

INVESTIGATING UNDERGRADUATES' TENSE ERRORS OF ACADEMIC ESSAY WRITING IN SUDAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This present paper aimed at investigating the fundamental errors and mistakes that face 4th year students at college of languages, Sudan University of Science and Technology in using tenses in academic essay-writing. The descriptive and analytical method was adopted in this paper. The data of this study was collected by the use of a test. The respondents of this paper were 56 students at fourth year at college of languages who had a test to diagnose the errors of tenses. The findings of the study showed that the students have no background information about knowledge of error analysis techniques and strategies of error correction. The results also showed that lots of students commit numerous of punctuation errors. The study recommended that the syllabus designed at previous stage should be altered by a current English syllabus which has lots of exercises, drills and tasks as well as teachers' opinions and views ought to be taken into consideration while designing English syllabus. Lastly, English literature should be selected as supplementation to enforce the students' fluency and accuracy in writing essays without lots of errors or at least minimizing them.

Key words: tense, academic essay, error analysis

المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي الأخطاء الجوهرية التي تواجه طلاب السنة الرابعة بكلية اللغات ، جامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا في استخدام الأزمنة في كتابة المقالات الأكاديمية. وقد تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي والتحليلي في هذه الورقة ، وتم جمع بيانات هذه الدراسة باستخدام اختبار. كان المشاركون في هذه الدراسة ستة وخمسين طالبا في السنة الرابعة في كلية اللغات أجروا اختباراً لتشخيص أخطاء الأزمنة ، ولقد أظهرت نتائج تلك الدراسة أن الطلاب ليس لديهم معلومات أساسية حول معرفة تقنيات تحليل الخطأ ولستراتيجيات تصحيح الخطأ ، وأظهرت النتائج أيضا أن الكثير من الطلاب يرتكبون العديد من أخطاء علامات الترقيم ، أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تغيير المنهج الدراسي المصمم في المرحلة السابقة من خلال منهج لغة انجليزية متكامل يحتوي علي الكثير من التمارين والتدريبات والواجبات بالإضافة إلي آراء المعلمين ووجهات نظرهم التي يجب أن تؤخذ في الاعتبار عند تصميم ذلك المنهج. وأخيراً ينبغي إختيار الأدب الانجليزي كمكمل للمنهج ولتقوية طلاقة الطلاب ودقتهم في كتابة المقالات بدون أخطاء أو علي الأقل التقليل منها.

Introduction

According to Jacobs (1995:187) who defines the term tense as the grammatical marking on verbs that

usually indicates time reference relative to either the time of speaking or the time at which some other situations were in force.

When we deal with tense, we are dealing with actual language forms used to represent time reference notions. Indeed, we aren't concerned with all kinds of language forms used for time reference, but just the verb forms. Additionally, Crystal (2003:100) confirms that English has one inflectional form to express time; the past tense marker (typically-ed), as in walked, jumped, and saw. There is therefore a two-way tense contrast in English: I walk vs. I walked- present tense vs. past tense. English has no future tense ending, but uses a wide range of other techniques to express future time, for instance, will/shall, be going to, be about to, and future adverbs. Added to that Chalher and others (2014:133) prove that in discussing tense, labels such as present tense, past tense, and future tense are misleading, since the relationship between tense and time is often not on one-to-one. Present and past tenses can be used in some circumstances to refer to future time (e.g. If he comes tomorrow ..., If he came tomorrow ...), present tenses can refer to the past (as in newspaper headlines, e.g. Minister resigns ..., and in colloquial narrative, e.g. so she comes up to me says ... and so on. Lastly, Nordquist (2018:50) defines the term tense in grammar as the time of a verb's action or its state of being, such as present, past, or future. These are called verb's time frame. Many contemporary linguists equate tenses with inflectional categories (or different endings) of a verb, which means that they don't consider future to be a tense.

1.0 The statement of the problem

Tenses' error is always a great concern for language teachers and so the

problems which this paper attempts to investigate those L2 learners at university have difficulties in using tenses properly. L2 learners are often confused about using tenses correctly in essays, for example, instead of (He didn't have enough time yesterday.) they write (He hadn't enough time yesterday.). So, the students mistakenly use the negation of the past simple and the reason of this problem may be that the students lack techniques and strategies of correcting errors or other reasons. Otherwise surely this phenomenon has just enforced the researcher to carry out an investigation about the errors of tenses in academic essays that encountered undergraduates and to shed lights upon the factors that make L2 learners commit those tenses' errors in order to suggest and recommend the best methods of solving or at least minimizing students' tenses' errors in essays.

1.1 The key objectives of the study

The paper aims to:

- iv) pinpoint the errors of tenses faced EFL learners in context of academic essay-writing.
- v) recommend techniques that can help EFL learners in correcting and minimizing their tenses' errors.
- vi) identify the main factors that make students commit tenses' errors in essays.

1.2 The questions of the study

This paper will answer the following questions:

- iv) To what extent do EFL learners have errors of using tenses in academic essay-writing?
- v) What are the techniques to correct and minimize the university undergraduates' errors in tenses?

vi) What are the main factors that make students commit tenses' errors in essays?

1.3 The hypotheses of the study

i) The EFL learners have tenses' errors in academic essays.

ii) There are possible techniques to correct and minimize the university undergraduates' errors in tenses.

their tenses' errors.

iii) There are main factors to make students commit tenses' errors in essays.

1.4 The significance of the study

This paper is significant to the students, because it helps them to overcome their difficulties in tenses. Furthermore, the study is so significant so significant to teachers, syllabus designers and test developers." Keshavarz(1994:124)

1.5 The method of the study

To fulfill the objectives of this paper, the descriptive, analytical, qualitative and the experimental methods were used beside the test for administered to undergraduates as a tool for the study.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The scope of this study is limited to errors of tenses in essays among university undergraduates and it is confined to English language students at Sudan University of Science and Technology, college of languages. The findings of this study can, therefore, not be applicable to other EFL learners elsewhere for any different environmental or cultural reasons.

2. Review of the Previous Studies

Coming back to the contributions of other studies, is so essential for having an obvious picture to participate in providing some suggestions and

participations. Thus in this paper, the researcher will display some related studies.

Nurtan (2003) declares "Analysis of Verb Tense Errors in the Written English of Gaza Secondary School Students." This study classifies, identifies and analyzes the errors in verb tense committed by the General Secondary School Certificate Examinations GSSC students, when they write their EFL compositions. Also, the researcher attempts to diagnose the cause lying beyond those errors, i.e. why do such errors occur? Do they occur as a result of Arabic language interference, (L1) into the target language L2? Or because of the variation in teaching techniques? Again, the researcher mentions some results. The study is confined to the common errors of the three tenses: present, past and future. It has proved that the highest percentage of errors has been found in Tense shift, particularly in the present simple tense, where the lowest percentage of errors has been found in the verb omission area.

In another study, Risto (2016) examines in his study "Concepts of Tense". The researcher declares that there isn't and cannot be one true concept for any linguistic phenomena as there are no "true", language-independent linguistic phenomena. This means that studies employ concepts that differ from each other. However, the concepts should not differ from each other randomly; the concepts cannot be "right" or "wrong", but they can be more or less appropriate.

Lastly, the researcher shows that the concept of tense is indeed an essential part of any linguistic study. The results of the study include a detailed list of components and their values for tense as well as an analysis of their frequency, centrality and canonicity in regard to the concepts of tense. Similarly, Sadouki (2018) investigated the Use of Past Tenses in Students' Narrative Essays. This study aims at investigating the use of past tenses in the narrative essays of third year licence students of English by conducting an error analysis. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative treatment through a writing test for students and semi-structured interviews for teachers. The sample of this includes thirty-one third year licence students of English, six teachers of written expression and comprehension. The results of the study shows that misformation error is the most common error type that third year licence students of English at Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla made with 70.6%, and intralingual error is considered to be the first source of students' errors since it is the most frequent source with 78-45%. Additionally, this study has found that teachers' written expressions and comprehension take into consideration teaching grammar implicitly in their writing classes.

4.0 Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis

Statement: Misuse of correction of past tense negation form is a common error.

3. The Methodology of the Study Method and Material

To fulfill the objective of this paper, the descriptive, analytical, qualitative and experimental methods were used. The paper design was structured and particularly prepared to explore an investigation into students' errors of tenses in academic essays.

The subject of the current article are (56) students. It is worth mentioning that the investigation also intends to meet several requirements such as reliability and validity, as argued by Bachrnan and Cohen (2018) who states that "any measuring test must meet requirement like reliability and validity.

This study adopts a qualitative approach that explains the phenomena based on a numerical data.

A test was design to diagnose the fundamental problems that faces EFL students in tenses' errors in their essays. The test was used as a data collection tool. Particular procedures and steps were flowed in collecting the data. To check the content validity of the test, the researcher ran a pilot study, where statements of the test were distributed to five experts of Ph.Ds. holders; according to their comments, the numbers of the statements were reduced. Also, some of the statements were modified.

Table (1)

Pre-test
Control group

Section	Percent		
	Correct answer	Incorrect answer	Total
6.	28.1%	71.9%	100%
7.	1.7%	98.2%	100%
8.	29.8%	70.2%	100%
9.	45.6%	54.4%	100%
10.	24.67%	75.4%	100%

Post-test

Experimental Group

Table (2)

Section	percent		
	Correct answer	Incorrect answer	Total
6.	92.9%	7.1%	100%
7.	78.6%	21.4%	100%
8.	60.7%	39.3%	100%
9.	60.7%	39.3%	100%
10.	83.9%	16.1%	100%

Statement: Subject-verb agreement is a common error.

Pre-test

Control Group

Table (3)

Section	No	Mean	Std.Deviation
6.	56	6.1	2.23
7.	56	0.7	1.63
8.	56	3.6	2.97
9.	56	5.2	3.48
10.	56	7.0	3.00

Post-test (Experimental Group)

Table (4)

Section	No	Mean	Std.Deviation
6.	56	7.7	1.62
7.	56	6.1	3.03
8.	56	5.4	2.50
9.	56	5.8	3.05
10.	56	7.2	2.77



4.2 Results and Discussion

The above tables showed a comparison between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. The experimental group was taught tenses implicitly and control group was inspected tenses explicitly. The former one achieved better results in the post-test than the pre-test. The main target of making these tables is to show the different results between correct answers and incorrect ones of the pre-test and post-test. The responses showed that the total average of learners' correct answers of the pre-test was (71.9%) while (28.1%) for incorrect answers. Added to that the responses showed that the total average of learners' answers of the post-test was (92%) while (7.1%) for incorrect answers of the same group. Small differences were found between the two tests results.

The results of the previous tables displayed the fact that in all cases the experimental group achieved progress in forming correct tenses in written work. The experimental group learns tenses through (ample exercises, drills, tasks and variety of correction techniques and strategies) faced fewer difficulties and was able to write more fluently and accurately than the control group. The discussion showed that the results provided by various activities and thus there was a quick development. As the result of that the experimental group was able to advantage from the circumstances provided by enough practice such as exercises, drills, tasks, correction techniques, group discussion and pair work. All these factors involved together to solve students' errors of tenses in essay-writing.

5. Findings

According to the description and analytical methods, quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as the test as the tool of the study, the researcher has had the following findings:

1. University undergraduates are unable to use tenses correctly in essays' writing.
2. University undergraduates are unaware of techniques of pinpointing and correcting their mistakes and errors of tenses in essays' writing.
3. The knowledge of errors analysis plays a fundamental role in removing or minimizing the errors of tenses in essay-writing.
4. Tenses are the most troublesome areas of English language that can encounter L2 learners.
5. It is possible to compose an impressive and understandable essay without errors in tenses.
6. The majority of students' errors in writing essays are due to the lack of the knowledge of error analysis.
7. It is clear that the students of 4th year in SUST, college of languages have shortages of exercises and drills in tenses as well as in essays.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations of this study are based on the findings. Therefore, the researcher has recommended the following:

10. Teachers and students should have adequate methods and techniques for dealing with errors of tenses in essay-writing.
11. Teachers should pay attention to the role of tenses in enhancing L2 learners' essays.
12. Students should have sufficient drills and exercises about tenses and these activities can improve their written work.

13. Both teachers and learners ought to pay attention about importance of error correction techniques in developing writing skill. Some of these techniques are self-correction, peer correction, group correction, teacher correction etc...

14. Teachers should be aware that making of errors are regarded as a device the learner uses so as to learn.

15. The teacher should give the learners some model pieces of essays.

16. Essays cannot be learned without learning tenses. So, teachers should give students adequate practice about tenses because practice makes them writing perfectly.

17. It is a good strategy that the teacher should be so kind and patient in the way he/she corrects. Always the teacher should encourage the students to keep trying new language they have learned and assure them that making errors isn't bothering; it is Ok and natural in the process of learning languages. So the learners have to require teachers' support and encouragement.

18. The ideal teacher ought to have variety of strategies to facilitate the process of learning, for example, giving the learners an opportunity to self-correct, or applying peer -correction in the classroom. Some students learn better when they are corrected by their classmates instead of teachers.

19. Teachers shouldn't correct every single error and mistake. He/ She ought to keep error correction relevant and make sure that the students benefit and learn from it.

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