

Unembedded Dependent Clause Structures

A research paper submitted

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Abstract:

An English sentence is normally composed either of a single independent clause, or two

or more independent clauses, or one independent plus one or more dependent clauses, in which case they are known as simple, compound and complex sentences respectively. In the complex sentence the clauses may be related to one another by subordination or coordination.

This paper is particularly focusing on the complex sentences that contain a subordination relation, i.e., sentences in which a main clause is related to one or more subordinate clauses. Different grammarians have given different names to these two types of clauses that appear in complex constructions. In addition to the terms 'main' and 'subordinate', some grammarians refer to them as 'independent' and 'dependent' clauses or as 'high' and 'low' clauses respectively. These various names are given to imply that one of them (the main clause) can stand alone by itself, whereas the other(the subordinate clause) cannot stand alone by itself, i.e., it is always embedded as part of the main clause (the matrix clause).

What this paper is principally aiming to achieve is to investigate certain situations in which a user of any language, probably due to the sort of the

attitude he wants to convey or due to certain situational or textual ellipsis, uses a subordinate clause alone, which is in essence part of the main clause in the deep structure, without annexing it to a main clause, i.e., without embedding it into a main clause, and yet deals with it as if it were an independent clause, as when, in speaking, he utters the sentence independently, and, in writing, he starts the clause with a capital letter and ends it with a period; and these are originally punctuation markers of a complete independent sentence.

To demonstrate this linguistic case, the paper is divided into four sections. Section two deals with complex sentence constructions with reference to coordination and subordination relations. Section three dwells on ellipsis and structural condensation that is pertinent to the case in question. Section four, eventually, exhibits dependent clauses without a main clause via those situations in language that allow for such unembedded clauses to occur alone in both speaking and writing. The paper ends with a conclusion and a list of the references utilized.

2. Complex Sentence Construction

The Structure of complex sentences in English involves subordination and coordination which are two devices of elaboration and condensation. These two aspects of grammar are closely interrelated since both involve the linking of units, and both are used by speakers to elaborate and combine the structure of clauses.

(Biber,2002:223)

2.1 Coordination

Coordination is the process of linking clauses which are usually of equivalent syntactic status. The major coordinators used to join clauses are 'and', 'but' and 'or'. These coordinators are not equally common; 'and'

is much more common than 'or' or 'but' especially in academic and fiction writing (Biber: 227), e.g.,

1. They are my neighbours, *but* I don't know them very well. (contrast)
2. John plays the guitar, *and* his sister plays the piano. (addition)
3. They are living in Baghdad, *or* they are spending a vacation there.
(alternative)

In the above example sentences, the units linked by the coordinating conjunctions 'and', 'but' and 'or' are on the same syntactic level; and the coordinators not only join these units, but also show how their meanings are related: contrast in 1, addition in 2 and alternative in 3 (Swan:129).

Moreover, we can observe that the coordinators in the above examples are confined to the initial position in the clause and they are also sequentially fixed, i.e., the clause beginning with a coordinator cannot be moved in front of the preceding clause without affecting the grammar of the sentence. For example, sentence 3 above cannot be rewritten as ' *Or they are spending a vacation there, they are living in England (Quirk,1973: 255).

As a device of condensation, coordinators allow ellipsis of the subject of the clause they introduce if the subject is co- referential with that of the preceding linked clause, e.g., I may see you tomorrow or (I) may phone later in the day (Quirk,1973: 256).

2.2 Subordination

Subordination, unlike coordination, is a non-symmetrical relation holding between two clauses in such a way that one is a constituent or part of the other. The coordinators *if*, *because*, *when*, *which*, *though*....etc. are markers of such subordination relation, compare:

4. I like John and John likes me.

I Like John because John likes me.

Subordinate or dependent clause

Super-ordinate or Matrix clause

The device of subordination enables us to organize multiple clause structures. Each subordinate clause may itself be subordinate to one or more other clauses, so that a hierarchy of clauses, one within another, may be built up, sometimes resulting in sentences of great complexity ,e.g.,

6. [I think [that you can do it [if you try.]]]

X Y Z Z Y X

Here the clause beginning with Z is subordinate to the clause beginning with Y , which in turn is subordinate to the clause beginning with X. Both Y and Z are dependent clauses, whereas X is the independent clause (Quirk,1973: 309) .

Complex sentences can also result from a combination of coordination and subordination of clauses, e.g.,

7. That the earth is round and that it can thus be circumnavigated was once a surprising fact.

(Leech,1982: 77)

Furthermore, coordination is most often used along with subordination in texts and they could both be found in any text of a few lines in extent. It is this flexible use of both devices that provide the text with variety on the one hand, and with a well ordered presentation of information on the other. This combination also enables one to achieve a high degree of complexity within a single unified whole, e.g.,

“ Although I know it is a bit late to call, seeing your light still on and needing your advice if you’d be willing to help me, I parked my car as soon as I could find a place and ventured to come straight up without ringing the bell, because, believe me, I didn’t want to add waking your baby to the other inconveniences I’m causing you.” The clauses in this example are grammatically well formed and textually coherent (Greenbaum and Quirk,1990: 460).

3. Ellipsis and Structural Condensation

Ellipsis, like coordination, is a variable device which can occur in various grammatical structures. It involves the omission of elements which are recoverable from the linguistic context or the situation. In the following example, the ellipited elements are reinserted in brackets:

8. He squeezed her hand but (he) met with no response.

9. He and his mate both jumped out, he (jumped out) to go to the woman, his mate (jumped out) to stop other traffic on the bridge.

The words within brackets can be added without changing the meaning of the clause and without producing an ungrammatical structure. Thus, ellipsis, as a linguistic device, condenses (or reduces) the same meaning into a smaller number of words. There are, generally, two types of ellipsis: *textual* and *situational* (Biber et al,1999: 230):

In *textual* ellipsis, the missing words can be found in the nearby text. Typically, the missing words occur in the preceding text, as in 8 and 9 above. Thus, textual ellipsis is a means of avoiding unnecessary repetition. In *situational* ellipsis, on the other hand, the missing words are clear from the situation in which the utterance is used:

10. () saw Susan and her boyfriend weeks ago.

11. () hope everything is well with you.

In the preceding example, the subject 'I' is omitted, but it can be easily supplied from the context. Such type of ellipsis is a common feature of conversation in which one can easily fill the gaps using grammatical and situational knowledge (ibid). Likewise, in the following sections, we observe that speakers sometimes use subordinate clauses alone ,i.e., with the main clause ellipted. But this main clause can be easily supplied or understood by the listener from the context.

4. Dependent Clauses without a Main Clause (Unembedded Subordinate Clauses)

In special circumstances, dependent clauses can be used without being attached to a larger structure. The investigation in this paper resulted in the following situations:

i. In formulae structures:

There are certain patterns which are defective in terms of regular clause or sentence structure, such as exclamatory expressions, e.g.,

12. If only I had listened to my parents.

13. To think I was once a millionaire.

ii. In emphatic constructions:

Sometimes, in the process of communication, a writer or a speaker endeavours to separate clauses for the sake of expressing emphasis,

e.g.,

14. The government has got to go. Before it does any more damage.

iii. In structures expressing afterthoughts:

Subordinate clauses that express afterthoughts may also appear alone without getting them embedded into a main clause, e. g.,

15. Ok I did it. Though I didn't mean to.

(Swan,1980: 129)

iv. In sentential relative clauses, e.g.,

16. The scientists can only wait and hope.

(new paragraph) Which is what I shall be doing for the next three months.

v. In texts written in an informal style

17. Sneaky, insincere? Depends how it is done. Which brings us onto those Americans. We Brits recoil.

(Biber,2002: 230)

vi. In delivering series of continuous comments on an event:

Sometimes, subsequent clauses are used in a broadcast commentary on a continuous event, i.e., when a number of remarks follow one another continuously while an event is taking place. For instance, a football match commentator might use the following clause to comment on an act performed by a player, e.g.,

18. If just he made a stronger shooting.

vii. In block language:

The use of block language in newspaper headlines usually involve the utterance of subordinate clauses alone e.g.,

19. Paris Transport Workers to Strike.

viii. In dialogues :

Unembedded dependent clauses can occur most often in dialogues owing to the influence of ellipsis, e.g.,

20. I'm going out Mum. "As soon as you brush your hair"

21. A. You'll be careful with that, won't you?

B. Yea!

C. Cos it costs a lot of money.

(Swan,1980: 129)

Conclusion

Sentence is simply a name given to the largest stretch of language we normally consider in grammar. Obviously, English sentences are of different types depending on their internal structures. One of those types is the complex sentence which is composed of a *main* clause, a clause which can stand alone, and a *subordinate* clause, a clause which cannot stand alone, i.e., which cannot, for instance, start with a capital letter and end with a period, and is always annexed to or embedded as part of another clause. Grammarians, therefore, call these clause structures *independent* and *dependent* clauses or *high* and *low clauses*.

What this humble work has tried to reveal is to disclose those situations in which subordinate clauses are used alone without getting embedded into a larger structure (a main clause). That is, they are sometimes dealt with as if they were independent sentences, in that they are punctuated as independent clauses; starting with a capital letter and ending with a period.

The investigation has shown eight different situations in which this phenomenon is quite vividly observed, such as when users of a given language use subordinate clauses in emphatic constructions, texts written in an informal style, broadcast commentary, clauses expressing afterthoughts and

others. In all the above cases, although the subordinate clauses occur alone in surface, they do relate to some preceding or following utterance in the context.

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الجمل الثانوية غير الداخلة في تكوين الجمل الرئيسة

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خلاصة البحث

تتكون عملية التواصل او التفاهم ,سواء كان شفهيًا ام كتابيًا ,من وحدة كلامية واحدة او اكثر ,كل واحدة منها تحتوي على منطوق لغوي كامل ,مكون حسب صيغة قواعدية محددة . هذه الوحدة الكلامية تسمى بالجملة .

ان الجمل الانكليزية تتضمن اما وحدة تركيبية مستقلة ,و فى هذه الحالة تسمى بالجمل البسيطة ,او تتكون من اكثر من وحدة تركيبية مستقلة و فى هذه الحالة تسمى بالجمل المركبة، او تتضمن جملة مستقلة مع واحدة او اكثر من الجمل الغير مستقلة، و فى هذه الحالة تسمى بالجمل المعقدة، اذ ترتبط فيها الوحدات بوسيلة التركيب او الربط .

هذا البحث يتطرق الى تركيب الجمل المعقدة فقط ,و التى تتكون اصلا من جملة رئيسية قابلة للاستعمال والنطق بمفردها وتعبر عن معنى تام ,واخرى ثانوية غير قادرة على الاستقلالية بذاتها.

الهدف من هذا البحث هو التحرى عن بعض المواقف اللغوية التى تسمح لهذه الجمل الفرعية (الثانوية) ان تظهر لوحدها من غير ان تدخل ضمن الجملة الرئيسة .

و قد قسم البحث على اربعة محاور .المحور الاول يتضمن مقدمة عامة للموضوع ,و المحور الثانى يتعلق ببيان تركيب الجمل المعقدة فى اللغة الانكليزية .المحور الثالث يلقى الضوء على عملية الحذف و التكتيف التركيبى التى تؤدى بشكل مبا شر الى خلق الظاهرة المدروسة .اما المحور الرابع و الاخير فيعرض بعض الحالات او المواقف التى تم دراستها فى هذا البحث و التى تسمح للجمل الثانوية با لظهور لوحدها كجمل رئيسة فى التركيب السطحى