

# The Placement of English Adverbial Clauses in Narrative Texts of Native Speakers and Chinese College Students<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The placement of English adverbial clauses has scarcely received due attention in the English language teaching in Taiwan. One major reason of such negligence is that the function of adverbial clauses has not been fully understood by English teachers, and the placement of adverbial clauses has been wrongly treated as a sentence combining issue. The purpose of this study is first, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the discourse function of adverbial clauses, and to see if Chinese students have fully understood the function of adverbial clauses. Then, we wish to apply this knowledge to writing instruction as a part of pedagogical grammar. The result of our analysis shows that the placement of adverbial clauses is highly discourse determined. Discourse factors have been found to contribute to determining the positions of adverbial clauses: foreground/background information structure, the scope of dependence of subordinate adverbial clauses, topic continuity of neighboring clauses, and time sequence of described events.

Key Words: adverbial clauses, information structure, scope of dependence,  
topic continuity, time sequence

## INTRODUCTION

The placement of English adverbial clauses<sup>2</sup> has scarcely received due attention in the English language teaching in Taiwan. One major reason of such negligence is that the function of adverbial clauses has not been fully understood by English teachers. In the perception of most people, adverbial clauses serve to

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<sup>2</sup> Subordinate clauses include participial, prepositional, and infinitive phrases in a broad sense. However, in this study we confine our analysis to finite subordinate adverbial clauses.