

Syntactic Structural Analysis of Student Writing and Language Education - A Pilot Study

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Introduction

In the new era of academic advancement, the disciplines, Linguistics and Education are indispensable and interconnected. They interact with each other in current higher education teaching and learning. Linguistic awareness, knowledge building, and the ability to apply language in formal communication lead a person to achieve a successful education. The English language is the skeleton of the education field, as the medium of instruction is English in most universities. Further, most human activities such as civilization, gaining knowledge, patience, emotional intelligence and communication, and academic writing takes place in their Education. Therefore, it enhances the capacity for cooperative learning. Writing skill is mastered at the latest stage in language learning. In Sri Lanka, students learn English as a second language at schools and universities at the tertiary level. According to Perera (2015), Public examinations like GCE (O/L) results measuring reading, and writing skills claim that student performance is unsatisfactory. One of the leading causes can be the low diversity of sentence generation in writing skills in the academic writing

Research Problem and Objective

However, after decades of ESL learning at schools and the university, they fail to generate sentence diversity in patterns and types and syntactic complexity in their writing as advanced learners expressing the ideas and the information concretely. Although writing skills are central to academic achievement, graduating from university, gaining employment, and effective written communication is a total failure of Education in the local and global open market scenario in the Sri Lankan context. Students of the University of Vavuniya do not show diversity and complexity in their essay writing at the tertiary level of education. The objective of the study is to investigate whether the first-year students of Vavuniya University show diversity and complexity at the intra-sentence level in their essay writing. Proficiency in writing increases with the diversity and complexity of the sentence and structural generation.

Literature Review

Hudson (2004) opines that our discipline, linguistics, seen as a whole, has a virtual interface with Education and that research whose results cross this interface is just as important as that which feeds into neuroscience or child development. Indeed, if academic linguistics is weakened, the impact of Education is ignored on language or vice versa.

Abdullah (2014) expresses that students use the same sentence patterns repetitively in their writing as they do not have mastery of sentence patterns. Fitri's (2017) study reveals that the strategy of teaching sentence patterns improves students' understanding of English sentences. "Essay writing forms the foundation of academic writing" (Fonseka & Manawaduge 2019). Ortega (2003) opines

that syntactic complexity is the syntactic maturity of the learners, the variety of forms used in language production, and the extent to which these forms are complex.

Ramendra and Aryana (2018) studied The Analysis of Sentence Structure of Students' Compositions in Grade VI of Elementary Schools in Bali Province Putrayasa. The data was analyzed using Burton- Roberts Model. The results indicate that there were only simple and compound sentences out of 1,036 from the grade VI students. This finding shows that the students' sentence patterns fall into SV, SVC, SVO, and SVA as simple and compound sentence types.

Gaining command of writing is essential, so providing confidence and courage for successful professionals in the 21st century is essential (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, Latham & Gentile). Both Crossley et al. (2011) and Ravid and Berman (2010) argued that phrase measures are an essential component of sentence patterns to examine syntactic complexity because sentences using more phrases were found to be more complex. According to Jagaiah (2017), students at the tertiary level can form syntactically complicated sentences to manipulate various sentences to create dynamic styles.

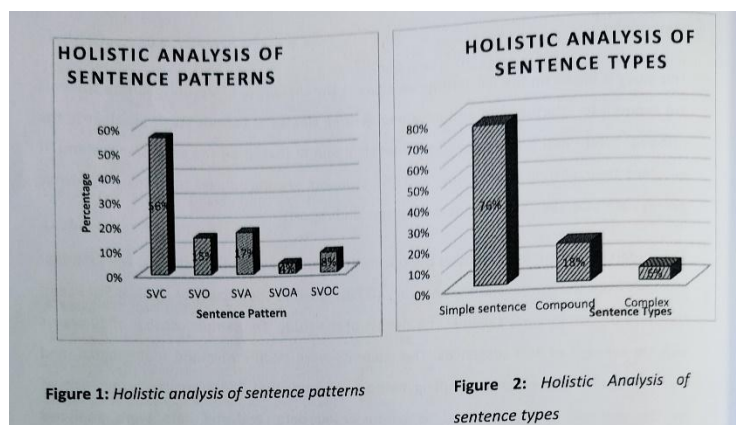
Methodology

This study is based on the ESL writing sessions at the University of Vavuniya. These students are exposed to intermediate and advanced writing classes at various stages, such as in the first-year level I and II and second-year levels II and III (based on the Semester System). It develops their writing proficiency, and the students are introduced to primary academic genres such as essays, summaries, and letters and reports.

The researcher primarily employed the qualitative descriptive research design. Ten first-year students from the Information Technology (IT) attached to the Faculty of Applied Science of Vavuniya University were taken as the sample of the study. The sample consists of 10 essays with an average of 150 sentences. The students were multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, and multi-cultural. A convenience sampling method was conducted. Therefore, the essays written by the students were collected as corpus-based data, and the data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively based on content analysis and thematic analysis using descriptive statistics. The discrete characteristics of generally structured sentences and how explicitly sentences play a prominent role in the texts will be under study.

Analysis and Findings

Holistic analysis of sentence patterns states that most students have generated the SVC (Subject Verb +Complement) pattern 56%, and the least are SVO (Subject+ Verb+ Object)15%, SVA(Subject+Verb+Adjunct) 17%, SVOA (Subject+ Verb+Object+Adjunct) 4% and SVOC (Subject+ Verb+ Object+ Complement) 8%. Most students have used the pattern SVC, the most dominant structure. This knowledge benefits students and helps them to be more creative and independent learners in academic writing when composing sentences at the university level.



Based on the holistic analysis, most students have written simple sentences 76% at the highest at the university level, and minor performance in writing compound 18% and complex 6% sentences. This finding indicates that the students' sentence patterns are limited and lack diversity in sentence formation. At the tertiary level, students are considered advanced learners and be prepared for better professions and higher studies locally and internationally. However, their writings indicate their lower-level competence and performance, and they must face the challenges of international examinations like IELTS and TOEFL in their academic progress.

Further, a detailed analysis of the sentences is given qualitatively. The Original is there are a lot of advantages and disadvantages in Technology but it became part of life that cannot be separated. [S1]. It has been revised at the micro level as there are a lot of advantages and disadvantages of Technology, but it is a part of life [S2]. Further, it was revised at the macro level as Technology has many advantages and disadvantages, but it has become a part of life that cannot be separated. [S3]. The sentence formula is as follows:

{(NP-Noun Phrase; PP-Prepositional Phrase; RC-Relative Clause; Conj-Conjunction)}

Sentence Pattern: Subject + Verb+ Complement (S +V+C) + (Con)) (S+V+O) +RC

The original sentence [S1] has been revised to form an acceptable structure. It has two sentences of the SVC pattern (complement is Noun Phrase) and a relative clause of the (S) VO (Passivized Verb) pattern. The clause is in the passive voice, abbreviated as PV in the formula, initially having an SVO pattern with the hidden agent in the subject position given in the bracket. Further, the first sentence is a simple sentence with a complex NP having the formula: NP+PP+PP, while the second sentence is a complex sentence with an NP having the formula: NP+That-Cl. That clause has replaced the Wh- clause to maintain syntactic appropriateness.

This sentence belongs to the domain of the complex compound. It has the logical argument of 'from the positive to the negative' semantically with the conjunction 'but'. In academic essay writing, this pattern formula - SVC (NP+PP+PP) + Conj + (S) VC (NP+That CI ((S) VO (PV))) - is an advanced application and appropriate functionally to communicate progressive ideas at the tertiary level. However, most students cannot attempt such types of sentences.

The relationship between the meaning and form is academically acceptable as these two patterns reflect a passive presentation of the academic ideas and events without overtly mentioning the subject agents, which are not necessary for this functional context. For example, the subject agent in the first sentence [S1] is 'the people who use Technology' is implied, so there is functionally no need to present it in the sentence physically. However, the expletive construction or dummy subject, 'there' is used. In the second sentence also, in the passive voice presentation of the relative clause, the same subject agent is implied, not visible. Again, however, an expletive construction or dummy subject is not used.

A phrase can consist of one or several words. When it has only one word, that word is the head of the noun phrase, Technology, as in Technology, has many advantages and disadvantages. In phrases with two or more words, one-word functions as the head. For example, in the noun phrase a part of life, the noun life is the head of the phrase. Likewise, in the verb phrase has become, the verb become is the head.

The Original Sentence is Nowadays, from kids to adults everyone is having smartphones for various uses [S4]. Therefore, the revised version is as follows: Nowadays, everyone, from kids to adults, has a smartphone for various uses. [S5).

Sentence pattern: Adverb + Subject +Verb +Complement

This sentence [S5] falls in the Subject + Verb+ Complement (SVC) pattern. Though the sentence type is simple, the student shows phrasal complexity, which is a positive sign for the development of writing at the phrase level rather than one word. In addition, the student applied prepositional phrases 1. For various uses and 2. From kids to adults, as embedded in the noun phrases. However, based on the findings, many students could not generate simple basic phrases or clauses in a sentence's subject, object, and complement positions. It indicates the low level of diversity and complexity at the tertiary level of education. The students do not know the functional capacity of phrases and clauses.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that the students generate simple and compound sentences and cannot use complex and compound-complex sentences in their essay writing. The results stress that university students' writing has limitations in academic writing. Therefore, students generate limited sentence patterns and show a lack of diversity and complexity. In addition, they use cliches and repetitive, monotonous choppy sentences in their essays. The analysis, findings, and discussion reveal that the diversity, variety, and complexity of sentence patterns in academic writing are possible when the students know the diversity, variety, and complexity of the phrasal and clausal structures and apply them in academic writing. First, the teachers must devise strategies and tactics to train the students in these two basic structural elements progressively before using them at the intra-sentence level. Second, sentence diversity and variety enrich inter-sentence level academic writing. However, the complexity of sentences can express the complexity of advanced ideas and concepts learned at the tertiary level. Therefore, the third step is to train the students to incorporate the simple phrases and clauses volitionally or not volitionally at the intra-sentence level. Finally, the fourth step is to train them to incorporate complex phrases and clauses at the intra-sentence

level to meet the complex or advanced communication involved in higher education. Subsequently, teachers and students benefit from the results of this research study as writing skill is a dominant feature and mastering sentence patterns and increasing the complexity at the clausal and phrasal levels is essential to avoid clichés of sentence patterns and sentence types in the essay. Besides, mastery of syntactic structures and functional implications helps them improve students' sentence sophistication and quality of academic writing ability. Therefore, the study recommends that ESL courses introduce and practice the diverse syntactic structures illustrated in the book, the key eight patterns recommended in the book, *University Grammar of English* by (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, 2008, 2016), and the 30 expanded patterns recommended in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: Encyclopedic Edition* by Hornby (1992).

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Note: Your copy may be a **1998 impression**, but the work was first published in **1990**. APA normally cites the publication year of the edition rather than the impression/reprinting year. Minio Browser

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