

Unit 9

NON-FINITE SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

I. INTRODUCTION

In Unit 8, we learned that **clauses** can be divided into two types: **main clauses** and **subordinate clauses**. Main clauses must be **finite** (i.e. have a finite verb, which is marked for **tense**). We also studied the forms and functions of some finite subordinate clauses.

It is important to know that, unlike main clauses, **subordinate clauses** can be either **finite** or **non-finite**. The following examples (taken from Unit 8) show both possibilities. The underlined subordinate clauses in (1,3,5,7) are finite, while those in (2,4,6,8) are non-finite (the non-finite verbs are given in bold print):

1. Because he was a tourist, he was easily cheated.
2. Being a tourist, he was easily cheated.
3. He booked his ticket early so that he could be sure of a seat.
4. He booked his ticket early in order to be sure of a seat.
5. Before he went to bed, he usually had a drink.
6. Before going to bed, he usually had a drink.
7. He told me that I should study harder.
8. He told me to study harder.

QUESTION 1:

Compare the finite and non-finite subordinate clauses in (1-8) above carefully. Note down all the general differences that you can find between them. [HINT: There are at least three general differences.] It is important that you try to work these out for yourself before reading on.

The general differences between finite and non-finite subordinate clauses are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

II. NON-FINITE VERBS

The first and most obvious difference you may have noticed between the two types of clauses is (of course) the following:

- The **verbs** of **finite** clauses are **finite** (i.e. have **tense**)
- The **verbs** of **non-finite** clauses are **non-finite** (i.e. have no tense)

We discussed tense in Unit 3. The verbs *was*, *could*, *went*, *should* in sentences (1,3,5,7) above are finite and have tense. In these cases, they happen to be in the past tense, but they could very well have been in the present tense: *is*, *can*, *goes*, *shall*.

The verbs *being*, *to be*, *going*, *to study* in sentences (2,4,6,8) are non-finite and have no tense. You will recall that there are 3 non-finite verb forms: **infinitive** (*to go*), **present participle** (*going*) and **past participle** (*gone*).

QUESTION 2:

The underlined clauses below are supposed to be non-finite subordinate clauses. Give the appropriate non-finite forms of the verbs given in brackets.

Julius Caesar was a great Roman general who wanted to _____ (be) crowned emperor of Rome. _____ (fear) Caesar's ambition, Brutus discussed with his friends what to _____ (do). _____ (draw) together by their love of democracy, the conspirators killed Caesar in the Capitol.

Caesar's friend, Mark Antony, gave a speech at his funeral. _____ (speak) at the top of his voice, he asked the Romans to _____ (lend) him their ears. _____ (stir) up by his fiery speech, the crowd then turned on the conspirators. Completely _____ (take) by surprise, they fled, and a civil war followed. _____ (know) that the end was near, Brutus killed himself.

III. SUBJECTLESS CLAUSES

In Units 7 and 8, we've seen that a **finite** clause – whether it's a main (as in sentence 1 below) or subordinate clause (sentence 2) – must have a **subject**:

1. Many innocent bystanders were injured at the demonstration.
2. I heard that many innocent bystanders were injured at the demonstration.

If the subjects were missing, the result would be ungrammatical:

- 1.* ___ were injured at the demonstration.
- 2.* I heard that ___ were injured at the demonstration.

But what about **non-finite** clauses?

QUESTION 3:

Some of the underlined non-finite subordinate clauses below are ungrammatical. Mark them with a (X), and explain why they are ungrammatical.

1. Driving to work this morning, John saw an accident.
2. He driving to work this morning, John saw an accident.
3. Disappointed with her performance, the boss decided to sack her.
4. He disappointed with her performance, the boss decided to sack her.
5. Peter applied to ten different universities in order to get into one.
6. Peter applied to ten different universities in order he to get into one.
7. To be eligible for a scholarship, you have to be a permanent resident.
8. You to be eligible for a scholarship, you have to be a permanent resident.

ANSWER:

From Question 3, you should have noticed the important generalisation that:

A non-finite clause does not normally have a subject.

The question you'll probably want to ask at this point is this: if a non-finite clause has no subject, then how do we know what it is about (e.g. 'who did what?')

QUESTION 4:

Here are the correct non-finite clauses from Question 3. For each underlined non-finite clause, write down its 'logical' subject, i.e. what you understand the subject to be, even though it is 'hidden'. What common pattern do you see in all these cases?

1. (_____) driving to work this morning, John saw an accident.
3. (_____) disappointed with her performance, the boss decided to sack her.
5. Peter applied to ten different universities in order (_____) to get into one.
7. (_____) to be eligible for a scholarship, you have to be a permanent resident.

Generalisation:

In each of the above sentences, the 'logical' subject of the non-finite subordinate clause is always _____

From Question 4, you should have discovered this general principle:

The '**logical**' subject of a **non-finite subordinate clause** is normally the same as the **subject** of the **main clause** that it is attached to.

QUESTION 5:

Based on the principle given above, what do you think is wrong with the following sentences? Re-write them in a grammatical form:

1. Swimming in the sea, the salt water got into his eyes.

ANSWER:

2. Destroyed by the earthquake, the workers started re-building the houses.

ANSWER:

3. Angered by the noisy demonstrators, the speech was cancelled.

ANSWER:

4. All the time talking on his mobile phone, the operation was badly done by the surgeon.

ANSWER:

QUESTION: What's common to all these ungrammatical sentences?

ANSWER:

There are, however, some exceptions to the generalisation that non-finite clauses do not have 'surface' subjects. We will avoid highly unusual sentences, and stick to the most common exception below.

QUESTION 6:

Some of the following non-finite clauses are ungrammatical, but some are grammatical even with a surface subject. Can you figure out the conditions under which a non-finite clause can have a surface subject?

1. * He to say such a thing is terrible.
2. For him to say such a thing is terrible.
3. * It is easy the monkey to climb the tree.
4. It is easy for the monkey to climb the tree.

For a non-finite subordinate clause to have a subject, it must: _____

IV. SUBORDINATORS

In Unit 8, we saw that a finite subordinate clause must have a **subordinator**, like *as* or *because*:

1. As he has become a citizen, he is entitled to apply for a passport.
2. He doesn't want to join the tour to Beijing because he has been there before.

Is this true of non-finite subordinate clauses too?

QUESTION 7:

The following sentences contain non-finite subordinate clauses (underlined), some with subordinators and some without. Which of them are ungrammatical? Can you explain why?

1. As having become a citizen, he is entitled to apply for a passport
2. Having become a citizen, he is entitled to apply for a passport.

3. Because having been there before, he doesn't want to join the tour to Beijing.
4. Having been there before, he doesn't want to join the tour to Beijing.
5. That being a Chinese, he naturally loves Chinese food.
6. Being a Chinese, he naturally loves Chinese food.

Some of the above sentences are ungrammatical because _____

From Question 7, you probably got the idea that a non-finite subordinate clause cannot have a subordinator. This is generally true, but it is not as simple as that.

QUESTION 8:

Both the finite and non-finite subordinate clauses underlined below have subordinators. Identify the non-finite clauses, and decide whether any of them is ungrammatical.

1. Since he became a Christian, he has given up gambling.
2. Since becoming a Christian, he has given up gambling.
3. When you ride a horse, be careful not to frighten it.
4. When riding a horse, be careful not to frighten it.
5. Though he was defeated, he did not lose heart.
6. Though defeated, he did not lose heart.

ANSWER:

You may have found that all the above sentences (1-6) are grammatical, including non-finite subordinate clauses with subordinators (*when, since, though, etc.*), contrary to what we found in Question 7.

Unfortunately, there is no simple way of generalising about which non-finite subordinate clauses can take subordinators, and which cannot. The general idea is that a subordinator is usually not present in a non-finite subordinate clause, unless the meaning really requires it. For example, in sentence (2) above, if we leave out the subordinator *since*, it would be hard to guess at the exact relationship between 'becoming a Christian' and 'he has given up gambling':

- 2a. Becoming a Christian, he has given up gambling.

To indicate that the relationship is one of time (i.e. ‘since the time he became a Christian’), we use the subordinator *since* to make this clear:

2. Since becoming a Christian, he has given up gambling.

V. FUNCTIONS OF NON-FINITE SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

In unit 8 we saw that finite subordinate clauses function as part of a ‘larger’ clause -- i.e. as the Subject, Object, Complement or Adverbial of that clause. What about non-finite subordinate clauses? Do they have the same range of functions too?

QUESTION 9:

Each of the following sentences contains a non-finite subordinate clause, underlined for you. What is the function of each of these clauses within the sentence?

1. Flying a plane is an exciting experience.

The function of the underlined non-finite subordinate clause in this sentence is:

2. Being chased by a vampire can be very scary.

ANSWER:

3. He hates being chased by vampires.

ANSWER:

4. She enjoys swimming in the sea.

ANSWER:

5. His favourite pastime is to watch girls passing by.

ANSWER:

6. His greatest regret is not having studied harder in his youth.

ANSWER:

7. Attacked on all sides, the soldiers had to surrender finally.

ANSWER:

8. After finishing his homework, he enjoys watching a movie.

ANSWER:

9. She opened the door and let the intruder in, thinking that he was her husband.

ANSWER:

10. Having worked tirelessly for forty years, he finally decided to retire.

ANSWER:

You will find that non-finite subordinate clauses, just like finite subordinate clauses, function as part of a larger clause – e.g. as its Subject (as in sentences 1-2), Object (3-4), Complement (5-6) or Adverbial (7-10).

QUESTION 10:

Fill in the blank in each of the following sentences with a **non-finite subordinate clause**, using the appropriate form of the words in brackets, plus any other words that are needed to complete the clause:

1. _____ (escape, jail), he was arrested again by the police.

2. _____ (read, letter), he started to cry.

3. _____(be, mother) is no easy task.
4. She enjoys _____(watch, old movies).
5. His biggest achievement was _____(climb, Mount Everest).
6. _____(travel, Egypt), he saw the pyramids.

VI. SUMMARY

To sum up, in this unit, we've learned that:

- i) A subordinate clause (unlike a main clause) can be either finite or non-finite;
- ii) A non-finite subordinate clause has a verb which is non-finite (not marked for tense);
- iii) It usually has no surface subject, and its 'logical' or 'understood' subject is the same as the subject of the main clause;
- iv) It is not introduced by a subordinator (unless the meaning requires it);
- v) Like a finite subordinate clause, a non-finite subordinate clause functions as part of another clause (as Subject, Object, Complement or Adverbial).

And now, to reinforce what you've learned, let's do some additional exercises.

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ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

In each of the following passages, some subordinate clauses (or parts of them) have been left out from some of the sentences. Complete the missing parts, making use of the words given in brackets – but note that you may also need to use other words of your own, such as subordinators (*that, when, because, if, etc.*), determiners (*the, her, this, etc.*), auxiliaries (*can, be, have, etc.*), and other words. Make sure that the parts completed by you make sense and are grammatically correct.

Text 1:

_____ (read, report) about abode seeker Wong Lau-shi, I feel both sympathy and disgust - sympathetic towards the mentally disabled deaf and dumb girl and disgusted at the Hong Kong government.

Just what does it take to activate the government's discretionary powers on humanitarian or compassionate grounds? This 26-year-old woman has no one on the mainland _____(take care), but has two able-bodied parents who can give her love and support right here in Hong Kong. _____(send back, mainland) with no proper care available, she will almost certainly be taken advantage of in some way.

Text 2:

A hidden army of obese Hong Kongers are living indoors for fear of _____(laugh at), says an expert who released figures yesterday. _____(show) 29 per cent of the adult population is grossly overweight.

About one in 20 adults weighs double their ideal body weight and are classified as morbidly obese, Chinese University of Hong Kong dean of medicine Sydney Chung Sheung-chee said.

"That figure may come as some surprise because _____(walk in the street) we don't see it," Professor Chung said.

"But the truth of the matter is _____(morbidly obese, patients, stay, home); they don't want to be seen."

Text 3:

_____ (Three Gorges Dam project, enter, next phase), critics charge that issues ranging from environmental protection to the forced relocation of 1.1 million people have yet _____(properly, deal with).

"Despite two-thirds of the Three Gorges Dam construction project being finished, problems such as environmental protection and migration are not yet solved," said Kevin Li Yuk-shing, a researcher for the International Rivers Network, a US concern group.

The Three Gorges Dam was begun in 1992 and is expected _____(complete, by 2009) at a cost of 198 billion yuan (HK\$187 billion).

China hopes the project will control flooding of the Yangtze River and generate 84.7 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, but critics have argued _____(also, have, disastrous impact) on displaced people and the environment.

More than 1.1 million people living around the Three Gorges Dam area have been forced to leave their homes _____(land, live on, flood) when the dam is completed.

There have been reports of resettlement funds _____(embezzle, misappropriate, illegally, use).