

Round 1 2013

6 The long and short of English verbs (15 marks)

Mariko, a student of English as a foreign language, came across a piece of paper on which her English teacher had been planning a lesson on English grammar, so, being an ambitious and conscientious student, she thought she decided to prepare for the next lesson by reading the teacher's notes. Here's what she found.

Teach them this analysis:

- (1) Helen was a tall girl | when she was young.
A A B
- (2) She is always | late.
A
- (3) Were you | ever | in Wales?
- (4) Yes, we were once.
- (5) Mount Everest is a lot higher | in fact than Snowdon is.

Then use this classification to teach them the rule for reducing *is* to 's.

- (6) Helen is a tall girl now. ✓
- (7) She is always late. ✓
- (8) She is late more often than Mary is. ✗
- (9) The concert is in the evening. ✓
- (10) The meeting is in the same room in the morning that the concert is in the evening. ✗
- (11) Where is that? ✓
- (12) Joan is doing well, and Helen is too. ✗

Rule: *is* can shorten to 's when it is accompanied by a type X element which is positioned Y it.

Questions

6.1. As you can see, the teacher had underlined some words or word-groups, with a separating | between adjacent words that needed separating, and had started labelling the underlined items with A's and B's but had only labelled the first few. Your task is to complete the classification of the underlined items in sentences (2) to (5), making sure that whatever analysis you adopt is relevant to the change of *is* to 's.

6.2. The teacher's notes use ✓ and ✗ to show which sentences allow the underlined is to change to 's and which don't, but unfortunately they include only part of the rule.

Your task is to complete the rule by specifying X and Y so as to explain the differences.

**6 The long and short of English verbs [15 marks]
(answer sheet)**

6.1.	<u>She</u> (is)	<u>always</u>	<u>late.</u>	
(2)	----			
(3)	(Were) <u>you</u>	<u>ever</u>	<u>in Wales?</u>	
(4)	(Yes,) <u>we</u>	(were) <u>once.</u>		
(5)	<u>Mount Everest</u>	(is) <u>a lot higher</u>	<u>in fact</u>	(than) <u>Snowdon</u> (is).
6.2.	X =		Y =	

6 The long and short of English verbs [15 marks] (solutions and marking)

17 points:

- 6.1: 1 point each per A/B
- 6.2: 3 points each for fillers.
 - require mention of A.
 - accept Y = ‘Anywhere but in front of it’ or ‘to the right of’. Not Y = ‘in front of it’
- No half points.

6.1.	<u>She (is)</u>	<u>always</u>	<u>late.</u>	
(2)		B	A	
(3)	(Were) <u>you</u>	<u>ever</u>	<u>in Wales?</u>	
	A	B	A	
(4)	(Yes,) <u>we</u>	(were) <u>once.</u>		
	A	B		
(5)	<u>Mount Everest</u>	(is) <u>a lot higher</u>	<u>in fact</u>	(than) <u>Snowdon (is).</u>
	A	A	B	A
6.2.	X = A		Y = after	

Comment

The point of this problem is the syntactic contrast between ‘arguments’ (subjects and complements) and adjuncts.

6.1: A is for arguments, and B is for adjuncts. Arguments are syntactically expected or even required, adjuncts are always optional. But notice also that this question asks for a classification which will help to explain the facts about auxiliary reduction in 6.2; so they can’t just make up any old classification which happens to fit the data.

6.2: Reduction is possible only if there is a following (= Y) argument (= A). An answer to 6.2 should build directly on the answer to 6.1 (since they were told explicitly to make 6.1 relevant), so any answer other than $X = A$ is at best misguided (even if it’s factually correct), and arguably wrong. But 3 points for each part of 6.2 allows plenty of room for partial answers. There may be some room for uncertainty about the relation Y if it’s described in terms of ‘in front of’ (in ‘x y’, y could be described as being ‘in front of x’?); but ‘before’ and ‘to the left of’ are unambiguously wrong. Notice that adjacency is not required (*She’s always late* is fine, but not **She’s always.*) A very odd rule