

So what have we learned from our brief look at clauses? What if we step back for a bigger picture, where we are not distracted by details?

Clauses show us how powerful our minds are, that whirl clauses into place in a split second, poetry in motion, zooming through structural options one after another. As we speak, we spin out a simple sentence with a compound verb, and we are so good at it that we do not even know we are doing it. One second later we are uttering a compound sentence with two independent clauses that have something to do with each other. A second later we are uttering a complex sentence in which the direct object of the main clause is also a clause in itself, and a second later we are uttering a complex sentence in which the dependent clause acts as an adverb. This continues, minute after minute, our minds whirling all these things into a focused and meaningful stream of thought, and our listener understands it all without effort, and we think of it as a conversation. We think of it as fun. It is easy. And all of that intellectual power happens in the background of our brain as a built-in part of who we are. We do not even realize that we are creating grammar, structure after structure, at the speed of conversation. So the first thing that we learn from studying the grammar of clauses is that it is a marvel to be human. The t-models in this chapter are a kind of scrapbook of the forms of your mind; they show the patterns that your mind uses to form ideas.

A second observation is that the clause structures change for reasons. We need one structure, and not another, in order to capture a particular reality in the world. Two facts are connected, or one causes another, or one does something to another, or one idea expresses the purpose of another's action. These clause structures, collectively, are like snapshots of reality, but in code. The structures of the sentences secretly assume the forms of the structures in the world.

This brings us to writing. Sometimes I hear the advice of changing clause structures frequently in order to keep writing interesting. But to think that way is to miss the purpose of clause structures. We cannot vary clause structures for no meaningful reason. Structures have meaning. Clause structures reflect structures in the world. When we write, our structures should tell the truth. If we are describing simple, discrete facts, then we should not do it with compound or complex sentences. To describe a complex reality with simple sentences would be a kind of falsification. Clause usage is not a shallow question of style; it is a question of accuracy. We must write clause structures that are true to what they represent. Language is an attempt to express the truth.