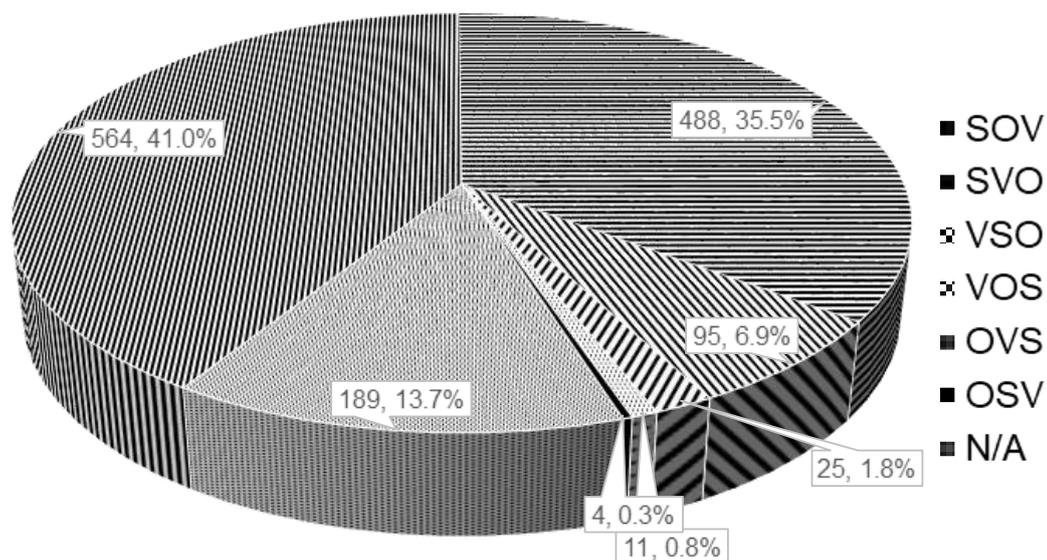


Language Awareness for Key Stage 3

14: Word Order

Key Terms	Optional Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Order • Subject • Object • Adposition • Head • Phrase • Dependant • Agreement • Syntax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postposition • Speech Act

- Introduction: Word Order
 - Today we will look at word order and how languages arrange words in different ways
 - We will see different orders that languages use for subjects, objects and verbs
 - We will look at different word orders for adjectives and adpositions (prepositions/postpositions, e.g. *on*)
 - We will also look at how word order can vary within a single language and how languages use different word orders
 - We will see how word order patterns can tell us about the structure of language in general
- Word Order
 - You may remember from our first lesson that different languages have different orders for subject, object and verb
 - Subject–Verb–Object (SVO): I saw them
 - Subject–Object–Verb (SOV): I them saw
 - Verb–Subject–Object (VSO): Saw I them
 - Verb–Object–Subject (VOS): Saw them I
 - Object–Verb–Subject (OVS): Them saw I
 - Object–Subject–Verb (OSV): Them I saw
 - Some of these language types are much more common than others





Map adapted from WALS (<https://wals.info/feature/81A>)



- Most languages show a preference for having the subject before the verb, and having the subject before the object
- The evidence suggests that these types of language are somehow ‘easier’
- However, we don’t yet have enough data to say what makes this easier, or in what way
- The order of subjects, objects and verbs is not the only thing that can vary from language to language
- You may remember that languages have different types of adpositions
- Some languages have prepositions, which come before the noun
 - in Japan (English)
 - from Tokyo
- Others have postpositions, which come after the noun
 - Nihon ni (Japanese)
 - Tokyo kara
- Likewise, in some languages adjectives come before the noun, while in others they follow it
 - black coffee (English)
 - schwarzer Kaffee (German)
 - kurodesu kōhī (Japanese)
 - café noir (French)
 - caife dubh (Irish)
 - coffi du (Welsh)
- There are patterns in this variation in word order
 - For example, languages with the verb before the object tend to have prepositions before the noun
 - Languages with the object before the verb are more likely to have nouns followed by postpositions
- However, there are exceptions to some of these patterns
 - For example, languages with the verb before the object often place nouns before adjectives, as in Irish
 - However, in English the verb comes before the object, but adjectives come before the noun
- Why do these patterns exist at all?
- They can be seen as different applications of the same general principles
- For example, verbs have the same sort of role in regard to their objects as prepositions do
- Verbs and prepositions specify the type of relationship that exists, and the objects specify what the relationship is to
 - A hedge surrounds the garden
 - There is a hedge around the garden
- We can say that in relation to their objects, verbs and prepositions are both heads
- The verb and the object that depends on it form a single unit, the verb phrase, with the verb as the head of the phrase
- The same is true for prepositions and prepositional phrases
- The patterns that we see in word order can then be expressed as a single statement:
 - In any given language, heads will tend to have the same order with respect to their dependants
 - Head + Dependant = Verb + Object, Preposition + Noun...
 - Dependant + Head = Object + Verb, Noun + Postposition...

Activity 1:

In groups, take some time to think of any other languages that you might know. Make a note of word orders in these languages. If a language can have more than one order, try to choose the most basic, “ordinary” one. Afterwards, the groups can compare notes. What patterns do you see?

Language	Verb Phrase	Adjectives	Adpositions
<i>English</i>	<i>SVO</i>	<i>AN</i>	<i>PN</i>

- So far, when we have talked about word order we have only been looking at a single, “basic” word order for each language
- However, many languages allow you to vary this basic word order for different reasons
- You may remember that languages in which subjects and objects are clearly marked using case endings can be very flexible about word order
- For example, in Latin there are six different ways of saying ‘John saw Mary’
 - Johannes Mariam vidit
 - Johannes vidit Mariam
 - Vidit Johannes Mariam
 - Vidit Mariam Johannes
 - Mariam vidit Johannes
 - Mariam Johannes vidit
- What good are all these different orders?
- One use for them is to change the emphasis
- In Latin, the normal order is subject–object–verb
 - Johannes Mariam vidit
‘John saw Mary’
- By rearranging the sentence, you can focus on different words
 - Mariam Johannes vidit
‘As for Mary, John saw her’, ‘It was Mary that John saw’, etc.
- As you can see, changing the emphasis in English often results in a more complex structure
- Even in English, you can sometimes add emphasis just by changing the order of words
 - Mary’s alright, but John I hate
- Questions and Other Speech Acts
 - One very common use for different word orders is to distinguish different types of speech act
 - Mary is so happy. (statement)
 - How happy is Mary? (question)
 - How happy Mary is! (exclamation)
 - Moving the verb before the subject is a very common way of forming questions in Indo-European languages
 - Is Mary happy? (English)
 - Ist Maria froh? (German)
 - ¿Está Maria feliz? (Spanish)

- However, there are also other ways of forming questions
- Another way to form questions is by leaving the words in the same order and just using a different tone of voice
- In English, this sort of question is often used to echo a previous statement
 - Mary's happy.
 - She's happy?

Activity 2:

Take some time and try to think of other situations where you might use this sort of question in English. Can you come up with a list of rules about when to use which sort of question?

Notes

- Some languages make much more extensive use of questions that leave the words in the same order
- This is the most common sort of question in informal French
 - Est-elle heureuse? (formal)
'Is she happy?'
 - Elle est heureuse? (informal)
'She's happy?'
- In other languages, this is the only way of asking questions
- In Amharic (spoken in Ethiopia), all questions have the same word order as statements
 - Mariyami desitenya nati
'Mary is happy'
 - Mariyami desitenya nati?
'Is Mary happy?'
- Sentence Structure
 - So far we have only been looking at the order of words
 - But word order is inseparable from other aspects of language
 - For example, word order can have an effect on agreement
 - You may remember from the last lesson that verbs agree with their subjects
 - However, agreement can be affected by word order
 - In Arabic, subjects can appear before or after the verb
 - L-tullaabu wasaluu
'The students have arrived'
 - Wasala l-tullaabu
'The students have arrived'
(literally, 'Has arrived the students')
 - When the verb comes first, it no longer agrees with the subject
 - The verb is singular, but the subject is plural

- However, this does not happen in most languages that allow multiple word orders
 - Hoi mathētai aphikonto (Greek)
‘The students have arrived’
 - Aphikonto hoi mathētai
literally, ‘Have arrived the students’
- As you saw earlier, word order has no effect on agreement in Latin either
- What do these differences mean?
- Even though we see the same word orders in Arabic and Greek, the similarities are just on the surface
- There’s a sense in which the verb in Arabic is actually in a “different” place from Greek, even if all you can see on the surface is that they are both before their subjects
- It almost seems that in Arabic the verb is somewhere where the subject can’t “reach” it
- Studying these sorts of similarities and differences between languages can let us see patterns that exist “below the surface” of language
- When we look at these things, we are studying syntax
- Syntax is the system of rules that a language has for combining words into sentences
- In the next lessons we will see more examples of these patterns
- Conclusion
 - Today we have seen how different languages have different rules for arranging the words in a sentence
 - We have seen how specific differences that seem arbitrary can be expressed in terms of more general rules
 - We have looked at the use of special word orders for special purposes such as questions
 - We have seen that in some languages word order can affect agreement
 - This is an example of how languages can seem the same on the surface but be different underneath