

TERTIARY STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN COMBINING ENGLISH CLAUSES TO GENERATE COMPLEX SENTENCES

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Abstract. *This study aimed to describe tertiary students' difficulties in combining English clauses to generate complex sentences. A descriptive quantitative method was applied by involving 30 tertiary English students at IAIN Curup as the samples. They were selected using a quota sampling technique. The present study revealed that many students (62.82%) had difficulties combining adjective clauses and independent clauses to generate complex English sentences. They also found it challenging to use subordinate connectors "who, whose, whom, and which" properly. Some students (42.64%) had difficulties in combining adverbial clauses and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences. They found it challenging to use some subordinate connectors such as "after, if, before, nevertheless, and however" appropriately. Subsequently, many students (69.31%) had difficulties in combining noun clauses and independent clauses to generate complex English sentences. They found it challenging to use subordinate connectors such as "what, where, why, whose, when, and how" properly. Further studies are expected to conduct experimentations and classroom-action research to help improve students' English grammatical competence.*

Keywords: *complex sentence; dependent clause; independent clause*

A. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a foreign language teaching and learning, the issues of English productive skills seem to be highly proximate to the case of grammar. The urgency of grammatical competence in writing skills is likely to be over speaking skills. The foregoing premise is considerably justified since speaking skill tends to be mainly oriented towards meaning, and cultural

negotiations wherein grammar seems to merely be placed at a moderate priority (Fang, 2017; Kirkpatrick, 2018; Liu, 2019). In addition, the status of today's English which takes a stance as the world lingua franca (Mauranen, 2018; Morganna, Sumardi, & Tarjana, 2020; Sherman, 2018; Wright & Zheng, 2018) draws scholars' attention more to the essence of English speaking skill which is to communicate across cultures than to learn too much grammar in detail. The aforesaid arguments by nature position grammar a little farther in terms of speaking skill. However, different things are found in the realm of English writing skills. Grammar always plays a pivotal role in writing skills to become a high priority (Fahim & Rad, 2012; Purba, 2018; Worden, 2018). Grammatical mistakes in writing skill cannot be tolerated since between the writer and readers lie diverse time and space so that once grammatical mistakes are made in a written work, the readers cannot instantly ask for clarification. This indicates that grammar is of paramount importance in English writing skills.

The nature of grammar is initially broad since it covers the elements of phonology associated with the grammar of sounds (J. & Spencer, 2000; Roach, 2009), morphology corresponding to the grammar of morphemes (Gottardo, Mirza, Koh, Ferreira, & Javier, 2018; Kraut, 2015; Reynolds, 2019; Xue & Jiang, 2017), and syntax as regards the grammar of phrases, clauses, and sentences (Communication, 2013; Swan, 2005). In terms of English writing skills, the main oriented grammar will be towards the element of syntax extending to the components of sentences, clauses, and phrases alongside their varieties and uses. According to Peng (2017), grammar is a system of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of words in a sentence. Swan (2005) postulates that the ultimate source of accuracy in any language is grammar. In the aspect of writing, the important element of writing quality is grammar.

Simply put, the relation between grammar and writing can be analogized, such as human bone and body. Grammar is the foundation of writing skills. In

such a way, the view of grammar has been made specific to syntax which studies grammar for written work at the level of sentences and their kinds in tandem with their detailed components.

In general, there are four kinds of sentences. They are simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. In learning English writing skills, students have to understand how to write such types of sentences, especially complex sentences, due to their difficult nature. Complex sentences are essential in writing because they will help students express their ideas in fluid and flexible ways into exciting sentences. By using complex sentences, some wasting and redundant uses of words can be avoided. However, besides the great essence of complex sentences, obstacles also exist therein since students need to be clear about the presences and functions of independent and dependent clauses.

Mart (2013) stated that students often find it difficult to write complex English sentences because they are often confused about clauses and their specificities. In complex sentences, in terms of independent and dependent clauses, the former is similar to a simple sentence, which can stand alone, and the latter refers to a simple sentence with conjunction embedded therein. The conjunction makes this sentence dependent, or the sentence *per se* cannot stand alone in this sense (Eastwood, 2008; John Eastwood, 1999; Hornby, 1975). Concerning dependent clauses, they commonly fall into three categories, namely noun clause, adjective clause, an adverbial clause. A noun clause is a clause that plays a role as a noun; an adjective clause is a clause that has a similar function to an adjective, which commonly gives specific characteristics to a noun; and adverbial clause is a clause that plays a role just like an adverb. The ability to make use of those kinds of clauses is beneficial to English students in order that they can write well. Conversely, when students use and integrate English clauses into complex

sentences in improper ways, they can end up with generating unclear meanings of the written sentences.

In this study, it is integrating clauses as the forgoing means to combine independent and dependent clauses so that a set of meaningful complex sentences are generated in a written work. In this study, the researchers would like to discuss both dependent and independent clauses in complex sentences. A simple sentence is called an independent clause that contains a subject and a verb. It expresses a complete thought (Byrd & Benson, 2001). A dependent clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate that function as a part of a sentence and depend on the rest of the sentence to complete its meaning (Swan, 2005).

Furthermore, two ways of combining independent and dependent clauses into a complex sentence: first, an independent clause is placed at first, and it is then followed by a dependent clause wherein conjunction is instilled into the dependent clause. Second, the dependent clause with conjunction embedded therein is placed first; a comma is subsequently used, and an independent clause takes a position exactly after the comma. According to Astri, Syarif, and Wahyuni (2018), in their findings, there are some problems encountered when the students combine independent and dependent clauses. Such problems encompass the uses of subordinator, double connector, omitted comma, wrong clause type chosen as a complement, and wrong use of a relative pronoun.

In this study, the researchers also encounter a phenomenon *vis-a-vis* students' problems about the uses of independent and dependent clauses in English writing. Anchored in pre-interviews with sixth-semester students of the English department at IAIN Curup, the students already learned about clauses. However, they were still confused when the lecturer asked them to identify dependent and independent clauses. Likewise, based on the essay writing test given by the writing lecturer, 45 students wrote essays under a theme of "success", but there

were only nine students who could write clauses correctly. The researchers also found that, in an essay, one of the students wrote a dependent clause without an independent clause. For example, the student wrote, “So I draw a caricature”. This dependent clause needed an independent clause so that it could be correct. An independent clause can be written in many ways according to the context and the writer’s intention. For example, to make the foregoing dependent clause correct, the student can integrate an independent clause such as the following complex sentence: “My teacher asked me to draw an interesting picture, so I draw a caricature”.

In another example, one of the students wrote, “a success requires an earnest effort once a success is made the priority.” In this case, the student wrote a complex sentence using double subordinate connectors “once” and “when”. As a subordinate connector, the word “once” already conveyed a time-nuanced meaning similar to the word “when”. To make this sentence correct, the student should use only one connector. For example, “a success requires an earnest effort when a success is made the priority.” Subsequently, resting upon information elicited from conducting interviews with the writing lecturer, some sixth-semester students still made mistakes in using a variety of conjunctions to make meaningful complex sentences. It was also found that some students already understood the concepts of both independent and dependent clauses, but they were still inclined to write complex sentences in improper ways.

The above phenomenon calls for further and detailed scrutiny for the sake of delving into students’ problems in using independent and dependent clauses to generate meaningful, proper, and correct complex sentences. Such scrutiny is urgent since grammar is always substantial in writing skills. Accordingly, revealing students’ problems utilizing testing their grammatical competence in complex sentences is necessary. Such an effort will help both students and lecturers to reflect on better learning, which can facilitate students’ improvement

in this sub-component of grammar. Accordingly, the present study investigates tertiary students' difficulties in combining independent and dependent clauses to generate meaningful English complex sentences. The following research question guides this study: What are students' challenges in combining independent and dependent clauses to generate English complex sentences?

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The current study applied a descriptive quantitative method to reveal tertiary English students' difficulties in combining independent and dependent clauses to generate meaningful and proper English complex sentences. Descriptive study is the research-oriented towards describing any situation or condition in population in systematic, factual, and accurate ways (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Walker, & Razavieh, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The rationale underlying the adoption of a descriptive quantitative method in the current study is because this method can provide objective data representing the problem formulated. The data revealed in this study can be generalized to other contexts since the data are statistical and realistic.

Population and samples

Population is the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which she or he would like the study to be generalizable (Ary et al., 2010; Gall et al., 2003). Sugiyono (2007) defines a population as the general area consisting of subjects or objects which have a particular quantity or characteristic determined by the researcher, which he/she would like to investigate in-depth and draw relevant conclusions. In this study, the population covered 236 tertiary students of second, fourth, sixth, and eighth semesters from the English department of IAIN Curup in the academic year of 2019/2020. Subsequently, in choosing the samples, the researchers deployed a quota sampling technique (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Finally,

they could decide on 30 sixth semester students from classes A, B, and C. Those students were eligible to be involved as the samples because they already took an English essay writing class. In such a way, they were adequately experienced in practical English grammar for writing skills. Thus, they were appropriate to be included as the samples of this study, which sought to investigate students' difficulties in combining independent and dependent clauses to generate meaningful and useful English complex sentences.

Technique of Collecting Data

For collecting data, the researchers used to test the technique to find out students' difficulties in combining clauses in complex sentences. The test is an instrument deployed to scrutinize specific proficiencies of a group of samples (Oppenheim, 2001). The test in this study was adapted from English grammar theory-based handbooks and English grammar exercises or worksheets (Alexander, 1998; John Eastwood, 1999; Hewings, 1999; Swan, 2005), which addressed English complex sentences. The test in this study focused on combining dependent and independent clauses in complex sentences. The questions contained 3 kinds of clauses; they ranged from noun clause, adjective clause to adverbial clause. Entirely, there were 22 pairs of provisions that had to be combined by students in this test.

Technique and data analysis

The data garnered from the English grammar test were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistical analysis. Data analysis in this way processed students' test results and coded the results in percentages (Myers, Well, & Lorch, 2010). The percentages generated from students' test results depicted the extent of their difficulties in combining dependent and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted on June 17th, 2020. During this study's conduction, the researchers obtained adequate information corresponding to tertiary students' difficulties in combining English clauses to generate complex sentences. The researchers gave an English grammar test to thirty (30) students engaged as the respondents or samples of the present study.

Table 1 below presents the percentage of each test item. The percentages exhibited do not represent the degree of correct answers but the degree of incorrect answers from the test accomplished by students. Accordingly, the percentages represent students' difficulties in combining clauses to generate complex English sentences.

Table 1. Percentages of difficulties in combining clauses to generate English complex sentences

Number of Questions	Questions		F	%
	Clause 1	Clause 2		
1	Jake and Jessica Carter bought a new house recently.	Jake and Jessica Carter got married about a year ago.	21	70%
2	Elaine is my lab partner.	Elaine just moved here.	16	53.3%
3	There is a girl in my class.	Her family emigrated from India.	20	66.6%
4	The man forgot his umbrella.	His father is a professor.	18	60%
5	The criminals broke into a bank downtown.	Two of them managed to escape.	23	76.67%
6	This is the girl.	He fell in love with her in Madrid.	22	73.3%

7	The ball bounced into the hole.	Casey and Robert could not reach it.	12	40%
8	<i>I went to school.</i>	<i>I had finished my homework.</i>	13	43.3%
9	<i>Yuza is fussy.</i>	<i>Rafna is fussy.</i>	13	43.3%
10	She had already eaten.	He arrived for the meeting.	14	46.6%
11	My sister earned a lot of money.	She would not buy a big car.	12	40%
12	Tom likes animals	He does not want to buy a dog	12	40%
13	The lecturer knows	What did we do in the class yesterday?	18	60%
14	They always said to me.	Where must I wait for the train?	19	63.3%
15	He can prove.	Why does he lie to her about his feeling?	23	76.6%
16	Rayhan explains.	Whose sneaker is this?	24	80%
17	What did he say?	I didn't hear.	18	60%
18	When did Tim leave?	I don't know	18	60%
19	How much does this book cost?	Could you please tell me?	24	80%
20	Whose car is in the driveway?	Do you know?	25	83.3%
21	I can't remember	How much does it cost?	20	66.6%
22	I cannot guess.	How old is he?	19	63.3%

Grounded in table 1, some information is revealed. Question number 1 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "who". In this entity, 70% of students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 2 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "who". To this entity, there were 53.3% of students gave incorrect answers. Question number 3 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "whose". In respect of this entity, there were 66.6% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 4 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "whose". Appertaining to this entity, 60% of the students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 5 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "whom". Pertinent to this entity, 76.6% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 6 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "whom". Corresponding to this entity, there were 73.3% of the students who provided incorrect answers. Question number 7 is to combine clauses with the use of subordinate connector "which". Related to this entity, there were 40 % of the students who provided incorrect answers—questions 1 to 7 negotiated students' capability to combine independent clauses and adjective clauses.

Question number 8 is to combine clauses using the time-nuanced conjunction "after". Concerning this entity, there were 43.3% of the students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 9 is to combine clauses using a causal coordinator "if". In this entity, there were 43.3% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 10 is to combine clauses using the time- nuanced conjunction "before". Appertaining to this entity, 46.6% of the students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 11 is to combine clauses using connectors mediating the expression of a contrary idea such as "however, nevertheless, or nonetheless". About this entity, there were 40% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 12 is to combine clauses using connectors mediating the expression of a contrary idea such as "however,

nevertheless, or nonetheless". In terms of this entity, there were 40% of the students provided incorrect answers. Questions 8 to 12 in this test negotiated students' capability to combine independent clauses and adverbial clauses.

Subsequently, questions number 13 and 17 combine simple sentences and noun clauses with the use of subordinate connector "what". Concerning this entity, there were 60% of the students gave incorrect answers. Question number 14 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause with the use of subordinate connector "where". Concerning this entity, there were 63.3% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 15 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause with the use of subordinate connector "why". In this entity, 76.6% of the students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 16 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause using a subordinate connector "whose". With this entity, there were 80% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 18 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause using subordinate conjunction "when". With respect to this entity, 60% of the students answered this item incorrectly. Question number 19 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause with the use of subordinate connector "how". Pertinent to this entity, there were 80% of the students provided incorrect answers. Question number 20 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause using a subordinate connector "whose". Associated with this entity, there were 83.3% of the students gave incorrect answers. Question number 21 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause with the use of subordinate connector "how". As regards this entity, there were 66.6% of the students incorrectly answered this item. The last, question number 22 is to combine a simple sentence and a noun clause using a subordinate connector "how". Pertinent to this entity, 63.3% of the students answered this item incorrectly.

Table 2 below displays the embedded dependent clause indicators of the test items in tandem with their negotiated subordinate connectors and the mean

percentages of students' related difficulties. In such a way, the obvious degree of students' difficulties in modifying complex sentences according to specific types of dependent clauses can be viewed.

Table 2. Types of dependent clauses embedded, subordinate connectors instilled, and the means of percentages of students' difficulties

No	Test Items	Types of Dependent Clause Embedded	Subordinate Clauses Tested	Respective Percentages of Students' Difficulties	Mean Percentage s of Students' Problems
1	1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7;	Adjective clause	who; whose; whom; which	70%; 53.3%; 66.6%; 60%; 76.6%; 73.3%; 40%;	62.82%
2	8; 9; 10; 11; 12	Adverb clause	after; if; before; nevertheless; nonetheless; however	43.3%; 43.3%; 46.6%; 40%; 40%;	42.64%
3	13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22	Noun clause	what; where; why; whose; when; how	60%; 63.3%; 76.6%; 80%; 60%; 60%; 80%; 83.3%; 66.6%; 63.3%	69.31%

Grounded in table 2, it could be summarized that many students or 62.82% of the students, had difficulties combining adjective clauses and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences. The aforesaid problems were also affiliated with their problems in using subordinate connectors “who, whose, whom, and which”. Some students or 42.64% of them, had difficulties in combining adverbial clauses and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences. The aforementioned difficulties were also connected with their difficulties in using some subordinate connectors such as “after, if, before, nevertheless, nonetheless, and however”. Subsequently, many students, or 69.31% of them, had difficulties in combining noun clauses and independent clauses to generate complex English sentences. Those problems were also associated with their difficulties in using subordinate connectors such as “what, where, why, whose, when, and how”.

To be discussed, the current study revealed that more than average tertiary English students in the sixth semester at IAIN Curup have difficulties in modifying English complex sentences. Along with such problems lie specific challenges related to the uses of noun clause, adjective clause, an adverbial clause. In more detail, their difficulties for the three clauses mentioned above also indicate many problems they face *vis-a-vis* the uses of subordinate connectors. The data revealed in the present study could be resources for teaching and learning reflection on the sides of both lecturers and tertiary students. To help students improve their English grammatical competence, they need to be intervened by promising grammatical instructions. Prior studies have offered some good grammatical instructions, for instance, inductive teaching method (Dhiorbháin & Duibhir, 2017; Duibhir, Dhiorbháin, & Cosgrove, 2016; Paesani, 2004; Rice, 2016), deductive teaching method (Wang, 2007), and even the combination of both deductive and inductive teaching methods (Haight, Herron, & Cole, 2007; Jean & Simard, 2013; Sik, 2015).

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The present study revealed that many students or 62.82% of them had difficulties in combining adjective clauses and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences. The aforesaid difficulties were also affiliated with their problems using subordinate connectors “who, whose, whom, and which”. Some students or 42.64% of them, had difficulties in combining adverbial clauses and independent clauses to generate English complex sentences. The aforementioned difficulties were also connected with their difficulties in using some subordinate connectors such as “after, if, before, nevertheless, nonetheless, and however”. Subsequently, many students, or 69.31% of them, had difficulties in combining noun clauses and independent clauses to generate complex sentences. Those difficulties were also associated with their difficulties in using subordinate connectors such as “what, where, why, whose, when, and how”.

The current study implied that the sixth-semester English students at IAIN Curup need to be trained in-depth with grammatical instructions, especially in competencies to modify English complex sentences. In such a way, they will receive adequate grammatical knowledge and competences to deal with writing works whose one of the foundations is grammatical ability in terms of syntax. Further studies are expected to conduct many kinds of experimentations and classroom-action studies that incorporate various English grammar instructions to improve English students’ grammatical ability.

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