

COMMON ERRORS ON THE USAGE OF VERBS IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESHI EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the errors on the usage of verbs in English essay of comparison and contrast method written by 36 tertiary level EFL learners at International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Bangladesh. This study examines the errors of agreement with verb, missing of verbs, misusing verb tense, misusing past tense after infinitive and misusing “to have” verb. The purpose of the study is to show the errors of verb usage to the tertiary level EFL learners, to draw the attention of the teachers to the areas of problems in written English and to help the learners to overcome the verbal errors further.

INTRODUCTION

Among the four skills of language- listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing comes at the end of one’s mastery over the other three skills. It is not an inborn skill. It must be learned and practiced in a formal instructional setting or environment. It requires cognitive faculty and linguistic faculty. This skill demands that the learner generates ideas and transfers them into text. According to Brown (1994), writing is a process in which a writer puts his ideas on paper and transforms his thoughts into words. Brown (1994; P-321) thus puts- “Writing is a two step process. First, you figure out your meaning, and then you put it into language”.

Therefore it is a complex process and to practice this skill to produce any write up in L1 is a difficult job. While it is difficult in L1, it is more difficult in L2. The gravity of difficulty goes up, because a learner has to consider the grammar, writing convention of the target language and the like of the target language norm. Thus, grammar is a significant aspect of language that a learner has to develop mastery among all other aspects of language. Grammar plays the role of skeleton of a language. The case of the grammar of English, which is a foreign language for Bangladeshis, deserves more focused attention. It can be easily assumed that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners of Bangladesh must have difficulty in learning English grammar. They must have committed errors in the way of developing competence in EFL.

Analysis of errors in language which is widely known as Error analysis (EA) is a much talked about area in the field of EFL. Analysis of errors in using grammar is a part and parcel of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Linguists, educationists and researchers talk about knowledge of grammar as significant for developing linguistic competence. A learner needs to learn certain structure or necessary grammar to produce correct language. Whenever there is deviation from the accepted norms of language, the idea of EA comes in. EA puts a learner at a point at which a

learner deviates from the accepted standard of the language (in the context of this study, it is English). It helps the instructor to know about the level of learners' English. It shows what a learner has learned and what has not learned. It helps know the items what a learner has to master, among the errors in EFL grammar, errors of verb usage is a significant item. The very communication does not take place because of errors of verb usage. The learners commit this kind of error very regularly.

International Islamic University Chittagong is a private university in Bangladesh which maintains English as the medium of instruction. The students of the department of English Language & Literature in this university have to receive instruction in English, have to sit for exam in English and have to communicate also in English. For these learners, strong grammatical knowledge is strongly needed. The knowledge of verb is a very necessary item among the plethora of items of grammatical knowledge which facilitates smooth presentation as well as effective communication in English.

Statement of the problem

The error of verb usage is a common problem among the learners' community. Educators are highly critical about the error of verb usage in the learners' writings. Researcher like Bhatia (1974) as quoted by Stapa and Izahar (2010) points out the error of subject-verb agreement to ESL learners. Surina and Kamarulzaman (2009) also, as cited in Stapa and Izahar (2010), find this problem of agreement in the writings of Malaysian learners. Based on the findings of this study it can be assumed that while it poses as a problem for the ESL learners, the EFL learners too will have this problem.

Ahmad (1986), Simbwa (1987), Al-Hassan(1989), Al-kahtybeh (1992), Hazaymeh (1996) (all are as cited in Zawahreh (2012)), , Sun. & Shang (2009) Yahya, Azizi, et al. (2012) and Zawahreh (2012) conducted their studies in different EFL/ ESL countries like Jordan, China and Malaysia. To the best of my knowledge, no study was conducted on EFL learners in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study is an attempt to fill in this gap.

Moreover, all the studies mentioned above looked into errors of all sorts in the students' writings. Considering the study to look into errors of all sorts in the students' writings as a gigantic task, this study looks into a small scale study of looking into the problem of a single item of grammar like usage of verb in the writings of Bangladeshi EFL students. Furthermore, my experience as an EFL teacher for the last 14 years has given me this notion that the students regularly commit this kind of error of verb usage. This study is an attempt to investigate the problem of verb usage in the writings of Bangladeshi EFL learners.

Objective of the study

The present study takes the objective to examine the errors of verb usage in the writings of Bangladeshi tertiary level EFL learners.

Research question of the study

The study forms the following research question to meet the objective of the study:

What kinds of grammatical errors of verb usage do the Bangladeshi tertiary level EFL learners commit?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Raimes (1983) gives the explanation that students commit errors in writing and students find it useful if they can understand their errors because of the following reasons: “First, it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary that have been taught to students. Second, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language. Third, when they write they necessarily become very involved with the new language”.

Ahmad (1986), Simbwa (1987), Al-Hassan (1989), Al- Kahtybeh (1992), Hazaymeh (1996), (all are as cited in Zawahreh (2012)), Yahya, Azizi, et al. (2012), Sun and Shang (2009), Zawahreh (2012) and Stapa and Izahar (2010) analyzed different aspects of grammar in the writings of different levels of students from different countries. Secondary students’ writings – descriptive, argumentative and narrative- got more focus from the researchers for analyzing errors. Syntactic errors were looked into specifically. WH questions, passive construction and verb usage were examined to a little extent. Stapa and Izahar (2010) examined the errors of agreement between subject and verb in ESL context. Wang and Huang (1999) analyzed the errors of verb usage in the writings of Chinese EFL tertiary level learners.

Ahmad (1986) examined 150 secondary school students’ errors in formulating WH questions. Simbwa (1987) looked into the causes of syntactic errors in the English essays written by 94 male and 14 female secondary school students in Uganda. Al-Hassan (1989) made a study about the errors in passive sentence construction committed by 90 Jordanian secondary male students. The sample was taken from 3 grades- 1st, 2nd and 3rd – amounting at 90 students in total. Al-Kahtybeh (1992) investigated the syntactic errors in the essays of 243 male and female tenth grade students from 8 schools in Irbid district. Hazaymeh (1996) did a study to find out the secondary students’ errors in learning English verb tenses. The sample included male and female students. Of them 587 were from public schools and 172 students were from private schools. Yahya, Azizi, et al. (2012) did a study into 30 lower secondary school students’ errors in two types of essay writings- descriptive and narrative- in Malaysian setting. Sun. & Shang (2009) conducted a study into English Majors’ writings of argumentative essays of Ludong University in China. The study was carried out to find out the errors of the first semester students of and their causes. Zawahreh (2012) examined the written English errors of 350 tenth grade students in their writing of a narrative essay- “A Journey to the Ancient City of Jerash in Jordan”. Stapa and Izahar (2010) analyze errors of subject-verb agreement found in 40 written compositions – argumentative and factual- among 20 post graduate teacher trainees in a teachers’ training college in Malaysia. Wang and Huang (1999) collected 750 pieces of composition to analyze the errors of verb usage.

METHODOLOGY

Sample of the study

The population of the study consisted of all students who registered for the course ENG-1212 (Writing –I) in International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh. All the students are put into five groups. The study is conducted on one group of female students in which the number of students is 40. Out of these forty students 36 students participated in the study. All the students were in the second semester of their study and they had read English as a compulsory course for 12 years and English is their first language. From this point of view, the participants of this study are homogeneous.

Data Collection

The study examined the errors of verb usage in an essay of comparison and contrast on the topic- Two Places I have visited. The students were asked to write an essay on the given topic following the method of comparison and contrast. They were allocated 40 minutes for writing the essay. The participants were informed that the essay would not affect their result. The essay would be examined to find out the errors of verb usage only to help them overcome this type of error in the after time.

Data analysis

The study followed the procedure suggested by S. P. Corder (1967) for the analysis of errors verb usage. The procedure of S. P. Corder (1967) suggests five steps which are given below:

- a. Collection of write ups of language learners
- b. identification of errors in their written languages
- c. description of errors
- d. explanation of errors and
- e. evaluation of errors.

Following the five steps as mentioned above the write ups of all the participants were collected and the errors of verb usage were identified, described, explained and evaluated. Wang and Huang (1999) look for seventeen kinds of errors like the errors of no agreement between subject and verb, misusing in forming the passive voice, missing verb, misusing verb tense and unwanted infinitive after auxiliary verb and the like. This study examines the errors of agreement with verb, missing of verbs, misusing verb tense, misusing past tense after infinitive and misusing “to have” verb. Among the errors of verbs, lack of agreement between subject and verb tops the list. In this type of errors, there are sentences in which subject is in the singular form but the verb does not agree with the subject. The rules of grammar suggest that if the subject is in singular, the verb must be in singular form. Some examples are given below-

Shadinata park have (has) many -----
The zoo where the animal are (is)----
It give (gives) us joy.
When any one ask (asks) about-----

In the above sentences, Shadinata park, the animal, it, any one- are in singular number. In agreement with the subjects, the verbs must be as written in the parenthesis.

In the same way, there are sentences in which the subject is in the plural form, but the verb does not agree with the subject. The examples from the essays of the learners are given below:

-- they both attracts (attract) me most.
Two memorable visits was (were) -----
Children likes (like) most.
Both places was (were) very peaceful.

In the above sentences, they, visits, children and places are in the plural number. Therefore, the following verbs must be as written in the brackets.

Furthermore, it is also seen that in some sentences, the errors of verb usage are observed in case of their agreement with relative pronouns. The grammatical rule goes like this that relative pronouns will have verbs according to their antecedents. In all the three sentences which is used as a relative pronoun. "Which" has plural antecedents, therefore, the verb after "which" must be in agreement with the plural nouns.

----two places which is very beautiful
Shahid minar, Ahsan Manjil, Suna Masjid etc. which is -----
-- hand made things which charms us.

The second kind of verb error is seen in case of not using any verb in the sentence. English grammar maintains that a sentence must have a verb. In the following sentences, no verb is supplied-

I can not (?) any time
This visited place will (?) very helpful
Some times it (?) used as a court.
Two places (?) situated in Bagerhat
It (?) also important
There (?) many hills in Rangamati
We (?) staying in Cox's Bazar.
Cox's Bazar (?) the most attractive tourist spot .
It (?) also a historical place.
Though the two places (?) so much wonderful

The third category of error is misusing verb tense. In the following sentences, we see that the verb is not correctly. The correct version is given in the parenthesis.

Every year many travelers visited (visits)--
People catch fish, bathing (bath)-----
These two places are (auxiliary verb is not necessary) helped -

This place is (auxiliary verb is not necessary) looking (looks) very charming.
Many tourists are (auxiliary verb is not necessary) come.
The sun is (auxiliary verb is not necessary) stayed in the last corner.
*Then we were (auxiliary verb is not necessary) visited **pari bibir majar***
It is (auxiliary verb is not necessary) also look (looks) very nice.
Some are (do) not match
Last week I have (auxiliary verb is not necessary) visited
I have learn (learnt) many things
Which is (auxiliary verb is not necessary) played an important role
I was (auxiliary verb is not necessary) visited Himchari
I was (auxiliary verb is not necessary) enjoy very much
I have notice (noticed) many---
Since my childhood I live (have been living) in here.
I have visite (visited) many places.

The fourth category of error is to use past form of verb after infinitive “to”. English grammar supports the use of present/base form of verb after infinitive “to”. The learners’ errors of this nature are given below-

To decreased (decrease)
Many people come to visited (visit)
Like to visited (visit) many places

The fifth category of verbal error is regarding the use of “to have” verb. According to English grammar, “have” indicates personal possession. It is assumed that the error of using “to have” is the cause of L1 transfer. In the following examples, to indicate possession, “have” is used. The examples are given below-

There are have (no need to use “have”) facilities
There also had (was) a nice bridge.
In every country has--- (this error is solely because of L1 transfer)
There have (is) the tomb of Paribibi.
In this museum have six galleries (there are six galleries in this museum).

Implications of the study

The study shows that the tertiary level learners are committing errors of agreement with verb, missing of verbs, misusing verb tense, misusing past tense after infinitive and misusing “to have” verb. Therefore, they should be made aware of the importance of this item of grammar. Errors of this nature may lead to miscommunication. In addition to this, the learners should be kept engaged in discussing the grammatical items of the texts they are reading as the part of their course. Textual analysis may include the rules of usages of verb. Furthermore, attention should be given to the analysis of mother tongue influence whether it causes errors of verb forms.

CONCLUSION

The current study shows that the tertiary level students of Bangladesh are committing the errors of verb forms. They have learnt English for more than 12 years. Despite that they are having this kind of error. They should have textual analysis and feedback based on their write-ups. They should be motivated to get involved in peer group discussion of the necessary rules including the rules of verb forms. Thus, awareness, analysis, practice and feedback should be regular part of academic activities.

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