Lecture Three: An Introduction to Complex Syntactic Structures

· Noun Clauses (NC)

Definition

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, Ø, 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 can begin with four main kinds of markers:

1. that

- We know **that** he read the report.

- I hope **that** you have a good time!

- Jake said **that** the food was delicious.

- I think **that** it costs $10.

The subordinator *that* can also be removed:

- We know **that** he read the report. >> We know he read the report.

- I hope **that** you have a good time! >> I hope you have a good time!

- Jake said **that** the food was delicious. >> Jake said the food was delicious.

- I think **that** it costs $10. >> I think it costs $10.

2. If or whether

We use "if" or "whether" to describe a yes/no question or "or" question in our minds or expressed to another person.

- I wonder **if** Eva will also speak at the event.

- He asked **if** they were planning a trip to Slovakia.

- I don't know **whether** they will come to the party.

- She can't remember **whether** Pam or Ben will speak first at the event.

3. wh- question words (also called interrogatives): who, whom, what, when, where, why, and how

- I don't know **who** she is.

- I remember **whom** you chose.

- She understands **what** the problem is.

- He forgot **when** the movie starts.

- I remember **where** I put my keys.

- They explained **why** they did it.

- We discussed **how** we solved the problem.

4. Question word-ever pronoun: whoever, whatever, wherever, whenever, whomever, however, and whichever

- You can invite **whoever** you want.

- She helps **whomever** she can.

- You can bring **whatever** you need.

- The cat visits us **whenever** it likes.

- They were successful **wherever** they worked.

- Students can design their products for the group project **however** they desire.

Grammatical Function of Noun Clauses

Noun clauses perform nominal functions, or functions prototypically performed by nouns and noun phrases. They are also referred to as content clauses. The eleven main functions of noun clauses in English grammar are:

1. Subjects

The first grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the subject. A subject is a word, phrase, or clause that performs the action of or acts upon the verb. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as subjects:

- *Whoever ate my lunch* is in big trouble.

- *How you will finish all your homework on time* is beyond me.

- *That the museum cancelled the lecture* disappoints me.

2. Subject Complements

The second grammatical function that noun phrases perform is the subject complement. A subject complement is a word, phrase, or clause that follows a copular, or linking, verb and describes the subject of a clause. The terms *predicate nominative and predicate noun* are also used for noun clauses that function as subject complements. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as subject complements:

- The truth was *that the moving company lost all your furniture*.

- My question is *whether you will sue the company for losses*.

- The first place winner will be *whoever swims the farthest in an hour*.

3. Direct Objects

The third grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the direct object. A direct object is a word, phrase, or clause that follows a transitive verb and answers the question "who?" or "what?" receives the action of the verb. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as direct objects:

- The counselor has been wondering *if she chose the right career*.

- Do you know *when the train should arrive*?

- Our dog eats *whatever we put in his bowl*.

4. Object Complements

The fourth grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the object complement. Object complements are defined as words, phrases, and clauses that directly follow and modify the direct object. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as object complements:

- Her grandfather considers his biggest mistake *that he did not finish college*.

- The committee has announced the winner *whoever wrote the essay on noun clauses*.

- You may call your husband *whatever you wish*.

5. Indirect Objects

The fifth grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the indirect object. An indirect object is word, phrase, or clause that indicates to or for whom or what the action of a di-transitive verb is performed. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as indirect objects:

- The judge will give *what you said* some deliberation during her decision.

- The group has given *that most Americans do not support their cause* little consideration.

- My parents gave *that my brother wants his own car* much thought.

6. Prepositional Complements (Object of a Preposition)

The sixth grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the prepositional complement. A prepositional complement is a word, phrase, or clause that directly follows a preposition and completes the meaning of the prepositional phrase. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as prepositional complements:

- Some people believe in *whatever organized religion tells them*.

- We have been waiting for *whoever will pick us up from the party*.

- My husband did not think about *that I wanted some nice jewelry for my birthday*.

7. Adjective Phrase Complements

The seventh grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the adjective phrase complement. An adjective phrase complement is a phrase or clause that completes the meaning of an adjective phrase. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as adjective phrase complements:

- I am pleased *that you are studying noun clauses*.

- The toddler was surprised *that throwing a tantrum did not get him his way*.

- My brother is angry *that someone dented his new car*.

- I am sad *that my husband is sick again*.

8 Appositives

The eighth grammatical function that noun clauses perform is the appositive. An appositive is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies or explains another noun phrase. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as appositives:

- That man, *whoever is he*, tried to steal some library books.

- The problem, *that the storm knocked out power*, is affecting the entire town.

- Your question, *whether you should wear the blue dress or pink one*, is frivolous in the situation.

9. Object of Infinitive

As an object of infinitive, a noun clause functions not as the object of the main verb, but of the infinitive. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as objects of the infinitives:

- Everyone wanted to know *where they went.*

- The investigator came to notice *what they might have missed.*

- Please, feel free to ask *whatever you want to know.*

- We are determined to do *what we want to do.*

10. Object of Gerund

A noun clause can function as the object of a gerund in a gerund phrase. For example, the following italicized noun clauses function as objects of the gerund:

- Knowing *where they went* is essential.

- Preserving *what is left in nature* needs a collective effort.

- Believing *what your eyes see sometimes* leads you to misunderstanding.

- She is really good in deciding *what should be done* and estimating *what it costs.*

11. Object of Participle

- The girl was so grateful, knowing *that her parents came home.*

- Remembering *what he did,* I couldn't forgive him.

Forming Noun Clauses from Questions

One way to analyze noun clauses is via formation from interrogative constructions (questions). Only finite noun clauses can be formed from questions. The only subordinating conjunctions that can introduce noun clauses formed from questions are *if, whether,* and *wh-* words.

To form a noun clause from an interrogative construction, use the following syntax patterns.

1. If the interrogative construction begins with the copular verb *be,* un-invert the subject and the verb and insert either *if* or *whether* before the subject. For example:

Was your grandmother beautiful? → if/whether [was] your grandmother was beautiful

if your grandmother was beautiful

whether your grandmother was beautiful

2. If the interrogative construction begins with the do operator, simply replace the do operator with if or whether and conjugate the verb to agree with the number and person of the subject and tense of the do operator. For example:

Does his aunt wear purple lipstick? → if/whether [does] his aunt wears purple lipstick

if his aunt wears purple lipstick

whether his aunt wears purple lipstick

3. If the interrogative construction begins with an auxiliary verb other than the do operator, un-invert the subject and the verb and insert either if or whether before the subject. For example:

Had the delinquents been being punished? → if/whether [had] the delinquents had been being punished

if the delinquents had been being punished

whether the delinquents had been being punished

4. If the interrogative construction begins with a wh- question word and the copular verb be, un-invert the subject and the verb. For example:

Who was your second grade teacher? → who [was] your second grade teacher was

who your second grade teacher was

5. If the interrogative construction begins with a wh- question word and contains a do operator, remove the do operator and conjugate the verb to agree with the number and person of the subject and tense of the do operator. For example:

To whom does the company send cards? → to whom [does] the company sends cards

to whom the company sends cards

6. If the interrogative construction begins with a wh- question word and begins with an auxiliary verb other than the do operator, un-invert the subject and the verb. For example:

Where are you flying? → where [are] you are flying

where you are flying

7. If the wh- word functions as the subject of the interrogative construction, then the noun clause and interrogative construction are identical in form. For example:

Who stole the cookies? → who stole the cookies
who stole the cookies

Using Noun Clauses from Questions

Noun clauses formed from interrogative constructions are used to embed questions into the grammatical structure of the main clause, most frequently as a direct object or prepositional complement. For example:

Ask your grandpa. + Does he read science fiction?
Ask your grandpa if he reads science fiction.

His father asked her. + What was he thinking?
His father asked her what he was thinking.
His father asked her about what he was thinking.

- Note that prescriptive grammar rules require that the verb tense of the noun clause parallels the verb tense of the main clause if the main clause contains the past tense. However, native English speakers sometimes use different tenses in the two clauses. For example:

The boss questioned me. + When will the shipment arrived?
The boss questioned me about when the shipment would arrive. (more formal)
The boss questioned me about when the shipment will arrive. (less formal)

The tense rule does not apply if the main clause contains the present tense. For example:

Do you know? + Where did she live last year?
Do you know where she lived last year?
*Do you know where she lives last year? (incorrect)

Reporting Verbs

A noun clause can be used to report what someone has said without using quotation marks or writing from the point of view of the reporter.

It has been reported *that drinking four cups of coffee a day is good for your health.*

Maintaining verb tense agreement in noun clauses

- If the reporting verb is in present or future tense, the noun clause verb is not changed.
- If the reporting verb is in the past, the noun clause verb will usually be in a past form.

Exceptions: If the reported sentence deals with a fact or general truth, the present tense is used:

*She said that the earth **orbits** around the sun.*

- If will was used in the reported statement and expresses future time, and if the statement still holds true, the *will* may not be changed to *would*:

The scientist said that 2016 will be the hottest year on record.

Subjunctive in noun clauses

Subjunctive verbs are used in sentences to express or stress wishes, importance, urgency, etc. A subjunctive verb usually appears in a noun clause beginning with *that*, and it uses the simple form of a verb that does not have the present, past or future forms. The subjunctive verb is neither singular nor plural. Examples:

- The father advised *that she not go to the cinema alone.*
- His mother suggested *that he see a doctor.*
- The kidnappers demand *that the company's Manager pay for our release.*
- We insisted *that the other party honor the terms of the agreement.*
- The villagers recommended *that the driver take the other route which was shorter.*
- It is important *that everyone be told the truth.*

Reduced or Abridged Clauses

It is possible to reduce noun clauses embedded in reported speech, indirect question, or subjunctive to infinitive, gerund, or prepositional phrase.

1. *Noun clauses to gerund phrases*

When you change noun clauses to gerund phrase, you must first change the verb in the noun clause to its *ing* form.

Examples:

- Full: They admit that they have problems at school.

  Reduced: They admit having problems at school.

- Full: They recommend that you buy a less expensive car.

  Reduced: They recommend you buying a less expensive car.

- Full: I suggested that John buys a less expensive car.

  Reduced: I suggested John's buying a less expensive car.

- Full: That the peace treaty was signed was important.

  Reduced: The signing of the peace treaty was important.

2. *Noun clauses to infinitive phrases*

When you change noun clauses to infinitive phrases, you must first delete the clause marker and change the verb in the noun clause to an infinitive by adding "to" the base form of the verb.

Advice

- He advised me *that I should review the lessons.*

→ He advised me to review the lessons.

- He told me that I should show him the passport.

→ He told me to show him the passport.

Request

- He asked me *if I would pick him up.*

→ He asked me to pick him up.

- Please inform where we will have the meeting.

→ *Please inform us where to have the meeting.*

Offer

- I'd like to know *how I can help.*

→ *I'd like to know how to help.*

- He offered *that he would clean the car for me.*

→ *He offered to help clean the car for me.*

Polite question

- I don't know *what I should do.*

→ *I don't know what to do.*

- She wondered *how she could learn English faster.*

→ *She wondered how to learn English faster.*

Reported speech

- He doesn't know how he should solve his problem.

→ *He doesn't know how to solve his problem.*

- He is not sure *whether he should study economics or marketing.*

→ *He is not sure whether to study economics or marketing.*

Practice

- Underline the noun clause in each sentence.

Example: I know <u>what the answer is.</u>

1. Do you know who is the governor of Ohio?

2. Susan thinks that she will get the job at Martin's Store.

3. Whoever phoned us didn't let the phone ring long enough.

4. Andy promised that he'd be on time for the party.

5. Whether or not she should go camping worried Jane.

6. Mr. Sims mentioned that he'd be late for the meeting.

7. Whoever sent us this letter should have signed his or her name.

8. Who your ancestors were makes no difference to me.

9. Mr. Barnes swore that he would tell the truth.

10. That anyone else could be doing the same experiments never occurred to him.

11. The old man knew where the treasure was kept.

12. I'll never forget what happened on our way to the carnival.

13. I knew that the safe was behind the picture.

14. Amy assured Miss Jordan that she understood the problems.

15. What happened on June 30, 1973, will never be forgotten in our town.

16. We knew that we were in for a spell of hot, humid weather.

17. Whoever visits us will be assured of a freshly painted room.

18. Whoever sent us this Christmas card forgot to sign his or her name.

19. We all believe that Jim will be elected class president.

20. Mr. Norman regrets that he didn't travel more in his youth.