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Teaching aspects of English sentences to second-language learners: a Nigerian example

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This paper is informed by a study carried out among 720 randomly selected senior secondary school learners from 36 randomly selected secondary schools from the Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Lagos, Ondo and Ekiti States of Nigeria (Asiyanbola, 2003). Based on the employment of the elicitation techniques of six composition topics and a ten-item supply-response test, a large number of grammatical problems were identified from observations of the written language behaviour of the participants. The pupils experienced great difficulty in forming non-basic and non-simple sentences. A step-by-step presentation of English sentences is thus suggested: basic simple, non-basic simple and non-simple sentences. These could be incorporated into the grammar units of three common English language course books and the teaching syllabus used in Nigerian senior secondary schools. Moreover, essential points of grammar are also suggested, to be taught alongside each of the sentence types at various stages, since sentences cannot be taught in isolation.

L'enseignement de certains aspects de la phrase anglaise aux apprenants de l'anglais comme deuxième langue (ACDL): un exemple nigérian

A l'aide de six sujets de rédaction comme moyen de contrôle concernant la formulation de phrases en anglais, cet article identifie les problèmes de 720 apprenants choisis dans quelques écoles secondaires de la région au sud-ouest du Nigéria. L'étude évalue les unités grammaticales élaborées dans trois livres de cours et dans les programmes scolaires de ces échantillons. A partir de là, nous découvrons certains vides à combler. Ainsi, l'article propose des processus variés pour la formulation de phrases en anglais grammaticalement acceptables et plausibles et que l'on pourrait intégrer aux nouvelles éditions et aux révisions du programme.

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In Nigeria, during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the teaching and learning approaches to the English language were characterised by the classical grammar of Latin since Latin itself was a school subject. Apart from the fact that Greek and Latin were at the time given pride of place, the grammar of these two languages served as a yardstick for the study of English. Therefore, all the anomalies associated with traditional grammar characterised the mode of teaching and learning of English in schools. Confusion prevailed with regard to the concept of grammar as people misconceived English grammar as meaning the use of imprecise and inconsistent terminologies involving the application and adaptation of the grammar of Latin to English grammar (cf Boadi *et al* 1968).

The difference in the grammar of the two languages is that, whereas that of Latin comprises the grammar of words and inflections, that of English consists mostly of sentence grammar. This fact eluded early linguists and teachers in Nigeria as well as in certain Commonwealth countries in West Africa. At that time, the teaching and learning of the English language was restricted to colloquial as opposed to the spoken and written forms. It was also associated with the study of the books written by the best authors of the classical and Elizabethan periods, for instance Homer's *Iliad*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, William Shakespeare's plays and others. Grammar at this time was prescriptive and normative rather than descriptive since scholars were wont to prescribe what ought to be in the English language rather than to consider what was actually found there.

The definition method of parts of speech was in vogue, for instance: "A noun is the name of any person, animal, place or thing". Scholars were not so much concerned about the language data, but with the rules in terms of which the language data should be generated. The traditional grammar theory upheld by linguists and teachers of that period gave birth to a poor conception of grammar.

At one time, the government, by means of its examination body (the West African Examination Council, made it a policy that formal English grammar should not be taught in schools since people saw it as a hindrance rather than a help (Grieve 1964; Jacob 1966). Students were to concentrate on comprehension, lexis and structure, composition and letter-writing. Lexis and structure were taught only in the form

of class exercises, with little or no explanation from the teacher — who could be a graduate of history or any discipline in the arts.

Sentence construction is an important aspect of grammar that has not been given adequate attention in many Nigerian senior secondary school English language textbooks. Despite the fact that the language learning problems of senior secondary school learners mainly reside in the area of English sentence formation,[1] few of the existing textbooks represented significant attempts at teaching sentence construction to these target learners, while in numerous textbooks, only lip-service was paid to its teaching. What we actually see in practice in the grammar units of these textbooks is the abundant presentation of discrete points of grammar at the expense of sentence types (Asiyanbola 2003). Moreover, the English language teaching syllabus designed for this set of learners is inadequate as regards sentence formation learning examples. The poor teaching inputs in the syllabus are automatically fed into the textbooks; the culmination of which procedure has been the poor teaching of sentences and certain points of grammar that would be of assistance to learners in sentence construction.

In view thereof, this paper represents an endeavour to itemise and discuss various ways of teaching this apparently difficult aspect of grammar to Nigerian senior secondary school learners. Written language samples collected from the pupils themselves, their textbooks and their teaching syllabus will be used as a data base.

1. Theoretical framework

Insights below have been derived from a combination of three grammatical theories, namely Systemic Grammar, Structural Grammar and a modified version of Government and Binding Theory. These theories have been adopted on account of the apparent perception of the difficult nature of English sentence formation, with specific reference to second language learners of English in Nigeria. In the presentation of basic simple sentences and non-simple sentences, insights have been used from the structural grammar of Boadi *et al* (1968), Quirk *et al* (1985), and

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1   Cf Tomori 1967, Afolayan 1968, Boadi *et al* 1968, Banjo 1969, Aremo 1982, Okanlawon 1984, Orisawayi 1987, Jowitt 1991, Asiyanbola 1997 & 2003.

Aremo (2004) as well as the systemic grammar of Scott *et al* (1978). Insights about non-basic simple sentences have also been adopted from the Government and Binding Grammar of Radford (1988), which is an offshoot of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Grammar (1957 & 1965). The complete study, however, is based on the Natural-Order Theory of language learning which stipulates that learners should progress from simple to complex materials, as explicated in Halliday *et al* (1964) and White (1988). This is the reason why English sentences have been introduced in order of simplicity.

The basic simple sentences which are the simplest and foundation sentences are first presented to the learners. These are followed by the more complicated ones which comprise the non-basic simple sentences that involve the processes of insertion, movement and deletion of linguistic items. Finally, the sentences experienced by learners as being the most difficult to construct are taught as non-simple sentences, such as complex, compound, compound-complex, multiple and multiple-complex sentences.

2. Learners' language learning problems

Research was carried out among 720 Yoruba-Nigerian learners in six states, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo (Asiyanbola 2003). Five different essay topics and a supply-response test were used to elicit written linguistic data from the learners. From the study, about 3701 simple sentences were identified in the essays of all the subjects. This represents about 47.7% of all the sentences (7758) identified in the 720 essays. It also implies that about 103 simple sentences were recorded in each of the 36 schools under study. Furthermore, about 1632 compound sentences, which represent 21% of the total number of sentences, were identified, an average of about 45.3 in each school. A further 1883 complex sentences were identified in the essays of the learners, which represents 24.3% of the total number of sentences identified, with an average of 54.3 complex sentences per school. Finally, approximately 542 compound-complex sentences, which represent 6.99% of the total number of sentences, were identified, with an average of about fifteen in each school (cf Table 1).

Table 1: Table showing the summary of the distribution of sentence types in 36 schools under study

Sentence type	Frequency	Percentage	Average per school
Simple sentences	3701	47.7	103.0
Compound sentences	1632	21.0	45.3
Complex sentences	1883	24.3	52.3
Compound-complex sentences	542	7.0	15.1
Total	7758	100.0	276.0

The investigation identified 22 types of errors, which can conveniently be divided into major and minor ones (Asiyanbola 2003). The major ones consisted of involved sentences, comma errors, problems of sentence-boundary delineation, wrong verb forms, omissions, concord problems and sentence fragments written as full sentences. The minor ones included upper- and lower-case letter errors, misspellings, singular/plural errors and so on. Some important errors in grammar identified in the pupils' language data are exemplified as follows:

• Involved sentences

> When I get home around 6.30 pm *in the evening* I will *greet* my elderly ones who are around, and then off to my room to pull off my school uniform, settle down on the *dinning* table to eat my food.

> After sweeping, I brush my teeth and have my bath, and take my breakfast either in the house or to school but my parent believe I should eat breakfast at home because if I take *eat* to the school, I would sure take surplus for me and my friends.

Each of the two sentences can be recast into three other sentences, for example:

> When I get home around 6.30 pm in the evening, I will greet the elderly ones who are around. Then, I will go straight to my room to take off my school uniform. After that, I will settle down at the dining table to eat my meal.

> After sweeping, I brush my teeth, bath, and have my breakfast at home or at school. However, my parents prefer my eating it at home because they know I will take more than enough for me and my friends.

- Errors involving the use of commas

  After school I will play with my friends, *chart* and sing some songs, because they said and I quote […] (omission of comma after *school* and its redundancy after *songs*).

  At about 3 pm I go off to lesson (to evening class), there I learn more in my studies (omission of comma after 3 pm and wrong substitution of comma for full stop after *evening class*).

- Sentence-boundary delineation problem

  It should be played at any time if you like you we play it at morning at afternoon or evening (sentence boundary delineation after *time* is not observed with the use of full-stop.

  At about 3 pm I go off to lesson (evening class) there I learn more in my studies (delineation after *class* (in brackets) before *there* is ignored).

- Wrong expressions

  My parents believe I should eat my breakfast at home because if I take *eat* to the school, I would sure take surplus food in a big cooler or place and take about three spoons for my friends and …

  There are different subject for each day and there are subjects ready to teach

- Wrong words

  After the prayers, I will have to dress my bed, tidy up my *cloths* and come out of my room to *great* everybody around me.

- Redundancy

  After that, when I get into my classroom (next) our class teacher will mark ^ register for that day and our captain will go for ^ teacher to teach us (for) whatever *will* have (redundancy of the words *next* and *for*).

  I normally play football (game soccer) (redundancy of the words *game* and *soccer*).

- Tense

  When I get to school, I *went* to the school morning assembly at 7.45 am to 8.00 am and after the assembly, I *went* into the class to attend some lessons [simple past tense used instead of simple present tense].

  After that, I went to prepare my dinner and take it in (simple past tense wrongfully used instead of simple present tense).

- Wrong verb forms

  After finishing that, I then go to the bathroom to bath, *took* my breakfast and bidding farewell to my parents and other people at home (past verb form used instead of present verb form).

  After the Morning Prayer, I then went to my dady bedroom and purstrate to greeted him (past verb forms *went* and *greeted* used instead of present verb *go* and *greet*).

- Errors of concord

  The activities that we usually engage in is reading of novel (no agreement between the plural *activities* and verb *is*).

  The government are so good to us because we will […] my father will ask me to wash their car (no agreement between pronoun and its antecedent).

- Lower case letters used instead of upper case letters

  That is the subject we have for that day …

  After my lesson, I great my parents and my brothers and sisters and I play with my friend till 8 pm.

- Singular/plural errors

  I always say my prayer early in the morning (PRAYERS)

  After assembly I will settle down in the class to attend my lesson (LESSONS).

- Spelling errors

  So after doing that, I *bide* farewell to my parents and other people at home (for BID).

  The prefect in charge of my class is too *hash* (HARSH).

- Upper-case letters used for lower-case letters

  I put on my torchlight and I read my best *Novel*.

  I will *Lay* down with my *Net* down and my pyjamas worn …

- Wrong demonstratives and determiners

  After I finish all *this* things […] (THESE).

  My mates will be doing *there* assignment (THEIR).

- Wrong use of prepositions

  When I get to school, I went to the morning assembly at 7.45 am to 8.00 am […] (FROM).

> Going *with* the activities at school, I love playing games and doing other sports at school (BY).

- Sentence fragments used as full sentences

  > When there is goal at the side of the game.
  > Because it is a good game.

- Omission of essential linguistic itemS

  > I also bath my younger ones before go to school feeding them.
  > I do other things before I go to school example — I usually have my birth …

- Wrong word order

  > When I bathe finished […] (when I finish bathing […]).
  > After I ate finished […] (After I have finished eating […]).

3. Sentence formation inputs in selected textbooks and the teaching syllabus

Three common Nigerian senior secondary school textbooks (*Effective English*, *Intensive English* and *Senior English Project*) were examined to quantify and qualify their sentence-type content. Table 2 (in the Appendix) shows the ratio of formal sentence-type presentations to discrete points of grammar. The *Effective English Series* allots 44 units to formal sentence types and 201 to discrete points of grammar. In the *Senior English Project* 35 units are allotted to sentence types and 39 to discrete points of grammar. Sentence types are introduced in about seventeen units of the *Intensive English* course, with 28 units of discrete points of grammar. Finally, the teaching syllabus, which ought to be a model, contains thirteen units of sentence types and 24 units of discrete points of grammar.

The proportion of sentence-type inputs in the three types of textbooks clearly reflects the teaching syllabus (Table 2). Neither the textbooks nor the teaching syllabus has enough formal sentence-type content. Discrete points of grammar (the presentation of parts of speech, tenses, synonyms and antonyms, etc, with few or no sentence illustrations) are afforded for more prominence than formal sentence-type examples. Our notion of the formal presentation of sentence types may be defined as

comprising structural sentence types — such as simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, multiple and multiple-complex sentences — or functional sentence types such as statements, commands, questions and exclamations (cf Lyons 1971).

Table 2: Table showing the ratio of frequency of sentence type and discrete points of grammar

Textbook/teaching syllabus	Formal sentence type	Discrete points of grammar
Effective English	14	201
Senior English Project	35	39
Intensive English	17	28
Senior school teaching syllabus	13	24

4. Pedagogical recommendations

As reflected in the analyses of the learners' language problems and the lack of adequate sentence-formation content in both the teaching syllabus and the textbooks, a learning gap exists. The content will be itemised and discussed below, focusing on basic-simple, non-basic simple and non-simple sentences. At each stage of teaching these sentence types, necessary points of grammar such as tense, concord, finite and non-finite verbs, rank scale, punctuation, conjunctions, relative clauses and morphology will be introduced in order to facilitate learning the construction.

4.1 Teaching basic simple sentences

Basic simple sentences are the first group that should be introduced to learners (Boadi *et al* 1968, Aremo 2004); Huddleston (1988) calls them kernel sentences; Quirk & Greenbaum (1973) refer to them as involving seven clausal types.

Basic simple sentences are important since they serve as points of departure leading to the non-basic simple and non-simple sentences. Aremo (2004) recognises nine basic simple sentences:

Pattern I

Subject	Verb
The baby	*laughed*

In the above pattern the sentence contains two constituents: a subject and an intransitive verb (which does not allow to take an object). Other examples of intransitive verbs are:

dream(s) / dreamt,

dance(s) / danced,

smile(s) / smiled, etc.

Pattern II

Subject	Verb	Direct object
Ade	*killed*	*a ram*

The verb in this sentence is transitive, and thus takes an object. The action is passed from the subject to the object.

Pattern III

Subject	Verb	Indirect object	Direct object
The teacher	*gave*	*Mary*	*a book*
Agent	Action	Recipient	Affected

In this example, the action is passed from the subject to two objects (one direct, the other indirect). The verb is therefore di-transitive. The indirect object (recipient) is usually a human being, while the direct object (affected) is usually non-human.

Pattern IV

Subject	Verb	Subject complement
Ojo	*is*	*my brother*

The verb in the pattern above is intensive or equative. "My brother" is another name for the subject referent (*Ojo*). The subject complement above is noun-headed (*brother*). A subject complement can also occur in a four-constituent construction such as:

(a) *Bose/ made/ Akin/ a good wife* (Subject-Verb-Direct object and subject complement or S V DO SC)

(b) *His radio made him a good companion* (S V DO SC)

In the two examples above, the subject (the initial item) and the complement (the final item) share an intensive relationship despite the fact that the two constructions each comprise four constituents.

Pattern V

Subject	Verb	Subject complement
Ojo	*is*	*happy*

Pattern V also reflects an equational relationship between the subject and the subject complement, but with an adjective-headed complement:

Pattern VI

Subject	Verb	Adverbial
The fish	*is*	*in the fridge*

In Pattern VI, the verb is a locative, as we can locate *the fish* in *the fridge*. The sentence contains three constituents, namely subject, verb, and adverbial phrase. The adverbial is realised by a prepositional group made up of prepend (preposition *in*) and completive (the nominal group *the fridge*). The adverbial in this pattern is an obligatory one, since it comprises an essential part of the sentence. Other examples of obligatory adverbials include *here*, *there*, *in that place*, and so on. These differ from optional adverbials such as *always*, *quickly*, *fluently*, *slowly*, and so on, which may easily be removed from sentences without rendering them meaningless or implausible.

Pattern VII

Subject	Verb	Direct object	Object complement
The club	*made*	*my father*	*their chairman*

The verb in the sentence pattern above is a complex-transitive type as it has both a direct object and an object complement. There is an intensive relationship between "my father" (the direct object) and "their chairman" (the object complement). The two constituents share a single referent (my father). The object complement in this case refers to the object, in contrast to Pattern IV, which has a subject complement refering to the subject.

Pattern VIII

Subject	Verb	Direct object	Object complement
The club	*made*	*my father*	*glad*

Pattern VIII resembles Pattern VII, but with the difference that the object complement in Pattern VII is noun-headed and that in Pattern VIII is adjective-headed.

Pattern IX

Subject	Verb	Direct object	Adverbial
They	*put*	*the book*	*on the shelf*

The verb in the sentence pattern above is transitive-locative. The pattern contains four constituents, namely subject, verb, direct object and adverbial.

When teaching the basic simple sentences in English, some points of grammar such as morphemes, words, the simple present tense, the present progressive, the past tense and subject-verb concord may be introduced. Another grammatical concept which may be introduced is that of groups, namely verbal groups, nominal groups, adverbial groups, adjectival groups, prepositional groups. It is necessary to introduce all these points of grammar at this stage since their mastery will assist learners in forming grammatical sentences that are meaningful and plausible.

Morphemes may be explained as the basic word-parts which are the smallest meaningful units in grammar. They may be classified as free when they function as words. For instance *brother* (noun) is a free morpheme or root in *brotherhood*; *educate* (verb) is a free morpheme in the word *education*. Bound morphemes or affixes are normally attached before or after free morphemes or roots. For instance in *international*, *inter-* and *-al* are affixes (prefix and suffix, respectively). Other examples of affixes include the prefixes *a-* in *amoral* and *anti-* in *anti-government* and the suffixes *-ion* in *education* and *-ness* in *greatness*. Morphemes may also be classified as derivational or inflectional. Derivational morphemes are lexical in the sense that, in most cases, new words are created when they are attached to a root, for instance *educate* (verb) + *-ion = education* (noun), *drive* (verb) + *-er = driver* (noun), *engine* (noun) + *-er = engineer* (noun) and *great* (adjective) + *-ness = greatness* (noun).

In the case of inflectional suffixes, no new lexical item is formed. If any word is indeed formed, it is a grammatical one which has the same lexical relationship as the first word. Examples include the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives: *clever- cleverer- cleverest*, *big- bigger- biggest*, *beautiful- more beautiful- most beautiful*; past tense verb inflections: *teach-taught*, *kill-killed*, *give-gave*, and plural inflections: *boy-boys*, *child-children*, *girl-girls*, *ox-oxen*, *mango-mangoes*.

The term "word" needs to be explained to learners as having two meanings, a lexical sense (vocabulary) and a grammatical sense (structural). Words in the sense of vocabulary are the content words, for example nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. These are lexemes that carry the meaning in a sentence. Structural or grammatical words are useful only in the formation of sentences. These are demonstratives, for example *this*, *that*, *those* and *there*; determiners, for example *my*, *their*, *our*, *many*, *few*, *a few*, *little*, *a little*, etc; articles, for example *a*, *an* and *the*, and auxiliaries (variants of the verb "to be" and the modal auxiliaries), for example *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, *were*, *will*, *shall*, *may*. All these need to be treated in the correct context and their usage should be explained to learners.

The simple present, simple past and present progressive tenses may also easily be introduced in teaching the basic simple sentences, for example:

(a) *Ade goes to farm every day* (simple present-habitual action)

(b) *Ade is going to farm now* (present progressive-action still in progress)

(c) *Ade went to farm yesterday* (simple past tense).

The subject-verb concord of person and number may also be introduced, for example:

(a) *Ade goes to school every day* (singular subject with singular verb)

(b) *Ade and Ojo go to school every day* (plural subject with plural verb)

(c) *I/We go to school every day* (first person singular and plural subjects used with the basic verb)

(d) *He/She goes to school every day* (third person singular subjects taking the basic verb+s).

Other grammatical concepts that may be taught at various stages of the introduction of the basic simple sentences include grammatical functions such as subject, verb, direct object, indirect object, subject complement and object complement.

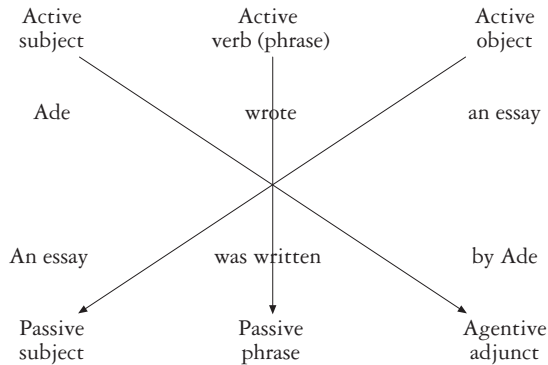## 4.2 Teaching non-basic simple sentences

Non-basic simple sentences are variants of the basic simple sentences that have undergone one or more of the following transformational processes: insertion, movement and deletion (Aremo 2004). This view is in line with Government and Binding Theory, and particularly the "move alpha" aspect, as explicated by Radford (1988). (The presentation of non-simple sentences in this paper is informed by these two sources.) With the application of one or more of the three processes enumerated above, it is possible to form passive sentences, negative sentences, emphatic sentences, sentences with auxiliary verbs as predicators, sentences with unusual first parts, "there" sentences, polar questions, WH-questions, declarative-sentence questions, tag questions and answers, commands, exclamations, sentences with intransitive predicators, sentences with extraposition and cleft sentences. An example of each of these types of sentences will now be given, together with suggestions as to how they may be introduced to Nigerian learners in the senior secondary phase.

4.2.1 Passive sentences

Active sentences may be converted to passive sentences, for example:

1   (a)   *Ade wrote an essay*

     (b)   *An essay was written by Ade*

2   (a)   *The butcher killed a goat*

     (b)   *A goat was killed by the butcher*

The movement and changing may be explained diagrammatically, thus:

Active subject	Active verb (phrase)	Active object
Ade	wrote	an essay
An essay	was written	by Ade
Passive subject	Passive phrase	Agentive adjunct

In the construction of passive sentences, we are more interested in the passive subject (the former active object) than in what was the active subject, which is treated as an agentive adjunct (by + noun phrase). The active object noun phrase (NP) moves to the initial position of subject; the active verb changes to a passive verb (usually an auxiliary plus a lexical verb), and an adjunct containing an NP agent is added. Lastly, the NP active subject moves to the final part of the sentence to become an agentive adjunct.

4.2.2 Negative sentences

Negative sentences normally have the negative *not* (or its enclitic form (*n't*) inserted immediately after the auxiliary verb, for example:

a   (i)   *Ade is writing an essay* (positive)

     (ii)   *Ade is not writing an essay* (negative)

     (iii)   *Ade isn't writing an essay* (enclitic)

b   (i)   *Ade wrote an essay yesterday* (positive)

   (ii)   *Ade did not write an essay yesterday* (negative)

   (iii) *Ade didn't write an essay yesterday* (enclitic)

In example (b) above, *do* is introduced because there is no overt auxiliary such as in example (a).

4.2.3   Emphatic sentences

Apart from the emphasis that may be shown in the placement of stress on words (word stress) in English sentences, emphasis may also be reflected in the use of the auxiliary verb *do*, in both positive and negative sentences. The sentences formed by this type of process are called emphatic sentences. These can be either positive or negative.

a   (i)   *I came to school yesterday* (non-emphatic statement)

   (ii)   *I did come to school yesterday* (positive emphasis)

   (iii) *I didn't come to school yesterday* (negative emphasis)

b   (i)   *He writes letters every Saturday*

   (ii)   *He does write letters every Saturday*

   (iii) *He does not write letters every Saturday*

4.2.4   Sentences with an auxiliary as predicator

Sentences with an auxiliary as predicator are often used in conversations, for example:

a   *Can you see me today?*

b   *Yes, I can*

a   *Will you be playing polo this evening?*

b   *Yes, I will*

In the responses of speaker B, the predications have been deleted, leaving only the subject and operator. The predication or complementation is what remains after the auxiliary or operator has been taken away from the predicate (the sentence part containing both the operator and predication).

4.2.5 Sentences with unusual first parts

Sentences with unusual first parts involve the movement to the initial part or fronting of the most important sentence element. This is common in informal speeches as certain elements such as subject complement, object complement, direct object, prepositional complement, adverbial or predication can be made to function as themes (or initial elements). This implies that the speaker is emphasising the element that is fronted in each case as this element can be separated by means of a comma or given a nuclear stress (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973: 412-3). The declarative sentence from which such sentences are formed is said to be unmarked, while the unusual sentence which is formed from it is said to be marked, for example:

a   Unmarked theme: *His name is Jonathan*

   Marked theme: *Jonathan, his name is* (subject complement)

b   Unmarked theme: *They had a fine lunch at that restaurant*

   Marked theme: *Fine lunch, they had at that restaurant* (direct object)

c   Unmarked theme: *You call that fun*

   Marked theme: *Fun, you call that* (object complement)

d   Unmarked theme: *She is fond of my money*

   Marked theme: *My money, she is fond of* (prepositional complement)

e   Unmarked theme: *He was born in Ibadan*

   Marked theme: *In Ibadan, he was born* (adverbial)

4.2.6 "There" sentences

"There" sentences are sentences with the "anticipating" or existential *there* being fronted, for example:

a   *Four girls are in the class today*

   There are four girls in the class today

b   *Many students are in school today*

   There are many students in school today

In the above examples, there is auxiliary movement from the position between the subject and the predication to the pre-subject position,

after which the lexically empty "there" is added or inserted at the beginning of the sentence, as in:

Four   girls   are   in   the   class — first level
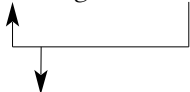
… are four girls in the class: second level (auxiliary movement) — second level

There + are four girls in the class (insertion of there at the beginning of the sentence) — third level

4.2.7   Polar questions

Polar questions can also be referred to as yes/no questions (Radford 1988). They involve movement of the auxiliary verb from its natural position between the subject and the lexical verb to the pre-subject position, for example:

a   *You   are   coming to dinner*

Are you coming to dinner? (polar question)

b   *Ade   is   playing polo in the evening*

Is   Ade   playing polo in the evening?

Where a problem can arise is when we want to convert statements without an auxiliary verb into polar questions such as in

c   *Ade went to school yesterday*

We now need to insert a *do* element to make the statement emphatic before we move the covert auxiliary *do* to the pre-subject position thus:

c   *Ade did go to school yesterday* (emphatic sentence)

Did Ade go to school yesterday? (polar question)

4.2.8   WH-questions

WH-questions normally start with words with a WH-element, for example: *what*, *whose*, *when*, etc. They can be explicated thus:

a   *My father will put the Mercedes Benz in the garage*
(statement) — first level

b   *Your father will put which car in the garage?*
(declarative sentence question) — second level

c   *Which car will your father put in the garage?*
(WH-question) — third level

In the above examples, there are two movement transformations (alpha movement). First, there is the movement of the auxiliary from its natural position between the subject and the predication to the pre-subject position, which is its landing site. Secondly, there is the movement of the WH-element (*which car*) to the position behind the moved auxiliary, as presented in the following diagram:

1   2   Your father   <u>will</u>   put   *which car*   in the garage?

Which car   will   your father   put   in the garage?
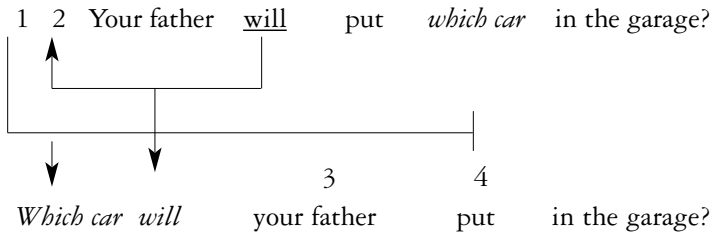
Thus item 3 (the auxiliary *will*) is moved to position 2 before the subject (*Your father*) and item 4 (*which car*) is moved to position 1 (initial position) before the moved auxiliary.

4.2.9   Declarative-sentence questions

Declarative-sentence questions are otherwise called statement questions. In writing, they arre punctuated at the end with a question mark, and in spoken form with a rising inflexion, for example:

The lady got an A in the course?

4.2.10 Tag questions and answers

As the names imply, tag questions and answers are normally added to statements in this order:

Statement/Question tag/Answer tag

The rule is that when the statement is positive, the question tag is negative and the answer tag positive. Alternatively, when the statement is negative, the question tag is positive and the answer tag negative:

Positive statement	Negative question tag	Positive answer tag
Negative statement	Positive question tag	Negative answer tag

The exception to this rule is that when the utterance is a command, the question tag is usually "will you" — as in:

Go out of the room, will you?

4.2.11 Commands

Commands can be the part remaining after an initial sentence part (usually a noun phrase subject) has been omitted, for example:

(You must) come and register now.

If the subject and the auxiliary are deleted, the predication, which is the remaining part, forms a command. The definition above may not hold for some other kinds of commands, such as those with *let* and those with subjects or vocatives. What is true of all commands, however, is that they are used to instruct. Commands are of various types, namely:

    a   Pure commands, for example:

        Go out of the room

    b   Commands with *let* excluding the speaker, for example:

        Let them shout my name

        Let the boy attend the lesson

    c   Commands with *let* including the speaker, for example:

        Let us go home

        Let Akin and I do the work

    d   Commands with a subject or vocative, for example:

        You come back now (with subject)

        Damola, close the door now (with vocative)

4.2.12 Exclamations

Exclamations or exclamatives are used to show one's feelings or emotions. They can be derived or generated from statements, for example:

a   *We have had a beautiful day today*

    What a beautiful day we have had today!

b   *She has done a wonderful job*

    What a wonderful job she has done!

In the examples above, exclamatives involve the use of inversion or movement, whereafter a WH-element can be added at the beginning of the sentences, for example:

First level: *We have had a beautiful day*

Second level: … *a beautiful day we have had* (inversion or movement)

Third level: *What + a beautiful day we have had*! (insertion of WH-element at the beginning)

4.2.13 Sentences with intransitive complementation

Radford (1988) treated sentences with intransitive complementation under middle and ergative constructions, but since there is a syntactic affinity in that they have intransitive verbs, they are treated here as sentences with intransitive complementation. They are derived from sentences with human as subjects but do not themselves have human subjects. Let us examine how they are generated:

a   *John broke the door* (S V O)

    The door broke (S V)

b   *John might drown the kittens* (S V O)

    The kittens might drown (S V)

c   *Somebody translates Greek easily* (S V O A)

    Greek translates easily (S V A)

d   *Somebody transfers the baggage easily* (S V O A)

    The baggage transfers easily (S V A)

The movement transformation can be shown thus:

John might drown the kittens

The kittens might drow
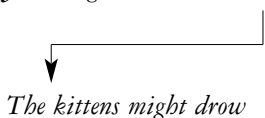
4.2.14 Extraposition

Extraposition involves the movement of the prepositional phrase, or sometimes a relative clause from its qualifier position in the noun phrase, to the final part of the sentence, for example:

M   H   Q

a   A review *of my latest book* has just appeared

A review has just appeared *of my latest book*

(b) The death *of a business man* has just been announced

The death has just been announced *of a businessman*

4.2.15 Cleft sentences

Cleft sentences can be directly generated from simple-clause statements such as:

S   V   O   A   A

John wore his best suit to the dance last night

Any of the above elements except the verb phrase can be emphasised in cleft sentences, for example:

a   It was *John* who wore his best suit to the dance last night (subject as focus)

b   It was *his best suit* that John wore to the dance last night (object as focus)

c   It was *last night* that John wore his best suit to the dance (adverbial as focus)

d   It was *to the dance* that John wore his best suit last night (adverbial as focus)

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4.3 Teaching non-simple sentences

Simple sentences may be joined together to form non-simple sentences of various kinds, such as complex sentences, compound sentences, compound-complex sentences, multiple sentences and multiple-complex sentences. In this section of the paper, the number of different kinds of sentences has been increased from the number recorded in Table 1 (see Appendix). This has been done deliberately for pedagogic purposes, to give six divisions of non-simple sentences: complex, compound, compound-complex, multiple and multiple-complex sentences.

At the stage of teaching non-simple sentences, points of grammar such as collocation or word order may be introduced. When words habitually occur together in a language, this phenomenon is referred to as collocation and the elements that co-occur are referred to as collocates. Collocation can be of two types: fixed collocation and free collocation. Free collocation refers to cases such as the following: fish-swim, rat-run, writer-pen, while fixed collocation involves the use of idiomatic expressions or phrasal verbs, for example *passed on* (*die*); *a chip off the old block* (*like father like son*); *hook, line and sinker* or *lock, stock and barrel* (everything is included). Furthermore, punctuations, such as exclamation marks, question marks, and full stops may be introduced to learners at this stage, since some of the sentences require them.

4.3.1 Complex sentences

A complex sentence comprises one main clause and (a) subordinate clause(s), for example:

a   *This is the man* (simple sentence)

   He broke the utensil (simple sentence)

   This is the man who broke the utensil (complex sentence)

b   *He went to the market* (simple sentence)

   It was two o'clock in the afternoon (simple sentence)

   He went to the market when it was two o'clock in the afternoon (complex sentence)

At the stage when complex sentences are introduced, it is essential that the teacher teach finite and non-finite clauses since they are associated with long sentences. Finite clauses contain finite verbs (verbs

that are marked for tense). Examples of sentences that contain finite verbs are the following:

a   *When I was coming to school, I met an old friend*

b   *Olu came to my house yesterday*

Non-finite clauses, on the other hand, do not contain finite verbs but non-finite ones, for example:

a   *When going to school ...*

b   *Perched on the mahogany tree ...*

Non-finite clauses can traditionally be treated as phrases. As such, they cannot be used as representing criteria for classifying sentences into structural classes of simple, complex, compound, compound-complex, and so on; only finite clauses can do so. Another very relevant concept to the treatment of the complex sentence is that of main (independent) clauses and subordinate (dependent) clauses, for example:

a   *The student performed brilliantly* because he worked diligently

b   When the bush is burning furiously, *the animals run helter-skelter*

The items italicised above are referred to as independent (main) clauses because they can function as simple sentences, while the items not italicised are referred to as subordinate (dependent) clauses because they cannot function as sentences, only in other sentences.

At this stage, moreover subordinating conjunctions should be dealt with because they are needed in the joining of the main clause to the subordinate clause. Examples of these are: *then*, *before*, *as*, *which*, *that*, *who*, *whom* and the zero type. Also at this stage, the three particular tenses may be introduced, namely present perfect, past progressive, past perfect, present perfect progressive and past perfect progressive.

a   *I have written notes for thirty minutes before he came* (present perfect)

b   *I had written notes for thirty minutes already before he came in yesterday* (past perfect)

c   *Olu was coming to school when he met a strange man* (past progressive)

d   *I have been attending the school for two years when he came to join me* (present perfect progressive)

e   *I had been doing the work for three hours before Agnes came to assist me last week* (past perfect progressive)

Alongside complex sentences (complex, compound-complex and multiple-complex), the teacher needs to teach relative clauses. These are subordinate clauses normally introduced by relative pronouns (or subordinating conjunctions), for example: *which*, *that*, *whom*, *who* and the zero type, for example:

a   *This is the sergeant who like a brave and hardy soldier fought against my captivity* (Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene II)

b   *I want the book that I gave you*

c   *The boy whom you met in London is now married to Sade*

d   *The book I gave him is now torn*

e   *Olu, who is a brave hunter, brought a live antelope to the village*

f   *Mrs. Olutimeyin, whose son went overseas, returned happily to the village*

We can set off a relative clause between commas when we know that it is non-restrictive (non-defining). That is, the relative clause is not a major part of the sentence but an additional part that can be done without. It is restrictive or defining when the information in the relative clause is essential to the sentence. The use of commas to separate the initial adverbial clause or phrase may also be introduced at this stage, for example:

a   *Yesterday, he came to school*

b   *In the drawer, there is a lot of money*

c   *When I was coming, I met a strange looking fellow*

4.3.2 Compound sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two main clauses, for example:

a   *The boys played football* (simple sentence)

    The girls played handball (simple sentence)

    The boys played football and the girls played handball (compound sentence)

b   *You should attend the lecture* (simple sentence)

You should read the topic up in a book (simple sentence)

You should either attend the lecture or read the topic up in a book

*(*compound sentence)

With the introduction of compound sentences and multiple sentences, the teacher needs to teach the use of co-ordinating conjunctions such as *or*, *and* and *but*. The co-ordinator *or* implies alternativeness or choice between two things; the co-ordinator *but* implies contrast, while the co-ordinator *and* implies an addition. Other lesser co-ordinators, called correlatives, should also be introduced to the learners at the stage of teaching compound and multiple sentences. Examples of correlatives are *either-or*, *neither-nor* and *both-and*.

Punctuation such as commas, semi-colons and colons should also be introduced at this stage. Sentences involving the use of these punctuation marks as well as their explanations should be provided because they are problematic for learners in Nigeria, particularly the comma, which is the most often used of them all. Commas may be used to set off articles in a series, for example:

My wife went to the market and bought a kilogram of meat, two litres of kerosene and a barrel of soap

Commas may also be used to separate certain adverbials in sentences, for example *namely* and *however*, as in the following sentences:

a   *The boy came to class, however, he did not write anything*

b   *The teacher gave three reasons, namely, …*

A colon is used to separate two items, in which case the second item is the explanation of the first, for example:

a   *The pregnant woman has been delivered of twins: she had a boy and a girl*

b   *The chief exports of Nigeria are the following: tin, timber, cocoa, oil, palm products and groundnuts*

A semi-colon is stronger than a comma and when items are listed, it signals the beginning of a list. Sometimes, it indicates an illustration of the first item mentioned. The following are examples of the use of the semi-colon:

a   *At the first meeting, the History Society elected Olu Tomori, the school captain, as president; nominated Uzo Nuogu, a sixth form boy, as secretary, and decided to appoint the remaining officers at the next meeting* (Grieve & Pratt 1976)

b   *Mr. Jumobi's car broke down; consequently, he was late for the meeting*

c   *The speaker has made a useful suggestion; I think we should follow it*

4.3.3   Compound-complex sentences

A compound-complex sentence is made up of two main clauses and a subordinate clause(s), for example:

a   *I tried to phone her* (simple sentence)

   She could not phone me back (simple sentence)

   She doesn't stay in her office (simple sentence)

   I *tried to phone her and she could not phone me back because she doesn't stay in her office* (compound-complex sentence)

b   *The boys played football* (simple sentence)

   The girls played handball (simple sentence)

   There was an inter-school sports competition (simple sentence)

   The boys played football and the girls played handball when there was an inter-school sports competition (compound-complex sentence)

4.3.4   Multiple sentences

A multiple sentence is made up of three or more main clauses, for example:

a   *The boys played football* (simple sentence)

   The girls played handball (simple sentence)

   Their teachers also took part in volleyball (simple sentence)

   The boys played football, the girls played handball and their teachers also took part in volleyball

b   *I tried to phone her* (simple sentence)

   She could not phone me back (simple sentence)

   Her boyfriend kept on asking me about her (simple sentence)

I tried to phone her and he could not phone me back but her boyfriend kept on asking me about her (multiple sentence)

4.3.5   Multiple-complex sentences

A multiple-complex sentence contains three or more main clauses and (a) subordinate clause(s), for example:

The boys played football

The girls played handball

Their teachers also took part in volleyball

There was an inter-school sports competition

The boys played football, the girls played handball and their teachers also took part in volleyball when there was an inter-school sports' competition. (multiple-complex sentence)

4.3.6   Sentences with rank-shifted clauses and groups

Sentences with rank-shifted clauses and groups can also be formed by combining simple sentences, for example:

a   *The lady came here yesterday* (simple sentence)

   She is Tayo's wife (simple sentence)

   The lady who came here yesterday is Tayo's wife

b   *The boy is a friend* (simple sentence)

   He is in the corner (simple sentence)

   The boy in the corner is a friend

5.   Concluding remarks

It was the endeavour, in this paper, to establish that senior secondary Nigerian school learners have learning problems with regard to the formation of English sentence constructions of various kinds. They avoid the use of certain points of grammar, such as reported speech, relative clauses, idioms and figurative expressions, while they have problems with tense, concord, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation. It has also been noted that a single grammatical approach is inadequate for the teaching of English sentence types, hence our adoption of an eclectic approach to English Language Teaching (ELT). We have made

pedagogical recommendations, therefore, in respect of various English sentence constructions such as basic simple, non-basic simple and non-simple sentences. Furthermore, essential points of grammar for learners to master in order to formulate correct English sentences be introduced at certain specific points while teaching the various sentence types.

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