

Topic: Syntactic and semantic functions of subordinate clauses

Similarly to phrases in a simple sentence, subordinate clauses in a complex sentence can function as subject, object, complement, or adverbial.

Example: *They know her to be reliable.* (object complement in SVOC clause type)

In addition, subordinate clauses can function within sentence elements/constituents:

Example: *Few of the immigrants retained the customs that they had brought with them.* (postmodifier in noun phrase)

According to their potential functions **four major categories of subordinate clauses** can be distinguished:

nominal clauses (functioning as subject, object, complement, appositive, and prepositional complement) *That we need a new computer has become clear.* (S)

Your criticism, that no information has been offered, is fully justified. (appos.)

adverbial clauses (mainly functioning as adjuncts or disjuncts)

We left after the lecture ended. (temporal clause)

We left after the end of the lecture. (temporal phrase)

relative clauses (used in restrictive or nonrestrictive modifiers of noun phrases, parallel to attributive adjectives) *a man who is lonely x a lonely man*

comparative clauses (resembling adjectives and adverbs in their modifying functions) *She has more patience than you have.*

He is not as clever as a man as I thought.

(e.g. *more, as, -er* are correlative elements)

Nominal clauses: finite clauses *that-clauses*

wh-clauses

non-finite clauses *infinitive clauses* (*to*-infinitive or bare infinitive)

-ing clauses

verbless clauses

Notes on some of the above types: **No. 1: That-clauses**

When the *that*-clause is direct object, complement, or extraposed, the conjunction *that* is frequently omitted, leaving a zero *that*-clause:

Example: *It is a pity (that) you don't know Spanish.* (extraposition)

When the object or subject *that*-clause is fronted, *that* is not omitted:

Example: *That she never said such a thing I simply don't believe.* (fronted object cl.)

No. 2: Exclamative clauses

generally function as extraposed subject, direct object, or prepositional complement

Example: *How fast she can run!* x *It is incredible how fast she can run.*

No. 3: Nominal relative clauses

resemble *wh*-interrogative clauses (e.g. *I can't imagine what they want.*) in that they are also introduced by a *wh*-element. They can be analysed as noun phrases modified by relative clauses, except that the *wh*-element is merged with its antecedent:

Examples: *I took what they offered me.* ('... the thing(s) that they offered me.')
Macy's is where I buy my clothes. ('... the place where I buy my ...')

No. 4: Bare infinitive clauses

Examples: *They made her pay for the damage.* (object complement)

Turn off the tap was all I did. (subject)

No. 5: Verbless clauses

Example: *A friend in need is a friend indeed.* (proverb)

can be paraphrased *To be a friend in need is to be a friend indeed.*

Adverbial clauses function mainly as **adjuncts** and **disjuncts**, unlike adverbial phrases that can function as adjuncts, subjuncts, conjuncts, and disjuncts.

Clauses of time

(subordinators such as *after, as, once, since, until, when, while, once, till, whenever*)
Examples: *Wait until you are called.* *Complete your work as soon as possible.*

An adverbial clause of time relates the time of the situation in its clause to the time of the situation in the matrix clause. The time of the matrix clause may be previous to that of the adverbial clause (e.g. *until*), simultaneous with it (e.g. *while*), or subsequent to it (e.g. *after*). The time relationship may also convey duration (e.g. *as long as*), recurrence (e.g. *whenever*), and relative proximity (e.g. *just after*).

Clauses of place

introduced by *where* or *wherever*, indicating position or direction. The archaic forms *whence* ('from where') and *whither* ('to where') are found in e.g. religious language.
Example: *They went wherever they could find work.* (direction)

Clauses of condition

overlapping with clauses of concession and contrast, *if* being used in all of them, *whereas* in the last two types. All the three types tend to be used in initial position. Conditional clauses convey a direct condition in that the situation in the matrix clause is directly dependent on the situation in the conditional clause.

Example: *If you put the baby down, she'll scream.*

subordinators *if, unless* are most frequent of all and occur in finite, nonfinite and verbless clauses; the others are used only in finite clauses: *given (that), on condition (that), provided (that), providing (that), supposing (that)*.

Example: *Unless otherwise instructed, you should leave by the back exit.*

There are **two major types of conditions** (direct conditions):

open condition: it is not known whether the condition and the outcome are true or will happen: *If Colin is at home, I'll tell him.*

hypothetical condition: it is suggested that the condition will not happen, or is not true now, or did not happen: *If he changed his opinion, I'd be surprised.*

There are **two minor types of conditions**:

rhetoical condition: while looking grammatically like an open condition, it is strongly assertive: *If I win, I'll eat my hat.* ('I'm sure I won't win.')

indirect condition: in which the matrix clause does not actually follow as a consequence of the condition: *I think it's a mistake, if you don't mind my saying so.*

Clauses of concession

indicate that the situation in the matrix clause is contrary to what one might expect in view of the situation in the concessive clauses; subordinators: *although, though, while, whereas*. Sometimes it is possible to view each situation as unexpected in the light of the other:

Examples: *No goals were scored, although it was an exciting game.*

It was an exciting game, although no goals were scored.

Conditional-concessive clauses

the correlative sequence *whether ... or (whether)* combines the conditional meaning of *if* with the disjunctive meaning of *either ... or*:

Example: *He is getting married, whether or not he finds a job.*

Clauses of contrast

with subordinators *whereas, while, whilst* and optional correlative antithetic conjuncts such as *in contrast, by contrast* used for emphasis.

Example: *While Jane teaches history, (in contrast) Mary teaches physics.*

Clauses of exception

introduced by *but that, only*, both being used only after the matrix clause, *save (that), except (that), excepting (that)*:

Example: *Nothing would satisfy the child but that I place her on my lap.*

Clauses of reason

convey a direct relationship with the matrix clause. It may be that of cause and effect (e.g. *She is slim because she doesn't eat much.*), reason and consequence (e.g. *She watered the flowers because they were dry.*), motivation and result (e.g. *You help me because you are my friend.*), or circumstance and consequence (e.g. *Since the weather wasn't good, the match was cancelled.*)

Note: A *for*-clause must be in final position: *Much has been written, for it is required.*

Clauses of purpose

with identical subjects usually infinitival, introduced by *in order to* and *so as to*:

Example: *Students should take their notes (so as) to make revision easier.*

with different subjects most frequently introduced by *so that*:

Example: *The school closes earlier so that the children can get home before dark.*

Clauses of result

introduced by the subordinators *so that* and *so*:

Example: *I took no notice of him, so (that) he flew into a rage.*

Clauses of similarity and comparison

The former are introduced by (*just/exactly*) *as* and *like* (AmE), the latter by *as if*, *as though* and *like* (AmE). If the verb is dynamic, they are difficult to distinguish from manner. Examples: *Please do (exactly) as I said.*

She looks as if she is better.

She treated me as though I was/were a stranger.

Clauses of proportion

a kind of comparison, a proportionality or equivalence of tendency or degree between two situations, introduced by *as* and/without correlative *so*, or by the fronted correlative *the ... the* followed by comparative forms:

Examples: *As he grew tired, (so) his work deteriorated. The sooner, the better.*

Clauses of preference

usually nonfinite, may be introduced by the subordinators *rather than* and *sooner than*, with the bare infinitive as the verb of the clause:

Examples: *Rather than go/I should go there by air, I'd travel the whole day.*

They'll fight to the finish sooner than surrender.

Comment clauses

parenthetical disjuncts, occurring initially, finally, or medially, usually having a separate tone unit, characteristic of spoken English. Six types can be distinguished:

(1) like the matrix of a main clause: *There was no milk, I believe, in the fridge.*

(2) an adverbial finite clause, introduced by *as*: *I'm too busy this week, as you know.*

(3) a nominal relative clause: *What's more important, we have enough money.*

(4) *to*-infinitive clause as style disjunct: *I don't know, to be honest.*

(5) *-ing* clause as style disjunct: *I cannot specify it, speaking as a layman.*

(6) *-ed* clause as style disjunct: *Stated bluntly, he had no chance.*

Sentential relative clauses

unlike adnominal relative clauses, which have a noun phrases as antecedent, they refer back to the predicate or predication of a clause, or to a whole clause or sentence, or even to a series of sentences:

Example: *Everything has improved, which surprises me.*

The subject of nonfinite (-ing, -ed) and verbless clauses

Nonfinite and verbless clauses that have an overt subject but are not introduced by a subordinator are **absolute clauses** because they are not explicitly bound to the matrix clause syntactically. They are very formal and infrequent.

Example: *Lunch finished, the guests started their discussion.*

Note: When a subject is not present in a nonfinite or verbless clause, the normal **attachment rule** for identifying the subject is that it is assumed to be identical in reference to the subject of the superordinate clause:

Driving home, I accidentally went through a red light. ('While I was driving home')

Supplementive clauses

are adverbial participle and verbless clauses without a subordinator. They do not signal any specific logical relationships, but such relationships are clear from the context. According to context, they imply temporal, conditional, causal, concessive, or circumstantial relationships.

Examples: *Reaching the river, we pitched camp for the night.* *We spoke face to face.*
The sentence is ambiguous, taken out of the context.

Comparative clauses

In comparative clauses, a proposition expressed in the matrix clause is compared with a proposition expressed in the subordinate clause. Words repeated in both clauses may be omitted in the subordinate clause:

Examples: *Jane is as happy as her sister (is).* *Jane is happier than her sister (is).*

The comparison is with respect to some **standard** or **comparison** (happiness). The clause element that specifies the standard is the **comparative element**: *as happy* and *happier* above. The **basis of comparison** is *Jane's sister* above.

Comparison includes comparisons of equivalence and nonequivalence (see above) or comparisons of sufficiency and excess (see below):

Examples: *Jane is sensitive enough to understand your problems.*
Jane is too polite to say anything against it.

The comp-element of a comparative construction can be any of the clause elements, apart from the verb:

Examples: *She knows more history than most people.* (direct object)
Jack is more relaxed than he used to be. (subject complement)
You have worked much harder than I (have)/me. (adverbial)

Ellipsis is the rule rather than the exception in comparative constructions because the two clauses are closely parallel both in structure and content.

John and Susan often go to plays but

(i) *John enjoys the theatre more than Susan enjoys the theatre.*

(ii) *John enjoys the theatre more than Susan enjoys it.*

(iii) *John enjoys the theatre more than Susan does.*

(iv) *John enjoys the theatre more than Susan.*

(v) *John enjoys the theatre more.*

Ellipsis of the object generally cannot take place unless the main verb too is ellipted, as in (iii) and (iv) above.

ambiguity: *He loves his dog more than his children.* (*they* or *them*, subject or object?)

Enough and too are used in comparative constructions that express the contrasting notions of sufficiency and excess, followed by *to*-infinitive clauses:

Example: *The book is simple enough/is not too difficult to understand.*

So ... (that) and such ... (that) introduce constructions that combine the notion of sufficiency or excess with that of result:

Example: *It's so good a movie/such a good movie that we mustn't miss it.*