



## THE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SIMPLE SENTENCES IN ENGLISH: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

M. Somathasan<sup>1</sup> and R. Saranya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, CAS in Linguistics, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, CAS in Linguistics, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.

### ABSTRACT :

*The study of simple sentences in English is quite essential as they play an important role in the development of whole syntactic patterns. The simple sentence is the first type of sentence a student of English learns to speak and write at the beginning of the ESL process. According to Greenbaum and Quirk (2001), a simple sentence may appear in seven patterns. But, sometimes the students get confused in realizing the correct pattern of these sentences. As a result, the students' syntactic knowledge is inhibited to great extent. It is noted that most of the first year students of Higher National Diploma in English (HNDE) at the Advanced Technological Institute (ATI) in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, while learning about the simple sentences, meet the difficulty in recognizing the pattern of the sentences. Thus, this study deals with an innovative method based on the computer technology to help those students improve their sentential knowledge. The participants of this study were 50 first year students of HNDE at the ATI, Trincomalee. Further, a student-friendly learning and testing tool, known as Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester, as an innovative method was developed by using the computer language, Visual Basic 6, to promote the knowledge in simple sentence patterns. Then the participants' both existed and gathered knowledge in sentence patterns were tested through a pre-test in the form of a printed questionnaire and a post test with the tool, respectively. The results of the tests revealed that the post test as an innovative method showed a good result than the result of the pre-test as a traditional method. Finally, the study concludes that the students of HNDE could develop their syntactic knowledge highly by the utilization of the innovative method.*

**KEYWORDS :** HNDE, simple sentence, ESL process, syntactic patterns, innovative method, pre-test, and post test.

### INTRODUCTION:

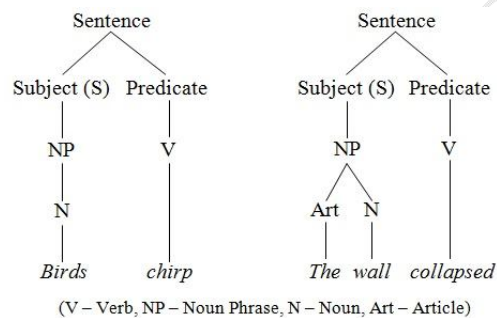
An understanding of the structures of English sentences, especially simple sentences, is fundamental to the development of spoken and written English. For this, a learner should be more concerned with sentence building. Especially, he needs to become acquainted with the patterns of English sentences. Unless the learner becomes familiar with the sentential patterns, he will be unable to use his vocabulary (Hornby, 1975). A sentence expresses a complete thought and contains at least one subject-verb combination (Longknife and Sullivan, 2002). As far as a simple sentence is concerned, it is a single independent clause (Greenbaum 1996: 44) and it traditionally consists of a subject and a predicate (Bhatia, 1995). For example, in relation to the syntax of a simple sentence, 'Students protested', it is said that 'Students' functions as the subject of the sentence, and 'protested' being the predicate. Further, the subject (*Students*) and the predicate (*protested*) belong to a specific grammatical category, i.e. 'Students' being a plural noun and 'protested' a past tense verb. It is noted that a simple sentence has only one finite verb as it has only one clause. Though a sentence is traditionally divided into a subject and a predicate, it is linguistically or in modern grammar passed into a noun phrase (NP) and a verb phrase (VP). According to Greenbaum and Quirk (2001), a simple sentence may appear in any of the following seven combinations or patterns:

### 1. Subject + Verb (SV)

This sentence pattern is the combination of the subject and the verb. The most important grammatical skill a student of ESL can learn is how to identify subjects and verbs in sentences (Choy and Clark, 2011). The subject is the main word in a sentence. It is the person or thing that performs the action denoted by the verb. The subject tells us *who* or *what* the sentence is about. Hence, the subject is usually the 'doer' (Penston, 2005). When the predicate (i.e. an NP) in a sentence consists of one word, it is the verb, which is the indispensable part of every sentence. The verb refers to *an action* or *a state of being*; it tells us what the subject *does*, what the subject *is*, or what the subject *receives*. For example:

1. *Birds chirp.*
2. *The wall collapsed.*

In the above sentences (1) and (2), 'Birds' and 'The wall' are subjects; 'chirp' and 'collapsed' are verbs. The constituents of these sentences are represented in the following tree diagrams:

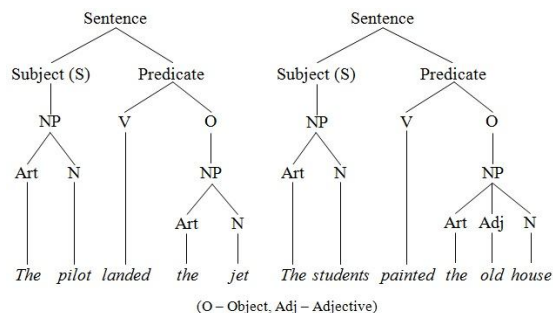


### 2. Subject + Verb + Object (SVO)

This pattern is the combination of the subject, verb, and direct object. If the verb affects the object in a sentence *directly*, it is called the 'direct object'. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 369), an object is the noun, noun phrase or clause, or pronoun in sentences with transitive verbs, which is traditionally described as being affected by the action of the verb. For instance:

3. *The pilot landed the jet.*
4. *The students painted the old house.*

In the above sentences (3) and (4), 'The pilot' and 'The students' are the subjects; 'landed' and 'painted' are transitive verbs, and 'the jet' and 'the old house' are the direct objects. The following tree diagrams serve well the constituents of the above sentences:



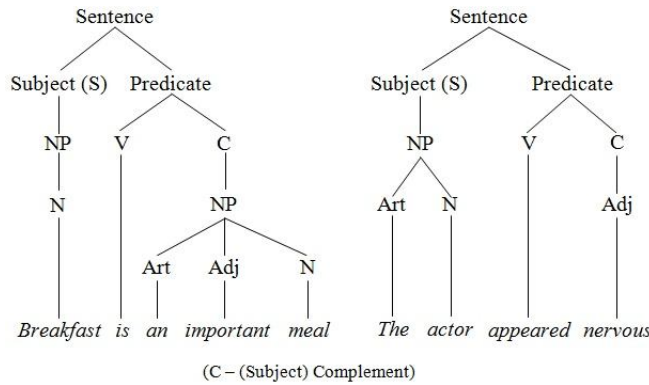
### 3. Subject + Verb + Complement (SVC)

This structure or pattern consists of the subject, verb, and the subject complement. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 95), a complement is the part of the sentence which follows the verb and which

thus *completes* the sentence. Complements are of two types: *Subject complement* and *Object complement*. According to Leech (2006: 22), a subject complement typically follows the verb *be* and consists either of an adjective (phrase) or a noun phrase. The subject complement describes what the subject refers to. Further, a subject complement can follow the linking verbs like *seem, feel, become, and appear*. For example:

- 5. *Breakfast is an important meal.*
- 6. *The actor appeared nervous.*

In the above sentences (5) and (6), 'Breakfast' and 'The actor' are subjects; 'is' and 'appeared' are verbs; and 'an important meal' and 'nervous' are subject complements. The constituents of both sentences are clearly represented in the following tree diagrams:

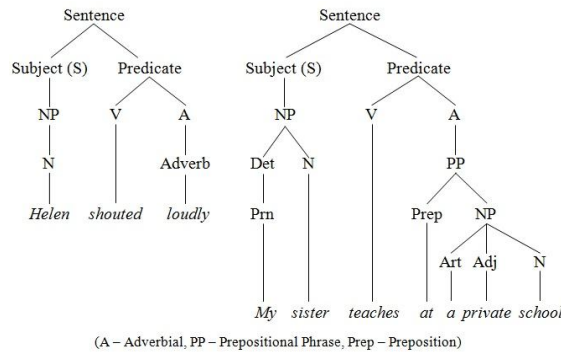


**4. Subject + Verb + Adverbial (SVA)**

This pattern includes the subject, verb, and the adverbial. In modern grammatical framework, the adverbial, symbolized by A, is one of the five elements of a clause structure, comparable to Subject (S), Verb (V), Object (O), and Complement (C). An adverbial is any word, phrase, or clause that functions like an *adverb* (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 15). An adverb is a single-word adverbial whereas a noun phrase or a prepositional phrase is a phrase-level adverbial. Further, an adverbial adds extra meaning about the event or state of affairs described (Leech, 2006: 8). For example:

- 7. *Helen shouted loudly.*
- 8. *My sister teaches at a private school.*

In the above sentences (7) and (8), the adverbials are 'loudly' and 'at a private school' whereas the subjects are 'Helen' and 'My sister' and the verbs are 'shouted' and 'teaches'. All the constituents of these sentences are fairly shown in the following tree diagrams:

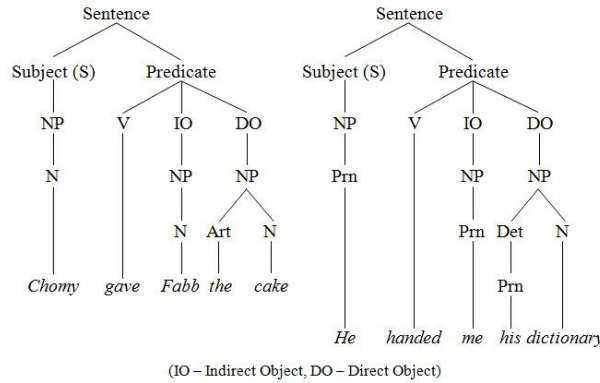


**5. Subject + Verb + indirect Object + direct Object (SVOO)**

This structure contains the subject, verb, indirect object, and direct object. The constituents, *indirect object* and *direct object*, are symbolized by **O** (which is for testing purpose, but for tree-diagram purpose, they are shown by **IO** and **DO**, respectively). According to Richards and Schmidt (2002: 369), if the object of a verb is affected by the verb *indirectly*, it is usually called the ‘indirect object’. Further, when both the direct and indirect objects occur in a sentence, the indirect object precedes the direct object (Greenbaum and Quirk, 2001: 206). In English, the indirect object is the receiver of the direct object, as in:

- 9. *Chomy gave Fabb the cake.* (i.e. ‘Chomy gave the cake to Fabb’)
- 10. *He handed me his dictionary.*

The following tree diagrams show well the constituents of the above sentences (9) and (10):

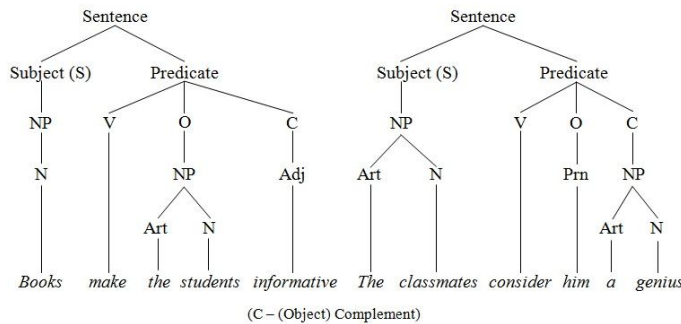


**6. Subject + Verb + Object + Complement (SVOC)**

This pattern consists of the subject, verb, direct object, and the object complement. The constituents, *direct object* and the *object complement*, are simply symbolized by **O** and **C**, respectively. The object complement is the complement linked to an object (Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 95). It is called ‘object complement’ because it follows the object and describes what the object refers to (Leech, 2006: 22). For example:

- 11. *Books make the students informative.*
- 12. *The classmates consider him a genius.*

In the above sentences (11) and (12), ‘informative’ and ‘a genius’ are the object complements as they describe the respective objects ‘the students’ and ‘him’. ‘Books’ and ‘The classmates’ are subjects and ‘make’ and ‘consider’ are verbs. All of the constituents of the above sentences are distinctly represented in the following tree diagrams:



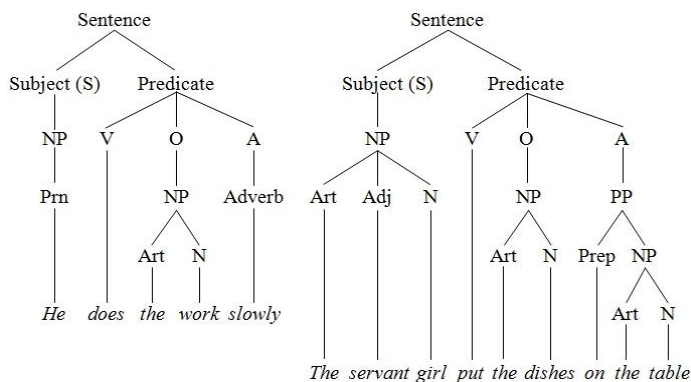
## 7. Subject + Verb + Object + Adverbial (SVOA)

This pattern is the combination of the subject, verb, direct object, and the adverbial. For example:

13. *He does the work slowly.*

14. *The servant girl put the dishes on the table.*

In the above sentences (13) and (14), 'He' and 'The servant girl' are the subjects; 'does' and 'put' are the verbs; 'the work' and 'the dishes' are the objects, and 'slowly' and 'on the table' are the adverbials. The following tree diagrams reflect the constituents of these sentences clearly:



### An innovative approach based on computer technology for the study of simple sentences

In this century, teaching without using any technology has become almost literally impossible. Especially, when the language teaching is concerned, computers have been used for it since the 1960s. Using computer applications in English as a Second or Foreign Language is becoming increasingly important in the educational environment around the world (Bailey, 1996). Computers can cope with the real needs of individuals. It is obvious that computers allow students to set their own personal pace of work, because they are very 'patient' and flexible tools. Further, it is clear that, together with a fascination for computers, many students rank acquisition of computing skills alongside the acquisition of English language as essential for survival in the modern world (Hall and Hewings, 2001: 241). Learning the English language is an interesting and exciting journey that is enhanced when the learning material is presented in a stimulating and enjoyable manner that encourages a learner to keep moving forward. At present, the computer technology (usually in the form of computer software like *encyclopedias*, *subject-wise CDs*, *e-Thesaurus*, *e-dictionaries*, etc.) is quite indispensable in English language teaching and learning. In the case of teaching and learning of the analysis of the simple sentence patterns, the ample software are available in the digital market and further, many free related software can be downloaded from the websites, as well. Based on all these things, for this study, a student-friendly innovative computational tool, i.e. 'Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester, has been developed to promote the knowledge of simple sentence structures of the students at the ATI, Trincomalee.

### METHODOLOGY

For this study, 50 participants were taken from the first year students of HNDE at the ATI, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. Then, hundred (100) simple sentences with different seven patterns from the books and materials relevant to the course of HNDE were collected as data; and further this study was done in three phases: phase 1, phase 2, and phase 3.

In phase 1, a pretest which was in the form of a questionnaire in printed material was conducted to know the participants' existing knowledge of the simple sentence patterns. For this purpose, 20 sentences (out of 100) were used. Further, the pretest was evaluated out of 100 marks. The answers of the test were observed and noted down for the analysis of the results and findings.

In phase 2, the innovative tool, 'Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester', was developed in a user-friendly manner with the help of the computer language, Visual Basic 6. For this purpose, 60 simple sentences (out of 100) as data were fed into the tool or programme. As far as the mechanism of the tool is concerned, it has two options (in the form of two buttons): *Learning* and *Testing*. When a student clicks the 'Learning' button, he can learn about the seven patterns of the simple sentences thoroughly. Then he can go to the testing process by clicking the 'Testing' button. While clicking this button, the interface of the testing process would appear in which the student can find a 'Sentence' button. When the 'Sentence' button is clicked, it automatically changes into the name of 'Next', and the first sentence is displayed to find out its pattern. There are already the seven patterns of the simple sentence in the tool. Then the student has to study the displayed sentence deeply and click the correct pattern of that sentence. Then, by clicking the 'Check' button, he can check whether his answer is correct or not. Further, the tool has been developed to show the user's attempt, correct sentence pattern, and the user's marks or score. This is the operation of the tool. Moreover, this tool was practiced by the participants in the computer laboratory at the relevant ATI for one week.

In phase 3, a post-test was conducted with the help of the developed tool, 'Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester', to know the participants' gained knowledge in simple sentence patterns. For this purpose, the rest of the simple sentences, i.e. 20 (out of 100), were used. Further, the post-test was evaluated out of 100 marks. The answers of the test were observed and recorded for the analysis of the results and findings.

### Sample visual of the developed innovative tool

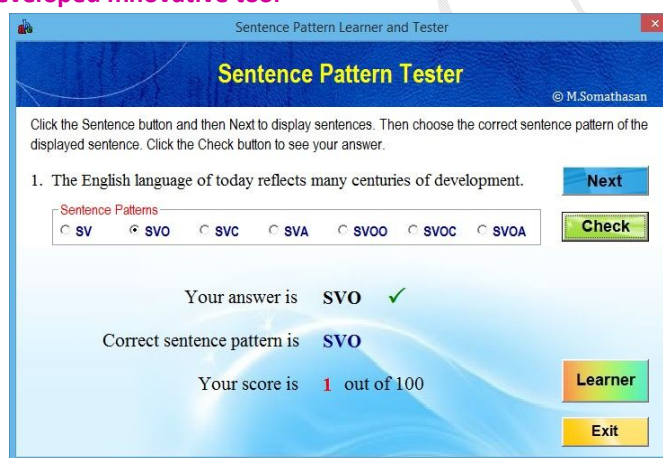


Figure 1 – The sample visual of the developed tool

### ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The following results were analysed to make the findings by comparing the results of the pretest (i.e. the traditional method) with the results of the post-test (i.e. the innovative method) regarding the participants' knowledge in simple sentence patterns in English.



The Results of Pretest and Post-test on Simple Sentence Patterns				
Marks Range	Number of Participants (50)			
	Pretest	Percentage (%)	Post-test	Percentage (%)
0-24	3	6%	0	0%
25-29	2	4%	0	0%
30-34	3	6%	2	4%
35-39	7	14%	4	8%
40-44	7	14%	4	8%
45-49	8	16%	3	6%
50-54	7	14%	6	12%
55-59	4	8%	8	16%
60-64	3	6%	7	14%
65-69	4	8%	6	12%
70-84	1	2%	5	10%
85-100	1	2%	5	10%
	50	100%	50	100%

Table 1 – The results of pretest and post-test on simple sentence patterns

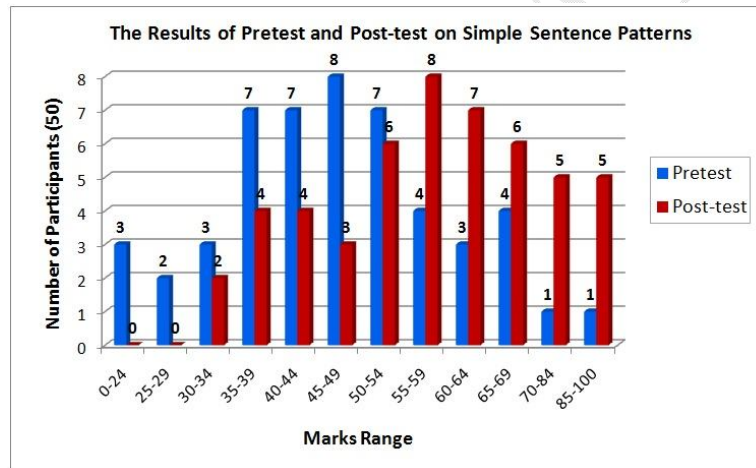


Figure 2 – The results of pretest and post-test on simple sentence patterns

The above graph (Figure 2) shows the results of the pretest and post-test in the knowledge of simple sentence patterns; and it is observed that a higher development in the knowledge of sentence patterns has been achieved by the participants with the help of the developed innovative learning and Testing tool, ‘Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester’.

**FINDINGS**

From the analysis of the results above, the finding is drawn by stating that the participants of this study have improved their knowledge of the analysis of the simple sentence patterns to large extent by using the developed innovative method or tool, i.e. ‘Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester’, rather than using the traditional method in the classroom.

**CONCLUSION**

Computers are more and more familiar everyday for young students and highly contribute to teach and learn the components of English in the classroom. They widely serve as the digital teaching and learning tools. It is obvious that the students of ESL must have a proper knowledge of simple sentence structures to

promote their language skills, especially the effective writing and the communicative competence for the success of their education in the current competitive world of work. Computers can be easily utilized to teach and learn about the sentence structures for which there are many software in the field of ELT; at the same time, the own software can also be developed to accomplish the required tasks in language teaching. Based on this idea, an innovative tool, known as 'Sentence Pattern Learner and Tester', was developed to help the participants of this study for mastering the knowledge of simple sentence patterns in English. The tool was tested among the participants and the results evinced that the students could gain more knowledge in sentence structures with the help of the innovative method rather than the traditional method.

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**M. Somathasan**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, CAS in Linguistics, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.