessary to complete the meaning of a sentence. Aarts (1997) holds adjunct as “a function label which indicates the where, why, when etc. in a proposition (p.274).

For example: She is flying to Pokhara *next week*. He went out *slowly*.

3. Presentation of Sentences for Examining the Functional Roles of Noun Phrases

The article writer has not included personal pronouns in isolation to show their functional roles in the sentences, because they are too easy to be understood. The writer deals with the nouns that occur in isolation or come with other constituents that contribute to the formation of a noun phrase.

Presentation No. 1

NP+VP+NP

Let’s consider these sentences that follow the NP+VP+NP structure.

- 1.Ram writes a letter.
- 2.Rita has two books.
- 3.Shyam is a good teacher.

Interpretation

In the first sentence, [Ram] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Ram] as a head word, [writes] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [write] as a head word and [a letter] is a noun phrase formed of an indefinite article [a] and a noun [letter] as a head word. [Ram] is a subject. It performs an action of writing, [writes] is a predicator and [a letter] is a direct object. It answers the question “what”.

In the second sentence, [Rita] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Rita] as a head word, [has] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [have] as a head word and [two books] is a noun phrase formed of an adjective [two] and a noun [books] as a head word. [Rita] is a subject. It describes the possession of books, [has] is a predicator and [two books] is a predicator complement. It complements the verb.

In the third sentence, [Shyam] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Shyam] as a head word, [is] is a verb phrase made up of a copulative verb [be] as a head word and [a good teacher] is a noun phrase formed of an indefinite article [a], an adjective [good] and a noun [teacher] as a head word. [Shyam] is a subject. It is described. Here, [is] is a predicator and [a good teacher] is a subject attribute. It is related to the subject.

Table 1: Conclusion

NP+VP+NP	Su + P+ DO	First Sentence
	Su+ P + PC	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ SA	Third Sentence

Presentation No. 2

NP+VP+NP+NP

Let’s consider these sentences that follow the NP+VP+NP structure.

- 1.Ram gave his son a car.
- 2.Rita bought her daughter a beautiful doll.
- 3.Shyam left his wife last week.
- 4.A man called Hari a fool.

Interpretation

In the first sentence, [Ram] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Ram] as a head word, [gave] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [give] as a head word, [his son] is a noun phrase formed of a possessive adjective [his] and a noun [son] as a head word, and [a car] is a noun phrase framed of an indefinite article [a] and a noun[car] as a head word. [Ram] is a subject. It performs an action of giving, [gave] is a predicator and [his son] is an indirect object. It answers the question “to whom” and [a car] is a direct object. It answers the question “what”.

In the second sentence, [Rita] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Rita] as a head word, [bought] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [buy] as a head word , [her daughter] is a noun phrase formed of an possessive adjective [her] and a noun [daughter] as a head word and [a beautiful doll] is a noun phrase constructed of an indefinite article [a], an adjective [beautiful] and a noun[doll] as a head word. [Rita] is a subject. It performs the action of buying, [bought] is a predicator, [her daughter]

is a benefactive object. It gets the benefits of buying the doll and [a beautiful doll] is a direct object. It answers the question “what”.

In the third sentence, [Shyam] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Shyam] as a head word, [left] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [leave] as a head word and [his wife] is a noun phrase formed of a possessive adjective [his] and a noun [wife] as a head word, and [last week] is a noun phrase composed of an adjective [last] and a noun [week] as a head word. [Shyam] is a subject. It performs the action of leaving. Here, [left] is a predicator and [his wife] is a direct object. It answers the question “whom” and [last week] is an adjunct. It is answering the question “when”.

In the fourth sentence, [A man] is a noun phrase composed of an indefinite article [a] and a noun [man] as a head word, [called] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [call] as a head word and [Hari] is a noun phrase formed of a personal proper noun [Hari] as a head word, and [a fool] is a noun phrase composed of an indefinite article [a] and a noun [fool] as a head word. [A man] is a subject. It performs the action of calling. Here, [called] is a predicator and [Hari] is a direct object. It answers the question “whom” and [a fool] is an object attribute. It is related to the object.

Table 2: Conclusion

NP+VP+NP+NP	Su + P+ IO+DO	First Sentence
	Su+ P + BO+DO	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+A	Third Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+OA	Fourth Sentence

Presentation No. 3

NP+ VP+ Prep. P

Let’s consider these sentences that follow the NP+VP+NP structure.

- 1.This book belongs to Maya.
- 2.Rita is at home.

Interpretation

In the first sentence, [This book] is a noun phrase composed of an adjective/ determiner [this] and a noun [book] as a head word, [is] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [belong] as a head word and [to Maya] is a prepositional phrase formed of a preposition [to] and a personal proper noun [Maya] . [This book] is a subject. It is described, [belongs] is a predicator and [to Maya] is a predicator complement. It complements the verb belongs.

In the second sentence, [Rita] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Rita] as a head word, [is] is a verb phrase made up of a copulative verb verb [be] as a head word , [at home] is a prepositional phrase formed of a preposition [at] and a noun [home]. [Rita] is a subject. It is described, [is] is a predicator and [at home] is an adjunct. It answers the question “where”.

Table 3: Conclusion

NP+VP+ Prep. P	Su + P+ PC	First Sentence
	Su+ P + A	Second Sentence

Presentation No. 4

NP+VP+NP+ Prep. P

Let’s consider these sentences that follow the NP+VP+NP +Prep. P structure.

- 1.Peter married Linda in Tokyo.

- 2.This place reminded Hari of Pokhara
- 3.Ram mistook Binita for my sister.

Interpretation

In the first sentence, [Peter] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Peter] as a head word, [married] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [marry] as a head word, [Linda] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Linda] as a head word, and [in Tokyo] is a prepositional phrase framed of a preposition [in] and a noun[Tokyo]. [Peter] is a subject. It performs an action of marrying, [married] is a predicator, [Linda] is a direct object. It answers the question “to whom” and [in Tokyo] is an adjunct. It answers the question “where”.

In the second sentence, [This place] is a noun phrase composed of an adjective [This] and a noun [place] as a head word, [reminded] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [remind] as a head word , [Hari] is a noun phrase formed of a personal proper noun [Hari] and [of Pokhara] is a prepositional phrase formed of a preposition [of] and a noun [Pokhara]. [This place] is a subject. It is described, [reminded] is a predicator, [Hari] is a direct object. It answers the question “to whom” and [of Pokhara] is a predicator complement. It complements the verb [reminded].

In the third sentence, [Ram] is a noun phrase composed of a personal proper noun [Ram] as a head word, [mistook] is a verb phrase made up of a lexical verb [mistake] as a head word and [Binita] is a noun phrase formed of a personal proper noun [Binita] as a head word and [for my sister] is a prepositional phrase composed of a preposition [for], a possessive adjective [my] and a noun [sister] as a head word. [Ram] is a subject. It performs the action of mistaking. Here, [mistook] is a predicator and [Binita] is a direct object. It answers the question “whom” and [for my sister] is an objective attribute. It is related to the object.

Table 4: Conclusion

NP+VP+NP+ Prep. P	Su + P+ DO+A	First Sentence
	Su+ P + DO+PC	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+OA	Third Sentence

Table 5: Summary of the Functional Roles of Selfsame Phrases

NP+VP+NP	Su + P+ DO	First Sentence
	Su+ P + PC	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ SA	Third Sentence
NP+VP+NP+NP	Su + P+ IO+DO	First Sentence
	Su+ P + BO+DO	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+A	Third Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+OA	Fourth Sentence
NP+VP+ Prep. P	Su + P+ PC	First Sentence
	Su+ P + A	Second Sentence
NP+VP+NP+ Prep. P	Su + P+ DO+A	First Sentence
	Su+ P + DO+PC	Second Sentence
	Su+ P+ DO+OA	Third Sentence

This table shows that the same pattern of phrases may perform diverse functional roles in English sentences. It makes the students and teachers think creatively. Language is productive. We can produce various sentences from a single pattern.

4. Expected Result

The article writer considers that this article will be able to supply the students and teachers with the basic concept about the selfsame phrases and their assorted functional roles in sentences. Their understanding of functions of phrases will encourage them to learn the other phrases with miscellaneous functions resulting in enhancing their knowledge in grammar.

5. Conclusion

This article concludes that a particular phrase can play the roles of a subject, subject attribute, direct object, indirect object, benefactive object, object attribute, predicator complement and adjunct in sentences. Similarly, a functional role can be realized by multiple phrases. Discerning the structures of phrases and their functional roles can be convoluted for ordinary students, but continual effort and practice will enable them to scrutinize diverse syntactic functional roles of phrases in English sentences.

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