

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF PERFECT TENSE AMONG ISLAMIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TERENGGANU

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ABSTRACT

English language is a global language which has been spoken around the world for a long time. Some countries such as Malaysia considers English as a second language spoken along with Bahasa Melayu, the national language. However, not all Malaysians are able to speak English fluently with great accuracy due to the language errors produced, especially tense errors. Many have related this to perfect tense errors, considered to be the hardest to understand by many ESL learners. There are many categories of schools in Malaysia, in which all of these schools have to include English subject in the academic curriculum. In schools where English subject have received less attention, such as Islamic schools, the rate of students who can acquire advanced English is not very high. The main factor can be traced to lack of interest and practice. Despite this factor, students of English have to acquire perfect tenses in order to have complete mastery of English. This study aims to investigate perfect tense errors produced by secondary school students of Islamic schools in their written production. The error analysis method proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) was used to analyse the errors produced in the respondents' essays in terms of Addition, Omission, Misinformation and also Misordering. This qualitative study recruited 15 sample short paragraphs produced by 15 form five students of Islamic secondary school in Terengganu. Subject matter experts were consulted to validate the analysed perfect tense errors. Data were analysed and presented in tabulated form. Results show that students frequently committed misinformation errors of perfect tense in their essays. This can be explained in terms of their confusion of perfect tenses as Bahasa Melayu is not a tense language but rather an aspect one. This study concluded that perfect tense errors are serious errors needing serious attention. It is recommended that students be raised of their awareness of perfect tense errors in their writing as a means of correcting and improving English proficiency.

Keywords: Perfect tense errors, Islamic secondary schools, error analysis, misinformation errors, awareness raising

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an important element in the study of a language. It has become a main root for someone to have a better proficiency in a language learned. "The persons who wish to communicate in the artistic manner with well-defined structures must go for the greater depth of understanding and proficiency what the study of grammar offers" (Debata, 2013). Generally, Tense is a part of grammar studies, it is included among parts of speech which is crucial in English language. Every type of tenses in English language portrays different timelines which can produce a different contextual meaning in English sentences. "When describing the meanings of the tenses, linguists have relied on a specific instance of the space-time analogy: the TIMELINE" (Michaelis, 2006). The importance of grammar shown when someone cannot understand the context of the message due to wrong sentence structure, punctuation,

pronunciation, etc. However, this rarely happens when one uses his/her mother tongue language to converse compared to their second language. This is because of different grammatical structure between the first and second language. For example, Bahasa Melayu and English language have a totally different grammatical structure especially in the aspect of tenses. Furthermore, tenses are emphasized in English language rather than Bahasa Melayu. In the English language, a time marker that indicates the timeline of a message has to deal with the tenses used in order for the people to convey their message accurately.

Malaysia is one of the countries that emphasizes on English language since it is a second language among Malaysians. Therefore, in order to possess a good English proficiency, L2 learners should master the English grammar since it is one of the methods to master the language. As mentioned earlier, tenses is also one of the grammar lessons and unfortunately, most of L2 learners do not master English tenses very well especially perfect tense. "The study reveals that most learners face problems in mastering tense and aspect due to their L1 interference" (Rahman and Ali, 2015). This may lead to the weak English communication as tenses play important role in the language. "Using the correct grammar is important to avoid misunderstandings and to help the listener to understand the speaker easily" (Subasini and Kokilavani, 2013).

As the main participants of this research were students of Islamic secondary school, the problem of mastering English can be observed among them due to their lack of focus towards English subject at school as if English subject is not important at all for their academics. Adnan (2017) did state in his research regarding the real experience of English teacher at Islamic secondary school:

"Azman wrote a sharp commentary in early 2014: Of course in my school it is worse because students prefer to put more effort on Arabic than English. ... A few very weak students do not care at all when it comes to English. They even said they do not care if they failed English. For them, bahasa Melayu [Bahasa Melayu] and Arabic are more important."

Here are the research questions and research objectives of the study conducted:

(a) Research Questions

- i) What are the perfect tense errors produced by the Islamic secondary school students in their writings?
- ii) What are the factors contributing to the errors?

(b) Research Objectives

- i) To explore the perfect tense errors produced by the Islamic secondary school students in their writings.
- ii) To investigate the causes contributing to the errors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Error analysis is the process of identifying what the errors are made in the investigated fields or topics. "Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) state that the analysis of errors is the method to analyze errors made by EFL and ESL learners when they learn a language," as cited by Semsook, Liamnimitr and Pochakorn (2017). Learning English as a second language could be difficult for certain individuals due to huge difference between the English and their first

language. Probably, certain languages have less complicated especially in grammatical rules rather than English language, thus this may contribute to the errors committed as a L2 learner.

Somehow, L2 learners might get influenced of their first language that may cause them applying a same grammatical rules in the second language they learn. "Learners of second language tend to transfer the forms, meaning and culture of their L1 to the foreign language and culture when attempting to speak the language. By learning L2 habits, L1 habits are also transferred and then the errors occur" (Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015). Second language interference theory was proposed by Weinreich (1968). He defined that "interference is the deviation of language norm in usage as the effect of bilingual toward another language".

Interlingual error is when the learners get mixed up or affected with their first language linguistics competence with their second language knowledge such as the grammatical rules in first language being applied in their second language. Corder (1981) stated that "these kinds of errors occur when the learner's habits (patterns, systems, or rules) interfere or prevent him or her, to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language" as cited by Sari (2015). On the other hand, intralingual error it is the factor that has no affected by explicit reasons but it is more to the misunderstanding of the learners themselves during the learning process. For the intralingual errors. "...the deviate form of language caused by conflicting information of the target language" (Kaweera, 2013). There are four types of intralingual errors that can be analysed (Richard, 1974) which has been explained by Sari (2016):

- a) **Overgeneralization:** The learners assuming all the grammatical elements are similarly one another such as the Past Tense should be added with morpheme '-ed'. So the assumption made by putting all the words with '-ed' to indicate Past Tense.
- b) **Ignorance of Rule Restrictions:** The learners do not follow the grammatical rules that have been set such as for the case of subject-verb agreement when the subject is singular the verb should be added 's' but due to their ignorance, they will simply not put the 's'.
- c) **Incomplete Application of the Rules:** This may occur when the learners do not apply the rules completely and they are just being a half way of it. For example 'You student' instead of 'You are student'.
- d) **False Concept Hypothesized:** The errors produced when the learners got mistake in having their own general idea towards the grammatical rules learned. Such as 'She is not go to school yesterday' instead of 'She did not go to school yesterday'. The word 'is' and 'did' might have a same use but actually in different context of sentence.

The related studies regarding this topic have been found with some difference tenses used. Abdullah (2013) found that students have a problem in the use of tense as if the students got mixed up to use either simple present tense or simple past tense instead. This is quite similar to the research conducted by Garrido (2012) who found that the students encounter a problem in choosing a correct English tense. Even Vethamaicacam and Garapathy (2017) claimed in their research findings that students tend to get confused and mixed up with the choice of tense due to the timeliness aspect in English tense.

Sermsook, et al. (2017) revealed that one of the most committed errors done by students is related with subject-verb agreement. It means, the students were still confused in choosing correct auxiliary verb (have and has) that can be agreed with the subject. A same finding has been extracted from Ratnah (2013) who stated that "it has been found that the errors made by the students in using present perfect tense is error of selection (selection of 'has/have')".

Abdullah (2013) stated that "Some factors have been identified to contribute to the problem such as : lack of knowledge and competence of the English grammar, influence of the

mother tongue, loan words and lack of exposure of the English language”. Even Sermsook et al. (2017) had a same finding on this matter “limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and carelessness of the students were found to be the major sources of the errors”. These factors or the more appropriate term in error analysis is known as causes of the errors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research design has been used for this study and the researcher conducted the study through the error analysis by describing the errors based on the classifications of errors proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) in their Surface Strategy Taxonomy consisted of Addition, Omission, Misinformation, and Misordering. 15 samples were selected from 15 students of Sekolah Menengah Agama (SMA) Sultan Zainal Abidin, Ladang; one of Islamic secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. The instrument used for this research was on essay basis entitled ‘*What have you done so far to achieve your dreams?*’ which then being analysed by the researcher through the Error Analysis procedures as proposed by Ellis (1994). The respondents were selected randomly among form five students since they had gone through all the English syllabus of secondary school.

The descriptive statistical analysis used to analyse the data collected by describing and explaining the errors committed by the students. The percentage involved in this data analysis was only a small part of the study, the major one would be the detail explanation on the errors committed. The data were displayed in tabulated form where the percentages of each error were counted.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

(i) *The Perfect Tense Errors Committed by the Students*

Based on the Table 1, it was found that six students (40%) did errors on Omission in their perfect tense writing. This is the second highest error made by the students in constructing perfect tense sentence. It is clearly different to Misinformation type of error which 15 students (100%) did commit the error in constructing perfect tense in their writing. Lastly, for another two types of errors which are Addition and Misordering, it was found that only one student (6%) committed the errors.

Table 1: Number of Students Committed the Errors

Types of errors	Number of students	Percentage
Omission	6	40%
Addition	1	6%
Misinformation	15	100%
Misordering	1	6%

(a) Omission

For the Omission type of error, seven respondents committed error in constructing perfect tense sentence. Here are some examples of the errors committed by the seven respondents according to Omission category:-

- Respondent 2: *I watching the YouTube... to improve my knowledge* (Error)

I have been watching the Youtube..to improve my knowledge (Correct)

He omitted 'have been' by directly writing 'I watching the YouTube', the phrase 'have been' was omitted and this against the rule of perfect continuous tense. Thus the correction should be made as 'I have been watching the YouTube..to improve my knowledge' which indicates the action of watching YouTube has been done from certain point of the past time till present.

- Respondent 5: *...I already saving money bit by bit since I was little kid.* (Error)
...I have already been saving money bit by bit since I was little kid... (Correct)

He omitted 'have been' as same as respondent two did, this totally against the grammatical rule of perfect continuous tense. It seems, perfect continuous tense is not the common type of perfect tense to be used among the students, thus they could not construct perfect continuous very well.

(b) Addition

Next, for the Addition type of error, only two respondents committed to the error. Here are the examples of the error done by the respondents in constructing perfect tense sentence:-

- Respondent 5: *I'll make sure ...every single leisure time that I had being used* (Error)
I'll make sure ...every single leisure time that I have used (Correct)

He did the error by including the word 'being' which is not necessary to be included in the context of the sentence above and the error also is related with another type of error too which is Misinformation. As he started his sentence with future tense 'I'll', he should use simple perfect tense to indicate the action he did in the past generally without specific time. Plus usually past perfect tense is only used when two past actions interrelated one another as explained in chapter two.

- Respondent 9: *I am always learn to...* (Error)
I have always learnt to... (Correct)

The respondent wrongly added 'am' to the sentence if really he wanted to say in simple present tense, the verb-to-be 'am' is not needed. However, it is still considered as wrong since the context of the sentence is to indicate what he has done so far to achieve his dream, thus it should be written in present perfect tense as 'I have always learnt'.

(c) Misinformation

For the Misinformation error, all of 15 respondents committed this error. Therefore, it can be inferred that the respondents had issues in applying the exact rules in perfect tense which caused them to construct perfect tense sentences inaccurately. Sometimes, they got an error in choosing the accurate form of the verb where past participle form of verb should be used instead. So, here are some significant examples that can be traced from the data collected regarding this matter:

- Respondent 1: *I has do some researches...* (Error)
I have done some researches... (Correct)
- Respondent 2: *I have not understand...* (Error)
I have not understood... (Correct)

Based on the examples above show that the respondents did the error in choosing a correct form of verb when constructing perfect tense sentence. They put the root verb instead of past

participle form and this error should be taken seriously because it is just a basic structure of perfect tense sentence. This misinformation can be categorised under alternating forms category because the respondents got interchanged between the word classes of the verb in the sentences. In addition, under misinformation type of error, the respondents also have misused between choosing perfect tense with another tenses. Here are some of the examples:

- Respondent 6: *I have studied since I was six years old...* (Error)
I have been studying since I was six years old... (Correct)

The error committed in respondent six's sentence when he used present perfect tense instead of present perfect continuous tense even though it stated clearly there, the phrase started with 'since' in perfect tense is always indicating the action that has been done and still ongoing starting from the certain point of time. Therefore it should be written as 'I have been studying' instead of 'I have studied'.

(d) Misordering

The last type of error committed by the respondent based on the table 4.2 is Misordering, who has been committed by the respondent 12. Here is the example:

- Respondent 12: *What have I do to be a racer is I always...* (Error)
What I have done to be a race is I always... (Correct)

From the example above, besides of the verb 'do' that should be corrected, the phrase 'What have I do...' is still considered as error since it is a statement, not a question, therefore it should be written as 'What I have done...'. When it comes to question sentence, the verb comes before the subject such as 'What have I done to you?', but according to the sentence, even though the question marker 'what' is there, but it functions as statement and not as a question.

(ii) Causes of Errors

The main cause of errors occurred is interlingual as referred to Misinformation errors they committed the most when they get misused of other tenses with perfect tense. This finding is supported by Astuti (2014) who found that their respondents got influenced of their first language in constructing perfect tense sentences. On the other hand, the minor cause of error that may contribute as well is Intralingual which several respondents seemly to be clueless on the grammatical rule for perfect tense. It can be seen through the error analysis made, a few students still have a problem to choose a correct word class of the verb for being included in the perfect tense.

DISCUSSION

Misinformation is the most errors committed by the students in writing their perfect tense sentences. It seemed that the students were still confused with the usage of the perfect tense and moreover, they were not aware of the tense used in the question given. The results is as same as the past study done by Sukmawati (2016) who stated 'the most frequent types of errors by the students were omission and misinformation error'. Other than that, Mustafidah (2014) concluded in her research on present perfect tense errors that the most type of error committed by her respondents is misinformation with the percentage of 71.09%. The students seemly did not give full attention in aspect of choosing correct form of verb and tenses in constructing their perfect tense sentences. Even though, their English proficiency level is intermediate as claimed by their teacher, this proves that their grammatical competence is still in lacking of

some parts. Besides, from the examples of Misinformation given earlier, it can be inferred that some students are still lacking of verb form knowledge that consists of root word, present participle and past participle. Thus they tend to do error in choosing the accurate verb form to be inserted in perfect tense sentence. This may happen, as the respondents are unaware of the details, they might have a limitation of verb vocabs. Generally known that verb consists of two types, regular and irregular verb. Regular verbs is easier to be identified as their past form and past participle form are the same, just adding the morpheme –ed but for irregular verbs, the students should memorize them as the verbs change when it comes to past and past participle form. If the students do not master these basics of verb, they cannot produced accurate perfect tense sentences.

It is undeniable that, most of L2 learners have been stressed more on communication skills rather than empowering the grammatical parts of the language learned. This is supported by Blaxell (2012) who claimed that ‘the whole language approach was at the centre of much English teaching, exposure to explicit lessons in grammar (and other technical aspects of written communication) has decreased’. The students also got influenced with their first language as for this case, Bahasa Melayu is the first language of the students. “In order to make sense of a new expression, the learner makes use of his previous mother tongue experience to learn a new language, which will cause many misuses” (Liu, 2012).

English and Bahasa Melayu have a different language rules especially in aspect of tense which English is more complex rather than Bahasa Melayu. According to Young (2001), as cited by Abidin, Ismayatim and Yee (2016), ‘Bahasa Melayu did not correspond to the English language where it failed to distinguish between simple past tense and present perfect tense.’ Thus, most of the students cannot apply the use of perfect tense properly in their writing. Even, they used to get confused of using simple present tense and simple past tense with perfect tense in their writing, the proves that can be taken are from the errors explained previously.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the major errors committed by the students in producing perfect tense in their writing are under category of Misinformation. Besides, the main cause of error contributed to the errors is Interlingual due to influence of mother tongue in their second language production. Indeed, Interlingual always be the main factor of errors committed by L2 learners especially among Malaysian as Bahasa Melayu does not have a same tense system as in English language does. Nevertheless, students should not be blamed fully on their failure in constructing English perfect tense. The truth is, students from Islamic secondary school especially in Terengganu, they have been less stressed on the English subject since their main focus towards religious subjects are greater, just for the reason that those are the main core of the Islamic school curriculum. This should be stopped since every subject have to be treated fairly because the students are not necessarily going to further their study later in religious fields. Most probably, there are some Islamic school students intended to further their study in language fields or maybe Science fields which require them to have good proficiency in English.

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