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Exploration of Students' Knowledge about Predicate and Tree Construction in Syntax

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ABSTRACT

English language instruction places a high priority on syntax, notably in assisting pupils in comprehending grammatical relationships and sentence structure. Predicate identification and syntax tree creation, both of which demonstrate students' comprehension of hierarchical sentence structures, are two crucial aspects of syntax learning. This study seeks to determine how well students comprehend predicate identification and syntax tree creation in English syntax. Students in the English Department who had finished a syntax course participated in a quantitative descriptive study design. The data were gathered via an internet survey that included Likert scale questions and multiple-choice options. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics presented as percentages. According to the data, the majority of students exhibit a strong conceptual grasp of predicates, as seen by their capacity to recognize predicates in basic sentences and identify verbs as the head of verb phrases. But in analyzing complex sentence structures and building syntax trees, students exhibit less assurance and skill. Despite these challenges, students show a positive outlook on learning syntax and a strong desire to increase their knowledge. The research comes to the conclusion that, despite students having basic syntactic knowledge, more instructional focus should be placed on visual-based methods and guided practice in order to improve their practical skills in creating syntax trees.

Keywords: *English language instruction, Predicate identification, Syntax, Syntax tree, Verb Phrase*

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental aspect of language proficiency is syntax, which helps students comprehend how words are put together to form coherent sentences. Syntactic knowledge is crucial for both grammatical correctness and the development of analytical abilities in sentence interpretation in English language instruction. Predicate identification and syntactic tree construction are two essential components of syntax learning since they both demonstrate students' comprehension of sentence structure and the hierarchical links between constituents (Radford, 2009; Carnie, 2021).

While tree construction uses phrase associations, especially verb phrases (VP), to graphically depict the internal structure of sentences, predicate knowledge enables students to identify the main component of a sentence that reflects an action or state. Deeper syntactic analysis requires mastery of these ideas, but prior research shows that students frequently struggle to apply abstract syntactic representations, particularly when converting theoretical knowledge into tree diagrams (Brown & Miller, 2013; Tallerman, 2015).

According to the data gathered for this study, students' comprehension of predicate ideas is comparatively adequate, as evidenced by their capacity to correctly respond to definition-based and identification questions. On the other hand, the findings also show lower levels of competence and confidence in building syntax trees and recognizing verb phrase links inside hierarchical structures. Even though they acknowledged that knowing syntax improves their grammatical comprehension, a number of students expressed difficulty creating tree diagrams and visually analyzing sentence patterns. This trend points to a disconnect between students' practical analytical abilities and their conceptual understanding of grammar.

These results show that although students have a basic understanding of predicates, syntactic tree construction is still a difficult subject that needs more teaching focus. Thus, the purpose of this study is to quantitatively investigate students' understanding of predicate identification and syntax tree construction, with an emphasis on identifying their syntactic competence strengths and shortcomings. It is anticipated that the findings would offer pedagogical insights for enhancing syntax instruction in English language education settings.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a quantitative descriptive method to explore students' knowledge about predicate and tree construction in English syntax. The purpose of this study was to describe and measure how well students understand these two important parts of syntax. The quantitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to collect numerical data and present the results in percentages and tables

without giving any treatment or experiment to the participants. According to Creswell (2014), this type of method is useful to describe existing conditions based on data collected from a group of respondents.

The participants in this study were English Department students who had taken a syntax course. They were selected through purposive sampling, meaning that only students who were considered to have basic knowledge of grammar and syntax were chosen. The total number of participants was between twenty five and thirty students from different semesters in the same university. These students were expected to have already learned about the function of subject and predicate and how to make tree structures in English sentences.

After the data were collected, the researcher analyzed them using descriptive statistics. The students' test and questionnaire results were explained in descriptive form to show the level of understanding. This made it clear which parts of predicate and tree construction students understood well and which parts were still difficult. According to Sugiyono (2013), descriptive analysis is an effective way to explain the distribution of answers in quantitative descriptive research.

The data were interpreted and compared with syntactic theories from Radford (2009), Carnie (2013), and Chomsky (2014). This comparison helped to identify whether students' answers followed the correct grammatical structures or showed misunderstanding in identifying the predicate and drawing tree diagrams. Through this process, the researcher was able to conclude the general level of students' knowledge and highlight areas that need more attention in syntax teaching.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results from the 19 student participants who finished the questionnaire on syntax tree building and predicate identification are presented and analyzed in this chapter. The primary goal of this study is to examine students' conceptual understanding of predicates, their understanding of fundamental syntactic tree structures, and their perceptions and challenges in using syntactic analysis. A formal online survey comprised of Likert-scale questions and multiple-choice questions was used to gather the data. The students' levels of comprehension and learning behaviors were descriptively examined using percentage calculations.

In general, the results suggest that students have a fair grasp of fundamental predicate concepts. In response to the first question, 89. 5% of respondents accurately identified the predicate as the portion of a sentence that explains what the topic is or performs. The theoretical explanation that predicates serve as the foundation of a sentence by conveying actions or states (Radford, 2009) is supported by this conclusion, which implies that the majority of students have a basic understanding of predicate definitions.

The second question, in which all respondents correctly identified "plays guitar" as the predicate in the statement "The boy plays guitar," further supports this understanding. Students' exceptional aptitude for recognizing predicates in basic and straightforward sentence structures is demonstrated by this flawless score. According to the discovery, pupils can use their syntactic knowledge effectively if predicates are taught in understandable and well-known situations.

In terms of the inner makeup of predicates, 73. 7% of pupils accurately recognized the verb as the head of a predicate phrase. As highlighted in syntactic theory (Carnie, 2021), the majority of pupils comprehend the critical function of verbs in predicate words, as demonstrated by this conclusion. Nevertheless, the remaining incorrect answers imply that some pupils may still mix up verbs with other components of a sentence, like objects or complements, especially while evaluating phrases as opposed to complete sentences.

The fourth question, which assessed students' comprehension of compound predicates, had 84. 2% of respondents choose the statement "She runs and swims every morning" as the correct answer. The majority of pupils are able to identify sentences with more than one verb sharing the same subject, according to this study. However, the existence of erroneous answers suggests that compound predicates continue to be a possible source of misunderstanding, particularly for pupils who base their reasoning on superficial patterns as opposed to underlying connections.

Additionally, pupils seem to have a fair understanding of the fundamental vocabulary used in syntax trees. 94. 7% of survey participants accurately identified VP as a Verb Phrase in the fifth question. This finding implies that pupils have been taught the basics of phrase structure and are familiar with the typical labels used in syntax trees. Since syntactic trees heavily depend on the identification of phrase categories and hierarchical relationships (Tallerman, 2015), this familiarity is necessary for syntactic analysis.

Although students performed well on conceptual questions, the Likert scale results show a greater range of responses when it comes to their self-assurance and real-world abilities. For instance, 52. 6% of pupils said that they know what a predicate is in a sentence, and 42. 1% said that they are able to accurately recognize predicates in simple sentences. These answers support the findings of the multiple-choice portion, demonstrating that, on the whole, pupils are at ease with identifying fundamental predicates.

But students' answers about building syntax trees point to a lesser level of confidence and skill. 47. 4% of students chose the neutral response for the statement, "I know how to create a simple tree diagram in syntax. " In a similar vein, 42. 1% of survey participants gave neutral answers to questions about how to recognize verb phrases in syntax trees and how phrases connect to one another in sentence structures. These results point to hesitation and uncertainty, implying that many students are not entirely sure of how to use their theoretical knowledge to complete tree-building projects.

When students are asked about complicated sentence analysis, this problem becomes more obvious. In response to the statement, "I find it difficult to identify the predicate in complex sentences," 47. 4% of participants chose the neutral option, suggesting that students may have difficulties but are unsure of how serious they are. This outcome highlights a typical problem in syntax instruction, where students grasp fundamental concepts but have difficulty when sentence structures become more complex and hierarchical (Brown & Miller, 2013).

Students have a positive outlook toward learning syntax despite these difficulties. The majority of respondents agreed strongly that syntax helps them comprehend English grammar (61. 1%) and that visual representations, like syntax trees, help them comprehend sentence structure (63. 2%). Because syntax trees enable students to see abstract grammatical relationships, these results emphasize the pedagogical importance of visual representations in syntax education.

In addition, 36. 8% of students said they feel confident when using tree structures to analyze sentences, which shows that, while confidence is not yet the norm, it is growing. Notably, 78. 9% of survey participants said they would like to get better at comprehending predicates and building syntax trees. This strong motivation shows that students are aware of their shortcomings and are receptive to additional learning and practice.

In general, the results point to a distinct trend: while pupils have a strong understanding of the fundamentals of predicates and essential syntactic terminology, they struggle to use this knowledge in the creation of syntax trees and in the analysis of complex sentences. The necessity for more guided practice and visual-based instruction in syntax learning, as highlighted by prior studies (Tallerman, 2015; Carnie, 2021), is supported by this gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

CONCLUSION

According to the results and discussion, this research comes to the conclusion that, on the whole, students in the English Department have a solid conceptual grasp of predicates in English sentences. The majority of pupils can properly define predicates, identify them in basic phrases, and recognize the verb as the focal point of a predicate statement. This demonstrates that the fundamental syntactic notions pertaining to sentence structure have been effectively presented and comprehended at a theoretical level.

The research, however, also shows that students have significant challenges in utilizing their syntactic knowledge in real-world situations, notably when it comes to analyzing complicated sentence structures and building syntax trees. When dealing with hierarchical relationships between sentence parts, particularly verb phrases inside tree diagrams, many pupils demonstrate uncertainty and a lack of confidence. This divide

between theoretical knowledge and real-world application indicates that pupils require more organized instruction and practical experience in syntax analysis.

Students nevertheless display a favorable outlook toward learning syntax and a strong desire to enhance their abilities in this area. The results indicate that syntax education should prioritize visual representations, gradual tree creation, and consistent practice in order to improve students' analytical skills. The efficacy of particular teaching methods in enhancing students' ability to build syntax trees may be investigated in future studies using experimental or mixed-method methodologies.

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