

Extension exercises

Chapter 30: Complex sentences: integrating the elements | Comments

Exploring learners' problems with comprehension

Precise responses to this question will depend on the students involved and on the materials chosen. By carrying out experiments like this, however, we often learn to anticipate problems better, and learners sometimes learn to recognise problems (for example, they may think they have understood, but their 'understanding' may be wrong).

Exploring how learners use English

Again, precise responses to this question will depend on the students involved and the task which is set. The following, however, are some of the points teachers often discover through carrying out experiments like this.

- Students don't use constructions in particular contexts that we would expect – although they may be able to manipulate the form correctly in guided exercises, they lack the confidence to use them more freely.
- There are great differences in awareness among students. The students who are more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses tend to be more competent, although there are sometimes quite dramatic exceptions to this general rule.
- Personality is often a key factor – some people really prefer to 'play safe', and others, for example, will go all out to get across their point despite lacking the appropriate ways to express themselves.
- In multilingual classes, students with different first language backgrounds will have different kinds of advantages (students who speak a language which is closely related to English may be able to assume a great deal more about the formation of complex sentences, but they are also more likely to be 'tricked' by differences that they don't expect).

Course materials

Precise responses to this question will depend on the materials you choose. Materials produced for European or international distribution often pay attention primarily only to general reading skills, and unravelling meaning in complex sentences is neglected (perhaps because complex sentence construction is not such a significant problem for learners who already speak a European language).

Learners are often given practice (frequently of a fairly mechanical kind) in forming subordinate (adverbial) clauses using conjunctions, and in forming relative clauses. However, less attention is sometimes paid to other kinds of clause (for example, non-finite clauses and noun clauses), and often the topic of when and why we use complex sentences is neglected.