



STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION DIFFICULTIES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the difficulties, competency level and language learning strategies in changing sentences from deep into surface structure of high school students from each curriculum level. Also, suitable questionnaires were used to gather data and were assessed using a five-point Likert scale with mean range and corresponding descriptive ratings. Meanwhile, a 40-item test was used to measure the level of competence of the students in changing deep into surface structure of a sentence. Result of assessment shows that the dominant types of difficulties faced by students were applying each rule in subject- verb agreement in sentence construction, constructing a sentence based on the tenses of verb, distinguishing the parts of speech, making a question from a statement based on the tense that is used, constructing the words in supporting the ideas, and distinguishing the differences of each transformational rule. In the meantime, the overall mean score in the 40-item test in English described students' competence at low achievement level. In terms of language learning strategies, the overall mean obtained was described as Generally Not True to students. Results of this study clearly point out that even though subject-verb agreement is one of the basic features of the English grammar and has been referred to as a fairly simple or easy semantic feature, even advanced learners and sometimes also native speakers fail to use the feature correctly. It is therefore essential for English language teachers to provide activities for learners to motivate them on the use of various language learning strategies to improve their proficiency level.

Keywords: *deep structure, language learning strategies, structural transformation difficulties, surface structure, transformation rules*

INTRODUCTION

English language teachers in secondary schools inevitably face various problems in teaching through printed and digital modules such as moderate proficiency in oral and written English, difficulties in comprehending language structures, and students' lack of motivation in learning proper grammar that basically prevents them from producing utterances or paragraph.

Competence in Writing can be assessed through one's ability to properly organized thoughts using appropriate structures. Good writing consists not only of a string of varied, correctly-structured sentences. The sentences must also lead from one to the next so that the text is cohesive and the writer's ideas are coherent, Talosa, and Maguddayao (2018).

Talosa and Batang (2019) argued that writing academic discourse engages a writer to undertake well-defined processes where he or she has to observe crucial characteristics such as



language norms, rules and stylistics conventions thereby relying on to his or her fine motor functions, visual-motor planning, attention, sequencing, thinking, memory and syntactic, semantic and lexical knowledge. These findings confirm that writing is a difficult-to-learn skill that necessitates an in-depth understanding of syntax structures.

According to Tafida & Okunade (2016), English Grammar presupposes eight parts of speech namely: noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunctions, interjections and verbs. Students are taught to be competent in the fictional use of these grammatical elements. However, it was noted that ESL students' problematic difficulties in their use of subject-verb agreement are becoming more obvious and rampant, and it cuts across the different grade levels where students belong. The more worrisome dimension of this problem is that such fiasco extends even to professionals who use English in their lectures or those among the honorable members of state and national assemblies or those engaged in varied media outfits. Errors in subject-verb agreement are becoming wide spread and it seems as if many people are either no longer aware of the rules or they simply undermine the importance of grammar rules, for as long as they are able to convey their message.

Nayan (2009) also concurred with this that despite being instructed of the grammatical rules at younger age, ESL (English as a second language) learners are not adept in deploying their knowledge of rules in their actual communicative use of English.

These problems leave teachers with no other option but to develop online interactive pedagogies that will engage learners more effectively in their learning in realizing the ultimate goal of the Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum to produce graduates who apply the language conventions, principles, strategies and skills in interacting with others, understanding and learning other content areas, and fending for themselves in whatever field of endeavour they may engage in.

With these limitations at hand, a challenge is tossed upon teachers of English language to find out, among other things, what the learners know that enable them to learn and use a language- to create sentences indefinitely and to understand sentences they have never heard before. Although teachers cannot see the mental processes that go on in the minds of the learners, it is their responsibility to help them recognize various categories and constructions that make up their language--the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbials, noun phrases, verb phrases, etc.

While there is a dearth of studies and information regarding grammar in the Philippines, somehow it can be pointed out that the goal of achieving accuracy both in oral and written language learning remains to be highly imperative.

In view of the above considerations, this study will be conducted to help teachers evaluate and apply information which enable them to help learners recognize the patterns and rules of the language that emerge as they interact with literary and informational texts to make meaning.



This research work involves determining the difficulties and identifying the level of competence of the junior high school students in changing deep structure into surface structure

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the difficulties in transforming sentences from deep structure into surface structure of the junior high school students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What are the difficulties in changing deep structure into surface structure of the junior high school students?
2. What is the level of competence of the junior high school students in changing deep structure into surface structure?
3. What are the language learning strategies of the students that help them solve the difficulties in changing deep structure into surface structure?

Significance of the Study

With the foregoing premise, this study will contribute to a more thorough understanding on difficulties of learners in writing accurate sentences therefore making them understand how to use the language in a real context.

Investigating the strategies in which learners transform sentences provides teachers with the essential information to improve teaching practices and devise appropriate and practical approaches and strategies on how to integrate learning content with students' current deficiencies.

Learners can find essential feedback and information as regards their writing performances which could provide guidance and direction on better English language skills development and for a more improved language performance.

The information that the school may get in this study will serve as reference on the implementation of one of the K to 12 curriculum principles to develop students' oral language and literacy through appropriately challenging learning.

School administrators will be able to design training for teachers on language proficiency to improve English language teaching and learning consistent with education policies.

Lastly, the result of the study could provide meaningful data useful for other research enthusiasts. Hopefully, more replicate studies along this line of concern can be done to further ascertain the best practices in developing communicative competence and critical literacy of the students.

Scope and Delimitation

This study focused on determining the difficulties, level of competence, and language learning strategies used in changing the sentences from deep into surface structure through



transformational rules which include movement, assignment of semantic rules, deletion, and substitution.

Moreover, the participants of the study were the 80 junior high school students of Alfreda Albano National High School- Masipi Annex, School Year 2021-2022.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One problematic aspect of the language for both teachers and students is grammar. They obviously lack adequate knowledge of grammatical theories which are bases for sound mastery of the rules governing the social and linguistic uses of the language.

Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG)

According to Chomsky (2002), a sentence has two structures, one is surface structure and the other is deep structure. The surface structure is the kind of sentence we ordinarily say, while the deep structure is an abstract syntactic representation of sentence from which its surface structure generates. The rules with which we transform the deep structure of a sentence into the surface structure are called transformational rules. These rules were used to add, delete, or permute, that is, change order and some-times also hierarchic relationship among constituents of the deep structure to turn it into an ordinary sentence we use in everyday life.

On the contrary, Halliday (1973) recognized three functions of language in communication of human society. They are: 1) Ideational function: language functioning as a means of conveying and interpreting experience of the world (this function is subdivided into two sub-functions, the experiential and the logical sub-functions). 2) Interpersonal function: language functioning as an expression of one's attitudes and an influence upon the attitudes and behavior of the hearer. 3) Textual function: language functioning as a means of constructing a text, that is, a spoken or written instantiation of language.

Nida (1969) also reversed Chomsky's model in the stage of analysis. This process was conducted according to his observation that through analysis complex and ambiguous structures (e.g. phrases and sentences) should be back transformed into simple ones.

Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1968) argued that a transformation is a particular processes of alteration by which one sentence structure is converted into another sentence structure without any change in the meaning. The changing of deep structure to surface structure is via transformation consists of adjunction, substitution, and deletion.

Meanwhile, Sampson (1980) defined the term of transformational rule as a rule which operates on the hierarchical structure assigned to a morpheme sequence by a constituent



grammar, and alters it into a new hierarchical structure in way which modifies the string of morphemes acting as levels of the tree.

Akmajian and Henry (1975) stated that transformation means preserving of two surface structures derive from exactly the same underlying structure and if their derivations differ only in that an optional transformation has applied in one but not the other, than they must have the same meaning.

Transformational Rules

Movement

According to Ouhalla (1999), all movement transformations have in common the property of moving a category from one position to another in the phrase markers. This fact suggests the possibility of reducing all movement transformations to a single general process which performs all the operations previously performed by individual transformations.

Assignment of Semantic Roles

For Dowty (1989), the four characteristics that theories of thematic roles are Completeness (Every argument of every verb is assigned some thematic role or other.), Uniqueness (Every argument of every verb is assigned only one thematic role.), Distinctness (Every argument of every verb is distinguished from the other arguments by the role it is assigned.) and Independence (Each role is given a consistent semantic definition that applies to all verbs and all situations.)

Deletion

Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1968) argued that there are five kinds of deletion. These are noun phrase deletion, linking verb deletion, verb phrase deletion, imperative deletion, and deletion under identity.

Substitution

According to Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1968), it is a technique used to determine an expression which can be substituted using another expression in phrases or sentences like that in which it occurs by another expression.

Language Learning Strategies

O'Malley, et.al (2007) stressed that learning strategies of these good language learners, once identified and successfully taught to less proficient learners, are potentially "an extremely



powerful learning tool” because they could facilitate the development of second language skills.

Oxford (1999) identified six language learning strategies divided into two categories. These are the direct strategies and indirect strategies. Under the direct strategies are the memory, cognitive, and compensation. On the other hand, under indirect strategies are the metacognitive, affective, and social.

Rebecca Oxford in 1990 developed the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) to fulfil the need for a standardized tool that could be used for strategy assessment. To date, it is considered the most well-structured and most comprehensively written questionnaire (Nunan, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative-descriptive method of research to determine the difficulties, level of competence, and language learning strategies used in changing sentences from deep into surface structure of the junior high school students for the school year 2021-2022.

Research Setting

The setting of the study was at Alfreda Albano National High School, Masipi Annex. It is located at Masipi East, Cabagan Isabela in which the learning modality is Printed Modular Distance Learning.

Research Participants

The sources of data of this study were the 80 junior high school students at Alfreda Albano National High School Masipi Annex. The students were the primary sources of the data from which the researcher determined their difficulties, level of competence, and language learning strategies used in changing sentences from deep into surface structure by administering a researcher-made test and survey questionnaires.

Research Instrument

There were two instruments in the study: a researcher-made test, and two survey questionnaires that covered the difficulties and language learning strategies used in changing the structure of the sentences from deep into surface. Meanwhile, techniques done to validate the data were discussion with colleagues and item analysis.

Questionnaire

A 25-item survey questionnaire adopted and modified from the study of Susanti (2018) was used to gather information on difficulties of the junior high school students in changing sentences from deep into surface structure.



Meanwhile, a 25-item structured questionnaire based on the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) of Rebecca Oxford (1990) was used to gather data on the language learning strategies used by the respondents.

Teacher-Made Test

A 40-item test was used to determine the level of competence of the junior high school students in changing sentences from their deep into surface structure. The test covered the transformational rules which include movement, assignment of semantic rules, deletion, and substitution (Jacobs and Rosenbaum, 1968).

Statistical Tools

This study made use of mean, frequency, percentage, and 5-point Likert scale to determine difficulties and language learning strategies used in changing sentences from deep into surface structure.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was sought from the school head to virtually float the test and survey questionnaire. The researcher conducted a virtual orientation with the respondents to ensure the reliability of the data gathered. After the test and survey questionnaire were properly accomplished, these were collected, verified, collated and tabulated for analysis and interpretation.

With the generous assistance from the parents and subject teacher, the researcher conducted online the achievement test and survey questionnaire in a room that is well-ventilated and noise-free to ensure a pleasant and satisfying atmosphere for the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the results, findings, discussions and interpretation of data gathered.

Difficulties in the Structural Transformation

Result of the test shows that 53 students failed to transform the sentences in movement transformation and assignment of semantic rules. These sentences are:

1. *The woman put out the fire.* -Movement Transformation
2. *The little boy saw him murdered the old man.* – Movement Transformation
3. *The boy broke the window with a rock.*- Assignment of Semantic Rules



Based on the data gathered, students transformed the sentence, “The woman put out the fire.” into 1) The fire puts the woman out. 2) The woman is fired out. and 3) The woman puts the fire.

Also, the sentence “The little boy saw him murdered the old man.” was transformed into: 1) The little boy murdered the old man. 2) The old man was murdered by the little boy. and 3) The old man murdered the little boy.

Meanwhile, the sentence “The boy broke the window with a rock.” was transformed into 1) They broke the window with a rock. 2) The window was being broken by them. and 3) The rock was broken.

This points out that students have a hard time moving constituents from one position into another in a sentence through set of conditions on rule application which will specify how movement rules can, and cannot, apply. Ouhalla (1999) has the same opinion. He said that all movement transformations have in common the property of moving a category from one position to another in the phrase markers. This fact suggests the possibility of reducing all movement transformations to a single general process which performs all the operations previously performed by individual transformations.

Weighted Mean on the Difficulties in Changing Deep Structure into Surface Structure

The students were assessed on the difficulties in changing deep structure into surface structure. Result of assessment shows that the dominant types of difficulties faced by students were: applying each rule in subject- verb agreement in sentence construction (3.45), constructing a sentence based on the tenses of verb (3.43), distinguishing the parts of speech (3.36), making a question from a statement based on the tense that is used (3.31), constructing the words in supporting the ideas (3.23), and distinguishing the differences of each transformational rule (3.23).

According to the study of Susanti (2018), it was found out that the dominant types of difficulties faced by students in learning transformations were lack of motivation to study, lack of understanding about English grammar, and lack of understanding about English parts of speech and phrases.

This implies that the country needs to scale up with its efforts to improve the teaching and learning of English to improve one’s ability to communicate in a particular language.

Mean Scores of Students in the 40-Item English Test

A 40-item examination was used to investigate the level of competence of the junior high school students in changing deep structure into surface structure.

Table 1

Competency Level of the Junior High School Students Based on 40-Item Test

Number of Respondents	Mean Score	Competency Level
80	10.8125	Low

An overall mean score of 10.81 was attained and which is described as Low achievement level. 53 (66.25%) of students fail to transform correctly the sentences, “The woman put out the fire.”, “The little boy saw him murdered the old man.” and “The boy broke the window with a rock.”

This implies that students cannot remember bits of information being taught for a year. This supports the theory of Peterson and Peterson (1959) that the longer the delay, the less information is recalled. The rapid loss of information from memory when rehearsal is prevented is taken as an indication of short term memory having a limited duration.

Weighted Mean on the Extent of the Language Learning Strategies of Students

Table 2

The next table presents the assessment of the language learning strategies of the junior high school students.

Extent of the Language Learning Strategies of the Students

Learning Strategies	Mean	Description
Memory	3.5	Generally Not True of Me
Cognitive	3.57	Generally Not True of Me
Compensation	3.33	Somewhat True of Me
Metacognitive	3.47	Generally Not True of Me
Affective	3.50	Generally Not True of Me
Social	3.45	Generally Not True of Me
Overall	3.47	Generally Not True of Me

Reflected in Table 2 is the extent to which the language learning strategies are true to the students in the following six categories: memory (3.5), cognitive (3.57), compensation (3.33), metacognitive (3.47), affective (3.50) and social (3.45).

The result shows that all of the language learning strategies yielded an overall mean of 3.47 which was described as Generally Not True to students. The areas of Cognitive, Memory and Affective may be attributed to several factors. For Cognitive, it can be considered that students find difficulty in transferring words from first language to second language to make new sentences. On the other hand, the high mean in the Memory aspect is most probably due to difficulty in placing new words and language into a sentence, conversation or story. Or oftentimes, students cannot make use of visual images to relate new information to meaningful information with concepts already memorized. Meanwhile, the Affective aspect is most probably due to high anxiety in learning English, not encouraging themselves to be motivated in learning English, and also uncontrolled emotion in learning a language.



Weimer (2002) claimed that in practice, most lectures do not engage students or motivate them to take responsibility for what and how they learn. Lectures tend to encourage passivity and make students dependent on the teacher. As a result, teachers are rightly encouraged to rely less on lectures and to explore other methods.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of this study, the dominant types of difficulties faced by students were the difficulty in applying each rule in sentence construction, constructing a sentence based on the tenses of verb, difficulty in distinguishing the parts of speech, difficulty in making a question from a statement based on the tense that is used, difficulty in constructing the words in supporting the ideas, and difficulty in distinguishing the differences of each transformational rule. On the other hand, the competency level of the students is at low level while the utilization of language learning strategies is generally not true to junior high school students.

Based on the conclusions, the researcher recommends that teachers and administrators should provide the students varied reading and learning materials on subject-verb agreement to enhance their grammatical competence. Also, they are encouraged to conduct home visitations to further understand the real situations and needs of the students which affect their academic performance. As classroom managers, they should endeavour to find the language teaching and learning strategies that can be adopted to improve not only the learning outcomes but also the personality development of the students. Moreover, English language teachers must establish a simple yet practical feedback mechanism to encourage students to make suggestions in improving their learning strategies and employing a combination or assortment of all possible techniques to help them attain better learning proficiency. In other vein, they need to re-evaluate their capabilities and level of interest to welcome challenges for self-improvement towards gaining excellence in performing their essential yet primordial role of enhancing students' language learning outcomes.

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