12

Word order choices

GRAMMAR BITES in this chapter

A Fronting and inversion

- ➤ Unmarked word order (i.e. normal word order)
- ➤ Different types of fronting and their uses across registers
- ➤ Different types of inversion and the uses of inversion across registers

B Existential *there* clauses

- ➤ *There* in existential clauses
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- ➤ Types of dislocation
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- ➤ Word order choices after the verb: the placement of objects
- ➤ Summary of syntactic choices in conversation and academic prose

12.1 Introduction

The basic word order of English is subject–verb–object (SVO), as you can see in a sentence such as:

> *Myrna*[S] *makes*[V] *the best cucumber salad*[O] . (CONV)

Myrna, the subject, precedes the verb *makes*, which precedes the object *the best cucumber salad*. However, different contexts may make it preferable to put elements of the clause in different places. For example, a speaker who wants to emphasize that Myrna, not someone else, makes the best cucumber salad might say:

> *It's Myrna who makes the best cucumber salad.*

This type of construction is called **clefting** (12.12). Or a speaker who is discussing a variety of cucumber salads might start with *the cucumber salad* and say:

> *The best cucumber salad is made by Myrna.*

This type of construction is the **passive** (discussed fully in 6.6–8). These are just two examples of ways to reorder clause elements.

In the present chapter, we discuss six grammatical devices to manipulate word order in clauses: fronting, inversion of subjects and verbs, existential *there* clauses, dislocation, clefting, and variations in the ordering of objects. Some of these devices involve simply moving elements to different positions. Others require changing the clause in more complicated ways, such as changing the verb to passive voice.

The techniques that we discuss here are used in a variety of ways to make a clause better fit its context. Four major discourse factors are important in understanding the grammatical choices that influence word order:

- information flow: given v. new information
- focus and emphasis, including end-focus and double focus
- contrast
- weight, including end-weight and balance of weight.

Because these factors are so important, we introduce them first in this chapter. However, these concepts do not explain all the reasons for word order changes. For example, irony and surprise may also be important. Also, in some registers, such as fiction, writers may simply want to make varied use of language.

12.1.1 Information flow

If we look at a clause in its discourse context, some elements refer back to information that is familiar due to the preceding discourse—i.e. given information—and other elements present new information. The typical word order in English is to start with given information and move to new. Thus, in the following example clause, the person *Mr Summers* and *the house* have already been introduced.

> 1 *Inside the house Mr Summers found a family of cats shut in the bathroom.*
> (NEWS)

The clause is first grounded in the situation that has already been mentioned— *the house* and *Mr Summers*. Then the communication advances with the

information about what Mr Summers found. This typical ordering of information—from given to new—is the **information-flow principle**.

Given–new order of information contributes to the **cohesion** of a text. The given information is usually related to its previous mention, and the new information is often taken up in the following discourse. This order of information makes it easier for receivers to understand, because the clause starts with something that is familiar.

However, there are exceptions to the information-flow principle. For example, the needs of focus and emphasis, discussed in the next section, may be stronger than the need to follow the information-flow principle.

12.1.2 Focus and emphasis

In any clause, there is usually at least one point of focus. This point receives some prominence in the clause. It is apparent in speech because the strongest stress or intonation peak will occur at this point. Typically, the focus occurs naturally on the last lexical item in the clause (e.g. *the bathroom* in **1** above). The general principle governing focus is therefore known as the principle of **end-focus.** When the information-flow principle is being followed, new information, which occurs at the end of the clause, will be the focus.

However, there is another potential point of focus in a clause: the beginning. Many of the devices covered in this chapter increase the focus given to the beginning of the clause by starting with an element other than the subject. The result is a clause with double focus (or even more than two points of focus). For example, in **1** an adverbial occurs first. That adverbial—*Inside the house*, and more specifically the lexical item *house*—receives its own focus, in addition to the focus on *in the bathroom*.

When an initial element is the point of focus, it gains prominence. A complement of the verb in initial position is intensified, much as it is intensified by an adverb like *very*:

> *Brilliant that was!* (CONV)

Here *brilliant* is intensified by being in initial focused position, before the subject. The meaning is similar to the speaker saying *That was absolutely brilliant!* The marked word order—with the complement first—gives intensification to the complement (*brilliant*).

12.1.3 Contrast

Contrast occurs when the focused part is highlighted to show its difference from another element:

> *It's not **the bikers** – it's the **other vehicle** that's on the road.* (CONV†)

Here *the other vehicle* is focused and contrasted with *the bikers* in the preceding clause in a parallel structure. The manipulation of the sentence structure shows contrast just as the coordinator *but* and the linking adverb *however* do. The speaker, for instance, could have said: *The bikers are not a problem. However, the other vehicle is.*

12.1.4 Weight

Elements in a clause are frequently of different size and complexity, relating to their weight. For instance, a noun phrase consisting of a head noun with long premodifiers and postmodifiers is much 'heavier' than a noun phrase consisting of a single pronoun. The preferred distribution of elements in the clause is called the principle of **end-weight**: long and complex (i.e. heavier) elements are placed towards the end of the clause. This placement helps hearers and readers to follow the message more easily, because they do not have to keep in their mind complex information from the beginning of the clause as they reach the end of the clause (compare the principle of real-time processing in 13.2.5). Many heavy elements also contain a large amount of new information. The information-flow principle and end-weight principle therefore often reinforce one another.

Sometimes heavy elements are at the beginning of sentences. As described above in 12.1.2, these heavy elements then gain some prominence and they can give a clause more than one point of focus—at the end and at the beginning.

GRAMMAR BITE

A Fronting and inversion

12.2 Word order

The term 'word order' is used to refer to the order of elements in a clause: subject, verb, object, predicative, and adverbial.

The **unmarked** word order in English (i.e. clauses that contain the normal word order) has the following characteristics:

- The subject normally precedes the verb, and the verb normally precedes its complements: S + V, S + V + A, S + V + SP, S + V + DO, S + V + Prep + PO, etc.
- Independent interrogative clauses normally have subject–operator inversion (e.g. *Are you sure?*).
- All clause elements realized by *wh*-words are regularly placed in initial position. For example: *I don't know [**what** you want].* (CONV†). (Even though *what* is the object in the dependent clause (*you want what*), it is placed before the subject *you*.)
- Phrases are normally continuous. This means that a phrase is not usually broken up by another element.

12.3 Fronting

Fronting means placing in initial position a clause element which is normally found after the verb. Fronting is relatively rare in English, and it is almost always

in declarative main clauses (except for the fronting of *wh*-words mentioned in the last section). However, several kinds of fronting are possible, summarized in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1 **Types of fronting**

type	examples	description
fronted object	1 ***This*** *I do not understand.* (FICT) 2 ***Why he came this way*** *I will probably never know.* (FICT)	The object of the clause is in initial position. Many different structures occur as fronted objects, such as nouns, pronouns (**1**), and complement clauses (**2**).
fronted nominals other than object	***Whether Nancy was there or not,*** *she could not be certain.* (FICT)	A nominal structure is in initial position, such as the complement to the adjective *certain* in the example here (*She could not be certain* ***whether Nancy was there or not***).
fronted predicatives	1 ***Far more serious*** *were the severe head injuries.* (NEWS) 2 ***The larger*** *the base* ***the easier*** *it will be to perform the action.* (ACAD) 3 ***So preoccupied*** *was she* ***that*** *she was unaware that Diana was standing in the doorway.* (FICT†)	A subject predicative is in initial position. Many structures can occur as fronted predicatives. Special cases include **proportion** clauses with *the* (**2**) and degree clauses with *so . . . that* (**3**). Some fronted predicatives occur with inversion (**1, 3**).
fronted non-finite constructions	1 *I have said he would come down and* ***come down*** *he did.* (FICT) 2 ***Waiting below*** *was Michael Sams.* (NEWS) 3 ***Enclosed*** *is a card for our permanent signature file.* (FICT†)	An infinitive (**1**), *ing*-participle (**2**) or *ed*-participle (**3**) is in initial position. Its complements are fronted with it (e.g. *down* in *come down*). Some fronted non-finite predicates occur with inversion (**2, 3**).
fronting in dependent clauses that use *as* or *though*	1 ***Try*** *as she might to make it otherwise <...>* (FICT†) 2 *<...>* ***unsuccessful*** *though they have been in their proposals <>* (ACAD†)	Dependent clauses that use the subordinator *as* (**1**) or *though* (**2**) sometimes have an element placed before the subordinator. (**1**) illustrates fronting of a main verb and (**2**) illustrates fronting of a predicative.

12.3.1 Fronted objects and other nominals

- Noun phrases as fronted objects:
    1 *Sandy moved ahead. '***This*** *I do not understand,' he said.* (FICT)
    2 *Bess was satisfied with her hair, but* ***her freckles*** *she regarded as a great and unmerited affliction.* (FICT)
    3 ***Some things*** *you forget.* ***Other things*** *you never do.* (FICT)
- Complement clauses as fronted objects:
    4 ***What it was that changed this conclusion,*** *I don't remember.* (FICT)

> 5 ***Why he came this way*** *I will probably never know.* (FICT)
> 6 ***What they can do****, we can do.* (FICT)
> 7 ***Whether Nancy was there or not****, she could not be certain.* (FICT)

- Nominals with other syntactic roles (e.g. here a subject predicative):

> 8 *'Pretty strange, huh?' **That** it is. I nod sadly.* (FICT)

As these examples show, most occurrences of fronting put focus on both the beginning and ending of the clause. For example, in **1**, *this* gains emphasis from its initial placement, rather than the unmarked word order *I understand this.* At the same time, *understand* has its own focus because it is the last element in the clause. In addition, many instances of fronting facilitate the information-flow principle: the fronted element refers to given information. This is particularly obvious with the fronted pronouns in **1** and **8**. Finally, several fronted objects show contrasts. For example, *her freckles* are contrasted with *her hair* in **2**, *other things* are contrasted with *some things* in **3**, and *they* with *we* in **6**.

12.3.2 Fronted predicatives

Many clauses with fronted predicatives have subject–verb inversion, but some do not. Predicative fronting with subject–verb inversion can occur with comparative and superlative forms. In the following examples, underlining signals the subject, here highlighted as new information by the inversion:

> 1 *The hens in the next garden: their droppings are very good dressing.* **Best of all***, though, are* <u>the cattle</u>, *especially when they are fed on those oilcakes.* (FICT)
> 2 ***Far more serious*** *were* <u>the severe head injuries</u>; *in particular a bruising of the brain.* (NEWS)

Usually, the predicatives which have been fronted make a comparison with some element in the preceding discourse, and form a cohesive link. In **1**, for example, the cattle are being compared with the hens. The cohesive link is also sometimes made with the words *also* and *such*:

> 3 *Under stress, Sammler believed, the whole faltered, and parts (follicles, for instance) became conspicuous.* **Such** *at least was* <u>his observation</u>. (FICT)
> 4 ***Also popular for travelling*** *are* <u>quilted, overblown pseudo-ski jackets in pink or blue that look like duvets rampant</u>. (NEWS)

The organization of these examples is consistent with the information-flow principle. In **3**, for example, *such* refers to Sammler's beliefs mentioned in the previous sentence.

There are two special cases of predicative fronting. The first contains combinations of proportion clauses (see 11.9.2) marked by pairs of phrases with *the*:

> 5 *The more general the domain,* **the more general, selective and tentative** *are* <u>the statements about its style</u>. (ACAD) <with inversion>
> 6 *The larger the base* **the easier** <u>*it*</u> *will be to perform the action.* (ACAD) <without inversion>

Heavier subjects, as in **5**, often have subject–verb inversion. Clauses with a subject pronoun, as in **6**, often do not have inversion.

The second special type of predicative fronting concerns adjectives premodified by *so* and followed by a *that*-clause of degree. For example:

> **So preoccupied** was <u>she</u> at this moment, she was unaware that Diana was standing in the arched doorway to the sitting room. (FICT)
> <compare: *She was so preoccupied at this moment that she was unaware...*>
>
> **So ruthless** was <u>the IRA</u> in its all-out onslaught against the police and the Army, it didn't care who got in its way. (NEWS)
> <compare: *The IRA was so ruthless in its all-out onslaught that it didn't care who got in its way.*>

In these sentences, the adjective and intensifier *so* are fronted, but the *that* comparative clause is not fronted.

When the subject is an unstressed pronoun, predicatives can still be fronted but subject–verb inversion does not take place:

7 **Right** <u>you</u> are! (CONV)
8 **Bloody amazing** <u>it</u> was! (CONV) <note: *bloody* is a taboo word and may be offensive to some people>
9 **Peter Harronson**, <u>he</u> said he was called. (FICT)

Fronting has an intensifying effect, often strengthened by the choice of words (e.g. *bloody amazing*) or by emphatic stress when spoken. The fronted material is new rather than old, which makes it a marked choice with respect to the information-flow principle. In some cases, the initial predicative highlights the main purpose of the utterance; for example, in **9**, the purpose is to establish the person's name. In **9** you can also see that the fronted predicative can be an object predicative, and can actually belong to an embedded clause (signaled by [] in: *He said [he was called **Peter Harronson**]*).

12.3.3 Fronted non-finite constructions

There are three major types of fronted non-finite constructions, corresponding to the three types of non-finite verb forms: a bare infinitive, an *ing*-participle, and an *ed*-participle.

A Fronted bare infinitive constructions

In these constructions, a non-finite verb and its complements are fronted. The subject and an auxiliary verb follow in their normal position. Emphatic *do* is used if there is no other auxiliary verb (focused elements are underlined):

1 *I had said he would come down and **come down** he <u>did</u>.* (FICT)
2 *But, as he said, it had to be borne, and **bear it** he <u>did</u>.* (FICT†)

As these examples show, fronted bare infinitives are often associated with the echo of a previous verb. The echo is not providing new information, so the fronting serves the information-flow principle and cohesion. However, the fronting also emphasizes the repeated element. Compare **2** above with the unmarked word order and typical ellipsis (marked with ^) of the repeated element in **3**:

3 *I had said he would come down and he did ^.*

Thus, the fronted infinitive predicate gives a double focus—the fronted element and the auxiliary at the end of the clause. The same is true for fronted infinitive constructions that do not echo a previous verb:

4 **Work** *I* <u>must</u>, *and for money.* (FICT)

In **4**, both *work* and *must* are focused elements.

B Fronted *ing*- and *ed*-constructions

Fronted *ed*- and *ing*-constructions usually occur with exceptionally long subjects. Subject–verb inversion accompanies fronted *ed*- and *ing*-constructions, so the heavy subjects (underlined below) are moved to clause-final position:

5 *Nothing on the walls, with one exception:* **tacked over the bed** *was a yellowed, deckel-edged photograph.* (FICT†)

6 **Enclosed** *is a card for our permanent signature file which we request you to sign and return to us.* (FICT)

7 *Billy beamed lovingly at a bright lavender farmhouse that had been spattered with machine-gun bullets.* **Standing in its cock-eyed doorway** *was a German colonel.* (FICT)

8 *The money was left on the parapet of a bridge carrying the track over an old dismantled railway line.* **Waiting below** *was Michael Sams, who had left a tray on the bridge parapet for the money.* (NEWS)

The order of the elements in these clauses agrees with the information-flow and end-weight principles. There is generally a reference to the preceding context early in the structures, and new information is introduced in the subject, which occurs at the end of the clause. The subjects are often indefinite noun phrases: the use of *a/an* shows their status as new information (*a photograph, a card, a colonel*). The fronted items contain definite noun phrases (*the bed*) and pronouns (*it, its*), showing their status as given information.

12.3.4 Fronting in dependent clauses

In dependent clauses, fronting occurs only with the subordinators *as* and *though*. For example (the dependent clause is shown in *[]*):

1 *[***Try** *as they* might*], no one close to Frankie Howerd could ever improve his image.* (NEWS†)

2 *The proponents of more traditional solutions to the problem of universals, [***unsuccessful** *though they have been in their own proposals], have made trouble for the solution in terms of individual properties.* (ACAD†)

Fronting the items in bold puts them in a conspicuous position before the subordinators and clearly emphasizes them. Notice that these are clauses of concession, and involve some contrast. In **2**, for example, *unsuccessful* is contrasted with the fact that they have still *made trouble*. You can also see that the end-focus falls on the underlined constituents.

12.3.5 Fronting in exclamations

Exclamative clauses with a *wh*-element (e.g. *How good she is!*) have obligatory fronting, since the *wh*-element has to occur in pre-subject position. However, there are other types of exclamations where fronting is optional. *Such* can be used like *what* in exclamations:

Such a gift *he had for gesture. He looked like a king in exile.* (FICT)
<compare: *What a gift he had for gesture*; and normal order: *He had such a gift. . .*>

> *And she thought:* **Such a sure hand** *my son has with people.* (FICT)
>
> <compare: *What a sure hand my son has with people.*>

In some cases, the exclamatory effect of the fronting is apparent from the use of exclamation marks:

> **Charming** *you are!* (FICT)
>
> **A fine time** *you picked to wake up! Where were you in my hour of need?* (FICT)

Fronting in exclamations is often used with irony or sarcasm, as it is in these examples.

12.3.6 The use of fronting across registers

Fronting is relatively rare in all registers, although this device is used more in fiction and academic prose than conversation or news. Further, different types of fronting are preferred in each register.

In academic prose, the most common form is predicative fronting, which aids cohesion by linking clauses:

> *In the Peruvian case study that follows, the degree to which marketwomen are independent petty commodity traders or are undergoing proletarianization is problematic.* **Also problematic** *is the degree to which gender may be playing a part in the proletarianization process.* (ACAD)

The fronting ties the sentences together through repetition (note the repetition of *problematic* above).

Conversation and fiction more commonly use fronting of objects. These elements are fronted for focus rather than for cohesion:

> A: *What actually does the price include?*
>
> B: **That** *I couldn't tell you.* (CONV†)

> *'No wet beds.* **That** *I won't stand.'* (FICT)

> **Whether it would fire after being in the river,** *I can't say.* (FICT)

In fiction, where varied sentence structure and stylistic effect are especially valued, fronting occurs more frequently than in conversation.

Although fronting is relatively rare, it is an important option for focus and cohesion; its rarity makes these effects even more conspicuous when they do occur.

12.4 Inversion

In inversion, the verb phrase or the operator comes before the subject. There are two main types of inversion (the subject is underlined):

- **subject–verb inversion** or full inversion: the subject is preceded by the entire verb phrase:

  > *Best of all* **would be** <u>to get a job in Wellingham</u>. (FICT†)

- **subject–operator inversion** or partial inversion: the subject is preceded only by the operator rather than by the main verb or full verb phrase:

  > *Not before in our history* **have** <u>so many strong influences</u> **united** *to produce so large a disaster.* (NEWS)

In this example, the main verb is *united* but only the auxiliary verb *have* is placed before the subject. If no other operator is present, auxiliary *do* is inserted.

> *Never again **did** I **think** of disobedience.* (FICT†)

In general, inversion serves the following discourse functions:

- cohesion and information flow (especially subject–verb inversion)
- intensification (especially subject–operator inversion)
- placement of focus (both kinds of inversion)
- end-weight (both kinds of inversion).

The different types of inversion are summarized in Table 12.2 and explained below.

Table 12.2 Types of inversion

type of inversion	examples	conditions commonly associated with this inversion
subject–verb	*On one long wall **hung a row of van Goghs.*** (FICT†)	initial adverbial (*on one long wall*)
		short intransitive verbs (*hung*)
		long subjects (*a row of van Goghs*).
subject–operator	**1** *On no account **must he** strain.* (CONV)	negative opening elements (**1** *on no account*)
	2 *So badly **was he** affected that he had to be taught to speak again.* (NEWS)	degree expressions with *so* or *such* (**2** *so badly*)
	3 *She hadn't known much about life, nor **had he.*** (FICT)	the linking words *so, nor, neither* (**3** *nor*)
subject–verb and subject–operator in formulaic use	*So **be it**.* (FICT†) *Long **May She** Reign!* (NEWS)	archaic and formal expressions

12.4.1 Subject–verb inversion

Subject–verb inversion is most often found with an initial adverbial, a short intransitive or copular verb phrase, and a long subject that introduces new information.

A Initial adverbials

Initial place and time adverbials with subject–verb inversion are especially common.

> *They found an extension to the drawing room with thigh-high cannabis plants growing in polythene bags full of compost. **Nearby** was a 400-square-yard warehouse with more plants flourishing in conditions controlled by artificial lighting and automatic watering systems.* (NEWS)
>
> *For a moment nothing happened. **Then** came voices all shouting together.* (FICT)

> *First came the scouts, clever, graceful, quiet. They had rifles. Next came the antitank gunner.* (FICT)

Usually these adverbials have a cohesive function. They are often tied to previous discourse, and they often show how a scene unfolds, either in physical space or through time. *Here* and *there*, defining a place relative to the speaker, are often found with inversion:

> 1 *Here comes the first question.* (FICT)
> 2 *There's the dog. Call the dog.* (CONV)

(Notice that the place adverb *there* in **2** is different from existential *there*, explained in 12.5–10).

In academic prose, there is less need for description and time narration, but other initial adverbials are sometimes used with inversion. They usually have a clear cohesive function. For example:

> *Formaldehyde may be generated in various ways. **Among these** is heating a solution of <...>* (ACAD†)

Sometimes an adverbial particle of direction is used with inversion:

> ***In** came Jasper, smiling jauntily, stepping like a dancer.* (FICT)

> *Billy opened his eye, and **out** came a deep, resonant tone.* (FICT)

This type of inversion is used in dramatic narration, to emphasize a sudden happening.

B Short intransitive/copular verb phrases, and long subjects

You can see in the above examples that most of these verb phrases are short, consisting of either a copular or an intransitive main verb (e.g. *came*, *is*, *was*). As the following examples show, more complex verb phrases are possible, but here the delayed subject is heavier than the verb, thus following the principle of end-weight:

> *Among the sports **will be** <u>athletics, badminton, basketball, <...>.</u>* (NEWS†)

> *Also noted **will have been** <u>the 800 metres run by under-15 Claire Duncan at Derby and the under-17 100 metres hurdling of Jon Haslam (Liverpool) which also gained Northern silver.</u>* (NEWS)

Subject–verb inversion does not occur with a lightweight pronoun as subject:

> full noun phrase: *Then **came** <u>the turning point of the match.</u>* (NEWS)

> pronoun: *Then <u>it</u> **came** again like a whiplash.* (FICT) <but not: **Then came it.*>

12.4.2 Subject–operator inversion

In subject–operator inversion, only the operator (see 8.7), rather than the whole verb phrase, is placed before the subject. Apart from its regular use in forming questions, subject–operator inversion occurs under special conditions:

A Negative and restrictive opening elements

Subject–operator inversion is found after initial negative expressions such as: *neither, nor, never, nowhere, on no condition, not only, hardly, no sooner, rarely, scarcely, seldom, little, less, only.* (Notice that *little, less,* and *only* are negative in

meaning.) The negative 'trigger' for inversion is usually an adverbial or a coordinating conjunction. In the following examples, the trigger element is underlined and the operator is marked in bold:

1 A: I haven't got a copy of club rules.
   B: <u>Nor</u> **have** I. (CONV)
2 And she said, you know, <u>on no account</u> **must** he strain. (CONV)
3 <u>Rarely</u> **are** all the constraints on shape, function and manufacturing clearly defined at the commencement of the activity. <u>Even less</u> **are** they understood and their effect, one on another, recognized by the designer. (ACAD)

Because of the inversion, the force of the negative element is intensified. Example **3** intensifies the force further, through use of parallel structures in the two sentences.

The expression *no way* is often found in colloquial language, triggering inversion:

4 Oh <u>no way</u> **do** I want to take that. (CONV)
5 And if the case went to trial, there wasn't a damn thing Katheryn could do to stop them. And <u>no way</u> **could** she get Sarah to understand that. (FICT)

In **4**, notice that dummy *do* is used as the operator, where *do* would be used in ordinary *not* negation: *I **don't** want to take that* (see 8.8.1).

Notice also that negative elements trigger subject–operator inversion only when they have scope over the entire clause (see negative scope in 8.8.9). Contrast **6** and **7**:

6 <u>In no time at all</u> the hotels **would** be jammed to the doors. (FICT)
7 <u>At no time</u> **did** he indicate he couldn't cope. (NEWS)

In **6**, *in no time* is a time adverbial roughly meaning 'very soon'; it does not affect the positive nature of the clause, and thus subject–operator inversion is not possible. But in **7**, *at no time* means that the entire clause is negative. A paraphrase would be: *He never indicated that he couldn't cope.* Thus, the opening element of **7** (but not **6**) has scope over the entire clause. Correspondingly only **7** has subject–operator inversion.

B Degree expressions with *so* and *such, neither* and *nor*

Subject–operator inversion occurs in clauses that begin with the degree adverb *so* followed by an adjective or adverb:

> <u>So badly</u> **was** he affected that he had to be taught to speak again. (NEWS)

Similar constructions occur with *such ... that*:

> <u>Such</u> **is** the gravity of the situation <u>that</u> it has already sparked an international incident. (NEWS)

Inversion can occur after initial *so* when it is used as a pro-form pointing back to the predicate of a preceding clause:

> A: We used to watch that on T.V.
> B: Yes, <u>so</u> **did** I. (CONV) <= and I did, too>
>
> As infections increased in women, <u>so</u> **did** infections in their babies. (NEWS)

The initial *so* in these examples stands for given information and has a cohesive effect. The subject, containing the main new communicative point of the clause, is placed in the end-focus position after the verb.

Clauses with initial *nor* and *neither* express parallelism with a preceding negative clause. Again the inversion pattern has a cohesive effect, as the linking word refers back to given information:

> She hadn't known much about life, <u>nor</u> **had** he. (FICT)

> The generalization's truth, if it is true, is not affected by how we count things in question, and <u>neither</u> **is** its falsehood if it is false. (ACAD)

With *nor* and *neither*, subject–operator inversion is mandatory.

C Special cases of inversion

There are a few cases of inversion with formulaic expressions. Typically, these are felt to be archaic expressions with literary overtones.

Subjunctive verb forms (8.17) express a strong wish:

> If you want to throw your life away, **so** <u>be</u> **it**, it is your life, not mine. (FICT)

> 'I, Charles Seymour, do swear that I will be faithful, <...> **so** <u>help</u> **me God.**' (FICT†)

Inversion combined with a subjunctive verb form (*be*, *help*) gives these expressions a solemn tone.

Clauses with inversion opening with the auxiliary *may* also express a strong wish:

> **May God** forgive you your blasphemy, Pilot. Ye-s. **May he** forgive you and open your eyes. (FICT)

> The XJS may be an ageing leviathan but it is still a unique car. Long **may it** be so! (NEWS)

12.4.3 Inversion in dependent clauses

Although inversion is most common in independent clauses, it also occurs in dependent clauses.

A Opening adverbials and opening negatives

Adverbials and negatives that begin a dependent clause (signaled by underlining in **1** and **2**) can take inversion just as they do with independent clauses. Notice the inversion after the relativizer in **1**:

> 1 *In the centre of the green was a pond, beside it was a wooden seat <u>on which</u> sat two men talking.* (FICT)

> 2 *Introspection suggests that <u>only rarely</u> **do** we consciously ponder the pronunciations of words.* (ACAD)

Dependent clauses also have some special cases of inversion. These are summarized in Table 12.3. The particularly interesting cases of interrogative clauses and reported clauses are discussed below.

B Dependent interrogative clauses with 'semi-direct speech'

Dependent *yes/no* interrogative clauses (marked by *[]* below) are usually introduced by *whether* or *if* and have ordinary subject–verb order, as in:

> I asked them [if **they would** hurry it up a bit]. (FICT)

An informal alternative is to use subject–operator inversion:

Table 12.3 **Special types of inversion in dependent clauses**

type of dependent clause	examples	description
comparative clauses with *as* and *than*	*Independent agencies are in a better position to offer personal service* **than are those** *tied to big chains.* (NEWS†)	The operator follows the subordinator *as* or *than*. Usually in formal writing.
some clauses of manner	*Charlotte was fascinated,* **as were the other guests.** (FICT)	The operator follows the subordinator *as*.
conditional clauses that are hypothetical or tentative and use *had, should,* or *were*	**1 Should either of these situations** *occur, wrong control actions may be taken.* (ACAD) **2 Were it** *running more slowly, all geologic activity would have proceeded at a slower pace.* (ACAD)	The verbs *had, should,* or *were* come before the subject. The alternative form is to use the subordinator *if* (1 *If either of these situations occur* …).
conditional clauses that present alternatives or universals	**1** *When the going gets tough, it's these people who react best –* **be it** *a natural disaster, accident or sudden emergency.* (NEWS) **2** <…> *[He] has somewhat desperately tried to make up his mind to utter his whole self,* **come what may.** (ACAD†)	Alternative clauses can be paraphrased with *whether it/he/she/ they is/are*. The subjective *be* is used. For (1) compare: *whether it is a natural disaster*. Universal clauses express a condition that is universally true. They can be paraphrased with *whatever*. For (2) compare: *whatever may come*.
interrogative clauses	*And she said* **would we** *like these shirts.* (CONV)	The inversion gives the sentence characteristics of both direct and indirect speech.
reporting clauses	*'That's the whole trouble,'* **said Gwen,** *laughing slightly.* (FICT)	The reporting clause may have subject–verb inversion. Inversion is not usual, however, when the clause subject is a pronoun (*said she*).

3 *The young man who had seen Mac in Westmoreland Street asked [**was it** true that Mac had won a bet over the billiard match].* (FICT)
4 *She needed a backing guitarist and asked Kieran, who she had met once or twice on the road, [**would he** help out].* (NEWS)
5 *And she said [**would we** like these shirts].* (CONV)

This pattern represents a compromise between direct and indirect speech. It preserves the subject–operator inversion of the independent interrogative clause, but pronouns and verbs have been adjusted to show the reporting situation. Compare, for example, these alternatives for the semi-direct speech in example **5**:

direct speech: *And she said, 'Would you like these shirts?'*

indirect speech: *And she asked whether we would like these shirts.*

C Reporting clauses

Reporting clauses are direct quotations of a person's speech or thought. They are on the borderline between independent and dependent clauses. They contain some kind of reporting verb, which can be a simple verb of speaking/thinking (e.g. *say, think*) or a related verb identifying a manner of speaking (e.g. *mutter, shriek*), the type of speech act (e.g. *offer, promise*), or the phase of speaking (e.g. *begin, continue*). Such clauses often have subject–verb inversion:

> *'That's the whole trouble', **said Gwen**, laughing slightly.* (FICT)
>
> *Fifties and post impressionist, **thought Alexander**, connecting.* (FICT)
>
> *Councils, **argues Mr Cawley**, are being hit by an unenviable double whammy.* (NEWS)

As these examples show, quotation marks are not always present.

In news, reporting clauses can also be used for attributions of written text:

> *Where farming used to be the only viable source of income, hundreds of people have found regular work, **reveals Plain Tales from Northern Ireland**.* (NEWS†)

There is a strong preference for unmarked word order—that is, subject before verb—under any of these three conditions:

- where the subject is an unstressed pronoun:

  > *'The safety record at Stansted is first class', **he said**.* (NEWS)

- where the verb phrase is complex (containing auxiliary plus main verb):

  > *'Konrad Schneider is the only one who matters', **Reinhold <u>had answered</u>**.* (FICT)

- where the verb is followed by a noun or pronoun that names the addressee:

  > *There's so much to living that I did not know before, **Jackie had told <u>her</u> happily**.* (FICT)

The conditions of inversion in reporting clauses are similar to those for all inversion. Usually inversion is influenced by the end-weight and information-flow principles. A weighty element and/or an element deserving emphasis is last. However, inversions sometimes occur in unexpected conditions, such as with this subject pronoun:

> *'We may all be famous, then,' **said <u>he</u>**.* (FICT)

12.4.4 Inversion across registers

Figure 12.1 shows that inversion is a relatively rare phenomenon, although it is somewhat more common in the written registers. In fiction and in news, inversion is most common in reporting clauses, where it accounts for more than half the total occurrences.

Conversation has certain fixed patterns involving inversion, for

Figure 12.1

Approximate frequency of inversion
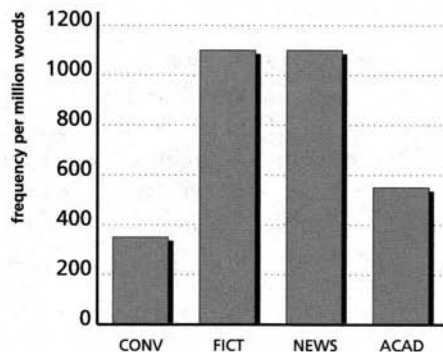
example *so am I*, and *there's/here's* ... (where *here* and *there* are deictic adverbs, as in *Here comes your mother*). However, the time for planning and editing in the written registers makes it easier to achieve the variety of word order required for inversion.

Review

Major points of **GRAMMAR BITE A**: Fronting and inversion

➤ Many types of clause elements can be fronted (i.e. moved to the front of a clause): objects, nominals other than objects, predicatives, non-finite constructions, and some elements in dependent clauses.

➤ Fronting is generally infrequent, but the frequency of each type varies across the registers.

➤ Fronting is typically used for cohesion and for special emphasis and contrast.

➤ Inversion has two primary forms: subject–verb and subject–operator inversion. Other types of inversion occur in dependent clauses.

➤ Inversion can be used for cohesion, information flow, intensification and placement of focus.

GRAMMAR BITE

B Existential *there* clauses

12.5 Existential *there*

Existential *there* is a device used to state the existence or occurrence of something (or its non-existence or non-occurrence). It is used with an intransitive or copular verb. Most typically, a clause with existential *there* has the following structure:

there + *be*	+ indefinite noun phrase	(+ place or time position adverbial)
There's	*a bear*	*sitting in the corner.*

For example:

1 *A man goes in the pub.* **There's** *a bear sitting in the corner. He goes up to the, he goes up to the bartender. He says, why **is there** a bear sitting over there?* (CONV)

2 **There are** *around 6,000 accidents in the kitchens of Northern Ireland homes every year.* (NEWS)

The noun phrase following *be* is called the **notional subject**. Thus, in **1**, *a bear* is the notional subject, and in **2**, *around 6,000 accidents* is the notional subject. Typically, the notional subject is an indefinite noun phrase.

Clauses with existential *there* are called existential clauses. The main function of existential clauses is to introduce new information, which is presented in the indefinite noun phrase, the notional subject.

12.5.1 The grammatical status of existential *there*

Existential *there* is a function word. It developed from the place adverb *there*, but it no longer has a meaning of place. Existential *there* differs from the place adverb *there* in the following ways:

- Phonologically, it is normally reduced to /ðə(r)/.
- The original place meaning is lost.
- Syntactically, it functions as a subject rather than an adverbial.

You can easily see the difference between existential *there* and adverbials when existential *there* occurs in the same clause as the place adverbs *there* or *here* (underlined in these examples):

> 1 **There**'s more gravy <u>here</u>. (CONV)
> 2 **There**'s still no water <u>there</u>, is **there**? (CONV)

Existential there is an empty grammatical element. It has no lexical meaning. The place adverbs do have meaning and can be paraphrased: *here* = in this place, *there* = in that place.

Syntactically, existential *there* behaves like a grammatical subject. It is placed before the verb in declarative sentences, and as **2** and **3** show, it can be used with inversion in questions and question tags.

> 3 *Is **there** a microphone we can borrow?* (CONV)

Existential *there* can also occur as the subject of a non-finite clause:

> *N may be too large for [**there** to be room for that number].* (ACAD)

> *The paramedics arrived just in time, and there was some question of [**there** being brain damage this time].* (FICT)

Such non-finite existential clauses are relatively rare, however. They usually occur in academic prose.

Place *there* and existential *there* have very different patterns of distribution across the registers, as you can see in Figure 12.2. Place *there* is very common in conversation and very rare in academic prose, reflecting differences in the importance of physical setting for the registers. In conversation, the setting is shared by speaker and addressee. It makes sense to refer to *here* and *there*. The same is true of fictional dialog. But in news and academic prose, there is no shared physical setting. The frequency of the place adverb *there* is therefore low. When place *there* does occur, it usually refers to a place in the text rather than the physical setting: e.g. *<...> references for further reading given **there*** (ACAD†).

In contrast to place *there*, existential *there* is relatively common in all four registers.

Figure 12.2

Existential v. locative *there*
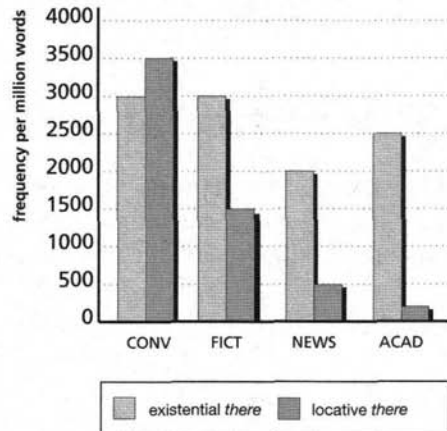
12.6 The verb in existential *there* clauses

The great majority of existential *there* clauses contain a form of the verb *be*. It may be preceded by auxiliaries or semi-modals: *has been, will be, is to be, is supposed to be, used to be,* etc. *Be* may also occur in a *to*-infinitive complement, where the controlling lexical verb expresses a kind of stance: *happen to be, tend to be, appear to be, is said to be,* etc.:

> <u>There</u> **used to be** *a – a house on the end of the common up at Clarendon Road.* (CONV†)

> *If you want to know,* <u>there</u> **is supposed to be** *a plot between you and me to get hold of his wealth.* (FICT)

> <u>There</u> **seem to have been** *a lot of people who took up painting for a while and then dropped it.* (NEWS)

> <u>There</u> **is said to be** *a mismatch between the mother tongue and the target language at these points.* (ACAD)

Existential clauses can also contain verbs other than *be*, usually intransitive verbs of existence or occurrence:

> *Somewhere deep inside her* <u>there</u> **arose** *a desperate hope that he would embrace here.* (FICT)

> <u>There</u> **seems** *no likelihood of a settlement.* (NEWS)

Existential *there* clauses with verbs other than *be* are generally rare. *Exist* is the most common alternative to *be*. It is used almost entirely in academic prose, where it has a more formal sound than *be*:

> *There* **exist** *innate conventions through which human artifacts convey meaning.* (ACAD†)

> *There now* **exists** *an extensive literature on the construction and use of social indicators in a variety of contexts.* (ACAD†)

Fiction has a greater variety of verbs in existential clauses. These include *come* and *seem* as well as a variety of less common verbs: *arise, ascend, break out, emerge, erupt, float, flow, flutter,* etc.

> *There* **came** *a faint stirring in his entrails.* (FICT†)

> *There* **followed** *a frozen pause.* (FICT†)

> *There* **remained** *something unmistakably clerical in his manner.* (FICT†)

12.7 The notional subject

The notional subject is the noun phrase that functions logically as the subject of the clause. Since *there* has no content, the notional subject is what the clause is mainly about. Usually, the notional subject is an indefinite noun phrase.

> *There won't be **a mass**.* (CONV)
>
> *There was **nobody** here yesterday.* (CONV)

Many notional subjects are structurally complex:

> *There is **something extra and a little heroic about him**.* (FICT†)
>
> *There must be **an enormous sense of isolation, of being aware of being let down**.* (NEWS)

The notional subject can also be followed by a post-modifying clause:

> *There's a cow **standing in the middle of the road**.* (CONV†)
> <compare: *A cow is standing in the middle of the road.*>
>
> *There are two scales of temperature **used in science**.* (ACAD)
> <compare: *Two scales of temperature are used in science.*>

Existential clauses also sometimes have notional subjects that are definite noun phrases or proper nouns. For example:

> *First there was **the scandal of Fergie romping with John Bryan, pictured exclusively in the Mirror**.* (NEWS)
>
> *There is also **the group of non-benzenoid aromatic compounds**.* (ACAD)

As in these examples, the definite noun phrases usually occur when a series of new information elements is introduced, often marked explicitly with a linking adverbial or additive adverb (e.g. *first, also*).

12.8 Adverbials in existential clauses

Often the important information of an existential clause is not simply that something exists, but when or where it exists. Thus, existential clauses often contain a time or place adverbial.

> *I said, well, there's a wheelbarrow **down there**.* (CONV)
>
> *There are no trains **on Sundays**.* (NEWS†)

As in these examples, the adverbial is often at the end of the clause. However, initial and medial placement is also possible:

> 1 ***Near the peak*** *there were no more trees, just rocks and grass.* (FICT)
> 2 *There rose **to her lips** always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity.* (FICT)

The placement of the adverbials is affected by the same conditions as adverbials of place and time in general (see 11.8). For example, in 1, the adverbial creates cohesion in the text because it relates to previously mentioned information. The ordering agrees with the information-flow principle, with new information at the end of the clause.

12.9 Simple v. complex existential clauses

We have just described two ways that existential clauses can be expanded: with postmodification of the notional subject and with adverbials. Figure 12.3 shows that the majority of existential clauses have one or both kinds of expansion. Two

elements of existential clauses contain little or no information: the verb (*be*, in most cases) and the grammatical subject *there*. As a result, it is not surprising that most existential clauses have additional information in adverbials or postmodifiers of the notional subject.

Consider these existential clauses that have both forms of expansion—an adverbial prepositional phrase and a postmodifying relative clause:

1 *There's stuff [in here] we need.* (CONV)

2 *In most cases a syllable is represented by only one character, but there are many cases [among the 558] in which the same syllable is written in more ways than one.* (ACAD†)

Figure 12.3
Existential clauses with and without expansion

You can see that, without the expansion, the clauses would not convey much information: *There's stuff* (**1**), *There are many cases* (**2**). What is strange about **1** and **2** is that the relative clause (underlined) is separated from the rest of the notional subject by the adverbial (marked by *[]*). This is a symptom of the rather loose way in which expansions are added to the end of the notional subject.
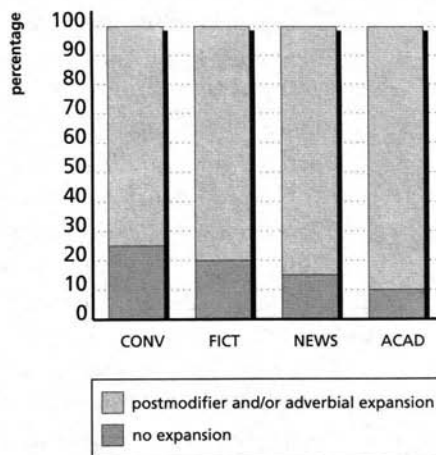
Existential clauses without expansion occur in all four registers, but they are most common in conversation. There is a tendency in speech to present information in smaller chunks and to leave more for the listener to infer. These minimal existential clauses are often negative:

There's no bus. (CONV)

Yeah, there really is no excuse, is there? (CONV)

In these cases, the negative itself is important information.

12.10 Discourse functions of existential clauses

A Focusing on a new topic

It is often said that existential *there* is used to introduce new elements into the discourse. However, consider the example at the beginning of this Grammar Bite:

*A man goes in the pub. **There**'s a bear sitting in the corner. He goes up to the, he goes up to the bartender. He says, why is **there** a bear sitting over there?* (CONV)

Notice that the first sentence introduces a new element: *a man*. However, this sentence does not use existential *there*. Instead, existential *there* is used twice

when introducing the bear into the discourse. Significantly, the bear is the main 'character' in the story. Furthermore, when this utterance is spoken, stress falls on *bear*.

From this example, you see that existential *there* is used especially to focus on the existence or occurrence of something. Not only is this 'something new', but it is probably going to be a focus of the continuing discourse. Since existential *there* delays the new information until later in the clause, it is consistent with the information-flow principle. Often the new information comes at the end of the clause, thereby receiving end-focus.

One context where it is appropriate to focus on the existence of 'something new' is at the beginning of a story. Thus, fairytales often open with an existential clause:

> *Once upon a time* **there were** *three bears. Mama bear, Papa bear, baby bear – They all went for a walk down the woods.* (CONV) <mother reading to child>

Sometimes in informal narrative, the notional subject is further emphasized with the use of a demonstrative pronoun:

> *There was* **this really good-looking bloke** *and he was like – We, we'd given each other eyes over the bar in this pub and Lottie goes, well if you don't hurry up with him I'm gonna go and have him.* (CONV†) <note: *goes* = *says*>

> *There was* **this wonderful little old lady** *called the tissue collector. She was grey haired, quite dumpy with a white coat on and she came to collect sperm if you wanted it stored. She came up in front of my parents <...>* (NEWS†)

Again, notice that the narrative continues with further reference to the person introduced with existential *there*.

B Introducing a series of new items

Existential *there* is also used to develop text in another way. It is used to introduce a series of items:

> **There are** *many types of aid to medical decision making available. The earliest ones used <...>* (ACAD†)

> **There** *are three basic rules to consider in planning a farm enterprise: <...>* (ACAD†)

The existential clause sets up the elements that are to follow. Existential clauses also often introduce a series of 'new things' separately. For example:

1 *But* **there was** *a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out:* **there was** *his size, and the attractive appearance; and most, obscurely, yet most powerfully,* **there was** *the conch.* (FICT)

2 *It was like heaven.* **There was** *candlelight, and* **there were** *bunks with quilts and blankets heaped on top.* **There was** *a table with a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread and a sausage on it.* **There were** *four bowls of soup.* **There were** *pictures of castles and lakes and pretty girls on the walls.* (FICT)

Review

Major points of GRAMMAR BITE B: Existential *there* clauses

➤ Existential *there* is a grammatical subject but has no meaning content.
➤ Most existential clauses have the verb *be*, but the written registers use alternatives such as *exist*, *come*, and *follow*.
➤ The 'idea subject' of the existential clause is called the notional subject. It is usually an indefinite noun phrase.
➤ Many existential *there* clauses have adverbials or postmodification of the notional subject. This is because the obligatory elements of the clause usually contain little information.
➤ Existential clauses are used to introduce a new element (or series of elements) which is going to be the focus of the following discourse.

GRAMMAR BITE

c Other topics in word order

12.11 Dislocation

Dislocation has to do with how information is distributed in spoken language. It is not a simple word order option, but involves breaking up a clause-like structure into two separate chunks. A definite noun phrase is placed at one end of the clause, and a co-referential pronoun is used in the core of the clause. In the following example, | separates the two chunks, which each express an important piece of information:

> **This little shop** | *it*'s lovely. (CONV)

The unmarked sentence structure would be: *This little shop is lovely.* With dislocation, *this little shop* is placed in initial position and repeated with the 'proxy' pronoun *it* in the core of the clause.

There are two types of dislocation. The above example is a **preface**: the definite noun phrase occurs in initial position. The definite noun phrase can also be after the clause—this is termed a **noun phrase tag**:

> *I think* *he*'s getting hooked on the taste of Vaseline, **that dog**. (CONV)

12.11.1 Prefaces

Prefaces can precede both declarative and interrogative clauses. The relationship between the preface and its clause varies. In many cases, the preface is co-referential with a subject pronoun (underlined in the examples):

1 **Sharon** <u>she</u> plays bingo on Sunday night. (CONV)
2 **That picture of a frog**, where is <u>it</u>? (CONV)
3 '**That crazy Siberian, what's his name**, <u>he</u> got one of the best houses in town.' (FICT†)

A preface can also be co-referential with an object pronoun:

4 *Well* **Bryony** it seemed to be a heavy cold that was making <u>her</u> feel miserable. (CONV)

5 *'But **Anna-Luise** – what could have attracted <u>her</u> to a man in his fifties?'*
(FICT)

The pronoun can even be embedded in a dependent clause, as it is in 4 (*that was making <u>her</u> feel miserable*).

12.11.2 Noun phrase tags

Noun phrase tags may follow both declarative and interrogative clauses. The tag normally refers back to the subject of the preceding clause:

*Has <u>it</u> got double doors, **that shop**?* (CONV)

*Did <u>they</u> have any, **the kids**?* (CONV)

Sometimes the noun phrase tag is a demonstrative pronoun rather than a definite noun phrase:

*It was a good book **this**.* (CONV)

12.11.3 Functions and distribution of prefaces and noun phrase tags

Prefaces and noun phrase tags are relatively common in conversation, and they also occur occasionally in fictional dialog; they are very rare in ordinary written prose.

Prefaces serve to establish a topic. The same work can be done by separate clauses:

A: *When I went to the hospital today, **there was this girl, right**.*

B: *Yes.*

A: ***She** took an overdose.* (CONV†)

Prefaces are also a sign of the evolving nature of conversation. Notice how the first speaker appeals to the addressee by adding the discourse marker *right*. The addressee responds, and then the first speaker goes on to the main point.

The discourse functions of noun phrase tags are more difficult to pinpoint. Frequently they seem to have a clarifying function. It is possible that the speaker, after using a pronoun, may realize that the listener will not understand the referent, and thus the noun phrase tag is necessary clarification. Some noun phrases also seem to serve the principle of end-weight:

*'It must have come as a bit of a shock, **the idea of, er, Rhiannon coming and settling down here after everything**.'* (FICT)

When tags consist of a demonstrative pronoun, they obviously do not fit either the end-weight principle or the clarification function. In sentences such as the following, end-focus seems to give the noun phrase extra emphasis:

*That's marvelous **that**, isn't it yes?* (CONV)

12.12 Clefting

Clefting is similar to dislocation because information that could be given in a single simple clause is broken up. For clefting, the information is broken into two

clauses, each with its own verb. There are two major types of cleft constructions: *it*-clefts and *wh*-clefts.

- *it*-cleft:

  1 *It's a man I want.* (FICT)
  <compare: *I want a man.*>

- *wh*-cleft:

  2 *What I want is something to eat, now!* (CONV)
  <compare: *I want something to eat.*>

Clefts are used to bring particular elements of the clause into additional focus, often for contrast. The extra focused element normally appears early in *it*-clefts and late in *wh*-clefts. Thus, in 1 *a man* is focused, and in 2 *something to eat* is focused. Both of these are direct objects in the basic clause structure *I want X.*

12.12.1 *It*-clefts

It-clefts consist of:

- the pronoun *it*
- a form of the verb *be*, optionally accompanied by *not* or an adverb such as *only*
- the focused element, which may be of the following types: a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, an adverb phrase, or an adverbial clause
- a relative-like dependent clause introduced by *that, who/which,* or zero.

In the examples below, the specially focused element is in bold and the dependent clause is in *[ ]*:

- noun phrase:

  *His eyes were clear and brown and filled with an appropriate country shyness. It was **his voice** [that held me].* (FICT)

- prepositional phrase:

  *It was only **for the carrot** [that they put up with his abominable parties].* (FICT)

- adverb:

  *It is **here** [that the finite element analysis comes into its own].* (ACAD)

- adverbial clause:

  *It was **because they were frightened**, he thought, [that they had grown so small].* (FICT)

You can see that the focused element has various syntactic roles as well. For example, in 1, *his voice* acts as subject of the dependent clause: *his voice held me.* In 2, the focused prepositional phrase is a reason adverbial: *they put up with his abominable parties for the carrot.*

A rare variant of *it*-clefts has the focused element in initial position:

  *The ceremony was in the hands of Mr Alexander Dubcek <...> **He it was** [who ushered in the new head of state to the dais] <...>* (NEWS†)

The combination of fronting and the *it*-cleft construction has a heightening effect. The meaning suggested is 'it was he and no one else'.

12.12.2 *Wh*-clefts

Wh-clefts consist of:

- a clause introduced by a *wh*-word, usually *what*; this clause has its own point of focus, usually at the end of the *wh*-clause
- a form of the verb *be*
- the specially focused nominal element: a noun phrase or a complement clause.

The specially focused element is in bold in the examples below, and the dependent *wh*-clause is placed in *[]*:

- noun phrase:

    *[What I really need] is **another credit card**.* (CONV)

- bare infinitive phrase:

    *[What you should do] is **tag them when they come in**.* (CONV)

- *to*-infinitive clause:

    *[What he did] was **to go to Holy Trinity Church**.* (FICT†)

Wh-clefts are less flexible than *it*-clefts in that they cannot be used to focus on a prepositional phrase:

> *It is **to that boy** [that she has remained faithful].* (FICT)
> <but not: *What she has remained faithful is to that boy.>

On the other hand, *wh*-clefts have an advantage over *it*-clefts because they have a double emphasis: they give some emphasis to the opening nominal clause as well as to the element in final position.

12.12.3 Reversed and demonstrative *wh*-clefts

In general, reversed *wh*-clefts look like ordinary *wh*-clefts except that the *wh*-clause and the focused element switch positions. In the following, the reversed *wh*-clefts are underlined:

1 *There's a lot more darkness in this second TV series compared with the last one but **darkness** is [what comedy is all about].* (NEWS†)
2 *'Poor Albert,' Carrie said <...> He heard what she said and shouted down to her, '**Help** is [what I want], not your pity.'* (FICT†)

In some cases, as in **1**, the focused element is picked up from the preceding text (here, *darkness*). This accounts for its early placement. In **2** the initial placement seems to be used to emphasize the contrast between *help* and *pity*.

Another related structure has a demonstrative pronoun (usually *that*) followed by a form of *be* plus a dependent clause introduced by a *wh*-word:

> ***That**'s [how I spent my summer vacation].* (FICT)

> ***This** is [what it means to say such systems are effective mixing devices].* (ACAD)

These structures usually cannot be reversed (**How I spent my summer vacation is that*). Similar to many reversed *wh*-clefts, they open with a reference to preceding text. We refer to them as demonstrative *wh*-clefts.

12.12.4 Distribution of cleft constructions

Figure 12.4 shows that both conversation and the written registers use clefts, but the different types of clefts have different distributions across the registers.

It-clefts are relatively common in all registers but most common in academic prose. *It*-clefts are typically contrastive:

> But it wasn't **the colour of his eyes** [that was peculiar to him], it was the way he walked. (FICT)

Because the focused elements occurs early in the sentence, the *it*-cleft is suitable for expressing a connection with the preceding discourse:

Figure 12.4

Frequency of cleft types

Legend: other *wh*-cleft · ordinary *wh*-cleft · *it*-cleft

> These are the faculties which make clerks into merchants, and merchants into millionaires. It is **these** [which enable the discontented clerk to earn more than eighty pounds a year]. (ACAD)

It-clefts can allow very precise statements to be made. They are also particularly useful in academic prose for presenting information as 'given', or known. Consider this example:

> It is in fact the case that whereas not all the early investigators even tried to validate their reasoning, several, including Cauchy, Servois and Boole, certainly did. And it was **in this connection** [that Servois, in 1815, introduced the notions of functions which are 'distributive' and 'commutative', terms still used today]. (ACAD†)

The information in the subordinate clause is presented as known, or taken for granted. Such clefts often occur in written texts, where they help to draw the line between what is presupposed and what is treated as new information.

Wh-clefts are more associated with conversation than the written registers. The focused element in *wh*-clefts is at the end, in agreement with the information-flow principle. The purpose of the construction is to signal what is taken as background and what is the main communicative point:

> No that's Nescafe. [What we usually have] is **Maxwell House from work**. (CONV)

This example occurred in a context where different sorts of coffee are discussed. The main communicative point is at the end of the sentence. That is, the new information is about *Maxwell House. Wh*-clefts are often used in conversations as a starting point for an utterance: *what I think . . . , what I want to say . . . , what we need . . . , what this means . . .*

Demonstrative *wh*-clefts show the biggest differences across registers: relatively common in conversation but very rare in academic prose. The
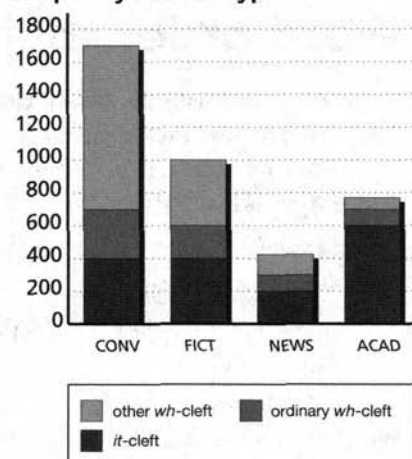
difference is probably one of formality and also the low information content that is common in these *wh*-clauses:

> *That's what I thought.* (CONV†)

12.13 Word order choices after the verb

In general, there is little variation in the order of the core elements towards the end of the clause. However, there are a few options worth considering.

12.13.1 The placement of direct objects and indirect objects

Ditransitive verbs often allow two options that are equivalent in meaning:
- indirect object + direct object:
  > *I'll fix [you<sub< IO></sub] [some tea<sub< DO></sub] later.* (FICT)
- direct object + preposition *to* or *for* + prepositional object:
  > *I'll fix [it< DO>] [for [you<PO>]].* (FICT)

For the indirect object + direct object pattern, the principle of end-weight is most important. The indirect object is very short in most cases:

> *The Academy never granted [**him**] [the membership that was his life's ambition].* (NEWS)

In the prepositional pattern, the prepositional phrase is often longer than the direct object. In addition, the prepositional phrase is often a clearer way to communicate the syntactic relationship. The prepositional phrase may even be placed before the direct object:

> *This irregularity in her features was not grotesque, but charming, and gave [to [Anastasia's face<PO>]][a humor she herself did not possess<DO>].*
> (FICT)

12.13.2 Pronoun sequences as direct and indirect objects

Where both the direct and the indirect objects are personal pronouns, there are three major patterns:

> 1 direct object + *to*-phrase: '*Give **it** to me, Pauli.*' (FICT)
> 2 indirect object + direct object: *Give **me** it, you little cow!* (CONV) <note: *cow* is an insult here>
> 3 direct object + indirect object: '*Do let me give **it** him*', *she said.* (FICT)

The first pattern, direct object + *to*-phrase, is the most common in all the registers. This is probably because it is the clearest way to mark the syntactic relationships in the clause. In patterns **2** and **3**, there is no overt signal to show which pronoun is the indirect object and which the direct. The correct interpretation must be determined from the context. Pattern **2**, indirect object + direct object, occurs almost exclusively in conversation. Pattern **3** occurs in conversation and fiction, but is relatively rare in both.

12.13.3 Clauses with direct object and object predicative

A direct object usually precedes an object predicative. However, the object may be postponed to the end position under particular circumstances. In the following examples, the object predicative is underlined and the postponed direct object is marked in bold:

> Each region has a responsibility to create and make <u>available</u> **a collection of contemporary work.** (NEWS†)
> <compare: *Each region has a responsibility to create a collection of contemporary work and make **it** <u>available</u>.*>

The object predicative is light in such cases in comparison with the direct object, which is long and complex. Where the direct object is a pronoun or a short noun-headed phrase, it must precede the object predicative.

> *I can make **you** <u>available to people</u>, yeah?* (CONV†)
> <compare: **I can make available to people you.*>
>
> *He made **it** <u>impossible</u>.* (FICT)
> <compare: **He made impossible it.*>

12.13.4 Placement of objects of phrasal verbs

For transitive phrasal verbs, direct objects (DO) can be placed before or after the adverbial particle (AP). In the following examples, the adverbial particle is underlined, and the direct object is marked in bold:

> 1 *Why do you like picking <u>up</u> **the telephone** so much?* (CONV)
> 2 *How fast can you pick **it** <u>up</u>?* (CONV)

Where the direct object is a pronoun, it is usually placed between the verb and the particle (over 90 per cent of the time), as in **2**. However, when the direct object is an indefinite pronoun, it is often placed after the adverbial particle:

> *He's going to – er – pick <u>up</u> **somebody** somewhere.* (CONV†)
>
> *He sent <u>out</u> **someone** to capture the bounty hunter.* (FICT†)

When the direct object is a full noun, there is more variation in its placement. In conversation, over 60 per cent of the occurrences have the order direct object + adverbial particle. However, in the written registers less than 10 per cent of the occurrences have this order. In general, placement follows the principle of end-weight, with heavy direct objects placed after the adverbial particle.

Two other factors are particularly interesting in the placement of the direct object. First, the placement depends somewhat on the nature of the phrasal verb. Some phrasal verbs, such as *take up* and *make out*, are idiomatic. That is, *up* and *out* do not have their literal meanings. In these cases, adverbial particle + direct object is preferred. Other phrasal verbs can have a more literal meaning, such as *take out*, where *out* still has a spatial meaning. In these cases, direct object + adverbial particle is more usual. You can see the contrast in the following examples with *carry out*, which has both an idiomatic and literal meaning:

- idiomatic meaning, adverbial particle + direct object:

  *Now carry <u>out</u> **the instructions**.* (FICT)

- literal meaning, direct object + adverbial particle:

  *The Germans carried **the corpse** <u>out</u>.* (FICT)

The second factor is the use of adverbials. Typically, direct object + adverbial particle is preferred when the particle is followed by an adverbial. For example:

  *Paul took **his friend** <u>up</u> to the top floor.* (FICT)

  *Last week a husband took **his wife** <u>out</u> for a drive.* (NEWS†)

In these cases, the particle and adverbial are closely related in meaning and so are placed together.

12.14 Summary: syntactic choices in conversation v. academic prose

With the exception of existential clauses, the special word-order choices covered in this chapter are relatively rare. This does not mean that the devices are unimportant. When they are used well, they can contribute greatly to the coherence and effectiveness of a text. The devices that are chosen most often, however, vary across the registers. For a final review of these patterns of variation, we focus on conversation and academic prose, the registers which tend to differ the most. (Although the passive was discussed in an earlier chapter (6.6–8), we include it here. Other structures, like extraposition (Ch. 10) and adverbial position (Ch. 11) have been fully described in earlier chapters.)

In the following, + and − indicate higher v. lower relative frequency:

	CONV	ACAD
marked word order (fronting, inversion, etc.)	−	+
passive constructions	−	+
existential *there*	+	−
prefaces and noun phrase tags	+	−
demonstrative *wh*-clefts	+	−

As you can see, marked word order and passive constructions are more common in academic prose. These choices are more complex structures, reflecting the complexity of academic content and the opportunity to edit and rewrite.

Existential *there*, prefaces, noun phrase tags, and demonstrative *wh*-clefts are more common in conversation. Conversation is produced without planning and editing, and production demands are eased by the use of prefaces and tags and, in general, by shorter and simpler clauses—including short existential clauses. The language of conversation is also less varied and relies more on brief stereotyped expressions, including demonstrative *wh*-clefts such as *That's what I thought.*

Review

Major points of **GRAMMAR BITE C**: Other topics in word order

➤ There are several additional ways of manipulating word order for such purposes as focus, cohesion, contrast, and end-weight.

➤ There are two types of dislocation: prefaces and noun phrase tags.

> ➤ They occur almost exclusively in conversation, and help to break the discourse up into manageable 'chunks'.
> ➤ Clefts are another special construction type, subdivided into *it*-clefts and *wh*-clefts.
>> ➤ Both types allow special emphasis to be put on a particular element.
>> ➤ *It*-clefts are used especially for contrast and cohesion. They are particularly common in academic prose.
>> ➤ *Wh*-clefts show typical information flow, though some have very little new information. They are informal and most common in conversation.
> ➤ There are also a few word order options following the verb: the placement of direct objects, indirect objects, object predicatives, and objects of phrasal verbs.
> ➤ The options for word order are used with different frequencies across the registers.