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Formation of the interrogative and Negative sentences using the complete verb form based approach: Class room procedures

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Abstract

In most ESL/EFL class room contexts teaching the formation of Tenses and the interrogative and negative sentences using the various forms of the verbs becomes a lot difficult task. Most of the ESL and EFL learners find it difficult to understand the formation of tenses and apply them in their day to day interaction. Similarly, formation of the interrogative and negative verbs and their application is somewhat difficult for the learners. It becomes all the more difficult for them to use the non-finites in the formation of tenses and the finites in the formation of the interrogative and negative sentences. The reason for the difficulty in forming the interrogative and negative verb forms using 'not' could be attributed to the learners' lack of understanding of the all the forms of the English verb. As far as traditional teaching is concerned most teachers follow the three form --'Do—did—done, go—went – gone' approach to teaching the English verb. The effectiveness of this approach is doubtful as other forms are not discussed. Hence, most students fail to apply the verb forms in their correct tenses and contexts. This has become a concern not only for the teacher but also for the ESL and EFL learner, who has to work in a global business scenario after his education. This inadequacy results in poor and embarrassing work place communication.

Keywords: Formation, sentences, verb, Class room procedures

Introduction

The verb is the heart beat of the language systems across the world. It is the meaning part of the sentences telling about either the actions of the subject or the state of being or possession. As regards the English verb, it has been dealt in ESL and EFL classes in an incomplete and incomprehensive manner thus making it difficult to understand and apply it in real life situations. Further, the later 20th century learner of English as a Second Language or Foreign Language had fewer opportunities of reading well written Standard English prose thus distancing himself from learning the subtle applications of the Verb. Therefore, the learners' understanding of the Verb has been faulty and hence his power of using it to mean correctly into sentences has become haphazard. The reason for this confusion could be attributed to: 1. the method of teaching the verb and 2. The teacher's lack of complete understanding of the English Verb, 3. The standard of the content and materials. Any case the learner suffers significantly and fails to apply the verb in day to day conversation and other contexts.

Traditionally, the English verb has been taught in the ESL and EFL classes as having three forms: for example: take—took—taken; do—did—done. Technically speaking there may not appear any faults in this method and it is absolutely right as far as the native proficiency is considered. But, for a Second language or foreign language learner the method is inadequate as it does not familiarize him to the other forms of the verb. Even, most of the teachers believe the first form: 'take or do' to be the present tense form and the other two are the past and the past participles. It may be right as far as the lexis is concerned. But, theoretically the first form represents the dictionary entry i.e. the infinitive. This may be explained through the example of 'BE' which in fact is an infinitive. The method does not discuss the other important and some of the most commonly used forms the verb-the present tenses, and the present participle. Further, this method does not even touch upon the finites and the non-finites- an understanding of which is very essential for effective language learning.

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The learner always finds it difficult to use the verb in the present and past tenses as his understanding is limited: hence he is prone to say ‘they doesn’t comes, he didn’t came’ etc. Not only in the negative sentences but in the affirmatives too the learner would tend to say ‘he come or they comes’ etc. Another important defect of the method and the understanding resulting from this method is in the use of the past tense. Most of the learners would easily confuse between the past tense, the past perfect and the present perfect. Where a correction is required with respect to the past tense, most students would use the past perfect in its place as in ‘He has come yesterday’ if frequently corrected to ‘He had come yesterday’. These specific cases have been considered as indicatives of the importance of covering the finites. As regards the auxiliaries, specially the modals, many teachers would believe them to be having three forms, ‘will—would—would, can—could—could’. A deeper understanding would reveal that there are only two forms ‘Will—would, Can—could’. Other auxiliaries like ‘BE’ are discussed in the same manner as ‘are--were—been, am—was—been, is—was—been’ which is technically correct.

This leaves the learner in a state of confusion when he has to use these verb forms in contexts of his own or understand them when he reads a standard prose text. In order to enable the learner to overcome the difficulty a more comprehensive method of teaching the English verb is required. This new method should focus on not just three forms but should deal the verb in its completeness. The method should naturally focus on the Infinitive, the Participles (The Non-Finite Forms) and the Present and the Past Tenses (The Finite forms). It should also discuss how various verb forms could be used in meaningful contexts in a comprehensive manner. The method should also integrate in it the use of the auxiliaries, modals in order to make the understanding more effective. When it is done it should enable the learner to understand and apply the verb in a better fashion to make meaningful sentences to begin with. This method should be particularly useful to the non-native speakers of English in the ESL and EFL contexts.

The English verb should be discussed in comprehensive way including the root form, the finites and the participles in that order. For example:

Category 1

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural V2	Present Tense Singular V3	Past V4	Past V5	Present V6
(to) take	Take	Takes	Took	Taken	Taking
(To) Work	Work	Works	Worked	Worked	Working
(To) Bring	Bring	Brings	Brought	Brought	Bringing

From the above table it may be observed that the V1 and V2 look alike except in the nature and kind. Similarly for all verbs in this category V3 is formed by adding an ‘s’ or ‘es’ to V1 and V6 is formed by inflecting ‘ing’ to V1. This may be one of the reasons why in traditional methods we generally do not mention them and go with the three form approach- Take – took – taken, etc.

Category 2: Auxiliaries

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural V2	Present Tense Singular V3	Past V4	Past V5	Present V6
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing
(To) Have	Have	Has	Had	Had	Having
(To) Be	Are/Am	Is	were / was	Been	Being

This category of the verbs represents the auxiliaries. It may be observed that all English verbs have six forms, whether they belong to category 1 or 2, except the defective verbs- the Modals, which are discussed below. It may also be observed that ‘BE’ is the only verb in the entire language to have two different forms in the Past Tense

Category 3: Modal Auxiliaries These auxiliaries are also called Defective Verbs as they cannot form the infinitives, Present singular, or the participles.

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural V2	Present Tense Singular V3	Past V4	Past V5	Present V6
XXX	Will	XXX	Would	XXX	XXX
XXX	Can	XXX	Could	XXX	XXX
XXX	May	XXX	Might	XXX	XXX
XXX	Must	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX

Formation of Interrogative and negative verbs using the Complete Verb forms

In the class room a teacher does not feel much difficulty forming the negative or interrogative for ‘will come’ nor does the learner. The learner can easily say it is ‘will not come or will they come?’ The same is the case with ‘can do, has made, is going, are singing, etc.’ The ease with which they can do it lies not in the familiarity alone, but in their unawareness of the presence of the split verb and the presence of the natural finite in them in the form of either ‘will, or can or has or is or are’ In most cases the teachers of ESL and EFL themselves are not aware of these finites. Therefore for improving the understanding of the formation of the interrogative and negative verbs, it is necessary to discuss all the forms of the English verb in the class room.

‘Then, what are these forms and how to discuss them and in which order?’ is the natural question that arises in the minds of teachers and learners.

Before we start our discussions on the formation of the interrogative and negative forms of the verbs, we need to discuss the various verb forms in a systematic manner. We need also to discuss what are the natural finites, non- finites and their kinds. It would be useful to detail the learners on the unique features of specially the finites. Instead of the three form approach we need to discuss the 6 form approach where the discussion of the verb typically begins with the infinitive, then the finites and then the participles.

As it was discussed in ‘Complete Verb Form Based Learning of Formation of Tenses in English: An Innovative Method’ (2) we may introduce the English verb in all its six forms and show how various tenses could be formed. However, in the current paper my attention is solely limited to how negatives and interrogatives of the verbs are formed using the six form approach.

Category 1

Infinitive	FINITES- Tense			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) take	Take	Takes	Took	Taken	Taking
(To) Work	Work	Works	Worked	Worked	Working
(To) Bring	Bring	Brings	Brought	Brought	Bringing

Category 2: Auxiliaries

Infinitive	FINITES-Tense			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing
(To) Have	Have	Has	Had	Had	Having
(To) Be	Are/Am	Is	were / was	Been	Being

Category 3: Modal Auxiliaries

Infinitive	FINITES- Tense			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural/ singular	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
XXX	Will	XXX	Would	XXX	XXX
XXX	Can	XXX	Could	XXX	XXX
XXX	May	XXX	Might	XXX	XXX
XXX	Must	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX

Discussion

It is clear that the above verbs are categorized as Action verbs and Auxiliaries. Let us start our discussion with the definition of finite and non-finite verbs and then discuss clauses for a better understanding. The underlying principle of formation of the interrogative and negative verbs is that the verb should be split into at least two forms in order to be able to form them.

A finite is that form of the verb which expresses ‘Tense’ by itself. In the above tables we know that there are only three such natural tense expressing forms, i.e. the Present tense and the past tense form. The other three, i.e. the Infinitive and the past and the present participle do not naturally express tense and therefore they have to seek the help of the finite forms of the auxiliaries to express tense. As in ‘will take, has taken, is taking, etc.’ For forming negatives of such verbs we need only to insert a ‘not’ between them. It is because the verb is already a split verb and the first part of it is a natural finite.

Further, in clause or a simple sentence there is only one finite and that finite could be the natural finite of an action verb or of the auxiliaries. When we have to form the negative of finite forms of auxiliaries like are, is, am, were, was, have, has, had, we need only to insert a ‘not’ after it. For example, He is a student. The negative ‘He is not a student’ works quite well.

But when the verb in the clause or the simple sentence is the finite of an action verb, then most teachers and learners find it difficult to logically explain how the negative or the interrogative is formed. In this context we need to keep the rule of the finites in mind and try to work out. For our understanding, the rule says that in a clause or a simple

sentence, there should be only one finite, they may have any number of non-finites but one finite. As in: “Having decided to sing, the little girl rose from her seat.” In this sentence there are four verb forms -“Having (V6), decided (V5), to sing (V1) and rose (V4)”-of which only rose (V4) is a finite and others are non-finites. If the verb is already a split verb we can simply place the ‘not’ after the finite form in the negative sentence. But if the verb is a natural finite indicating action where it is not a split one some difficulty arises. For resolving the difficulty we may follow some simple steps a discussed hereunder.

Look at the following sentences

1. He went abroad.
2. She sings well
3. They play basketball.

In the sentences above some verbs of action are used in their natural finites. Let us first look at all the six forms of them.

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) Go	go	goes	went	Gone	going
(To) sing	Sing	Sings	Sang	Sung	Singing
(To) Play	Play	Plays	Played	Played	played

From the above we can conclude that the verbs used in the sentences are the finite forms of the given verbs.

For forming the negative or interrogatives of these verbs we need to split them into two. Here we need to take the help of the auxiliary ‘Do’.

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) Go	go	goes	went	Gone	going
(To) sing	Sing	Sings	Sang	Sung	Singing
(To) Play	Play	Plays	Played	Played	played

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing

When we have to split the main verb ‘go’ (V2) we need to consider placing the V2 of do before the V1 of go. Thus the V2 go becomes ‘do (V2) + go (V1)’. At this point we should bear the rule of the finite in mind that in a verb phrase there should not be more than one finite. In ‘do (V2) + go (V1)’ do is the finite and go is the infinitive which is a non finite. Now we have to form the negative by placing ‘not’ between ‘do (V2) + go (V1)’ thus we get ‘Do not go’. Similarly for goes (V3) we need to place the V3 of ‘do’ i.e. ‘does’ and then write the V1 form of go i.e. go (V1), hence getting the phrase does (V3) +go (V1) now place ‘not’ in between to get the negative of ‘goes’. Coming to went (V4), we identify did (V4) and carry the V1 of went i.e. ‘go’ and place it after did. Thus for ‘went’ we get did (V4) + go (V1).

Class room Procedure:

Ask the learners to write/say all the six forms of the verb SING

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(To) sing	Sing	Sings	Sang	Sung	Singing

Then ask the learners to write the forms of the Verb DO

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing

1. Now ask the students to identify the finites of 'sing and do'.
2. Repeat the rule of the finites in a clause and sentence: that there cannot be more than one finite in a clause.
3. Now ask the students to split 'V2 sing' into a phrase using do forms. Help them in identifying the V2 equivalent of sing.
4. Tell them after identifying 'V2 of do' they cannot use the finites of sing any longer and therefore they have to use the 'V1 of sing'
5. Check if they have correctly arrived at Do (V2) + Sing (V1). Repeat the same exercise for V3 sings and V4 Sang.
6. Give them ample practice using different verbs in order to make them overcome such weaknesses as saying did broke etc.
7. Now tell them to place a 'not' between 'V2, V3, V4 of do' and the V1 of the main verb to complete the formation of the negative of the finites of the main verbs.

Practice

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) make					
(To) Say					
(To) read					
(To) write					

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing

Formation of the Interrogative

By definition the verb is the telling word and it tells something about either the actions or the state of being or the state of having of the subject, which is typically a noun or noun equivalent. It plays a key role in sentences as it is the meaning part. We manipulate the verb to mean differently into sentences when it is used differently. The position of the verb plays an important role when we use it in the interrogative sentences. As far as the declarative sentences that use the non finites of the main verb with the finites of the auxiliaries are concerned the learners would face little difficulty in forming the interrogatives. For example:

He is coming to college.

In this sentence He is (V4 of BE) + Coming (V6 of COME) have been used. For such sentences forming the interrogative is relatively easy, as the learner would say, is he coming to college? All that we as teachers would need to tell the learners is that they have to place the subject word between the verb phrase and end the sentence with question mark.

When the sentence contains the finite of an auxiliary like be or have we need to reverse order of the subject and the verb to form the interrogative, for example: He is a boy. The interrogative of this sentence is 'Is he a boy?'

But, when we have to form the interrogative sentence from a declarative sentence with a finite of an action verb, we need to split the verb into a phrase using the finites of the Do forms and the infinitive of the action verb given, in the same manner as we did for the formation of the negative verb. For our convenience we discuss the same here:

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) Go					
(To) sing					
(To) Play					

Infinitive	FINITES			Participles	
	Present Tense Plural	Present Tense Singular	Past Tense	Past	Present
(to) do	Do	Does	Did	Done	Doing

For a sentence like: They go (V2) to church every Sunday, the negative is they do (V2) not go (V1) to church every Sunday. In the same manner we need to split the finite of the main verb for the formation of the interrogative sentence and then place the subject word between the split verb. Thus, for the same sentence the interrogative would be 'Do (V2) they go (V1) to church every Sunday?' is clear.

Class room procedure

1. Now ask the students to write / say the other forms of the verbs go, sing and play.
2. Repeat the rule of the finites in a clause and sentence: that there cannot be more than one finite in a clause.
3. Now ask the students to split 'V2 go' into a phrase using do forms. Help them in identifying the V2 equivalent of do.
4. Tell them after identifying 'V2 of do' they cannot use the finites of 'go' any longer and therefore they have to use the 'V1 of go'
5. Check if they have correctly arrived at Do (V2) + go (V1). Repeat the same exercise for V3 goes and V4 went.
6. Give them ample practice using different verbs in order to make them overcome such weaknesses as saying did broke etc.
7. Now ask the learners to form declarative sentences using go (V2) goes (V3) and went (V4). Probable responses from the learners are :
 - a. They go to school every day.
 - b. He goes to the market regularly.
 - c. She went to the cinema yesterday.
8. Now ask the students to identify the subject word in each of the sentences by asking the questions with Who? Or What?

9. Then tell them to place the subject word between the split verb phrases
10. Probably the learners would come up with: They do (V2) + go (V1) to school every day, He does (V3) + go (V1) to the market regularly or She did (V4) + go (V1) to the cinema yesterday. Having done this the learners should be able to place the subject between (V2), or (V3) or (V4) of do and V1 of Go and complete the sentence. Now the Interrogative would be formed as 'Does he go to school every day?' Etc.
11. Repeat the practice with other sentences as well.

Practice

1. Sam makes coffee for us.
2. Lily Jumped off a wall.
3. Jasmine dances pretty well.
4. Victor joined the party.
5. Smith scored a ton.
6. Watson and Sachin play cricket wonderfully.

Conclusion

The complete verb form based teaching of the interrogative and negative sentences and their formation will enable the learners to develop a thorough understanding of the principles and thereby apply the interrogative and negative sentences in real life situations correctly and effectively.

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