Sensorveiledning, ENG2100 Advanced English Grammar: Syntax and Argumentation

Generic guidelines
This digital (4-hour) unsupervised written exam consists of three questions. Pass marks are required on all three. The first questions counts 50%, the second question counts 20% and the third question counts 30%. This should be reflected in the time and the number of pages dedicated to each question. The candidates choose one out of two alternatives in Parts I and III.

Both the language and the content of the paper count towards the final mark. The evaluation (and marking) of the candidate's performance on the exam follow the underlying principles regarding analytical skills, judgement and independent thinking, according to the general evaluation criteria specified by "Universitets- og høgskolerådet".

The exam questions reflect the aims and learning outcome of the course, namely that the students should

- be able to think analytically about English syntax

- have in-depth knowledge of the English verb phrase

- have in-depth knowledge of the English noun phrase

- be able to explain grammatical structures of the English language and argue for your analysis

The language of the examination is English, and candidates submit their responses in English. Candidates are allowed to use sources. References in the text are required in the case of quotations, but the University does not require a full bibliography in the case of short take-home exams. The attached text should be used for exemplification, particularly in for Part I. Since the students are allowed to use sources it is important that they show that they can recognize and analyse relevant constructions as they occur in a piece of text.

The exam paper consists of THREE parts, Parts I, II and III. All three parts must be answered. In Parts I and III, choose ONE of the two alternatives. A pass mark is required on all parts.

The answers suggested below should not be regarded as a definitive key. Additional points, arguments and examples may be relevant, and not all the items mentioned need to be present in a fully acceptable answer to each question.

Part I (50%)

Students choose EITHER question A OR question B.

A. Give an account of information-packing constructions in English. Focus on their role in information structure, i.e. how they make sentence conform to for example the information principle and/or the end weight principle. Your account need not be exhaustive, but it should include the identification and description of three relevant constructions found in the attached text.

A full answer should include an overview of information-packaging constructions as well as definitions of information structure and end weight. The description of each construction should include comments on both form and meaning (for example, these constructions are non-canonical, so they can be compared to canonical sentences).

For example, regarding the passive, a description could be as follows: a long passive can make a sentence conform to both the information principle and the weight principle, if the agent carries new information and the patient carries old information. This is because the passive typically has an argument with the thematic role of patient as subject. This is the case in line 25-26, *Laws are limited by what is enforceable and reasonable.* The possibility of omitting the agent has to do with information packaging, that is, with leaving out information that would have been obligatory, as an agent subject, in a corresponding active clause. (For example, line 15, *New laws to impose some consistency in this area have been needed for a while*.)

Other information-packaging constructions in the text are topicalization/preposing (e.g. line 8-9, *Left out in the colde at night…;* line 20, *For instance, on the question of insect sentience, scientists are divided*); extraposition (line 32-33), existential (line 33-34). Existentials are used to introduce new information at the end of a sentence. The topicalizations in the text concern initial position of adverbials. This is not uncommon, but still regarded as a non-basic structure in our textbooks. Information-packaging constructions usually involve non-basic sentences, i.e. variations on the basic NP+VP structure with a clause-initial subject referring to the agent of the action. Non-basic sentences are so called because they can be related to a basic structure which is typically shorter and syntactically simpler. Some non-basic sentences are more common than their basic variants: this is true of at least *it*-extraposition, and possibly of existential *there*-constructions, which do not even always have a basic variant (that is, if they are 'bare existentials' without an adjunct).
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Part II (20%)

Draw an X-bar diagram of the following sentence. Write a brief comment on your analysis in which you explain the choices you made.

The urge to attribute feelings to insects can be surprisingly strong.

The   urge to attribute feelings   to insects can   be   surprisingly   strong
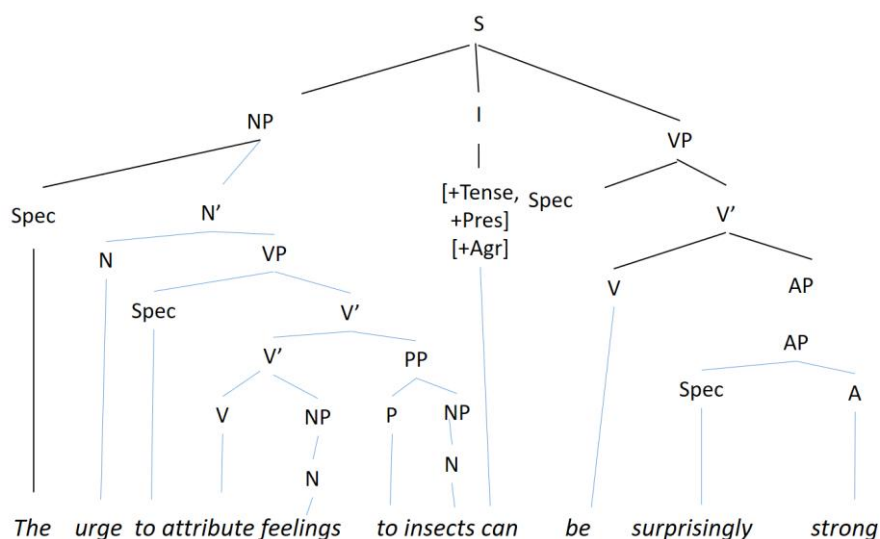
The modal auxiliary *can* goes into the I-node (unlike non-modal auxiliaries). Inside the subject NP, *urge* is the head, and an infinitive clause acts as a postmodifier. In the infinitive clause, *feelings* is a direct object and *to insects* an adjunct. This is shown by adjoining the adjunct PP higher up in the VP than the object NP. The tree shows a simplified analysis of the NPs *feelings* and *insects*, in which the Spec is not drawn into the diagram for space reasons. In both cases, instead of going directly from NP to N, there should have been an N' in between, split into Spec + N. The Spec position is empty in both cases. In the case of the AP, the Spec position is filled by an Adverb phrase, which could likewise have been analysed in more detail, as AdvP' followed by an empty Spec and head Adv.

Part III (30%)

Students choose EITHER question D OR question E.

D. How can you argue for or against classifying the underlined words in the following sentences as auxiliaries?
    Some doubt <u>begins</u> to creep in.   *Science <u>is</u> moving quickly*.
    Use the syntactic criteria outlined in the textbooks to discuss differences between "auxiliaries proper" and verbs such as *begin*.

Auxiliaries can be distinguished from other verbs by a set of syntactic tests: the so-called NICE tests. An auxiliary can have **N**egative inflection, precede the subject in **I**nversion, express **C**ode and carry **E**mphasis.

- N: Science isn't moving quickly. * Some doubt beginsn't to creep in.
- I: Is science moving quickly? *Begins some doubt to creep in?
- C: It has. *It begins.
- E: Science IS moving quickly. * Some doubt BEGINS to creep in.

In all these cases the second sentence would have needed the support of dummy *do* to be grammatical, hence *begin* is shown not to be an auxiliary, while *be* is one. That is, the NICE test can be used in syntactic argumentation about whether a verb is an auxiliary or a lexical verb.

The main arguments FOR classifying *begin* as an auxiliary are semantic and functional: the two verbs denote ONE action rather than two separate ones, so that they can be seen as parts of the same verb phrase. The main meaning of this VP is carried by the lexical verb *creep*, while *begin* adds a kind of aspectual meaning.