

Investigation Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL Learners' in Dealing with English Sentence Structure

A. lecturer Rusul Aasim
University of Kufa
College of Education

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the problem of Iraqi EFL university students Awareness of English Sentences Structure. There are two main categories of sentence structure, one of which is identified by Quirk et all (1985: 191) divide them as four types such as (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamation), while the other one is that which includes other three types: (simple, compound, and complex) as identified by Alexander (1967: 1).

The study aims at: Investigating the difficulties faced by students in recognizing and distinguishing English sentence structure. It is hypothesized that:

1. Students commit grammatical mistakes through making sentences by their own.
2. They do not tend to use types of sentence structure in a right way.

To test the validity of the hypotheses above, a diagnostic test is formulated and administered to a representative sample of Iraqi EFL learners, Fourth Year Department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon 2009- 2010.

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter One is devoted to the discussion of the problem, aims, hypotheses, procedures, limits, and value of the study .Chapter Two and three are about a theoretical survey of sentence structure and their types. Chapter Four outlines the results of the test. Chapter Five offers the conclusions as a theoretical ad practical parts.

Section One

Introduction

This paper is about the sentence structure. The two parts of every English sentence are the subject and the predicate. A simple sentence can also be descried as a group words expressing a complete thought. Subjects can be described as the component that performs the action described by the predicate. The sentence format consists of a subject and a predicate. The subject names the topic and the predicate tells about the subject. The receiver of actions is called the object. A group of words used as a single value without subject or predicate is called a phrase. A clause is a group of words with a subject and predicate. Principal or independent clause can form sentences. A compound sentence contains two or more principal clauses. A clause which cannot form a sentence is called a dependant clause. A complex sentence contains principal clause and one or more dependant or subordinate clauses. A compound-complex

sentence contains two principal clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

1.1 The Problem

There are many types of sentences in which the students face difficulty to distinguish between them correctly.

Sentence structure represents a problematic area for learners of English as a foreign language. One common observation in this respect is that they make a grammatical mistake through making sentences of their own.

1.2 Aims of the Study

This study aims at :

Investigating the difficulties faced by students in recognizing and distinguishing by sentence structures in English.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. Students commit grammatical mistakes through making sentences by their own.
2. They do not tend to use types of sentence structure in a right way.

1.4 Procedures

1. Presenting theoretical part of basic English sentence structure.
2. Identifying general definitions of deep and surface structure.
3. Conducting a test.
4. Analyzing the results of the test.

1.5 limits

This study limits itself to the evaluation of the use of sentence structure by Iraqi learners, fourth year at college of Education, Babylon University during the academic year 2009-2010.

1.6 Value

The theoretical value lies in providing information about sentence structures which can be helpful for pedagogical purposes and the difficulties that face students in dealing with it.

As for the practical value, it is hoped that this study will be of pedagogical contributions to text book writers and syllabus designers by providing them with the problematic area related to sentence structure.

Section Two

2.1 Types of Sentence Structure

According to Quirk et al (1985:191) there are four types of sentence. The declarative sentence makes a statement, the imperative sentence gives a direction or a command, the

interrogative sentence asks a question and the exclamatory sentence is a statement that shows strong emotion .

Hawkins (2006:2) lists types of sentence as follows :

1. A statement gives information : Football is a sport . It is a game for tow teams.
2. A question asks something : Do you like football ? Is football an exciting game ?
3. An order tells somebody to do something : Don't play football there! Go to the park instead .

An order may or may not end with an exclamation mark.

4. An exclamation is a sentence that expresses a strong feeling : I love football ! It is a brilliant game! An exclamation ends with an exclamation mark.

There are some of examples below :

- My name is sami.
- I hate fish!
- Do you like fish ?
- Be quiet !
- That's great idea !
- Can we go to the park after school ?
- London is the capital city of England.
- Is that a new dress ?
- Find a partner and sit together in a space on the floor
- What a fantastic film !

(Hawkins,2006:2)

2.2Simple , Compound and Complex Sentences

According to Alexander (1967:1) there are three types of sentence: Simple, Compound, Complex.

The simple sentence refers to only one idea and it contains one subject and one predicate.

The compound sentence expresses more than one idea. Thus this type reflects all ideas dealt together as an equal value.

The complex sentence contains one main clause and one or more than one idea as a secondary thoughts could be called subordinate clauses (ibid).

As we can see in the examples below of the three types above :

1. The man knocked at the door.
2. The man knocked at the door and waited for an answer.
3. As soon as he arrived at the house , the man knocked at the door. (ibid)

Sentence number (1) (the man) is the subject and the rest of the sentence is predicate to sum up it is a simple sentence.

Sentence number (2) is compound because it contains more than one idea.

Sentence number (3) is complex which has a main clause (knocked at the door) and a subordinate (As soon as he arrived at the house) (ibid).

2.2.1 The Simple Sentence

Simple sentence which one clause, it can be short as one word :

- Run !

Or contains subject and a predicate as :

- The ice melts quickly.

Also it can be a long sentence as :

- Lying exposed without its blanket of snow , the ice on river melts quickly under the warm March sun.

The simple sentence is the most natural sentence structure , it is the first sentence or kind that children learn to speak also it is the most common sentence of people of all ages in spoken language .

It is used in written work , it can be very effective for grabbing a reader's attention.

(Megginson,2007:1)

2.2.2 The Compound Sentence

Compound sentence consists of two or more independent clauses or simple sentences joined by co-ordinating conjunctions like (and, but and or).

e.g. Simple : Canada is a rich country.

Simple : Still, it has many poor people.

Compound : Canada is a rich country , but still it has many poor people.

Compound sentence are natural for English Speakers small children learn them early.

There are two types of compound sentence , the first joining two simple sentences together or joining sometimes two complex sentences or one simple and one complex this is called a compound-complex sentence.

e.g. The package arrived in the morning , but the courier left before I could check the contents.

The second type involves punctuation , join two originally separate sentences into compound by using a semicolon instead of a co-ordinating conjunction.

Ex. Sir John A. Macdonald had a serious drinking problem ; when sober , however, he could be a formidable foe in the House of Commons.

The most effective of compound sentence is the one used to create a sense of contrast between two or more equally ,important pieces of information (ibid:2).

2.2.3 The Complex Sentence

The complex sentence contains one independent and one dependent clause. It includes sentences which are not equal.

e.g. Although my friend invited me to a party, I do not want to go.

So (Although my friend invited me to a party) is clause or dependent clause sentence.

The complex sentence is different from compound sentence because it is clear which ideas

are more important (ibid).

So when you write :

My friend invited me a party but I do not want to go.

The reader will have problem to know which piece of information is important to you but when you use (although) it will be clear that your friend invited you is less important than the fact that you do not want to go (Megginson, 2007:3).

Section Three

3.1 A Basic English Sentence Structure

Basic sentence structure in English contains [Subject-Verb-Object-Adjective and Adverb]

Subject – Verb and Object

e.g. Mary likes Dave.

Subject = Mary

Verb = likes

Object = Dave

Sentence structure is very important in English, a subject and object have the same form except for pronouns (Jenning,2008:1).

e.g. The sentence (Mary likes Dave) does not have the same meaning as(Dave likes Mary).

Transitive Verbs take one object for example the verb (to want) always takes an object so it is not correct to say (Mary wants).You must complete the sentence with an object, (Mary wants a ball).

The object of transitive verb can be a prepositional phrase or a sentence complement ,for example:

- Prepositional phrase as object : Mary sleeps on the couch .
- Noun phrase as object : Mary hold a doll .
- Sentence complement as object : Mary wishes that Jim would come home .

A few transitive verbs take two objects , a noun phrase and a preposition phrase .

e.g. Noun phrase and preposition phrase as object :

Mary puts the purse on the table . (ibid)

3.2 A Basic Sentence with Verb that does not take an Object [Subject - Verb]

e.g. John cried .

Subject = John

Verb = cried

An intransitive verb does not take an object . For example the sentence (John cried) does not have an object so the verb (to cry) is intransitive . There are very few verbs that are always intransitive. The important or main test intransitivity is whether the verb resists taking a prepositional phrase. Some grammar systems classify verbs into transitive and intransitive in different way, taking the rule of location as a test to prove transitivity .

For example :

- He sang . (intransitive)
- He sang a song . (transitive) (ibid)

3.3 A Basic Sentence with an Indirect Object [Subject -Verb - Indirect Object - Object]

The sentence (Mary gives John the ball) contains :

Subject = Mary

Verb = gives

Indirect Object = John

Direct Object = the ball

In other sentences such as (Mary gives the ball to John), the indirect object must be a part of a prepositional phrase. So :

Mary = Subject

Gives = Verb

The ball = indirect Object[A noun phrase = Determiner (the) + Noun (ball)]

To John = Direct Object[A prepositional phrase (to) + Noun (John)] (ibid).

3.4 Sentence Structure which has an Auxiliary [Subject - Auxiliary - Verb - Indirect Object - Direct Object]

The sentence that has an auxiliary such

as(will, have, been, is, order or other auxiliaries) there place is before the verb. For example :

- Mary will give John the ball.
- Mary has given John the ball.

Sentence structure with Negation and Auxiliary[Subject-Aux- Neg- Verb- Indirect Object- Direct Object] .The sentence that has negation and an auxiliary, the position of the negative is between the auxiliary and verb. For example :

- Mary will not give John the ball.
- Mary has not given John the ball. (ibid)

If the sentence has more than one auxiliary so the order of auxiliary is determined by the verb form.

3.5 A Basic Sentence Structure with Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives modify nouns while adverbs modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. e.g. The clown's sad smile touched us deeply.

The adjective (sad) modifies the noun smile which is the subject of this sentence and the adverb (deeply) modifies the verb touch.

Adjectives appear in front of the noun that they modify also they sometimes appear in a third position in a sentence after a linking verb like (am, are, is and so on) as their name implies , these verbs link subject with adjective.

Ex. His voice was rough.

The adjective (rough) modifies the subject that follows the linking verb (was).

Adverb modify the verb they follow :

Ex. I dance occasionally.

Sometimes it appear directly in front of the verb or at the very beginning of a sentence . Ex. I occasionally dance (.Hurford,1992:6).

3.6 Definitions of Deep and Surface Structure

The concept of deep structure and surface structure plays an important role in transformational grammar. In transformational syntax, deep structures are derivation trees of a context free language.

Surface structure : Means an abstract syntactic representation of an utterance in the mind of the speaker in which the elements of the sentence, having undergone transformation from deep structure are represented structurally in the same linear order.

- Charlie broke the window.
- The window was broken by Charlie.

(Yule,2003:102)

According to Stageberg (1981:299) a sentence has deep and surface structures, deep structure determines the meaning while surface structure is associated with the pronunciation of sentences.

Deep structure contains two components: The phrase structure and lexicon while the surface structure is derived from deep structure by the application of one or more transformations. (ibid)

Section Four

4.1 Definition of the Test

Test is formal systematic, it is an instrument or a tool of measurement. It is a procedure used to gather information about student's testing is a part of assessment and it measures learner achievement. (Coombe, etal, 2007:15)

4.2 Features of a Good Test

4.2.1 Validity : The term validity refers to measuring what is supposed to be measured. It means how to teach and what you teach also validity include content, construct and face

validity. (AL.Juboury,2000: 22)

- 4.2.2 Content validity :** Means that the test assesses the course content through using formats familiar to the students. (Coombe et al,2007:22)
- 4.2.3 Construct Validity:** It possess construct, it is designed in accordance with a theory of language behavior and learning.(AL.Jubouey,2000: 22)
- 4.2.4 Face Validity:** Here we mean the way the test looks to the examines, supervisor or in general to people concern with the education of the students. (Harris,1969:21)
- 4.2.5 Reliability:** Al-Juboury (2000:21) says that reliability means the stability of test scores.

While Harris (1969:14) says that reliability means affected by number of factors, chief among them being the adequacy of the sampling of tasks.

4.3 The Sample

The researcher chooses this sample from fourth stage in department of English/ College of Education has been chosen because they have a background Knowledge about the sentence structure in English.

4.4 The Population

A sample of students from the fourth stage in department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon, during the academic year (2009-2010). It is consist of thirty students they are native speakers of Iraqi Arabic who have similar EFL background and their average is twenty-two years old.

4.5 Test Material

The items of the test have been selected from "An Introductory English Grammar" (Stageberg, 1981;299), "A comprehensive Grammar of English Language" (Quirk, 1985:191).

4.6 Test Design

It consists of two questions. The first question is designed to asses students responses at the recognition level. This question includes seven items, the students are required to tick the right answer.

The second question is designed to measure the students responses at the production level. This question includes seven items, the students are asked to write sentences about types of sentences.

4.7 Results and discussion

The following is an analysis and discussions of the responses of the students:

4.7.1 Results and discussion of the first question (Recognition Level):

1. Fourteen students (47%) in item (6) answered incorrectly because they did not recognize the sentence as a complex sentence from the word (although).
2. Thirteen students (43%) in item (7) answered incorrectly because they are not aware of the kind of the sentence as compound sentence.
3. In item (1), (3) and (5), the students face no difficulty.

The results of the first question (recognition level) show that the most students did not face much problems in recognizing the kind of the sentence only two items about (complex and compound) in item (6 and 7) which are (47% and 43%) as in table (1):

Table (1) the total responses of Recognition Question.

No of Items	No of Correct Responses	Percentage	No of Incorrect Responses	Percentage	Total
1	17	57 %	13	43 %	30
2	22	73 %	8	27 %	30
3	17	57 %	13	43 %	30
4	16	53 %	14	47 %	30
5	20	67 %	10	33 %	30
6	14	47 %	16	53 %	30
7	13	43 %	17	57 %	30
Total	119	56 %	91	43 %	210

4.7.2 Result and discussion of the second question (Production Level):

1. Twenty two students (73 %) answered item (2) incorrectly because they were not aware of making a grammatical sentence about the complex interrogative sentence.
2. Seventeen students (57%) answered item (3) incorrectly because they have a difficulty in making a sentence of (sentence pattern compound SVO).
3. Sixteen students (53%) answered item (4) incorrectly because they did not know how to make a sentence about declarative complex.
4. Twenty three students (77%) of the item number (7) answered incorrectly because they were not aware of making sentence about interrogative (wh) question.

The results of the second question (production level) show that the most of the students faced serious difficulties especially in complex type of sentence structure and making grammatical mistakes in general as in item (7 and 2) with the percentage (77% and 73%) as in table (2).

Table (2) the total responses of Production Question.

No of Items	No of Correct Responses	Percentage	No of Incorrect Responses	Percentage	Total
1	27	70 %	9	30 %	30

2	8	27 %	22	73 %	30
3	13	43 %	17	57 %	30
4	14	47 %	16	53 %	30
5	19	63 %	11	37 %	30
6	18	60 %	12	40 %	30
7	7	23 %	23	77 %	30
Total	100	47 %	110	52 %	210

Section Five

Conclusion

Conclusion will be of two parts:

5.1 The Theoretical Part:

1. There are different types of sentence but according to my study simple sentence is the primary type of sentence structure because any other type depends on simple sentence.
2. The concept of deep structure and surface structure has a role in transformational grammar.

5.2 The Practical Part:

1. The results of the test at the recognition level show that most of Iraqi EFL learners have serious difficulties in under showing (the complex and compound sentence).
2. The results of production level show that Iraqi EFL learners have serious problems in making a grammatical mistakes such as failure to use two types in one grammatical sentence as complex interrogative sentence and sentence pattern compound (SVO).
3. The results of the test are identical with the hypothesis, the learners make mistakes through making sentence by their own and they do not tend to use types of sentence correctly.

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Appendix I

The Test

Q1. Identify the types of the following sentences whether they are (simple- compound- complex) and (declarative- imperative- interrogative- exclamatory).

1. Speak to the boss today.
2. John will go to school today.
3. What a noise they are making!
4. Have you finished the book?
5. The ice melt quickly.
6. Although my friend invited me to a party, I do not want go.
7. Canada is a rich country, but still it as many poor people.

Q2. Exemplify the following:

Note [The sentences should be different from those used in question one].

1. Imperative Simple
2. Complex Interrogative
3. Sentence Pattern Compound SVO
4. Declarative Complex
5. Exclamatory (wh) word
6. Simple sentence
7. Interrogative (wh) question

Appendix II

Key Answers of question 1

1. Imperative sentence
2. Declarative sentence
3. Exclamatory sentence
4. Interrogative sentence
5. Simple sentence
6. Complex sentence
7. Compound sentence

Possible answers of question 2

1. n the door.
2. How did you find the card after I lost it ?
3. I played football and Mary went shopping.
4. The teacher returned the homework after she noticed the error.
5. What a wonderful day this is !
6. Ali goes to the library.

7. Why do you believe that ?