

English learners' difficulties in dealing with simple sentences

Abstract:

The syntax of simple sentences is generally considered by both teachers and students to be one of the most challenging parts of English grammar. We thus decided to determine the reasons why most students find it difficult to understand and assimilate grammatical factors related to simple sentences. To do so, we carried out a study focused on exploring the mistakes made by our students. The target group, which comprised 88 second-year students both majoring and minoring in English, was given a two-part test. The total exam time was 1 hour and 40 minutes, preceded by a 10-minute briefing during which the students were given specific instructions. The first part of the exam asked students to identify the constituents of the sentence by type, namely phrases, to distinguish the head words and analyse them from a syntactic point of view. As regards the second part of the test, the students were to translate a number of simple sentences from Romanian into English, and also to indicate the syntactic functions of the sentence constituents.

After analysing our students' papers, we drew up a list of recurrent mistakes. In particular, students had difficulty identifying the predicative and differentiating between the two types of predicate. Some confused the direct object with the indirect object and vice versa, as well as the prepositional object and the indirect object. Moreover, they mixed up several types of adverbial modifiers. Though the overall translation of the sentences was quite good, the recognition of the constituents and their syntactic functions revealed several types of mistakes. The main problem also lay in the identification of predications, together with the types of objects. Further, we noticed that the students did not pay attention to the topic of the simple sentence. The second part of the test proved that, in some cases, the students' mother tongue had both advantages and drawbacks.

Last but not least, our study offers insight into the grammatical aspects that pose problems for students and can contribute to improving teaching strategies regarding simple sentences.

Keywords: *Simple sentence-related difficulties; Phrases; Syntactic functions; Mistake analysis.*