

Analyzing Past Tenses Errors Made by EFL Learners at Tertiary Level (A case study of semester8 Students, 2015 - Faculty of Arts - Shendi University - Sudan)

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Abstract: This study attempts to investigate and identify the problems facing the students regarding the past simple and the past continuous tenses and to suggest suitable remedial procedures. In this study the researcher takes the students of semester eight at the Faculty of Arts who study English as a foreign language at the University of Shendi as a sample to carry out this study. A test was given to 40 students who represent the whole class of the semester. The test results were analyzed by using (SPSS).

The tests revealed the following findings:

- 1- Concerning the past simple test, 7 of the students are excellent, the average are between good and pass although few of them failed.
- 2- Concerning the past continuous test none of the students get excellent, the majority is between pass and failure.
- 3- The performance of the students in the simple past tense is better than their performance in the continuous past tense test.

Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving the students' problem, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

1. Teaching tenses should be given more attention like other aspects of language.
2. Tenses and their activities should be taught as a part of studying writing and semantic, as tenses have a big impact on meaning.
3. Reading comprehension passages could be more effective in practicing tenses.
4. Curriculum should include enough courses about tenses and their activities.

1.2 Key concepts: (Tenses, past simple, past continuous, analysis, EFL learners)

خلاصة

في هذه الدراسة قام الباحث بأخذ طلاب الفصل الدراسي الثامن بكلية الآداب قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة شندي كعينة للتعرف والتحقق من الصعوبات التي تواجههم في استخدام أفعال الماضي البسيط والماضي المستمر في اللغة الانجليزية و اقتراح حلول مناسبة. قام الباحث بإعطاء امتحان لعدد 40 طالبا من الطلاب المعنيين بالدراسة و هم كل طلاب الفصل الدراسي الثامن تم تحليل البيانات الخاصة بأداء الطلاب في الامتحان بواسطة نظام (SPSS) الإحصائي. أثبتت النتائج المستخلصة من الامتحان الخاص بالطلاب ضعف الطلاب الشديد في هذه الأفعال و استنادا على النتائج المستخلصة من الدراسة و مساهمة من الباحث في حل هذه المشكلة كانت اهم توصياته على النحو التالي:

- إعطاء الأفعال الأهمية في العملية التدريسية
- تدرس الأفعال وتدريباتها كجزء من تدريس مهارة الكتابة و علم المعاني
- مهارة القراءة يمكن أن تكون لها تأثير جيد في ممارسة تعلم الأفعال
- يجب أن تتضمن المناهج مقررات كافية عن الأفعال في اللغة الانجليزية

I. Introduction

1.1 Background

Tenses in English language are sometimes challenges not only for the learners of English as a foreign language, but also for the native speakers of English language themselves. They can all speak fluent English and communicate effectively although they know nothing about the aspect of tenses. Good master in using tenses is much more important in communicating messages, views and ideas.

Students of English, as a foreign language, face many difficulties in writing process as well as the writing product which is one of the most problematic skills. Learning English at tertiary level cannot be separated from teaching and learning English at other levels. There is a big gap between the standard of the English language of the students and what is required in the courses when they first enter the tertiary level.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This study has been conducted because there is a growing concern about the falling standards of writing skills among the students of English as a foreign language. The staff- members in the Department of English Language at Shendi University have often expressed their concern about the students' achievement and

their level of English. This study attempts to investigate and identify the students' problems in the past tenses who study English at the University of Shendi.

1.3 Aims of the study: This study attempts to investigate and identify the problems facing the students of English language regarding **past simple** and the **past continuous** tenses and eventually recommends ways of remedial work.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study is of great value to the following:

- 1- English language teachers.
- 2- Planners and designers of English language syllabus.
- 3- Learners of English as a foreign language.
- 4- Researchers in the area of English language teaching.

1.5 Methods of the study: The researcher adopts the descriptive analytical method. A test will be given to the students with the aim of collecting the data for the study. The SPSS will be used for data analysis.

1.6 Limits of the study: The study is limited to the fourth year students enrolled in (8th semester) of the academic year 2015 – 2016 of English as a second language who study at Shendi University, Faculty of Arts. The study is limited to the past simple & the past continuous tenses only.

II. Literature Review

2. What are Tenses?

Tenses in English language are the study of actions related to their times. Almost all languages express the concepts of the **presence** (I go), the **past** (I went) and the **future** (I will go).

"Tense is a grammatical category referring to the time of the situation; the tense is indicated by the form of the verb". (Greenbaum S & Nelson G. 2002:55)

2.1 Past simple tense

Usage: Past simple tense is used to indicate events completely ended in the past. It does not matter how long ago the event is; it can be few minutes or even millions of years in the past. The Past Tense refers an action to the past without telling anything about the connection with the present moment. "The simple past is used when a definite time or date is mentioned, while the present perfect is used when no time is mentioned." (T. J. Fitikides 1980: 28)

Seaton A (2007) stated that the simple past tense is also used to talk about things that happened in stories.

Examples

- *I **lived** in Shendi for 10 years.
- *We **lived** in that house when we were young.
- *You **went** to school yesterday.
- *They **drove** to London on Monday.
- *He **ate** an apple.
- *She **stopped** smoking.
- *It **began** to rain at 6 o'clock.

"The simple past (or Preterite) tense is used to express an action wholly completed at some point, or during some period, in the past" (Eckersley C.E. & Eckersley J. M. 1981: 160). (Murphy R. et al 1998: 22) states that "We use the simple past to talk about actions or situations in the past"

Negation

We used (did not or didn't) to form the negative of the past simple tense.

I, we, you, they, he, she it + did not (didn't) + verb e.g.

- * I **didn't live** in Shendi for 10 years.
- * We **didn't live** in that house when we were young.
- * You **didn't go** to school yesterday.
- * They **didn't drive** to London on Monday.
- * He **didn't eat** an apple.
- * She **didn't stop** smoking.
- * It **didn't begin** to rain

2.2 Past Continuous Tense

Usage: Using the past continuous indicates that the action was in progress during the past period of time. It is also called **progressive** tense and we use it to say what we were in the middle of doing at a particular moment in the past. "We can use the past continuous, particularly in spoken English, when we want to emphasize that repeated actions went on for a limited and temporary period of past time" (Hewings M.2005:8)

Examples

*I **was** teaching them English.

*We **were** eating our breakfast.

*You **were** telling then a story.

*They **were** speaking to me.

*He **was** running very fast.

*She **was** washing her hands.

*It **was** raining whole the night.

The past continuous is also used to indicate that an action was going on at a time when something else happened e.g.

As I was walking in the street I met Ali.

Negation

* I was **not (wasn't)** teaching them English.

* We were **not (weren't)** eating our breakfast.

* You were **not (weren't)** telling then a story.

* They were **not (weren't)** speaking to me.

* He was **not (wasn't)** running very fast.

* She was **not (wasn't)** washing her hands.

* It was **not (wasn't)** raining whole the night.

2.3 Past Perfect Tense

Usage: The past perfect tense is used to show that an action took place before another one in the past (the past in the past) "We use Past Perfect to talk about things that took place before something else in the past." (Richard Side & Guy Wellman 2000:17)

Examples

*I took the decision after I **had spoken** to John.

* As I reached the shop I discovered that I **had lost** my money.

* He told me that he **had not seen** me before.

* She explained that she **had closed** the window

Negation

2.4 Past Perfect Continuous Tense

Usage: The past perfect continuous tense is like the past perfect tense, but it expresses longer actions in the **past** before another action in the **past**.

"It is used to express the duration of an action up to a certain time in the past"(Eckersley C.E. & Eckersley J. M.1981: 180)

Examples

*When I **got** to the class the teacher **had already been speaking** for half an hour.

*The telephone **had been ringing** for three minutes before it **was answered**.

*You **had been playing** football.

* We **were** too late, the train **had left**.

*They **had been eating**.

*He **had been running**.

*She **had been washing** her clothes.

*It **had been raining**

Negation:

For negative sentences in the past perfect continuous tense, we insert **not** after the first auxiliary verb e.g.

* You had **not** been playing football.

* They had **not** been eating.

III. Results And Discussion

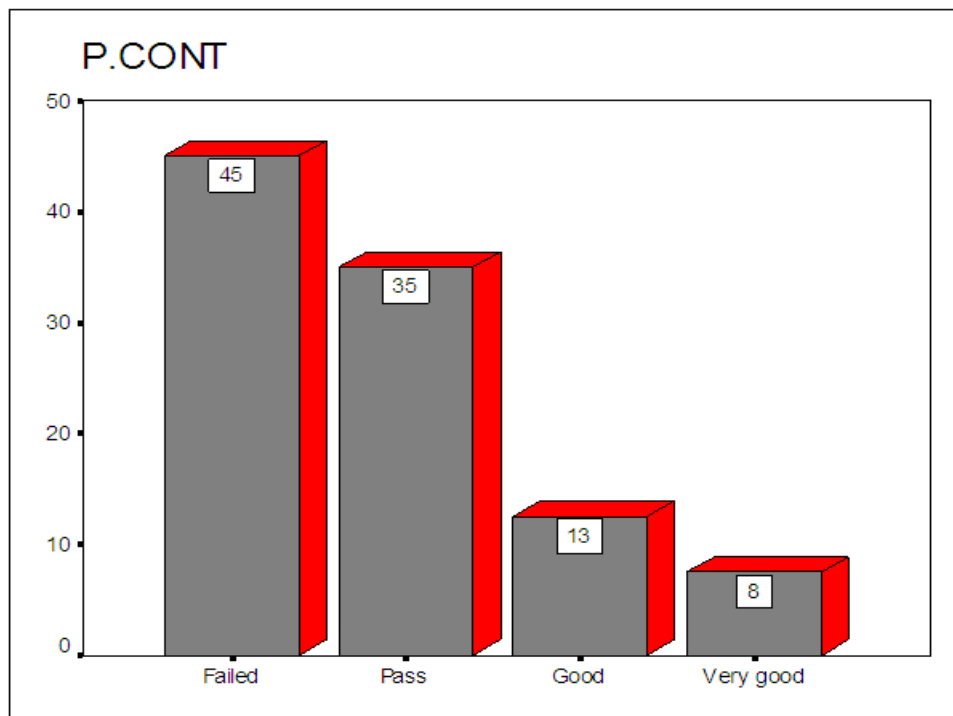
The performances of the students on the test were measured according to the following scales:

- 1- **A** = excellent.
- 2- **B** = very good.
- 3- **C** = good.
- 4- **D** = pass
- 5- **F** = failure.

The test given to students was conducted as a part of their prescribed courses work at the university. The students seriously dealt with the test as a part of the semester's syllabi not as a study conducted on them. So the results of the test are true and authentic.

Table and figure No (1) Show the performance of the students regarding the past simple test.

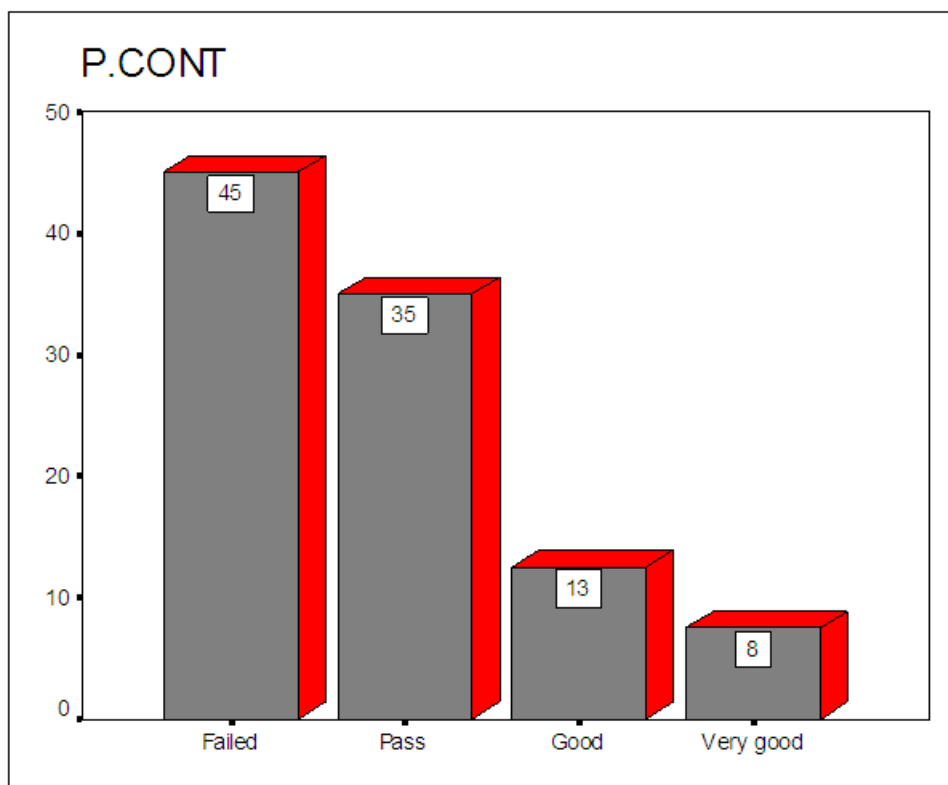
Degrees	Frequency	Percent
A	7	17.5
B	11	27.5
C	8	20
D	11	27.5
F	3	7.5
Total	40	100.0



According to table and figure (1), it is clear that **7** of the students get (A), **11** students get (B), **8** students get (C), **11** students get (D) and only **3** of them failed to pass the test of the past simple tense.

Table and figure No (2) Show the performance of the students regarding the past continuous test.

Degrees	Frequency	Percent
A	0	0.0
B	3	7.5
C	5	12.5
D	14	35.0
F	18	45.0
Total	40	100.0



According to table and figure (2), it is clear that **none** of the students get (A), **3** students get (B), **5** students get (C), **14** students get (D) and the majority of them (**18**) failed to pass the test of the past continuous tense.

IV. Conclusion

The results revealed by the test have affirmed that the students really have some problems when using the simple and the continuous past tenses.

The tests revealed the following:

- 1- Concerning the past simple test, **7** of the students are excellent, the average are between good and pass although few of them failed.
- 2- Concerning the past continuous test none of the students get excellent, the majority is between pass and failure.
- 3- The performance of the students in the simple past tense is better than their performance in the continuous past tense test.
- 4- T-test revealed that the significance is (0, 00)

V. Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving this problem, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

1. Teaching tenses should be given more attention like other aspects of language.
2. Tenses and their activities should be taught as a part of studying writing and semantic, as tenses have a big impact on meaning.
3. Reading comprehension passages could be more effective in practicing tenses.
4. Curriculum should include enough courses about tenses and their activities.

References

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VI. Appendices

6.1 The three following tables are the original output tables regarding the performance of the students on the two tests.

Std. Error Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	X	
2.740	17.328	61.50	40	s1	Past simple
2.467	15.605	40.25	40	s2	

Cumulative Percent	Valid Percent	Percent	Frequency		
7.5	7.5	7.5	3	Failed	Valid
35.0	27.5	27.5	11	Pass	
55.0	20.0	20.0	8	Good	
82.5	27.5	27.5	11	Very good	
100.0	17.5	17.5	7	excellent	
	100.0	100.0	40	Total	

Cumulative Percent	Valid Percent	Percent	Frequency		
45.0	45.0	45.0	18	Failed	Valid
80.0	35.0	35.0	14	Pass	
92.5	12.5	12.5	5	Good	
100.0	7.5	7.5	3	Very good	
	100.0	100.0	40	Total	

6.2 This table shows the result of the T-test.

t-test for Equality of Means							Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Std. Error Difference	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)	df	t	Sig.	F		
Upper	Lower									
28.590	13.910	3.687	21.25	.000	78	5.763	.697	.152	Equal variances assumed	Past simple
28.592	13.908	3.687	21.25	.000	77.160	5.763			Equal variances not assumed	

6.3 The past simple test.

- I (goed – gone - went) to the mall after school.
- My brother (seen - saw - sees) a bear an hour ago.
- (Did – Are - Does) Hassan visit his grandmother last night?
- Ali did not.....(working - work - worked) last weekend.
-(Was - Were - Are) Ali and Hassan at last month's meeting?
- We (were - was - did) not happy after the sad ending.
- (Are – Did - Do) you see Jody's new dog yesterday?
- Sorry, I(wasn't - didn't - am not) hear you at the door.
- I(studying - study - studied) English for two years.
- What(do - did - were) you eat for lunch yesterday?

6.4 The past simple test with its answers.

- I (goed – gone - went) to the mall after school.
- My brother(seen - saw - sees) a bear an hour ago.
- (Did – Are - Does) Hassan visit his grandmother last night?
- Ali did not.....(working - work - worked) last weekend.
-(Was - Were - Are) Ali and Hassan at last month's meeting?

6. We (**were - was - did**) not happy after the sad ending.
7. (**Are - Did - Do**) you see Jody's new dog yesterday?
8. Sorry, I (**wasn't - didn't - am not**) hear you at the door.
9. I (**studying - study - studied**) English for two years.
10. What (**do - did - were**) you eat for lunch yesterday?

6.5 The past continuous test.

1. My brother and sister (**are - was - were**) playing tennis yesterday.
2. (**Are - Was - Were**) you still working at 7pm last night?
3. At 8.30am today I (**was - am - were**) driving to work.
4. We..... (**was - weren't - won't**) sleeping when the police came.
5. Why..... (**was - does - were**) he having lunch at 4pm?
6. Was he (**doing - do - done**) his homework?
7. Snow (**fell - was falling - is falling**) lightly. Suddenly a reindeer appeared.
8. Somebody threw a shoe at him..... (**after - when - while**) he was speaking.
9. They (**were watching - were watched - watched**) TV when I arrived.
10. I was reading a detective story (**during - while - when**) I heard a noise.

6.6 The past continuous test with its answers.

1. My brother and sister (**are - was - were**) playing tennis at 11am yesterday.
2. (**Are - Was - Were**) you still working at 7pm last night?
3. At 8.30am today I (**was - am - were**) driving to work.
4. We..... (**was - weren't - won't**) sleeping when the police came.
5. Why..... (**was - does - were**) he having lunch at 4pm?
6. Was he not (**doing - do - done**) his homework?
7. Snow (**fell - was falling - is falling**) lightly. Suddenly a reindeer appeared.
8. Somebody threw a shoe at him..... (**after - when - while**) he was speaking.
9. They (**were watching - were watched - watched**) TV when I arrived.
10. I was reading a detective story (**during - while - when**) I heard a noise. أسفل النموذج