THE OBJECT OF A SENTENCE

If I said to you,

'The dog killed. He killed yesterday,' or 'This shop sells', you would look at me, rather puzzled and say, 'Go on. Finish the sentence. Tell us what the shop sells and what the dog killed. Those verbs sell and kill don't make sense by themselves. You must put something after them to make sense.'

So I do what you tell me and say, 'This shop sells bicycles.' 'The dog killed a rat. He killed it yesterday.'

'Oh yes', you say at once, 'that makes sense.'

The word bicycles is the object of the sells; the words rat and it are the objects of the verb killed. Verbs that have an object (some verbs don't) are called *Transitive Verbs*. 'Transitive' comes from a Latin word that means 'going over.' The action of killing 'goes over' from the dog to the rat. The action of selling 'goes over' from the shop to the bicycles. So we can say:

The object of a sentence is a noun (or pronoun) which tells us the person or thing to whom the action of the verb happened.

You will remember that we found the subject of the verb by putting the question word *who* (or *what*?) before it. We can find the object by putting the question word *what*? (or *whom*?) after the verb.

For example, 'the shop sells bicycles.' The verb is sells. Put the question word 'what?' after it, 'sells what?' Answer: 'bicycles.' Then 'bicycles' is the object.

Here are two more sentences:

1. The rat bit the dog.
2. The dog killed the rat.

In sentence 1, the action of biting goes from the rat to the dog. In sentence 2, the action of killing goes from the dog to the rat. Both sentences have objects; the verbs bit and killed are transitive verbs.

Verbs that take objects are called Transitive verbs.

But there are some verbs that don't have objects, because sometimes the action doesn't 'pass over' from one person to another person or thing.

Consider these sentences for example:

The dog growled. The rat died.

The action of growling starts and ends with the dog. It doesn't 'go over' to anything else. The action of dying begins and ends with the rat.

If you say, 'growled what?', 'died what?' you can't get a sensible answer. These verbs haven't any object. They are *intransitive verbs*.

Verbs that don't take objects are called intransitive verbs.

The Complement

If I said: 'Today is', 'The flower seems', you would say: '… is what? …seems what? …something is missing.' So I add a little, e.g. 'Today is my birthday.' 'The flower seems dead.' The words I have added are not objects – *is*, and *seems*, are intransitive verbs.

Words or phrases that are needed to complete the meaning of intransitive verbs such as 'be', 'seam', are called complements.