

# Identifying Embedded and Conjoined Complex Sentences: Making it Simple

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any textbooks on child language disorders recommend that clinicians conduct an analysis of complex sentence use when assessing preschool and school-aged children (e.g., Bernstein & Tiegerman-Farber, 2002; Nelson, 1998; Paul, 2001; Reed, 1994). Unfortunately, this task can be daunting due to the limited definitions and examples provided and the fact that speech-language pathology students do not appear to have a strong understanding of syntactical structures. Justice and Ezell (1998) found that speech-language pathology students were able to identify sentence type (i.e., simple, complex, compound, compound-complex) with only 67% accuracy. Given the fact that many students

have difficulty identifying the basic structures of English, such as nouns, verbs, and adverbs (Long, 1996), it is of little surprise that they also struggle with identifying complex sentences. Given these difficulties, a tool to help students and practicing speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify complex sentences was developed. The result was a flowchart using the complex sentence types described by Paul (1981). Although these categories are not the only way complex sentences are described, they are commonly discussed in textbooks for language development (e.g., Haynes & Shulman, 1998; Owens, 2001), language disorders in children (e.g., Nelson, 1998; Reed, 1994), and language sample analysis (e.g., Paul, 1981; Retherford, 2000).

This article was developed to be a tutorial. Initial information will be provided concerning the development and importance of complex sentences. The major portion of the article provides the definition of complex sentences, explains how to identify them, and presents cautions to take during identification. Finally, a flowchart that can be used to identify complex sentences is presented with practice sentences. In order to accurately use this flowchart, an understanding of the structure of English is needed. A glossary defining terms used in this tutorial is provided in Appendix A. In the Cautions section, information is provided about modals, auxiliaries, and copulas. It is assumed that the person using this flowchart has an understanding of what these structures are. Furthermore, it is assumed that the reader understands that many words in English serve different functions within a sentence depending on their use. For instance, the word *before* can take the form of a preposition (He will not arrive *before* noon) or a conjunction (*Before* you go, you must finish your work). The flowchart does not aid one in learning the parts of speech.

**ABSTRACT:** An important area of assessment for later preschool and school-aged children is the use of complex sentences. In this article, complex sentences are those identified by R. Paul (1981): embedded and conjoined. These sentences allow a child to provide information about clausal and temporal relationships and aid in more mature narratives. Unfortunately, these types of sentences are difficult to identify. A complex sentence flowchart was developed by the author to aid in identifying 12 types of embedded and conjoined sentences (e.g., relative clauses, infinitive clauses, multiple embedded, simple conjunctions). Included in this tutorial is a review of sentence structure, complex sentence development and importance, and use of complex sentences by children with language disorders. The tutorial also defines complex sentences and introduces the flowchart; it can be used when analyzing a child's language sample and/or narrative. Practice sentences, answers, and explanations are provided so that the reader can practice using the flowchart.

**KEY WORDS:** child, language, assessment, syntax

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## TYPES OF SENTENCES

A brief explanation of the sentence types in English is provided below as a basis for discussing complex sentences. Two definitions are needed in order to do so: sentence and clause. A *sentence* is a “structure that consists of one or more clauses capable of presenting a complete thought in a manner which is grammatically acceptable” (Turner, 1966, p. 87). A *clause* contains a subject and predicate (verb plus any complements or modifiers) (Harris, 2006). Sentences can be identified based on their function or clause structure. A brief explanation of these classifications is provided. For more in-depth explanations, the reader is referred to textbooks on English grammar (e.g., Huddleston & Pullum’s [2005] *A Student’s Introduction to English Grammar*). This author has found *The Syntax Handbook* by Justice and Ezell (2002) to be a helpful book; this book was written by SLPs.

### Sentence Function

Sentences can be classified based on the function (purpose) of the sentence. There are four functions of sentences. The speaker’s purpose could be:

- Declarative  
**Definition:** The speaker makes a positive or negative statement.  
**Examples:** The dog is big. I like to eat chocolate. We are not home.
- Interrogative  
**Definition:** The speaker asks a question in the form of yes/no, *wh-*, or tag.  
**Examples:** Are you going home? Where is the school? You’ll eat this, won’t you?
- Imperative  
**Definition:** The speaker gives a command or makes a request.  
**Examples:** Give me the keys. Put the paper on the floor.
- Exclamatory  
**Definition:** The speaker expresses strong feeling.  
**Examples:** That was an amazing day! Oh no, the dog got hit!

### Sentence Clausal Structure

Sentences can also be identified based on the structure of the sentence. This is related to the number of clauses found in the sentence. Remember that a clause contains a subject and predicate. Clauses can be independent (expresses the main idea of a sentence; can stand by itself and continue to have complete meaning) or dependent (must be used with an independent clause in order to have complete meaning).

Sentences are identified as follows:

- Simple  
**Definition:** contains one independent clause; has a subject and predicate; conveys one thought; these sentences can be long or short; simple sentences may contain a compound noun (e.g., *The boy and girl* stood by the door) or verb (*Shelly washes and dries* the dishes).  
**Examples:** The snow melts. The snow melts quickly. Sara and Angel dance everyday.
- Compound  
**Definition:** contains two or more independent clauses (simple sentences) conjoined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so); they have two or more subjects and predicates.  
**Examples:** The boys wanted to play football, but it was too hot. I wanted some ice cream, so I bought some at the store.
- Complex  
**Definition:** joins one or more dependent clauses to an independent clause; the dependent clauses can be found at the beginning or end of the sentence, or embedded within it; these sentences usually have a subordinating conjunction (e.g., because, when, although) or relative pronoun (e.g., that, which, who)  
**Examples:** After I went to work, I went to the gym. I went to the gym after I went to work. The crowd clapped while the children danced. It makes me happy that you are here.
- Compound–complex  
**Definition:** contains two or more independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction and one or more dependent clauses (generally conjoined to the independent clauses with a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun); these sentences combine a complex sentence with a compound sentence.  
**Examples:** When I saw her, she was dancing because she had won the prize. They could not believe that he was there, but Nancy said he was.

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## ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT COMPLEX SENTENCES

The clausal structure descriptions above are how sentences are typically identified in English grammar references both in print and on-line as well as in some speech pathology textbooks. Contrastively, some SLPs who specialize in child language identify complex sentences differently (e.g., Owens, 2001; Paul, 1981, 2001; Retherford, 2000). Such authors identify complex sentences as “those that contain more than one verb phrase in embedded or conjoined multiclausal utterances” (Paul, 2001, p. 427). Some researchers (e.g., Craig, Connor, & Washington, 2003; Jackson & Roberts, 2001; Marinellie, 2004) also use this definition of complex sentences in published research articles.

This tutorial was written to aid students and SLPs in identifying this type of complex sentence. In this form, complex sentences are identified as either embedded or conjoined.

## Development of Complex Sentences

Complex sentences generally emerge in a child's speech when he or she has attained a mean length of utterance (MLU) of 3.0 (Lahey, 1988; Paul, 1981). The first complex sentence structures that emerge in children are (a) coordination of clauses with the word *and* (e.g., I like Barbies and he likes Batman), (b) noun phrase complements (also known as full propositional complements) (e.g., I wish I was bigger), and (c) infinitives with the same subject (e.g., I want to eat a banana) (Bloom, 1991). These generally develop when a child has an MLU of between 3 and 4

(Paul, 2001). As children continue to develop, they add more embedded sentences to their language by using (a) infinitives with different subjects (I want you to go to sleep) and (b) relative clauses (He is the man that I saw) (Bloom, 1991). Paul reported that these skills develop when a child's MLU is between 4 and 5. Other complex sentences generally developed during this time are gerunds (I liked seeing it), *wh-* infinitives (I know how to do it), and unmarked infinitives (Watch me swing). All of the listed complex sentences are defined in Table 1 and are included in the flowchart (Figure 1) presented later in this tutorial. By the time the child has an MLU of 5.0, it is expected that 20% of his or her utterances will be complex. This is generally achieved by the age of 4 or 5 (Paul, 2001). As children become effective narrators, they use complex sentences to show the temporal and causal relationships between elements of an episode and development of the story theme (Bamberg

**Table 1.** Complex sentence descriptions and examples.

| <i>Description</i>  | <i>Examples</i>  |
|---|--|
| 1. <b>Full propositional complement (Object noun phrase complement):</b> Contains a "cognitive" verb such as <i>think, guess, wish, know, hope, wonder, show, remember, pretend, mean, forget, say, tell</i> ; may or may not contain <i>that</i> | <i>I hope (that) we go to lunch soon.</i><br><i>Forget that you did it.</i>                            |
| 2. <b>Gerund:</b> Contains an <i>-ing</i> form that functions as a noun (is not directly related to the auxiliary verb)   | <i>Swimming is fun.</i><br><i>I felt like jumping.</i>   |
| 3. <b>Participle:</b> Contains an <i>-ing</i> form that functions as an adjective (modifies a noun or pronoun) (is not directly related to the auxiliary verb)  | <i>I see the man driving down the street.</i><br><i>I want the dog barking loudly.</i>                 |
| 4. <b>Simple infinitive:</b> Contains <i>to</i> followed by a <i>verb</i> ; subject is the same as the main sentences; this <u>does not</u> include early-developing catenatives such as <i>gonna, wanna, gotta, sponsta, hafta, let's, lemme</i> | <i>I need to go.</i><br><i>They want to sleep in the tent.</i>   |
| 5. <b>Infinitive clause with different subject:</b> Contains an infinitive ( <i>to + verb</i> ); the subject of the infinitive clause is different from the main clause   | <i>I want the baby to eat.</i><br><i>He needs the dog to go away.</i>                                  |
| 6. <b>Unmarked infinitive:</b> Contains <i>make, help, watch, or let</i> without a <i>to</i> marker   | <i>Watch me run.</i><br><i>Let me do it.</i>   |
| 7. <b>Simple wh- clause:</b> Contains <i>who, what, where, when, why, how</i> ; does <i>not</i> contain an infinitive <i>to</i> marker  | <i>See how fast I am.</i><br><i>I remember what we do.</i>   |
| 8. <b>Wh- infinitive:</b> Contains a <i>wh-</i> word ( <i>what, where, who, how, when</i> ) and an infinitive   | <i>I don't know what to wear.</i><br><i>You know where to put it?</i>                                  |
| 9. <b>Relative clause:</b> Contains an embedded phrase that functions as an adjective; modifies an object or subject noun phrase; may be marked by <i>who, which, that</i>  | <i>The man who is running is fast.</i><br><i>That is the one that I like.</i>                          |
| 10. <b>Simple conjoining:</b> Contains two clauses that are joined by a conjunction; can be coordination ( <i>and, but, or, etc.</i> ) or subordination ( <i>because, after, etc.</i> )   | <i>I ate fast so I could leave.</i><br><i>I like cake and I like ice cream.</i>                        |
| 11. <b>Embedded and conjoined:</b> Contains both an embedded and conjoined clause; may include a catenative; will have 3 or more verbs  | <i>Swimming is fun because I like to get wet.</i><br><i>I want to stay here, but my mommy says no.</i> |
| 12. <b>Multiple embedding:</b> Contains more than one embedded clause; one verb may be a catenative; will have 3 or more verbs  | <i>I wanna start to run now.</i><br><i>I know that we have to eat soon.</i>                            |

& Marchman, 1991). School-aged children develop further use of conjoining sentences by using words such as *therefore*, *or*, and *before* (Bloom, 1991). Development of complex sentences continues into the adolescent years (Nippold, Schwarz, & Undlin, 1992; Reed, 1994; Scott, 1988) and plays a vital role in a person's writing abilities, oral and written narrative production, and expository text.

## Importance of Complex Sentences

As children develop, they begin to use their language to discuss more complex thoughts and ideas. As they enter school, they are required to use language for many purposes such as talking about unfamiliar objects and events, predicting, persuading, and reporting. Furthermore, they become literate and are required to use concise syntax in written language. These tasks cannot be accomplished easily with simple sentence structure only. Complex sentences aid children in sequencing events temporally and causally (Haynes & Shulman, 1998), improving the cohesiveness of narratives (Badzinski, 1988), and increasing the sophistication of written language (Paul, 2001). Children who struggle with such structures are "increasingly disadvantaged as grade level and linguistic demands increase" (Nelson, 1998, p. 374). Such students would be less prepared to discuss abstract and decontextualized information, understand and use the language of the school curriculum, and understand and use literate language. Increasing a child's ability to use complex sentences has been found to improve reading and writing in regular education students as well as at-risk students (McAfee, 1981; O'Hare, 1973; Saddler, 2005; Weaver, 1996). Scott (1988) indicated, "The importance of complex language to the child cannot be overstated...language consists of intricate weavings of meaning relationships, and these can never be adequately expressed in simple sentences" (p. 59).

## Complex Sentences and Language Impairments

Research has shown that children with language disorders do use complex sentences (e.g., Curtiss, Katz, & Tallal, 1992; Leonard, 1995); however, they use fewer complex sentences and fewer grammatically appropriate complex sentences than their same-age peers (e.g., Gillam & Johnston, 1992; Leonard, 1995; Marinellie, 2004; Schuele, Dykes, & Wisman, 2001; Schuele & Nicholls, 2000). For instance, Gillam and Johnston (1992) investigated the simple and complex *T* units used by school-aged children with language learning impairments compared to those used by their same-age peers. They performed similarly to the same-age peers on measures of content; however, they performed more poorly on measures of form. Specifically, they had more grammatical errors on simple and complex sentences and used fewer complex sentences.

Capps, Losh, and Thurber (2000) studied the narrative abilities of children with autism, children with developmental delays, and children with matched language skills. They found that although the children with autism had similar

narratives to the other groups in relation to length and morphosyntactics, they had significantly fewer complex sentences. Other research has shown decreased complex sentence usage in children who had been maltreated (Eigsti & Cicchetti, 2004).

Analyzing complex sentence use in African American students has also been encouraged because it is based on the clausal unit as opposed to the morphological unit, which is often affected by the use of African American English (Jackson & Roberts, 2001). Craig et al. (2003) suggested that language sampling can be used as a way of "reducing the impact of assumptions derived from the majority culture on the child's use of language" (p. 32). They further suggested that the frequency of complex syntax usage be determined when assessing African American children. Furthermore, Craig et al. identified skills that were positive predictors of reading comprehension for African American students. They found that the use of complex syntax was one of the early predictors.

## Gathering a Sample of Complex Sentence Use

In order to identify what type of complex sentences a child is using, it is necessary to have a sample of the child's spoken language. This can be achieved by gathering either a language sample or a narrative sample. Language sample analyses are most appropriate for children in the developing language stage, as discussed by Paul (2001). Normally developing children in the developing language stage are generally 2½–5 years of age. Narrative samples are appropriate for children in the language for learning stage (i.e., school-aged children). Language samples are commonly used in the field to assess a child's spontaneous language production (Hux, Morris-Friche, & Sanger, 1993; Kemp & Klee, 1997). Surveys of SLPs have found that most use conversation to gather the sample (Hux et al., 1993), and that 48% have a preference for such non-standardized measures (Kemp & Klee, 1997). A complete review of language sampling techniques is beyond the scope of this tutorial. The reader is directed to one of the various analysis procedures available such as *Guide to Analysis of Language Transcripts* (Retherford, 2000) or the *Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts* (Miller & Chapman, 2000). It may be more beneficial to gather a narrative sample in order to determine the use of complex sentences. Dollaghan, Campbell, and Tomlin (1990) found that children produced more complex sentences in narration than in conversation. The University of Wisconsin, Madison has developed a tutorial that provides information about how to gather a language sample and which samples are the most useful for different syntactic analyses. It can be found at [www.languageanalysislab.com](http://www.languageanalysislab.com).

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## WHAT IS A COMPLEX SENTENCE?

The main characteristic of all conjoined and embedded complex sentences is the presence of two or more main

verbs (Paul, 1981). Use of these two plus verbs allows the speaker to express two or more ideas in a single sentence. In order to identify complex sentences, it is important to have working knowledge of independent and dependent clauses. As a reminder, an independent clause is a group of words that contain a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence. Examples of independent clauses are (a) *The man is big*, (b) *I like chocolate*, and (c) *We are driving to school*. A dependent clause is a group of words (phrase or sentence) that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence because it depends on another clause in the sentence to complete the thought. Examples of dependent clauses are (a) *that I want*, (b) *When I got up this morning*, and (c) *crying baby*. Dependent clauses function as nouns (person, place, or thing), adjectives (modifies a noun or pronoun), or adverbs (modifies a verb, adjective, or other adverb) (Owens, 2001). There are two ways to form complex sentences: conjoining and embedding.

### Conjoined Complex Sentences

Conjoined complex sentences contain two or more independent clauses joined together using a conjunction. For instance, the following sentences are simple sentences (i.e., they each contain only one main verb):

- I *went* to the store
- I *needed* ice cream.

These two simple sentences can be combined using a conjunction to make a complex sentence: “I *went* to the store *because* I *needed* ice cream.” This is a complex sentence because it contains two verbs (*went*, *needed*). It is a conjoined sentence because it contains two independent clauses (I went to the store; I needed ice cream) and a conjunction (because). There are a number of conjunctions in the English language. These include (a) coordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *or*, *but*, *both*, *neither*, *either*, *nor*), (b) subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *for*, *so that*, *which*, *because*, *while*, *if*, *after*, *before*, *although*, *as*, *until*, *whenever*), and (c) conjuncts (e.g., *therefore*, *furthermore*, *instead*, *yet*, *however*, *contrastively*).

In the flowchart, there are two instances in which a sentence would be considered conjoined: (a) simple conjoined and (b) embedded and conjoined. For a definition and examples of these types of sentences, please see items 10 and 11 in Table 1.

### Embedded Sentences

Embedded complex sentences contain an independent clause and a dependent clause or phrase. As we know, a dependent clause and phrase must be attached to an independent clause in order for it to have complete meaning. Embedded phrases or clauses can be found at the beginning or end of a sentence. They can also be within the sentence (embedded). For instance, the following two sentences are simple sentences because they contain only one main verb:

- The toy *is* on sale.
- I *want* the toy.

They can be combined to make a complex sentence: “The toy *that I want is* on sale.” This sentence contains the independent clause “The toy is on sale.” This sentence can be said by itself and maintain its full meaning. On the other hand, the dependent clause “*that I want*” cannot be said by itself. It does not have full meaning unless it is attached to the independent clause.

Because embedded clauses are a bit more difficult to understand, a second example is provided:

- They can see us.
- We are sitting by the water.

These two sentences can be combined as such: “They can see us *sitting by the water*.” This is an embedded sentence called a gerund. In this sentence, the independent clause is: “They can see us.” This sentence maintains full meaning by itself. However, “sitting by the water” is not a complete sentence. It has to be attached to the independent clause in order to have meaning.

Ten of the sentence types identified by the flowchart are embedded. Descriptions and examples are provided in Table 1. The sentences are full propositional complement (#1 on the table), gerund (#2), participle (#3), simple infinitive (#4), infinitive clause with different subject (#5), unmarked infinitive (#6), simple *wh*- clause (#7), *wh*- infinitive (#8), relative clause (#9), embedded and conjoined (#11), and multiple embedding (#12). It should be noted that embedded and conjoined was listed in both the conjoined and embedded sections because it will have two clauses conjoined as well as one of the embedded phrases (items 1–9) such as a simple infinitive or relative. It is recommended that the reader take a few moments to review Table 1 at this time to familiarize him- or herself with the different types of sentences and to explore unknown terms.

## IDENTIFYING COMPLEX SENTENCES

As mentioned previously, the main characteristic of a complex sentence is that it contains two or more main verbs. Therefore, in order to identify a complex sentence, the first order of business is to identify all sentences from a sample obtained from a child that contain two or more verbs. This sample can be gathered through language sample means such as conversation, play, or narrative. When identifying the sentences with two or more verbs, a number of cautions should be kept in mind.

### Caution #1: Catenatives

**Description:** Catenatives (also known as semiauxiliaries) are words such as *gonna*, *wanna*, and *hafta*. When counting verbs, catenatives are counted *only* if there are two other main verbs in the sentence.

**Examples:**

- I wanna eat a sandwich.
- I am gonna eat a sandwich and watch a movie.

The first sentence is a simple sentence because it contains one main verb (*eat*) and a catenative (*wanna*). The

second sentence is a complex sentence because it contains two main verbs (*eat* and *watch*) and a catenative (*gonna*).

## Caution #2: Auxiliaries and Modals

**Description:** Auxiliary verbs (also known as helping verbs) are used with main verbs to clarify the action. Examples of helping verbs include *to be*, *have*, *do*, *can*, *could*, *would*, *should*, *may*, *might*, and *must*. Some of these verbs are called modals; they provide information about “certainty, intention, command, and emphasis” (Justice & Ezell, 2002, p. 46). Modals include *can*, *could*, *would*, *should*, *may*, *might*, *must*, *will*, and *shall*. Sometimes the modal or auxiliary verb is contracted with a negative (e.g., *shouldn't*, *don't*, *can't*). The modal or auxiliary verb is *not* counted as a verb; only the main verb is counted.

**Examples:** The following sentences are simple sentences because they contain a main *verb* and a *modal*:

- I *should* go to school.
- I *might* be late.

Some auxiliaries such as *have* and *do* can be identified as an auxiliary or a main verb depending on the sentence. The following sentences contain *have* and *do* as main verbs:

- I *have* to get more money.
- I *did* it fast because I was late.

In the above sentences, the words *have* and *do* are counted as verbs. Therefore, each sentence is complex because it has two verbs (*have* and *get* in the first sentence; *did* and *was* in the second sentence).

*Do* and *have* can also be used as helping verbs as in the following sentences:

- I *do* want an ice cream cone.
- I *have* gone to school for many years.

Both of these sentences are simple because the word *do* and *have* are not the main verbs. Therefore, each sentence has only one verb.

## Caution #3: “To Be” Verbs

**Description:** The *to be* verbs included in this caution are the present and past tense use of *is*, *am*, *are*, *was*, and *were*. They can be used as a main verb (copula) or a helping verb (auxiliary).

**Examples:** The following sentences contain the use of a *to be* verb as a main verb (copula). Each *to be* verb is counted as one verb.

- The man *is* big.
- We *were* hungry.

The following sentences contain *to be* verbs that are helping verbs (auxiliary):

- The man is running.
- They are singing.

In these sentences, the main verb is the verb + *ing* (i.e., running, singing). The *to be* verb is a helping verb; it is

not counted as a verb. Therefore, each of the sentences are simple sentences because they contain one main verb. Keep in mind that *to be* verbs can be used in complex sentences when there is another main verb (e.g., The man who *ran* the race *was* tired).

A further caution concerning *to be* verbs is when they are used in question form. In such a case, they will be separated by the noun because of inversion. When counting verbs, the main verb is still the verb + *ing* while the *to be* verb is helping. Therefore, the following sentences have only one verb.

- Where *are* they *going*?
- *Is* he *running*?

*To be* verbs can be used in other forms than past or present tense. For instance in the sentence “I have been worried about you,” *been* is a *to be* verb that is used as a present perfect verb. For this caution, however, the focus is on the auxiliary and copula use of *to be* verbs described above.

## Caution #4: Fillers

**Description:** Fillers are phrases that are added to utterances that do not contain information necessary for the sentence. Sometimes these will include a word that could be identified as a verb. When counting verbs, do *not* count the words used in filler phrases.

Examples:

- It's, *you know*, the pits.
- It's, *like*, the pits.

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## USING THE FLOWCHART TO IDENTIFY COMPLEX SENTENCES

Paul (1981, 2001) identified 11 types of complex sentences. These were used to develop the flowchart. Participles have been added. A list of the complex sentence types, definition, and examples are provided in Table 1. The Complex Sentence Flowchart is provided in Figure 1. Steps for using the flowchart are as follows:

- Gather a language sample. This sample can consist of spontaneous conversation and/or a narrative.
- Identify the utterances that contain two or more verbs.
- Read the information in the boxes of the flowchart and answer the questions. Follow through the flowchart until you can identify the complex sentence type.

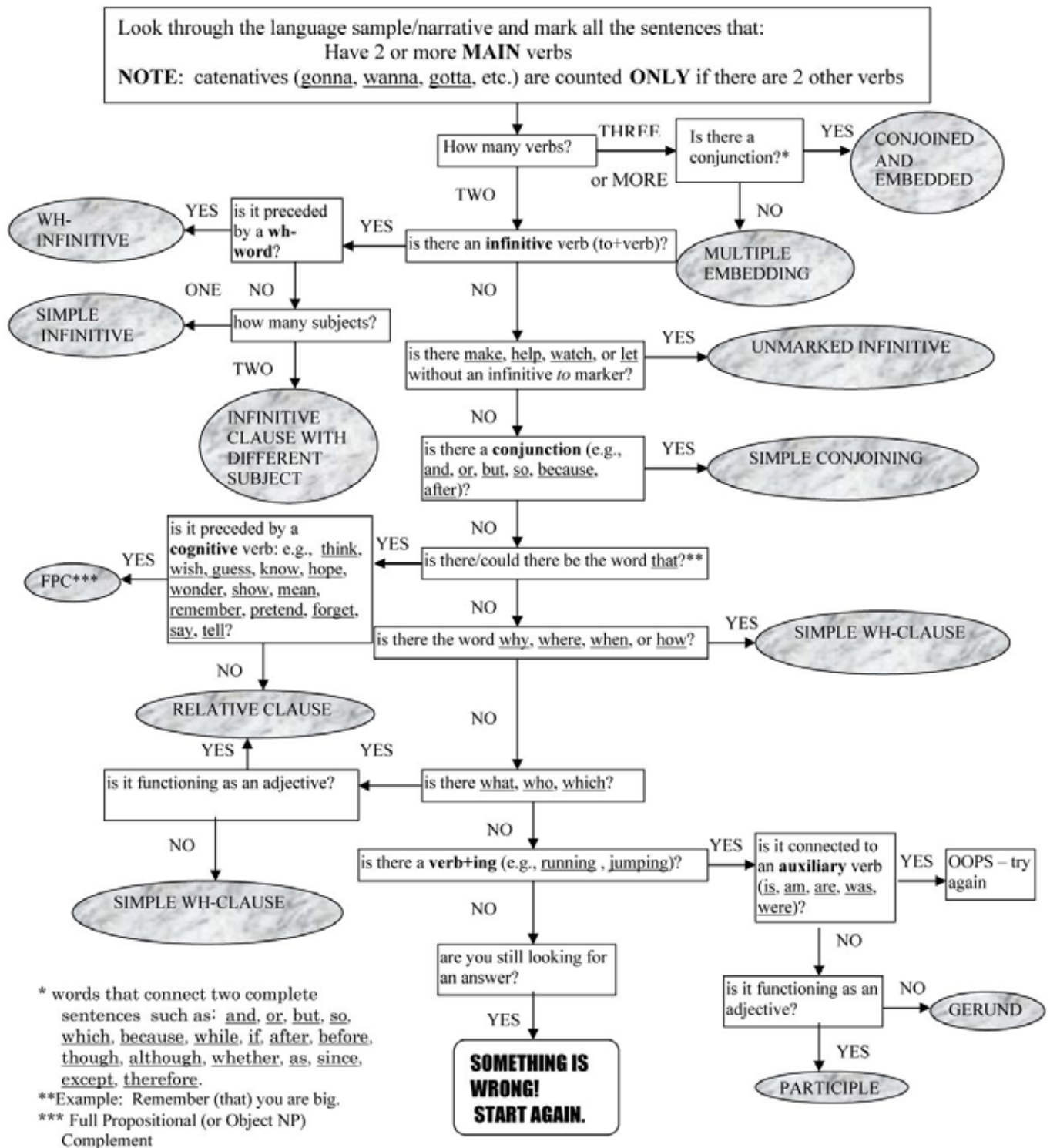
Practice Sentence: *The man who won the race was fast.*

This sentence contains two verbs (*won* and *was*). Starting at the beginning of the flowchart, we would proceed as follows:

- How many verbs? - TWO
- Is there an infinitive verb? – NO
- Is there make, help, watch, or let without an infinitive to marker? – NO

Figure 1. Flowchart to aid in identifying conjoined and embedded complex sentences.

## COMPLEX SENTENCES



- Is there a conjunction – NO
- Is there/could there be the word that? – NO
- Is there the word why, where, when, how – NO
- Is there what, who, which? YES (go to the box on the left)
- Is it functioning as an adjective (modifier)? YES – who won the race describes (modifies) the man
- ANSWER – **relative clause**

Appendix B contains a list of utterances. Try your hand at using the flowchart to identify the type of complex sentences. Keep in mind the cautions discussed above. Also, keep in mind that if the sentence has three or more verbs, the flowchart will only help you identify whether it is *multiple embedding* or *embedded and conjoined*. The multiple embedded sentences will contain more than one type of embedding. For instance, in the sentence *I know I have to go*, there are three verbs (know, have, go). In this sentence, there is a full propositional complement (I know) and an infinitive (to go). This flowchart was not devised to identify the different types of embeddings within a multiple embedded sentence. Furthermore, the flowchart was developed to identify complex sentences in children; it is not appropriate for longer, more complex sentences produced by adults. The answers to the sample sentences and explanations are also provided in Appendix B.

## CONCLUSION

As stated previously, children’s reading and writing abilities improve when they are trained to combine sentences into complex sentences. Oral language is now known to lay “the foundation for acquiring literacy” (Paul, 2001, p. 397). Paul further indicates that children who have difficulty understanding complex sentences will have difficulty with these structures in oral expression and writing. Beyond the importance of complex sentence identification and development for language and reading, researchers have found that children with fluency disorders stutter more on longer, more complex sentences (e.g., Logan & Conture, 1997; Melnick & Conture, 2000; Weiss & Zebrowski, 1992). Although identifying complex sentences can be a difficult job, for our client’s sake, it is imperative that we be able to identify whether the client can use complex sentences and what types are being used.

Treatment plans can be developed to work on improving the use of complex sentences, thereby helping the child be a more sophisticated communicator. Eisenberg (2006) provides descriptions of therapy approaches that may be used to increase complex sentence use: modeling, imitation drills, error detection (identifying whether a sentence was correct/incorrect), and sentence combining. She further indicates that some suggest that children be taught grammar analysis (learning to label grammatical structures); however, Weaver (1996) found, in a review of the literature, that such activities were not efficacious in generalizing to practical use. Eisenberg encourages that regardless of the treatment approach used, therapists should always include

meaningful activities whether they be written or oral. Published therapy materials are available for targeting the use of complex sentences. Linguistics produces therapy materials such as “No-Glamour Sentence Structure Interactive Software,” “Spotlight on Grammar Book 6,” and “Strategic Learning Compound and Complex Sentences.”

Regardless of the availability of materials and discussion of complex sentences in language textbooks, there are limited studies that have indicated how targeting complex sentences can help children with language disorders and which therapy approaches would be most efficacious. Further research is recommended. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of the flowchart for students and practicing SLPs is needed. The author has used the flowchart effectively for approximately 10 years to aid students in identifying complex sentences. However, empirical analysis of its effectiveness is needed.

Hopefully, the use of the flowchart will aid in identifying complex sentences. You may find that if the flowchart is used a number of times, it eventually is not always needed; one can identify a sentence just by looking at it. The flowchart has been revised a number of times over the past years to make it more useful. Keep in mind that not all complex sentences fit neatly into the categories presented; however, this is a place to start.

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## APPENDIX A. GLOSSARY

**Adjective:** a modifier that describes a noun or pronoun

**Catenative:** a semiauxiliary verb; it is a syllabic reduction of the main verb and an infinitive verb (wanna = want to); examples include *wanna, gonna, hafta, gotta, shoulda, sposta, and woulda*

**Clause:** A group of words that contain a subject and predicate

**Conjoined sentence:** a sentence that contains two independent clauses that are joined by a conjunction

**Coordinating conjunction:** a conjunction used to combine two independent clauses: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*

**Dependent clause:** a clause that must be attached to a dependent clause in order to have meaning; commonly begins with a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun

**Embedded sentence:** a sentence that contains an independent clause and a dependent clause or phrase

**Independent clause:** a clause that can stand alone; expresses the main idea of the sentence

**Infinitive:** to followed by a verb (e.g., to eat)

**Noun:** a word that represents a person, place, or thing

**Predicate:** a word or group of words that indicates action or state of being; contains a verb; follows the subject

**Subordinating conjunction:** a conjunction used to combine a dependent clause with an independent clause; examples include *when, because, after, and although*

**Verb:** describes what is done to a noun or pronoun; describes an action or state of being

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## APPENDIX B. PRACTICE SENTENCES, ANSWERS, AND EXPLANATIONS

Identify the type of complex sentence used:

1. Daddy wanted to wear shorts.
2. Standing in line is boring.
3. Help me eat this.
4. The boy is running.
5. I can't get this thing to move.
6. I don't know where to put the toy.
7. I hope you like it.
8. I know we gotta study for the test.
9. It broke and we didn't have it anymore.
10. It's not mine cuz it doesn't have my name on it.
11. Look how tall it is.
12. Mom made this shirt for me to wear.
13. Pretend you are big.
14. Tell me where it is.
15. Where are you going?
16. She likes to read a book, and I don't.
17. She wants to go now.
18. The man's going to want to eat.
19. The dog that is small is mine.
20. We could start working with this.
21. I can see the bunny.
22. Here are the tracks that belong to that.
23. I know how to play that.
24. I don't like the crying baby.

### Answers and Explanations

*Note.* All verbs are underlined; conjunctions are *italicized*.

1. Daddy wanted to wear shorts.

#### SIMPLE INFINITIVE

There is only one subject – daddy. In order for this to be an infinitive with different subjects, the sentence would need to be something like “Daddy wanted the boy to wear shorts.”

2. Standing in line is boring.

#### GERUND

A gerund is an *-ing* verb that is used as a noun. Standing in this sentence is a thing that is being done. is is a helping verb (used as an auxiliary) so it is not counted as a verb. See caution #3.

3. Help me eat this.

#### UNMARKED INFINITIVE

Unmarked infinitives contain the words make, help, watch, or let generally as the first word in the sentence.

4. The boy is running.

#### SIMPLE SENTENCE

This is a simple sentence because it has a main verb (running) and an auxiliary to be verb (is). So, it has only one verb.

5. I can't get this thing to move.

#### INFINITIVE CLAUSE WITH DIFFERENT SUBJECT

This has an infinitive (to move) as well as two subjects (I, this thing).

6. I don't know where to put the toy.

#### **Wh- INFINITIVE**

There are two verbs (know, put). don't is a helping verb so is not counted as a verb. A *wh-* infinitive contains a *wh-* word as a conjunction (*where*) and an infinitive (to put).

7. I hope you like it.

#### **FULL PROPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENT (object noun phrase complement)**

A full propositional complement contains a cognitive verb. In this sentence it is hope. For the flowchart, you would answer yes to the question "is there/could there be the word that." This sentence could be said "I hope that you like it."

8. I know we gotta study for the test.

#### **MULTIPLE EMBEDDING**

This sentence has two verbs plus a catenative (see Caution #1) so we count three verbs.

9. It broke *and* we didn't have it anymore.

#### **SIMPLE CONJOINED**

Only two verbs in this sentence and a conjunction. didn't is a helping verb.

10. It's not mine cuz it doesn't have my name on it.

#### **SIMPLE CONJOINED**

Some to be verbs can be contracted (it is = it's). doesn't is a helping verb. Children often say cuz rather than because as a conjunction.

11. Look how tall it is.

#### **Wh- CLAUSE**

*Wh-* clauses contain a *wh-* word but not an infinitive like *wh-* infinitives do. Remember that how is considered a *wh-* word.

12. Mom made this shirt for me to wear.

#### **INFINITIVE CLAUSE WITH DIFFERENT SUBJECT**

There are two subjects: *mom* and *this shirt*.

13. Pretend you are big.

#### **FULL PROPOSITIONAL COMPLEMENT**

The cognitive verb pretend makes this a full propositional complement. You can say "Pretend that you are big."

14. Tell me where it is.

#### **SIMPLE Wh-CLAUSE**

The *wh-* word (where) is important here.

15. Where are you going?

#### **SIMPLE SENTENCE**

This is a simple sentence because it has a main verb (going) and a helping verb (is). This is a sentence in question form so we invert the subject and verb that separated the main verb and helping verb. See Caution #3.

16. She likes to read a book, *and* I don't.

#### **EMBEDDED AND CONJOINED**

This has three verbs. don't is considered a main verb, not a helping verb in this sentence because it is not followed by another verb.

17. She wants to go now.

#### **SIMPLE INFINITIVE**

The infinitive is easy to spot. There is only one subject (she).

18. The man's going to want to eat.

#### **MULTIPLE EMBEDDING**

This has three verbs without a conjunction.

19. The dog that *is* small *is* mine.

#### **RELATIVE CLAUSE**

A relative clause has a phrase that contains a verb and modifies a noun. In this sentence, "that is small" modifies (describes) the specific dog.

20. We could start working with this.

#### **GERUND**

could is a modal (see Caution #2).

21. I can see the bunny.

#### **SIMPLE SENTENCE**

Another simple sentence. can is a modal.

22. Here are the tracks that belong to that.

#### **RELATIVE CLAUSE**

The phrase "that belong to that" modifies the specific tracks.

23. I know how to play that.

#### **Wh- INFINITIVE**

how is a *wh-* word and to play is an infinitive.

24. I don't like the crying baby.

#### **PARTICIPLE**

A participle is a verb + *ing* that functions like an adjective. In this sentence, crying is describing the specific baby. don't is a helping verb.