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The recognition of extended simple sentences as a teaching writing problem

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Abstract

The English sentence structure is composed of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. There is a type of simple sentence with extended phrasal modifiers that can occur at the beginning of the sentence, mid-sentence, or at the end of the sentence, which confuses the students of writing lessons. In many grammar books, the structure of simple sentences is not satisfactorily explained. For example, there is an extended simple sentence type which is often neglected in textbooks that waits to be analyzed. In this article, the difficulties caused by expanded simple sentences via 9 additional phrases in English will be unearthed.

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1. Introduction

“A sentence is any sense-making script that begins with a capital letter and ends with a period, with three dots, with a question mark, or with an exclamation mark. Speech reduced to writing that does not begin and end that way is not a sentence” (Teschner and Eston, 2007: 1). A simple sentence has a single independent clause by expressing a complete thought (Radford, 2009:8; Kroeger, 2005:52; Verspoor and Sauter, 2000:35; Altenberg and Vago, 2010:207; Demirezen, 2012). They contain a subject and a predicate as a must; in addition, they can contain double or triple or more subjects, verbs or objects at the same time in the same sentence. The English sentence structure includes simple, complex, and compound-complex sentences (Demirezen 2012; Altenberg and Vago, 2010:207; Verspoor and Sauter, 2000; Radford, 2009b). The most common type of

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sentence in English language in the spoken and written language of people of all ages is the simple sentence.

2. The Structure of Simple Sentences

“English teachers frequently remind their students that each sentence must express a complete thought” (Kroeger, 2005:52). In teaching writing, the basic English sentence that carries a complete thought is known as the simple sentence. A sentence that contains only one clause, that is, one subject and one verb phrase, is called a simple sentence (Altenberg and Vago, 2010:207; Radford, 2009a:8; Radford, 2009b: 479.). Primarily, a simple sentence requires a subject and a predicate. “A sentence is natural order when the subject precedes the predicate” (Wishon and Burks, 1980:276). A simple sentence is very easy to recognize when it is short and has no extensions at the beginning, middle and at the end of the words. It can be as short as one word, or it may appear in some combinations with verb, direct object and indirect object. To this level, the structures of simple sentences are understandable by the students without structural confusions.

2.1. The Formulas on Simple Sentence Structure

The possible structural formula of a simple sentence can be epitomized as

1. S + V
2. S + V + (Object 1)
3. S + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2))

In the process of writing, short sentences, as shown above, add strength to the meaning and style of the written expressions, but too many of them build a choppy style to the writer.

3. Variety in Simple Sentences

In advanced writing, there is also variety in simple sentence lengths. Variety achieved in simple sentence structures is said to be the spice of sentence style, adding interest to one’s writing. Simple sentences can be enriched by the use of additional phrases used as sentence expansion devices. Extended with additional phrases within sentence-initial, middle, and final positions or three of them together, simple sentences may can gather more attention, emphasize important ideas, or produce certain dramatic impacts upon the readers.

The concept pertaining to the maximum length of simple sentence is not very much discussed. “A simple sentence consists of one main clause only. However, this does not mean that the sentence has to be very short” (Verspoor and Sauter, 2000:35). The parts of a simple sentence can be further arranged and extended to produce the particular effect intended by the writer. The possible length of a simple sentence is handled by Verspoor and Sauter (2000:35), who exemplify this case by the following long sentence:

The waitresses are basking in the sun ‘like a heard of skinned seals, their pinky-brown bodies shining with oil’.

A simple sentence that has no dependent clause can be much further expanded in several ways whose possible expanded patterns can be demonstrated as:

- A. **Extension.....**, S + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2))
- B. **S, extension.....**, + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2))

C.S + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2)), **extension.....**

D. Extension....., S, **extension.....**, + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2)), **extension.....**

It is the aim of this paper to explore whether expanded simple sentences confuse the perception of the students in (1), (2), and (3) forms mentioned above. The fourth form deserves a special research because it is a very special form of advanced sentence writing.

In the process of writing, then, in order to be more expressive in simple sentences, the structures of simple sentences can be expanded by additional phrasal segments from the beginning, middle, and at the end by such phrases like noun phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases, verb phrases, infinitive phrases, gerundive phrases, participle phrases, participial phrases, and appositive phrases, which may be very confusing for the students, but they “make it possible for a writer to show accurate relations in complex ideas” (Wishon and Burks, 1980: 275).

Simple sentences can have different degrees of complexity in relation to length to non-natives of English language. According to Bock (1982) the size of sentences can be confusing in planning the length of the sentences while writing. In this respect, the extended part of simple sentences can function as distracters. Simple sentences that can contain single, double or even triple extended parts at the beginning, in the middle and at the end can be typified as follows:

4. Problem-causing areas of simple sentences

The following classifications typify the problematic grouping of simple sentences for Turkish Students:

4.1. Simple sentences extended from the beginning:

Extension.....,S + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2))

Simple sentences can be long, although they still consist of one subject (a noun and modifiers) and one predicate (a verb and other elements). In order to achieve variety in simple sentence arrangements, the parts of a sentence can be arranged to produce the particular effect desired by the writer. Here are ways to vary the sentence order and variety impact:

For some reason, the key wouldn't turn.

Turning the car around, we headed home.

Until the early 20th century, Istanbul was the capital of the large Ottoman Empire.

For the sake of simplicity, the tax form is divided into four sections.

Three years ago, my grandson was born on the first day of July.

To earn his living, my brother works at the Opera House.

Fearing further attack, the Syrian people had abandoned the called Humus.

In order to buy my wife a present, I sold my brand-new bicycle

In order to ensure a single impression, this novelist carefully prepares his readers for the unexpected ending.

As well as being a musician, she is known for her active involvement in the Green Peace Movement.

4.2. With double or triple extensions from the beginning

During this period, called the **Shogunate**, the Emperor of Japan had no real governing power.

The Theory of Evolution, otherwise called the **Theory of Natural Selection**, Darwinism is a biological theory based on natural selection of living beings to continue to live on.

4.3. Simple sentences extended from the middle

S, extension....., + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2)) My wife, **burning the roasted turkey**, looked terribly embarrassed. Jane, **waving good-bye to Tarzan**, drove away in an incredible high speed. My brother, **dancing at the wedding of my elder sister**, met his future wife. The car, **sliding out of control toward building**, will likely hit the living room of the house. The astronauts **chosen to ride the space shuttle to Moon** are afraid of long-distance travels.

Sleeping Beauty, **the main character in a fairy tale**, is a princess living in a castle.

Turkey, **acting as a bridge between Europe and Asia**, has asked to become a member European Union.

Alabama, **known as the birth place of Human Rights Movement**, is a state in the south east of United States.

Captain Ahab, **killing himself and most of his man**, sinks his ship in a fight with a big white whale called Moby Dick.

Twiggy, **known for being extremely thin and for wearing miniskirts**, was a famous British Model in 1960s.

Some parts of Spain, **especially Catalunya and Basque country**, have their own language and culture.

Steven Speilberg, **one of the most successful film directors, known especially films full of exciting events**, is a legend in the history of American Cinema.

Simple sentences extended from the middle are created by using appositive phrases which also require certain intonation adjustments in forms of junctures so as to make the meaning of sentences to be much more effective.

4.4. With double or triple extensions from the middle

Siberia, a very large area in Russia, between the Ural mountains and Pasific Ocean, is inhabited by very few people.

Sicily, **an island in the Mediterranean Sea, known especially the home of Mafia**, is a part of Italy.

Silicon Valley is a part of California, **in the area between San Francisco and San Hosé, known as the center of computer industry**.

SoHo, **an area of Manhattan, New York City, south of Houston Street**, houses many art galleries and small fashionable shops.

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, **the first president of Turkey, also the great commander of army, known for being extremely wise**, is the founder of modern Turkey.

4.5. Simple sentences extended from the end

She turned away, **hiding the fear in her eyes**.

Ashley gazed at him, **her thoughts in turmoil**.

He is a famous basketball player, **considered one of the best players ever**.

The health center serves for all patients, **regardless of their ability to pay**.

Ephesus is a historical touristic site near the city called İzmir, **famous for its ruins dating back from Roman and Byzantine times**.

South Korea is a country in East Asia, **officially called the republic of Korea**.

The term Amerindian is used for native Americans, **used especially in works on anthropology and archaeology**.

4.6. Simple sentences extended from the beginning and final parts

In the Kızılay Square of Ankara, there are many restaurants selling food, **especially Turkish and Italian food.**

As one of the seven main areas of land on Earth, Africa is a continent in the south of the Mediterranean Sea, **facing west Asia and Indian Ocean.**

A prison on a rocky island in San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz is a notorious prison, **known for being almost impossible to escape from.**

A river in South America, the Amazon goes through Peru and Brazil, **being the second longest river in the world.**

By pouring boiling oil into the jars, Ali Baba is saved by his servant, **killing all of the 40 thieves.**

4.7. Simple sentences extended from the beginning, middle, and final parts

This is the most difficult case of simple sentence writing; if incorrectly utilized, it creates vagueness by forming dangling modifiers, which are mostly due to structural errors and misuse of modification in expanded patterns.

Extension....., S, extension....., + V + ((Object 1) + (Object 2)), extension.....

It must be noted that the length of the simple sentences can even be extended into two or more phrases sentence initially and sentence finally, as indicated in the following sentence:

A prison on a rocky island in San Francisco Bay, in California, Alcatraz, **the real sample of hell in the present world**, is a notorious prison, **known for being almost impossible to escape from, with very strict rules for its prisoners.**

5. Conclusion

A simple sentence can be very short, consisting of only one word (a noun) for the subject and one word (a verb) for the predicate, but in advanced writing it can have further extensions at the sentence initial, middle, and final positions which distract the students. When sentences are put to form paragraphs, the frequent use of short sentences exhibits a choppy, clumsy, non-unified, loose, vague, and underdeveloped style. It is very important that a variety of simple sentence types and lengths be used, which improves the style of the writer by adding interest. This way, the written form of a passage, paragraph, composition or essay can be more catchy, interesting, and academically stylish. The important factor to keep in mind is that effective and occasional use of simple sentences with correct simple sentence structure, mentioned in these four patterns, contributes to fluency to your writing even if there is a danger of curtailing the meaning and perception to clarity. In advance writing classes long simple sentences utilized in variety, if grammatically correct and effectively used can create the power of expressing the relationships in complex ideas that are produced by complex or compound-complex sentences.”

But there is a serious danger in writing simple sentences with extended elements: the dangling modifiers, which create pitfalls in teaching writing, are troublesome for poor writers. In a research (Demirezen, 2012a), it was discovered that expanded simple sentences from the beginning, middle, and of the sentences by means of phrases in forms of double and triple cases confuse the students, who perceive them as not simple sentences but as compound, complex, add compound-complex sentences. Then, lengthy simple sentences must be treated very carefully; otherwise, they will mislead the students into writing grammatically wrong structures with dangling modifiers. Here is an example: ‘Having **arrived late for the exam**, a written excuse was needed.’ In this statement, ‘who arrived late?’ is not clear. This sentence says that the written excuse arrived late because of the

dangling modifier ‘Having arrived late for the exam’. Whereas the rule says that the appropriate or logical doer of the action as the subject of the main clause must be named. To revise, ‘who actually arrived late’ must be decided. The possible revision might look like this: **Having arrived late for the exam**, the student needed a written excuse. Here is another example: **‘Having finished the homework**, the radio was turned on’. This sentence has an incorrect usage because ‘Having finished’ is a participle phrase that expresses action, but the doer of the action is not ‘the radio’, which acts, in fact, the subject of the main clause. Can radios finish assignments? Since the doer of the action expressed in the participle phrase has not been clearly put forward, that it happens to be a dangling modifier. The possible revision might look like this: **Having finished the homework**, Jack turned on the radio’. In this sentence, it is Jack who appears logically to be the one who does the action (“having finished”), and **‘Having finished the homework**, **Jack turned on the radio**’, therefore, does not have a dangling modifier. It must be noted that dangling modifiers, which are misplaced modifiers in phrases and sentences, are potential ambiguity carriers” (Demirezen, 2012a:143). Misplaced modifiers are positioned so misleadingly that they appear to modify the wrong constituents of sentences. In fact, students improve their writing skills to a greater extent by paying attention to basic problems like misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers in lengthy sentences. The common fact is that many students regularly misplace these modifiers, which become dangling modifiers that accidentally change the entire meaning of a simple sentence. If a student or editor can easily fix a dangler occurring in a simple sentence, the result is a clearer, sharper, and more academically written sentence.

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