

Forms and Functions of Clauses in English

A- Clauses are defined as grammatical structures that contain a subject and a predicate. Clauses can be of two types: main clause and minor clause.

Minor Clause or a sub-sentence: It is a structure that cannot give a complete thought alone even if having all the sentence elements because it is, itself, a part or an element in the main sentence. It can be a sub sentence (or a sub-ordinate clause) within a main sentence. It can be of many types according to the purpose of analysis referred to.

The English language has three forms of clauses according to their function. Each grammatical form of clause in English performs distinct grammatical functions.

1- Noun clause

Noun clauses are defined as **subordinate clauses** formed by a subordinating conjunction followed by a clause. The subordinating conjunctions in English that introduce noun clauses are *that*, *if*, *whether*, *wh-* words, and *wh-ever* words. For example, the following italicized clauses are examples of noun clauses:

- The library will send a bill to *whoever damaged this book*.
- *Whether you will pay for the damage* is not even a question.
- The judge has given *that you behaved well after your arrest* some consideration.

Noun clauses perform nominal functions, or functions prototypically performed by noun phrases. The nine main **functions of noun clauses** in English grammar are:

1. **Subject**
2. **Subject complement**
3. **Direct object**
4. **Object complement**
5. **Indirect object**
6. **Prepositional complement**
7. **Adjective phrase complement**
8. **Noun phrase complement**
9. **Appositive**

Noun clauses are also referred to as content clauses.

2- Adjective clause

Adjective clauses are defined as **subordinate clauses** formed by a subordinating conjunction followed by a clause. The subordinating conjunctions in English that introduce adjective clauses are *who*, *whom*, *that*, \emptyset , *which*, *whose*, *when*, and *where*. For example, the following italicized clauses are examples of adjective clauses:

- The woman *that works in the bakery* is my neighbor.
- The car *you hit* belongs to the man *whose daughter is my classmate*.

- The restaurant *where you left your purse* is known for its unique pasta dishes.

The primary **grammatical function of adjective clauses** is **noun phrase modifier**. **Noun phrase modifiers** are defined as words, phrases, and clauses that describe or modify a noun phrase. Adjective clauses may also, although rarely, function as **verb phrase modifiers**, **prepositional phrase modifiers**, and **noun clause modifiers**.

Adjective clauses are also referred to as relative clauses. The subordinating conjunctions that introduce adjective clauses are also called **relative pronouns**.

3- **Adverb clause**

Adverb clauses are defined as **subordinate clauses** formed by a subordinating conjunction followed by a clause. Some of the more common subordinating conjunctions in English that introduce adverb clauses include:

- after
- although
- because
- before
- even though
- if
- once
- since
- so that
- though
- unless
- until
- when
- whereas
- while

For example, the following italicized clauses are examples of adverb clauses:

- *After she gave the baby a bath*, she decided to take a nap.
- The girl cannot usually eat beef stew *because she is allergic to carrots*.
- The couple has been saving money *so that they can go on a vacation*.

All adverb clauses perform the grammatical function of **adjunct adverbial**. Adjunct adverbials are words, phrases, and clauses that modify or describe an entire clause by providing additional information about time, place, manner, condition, purpose, reason, result, and concession.

B- According to the type of the verb phrase it contains, a clause can be:

1- A **finite clause** that has a finite verb able of showing clearly the tense. It can be a main (super ordinate clause), or a secondary (minor, sub-ordinate , written down in a bold type) one as an element in the sentence (S, V, O, C, Adv) :

- **that I helped him** was nice. S
- I should blame **who reveals this disaster**, O
- It is sure **that I am honest with you**. Cadj

- I was late **because there were a heavy traffic jam.** adv
- The truth sounds **what he has just said.** Cs
- he made her **what she is now.** Co

2- A **non-finite** clause that has a non-finite verb unable of showing clearly the tense. It can be only a sub-ordinate (minor, secondary) clause and as an element in the sentence. It is of three main types of verbs:

- a- To+infinitive V. ex: **To help him** is a nice thing. S
- b- ing-participle form of V: I like **going abroad.** O
- c- ed-participle form of V: **Damaged in the street,** I left the car. Adv

References

Quirk, Randolph and Greenbaum, Sidney. 1992. *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

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