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Analysis of Chapter Sixteen: Parts of Speech: Positional Classes in *An Introductory English Grammar* by Norman C. Stageberg

Chapter Sixteen of *An Introductory English Grammar* (fifth edition, 2000) by Norman C. Stageberg, co-authored with Dallin D. Oaks, titled "Parts of Speech: Positional Classes," provides a detailed examination of how parts of speech are defined by their positions and functions within sentence structures. Building on earlier chapters about parts of speech (Chapters Nine, Twelve, and Thirteen), inflectional paradigms (Chapter Eleven), syntax (Chapter Fourteen), and basic sentence patterns (Chapter Fifteen), this chapter offers advanced students, particularly non-native English speakers and those in linguistics or geography programs, a systematic framework for understanding how positional roles refine the classification of words. Focused on structural linguistics, the chapter is essential for third-year geography students who need precise language skills to articulate spatial relationships, environmental processes, and analytical concepts in academic contexts.

Content and Structure

Chapter Sixteen introduces **positional classes** as a method of classifying parts of speech based on their syntactic positions and functions within sentences, complementing the morphological focus of earlier chapters. Stageberg emphasizes that English, with its relatively fixed word order, relies heavily on position to determine grammatical roles. The chapter revisits form classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) and structure classes (prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, auxiliaries) from Chapters Twelve and Thirteen, but analyzes them through their **distributional patterns** in sentences.

Key topics include:

- **Positional Criteria:** Words are classified by the positions they occupy in sentence patterns, such as those outlined in Chapter Fifteen (e.g., SV, SVO, SVA). For example, nouns typically appear as subjects or objects (e.g., "The river" in "The river flows" [SV]), while adjectives occupy attributive positions (e.g., "steep" in "The steep mountain").
- **Form Classes in Positional Roles:**
 - **Nouns:** Appear in subject, object, or complement positions (e.g., "The valley supports agriculture" [SVO]).
 - **Verbs:** Serve as predicates, central to sentence structure (e.g., "erodes" in "The glacier erodes the rock" [SVO]).
 - **Adjectives:** Occupy attributive (before nouns, e.g., "arid desert") or predicative positions (after linking verbs, e.g., "The desert is arid" [SVC]).

- **Adverbs:** Modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, often appearing in flexible positions (e.g., "flows rapidly" or "rapidly flows" in "The river flows rapidly" [SVA]).
- **Structure Classes in Positional Roles:**
 - **Prepositions:** Introduce prepositional phrases, often indicating spatial or temporal relationships critical for geography (e.g., "across the plain" in "The road runs across the plain").
 - **Conjunctions:** Link clauses or words, facilitating complex descriptions (e.g., "because" in "The region prospers because of irrigation").
 - **Pronouns:** Substitute for nouns in specific positions (e.g., "it" in "The forest is dense; it supports wildlife").
 - **Auxiliaries:** Support verb phrases, appearing before main verbs (e.g., "is eroding" in "The coastline is eroding").
- **Syntactic Flexibility:** The chapter discusses how some words belong to multiple positional classes depending on context (e.g., "fast" as an adjective in "fast river" or an adverb in "flows fast"). This flexibility is key for understanding English's dynamic syntax.

The chapter uses geography-relevant examples, such as “The mountain rises steeply” or “Cities near rivers thrive,” to illustrate how positional classes function in academic discourse.

Pedagogical Approach

Chapter Sixteen balances theoretical analysis with practical application, consistent with Stageberg's accessible teaching style. Exercises encourage students to identify positional classes in sentences, such as labeling “valley” (noun, subject) and “beyond” (preposition) in “The valley lies beyond the hills” [SVA]. Students may also analyze word class shifts (e.g., “round” as an adjective in “round hill” vs. a preposition in “round the corner”). These tasks reinforce syntactic understanding, particularly for geography students describing spatial or environmental phenomena.

The chapter's clear explanations and everyday English examples ensure accessibility for native and non-native speakers, especially in ESL contexts like Vietnam, where the book is widely adopted. Its structured approach, with concise definitions and practical exercises, supports classroom instruction and self-study, making it a valuable resource for third-year geography students.

Objectives

The primary objective of Chapter Sixteen is to enable students to classify parts of speech based on their positional roles within sentences, enhancing their

understanding of English syntax. For third-year geography students, the chapter aims to provide tools for constructing precise sentences to describe geographic concepts, such as spatial relationships (e.g., “The city lies between two rivers” [SVA]) or processes (e.g., “Erosion reshapes landscapes” [SVO]). It seeks to deepen students’ ability to analyze how word positions determine grammatical functions, improving their academic writing and communication.

The chapter also aims to connect positional classes to the form and structure classes discussed in earlier chapters, showing how function words like prepositions and conjunctions facilitate sentence cohesion in geography-related discourse. For non-native speakers, it supports mastery of English syntax for academic purposes, while its exercises and clear explanations aid instructors in teaching these concepts effectively in geography-focused ESL contexts.

Contributions

Chapter Sixteen makes significant contributions to English grammar education, particularly for third-year geography students, by providing a clear framework for understanding parts of speech through their positional roles. Its exploration of how nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and structure classes function in specific syntactic positions equips students with tools to construct accurate and varied sentences, crucial for articulating geographic concepts like urban planning (“The city expands rapidly” [SVA]) or environmental dynamics (“Deforestation, which harms ecosystems, continues” [complex sentence]).

The chapter’s emphasis on practical exercises, such as parsing sentences like “The plateau, situated above the valley, attracts researchers” to identify positional roles (e.g., “plateau” as noun-subject, “above” as preposition), enhances its pedagogical value. These skills are vital for geography students writing essays or delivering presentations on topics like climate change or geospatial analysis. The book’s global adoption, particularly in ESL settings like Vietnam, underscores its impact, helping non-native speakers master grammar for cross-disciplinary communication. By bridging theoretical syntax with practical application, Chapter Sixteen equips geography students with the linguistic precision needed for advanced academic and professional success in a globalized field.