

## **RAISING STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF SUBJECT-VERB USING POWERPOINT**

**Nuria Mufidah, Chatarini S.N.L, & R.Silvia Andayani**

*[nuriamufidah@gmail.com](mailto:nuriamufidah@gmail.com)*

*Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Bahasa Dan Sastra Satya Widya Surabaya*

### **Introduction**

Many students in higher learning institutions struggle with their English lesson and still have problems regarding sentence structure. Even though they have been learning English for about 12 years in school, they still have problems in applying the grammar rules. Consequently, many of them failed in English proficiency test which is required to meet various purposes in university. The test result of English proficiency tests gathered from several higher institutions revealed that structure section frequently gets the lowest score. This can be understood since most of the students still have problems in understanding the basic concept of English sentence structure, especially dealing with subject and verb as the most important elements in a sentence and the most dominating test items in paper-based English proficiency test (structure and written expression section).

Subject- verb is very vital in language and conveys the extent to which a user of the language has internalized the rule. However, English language learners at various levels of education frequently reveal some errors in identifying subject and verb. The reasons are various: some do not know the form of subject-verb, some do not know or forget the rules and the others did not understand the function of subject-verb in sentences.

According to Stapa and Izahar (2010), errors committed by the learners revealed the true state of second language learners' proficiency of the new language they are learning at a particular point of time. Errors also revealed what the second language learners do not know and what they have internalized of the new language system. Addressing this issue, we should investigate the grammar teaching in the classroom which in practice never considers the language processing stages. According to Skehan (2002) grammar teaching should apply these four stages: noticing the input, patterning the input for further analysis and generalization, controlling the analyzed knowledge in production, and lexicalizing or variegating the patterns learned to suit different communicative or situational context. This paper will focus only on the first required stage, noticing, using Powerpoint™ as a learning media to promote noticing in English proficiency test preparation class to investigate whether the use of Powerpoint™ could help students recognize the subject-verb in sentences and improve their grammar competence.

The decision to use this application was based several reasons:1) The use of computer can enhance learning. 2) It provides features that can be used to promote noticing strategy. (2) Basically, it is easy and simple to use (3) It is used by both students and teachers in academic world.

## Theoretical Framework

Dealing with grammar learning, many researchers agree that explicit knowledge (conscious learning) can have some impact on implicit knowledge and students experiencing explicit grammar instruction achieve a better grammar accuracy than those who do not (Ellis, 2002, p.19). To support this, Schmidt (1990), identifies three aspects of consciousness involved in language learning process: awareness, intention and knowledge. Consciousness as awareness, embraces noticing. Batstone (1996) stated that noticing is the idea that if learners pay attention to the form and meaning of certain language structures in input, this will contribute to the internalization of the rule. The underlying claim of all these theoretical approaches is that some form of attention is crucial in promoting further processing of grammatical information in adult learners' L2. This can be achieved by making more salient grammatical forms in the input (Sharwood Smith, 1993). Leow (1997) stated that highlighting or making salient the forms through the use of typographic manipulation (e.g., larger type sizes and different typefaces) and typographic cues, (e.g., bolding, colour shading and coding, underlining, and uppercasing etc.) (p.167) can be done to draw L2 learners' attention to targeted form. Additionally, Bialystok (1978) has provided a theoretical framework that allows a role for conscious knowledge, and Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985) have argued that 'consciousness raising', drawing learners attention to the formal properties of language, facilitates language learning. Eventually, Cross (2002) suggests factors that draw attention to certain features in input: *Explicit instruction* (instruction explaining and drawing attention to a particular form), *Frequency* (the regular occurrence of a certain structure in input), *Perceptual Salience* (highlighting or underlining to draw attention to a certain structure), *Task Demands* (constructing a task that requires learners to notice a structure in order to complete it).

To support this strategy, computer applications will be used for two major reasons. First, many empirical evidence have proven that the use of computer has successfully improved students' learning. Second, computer applications provide tools with multi-sensory features which meet the need of today's students and accommodate students' different learning styles.

PowerPoint™ is selected for its features which can be used to promote noticing strategy. Their easy and quick access to those applications are the main reasons for integrating them in grammar teaching. Another reason is that they could perform eye-catching tasks which could draw the learners' attention better than the instructors do. These applications will be used to assist learning, complementing the teaching strategy being used.

## Methods

As an application designed for promoting noticing strategy, PowerPoint™ presentation is modified by applying VB script to create exercises to help students identify Subject and Verb in sentences. Several exercises containing targeted forms were presented during practice session. The participants were 13 students of English proficiency test preparation class but only 3 students were excluded because of their attendance. Two kinds of tests were given before and after the program. In the first test students should identify the subject and verb in 15 sentences. The second was grammar test.

## Findings and Discussion

The collected data revealed that the use of PowerPoint™ exercise helped students notice the subject-verb in sentences as reported in table below. The first table shows the students' ability in identifying subject-verb in sentences given before and after the PowerPoint™ exercises were

presented. In the pretest most students made more than 50% mistakes in identifying the subject-verb in 15 sentences and in the posttest almost all students made improvements in identifying subject-verb in the same sentences (figure1).

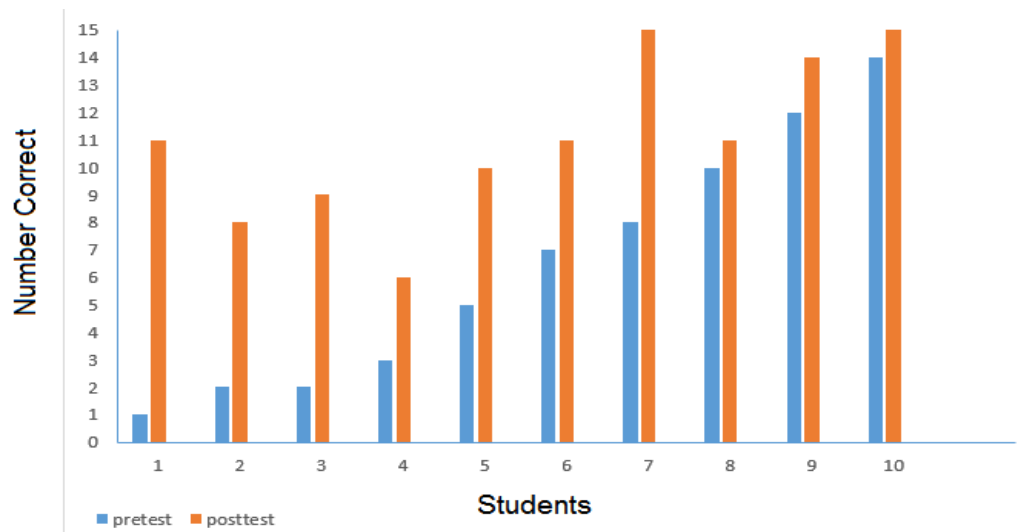


Figure 1. Pretest and Posttest results of Subject-Verb Identification Test

In the posttest students made less mistakes in identifying subject and verb in the same sentences. The second test was grammar test given before and after the program.

In grammar test the result varied as presented in the chart below (figure2):

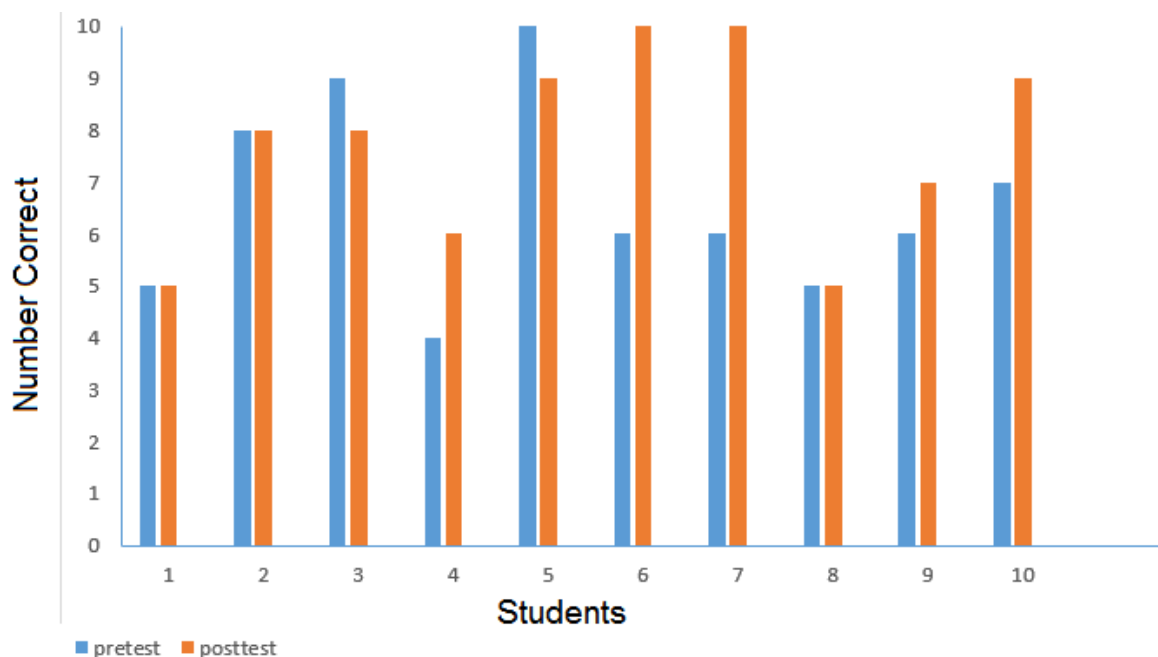


Figure2. Pretest and Posttest results of Grammar Test

From the chart above it is clearly seen that 50% of the students improved their ability in completing grammar test, 30% stayed the same, and 20% experienced a decline. This can be explained since in this grammar test they should perform higher level of thinking skill. They are required to analyze the sentences focusing on subject and verb.

About the use of PowerPoint™ exercises in helping students recognize subject-verb, 70% stated that it was helpful and 30% of students claimed it was very helpful. This can be seen from their expressions when doing the exercises. The feedback score at the end of the exercises gave them curiosity and motivation for the next activities. Most of them wanted to repeat the exercises.

From the results above we can conclude that PowerPoint™ exercises used in this study have successfully helped students recognize or identify subject-verb and improve their grammar competence. Additionally, they also give the students positive feeling which is also needed in the learning process.

However, some constraints found during the teaching and learning process should be considered for better results. First, item for exercises should be selected carefully with graded level of difficulties, focusing on the targeted forms. Second, since it involves digital devices, technical problems should be anticipated.

Dealing with the computer application, PowerPoint™ has several weaknesses that might be considered for further research, especially for software developers:

1. PowerPoint™ exercises can only be used in tablet, laptop or personal computer. They cannot be used in mobile device since the VB script is not compatible with Android platform. Mobile platforms would be more applicable and fit the need of the students of this century.
2. PowerPoint™ exercises used in this study require complicated script, so not all teachers can create this kind of exercises. Simple Tutorials should be made to help teachers who want to modify or create their own exercises.
3. PowerPoint™ exercises does not provide a ready template for this kind of exercises. An easy and simple template would be very helpful.
4. PowerPoint™ exercises used in this study require complicated coding process in creation, therefore another simpler platform should be developed.

To summarize, noticing strategy can help students recognize subject-verb better with the help of specifically designed PowerPoint™ exercises involving VB script. This strategy also can increase students' grammar competence. Improvements and developments are needed for larger scope, both for researcher and software developers for similar needs in the future.

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