

## CHAPTER - VII

Schools are primarily responsible for drilling the rules of grammar into their learners. This is more so in the case of a foreign language. Since school curricula still pay considerable attention to English grammar and usage, it may not be wholly irrelevant to look into the pedagogical responses to the subject of the present study — namely, the English past perfective. What, then, this penultimate chapter attempts to do is to catch the glimpses of how school teachers approach some of the rather peculiar aspects of the past perfective.

In order to make a survey of the pedagogical responses, questionnaires were sent to the teachers of English of twenty well known schools in India and abroad. Only ten of them responded to the queries sent. Admittedly, the number may look too inadequate for a survey to yield good results; but this limitation may be said to have been considerably compensated by the valuable responses from such schools as Eton College and Harrow School of England and Wesley College of South Australia.

Each of these ten informants was given a questionnaire containing a 'topic' followed by queries. We will, for the sake of convenience, first mention the topic and then go on to recount and discuss all the pedagogical responses in respect of each of the queries.

## TOPIC :

The Past Perfect : the 'past within past' structures

- A. The patient died before the doctor came.
- B. The patient had died before the doctor came.
- C. The patient died before the doctor had come.
- D. The patient had died before the doctor had come.

## QUERY 1 :

Which of these four structures do you think the students should adopt to mean that first the patient died and then the doctor came?

## RESPONSES:

Six informants, including Eton College, are of the opinion that structure B should be adopted. Harrow School (Appendix-XXXIII) and Wesley College (Appendix XXXIV) have ticked off all the four (A — B) structures, implying that all of these signify the same. In a marginal note on the response to the query, Harrow School clarifies its stand by saying that the word 'before' defines the general sequence for all the four. Lagda High School (see Appendix XLI) opts for both A and B in this regard, while Don Bosco (Appendix XXXVII) ticks off only C.

## QUERY 2 :

Are the students taught that A & B are identical in meaning?

## RESPONSES:

The responses of the informants to this query are highly disparate and sometimes self-contradictory. For example, Harrow School says that A and B are not identical and thereby contradicts its own response to Query 1. Similar self-contradiction can be seen in the cases of Loreto Day School, St. John's Diocesan School, Calcutta Boys School, (Appendices XXXV — XXXVII) — all of whom opine that A and B are identical although each of them ticks off only one of the four structures in responding to Query 1.

Quite in keeping with their responses to Query 1, Eton College (Appendix XXXII), St. Paul's School (Appendix XXXIX) and F.D. Institution (Appendix XL) do not think that A & B are identical. The schools which take A & B to be identical but do not invite self-contradiction are Wesley College (Appendix XXXIV), Lagda High School (Appendix XLI), and Don Bosco (Appendix XXXVIII).

## Query 3 :

How would you show to your students the difference, if any, between A & B ?

## RESPONSES :

Eton College considers A wrong and B correct because "the patient died before the doctor came — and so the first

verb must be in the past perfect tense" (Appendix XXXII). Calcutta Boys School (Appendix XXXVII) shows a similar response in calling the difference 'structural' and then adding that A is an "incorrect grammatical structure". Harrow School sees the difference "in terms of viewpoint/perspective in time from which the statement is made; in terms of the emphasis on degrees of separation between two events; in terms of other purposes (in context) and tenses of the speaker/writer" (Appendix XXXIII).

Although Wesley College considers A & B identical in meaning, it goes on to speak of the difference between the two with the help of a diagram (Appendix XXXIV). The asterisks in the diagram indicate that the difference pointed out is one of time-gap.

Loreto Day School (Appendix XXXV) and Don Bosco School (Appendix XXXVIII) view the difference between A & B as one owing to different specifications of time-gap between the two past events. The former is of the opinion that "the use of past perfect brings out the time difference more clearly", while the latter speaks of the "Difference in time of death". These two schools thus echo what Wesley College seeks to say diagrammatically and what Harrow School includes among the possible reasons it gives for the difference.

St. John's Diocesan School (Appendix XXXVI) see B as recording "the correct usage of the past perfect" and opines that "The use of the past perfect reiterates (stresses) that the first action had happened earlier than the second. ... In short both 'A' and 'B' have the same meaning in [ sic ] 'B' the fact that the patient had died stresses that indeed happen [ sic ] earlier". What, therefore, is implied here is that the past perfective emphasizes one of the two past events.

St. Paul's School shows the difference between A and B by saying that "in 'B' the past perfect tense 'had died' is used to describe an action which had been completed at some point in the past time before another action commenced ...." (Appendix XXXIX). So, according to this response, the past perfective registers the completion of the particular event concerned.

Lagda High School does not see any difference between A and B on the ground that "Died and had died imply the same point of time. Hence no difference should be made between these two structures" (Appendix XLI).

F.D. Institution says that "the categorical difference, however, cannot be shown", although its response to Query 2 is that A and B are not identical in meaning.

## Query 4 :

Have the structures C & D ever been brought to the notice of the students?

## RESPONSES :

The strongest of the responses to this query comes probably from Eton College which says : "yes — but only to show why they're wrong" (Appendix XXXII). In Harrow School these two structures have been brought to the notice of the students "but not with these distinctions, as a group of four" (Appendix XXXIII). A simple 'yes' comes from Calcutta Boys (Appendix XXXVII), St. Paul's School (Appendix XXXIX) and F.D. Institution (XL) while the rest of the schools under the survey has said simply 'no'. However, the reason given by Wesley College for saying 'no' is worth noting : "Too confusing for ESL learners who think Tense = time ! ! I'm happy if they manage to grasp (a) & (b)" (Appendix XXXIV).

## QUERY 5 :

Have you ever noticed the structures C & D but considered them too complex for your students?

## RESPONSES :

Informants who do not regard structures C and D as too complex are Eton College (Appendix XXXII) and St. Paul's School (Appendix XXXIX) and Harrow School (Appendix XXXIII).

Wesley College (Appendix XXXIV), St. John's Diocesan School, Calcutta Boys School, Don Bosco School (Appendices XXXVI — XXXVIII) and F.D. Institution (Appendix XL) are of the opinion that the structures are too complex. To Loreto Day School (Appendix XXXV) the question is not one of "complexity but inaccuracy", while Lagda High School (Appendix XLI) remarks in responding to Query 6 that they have no acquaintance with structures C and D.

QUERY 6 :

If you are already acquainted with the structures C & D, what in your opinion could they imply?

RESPONSES :

Some of the informants have labelled structures C & D as contradictory and wrong, and in doing so they have often offered explanations. For example, Eton College has the following explanation:

C. is contradictory : "the doctor had come" implies that that action took place before the patient died, but the sentence says the opposite.

D. is wrong because the two verbs imply that the two actions took place at the same time, which is not what the sentence means to say.

(Appendix XXXII)

Loreto Day School (Appendix XXXV) regards both the structures as inaccurate and does not see any implication. Calcutta Boys School (Appendix XXXVII) remains silent about structure C but comments that "Structure D is grammatically incorrect" owing to the repetition of 'had'. Don Bosco School (Appendix XXXVIII) is quite of the same opinion as Calcutta Boys School. The response of F.D. Institution is not very clear although it seems to have disapproved of the two structures: "Action of the verbs is in the past but one takes place earlier than the other and the indication to the reality is just the reverse" (Appendix XL).

Taking contextuality largely into account, Harrow School finds the following implications of structures C and D :

- C. That the doctor's arrival was not solely related to the needs of this patient but to other purposes (e.g. other patients) or to a greater span of time altogether. Or that the arrival constituted some event whose consequences reached to include this patient only as one possible part of his/her task.
- D. This statement has remoter past within past structure. It seems appropriate for contexts where preceding senses have either raised possibilities that require emendation or where assumptions need rebuttal.

(Appendix XXXIII)

Wesley College looks into the matters of completion and occurrence of the events recounted:

C. Both actions in past are completed; sequence is denoted by "before". Some implication of judgement on the doctor's tardy arrival.

D. Both actions are past and completed; neutral attitude to both events.

(Appendix XXXIV)

St. John's Diocesan School holds that in C and D, unlike in A and B,

only the fact that the patient died belongs definitely to the past. All we know that it happened before the doctor had come. When the doctor ultimately came is not clearly expressed or whether he came at all.

(Appendix XXXVI)

Lagda High School declares that they have no acquaintance with structure C and D but goes on to add that "they seem to imply both A & B " (Appendix XLI).

QUERY 7 :

What structure would you recommend to the students to cover a statement like "the patient died but the doctor did not ultimately come ?"

## RESPONSES :

It is interesting to note that in most of the responses to this query the structures recommended do not make use of the past perfective at all. Instead, the past simple has been used throughout. What is more, conjunctions like 'and' and 'but' are used instead of 'before' to mark off the temporal relation between the two past events. Here is the structure recommended by Eton College : "The patient died but the doctor never came" (Appendix XXXII). It is thus quite clear that convenient paraphrases have been adopted and the simple past + before + past perfective or past perfective + before + past perfective structure has been shunned in implying that the second event did not at all take place. A good variety of paraphrase has been furnished by Wesley College :

The patient died without the benefit of [ the ] doctor attending.

The patient died and the doctor never arrived. The doctor failed to attend his patient who subsequently died.

Death came to the patient; [ but/however ] the doctor didn't.

(Appendix XXXIV)

Only in two responses the use of the past perfective is to be seen. While St. John's Diocesan School (Appendix XXXVI) recommends "The patient had died but the doctor did not come", Lagda High School (Appendix XLI) would like to recommend the structure B ("The patient had died before the doctor came", grievously contradicting its own response to Query 1.

The only informant to see C or D as a possible structure is Harrow School (Appendix XXXIII) whose tentative remark is worth quoting : "If one has to use "before", then C or D to become possible, but without a context both of grammar and times this is very speculative".

What the foregoing survey yields may be summed up in the following points:

- (i) Most of the informants do not think that the simple past + before + simple past and past perfective + before + simple past structures are identical.
- (ii) Only two informants think that all the variants (A — D) imply the same probably on the ground that the word 'before' is enough for the implication.
- (iii) The reasons given for the difference between A and B as well as the implications seen in C and D greatly vary.

- (iv) The whole responses can be evenly divided into two opposite groups as to the questions whether C and D are too complex and whether these have ever been brought to the notice of the students.
- (v) Five (including Eton College) of the ten schools surveyed are of the opinion that C and D are wrong. This is a response that goes against Quirk et al (1985 : 1020), Declerck (1979b) and Jespersen (1924 : 266) — all of whom have tried to see some implication or other in structures C and D. Even when some of the informants have sought to explain C and D, their explanations greatly vary.
- (vi) None has had recourse to the simple past + before + past perfective or the past perfective + before + past perfective structure in signalling the non-factuality or non-occurrence of any of the events recounted in the domain of past. What is more, almost all the responses do not even use the past perfective in this regard. A strong propensity towards paraphrase (i.e. other structural means) is seen in them.
- (vii) That the past perfective is not an easy matter altogether to handle so far as teaching is concerned is suggested by one of the informants in the following way : "The past perfect is an extremely difficult tense to teach and a clear distinction must be made between timing and tense" (Appendix XXXIV).