

Ill-Formed Phrases and Ambiguity of Sentence Meaning in Students Sentence Writing

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Abstract--Being able to compile their own academic writing is one of college students' main goals. They can generally make some good sentences yet they often make mistakes when they create phrases. The phrases which are formed wrongly will be called ill-formed phrases in this paper. This paper illustrates which ill formed phrases, the reconstruction of phrase meaning and the reconstruction of the sentence meaning. The methodology of this research is descriptive qualitative research. Syntax theories, semantics and some general linguistics theories are used in this paper. The objective of this research are to identify ill-formed phrase construction in students' work, to reform the phrase meaning and to reform sentence meaning. The result of this paper concern to the forms of possible ill-form phrases, the phrase reconstruction in students' works and threconstruction of the sentence meaning.

Key words—Possible Ill-Formed Phrases, Phrase Reconstruction, The Reconstruction of Sentence Meaning

1. Introduction

Students generally make some good sentences in their writings yet they often make mistakes when they create phrases. The phrases which are formed wrongly will be called ill-formed phrases in this paper. These ill-formed phrases have unusual constructions and unusual meanings and this, of course, affect the meaning of the sentences in which they are used. These unusual constructions and unusual meanings are in contrast to English syntactic and semantic theories.

A phrase is a series of words which has meaning. Chaer (2003:222) states that a phrase is a grammatical unit which is in a form of predicative word combination, or normally it is known as word combination which fills one of syntactic function in a sentence whereas Miller (2002: 17) states that phrase is applied only to sequences of more than a word. In addition, Saeed (2001: 11) states that in Chomsky's model of grammar the phrase structure rules build sentences and thus provide the link between individual words in the lexicon and the semantic component, which then combines the meanings of individual words into overall sentence meanings.

Words, phrases, clauses and sentences carry meaning. Hofmann (1993: 12) states that "Meaning, which is often called sense compared to reference, is something which can be understood from the word itself and can be separated from the use of context. Therefore, the meaning is not changed and it depends on the speaker."

The objective of this research are to identify ill-formed phrase construction in students' work, to reform the phrase meaning and to reform sentence meaning.

There are three kinds of theories used in this paper. The first is general linguistics theories compiled by Chaer (2003), O'Grady et.al (1989), and Traugott and Pratt (1980). The second is syntax theory which is compiled by Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001). The last is semantics compiled by Saeed (2001) and Griffiths (2006).

2. Literature Review

O'Grady et.al (1989: 128-131) classifies phrases into four types; noun phrases, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, and adverbial phrases whereas Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001:67-70) classifies phrases into five; noun phrases, adjective phrases, adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, and verb phrases.

1. Noun Phrases (NP)

O'Grady et.al (1989: 128-131) defines noun phrases as words which are grouped altogether because all nouns are combined with determiners and adjectives to form larger phrases (for examples: the books and the controversial books in English) whereas Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001: 68) describes a noun phrase as a constituent which has a noun as its head.

Phrase structure base Traugott and Pratt (1980: 133): NP → (DET) N

Note: (DET) or determiners include the articles (a, an, the), the demonstratives or pointers (this, that, these, those), numerals (one, hundreds, five of), and quantifiers (many, some, some of).

2. Adjective Phrases

According to Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001: 68), an adjective phrase is a constituent which has an adjective as its head. For example: very tall (tall is its head) and quite expensive (expensive is its head).

3. Adverbial Phrases

O'Grady et.al (1989: 128-131) adverbial phrases consist of adverbs and certain complement. For examples: English adverbial phrases (very early and very quickly). Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001: 69) describes an adverb phrase is a constituent which has an adverb as its head. For example: very slowly is an adverb phrase with slowly as its head.

4. Prepositional Phrases (PP)

O'Grady et.al [1989: 128-131] state that prepositional phrases are a combination between a preposition and a noun phrase (NP). For example: in the park. According to Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001:69) a prepositional phrase is a constituent which has a preposition as its head. For example: *at the back* is a prepositional phrase with *at* as its head and *on Friday* is a prepositional phrase with *on* as its head.

Phrase structure (Traugott and Pratt 1980: 134; Cirak, 2019): PP → PREP + NP

5. Verb Phrases

Verb phrases are the combination of verbs and noun phrases (NPs) or Prepositional Phrases (PPs). For examples: drop the ball and trip on the boat (O'Grady et.al 1989: 128-131]. Similarly, Traugott and Pratt (1980: 134) states that at a minimum, the verb phrase consists of a main V(erb) and it may be followed by one NP (usually the traditional "object" relation, as in:

- a. John saw two bobcats.
- b. Bill revved his motorbike.

Phrase structure (Traugott and Pratt 1980: 134): VP → V(NP) (PP)

There are many kinds of meaning but in this section I will discuss briefly two meanings which will be helpful while analysing the data. The first one is word meaning. It is a meaning which is a product of naming a thing by using language and which Griffiths (2006: 24) calls it as senses. The second is sentence (literal) meaning. The literal meaning of a sentence is based on just the semantic information that you have from your knowledge of English and is available without wondering who might say or write the words, when or where. No consideration of context is involved (Griffiths, 2006: 6). In addition, Traugott and Pratt (1980: 187) describes sentence meaning as meaning relations that hold between morphemes and lexical items in a sentence. Saeed (2001: 11) also states that sentence meaning is compositional which means that the meaning of the meaning of an expression is determined by the meaning of its component parts and the way in which they are combined.

Since the data are in forms of narration descriptive qualitative method is used in this research. Syntax, semantics and general linguistics theories are used proportionally in this paper. Sugiyono (2007:1) qualitative research exists because there is a change in paradigm in viewing reality/phenomena/symptoms. It has already been mentioned before that the used technique is the qualitative one. Ritchie et al (2003:3) state that "Qualitative gives directives in providing depth understanding of the social world of research participants through learning their social values, their experiences and perspectives." The definition given by Punch (1998:29) expresses that a qualitative research not only uses non-numerical and unstructured data but also, typically, has research questions and methods. He adds that another method is used interpretative description, allowing the writer to describe as well as interpret the signs used including dialogue and narration, camera shots, camera angles and movement, color and lighting.

The techniques of data collection the writer uses are as follows:

1. The writer asked the students to write ten sentences in accordance to their personal ability.
2. The writer selected some sentences which can be considered as data for this research.
3. The writer classified the data based on the types of phrases suggested by O'Grady et.al (1989) and

Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001)

After the writer got all data the writer took secondary procedure in order to be able to analyse the data. The procedures are The writer reread the students' sentences were reread and were analysed mainly based on theories compiled by O'Grady et.al (1989), Deterding and Poedjosoedarmo (2001), Griffiths (2006), Traugott and Pratt (1980) and Saeed (2001).

3. Result and Discussion

There are thirty data. The data are classified under four main labels. They are adverbial phrases, adjective phrases, noun phrases and verb phrases.

A. Adverbial Phrases

- a. I am waiting you in here.

Analysis

The prepositional phrase *in here* sounds awkward and there should be preposition 'for' in front of 'you'. The phrase *in here* is unnecessary because it should be written without the preposition *in* and its meaning is also unclear. The sentence meaning of the reformed sentence is that the subject 'I' is waiting the object 'you' in a particular point close to the subject (here).

- b. He play so good.

Analysis

The first ill-formed phrase construction is 'so good'. The adverbial phrase 'so good' should be replaced by an adverb 'nicely' or an adverbial phrase 'very nicely' instead of 'so good'. The reason is that the phrase is only acceptable in an informal setting and it is barely accepted that such phrase can modify a verb. The second ill form phrase is the verb play whose position is as a verb phrase in the sentence. There should be 's' ending behind the verb 'play.' The meaning of the sentence is actually clear. The sentence meaning is awkward because the verb does not reflect the subject and the the construction of the adverbial phrase is wrong so that the meaning of the sentence is not clear.

- c. I never came to late.

Analysis

There are two ill formed phrases. They are 'never came' (verb phrase) and 'to late'(prepositional phrase). The adverb 'never' cannot be combined with 'came' because it is an adverb which indicates permanent state and *to* in the prepositional phrase 'to late' should be omitted because the phrase has no meaning at all. The sentence has awkward meaning because the components which form it have awkward structures.

- d. I will join with the army and go to the war.

Analysis

The only ill-formed phrase construction in this sentence is the verb phrase *join with*. This phrase should be *join in*. The phrase and the sentence meaning are acceptable once the verb phrase is corrected.

- e. I am just listening music now.

Analysis

The only ill-formed phrase construction in this sentence is the verb phrase am just listening music. In this phrase, there should be the preposition 'to' after the verb 'listening.' Even if the sentence meaning is comprehensible in general, the error in the construction of the verb phrase slightly affects it.

- f. I will be vacation Bali or Mahameru.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction occurs in the verb phrase *will be*. It needs preposition 'on' after the verb 'be'. 'I will be vacation' means that the speaker is the vacation itself because *will be* represents one's state in the future. However, if sentence is I will be on the vacation, it means that the speaker will have a vacation.

B. Adjective Phrases

- a. Hadi is handsome than Ade.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction occurs in a comparative form of an adjective phrase. In the sentence the adjective phrase is handsome than.... A comparative form of the phrase should be 'more handsome than....' Now that the phrase meaning is not clear, then the meaning of the sentence also cannot be understood entirely.

- b. Rani is beautify.

Analysis

The word 'beautify' should be replaced by beautiful because beautify is a verb. The meaning of the sentence is not clear because the sentence literally has two verbs one of which should have been omitted.

C. Noun Phrases

- a. My mother buy a one set kitchen.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction of the sentence above is a one set kitchen and it has redundant meaning because 'a' has the same sense as 'one'. The phrase construction is also wrong. Thus, it should be 'a kitchen set.' The sentence meaning is clear after the phrase is constructed.

b. My nephew drink two glass of milk.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction of the sentence above is two glass. The noun phrase should be 'two glasses.' Another ill formed phrase is 'drink'. This verb which can be included into a verb phrase is problematic because there should be a '-s' ending after the word drink. The reason is that the subject of the sentence a noun phrase whose meaning is a single being (a nephew). Generally, the sentence meaning is understandable yet it is more acceptable once the phrase is reconstructed.

c. The people like cold, an orange juice.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence is cold, an orange juice. The construction of the phrase is wrong and it makes both the meaning of the phrase and the meaning of the sentence awkward. The construction should be: determiner+ adjective (temperature)+ adjective (a noun form of a fruit)+ noun= a cold orange juice. Once the phrase was reconstructed, the meaning of the sentence is clear.

d. His wife is a accountant.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is a accountant. The phrase should be *an accountant*. Generally, the sentence meaning is understandable yet it is more acceptable once the phrase is reconstructed.

e. My brother is leader.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is leader. The phrase should be *a leader*. Generally, the sentence meaning is understandable yet it is more acceptable once the phrase is reconstructed.

f. Tonight, I go to the park to watch the star's falldown.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase constructions are found in the verb and in the noun phrase. The verb phrase should be 'will go' instead of 'go' by considering the adverb *tonight*. The noun phrase must be a self-made noun phrase. The star's falldown has its own word in English that is either a shooting star or a meteorite. The sentence meaning is both understandable and acceptable after the ill-formed phrases are reconstructed.

g. I is a men.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction are found in verb phrase and the noun phrase which follows it. The verb phrase is must be replaced by am because the subject is 'I.' The noun phrase should be 'a man' instead of 'a men' because the determiner a must be followed by a singular noun. The sentence meaning is both understandable and acceptable after the ill-formed phrases are reconstructed.

h. Yanto is a kind guys.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is found in a noun phrase after the main verb of the sentence. The phrase is ill-formed because the construction is: determiner+ adjective+ plural noun. The noun phrase construction should be: determiner + adjective + a singular noun. Thus, it should be 'a kind guy.' The sentence meaning is both understandable and acceptable after the ill-formed phrases are reconstructed.

i. I had to books.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence above is found in a prepositional phrase 'to books' (construction: a preposition + a plural noun) because the students wrote the prepositional phrase after the verb 'had' which should have been written as a noun phrase 'two books.' In addition, had to books also cannot be considered or assumed as a verb phrase because the word books has an ending '-s' while it is located after 'to' if 'to' is considered as an infinitive. The meaning of the sentence is clear once the prepositional phrase is replaced by a noun phrase because it will be more acceptable and logical.

j. He visited him grandmother last month.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence is *him grandmother*. The object pronoun should be replaced by a possessive pronoun. It should be 'his grandmother.' The sentence meaning is both understandable and acceptable after the ill-formed phrase is reconstructed.

k. He is a friendly people.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence is a friendly people. Even if the construction of the noun phrase is correct but the form of the noun of the noun phrase is wrong and this causes the meaning of the phrase is unacceptable. The phrase should be a friendly person because the subject of the sentence is in a singular form and in the phrase itself there is a determiner 'a'. The sentence meaning is both understandable and acceptable after the ill-formed phrase is reconstructed.

1. We watch movie extremely.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence above is found in a phrase located after the verb of the sentence. The phrase construction is: noun + adverb which does not exist in any English phrase construction. Hence, the phrase 'movie extremely' should be 'an extreme movie' whose phrasal construction is determiner + adjective + noun. The newly reformed phrase is included into a noun phrase. The meaning of the sentence is clear once the prepositional phrase is replaced by a noun phrase because it will be more acceptable and logical.

D. Verb Phrases

- a. I playing piano now. I driving my car today.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is found in a verb phrase in every sentence in this data. In the first sentence, the verb phrase should be *am playing* instead of *playing* because the verb phrase actually has a present continuous phrase construction: be + Ving by considering the adverb 'now.' This reconstruction manner can also be applied in reconstructing the main verb in the second sentence which has *today* as its adverb. The meaning of the sentences above are clear once the verb phrases are reconstructed.

- b. I has work.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is in verb phrase. It should be 'have' instead of 'has.' The meaning of the sentence is clear after the verb is replaced by a proper verb.

- c. Rani teach mathematics the elementary school.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase constructions are in a form of a verb (teach) and a noun phrase after a phrase which has different meaning. The verb teach should have an ending -s behind it to indicate Rani's on going job and there should be a preposition 'in' before elementary school to show location. The meaning of the sentence is clear after the verb has an ending which indicates time and after a preposition is added before a noun phrase the elementary school.

- d. I have a medical problem when I was a child.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is in the verb phrase of the main clause of the sentence. Since the subordinate clause uses past-form verb, the verb in the main clause should be in past form as well. Hence, the sentence should be 'I had a medical problem when I was a child.' The meaning of the sentence is clear after the verb in the main clause is replaced.

- e. Jane has been go to Bali.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is in the verb phrase. The verb phrase structure does not exist in English verb pattern. It should be: has gone (pattern: has + V3). The meaning of the sentence is clear after the verb is replaced.

- f. I want learning skateboard trick.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the sentence above is want learning. This form of verb is against its verb pattern. The acceptable verb pattern is 'want + to + Vbase.' Hence, it should be: want to learn. The meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the verb phrase are clear after the verb is corrected.

- g. I'm very happy if you not lie to me.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction in the subordinate clause of the sentence above is not lie which it does not fulfill any English sentence pattern. *not lie* is only part of the verb phrase of the subordinate clause. It should be 'do not lie' because the subject of the subordinate clause is *you* so that the used auxiliary verb in the negative form is *do*. The meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the verb phrase are clear after the verb is corrected.

- h. I was fall asleep.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is in a form of a verb phrase. The verb phrase does not fulfill any of English verbal phrase construction. In this case, the writer wrote a past form of a verb in a wrong manner. *was fall* has a construction: *was + Vbase* and it is wrong because it should be written as *was fallen (was +V3)*. Though, even if the verb is corrected in such a manner, it does mean that the sentence meaning makes sense. The meaning of the sentence will make sense if the writer writes *fall* instead of ‘*was fall*.’

- i. Many mosque at here.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is in the noun phrase *many mosque*. *Many mosque* is against the English noun phrase construction rule (‘*many + plural noun*’). In the sentence, *many* is followed by a singular noun. The others are in the verb phrase and in the prepositional phrase. In the sentence, there is no verb after the subject. If the subject of the sentence is *many mosques*, then a plural verb should be added. The prepositional phrase is also unnecessary because if the writer wants to write a sentence, he can write: *many mosques are/were here* instead of writing: *many mosques are/were at here*. The sentence above does not make sense and is totally wrong. The meaning of the sentence exists if the sentence is constructed properly.

- j. She try to climbing the mountain.

Analysis

The ill-formed phrase construction is try to climbing. First of all, the verb should be ‘*tries*’ instead of ‘*try*’ and secondly, the verb pattern of the sentence should be: *try +to +Vbase (tries to climb)* instead of *try + to + Ving (try to climbing)*. The meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the verb phrase are clear after the verb is corrected.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, possible ill-formed phrases occur because they are against the phrasal construction rules. Some of them occur because of omission of certain parts of the phrases, the formation of unnecessary phrases and the a self-made phrase or a phrase which is form without looking at English phrasal equivalent. Phrase reconstruction is made to form or to reconstruct sentence meaning.

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