

The Creation of a Workbook to Improve Kosen Students' English Proficiency Effectively and Its Verification

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Abstract

It is clear that the average English proficiency of Kosen students is fairly low. They easily misunderstand simple English sentences and make mistakes in writing them. In order to examine the biggest cause of the students' poor English proficiency, we referred to Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008), Hashimoto (2009), Kunishige and Oomura (2009), and Oomura (2010). It turned out that the biggest reason for their inability in English is their lack of knowledge in sentence patterns, tenses, voices, infinitives, gerunds, and participles, which are all closely related to verbs. This paper aims to show how we made a workbook to help the students acquire enough knowledge of the above-mentioned points of grammar, show its part, and verify the effectiveness of the workbook.

Key Words : English proficiency, sentence patterns, tenses, voices, verbs, workbook

1. Introduction

As Hashimoto (2009) pointed out, a majority of the students at Tokuyama College of Technology have a poor English proficiency. There are a variety of reasons for this situation. One example is that to successfully gain credits for the required technical subjects, students often spare only a little time to study English. Consequently, many students cannot acquire skills to read and write simple English sentences. The end result is that they are most likely at a loss for what to do in a company setting after graduation when they are obliged to use English.

In order to solve this problem, this paper clarifies the students' common mistakes and recommends procedures to improve their skills with the use of a specially targeted workbook. We have put forth some of the workbook's content in this paper.

Initially, we analyzed the students' weak points in English grammar from the previous research results of Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008), Hashimoto (2009), Kunishige and Oomura (2009), and Oomura (2010).

After this, we set our own tests to the students to compare the results with those of the previous studies. Upon our consideration, we prioritized

some of the students' weakest grammatical issues, which were mainly verb-based ones, and created a workbook for the students to master these issues.

For the purpose of helping students acquire a more scientific vocabulary and to get used to sentences with such a vocabulary, we included words and sentences used in the fields of science and engineering in the workbook. By doing so, we hoped our work may assist the students acquire both grammatical knowledge and the vocabulary that will be required in their future work environments.

Next, we had a test group of students study with the workbook. Finally, in order to verify the effectiveness of the workbook, we examined their improvement against their past performance in English proficiency.

This paper presents the above-mentioned process and portraits a part of the workbook.

2. Analyses based on previous studies and the test we conducted

This section analyzes the students' weak points in English grammar based on the previous research results shown in Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008), Hashimoto (2009), Kunishige and Oomura (2009), Oomura (2010), and on the results of the test we

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conducted.

2. 1. Analysis based on Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008) and Hashimoto (2009)

In the abstracts the students wrote, there were a host of errors. So, Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008) and Hashimoto (2009) examined the abstracts to find the common mistakes. As a result, it turned out that the students were deficient in the use of tenses, voices, participles, infinitives, intransitive verbs and transitive verbs. Kunishige and Hashimoto (2008) and Hashimoto (2009) invented a tool to help the students write better abstracts in English. It had improved the students' writing to some extent. However, too many mistakes were still found in their abstracts.

2. 2. Analysis based on Kunishige and Oomura (2009) and Oomura (2010)

Kunishige and Oomura (2009) and Oomura (2010) also pointed out the grammatical errors which the students tended to make. Let us introduce two examples Kunishige and Oomura (2009) demonstrated. One is related to the use of tenses:

- (1) Mr. Jones found that he (1. had been leaving 2. was leaving 3. has left 4. had left) his notes at home, and he didn't know what to do.
- (2) I (1. am living 2. have been 3. have lived 4. lived) in Kyoto for three years when I was a child.

Out of forty-two advanced-course students who answered the above questions, more than half of them could not get the correct answers.

For (1), about thirty percent of them opted for 1. In case of expressing a particular kind of action

performed before the past, we have to use a past perfect form. So, the answer is 4.

In (2), the correct answer is 4, but about seventy percent of them opted for 3. In order to answer a question which requires the knowledge of tense, it is important to see where the base point in time is located. In this sentence, the base point in time is a past time because "when I was a child" is attached. So, the answer is 4.

The other example pertains to the use of *to*-infinitive:

- (3) If you ask nicely, she will probably (1. allow you having 2. allow you have 3. allow that you have 4. allow you to have) a piece of cake.
- (4) It's cold outside. Be careful (1. not catch 2. not to catch 3. not catching 4. of not catching) a cold.

In the choices in (3), the verb *allow* is used with various verb forms. However, *allow* is used only with a *to*-infinitive. So, the answer is 4.

In (4), about forty percent of the students chose 3. In this sentence, you have to make a negative form of a *to*-infinitive, which takes a form of *not to* ... So, the answer is 2.

The above analyses indicate that the students did not master English grammar points such as tenses, voices, and *to*-infinitives they had studied.

2. 3. Analysis based on the test we conducted

After analyzing the results of the former studies, we set our own tests to thirty students to compare the results with those of the previous studies.

The analysis of the test result demonstrates that the students do not understand essential English grammar points, which are especially concerned with verbs. Some of the mistakes the students

made are shown below:

- (5) To my surprise, the director called the plan
(1. succeed 2. successfully 3. a success).

In example (5), more than fifteen students chose 2. But, (5) belongs to sentence pattern 5, so that the adverb *successfully* must be replaced by a noun *a success*. Therefore, the answer is 3.

- (6) When you (1. arrive 2. reach) the airport, you must first let me know.

In (6), most of the students chose the intransitive verb *arrive*. However, in this situation, they have to choose the transitive verb *reach* because an intransitive verb cannot take an object directly after it.

As shown above, the students do not understand the most basic items in English: basic sentence patterns and especially verbs in most forms.

2. 4. Evident conclusion drawn from the three analyses

Considering the three analyses above, it is clear that students have not learned English points of grammar adequately. Also, it has turned out that their weak points are all concerned with verbs.

The students need to understand the nature of verbs above all because a verb is an essential part in a sentence, and it changes its form according to its time orientation. In other words, their English skills will improve substantially by acquiring the understanding of verb function in use.

3. Creation of a workbook

Based on the information about the students' weak points, we created a workbook. Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate some parts of the workbook:

解説

1. 動詞・文型の研究

動詞には、大きく分けて、自動詞と他動詞があります。自動詞というのは、主語と動詞の組み合わせで意味をあらわす動詞です。第1文型と第2文型をとれる動詞です。

(自動詞の例)

He didn't move. (彼は動かなかった)
⇒動詞 move は「動く」という意味で使われています。
He smiled. (彼は微笑んだ)

また、主語と動詞だけで意味を表すことは少なく、動詞の後ろに情報を加えることが多いです。

My uncle lives in London. (私のおじはロンドンに住んでいる)
⇒動詞 live は自動詞です。in 以下は修飾語です。

上の3つの例文のように、主語(S)と述語動詞(V)だけで完結している文型を第1文型(SV)といいます。また、SVに補語(C)を組み合わせた文型を第2文型(SVC)といいます

※補語(C)は、主語や目的語が「どういふ物なのか」あるいは、「どういふ状態にあるのか」を説明する語です。補語になれるのは、名詞・形容詞です。

The movie was funny. (その映画はおもしろかった)
⇒was がVで、Vの後に funny という形容詞がきている。funny という形容詞が主語を説明している。

He is an engineer. (彼は技術者である)
⇒V のあとに engineer という名詞がきている。動詞のあとに、主語を説明する補語(engineer という名詞)がきている。

他動詞は、名詞を後に続けて意味を表す動詞です。つまり、後ろに目的語がない文が成立しない動詞で、とれる文型は第3,4,5文型です。

※目的語(O)は、動詞が及ぼす動作などの対象となる語のことを言います。目的語は他動詞の後ろに置かれ、<他動詞+目的語>で意味を成します。目的語になれるのは名詞です。

自動詞と他動詞のどちらの用法もある動詞もあります。(study, carry, run など)
※同じ動詞でも、自動詞としての意味と他動詞としての意味が異なる動詞もあります。

Fig. 1 Part of the workbook: explanations

動詞・文型の研究

[001]
次の文の説明は自動詞についてですか、他動詞についてですか。
1. 第1,2文型をとることができる。
2. 第3,4,5文型をとることができる。
3. 主語と動詞だけで文が成立する。
4. 動詞の後ろに目的語があると文が変になる。
5. 動詞の後ろに目的語がつかないと文が成立しない。

[002]
目的語になれるのは次のうちどれですか？
また、補語になれるのは次のうちどれですか？全て答えなさい。
[名詞・動詞・形容詞・副詞・助動詞・前置詞・接続詞]

[003]
下線部の動詞は自動詞なのか他動詞なのか答えなさい。
1. I can run fast.
2. She has a special pencil.
3. The door opened and a young man came out.
4. He went to the window and opened the curtain.
5. He is a nice man.
6. I will give you my treasure.
7. Birds sing.
8. 一次方程式の一般的な形は $y = ax + b$ です。
The general form of a linear equation is $y = ax + b$.
9. Look at the graph and complete the table of data.
10. これらの文を日本語に翻訳することができます。
I can translate these sentences into Japanese.
11. あなたの説明で私は混乱した。
Your explanation confused me.
12. 私は編入試験を受けるつもりです。
I will take an examination for admission as a transfer student.
13. He wears a new shirt.
14. 太陽は東から昇る。
The sun rises in the east.
15. 幸せを得るためにすごく苦しまなければならない。
You have to suffer greatly to achieve happiness.

Fig. 2 Part of the workbook: exercises

As points of grammar, the workbook contains sentence patterns, tenses, voices, infinitives, gerunds, and participles, which are all closely related to verbs. It is divided into the following four chapters:

Chapter 1: verbs and sentence patterns

Chapter 2: tenses

Chapter 3: voices

Chapter 4: infinitives, gerunds, and participles

The workbook consists of detailed explanations of grammar points, a variety of exercises with regard to each grammatical item, and the answer keys to the exercises.

In addition, we adopted sentences and words that are frequently used in the context of science and engineering as in (7) and (8) below¹. By doing so, we gave the workbook a quality that can bridge the gap between E.G.P.² and E.S.P.³:

(7) The viscosity of a liquid generally decreases as the temperature increases.

(8) Don't forget to lubricate the machine every day.

If the students can get used to words such as *viscosity* in (7) and *lubricate* in (8) and sentences containing such words by using the workbook, they will be able to read technical books and academic papers in engineering more easily.

Moreover, some of the important questions and sentences in the workbook are intentionally repeated later in the course of study so that the learners may master the grammatical knowledge in question efficiently.

4. Verification of the workbook

To verify the effectiveness of the workbook, we

had a test group consisting of twenty-six students study English with the workbook for four days. Before the four-day study, we conducted a pre-study test. It is made up of 25 TOEIC style questions regarding grammar points in the workbook. After the four-day study, we concluded with a post-study test. It is also composed of 25 TOEIC style questions regarding the same grammatical items. Also, the level of the questions was the same as that of the pre-study test.

The results of the two tests are as follows: The average scores of the pre-study test and the post-study test were 56.5 and 65.4 respectively. The average score rose by about 10 points.

We also found from the post-study test result that most participants in the four-day study were able to master sentence patterns and tenses. Moreover, scores of the students whose score of the pre-study test was 30 points or lower went up dramatically.

The above initial results appear to verify on our first study the effectiveness of this workbook.

We will conduct further tests and refine this workbook.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to create a workbook to help our students acquire adequate knowledge of verbs, sentence patterns, tenses, voices, infinitives, gerunds, and participles to assist their future careers.

We limited the grammatical items in the workbook to ones related to specific verb problems because of the critical nature they convey to the understanding of English sentence timeframes which is essential in business communication. We consider these grammatical items to be the core issues among E.F.L.⁴ speakers. Further studies will focus on communication between an E.F.L.

speaker and a native English speaker. We may therefore examine other points in grammar such as prepositions and conjunctions since the communication issues may be different when a native English speaker is involved.

Since the average score of the post-study test increased from that of the pre-study test by 10 points on average, we presume that the use of this workbook is effective to that extent in improving the learners' English proficiency.

What remains to be done is to examine the results of the post-study test in detail to clarify which grammar points the examinees found most difficult. After that, we will fine-tune the workbook according to these findings.

The goal for the second workbook will be to increase scores by 20 points above the original test group's first examination rather than the current 10.

Notes

1. We did not include too much highly specialized vocabulary in the workbook so as not to demotivate the learners.
2. E.G.P. stands for English for General Purposes.
3. E.S.P. stands for English for Specific Purposes.
4. E.F.L. stands for English as a Foreign Language.

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