Research Article

Investigating Errors in Past Simple Tense Usage Among English Language Learners As a Second Language : A Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract. This research aimed to find out the Common Errors Students make in learning past simple tense. The population of this research was Grade 6 students of K / Denu As Siraj Boys College—Dellanga, Gelioya. The objectives of the study were to identify the challenges faced by the grade 6 students, To find out the rules and regulations of the past simple tense, To find out the knowledge

of regular and irregular verb forms, and to investigate the improvement in the level of language proficiency of students after examining them. The researcher used a mixed method to collect data from the students. Quantitative and Qualitative methods were used. Post Test and Pre Test were used as the quantitative data and the Interview as the Qualitative method. In this research, 35 students were performed as the sample. After the data collection procedure the researcher analyzed the data according to written test performance. In this process (SST), the Surface Strategy Taxonomy method was used to classify the errors.The findings of this research indicated that there were 130 total errors that students made in Post Test. which were classified into four categories based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST). Those were the error of omission with 47 errors , error of addition with 19 errors, misformation with 61 errors and misordering with 3 errors. The students made the dominant error in misformation category. It can be seen from the percentage result where misformation was 47%,then followed by error of omission with 36%,errors of addition with 15% and misordering with 2%.On the other hand in Pre Test students committed error in Misformation was 54%, error with omission 38%, Addition 6%, and Misordering 2%. The researcher finally got the conclusion that in both tests most of the students made dominant errors in Misformation. The researcher suggests that students learning English as a second language need proper guidance from the beginning. Emphasis should be placed on speaking practice rather than writing to help them better understand the language. Additionally, they are encouraged to develop reading habits to learn sentence structures and new vocabulary in English.

INTRODUCTION
Research Background

Language is our faculty to speak. In Encyclopedia Britannica, vol.13 "Language is defined as a system of conventional, spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as a members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate. According to Sapir, "Language is a primarily human and non instinctive methods of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols." Edward Sapir.(1921).

English language is one of the unique languages. It has become an international medium of communication among the people on earth. This international language is not only used for communicational purposes but also in many aspects of life . For instance in the field of Technology, commerce, education and many other aspects of life. Learning English can bring a lot of advantages in many ways. Learning English language is not as simple as we thought because there is a set of rules that must be learnt which is called grammar. Grammar is one of the English components which are taught to every language learner. It has a very important role in understanding the English language. One of the aspects of grammar is tense. According to Oettinger (1996) many languages have grammatical means to indicate the time when an action/ event occurs or when a state or process holds. This phenomenon is called tense. In making a tense in English either write or

spoken tense plays a very important role. There are many kinds of tense such as simple present tense , simple past tense, present perfect tense. From those tense, some students find some difficulties in understanding simple past tense. It is very important to use the proper tense when we speak or communicate. It helps us to communicate clearly and effectively.

Tenses are a fundamental part of the English language. We should learn tenses to describe things that take place at different times (past, present, future).Also to build Complex sentence structures for conveying Complex ideas. Moreover it helps to bring clarity into your communication. Learn and understand the rules, sentence building and English exposure are the strategies to improve tenses.

Most importantly verbs are the action words in a sentence that describe what the subject is doing. Along with the nouns, verbs are the main part of a sentence of phrase. Telling a story about what is taking place. In fact without a verb, full thoughts can't be properly conveyed and even the simplest sentences. Tense is the form of a verb that shows the time something happened or going to happen. that has already happened.

In Sri Lanka the government school education system includes English as the second language in the beginning of the school education. The students of grade 6 became the sample of this dissertation. The researcher selected As Siraj Boys College- Dellanga, which is a Tamil medium school and the students are learning English as the second language. Here the research focuses on one of the grammar aspects, tenses . Especially past simple tense, which describe the situation happened in the past or prior moments. It is generally accepted that an understanding of the grammar will improve well formed language includes in the writing form.

Thus, the grammatical understanding of this tense finally will affect the ability of student in having a good and comprehensive writing and also good skills in talking English. Mostly the beginners have problems in Regular and Irregular verb forms. So, First of all they must gain their knowledge in above sections. Specially students making errors while using past simple tense because of the confusions in those verb forms. So, the researcher conducted this research to find out the common errors in this grammar aspect.

Aim and Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research is to find out the most common difficulties and errors made by grade 6 students when they use past simple tense in the second language English learning At Siraj Boys College- Dellanga.

The objectives of the research are,

1. To identify the challenges faced by the grade 6 students when using past simple tense at Siraj Boys College .

2. To find out the rules and regulations of the past simple tense.

3. To find out the knowledge of regular and irregular verb forms.

4. To investigate the improvement in the level of language proficiency of students after examine them.

Research Question

1. What are the challenges faced by the grade 6 students when using past simple tense.

2. What are the rules and regulations applied for the simple past tense.

3.What are the methods that the students can follow to find out the knowledge of regular and irregular verb forms.

4.What are the improvements that we can see in the in the level of language proficiency of students after examine them.

Research Problem

English language is a Universal language. And it is very important in this technological world. As a student of ESL learners, the students of As siraj Boys College might face struggles to learn past simple tense. Generally in case of ESL learners it is questionable how much they get the opportunity to learn and perform successfully in classroom.

Therefore it is necessary to evaluate learner's level of English language and their performance. So that, this study helped to find out the common errors of students in learning in past simple tense.

Limitation

The researcher selected only grade 6 students for this research, in order to find out the difficulties in the early stage. The study is limited by its sample, size and scope forcing only on Grade 6 students. There are many lessons in English grammar and also in tenses. But only the past simple tense can be included for an effective outcome. This research conducted for a short period to identify the students knowledge and the difficulties they are facing while learning past simple tense. And 35 students became sample for this research work.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This research used mixed method. Quantitative and Qualitative methods were used to collect the data. his study used a qualitative method also because researcher wants to analyze students' errors in using simple past tense. As a quantitative method the researcher used pre test and post test. Therefore the researcher investigates the analysis of students' errors in using simple past tense of grade 6 students of As Siraj boys college- Dellanga.
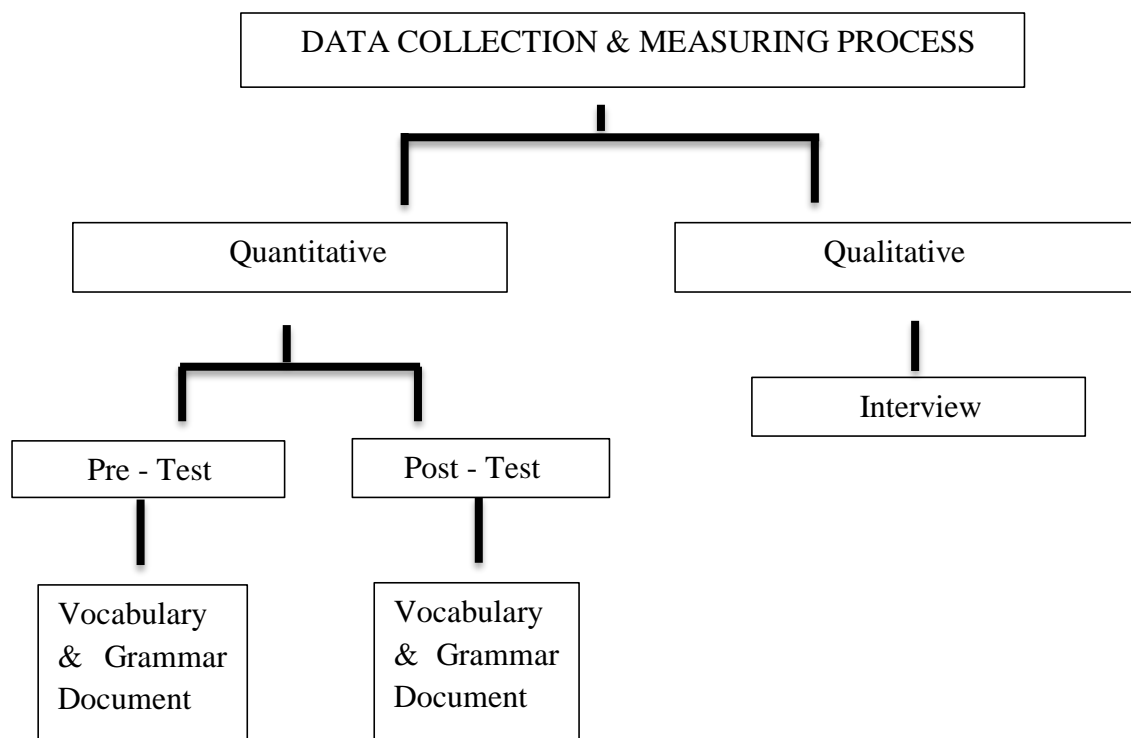
Figure 1 : Research Design

Sample and sampling procedure

The research samples consists of students of As Siraj Boys College-Dellanga. The researcher selected grade 6 students and they were given a posttest and pretest paper. An interview also conducted with the students by the researcher. The research targeted 50 students from the school, and after the pre-test, 35 students were selected to form the sample for the study, including those who scored below 40 marks. These students were enrolled in the grade 6 at the school, representing a diverse group with varying learning styles and academic backgrounds, offering a comprehensive sample for the research.

Instrumentation

Firstly a test was conducted on simple past tense. According to their marks they selected for an interview and also they were tested with post test worksheet. Each student was requested to face the paper alone. The students were given 30 minutes for first worksheet and an interview also conducted. And the teaching session was conducted for an hour. finally the students were asked to do the test paper within an hour.

Techniques of Collecting The Data

a) Interviews

First data collection technique is interviews. According to Sugiyono (2013:231) an interview is a meeting between two people to exchange information

and ideas through questions and answers, so that meaning can be constructed on a particular topic. The researcher chose 35 students to be used as samples based on the most errors. The teacher also interviewed to get to know the difficulties faced by the students while learning past simple tense .

b) Documentation

According to Sugiyono (2013:240) documents are records of events that have been missed. Documents can be in the form of images, writing or someone's monumental work. The documents in this research is student worksheets.

Data Analysis Procedures

Error Analysis is considered as a process. As a process, there must be a kind of procedures that must be followed as a guideline. This procedure consists of several stages. In this research, the procedure used in analyzing the data is the researcher's own ideas. The complete procedures are as follow:

1) Preparing a Pre-test according to Grade 6 syllabus to submit the students.
2) Identifying errors in worksheet
3) Classifying errors according to error type.
(SST) Surface Strategy Taxonomy method was used to classify the errors. The SST was proposed by Dulay et al , Burt and Krashen in(1982) as cited by Fadzilyna (2013). SST is a classification system for grammatical errors that highlights how surface structures are changed in a systematic way. Eg: (omission ,addition. misformation, misordering)
4) Classifying errors according to verb forms (Regular verbs and Irregular)
5) Having an interview to find out the reasons for students' errors in understanding the lesson.
6) Holding a teaching lesson to identify which teaching technique is more effective.
7) Holding a teaching session by providing a handout with related theories of the SPT.
8) Finally conducting a Post-test to find out the findings
9) Explaining errors
10) Evaluating errors.

Data analysis was done according to the contents of their syllabus. So, finding out these errors can help the researcher to achieve what the researcher aimed.

DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this research the data were collected from 34 students of As Siraj boys college- Dellanga . By conducting an interview and pretest. The researcher was able to collect the data.

The result of interview

In the interview the researcher asked some questions from the teacher. The first question asked about the teaching method which was used in teaching simple past tense. The second question was about the teaching aids and the third question was about the students difficulties in teaching simple past tense. According to teacher the most difficult level in using the simple past tense was identifying irregular and regular verb.

Students were also interviewed by the researcher. Which was conducted after they did the pretest. The researcher asked some questions regarding simple past tense. Firstly, the researcher asked about the knowledge and problems in learning simple past tense. Also got to know about their fluency in reading, writing, grammar knowledge and more. From the students interview and according to their pretest paper, the researcher found that most of the students faced difficulty in determining and using simple past tense form of irregular verb. Also they don't have much knowledge in identifying simple past tense in a sentence. The students make mistakes in using simple past tense because they did not pay full attention to the teacher in the classroom.

The result of Pre Test

Pre Test was conducted to identify the students knowledge in past simple tense . The test paper included four activities regarding Past Tense. The researcher analyzed all the errors that was made by the students to obtain the data for this research .The researcher took the data from student`s result of test.

The Identification of the Errors of the student
Activity 1
Error Identification :

Yesterday Sara play Tennis.
Last week John Watch a film.
Last Monday the children Stay at home.
Last year I paint a picture.
Last month you visit your grandma.

The answers should be :

Yesterday Sara played Tennis.
Last week John Watched a film.
Last Monday the children Stayed at home.
Last year I painted a picture.
Last month you visited your grandma.
In this case most of the students wrote the incorrect answer . Because they were not aware of the past form of the verbs play, watch, stay, paint and visit. Here

The researcher identified the error of omission because   an element that should be appear was omitted "ed".

Activity 2
Error Identification :
> Hate

Answer should be :
> Hated

In the second activity 10 verbs were given to write the past form of the verb. Most of the students wrote correct answer for almost every verb. But some students wrote Hate as the answer instead of "Hated" This error also comes under the omission.

Activity 3
Error Identification :
> The Ostriched is walking.
> The Ostrich is Walkinged.
> The Ostrich are walking.

Answer should be :
> The Ostrich was walking.

From the above Incorrect answers we can understand the students struggled to find out the verb and the past form of the verb when it comes to a sentence. In this case Misformation error occurred. Because the students used the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. This was the dominant error made by the student.

Activity 4
Error Identification :
> I were at home yesterday.
> We was very successful.
> Chris weren`t in the class.

Answers should be :
> I was at home yesterday.
> We were very successful.
> Chris weren`t in the class.

This Errors also comes under Misformation. Here the students used the wrong grammatical form.

NO	Types of Error	Total Errors	Percentage %
1	Omission	56	38 %
2	Addition	9	6%

3	Misformation	79	54%
4	Misordering	3	2%
	TOTAL	**147**	**100%**

Based on the Pre Test errors the researcher classified them and analyzed the percentage of the errors.

Table 1 – Pre Test error Percentage Table
    According to the chart above , The highest number of error is Misformation with 56%. The second is omission with 9%. An Error made on made in Addition is 79%. Least Error is in Misordering with 2%.We can conclude that Misformation was the dominant error made by the students in using simple past tense.

The Result of Post Test
    The Post Test was conducted after the Teaching session. This Post Test helped the researcher to get an idea about the knowledge and the understanding of the students about past tense after the Teaching session.

The Identification of the Errors of the student

Error Identification	Error Correction	Type of Error
My Uncle gived the idea	My Uncle gave the idea.	Omission
You did meet him?	Did you meet him?	Misordering
I felt Happied	I felt Happy	Addition
The cat eated the chicken	The cat ate the chicken.	Misformation
I sleepy	I was sleepy	Omission
I stayed at home because of raining	I stayed in home because of raining	Misformation
My mom buyed fruits	My mom bought fruits	Addition
I take the book	I took the book	Misformation
I arrive in kandy	I arrived in kandy	Misformation
I went to store	I went to the store	Omission
We arrived in the beach	We arrived at the beach	Misformation
He promise	He promised	Omission

Table 2 – The Identification of the Errors of the student

    The above chart shows some of the errors that students made in Post Test. And they were classified in 4 categories. The researcher explained   the errors mentioned above:
    Eg 1 : "My uncle gived the idea"

M.R.F Nashfa, MJF Sujani, MB Nowzath, MR. Rishad Muhammed

Investigating Errors in Past Simple Tense Usage Among English Language Learners As a Second Language : A Contemporary Analysis

In this sentence the student was not able to write the past form of the verb give.

Eg 2 : "You did meet him?"

This is a misordering error. The student wanted to make a question but the placement was incorrect.

Eg 3 : " I felt Happied"

Here the student added unnecessary item in their sentence. So that the error occurred.

Eg 4 : " The cat Eated the chicken"

In this sentence the student formed the incorrect past form to the word eat.

Eg 5 : " I Sleepy"

Here the student omitted was in the sentence.

Eg 6 : " I stayed at home because of raining"

Misformation error occurred in this sentence. Because the answer should be included "in" instead of "at" .

Eg 7 : " My mom buyed fruits"

This error comes under addition error. Because the student added unnecessary element in the word buy.

Eg 8 : " I take the book'

This is a misformation error. The error occurred because of the wrong formation of the past form of the verb "take".

Eg 9 : "I arrive in kandy"

Here the student was made error in identifying the past form of the verb.This error comes under the error of Misformation.

Eg 10 : " I went to store"

The student missed to add "the" in the sentence. So that this error identified as the error of omission. Because the student committed error by omitting an item that must appear within a morpheme.

Eg 11 : "We arrived in the beach"

The error of misformation occurred because of the incorrect formation.

Eg 12 : " He promise"

This is a error of omission. Because the student 'ed" in the sentence.

Based on the Post Test errors, the researcher classified them and analyzed the percentage of the errors.

NO	Types of Error	Total Errors	Percentage %
1	Omission	47	36 %
2	Addition	19	15%
3	Misformation	61	47%
4	Misordering	3	2%
	TOTAL	**130**	**100%**

Table 3 : Post Test Error Percentage Table

According to the chart above , The highest number of error is Misformation with 47%. The second is Omission with 36%. An Error made on made in Addition is 15%. Least Error is in Misordering with 2%.We can conclude that Misformation was the dominant error made by the students in using simple past tense.

Comparison of PreTest & Post Test

Comparing the Pre Test and the Post Test, the researcher analyzed that dominant error made by the student was Misformation in both tests. But we can see a slight improvement in error reduction compare to Pre Test. In Pre Test the error percentage of Misformation was 54% and Post Test error percentage in Misformation was 47%. Moreover It is evident that most of the students made error in addition in Post Test comparing to Pre Test. It was 15% in Post Test and 6% in Pre Test.

DISCUSSION

According to the analyzation the researcher found the most common error made by the student while using simple past tense. According to the above table the researcher shows that, Most of the students made mistake in misformation. Also the students had complications in finding irregular verb.

The First Step of Error analyzing is Collecting samples. Here the researcher conducted pretest as the first sample for the research. Second step is Identifying the errors. The Researcher identified the errors made by the students after analyze their pretest paper. As the third step of Describing the Errors,The Researcher identified that most of the students made mistake in misformation. For instance , The researcher asked the student to write the following sentence in simple past tense 'I know her'. In this case most of the students wrote it as 'know' instead of 'knew'. Here the students not aware of the past tense of the word know.Researcher describing the errors by qualitative method by conducting a teaching session and an interview. To Evaluate the Errors, The Researcher distributed a handout to the students to learn more about simple past tense. Also it is a better way to make them understand what is simple past tense.

So, the researcher included the interview outcomes and the error percentage made by the grade 6 students of K / Denu As Siraj Boys College – Dellanga.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
CONCLUSION

01. Teachers must remind their students that if they write in English, they must think in the target language so that they do not bring in any feature of their mother tongue or first language.

In this case, the teacher should explain why certain constructions are not grammatical. In this respect, it would require the teachers to have a good command of English language as well as a good knowledge of the mother tongue or the first language of the students.

02. Teachers must explain to students the exceptions to the rule in the English language regarding grammar and vocabularies.

03. Teachers can discuss with their students on how to identify their errors and what the possible causes are. This would bring about a greater understanding of the common errors that students make.

04. A variety of techniques in teaching can be introduced. Some examples may include Self-Correction without indication of mistakes, Peer correction, Underlining Mistakes and Search and Correct technique. However, it would be better if teachers can come out with their own authentic teaching materials.

05. More emphasis should be given to written exercises and practice in the classroom.

06. It is recommended to use different Teaching aids to keep the students attentive during the class.

07. The students need to practice more in simple past tense in order to get them used in making sentences in simple past tense.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the researcher suggests that, more concentration should be given to the students who is Learning English as a Second Language. Because from the beginning the students must be given a proper guide when it comes to learning a second language to get a better understanding in that language. Also the students must be given speaking practice rather than writing. Moreover it is recommended to suggest the students to increase reading habit to get to know the structure and new words in English.

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