

Extension exercises

Chapter 30: Complex sentences: integrating the elements

Exploring learners' problems with comprehension

Find a piece of authentic written English on a topic that you think will be of interest to one of your classes. Look specifically for a text which includes complex sentences that you think will cause difficulties of comprehension for many of students.

After using the text in class for general comprehension purposes and/or discussion of the topic, ask the students to pick out any sentences whose grammar makes them difficult to understand and ask them to explain where the difficulties lie.

If the students don't focus on the sentences you had anticipated, draw their attention to these, and ask them to explain them to you.

What insights or knowledge do you gain through carrying out this activity?

Exploring how learners use English

Choose a class which has already studied and practised aspects of constructing complex sentences in English.

In class, prepare the students to write a composition by discussing the topic and providing some help with vocabulary and expressions which will be useful to them. Tell the students that in correcting the composition you will focus in particular on the construction of sentences and will give credit for appropriately constructed complex sentences.

Before you collect in the compositions, ask students to mark on the composition in a different coloured pen any sentences or parts of sentences that they either feel they have constructed particularly well, or that they feel particularly unsure about. Ask them to add a written comment to explain their markings.

Analyse (some of?) the compositions and consider:

- 1 What specific strengths and difficulties are characteristic of your students' writing?
- 2 What is the relationship between these strengths and difficulties and the particular aspects of sentence construction they have studied?
- 3 What is the relationship between these strengths and difficulties and the way sentences are constructed in their first language(s)?
- 4 How aware do the students seem to be of their strengths and difficulties?
- 5 To what extent is there any correspondence between students who construct sentences well and those who are strong in other aspects of the language?
- 6 Is there any other way in which you can account for differences between individual students with regard to their ability in this respect?
- 7 If possible, ask a colleague or some colleagues to carry out a similar activity so that you can compare and discuss the results.

Course materials

Choose some course materials which your students use to study English. Consider the following specific questions.

- 1** How much guidance and practice is provided in identifying and unravelling the meaning of complex sentences and badly-expressed sentences?
- 2** How much systematic guidance and practice is provided in identifying the structure of specific kinds of complex sentences?
- 3** How much guidance and practice is provided in producing these specific features of complex sentences?