Chapter: 02 Problems of Making Interrogative Sentence in English Faced by the Tertiary Level Students of Bangladesh: A Linguistics Analysis

Farzana Parvin¹, Lutfun Naher Jolly² and Mahfuja Sultana³

Abstract

In Bangladesh English is introduced as a compulsory subject from Primary to Higher Secondary level education. After 12 years of studying English most of the students’ proficiency level of English is not satisfactory. They can neither speak fluently in English nor comprehend what they listen or read even they fear to write in English. This paper attempts to identify the difficulties of constructing interrogative sentence in English realized by the tertiary level students of Bangladesh. For this purpose, 106 students from different educational institutions were included as the subjects of the study. Furthermore, this study also included 10 teachers who were teaching the subject students. A language test containing 10 items (making interrogative sentences: close and open questions) has been carried out to discover the linguistics errors. The findings revealed that most of the students faced some problems in their EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class regarding interrogative sentence. Based on the findings, the researchers provide some pedagogical suggestions to help students overcome their incompetence and weak performance in constructing interrogative sentence.

Keywords: Interrogative Sentence, EFL, Open Question, Close Question

1. Introduction:

Interrogative sentences play an important role in our daily conversation. Many Bengali learners, especially at the tertiary level, have a lot of problems with the production of English questions accurately. Though they have learnt English through 12 years but most of the cases, students remain weak in making a sentence properly. For this reason, they fail to write English correctly as students and later as employees. It is the teachers’ responsibility to prepare students in such a way that they become capable of using the English language accurately. It has been observed that in SLA classroom most of the students hesitate to make questions to their teacher. The purpose of this present research is to explore the complications of making interrogative sentence.

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1.2 Statement of the Problem:

In Bangladesh students at the tertiary level studying different subjects have a basic course on English language. The focus is given on all four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The real fact is that knowing all skills of the target language students can not apply it in their real life situation. From the general observation and teaching experience it is found that in their school and college they only memorize the grammatical rules of English and have had little or no opportunity for contextual usage. Teachers teach grammar by using grammar-translation method. They usually do not use the spoken form of English in the class room. As a result, students may face the problem of creating appropriate sentence especially when they transform from one sentence to another like interrogative sentence.

1.3 Objective:

a. To identify the problematic areas of constructing interrogative sentence in English realized by the students at the tertiary level.

b. To make possible suggestions to overcome those difficulties on the basis of collected data.

2. Literature Review:

Interrogative sentences are used to form questions. They are easy to spot; they always end with a question mark. Interrogative sentences are typically marked by inversion of the subject and predicate: that is, the first verb in a verb phrase appears before the subject. Hornby (cited in Gorjian, Naghizadeh, Shahramiri; 2012, p. 120) defines a question as a sentence, phrase or word that asks for information. According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegen (cited in Gorjian, Naghizadeh, Shahramiri; 2012, p. 120) questions are many times more common in conversation than in writing. Questions are most typically expressed by full independent clauses in the written registers, while nearly half of the questions in conversation consist of fragments or tags (Biber et al., 1999, p.211). According to Webber (cited in Gorjian, Naghizadeh, Shahramiri; 2012 p. 121), questions create anticipation, arouse interest, challenge the reader into thinking about the topic of the text, and have a direct appeal in bringing the second person into a kind of dialogue with the writer, which other rhetorical devices do not have to the same extent. Questions have been classified differently by different authors.

Munoz Claudio (2006, p. 07) explains that in any language of the world or any kind of communication process that exist, there are always going to be only two kind of questions: yes/no questions and information questions. Long and Sato (cited in Gorjian, Naghizadeh, Shahramiri; 2012 p. 121) two types of questions based on the purpose of the questioning: Referential and Display questions. The purpose of using a referential question is to seek information, while the purpose of using a display question is to elicit language practice.Celce-Murcia Larsen, Biber et al. (cited in Gorjian, Naghizadeh, Shahramiri; 2012 p. 121) also classified questions on the basis of their forms into four types: yes/no questions, WH-questions, tag questions and alternative questions. This study is aim to find out the difficulties that students of Bangladesh at tertiary level faced in making interrogative sentence in English. This
paper will go through the process of open and close question that is mentioned here as yes/no type and WH-question type.

2.1 Research Question

Which question, close or open question, is more difficult to construct for Bengali speaking English learners?

2.2 Research Hypothesis

Constructing the close question which demands yes/no, true/false or right/wrong is easier than to construct open question or Wh-question for our students.

3. Methodology

The present study aiming at discovering the difficulties that the students of tertiary level face to make interrogative questions, and this research paper has also made an assumption as hypothesis that there is an usual fact that students face much difficulties to make ‘open question’ rather than ‘close question’ or yes/no question.

For this study data has been collected from the students who are studying at the tertiary level. A total of 106 students from three private universities of Bangladesh were chosen for survey and data collection. These data were collected randomly from different departments- English, Law, THM, BBA, FDT. The respondents were in the first year second semester of the 4-year Bachelor’s degree programme of the academic year 2015. They studied a mandatory foundation English Language course in their first year first semester honours programme. All of them received formal English education at school and college for about twelve years.

The study also incorporated ten English teachers teaching these students in the same institutions. All of the teachers have the experience of teaching English at the tertiary level students.

The basic instrument for this study was a language test. The data was collected by taking a language test (based on clues), where students had to make 5 open questions and 5 close questions. Each question carries 1 mark; researchers had conducted this test under their own supervision.

3.1 Data Analyzing Process

The collected data is analyzed with the assistance of statistics for interpreting the results of investigation. The identities of the respondents were hidden. The researcher analyzed the data qualitatively keeping in touch with the research questions. Survey results are presented here in different ways: by text and in figures.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

After analyzing all data, researchers tried to show the result in percentage of the obtained marks. The results of all the students are given in the table and the question of language test has been presented in the appendix-1.
It is very clear from the result presented in Table 1 that 21.44% of all students got zero (0) out of 5 in open question where 12.60% of all students got zero (0) in making close question. On the other hand 02.85% of all students got 5 out of 5 in open questions where 04.01% students got 5 out of 5 marks in close question. As this research paper was intending to detect the difficulties faced by the tertiary level students to make interrogative questions specially in making open questions. The result shows that in each case the performance of all students are better in making close questions rather than open question. So, the result is very transparent and proved as well after being analysed.

4.1. Students’ Problems of making ‘Interrogative Sentence’:

The interrogative sentence seems very problematic or to some extent difficult for the students to make. This present study explored some common difficulties of constructing interrogative sentence faced by the students and those are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Percentage of the obtained marks for close and open questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Close question</th>
<th>Open question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.60 %</td>
<td>21.44 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.53 %</td>
<td>33.15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.90 %</td>
<td>24.76 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.40 %</td>
<td>16.69 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.56 %</td>
<td>1.11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>04.01 %</td>
<td>2.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 2: The problems identified from students response in language test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Language Test Question</th>
<th>Students’ Response</th>
<th>Correct Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Sentence Construction | 2. A: Why……to bed so early last night?  
B: I was feeling very tired.  
4. A:……television every morning?  
B: No, only if there’s something special on.  
6. A: ….live?  
B: In Bangladesh. | A: Why go to bed so early last night?  
A: You watching television every morning?  
A: Where you live? | Why did you go to bed so early last night?  
Do you watch television every morning?  
Where do you live? |
Table 2 represents the major five (5) common problems that students faced to make interrogative sentence. It is found that, students did mistakes in sentence construction. From the above examples it is very clear that most of the students could not make an interrogative sentence by following the proper structure of it. However, due to lack of sufficient vocabulary in the target language often leads L2 learners to use wrong words, resulting in wrong word choice. Moreover, students faced difficulties with the correct verb forms when they made interrogative sentence. The most crucial problem the students faced is the use of tense-sequence. It troubled the students more to write an interrogative sentence. Besides, the problem of subject –verb agreement was also found as the students did mistakes to select the correct form of verb followed by the subject.

5. Findings from Teachers’ Observation:
From the teachers’ observation there are some major findings regarding students’ problems of making interrogative sentence in English. These are as follows:

- Inadequacy and defectiveness of teaching methods, teaching and learning materials employed at the pre-university level.
- English is not the medium of instruction at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels.
- Influenced by mother tongue (L1) i.e. comparing English syntax with native language.
- Having lack of knowledge of auxiliary verbs and their uses.
- Facing complexity with dealing of long or complex/compound sentences.
- Practicing the grammar in memorization process from primary level.
- The teachers rarely encourage students to ask questions in the classroom.

6. Recommendation

English is undoubtedly an essential language in the present age of globalization. As a foreign language, it is taught and learnt in Bangladesh with great emphasis. But still students face some problems which cannot be solved overnight. After 12 years of learning English, students at the tertiary level cannot make sentence like interrogative which is so disappointing. The significance of this study is to inform teachers, educators, and language study material developers about the kind of problems what students face at this stage so that they can extend their hands to overcome these problems. Some pedagogical suggestions are given with a view to solve the problems faced by the teachers and students.

6.1 Recommendation for the Teachers

On the basis of the findings the following points are recommended for the teachers through whom the teaching process is conducted.

1. Teachers should be very friendly and interactive in the class and should make the class student-centered.
2. Grammar should be taught inductively.
3. New vocabulary items should be introduced to the students with the visual objects so that the students can easily grasp them.
4. Teachers must get proper training to teach the target language.
5. Teachers should give proper practices to the students which will cover all the four basic language skills.
6. For practicing oral skill, teachers should encourage and motivate students to speak inside and outside the classroom.
7. Teachers should use the mother tongue only when they are asked by the students for the clear understanding of the topics.

6.2 Recommendations for the Students

Students play the central role in learning target language so they need to be empowered in language learning activities. It has already been said that the class should be student-centered so as to get the benefit of proper learning. Students should use language more in interactional activities such as role play, debate, presentation, pictography uses etc. inside and outside the classroom.
7. Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that comparatively the students are good at making ‘Close questions’ rather than ‘Open questions’, though the data shows that some students faced problems in making close questions as well, which means that the basic of their knowledge in English is not good enough to construct interrogative sentences in English. This exploratory study intended to shed light on the problems of making interrogative sentence in English faced by the tertiary level students of Bangladesh based on hypothesis. The hypothesis that constructing the close question which demands yes/no, true/false or right/wrong is easier than to construct open question or Wh-question is true. The researchers’ experience of teaching indicates the problem identified here more or less similar all over the Bangladesh. Thus, it is necessary to look into the matter seriously and come up with possible solutions to overcome the problems.
Appendix-1

Language Test

Level of the learner (Semester)..................Medium..................

Department..........................Date..............................

Complete each question using the clues.

1. A: .................................................? (watch/TV)
   B: Yes, she was watching TV.

2. A: Why ............................................to bed so early last night?
   B: I was feeling very tired.

3. A: Where ...............................................
   B: Just to the post box. I want to post these letters. I’ll be back in a few minutes.

4. A: ........................................television every morning?
   B: No, only if there’s something special on.

5. A: Your house is very beautiful. How long .............................here?
   B: Nearly ten years.

6. A: ........................................live?
   B: In Bangladesh.

7. A: .................................................?(born/there)
   B: No, I was born in London.

8. A: .................................................? (married)
   B: Yes.

9. A: ................................................. (how long/married)?
   B: 17 years.

10. A: .......................................................?(children)
    B: Yes, two boys.
References

Bahman Gorjian et al. (2012), Making interrogative sentences in English and Persian Language: A contrastive analysis approach, World Science publisher, United States

Claudio. Mundo. (2006), An easy way to make questions in English: yes/ no and information questions, Communications Competencies Center University press, Spain