

# Exploring Errors Made by Libyan University Students When Forming Relative Clauses in English

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## Abstract

The present study aims to examine how grammar courses can help Libyan EFL university level students acquire, master, and produce complex syntactic structures of the English language. It focuses on relative clauses in English, and examines some of the problems associated with acquiring and producing this kind of complex structures by Libyan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Concerning the kinds of errors made by the participants, the study sheds light on three areas of relative clauses in English. The first two areas investigated here are correct relative pronoun choice and the difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses as they are among the topics covered in the Advanced Grammar course from which the participants in this study are taken. The third investigated area tests the participants' ability to produce correct relative clauses in English and which types of relative clauses will be easier for them to produce. The results showed that the Libyan participants have some problems in choosing the appropriate relative pronouns and problems in assessing whether the relative clauses convey defining or non-defining information. Regarding relative clause formation, the results demonstrated that the participants could not always produce correct structures. They also revealed that some types of relative clauses were more accessible to the participants than others. This study demonstrated that the frequency of production or acquisition order of relative clauses was OS > OO and SO > SS.

## Keywords:

*Relative Clauses, Relative Pronouns, Defining and Non-defining Relative Clauses, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)*

## ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من المدى الذي تساهم فيه مواد تدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية في اكتساب الطلاب الليبيين للغة الإنجليزية وقدرتهم على استيعاب وتكوين التركيبات النحوية لهذه اللغة. وتُركز الدراسة أيضاً على الأسماء الموصولة المستخدمة في اللغة الإنجليزية وتركز أيضاً على اختبار بعض المشاكل المتعلقة باكتساب وتكوين هذا النوع المعقد من جمل صلة الموصول في اللغة الإنجليزية. وفيما يتعلق بأنواع الأخطاء التي يقع فيها المشاركون في هذه الدراسة فقد أُلقت هذه الدراسة الضوء على ثلاث جوانب متعلقة بالأسماء الموصولة في اللغة الإنجليزية. أول جانبين تم اختبارهما في هذه الدراسة هما اختيار ضمير صلة الموصول الصحيح وكذلك الاختلاف بين جمل صلة الموصول التعريفية المحددة وغير المحددة كما تم تناولها في مادة القواعد المتقدمة والتي تم أخذ عينة هذه الدراسة. أما الجانب الثالث الذي تم اختباره هو اختبار قدرة المشاركين في هذه الدراسة على تكوين جمل صلة الموصول الصحيحة باللغة الإنجليزية وكذلك

اختبار أي أنواع الجمل تعد هي الأسهل من حيث ربط وتكوين الجمل. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن المشاركين الليبيين في هذه الدراسة يواجهون بعض المشاكل في اختيار ضمير صلة الموصول المناسب، وأظهرت الدراسة أيضا المشاكل التي تواجههم في تحديد ما إذا كانت جمل صلة الموصول تتقل معلومات تعريفية محددة أم غير محددة. وفيما يتعلق بتكوين جمل صلة الموصول فقد بينت الدراسة أن المشاركين ليسوا دائما بقادرين علي تركيب وربط الجمل بطريقة صحيحة حيث أن بعض أنواع الجمل بالنسبة لهم كانت أكثر سهولة من غيرها وحيث كان ترتيبها علي النحو التالي من حيث سهولة اكتسابها: OS> OO و SO> SS .

## 1. Introduction

Learning a new language is learning a new language system. When learning English, learners are exposed to different grammatical structures they may employ in their academic writing. There are different kinds of complicated syntactic structures in learning English grammatical rules (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). The acquisition of relative clauses is considered one of the most common subjects of many debates in the last few decades because of their complex syntactic behavior compared to other complex structures. Many studies showed that EFL learners made errors when forming relative clauses. English relative clause structure is considered as an obstacle for EFL learners who misuse them quite often. Such repeated errors have become a common issue among EFL learners. Relative clauses are important for EFL learners to master, produce and comprehend (Zagood & Juma, 2012). For instance, in the sentence: ‘*Nora laughed at the boys who had not done their assignments*’, ‘*Nora did not laugh at all boys; just the ones ‘who had not done their assignments*’.

Yong (1987) claimed, “The study of relative clauses forms one of the most important and interesting topics in language typology and universals. It is considered to be as a rich field of enquiry which has attracted many Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers to focus on”(p. 50).

There are many difficulties that a second language learner may face when learning this kind of complicated syntactic structure in the target language. One of the difficulties that challenge second language learners in acquiring relative clauses in English is that there are different structures of this kind of clauses in the English language. Alotaibi (2016) explained this by demonstrating that relative clauses in English are basically categorized into two main structural features, which are “firstly, the syntactic function of the head, namely the main clause constituent which is described by the relative clause [and] secondly, the syntactic function of the gap, namely the constituent which is relativized within the relative clause" (p. 58). Alotaibi also mentioned that studies on the acquisition of relative clauses focused on four types which: SS relative clauses that modify the subject of the main clause and include a subject gap as in ‘*The woman who lives next door is my aunt*. The second structure is OS relative clauses that modify the main clause is object and involve a subject gap as in *I know the lady who lives next door*. The third type SO relative clauses which modify the subject of the main clause and involve an object gap, as in *the lady whom you know is my aunt* and the fourth type is OO relative clauses which modify the object of the main clause and include an object gap as in *I know the lady whom you met yesterday*.

## 1.1 Research Questions

The current study is conducted to investigate the following questions:

1. What types of errors are made by Libyan EFL learners at the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts in Misurata University while forming relative clauses in English?
2. Are the Libyan EFL learners able to master the difference between subject and object relative pronouns?
3. Will the Libyan EFL learners be able to assess the importance of the information within the relative clause? Will this lead them to know the difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses?
4. Which relative clause syntactic structures will be easier for the Libyan EFL learners to acquire?

## 1.2 Hypotheses

As answers to the previous enquiries, it is hypothesized that :

1. The Libyan EFL learners target group will encounter some difficulties in knowing the difference between subject and object relative pronouns.
2. The difference between the importance of the information conveyed in defining and in non-defining relative clauses will not be clear and easy to acquire for most learners.
3. The order of the acquisition of relative clauses by Libyan EFL learners will go with Kuno's order (1974) which was OS> OO>SS>SO.

## 1.3 The Objective of the Study:

The aims of this study are to:

1. Investigate Libyan EFL students' ability to select the appropriate relative pronoun in sentences.
2. Differentiate between defining and non-defining clauses.
3. Identify which types of relative clauses that Libyan EFL students can construct easily?

## 1.4 Literature Review:

A clause is an essential part of a language. It is a group of words which include contain a subject and a verb (Azar, 2002). Clauses are deemed one of the grammatical structures that EFL students may face some challenges to master and use. Swan (2005) defined a clause as “a part of a sentence which consists of a subject and a predicate” (p.50). Azar (2002) stated that there are two types of a clause which are: dependent and independent. An independent clause which is also called the main clause, is a complete sentence. It can work by itself as a sentence while a dependent clause or a subordinate clause is not a complete sentence which have to be accompanied by an independent sentence (Azar, 2002).

Aarts, Chalker and Weiner (2014) defined a clause as “a unit of grammar which typically involves a subject predicate relationship, and which operates at a level lower than a sentence, but higher than a phrase.” (p.64). This definition is also asserted by Azar and Hagen (2009) and Macfarlane (1995), who described a clause as

a group of words which has a subject and a verb. Herring (2016) said that a clause could be an independent (main) or a dependent (subordinate) clause. While the former can stand alone as it conveys a complete, independent information, the latter must be connected to another clause; an independent clause, to express a complete, logical idea. Furthermore, these clauses are also known as main and subordinate clauses (Herring, 2016). Frank (1992) stated that a dependent clause has a subject and a predicate, and it begins with a word that connects it to another clause called an independent clause. Azar and Hagen (2009) determined that independent clause is a complete sentence which has a subject and a verb, while a dependent clause is not a complete sentence. Jackson (2002) defined the relationship between dependent and independent clauses as subordinating two clauses where one 'the subordinate clause' is embedded in the other 'the matrix clause'. Azar (2002) classifies clauses into three types: adverbial clause, relative clause and noun clause.

Wulandari (2018) defined a relative pronoun as a pronoun that functions to combine two sentences into one sentence. He added that this kinds of pronouns are used to connect between main and subordinate clauses. Relative pronouns have the function of subjects or objects in adjective clauses. In other words, a relative pronoun acts as the subject or the object of the subordinate clause. A relative pronoun has the same referent in the main clause of a sentence which is the relative clause adjusts. For example, in the sentence '*This is the car that Sam bought yesterday*', the word '*that*' is a relative pronoun which shows the relative clause '*that Sam bought,*' which modifies the noun '*car*' in the main sentence. '*That*' mentions a '*car*' in the main clause and connects the two sentences '*This is a car*' and '*Sam bought the car yesterday*', where '*car*' is the same word in the two sentences.

Leech and Svartvick (2002) presented that a relative clause's main function is to modify a noun phrase. Radden and Driven (2007) said that relative pronouns' function is to demonstrate the relative clause within the formation of a complex sentence. In other words, Bao (2015) presented that relative pronouns are used to represent the people or things in the main clauses, and each relative pronoun has its particular function. For instance, '*who*' and '*whom*' are used for people, '*that*' is manipulated for people and things, '*which*' is manipulated for things, and "*whose*" is manipulated for a possessive adjective.

Foley and Hall (2003) said that a relative clause either identifies a noun or provides additional information. The two researchers classified relative clauses into two types: defining clauses that identify which people or things and non-defining clauses that provide more additional information about those people or those things. Vince (2010) illustrated that the information provided in defining clauses are seen as necessary for the sentence to be obvious, whereas the information presented by the non-defining clause are placed between commas and do not affect the meaning of the sentence. Defining and non-defining clauses are also known as restrictive and non-restrictive clauses (Herring,2016). In other words, Lock (1996) classified English relative clauses into two types according to the necessity of the information they supply. The first type is referred to as a restrictive relative clause since it provides central information to clarify the noun phrase (NP) it modifies, while a non-restrictive relative clause provides interesting but not necessary information.

Furthermore, relative clauses are also called adjective clauses used to connect two sentences to form one sentence. They get their names from the way they function in sentences, which are as adjectives. The adjective means a word that describes a noun. An adjective clause is an essential element to recognize because it relates to a clause or sentence that has a principal task in English language (Azar, 2002). Azar said that the students who can use adjective clauses in dependent clauses can significantly develop their communicative competence in the English language.

Based on what Azar (2002) said, adjective clauses are complex syntactic structures in the English language. They are problems to make, comprehend, and use. In learning English language grammatical rules, adjective clauses are frequently used in different English contexts, about which EFL students have to read to develop their knowledge. Moreover, in this era, EFL students may sometimes misinterpret their first language's grammatical system with the target language that is learnt. They usually used translation methods from their L1 to form adjective clauses. According to Parrott (2000), another cause that may affect students' ability to use relative clauses correctly is related to comprehension of relative pronouns. Some learners have difficulties in recognizing and understanding adjective clauses without relative pronouns in a text.

### **1.5 Related Studies**

Adjective clauses are one of the most common problems which studies in the field of second language acquisition focuses on investigating their complexities. A study was done by Mohammed (2016), aimed to clarify the troubles that encountered Sudanese students in Sudan University of Science and Technology in using relative pronouns. The researcher demonstrated some problems such as the use and the function of relative pronouns, misuse of commas, and struggles in reducing relative clause. The researcher also utilized two methods to gather the required information: a quantitative analytical method and a test. The test of the participants included four types of questions. Each type consisted of six statements. The participants were 50 Sudanese students at the fourth level, and they were selected to test their ability in using and forming relative clauses. The results showed that 40% of the participants faced difficulties in using relative clauses. Half of the students did not recognize the functions and the construction of the relative clauses, while approximately 40 % of them could not know how and when they should use the comma. The study also reported that 80% of the students encountered difficulties in reducing relative clauses and combing the sentences using the appropriate relative pronouns.

Abdolmanafi and Rahmani (2012) tried to examine Persian learners' ability to learn English relative clauses. The participants were 78 fourth semester learners who were studying English (Translation) at the University of Applied Science and Technology (ElmiKarbordi) in Sari, Iran, in 2012. The learners were high intermediate students, and their mother language was Persian. Their ages were between 21 and 26, and they have been studying English for over ten years. The researchers used a special questionnaire, language proficiency test and sentence combination test as instruments to achieve the purpose of their study. The researchers examined the rank of mastery over four relative clauses, SS, SO, OS, and OO. The scores and percentages of the questionnaire and the two tests were collected and analyzed according to four relative clause types. The results showed that SS, OO and SO were the easiest types for mastery while OS was the most challenging type.

Khan and Al-Namer (2017) aimed to study 50 Arabic-speaking EFL learners' comprehension of English relative clauses. The learners were studying at Al Ain University of Science and Technology, in Al Ain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They were divided into two groups according to their proficiency levels: intermediate and advanced. The study also examined which relative pronouns were the easiest to acquire and comprehend and which were the most difficult. Furthermore, it put light on the effect of the English proficiency level of comprehension of relative pronouns. The results showed that most of the students could not fully understand English relative clauses and how to use them correctly. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that the most complicated part for them was SO and OO relative clauses.

Zulkarnein (2016) had a study that focused on analyzing students' errors and problems in using adjective clauses at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University. The study aimed to discover the errors done by 20 students in the 8th semester of the English department. A test and semi structured interview were used as a quantitative and qualitative method to collect the data. The result demonstrated that 89% of the students produced errors using '*whose*', and 60 % also made errors in SO and OO relative clauses. According to Zulkarnein, the causes of the students' error were confusion in using relative pronouns, overemphasis on language forms, the lack of vocabulary mastery, and language transfer problem.

In her study, Aini (2014) examined the learners' ability to master the different types of clauses. Furthermore, she demonstrated the difficulties which the participants faced when using relative clauses. They were 96 learners who were studying at the second year at SMAN-1 Kumai in the academic year 2013-2014. The researcher used two tools to collect the data: a test and documentation. The results revealed that 68 % of the students were unable to differentiate between the subject and object relative pronouns while they were using them.

Wulandari (2018) investigated 57 learners who were at the tenth grade in SMA Dharma Wanita 4 Taman, Sidoarjo in the academic year 2017/2018. The participants faced difficulties in distinguishing between the relative pronouns of adjective clauses. The researcher tried to find out these struggles and the factors which caused them. Three types of methods were used in this study to present the struggles and causes. These methods were documentation and interview. The findings showed that the tenth grade students had struggles acquiring relative pronouns, using unnecessary pronouns, and using the subject and the object relative pronouns in the sentences correctly. The researcher thought that the students found difficulties because relative pronouns of adjective clauses have different types, different functions and different usages based on the data analysis. This led them to have problems in learning adjective clauses

Hendrayana (2010) aimed to describe the English Department students' ability in forming defining and non-defining relative clauses, and to analyze students' errors in constructing these types of clauses. The researcher manipulated a test as a quantitative descriptive method that assisted them in order to gather the data. The participants in this study were third year students at the Department of English in the State University of Padang. The study demonstrated that many participants had struggles in acquiring and forming restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses.

Alotaibi (2016) aimed to examine Kuwaiti EFL students' ability to comprehend the formation of relative clauses in English by examining their ability to produce this structure. It also focused on finding out whether the learners' English proficiency level can play an essential role in mastering the relative clauses. The participants were 120 EFL learners who were studying at the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET) and College of Basic Education (CBE) in Kuwait. Their age was 23 years old. They were divided into two groups according to their scores on a particular English test which is English Placement Test (EPT). Their proficiency levels were intermediate and advanced. The participants studied English at schools in Kuwait for twelve years and completed two main English courses. Alotaibi used a sentence combination task to measure the participants' ability to make relative clauses and to test the kinds of error produced by them. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) analysis was used to analyze the data. The results revealed that 60 % of Kuwaiti EFL learners could not comprehend how to form relative clauses in English fully. The test manifested that the English proficiency level significantly affected the participants' answers on the test. The number of errors produced by the intermediate learners was more than that made by the advanced learners. The study also showed that transferring from Arabic to English was one factor that challenged Kuwaiti EFL learners. Regarding to the four types OS, SO, OO, SS, analysis of the participants' answers clarified that the easiest type was OS relative clauses while OO relative clauses were the most common errors on the test.

Alotaibi (2016) referred to a previous study done by Kuno (1974) in which he presented his 'Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis'. In this hypothesis, Kuno (1974) assumed that specific syntactic patterns such as embedding or subordination of relative clauses and position of relative clauses and conjunctions can cause perceptual difficulties for language learners. He explained that "it is the successive center-embedding of clauses having the same grammatical function that significantly reduces the comprehensibility of the sentence" (p.124). Consequently, Kuno considered embedding as an essential factor in relative clause processing. Alotaibi (2016) illustrated that according to this hypothesis, Kuno argued that OS and OO types should be easier than SS and SO since learners tend to avoid embedding.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The participants in this study were 30 Libyan EFL students studying English at Misurata University. They were enrolled in Advanced Grammar course which was taught to the students in the Department of English language. This study included three tasks (see the Appendix) designed to investigate the types of errors made by Libyan learners when forming relative clauses in English. The first task was designed to investigate whether these mistakes may include wrong relative pronoun choice. The task consisted of ten sentences in which the participants were asked to choose between subjective relative pronoun *who* or an objective relative pronoun *whom/that*. The participants were given 1 mark for every correct choice and no mark for every incorrect choice.

The second task was designed to test the participants' ability to assess the necessity of the information which the relative clauses supply. This task also included ten relative clauses and the participants were asked to decide whether the relative clauses contained necessary (defining) or unnecessary information (non-defining).

Following the same procedure, the participants were given 1 mark for every correct choice and 0 mark in case of wrong choices.

The third task was a sentence combination task which aimed to test which types of relative clauses structures may be easier for the Libyan participants to produce. In this sentence combination task, the participants were asked to join 16 pairs of sentences using relative pronouns. This task was designed to test which relative clause structures will be easier for the participants to form and which may cause difficulty. The task focused on the four structures which appeared in Kuno's order (1974) which are OS> OO>SS>SO and it contained four sentences of every one of the four types which makes them 16 sentences in this task.

### 3. Results and Discussion:

The results of the first task which tested the participants' ability to choose the correct subject or object relative pronoun showed that the overall percentage of correct answers is 72.3% as appears in table (1). In most cases, the participants chose the correct subject or object relative pronoun which may suggest that this aspect of the acquisition of English relative pronoun was not very difficult for this target group of Libyan EFL learners to develop. This result is very different from Aini (2012) which came to the result that 68% of the participants were not able to differentiate between subject and object relative pronouns.

**Table (1): Results of the participants' performance on the first and the second task**

|        | correct answers % | Median | Stand. Dev. | Mode  | Number of Errors |
|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------|-------|------------------|
| Task 1 | 72.33%            | 8.00   | 2.71        | 10.00 | 83               |
| Task 2 | 47.67%            | 4.00   | 2.57        | 3.00  | 157              |

On the other hand, the results of the second task which tested the participants' ability to assess whether the relative clause is defining or non-defining of the noun phrase that it modified showed that this is not an easy aspect of relative clause acquisition. As also appears in table 1, the overall percentage of correct answers in this task is 47.7% . This suggested that the participants did not have a clear idea about the difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses. In addition, it was noticed that just five students added commas to the non-defining clauses as they were asked at the beginning of the task to add commas were necessary. This proposed that only this small group of the participants was aware of the idea that non-defining relative clauses provide extra information which will have to be put between commas.

Concerning the results of the third task, it was hypothesized that the participants will find difficulty in forming English relative clauses in line with Kuno's hypothesis about the order of the acquisition of relative clauses which says that the sequence of the acquisition will be as follows OS > OO > SS > SO. However, the results revealed that the easiest structure was OS structure which goes with Kuno's order as it was found that 80% of the participants formed the OS structure in a correct way which gave an indication that this type of relative clauses is not so complicated for the participants. On the other hand, the overall percentage of forming OO relative clauses was 63.3%, almost exactly the same percentage of correct formation of SO structures which was 62.5%. The SS structure sentence was the most difficult one as only 17 out of 30 students (56.6%) were able to form it in a correct way which makes



this relative clause structure as the most difficult for the participants. Table (2) shows the results got by the participants in all the four types of relative clause structures in this sentence combination task.

**Table (2). Results of sentence combination task concerning the four relative clause structures**

| Relative clause Structure | Percentage of correct formation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| OS structure              | 80 %                            |
| OO structure              | 63.3 %                          |
| SO structure              | 62.5 %                          |
| SS structure              | 56.6%                           |

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The purpose of this study was to find out some types of the errors produced by university level Libyan EFL students in forming relative clauses in English language. The results showed that despite of the advanced level in studying English grammar which included studying complex syntactic structures such as relative clauses, the participants still have problems in acquiring full knowledge of how relative clauses are constructed in English. Their responses indicated that they had problems in differentiating between defining and non-defining relative clauses and problems on knowing the importance of adding commas when forming non-defining clauses. Some students also had problems in correct relative pronoun choice and in identifying the difference between subject and object relative pronouns.

Concerning the formation of relative clauses, the results of this study does not go with Kuno's Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis (1974) which assumes that OS and OO kinds of relative clauses should be easier for second language learners than SS and SO types. The OO type sentences were not easier than SO type as the performance on forming relative clauses of these two types was almost the same. The results showed another difference which is that the most difficult type for the Libyan EFL participants was the SS. However as suggested by Kuno, the OS type was the easiest type for the participants in this study. The order of the acquisition of relative clauses by this group of learners was OS > OO and SO > SS. These results also does not go with Abdolmanafi and Rahmani (2012) 's study in which they approved that the frequency of production or acquisition sequence of relative clauses by the Persian learners was SS > OO > SO > SO.

These results suggest that some changes will need to be done in the way that some complex syntactic structures are taught in English grammar classroom in Misurata University. Advanced grammar course will need to include some explanations on the different kinds of relative clause structures and will need more explanations on how to assess whether the information given by the relative clause is necessary (defining) or whether it is some extra (non-defining).

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## Appendix

### Task 1: Choose the correct relative pronoun to complete these sentences:

1. The woman (who/whom) .....helped me is my neighbor.
2. My friend (who/whom) .....you have met is from UK.
3. He is a person (who/whom).....everyone regarded as trustworthy.
4. Do you know the woman (who/whom).....lives next door?
5. This is Sophia (who/whom).....is taking my job when I leave.
6. The success of a shared parties depends on (who/whom).....we share it with.
7. What was the name of the person (who/whom).....bought your old car?
8. There is no person to (who/whom).....I owe more than I can say.
9. Sara was the first person (who/whom).....was elected to the parliament.
10. He was the first man (who/whom).....landed on the Moon.

### Task 2. Underline the relative clause in each sentence, and say if it is *defining or non-defining*. Use **COMMAS** if necessary.

1. Yesterday I met Ali's fiancée who was very beautiful. ....
2. The company which is very big is also very cold! .....
3. My next-door neighbor whose children go to the park with ours has just bought a new house. ....
4. The new park which our children used to go to has been closed down .....
5. the supermarket which I met you in yesterday is closed today.....
6. The lady who lives next door works in a big company. ....
7. These are the flights that have been cancelled. ....
8. The laptop that I bought last Saturday has started making a strange noise! .....
9. My grandmother who's 90 goes shopping every Saturday. ....
10. The award was given to Nora whose story impressed the judges. ....

### Task 3. Combine each sentence with the sentence between brackets using a relative pronoun.

1. We called the secretary. (I went to school with secretary)  
.....
2. The bag was stolen. (I bought the bag yesterday)  
.....
3. My nephew broke the plate. (I received the plate as a present)  
.....
4. The girl is on TV tonight. (I met the girl yesterday)  
.....
5. His friend lives in Scotland. (His friend is a lawyer)  
.....
6. I broke the plate. (The plate was a wedding present).  
.....
7. The girls seemed sad. (We met them at the wedding).  
.....
8. The taxi finally arrived. (I'd ordered it.)  
.....

9. He is working for a man. ( He has known him for a long time.)

.....  
10. She would like to go out with her friends. (I know them very well.)

.....  
11. The letter was delivered to him this morning. (The letter contained bad news).

.....  
12. I enjoyed reading the book. (It was about plants).

.....  
13. The person was kidding you. (He said you were clever).

.....  
14. They interviewed the manager. (The manager was very aggressive).

.....  
15. The dog belongs to those people. (The dog chased our cat).

.....  
16. I visited my neighbor. (My neighbor was sick).