

Some Difficulties of Noun Clauses Experienced by Advanced Students of English: A Study in Tishk International University in Erbil

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Abstract: Noun clauses in English go unattended in many grammar books and coursebooks. Although reported speech is part of noun clauses, it is given in B1 level, but noun clauses are not taught even in advanced levels. In the study we did, we worked on advanced learners of English who were candidates for taking IELTS exam and realized that even these adult learners did not know this topic. We explained the topic by dividing into segments and concluded that they got very successful at this topic. Noun clauses are so uncommonly taught that even these learners did not do well in the pre-test, but later in post-test, they got satisfactory results showing that they had learned thoroughly.

Keywords: Noun Clauses, Adult Learners, Reported Speech

1. Introduction

There are some advanced topics in English grammar that even advanced learners of English do not learn, but they are used in the language commonly. Noun clauses are one these topics, and learners generally cannot learn that because this topic is not given in coursebooks. For this reason, even advanced learners do not know it clearly, or they somehow learned it unconsciously. In this study, some advanced learners were used to see how aware they were about this topic, and we explained this topic by dividing into segments so that they could get it more easily.

2. Literature Review

2.2 Clauses in English

A clause can be defined as a grammatical unit that consists of a subject and a conjugated verb (Crystal, 2011). This is also a concise definition of a sentence, and it is possible to add object and complement after the verb in English. The use of a subject, a verb, and an object is universal, but the order changes in different languages. If the definition of a clause and a sentence is the same, the question "what makes them

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different?" arises. A sentence expresses a complete judgement with the subject and the conjugated verb which expresses a certain tense, or a complete sentence can be expressed through using modals. As for a clause, it does not express a full judgement and needs a sentence to complete the meaning. The difference can be explained with the same sentence in different uses.

1. He likes football.
2. That he likes football makes him different from us.

In these two examples, the sentence "He likes football." has different functions. In (1), it expresses a full judgement, and it is a full sentence. But as for (2), it is the subject of the sentence, and it never completes the meaning without the continuation of the sentence.

There are three main types of clauses in English.

- Adverbial Clauses
- Adjective Clauses (Relative Clauses)
- Noun Clauses

Adverbial clauses consist of one subordinate clause and one main clause. It is also possible to come across different naming in different sources. Subordinate clause is also named as dependent clause, and main clause is also named as independent clause. An important point to be underlined is that subordinate clause does not complete the meaning on its own (Azar, 2002). In order to express a full meaning, it needs a main clause.

3. When he arrived home
4. When he arrived home, he turned on the air conditioner.
5. He turned on the air conditioner.

In these examples, (3) is a subordinate clause and it does not express a full meaning. In order to do that, it needs the main clause as in (4). But that sentence expresses a full meaning, and the judgement is complete when you use it on its own as in (5).

As for adjective clauses, they are not in the form of separate clauses from the main clause, they are embedded sentences and inserted inside the main clause. They function as adjectives of the nouns they are related to (Fang & Wu, 2010).

The third form of clauses in English is noun clauses. While the clause serves as an adjective in adjective (relative) clauses, noun clauses are directly used instead of a noun in the sentence, and they are also embedded inside the main clause. In this sense, only the adverbial clauses form a separate clause, the other two types are inserted inside the main clause (Huddleston et al., 2004).

Noun clauses are made up of three different sentence types.

1. Affirmative and Negative Sentences: you can make these kinds of sentences into noun clauses by adding "that" at the beginning of the sentence.

6. She keeps her promise.
7. She does not take after her mom.

These two sentences can be turned into noun clauses by adding “that” at the beginning.

8. That she keeps her promise
9. That she does not take after her mom.

When we do necessary operation on the sentences by adding “that” to them, they are ready to be part of another sentence as noun clauses, and they are inserted in three positions in a sentence:

- Subject position:
 - That she keeps her promise makes her a dependable person.
 - That she does not take after her mom surprises me very much.
- Object position:
 - You know that she keeps her promise.
 - Her dad admits that she does not take after her mom.
- After a preposition:
 - You should deal with that she keeps her promise.
 - Everybody is so interested in that she does not take after her mom.

Noun clauses in general are used in these three positions in a sentence in English.

2. The second type of noun clauses are made up of yes/no questions.
10. Does he like playing football?

In order to turn this sentence into noun clause, we should make some changes on it. Firstly, we must add “whether” or “if” at the beginning and after that write this sentence in affirmative form like this:

11. If he likes playing football (or not)
12. Whether he likes football

Then it is ready to be used in another sentence in the place of a subject, an object or after a preposition.

- Subject position:

If he likes playing football (or not) does not interest you.

- Object Position:

I wonder if he likes playing football.

- After a preposition:

I want to be informed about if he likes playing football.

There are important differences between these two types. These example sentences will reveal the differences.

13. That he likes playing football does not interest me.
14. If he likes football or not does not interest me.

In (13), I know that he likes playing football, and it does not interest me. But in (14), There is still a question and I don not know his preference about football, and that does not interest me.

3. The third type of noun clauses are made up of wh- questions, and their formation is quite similar to yes/no questions.
15. Why don't you like football.

In order to change this example sentence into noun clause, we should write the question word at the beginning and write the other part of the sentence like an affirmative sentence.

16. Why you don't like football

Then it is ready to be used as part of another sentence.

- Subject position:

Why you don't like football is none of my concern.

- Object position:

I really want to know why you don't like football.

- After a preposition:

I am really not interested in why you don't like football (Alexander, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Model

Noun clauses are not usually taught at school level, as they are one of the advanced grammar topics of English. To conduct research on such a topic on students, they must have an advanced level of English. Therefore, this research was conducted on people who applied to Tishk International University's Center for Continuing Education for TOEFL and IELTS courses. First of all, it should be noted that these students' English levels are sufficient to get satisfactory scores from TOEFL and IELTS exams. These students were asked how much they knew about noun clauses, and it was determined that they mostly did not know it as a subject. In fact, some students with a much better English level stated that they only knew the way it was used, but they did not know that the subject was named in this way. After the topic was explained to the students as shown in the literature review, exercises from Betty Azar's book "Understanding and Using English Grammar" were done. Afterwards, the students were asked some questions about the subject and their opinions were taken. Thus, it has been determined that this subject is not effectively known even by advanced students.

3.2 Sampling

Adults with advanced English who applied to the Continuing Education Center of Tishk International University to take TOEFL and IELTS courses were used in this study. The reason for these people to take these courses is to do master and doctorate. A total of 15 people participated in this study.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection is done through observation, and a post-test to these adult learners. Their knowledge was measured through a test and 18 questions from Azar's "Understanding and Using English Grammar." In the post-test, we again applied these 18 questions and extra 16 questions from the same chapter in the book.

4. Findings

These students, whose English level was C1 and above, knew all the grammar topics shown in their books. These subjects include the Present Perfect Tense and the Past Perfect Tense. In addition, the topic "gerund / infinitive" is covered in this book. Moreover, students know this subject. Although they do not know all the details about this subject, at least they know that there is such a title in grammar and many usage areas. Besides, in the IELTS preparation coursebook that we follow (Brook-Hart & Jakeman, 2012), students can easily understand the reading passages that are quite difficult. However, the situation of students in noun clauses is different.

4.1 How aware are they of the Noun Clauses?

When we asked the students what noun clauses were, none of the students knew about it. However, after giving some examples, some students understood what the topic was. Although these students did not know the name of the subject, 6 of them showed that they knew the subject by subconscious learning. Later, when the students were asked to make sentences by themselves, these 6 students were able to construct sentences without errors. However, the students did not know that it was called noun clauses.

4.2 Pre-test Results

The students were given an exercise with 18 questions from the book of Betty Azar "Understanding and Using English Grammar" and the results were evaluated. Accordingly, the result is as follows:

Table 1: Pre-test results out of 18 questions

Student 1	9
Student 2	7
Student 3	6
Student 4	5
Student 5	5
Student 6	4
Student 7	2
Student 8	0
Student 9	0
Student 10	0
Student 11	0
Student 12	0
Student 13	0
Student 14	0
Student 15	0
Average	2.5

Since they did not study this topic previously, they sometimes made mistakes and sometimes answered correctly. The same student may have answered one sentence correctly while the other in wrong way. This is because of the reason that they learned this subject unconsciously. The high achievers shown above made mistakes at first and then they detected how to correct their sentences. After that, they answered correctly. Even more, they had difficulty in changing a yes/no question into noun clause.

4.3 Explanation of the Topic

We explained the topic as it was clarified above in literature review. Three kinds of sentences can be turned into noun clauses. They are

1. Affirmative / Negative Sentences

2. Yes / No Questions
3. Wh- Questions

Then we showed them how to make operations on these sentences one by one and change them into noun clauses. After that, we explained that they are ready after this operation to be used as a noun clause inside another sentence. We explained that noun clauses can be used in three different positions in another sentence.

1. Subject Position
 - That she will visit us does not excite me.
 - If she arrives early or not will not make any change in our plans.
 - What she will show us does not draw my attention.
2. Object Position
 - We know that he does not have to lend us any money.
 - I wonder if she can lend us any money.
 - I want to know when they will arrive.
3. After a Preposition
 - She does not deal with that we will immigrate to her country.
 - You should not worry about if she comes home late or not.
 - She does not seem to deal with what her husband likes.

After explanation, we asked them to translate these sentences above into their mother tongue. When they translated, they realized that there are similar changes in the sentences while they are adapted into noun clauses in their mother tongue. Interestingly enough, they also realized first time there that they make these similar changes in their mother tongue when they change sentences into noun clauses.

4.4 Post-test Results

Then we turned back to Azar grammar book, and they did the same 18 exercises and extra 16 ones inside the book. Since their English proficiency level is high enough, they barely made some mistakes, but later, they corrected themselves.

Table 2: Post-test results out of 34 questions

Student 1	34
Student 2	34
Student 3	34
Student 4	34
Student 5	34
Student 6	34
Student 7	34
Student 8	34
Student 9	34
Student 10	34
Student 11	33
Student 12	32
Student 13	30
Student 14	30
Student 15	30
Average	33

Those who made mistakes in the post-test were shown where they are mistaken and asked to correct themselves. In fact, they all corrected their mistakes immediately after that.

5. Discussion

Noun clauses are used commonly in English, but they are mostly not taught in school curricula. Although “Reported Speech” is part of noun clauses, it is possible to find this topic in coursebooks, but not noun clauses. Logically, noun clauses should come before reported speech because in reported speech, we made the changes as we do for noun clauses, and we also add more changes such that we should also change the tense of the sentence in reported speech, so we add more changes to noun clauses to make them into reported speech. But any coursebooks do not make room for noun clauses while they generally teach

reported speech at B1 level. It is so apparent from these adult learners that although their English proficiency level is rather high, they are mostly not aware of even the existence of such a topic in grammar.

The teaching method is also important and should be highlighted. It is generally clearer for people to understand when any topic is divided into small units and given step-by-step. We also divided noun clauses into three forms and gave examples accordingly. In this way, they clearly saw the formation of noun clauses from different kinds of sentences. In that way, the topic became very understandable to them. Even more, they answered almost all the questions correctly after the explanation.

As a result, dividing this topic into three different segments and giving clear examples how these noun clauses are used in another sentence made it very clear to the adult learners. It should also be underlined that this grammar topic generally remains untouched in English grammar and even advanced level learners go unaware of it.

6. Conclusion

Noun clause are part of English grammar, and should be given accordingly, but they generally go unattended in many coursebooks even at advanced levels. More interestingly, although reported speech is part of noun clauses and require more changes than noun clauses, they are given in early levels like B1, but noun clauses remain unlearned.

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