Examination paper for ENG2155
Theoretical Approaches to English Language

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Collins COBUILD English (Advanced Learner’s) Dictionary

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America’s smallest town is sold for $900,000

1 A remote trading post in Wyoming that advertised itself as the smallest town in the United States was sold at auction for $900,000 on Thursday to an unidentified man from Vietnam. Buford lies near the Interstate 80 road that links New York to San Francisco. Its sole resident is Don Sammons, who also owned it for the last 20 years.

Sammons had been an army radio operator in Vietnam in the 1960s. After meeting the Vietnamese buyer, he realised the irony of the situation. "It's funny how things come full circle," he said.

The new owner will get a gas station, a convenience store, a schoolhouse from 1905, a cabin, a garage, 10 acres of land, and a three-bedroom home. The town overlooks the interstate on one side and the snowcapped mountains of the Rocky Mountain National Park on the other. It traces its origins to the 1860s, when the Transcontinental Railroad was constructed. The trading post originally had 2,000 residents before the railroad was rerouted. Sammons, who moved from Los Angeles to find tranquility, bought Buford in 1992. It was the fantastic views over the Rockies that attracted him most. He has been running the trading post since he arrived. He plans to retire from his unofficial title as "mayor" and write a book about his experiences. His neighbours were surprised when they heard that Sammons was leaving Buford. He was considered to be the happiest man in Wyoming.

The buyer, who had never visited the US previously, arrived in Wyoming two days before the auction. The estate broker who represented him claimed that the man’s motivation was to own a "piece of the United States".

The online bidding for the town started at $100,000 and attracted bidders from 46 countries. The town was not expected to be sold so quickly. Dozens of people showed up for the event. Some of the people who live in remote houses in the area and pick up their mail from the trading post also participated in the bidding process. Officials from the auction company stood out in their business suits among the locals who were dressed in jeans and western attire.

Inside the convenience store, most of the snacks, beer and cigarettes had already been sold off. Souvenirs and T-shirts proclaiming Buford as the smallest town in the United States remained unsold.

It surprised Sammons that the auction received global interest. "I have owned this place for so many years. I’ve been living here for more than 30 years and nobody knew it," he said. "Now everybody knows why I’m leaving.".
Question 1. [24 points]
The grammar of English main verbs and auxiliaries.

Task 1
Identify the tense, aspect and voice of the sentences in (1)-(5) taken (or adapted) from the text.

Task 2
Write a short text discussing the S-structure position of the finite verb in these sentences. Has the I-element lowered to a V-position, or has a verb raised from a V-position to the I-position, or do neither of them move?

(1) I have been living here for more than 30 years (cf. line 32)

(2) The trading post originally had 2,000 residents. (cf. line 12)

(3) Sammons had been an army radio operator in Vietnam in the 1960s. (line 11)

(4) The new owner will get a gas station, a convenience store, a schoolhouse from 1905, a cabin, a garage, 10 acres of land, and a three-bedroom home. (lines 8-9)

(5) Most of the snacks, beer and cigarettes had already been sold off (cf. lines 23-24)

Task 3
There is a connection between V-to-I raising and subject-auxiliary inversion and do-support in questions in English, illustrated by the data in (6)-(7). Explain briefly what that connection is.

(6) a. The trading post originally had 2,000 residents. (cf. line 12)
    b. *Had the trading post originally 2,000 residents?
    c. Did the trading post originally have 2,000 residents?

(7) a. The buyer had never visited the US previously. (cf. lines 16-19)
    b. Had the buyer never visited the US previously?
    c. *Did the buyer never have visited the US previously?
Account for the grammaticality contrast seen in the sentence pairs in (1)-(3), and the lack of such a contrast in the pairs in (4)-(5). There is one relevant difference between the (a)- and (b)-sentences in each pair. What is it? How can the ungrammaticality of (1b), (2b) and (3b) be explained, and why on the other hand should (4b) and (5b) be grammatical?

(1) a. It traces its origins to the 1860s, when the Transcontinental Railroad was constructed. \(\text{(line 11)}\)
   b. *It is tracing its origins to the 1860s, when the Transcontinental Railroad was constructed.

(2) a. The town overlooks the interstate on one side and the snowcapped mountains of the Rocky Mountain National Park on the other. \(\text{(lines 9-11)}\)
   b. *The town is overlooking the interstate on one side and the snowcapped mountains of the Rocky Mountain National Park on the other.

(3) a. I have owned this place for so many years. \(\text{(lines 31-32)}\)
   b. *I have been owning this place for so many years.

(4) a. Some of the people participated in the bidding process. \(\text{(cf. lines 24-25)}\)
   b. Some of the people were participating in the bidding process.

(5) a. He has run the trading post since he arrived.
   b. He has been running the trading post since he arrived. \(\text{(cf. lines 14-15)}\)
Question 3.          [20 points]

Subordinate clauses.

Task 1

Identify the embedded clause in the following examples and state what type of embedded sentence it is, giving reasons for your classification.

(1) Its sole resident is Don Sammons, who also owned it for the last 20 years.  (line 4)

(2) The trading post originally had 2,000 residents before the railroad was rerouted.  (lines 12-13)

(3) It was the fantastic views over the Rockies that attracted him most.  (line 14)

(4) Now everybody knows why I’m leaving.  (line 33)

(5) Some of the people who live in remote houses in the area also participated in the bidding process.  (cf. lines 24-25)

(6) It surprised Sammons that the auction received global interest.  (line 31)

Task 2

Now consider the groups of sentences in (7)-(8). In each case, account for the grammaticality contrasts among the group. In your explanation, you should refer to the specific type of the subordinate clauses involved, and you may need to refer to a gap that the clause contains.

(7) a. The suits which they wore stood out in the crowd.

b. The suits that they wore stood out in the crowd.

c. The suits they wore stood out in the crowd.

(d. The men who wore them stood out in the crowd.

(e. The men that wore them stood out in the crowd.

f. *The men wore them stood out in the crowd.

(8) a. Sammons, who moved from Los Angeles to find tranquility, bought Buford in 1992.  (lines 13-14)

Question 4.

Phrase structure, predicate-argument structure, and Case.

- Draw a complete phrase structure tree for the sentence in (1), using the CP-IP-VP structure.
- For every argument (Noun Phrase or clause) in the sentence, state which predicate it is an argument of, i.e. which predicate word assigns a theta-role to it.
- For every Noun Phrase in the sentence, state what its Case is, and what the Case-assigner is.

(1) Sammons will arrange for them to sell his town to a Vietnamese buyer.

Note: You may omit intermediate projections where the phrase has no specifier. Nothing has undergone movement or deletion in this sentence, so the D-structure tree is the same as the S-structure.
Question 5. [20 points]
Passive.

Task 1
In the generative syntax approach, most passive sentences are held to be derived by movement of a Noun Phrase, which becomes the subject of the passive sentence. The following sentences taken from the text are relevant examples.

(1) A remote trading post in Wyoming was sold at auction for $900,000 on Thursday to an unidentified man from Vietnam. (cf. lines 1-2)

(2) The town was not expected to be sold so quickly. (line 23)

For each of these examples:
- Identify the verb (or verbs) that has been passivised.
- Provide a corresponding active sentence, i.e. a sentence which contains the same verb (or verbs) in the active voice and which expresses more or less the same meaning as the original passive sentence in the text.
- Identify the subject NP of the passive sentence, determine its thematic role, and identify the verb which assigns that thematic role.

Task 2
- Draw a complete S-structure tree for sentence (2) using the CP-IP-VP structure. Mark in your diagram any movement operations which take place in the derivation of the sentence.