

1.5 - DIRECTIVES AND OPINIONS – PARTIAL STATEMENTS

Learning Objectives

- ❖ Distinguish between 'full' statements and those that are partially so.
- ❖ Apply criteria for identifying directives in text.
- ❖ Identify the terms and phrases that shape the meaning of directives.
- ❖ Use the appropriate criteria for recognizing opinions in the text.
- ❖ Differentiate between descriptions that are more closely linked to factual information and opinions.
- ❖ Separate opinions from facts when both are used together in a single segment of text.

Let's begin this final section of the unit by reiterating what we know about a statement, and in particular about its two core features. First, its meaning is firmly communicated. The author expresses himself or herself in such a way as to leave no doubt about his or her confidence and conviction about what he/she is saying. The intention of the author is that those to whom the information is directed, must accept it as presented. Secondly, a statement conveys information about actions, events, states, conditions that, **according to the author**, are, have been, were; exist, have existed, existed; are happening, have happened, happened.

Opinions and directives meet the first criterion of a statement but not the second. Consider the following examples:

Examples of directives and opinions

- i. *My concern is that these students [dropouts] are in the pool out of which criminals are recruited; who are forced to "look for money" at their young age and find themselves locked in the world of gangs.*
- ii. *No eating or drinking allowed.*
- iii. *Grate the coconut; cut up the chicken into small pieces; season with green seasoning.*
- iv. *They need to clear the land before the rains come.*
- v. *Every employee should know the menus, specials and activities of the [food and beverage] establishment and be encouraged to promote them.*
- vi. *With fewer than 2000 rooms in the accommodation sector [of Grenada], as well as a lack of airlift, it is the very determined, and those who know the charm of the island that make the effort to travel as far south as they do. When they arrive, they find an unspoilt, picturesque, diverse destination.*

The list above comprises both directives and opinions. Can you tell them apart?

Directives

Numbers (ii) through (v) are different types of directives. The first of the four is an order or **command**. Following that is a recipe comprising a series of **instructions**.

Next is a strong **suggestion** or **recommendation**, directed to certain individuals regarding the clearing of the land. The word 'should' in the last of the four signals what **ought** to be done.

They are called directives since they are intended to direct, control, regulate or guide the actions of others. In one sense, all four meet one criterion of a statement in that they are all presented firmly and with conviction. On the other hand, they do not state 'what is/was', 'what exists, existed', 'what is happening, happened', as seen from the perspective of the author. The command is intended to make the listeners do (or not do) something. It does not state what they are actually doing. Similarly, the recipe gives step-by-step instructions of what an individual must do to create the dish; it is not stating what the person is actually doing. The other two can be categorised as sentences that exhort, encourage, recommend, or urge another person (or persons) to do something. Terms like '*must*', '*should*', '*need to*', '*ought*', all convey an intention to direct or even force someone to take a particular line of action, or behave in a certain way. However they do not convey information about the activity or behaviour actually taking place.

It is important to separate these '*partial statements*' from facts, assertions and generalisations. Blurring the lines between the two sets may mean that you are not accurately representing the information communicated by the author.

Here is a longer excerpt that is largely based on the use of directives.

Extract 1.17

Adhering to food safety standards can be time consuming and expensive but failure to do so can be disastrous to an organisation. A single incident of food poisoning, a bad report from the health inspector, or an accident caused by unsafe conditions in the kitchen or bar can be far more expensive in terms of lawsuits, bad publicity and reputational damage. It therefore is imperative that every member of the food and beverage team receives the appropriate training, is provided with the necessary safety equipment, gear and cleaning materials. Most importantly, managers have to hold staff accountable for adhering to the policies and procedures. Managers also need to investigate reports

of incidents or food-related illnesses and put in place remedies as needed.

This segment begins with an assertion that is followed up by another to reinforce it. Based on our earlier examination of assertions, you may be expecting to see follow-up evidence to support the claims that start this extract. However this is not the case here. No support is provided. Rather the author proceeds to give directives about what must be done in light of the issues raised in the claims.

Pay attention to the words and phrases that shape the meaning of those recommendations. The third sentence begins with '*It is imperative*', suggesting that this is an order. The next begins with '*most importantly*' with the main part of the sentence noting what managers '*have to do*'. Finally, in the last sentence of the extract, the word '*need*' continues the pattern of exhorting people to act or behave in a particular way.

Like '*should*', '*must*' and '*ought to*' all the selected terms and phrases in this segment are core elements of this type of directive. As noted earlier, we need to be alert not to mistake these 'partial' statements for 'full' statements since they do not indicate what actually is/was etc.

Opinions

As we have already acknowledged, both a directive and an opinion share one core feature of a statement in that both are conveyed with conviction and authority. What is interesting about opinions is that one can easily fall into the trap of thinking that they also convey a meaning of what is/was, and more specifically, we may be inclined to treat them as if they were facts. So what exactly is an opinion?

You can think of an opinion as a personal feeling, how a person feels about something. One dictionary defines it as '*a belief or conclusion held with confidence but not substantiated by positive knowledge or proof*'. And yet another source defines it as "*a view or judgment formed about something not necessarily based on fact or knowledge*".

Let's return to the list of partial statements at the beginning of the section. We have already identified numbers (ii) through (v) as directives. The first and last are examples of opinions. Let us examine the first, which was taken from a letter to the editor of a daily newspaper. The writer is noting the large number of school dropouts and is expressing concern that they may get pulled into gangs. Even though the letter-writer appears confident about the conclusion he has

drawn, he has not provided any substantial proof to move his concern beyond a personal feeling or even belief.

In the case of the comment on the tourism sector of Grenada (the last in the list), it contains two facts: namely that there are fewer than 2000 rooms in the accommodation sector and very few flights to the island. While those details are not verified in this segment, we can feel certain that they have been taken from sources that can be trusted. Not so the rest of the segment, which reflects the personal views of the writer. It speaks of '*the charm of the island*', and further refers to the country as '*an unspoilt, picturesque, diverse destination*'. These are all opinions. Care must be taken to distinguish facts from opinions when both are merged in a single segment of text. We will return to this matter later.



Figure 1.11 – Opinion – unspoilt and picturesque,

Description, based on observation – cloudless sky, calm sea.

In many cases, opinions are expressed in the form of descriptions, as in the example just reviewed. Earlier, in Section 1.2, in discussing how authors combine facts to arrive at a description, we cautioned about the need to distinguish that form of language use from opinions. At that time, we noted that the description was a part of the thing itself, that the features or characteristics were inherent in the thing being described.

This longer extract should allow us to get a better understanding of the nature of opinions, as distinct from descriptions that emerge more directly from factual information. It was taken from a tribute, written in memory of the deceased Emeritus Professor Mervin Alleyne, scholar in the field of Caribbean linguistics and formerly of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Extract 1.18

Alleyne had an abiding disrespect for orthodoxy, a fiercely protective attitude towards the African heritage in Caribbean languages and a facility with argument that was difficult to defeat. He was supportive of creative and imaginative thinking, tolerant of views contrary to his, gentle in his rebuke and resolute in his personal beliefs and perspectives. He treated all persons with considerable respect for their humanity even though he might have been very opposed to their expressed positions.

This segment is an extended opinion about the late Professor. It is a continuous, uninterrupted statement of the writers' views of the Caribbean linguist. For example, he had '*an abiding disrespect for orthodoxy*'; he was '*supportive of creative and imaginative thinking*'; he was '*gentle in his rebuke*'. It is apparent that the writers of the tribute are able to make these remarks based on their deep knowledge of the deceased scholar. At the same time, it is also evident that these are beliefs formulated in their minds, even if held with the confidence that comes out of their direct association with the individual.

One additional term that we can use to describe the language of an opinion is that it is **subjective**, as opposed to objective. It is an expression of a personal judgement, formed in the mind of an individual, about an object of interest and which does not seek to identify external evidence for support.

Readers should pay even closer attention when opinions and facts are combined in a single segment. That is the case in another excerpt from the tribute to Emeritus Professor Alleyne and presented below:

Extract 1.19

His seminal work, "Comparative Afro-American", exposed the major areas of similarity across the languages described as "creole" by other linguists. He himself did not consider the term "creole" adequate for the languages it attempted to describe. For Alleyne, the similarities were brought on by the circumstances and experiences of the persons who speak these languages rather than

by their exemplifying an exotic typology. He used the national names of these languages – he insisted that he spoke “Trinidadian” ... Jamaicans spoke “Jamaican”, not Jamaican Creole, and Haitians spoke “Haitian”, not Haitian Creole. It was a statement of empowerment through language.

That paragraph is largely (but not exclusively) informational, presenting the following facts about the work of Prof. Alleyne:

- ❖ In his work ‘Comparative Afro-American’, Prof. Alleyne drew attention to the similarities among all the languages that other linguists described as ‘creole’.
- ❖ He was of the view that these similarities in language were as a result of the shared circumstances and experiences of the speakers of those languages.
- ❖ He disagreed with the creole linguists who claimed that they could all be classified linguistically as ‘creole’ languages.
- ❖ To emphasize his disagreement with that perspective, he used the national names of the languages, dropping the word ‘creole’ from the name.

Even though largely factual, there are two points in the paragraph where the authors insert their opinions to influence the way the readers see the facts. First, there is the phrase ‘*exemplifying an exotic typology*’, and secondly, the last sentence of the paragraph, ‘*It was a statement of empowerment through language*’. None of these contribute to the factual information about Prof. Alleyne’s work. Rather they reflect the writers’ opinion about Prof. Alleyne and his work.

In the case of the first, the word ‘exotic’ introduces a subjective dimension to the text. It suggests that the way creole linguists categorized the languages of the peoples of the different Caribbean islands made them (the languages)

appear as if they were out-of-the-ordinary, emanating from some faraway lands and not grounded in the lived experiences of the people. Similarly, the phrase '*a statement of empowerment through language*' represents a personal judgment on the part of the writers of the tribute. In their view, the decision of the deceased linguist to name each language according to the island in which it was spoken reflected his (Prof. Alleyne's) conviction of how a people's language mirrored their awareness of who they are.

In some instances, while readers may get the impression that they are only receiving objective factual information, in reality they are receiving it through the subjective lens through which the author chooses to present the information. This subjective view is embedded in the words and phrases used in the presentation. Readers must be alert to the way authors insert their own views within the facts they are presenting.

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Partial statements share only one characteristic with 'full' statements.
- ❖ Directives do not convey information about actual events, activities or situations.
- ❖ Directives are intended to direct, control or guide the actions of others.
- ❖ Opinions are based on personal beliefs and judgments.
- ❖ They are not derived from the actual nature of the phenomenon to which they refer.
- ❖ Opinions are subjective.
- ❖ Care must be taken to distinguish opinions from facts.

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