

# **Describing and Analysing Language**

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## **Grammar Assessment**

**(word count: 2195)**

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## Question One

Words containing more than one morpheme are underlined and in bold in the following sentence:

The **data** for this study **consist** of a large number of **recordings** of **children** who were **tape-recorded throughout** their first **years** – **children** from **welfare, working-class** and **professional backgrounds**. The **researchers** **looked** at the number of **encouragements** **given** to the **children**.

Word	Root	Word	Root
data	dat(um)	working-class	work, class
consist	NA	professional	profession
recordings	record	backgrounds	back, ground
children	child	researchers	search
tape-recorded	tape, record	looked	look
throughout	through, out	encouragements	courage
years	year	given	give
welfare	wel(l), fare		

Table 1: words and their root morphemes

### Data

This was a problem word due to confusion over whether it is a plural or singular noun. This arises from its roots as a Latin word. According to the Oxford English Dictionary help website (AskOxford.com), “strictly speaking, data is the plural of datum, and should be used with a plural verb (like facts)”. As we can see in the example sentence above, the main verb of the sentence is ***consist*** (“*The data for this study consist ...*”). From this we can gather that ***data*** is indeed the plural form. Its singular form is *datum*. So the root morpheme would be ‘*dat(um)*’. The suffix ‘-a’ is inflectional, signalling plurality.

### Consist

This was another problem word. Clearly, ‘*con-*’ is a prefix (meaning *together, with*). However, even though ‘*sist*’ exists in a number of words (e.g. *subsist, resist, insist*, etc.), it has no particular meaning (unless by reference to its Latin origin maybe) on its own and is thus a bound morpheme (‘*-sist*’). Therefore, ***consist*** is an “unanalyzable whole” (Jackson, 1982:111).

### Recordings

Similar to *consist*, ‘*re-*’ is a prefix (meaning *again*). However, ‘*cord*’ has no particular meaning in itself but is the bound morpheme ‘*-cord*’. Therefore, ‘*record*’ is an unanalyzable whole. This is the root morpheme of *recordings*. However, there are two other constituent morphemes. The first, the suffix ‘*-ing*’, is derivational and changes ‘*record*’ from a verb into a noun. The second, the suffix ‘*-s*’, is inflectional and signals plurality.

### Children

Finally, a relatively straightforward word. *Children* consists of two morphemes, the root morpheme, ‘*child*’, and the suffix, ‘*-ren*’, which is inflectional and signals plurality.

### Tape-recorded

*Tape-record* is an example of the process of **compounding**—“the combination of more than one root” (Jackson, 1982:117). *Tape-record* is a compound root consisting of the root morphemes ‘*tape*’ and ‘*record*’ (see above). The morpheme ‘*-ed*’ has been added. This suffix is inflectional and signals the past tense.

### Throughout

*Throughout* is another example of the process of compounding. Two root morphemes, ‘*through*’ and ‘*out*’, are combined to form the word, *throughout*.

### Years

*Years* consists of two morphemes, the root morpheme, ‘*year*’, and the suffix ‘*-s*’, which is inflectional and signals plurality.

### Welfare

*Welfare* is another example of the process of compounding. Two root morphemes, ‘*wel(l)*’ and ‘*fare*’ (meaning *to be successful/unsuccessful*), are combined to form the word, *welfare*. However, most speakers of English would probably not think about splitting this word up. Another example of this type of word is *welcome*.

### Working-class

*Working-class* is another example of the process of compounding. Two root morphemes, 'work' and 'class' are combined to form the word, *working-class*. However, there is also an inflectional suffix, '-ing', added to 'work'. This morpheme converts the verb 'work' into the present participle 'working' (i.e. 'the class that is working')

### Professional

This was another problem word, similar to *consist* and *record*. Clearly, 'pro-' is a prefix (meaning *support, approve*). However, even though 'fess' exists in some words (e.g. *confess*), it has no particular meaning and is therefore the bound morpheme '-fess'. Therefore, 'profess' can be considered as unanalyzable whole. But is 'profession' derived from 'profess' by adding the suffix '-ion'? The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines 'profess' as "to say that you do or are something, especially when it is really not true" and 'profession' as either **1**) "a job that needs a high level of education and training" or **2**) "a statement of your belief, opinion, or feeling". Even though the second definition of 'profession' has perhaps been derived from 'profess', clearly there is no obvious link between 'profess' and the first definition. As the example sentence uses the first definition of 'profession', it can be inferred that the root morpheme of *professional* is 'profession', with '-al' acting as a derivational suffix changing the noun 'profession' into the adjective *professional*.

### Backgrounds

*Backgrounds* is another example of the process of compounding. Two root morphemes, 'back' and 'ground', are combined to form the compound root, 'background'. An inflectional suffix '-s' is added to signal plurality.

### Researchers

The root morpheme is 'search'. The morpheme 're-' is a derivational prefix, giving the meaning of *again* to the word. The morpheme '-er' is also a derivational suffix, changing the verb 'research' into a noun, 'researcher'. Finally, the morpheme '-s' is an inflectional suffix that signals plurality.

### Looked

The root morpheme is 'look'. The morpheme '-ed' is an inflectional suffix that signalling the past tense.

### **Encouragements**

The root morpheme is 'courage'. The morpheme 'en-', meaning 'make someone be in a particular state or have a particular quality', is a derivational prefix that changes the noun 'courage' to the verb 'encourage'. The suffix '-ment' is also derivational, changing the verb 'encourage' into the noun 'encouragement'. Finally, the suffix '-s' is inflectional, signalling plurality.

### **Given**

The root morpheme is 'give'. The morpheme '-n' is an inflectional suffix signalling the past tense in the form of the past participle.

One other word, **study**, caused a few difficulties. Initially, I thought that the root morpheme of the word was 'stud'. This root appears in a number of words such as student, studious and studio. But how do you explain the presence of the morpheme '-y'? Instead, I feel that **study** is an unanalyzable whole and as such has no constituent morphemes. As **study** is a noun in this context, it could be argued that it has derived from the verb **study** (or vice versa), but there is no constituent morpheme that indicates this derivation.

## Question Two

### A. Writing

*“I went on a **writing** course.”*

**Writing** is a noun because of the following reasons:

1. It can be preceded by determiners and adjectives  
e.g. *The **writing** was very neat. / A **writing** consists of words and punctuation.*  
*Her creative **writing** was enjoyable to read.*
2. It takes plural ‘-s’. e.g. *His **writings** have been published in scientific journals.*
3. It takes possessive ‘-s’. e.g. *The **writing’s** message was unclear.*

### B. Astonishing

*“This was the most **astonishing** thing that happened to me.”*

**Astonishing** is an adjective because of the following reasons:

1. It can be followed by a noun  
e.g. *It was an **astonishing** thing.*
2. It can be preceded by the comparative and superlative markers ‘more’ and ‘most’  
e.g. *His second trick was more **astonishing** than the first one.*  
*This was the most **astonishing** thing that happened to me.*
3. It can take the ‘-ly’ affix to form an adverb.  
e.g. *He **astonishingly** disappeared before my very eyes.*
4. It can appear directly after verbs such as ‘seem’ and ‘be’.  
e.g. *It seems **astonishing** that he passed. / When he plays, Ronaldo is **astonishing**.*

### C. Britain

*“Britain’s retailers face a grim Christmas.”*

**Britain** is a noun because of the following reasons:

1. It can be preceded by determiners and adjectives

e.g. A **Britain** that is strong is important for Europe.

The **Britain** of our parents was much different.

A strong **Britain** is important for Europe

2. It takes possessive ‘-s’. e.g. **Britain’s** retailers face a grim Christmas.

3. It can come in the subject position. e.g. **Britain** is an island nation.

4. It can come in the object position. e.g. *The Romans invaded* **Britain**.

It would be very unusual for **Britain** to take the plural ‘-s’ as there is exists one entity (a country) called called ‘Britain’. However, it could be argued that the sentence—“From a social viewpoint, the Britains of the 1930s and 1960s were very different”—demonstrates use of the plural ‘-s’.

### D. Opposition

*“Opposition MPs called for a full inquiry of Mr Blunkett’s consultancies.”*

**Opposition** is a noun because of the following reasons:

1. It can be preceded by determiners and adjectives

e.g. The **opposition** was very weak. / An **opposition** should be vocal to be effective.

The strong **opposition** caused the government to crumble.

2. It takes plural ‘-s’. e.g. *Successive* **oppositions** in post-war Italy were divided.

3. It takes possessive ‘-s’. e.g. *The* **opposition’s** position was undecided.

4. It can come in the subject position. e.g. The **opposition** was very weak.

5. It can come in the object position. e.g. *He criticised* the **opposition**.

## **E. Similar**

(“The UK will not adopt an attitude **similar** to that held by the US.”)

**Similar** is an adjective because of the following reasons:

1. It can be followed by a noun

e.g. *The two students had **similar** grades.*

2. It can be preceded by the comparative and superlative markers ‘more’ and ‘most’

e.g. *A leopard is more **similar** to a cheetah than a lion.*

*In their family, she is the most **similar** to her mother.*

3. It can take the ‘-ly’ affix to form an adverb.

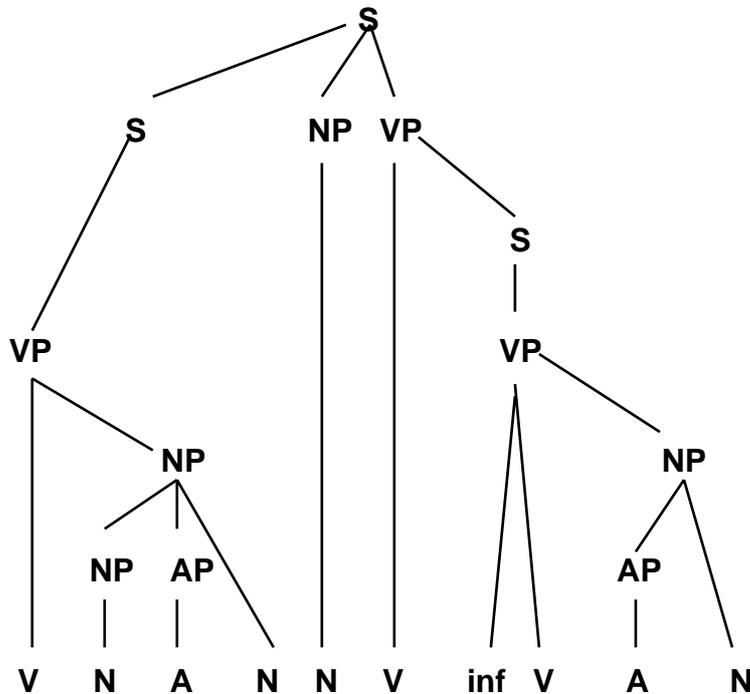
e.g. *America reacted **similarly** to the situation.*

4. It can appear directly after verbs such as ‘seem’ and ‘be’.

e.g. *He seems **similar** in character to his brother. / A cat’s cry is **similar** to that of a baby.*

### Question Three

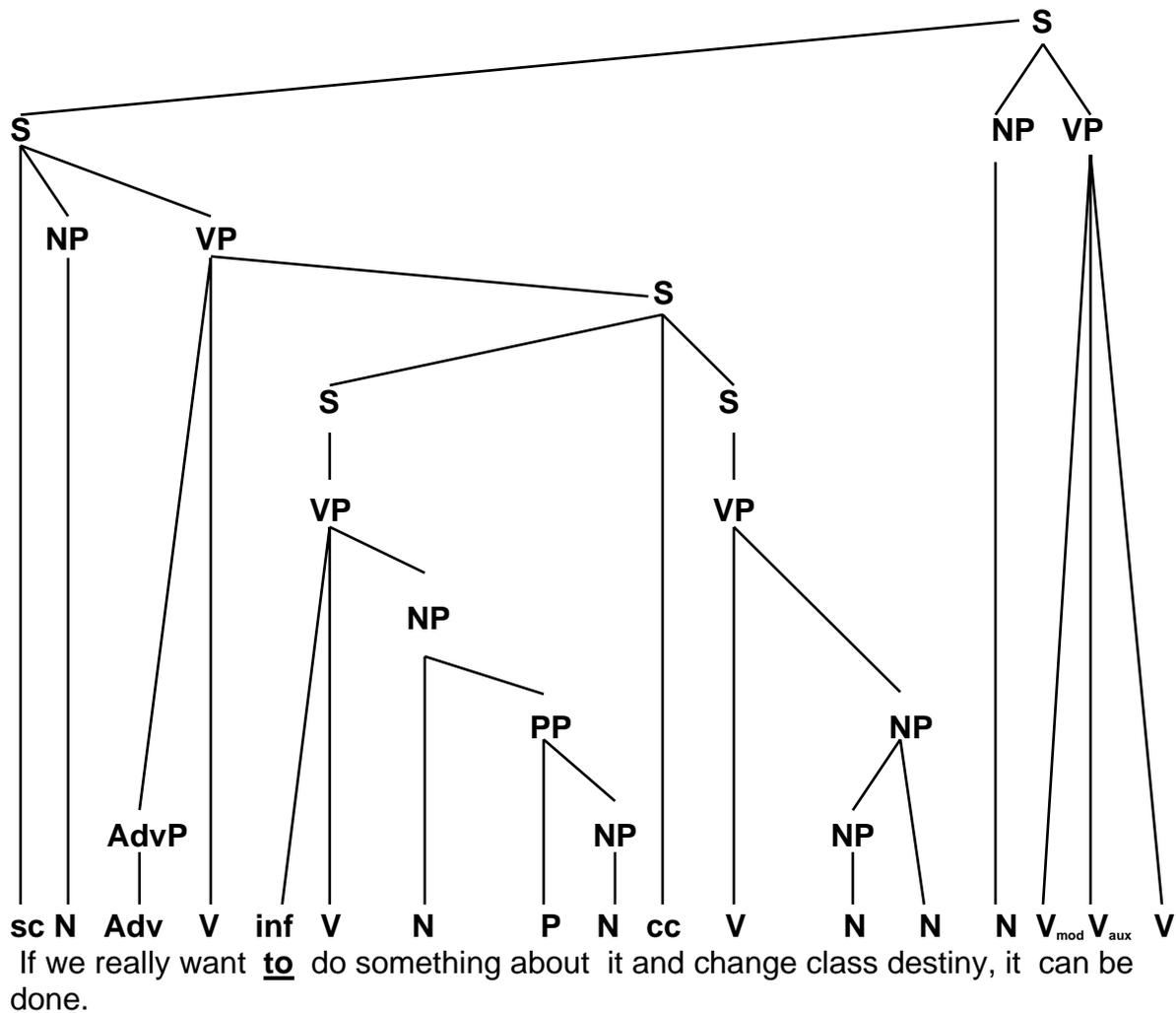
**A. Writing my recent book, I decided to take low-paid work.**



Writing my recent book, I decided to take low-paid work.

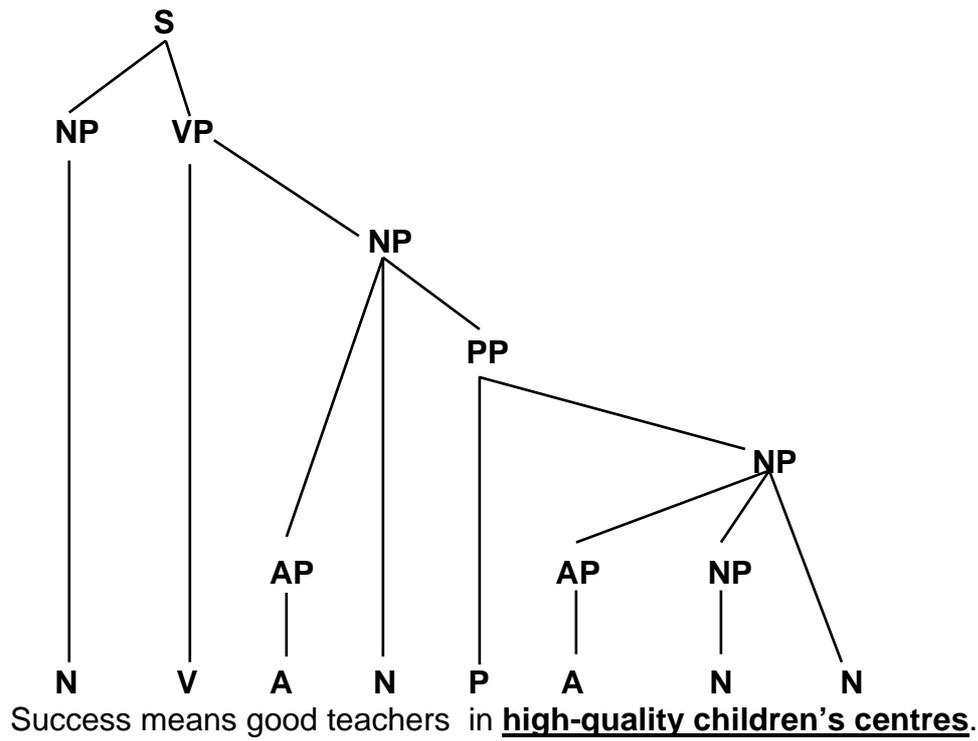
The only problem area in this sentence was defining “low-paid”. It is a compound word, therefore I adhered to the logic of Fabb (2005, 50-51): “When you come across [a compound word], treat it as a single word within a single category”. It can be classified as an adjective as it adheres to the following criteria: it can be followed by a noun (e.g. “low-paid work”), it can appear directly after verbs such as ‘seem’ and ‘be’ (e.g. “He is/seems low-paid”). It can take the comparative and superlative endings ‘-er’ and ‘-est’, but there is a slight problem here as the endings are added to the adjective in the compound, not to the compound itself. (e.g. “He is the lowest-paid worker”).

**B. If we really want to do something about it and change class destiny it can be done.**



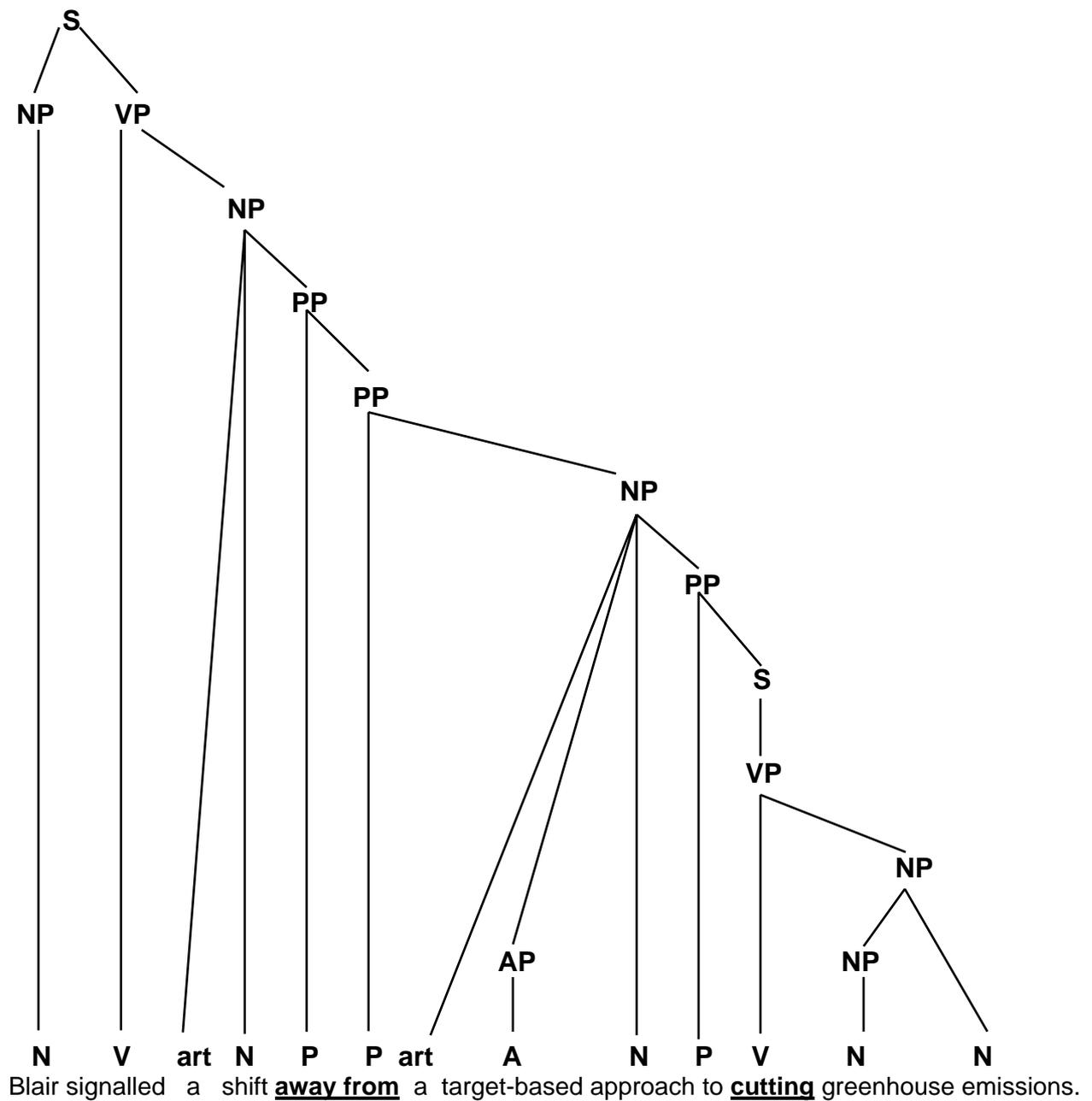
As can be seen from the tree structure, this sentence is quite complex. The main problem area was dealing with the phrase “to do something about it and change class destiny”. This phrase can be rewritten as “to do something about it and to change class destiny”, with the infinitive “to” being added before the second verb “change”. Now it can be clearly seen that the phrase consists of two similar sentences joined by the conjunction “and”.

**C. Success means good teachers in high-quality children's centres.**



The only major area of deliberation was with the phrase “high-quality children’s centres”. Two alternative meanings were available: the first was “centres with high-quality children”, the second “children’s centres that were of high-quality”. The latter was decided on.

**D. Blair signalled a shift away from a target-based approach to cutting greenhouse emissions.**



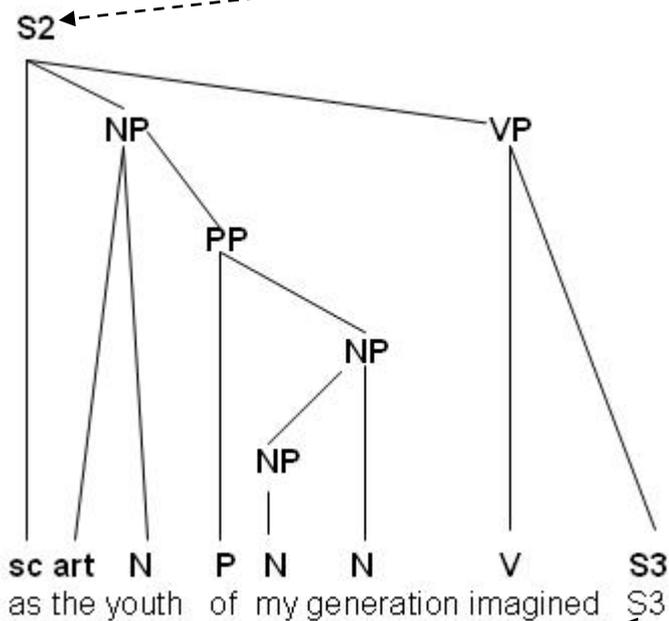
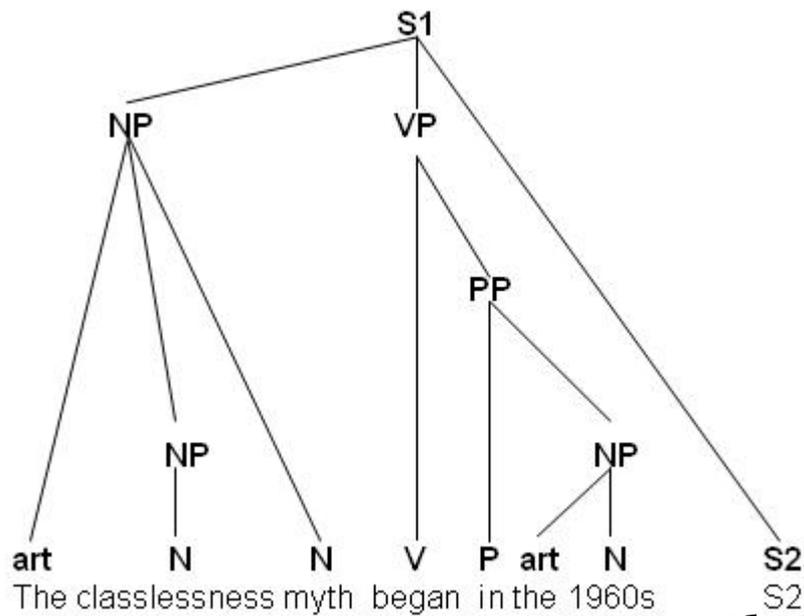
There were two main problem areas in this sentence. The first was the treatment of “cutting”—is it verbal or is it nominal? The former was selected because “cutting” can take an object (“greenhouse emissions”) and can be replaced by “to cut” if the sentence is reworded slightly (i.e. “a shift away from a target-based approach to cut greenhouse emissions”).

A bigger problem area was dealing with the double prepositions “away from”. As can be seen from the tree structure, “away from a target-based approach cutting greenhouse emissions” was judged to be a phrase. However, providing the definitive evidence for this was difficult. Using the movement test for constituent structure produced two possible outcomes: “Away from a target-based approach to cutting greenhouse emissions, Blair signalled a shift” and “From a target-based approach to cutting greenhouse emissions, Blair signalled a shift away”. Furthermore, using the omission test, two outcomes can also be produced: “Blair signalled a shift” and “Blair signalled a shift away”. A final test was used to check for grammaticality when omitting either of the prepositions. “Blair signalled a shift from a target-based approach ...” is correct but “Blair signalled a shift away a target-based approach ...” is incorrect. Therefore, “away from” must be used together. This provides the evidence that “away from a target-based approach to cutting greenhouse emissions” is indeed a phrase consisting of one prepositional phrase inside another.

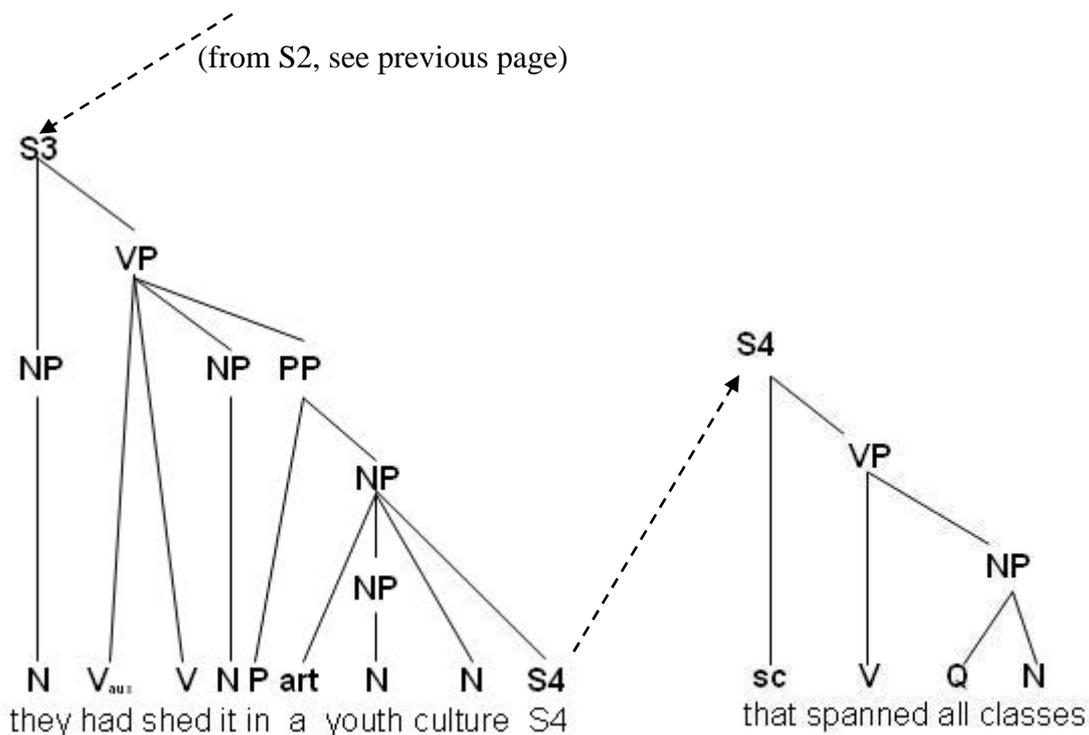
**E. The classlessness myth began in the 1960s as the young of my generation imagined they had shed it in a youth culture that spanned all classes.**

As this sentence is very long, it was split into four distinct sections, S1-S4, as follows:

- a. **S1**—The classlessness myth began in the 1960s ‘S2’
- b. **S2**—as the young of my generation imagined ‘S3’
- c. **S3**—they had shed it in a youth culture ‘S4’
- d. **S4**—that spanned all classes.



(See next page)



Even though the sentence was quite complex and the layout of the tree structure presented difficulties, there was only one area that presented problems grammatically. This was in S3—“they had shed it in a youth culture”. It had to be determined if the phrase “in a youth culture” was dependent to the noun phrase “it” or not. By using the movement test, the phrase “in a youth culture” can roam within S3; therefore, it is dependent to the verb phrase and not to the noun phrase.

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