

# **Aided versus Unaided Writing Skill with Special Reference to English Grammar of X Standard Students in Thiurvallur District, Tamil Nadu**

**R. Ashok Kumar, Ph.D. Scholar**  
**Prof. G. Radha Krishna, Ph.D.**

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## **Introduction**

This article is a part of my Ph.D. work presently in progress. The students of X standard are of primary importance, as they are in a position at the end of the X standard to pursue their higher education or enter work force after their board examination.

## **Aims of the Study**

1. To find out the accuracy level of students' writing.
2. To find if they are able to patch up their knowledge deficiency, when they are supplied with reference materials.
3. To find out whether the educational level of their family members have any effect on their English proficiency.
4. To find out if their purpose for learning motivates their volitional exposure to language skills.

## **Accuracy**

Accuracy is “the ability to produce target-like and error-free language” (Housen, A., et al. 2012; P2). Accuracy develops in proportion to the learners' understanding of “form – function” relationship (Robinson, P. et al. 2011; P 81). In the initial stages of teaching English, students need exposure to two aspects of the language (Ellis, R. 2003; P 13):

- The chunks of language structure (i.e. Formulae / Items)

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- Acquiring rules (i.e. Function / System)

Poor control of grammar is the reason why students cannot concentrate on what to say (Leaver, B.L., et al. 2002, p. 24)

Writing, according to Llach, M.P.A (2011, p. 42), demands the right choice of:

- Syntactic Patterns
- Morphological Inflections
- Vocabulary
- Cohesive Devices and
- Combining them all into Coherent piece of text

The students of school level are expected to be good at “Organizational Competence” (Jordon, G. 2004, p. 8) only. In other words they are expected to produce just simple but grammatically error-free sentences leaving out “Sociolinguistic Competence” (Aslam, R. 1992, p. 51).

### Data for Study

The data is collected from Tamil and English medium students in two phases:

1. Unaided – Without Reference materials
2. Aided – With Reference materials

In each phase, they are asked to write five sentences. The questionnaire supplied to them consists of two pictures.

Medium	Phase	No of Sentences X No of Students	Total	Grand Total
	Unaided	5 X 10	50	

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Tamil	Aided	5 X 10	50	100
English	Unaided	5 X 10	50	100
	Aided	5 X 10	50	
Grand Total				200

Table 1: Data Collection

Thus, we obtained two hundred sentences.

### Method of Analysis

I have collected descriptive data which has to be codified first qualitatively and then converted into simple quantitative data so that comparison and contrast becomes easier.

The method of analysis followed is the one proposed by Pica et al.'s model of C-unit (Rod Ellis, et al. 2009; 155) for complexity analysis. I have used the method of analyzing the data into five form levels and two functional levels and finally 'Percentage of Error – free AS-units' as advocated by Foser & Skehan 1996 (Rod Ellis, et al. 2009; 155) and Cecilia Gunnerson (Housen, A., et al. 2012, p. 16) to find out the level of students' writing skill. Robinson, P. (2013, p. 667) proposes the following five categories for the analyses of learners' language:

- ✓ Word or Phrases;
- ✓ Errors;
- ✓ Clauses and T-units;
- ✓ Entire texts and
- ✓ Changes across text.

We have opted Words or Phrases and Clause levels for our analysis.

The form levels include:

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Noun Phrase

Preposition Phrase

Verbal Group

Adjective Phrase and

Adverb Phrase

The functional levels include:

S-V Agreement

Sub-categorization

The sentence level

The determination of phrasal levels themselves poses certain problems: English is a language which has the distinct VP in Phrase Structure (Paul R. Kroeger 2005, p. 81) and the V° under the VP determines the complements in the form of NPs, PPs, Adj. P and Adv. P. Hence, they have to be taken as a whole group. We overcame this problem by means of ‘Verbal Group’.

### **Methodological Issues**

Leech, G., et al. 1982, p. 60 lists out five functions of NPs: Subject; Subject Complement; Direct Object; Object Complement and Indirect Object. For our analysis, we have considered all the NPs throughout the data but not those NPs fused within PPs as complements and adjuncts.

### **Examples:**

The picture of village (Pavithra – Aided – Tamil Medium)

Picture of three tools (Nivetha – Aided – Tamil Medium)

A picture of the farmer (Sundhar – Aided – Tamil Medium)

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Many villages in India (Suresh – Aided – Tamil Medium)

A village in Punjab (Suresh – Aided – Tamil Medium)

The village in this photo (Karthick – Aided – Tamil Medium)

The people of the village (Karthick – Aided – Tamil Medium)

The back bones of India (Babu – Aided – Tamil Medium)

The picture of a village (Bavani – Aided – Tamil Medium)

Many villages in India (Sathish – Aided – Tamil Medium)

The man in the vehicle (Kalpana – Aided – Tamil Medium)

All PPs contain NPs after the Preposition head as complement. They are not considered separately for they may result in double entry.

**Examples:**

to the water (Meena – Unaided – Tamil Medium)

on the road (Lakshmi – Unaided – Tamil Medium)

by the Government (Babu – Unaided – Tamil Medium)

in the vehicle (Kalpana – Unaided – Tamil Medium)

PPs occur as dependent of a verb; as dependent of a noun and as dependent of an adjective (Huddleston, R. 2002, p. 32). I have counted all except those PPs fused within another head. Certain PPs function as Adjectives and Adverbs. Adjective Phrases occur in Attributive position, Post Positive position and Predicative position (Lose Luis Estefani Tarifa 2003, p. 122). Adjectives as Attributives are fused within NPs and PPs; Post Positive Adjectives are rare and found only in fixed expressions. None has used adjectives in post positive position. So, I have counted only those in Predicative Position.

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Adverb Phrase function is often done by PPs. They are left out. Those adverbs functioning as Adjective phrase modifiers are fused with in NPs and so they are left aside and those functioning as Verb Phrase modifiers, as Adverbials and as Adjuncts are considered. These are the least found items.

S-V Agreement and Sub-categorization are the levels posed by me as interface between Phrase level and Sentence level. These are the two levels where low-proficiency students falter much.

Nearly half of the sentences done by Tamil medium students are without verbs and so they cannot be taken for counting in Sentence level.

**Examples:**

There lady long ago water (Pavithra – Unaided – Tamil Medium)

Should be village the water in Government (Lakshmi – Unaided –  
Tamil Medium)

Road will on the accident (Sowmiya – Aided – Tamil Medium)

This is a picture one man road (Nivetha – Aided – Tamil Medium)

**Conclusions**

The following is a table prepared on the basis of Error-free performance of the students:

Levels	Tamil		English	
	Unaided	Aided	Unaided	Aided
Form Levels				
NP	69%	81%	91%	99%
PP	90%	77%	100%	100%
VG	44%	36%	86%	80%

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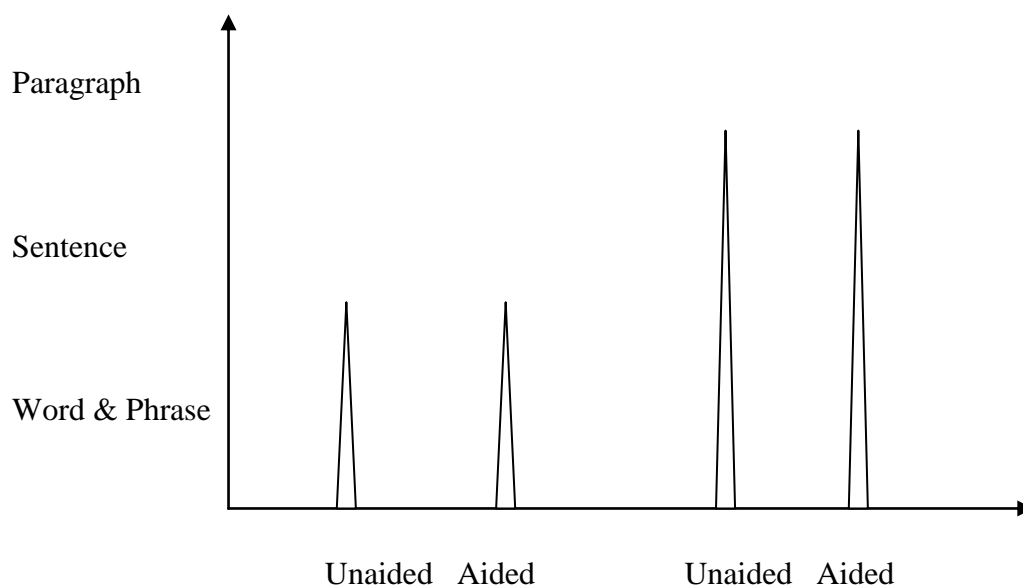
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AdjP	33%	100%	100%	86%
AdvP	33%	50%	100%	86%
Function Levels				
S-V Agreement	36%	38%	88%	86%
Sub-categorization	27%	40%	100%	91%
Sentence Level				
Sentence	02%	04%	70%	62%

Table 2: Error-Free Performance

### HYPOTHESIS – 1

The above table shows that Tamil medium students are in Phrase level and above that, but they are below Sentence level. English medium students show that they are in Sentence level and above that. We have not taken Paragraph level into consideration for it falls into Complexity analysis and not into Accuracy analysis.



Graph 1: Level of Students in Writing Skill

**HYPOTHESIS – 2**

The table above shows that Tamil Medium students show improvement of 02% in Aided Writing in S-V Agreement and 13% in Sub-categorization. But, the vast difference in functional level is not reflected in Sentence level where only 02% difference is noticed.

English medium students show results contrary to Tamil medium students. They exhibit 02% improvement in S-V Agreement and 09% in Sub-categorization in Unaided writing. In sentence level 08% is more in Unaided writing than Aided writing.

This shows that the availability of reference materials does not enhance their performance in the case of low – proficiency students. But, this is quite opposite to the high – proficiency students.

**HYPOTHESIS – 3**

Medium	Educational Level of Family Members	Names of Students
Tamil Medium	School level & below	Nivetha, Meena, Banu, Sandhiya, Sundhar
	With degree	Mohana, Sowmiya, Lakshmi, Pavithra, Sasi Kumar
English Medium	School level & below	Suresh, Babu, Bavani, Kalpana, Mani, Ilango
	With degree	Karthick, Sathish, Geetha, Kavitha

Table 3: Educational Level of Family Members



In hypothesis 1, we learnt that Tamil medium students are in Word & Phrase level and above, while English medium students are in Sentence level and above. Keeping the above table (3) in mind, we compare them with the individual record of the students.

The table 3 shows that Sowmiya and Sasi Kumar have several educated elders at home, while Meena has none like that. To the surprise, Nivetha, Sandhiya and Sundhar have parents who have completed their school level education.

Compare the two functional levels (SV Agreement and Sub-categorization) where the children of family members with the education of school level and below have outperformed those students with graduated elders at home.

The table 3 reveals the fact that Ilango, Suresh, Babu, Mani and Kalpana have elders with school level education, while Sathish, Kavitha, Geetha and Karthick have at least a single graduate family member at home.

Comparison of sentence level (in Table 5) of these students makes it clear that both groups are more or less equal in framing sentences with grammatical accuracy.

The individual performance detail is given below:

SL.NO	NAME	NP		PP		VG		ADJ P		ADV P		S-V		SUB		SEN		TOTAL	
		UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID
1	MOHANA	6	6	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	2	0	1	15	13
2	NIVETHA	4	7	6	3	4	3	0	0	0	0	2	5	3	4	0	0	19	22
3	SOWMIYA	6	2	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	06	10
4	LAKSHMI	8	3	1	4	2	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	3	2	0	0	17	13
5	PAVITHRA	6	3	1	2	4	3	1	0	0	1	2	2	3	2	0	0	17	13
6	MEENA	5	4	4	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	2	1	0	14	12
7	BANU	8	1	1	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	14	06
8	SANDHIYA	5	10	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	7	0	1	07	22
9	SASI KUMAR	7	6	6	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	18	11
10	SUNDHAR	8	6	6	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	2	0	0	20	15
TOTAL		63	48	26	24	22	18	01	01	02	02	18	19	14	23	01	02	147	137

Table 4: T.M. STUDENTS CUMULATIVE RECORD OF INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

SL.NO	NAME	NP		PP		VG		ADJ P		ADV P		S-V		SUB		SEN		TOTAL	
		UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID	UN	AID
1	SURESH	11	8	2	4	7	5	0	0	0	0	7	5	7	7	4	2	38	31
2	KARTHICK	6	5	3	5	4	4	0	3	0	1	4	4	4	5	4	4	25	31
3	BABU	7	9	1	3	5	6	1	1	0	0	6	4	6	6	3	4	29	33
4	SATHISH	6	8	2	4	6	4	0	0	1	0	5	5	6	4	3	2	29	27
5	BAVANI	10	9	1	1	6	5	0	0	1	0	5	4	6	2	3	3	32	24
6	GEETHA	6	6	2	2	4	5	0	1	0	1	4	6	5	4	4	4	25	29
7	KAVITHA	5	9	1	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	4	7	2	3	18	28
8	KALPANA	8	8	2	3	4	4	1	0	0	2	5	5	6	5	3	4	29	31
9	MANI	8	9	1	2	5	5	0	0	1	0	5	6	5	5	5	2	30	29
10	ILANGO	8	5	3	3	6	4	0	1	0	2	7	5	6	6	4	3	34	29
TOTAL		75	76	18	30	50	45	02	06	03	06	51	47	55	51	35	31	289	292

Table 5: E.M. STUDENTS CUMULATIVE RECORD OF INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

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Thus, the data shows that the educational level of the members of the family do not make any difference in learning English.

#### **HYPOTHESIS – 4**

The purpose of study and their exposure to the English TV and English Newspaper are given as follows:

Purpose of Study	Names of Tamil Medium Students	Names of English Medium Students
To speak, to read and to write	Mohana, Pavithra, Meena, Sandhiya	Suresh, Sathish, Bavani, Geetha, Kavitha, Kalpana, Mani
To go abroad or other states	Nivetha, Banu, Sasi Kumar, Sundhar	Karthick
To pass the exam	Sowmiys, Lakshmi	Babu, Ilango

Table 6: Purpose of Study

An analysis of table 6 with the background of table 5 at sentence level reveals certain facts. The first number after names of students stand for Unaided, while the second for Aided Writing. Babu (3-4) and Ilango (4-3) who want just to pass the exam can compete equally with others Suresh (4-2), Sathish (3-2), Kavitha (2-3) and Bavani (3-3) who want to learn English for Practical Purposes.

Among Tamil Medium students, Lakshmi (2-2/3-2), who just wants to pass the exam, is not inferior to Mohana (3-1/2-2), Pavithra (2-2/3-2), Banu (3-0/0-0) and Sasi Kumar (0-1/2-1), while Sowmiya (0-0/0-1) disproves the decision.

Note that numbers within parenthesis show the performance of the students from table 4. The numbers before slash stands for SV Agreement and after slash for Sub-categorization. The first number stands for unaided writing, while the second number for aided writing.

The next table shows their efforts to learn English. In a country like India where English is a Second Language used for official purposes the main exposures to students out of the class room are through:

Watching TV and

Reading News paper

Though Tamil Medium students want to learn English for practical purposes, they do not take personal steps to expose themselves to the language. English Medium students, on the other hand, watch English TV Channels and read English newspapers as given below:

Language Exposure	Tamil Medium		English Medium	
	Watch TV	Read News Paper	Watch TV	Read News Paper
English	-	-	Karthick Mani	Karthick Babu Geetha
Tamil	Mohana Pavithra Meena Sundhar Sandhiya Sasi Kumar	Mohana Nivetha Sowmiya Lakshmi Pavithra Meena Banu	Suresh Babu Sathish Bavani Geetha Kavitha Kalpana	Suresh
None	Nivetha Sowmiya	Sandhiya	ilango	Sathish Bavani

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	Lakshmi Banu			Kavitha Kalpana Mani Ilango
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Table 7: Language Exposure

Out of the ten, only one (Karthick) has the habit of watching TV and reading a newspaper in English. Mani watches English TV Channel, while Babu and Geetha read a newspaper in English.

### Final Conclusions

Tamil Medium students are below sentence level. They have not mastered SV Agreement and Sub-categorization frame of verbs they select for coding their thoughts in English. If these levels are mastered they can reach the sentence level like the students of English Medium. Once sentence level is reached, they can expose themselves to higher levels of language.

In the case of low-proficiency students, even the supply of reference materials and allowing them to write at their own pace make no difference in performance. That is, their performance remains at the same level. Only those who have succeeded in understanding the form-function mapping can use those aids.

The educational level of these students' family members does not usually match the demands of the level of the learning students are in, and the family members rarely spend their time with the students. Now-a-days, more often than not, students are found either with their friends or watching mother tongue mass-media.

Their purpose of study does not make any difference in their language use, as they are not in the environment where English is spoken as the first language.

Their purpose to learn English does not encourage them to expose themselves to mass-media. On the other hand, Babu, who learns English just to pass his board exam, reads

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English newspaper/s. The students of Tamil Medium neither read English newspaper/s nor do they watch English TV as they cannot make sense out of them. It seems mere waste of their time and is felt to be a monotonous activity. The environment they are in does not encourage and facilitate their learning of English for social interaction.

### **Suggestions**

The tendency to teach English merely to pass the exam needs to be changed. Both the educationists and the teachers have to recognize English as a skill subject. The students who are below the sentence level are not able to appreciate the reading materials as well as the mass-media they can freely have exposure to. The low level proficiency students too (as in table 6) have motivation to learn English but they need meaningful exposure to the language. Here the role of the teachers is crucial, since they happen to be the only ready source of English speech for most students.

On the other hand, those students with high proficiency, who are in and above sentence level, have intrinsic motivation to learn English but they neither read English newspapers nor watch TV to enhance their language skills. They feel happy that they can do well and score high grades in their examinations. Such students need more guidance and opportunity to exhibit their skills. The teachers may guide them by framing a set of tasks to perform and may provide an opportunity to them to speak in the class room. In this context, the teacher may listen to them and supply them with brief information or tips relating to their topic of speech or discussion.

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R. Ashok Kumar, Ph.D. Scholar  
Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages  
S.V. University  
Tirupati – 517 502  
Andhra Pradesh  
India  
[ashokr.yogi@gmail.com](mailto:ashokr.yogi@gmail.com)

Prof. G. Radha Krishna, Ph.D.

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Head of the Department, Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages  
S.V. University  
Tirupati – 517 502  
Andhra Pradesh  
India

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