

# *Mistakes that students of English Language make in using adverbial clauses of time*

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## **Abstract**

To know a language does not only mean to know its vocabulary, but how to link the words, the word order in a clause as well as the order of clauses in a sentence, their role and their relations to each other. The relationship of the clauses in a sentence is especially important concerning complex sentences, in which the clauses are not of the same level but show a dependency.

So, precisely the adverbial clauses of time are the ones that are highly complicated and create confusion. For this reason, most of the people try to avoid them, and use simple clauses instead, nevertheless, this somehow loses the meaning and originality of the idea. This means that although complex, adverbial clauses of time are crucial in explaining our ideas and thoughts.

Based on the great number of the adverbial clauses of time, on the meanings that they convey as well as on the manner how the meaning is expressed, this paper will concentrate on mistakes that students of English Language make when using adverbial clauses of time. It will focus on the structure of the adverbial clauses of time, as well as their use.

**Key words:** *clause, sentence, adverbial clause of time, main (independent) clause, subordinate (dependent) clause, subordinator.*

## ***Introduction***

Adverbial clauses are dependent clauses that function as adverbs. They are adjuncts and therefore they modify the verb of the main clause. Moreover, they are easy to identify because they are

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introduced by subordinating conjunctions. They can be put anywhere in the sentence: as the sentence opener or as a sentence closer.

### *Literature review*

Adverbial clauses of time are one of the most widely used and most numerous clauses of all adverbial clauses. Adverbial clauses of time are introduced by adverbs of time, which are also subordinators, and express the time of the action of the verb phrase in the main clause which can be fixed in time, duration or frequency. However, according to Nuhui (2002), "The time relations between the main and subordinate clauses can be different: the actions can be simultaneous, one action may follow the other, it may precede the other, it may start at the moment that the other finishes or it may last till the other begins, etc." (p. 149).

e.g. She sang as she drove home. - the action of the main clause and that of the subordinate clause happen at the same time.

He always reads an hour or so before he falls asleep. - the action in the main clause precedes that of the subordinate clause.

As soon as he wakes up, he turns on the radio. - both actions closely follow each other.

The baby-sitter sang until the baby fell asleep. - the action of the main clauses lasts until the action of the subordinate clause begins.

Subordinators that introduce adverbial clauses of time are:

when, whenever, while, as, as soon as, as long as, till, until, since, after, before, hardly...when, scarcely...when, no sooner...than.

According to Azar (2009), "When – shows that the actions in the main clause and time clauses are either simultaneous or follow each other; Whenever – means 'at what time', 'no matter when' ; While – means 'during the time that', 'at the same time that' ; As – introduces a clause in which the action is in progress; As soon as – means 'at the moment that', 'not later than' ; Till and Until – mean 'up to the time when' ; Since – means 'from the time that', 'after the time that' After – shows that the action of the subordinate clause of time precedes the action of the main clause ; Before – shows different order of the actions" (p. 368).

In general, these subordinators express something that happens by referring to a period of time or to another event and they answer the questions 'when?', 'since when?' that are used to find out the adverbial clause of time.

e.g. When I pass this exam, I will be very happy.

He proposed to her after he had known her quite well.

Before you go, bring me some water.

Lisa has lived in that house since she began to study.

I lived in Prishtina until I finished my studies.

When an adverb clause precedes an independent clause, a comma is used to separate the clauses whereas when the adverb clause follows, usually no comma is used.

According to Nuhiu (2002), "Adverbial clauses of time can also be performed by 'gerundial clauses' which are introduced by the preposition 'on' which emphasizes an idea of an immediate succession and by 'participial clauses' which are divided into present participial and past participial clauses of time" (p. 154)

e.g. On arriving home, somebody called him.

Spending all the money, he came back home.

Having finished his studies, he got a job.

"In Adverbial clauses of time, a Present Tense in the main clause takes a Present Tense in the time clause; a Past Tense in the main clause takes a Past Tense in the time clause" (Eckersley, 1967, p. 338).

e.g. He doesn't go to sleep until I read him a story.

She learned about her illness after she visited the doctor.

However, a Future Tense in the main clause takes a Present Tense or a Present Perfect Tense in the clause of time (Blaganje & Konte, 1979).

e.g. He will study at home until his mother comes.

He will study at home until his mother has come.

Adverbial clauses of time have the same word order as any other sentence. So, the subject is followed by the verb.

e.g. He came while she was cooking.

I will wait until they call me.

The weather is cold when it is cloudy.

## **Methods**

Based on my experience in teaching English Syntax at the AAB University, I have noticed that my students have difficulties and make many mistakes when it comes to using adverbial clauses of time. This happens for some reasons: first because they cannot make the difference between the phrase and the clause so whenever they have to complete a sentence (a main clause) with an adverbial clause of time they use a phrase instead, for example:

He was having dinner around ten o'clock. - prepositional phrase

He was having dinner after work. - prepositional phrase

A cow attacked your car yesterday. - adverbial phrases

I will ring you up tonight - adverbial phrase

My brother studied very hard all year. - noun phrase

A cow attacked your car this morning. - noun phrase

Then there are cases when they mix the subordinator, it means that instead of using a time subordinator, they use a subordinator of another type of adverbial clauses for example:

The package came where he went in. - place subordinator

My brother studied very hard because he had a lot of exams. - reason subordinator

Moreover, my students' sentences also contain mistakes regarding the tenses, it means they use different tenses in the main and subordinate clause and that's why their sentences sometimes don't make sense in English for example:

They left before the play is over.

Present Simple Tense is used in the subordinate clause instead of Past Simple Tense, it means that Past Simple Tense should have been used because both actions happened in the past.

When Tom got home, we already had dinner.

Past Simple is used in the main clause instead of Past Perfect Tense, it means that Past Perfect Tense should have been used because the action in the main clause happened before the action in the subordinate clause.

Mistakes are also found in identifying adverbial clauses of time in a complex sentence, whenever they see the subordinator 'when' they

think that the subordinate clause functions as an adverbial clause of time for example:

When he will come doesn't depend on us.

The subordinate clause functions as Subject Clause because it can be replaced with the word 'it'.

They don't know when he was coming.

The subordinate clause functions as Object Clause because the verb 'know' is a transitive verb and transitive verbs require an object.

The first thing to discover is when the victim was last seen.

The subordinate clause functions as Subject Complement Clause because the verb 'is' is a linking verb and the subordinate clause describes the subject or says something about it.

The year when he graduated was a happy year.

The subordinate clauses functions as a Noun Modifier and it modifies the noun 'year'.

Being aware of the most common mistakes that students make regarding the adverbial clauses of time, I offer here some exercises that can provide useful practice for my students in order to improve the mistakes that I mentioned above. Each type of exercise here is intended to demonstrate how the adverbial clauses of time answer a need when we communicate.

**Exercise 1:** Underline the adverbial clauses of time in the sentences below.

1. He stayed with his cousins when he was in New York.
2. As soon as the rain began, the children wanted to go outdoors.
3. I had a cup of coffee before I left for work.
4. We won't know the results until the doctor calls.
5. We ate something after we went to the movie.

**Exercise 2:** Add the word in brackets to the correct place in each sentence.

1. Anna gets home from work, she likes to read. (after)
2. We have to wait here she comes. (until)
3. John comes, we can leave for the cinema. (as soon as)
4. She speaks English, I can't understand her. (when)
5. She was shopping, her mother phoned her. (while)

**Exercise 3:** Complete the sentences by adding an adverbial clause of time.

1. I saw the movie.....
2. I always take a bath.....
3. I went to bed.....
4. Do not disturb me.....
5. I always brush my teeth.....

**Exercise 4:** Choose the best alternative.

1. We will finish the task when the week \_\_\_\_\_.

a.will  
c.has ended

b.ended  
d.ends

- 2.While you \_\_\_\_\_ coffee, a cow attacked your car.

a.have  
c.had

b.were having  
d.have had

- 3.John was having dinner when I \_\_\_\_\_ him.

a. called  
c. calls

b. was calling  
c. have called

4. The last time I \_\_\_\_\_ in London, the weather was rainy and wet.

a. had been  
c. was

b.am  
c. will have been

5. As soon as my brother knew the location of the thieves, he \_\_\_\_\_ the police.

a. was telephoning  
c. telephoned

b. had telephoned  
c. telephones

### **Findings**

We have noticed that students complete the sentences with a phrase and not a time clause as it is required. Another type of mistake found in the students' writings and tests is the use of subordinators, it means they use different types of subordinators or no subordinators instead of using time subordinators. We have also identified mistakes in the use of tenses in a complex sentence, there are cases when they use an incorrect verb tense in the time clause and as a result the sentence doesn't have meaning and is not grammatically correct. Furthermore,

we have noticed that students also have difficulties identifying adverbial clauses of time in a complex sentence.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion, I think that it is important to recognize adverbial clauses of time. Students should know that adverbial time clauses consist of a subject and a full verb and cannot stand alone, it means that they are dependent clauses. Therefore, we can say that an adverbial clause does the same function as an adverb or adverbial phrase.

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