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## ENGLISH SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION ABILITY OF THE STUDENTS OF CAGAYAN STATE UNIVERSITY AT GONZAGA, CAGAYAN

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**Abstract:** *Writing is a tedious activity which requires one's knowledge of grammar, punctuation, spelling, word choice and sentence structure. It is one of the skills that every teacher should commit to develop especially in language subjects. This study investigated the English Sentence Construction Ability of BSE Major in English Students of the Cagayan State University at Gonzaga, Cagayan. There were thirty (30) participants, who were randomly selected from the second year to fourth year Bachelor in Secondary Education major in English students of the Cagayan State University, Gonzaga Campus during the first semester of School Year 2015-2016, employed in this study. The data were obtained from the sentences constructed by the participants after the visual and the audio-visual prompts were presented to them. The result of the study shows that the English sentence constructions ability of the respondents is low as indicated by the sentence structure employed and the number of erroneous sentences constructed. It also shows that the two most commonly committed errors in sentence construction are misspelling and subject-verb agreement issues.*

**Keywords:** *writing ability, sentence construction, sentence structure, English subject, prompts*

### INTRODUCTION

One's ability to clearly put his/her ideas through writing enables him/her to communicate ideas with others. Speaking and writing are productive skills, while listening and reading are the receptive skills in language. Though these skills differ in characteristics, it is said that reading and writing skills are linked. That reading skills can improve when students read and write, and writing skills improve as they write and read. Cabansag (2013) points out that writing has one great advantage over speaking for it enables the writer to proceed by trial and error until he can formulate his ideas and parts of ideas in their best possible shapes. It is an activity where writers can freely express the flow of their thoughts. However, despite



the various strategies and studies that attempt to address this issue, language teachers are still confronted with issues of low English proficiency among students. At Cagayan State University- Gonzaga Campus, a disturbing issue that students who have been taking English subjects since the time they entered formal schooling and who are majoring in English could not express themselves well either in written or oral communication exists. Though they have passed the Basic English subjects like Grammar and Composition 1 and 2, some still fail in expressing their thoughts and so with putting them into writing.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Language Skills Connection**

Writing is a complex process, which requires the collaboration of different skills individuals possess in order to communicate ideas. As cited by Lesaux, Kieffer and Rivera (2006), fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are each multi-faceted in nature and require the integration of specific cognitive (e.g., word-reading accuracy and efficiency, working memory) and sophisticated language skills (e.g., depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and morphological awareness).

Knowledge of words is now considered the most important factor in language proficiency and school success, partly because of its close relation with text comprehension (Bernhardt, 2005; Wang, 2009). There is a significant positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Anjomshoa 2014). Reading a language and comprehending it require one to possess sufficient vocabulary (Salah, 2008).

A person who knows more words can speak, and even think, more precisely about the world. The more words people have, the more complex ways they can think about the world (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). This further advances some researchers' belief that reading facilitates language development (Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008) and the more people read, the more they will develop their knowledge (Hammer, 2007).

As cited by Nasir, et al (Canizares (2003), Ediger (2003), Mallozzi and Malloy (2007), and Manning and Manning (1992), reading and writing skills are linked. These researchers assert that reading experiences inform writing experiences and that writing experiences inform reading experiences. Manning and Manning (1992) further stresses that reading skills



improve when students read and write, and writing skills improve as they write and read; therefore children's writing reflects their reading.

### **Language Structure**

As cited by Aquino (2009), human languages are immensely complex systems of convention for linking symbols with meaning for the purpose of communication. Language is a system. It is so structured that the collection of sounds makes meaning; various units combine to form meanings. It has two dimensions: uses and structures. (Brunning, Schraw, Norby&Roning, 2004).

Structurally, English sentences can be classified into four different ways, though there are endless constructions of each. The classifications are based on the number of independent and dependent clauses a sentence contains. An independent clause forms a complete sentence on its own, while a dependent clause needs another clause to make a complete sentence. By learning these types, writers can add complexity and variation to their sentences (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/573/>).

### **Error Analysis**

Constructing English sentences correctly has become a well-known problem among students of EFL and ESL According to Surina (2009) as cited by Nasir et.al. (n.d.), many of the students in Malaysia have problems in applying rules regarding sentence structures and grammar in their writing even though they have been learning English for about twelve years in school. This conforms to the result of the study conducted by Cabansag (2013), which revealed that use of verb/s, verb tenses and proper capitalization are the persistent errors committed by the laboratory high school students in a state university in Cagayan Valley, Philippines.

### **Impact of Instructional Materials in Teaching English Language**

The use of visual aids is important in teaching. As cited by Guetierrez, Ouello and Galvis (2015), incorporating picture to language teaching and learning has positive effects on the improvement of learners' communication skills. These resources help teachers to contextualize language by connecting the classroom with the world outside its walls. They also encourage students to use target language by providing support or a reference point to write or talk about.



According to Kelley & Serb (1961) as cited by Mosaab and Rime (2013), visual perception contributes to about 90% to all human learning. By emphasizing on whatever is being said, visual aids help reach the targeted objectives. Clear pictures augment the audience's level of comprehension of the current material, and they should be used to reinforce your message, clarify points, and create excitement. Visual aids make the audience involved and presuppose a change from one activity to another: from hearing to seeing. Upon using visual aids, their use tends to encourage body language and movement on one's part. This added movement helps to give the speaker the control that is needed over the presentation. Using visual aids, then, is beneficial to both the audience and the speaker. Visual aids create influence and excitement to a presentation. They help targeting more than one sense simultaneously, therefore increasing the audience's comprehension. With pictures, the concepts or ideas presented are no longer simply words - but words plus images. People tend to be eye-minded, and the impacts visual aids bring to a presentation are crucial. In many studies, experimental psychologists and scholars have found that retention of information three days after a meeting or other event is six times greater when information is presented by visual and oral means than when the information is presented by the spoken word alone. Studies by educational researchers suggest that approximately 83% of human learning occurs visually, and the remaining 17% through the other senses - 11% through hearing, 3.5% through smell, 1% through taste, and 1.5% through touch.

## **METHODS**

A descriptive survey research design was employed in this study. The 30 participants employed in this study were randomly selected from the second year to fourth year Bachelor in Secondary Education major in English students of the Cagayan State University, Gonzaga Campus during first semester of School Year 2015-2016. The instruments used for this study are picture of the "Face in the Wilderness" and a video-clip of the "Rabbit and Turtle (Amazing Version)". These prompts are used as reference for the students to write as many sentences as they can within 30 minutes per prompt category. The different issues in writing were identified through a computer application called Grammarly which can be found at [www.grammarly.com](http://www.grammarly.com). The data were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistical tools namely: frequency counts, weighted frequency, percentage and rank.



## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents per Course and Year Level**

**According to The Number of Sentences Constructed using a Visual Prompt**

Course and Year Level	Number of Sentences Constructed in Using Visual Prompt	Percentage	Number of Sentences Constructed in Using Audio-Visual Prompt	Percentage
BSE II	157	26.66	166	35.32
BSE III	221	37.52	157	33.40
BSE IV	211	35.82	147	31.28
Total	589	100.00	470	100.00

The table presents the number of sentences constructed by the respondents when using visual and audio-visual prompts. It shows that out of 589 sentences constructed with the use of a visual prompt, BSE III had the most number of sentences with 221 or 37.52% while BSE II got the least number of sentences with 157 or 26.66%. On the other hand, out of 470 sentences constructed with the use of an audio-visual prompt, BSE II had written 166 or 35.32% while BSE IV wrote 147 or 31.28%. It indicates that the students can construct more sentences when using visual prompt than when using audio-visual prompt. This conforms to the idea of Kelley & Serb (1961) as cited by Mosaab and Rime (2013) that visual perception contributes to about 90% to all human learning. By emphasizing on whatever is being said, visual aids help reach the targeted objectives. Clear pictures augment the audience's level of comprehension of the current material, and they should be used to reinforce your message, clarify points, and create excitement. Visual aids make the audience involved and presuppose a change from one activity to another: from hearing to seeing. Upon using visual aids, their use tends to encourage body language and movement on one's part. This added movement helps to give the speaker the control that is needed over the presentation. Using visual aids, then, is beneficial to both the audience and the speaker. Visual aids create influence and excitement to a presentation. They help targeting more than one sense simultaneously, therefore increasing the audience's comprehension. With pictures, the concepts or ideas presented are no longer simply words - but words plus images.



**Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents per Year Level According to the Number of Correct Sentences Constructed Using Visual and Audio-visual Prompts**

Course and Year Level	Number of Correct Sentences Constructed in Using Visual Prompt	Percentage	Number of Correct Sentences Constructed Using Audio-Visual Prompt	Percentage
BSE II	107	29.32	92	33.45
BSE III	135	36.99	93	33.82
BSE IV	123	33.70	90	32.73
Total	365	100.00	275	100.00

Table 2 presents the number of correct sentences constructed by the respondents when using visual and audio-visual prompts. It shows that the BSE III had written the most number of sentences for both visual and audio-visual prompts with 135 or 36.99% and 93 or 33.82% respectively.

**Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents per Year Level According to the Number of Erroneous Sentences Constructed Using Visual and Audio-visual Prompts**

Course and Year Level	Number of Erroneous Sentences Constructed in Using Visual Prompt	Percentage	Number of Erroneous Sentences Constructed Using Audio-Visual Prompt	Percentage
BSE II	50	22.32	74	37.95
BSE III	86	38.39	64	32.82
BSE IV	88	39.29	57	29.23
Total	224	100.00	195	100.00

Table 3 presents the number of erroneous sentences constructed by the respondents when using visual and audio-visual prompts. It shows that BSE IV had committed the highest number of erroneous sentences which comprises 88 or 39.29% of the 224 erroneous sentences made when a visual prompt is used, while the group got the least number of erroneous sentences with 57 or 29.23% of 195 under audio-visual prompt.



**Table 4.a. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents per Year Level  
According to the Errors Commonly Committed in Using Visual Prompt in Each Category**

TYPES OF ERRORS*	BSE II	BSE III	BSE IV	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	RANK
<b>Grammar</b>						
Determiner Use	7	4	13	24	80	2
Modal Verb use	0	0	3	3	10	6
Noun Form	0	4	2	6	20	4.5
Preposition Use	5	7	6	18	60	3
Pronoun Use	1	0	0	1	3.33	7.5
Quantifier use	0	1	0	1	3.33	7.5
S-V Agreement	13	19	18	50	166.67	1
Verb form	3	1	2	6	20	4.5
<i>Total</i>	29	36	44	109		
<b>Punctuation</b>						
Basic punctuation	1	0	1	2	6.67	2
Compound & complex sentence Punctuation	2	2	3	7	23.33	1
<i>Total</i>	3	2	4	9		
<b>Spelling</b>						
Accidentally confused words	8	7	9	24	80	2
Commonly confused words	0	2	0	2	6.67	3
Misspelled words	12	16	20	48	160%	1
<i>Total</i>	20	25	29	74		
<b>Enhancement</b>						
Word choice	7	18	10	35	116.67	1
<i>Total</i>	7	18	10	35		
<b>Style</b>						
Improper formatting	3	7	6	16	53.33	1
Passive voice use	4	4	3	11	36.67	2
Use of colloquial phrases	3	3	1	7	23.33	3.5
Wordiness	2	0	5	7	23.33	3.5
<i>Total</i>	12	14	15	41		
<b>Sentence Structure</b>						
Incomplete sentence	3	5	2	10	33.33	1
Word order	1	1	0	2	6.67	2
<i>Total</i>	4	6	2	12		
	75	101	104	280		

\*Multiple Responses



Table 4.a presents the types of errors in each category committed by the participants in constructing sentences when using visual prompt. S-V agreement, determiner use and preposition use are the top 3 most committed errors with 166.67%, 80% and 60% respectively under grammar category. Compound and complex sentence punctuation with 23.33% is a major issue under punctuation. Misspelled words with 160% and accidentally confused words with 80% are identified under spelling. Word choice with 116.67% is the only error found under enhancement. Improper formatting, passive voice use, use of colloquial phrases and wordiness with 53.33%, 36.67% and 23.33% respectively are issues under style. Incomplete sentence with 33.33% and word order with 6.67% are also the issues identified under sentence structure. The top 5 most commonly committed errors in sentences construction are subject-verb agreement, misspelled words, word choice, determiner use and accidentally used words. It indicates that grammar is the most committed error, while punctuation is the least committed error in sentence construction when using a visual prompt.

**Table 4.b. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents per Year Level According to Errors Commonly Committed in Using Audio- Visual Prompt in Each Category**

Types of Errors *	BSE II	BSE III	BSE IV	TOTAL	Percent age	Rank
<b>Grammar</b>						
Adjective/adverb Use	1	0	0	1	3.33	9
Conditional Sentences	0	3	0	3	10	5
Determiner Use	11	13	7	31	103.33	1
Noun Form	1	0	1	2	6.67	7
Preposition Use	4	3	6	13	43.33	3
Quantifier use	0	1	1	2	6.67	7
Sequence of tenses	2	0	0	2	6.67	7
S-V Agreement	8	3	12	23	76.67	2
Verb form	2	2	1	5	16.67	4
<i>Total</i>	29	25	28	82		
<b>Punctuation</b>						
Basic punctuation	2	0	3	5	16.67	2
Compound and complex sentence Punctuation	4	9	9	22	73.33	1
<i>Total</i>	6	9	12	27		
<b>Spelling</b>						



Accidentally confused words	8	3	5	16	53.33	2
Commonly confused words	3	0	3	6	20	3
Misspelled words	23	14	27	64	213.33	1
<i>Total</i>	34	17	35	86		
<b>Enhancement</b>						
Word choice	11	9	6	26	86.67	1
<i>Total</i>	11	9	6	26		
<b>Style</b>						
Improper formatting	7	7	8	22	73.33	1
Passive voice use	4	3	4	11	36.67	3
Use of colloquial phrases	0	2	1	3	10	4
Wordiness	5	9	7	21	70	2
<i>Total</i>	16	21	20	57		
<b>Sentence Structure</b>						
Incomplete sentence	1	2	0	3	10	1
Word order		1	1	2	3.33	2
<i>Total</i>	1	3	1	5		
	97	84	102	283		

- Multiple Responses

Table 4.b. presents the types of errors per category committed by the respondents in constructing sentences when using audio-visual prompt. Determiner use, S-V agreement, preposition use are the top 3 most committed errors with 103.33%, 76.67%, and 43.33% respectively under grammar category. Compound and complex sentence punctuation with 73.33% is a major issue under punctuation.

Misspelled words with 213.33% is a major issue under spelling. Word choice with 86.67% is the lone error found under enhancement. Improper formatting and word choice with 73.33% and 70% respectively are issues identified under style. Incomplete sentence with 10% and word order with 3.33% are also the issues identified under sentence structure.

The top 5 most commonly committed errors in sentences construction are misspelled words, determiner use, word choice, subject verb agreement, compound and complex sentence punctuation and improper formatting, while adjective/adverb use and word order and sequence of tenses and quantifier use are the top two least committed errors.

It indicates that spelling is the most committed error, while sentence structure is the least committed error in sentence construction when using audio-visual prompt.



**Table 5. Distribution of the Respondents According to Sentence Structure Employed in Using Visual and Audio-visual Prompts in Each Category**

Type of Sentence According to Structure	Visual Prompt					Audio-Visual Prompt				
	BSE II	BSE III	BSE IV	Total	Percent- age	BSE II	BSE III	BSE IV	Total	Percent- age
Simple	146	195	210	551	93.55	109	110	110	329	70
Compound	1	5	3	9	1.53	25	7	8	40	8.51
Complex	9	9	7	25	4.24	27	38	25	90	19.5
Compound- complex	1	2	1	4	0.68	5	2	4	11	2.34
	157	211	221	589	100.00	166	157	147	470	100

Table 5 presents the structures employed by the respondents in constructing sentences. The respondents constructed 589 sentences where 93.55% are classified as simple, 4.24% as complex, 1.53% as compound and 0.68% as compound-complex for visual prompt. On the other hand, the respondents constructed 470 sentences as they used the audio-visual prompt, 70% are identified as simple, 19.5% as complex, 8.51% as compound and 2.34% as compound complex.

It reveals that most of the sentences constructed by the respondents from the three year levels are simple. The result indicates that the sentence constructions ability of the respondents falls under simple structure which implies low sentence construction ability for their level. This conforms with the study of Cumming, Kantor, Baba, Eouanzoui, Erdosy and James (2005) as cited by Cabansag (2013) of the important differences in the discourse characteristics of written responses that were related to proficiency levels -greater writing proficiency was associated with longer responses, greater lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity, and grammatical accuracy.

## CONCLUSION

Based from the result of the study, the English sentence construction ability of the BSE major in English students of the Cagayan State University at Gonzaga, Cagayan is low as indicated by the sentence structure they employed and the number of erroneous sentences they committed. In terms of sentence construction, the respondents constructed more sentences when using visual prompts, while in terms of sentence structure employed, the respondents constructed more sentences when using audio-visual prompt than when using



visual prompt. Also, the study revealed that the two most commonly committed errors in sentence construction are misspelling and subject-verb agreement issues. Considering the fact that the participants are given English subjects from elementary grades to present, it is therefore recommended that a study on the interferences of second language acquisition among college students be studied.

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