DEPENDENT CLAUSES

Folks, the following discussion may seem daunting at first, but there are no grammatical concepts here that you have not seen and worked with. You'll be introduced to some combinations we haven't talked about yet, but the ideas are the same.

You will remember that clauses have both subject and predicate.

Dependent clauses are simply clauses that do not stand alone but are part of a larger sentence structure. They have an analyzable internal grammar; include both subject and predicate; and as units of meaning function like nouns, adverbs or adjectives. There are two types:

- *Subordinate clauses*, as units of meaning, most frequently act as adverbs or nouns (infrequently, they function as adjectives).
- *Relative clauses*, as units of meaning, most frequently act as adjectives or nouns (infrequently, they function as adverbs).

Subordinating Conjunctions & Subordinate Clauses

Subordinating conjunctions are used to connect dependent clauses to some sentence element in a main clause. When we analyze subordinate clauses, the subordinate conjunction is first in line.

I often describe subordinate conjunctions as "flopping around up front." Sometimes I circle them and set them aside as simply subordinating.

Two points should be made here.

- First, within the clause itself the subordinate conjunction does not usually appear to work in a puzzle-piece way as do relative pronouns in relative clauses (thus the "flopping around").
- Second, the conjunction is nevertheless having an important and distinct grammatical influence over the clause – it is subordinating it.

A partial list of subordinate conjunctions:

After	How	Though
Although	If	Till
As	Inasmuch	Unless
As if	In order that	Until
As long as	Lest	When
As much as	Now that	Whenever
As soon as	Once	Where
As though	Provided (that)	Whereas
Because	Since	Wherever
Before	So that	Whether
Even if	Than	While
Even though	THAT	Why

A list of relative pronouns:

Who (whom, whose)
Whoever (whomever, whosever)
THAT
Which
What
Whatever
Whichever

Adverbial Subordinate Clauses

When used adverbially, subordinate clauses often modify verbs. Adverbial clauses answer the questions *why*, *when*, *where*, *how* – but not *what*.

As a test, adverbial subordinate clauses can usually be moved to different positions within a sentence.

> The flight was postponed [*because* the pilot had an aching toe.] {*why*}
>
> > [B*ecause* the pilot had an aching toe], the flight was postponed.]
> >
> > The flight, [because the pilot had an aching toe], was postponed.
>
> (You) Try it once more [*before* you give up.] {*when*}
>
> We'll miss the last bus [*if* we don't hurry.] {*why*}

Vincent will fail his tests [*unless* he undertakes some serious studying.] {*why*}

It looks [*as if* it might rain again.] {*how*}

As suggested above, adverbial subordinate clauses may precede the main clause:

[*When* the bell rings,] you'll see a mad rush.

[*After* he left,] I found his briefcase in the sink.

Subordinate Clauses functioning as Nouns

Subordinate clauses that act as noun clauses are most commonly used as objects or predicate nouns.

He thinks [*that* no one else can do the job.] *d.o.*

Nobody knows [*why* the coffee pot was moved.] *d.o.*

You must decide [*whether* the reward is worth the effort.] *d.o.*

Bear knew [that his obsession was an obsession]. *d.o.*

The question is [*how* we can control him.] *p.n.*

They can also be used as subjects of a clause:

[How they were to find the apples] was not said. *subj.*
[When we will pay the piper] can be negotiated. *subj.*

Adjectival Subordinate Clauses

Some subordinate clauses – a clear minority – function adjectivally. Consider the following examples:

> The thought [that oceans will rise] has become real.
>
> The fact [that water can be deadly] is proven.
>
> The possibility [that I can move away from here] is remote.

Note the use of *that*. We will speak more about this word, which can be a subordinate conjunction or a relative pronoun.

Be Careful: Some of the words used as subordinating conjunctions can also be used as prepositions. (The same is true of the *coordinating* conjunctions *but* and *for*.)

> *As* I predicted, Big Sam is causing trouble again. (*sub. conj.*)
>
> He has served three terms *as* captain of the funeral crew. (*prep.*)
>
> I haven't seen Joe *since* his garage fell down. (*sub. conj.*)
>
> I haven't seen Joe *since* Halloween. (*prep.*)

They're willing enough, *but* they need more practice. (*coord. conj.*)

You seem to have everything *but* the kitchen sink. (*prep.*)

Relative Pronouns & Relative Clauses

Relative clauses typically open with a relative pronoun, although they may begin with a preposition followed by a relative pronoun. They normally function as adjectives or as nouns (infrequently as adverbs).

We have been working with relative clauses for some time. When I am discussing case, it is often within a relative clause.

Relative clauses [that function as adjectives] *regularly follow the noun or pronoun that they modify.*

I know a man *who owns one*.

He is a man *whom everyone admires*.

The rifle *of which you speak* never belonged to me.

The rifle *which you speak of* never belonged to him.

The rifle *that you speak about* ain't mine.

The garden *that surrounds the house* is overgrown with weed.

In many sentences the relative pronoun can be omitted, particularly when, within the dependent clause, it is the object of a verb or a preposition:

> The man *she married* couldn't support her ("whom she married")
>
> Everybody *I speak to* seems to agree. ("to whom I speak")
>
> The picture *I showed you* is a Tom Thomson. ("that I showed you")
>
> The route *he took* is a little shorter ("that he took" or "which he took")

Definite relative pronouns have antecedents in the main clause.

> The MUSIC BOX *which* Janey owned held magic.

Relative clauses using definite relative pronouns are adjectival. All of the examples above make use of definite relative pronouns.

Relative pronouns are called *indefinite* when they are used in sentences without antecedents. Relative clauses using indefinite relative pronouns function as nouns.

Common indefinite relative pronouns include *who (whom, whose), which, what, whoever (whomever), whatever.*

I can guess [*whom* you're referring to.] *d.o.*

I know [*whose* it was] *d.o.*

[*What* I think] doesn't seem to matter. *subj.*

[*Whoever* comes] will be welcome *subj.*

She was [*what* she wanted to be] *p.n.*

He does [*whatever* he likes.] *d.o.*

A Matter of Categorization

I have suggested before that various schools of grammarians analyze grammar from slightly different perspectives and that they often apply different terminology to describe similar analyses.

Here's an example. Some grammarians would rather maintain a solid distinction between relative clauses acting as adjectives and relative clauses acting as nouns. They go so far as to suggest that relative clauses only function adjectivally. Any clause that opens with a relative pronoun but functions as a noun they denominate *Nominal Clauses*. We shall not maintain this distinction, but be aware.

Other schools of grammarian thought suggest that relative clauses that function as nouns are in fact "headless." Here is how their logic goes:

> This slender bed is [what we must sleep in tomorrow eve]. *p.n.*
>
> Playdough is not [what we asked for]. *p.n.*

These examples can be described as "headless" clauses if you recognize, identify, or imagine missing noun phrases:

> This small bed is {THE PLACE} [which we must sleep in tomorrow]. *adj.*
>
> Playdough is not {THE ITEM} [which we asked for]. *adj.*

English is full of elliptical constructions. These *may* be described as such (or as "headless"), but it strikes me as a needless reduction of grammatical possibilities (*It demands that all relative clauses must ultimately be adjectival. Why?*).

At any rate, the metamorphosis of the example involves an aggressive substitution that seems to discount this line of reasoning. {But I'll raise this issue again when we discuss relative adverbs.}

A Kicker

You will have noticed in several of the examples above that *that* is a commonly used relative pronoun. Intriguingly, *that* can also serve as a subordinate conjunction.

> The potato patch [that he planted] was fecund.

They loved [that he was troubled].

[That trouble was coming] was obvious.

The first sentence above use *that* as a relative pronoun; the relatively clause acts adjectivally. Note that *that* has an obvious place within the grammar of the relative clause (as *d.o.*).

The second pair of sentences use *that* as a subordinate conjunction. Both clauses function as nouns. Note that *that* does not have an obvious place within the grammar of the subordinate clause (other than to make the clause dependent). This can be difficult. Consider the following examples:

She was pleased [that he ate].

She was pleased [because he ate].

In the first sentence, *That he ate* looks like a relative clause – *he ate that* – but if so, then note the adverbial function of the clause. Why was *She pleased*?

The second clause is obviously adverbial and subordinate. So what to do? Perhaps *that* in the first example is not the *do* of the clause. Or perhaps we have an elliptical construction and the sentence should be understand as follows:

She was pleased (by the fact [that he ate]).

In the elliptical reconstruction above, the relative clause is once more functioning in a standard fashion, adjectivally.

But if you don't go for the elliptical construction, perhaps you simply want to describe the relative clause *that he ate* as acting adverbially. Fun eh?

Potter's Theorem

Several years ago Phil Potter, a student in this course, postulated what has become known as *Potter's Theorem*: "When attempting to distinguish between *that* used as a subordinate conjunction or a relative pronoun, substitute *which* for *that*. If it makes reasonable sense, you have a relative pronoun."

Applying Potter's Theorem to the example above allows us to reach an obvious conclusion.

Relative Clauses with Relative Adverbs

Here's a twist that I have not revealed clearly before. Relative pronouns are not the only part of speech that may open relative clauses. Related to *relative pronouns* and functioning similarly are *relative adverbs – where*, *when*, *why*.

> Toddy looked in the well [*where* Megan had secreted her diary]. *adj.*

The workmanship [*where* it could be seen] was poor at best. *adj.*

Name a time [*when* it is good for hurricanes to arrive]. *adj.*

The rain provided the reason [why I did not attend]. *adj.*

Just as relative pronouns are often dropped out of relative clauses, so too are relative adverbs:

The rain provided the reason [I did not attend].

Name a time [it is good for hurricanes to arrive].

Another Kicker

The three relative adverbs – *where*, *when*, *why* – can also be subordinate conjunctions (just as the relative pronoun *that* can be a subordinate conjunction). So, if you are not paying attention, this can get confusing.

Consider the following sentences:

Bear thought about occasions [when he did not ache for yogurt].

Bear tensed [when he did not ache for yogurt].

In the first example *when* is a relative adverb; the entire

relative clause is acting adjectivally, modifying *occasions*. In the second example *when* is a subordinate conjunction; the subordinate clause is acting adverbially, modifying *tensed*.

The easiest way to differentiate between relative adverbs and the same word as subordinate conjunction is to watch the function of the clause: adjectival? it is relative; adverbial? it is subordinate.

Adverbial Relative Clauses

In some cases relative clauses function adverbially. Consider the following examples:

> Dylan rides a skateboard, which many college students do.
>
> I'm exhausted, which you are not.
>
> Today is Halloween, which means trouble.

Here the relative clause asserts a power of modification that washes across the entire main clause.
How about this one?

> The toys are in a chest, where they will remain.

Is this describing the chest, or because of its nonrestrictive punctuation, is it washing across the entire main clause?

Modification is difficult.

Impacted Relative Clauses

My understanding of impacted relative clauses, also called double relative clauses, has evolved over time; it may continue to evolve. Here's the way I analyze them now. First, remember that like standard relative clauses, they function as units of meaning within the wider sentence. Second, when analyzing their internal grammar it may help to see them operating similarly to dialogue with speech tags. Consider the following clause structure:

[Relative pronoun + Speech tag + Remainder of Relative Clause]

. . . [whoever + she thinks + had a bad day].

Jane likes to congratulate [whoever she thinks had a bad day].

whoever, she thinks, had a bad day. OR *she thinks whoever had a bad day*. The standard portion of the clause, *whoever had a bad day*, functions as d.o. to *she thinks*. The entire impacted clause acts as a noun, the object of the infinitive "to congratulate"

Thinking about [whoever she believes loves dogs] has become a mission of sorts for Zoey.

whoever, she believes, loves dogs. OR *she believes whoever loves dogs*. The standard portion of the clause, *whoever loves dogs*, functions as d.o. to *she believes.* The entire clause acts as the object of the preposition *about*.

I'm exhausted, [which I know you're not].

> *which, I know, you're not*. OR *I know you are not which*. The standard portion of the clause, *you are not which*, functions as d.o. of *I know*. The entire clause acts *adverbially* washing across the main clause.

Substitution for the relative pronoun complicates the analysis. First, let's rearrange the clause into normal order:

. . . she thinks whoever had a bad day.

In this order the case of the pronoun is ambiguous: does it serve as d.o. of *she thinks* or is it subject of *had a bad day*? Here is the reordered clause with a noun substitution:

. . . she thinks Dylan had a bad day.

Again, there is a problem. How can two independent clauses coexist in such proximity without punctuation? In order to clarify, the clause may be rewritten as follows:

. . . she thinks [that Dylan had a bad day].

Here we have changed part of the impacted relative clause to a subordinate clause which acts as d.o. of *she thinks* (exactly as *whoever had a bad day* operates in the original impacted clause). Of course by following substitution (that dangerous game), we have stepped far from our original sentence and the sense is lost:

> Jane likes to congratulate [she thinks {that Dylan had a bad day}].

But we might rearrange one last time:

> Jane likes to congratulate [Dylan that she thinks had a bad day].

But now shouldn't it read *Dylan* [*who she thinks had a bad day*]? If so, we are right back where we started with an impacted relative clause (though one that functions adjectivally). Not quite sure what this means, but I offer it as an intriguing grammatical crux.

Something entirely different, the Expletive "it"

A noun clause may appear at the end of a sentence, introduced by the expletive *it*. In this common construction, the noun clause is considered the subject of the verb.)

> *Where he gets his supply* is not generally known.
>
> *sub. c. acting as noun*
>
> It is not generally known *where he gets his supply*.
>
> same construction with expletive "it"

That her mother was there was unfortunate.

sub. c. acting as noun

It is unfortunate *that her mother was there*.

same construction with expletive "it"

A bit more on Conjunctions

A conjunction is a word whose primary function is to join words or groups of words. There are two main types of conjunctions: *coordinating* conjunctions (which include *correlative* conj.) and *subordinating* conjunctions.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions are normally used to connect sentence elements of the same grammatical class: nouns with nouns, adverbs with adverbs, clauses with clauses.

> The words used as coordinating conjunctions are *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, *yet*.

Correlative Conjunctions

The coordinating conjunctions *and, but, or*, and *nor* are often used with *both, not only, either,* and *neither*, respectively, to form what are known as correlative conjunctions.

Correlatives are always used in pairs.

> *Both* faculty *and* administrators will back such a contract.

Usually the meaning is practically the same as it would be with a simple coordinating conjunction, but there is an additional degree of emphasis.