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**Sentence Pattern Method -
A New Approach for Teaching Spoken English
for Tamil / Indian / EFL Learners**

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Abstract

This paper discusses a new methodology, Sentence Pattern Method (SPM), for teaching spoken English for EFL learners. The SPM helps a learner to convert his/her thoughts (in mother tongue) into English sentences very easily. The paper also discusses five important rules for developing spoken English fluency for the learner in a very short time. The SPM was tested with school students, arts and engineering graduates of Tamil medium. It was found out that the learner showed great interest in learning the spoken English and starts speaking English without fear. In other words, the learner started speaking English without worrying about the errors and the nervousness of the learner was reduced considerably.

Keywords: Spoken English, Tamil, Sentence pattern method, Sentence structure, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

1. Introduction

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The main objective of the Sentence Pattern Method (SPM) is to make the learner speak English fluently the way he/she speaks his/her mother tongue.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the sentence pattern method; Section 3 discusses five rules for developing fluency in spoken English; Section 4 describes the case study with Tamil students and lists out the difficulties that prevent the students from speaking English fluently; Section 5 discusses the literature review. Finally, the paper ends with conclusion.

2. Sentence Pattern Method (SPM)

Sentence Pattern Method (SPM) is the sentence template that contains constants and variables. This is similar to mathematical formula. Let us consider the following example to understand SPM.

Example situation: Let us assume that a guest come to our home. First we welcome the guest and ask the guest to be seated. Then we may ask the guest what he or she would like to eat or drink. In this, what would be the sentence pattern method to ask the guest politely to have something?

Sentence Pattern Method: Would you like to do sth?

would – constant, you – constant or variable, like – constant, to- constant

do-variable (i.e. refers to Verb)

sth (something) – variable (i.e. refers to noun or complement)

If we ask the guest to eat ice-cream, the variables get the following values: do = eat & sth = ice-cream. Then substituting the variables in the SPM gives the following sentence:

SPM: *Would you like to do sth?*

(Substituting, do = eat & sth = ice-cream in SPM)

Final Sentence: *Would you like to eat ice-cream?*

If we ask the guest to drink apple juice, the final sentence is “*Would you like to drink apple juice?* (here, do = drink & sth = apple juice)

What we understand from the SPM is that forming a sentence is nothing but just substituting the values to the variables in SPM. Likewise, one can form different sentences for different values of the variables. The sentence patterns are available in English dictionaries and specifically the learner can refer to this website www.ldoceonline.com for getting the sentence patterns for different concepts and words.

3. Five Rules for Developing Fluency in Spoken English for Tamil / Indian / EFL Learners

Rule 1: The learner should use the Sentence Pattern Method (SPM) for constructing English sentences.

Rule 2: If one does not know SPM for the particular concept, how to create the sentence for the concept?

Example Concept: Just imagine this situation that you are sitting in the room and you are looking up the roof and you see that the fan is rotating. *Here the main question is how to create the sentence for the fan rotation.* The following steps are used:

Step 1: Find out what is the name of the action.

Step 2: Find out who is the doer of action (i.e. Subject).

Step 3: Write the above names in the following order: (Doer of the action) – (Action name)

Step 4: If the receiver of the action (i.e., Object (O)) and Complement (C) exists, write those (O, C) after the verb. (i.e., S V O C)

Fan rotation example:

Step 1: Find out what is the name of the action (***rotate***)

Step 2: Find out who is the doer of action (i.e. Subject) (***fan***)

Step 3: Write the above names in the following order: (Doer of the action) – (Action name)

(fan) – (rotate)

After adding the article and proper tense, the final sentence will be

The fan is rotating.

The rule 2 seems to be very simple and the main purpose of this rule is that many Tamil learners forget to form the English sentences with the above order. This kind of problem mostly arises for Tamil students and those who have the mother tongue order of the form S O C V.

Rule 3: During the initial stage of English learning, try to construct English sentences with present tense only. Don't use other types of English tenses (i.e., past tense, perfect tense, etc.) at the initial stage of English learning. Tenses actually refer to action timings. To refer action timings or tense, use appropriate timing word. This rule helps the learner to form the sentences very easily and quickly.

Example:

- I came here yesterday (*use this: I come here yesterday*)
- I am walking (*use this: I walk now*)
- I have eaten (*use this: I eat just now*)

Rule 4: Don't use complex English sentences for speaking. The EFL learner must use simple sentences and compound sentences for speaking. *The learner must practice/know how to convert complex sentences into simple and compound sentences.*

Example:

- You see me before leaving this place (*use this: First you see me. Then you leave this place*)
- When I ate in the home I saw my friend (*use this: I ate in the home, at that time, I saw my friend*)
- While eating I was watching TV (*use this: I was eating, meanwhile, I was watching TV*) (here, the actions 'eating' and 'watching' happens at the same time)

- Because of fever I didn't go to school (*use this: I had fever, so I didn't go to school*)

Rule 5: Write down the list of sentences in your mother tongue that (sentences) you spoke or thought last six months. (i.e., if your mother tongue is Tamil, write down the list of sentences in Tamil that you spoke last six months). For each sentence in your mother tongue, learn/know the corresponding English sentence pattern. Table 1 shows the list of sentence patterns for Tamil sentences.

S.No	Tamil Sentences	Sentence Patterns	Final Sentences
1	பர்ஸ் காணவில்லை (purse kanavillai)	<u>sth</u> is missing	<u>Purse</u> is missing
2	சர்க்கரை ஏதாவது மீதி இருக்கிறதா? (sarkarai ethavathu meethi irukkiratha?)	Is there any <u>sth</u> left/remaining?	Is there any <u>sugar</u> left/remaining?
3	கடைக்கு போய் முடி வெட்டிக்கிட்டு வா. (kadaikku poi mudi vetikkittu va)	Have sth1 done sth2 (done-past participle)	Have <u>your hair cut in</u> <u>the saloon/shop.</u>

Table 1: Sentence patterns for a list of Tamil sentences

4. Case Study with Tamil Medium School and College Students in Salem, Tamil Nadu, India.

The SPM has been tested with school students, arts and engineering graduates of Tamil medium. As a first step, the problems that prevent the students from speaking English fluently have been identified. Then the problems are addressed / rectified through the SPM method and the five rules as mentioned above.

The problems that prevent specifically the Tamil medium students from speaking English fluently and suggested solutions for those problems are as follows:

1. Tamil medium students use complex sentences for speaking. In other words, they exactly follow the sentences in the book, newspapers, etc.

- a. Solution: Students are asked to use sentence pattern method to form sentences, asked to use simple and compound sentences for speaking.
2. They speak English very fast as they do in Tamil.
 - a. Solution: Students are asked to speak slowly and tell the English words one by one.
3. They construct English sentences by translating Tamil sentences.
 - a. Solution: Students are asked to use sentence pattern method to form sentences and asked to follow rule 2.
4. Teaching English grammar rules makes them to lose interest in spoken English learning.
 - a. Solution: Students are asked to use sentence pattern method to form sentences and asked to follow rule 3
5. They do not understand non-reference words (such as preposition, timing words, conjunction, etc).
 - a. Solution: English has 256 important non-reference words. Students are taught those words with sentence patterns.
6. They are advised to read English newspapers for developing fluency in spoken English. Reading newspapers will help the students to develop the written English skill.
 - a. Solution: Students are asked to follow rule 5.

4.1 Experiments and Discussions

Ninety students have been taken for the experiment (i.e., spoken English training). Each batch consisted of thirty students and ten members of school students (of 8th standard class to 12th standard class), and had ten members of arts and science graduates and ten members of engineering graduates. There are three batches in total. The total training hour for each batch is thirty hours. There were fifteen sessions in the training. Each session consisted of two hours. The training continued for fifteen days for each batch. The table-2 shows the training plan for fifteen days.

The training gives more focus to SPM, creating sentence pattern for a list of Tamil situations that students will undergo in the future and speech exercise. The important research findings have been identified in the spoken English training conducted for ninety students and they are as follows:

Day	Training Contents	Teaching Methodology
Day 1	Introduction of Language learning process	Lecture
Day 2	Language and its components	Lecture
Day 3	Sentence Pattern Method (SPM)	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 4	Fluency problems	Lecture and demonstration
Day 5	SPM interpretation from www.ldoceonline.com	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 6	Rule 2 – construction of SPM for Tamil situations – Part I	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 7	Rule 2 – construction of SPM for Tamil situations – Part II	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 8	Rule -3 construction of sentences in present tense and teaching timing related words	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 9	Rule – 4 Transformation of complex sentences into simple and compound sentences	Lecture, tutorial and exercises
Day 10	Rule 5 – creating sentence patterns for list of Tamil situations – Part I	Tutorial and exercises
Day 11	Rule 5 – creating sentence patterns for list of Tamil situations – Part II	Tutorial and exercises
Day 12	Rule 5 – creating sentence patterns for list of Tamil situations – Part III	Tutorial and exercises
Day 13	Speech Exercise (Teacher gives Tamil situations and student speaks in English)	Exercise
Day 14	Speech Exercise (Teacher gives Tamil situations and student speaks in English)	Exercise
Day 15	Speech Exercise (Teacher gives Tamil situations and student speaks in English)	Exercise

Table 2: Fifteen days spoken English training plan for Tamil students

1. Students appreciated the importance of SPM approach for converting Tamil sentences into English sentences.
2. Rule 2 (i.e. the sentence order: doer of the action and action) played important role in forming English sentences for Tamil students.
3. The learner who didn't understand the SPM approach did not perform well in the training.
4. Many students followed complex sentences for the speech. They felt very difficult to speak English fluently. They were advised to use compound sentences and as a result they spoke very well and felt comfortable.
5. Some students gained more confidence in the training by just understanding the fluency problems and the SPM.
6. The learners felt more confident in speaking English sentences in present tense and using timing related words. Surprisingly, at the end of the training they started to use correct tenses for the English sentences.
7. The non-reference words helped the students to describe their situations very accurately. They understood that the non-reference words were important for spoke English.
8. Knowing the English sentence patterns for Tamil situations played major role in enhancing the student's spoken English fluency. Every student appreciated this exercise and they participated in the class very actively.
9. All the students had the confidence in speaking English. Many students started to use broken English sentences when they didn't know the exact sentence pattern for the given Tamil situation.

The findings clearly showed that the learner showed great interest in learning the spoken English and started speaking English without fear. In other words, the learner started speaking English without worrying about the errors and the nervousness of the learner was reduced considerably.

5. Literature Review

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Skehan (1998) and Foster (2001) mentioned the formulaic expressions, which are called in this paper as Sentence Pattern Method (SPM). It was mentioned that the formulaic expressions played the important role in second language acquisition and native speakers have been shown to use a much larger number of formulaic expressions than even advanced second language learners. Ellis (1984) and Myles, Mitchell, and Hooper (1998) demonstrated that learners often internalize the formulaic expressions and reuse them for different situations by substituting variables. Ellis (2005) proposed ten principles for language learning, which play the important role in designing the curriculum for spoken English teaching. Rebecca (2006) and Prabhu (1987) discussed the task based language teaching and learning and it is based on the concept that effective learning occurs when students are fully engaged in a language task, rather than just learning about language and tasks comprise the foundation of the curriculum.

In this paper, the task of creating English sentence patterns for Tamil situations played an important role in second language learning. Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses: the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982). Nation (2005) discussed how to teach a vocabulary for effective English learning. The learning burden or constituent parts of vocabulary consists of three components such as meaning, form and use.

The SPM covers these three aspects of vocabulary and it helps the learner to remember multiple meanings of a word. Nation (2003) discussed the role first language or mother tongue in English language learning and it showed that teaching the vocabulary in the first language gives the better understanding of the meaning. Similarly, in this paper the vocabulary was taught in the first language (Tamil) and its sentence pattern was given in the target language (English). This gave a good impact on vocabulary and language learning particularly for Tamil students.

6. Conclusion

This paper proposed a new methodology, Sentence Pattern Method (SPM), for teaching spoken English for Tamil learners. The SPM helped a learner to convert his/her thoughts (in mother tongue) into English sentences very easily. The paper also discussed five important rules for developing spoken English fluency for the learner in a very short time. The ten principles of instructed language learning of Ellis (2005) helped very much to design the fifteen days spoken English training plan. Many of the Tamil students appreciated spoken English training through SPM approach and they started speaking English without worrying about the errors. The nervousness of the learner was reduced considerably.

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