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Investigating Adverbial Clauses Used by EFL Students at University Level

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Abstract

Adverbial clauses represent a significant subject in English grammar, and mastering them –on the part of English learners- needs a high concentration on the use, functions, as well as the semantic role of this type of clauses. EFL learners may face some difficulties when dealing with adverbial clauses, especially when required to identify some types and functions of these clauses. Thus, this study is an attempt to investigate those difficulties that are faced by EFL students at university level. The researchers will first present a thorough discussion of adverbial clauses, then they go on to make tests for a sample of university students in order to find out to what extent students are able to use and recognize adverbial clauses

Key words: Adverbial clauses, dependent clauses, independent clauses, EFL students

1-Introduction .

A clause is the smallest grammatical unit that conveys a complete concept. It typically consists of a subject and a predicate that distinguish it from a phrase which does not contain such elements. In general, clauses can be either independent or dependent. Independent clauses are those which express complete thoughts or ideas, and thus, can stand alone as full sentences. On the other hand, dependent clauses are considered as supporting parts of a sentence, and they cannot stand by themselves as meaningful sentences. In other words, a sentence that has a dependent (subordinate) .clause must essentially have an independent (main) clause in order to have a complete meaning. Dependent or subordinate clauses are usually introduced by subordinate conjunctions. They can be classified into three types: noun clauses, adjective clauses, and adverb (or adverbial) clauses. As the titles suggest, each of these types has its own function when used in a full sentence. In this study, light will be shed on the adverbial clauses for their grammatical importance, specifically for university students of English

2-Aim of the Study .

The present study is mainly intended to investigate the problems faced by university students in recognizing and using adverbial clauses

3-Hypothesis .

It is hypothesized that EFL students at university level are able to identify the function of adverbial clauses, distinguish some of their types, and use them correctly

4-Procedures

The study first starts with a full discussion of adverbial clauses in English; then, to achieve the aim of the study, an arbitrary group of EFL students will be chosen to sit for a test on the functions, types, and use of adverbial clauses. Finally, the results of the test will be analyzed to reach out whether the hypothesis of the study proves true or not

5-Adverbial Clauses in English .

5-1What is an adverbial clause .

It would be important to define adverbial clauses before discussing their functions and types. Generally, all grammarians agree that adverbial clauses are classified as a type of dependent (subordinate) clauses. Forlini, et al (1990:160) state that "an adverb clause is a subordinate clause that modifies a verb, an adjective, or an adverb". Biber, et al (1999:194) claim that "adverbial clauses are used as adverbials in the main clause, generally as circumstance adverbials". A more detailed definition suggests that an adverbial clause is typically a dependent clause which acts as an adverb in a sentence, i.e. the whole clause is used to modify a verb, an adjective, or another adverb

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/adverbial-clause>

An adverbial clause is commonly introduced by a subordinate conjunction denoting the relationship to the main clause

If I have enough money, I would buy a new car

When we arrived home, it was almost dark

There's an hour and a half left before the show starts

As far as the placement of adverbial clauses is concerned, Quirk et al (1973:322) claim that adverbial clauses can occur in three positions within the main clauses: initial, medial, and final positions. However, initial and final positions tend to be more common for adverbial clauses

Because he is not experienced enough, he didn't get the job

You can call me whenever you need help

On the other hand, medial adverbial clauses are rarely occurring, and only a few number can be found in such constructions as "parenthetical comments", like in

You, when I last saw you, were still a little child

The weather, when it rains, gets wonderful here

The adverbial clauses in the above examples seem not to be essential elements in the whole sentences, they are mainly used for the purpose of adding clarifying comments

5-2Forms of adverbial clauses

Adverbial clauses can be found in the following syntactic forms suggested by Biber, et al (2002:358

1-Finite clauses .

She smiles to me whenever I meet her

2-Non-finite clauses, which are sub-divided into .

a- ing-clauses

The man suddenly rushed out, crashing the table and dropping the vase onto the floor

b- ed-clause

Astonished by his reaction, she left the place silently

c- to-infinitive

To get what you wish, you must work hard

d- verbless clauses

Inform us about the updates, if possible

5-3Syntactic functions of adverbial clauses .

Quirk et al (1985:1070-7) propose two main syntactic functions of adverbial clauses: adjunct and disjunct. They mention that syntactically, there is no difference between the two functions, since the adverbial clauses in both of them may have the same subordinator, and can occur in initial position or in final position. The difference between adjunct and disjunct functions appears when semantically considered

Adjunct clauses are integrated within the structure of the whole sentence and refer to "circumstances of the situation" in main clause. Disjuncts, on the other hand, provide comments either on the style of what is mentioned in the main clause (style disjuncts) or on its content (attitudinal or content disjuncts)

The following examples illustrate the semantic difference between adjunct and disjunct adverbial clauses

I have been waiting outside since it started to rain. adjunct adv. cl

I took an umbrella, since it was raining. (disjunct adv. cl)

He used to listen to music while he is studying. (adjunct adv. cl)

I stayed home, while my sister preferred to go out. (disjunct adv. cl)

Style and content disjuncts can be semantically differentiated in that style disjuncts denote the speaker's attitude towards what is said, whereas content disjuncts rather refers to the content of the main clause

She has to leave the job, though I have no right to say that. (style disjunct).

They enjoyed in the picnic, though it was raining. (content disjunct).

5-4Semantic functions of adverbial clauses .

Leech, et al (1982: 97) claim that adverbial clauses are semantically classified according to "what question they answer" (i.e. when, where, how, why, etc.), referring to specific meanings like time, place, manner, reason, etc. However, Quirk et al (1985:1077) suggest that adverbial clauses are classified into many types according to the semantic functions they have within sentences. These functions can be distinguished from the relationship an adverbial clause has to the main clause, and the adverbial clauses of each function are typically marked by subordinators indicating that relationship. What follows is a thorough discussion of these types

5-4-1 Adverbial clauses of time.

Both finite and non-finite adverbial clauses can be used for giving a concept of time in complex sentences. Finite clauses of time normally begin with such subordinators as when, until, after, before, since, as, as soon as, while, once

When he was a child, he was very naughty

Until she learns to behave well, we won't invite her to our parties

After I had finished my work, I went out with my friends

Non-finite –ing and -ed clauses of time may be introduced by mostly the same subordinators mentioned above

I replied to the e-mails while having my breakfast

Before eaten, fruits and vegetables must be washed well

5-4-2 Adverbial clauses of place.

The relationship of place is indicated by where or wherever introducing the adverbial clauses whether finite or non-finite

Wherever he went, he was welcome

Wherever found, flowers are admirable

When introducing adverbial clause of place, where denotes either the place of the action or the direction of the action

I found my glasses where I left them. (place of the action).

He went where his father sent him. (direction of the action).

5-4-3 Adverbial clauses of condition.

Conditional clauses typically refer to the degree of possibility of something to happen. <https://www.twinkl.com>. The subordinators if and unless are mainly used to indicate positive and negative condition respectively. As with time and place, adverbial clauses of condition can be both finite and non-finite

He must be foolish if he believed such a lie

Unless you stop smoking, you will not get better

If allowed, people would not stop taking photos in this area

Concerning the fulfilment of the condition, Quirk et al (1973:324) make distinction between "real and unreal" conditions, claiming that in real condition it is not certain whether the condition is fulfilled or not, whereas in unreal condition it could be predicted that it will not be fulfilled

If you drop this glass down, it will break

If he had been experienced enough, he would have got the job

5-4-4 Adverbial clauses of concession..

An adverbial clause of concession is used to show contrast with the main clause. Concession adverbial clauses are introduced by such subordinators as though, although, while, whereas, and even if

We enjoyed the trip, though/although it was raining most of the time

She liked the show while/whereas all her friends felt bored

Even if you dislike Jane, you must respect her

These subordinators, except whereas, can also introduce non-finite clauses of concession

Although feeling tired, he continued working all the day

Even if troubled by many problems in his life, he always seems well

5-4-5 Adverbial clauses of reason.

Clauses of reason often convey "the reason or cause for an action or event". <https://englishacademy101.com>. The most common subordinators indicating reason are because, as, and since

We all shocked because we didn't expect him to say that

As/Since the child behaved badly, his mother punished him

Non-finite clauses can express reason without subordinators introducing them

Being the only one who saw the accident, he was heavily questioned by the police

5-4-6 Adverbial clauses of circumstance.

Circumstance adverbial clauses express the relation between a thought or proposition and its conclusion. The subordinators used with clauses of reason, i.e. because, as, and since, can be used to indicate this meaning

Because/Since/As he was late, he was not allowed to attend the lecture

Hence, there is another compound subordinator, namely seeing that, which can be used in this respect

Seeing that the weather was bad, the airlines postponed all the journeys

As with the non-finite clauses of reason, those of circumstance can occur without subordinators

Being late, he was not allowed to attend the lecture

5-4-7 Adverbial clauses of purpose.

Purpose clauses indicate the goal behind doing something. <https://leveragreedu.com>. They are mainly represented by to-infinitive non-finite clauses

To win the competition, you must work hard

Adverbial clauses of purpose can also be introduced by such subordinators as in order to and so as to

You must work hard in order to win the competition

David didn't tell Rita the truth so as not to hurt her feelings

However, clauses of purpose can be finite and introduced by so and so that

You can use the GPS so (that) you may find the way easier

5-4-8 Adverbial clauses of result.

Result adverbial clauses are used to "say what may happen as a result of the action mentioned in the main clause". <https://www.scribd.com>. They are introduced by the same subordinators that introduce clauses of purpose, i.e. so and so that. This may lead to overlapping in meaning between both types. The main difference is that result clauses express an achieved outcome unlike purpose clauses which express a desired outcome. This is clearly represented by the requirement of a modal auxiliary in purpose clauses but not in result clauses. Another difference is that result clauses are disjuncts while purpose clauses are adjuncts

He saved some money, so that he bought a car. (result).

He saved some money so that he could buy a car. (purpose).

5-4-9 Adverbial clauses of similarity and comparison.

Clauses of similarity and comparison are typically predication adjuncts. Similarity clauses are 'introduced by as and like, which sometimes are modified by 'just' and 'exactly

He speaks (just) as/like his father did

Comparison clauses, on the other hand, are introduced by as if, as though and like

He speaks as if he is a lawyer

When the verb is dynamic, both similarity and comparison clauses are related with manner, as in the previous examples. However, similarity clauses with static verbs convey pure similarity, as in

The place was (just) as I imagined

5-4-10 Adverbial clauses of proportion.

Proportion clauses express equality between two situations, and they are introduced by as or by the "correlative the....the" with comparative forms

As he worked hard, he felt happy

The more you practice, the better you get

5-4-11 Adverbial clauses of preference.

Sentences containing subordinate clauses of preference provide two options; one in the main clause and the other in the subordinate clause. The option presented in the main clause is preferred to that presented in the subordinate clause. Adverbial clauses of preference are basically introduced by rather than and sooner than followed by a bare infinitive

Rather than send him a message, I'd call and ask about him

6-Data analysis and Results of the Test .6

In order to achieve the aims of the present study, the researchers used the quantitative analytical method. This method is students test (st). The test is designed for a sample of (50) students chosen randomly. All are third year students in the English Department/ College of Basic Education

The test consists of two questions (see appendix), in the first question the students are asked to find out the adverb clauses, while in the second question the students are given ten sentences with ten choices, and are asked to choose the correct answer

6-1 Results of Question /1

Sentence (1): Even if it rains, I will come

Table 1

Sentence (1)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	17	34 %
incorrect answers	33	66 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (1) shows that (17) of the participants were able to answer correctly, whereas (33) of the

students' answers were incorrect

Sentence (2): When you have finished your work, you may go home

Table /2

Sentence (2)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	22	44 %
incorrect answers	28	56 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (2) shows that (22) of the participants' answers were true whereas (28) answers were correct. This shows that most student, are unable to specify the adverbial clause

Sentence (3): You can put it wherever you like

Table - 3

Sentence (3)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	19	38 %
incorrect answers	31	62 %
Total	50	100 %

The results shown in table (3) indicate like the previous tables that most students (31) were unable to answer correctly, while only (19) of them managed to select the correct choice

Sentence (4): I didn't buy the watch because it was expensive

Table - 4

Sentence (4)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	20	40 %
incorrect answers	30	60 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (4) shows that the answer of (20) students are correct while (30) students answers are incorrect

Sentence (5) : You must go whether you hear from him or not

Table - 5

Sentence (5)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	20	40 %
incorrect answers	30	60 %
Total	50	100 %

The results shown in table (5) Shows that only (19) students answered correctly whereas (31) students' answers were wrong. The results indicate that students have a problem in recognizing adverbial clauses

Sentence (6) : He spoke in such a low voice that few people could hear him

Table - 6

Sentence (6)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	11	22 %
incorrect answers	39	78 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (6) shows that (11) students are able to answer correctly, while (39) students' answers are incorrect

Sentence (7) Since you have apologized, we will take no further action against you

Table - 7

Sentence (7)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	9	18 %
incorrect answers	41	82 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (7) shows that only (9) students are able to give the correct answer while (41) students are unable to answer correctly. This means that most students have a problem in recognizing adverbial clauses

Sentence (8) : It rained like it would never stop

Table - 8

Sentence (8)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	12	24 %
incorrect answers	38	76 %
Total	50	100 %

The results in table (8) show that only (12) participants answer correctly; whereas fail in giving the correct answer

Sentence (9) : He was so weak that he couldn't stand

Table - 9

Sentence (9)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	21	42 %
incorrect answers	29	58 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (9) shows that (21) of the students' answers are correct, while (29) answers are wrong

Sentence (10) : As he was not there, I spoke to his mother

Table -10

Sentence (10)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	15	30 %
incorrect answers	35	70 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (10) shows that (15) students answered correctly while (35).

The results reveal a big problem concerning the recognition of adverbial clauses

6-2The Results of Question 2.

Sentence (1): He resigned from his job, on ground that he was in poor health

Table - 1

Sentence (1)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	10	20 %
incorrect answers	40	80 %
Total	50	100 %

In table (1) only (10) answers are correct and (40) are incorrect which means that students are unable to select the correct answer

Sentence (2): Entering the room, he noticed the windows were open

Table - 2

Sentence (2)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	7	14 %
incorrect answers	43	86 %
Total	50	100 %

In table (2) the same problem is obvious in students answers. The majority of students answers are incorrect (43), while only (7) answers are correct

Sentence (3): We stayed inside till the danger was past

Table - 3

Sentence (3)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	11	22 %
incorrect answers	39	78 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (3) show that The frequency of correct answers is only (11) compared with the frequency of incorrect answers which is 39

Sentence (4): I'll never eat oyster as long as I live

Table - 4

Sentence (4)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	6	12 %
incorrect answers	44	88 %
Total	50	100 %

Table (4) shows that the number of correct answers is very low (6), as being compared with the number of incorrect answers which is 44

Sentence (5): Because he was 20 minutes late, he didn't dare to enter the lecture

Table - 5

Sentence (5)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	21	42 %
incorrect answers	29	58 %
Total	50	100 %

The results in table (5) as the results in the previous tables show that the percentage of correct answers is (42%) which is less than the percentage of incorrect answers' which is (58%)

Sentence (6): He has been living there since he entered the university

Table - 6

Sentence (6)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	18	36 %
incorrect answers	32	64 %
Total	50	100 %

The results in table (6) show that only (18) Students' answers are correct while (32) Students answers are incorrect

Sentence (7): It rained like it would never stop

Table - 7

Sentence (7)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	13	26
incorrect answers	37	74
Total	50	100 %

Table (7) shows that only (13) Participants answered correctly while (37) answers are wrong

Sentence (8): She went to England after she graduated

Table - 8

Sentence (8)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	21	42
incorrect answers	29	58
Total	50	100 %

The results in table (8) show that the number of correct answers is only (21); whereas the number of incorrect answers is (29) which is comprehensively higher than the correct ones

Sentence (9): He was so tired that he couldn't go out

Table - 9

Sentence (9)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	7	14
incorrect answers	43	86
Total	50	100 %

The results in table (9) again reflect a big problem in recognizing adverbial clauses. The number of correct answers is only (7) while the number of incorrect answers is 43

Sentence (10): The results were just as I had expected

Table - 10

Sentence (9)	Frequency	Percentage
Correct answers	7	14
incorrect answers	43	86
Total	50	100 %

Like the previous results, the results in table (10) reflect the same problem again. The number of correct answers (19) only which is less than the number of in correct answer which is 31

7-Conclusions and Recommendations

In the present study the researchers hypothesize that third year students in the English Department / College of Basic Education are able to identify and use adverbial clauses correctly. To test the validity of this hypothesis a test has been administered to a sample of 50 students. The results of the first question in which students are asked to find out the adverbial clauses show clearly that the target students have some kind of weakness in this respect, this is very clear in the score numbers of correct answers vs. incorrect answers shown below

Sentence 1: 17 vs. 33

Sentence 2: 22 vs. 28

Sentence 3: 19 vs. 31

Sentence 4: 20 vs. 30

Sentence 5: 20 vs. 30

Sentence 6: 11 vs. 39

Sentence 7: 9 vs. 41

Sentence 8: 12 vs. 38

Sentence 9: 21 vs. 39

Sentence 10: 15 vs. 35

The results of the second question in which students are asked to choose the correct adverb phrase to be put in the blank space, show again lower score of correct answers compared with incorrect ones. The results of correct scores vs. incorrect scores are shown below

Sentence 1: 10 vs.40

Sentence 2: 7 vs. 43

Sentence 3: 11 vs. 39

Sentence 4: 6 vs. 44

Sentence 5: 21 vs. 20

Sentence 6: 18 vs. 32

Sentence 7: 13 vs. 37

Sentence 8: 21 vs. 29

Sentence 9: 7 vs. 43

Sentence 10: 19 vs. 31

The previous results show obviously that the hypothesis is invalid. Therefore, the researchers suggest the following points to be taken into consideration

1-Students should be taught adverbial clauses at early stages .

2-Grammar teachers should give more emphasis to this area of English grammar .

Appendix 1

Q1-Underline the adverb clauses in the following sentences

1-Even if it rains, I will come. concession .

2-When you have finished your work, you may go. time .

3-You can put it wherever you like . place .

4-I didn't buy that watch because it was expensive . reason .

5-You must go whether you hear from him or not .Condition

6-He spoke in such a low voice that few people could hear him .result .

7-Since you have apologized, we will take no further action against you .Cause .

8-It rained like it would never stop .manner .

9-He was so weak that he could not stand .result .

10-As he was not there, I spoke to his mother (cause)

Appendix 2

Q2 -Read the sentences below. Choose the correct adverbial clause from the list and put it in blank space

long as I live - as.

like it would never stop -

after she graduated entering the room-

.on ground that he was in poor health as I had expected -

-till the danger was past

-.Because he was 20 minutes late

Since he entered the university that he couldn't go out-

1-He resigned from his job, on ground that he was in poor health .

2-Entering the room he noticed the windows were open

- 3-We stayed inside till the danger was past .
- 4-I'll never eat oyster as long as I live
- 5-Because he was 20 minutes late, he didn't dare to enter the lecture
- 6-He has been living there since he entered the university .
- 7-It rained like it would never stop .
- 8-She went to England after she graduated .
- 9-He was so tired that he couldn't go out .
- 10-The results were just as I had expected

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