

Difficulties of Building English Sentences in Writing
(A case study for Sudanese Secondary schools in Gezira State, Sudan)

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the problems of writing correct English sentences as for the Sudanese students of secondary schools. The study applied the descriptive and the analytical methods beside the statistical tools so as to achieve the desired goals. Therefore, the researcher used both questionnaire for teachers (31teachers) and test for students (25 students), and he reached the results below:

1. Most of the Sudanese students at secondary school are not acquainted with parts of speech.
2. The periods allocated for writing skills are extremely rare.
3. Teachers, encouragement for students concerning writing skills is entirely rare.
4. There is a complete absence in teaching lessons of English structure.
5. Students, mistakes in writing skills are not discussed in the presence of students.

Thus the study recommended that: there should be a sort of modification in the Sudanese secondary schools syllabus through introducing a lot of periods concerning English structure besides focusing on literature periods, for it is the main source of vocabulary.

Keywords: English sentences, writing skill, structure, vocabulary.

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Introduction:

Languages generally have an important function in terms of communication and exchange of ideas and interests among people. It can be seen that many necessary and inevitable things depend on language. Therefore whether language is written or spoken it should be clear and straight forward.

No doubt most official issues rely on written language such as treaties, matters of trade and other things of paramount importance. Therefore the more there is stress and for language especially English language which is world language, the more people on particularly students will make much progress and development on this field.

Unfortunately enough ambiguity will occur when students of English language express themselves in structurally wrong sentences. This ambiguity may lead to a sort of misunderstanding between the writer and the reader. Therefore the message will be lost between the ignorance of the writer and perplexity of the reader.

Moreover wrong written sentences may lead to a sort of misinterpretation for the message they convey. Since this topic is extremely academic the researcher attempts to choose a topic with the title of: Difficulties of building English sentences in writing skill.

Research problems:

The researcher will try to investigate and identify the actual problems facing Sudanese secondary school students in learning English language and especially in building English sentences. Moreover, he will try to find out why students have such problems, analyze accurately the difficulties that our students have in learning each pattern, as well as discover remedies for these problems and suggest solutions.

Aims of the research:

1. To investigate the nature of the problem of sentence writing.
2. To explore the difficulties facing Sudanese students in writing English sentences.
3. To find solutions for these difficulties of writing English sentences.
4. To solve the syntactic problems confront students in secondary schools in learning the target language.
5. To help students in terms of inflection.

Research Questions:

1. What are the actual problems that faced Sudanese secondary schools students in writing English language sentences?
2. What are the structural problems facing Sudanese secondary schools students in writing sentences?
3. To what extent are the teachers encouraging students to concern writing sentences?
4. To what extent is the English language syllabus supports writing sentences so as to provide syntactic problems?
5. To what extent does the absence of discussing mistakes affect in writing English languagesentences?

Hypotheses of this research:

1. There are actual problems that faced Sudanese secondary schools students in writing English language sentences.
2. There are structural problems facing Sudanese secondary schools students in writing sentences.
3. The teachers do not encourage students to concern writing sentences.
4. English language syllabus supports writing sentences so as to provide syntactic problems.
5. The absence of discussing mistakes affect in writing English language sentences.

Research limits:

- Theme limit: to cover three schools.
- Time limit: from 2010 to 2012-08-09
- Location limit: Gezira State North Medani.
- Human limit: students+ teachers

Literature Review:

Definition of sentence:

What exactly is a sentence?

Longknife and Sullivan (2002: 1) Mention that (a sentence is a means of communicating). A sentence expresses a complete thought and contains at least one subject –verb combination .It may express emotions , give orders make statements , or ask questions In every case , sentences are meant to communicate.

Sometimes, a sentence may be a single word:

What? Nonsense! Jump.

" What " and " nonsense!" communicate a complete thought.

"Jump" though, has an unspoken " you " as the subject.

Most sentences however have two parts: the subject which is a noun or pronoun, and the verb. These two parts follow a basic pattern:

Subject + Verb

John(1976: 31-32) illustrates that all language is spoken or written in sentences .The sentences is the mould into which all our thinking is run .Hence when we come to write , we are compelled to write in sentences.

General rules:

As our purpose in writing is to be easily and quickly understood, it is plain that there must be a few general rules to guide our practice these rules are:

- (i) The sentence ought not to be overcrowded either with words or with ideas
 - (ii) The right words must be used.
 - (iii) Let the sentence have a pleasant rhythm.
- (i) Another rule very usually given is: ' The sentence must have unity.' This means that we should speak or write of only one person or thing in the sentence;that we should not wander off to other subjects; and that the principal clause in the sentence should dominate and keep in their proper places all the subordinate clauses.

(ii) It is often necessary to ask the opinion of a friend as to whether this or that sentences are overcrowded. The writer already knows the meaning; to him it is all plain, and immediately plain; but the reader or hearer does not know what is coming, and has 'to take it in.' The hearer will be able to tell us, after he has heard our sentences, whether we have given to each the feeling of unity.

Crystal (1985: 277) maintains that, the largest structural unit in terms of which the grammar of a language is organized. Innumerable definitions of sentence exist, ranging from the vague characterizations of traditional grammar (such as the expressions of a complete thought,) to the detailed structural descriptions of contemporary Linguistic analysis. Most linguistic definitions of the sentence show the influence of the American linguist Leonard Bloomfield, who pointed to the structural autonomy or Independence of the notion of sentence: it is not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form.

Recent research has attempted to discover larger grammatical units (of discourse, or text) but so far little has been uncovered comparable to the sentence. Whose constituent structure is state able in Formal, Distributional terms.

Linguistic discussion of the sentence has focused on problems of Identification, classification and generation. Identifying sentences is relatively straightforward in the written language, but is often problematic in speech, where intonation and pause may give uncertain clues to whether a sentence boundary exists. Classification of sentence structure proceeds along many different lines. In generative grammar likewise, there are several models of analysis for sentence structure with competing views as to the direction in which a sentence Derivation should proceed. Certain analytic problems are shared by all approaches, e.g. how to handle ELLIPTICAL sentences (or 'sentence fragments').

In actual practice we often ignore the definition with its " complete thought " as a criterion. If for example, a reader attempts to count the number of sentences that occur on this or any other page of print, he usually does not stop to decide whether each group counted expresses " a complete thought ".

In fact he may not read a single word of the material nor even attempt to discover what the discourse about. Another practical definition used to count the number of sentences in any written material would thus be phrased as follows:

A sentence is a word or a group of words standing between an initial capital letter and a mark of end punctuation or between two marks of end punctuation.

Components of sentence:

(Phrases and clauses):

Phrases:

Radford (2009: 39-49) explains that to put our discussion on a concrete footing, let's consider how an elementary two-word phrases such as the italicized response produced by speaker B in the following mini-dialogue is formed :

(1) Speaker A: What are you trying to do?

Speaker B: Help you

As speaker B's utterance illustrates, the simplest way of forming a phrase is by merging (a technical term meaning "combining") two words together: for example by merging the word help with the word you in (1), we form the phrase help you . The resulting phrase help you seems to have verb-like rather than pronoun –like properties, as we see from the fact that it can occupy the same range of positions as the simple verb help, and hence e.g. occur after the infinitive particle to.

- (2) (a) We are trying to help .
- (b) We are trying to help you.

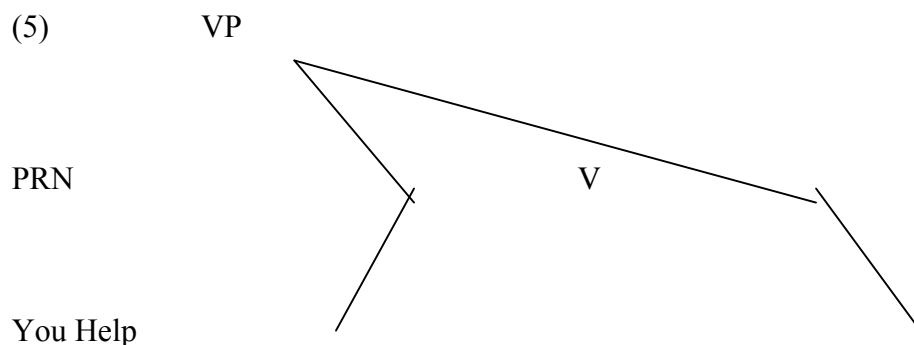
By contrast, the phrase help you cannot occupy the same kind of position as a pronoun such as you, as we see from (3) below:

- (3) (a) You are very difficult
- (b) * Help you are very difficult

So it seems clear that the grammatical properties of a phrase like help you are determined by the verb help, and not by the pronoun you .Much the same can be said about the semantic properties of expression, since the phrase help you describes an act of help, not a kind of person .Using the appropriate technical terminology, we can say that the verb help is the head of the phrase help you, and hence that help you is a Verb Phrase: and in the same way as we abbreviate category labelslike verb to V , so too we can abbreviate the category label Verb Phrase to VP , If we use traditional labeled bracketing technique to represent the category of the overall verb phrase help you and of its constituent words (the verb help and the pronoun you) we can represent the structure of the resulting phrase as in (4) below :

(4) {VP {V help} {PRN you} }

An alternative (equivalent) way of representing the structure of phrases like help you is via labeled tree diagram such as(5)below
(Which is a bit like family tree diagram – albeit a small family):



What the tree diagram in (5) tell us is the that the overall phrase help you is a Verb Phrase (VP) , and that its two constituents are the verb (V) help and the (PRN) you . The verb help is the head of overall phrase (and so is the key word which determines the grammatical and semantic properties of the phrase help you).

In (4) in the sense that the two provide us with precisely the same information about the structure of the phrase help you.

The differences between a labeled bracketing like (4) and a tree diagram like (5) are purely national: each category is represented by a single labeled node in a tree diagram.

Since our goal is developing a theory of Universal grammar is to un cover general structural principles governing the formation of phrases and sentences.

Clauses: a man on the tape length of thel the five the given the level

Leech and Slortvick (1987:211-212) asserts that clauses are the principal structure of which sentences are composed. A sentence may consist of one or more than one clause, there are three important ways in which clauses maybe described and classified:

- (a) In terms of the Clause Elements (subject, verb, etc.) from which they are constructed, and the verb patterns which are formed from these elements.

Classification of sentences:

Declarative sentence and word order:

Swick (2009 : 1+2+12+13+32) comments that Declarative sentence in English consist of a subject and predicate . The verb in the predicate is conjugated appropriately for the subject and in specific tense :

Subject	+	predicate
Mary	+	speaks English.

Lets look at some examples that can illustrate this point. Declarative sentences can have singular or plural nouns as their subjects and can be followed by a verb in any tense and by the complement of the sentence.

John repairs the car.
The boys ran into the forest .

Other declarative sentences use a pronoun as their subject , and again the tense of the sentence can vary .

1. She has never been to England. (Singular– pronoun subject, present perfect tense verb).
2. We shall visit him soon. (Plural – pronoun subject, future –tense verb)

Since English verbs can show an incomplete action or one in progress (he is going) or a completed or habitual action (he goes), when changing tenses you have to conform to the type of action of the verb .For example:

He is going, he was going, and he has been going
He goes, he went, and he has gone

The conjugation of English verbs is, with few exceptions, a relatively simple matter, but using the proper tense of verbs is something else. It is particularly important to understand the tense differences between verbs that describe an action in progress and verbs that describe a complete or habitual action.

Interrogative sentences:

There are two types of interrogatives, and both types ask questions. The first type can be called a yes-no question, because the answer to such a question will begin with the affirmative word yes or the negative word no. Most questions of this type begin with a form of the auxiliary verb do.

Auxiliary + Subject + verb + predicate +?
Do + you + have + the books +?

Yes –No questions:

If the verb in a yes –no question is the verb to be or the verb to have, the question is formed simply by placing the verb before the subject of the sentence.

To be / to have + subject + predicate +?
Is + she + the new student +?

This occurs in any tense. In the case of the perfect tenses or the future tenses, it is the auxiliary of the verbs to be and to have that precede the subject. For example:

1. Is she aware of the problem? (Present)
2. Was there enough time to finish the exam? (Past)
3. Have you been here before? (Present perfect)
4. Will you come back again? (Future)

Types of sentence:

Sentence structure:

Maclin (2000:301-304) demonstrates that sentence structure can be simple, compound, complex, or compound complex according to the kinds of clause in the sentence.

Simple sentence:

Murcia and Freeman (1983:280-283) states that they have decided to treat together sentences with *it* and *there* subjects. One reason for this decision is that both of these *it* and *there* subjects function syntactically as a subject in English i.e. their behavior in Yes –No questions and tag questions indicates that they undergo subject /auxiliary inversion.

It's a nice day. Is it a nice day?

It's a nice day, is not it?

There is a book on the table. Is there a book on the table?

Although the *it* and *there* subjects in these sentences express no referential meaning we know that in other contexts, these same words can indeed have a referential function:

Where is the book? It is on the table. (It refers to the book)

Let's go out in the garden .It is cooler there (there refers to in the garden). here is a book on the table, is not there?

Compound sentence:

What is compound sentence?

Zandvourt (1965:212-214) observed that, A compound sentence has at least two main or independent clauses, connected by coordinating conjunctions ((and, but, or not, for, so, yet)) . Each clause has its own subject and verb.

This second clause should be separated from the first by comma in front of the coordinating conjunction.

Example:

The man went to the store, and the sales clerk sold him some milk easiest way to expand this basic pattern is to join two simple sentences to make a compound sentence .

Compound sentence ; semicolon , no conjunctions ((two short ,related sentences now joined)).

S + v ; S + V .

Explanation:

This pattern can help us to join two short simple sentences having two closely related Ideas . They need as semicolon instead of conjunction and comma. The illustration in the box and the examples Show only two clauses you can actually three or more ,be sure to avoid two pit falls of the compound sentence:

1. The fused or run –on sentence (which has no punctuation between the two sentences that have been joined).

Example:

My cat lost her ball I do not know where .

2. The comma splice (using a comma instead of a period ,semicolon or colon to separate the two sentences you have joined.

Example:

The plant wilted, I forget to water it.

You avoid the above two problems if you faithfully copy the following patterns for compound sentences , being careful to imitate the punctuation exactly. (The art of styling sentence).

As regards the structure of the members of the compound sentence it is to be observed that a main clause may take any of the structural forms of a simple sentence .

Complex Sentence:

What is complex sentence?

A complex sentence has one main or independent clause and one or more dependent or subordinate clauses.

Example:

When an atom is split, it releases neutrons.

Dependent clauses can function in the sentence as a nouns ,adjective or adverbs

Methodology:

In this chapter the researcher introduces the description of the study methodology; the researcher will describe the tools utilized for data collection which contains the population (subjects), the procedure and the statistical analysis which applied in this research.He used (SPSS) which known as (statistical package social science) program, to analyze this data.

To know the difficulties in building English sentence between Sudanese secondary school students the researcher followed some steps. So this chapter deals with procedure, data collection from the population, the questionnaire and the test is very important tool for this process.

Population:**Consist of:**

- 1- A group of teachers from (30) governmental schools, were chosen from central State – North Medani
- 2- A group of (25) students were chosen from a governmental school in Central State North Madani.

Sampling:

In order to choose a sample for this study the target population is (31) teachers, this group is selected randomly.

The following table shows the study sample with regional to their sex, qualifications and experience.

Table 3.1: The frequency and the percentage for the sample individual survey.

Gender	frequency	percent
Male	21	67.74%
Female	10	32.26%
Total of sample	31	100.0%

Qualifications	frequency	percent
B.E	17	54.84%
M.A	14	45.16%
Total sample	31	100.0%

Experience	frequency	percent
Less than 5 years	6	19.4%
5-10 years	12	38.7%
More than 10 years	13	41.9%
Total sample	31	100.0%

Discussion:

The tables show the demographic distribution of the individuals of the study as questionnaire sample. It consists of 67.74% of male and 32.26% of female. As for qualifications, there is 54.85% getting bachelor and 45.16% getting master degree. For experts it can be seen that the majority of the sample individuals 41.94% have experience of more than 10 years teaching.

Tools:

In this study, data is collected by questionnaire beside test. 31 secondary school English teachers at central State-North Medani answered the questionnaire inquires.

The questionnaire design:

The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the difficulties building English sentence among Sudanese secondary schools students. The questionnaire consists of (20) statements and it was designed on the scale of five points:

Strongly agree – Agree - Disagree – Strongly disagree - Not sure

Validity:

Five judges have given their opinion on the validity of the questionnaire inquires. (Appendix 3)

Reliability:

The researcher has shown the characteristics of the sample individuals and their distribution .Therefore, the statistical divisions are as follows:

- (1) The frequencies and the percentage.
- (2) Degree of consistency and correlation.

The test:

The test consists of thirty questions .This test contains three parts each one is 10 questions .These questions are sentence completion ,answer the following questions and arrange these words correctly to compose sentences, is presented for 25 students .This test is designed to increase both the validity and the reliability of this research.

(Appendix 2)

The summary:

The researcher has introduced the description of the research tools which are used in this research, it includes measuring instruments, population, questionnaire, test, and statistical analysis method and he distributed the subjects according to their genders, pairs of experience and qualifications as it was shown above in the tables.

Conclusion and Results:**Recommendations and further suggestions:****Conclusion:**

Difficulties of building English sentences in Sudanese secondary schools are a problem which is so clear. The researcher has used two methods in conducting this study. So he used the descriptive and analytical method in analyzing data. So the researcher reaches these conclusions and results.

Results:

1. Most of the Sudanese students at secondary school are not acquainted with parts of speech.
2. The periods allocated for writing skills are extremely rare.
3. Teachers, encouragement for students concerning writing skills is entirely rare.
4. There is a complete absence in teaching lessons of English structure.
5. Students, mistakes in writing skills are not discussed in the presence of students.

Recommendations:

1. Establishing English societies is a must for the Sudanese students of secondary schools.
2. Modification in Sudanese secondary schools syllabus through allocating a lot of periods for writing skills.
3. Introducing modern techniques in terms of writing skills.
4. Encouraging Sudanese students of secondary school to write their own wall Newspapers
5. Avoiding the policy of large classes for they widen and deepen students' academic problems.
6. There should be a sort of balance between reading and writing skills concerning Sudanese secondary school English syllabus.
7. Introducing the culture of writing diaries and daily activities as for Sudanese students of secondary schools.
8. Using modern technology in developing English Language.

Suggestions:

The researcher advises other researchers who are interested in the area of writing skills to investigate the following points:

1. The problem of acquiring sufficient amount of vocabulary.
2. Making much use of literature as a main source of vocabulary.

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Appendix (1) The questionnaire

Dear: _____

Name: (Optional) _____

Gender:

Male

Female

Qualifications:

University Graduate

Post Graduate

Experi

Less than 5 years

5-10 years

More than 10 years

Questionnaire For Teachers

1. The English syllabus at secondary schools focus only on reading skills.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
2. The English syllabus at secondary schools ignores the techniques of writing skills.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
3. Most students at secondary school do not know parts of speech.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
4. Most students at secondary school have inadequate Knowledge of vocabulary.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
5. Writing exercises at secondary schools syllabus are very rare.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
6. The periods that are devoted for writing in English syllabus aren't enough.
 Strongly agree Agree Strongly disagree Not sure
7. Some teachers of English language do not encourage students to learn writing skills.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
8. Students lack motivation both at school and in their homes in terms for writing skills.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
9. The nature of Sudanese culture is mainly based on speaking not writing.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure
10. The structure of English language is not taught sufficiently at secondary schools.
 Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure

11. Teachers at Sudanese secondary schools do not put into consideration punctuations rules.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree No

12. Teachers do not provide student accuracy in writing skills.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree No

13. Teachers are not aware of the necessity of teaching competences.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree No

14. Students are often asked to read what they write.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree No

15. Sudanese students at secondary schools are acquainted with the components of English sentences.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree No

16. Sudanese students at secondary schools receive a reasonable dose of lessons of English structure.

Str agree Ag Di Str disagree Not

17. Sudanese students at secondary schools have sufficient lessons in writing.

Str agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure

18. Sudanese students at secondary schools tend to share ideas in groups.

Str agree Ag Disagree Str disagree Not sure

19. with Sudanese students at secondary schools mistakes are discussed individually.

Str agree Ag Disagree Strongly disagree Not sure

20. Teachers are satisfied with their student's standard in writing skills.

Str agree Ag Disagree Str disagree Not sure

Str agree Ag Disagree Str disagree Not sure

Appendix (2)
The Test
Group (A)

Section (I) Complete the sentences below write no more than three words for each answer:

1. Students must study hard _____.
2. Bernard Show is a _____.
3. We must take our lunch _____.
4. You should spend 40 _____.
5. We must take care _____.
6. Do not bring any money _____.
7. Telephone services provide _____.
8. You want to buy something _____.
9. My father helps my brother _____.
10. Computer courses are _____.

Section (II) Answer the following questions.

1. Where did you travel during the summer?

2. What is your favorite hobby?

3. What time does school open on Wednesday morning?

4. Who is your favorite author?

5. Where are you from?

6. Is fast food popular in your country?

7. What is your father job?

8. Do you visit parks?

9. What do you like doing in your free time?

10. Why do you think people like playing or watching team sport?

Section (III) Arrange these words correctly to compose meaning full sentences.

1. The / room / dining/on /is/ left.

2. She / shopping/ will/ and / come /in/half/ an / hour/go.

3. You/ come/ early /can.

4. Do / think/ you/ a country's system/ health should be free.

5. The / was / house/destroyed/ by/gas/the/ explosion.

6. The/ Roman/ last/ army/ defeated/was.

7. The / earth / is/ compared / sun / with / tiny.

8. You / stand / can / the/ sea /in / here.

9. They/ after/ look / their/ father/ sheep.

10. If/ smoke/ you/will harm/ lungs/your.

Appendix (3)
Names of judges

No	Qualifications	Name	Specialization	University
1	Prof.	Abdallah. Alkhanghi	Methodology	SUST
2	Dr.	Ezzeldeen Mohamed	Educational Tech.	SUST
3	Dr.	Lubab Altyeb	Structure	Gezira
4	Dr.	Awatif Satti	Testing	Gezira
5	Dr.	Imad Ahmed	Literature	Gezira

Comments:

Professor Abdallah Alkhanghi approved both test and questionnaire and commented that they are suitable to be used in the research.

Dr. Ezzaldeen Mohamed (associated professor) Approved both the test and the questionnaire are very good and commented that if the research follows guidance and comments.

Dr. Lubab Altyeb (Associated professor) approved both questionnaire and commented that they are suitable to be used in the research.

Dr. Awatif Satti (Associated professor) approved both questionnaire and commented that they are suitable.

Dr. Imad Ahmed (Associated professor) approved both questionnaire and mentioned that they are suitable.