A study of errors in learning English Grammatical structures on Tenses of MatthayomSuksa 4 Students of The Demonstration School, KhonKaen University

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Abstract

The purpose of this research were to study grammatical errors in learning English structures on Tenses of the MatthayomSuksa four students. The research group consisted of 31 Matthayom Suksa four student of the Demonstration School of KhonKaen University (Suksasart) in the second semester of the 2012 academic year. The data were collected by using three kinds of instruments, namely; a multiple choices test examining grammatical errors, a table recording each student’s errors, and a survey interviewing those whose errors were found. The student’s errors were subsequently analyzed to find the percentage. The results were presented in the from of a table with the description. The results showed the student’s errors in learning English grammars on Tenses. There errors were found in respective twenty two grammar rules in seven tenses as follow: They were past perfect tense (87.1%), past simple tense (74.2%), present perfect tense (67.4%), past continuous tense (54.8%), present simple (48.4%), future simple tense (41.7%) and present continuous tense (32.3%).

Keywords: A study grammatical errors, structure on Tenses.

1. Introduction

It was found that Thai students have problems of tense selection. Although they can use all tenses comfortably, in some situations they are not confident to select tense. In many research papers have been done to evaluate English proficiency of Thai students. It is interesting that result from certain researches indicate that tense is the most difficult element for Thai students to acquire.

In English grammar, tense is the most important part and one cannot deny that it is also the most difficult part in English grammar which non-native learners have to spend much time to understand and use it correctly and properly. It is obvious that, like many other researches in second language, most researches in second language ever done in Thailand conclude that language transfer in a major cause of difficulties in English grammar tense by Thai students.

In the fact that English has been taught in Thailand for nearly a century but nowadays according to Siam Voice (2012) Thai students use non standard English. Moreover, according to the result of English O-NET (Odinary

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doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.498
National Educational Test) Thai students who graduated from high school got only during 2010-2011 academic year 19.22% out of the total scores in average throughout the country.

Although their average years of studying English have been twelve before entering University, they still have a low standard of English. Sumitra Unwattanakul (2003) stated in her research that there are four major explanations to answer the problems why Thai students are not successful in English. First of all, the students are not exposed to the target language community where English is use as the first language. Second, the students transfer features of first language into the second language they are studying (Richard, 1990). Third, the students do not have adequate background knowledge about the second language’s linguistic system which means English linguistic system in this research. They can not develop their English skill. Junpai (2007) said that many schools in Thailand, both government and private institution, focus mainly on grammar but student still can not efficiently apply what they have learnt when they write, speak and read English.

Grammar is one are to understand another language’s linguistic system. This includes the study of tenses, sentence structure and part of speech accordingly. Therefore, English tenses were taught in all level English classes in Thailand.

Halliday (1994) said that if the learners of English as a second language do not understand the concept of tense, they cannot advance their English at the high level. According to Fredirickson (1997) the problem is that students get confused when they meet many kinds of verbs forms and they associate them with time. They have the idea that verb tenses are always associated with particular times. Many forms of verb tense are sometimes not related to the time as the learners understand. The present simple is not always about the past and present continuous is not always the progressive action.

UpsornTawilpakul (2001) studied the use of English tense by Thai University students. She said that a standardized proficiency of Thai learners is still unseen. English learners in Thailand still have competence which is far beyond that of native speakers. In order to examine such linguistic phenomena, many researches have been done to evaluate English proficiency of Thai students. It is interesting that result from certain researches indicate tense is the most difficult element for Thai student to acquire.

As mentioned above, the main problem for Thai students is adequate background knowledge about the second language’s linguistic system. This research will focus on A study of errors in learning English Grammatical structures on Tenses of Matthayom Suksa 4 students of The Demonstration School KhonKaen University.

1.1. Objectives

In this study, the writer is curious to know about the tense errors made by Matthayom Suksa 4 students of The Demonstration School Khon Kaen University. The analysis is done by answering the following questions

1. What kinds of these errors do the students make?
2. Which tense errors do the students mostly make?

In this study of errors is part of investigation of the process of language learning. Relating to this study, the writer puts some theories as theoretical concepts which contain the definition of error and Error Analysis English Tense.

There is a term “learning by mistake” We often hear that people make a lot of mistake in their part time and eventually be successful in the future. It may be occurred in learning a language or a target language. The classification of errors based on the classification of errors proposed by Richard (1974), Ellis (1997), and Dulay, Bart, and Karashen (1982)

2. Methodology of study
2.1. Instruments
The research group consisted of 31 MattayomSuksa 4 students of the Demonstration School of KhonKaen University in the second semester of 2012 academic year.

The data were collected by using three kind of instruments namely; a multiple choices test examining grammatical errors, a table recording each student’s errors, and a survey interviewing those whose errors were found. The student’s errors were subsequently analyzed to find the percentage.

2.2. Procedure


The test consist of sixty questions which included the seven tenses. The quality of content validity item-objective congruence (IOC). The analysis congruence was analyzed by expert in English Instructions. The IOC of questions from the Quality Evaluation Form was between 0.6-10. The quality of instrument of content validity from IOC were to the value from 0.9 It would be improved and corrected to be appropriate based on the experts’ suggestion.

3. Data Analysis

Percentage is used for data analysis to organize and categorize the data. The result of classification of the errors based on each tense will be presented in the from following table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Tenses</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Past Perfect</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>87.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Past Simple</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Present Perfect</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Past Continuous</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Present Simple</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Future Simple</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Present Continuous</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Result

Among all these seven tenses, error on Past Perfect was the most error that the students produced: it was 87.1%. This indicated that the students still have not acquired this tense. From each item that elicites, the error of tense showed that the students did not understand how to use this tense appropriately so, when they have to use Past Perfect in their answer, they were unable to do correctly and the numbers of the students who made errors were 27 students. The second most error was Past Simple. It was 74.2%, the numbers of the students who made errors were 23 students. The writer considered that they had lack of knowledge about Past Simple, in which of the numbers of the errors were constant. Mean while, the third most error that made by the students was Present Perfect. It was 67.7%. The students who made errors were 21 students. Past Continuous was in the fourth rank with 54.8% The students were unable to answer the items correctly were 17 students. Present Simple, it was the fifth rank. It reached about 48.4% by the students who made errors were 15 students. And then they went on Future Simple. It was 41.7%. The number of the students who made errors were 13 students. This indicated that most of students have known how to use this tense, but some were not. Finally the last error was Present Continuous. It was 32.3%. This indicated that students have acquired this quite well and the numbers of the students who made errors were 10 students.

4.1. Survey Interviewing: The Student’s attitude in Past Perfect
From the student’s score the first research question about how the students error tense past perfect has been answered. Moreover, it has been more completed with the data that got from questionnaire by investigating their attitudes.

**Question 1:** I have not mastered the Hypothetical (Past Perfection)

From the first question, there were 96.77% of students state that they strongly agreed that the content was very difficult to them

**Question 2:** I can’t translate it because it is an unreal past sentence (Type 3 Conditional Sentences)

Based on the second question most students strongly agree 83.87% that they didn’t know how to use this unreal past sentence

**Question 3:** I can’t remember (Type 3 Conditional Sentence Structure)

The third question, there were 80.64% of students who strongly agreed that the type 3 conditional Sentence structure was the hardest remembrance to them.

**Question 4:** I don’t understand how to use the past perfect tense in conjunction with the simple past tense.

From the fourth question, most students stated that they didn’t know much about how to use the past perfect tense and simple past tense together. There were 70.96%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Errors</th>
<th>Present tense</th>
<th>Present Continuous</th>
<th>Present Perfect</th>
<th>Future Simple</th>
<th>Past Simple</th>
<th>Past Continuous</th>
<th>Past Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sentences Structure</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>41.93%</td>
<td>48.38%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adverbs of time</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>48.38%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>41.93%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rearrange the sentence</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>90.32%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>41.93%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Forming Unreal Past Conditional/ Hypothetical Past Perfection</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Time Clause verb forms in both clauses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2 above shows five type of errors made by the students in dealing with the percentage of each type of errors Based on the result that the students have problem serious with sentences structure of the future simple reached 77.4% from total answers found and past perfect 74.1% and then following the past simple 64.5%. For past continuous, it reached 54.8% of sentence structure and following the present perfect 48.38%. The present continuous reached 41.93% The last one was present simple 12.12%

The second type of error was adverbs of time each tense

The student have problem the adverbs of time both tense which reached 74.1% And follow the present perfect 48.38% and then the past continuous reached 41.93%

The last both of tenses were present tense and present continuous They were not high 12.9%

The third type of error occurred in rearrange the sentence each tense. The students have problem serious with the rearrange the sentence The present continuous was the highest 90.32% and the second future simple tense 74.4%
and then following the present perfect. It reached 71% and went on in present tense 61.4%. The last was past simple 41.93%

Forming Unreal past condition and Hypothetical Past Perfection, It was the fourth type of error: This type of error was high percentage 67.7% from the past perfect.

The last type of error occurred in Time Clause verb forms in both clause It was the highest 87% from the past continuous, and the following the past perfect 77.4%

5. Conclusion

This chapter presents the general conclusion of A study of errors in learning English grammatical structures on Tenses of Matthayom Suksa 4 students of the Demonstration School KhonKaen University. As stated in the research question. The writer is curious about the types tense errors that are made by Matthayom Suksa 4. All students made errors in each tense.

The writer also found that past perfect tense was the most committed errors that occur in the work of the students. The second most error was past simple tense and the third was present perfect tense, while past continuous tense was the fourth position and the fifth error was present simple tense, and follow up future simple tense. The last one was present continuous.

Therefore, after looking at the findings of this study, the writer concluded that Matthayom Suksa 4 students have not mastered the seven tenses very well. There are possible reasons to explain why the students still have not mastered the tenses. The first reason was that the content was very difficult to them and the other reason was the influence of their mother language, Thai students, which did not have tense system that explain an event happens in one particular time. This influence might impede the process of acquiring foreign language and another one is the process of acquisition that influences the process of leaner’s’ interlanguage. Therefore, in the learning process, the students still made errors. The errors that occur will impede the process of acquisition if they did not realize that they commit the error. The other reason that they can’t remember the structure of tenses.

Therefore, throughout this study, the students are asked to try identify the errors, because the writer believes that they will get lots of benefits various forms of feedback on those errors that they committed.

Finally, the writer would like to suggest that the teachers at Demonstration School Faculty of Education KhonKaen University should focus on past perfect tense and give a lot of practices in using all kinds of tenses in class. As for the Matthayom Suksa 4 students, the writer suggests that they should learn more about tenses, they should also be more careful in doing a test, especially when the tenses are given in a class, and they pay attention to the time expressions given to minimize the possibility of making errors on the use of different tense. The writer hopes that from this study, the Matthayom Suksa 4 students especially could improve their ability to use English tenses.

Acknowledgements

This research project received research grant from the Project Inculcating the Researcher for Creating the International Research Finding 2013 (5th Time) of KhonKaen University, KhonKaen.

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