

Investigating the Students' Awareness of Perception Verbs at the University Level

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Introduction

1-1 The Problem

As an appropriate point, English parts of speech are categorized into eight types or classes. Some grammar books classify them into nine or ten. Generally, they are used to describe English words. This means that each single word belongs to one of the parts of speech explains what the word is and how it is used. One of these parts of speech is the verb that is the most central element of the sentence. Typically, a verb is a doing word. It shows what something or someone does. In English, there are three types of verb ; which are transitive, intransitive and copular. The last class is often called a linking verb which is divided into two types: verb **to be** and perception verbs such as **hear, see , look** and so on. The latter class is our concern. It is expected that most of Iraqi English language university students may lack enough knowledge about perception verbs. Moreover, they show weakness in using them.

1-2 Aims of the Study

The present study aims at:

- 1- Describing the verbs, their types in general and the perception verbs in detail.
- 2- Measuring the Iraqi students' ability in using such verbs.
- 3- Accounting the students' errors and their sources in terms of recognizing and producing the topic under discussion.
- 4- Identifying the types of their erroneous responses.

1-3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

- 1- Mastery of the uses of perception verbs is not achieved by Iraqi EFL students at university level.
- 2- Most of them may face difficulty in using some or all of them.

1-4 Procedures

For achieving the aims, the researcher adopts the following procedures:

- 1- Presenting materials about perception verbs in English.
- 2- Designing a test by selecting a sample of EFL university students to achieve the aims of the study, analyzing its results to give conclusions and suggestions.
- 3- Using static methods to rate the students' performance at the recognition and production levels in manipulating these verbs.

1-5 Limits of the study

- 1- Providing the literature relates to some verbs of perception.
- 2- Investigating the use of such verbs the students of forth year Department of English, College of Education for Human Science, University of Babylon for the academic year (2011-2012) as they are the most qualified students for the study.

1-6 Value of the Study

The study is hoped to be of some useful values into two aspects:

- 1-The theoretical aspect will provide a brief , comprehensive, detailed survey for syllabus designers and English Language teachers.
- 2- The practical aspect will have a pedagogical implication to the teachers in that it can shed light upon the problematic area concerning the subject in question.

2- The Concept of Verb

According to Gucker (1966:24), the verb is the word that is characteristically grammatically centre of the predicate of the necessary component of the sentence, i.e. it is the core of the sentence and without a verb a group of words is only a fragment of a sentence. Every sentence has a verb and in any language the topic of verbs is large and to some extent complicated. The verb asserts something about the subject of the sentence. It tells what the subject does, did or will do or tell the subject is, was, or will be something.

In accordance with Crystal (1978:409-410), the verb is ' a term used in grammatical classification of words to refer to a class traditionally defined as doing words'. But this description has been criticized by many linguists on the grounds that there are many verbs which do not act in any sense e.g., **seem, be**. He adds that the formal definition of a verb refers to an element that can display morphological contrasts of tense, aspect, voice, mood, person and number. Functionally, the verb is the element which singly or in combination with other verbs (i.e. 'verb phrase') is used as predicate of a sentence. If the predicate contains other elements, then it is the verb which is the unit that influences the choice of the unit. Accordingly, the verb is considered as the most important element in sentence structure.

As it has been suggested by Frank (1993:44), a verb is the most important part of speech. It has a word whose varying arrangements with noun decide the different types of sentence such as statements, questions, commands and exclamations. It seems like the noun having the grammatical qualities of person and number, qualities that require concord with the subject in contrast with other part of speech like adjectives and adverbs. But the verb also has other grammatical properties which are not shared other part of speech. These properties are tense, mood and aspect.

3- Kinds of Verbs

Gucker (1966:25) believes that no one has ever invented a foolproof definition for a verb but he thinks that a word that expresses an action or state of being. Hence, the verbs fall into two main types which are action verbs e.g., (**go, want, see, behave, need**, etc.) and state of being or thinking verbs e.g., (**is, was, has been**, ...etc. and **seem, smell, look** ...etc.). Accordingly, this classification action words not only such obvious verbs like (**run, fight, sneeze**) but verbs as (**rest, die, hope**). If this classification seems confusing , we might state the difference like this:

An action verb says what something (**is, was, will be doing**):

- 1- The old lady **died** last night.
- 2- Mother **needs** your help.

In (1 and 2) , the subjects are doing something.

A linking verb tells what something (**is, was, will be**):

- 3- Otto **will be** our next captain.
- 4- The salad **tastes** bad.

In (3 and 4) , the subjects are doing nothing. There are certain verbs such as (**smell, taste, look,etc.**) that can be both linking verbs or action verbs depending upon their use.

5- He **looked** tired. (not doing anything)

6- He **looked** intently at the picture. (doing something)

7- He **tasted** the sauce. (doing something)

8- It **tasted** too bitter. (not doing anything)

Eastwood (2002: 9) believes that verbs can be divided into three patterns. They are intransitive, transitive and linking verbs. Intransitive verbs do not take objects, but they can be followed by prepositional phrases. They usually express actions and events.

9- The man **runs** along the beach every morning.

10- Something unfortunate **happened**.

Transitive verbs, on the other hand, can take objects. They express not only actions but also feelings, possession and perception.

11- Every one **enjoyed** the conference.

12- The man **had** no money.

13- The driver **saw** the hitch- hicker at the side of the road.

Finally, the linking verbs can take an adjective, or an adverb or a noun phrase relating to the subject. They express a result and describe states of being.

14- The hotel **was** quiet.

15- Your garden **seems** nice.

Concerning aspects, Leech and Svartvick (2003:53) state that verbs can be divided into two classes; verbs taking and not taking progressive. The verbs that most typically take progressive case are verbs involving (**run, play, write, ...etc.**) or progresses (**change, grow, widen, ... etc.**) but they suggest repetition when they are used with progressive:

16- He **nodded**. (one movement of the head)

17- He **was** nodding. (repeated movement of the head)

The second kind of verbs called **stative verbs** which often cannot be used with the progressive at all, because the idea of something in progress cannot be easily applied to them. These verbs can be classified into three subdivisions of verbs referring to a relationship of mind or feeling (**believe, dislike, forget, ... etc.**) and verbs of perceiving (**feel, hear, see, ... etc.**) which will be discussed in the next section.

4- Perception Verbs

According to Azar (2002:15) perception verbs are certain verbs in English which are used to indicate action involving senses. These verbs can be transitive or intransitive that means they may or may not involve an object. Some verbs which have stative meanings are usually not used in progressive tense:

18- Yum this food **tastes** good.

19- I **like** it very much.

' **Taste**' and ' **like**' have stative meanings. Each describes a state that exists.

* 20- This food is **tasting** good.

* 21- I am **liking** it very much.

Sentences (20 and 21) are grammatically incorrect. However, some perception verbs have both a stative and progressive meanings.

22- The chef **is** in his kitchen.

23- He **is tasting** the sauce.

24- It **tastes** too salty.

In sentence (23) **tasting** describes the action of the chef putting something in his mouth and actively its flavour (progressive). In such special circumstances, one may say that the state verbs have been changed into active verbs. In sentence (24) **tastes** describes the person's awareness of the quality of the food (stative). It does not express perception verbs (**smell, feel, see**) can be progressive or stative depending on the situation in which he / she uses the verb.

Hall (2003:25) suggests that some verbs of perception can be used in both the simple and the continuous sense without changing in meanings:

25- Do you **feel** ok today?

26- Are you **feel** ok today?

Verbs which describe a sense or a form of perception do not usually use the continuous form e.g., **hear, notice, smell, taste**. The simple form or can / could + the verb is usually used when we do not deliberately use the sense i.e., the use is involuntary. In case of **smell** and **taste** the continuous is used for deliberate event.

27- I (can) **taste** cream in this. (there is a cream in the dish, involuntary action).

28- I am **tasting** the cream.

With verbs like **see** and **hear** we usually used only in the involuntary sense, if they have a different meaning.

29- I am **seeing** a new man at present. (going out with)

Look at, watch and **listen to** are used for intentional action.

30- Can you keep the noise down? I am **listening to** the afternoon play.

Verbs of perception are words in a language which express concepts such as (**see, hear, taste, sense, smell, ...etc.**). They are used to indicate action involving the sense or the ability to perceive the around world. These can be either transitive or intransitive which may or may not require an object that the subject perceives. Such verbs like **heard** and **taste** are often transitive because they need an object that is **heard** or **tasted** by the subject of a sentence. On the contrary, verbs such as **sound** and **feel** can be transitive that do not require an object.

31- You **sound** great.

32- I **feel** cold.

There are also active and inactive forms of perception verbs. An active verb is used to indicate an action that involves someone's sense or ability to perceive the surrounding world.

33- I **see** a dog.

In sentence (33), **see** is one of the perception verbs connected to vision, which indicates what action the subject is actively doing. Inactive verbs indicate that the subject perceive something although it happens without effort. In sentence (32), the subject perceive "coldness" but it is not actively doing something. Other verbs can be used in active and inactive forms depending on how they are used such as **smell** and **taste** while **look** is typically active (Web 1).

It is worth mentioning that some perception verbs take the bare infinitive in the active form like **feel, hear, see, smell, notice, watch, observe**. They also occur with the – ing participle clause:

34- I **watch** Bob teach(ing) Mary.

While in the passive form, the bare infinitive is replaced by the to- infinitive:

35- They were **heard** to shout something.

There is also a passive with being:

36- I **watched** Mary being taught (by Bob).

(Quirk and Greenbaum , 1973:411)

Scovel (1971: 76) states that perception verbs imply a notion of progression. They rarely occur in the progressive form because they represent a state which does not involve a notion of movement toward a completion. He identifies three types of perception verbs: cognition, active and descriptive verbs. Cognition verbs are statistically stative and the subject is called a dative or an experience. They cannot be used in the imperative. While active verbs in contrast to cognitive verbs involve a certain activity by the subject. They may occur in the progressive. Furthermore, active perception verbs in contrast to cognitive verbs can be used in imperative. The active forms are syntactically non- stative and the subject is called an agent. The last of the three cohesive sets is the descriptive perception verbs. (Scovel,1971: 83) calls them resultative verbs because they are verbal actions which are clearly the result of state of using sense. For example, a sentence requiring the descriptive verbs **look** is a result of using the eyes. Unlike the other verbs they do not occur with adverbs but with adjectives.

5 – Test and Data Analysis

A test is a method or a way which has the purpose of measuring what skills or knowledge the students' abilities in certain area (Brown 1987 : 219 . In this regard, Genesee and Upshur (1966: 14) declare that a test is a task to measure certain information from the testees. It is agreed upon the idea that errors are indicators that the students face up difficulties in certain structures and the percentage of errors reveals the degree of difficulty (Johanson, 1975 : 225).

Accordingly the present test is constructed to investigate the performance of Iraqi EFL university students in using the perception verbs. The study involves Fifty EFL undergraduate fourth-year students chosen randomly from Department of English, College of education for Human Science, University of Babylon. The test consists of two questions, the first one which concerns with measuring the students' responses at the recognition level which is of eight items. The highest percentage of the correct answer is (86 %) in item (6). From this result, we can infer that the students are greatly exposed to many chances to deal with structure in forming this item, whereas the lowest percentage of the correct responses is (30 %) in item (1). From the rate of the correct responses, we observe a weak area in recognizing the perception verb. This appears in Table (1).

Table (1):Subjects Performance at the Recognition Level in Question (1)

No. of Q.	No. of Items	No. of correct answers	Percentage	No. of incorrect answers	Percentage
Q1	1	15	30%	35	70%
	2	37	74%	13	26%
	3	28	56%	22	44%
	4	34	68%	16	32%
	5	19	38%	31	62%
	6	43	86%	7	14%
	7	37	74%	13	26%
	8	38	76%	12	24%
Total		251	62.75	149	37.25

Table (1) presents the following results:

- 1- The total number of the correct responses is (251, 62.75).
- 2- The total number of the incorrect responses is (149,37.25).

The second question is designed to measured the students' responses at the production level which also includes eight items. The highest percentage of the correct answer is (74%) in item (5). Such a high percentage is an indicator that the students may be exposed to such construction or it could be heavily included in their syllabus whereas the lowest percentage of in correct answer is (2%) in items (6 and 7). These results are attributed to lack knowledge about perception verbs requiring more attention in teaching English as a foreign language . See Table (2).

Table (2):Subjects' Performance at the Production Level in Question (2)

No. of Q.	No. of Items	No. of correct answers	Percentage	No. of incorrect answers	Percentage
Q2	1	18	36%	32	64%
	2	10	20%	40	80%
	3	8	16%	42	84%
	4	10	20%	40	80%
	5	37	74%	13	26%
	6	1	2%	49	98%
	7	1	2%	49	98%
	8	14	28%	36	72%
Total		99	24.75%	301	75.25%

Table (2) presents the following results:

- 1- The total number of the correct responses is (99, 24.75 %).
- 2- The total number of the incorrect responses is (301, 75.25 %).

To conclude, we can say that most of the students have failed to give the correct responses for the items of this question, hence the total number of correct responses is (99, 24.75), whereas that of incorrect ones is (301, 75.25). This is an indication result gives an evidence that most students face serious difficulties in forming sentences of requested perception verbs or they may be incompetent to produce sentences of such type.

Due to the limited exposure to the language use or insufficient practice of English language, the students hypothesized wrong rules to follow about the second language. Giving little attention to perception verbs in grammatical textbooks may be the main reason behind making erroneous responses in recognizing and producing them.

6- Conclusions

In the light of the preceding analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1- Most of Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in the recognition and production of the perception verbs.
- 2- The students are unaware of such verbs and they do not know how to use them dynamically.
- 3- It should be mentioned that the second language students' errors are either caused by the interference caused by the native language or intralingual errors or the learners are not familiar enough with the rules of the foreign language.

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Sited Webs

- www. wisegeek. com / what – are – perception – verbs. htm.
- www.grim.com / 2006 contrastive of perception verbs in English germ.

Appendix 1 The Test

Q1 : Select the suitable response that best completes the following sentences.

- 1- I (am seeing , see) another woman.
- 2- He (hears, is hearing) a noise.
- 3- I (am smelling, smell) something burning.
- 4- The soup (is tasting, tastes) too salty.
- 5- The doctor (is feeling, feels) her pulse.
- 6- She (is looking, looks) tired.
- 7- The announcer (sounds, is sounding) as if he has a cold.
- 8- He (is listening, listen) to his favourite radio programme.

Q2: Use the following perception verbs as dynamic verbs in complete sentences.

(see, hear, smell taste, feel, look, sound, listen)

Appendix 2 Answers of the Test

Q1:

1. I am seeing another woman.
2. He hears a noise.
3. I smell something
4. The soup tastes too salty.
5. The doctor is feeling her pulse.
6. She looks tired.
7. The announcer sounds as if he has cold.
8. He is listening to his favourite radio programme.

Q2:

1. She is seeing a new friend.
2. He is hearing something in his mind.
3. She is smelling the flower by inhaling deeply.
4. The cleft is tasting the soup.
5. I am feeling great today.
6. We were looking at the sunset.
7. It is a test. The fire station is sounding its alarm bell.
8. I am listening to you.