A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF TENSE ERRORS MADE BY TELUGU-SPEAKING ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN TELANGANA

RAJENDER PONDRA
Research Scholar
Ph.D. in English
The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad

ABSTRACT

This paper is from my doctoral research. This paper's primary focus is the error analysis of sentences and their grammatical components. *Error Analysis* is a method of linguistic inquiry; it focuses on the errors made by learners, generally in second language learning. In order to learn the target language, error analysis is regarded as a device for the learners. In Telangana, people learn English as a second language. Hence, it is natural for students to commit errors when using English in everyday interactions, i.e., oral or written. It is an observable fact that, as far as the learner is concerned, there is a large gap between the English curriculum set for engineering students and their outcome in the form of poor performance.

Keywords: Tense Errors, Engineering Students, Second Language Learning, Error Analysis and Mother Tongue Influence.

1.   Introduction

Engineering students need to use a lot of academic writing in English. Deviation from meaningfulness is a significant problem in their written English. Corder (1974) points out that a thorough analysis of language learners' errors can facilitate to make betterment in teaching. As for a suggestive remedy to address their erroneous sentences, this study concentrates on the nature of errors made in their written English[1] so that identifying incorrect grammatical components and deviating situations can be avoided in learning or teaching scenarios.

Regarding the cause of ungrammaticality, the following details of the informants taken for this study are essential for a rough estimation of the underlying problem of erroneous sentences. The details can serve as background understanding.

2.   Relevant Information about the Informants

- Number of informants: 60 students
- Mother tongue: Telugu
- Medium of instruction: English and translation into Telugu
- Education: Graduation in Engineering
- The language used for general purposes: Telugu
- Exposure to English communication: very less

By observing the above details, we can understand that there is also the possibility of errors due to mother tongue influence. In the absence of sufficient exposure to error-free English, the students written communication should be structurally good enough since context and situation may not be live.

---

[1] Written English demands accuracy and standards of grammar. Intelligibility of oral communication may be adjustable according to live context and situation;

tend to mug up notes and imitate them in writing during examinations. At times, in writing tasks, in case of not finding a suitable grammatical structure in English, the students tend to see the alternative pattern from their mother tongue. In this way, their written English turns into ungrammatical errors. A proper analysis of such errors can lead to the design of remedial measures by highlighting the common source of an error.

3. Error Analysis

For this study, error analysis is adopted as the research methodology. Error analysis is one of the branches of applied linguistics. As per the idea of Pit Corders (1967), it is an alternative to contrastive analysis. It became an accepted part of Applied Linguistics. Researchers like Ellis (1997), Gas and Selinker (2001) used error analysis as the process that is used to analyze the data. The four steps listed below are considered in the study

1) Data collection
2) Categorization of errors into error types
3) Identification of errors
4) A report of error frequency and analysis

4. Types of Tense Errors in Written English

The following are the result of the data analysis used in this study.

4.1 Substitution

A. <u>Using Progressive Form for Simple Form</u>
1. WS[2]: The companies like Wipro **are offering** jobs for degree holders.

   RS: The companies like Wipro **offer** jobs for degree holders.
2. WS: Many fans **are following** celebrities.

   RS: Many fans **follow** celebrities

At the time of the writing task, most of the students opted for the present progressive form rather than the present simple form. The students are supposed to use the present simple form because they want to express general or habitual events rather than continuity of action.

B. <u>Using Present progressive for Past Progressive</u>
1) WS: When he **is eating** food….

   RS: When he **was eating** food….
2) WS: After that I **am playing** cricket…

   RS: After that I **was playing** cricket…

As per the context at the time of writing, the students wanted to express an ongoing action in the past, but most of the students opted for the present progressive form rather than the past progressive form.

C. <u>Using Present Perfect Form for Simple Past</u>
1. WS: Last month, I **have paid** the bill.

   RS: Last month, I **paid** the bill.
2. WS: Yesterday, I **have gone** to my village.

   RS: Yesterday, I **went** to my village

Most students are ignorant about the difference between present and past perfect form in the given writing task.

D. <u>Using Dynamic Verb for Stative Verb</u>
1. WS: I **am feeling** about it.

   RS: I **feel** about it.
2. WS: We **are hoping** so

   RS: We **hope** so

It has been observed in this study that the students are unable to make a difference between Stative verbs and dynamic verbs in English. Stative verbs generally take simple rather than progressive forms in English.

4.2 Additions

A. <u>Unwanted Addition of Auxiliary Verb</u>
1. WS: It's a party where seniors and juniors **are interacted** with one another.

   RS: It's a party where seniors and juniors **interacted** with one another
2. WS: He **is talked** about it

   RS: He **talked** about it

It is adding an unwanted auxiliary verb before the main verb is a common error in most cases. This happens especially in simple tense forms.

4.3 Mistaken Analogy

A. <u>Using Wrong Past Tense Marker</u>
1. WS: We have **forgotted** time.

   RS: We have **forgot** time
2. WS: I am **sended** the money

   RS: I **sent** the money

It is observed that some students commit errors in spelling level regarding irregular verb forms; it is taken into account as this happens in the use of simple past tense.

B. <u>Wrong Usage of Negative Past Form</u>
1. WS: We did not found him

---

[2] WS indicates wrong sentence, and RS indicates right sentence.

RS: We did not find him

In negative sentences of simple past tense, generally the past verb needs to be divided into past auxiliary (did) and present tense verb (V1) using V2 along with 'did' (V2) is ungrammatical in English.

5. Conclusion

On the final observation of all the above examples and explanations, we can understand that substitution is the major problem in using tense properly in English. We can also find that the sub-categories in substitution have specific synonymous relations with the students' mother tongue (Telugu) because in Telugu, some tense forms are interchangeable in usage. For instance, they are using a present continuous form for simple present form. Apart from this, additions and mistaken analogy are the problems in the learning process. However, this study helps identify tense-related issues and to design particular workbooks for students who are poor in English grammar.

References

Brice, C. (1995*). ESL Writers' Reactions to Teacher Commentary: A Case Study*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 394 312. Accessed on: 2008/04/12. Retrieved from: http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED394312.pdf.

Brown, H.D. (1980). *The Optimal Distance Model of Second Language Acquisition.* TESOL. Quarterly 14: 157-64.

Corder, S. P. (1967). *The Significance of Learners' Errors.* Cited in Richards, J.C. (ed.) 1984 *Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*, pp 19 – 27. London: Longman, (Originally in International Review of Applied Linguistics, 5 (4)).

Corder, S. P. (1973). *Introducing Applied Linguistics*. Hammonds Worth: Penguin.

Corder, S. P. (1974). *Error Analysis.* In J. Allen P. B., & Corder, S. P. (eds.) *Techniques in Applied Linguistics* (The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics: 3). London: Oxford University Press (Language and Language Learning), pp 122-154.

Corder, S. P. (1982). *Error Analysis and Interlanguage.* London: Oxford University Press.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, p 67, Mahwah, NJ: LEA, Chapter 3.2.

Ellis, N. (2007). *The Associative-Cognitive Creed*: van Patten, B. and Williams, J. Eds., *Theories in Second Language Acquisition*: *An Introduction*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, pp. 77-95.