

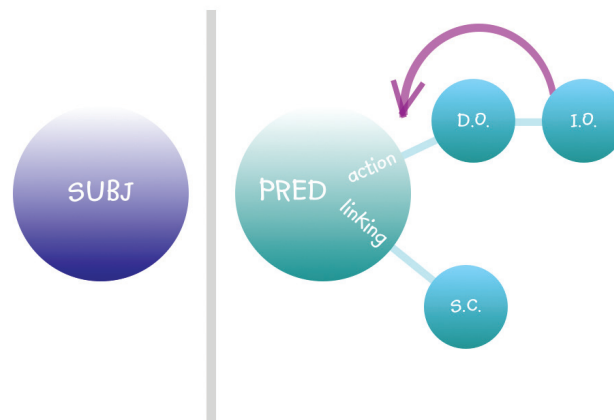
Royal Fireworks

Language Arts

by Michael Clay Thompson

# Grammar Voyage

*Third Edition*



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*Royal Fireworks Press*  
UNIONVILLE, NEW YORK

## A GRAMMAR VOYAGE

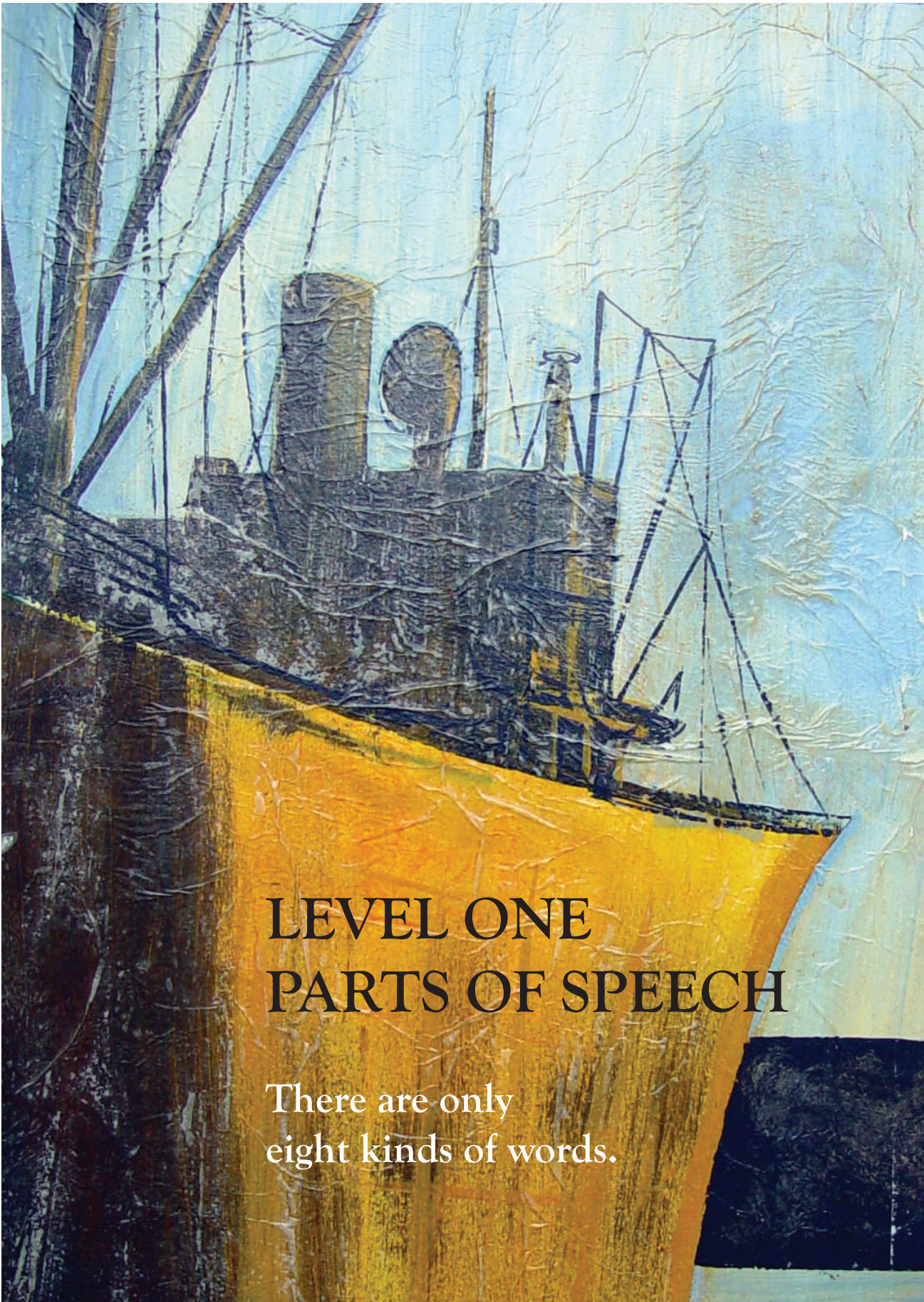
We set sail now on rolling seas  
that fall on beaches far and near.

Like passengers on rusty ships,  
we scan the water, trying to hear  
the sound, the voice, the mystery,  
the whispery report, the words,  
the clear austere details.

Around the seas we search,  
inspecting every port of call,  
the harbors, inlets, most of all  
the coastal cities on the far  
horizons, distant and inviting our  
arrival. In the misty night we sail,  
in the sea we make our trail  
until the vivid dawn reveals  
our destination. Now we feel  
it drawing near, we hear the sounds,  
the voices, words, clamor of birds  
and people walking toward the pier.  
We steer, we cast our ropes,  
and we are here.

On any grammar voyage,  
wild words pervade the world,  
like *freighter*, *storm*, and *cable*,  
*later*, *form*, *affable*, and *able*.  
There are words like *strike*,  
and *flake*, and *croak*, *opaque*,  
and words like *sudden*,  
*sodden*, and *red*den.  
*Happily* is a word, and *snappily*,  
and *mug*, and *log*, and *dog*.  
There are names for *seagulls*,  
and *seaweeds*, and *seashores*,  
and *more*. The wind might *roar*,  
a bird might *soar*, the knocking *oar*  
might dip into the water of the *port*,  
and row us to the *dock*.  
We climb up from the rocking *boat*  
and step into a new  
world full of language.  
There are voices, and tacit choices,  
and faces behind the words  
that rise and fall and tell us all  
the secrets of the heart.  
So let us start.





# LEVEL ONE PARTS OF SPEECH

There are only  
eight kinds of words.





## 1. NOUNS

Nouns name persons, places,  
and things—a world of things....

The **ship** chugged up the torpid **Congo**,  
gray **smoke** long ago passing the **stern**,  
the sharp **bow** cutting unconcerned  
the flowing **blue**, indolent **crew** knowing  
they will see the lurid **lights** of **Kisangani**  
bright beneath the vast and vivid **sunset**.

The word *noun* comes from  
the Latin *nomen*, meaning name.

**PROPER** nouns, such as *Madagascar*  
and *Titanic* and *Bombay*,  
are capitalized.

**COMMON** nouns, such as  
*fuel*, *dishes*, *foam*, and *horizon*,  
are not capitalized.

A noun naming one thing, such as  
*rail*, or *tide*, or *smokestack*, or *buoy*, or *quay*,  
is **SINGULAR**.

A noun naming more than one thing,  
such as *sails*, or *shores*, or *cultures*,  
or *ports*, or *songs*, or *seamen*,  
is **PLURAL**.

*Micronesia* is a singular proper noun.  
*Ships* is a plural common noun.

There are also **POSSESSIVE** nouns:  
We watched *John's* ship.

But many nouns,  
such as *Micronesia* and *bioluminescence*,  
are long words  
and take energy and time to say, so...  
we use a short word that means the noun,  
and it is called the *pronoun*.

## 2. PRONOUNS

Pronouns are quick words, code beeps,  
speedy shortcuts we use when we do not  
want to repeat a long noun.

Instead of saying  
*Joseph Theodore Conrad,*



the author of *Heart of Darkness*,  
whose real name was  
*Józef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski,*  
we can just say

*he.*

The noun the pronoun replaces is called the **ANTECEDENT**.  
Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in number.

There are several groups, or **CASES**, of pronouns.

One important group  
of pronouns is  
the **SUBJECT** pronouns:

*I you he she they it*  
*we you they*

*He* sailed west across the Pacific  
toward the Solomon Islands.

Another important group  
of pronouns is  
the **OBJECT** pronouns:

*me you him her them it*  
*us you them*

She gave *him* the map of Polynesia  
and taught *him* how to navigate  
by the stars at night.



## MEMORIZE

### SUBJECT PRONOUNS

|               | singular       | plural |
|---------------|----------------|--------|
| first person  | I              | we     |
| second person | you            | you    |
| third person  | he she they it | they   |

### OBJECT PRONOUNS

|               | singular        | plural |
|---------------|-----------------|--------|
| first person  | me              | us     |
| second person | you             | you    |
| third person  | him her them it | them   |

Notice that the subject pronouns *you* and *they*  
and the object pronouns *you* and *them*  
can be either singular or plural.  
These pronouns are not gender-specific.

**You must memorize these two groups of pronouns.**

Keep repeating them until you feel certain  
that you will know them for the rest of your life.

We will think more about this later,  
but do you notice anything now  
about how we use these pronouns?

I saw **him**, and **she** saw **me**,  
but **we** gave **him** and **her** the squid.

Notice that subject pronouns have *iee* sounds, and object pronouns have *mrmrmr* sounds, and that helps us keep them apart.

There are other kinds of pronouns, too.

We use **demonstrative** pronouns  
to demonstrate:  
*this, that, these, those.*  
*This* is a good harbor.

We use **possessive** pronouns  
to show possession:  
*mine, yours, his, hers, theirs, its, ours, yours, theirs.*  
*Mine* is the new ship at the dock.  
The word *its* is a possessive pronoun;  
*it's* is a contraction of *it is*.

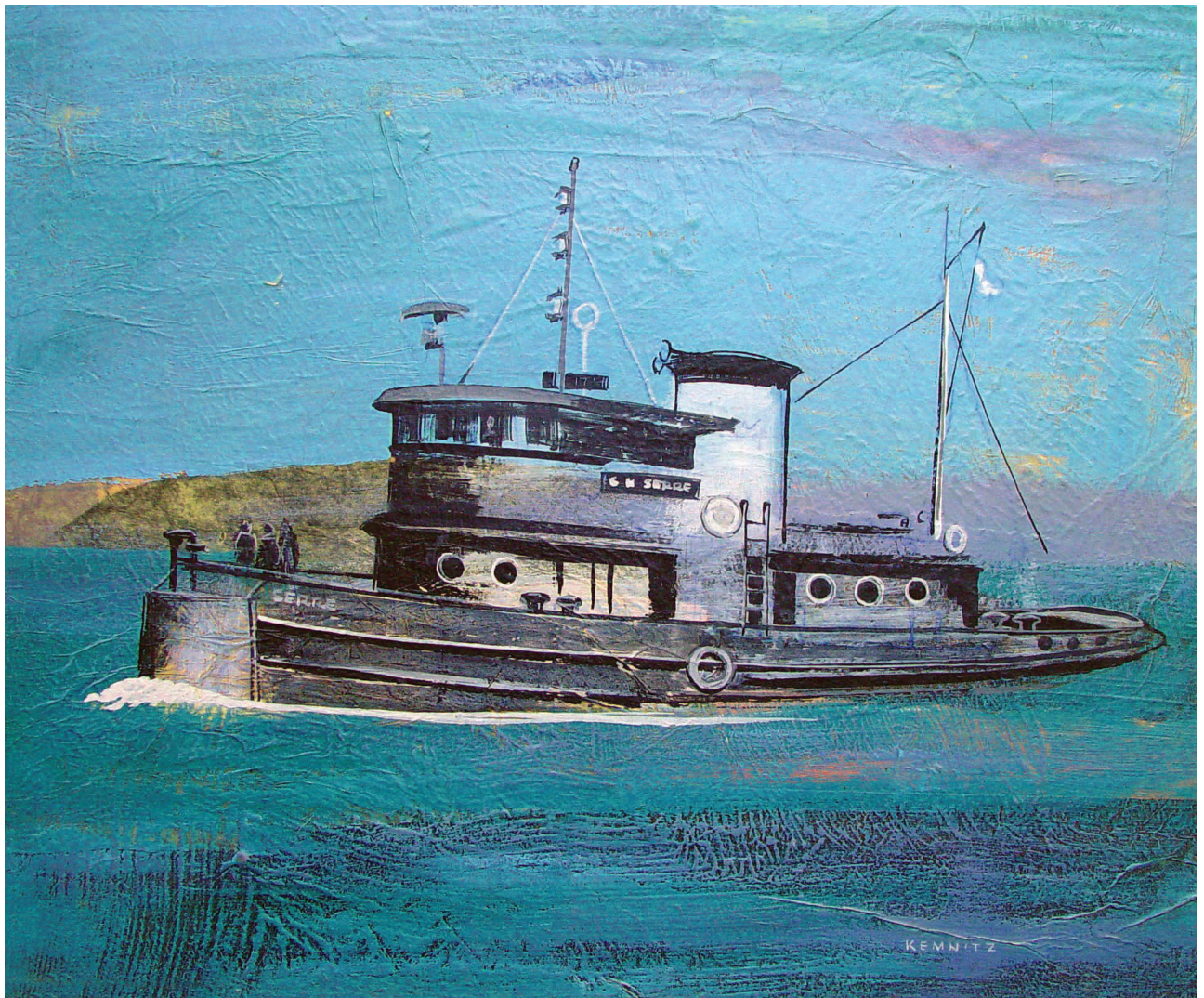
We use **interrogative** pronouns  
to interrogate (to question):  
*who, whose, whom, which, what.*  
*Who* stowed the grub today?

We use **indefinite** pronouns  
for unspecified references:  
*anybody, anyone, everybody, everyone,*  
*somebody, someone, many, few, etc.*  
*Someone* ate the potato.

## His It

One purple morning in San Juan harbor,  
there was a tugboat, the *G.W. Seagle*,  
splashing through the water toward the sea,  
which glowed and shone in the salty wind,  
and the pelicans dove for breakfast,  
and the first fingers of the sun  
spread red on the ocean clouds.  
The captain of the *G.W. Seagle*, José Borges,  
halted before the harbor mouth,  
where the foaming waves rolled in,  
and waited for *The Nostromo*, an old  
and melancholy freighter, coming from the  
west coast of Africa. *The Nostromo* was  
a blue speck on the horizon, a feather of smoke  
far out and just visible in the new light,  
and the captain of *The Nostromo*, Eduardo,  
would not spot the waiting tugboat  
for thirty more minutes.

But soon they would see each other,  
and he would signal him that he should  
bring his boat alongside his, where he  
would help him steer it toward it,  
and he would guide it toward his pier,  
where he would work with him  
to do his job right, which he did.



## ANTECEDENT

*ante* - before   *cede* - go

The antecedent is the noun that goes (*cede*)  
before (*ante*) the pronoun;  
it is the noun the pronoun replaces.

First **José** laughed; then he smiled.

Look at the second stanza on the previous page.  
What is the problem with the pronoun usage?



So nouns and pronouns let us name everything.

But the world is big, and the waters  
are wide, and the ports hum with tugboats,  
and we would need **millions of nouns**  
for the **millions of things** we would find...



...or would we? Well, no....



An abstract painting featuring a ship, likely a sailing vessel, rendered in dark, textured brushstrokes. The ship is positioned in the lower half of the frame, with its masts and rigging visible. The background is a complex, layered composition of various colors including yellows, greys, blues, and reds, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

# LEVEL TWO PARTS OF SENTENCE

## THE VERB DETERMINES THE SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Do you remember that some verbs show action,  
and other verbs are linking, like equations?

1. **ACTION** verbs show action:  
The tugboat **pushed** the barge.

2. **LINKING** verbs show that something IS something:  
The harbor **is** deep. The ship **was** an old Italian cruise liner.

The sentence is made of a **complete subject**  
and a **complete predicate** about it.

The **simple subject** is the noun or subject pronoun  
that the sentence is about.

The **simple predicate** is the verb.

If the verb is **ACTION**, it might act on a **direct object**.

A direct object is a noun or object pronoun  
that receives the action of the action verb.

The captain saw the **island** in the distance.

If you have a direct object, you might have an **indirect object**.

An indirect object is a noun or object pronoun  
that is located between the action verb and the direct object,  
and it is indirectly affected by the action.

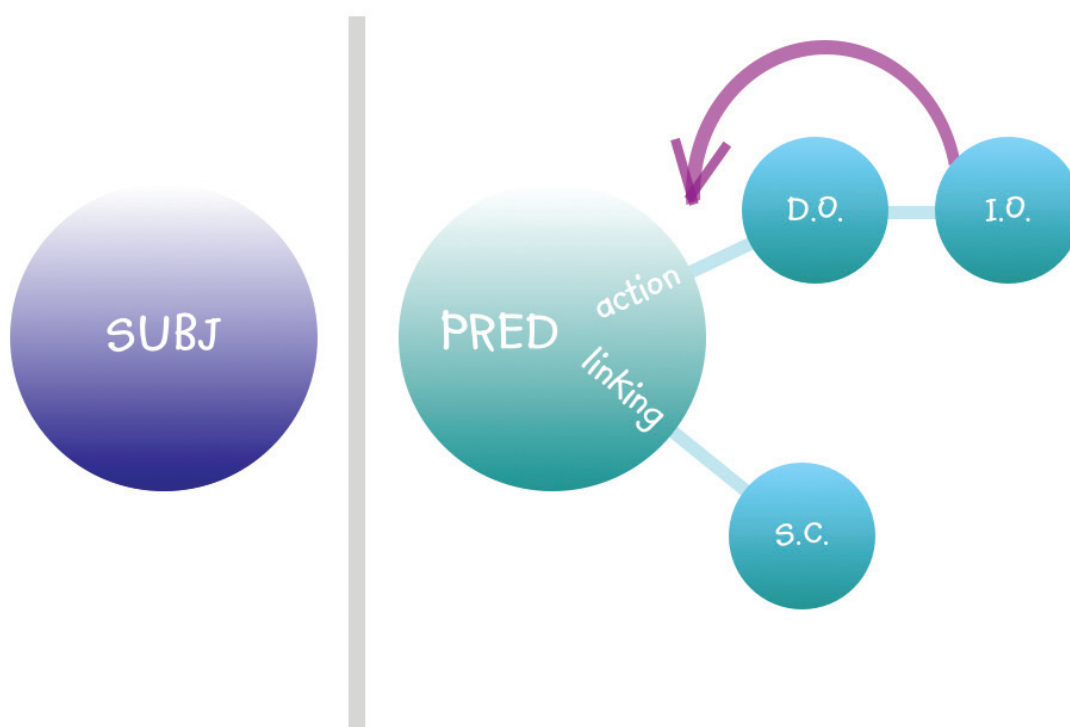
The captain gave the **seaman** a direct order.

If the verb is **LINKING**, you might have a **subject complement**.

A subject complement is a noun, subject pronoun, or adjective that is linked to the subject by a linking verb and that completes our knowledge of the subject.

Roberto is the **captain** of the red tugboat.

Roberto is **he**.      Roberto is **old**.

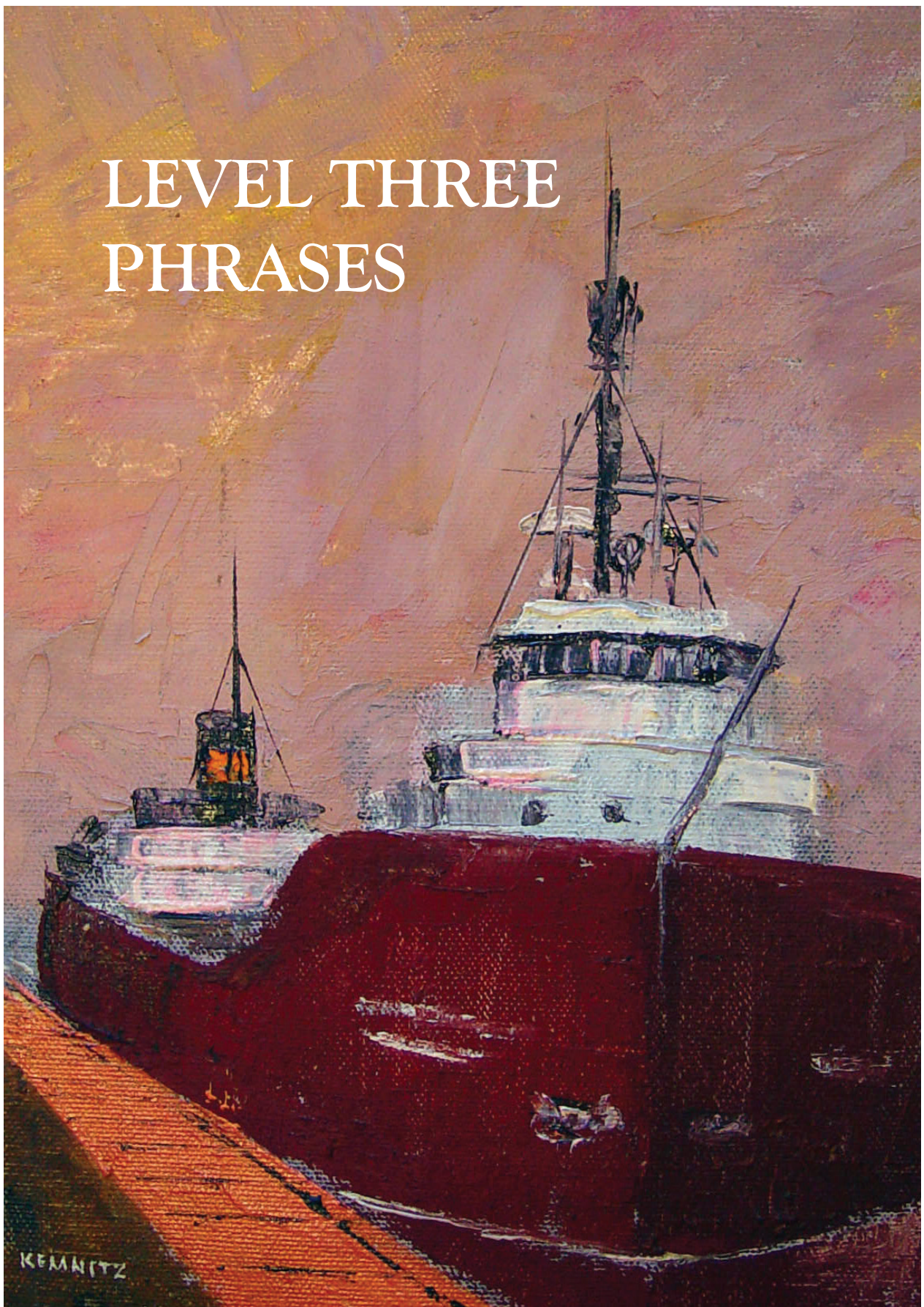


Notice the sequence if you have an action verb:  
subject - predicate - indirect object - direct object.

Roberto gave Vásquez the coffee.



# LEVEL THREE PHRASES



## THREE KINDS OF PHRASES

prepositional • appositive • verbal

A **phrase** is a group of words, but it acts like **one** word, like a *single* part of speech. It does a one-word job.

A phrase cannot have a subject and verb.

Some phrases act like nouns, others like adjectives or even adverbs.

A whole phrase, for example, can be a noun/direct object.

|       |      |                          |
|-------|------|--------------------------|
| I     | love | eating swordfish steaks. |
| subj. | AVP  | ~~~~~D.O.~~~~~           |

This is like “I love dogs” except that the direct object is a three-word phrase.

### 1. PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Prepositional phrases always begin with prepositions, and they act like **modifiers** (like adjectives or adverbs):

like an adjective: The ship **at the dock** sank.

like an adverb: It sailed **after sunset**.

like an adjective: It’s a letter **for him and her**.

like an adverb: **From the forecastle** he shouted commands.

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition that shows the relationship between its object, which is usually a noun or an object pronoun, and some other word in the sentence. Prepositional phrases are always modifiers. If a prepositional phrase acts as an adjective, it comes immediately after the noun or pronoun it modifies:

The main **hold of the ship** needed repairs.



See how *of the ship* modifies the noun *hold*, just as an ordinary adjective would? The phrase begins with the preposition *of* and relates its object *ship* to another word in the sentence, *hold*. If a prepositional phrase acts as an adverb, it can come in a number of different places, including at the beginning of the sentence:

**From the start** the trawler **led** the fleet.

In this case, *From the start* modifies the verb *led*. Notice that prepositional phrases do not have subjects and predicates. No phrases do. Many prepositional phrases start with a preposition, then have an adjective that modifies a noun: *on the deck*, prep.-adj.-n. Notice also that we do not put a comma after a single, short introductory prepositional phrase.

One of the problems that prepositions can cause occurs when a prepositional phrase modifies the subject of the sentence and therefore comes between the subject and its verb: *The leader **of the people** is benevolent*. The problem comes when we mistakenly match the verb to the object of the preposition instead of to the subject. We will examine this again in a few pages, but here is an example:

RIGHT: The **captain of the pirates** is cruel.  
WRONG: The **captain of the pirates** are cruel.





## 2. APPOSITIVE PHRASES

Appositive phrases are interrupting definitions. Enclosed in commas, they are put (*pos*) beside (*apo*) what they define. They act like nouns or sometimes like adjectives.

Roberto, **the captain's poodle**, came on board early.  
The canal, **an old lake system**, was still used by ships.

Appositive phrases are called *appositives* because they are apposed—put beside what they define. An appositive phrase is a graceful way of inserting a quick explanation or definition so that your reader is not confused for the rest of the sentence.

The *Franca C*, **a vintage passenger liner**, was in port.

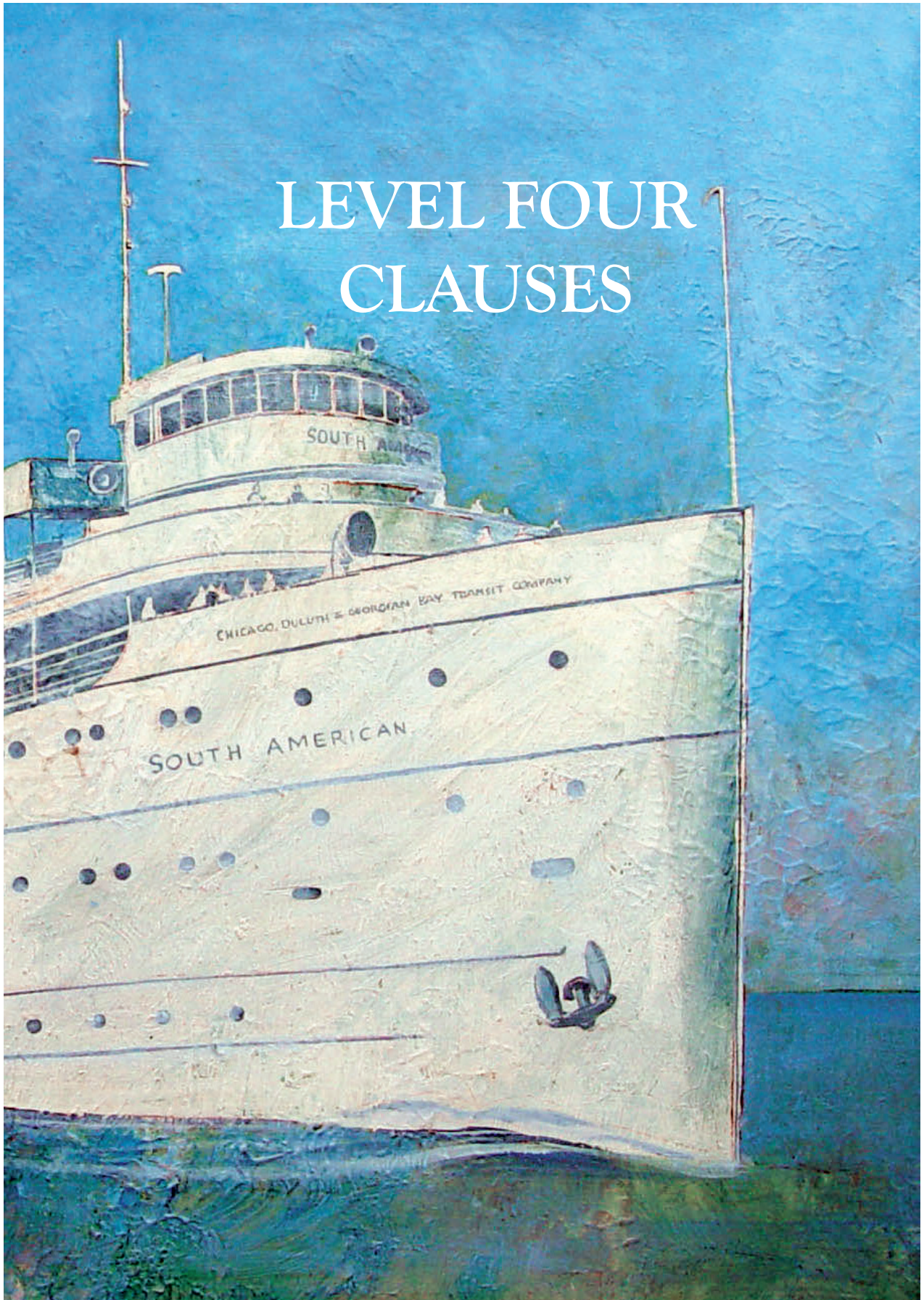
Because appositive phrases are interruptions, there is a comma rule for them; there should be commas before and after the appositive or appositive phrase:

Calle del Cristo, **the street by the plaza**, is beautiful.

Notice that appositive phrases do not have subjects and predicates. Also, there can be a one-word appositive, such as a state appositive or date appositive. It is not always a phrase (group of words), but it still needs two commas:

My old friend, **Hernandez**, arrived on the afternoon ferry.  
On March 10, **1837**, the harbor was sunny and calm.  
Veracruz, **Mexico**, is a seaside town.  
New Orleans, **Louisiana**, is on the Gulf of Mexico.

# LEVEL FOUR CLAUSES



## THREE KINDS OF DEPENDENT CLAUSES

adverb clause • adjective clause • noun clause

The dependent clauses we have seen in these complex sentences are **adverbial** in effect.

They act like adverbs to modify the verbs in the independent clauses.

There are also dependent clauses that act like **adjectives** and follow the nouns that they modify:

The **captain** **who sold the boat** left the harbor.

There are also dependent clauses that act like **nouns**:

I know **who broke the anchor**.

In this sentence the dependent clause

*who broke the anchor*

acts as a noun/direct object.

Here is another noun clause:

**Whoever defied the captain** is a mutineer.

In this complex sentence, the noun clause acts as the subject of the sentence.