

## Topic: The complex sentence

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 ... 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.

It is basically **a form of indirect speech**, but:

(1) the reported clause is usually omitted;

(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. It is basically **a form of direct speech**, but it is merged with the narration without any overt indication by a reporting clause of a switch to speech. 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, 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 subordinate 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.