



# AMBIGUITY

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# Structural Ambiguity

## Ambiguity in the Structure of Complementation

Ambiguity in the structure of complementation may occur in many ways.

\*(The unambiguous sentence of each example appears in parentheses.)

1. It may occur when **have** followed by verb in past participle form and **be** followed by a verb in present participle form may be interpreted as being auxiliaries or main verbs.

### 1.1 **have** + verb in past participle form

1.1.1 When **have** is considered an auxiliary, the verb in past participle form is the main verb followed by a direct object (DO):

	<b>VB</b>	<b>DO</b>
- Mary	<u>has invited</u>	guests.
	aux. main v.	

(Guests have been invited by Mary.)

1.1.2 When **have** functions as main verb, the verb in past participle form is the modifier of the noun which follows and the whole noun phrase is the direct object of the verb:



(Mary has guests who are invited.)

## 1.2 **be** + verb in present participle form

1.2.1 When **be** is an auxiliary, the verb in present participle form is the main verb followed by a direct object (DO):

**VB**                      **DO**  
- They are visiting/relatives.  
aux.    main v.

(Relatives are being visited by them.)

1.2.2 When **be** is considered main verb, the verb in present participle is the modifier of the following noun. The whole noun phrase is, then, the subjective complement (SC):



(They are relatives who are visiting us.)

2. It may occur when a verb in present participle form may be understood as being the modifier of a noun or as the verbal element of a complement.

2.1 verb in present participle as noun modifier:

- Tom <sup>VB</sup> likes / <sup>DO</sup> hunting dogs.

(Tom likes dogs for hunting.)



2.2 verb in present participle form as verbal element:

**VB**      **DO**  
- Tom likes/hunting dogs.

(Hunting dogs is Tom's favorite sport.)



3. It may occur when the complement (C) can be understood as either IO-DO (indirect object + direct object) or DO-OC (direct object + objective complement).

3.1 when the complement is IO-DO:

**VB**                      **C**  
- We call/Mike a doctor.  
**IO**                      **DO**

(We call a doctor for Mike.)



3.2 when the complement is DO-OC:

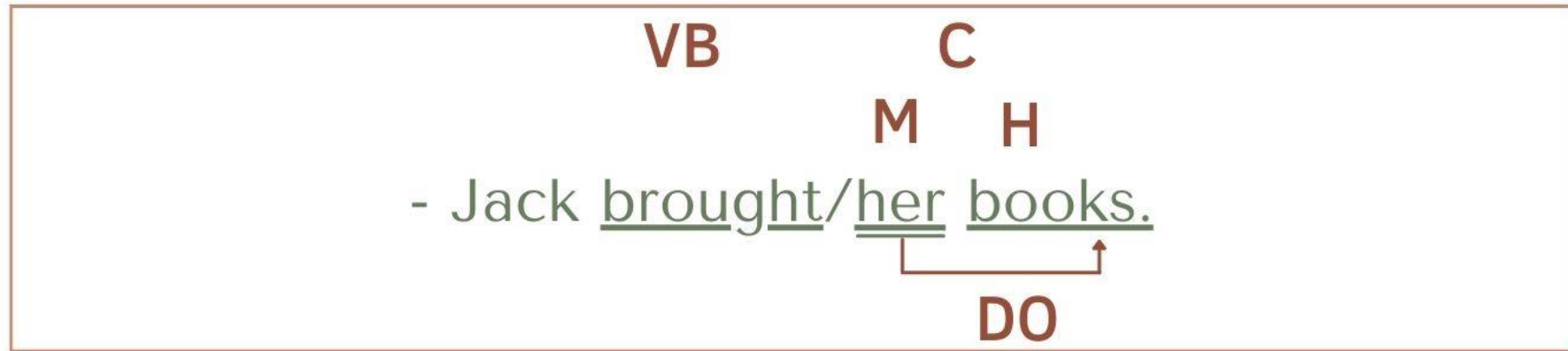
**VB**            **C**  
- We call/Mike a doctor.  
**DO**            **OC**

(We describe Mike a doctor.)



4. It may occur when **her** appears between a transitive verb, which can be either a monotransitive or a ditransitive verb.

4.1 **her** as noun modifier and after a monotransitive verb



(Her books were brought by Jack.)



4.2 **her** as indirect object and after a ditransitive verb:

	<b>VB</b>		<b>C</b>
-	Jack	<u>brought</u> /her	<u>books</u> .
		<b>IO</b>	<b>DO</b>

(Jack brought books for her.)



5. It may occur when the key verb can be understood as either a linking verb or an intransitive verb.

5.1 linking verb as key verb followed by an adjective:

- Those students **VB** **SC**  
looked/fast.  
linking v. adj.

(Those students were fast.)





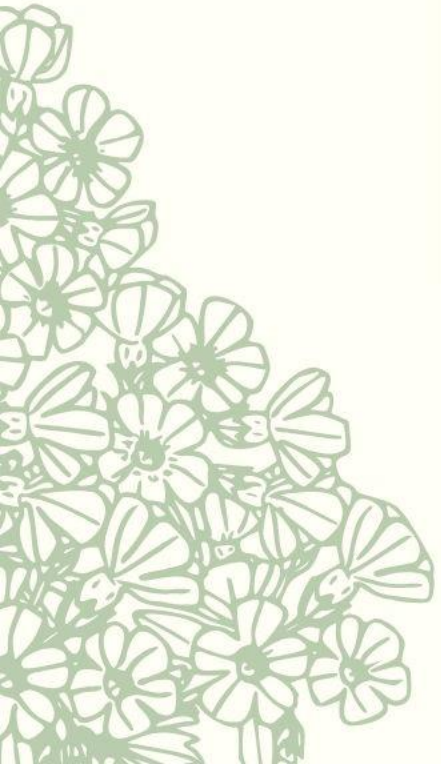
6. It may occur when the key verb, which is followed by an infinitive, can be either a transitive verb or an intransitive verb.

### 6.1 transitive verb as key verb:

**VB DO**

- He loves/to live.  
**transitive**  
**v.**

(What he loves is to live.)



## 6.2 intransitive verb as key verb:

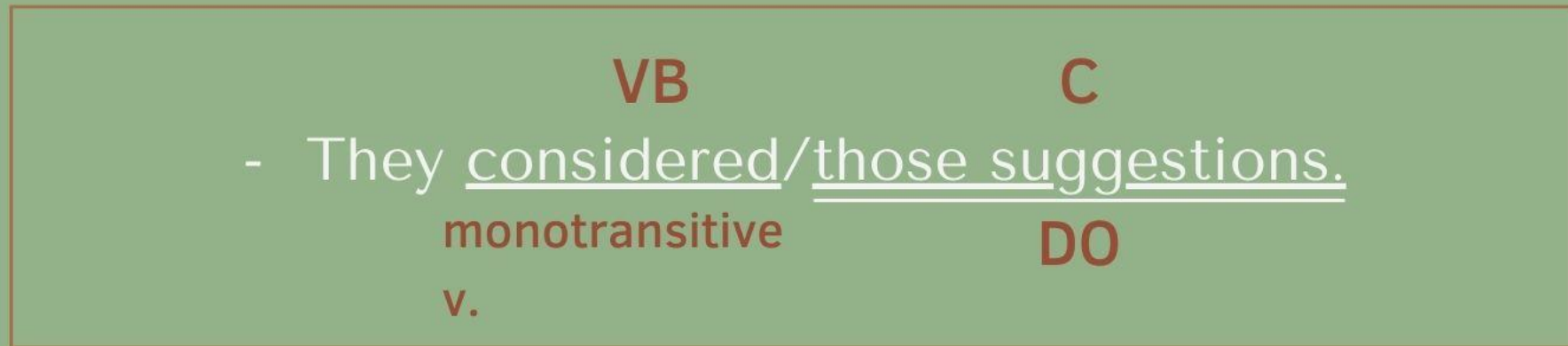
**H**      **M**  
- He loves/to live  
    └──┬──┘  
    intransitive  
    v.

(He loves in order to live.)



7. It may occur when **these** or **those** appears between a transitive verb, which can be either a monotransitive verb or a complex transitive verb, and a noun.

7.1 **these** or **those** as noun modifier after a monotransitive verb:



(Those suggestions were considered by them.)







8. It may occur when **be**, which is followed by **being** + verb in past participle, may be interpreted as either verb **to be** or auxiliary **be**.

8.1 verb **to be** + being + verb in past participle:

**VB** **C**  
- What he is fond of is/being highly admired by his colleagues.  
**SC**

(Being highly admired by his colleagues is what he is fond of.)



## 8.2 auxiliary **be** + being + verb in past participle:

- What he is fond of is being highly admired by his colleagues.  
**aux. aux. main v.**

(His colleagues are highly admiring what he is fond of.)



# REFERENCE

Jotikasthira, P. (2014). Introduction to the English Language: System and Structure. Bangkok: Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

