



ANALYSIS OF ERRORS IN SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT AMONG BANGALORE URBAN GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE LEARNERS

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Article Info:

Article Received:03/06/2015

Revised on:19/06/2015

Accepted on:28/06/2015

ABSTRACT

This article analyses writing by undergraduate learners of the government institution where the author of this article works as Assistant Professor in English. A two pronged survey was conducted – one of students and the other of teachers as they are two faces of the same coin. 50 students each from commerce and arts streams were given a topic to write on whereas 25 teachers working in government institutions were given a questionnaire to probe into the teaching methodology employed for teaching writing skills in their respective classrooms required for answering questions in the end semester exam question papers. The survey found that there is confusion in the understanding of *SVO- subject, verb and object arrangement*-they are classified into three categories- error of agreement between verb and singular subject, error of agreement between verb and plural subject and error of agreement between verb and relative pronoun. They are not in a position to identify the singular/plural nature of the subject/verb and arrive at the correct subject/verb thus writing incorrect sentences. The paper suggests a few simple steps in teaching writing skills for an improvement in the same.

Keywords: subject verb agreement, importance on employing effective pedagogic techniques for writing skills, better writing skills bridge to prosperity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that writing makes a man perfect. Of the four skills in a language listening, speaking, reading and writing it is the fourth one which is difficult to master and excel be it in the mother tongue or a second/foreign language. In India English language is a legacy of the British. There are 'n' number of theories and discussions regarding the merits and demerits of using the same. While Kachru(1990) states that many Indians consider, it as a language of prestige and upward mobility; it would be short sighted to deny the financial positives it has to offer. Kachru (1990)

further postulates the theory of concentric circles, which states that the circle of speakers learning English language is expanding every day and will continue to do so. Therefore whether a student likes it or not willy-nilly he/she is expected to master and excel in English language and perform well in order to get a good/high score in the examinations for a start-up in the career ladder. The teachers of the language too need to focus on all the skills of the language but more on the last one, i.e., writing as it gets reflected in the exam papers and marks are awarded for it, which again gets reflected in the mark card.

II. ACADEMIC BACKGROUND OF DEGREE COLLEGE LEARNERS IN GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS:

In Karnataka, there is a three language formula followed up to high school level, i.e. 10th standard, there are students who would have studied English, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil or Telugu as either their first, second or third language, depending on the schools they have joined. The mark distribution is such that, the first language has a total of 150 marks, the second language has a total of 100 marks and the third language has a total of 50 marks.

As a consequence, in government institutions at the under graduate level, the student body is a heterogeneous mix. Students with low academic results, (in past academic endeavors) and lesser level of efficiency in English language are seen along with students of high academic achievement and good language efficiency in English language.

In government institutions, a large section of the student body that takes admissions to colleges is from the lower economic background as the fee structure is within their means. This section of the student body is not exposed to the English language at previous school, i.e. 10th standard, college i.e. + 2 level, Pre-University course or at home and generally has low/less efficiency in English language. Undergraduate students in degree colleges in Bangalore (in the college selected for the survey) have a heavy L1 or mother tongue interference.

Another huge factor that affects results of English subject in the end semester examinations is attendance shortage of students. It has been noted that since a big number of students are from a poor economic background, they support themselves and their families by doing part time work, as a result, students tend to neglect or bunk English classes.

Despite the above factors it is a reality that students have to perform well in the end semester exam and score well in the English subject.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Students answer questions correctly on English chapter/poetry units in the mother tongue thus exhibiting comprehension of the text which leads to the problem that is articulation of the same

in writing. In the survey it was found that 85% of the students are confused regarding the correct use of subject verb agreement. They make the wrong choices with the singular/plural verb or subject, thus writing incorrect answers even though they have comprehended the chapter/poetry correctly, thus writing incorrect answers and securing low marks in the English subject or not acquiring the pass mark.

IV. METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED:

A two pronged survey was conducted of 50 students each from the commerce and arts streams in order to probe the writing skills of students along with one of teachers- 25 teachers working in government institutions to enquire into the pedagogy employed in teaching writing skills required for answering questions in the end of semester exam question papers.

The students were told to write 10-12 sentences of their own on the topic "Goal in life" and the written responses were used for analysis of errors in framing sentences.

The teachers were given a questionnaire discussing the methods like PPP, ARC, OHE, III and ESA. They were told to write a few sentences about the methodology they employed to teach writing skills to students in their classes.

It was found that teachers in government colleges mostly follow an eclectic approach to language teaching, as use of mother tongue i.e., Kannada is inevitable in classrooms with students of humanities (even in Optional English classrooms). In science classrooms the use of mother tongue is the least whereas in commerce classrooms it is only when a student raises a question/doubt regarding meaning of word etc.,

English language teachers follow the procedure/method of reading the text in front of the students then explaining it in simple words in English/Kannada. They attempt to explain the 'content' of the given text thoroughly so that students remember the gist of the story/lesson/poem etc.,

In grammar classes the given item is first explained. If the unit is 'reported speech', then the teacher explains the rules of converting sentences from direct to reported speech and orally dictates the question to the students and changes a few of

them from direct speech to reported speech. He/she further give some more written exercises to be done at home.

Some teachers may give 'model' notes on chapters/lessons/prose/poetry and grammar units. The student is expected to read the same, write and practice at home. With this preparation the student is expected to write answers at the end of term semester examination, which has short, paragraph and essay answers along with grammar units.

V. A FEW SUGGESTIONS TO IMPART EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILLS:

1. It is suggested the teachers employ **process writing** method rather than the free writing.
2. Process writing involves a **simple step by step gradual method** of moving from simple to complex steps. This method has the advantage of going back one/several steps for low achievers in a heterogeneous classroom.
3. Go back to the basics and **revise tenses**. Sample tenses students used for writing in the survey are given below to illustrate the intensity of the problem.
'his' in place of 'is'
'where' in place of 'were'
'ahre' in place of 'are'
'as' in place of 'has'
There by writing meaningless words and a faulty sentence.
4. **Clear confusion** regarding gender in case of pronouns. The pronoun 'he' in the first sentence becomes 'she' in the second and vice versa.
5. After the above exercises are learnt successfully go on to the next level i.e., sentence. Focus on identification of a sentence: i.e. **subject and predicate**.
6. Then focus on the different **parts of a sentence** like articles, prepositions, adverbs, and adjectives etc., used in a sentence and explain them in detail.
7. **Innovative oral tests** could be given by asking students to read out carefully selected passages with focus on different units of a sentence. When a student identifies a noun, they could clap, pronoun they could whistle, verb they could wave and so on.

8. The next step could be giving the **substitution table format only** with students inserting creative/different units as they see fit.
9. Give substitution tables of the parts of a sentence for the students to identify **Subject, Verb and Object**. (Even though the following step may sound very elementary, it has given good results as seen in the survey)
10. Alternately wrong/incomplete sentences could be given and students told to **rectify** them, thus revealing errors/reinforcing the lesson learnt so far.
11. **Guided paragraph** writing exercises of very short sentences eg. 1-2, 2-5 and 5-7 sentences could be given – the shorter the sentences the better comprehension of the parts of a sentence and their function.
12. Last but not the least, **conduct test** even if simple ones either oral or written to check these simple units at regular intervals.

VI. CONCLUSION

The survey conducted of students and teachers in the college selected have shown errors in language learning, there is confusion in the understanding of **SVO- subject, verb and object arrangement**-they are classified into three categories- error of agreement between verb and singular subject, error of agreement between verb and plural subject and error of agreement between verb and relative pronoun. which can be applied to students elsewhere also. The survey then explored possible steps to impart effective writing skills to teach students. The suggestions given above it is hoped when implemented in classrooms will help achieve better academic result in the end semester exam.

ABBREVIATIONS EXPANDED:

1. PPP – Production, Presentation and Practice
2. ARC –Authentic Use, Restricted Use, Clarification and Focus
3. OHE – Observe, Hypothesize, Experiment
4. III – Illustration, Interaction, Induction
5. ESA – Engage, Study, Activate

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