



COMPLEX SENTENCE: THEORY, STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC TYPES

Teshaboyeva Nafisa Zubaydulla kizi

Jizzakh branch of the National University of Uzbekistan

named after Mirzo Ulugbek

The Faculty of Psychology

the department of Foreign languages

Philology and teaching languages

nafisateshaboyeva@gmail.com

Muminova Odina Gulom kizi

Student of group 402-22

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18030102>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 21st December 2025

Accepted: 22nd December 2025

Published: 23rd December 2025

KEYWORDS

complex sentence, subordination, subordinate clause, subject clause, object clause, attributive clause, appositive clause, predicative clause.

ABSTRACT

The complex sentence occupies a central position in theoretical English grammar, as it reflects the speaker's ability to express logically and semantically interrelated ideas within a single syntactic structure. A complex sentence consists of one independent (principal) clause and one or more dependent (subordinate) clauses, which are grammatically and semantically linked to the main clause. This article examines the theoretical foundations of the complex sentence, its structural and semantic classification, and provides a detailed analysis of complex sentences containing subject, object, predicative, attributive, and appositive clauses. The study aims to systematize the main approaches to the classification of complex sentences and to demonstrate the functional diversity of subordinate clauses in modern English.

Introduction

The complex sentence occupies a central position in theoretical English grammar because it reflects the speaker's ability to express logically and semantically interrelated ideas within a single syntactic structure. A complex sentence consists of one independent, or principal, clause and one or more dependent, or subordinate, clauses that are grammatically and semantically linked to the main clause. Unlike simple sentences, which contain a single predicative center, and compound sentences, which are based on coordination between clauses of equal status, the complex sentence is characterized by subordination and a clear hierarchical relationship between its components. This structural hierarchy allows language users to convey cause, condition, concession, purpose, time, result, and other logical relations in a compact and precise form, making complex sentences especially significant in academic, scientific, and formal styles of communication. From the perspective of modern linguistic theory, syntax is concerned not only with sentence form but also with the relations between sentence elements and the meanings these relations encode. In this respect, the complex sentence represents a higher level of syntactic organization, as it integrates several predicative units into one communicative whole. The study of complex sentences is therefore essential for understanding how thought is

structured and verbalized in language. Through subordination, speakers are able to organize information according to its relative importance, placing the main idea in the principal clause and supplementary or explanatory information in subordinate clauses. This hierarchical arrangement reflects the cognitive processes involved in human reasoning and discourse formation. Subordinate clauses often perform functions similar to those of sentence parts, such as subject, object, predicative, or attribute, and this functional similarity provides the basis for their traditional classification in English grammar. Subject clauses function as the grammatical subject of the sentence and often appear when the formal subject *it* is used, while object clauses complete the meaning of verbs, adjectives, or nouns in the principal clause. Predicative clauses form part of a compound nominal predicate and serve to characterize or identify the subject, whereas attributive clauses modify nouns and provide descriptive or identifying information. Appositive clauses, in turn, explain or specify the meaning of abstract nouns, contributing to greater semantic clarity. The grammatical connection between the main clause and the subordinate clause is established through various means of subordination, including subordinating conjunctions, relative pronouns, relative adverbs, and, in some cases, asyndetic connection. These formal markers not only signal grammatical dependence but also indicate the semantic relationship between clauses. Intonation patterns and word order further support the interpretation of subordinate relations, especially in spoken discourse. Thus, the complex sentence serves as a crucial syntactic device that enables speakers and writers to express nuanced meanings and complex logical relationships within a single sentence. Its study is indispensable for theoretical grammar, as it reveals the interaction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, and for practical language use, as it enhances precision, coherence, and expressiveness in communication.

Theoretical Foundations of the Complex Sentence

In theoretical grammar, a complex sentence is defined as a syntactic unit containing at least two clauses: one principal clause, which is structurally independent, and one or more subordinate clauses, which depend on the principal clause both grammatically and semantically. The principal clause is capable of functioning as a complete sentence on its own, whereas the subordinate clause cannot exist independently without losing its grammatical and communicative function. For example, in the sentence *I know that he is right*, the main clause *I know* expresses a complete thought, while the subordinate clause *that he is right* functions as an object and derives its meaning only in relation to the principal clause. The relationship between clauses in a complex sentence is expressed through various means of subordination. One of the most common devices is the use of subordinating conjunctions such as *that*, *if*, *because*, and *although*. These conjunctions explicitly indicate the type of logical relationship between the clauses. For instance, in *She stayed at home because she was ill*, the conjunction *because* introduces a clause of cause, explaining the reason for the action expressed in the main clause. Similarly, in *If it rains, we will cancel the trip*, the conjunction *if* signals a conditional relationship, showing that the realization of the main action depends on a certain condition. Another important means of subordination is the use of relative pronouns such as *who*, *which*, and *that*. These pronouns introduce attributive clauses and simultaneously refer back to a noun in the main clause. In the sentence *The student who answered the question correctly received praise*, the relative pronoun *who* connects the subordinate clause to the noun *student* and provides additional identifying information. Relative adverbs such as *when*, *where*, and *why* perform a similar function, as seen in *This is the place where we first met*, where the subordinate clause specifies the noun *place*. In some cases, subordination is realized without an explicit connective, a phenomenon known as asyndetic connection. In such sentences, the relationship between the clauses is understood from context, word order, and intonation. For example, in *I thought you knew the answer*, the object clause *you knew the answer* is not introduced by the conjunction *that*, yet its subordinate status is clear. Asyndetic subordination

is especially common in spoken English and informal written styles, where brevity and natural flow are preferred. Intonation and word order also play a significant role in interpreting subordinate relations, particularly in spoken language. A pause or a change in intonation often marks the boundary between the main clause and the subordinate clause and helps the listener identify the hierarchical relationship between them. For example, in *What he said | surprised everyone*, the pause emphasizes the subject clause and highlights its function within the sentence.

Scholars emphasize that the complex sentence mirrors the logical structure of human thought. Typically, the principal clause conveys the central idea of the utterance, while the subordinate clause provides additional, dependent information that specifies, explains, or limits the meaning of the main clause. In *It is surprising that he refused the offer*, the main clause expresses evaluation, while the subordinate clause clarifies what exactly is surprising. Similarly, in *The fact that she succeeded proves her determination*, the subordinate clause explains the content of the abstract noun fact. For this reason, the theory of the complex sentence is closely connected with semantics and pragmatics, not merely with formal syntactic patterns. Complex sentences enable speakers to organize information logically, highlight what is most important, and guide the listener or reader through the intended interpretation. As a result, they play a crucial role in academic discourse, formal writing, and advanced language use, where precision and clarity of meaning are of primary importance. From a structural point of view, complex sentences may be classified according to the number and arrangement of subordinate clauses, as these factors determine the internal organization of the sentence. Some complex sentences contain only one subordinate clause, which may occupy different positions in relation to the principal clause. The subordinate clause may precede the main clause, as in *What he said surprised everyone*, follow it, as in *I remember the day when we first met*, or interrupt it, adding supplementary information within the main structure. Despite the difference in position, the hierarchical relationship between the clauses remains unchanged, with the subordinate clause always depending on the principal clause. Other complex sentences contain several subordinate clauses, whose interrelations may vary. In cases of homogeneous subordination, two or more subordinate clauses depend on the same element of the main clause and perform the same syntactic function. For example, in the sentence *She said that she was tired and that she wanted to leave*, both object clauses depend on the verb *said* and fulfill the same grammatical role. In heterogeneous subordination, subordinate clauses perform different functions within the same sentence, as in *I remember the day when we met because it was raining*, where the attributive clause *when we met* modifies the noun *day*, while the clause *because it was raining* expresses cause. In consecutive, or chain, subordination, one subordinate clause depends on another subordinate clause rather than directly on the principal clause. This can be observed in sentences such as *I heard that she said that the exam was difficult*, where the second object clause depends on the first subordinate clause. These structural patterns demonstrate the flexibility and expressive potential of complex sentences in English and allow speakers to build sentences of considerable syntactic depth.

Semantic Types of Complex Sentences

Complex sentences can also be classified semantically, according to the meaning expressed by the subordinate clause and its relation to the principal clause. On this basis, grammarians distinguish clauses of time, place, cause, condition, concession, purpose, result, and comparison. For instance, in *When the lecture ended, the students left the hall*, the subordinate clause expresses time; in *If you work hard, you will succeed*, it expresses condition; and in *Although he was tired, he continued working*, it expresses concession. Each semantic type contributes specific information that clarifies, specifies, or expands the meaning of the principal clause and

helps to establish logical coherence within the sentence. Nevertheless, a more traditional and pedagogically productive approach classifies subordinate clauses according to the syntactic function they perform in the main clause, as this method clearly demonstrates the structural role of each clause. A subject clause performs the function of the grammatical subject of the principal clause and often appears either in initial position or in constructions with the formal subject *it*. For example, in *What he decided was unexpected*, the subordinate clause itself functions as the subject, while in *It is important that students understand complex sentence structure*, the clause introduced by *that* carries the semantic content of the subject. Subject clauses typically answer the questions *who?* or *what?* in relation to the predicate of the main clause and are frequently associated with expressions of evaluation, necessity, or emotional attitude, such as *important*, *surprising*, *necessary*, or *obvious*. An object clause functions as the object of a verb, adjective, or noun in the principal clause and is one of the most frequent types of subordinate clauses in English. Object clauses are commonly introduced by conjunctions such as *that*, *if*, and *whether*, or by interrogative words like *who*, *what*, *how*, and *why*. For example, in *She wondered why he was late*, the subordinate clause functions as the object of the verb *wondered*. In many contexts, the conjunction *that* may be omitted without affecting the meaning, as in *I believe language reflects thought*. Object clauses are particularly important for expressing mental processes, speech acts, beliefs, and attitudes in a grammatically integrated and coherent way.

Complex Sentences with Predicative Clauses. A predicative clause forms part of a compound nominal predicate and follows a linking verb such as *be*, *seem*, or *appear*. It serves to characterize, define, or identify the subject of the principal clause. For instance, in *The problem is that we lack sufficient data*, the predicative clause explains the nature of the problem, while in *Her main concern was what others would think*, it identifies the content of her concern. Predicative clauses are therefore closely connected with the subject and play an important role in expressing evaluation and interpretation.

Attributive clauses. Attributive clauses, also known as relative clauses, modify a noun in the principal clause and function similarly to attributes. They are usually introduced by relative pronouns or relative adverbs, as in *The book that you recommended was very informative* or *This is the place where the conference was held*. Attributive clauses may be restrictive, providing information essential for identifying the referent, or non-restrictive, supplying additional, non-essential information. This distinction is significant both semantically and stylistically, especially in written English.

Appositive Clauses. Appositive clauses, by contrast, do not describe a concrete object but explain or specify the meaning of an abstract noun such as *fact*, *idea*, *belief*, or *suggestion*. They clarify the content of the noun rather than its physical characteristics, as in *The fact that he refused the offer surprised everyone* or *There is a strong belief that education determines social progress*. Appositive clauses are most often introduced by the conjunction *that* and are closely connected with the lexical meaning of the noun they explain, contributing to semantic precision and clarity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the complex sentence is a fundamental syntactic structure in English that enables speakers to represent intricate relationships between ideas within a single sentence. Its theoretical interpretation reveals the hierarchical nature of syntactic relations and the close interaction between form and meaning. Structural and semantic classifications of complex sentences highlight their diversity and functional richness, while the analysis of subject, object, predicative, attributive, and appositive clauses demonstrates how subordinate clauses can perform functions analogous to sentence parts. A thorough understanding of complex

sentences is therefore essential for linguistic analysis, academic writing, and effective communication in English.

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