The Use of Substitution Tables in Controlled and Guided Composition Writing

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When the pupil is given the task of writing a composition, and that too in a foreign language like English, he is in fact burdened with more than one task. He not only has to think of what to say but how to say what he wants to say in a way relevant to the situation in which the language is used. "How to say what he wants to say" involves a good stock of vocabulary, a sound knowledge of grammar and an ability to link his ideas in a logical order. For a learner of English as a Second Language, this is indeed a big task especially as we do not want to nurture a negative attitude towards the writing of compositions. I remember how we moaned and groaned over the idea of having to produce, without any teacher guidance, a lengthy essay. When it was all done it was like having scaled Mt. Everest but when we got back our books many of us felt the reverse—a death plunge to the foothills. We do not want history to repeat itself and to find our students completely demotivated by an abundance of red marks and low scores.

Our role as a teacher is to guide our students. As an English teacher you will agree with me that writing compositions is a much dreaded activity in the classroom. We have to show pupils that writing a composition can be done with little difficulty and that success is within the reach of every pupil. A teacher can help pupils achieve success and a sense of accomplishment by embarking on a course of guided writing by first using linked substitution tables and then progressing, in stages, to a completely free writing stage.

A completely controlled approach is a good start especially with pupils who have no control over their English language structures, transforms, functional words, idioms etc. It also permits sufficient time for the learners to develop skills within these areas. The substitution table is indeed an efficient teaching tool. Several substitution tables linked together by sentences arranged in a logical order and in paragraphs offer the pupil the chance to write many alternative compositions based on the same topic. In such completely controlled linked substitution tables, there is a complete avoidance of error. At the same time the pupils are being exposed to grammatically correct sentences which, hopefully, will serve as models for later writing.

Once the pupils have been given sufficient practice at this stage of controlled writing, the teacher may embark on the almost controlled linked substitution table exercises progressing gradually to the substantially guided linked substitution tables and those that give little or some guidance. In these three types of substitution tables, a more advanced selection of alternatives is required of pupils who have either to make lexical, grammatical or stylistic choices. This entails the students to think in order to make an acceptable choice of the language alternatives offered. Such exercises cannot be branded as "mechanical and dull".

One other aspect of training provided by such exercises is the practice in a correct style or register such as required in a narrative, descriptive or argumentative piece of writing or in letters or in technical writing.
Below are examples of the 4 types of controlled and guided linked substitution tables mentioned earlier.

Composition 1 – Completely controlled linked substitution tables
Composition 2 – Almost controlled linked substitution tables
Composition 3 – Substantially guided linked substitution tables
Composition 4 – Some guidance and a little guidance linked substitution tables.

1. **Completely Controlled Linked Substitution Type**

   **To The Market**

   **Language Items:** Simple Present Tense, Adjectives of quantity and quality, Indefinite Numbers and quantities

   **Teaching Aid:** Use a picture of a market scene as a stimulus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Every</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>I walk</th>
<th>to the market. It is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>take a bus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   not far from near
   1 mile from

   |       | my house. I see | all kinds of many a lot of | people on the way. Sometimes |
   | I meet my | good friends teachers neighbours | at the market. I usually | say hello to greet smile at |
   |       |       |        |        | them. |

   |       | They come to buy | fish fruit vegetables and | eggs. cakes. flowers. |
   |       | empty basket to carry take | home what they buy. Some of them buy | a lot of only a few a large number of |

   |       | things. The market is a busy noisy crowded | place in the morning, but in the evening |
   |       | it is quiet. peaceful. deserted. | |

2. **Almost Controlled Linked Substitution Type**

   **A Malaysian Fruit**

   **Language Items:** Adjectives of quality, the Passive

   **Teaching Aids:** Pictures of 3 types of Malaysian fruit – durians, mangosteens and rambutans
| The     | durian mangosteen rambutan | is a small medium size large | fruit with a hairy thorny smooth | skin. It is green or yellow red or yellow dark purple | in colour. When it ripens, it falls not very high. very high. | This fruit has a strong smell. When it is opened, you can see several seeds only one seed inside. Each The seed is covered with a layer of firm white soft creamy soft, snow-white flesh. | During the durian rambutan mangosteen season, many fruit stalls are set up beside the road. The fruit is neatly tied up in bundles piled up in small heaps to attract buyers. | Most Malaysians like the durian rambutan mangosteen because of its taste. |

3. **Substantially Controlled Linked Substitution Type**

**Language Items:** Negative questions with prepositions, Relative "that" and "which"

Choose for A: A suitable price, in Malaysian dollars, for the article you are writing about.

B: A price 20% less than (A) for the same article.

C: A final price 10% less than (A) for the same article.
A  Is this the guitar shirt pen frock that you wanted to buy? asked for? were telling me about? have tried on? have chosen?

B  Not exactly. quite. I wanted something like the same as exactly like Ahmad’s. the one I you my

No. I don’t think so.

showed you this morning.

have in the shop window.

father 

friend’s sister has.
bought.

A  Which Which one What was that? do you mean? is it like?

B  It’s the one with twelve strings. red and black stripes. a gold ribbon. a batik print.

which has frills at the bottom. Elvis’s picture on it.

A  Oh! that’s rather expensive. very expensive. not for sale.

that has been sold.

B  How much is it? What a pity! I like that very much. Don’t you have another one like that?

(A)  ................

Sorry, it’s my son’s. Not right now. Maybe, by Saturday, the new stock will have arrived.

(B)  (A)? It’s too much. Can’t you give it for (B)? ................  ................

All right, then. I’ll come by on Saturday to check...

It’s all right. Do you mind if I have a closer look at it? Maybe you’ll let me

A  Very well, I’ll let you have it for the final price of (C)  ................

Please do that. Don’t worry, I’ll remember to keep one aside for you.

By all means. Certainly. Yes, why not?

B  I’ll take it. Thank you very much. Goodbye.
4. Some Guidance and a Little Guidance Linked Substitution Type

A Cleaning Up Project

Language Item: Sentence Connectors

Read over the exercise below carefully. Notice each blank space is marked with a ?. This indicates that a word is needed and you are to provide the word. Where there are no ?'s in the frames, just choose the appropriate word/words given. Notice the Title is incomplete too. Supply an appropriate word at the end.

The [place] housing area [kampong] where I live in is in need of a big clean up. First, the [roads] paths must be attended to. They are strewn scattered with all kinds of rubbish which has to be [?].

Secondly, the drains require [sweeping] [improving] as [they are] the water [in them] [?].

Thirdly, the children's playground which is [overgrown] [strewn] [?] whenever it rains has to be looked into. The swings and slides need a new coat of [?] [red] [yellow] paint to make them look prettier. [more attractive] [?].

Many children [love] [?] [like] playing there in the evenings. Finally, those residents who keep fowls in their back-yards should be [requested] [told] [?] to keep the chicken coops clean in order to cut down the [?].

Hopefully, when all these improvements are done, my [?] will be a [cleaner] [good] [?] place to live in.