

# What's the Remedy?

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The first thing to be said about the compositions quoted in Vol. 1, No. 2 under this heading is that they should not have been written i.e. the teacher should not set compositions at all to a class, even a VI Form class, that produces sentences such as these:

“Two of thirty children were broke their heard class two less their hand” or “The driver and the other who saved in the accident were sending to their house”

It is clear from the compositions that these students are not grasped the differences in form and in meaning between active and passive verbs: that they have not learnt the past tenses of irregular verbs. So we can start by building up a sequence of lessons that teach and practise these past tense forms. We find the verbs most frequently used and therefore most needed in the word list and could start with

break fall run send take

**Step 1.** The teacher writes on the board (so that the students can see the written forms when they start the drill)

|      |       |      |     |      |      |
|------|-------|------|-----|------|------|
|      | break | fall | run | send | take |
| Past | broke | fell | ran | sent | took |

and asks questions that make the students use the verbs in their answers (that means long answers must be given).

Q: Who broke the glass? S: Ahmad broke it.  
Q: Where did he break it? S: He broke it in the laboratory.  
T: What did he break before that? S: He broke three bowls.  
T: When did he break them? S: He broke them yesterday.

Continue drilling by changing the object of the verb – to cups / plates / a chair / the leg of the table / the school clock / a glass door / the glass of my watch / the bus windows / the handles of the doors, etc.

and get the students to begin asking the same questions of each other. Rub out the verb forms from the board: continue the drill until everyone has spoken. Then give at least 5 questions with the longer nominals and get 5 written answers (this is to check pronoun use at the same

time as the spelling of the past tense is practised).

**Step 2.** Continue the same kind of rapid oral drill, followed by written work, for the other verbs.

**Step 3.** (Note that you may need some short pronunciation practice for *sent* ct *send* and *ran* ct *run*.)

Tell your students, orally, a very simple story such as this:

One day Ahmad, a three year old boy, was alone in the house. He climbed on to a chair and looked at some pretty flowers on the table. He took hold of the vase but it was too big for his small hands. It fell on the floor and the water ran out. His mother came in at that moment and shouted angrily at him. Then she sent him to bed.

Ask them to re-write it. Any one who makes mistakes in the verbs has to write it out again, at home.

**Step 4.** Now try to get some longer, complex sentences practised with the same verbs:

T: Why did Ahmad climb on a chair?  
S: He climbed on a chair (to look at the flowers. (because he wanted to look at the flowers).  
T: Why did he take hold of the vase?  
S: He took hold of the vase (because he wanted to get the flowers. (to get hold of the flowers).  
T: Why did the vase fall?  
S: The vase fell because Ahmad's hands were small. (or too small to hold it.)  
T: When did the water run out?  
S: The water ran out when the vase fell on the floor.  
T: Why did Ahmad's mother shout at him?  
S: She shouted at him because the vase fell on the floor/ because the vase broke/because she like the vase/ because it was an expensive vase, etc.

(Do these drills again: change Ahmad to the children/his sister, etc. to practise pronouns.)

Then get the students to write the same answers when you give the same questions orally.

**Step 5.** (1) Ask your students to write a similar short simple story using:

broke / sent / ran / took / fell

You should be able to correct any mistakes made by watching the students as they are writing and correcting immediately in their books.

(2) Then ask your students to write the same story in dialogue form:

Mother: "Why did you climb on the chair, Ahmad?"

Ahmad: "I wanted to see the flowers." etc.

How many lessons will you need to teach these five verbs?

It doesn't matter, as long as the students learn to use them. Remember that you can make the students use more advanced vocabulary by giving them a more sophisticated situation (but keeping the same verbs): e.g.

a man hijacked a plane

a thief broke into a house

two prisoners escaped from jail, etc.

You can easily extend the collocations for each verb (fire broke out: the car broke down: he broke off a piece of the wood: prices fell: rain fell: she sent him away: he sent off the letter: he took Judo lessons: he took the letters to the post, etc.) so that you give all the students practice in using the correct past tenses.

Once your Form VI students can handle the past tense forms of 40 to 50 verbs they should be able to write narratives or stories or reports with some accuracy and it would be very good to give them extended practice in writing very short paragraphs using all the past tense forms they have learnt. Subjects could be: What did the teacher do when he came into the room this morning? What did the naughty boy do when his mother went out? What did the children do when they visited Kuala Lumpur? What did the bus driver do in the floods? What did Hang Tuah do as a young boy? etc.

The next series of lessons then will be to teach the students how to handle the passive: and it would be better to separate these two series by giving some other language practice (pronouns, or prepositional phrases such as "in front of", or perhaps a revision of nouns in agreement with verbs (the policemen are coming, the ambulance man is coming, the shopkeepers are telephoning, etc.) so that *sent* and *was sent* are firmly separated in the learning process.

Suppose we start the passive by practising the same situation as the compositions dealt with. We make a table, having first checked that the students understand the meaning of the verbs used;

|                      |      |                         |
|----------------------|------|-------------------------|
| Not all the children |      | killed.                 |
| Some of the children |      | badly injured.          |
| A few of the girls   | was  | thrown out of the bus.  |
| Two boys             | were | thrown into the river.  |
| The bus driver       |      | drowned into the river. |
| All the students     |      |                         |
| One girl             |      |                         |

but perhaps before that we should check to see that our students remember the Past Participle form of the verbs they are going to use. This check can be done quite simply by setting them to write down, rapidly, a past participle form for every verb you give them orally.

T says: go see take write send fall read sell  
buy stand come say etc.

Ss write: gone seen taken etc.

The table is on the board: it should be wiped off as soon as you have asked the first batch of questions so that the second lot of answers is from memory.

Ask questions – What happened to the bus driver? and get the answers – He was badly injured. What happened to two boys? They were thrown out of the bus. You could also get all the sentences put in some consecutive order and repeated by as many students as possible.

Make another table, with a variety of of nominals, e.g.

|                            |      |                |
|----------------------------|------|----------------|
| A girl's leg               |      | broken.        |
| Two of the boys' hands     |      | hurt.          |
| Some of the students' arms | was  | cut off.       |
| The front of the bus       | were | crushed.       |
| The bus wheels             |      | badly injured. |
| The bus driver             |      | damaged.       |

which will bring out the differences between human beings being *injured* and buses being *broken* or *damaged*. Then when you have asked: "What happened to....." a sufficient number of times rub the table out and ask the students to write 5 or 6 or 7 sentences about what happened to the bus and to the people.

You can think of another set of sentences where the passive is used naturally:

|                                  |      |                          |
|----------------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| The ambulance from the next town |      | called for.              |
| The police                       | was  | telephoned.              |
| The injured students             | were | sent immediately.        |
| The damaged bus                  |      | taken to hospital.       |
| The girl with a broken leg       |      | lifted out of the river. |

We should note that if we have taught the past participle forms such as *damaged*, *broken*, *injured* we should try

to encourage the students to use them as adjectives and so we put them into the table. Remember that your students only learn what you teach them, and what you make them to use frequently in oral and written practice.

Now you might go back to the original story and ask your students to complete it as before: Last week a terrible accident happened five miles from our town. A bus with thirty children.....  
and we hope you would not have so many hours to spend with a red pencil as you did before.

At the same time we have to say that the passive has not been taught: it has merely been practised in one given situation where it is often used (an accident) and there will have to be many more situation devised by the teacher where it can be naturally used before the students can confidently handle in their passive form all the verbs / know.

Think of the situations in which the passive would be commonly used: A man is robbed and beaten: A house is broken into and things are stolen: Students are given the wrong test papers: Durians are brought into town and sold: A big block of flats is being built in the capital: Melaka was fortified in 1511: Rubber is produced in Malaysia: The coils are brought into contact, etc. If you want your students to learn to use the passive, you must create the opportunities for them to practise as wide a range of vocabulary as they have.

In Vol. I, No. 3 another sample of work taken from students' exercise books was given. This was concerned with vocabulary. The student had written twelve words in English and opposite them twelve other words in English which were supposed to be their meanings. This work must have been approved of by the teacher, as there were no corrections or comments made: but it was a less piece of work, and a waste of the student's time, for these reasons:

- (1) the words were not differentiated by using noun/verb/adjective/adverb labels: and frequently a noun (e.g. *strength*) was made equivalent in meaning to an adjective (e.g. *mighty*) or to a verb (e.g. *mixture = mingle*) No one could tell from the list if *experiment = try* was a noun or a verb.
- (2) The vocabulary items were written down in an un-systematic way e.g. *strangest* was in the superlative form: *froze* was in the past tense form: *protecting* may have been used as an adjective (the protecting power) or as part of a tense form (he was protecting). In neither case could *aware* be used as an equivalent. The word *crushed* was given in the past tense form, but its equivalent was given as the

neutral *break*. Similarly *submarines* is plural and could scarcely be represented by *diveship* in the singular (quite apart from the originality of this coinage).

What can be done to make such vocabulary lists more useful? Finding and writing down the meaning of words is quite a useful homework exercise for students at all levels, but making vocabulary lists should follow certain principles, so that the students learn not only to understand the meaning of each item but, more important, how to use it grammatically.

First, then, the teacher has to decide whether these vocabulary lists are intended for general use, or for the special purpose of understanding the passage or text being read: that is, are the equivalents given to be capable of substitution only in the context provided, or are they to have general application?

When that point is decided, there is the very important question – how much information needs to be given about each item? Perhaps we can suggest:

- (a) the word class of the item should be indicated i.e. whether it is a noun (n.) or a verb (vb.) or an adjective (adj.) or an adverb (adv). No other classification is necessary, unless the teacher would like vb. (trans.) i.e. transitive or intransitive to be indicated.
- (b) if the item is a verb with an irregular past tense, that should be written out i.e. freeze, froze, frozen (but not crush, crushed, crushed). The verb form used should be the base form (break) or the to-infinitive form (to break).
- (c) Nouns should be labelled unC (= uncountable) if they are generally or often used as such. Only irregular plurals (man – men) need to be written out.

When you, as a teacher, write some vocabulary items on the blackboard please remember that if your students are to copy them down (otherwise why did you write them?) you should always give them the basic classifications as outlined above. Then the student can use his word lists for learning, for revision and for reference. There are, of course, other things that can be added to make these word lists more useful. I would not, myself, add more to the nouns: I would certainly concentrate on the verbs. In the list given in the earlier article there are two verbs which could do with amplification and these are: *decide* and *consider*.

I would like to see  
*decide to do something*  
*consider doing something*

written in as useful adjuncts and we might add the preposition generally used after the verb *protect* – i.e. protect someone from something.

In other words, words should never be treated, even in a word list, as if they stood alone. They must always be put into their grammatical context if they are going to be used correctly by the student when they come to write.

One other point: if you expect the student to use

these words in speech as well as in writing, indication of stress is useful. Thus: ex'periment, con'sider, 'submarine.

Finally, it has, I think been made obvious that these vocabulary lists should deal only with content words: as no structural item can have its varied meanings summarized within the meagre dimensions of a student's word list. Words like some, any, of, at, in may, ought, etc. have no place in any such list.