

English Grammar Competence Of Filipino College Freshmen

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Abstract

Instructional materials on fundamental English grammar are required to develop English proficiency among first-year technology students. The study is organized around Dewey and Kolb's active learning theories and knowledge construction. This study aimed to ascertain the basic English grammar proficiency of first-year technology students at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University and to produce a worktext as an output. The researcher collected data for analysis using the descriptive method and a validated Achievement Test. The study discovered that the subjects were moderately competent in basic English grammar but excelled in the correct use of conjunctions, prepositions, possessive forms of nouns, and verb tenses; they were weak in the pronoun-antecedent relationship, noun pluralization, subject-verb agreement, adverb, and pronoun types, adjectives and adverbs order, and adjectives' degree of comparison. A validated Worktext for Basic English Grammar was developed.

Keywords: Competence, English Grammar, Parts of Speech, Subject-verb Agreement

Introduction

According to Edward Sapir, language is not just a vehicle for expressing thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a particular society. Still, it is also a representation of basic expressions of social identity. Moreover, Sapir said, "the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language." As a result, the retention of language helps maintain an environment of cultural kinship.

Language is one way to enhance knowledge, and in the modern world, knowledge is a critical factor in competitiveness. Brains and knowledge create prosperity and development that sometimes we tend to take for granted. In an advanced and innovative industrial society with increased demand, other languages' knowledge becomes obligatory. The advent and influence of the Internet have changed the lives of others. For decades, hundreds and millions of people in the entire world, who share common interests and goals, have been able to speak, communicate, and actuate with each other and exchange ideas, thoughts, and feelings. People manage to do all of these things not just because of technological advances, but they share a common language.

Undeniably, the knowledge and skills in English language usage are essential tools

available to young generations. English is one of the international languages in the world and a pathway of communication between or among countries, cultural groups/tribes, various enormous companies, organizations, communities, and friends (Kilgour, 2009).

Alexander (2006) quoted a set of linguists who claimed that language is nothing but 'habit formation' based on their assumptions of language in psychology. Moreover, language is learned through use and practice. In their view, "the more one is exposed to the use of language, the better one learns".

Further, written languages use symbols or characters to build words, sentences, and paragraphs. The totality of a language's words is referred to as its vocabulary. The syntax and grammar of the language are combined in meaningful ways depending on the words used. The semantics of a language defines the actual meanings and combinations of words (Manivannan, 2006).

Carrol (2004) explains that to master the spoken language, the learner must first master the language's phonology (its system of distinct phonetic elements); the language's grammatical structure (including morphology and syntax); and the language's lexicon (the "vocabulary" of forms used in the language and their meaning).

The British Council stated unequivocally that "English is the international language of books, magazines, newspapers, airports, domestic and international air traffic control, international or national business and academic conferences, science, technology, diplomacy, and sport." The syntax and grammar of the language are combined in meaningful ways depending on the words used. The semantics of a language define the actual meanings and combinations of words (Manivannan, 2006). international competitions or activities, music, and advertising. Over two-thirds of the world's scientists and doctors read and write in English. Three-quarters of the world's electronic mail is written in the English language. Eighty percent of the information in the world is electronically stored in English, and eighty percent or an estimated forty million users of the Internet communicate in the English language (De Guzman, 2007).

Moreover, the rise of economic globalization goes hand in hand with the increased use of English. Individuals are encouraged and persuaded to use or send messages in English rather than their native language. Many are unconcerned or believe that this is an inevitable trend toward global uniformity and a way for an increasing number of people to communicate directly with one another.

Roland J. Breton, a geolinguist at the University of Paris, stated that "The spread of English may be seen as a positive development which saves resources and makes cultural exchange easier. After all, it might be said, the advance in English is not aimed at killing off local languages but is simply a means of reaching a wider audience. A person makes a mark through his or her ability to use the most useful language or languages and over several generations, the most useful language eliminates the others."

Association of the Philippines reported that the country's Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry was regarded as a second front runner after India. Today, the Philippines has overtaken the latter in certain aspects of outsourcing. The country has also become the top destination for American companies' back office requirements. These companies

considered Filipinos' cultural inclination and disposition towards Americans and their "proverbial or axiomatic" American accent (Patron, 2008).

In addition, Wallace (2007) expounded that the Philippines is part of an ever-shrinking world, a world whose language for everyday use is English. Some 145,000 Filipinos would not have jobs today (in call centers and BPOs) if they could not speak English. Some 8.5 million Filipinos will be added to the 4.1 million (old and correct definition) unemployed if they do not speak English. They would be stuck here with no job instead of overseas, earning not only enough money to live decently but also enough to allow their family members back here to live decently.

Helen Flores (2010) informed that the general manager of Jobstreet.com, Grace Colet, posted that seventy-five percent of employers rejected job seekers with poor or low competence in oral and written English. Moreover, she even added that the Short Messaging System (SMS) language and the increasing popularity and familiarity of the "jejemon" culture in the country is a social phenomenon or activity where permission is taken with basic grammar and spelling to the point of incoherence.

The crisis of Philippine education is worsening. Quality of learning is deteriorating; school facilities and workbooks are inadequate and obsolete; the cost of education is rising, and campus repression is alarming. Education is failing in its mission to equip young Filipinos with relevant life skills and competence to enable them to confront the challenges of nation-building (<http://kilusan.net/index.ph>, 6 February 2009).

Students enrolled in skilled courses may not consider English their priority subject because they only focus on major subjects. This is an observation among skilled courses that students' written and speaking abilities have depreciated and underestimated because they are just focusing on their skills. Many students could not even construct simple sentences using straight English or identify the correct verb tense in a particular sentence. These are just basic in terms of English Grammar. Confusion in the appropriate use of the different aspects of the

English language is very evident in all the students inside the classroom. As cited by Bado (2004), Robles stated that even the student leaders were visibly groping for words that were not the case when they spoke in Taglish, which is a combination of Filipino Language and English Language (Pimentel, 2002).

At Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, teachers have continuously observed that the students have difficulty expressing themselves in English, mainly because they are not that good at using the various grammatical components in their sentence constructions. Further, the dearth of materials like textbooks, worktexts, and other instructional materials addressing students' grammatical incompetence also contributes to the perceived problem.

The researcher conducted a study on the level of English Grammar Competence of the Filipino Freshmen through an achievement test with the primary goal to produce a validated Basic English Grammar Worktext. This worktext is aimed to address the dearth of instructional materials in the field of essential English grammar learning.

Framework of the Study

As humankind's primary or essential and critical instrument, language has many functions. It serves as man's primary vehicle for thinking, and people cannot think without speaking or speak without thinking. Other uses are as follows: as a means of perception, identification or referential function, categorization, the body of knowledge, role in creative activity, as a record and as human memory, as the agency for conceptualizing and adjusting to space and time, and instrument for action.

Language learning theory is the systematic process by which humans can distinguish, produce and practice words to understand well and communicate clearly. This capacity encompasses the picking up diverse dimensions, including syntax, phonetics, and an extensive vocabulary. Also, language acquisition usually refers to first language acquisition, which studies infants' acquirement of their native language, rather than *second language acquisition*, which deals with the acquisition (in

both children and adults) of additional other languages.

One of the best-known models of language ability is known as "Communicative Competence." This model was developed to account for the kinds of knowledge people need to use language in meaningful interaction. Anthropologist Dell Hymes originally coined the term to describe the knowledge language users need in addition to the grammatical forms of the language. The language teaching community then adopted the term after it had been developed into a model for that field by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (1980), then by Sandra Savignon (1997).

Canale and Swain noted that grammatical competence, which encompasses fundamental grammatical principles such as knowledge of lexical items as well as rules of morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology, is critical for the development of learners' communicative competence, as it equips them with the ability to express themselves accurately.

In 1990, Bachman presented his model of communicative language ability (CLA), where he directed his attention toward both knowledge and abilities. He considers that the elements of the two competencies mentioned by Canale and Swain (grammatical and sociolinguistic competence) are so closely related that he associated them with language competence. Thus, this component involves language usage and notions of forming a text (organizational competence) and functions and discourse in the appropriate contexts (pragmatic competence).

One of the areas of communicative competence is linguistic competence. The researcher will focus on this area that uses a structural grammar approach to achieving communicative competence, ultimately leading to the attainment of functional (English) Grammar.

Structural Grammar is an approach to the written and spoken language that focuses on the mechanics and construction of sentences. This approach is very important in studying Basic Grammar skills or the basic parts of speech.

Christie (1991) described functional Grammar, wherein Grammar is used to construct

texts or words in their context of use. It is concerned with genuine language and not just with the examples of language that can be found in many language tests, exercises, worksheets, or traditional grammar books. Its application and implementation are not restricted to the analysis of isolated sentences. It elucidates how sentences or paragraphs are structured to construct whole texts such as stories, essays, articles, and reports that students learn to read and write in primary and secondary school. Also, functional grammar focuses on how grammar is organized to make meaning because it is concerned with meaning related directly to the concerns of teachers and learners in all subject areas.

There are two kinds of language symbols: the vocabulary elements that include thousands and thousands of words that can be found not in sentences but random list, in dictionaries, spelling books, and the glossary sections of foreign language textbooks. The other kind is the grammatical elements, including grammar, the study of a system of language code symbols, and the meanings these symbols express. Grammar dictates how the language is to be used with propriety and should ultimately aim at making people proficient in communication skills, thereby underscoring its social value because, in Grammar, "correct" can only mean socially acceptable (Robles, 2000).

There are three fundamentals of Grammar. First are parts of speech categorized into content words like nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. The second fundamental is the grammatical relations such as the case, modification, reference, tense, and mode. The third is the three methods of establishing grammatical relations: inflection, word order and punctuations, and relational words. (Robles, 2000)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is learner-centered, emphasizes communication and real-life situations, and emphasizes learning and acquiring to communicate through interaction and speaking in the target language. In CLT, the teacher serves as a facilitator than the usual function, allowing learners to be in charge of their learning through interactive exercises and instructional materials. The teacher sets up

exercises or activities and gives direction to the class, but the students do much more speaking or talking than in a traditional classroom. This responsibility to partake can often lead them to an increased sense of self-confidence in using the language-life situations. In the CLT scenario, the emphasis is on communicating a message using correct and standardized Grammar.

Language is the memory agent and a significant vehicle whereby one transmits, imparts, sends, and receives actualized experiences. Employing language, man can race mentally through space and time. It has been how the skills and wisdom of the race could be compared and factually and logically tested. It is more than an instrument for conveying ideas, more even than an instrument for working on the feelings of others and for self-expression.

In learning a language, one should be familiar with communicative competence. There are four areas of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. This study emphasizes grammatical competence.

Grammatical competence is the ability to use the forms of the language (sounds, words, and sentence structure). Moreover, as Valdez (2009) quoted in his study, structural Grammar is an approach to the written and spoken language that focuses on the mechanics and construction of sentences. This approach is very important in studying Basic Grammar Skills or the basic parts of speech.

This study, therefore, will focus on the seven parts of speech which include: nouns that have pluralization and types; pronouns that include types and pronoun-antecedent agreement; verbs which include tenses and subject-verb agreement rules; adjectives which include the degree of comparison and types; adverbs which include the types and distinguishing from adjectives; the utilization of prepositions and conjunctions.

The paradigm shows that inputs include the students' levels of competencies along: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions.

The process involves analysis of the English grammar competence of the Filipino freshmen, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the College freshmen in English

Grammar and lastly, the development of worktext in Basic English Grammar.

The factors may affect the English grammar competence of Filipino freshmen of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University Mid La Union Campus for the school year 2010-2011.

The results of the analyses served as a basis for developing a proposed worktext in Basic English Grammar.

This study aimed to determine the level of English grammar competence of Filipino freshmen of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University Mid La Union Campus as a basis for a Worktext in Basic English Grammar.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of English grammar competence of the Filipino freshmen at DMMMSU along with nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions?
2. What are the students' strengths and weaknesses in English Grammar?
3. What worktext in Basic English Grammar may be proposed?

Methodology

The descriptive method of research design was used in this study. It is primarily designed for the researchers to gather information about present conditions. The study's primary objective was to describe and investigate the nature of the situation as it

existed at the time of the study and investigate the causes of that specific phenomenon. This method studied investigation, which describes and interprets what it is. It is concerned with conditions or relationships or activities, practices that prevail, beliefs and processes that are going on, and effects that are felt on trends being developed (Florendo, 2009).

To collect data for the study, permission to administer the test was secured from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University Mid La Union Campus in the City of San Fernando, La Union.

The researcher-made test was the primary data-gathering instrument of the study. The achievement test (100 items) dealt with the selected grammatical structures focused on nouns (pluralization and possessive form), pronouns (types and pronoun-antecedent relationship), verbs (tenses and subject-verb agreement), adjectives (degree of comparison and order), adverbs (functions and order), conjunctions (correct usage) and prepositions (correct usage).

The validity of the test was determined through content validation. The contents of the achievement test were based on the use of the seven parts of speech. The contents were validated by five English Instructors/Professors.

The test was field-tested on 30 College freshmen of the College of Engineering. The reliability calculator determined the instrument's reliability using the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20.

The following descriptions were used to interpret the computed mean per part of speech:

1. For Pluralization of Nouns, Subject-Verb Agreement, Order of Adjectives, the following scale was used:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent
7.4 – 9.0	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
5.8 – 7.3	Highly Competent (HC)
4.2 – 5.7	Moderately Competent (MC)
2.6 – 4.1	Slightly Competent (SC)
1.0 - 2.5	Not Competent (NC)

2. For Possessive Form of Nouns, Degree of Comparison, the following scale was used:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent
4.4 – 5.0	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
3.4 – 4.3	Highly Competent (HC)
2.6 – 3.3	Moderately Competent (MC)
1.8 – 2.5	Slightly Competent (SC)
1.0 - 1.7	Not Competent (NC)

3. For Types of Pronouns, Pronoun-Antecedent, Tenses of Verbs, Types of Adverbs, Order of Adverbs the following scale was used:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent
5.8 – 7.0	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
4.6 – 5.7	Highly Competent (HC)
3.4 – 4.5	Moderately Competent (MC)
2.2 – 3.3	Slightly Competent (SC)
1.0 - 2.1	Not Competent (NC)

4. For Prepositions and Conjunctions, the following scale was used:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent
11.4 – 14.0	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
8.8 – 11.3	Highly Competent (HC)
6.2 – 8.7	Moderately Competent (MC)
3.6 – 6.1	Slightly Competent (SC)
1.0 – 3.5	Not Competent (NC)

5. For the sub-means and overall means, the following scale was used:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent
11.8 – 14.0	Very Highly Competent (VHC)
9.1 – 11.7	Highly Competent (HC)
6.4 – 9.0	Moderately Competent (MC)
3.7 – 6.3	Slightly Competent (SC)
1.0 – 3.6	Not Competent (NC)

To determine the strengths and weaknesses of the respondents in English grammar, the researcher used a 7-point scale. The means which fell within the 1.00-4.5 range were interpreted as weaknesses while means which fell within 4.6-7.0 were interpreted as strengths.

Results and Discussion

Level of English Grammar Competence of Filipino Freshmen

The table presents the level of English grammar competence of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University Filipino Freshmen along with nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions.

Level of English Grammar Competence of Filipino Freshmen

Indicator	Mean	DER
1. Nouns	8.44	MC
2. Pronoun	7.79	MC
3. Verbs	8.15	MC
4. Adjectives	8.90	MC
5. Adverbs	8.85	MC
6. Prepositions	6.68	MC
7. Conjunctions	6.71	MC
Grand Mean	8.01	MC

It shows that the Filipino freshmen of Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

were Moderately Competent in their Level of English Grammar Competence with a grand

mean of 8.01. Generally, this implies that the respondents are not yet competent in the different basic English grammar rules. This means that they still need to learn much about the rules of Grammar. This may have been influenced by respondents' exposure to the English language in various ways – through their spoken language at home and in the community, through the language they read. Through the way, they construct sentences in English.

Of the different indicators on the level of English grammar competence, the students were Very Highly Competent on the Correct Usage of Conjunctions, on the Correct Usage of Prepositions with weighted means of 6.71 and 6.68, respectively. This implies that the Filipino freshmen have not fully mastered the rules in determining the correct use of conjunctions and prepositions in sentences. This means that they should still have more exercises further to enhance the correct usage of conjunctions and prepositions.

This jives with the study of Corpuz (1994) on "Languages affecting daily conversations" and found out that Filipinos use their native language at home because it is already an established mode of communication inside the household. This implies that learning another language like English could be difficult for learners who are accustomed to their native language, especially in identifying correct Grammar.

Moreover, this confirms the study of Velasco (2002) on the most common errors in English Grammar of the senior students of Baguio Central University that exposure to reading materials like pocketbooks can significantly influence the students' performance in English.

Thus, reading pocketbooks in English and Filipino can develop their understanding of English Grammar because they become more

exposed to the syntactic composition of English sentences.

However, the respondents were Moderately Competent, and the ruling indicator regarding nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs registered a mean of 8.44, 7.79, 8.15, 8.90, and 8.85, respectively. This indicates that the students lack the necessary competence and knowledge of adjective rules, such as the degree of comparison and the use of adverbs, particularly the order of adverbs.

Strengths and Weaknesses in English Grammar

The table above shows the strengths and weaknesses in English Grammar of Filipino Freshmen along with nouns (pluralization and possession), pronouns (types and pronoun-antecedent), verbs (tenses and subject-verb agreement/voices), adjectives (degree of comparison and order), adverbs (functions and order), prepositions (correct usage) and conjunctions (correct usage).

The students have strengths in English Grammar along with four specific rule indicators. These indicators include correct usage of conjunctions, correct usage of prepositions, the possessive form of nouns, and verb tenses with registered means of 6.71, 6.68, 4.66, 4.63, and 4.35, respectively.

This shows that the students have sufficient knowledge and skills in determining the correct possessive form of nouns, relating tenses of verbs, and proper usage of prepositions and conjunctions in sentences.

These results agree with the study of Valdez (2009) entitled, "English Grammar Competence of Saint Louis College High School Senior Students," revealing that the students are competent with pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions.

Strengths and Weaknesses in English Grammar Competence of Filipino Freshmen

Competency/Indicators	Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Nouns		
1.1. Pluralization		3.78
1.2. Possession	4.66	
2. Pronoun		

2.1. Types		3.44
2.2. Pronoun- Antecedent		4.35
3. Verbs		
3.1. Tenses	4.63	
3.2. Subject-Verb Agreement		3.60
4. Adjectives		
4.1. Degree of comparison		2.95
4.2. Order of Adjectives		3.29
5. Adverbs		
5.1. Types		3.46
5.2. Order of Adverbs		3.02
6. Prepositions		
6.1. Correct Usage	6.68	
7. Conjunctions		
7.1. Correct Usage	6.71	

However, the students' weaknesses in English Grammar lie along with pronoun-antecedent relationship, pluralization of nouns, subject-verb agreement, types of adverbs, types of pronouns, order of adjectives, order of adverbs, and degree of comparison for adjectives with means of 4.35, 3.78, 3.60, 3.46, 3.44, 3.29, 3.02 and 2.95 respectively. This denotes that most of the students are still confused in checking the correct pronoun-antecedent relationship, correct use on the pluralization of nouns, determining types of pronouns, rules in subject-verb agreement, identifying adjectives, and adverbs and could lead to erroneous Grammar.

This jibes with Valdez's (2009) and Abrenica's (2002) study, revealing that the respondents are weak in English Grammar, particularly with the given indicators in the specific topics on subject-verb agreement and adjectives.

Worktext in English Basic English Grammar

Based on the study results, a worktext in English Basic English Grammar was developed to enhance the incoming College freshmen's English grammar proficiency. The Grammar contains all the topics considered in the study, such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and conjunction.

Since they were generally rated as moderately competent in the aspect of Basic English grammar and English grammar areas,

the worktext in English 100 (Basic English grammar) had been developed and validated.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Filipino freshmen at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Mid-La Union Campus, have mastered the fundamentals of English grammar and usage and are proficient in determining the correct use of conjunctions, applying the correct use of prepositions, determining the possessive form of nouns, and checking verb tenses, but have not mastered the bare minimum skills in the use of rules on pronoun-antecedent relationship, pluralization of nouns, subject-verb agreement, and reviewing verb tenses. Hence, Worktext in Basic English Grammar may be utilized to enhance their basic grammar skills.

It is recommended that Filipino Freshmen students should expose themselves to factors that will help them improve their competency level in English and should strive to use the language in their daily conversations in their homes and even in the community. Moreover, they should develop their Basic English Grammar specifically in a pronoun-antecedent relationship, pluralization of nouns, determining types of pronouns, subject-verb agreement, adjectives (degree of comparison and order), and adverbs (types and order) by answering some instructional materials like Worktext or exercises/activities to be familiarized with the rules. Finally, they should

be given instructional materials like a Worktext to enhance their Basic English Grammar. The proposed Worktext in Basic English Grammar must still be subjected to a reliability test to improve further or enrich it. Additionally, the proposed Worktext should be fully utilized by English Instructors/Professors to enhance the students' learning experiences. It should be used as a guide and follow-up learning activity or a formative test for all learners. The institution must adopt the worktext to benefit the teachers and the students.

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