



ELEMENTS OF BASIC SENTENCE IN ENGLISH: A LINGUISTIC-INNOVATIVE APPROACH

Dr R Saranya

Associate Professor CAS in Linguistics Annamalai University

N.Maheswari

Research Scholar CAS in Linguistics Annamalai University

KEYWORDS :

Introduction:

Nowadays, English is indispensable at this current scenario, because it has a predominant role as a tool of communication in the competitive world. Communicative skill is one among the most critical skills required for every human in any stage of his life span. In the case of rural students, communication in the English classroom environment is as difficult as any of the ways of expressing themselves. In rural schools found in Tamil Nadu, although English may be taught as a second language, it is used as the medium of instruction in all the higher educational institutions except one or two functioning in the respective mother tongue. Thus, teaching of English language based on linguistics is inevitable and ease learning of English as second language. Thus, in this paper, the linguistics strategies are applied in learning and teaching English, especially the components of basic sentence patterns, to the students; and the attempt involves explanation of the elements of basic sentences formed with its patterns, and most of the sentences in the exercises are based on the English language and its aspects which help these students not only develop their communicative skills but also raise their general knowledge on English and their academic performance as well.

Aim:

The aim of this paper is to explain the concept of the elements of basic sentence patterns which can be helpful to maintain their standard of English and to promote their written and spoken ability in English language to a great extent.

Objectives:

- To make the students differentiate the basic and derived sentences.
- To make the students understand the various structural elements of a basic sentence.
- To provide the students the knowledge on the patterns of basic sentences in English for their day-to-day educational purposes.
- To make the students enhance their writing and speaking ability by gaining the required knowledge in the basic sentence.

Concept of Basic Sentence:

A grammar should tell us about the principles of sentence construction. Simple as it may seem, it is one of the most difficult demands to satisfy in practice. Theoretically speaking, a sentence in any language can be infinite in length. Consider, for example: the sentence,

1. The rat that the cat that the boy that the girl slapped disliked chased ate the cheese.

The sentence could go on. Now it is difficult to describe the structure of a sentence that is infinitely long. So we break it up into its constituent sentences. We describe the structure of the basic sentences and then describe how these basic sentences can be combined to form more complex sentences. Thus, sentence (1) would consist of the following basic sentences:

2. The rat ate the cheese.
3. The cat chased the rat.
4. The boy disliked the cat.

5. The girl slapped the boy.

Such basic sentences are called kernel sentences. A kernel sentence is defined as a simple, declarative, affirmative, active sentence. All other sentences are non-kernel. Consider the following examples:

6. Kannan was writing a letter. (simple, declarative, affirmative, active: kernel)
7. Was Kannan writing a letter? (not declarative: non-kernel)
8. When was Kannan writing a letter? (not declarative: non-kernel)
9. A letter was being written by Kannan. (not active: non-kernel)
10. Kannan wasn't writing a letter. (not affirmative: non-kernel)
11. Kannan was writing a letter when his mother came in. (not simple: non-kernel)

Sentence (6) is a kernel and the rest of the sentences (7-11) are non-kernel, which are derived from the kernel sentence (6).

Elements of Basic Sentence:

Elements of basic sentence refer to the components which are used to form a sentence. There are six elements to form a simple sentence in English such as Subject, Verb, Direct Object, Indirect object, Complement, and Adjunct (Adverbial). A sentence is defined as a group of words that conveys a complete sense; and it consists of two basic components namely a subject and a predicate. They together express the meaning of the sentence. Before a sentence is taught, the concepts of six components—Subject, Verb, Indirect Object, Direct Object, Complement, and Adjunct (Adverbial)—have to be taught to the students in the class room situation. The concept of each element is given below.

a) Subject:

A subject is the first element of a sentence. It has a nominative case relation with the verb. It may be a single word or a group of words that represent a person or thing about which something is said in a sentence. Generally, a subject may consist of only one word, such as a pronoun, proper noun or common noun that is used in its widest sense. A common noun is one that is used in its widest sense; or it may consist of a group of words (noun and its modifiers). In the group of words, a noun is a head word and the rest of the words are treated as a modifier. The modifier may follow or precede the head noun. When it precedes the head noun, it is known as pre-modifier. If it follows the head noun, it is called as post-modifier. By using the modifiers, the structure of the subject is changed and expanded as well. Sometimes, the infinitive and the participial forms of the verb may function as a subject in a sentence. Thus, in the sentences,

1. Dogs bark.
2. A little girl ran fast.
3. Kannan gave the boy a gift.
4. The door opened suddenly.
5. The tall boy in this class opened the door.
6. Walking is a good exercise.
7. To err is human.
8. Siva's mother is a good singer.
9. His views are quite different.
10. Bharathi, the poet, wrote many poems.

11. To find fault is easy.

In the above sentences, *Dogs, A little girl, Kannan, The door, The tall boy in this class Walking, To err, Siva's mother, His views, Bharathi, the poet and To find fault* are subjects preceding the predicates *bark, ran fast, gave the boy a gift, opened suddenly, opened the door, is a good exercise, is human, is a good singer, are quite different, are quite different and is easy*. It is noted that the subjects typically do not always represent the doer of the action denoted by the verb. Thus, in sentence (4), the subject (The door) is not a doer of the past action 'opening'. Moreover, the head noun may be in the first position (eg, "Dogs" in sentence 1), middle position (eg, "boy" in sentence 5) or last position (eg, "girl" in sentence 2). Further, the head noun may not have any modifier, as can be seen in the following examples: "Dogs" in sentence (1), "Kannan" in sentence (3), "Walking" in sentence (6), and "To err" in sentence (7).

b) Predicate:

The predicate consists of the main verb (MV) and any one of the patterns given below:

- Verb + [Adjunct]
- Verb + Complement (Comp.) + [Adjunct]
- Verb + Object (Obj.) + [Adjunct]
- Verb + Indirect Object (Iobj.) + Direct Object (DObj.) + [Adjunct]
- Verb + Object (Obj.) + Comp. + [Adjunct]

The predicate may or may not have an adjunct in the end. The adjunct may be optional item.

By choosing different items mentioned above, we can construct different basic sentence patterns or kernel patterns. Thus, V+Comp. is one kernel pattern, whereas V + Obj. is another.

(i) Verb:

A verb is a core element in English sentence. It may show an action or a state of being or change of state. Example, (i) The snake ran fast, (ii) The snake died and (iii) The snake is dead. The verb in the first sentence shows the past action of 'running' done by the subject; in the second sentence, the verb expresses the change from one state to another undergone by the subject, i.e., from being alive to being dead. The verb in the third sentence expresses the state of being of the subject, i.e., dead (not alive). The verbs are classified into two groups: the Main verb having lexical meaning does the main function in a sentence such as *work, generate, write*, etc. and Auxiliary (helping verb) verbs. Auxiliary verbs can further be divided into two categories: Primary auxiliary such as be-forms (*am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being*) and Modal auxiliary such as *may-might, can-could, will-would*, etc). Primary auxiliaries consist of the manifestations of the forms of *to be, do, and have*. All these manifestations except *being* can function as a main verb in a simple sentence. Thus, in the sentences *Raja works hard* and *He is a teacher; works* and *is* are the main verbs, respectively.

(ii) Direct Object:

Object generally follows the transitive verb in a simple active construction. In terms of meaning, the object is often identified with the person or thing that is affected by the action verb and performed by the subject. Thus, the object typically represents the theme or patient. The object of the transitive verb may normally be a proper noun, a noun phrase, a pronoun, etc., that shows the accusative case relation with the verb. Thus, in the sentences such as *The teacher taught English grammar well, The students invited the dean and The child broke the toys; English grammar, the dean and the toys* are the objects of the sentences. A way to identify the direct object of the verb is to consider it as an answer to any of the two questions with *What* for nonhuman or *Whom* for human: *What did the teacher teach? (Answer: English grammar)* and *Whom did the students invite?(the dean)*.

(iii) Indirect Object

If a sentence consists of a ditransitive verb, an indirect object can occur. The object of the ditransitive verb may normally be a proper noun, a noun phrase, a pronoun, etc., that shows the dative case relation with the verb. A simple sentence may have an *indirect object* in addition to a direct object: for example, in *A professor is teaching the students a poem; the students* is the indirect object that represents those who are indirectly affected by the action of teaching, in this case, they are beneficiaries or recipients and *a poem* is the direct object. Indirect objects express the animate entity to or for whom an action is performed or takes place. They are neither the instigator of the action (the subject) nor that which is directly affected or created as a result of the action (the direct object). That is why they are indirect.

(iv) Complement:

A complement is something that completes a construction. Now this is a vague definition, but the following examples will make the meaning of the term clear:

1. She is a teacher.
2. She is good.
3. She is here.
4. She is in the class room.
5. She seems happy.

When the "be" verb is used as a main verb, anything that follows it is usually a complement. This can be used as a crude test for finding out whether something is a complement or not. Thus, in the following sentence,

6. He became a doctor.
Here, a doctor is a complement since we can have an equivalent sentence with "be" verb as the main verb:

7. He was a doctor.
8. He impressed her as stupid.
9. He found her silly.

A complement may be a noun phrase as in the sentence (1), an adjective as in the sentence (2), an adverb as in the sentence (3), or a prepositional phrase as in the sentence (4). When the complement is omitted, it is not treated as a sentence. Hence, the complement is obligatory. If the complement applies to the subject, it is a subject complement. In sentence (8), the subject "he" is the one who is stupid and hence "stupid" is a subject complement. In sentence (9), the object 'her' (she) is the one who is silly and hence "silly" is an object complement.

(v) Adjuncts (Adverbials):

An adjunct is an element which is found optionally in the second part of the sentence, namely predicate. The adjunct is added for additional or extra meaning about the event or state of affairs described by the verb in the sentence. It may be an adverb as in "He speaks well," adverbial phrase as in "He speaks quite clear," and prepositional phrase as in "He speaks in the classroom". Consider the following examples:

1. He slept *in the classroom*.
2. He slept *here*.
3. He slept *very well*.
4. He slept *because he took a sleeping pill*.
5. He slept *whenever he felt like sleeping*.

The prepositional phrase as in the sentence (1), an adverb as in the sentence (2), an adverbial phrase as in sentence (3), an adverbial clause as in the sentences (4 and 5) are adjuncts because we can say, "He slept," without an adjunct and hence an adjunct is optional. It usually answers to questions *How?, Where?, When?, Why?* etc. The adjuncts are usually optional elements which may not harm the sense of the sentence even if they are removed. The adverbial element "normally" is optional in "He speaks normally". Further, adverbials are usually mobile. Hence, they can be in the initial,

middle and last positions in a sentence, as in “She met her friend *accidentally*” (last position) ~ “She *accidentally* (middle position) met her friend” ~ “*Accidentally* (initial position), met her friend.”

Basic Sentence Patterns:

The patterns of a basic sentence vary from one another based on the different combinations of the various elements. They may be **SV** as in “The child smiles”, **SVA** as in “The child smiles beautifully”, **SVC** like “She became a teacher”, **SVDO** like “A cat chased a rat”, **SVIDO** as in “She taught him linguistics”, **SVOC** as in “The students elected him a class leader”, **SVOA** like “He met her accidentally”, **SVIDOAO** as in “He sent her a gift by speed post”.

Points to remember:

- Subject may be a single word or a group of words.
- Subject may be a proper noun, pronoun, common noun, verbal noun or gerundial infinitive.
- The head noun may be in the first, middle or last position.
- The elements of pre-modifier may be determiner, pre-determiner, number, adjective, or noun.
- The elements of post-modifier may be adverb, prepositional phrase (preposition-determiner-noun) or a relative clause.
- The complement may be a noun (phrase), an adverb (phrase), an adjective (phrase), or prepositional phrase.
- The adjunct may be a noun, an adverb (phrase-clause), or prepositional phrase.
- The adjunct is an optional element.

Conclusion:

By understanding the above-mentioned elements of basic sentence patterns, the rural students learning English as a Second Language can have a sound knowledge on the written and spoken mode of English language in their education and career. The progress of the development of second language particularly English in rural setup may be hindered with the lack of linguistics knowledge among teachers at school levels. Thus, an attempt is made to explore the concept of sentential components based on linguistic methods for promoting the student's language competence. It can root their educational success in the current competitive world.

REFERENCES

1. Alexander, L.G. 1990. Longman English Grammar Practice. Longman.
2. Aarts, F. and Aarts, J. 1988. English Syntactic Structures. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
3. Greenbaum, S. and Quirk, R. 2001. A Student's Grammar of The English Language. Pearson Education.
4. Jackson, H. 1982. Analyzing English: An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
5. Williams, J. D. 2005. The Teacher's Grammar Book. London. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.