

Ling 222 – Types of Embedded Clauses in English

1. Finite clauses

The verb in the embedded clause is finite and has a subject.

▪ Adverbial clauses

They fulfill the same function as an adverb or prepositional phrase. They are often adjuncts to the verb (therefore optional), and express meanings such as place, time, manner, concession, condition, result, etc.

They are typically introduced by a subordinate conjunction (*while, because, since, in order to, so that, whereas, unless, as though, as if, whenever, etc.*).

- I'd like to go out [while it's still sunny]
- [Although it rained all week], the sun came out during the weekend.
- The department called an urgent meeting [because the dean was dissatisfied with their proposals]

▪ Complement clauses

They are introduced by a complementizer (*that, whether, for*). They are also referred to as noun clauses, nominal clauses, or completive clauses.

They are often the direct object of a verb such as *think, believe, ask*, and also some adjectives and nouns.

- I think [that it's too windy to go out for a walk].
- Do you really believe [that the government will increase funding to universities]?
- He asked [whether there was parking in the building].
- I'm sure [that Kate will be here soon].
- The fact [that the candidate is still running] is evidence of her commitment.

The complementizer *that* can sometimes be deleted

- I think [it's too windy to go out for a walk].
- The reason [I'm telling you] is that I care about you.
- I'm sure [Kate will be here soon].

Some complement clauses are introduced by a *wh-* word (*what, why, who, etc.*).

- He asked [why there were so many homeless people in the city].
- I really didn't know [what I could tell him].

▪ Subject clauses

They are the subject of a main clause. They can be introduced by the complementizer *that* (which is not optional then), or by a *wh-* word.

- [What he's been telling us] has all been true.
- [That smoking causes lung cancer] seems evident.

2. Non-finite clauses

The verb is non-finite. There is usually no explicit subject, although the subject is understood to be the same as in the main clause.

When looking for a non-finite verb, keep in mind that the non-finite form has to be *the first verb in the verb phrase*. The verb phrase *was studying* contains a non-finite form (*studying*). However, it is finite, since the first verb (actually, the auxiliary) in that phrase is *was*, which is finite. Non-finite verbs can be complex (*to have lived, to be completed, having studied*), but it is always the case that the first form is non-finite.

- **Infinitive clauses**

The verb is a *to* infinitive. They can fulfill a number of functions, similar to those of finite clauses: subject, complement, or adverbial.

- [To live in a cosmopolitan city] has been his life-long goal.
- That's difficult [to believe].
- They went away for the weekend [to relax from the stress of the week].

They can be introduced by the complementizers *whether* or *for*, or by a *wh*- word.

- I don't know [what to do].

- **Past participial clauses**

The verb is a past participle (not to be confused with a simple past, which would be finite). Again, a number of functions, typically complements to a noun or adverbials.

- [Exhausted after a day's work], the bus driver decided to take a cab home.
- The proposal [provided by the city] did not satisfy city council.

- **Present participial clauses**

The verb is a present participle (the *-ing* form). They can be complements to a verb or noun, or adverbials.

- They kept [hammering away while we were working].
- [Having finished work early], the team celebrated by [going out for pizza].
- John ran out the door, [waving cheerfully as he left].
- The plumber found the leak [causing the flooding] quite fast.

2. Practice

Identify all the embedded clauses in the following sentences. Say which type they are.

1. John asked for us to leave.
2. When I was in elementary school, I said that my friends would always complain about me.
3. Even New Yorkers apparently have enough money to afford incredibly large apartments.
4. Phoebe regrets that she never got together with Ross.
5. The fact that he didn't call after the first date probably means that he doesn't want to see her again.
6. I usually don't mind staying up late, as long as I can sleep in the next day.
7. He's still wondering whether to call her back, because he doesn't want her to think that he's too eager to see her again soon.
8. The suspect told them everything, although she was afraid she would be put in jail anyway.
9. To tell you the truth, I think going out with him is not a good idea.