2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

So far as we can tell, all human languages are equally perfect as instruments of communication: that is, every language appears to be as well equipped as any other for saying the things its speakers want to say. It may or may not be appropriate to talk about primitive peoples or cultures, but that is another matter. Certainly, not all groups of people. are equally competent in nuclear physics or psychology or the cultivation of rice or the printing of batik cloth. But this is not the fault of their language. The Eskimos, it is said, can speak about snow with far more precision and subtlety than we can in English, but this is not because the Eskimo language (one of those sometimes mis-called ‘primitive’) is inherently more precise and subtle than English. This example does not illustrate a defect in English, a show of unexpected ‘primitiveness’. The position is simply and obviously that the Eskimos and the people who speak English live in different environments and adapt their languages accordingly. The English language would be just as rich in terms for different kinds of snow, presumably, if the environments in which English was habitually used made such distinctions important.

To produce or to understand a complicated sentence, we need a firm grasp on its underlying simple structure. In the following summary, the seven most common patterns are sorted out according to whether or not the verb carries along any complements, and, if so, how many and what kind. For each sentence pattern, the summary first shows the simple, bare-bones model. It then shows the pattern as it might be expanded and varied in actual sentences—first, through the addition of
modifiers, second, through the duplication of one or more basic parts; and, third, through inversions, or variations in word order.

Pattern one: Subject—Verb (S-V)
This is the bare-minimum sentence in English. The verb alone serves as the complete predicate. Verbs used in this pattern are called intransitive they are not “in transit” to anything; they are not going anywhere.
Example : Kites fly. Mary nodded. The rain had stopped.
Varied : A cat may look on a king.

Pattern two : Subject—Verb—Object (S-V-O)
In this pattern, a transitive verb carries the action of the subject across to a second noun (or noun substitute). The difference between a transitive and an intransitive verb is like that between a through road and a dead-end street. The second noun becomes part of the basic structure of the sentence and is called the direct object.
In many sentences, it acts as the target of an action, the result of a performance.
Examples : Dogs chase cats.
Varied : The heavens declare the glory of God.

Pattern three : Subject—Linking Verb—Noun, (S-LV-N)
In this pattern, the verb pins a label on the subject. The label is a second noun that serves as a description of the first. The second noun in this pattern is often called a predicate noun. The verb linking it to the subject is called a linking verb. Most commonly the linking verb is a form of be. Occasionally, especially in British usage, the linking verb is a verb like feel, seem, or remain:
Example : Philip is a fool.
Varied : Man is the measure of all things.

Pattern four: Subject—Linking Verb—Adjective (S-LV-Adj)

In this pattern, the linking verb again pins a label on the subject. But this time the label is not a second noun. It is rather a word chosen from the third major word class: an adjective. Adjectives are words like warm, slender, blue, heavy, beautiful, ladylike, studious. They typically fit in after intensifiers like very, fairly, extremely: very short, fairly expensive, extremely beautiful. In comparisons, they use forms with -er/-est or are preceded by more and most: older than my brother; more difficult than you think. The adjective that follows the linking verb is often called a predicate adjective. Verbs that may serve as linking verbs in this pattern include be, seem, appear, become, grow, turn, feel, taste, sound, smell, and look:

Examples : Men are mortal.

Varied : All the boys seemed to him very strange.

Pattern five : Subject—Verb—Indirect Object—Object (S-V-IO)

In this pattern, a transitive verb makes a detour through a second complement before carrying the action across to the direct object. The additional noun (or noun substitute) inserted between the verb and direct object is called the indirect object. Typically, the indirect object shows the intended recipient or destination. By its position, that is, by word order, it conveys a meaning that at a different point in the sentence would have to be shown by a preposition indicating to whom or for what. Verbs that fit this pattern include give, send, teach, write, buy, leave, lend, offer, show, ask:

Example : Jim wrote his wife a letter.
Varied : Thou canst not every day give me thy heart.

Pattern six : Subject—Verb—Object—Object Complement (S-V-O-OC)

In this pattern, a transitive verb first carries the action or process across to the object. We then go on to a second complement that pins a label on the object. In this pattern, the label pinned on the object is an additional noun (or noun substitute), called the object complement. The resulting pattern looks the same as Pattern Five but is put together differently. In Pattern Five, there is a triangle relationship of “Sender Destination — Missive.” What is sent and to whom are two quite different things. In Pattern Six, we have a combination of Pattern Two (“I consider John”) and Pattern Three (“John is a fool”). As a result, in “I consider John a fool” John and the fool are the same person. Verbs that fit this pattern include consider, think, call, make, name, choose, elect, vote, appoint:

Example : I consider John my friend.

Varied : A child’s laughter makes the darkness light.

Pattern seven : Subject—Verb—Object—Adjective (S-V-O-Adj)

In this pattern we again have the verb pin a label on the object. This time, the label is an adjective. The result is a combination of Pattern Two, and Pattern Four (“This action is premature”). Combining these two statements, we arrive at “I consider this action premature.” Verbs that fit this pattern include some of the verbs from Pattern Six, but also many others: consider, think, call, make, find, paint, turn, keep.

Example : I consider John eligible.

Varied : Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow.
When you start looking for the basic patterns that underlie actual sentences, remember the following cautions:

(1) Not all complete utterances fit the subject-predicate pattern.

In spoken English, but also in imaginative writing, we find many units that are grammatically self-contained and yet lack subject or verb or both. Many exclamations consist merely of a noun cluster:

What a man!

My ticket!

Many casual remarks sound like a sentence of Pattern Three or Four from which a mere filler subject like it and a form of be have been omitted:

(It is a) Beautiful day today.

Subject or verb or both are missing from many familiar sayings balancing one thing off against the other:

(2) Some familiar sentence types fit the basic patterns only imperfectly. The following sentences use be as a main verb (and not as an auxiliary); and be does not link a noun or an adjective to the subject. We would therefore classify it as an intransitive verb in Pattern One:

Your brother was here.

Here and abroad belong to the fourth major word class. They are adverbs — in this case, adverbs of place. Usually we would treat these as optional modifiers added to the basic pattern. But here the basic pattern does not seem complete until the adverb has been added. Some grammarians would therefore list a Pattern Eight: Subject—Be — Adverb (S-Be-Adv).
(3) Some sentences do not fit the familiar basic patterns at all. In the following sentences, the verb is an intransitive verb that fits Pattern One, but at the same time it acts as if it were a linking verb that pins a label on the subject:

Grandmother died happy

In the following sentence, the fourth element in the basic pattern pins a label on the subject—rather than on the object:

He left the casino a millionaire.

In other words, our listing of basic patterns is not intended as a complete inventory of possible sentence types. But it does furnish us with the most common among the simple structures that more complicated sentences expand, vary, and combine.