

## Topic 5: The complex sentences - Handout

A complex sentence consists of only **one main/matrix clause** and **one or more subordinate/dependent clauses** functioning as an element of the sentence.

Unlike a **simple sentence**, in which **all sentence elements are expressed by phrases**, a complex sentence comprises at least one sentence element expressed by a clause.

Compare: *He came here yesterday.* x *He came here after he finished all his work.*

Unlike a **compound sentence**, which comprises **at least two matrix clauses** (and any number of subordinate clauses), a complex sentence consists of only one matrix clause and any number of subordinate clauses (at least one).

The matrix clause is the superordinate clause minus its subordinate clause.

Example: *I'll give you some money if you help me.*

### **subordination x coordination**

Example: *He came here to help me.* x *He came here and helped me.*

Note: A subordinate clause may function as a constituent of a phrase, e.g. a relative clause as a postmodifier in a noun phrase. The result is not a complex sentence, since the subordinate clause does not function as a constituent of the sentence.

Example: *The boy we met yesterday is my best friend's son.*

There are **three main structural classes of clauses**:

1. **finite clauses** (with a finite VP): *I'll come as soon as I finish my work.*
2. **nonfinite clauses** (with a nonfinite VP): *I'll come after finishing my work.*
3. **verbless clauses** (with no VP): *I'll come as soon as possible.*

Note: One structural type of clause may be embedded within another:

*Too nervous to reply after other speakers had praised her devotion to duty, Margaret indicated that she would speak later.* (The matrix clause is underlined, the remaining clauses are subordinate.)

**Nonfinite clauses** (four structural subclasses):

- (1) **to-infinitive** - without subject: *The best thing will be to tell everybody.*  
- with subject: *The best thing will be for you to tell everybody.*
- (2) **bare infinitive** - without subject: *All I did was finish the work myself.*  
- with subject: *Rather than you finish the work, I'd prefer to finish it myself.*
- (3) **-ing participle** - without subject: *Leaving the room, he tripped over the mat.*  
- with subject: *Mary having left the room, I told John the news.*
- (4) **-ed participle** - without subject: *Covered with confusion, they left in a hurry.*  
- with subject: *The discussion completed, they left in a hurry.*

Subclasses (1) and (3) are used most frequently, especially (3) without subject, subclass (2) being relatively rare. The auxiliary *have* used in *to*-infinitive or *-ing* participle clauses indicate **anteriority in time** (see (3) with subject above).

**Nonfinite clauses** (lacking tense markers and modal auxiliaries, and frequently also a subject and a subordinating conjunction) are a valuable means of **syntactic compression**, used especially in written language.

### **Verbless clauses**

With verbless clauses it is usually possible to postulate a missing form of the verb *be* and to recover the subject, when omitted, from the context:

*Whether right or wrong, he always answers last.* ('*Whether he is right or wrong*')

The subject is often introduced by *with* or *without*: *With the children at school, we can go on holiday whenever we like.*

### **Formal indicators of subordination**

subordination is generally marked by a signal in the subordinating clause:

**subordinators** (subordinating conjunctions)

(1) **single-word subordinators** (e.g. *before, after, because, although, as, since, for, if, though, lest, till, once, that, until, unless, when, where, whenever, whereas, while*)

(2) **multiword subordinators** (e.g. (a) ending with *that*: *in order that, in the event that*; (b) ending with *as*: *as far as, as soon as, as long as*; others: *as if/though, in case*)

(3) **correlative subordinators**, combining two markers of subordination (e.g. *so ... that, such ... that, the ... the, whether/if ... or, as ... so, less/more (-er) ... than, if ... then, even if ... yet, although ... nevertheless, because ... therefore*)

**marginal subordinators** (three types of borderline cases)

(1) a subordinator and a following/preceding adverb: e.g. *even if, if only*;

(2) temporal noun phrases: e.g. *the moment (that), every time (that)*;

(3) prepositional phrases: e.g. *because of the fact that, in spite of the fact that*;

**other indicators of subordination**

(1) *wh*-elements in subordinate interrogative clauses and subordinate exclamative clauses, *wh*-elements in *wh*-relative clauses, and in conditional-concessive clauses;

(2) the relative pronoun *that* in restrictive relative clauses;

(3) subject-operator inversion, especially in conditional clauses, typically in literary or elevated style; operators permitting inversion being *had, were, should*, sometimes *could* and *might*, e.g. *Were she here, she would help us*.

(4) the absence of a finite verb since nonfinite and verbless clauses are generally subordinate;

There are **three types of subordinate clauses** that have **no clear indicator of subordination**:

(1) nominal *that*-clauses, e.g. *I suppose (that) he can use your phone*.

(2) zero relative clauses, e.g. *I've lost the book you sent me*.

(3) comment clauses have no overt marker of subordination, but they lack an obligatory complementation of the verb, e.g. *He has no money, I suppose*.

**Direct and indirect speech**

**Direct speech** tries to present the exact words that someone utters/has uttered in speech or writing. **Indirect speech**, on the other hand, conveys a report of what has been said or written, but does so in the words of a subsequent reporter:

*David said to me after the meeting, 'In my opinion, the arguments in favour of radical changes in the curriculum are not convincing.'*

*David said to me after the meeting that in his opinion the arguments in favour of radical changes in the curriculum were not convincing.*

*David told me after the meeting that he remained opposed to any major changes in the curriculum.*

**Direct speech** is usually signalled by being enclosed in quotation marks. The reporting clause may occur before, within, or after the direct speech:

(*John said*) '*I wonder,*' (*John said/he said/said John*) '*whether I can borrow your car.*' When the reporting clause is placed medially or finally, subject-operator inversion may occur if the verb (esp. *say*) is in the simple present or simple past.

**backshift in indirect speech**

**the sequence of tenses** - the resulting relationship of verb forms in the reporting and reported clauses (see the example about David above);

the sequence of tenses is **optional** when the time-reference of the original utterance is valid at the time of reporting: *I didn't know that our meeting is next Tuesday*.

The reference to persons, time, and place in indirect speech must be appropriate to the situation at the time of reporting. (*now - then, here - there, yesterday - last Tuesday*)

All the **main discourse types** can be converted into indirect speech:

(1) **indirect statements** (subordinate *that*-clauses), examples are above

(2) **indirect questions** (subordinate *wh*-clauses or *if*-clauses)

e.g. *John asked whether I was ready yet. (yes/no question)*

*I wondered when the plane would leave. (wh-question)*

*I asked whether or not she was satisfied. (alternative question)*

(3) **indirect exclamations** (subordinate *wh*-clauses)

*'What a brave boy you are!' Margaret told him.*

*Margaret told him what a brave boy he was.*

(4) **indirect directives** (subordinate *that*-clauses or *to*-infinitive clauses)

*'Tidy up the room at once,' I said to Tom.*

*I insisted that Tom tidy/should tidy up the room at once. (mandative subjunctive or putative *should*);*

*I told Tom to tidy up the room. (to-infinitive)*

**Free indirect speech** - used to report the stream of thought, especially in fiction:

(1) it is basically a **form of indirect speech**, but

(2) the **potentialities of direct-speech sentence structure** are retained (the presence of e.g. vocatives, tag questions, interjections, direct questions and exclamations);

(3) only the **backshift of the verb**, together with the **equivalent shifts in personal pronouns, demonstratives, and time and space references**, signals the fact that the words are being reported, rather than being in direct speech;

e.g. *So that was their plan, was it? He well knew their tricks, and would show them a thing or two before he was finished. Thank goodness he had been alerted, and that there were still a few honest people in the world!*

**Free direct speech** - used in fiction to represent a person's stream of thought:

(1) it is basically a **form of direct speech**, but

(2) it is **merged with the narration** without any overt indication by a reporting clause of a switch to speech.

(3) it is distinguished from the past time-reference of the narration by its **use of unshifted forms**;

e.g. *I sat on the grass staring at the passers-by. Everybody seemed in a hurry. Why didn't I stay at home?*

**Transferred negation** - typical of informal style; it is the transfer of the negative from a subordinate clause, where semantically it belongs, to the matrix clause:

*I don't think it's a good idea. (instead of *I think it isn't a good idea*.)*

The matrix **verbs that allow transferred negation** convey notions of **opinion** (e.g. *to believe, expect, imagine, suppose, think*) or **perception** (e.g. *appear, seem, feel as if, look as if, sound as if*) e.g. *I don't believe I've met you before.*

Note: When the subject of the main clause is *I*, the tag question corresponds with the sub. clause: *I don't imagine he cares, does he? (I imagine he doesn't care, does he?)*

**The verb phrase in subordinate clauses** - for details, see pp. 292-297 SGEL

1. the present tense in adverbial and nominal clauses; 2. the hypothetical past and hypothetical past perfect; 3. the present and past subjunctive; 4. putative *should* used in *that*-clauses to convey notion of a 'putative' situation, recognized as possibly existing or coming into existence (e.g. *I'm surprised that he feels lonely*. [it is true] contrasted with *I'm surprised that he should feel lonely*. [questions the loneliness]); 5. the perfect with temporal *since*-clauses (e.g. *She has been talking since she was one year old*. [past simple refers to the beginning of the situation] contrasted with *I've had a dog ever since I've owned a house*. [present perfect refers to a period of time lasting to the present]); 6. the perfect with other temporal clauses.