

CHAPTER - 2

2.1 Error Analysis

Error Analysis in Second Language Acquisition was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. Error Analysis was an alternative to Contrastive Analysis, an approach influenced by Behaviourism through which applied linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learner's first and second languages to predict errors.

Error Analysis showed that Contrastive Analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors although its more valuable aspect has been incorporated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error Analysis has been that many learner errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to present the different kinds of error made by the students in regard to the different uses of the tenses in English.

2.2 Simple Present.

The Simple Present tense is used to refer to habitual actions. For example

- i) I have a cup of coffee at 7 every morning.
- ii) I work eight hours a day.

The Simple Present tense is used in **proverbs** too as there is no specific time reference in them, i.e. when something is always true/to describe eternal truths. For example

- i) This packet contains twenty cigarettes.
- ii) The sun rises in the east.

Other Uses of the Simple Present

- i) The Simple Present is used to describe an action happening at a particular instant. This is called the instantaneous present. This is normally used in commentaries and demonstrations for dramatic effect. For example

A magician: Look! Take a red card and place it on a black box. The red card turns black!

- ii) To refer the past time in narratives in order to create a dramatic effect. This is called the use of the historical present. For example

Reema takes a rope and ties the hands of the boy. .

- iii) To refer to future time when expressed with certainty;
something which is scheduled or time tabled to happen in the
future. For example

The institute reopens on June 1st.

- iv) To indicate possession/physical ailment. For example

I have a bad headache.

- v) To describe mental activities. For example

I think/feel/suppose/consider/imagine/ ...

- vi) To describe emotions. For example

I love/care/adore/hate/like ...

- vii) Come from. For example

Where do you come from?

- viii) Present state. For example

I am hungry.

- ix) Present event. For example

I call the meeting to order.

x) In conditional clauses. For example

If it rains, we may not go out.

xi) Subjunctive. For example

We demand, we insist.

xii) Standard expressions. For example

God save the Queen!

Simple Present Tense: Form

	bare V or V + -s	
	Singular	Plural
1 st person	bare V I walk	bare V We walk
2 nd person	bare V You walk	bare V You walk
3 rd person	V-s He/She/It walks	bare V They walk

Table II: Simple Present Tense

It has been observed from the analysis of the questionnaires that most of the students committed a number of errors while using the Simple Present Tense. The following table presents the incorrect use of the simple present tense by most of the students. The correct form has also been indicated.

Incorrect	Correct
1. She always used to come late in college.	She always comes late to college.
2. She always talk about utter nonsense.	She always talks nonsense.
3. She used to carry other bags and extra material things	She often carries extra bags and materials
4. The girl have a beautiful smile.	The girl has a beautiful smile.
5. She is always go to school.	5. She always goes to school.
6. She is a class nine.	6. She is in class nine.
7. She never miss a single class.	7. She never misses a class.

Table III: Errors committed in the use of the Simple Present Tense.

The most common error that has been observed in the analysis of the Simple Present Tense is the use of the phrase “use to”. This is an error noticed among most of the students belonging especially to the vernacular medium.

Another common error that has been noticed is the omission of the third person singular -s with verb as evident from example 2, 5 and 7 of the table above: This error was found both among the English and the vernacular medium students.

Another error that could be observed is in the incorrect use of has/have in regard to the Subject. Students were often confused about their correct use which has been indicated in Table II.

2.3. Simple Past

Simple Past is used to describe an event in the past or a certain action in the past. It is also used in narratives. For example

My grandfather died in 1977.

The Simple Past tense form can also be used to refer to present time. This is a special use of the Simple Past tense form with verbs like **want**, **wonder**, **hope**, **think**, to make an utterance more polite or tactful. For example

I wanted to discuss my proposal with you, sir.

I wondered if I could discuss my proposal with you, sir.

I thought of discussing my proposal with you, sir.

I hoped to discuss my proposal with you, sir.

Other Uses of the Simple Past Tense Form

- i) After the conditional **if** to indicate tentativeness (hypothetical),
e.g. If I **were** the Education Minister, I would abolish the teaching of grammar.

- ii) After it's time, would rather, wish
e.g. It's 12 o'clock – it's time you **went** home.
I'd rather you **stayed** back here.
I wish I **was** beautiful.

- iii) In reported speech
e.g. I asked what the time **was**.

Simple Past: Form

Regular: V+ -ed (marker of past tense)	
Want + -ed = wanted	
Irregular: teach	taught
catch	caught
keep	kept
sweep	swept
bring	brought
cut	cut

Table IV: Simple Past Form

The following table shows some of the common errors that students committed in the use of the Simple Past Tense.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	He taken off his coat	He took off his coat.
2.	...at last he finds it a hole nearly dead.	...at last he found it in a hole nearly dead
3.	Once there was a shepherd who has used his sheep	Once there was a shepherd who lost his sheep.
4.	...at last he was find it in a hole nearly dead.	...at last he found it in a hole nearly dead
5.	Then he was rolled up his sleeves	Then he rolled up his sleeves.
6.	He was seized the tail and pulled and pulled.	He seized the tail and pulled and pulled.
7.	He had taken off his coat and tried to pull the sheep out by its tail.	He took off his coat and tried to pull the sheep out by its tail.
8.	... the tail break	... the tail broke

Table V: Errors committed in the use of Simple Past Tense.

From the table above it can be observed that students often tend to use double past tense markers e.g. was rolled ,was seized which is ungrammatical.

Incorrect use of the past tense form can also be observed from the above examples. In certain examples the present and past perfect form were also used instead of the correct past tense form.

2.4. Present Perfect and Past Perfect

The Present Perfect tense (**has/have + Verb in the past participle form**) is used to refer to actions in the past which have no definite time reference. The Present Perfect tense in English is used in the following three situations.

1) Indefinite Past (Experiential)

The present perfect tense is often used to talk about past actions and events which are completely finished. However, instead of the simple past tense the present perfect is used if the action/event has current relevance, i.e. it is related to the speaker's experience. In this case, even though the actions took place in the past, they are still with the speaker as a part of his/her experience and knowledge. This use of the present perfect is therefore also called the experiential use of the present perfect.

e.g. I have seen the Taj Mahal.

Have you read Shakespeare's plays?

2) Past → Present (Linking)

The present perfect tense is sometimes used to indicate an action/situation which began in the past and which has continued upto the present moment, i.e. the moment when we are speaking.

e.g. I have lived in Hyderabad for ten years (meaning: I started living in Hyderabad ten years ago and I am still living in Hyderabad.)

This use of the present perfect tense is also known as its linking use as it links the past with the present.

3) Resultative Past (Evidential)

The present perfect tense is also used to refer to past actions/events whose results are seen in the present, i.e. when there is evidence in the present for some action/event that happened in the past. Hence, it is also called the evidential use of the present perfect.

e.g. It has rained! (Evidence – Look! The ground is wet.)

The past perfect tense is formed by using **had** followed by a verb in its past participle form (**had done; had been done**). The past perfect is

used as a **sequencing device** when there are two actions that occurred in the past. The past perfect indicates as to which action happened first.

e.g. When I **arrived** at the station at 9 a.m the train too Delhi **had** already **left**.

The following table shows the errors committed by the students in the use of the present and past perfect tense.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.(a)	I can't cook anything now. The price Of cooking gas increased so much.	The price of cooking gas has increased so much.
(b)	I won't cook anything now. The price of Cooking gas is increasing so much.	
2.	The price of petrol rises by 10%	The price of petrol has risen by 10%.
3.	I had often asked you not to talk about my smoking	I have often asked you not to talk about my smoking.
4.(a)	I warned you of the consequences.	I had warned you of the consequences.
(b)	I will warned you of consequences	
5.	I had already decided to leave you.	I have already decided to leave you.
6.(a)	The alimony rates had also shoot up	The alimony rates have also shot up.
(b)	The alimony rates will also shot up.	

Table VI: Errors committed in the use of Present Perfect and Past Perfect

From the above table we can observe that most students are confused about the functional use of the present and past perfect tense and do not recognize the correct form as have+Ved/had+Ved.

2.5. Present Continuous Tense

The present continuous tense is formed by using **am/is/are** followed by a verb in its

-ing form.

Uses of the Present Continuous Tense

i) The present continuous tense is used to describe or refer to an action in progress at the moment of speaking or writing. This is the main use of the present continuous tense. However, it can also be used

ii) To refer to habitual actions.

e.g. She **is** always losing her keys.

In this case, the use of the present continuous indicates anger/irritation on the part of the speaker. In such cases adverbs like **always** are used.

iii) To refer to future time (for a pre-planned activity)/ to refer to a planned activity to be in progress in future.

e.g. We **are leaving** for London tomorrow.

The table below highlights some of the common errors detected in the use of the present continuous tense in English.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	What you do these days?	What are you doing these days?
2.	I work as a beautician	I am working as a beautician.
3.	But I looked for a better job	But I am looking for a better job.
4.	I try for a full time job	I am trying for a full time job.
5.	I will try for a full time job.	I am trying for a full time job.

Table VII: Errors committed in the use of the present continuous tense.

From the above table it is evident that the errors are mostly due to the use of the incorrect use of the verb in the present continuous tense. The present or past tense has been used rather than the present continuous tense.

2.6. Past Continuous

The Past Continuous Tense is used to refer to actions in progress in the past. The past continuous tense is formed by using was/were followed by a verb in its **-ing** form. It is often used in combination with the simple past to refer to an action which started before the action in the simple past.

e.g. My mother **was praying** when I **went** home.

The past continuous tense is also used to provide a time frame for an action.

e.g. When I **was working** in the State Bank of India there was a robbery.

In the following table, some common errors in the use of the past continuous tense have been listed.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	I cycled to school yesterday when suddenly a truck came onto the road from the lane nearby.	I was cycling to school yesterday when suddenly a truck came onto the road from the lane nearby.
2. (a)	I went quite past and the truck speeded also towards me.	I was going quite fast and the truck was also speeding towards me.
(b)	I go quite fast and the truck speed also towards me.	
3.	I thank God when another truck zoomed past me.	I was thanking God when another truck zoomed past me.

Table VIII: Errors committed in the use of the past continuous tense.

We can observe that instead of using the past continuous, students restrict to the use of past tense.

2.7. Present and Past Perfect Continuous

The present perfect continuous tense establishes a link between the past and the present (like the present perfect) but it is used to indicate that the action/activity which began in the past is in progress at the present moment for a temporary/limited duration. The present perfect continuous tense is formed by using **has/have** followed by **be** in its past participle form followed by a verb in its **-ing** form.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	For how long you are learning French?	For how long have you been learning French?
2.	I am attending classes for about two years now.	I have been attending classes for about two years now.
3.	When I was in class ix I was quarrelling with everybody.	When I was in class ix I had been quarelling with everybody.

Table IX: Errors Committed in the use of the Present/Past Continuous tense.

In these examples we find that in the place of present / past continuous tense, students commonly use the present or past continuous. Another error that has been observed is the use of the auxiliary after the subject, as in “you are learning” instead of “are you learning”

2.8. Future Tense

The future tense refers to **future time**.

e.g. It **will** rain.

It is **going to** rain.

- i) The simple present tense can refer to future time when we are **certain** about the future events.

e.g. Our college **reopens** on 25th October.

The use of the simple present indicates that the future events mentioned here are already parts of a programme/schedule.

The simple present tense is also used in subordinate clauses to refer to the future.

e.g. I'll be glad if she **comes**.

- ii) The modal auxiliary verbs **shall** and **will** are most commonly used to refer to actions/events in future. They are used in the following cases:

- When we predict future events/states most often based on some information like advertisements, posters or announcements.

e.g. You **will** win the lottery. (Prediction)

- For inevitable future facts.

e.g. I **will be** 60 next year. (Inevitable future fact)

iii) **Going to** is normally used to refer to future events/states in two cases:

- If there is a present indication of the future event.

e.g. She is **going to** have a baby.

- To express the fulfillment of a present intention. In this case, it is used only with human subjects.

e.g. I am **going to** Hyderabad next week to attend the Film Festival.

- The use of the present continuous tense is used to refer to future events shows that it has already been planned or arranged. It is generally used to refer to the near future.

The last table in this section lists some of the errors made by the students in the depiction of future time.

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	I stay at home (Sunday)	
2.(a)	I have an operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I will be operating on a patient at 9 a.m. stay at home ,
(b)	I am operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I will operate on a patient at 9 a.m
c)	I have to operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I shall operate on a patient at 9 a.m.
d)	I will operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I have to operate on a patient at 9 a.m.

Table X: Errors committed in the depiction or future time

From the above table we can observe that students are comfortable in using one familiar form of a verb and do not tend to correct it for a proper subject verb concord. This is evident from the use of the verb “Operation” in Table X

	Incorrect	Correct
1.	I stay at home (Sunday)	
2.(a)	I have an operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I will be operating on a patient at 9 a.m. stay at home
(b)	I am operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I will operate on a patient at 9 a.m
c)	I have to operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I shall operate on a patient at 9 a.m.
d)	I will operation on a patient at 9 a.m.	I have to operate on a patient at 9 a.m.

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Future tense is actually a confusing concept because it does not have any members like the other tenses. Modern grammarians deny the existence of something called "Future Tense". They believe that future time can be denoted by the use of other tense like the Simple Present and present continuous. For example:-

1. The Prime Minister arrives tomorrow.
2. The Prime Minister is arriving tomorrow.

Conclusion

Errors are an integral part of learning a second foreign language as Dulay and Burt (1974) maintained, "You can't learn without goofing". A systematic analysis of learner's errors bring to light some critical insights into the problems of the teaching and learning of the English language at the H.S. and the under graduate level. In the following chapter, certain findings and some recommendations have been stated which might contribute towards the better teaching & learning of English.