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A Course in Morphology and Syntax

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Intransitive Verb

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## **Intransitive Verb**

An Intransitive verb is a verb that does not require a complement to form a complete

VP. The term “intransitive” literally means “has (and needs) no complement.” For example, consider the following verbs:

• disappear • die • laugh • vegetate • play (in one interpretation)

These verbs do not need an NP (noun phrase) or any other complement to complete their meaning.

Let’s look at a simple sentence: • Omar sighed.

Here, sighed is an intransitive verb. The sentence is already grammatically complete without any additional elements.

## **-Intransitive Verbs as Complete Verb Phrases**

Because intransitive verbs do not take complements, they function as a complete VP by themselves. This is an important distinction from transitive verbs, which require an NP complement. Compare the following: ✓ Correct (Intransitive VP)

- The magician disappeared.
- She laughed.
- He died.

✗ Incorrect (Adding an NP Complement Unnecessarily)

- The magician disappeared the trick.
- She laughed the joke.
- He died his friend.

None of these sentences are grammatical because intransitive verbs do not allow direct objects.

### 3.Ditransitive Verb

A ditransitive verb requires two NP complements:

- The first NP functions as the indirect object (the recipient or beneficiary of the action).
- The second NP functions as the direct object (the thing being given, sent, or offered). Let's examine some examples:

✓ Ditransitive sentences:

- William gave **Millie** some bleach.
- The staff sent **the general** a message.
- Max buys **his butler** all necessary work-clothes.

In these cases:

- The indirect object (in bold) is Millie, the general, and his butler.
- The direct object (in italics) is some bleach, a message, and all necessary work-clothes.

### -Indirect vs. Direct Objects

Indirect objects typically indicate who receives or benefits from the action, while direct objects are the things being transferred.

✓ If we replace the NPs with pronouns, they must take the objective case (him, her, them, etc.):

- William gave her some bleach.
- The staff sent him a message.

## **-Identifying Ditransitive Verbs**

Let's analyze the following verbs:

- (a) show → Max showed Matilda his collection of razors.  
(Ditransitive)
- (b) offer → Tarzan offered Jane his hairy arm.  
(Ditransitive)
- (c) see → Max saw Matilda his collection of razors.  
(Incorrect – not

ditransitive)

- (d) tell → Heseltine told his boss the news. (Ditransitive)
- (e) announce → Heseltine announced his boss the news.  
(Incorrect – not ditransitive)

From this, we see that show, offer, and tell are ditransitive, while see and announce are not.

## **-The Relationship Between Indirect Objects and Prepositional Phrases (PPs)**

An important feature of ditransitive verbs is that their indirect object (IO) can often be rewritten as a prepositional phrase (PP) introduced by to or for:

✓ IO → PP Conversion:

- William gave Millie some bleach. → William gave some bleach to Millie.
- The staff sent the general a message. → The staff sent a message to the general.
- Max buys his butler all necessary work-clothes. → Max buys all necessary work-clothes for his butler.

This transformation does not change the meaning but provides an alternative sentence structure.

#### **4. Intensive Verbs**

Intensive verb requires a predicative complement to complete its meaning. The most common and central example of an intensive verb is “be,” also known as the copula.

Examples:

- Ed is rather extravagant. (AP complement)
- Sigmund was an auctioneer. (NP complement)
- Oscar and the First Mate were in the engine room. (PP complement)

In each case, the verb connects the subject to a complement that describes or identifies it rather than expressing an action.

Other intensive verbs include:

- ✓ become, seem, appear, turn, remain, look, taste, feel, smell, sound.

#### **-Predicatives vs. Direct Objects**

To understand intensive verbs, we must distinguish predicatives from direct objects.

✓ Predicatives describe the subject by attributing a property to it.

- ✓ Direct objects refer to a separate entity from the subject and receive the action of the verb. Compare these sentences:

✓ Sigmund was an auctioneer. (Intensive verb + predicative)

✗ Sigmund spotted an auctioneer. (Transitive verb + direct object)

- In the first sentence, an auctioneer describes Sigmund, meaning it is a predicative.

- In the second sentence, an auctioneer is a different person from Sigmund, so it functions as a direct object of the transitive verb spotted.



**Key rule:** If a verb takes only an Adjective Phrase (AP) as a complement, it is always intensive because APs only describe properties.

### **-Identifying Intensive vs. Transitive Uses of the Same Verb**

Some verbs can function as both intensive and transitive, depending on their meaning. Consider the following sentences:

- ✓ Max turned a subtle shade of green. (Intensive: predicative complement)
- ✗ Max turned another card. (Transitive: direct object) Other examples:
- ✓ Tarzan felt a real idiot. (Intensive) → Tarzan felt idiotic. (AP replacement possible)
- ✗ Tarzan felt a tap on his shoulder. (Transitive)
- ✓ The hat became a very useful wastepaper basket. (Intensive) → The hat became more useful.
- 💡 Tip: If you can replace the NP complement with an AP (adjective phrase) without changing the meaning, the verb is intensive. If not, it is transitive.

### **-Prepositional Phrases as Subject-Predicatives**

A Prepositional Phrase (PP) can also function as a predicative when it is necessary to complete the meaning of the verb.

✓ Oscar and the First Mate were in the engine room. (Predicative PP)

✗ Oscar and the First Mate were. (Incomplete without the PP)

💡 If removing the PP makes the sentence incomplete, it is a predicative complement rather than a modifier.

## 5. Complex Transitive Verbs

A complex transitive verb is a verb that takes both a direct object and an objectpredicative. The object-predicative characterizes the direct object, meaning it describes or assigns a property to it.

Examples:

✓ Jack finds his own jokes extremely funny. (Direct object = NP, Objectpredicative = AP)

✓ They made Stella their spokesperson. (Direct object = NP, Object-predicative = NP)

✓ Liza put the liquor under her bed. (Direct object = NP, Object-predicative = PP)

Key Differences:

- In an intensive verb sentence (Sigmund was an auctioneer), the predicative describes the subject.
- In a complex transitive verb sentence (They made Stella their spokesperson), the predicative describes the direct object. This means that the semantic relationship between direct object and object-predicative in a complex transitive VP parallels the subject-predicative relation in an intensive sentence.