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EFL University Students' Recognition of Sentence Patterns and Elements

Abstract
This research aims at investigating how well EFL university students in the Department of English Colleges of Basic Education/University of Mosul master the patterns of the English sentence. It hypothesizes that students of EFL do not have the level of proficiency of English Grammar that enables them to recognize different patterns and elements of sentences. The research also hypothesizes that there are some of the sentence patterns that are more easily recognized by EFL students than others.

With (50) participants, the instrument used for testing these hypotheses is a questionnaire designed by the researcher. This questionnaire is used to measure students' knowledge and command of the seven patterns of the English sentence. Using the software package SPSS, the data is analyzed. The results show that participants are still unable to learn and develop their recognition of correct sentence elements and patterns. Moreover, some patterns have been mastered by EFL learners better than others.

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I- The Theoretical Part:

1- Introduction:

According to Herring (2016: 19), Grammar refers "to the way words are used, classified, and structured together to form coherent written or spoken communication". The basic core element of two types of communications is the sentence which was first divided into subject and verb. Ever since then, students all over the world have found it worthwhile to study the structure of words and sentences, because skill in speaking and writing is the hallmark of all educated people.

Sentences, however, are not easy to define. However, they are simply defined as "a word or group of words that expresses a complete idea and that includes a subject and a verb" (Barrett, 2016: 13). This research gives an overview of English basic sentence patterns. It also sheds light on sentence elements like subjects, verbs, and clause connectors. English Grammar presents seven basic sentence patterns. Being able to recognize a variety of sentence patterns, students will enhance their ability to use those patterns in their own writing and to understand better how grammar functions. In addition, with an understanding of the most elemental structures, students will more easily be able to experiment with word-order variations, inversions, sentence combinations, and other writing techniques.

2- Problem of the Research:

The problem of the following research is crystallized in the following questions:

1- What are the problems faced by EFL learners to master sentence patterns?
2- What is the role of the approach adopted in teaching English Grammar at the department of English in the aforementioned College?
3- In relation to (2) above, how much learning of English sentence structure do students achieve through the curriculum adopted?
4- What are the suggestions important to develop learners' ability to master sentence patterns?

3- Aims of The Research:

1- Identifying basic sentence patterns and elements in English.
2- Understanding the need for studying basic sentence patterns.
3- Investigating EFL learners' knowledge of sentence patterns which form a part of the grammar material they are exposed to during their four-year stay at the Department of English, College of Basic Education, University of Mosul.

4- Hypotheses:

This study is designed to test the following hypotheses:

1- Students of EFL do not have the level of proficiency of English Grammar that enables them to master different patterns and elements of sentences.
2- Some of the sentence patterns are more easily recognized by EFL students than others.

5- Some Definitions of Clause:

Clauses have been tackled differently from different points of view. Traditionally, a clause is "a group of words expressing a complete thought" is not satisfactory, because it is notional and vague at the same time (Fries, 1952:9).

Some grammarians define the clause grammatically as "a group of words containing a subject and a predicate" (Roberts, 1956: 292). Although this definition applies to many clauses, it faces problems with single word clauses. Therefore, a clause is better defined as "a set of words (or occasionally one word) containing or implying a subject and a predicate and expressing a statement, question, exclamation, or command" (Allen, 1948: 681, cited in al-Juburi, 2003: 8).

Systematically speaking, a clause is a unit which is higher than a group and lower than a complex sentence in the rank scale. Three types of groups operate in the clause viz. a noun phrase (NP), verb phrase (VP), and adverbial phrase (AP). The elements of clause structure will be explained respectively throughout the research.

S is normally a noun or pronoun or a noun phrase.

V is normally a verb or verb phrase.

A is an adverb or adverb phrase.

C (whether of subject or object) is either a noun phrase, an adjectival phrase, or a clause with nominal function, that have a related reference with the subject or object. Some characteristics of the adverbial is that: 1- "The term adverbial is much larger than an adverb. Along with terms like subject, object a complement it denotes an element of clause structure as opposed to a word class; 2- "most adverbials are optional i.e. can be omitted without making a sentence ungrammatical; and 3- adverbials are highly mobile in the clause. They are optional because they can be omitted from the clause" (Finch, 2000: 84-5).

6- Types of English Basic Clause Patterns:

A pattern in its general sense, means "a systematic arrangement of units" (Crystal, 1985: 223). A basic pattern is usually different from a basic clause, e.g., "Tom hit the ball. John read the book" are two different clauses, yet their underlying basic pattern is the same, viz. SVO. Thus, it is possible to have one and only one pattern underlying different clauses. Therefore, a pattern is an abstraction of individual clauses, just as clauses are abstractions of utterances. Concerning the distinction between patterns and clauses, Lado (1968) points out that "a pattern is not a sentence, however, sentences express patterns. Each sentence illustrates a pattern to be memorized. There can be countless sentences, each unique, yet all constructed on the same pattern" (90-91).
7- Grammatical Description of Basic Clause Patterns:

In what follows, a grammatical description of all basic clause patterns is going to be presented with illustrative examples.

**Pattern (1): SV:**

This pattern consists of a subject and a verb only. The verb is intransitive, e.g.

S V

It is raining.

**Pattern (2): SVO:**

This clause pattern includes all transitive verbs where a noun follows the verb. The noun is called object, e.g.

S V O

John wrote a letter.

**Pattern (3): SVC:**

Here, C stands for both subject and object complements. The verb structurally links the subject and the complement, e.g.

S V C

John is clever.

**Pattern (4): SVA:**

The verb in the pattern is intransitive because it does not need an object. The predicator is considered obligatory, e.g.

S V A

The boy is here.

**Pattern (5): SVOO:**

The two O elements represent indirect and direct objects respectively. Verbs like give, call, etc. are followed by two nouns, e.g.

S V O O

John gave Marry a story.

**Pattern (6): SVOC:**

In this pattern, the C element represents an object complement, e.g.

S V O C

The team made John their captain.

**Pattern (7): SVOA:**

This pattern shows that though adjuncts are, in general, optional, there are certain verbs which need an adjunct of place for the clause to be complete, e.g.

S V O A

He put the book on the table.

8- Classes of Verbs:

Verbs are classified according to the types of objects and complements that they allow. The verb in sentences such as (2, 3) above, is intensive and allow a Cs, while it is extensive in all other sentences. In the sentence: It rained steadily all day, the verb is intransitive since it does not permit any of the four objects and complements distinguished above. This means that all other verbs in the patterns mentioned above are
transitive which are divided in turn into a mono-, di- and complex transitive.

Another important aspect in classifying verbs is whether they permit the aspectual contrast of progressive and non-progressive. "Thus, it is possible to say: John carefully searched the room; or John was carefully searching the room. But it is not possible to use the progressive in: The girl is now a student at a large university; *The girl is now being a student at a large university." (Quirk et al., 1973: 14).

II- The Practical Part:

1- Population and Sample:

The population of this research comprises all students at the 4th stage / Department of English / College of Basic Education for the academic year (2018-2019). They were (91) students distributed on two classes. This population was chosen on purpose, because they were supposed to have been acquired enough knowledge on sentence patterns and elements through the grammar material, they were exposed to during the four studying stages. The sample chosen was (50) male and female students who have been selected randomly from the population.

2- Data collection and Procedures:

To bring about the aims of the current research, a questionnaire has been prepared by the researcher with main focus on (1) generating students’ knowledge of sentence elements (2) their knowledge of the correct combination of sentence elements to form sentence patterns. This questionnaire was formed out of (14) sentences with different sentence patterns and students were required to decide on and give the correct pattern of the sentences given.

3- Data Analysis and Discussion of Results:

This section is devoted to survey the descriptive statistics of the sample’s overall performance data on each sentence, and then on the whole questionnaire. This is to find out the extent of the errors students in the sample have committed. It has been calculated by counting the number of correct and wrong answers of the (14) sentences given to the participants and found out their percentages. Then, these percentages were treated by using the Software package SPSS and Z-test. Table (1) below shows these results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence no.</th>
<th>Number of correct Answer</th>
<th>Percentage of correct Answers</th>
<th>Number of wrong sentence</th>
<th>Percentages of wrong answers</th>
<th>Z_ test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>2.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>0.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>3.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>6.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>4.305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the results obtained above, it is quite clear that the first hypothesis "Students of EFL do not have the level of proficiency of English Grammar that enables them to master different patterns and elements of sentences" has been verified. The reason behind that was all the sentences were statistically significant and in favour of the wrong answers except sentence no. (3). This result was due to the fact that the percentage of wrong answers was bigger than that of correct answers. As such, the value of Z-test was 1.960 at the significant level of 0.05.

Turning to the second hypothesis which states that "Some of the sentence patterns are more easily recognized by EFL students than others", the results support its verification. Sentence number 2 and 12 were statistically significant for the correct answers. These two sentences represent the pattern SV which is the one most easily recognized by students. While sentences 5, 10, and 14 were the sentences which got the highest percentages of wrong answers. It seems that the more elements are included within the sentence, the most difficult recognizing the pattern would be. The problem with the patterns which includes the element of the object is the more confusing one. Students found it difficult to distinguish between the direct object and indirect object on the one hand, and between the object and complement of the object on the other hand.

4- Conclusions and Implications for Teaching:

In this research project EFL university students in College of Basic Education/English Dept. were asked to choose the correct pattern of different sentences. It has been shown that students have not reached the level of proficiency required to enable them master or distinguish between the seven different types of sentence patterns. The pattern of SV was the one most easy for students to recognize among the other patterns. While the SVO and the SVOO caused confusions for them. This confusion was resulted because the difference of use between the direct and indirect objects was not perfectly acquired by students. This gap might be due to the grammar curriculum followed by teachers in that Dept. or the methodology adopted in teaching Grammar. So, the need for updating approaches to teaching sentence patterns is urgent as well as increasing the practice on identifying sentence patterns and elements to ensure enhancing their performance in this area. Moreover, teaching new vocabularies and
the basic parts of speech may reduce students' gab in deciding on the correct patterns of sentences.
References