

The Acquisition of English Verb Tense and Aspect of L2 Learners

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Abstract

This study explored the acquisition of English verb tense and aspect of L2 learners. Further, the present study sought to understand the representation and interpretation of the tense-aspect system, as well as the difficulties encountered by the Grade 10 L2 learners at Magallanes National Vocational High School in the grammatical and lexical aspects of verbs. Thus, a qualitative research design was utilized to comprehend the process of making sense of the tense-aspect from the perspective of the students. Subsequently, content and corpus analyses were employed to determine if the learners acquired the tense-aspect in the appropriate context in the 29 pieces of a narrative essay written by the students and answering a cloze test. To validate the significant data gathered from the corpus, an unstructured interview was also conducted. The results revealed that the learners have remarkably acquired the grammatical structures but exhibited confusion about the rules that made them apply the verb tense and aspect to unsuitable contexts. Moreover, the findings also showed that the students' concept of tense and aspect was similar to their knowledge of verbs in the L1 which is a strong implication of language transfer and entails errors in language use. Hence, this study recommended exposing L2 learners to language-teaching contexts where the grammatical structures and functions of verb tense and aspect are highly emphasized.

Keywords: acquisition; L1 transfer; grammatical errors; verb tense and aspect

Introduction

Second language learning has been a subject for a vast study of language and language behavior that encompasses not only the linguistic features of the target language but also the nature of the human mind. Moreover, this opened the possibility that learning and acquiring a new language may and may not be limited to the knowledge of the first language, which of course, leads to identifying the gap in the development of second language grammar (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

It is understood that language acquisition has a broader parameter. It is also known that the verb tense and aspect of the English language are one of the hardest syntactic features that L2 learners must deal with (Matsumoto & Dobs 2017). Thus, it could be concluded that L2 learners indeed were facing an excessive problem not only in acquiring the morphological features of the English verb tense-aspect system but also in formulating a correct meaning-form relationship that was aligned to specific contexts.

Over the past years, there have been several studies that discovered a great deal of challenges faced by L2 learners from different countries in applying the English tense-aspect system (Listia & Febriyanti, 2020; Lusiyani 2018). The other studies revealed that one of the difficulties faced by L2 learners was the linguistic features of their first language. Generating correct verb forms was a struggle for L2 students since their knowledge of the verbs from their L1 may cause them to confuse the rules with the English verbs (Islam, 2020; Huang, 2020; Toma & Saddiq, 2019; Wegner 2017; Lee, 2011). On the other hand, the occurrence of errors committed by the students in the process of acquiring the tense-aspect system may indicate positive

development in that they could use the available linguistic data in formulating discourse gradually and meaningfully (Ellis, 1994; Trawiński, 2005; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Hence, this current study seeks to understand the acquisition of the English verb tense and aspect by the L2 learners in the Philippine context which is just another complex topic and considered a new area in L2 acquisition since people tend to ponder inherent lexical and grammatical aspect beyond the scope of Universal Grammar (Alsalmi 2013). Furthermore, English has been part of the Philippine academic curricula. Despite the several changes in the education curriculum, the learning of English has always been intact and remains essential to the teaching and learning process of Filipino teachers and learners (Sioco & De Vera, 2018). The importance of the English language in the Philippine context is also reflected in the academic programs since English is one of the major subjects and should be taught as the second language at all levels as mandated through Executive Order No. 210, s. 2003. Using the English language in the classroom was also reinforced through the DepEd Order No. 36, s. 2006. This mandates that English shall be used in all levels of secondary public and private schools as the primary medium of instruction with time allotment for learning not being less than 70% of the total time allotment for all learning areas in all levels.

In connection to the current study about the acquisition of the English verb tense and aspect, the curriculum guide of the Junior High School in English under the K to 12 program contains twenty-four (24) learning competencies about the verbs starting in the first grade until the ninth grade. Only eight (8) of these learning competencies give focus on verb tense and aspect (K to 12 English Curriculum Guide, May 2016). Meanwhile, during the insurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the DepEd revised the CG that would fit into the distance learning modalities in education, thus, the department released a new set of CG which contains the so-called Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs). As a result, the 24 learning competencies about the verb were narrowed down to 12 in which seven (7) of these include direct instructions for tense and aspect (K to 12 English MELCs, 2020).

It can also be observed that in the tenth grade, there is no longer a competency that caters to intensive instructions about the verb tense and aspect in both the English CG and MELCs. The only competency that is included in the Grade 10 English subject related to verbs is the modals. Given this context, this could be associated with the spiral progression used in the K to 12 curriculum wherein the learners are expected to have mastered the competencies in early stages to cope with the advanced grammar lessons requisite to a higher level of education.

Despite the fact that the education department has been designing and implementing programs that would help Filipino learners acquire the target language at the high school level, they still dwell on difficulties even until they reach higher education, in which first-year college students exhibited to only achieve an average grammar skill (Alieto, Rillo & Tanpoco, 2019). They emphasized that senior high school students must review the basics of grammar, including the rules for using verbs because the students tend to transfer errors from Filipino to English in writing. On the other hand, Torres & Santos (2021) viewed that in teaching English grammar, the teachers' theories become the basis for their knowledge which contributes a great impact in preparing the instructional materials, decisions, and classroom practices.

Therefore, this study aimed to investigate if the Grade 10 students in Magallanes National Vocational High School have acquired the English verb tense and aspect through formal instructions at elementary and junior high school levels. It also investigated the difficulties encountered by the learners in mastering the verb tense-aspect as well as their interpretation of the statements that encode aspects. Most of all, the result of this research aspires to recommend ideas and concepts that may assist the students to significantly acquire the English verb tense and aspect.

Objectives

The study investigated the acquisition of English Verb Tense and Aspect used by L2 learners at Magallanes National Vocational High School, S.Y. 2023-2024. Specifically, the study sought to (1) discover the way L2 learners represent the tense-aspect in English; (2) understand the manner of the learners in interpreting English morphosyntax that encodes aspect; (3) determine the difficulties encountered by the learners in following the morphosyntax rules of tense-aspect in English; (4) propose an assistance for learners to acquire the tense-aspect rules of English.

Methodology

To realize the objectives, qualitative research design was employed by applying the purposive sampling technique, a type of non-probability sampling in which the participants are available and likely to participate over a specific period (Hancock et al, 2009). Hence, the participants in this study were the Grade 10 students from section Cardamom, a heterogenous class, for they have 100% average daily attendance which was helpful during the data gathering. Murphy, et al. (2017) noted that their research complements and enhances the literature on within-class ability grouping by demonstrating that students may attain basic comprehension regardless of the makeup of their groups, but heterogeneous grouping is more likely to result in high-level comprehension than homogeneous grouping. Moreover, to gather the data needed, tasks such as retelling activity, cloze test, and unstructured interview were administered.

In the retelling activity, the participants were tasked to write a narrative essay, in which they had to narrate or retell the series of events that happened in the story presented to them. A narrative essay recounts a specific event or experience, aiming to convey a point or message through storytelling. It organizes the events sequentially according to time (Mohammed, 2021). The researcher presented a video to the students from which they were instructed to watch and take down notes of the events happening in the video for them to easily recall the events that occurred. Another activity to gather data was conducting a cloze test on the participant. In the cloze procedure, gaps or blanks were formed by removing specific words from a text. The test-taker must then complete these gaps by selecting suitable words based on context clues provided within the passage (Ajideh, et al., 2012). In the present study, the cloze test, a fill-in-the-blank type of test is an instrument that required the L2 learners to fill in the sentences and passages with the correct form of the verb tense and aspect to complete the meaning of the passages. The test holds 12 passages that correspond to the 12-verb tense and aspect in English. The topic for each paragraph revolved around PISA results, artificial intelligence, catch-up Fridays, war, internet connectivity, El Niño, and inflation. These topics were selected because of their timeliness and the students were aware of these issues. In constructivist perspectives, learning entails reorganizing preexisting information and expanding upon the learner's prior knowledge (Hurst, Nixon, & Wallace, 2013).

Consequently, content and corpus analyses were used to analyze the data gathered from the retelling and cloze test activities. This approach presented the frequency and pattern of the verb tense and aspect that the learners used during the writing performances. Hence, it is suitable to use when analyzing documents (Hancock, et.al 2009). The methodological framework based on Payne (2011) was utilized to understand and analyze the data gathered from the corpus as well as to answer the first three objectives of the study. In connection with the first and second objective, the researcher used Payne's theory to look into the domains of time and reality. This concept became the basis of tense which indicates the timing of actions or states concerning a specific reference point within the context of discourse or real-world situations, while aspect was viewed as the dimension of time that refers to the internal temporal shape of actions. In addition, this framework also helped to understand the difficulties encountered by the L2 learners. A tool for the frequency count of verbs that contains the list of grammatical tense and grammatical aspects based on Payne's (2011) framework was

utilized. Furthermore, the retelling activity and the cloze test were used to assess the lexical and grammatical awareness of the learners on the usage of the English verb tense and aspect.

To further understand the cognitive process and to get direct information on the participants' thinking, an unstructured interview was carried out by the researcher. Wildermuth and Zhang (n.d.) defined unstructured interview as a technique first developed in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology as a method to elicit people's realities. Minichiello, et al. (1990; as cited in Wildermuth and Zhang, n.d.) described it as a type of interview in which the questions and answers are predetermined. The questions depended on the kind of answers that the learners had during the cloze test. Thereupon, when the participants asked questions during the interview, the researcher's opinion should not be expressed but instead, would only use a neutral voice to answer what was asked. Each of the 29 participants underwent the interview to validate their knowledge and interpretation of the verb tense and aspect that was reflected in their answer during the cloze test. The time allotted for each student varied due to the difference in their ability to respond.

A descriptive method was applied to give a description, analysis, and interpretation of the results extracted from the content analysis, corpus analysis, and unstructured interview.

Results and Discussions

1. Learners' representation of tense-aspect in English

1.1. *Morphosyntax*

1.1.1. Simple past

The corpus gathered by the researcher revealed that the learners represented the tense-aspect in English as related to the conceptual domain of relative time. Since the text they wrote was a narrative, the learners affixed the morphological markers *-ed* and *-d* for the regular verbs, changed the irregular verbs into their respective irregular forms, and utilized the correct auxiliary verbs to represent the simple past. This suggests that acquiring the inflection markings *-ed* and *-d* was easier to master. This finding also provided another evidence to the argument of Ellis (1997) that L2 learners find it easier to mark verbs for past tense if the verb refers to events. The grammatical structures used by the learners reflected their representation of the grammatical aspects of the verbs in the context of narration. Most of the verbs used by the participants encoded perfective and completive aspects in which the series of events in the students' narratives were presented with a clear beginning, middle, and completion of the actions. Similarly, Lu & Kawaguchi (2021) observed that L2 learners affixed the inflection marker *-ed* multiple times with Accomplishments and Achievement verbs. These are the lexical aspects of verbs that express duration and punctual (Partee, 2007). Thus, the finding also reflected a similar concept with the Aspect Hypothesis (AH) in which learners perceived that if the action or event was already done, the simple past should be used to express the concluding point of the action regardless of the required grammatical tense and aspect (Granger, Sylvaine, Hung, & Petch-Tyson, 2002). In addition, according to Almakrob & Alotabi (2020), L2 learners could successfully mark past morphology with telic verbs or those verbs that express a clear terminal point, which indeed was appropriate to use in the retelling activity administered in gathering the corpus of the study. It may also indicate that participants rarely mark the verbs with past markings that are perfect, imperfective, and inchoative because these aspects do not encode inherent endpoints but instead, highly express significant state carried by the verbs.

1.1.2. Simple present tense

In retelling the actions that expressed a state of being in the past, most of the students remarkably marked those verbs with the inflections *-es*, and *-s* for singular verbs and used the base form for plural verbs which manifested the use of the simple present tense. The inappropriate use of simple present tense in narration was related to conveying imperfective, inchoative, and habitual aspects. This indicated that students tend to use simple present tense morphology markers in describing contexts that they perceived as true and existing at the moment of reporting. This finding appeared that learners represented states and activities associated with speaking time to simple present tense. Additionally, this may be possible as Al-Quyadi (2016) described the present simple tense as referring to general habits, customs, characteristics, and truths. Although the learners may have acquired the morphology marker for simple present and its grammatical use, it was unnecessarily and inappropriately applied in the context of retelling a story. Writing about a series of events is known as narration or narrative. The most basic type of narrative is chronological, which is the sequence in which the events are described or that they could have occurred. The author is free to employ non-chronological events. It indicates that the author has used a flashback narrative (Anwar, 2016). In connection to the definition of narration, many researchers approve of the paradigm that writing a narrative uses the simple past tense (Lusiyani, 2018). Furthermore, Kawaguchi (2000) highlighted that L2 learners tend to resort to using the present tense instead of the past tense if they view the context with a 'generic' meaning or express a present significant meaning or implication. This explains the use of simple present among the learners when talking about details in the contexts which included the state of being of the agents.

1.1.3. Present progressive tense

In connection with the use of simple present, from the result of the writing activity also revealed that the learners used present progressive in the retelling activity. They represented the present progressive by affixing the morphology markers *is/are + present participle of the verb (the -ing form)*. Some refer to it to *be + -ing*. Although narrating a story requires the use of past tense, most of the students expressed the events in the story as if they were still an ongoing process or event that exists in the present time. Chiravate (2018) noted that the using *be + -ing* may suggest that it is a preliminary stage of an event or process leading up to an endpoint which was also referred to as futurate. Likewise, in the study of Viquez (2010), L2 learners could successfully represent progressive activities in habitual contexts and accepted that progressive sentences could also encode futurate meaning. These studies clearly showed that using the present progressive tense is associated with a progressive aspect and in this case, was not suitable to be used in the retelling activity as what the participants of this present study exhibited.

This result could mean that the learners positively acquired the inflection markings as well as the grammatical function. Also, this shows that learners have significantly faster processing of verbs with progressive morphological markers compared to any other categories (Zeng, Chen, & Shirai, 2021). The result manifested from the retelling activity and the cloze test significantly revealed that the learners know how to represent the present progressive tense, but the same with the simple present, the participants seemed to fail in using it in an appropriate context, although the successful use of the progressive aspect is an early indication of acquiring the English verb tense and aspect (Lusiyani, 2018). The representation of the present progressive tense in narration may suggest that the learners were referring to the ongoing action from the story while performing the retelling activity which is parallel to the claim of Perez-Cortes (2012) that expressing the verbs in present progressive form in English is basically dependent on the concept of spontaneity.

1.1.4. Present perfect tense

Furthermore, a few participants used the present perfect in narration. The students displayed awareness of the grammatical forms of the aforementioned verb tense. Although the verb tenses were represented correctly such as using *has/have + past participle* the learners used it in contexts that were already in the past which has nothing to do with the state that resulted from the situation expressed by the verb in present perfect because the action has been completed. The learner used the present perfect tense which indicated that an action has been completed and has a result. Looking at the context of the story, the narrative clearly presented an event that was over for some time, so using the present perfect instead of the simple past became inappropriate because it was used to emphasize immediate past action that has an effect in the present time.

The perfect and inceptive aspects that were encoded in these verb tenses did not jive with the temporal framework where the students used them as the task required them to retell the events that completely happened in the past. Lusiyan (2018) observed a similar scenario in her study in which the L2 participants also misused the present perfect. In her findings, the participants associated the present perfect as the past time markers in Bahasa. In connection, the L2 learners in the present study may have used the present perfect tense because it also represented their point of view relating to the past event, which is the story itself, to the present time, in which during that time was the act of retelling the story that makes it difficult to grasp (Listyani and Al-Kadi, 2022).

1.1.5. Future tense

The participants were noticeably aware of the grammatical forms of the future tense in which they represented it using *will + the base form of the verb*. Payne (2011) described the meaning of the auxiliary verb 'will' as future time. Meanwhile, Pinker (2007) noted that the future tense denotes a grammatical form that indicates an action or state expected to happen after the present moment.

That learners were aware of the grammatical form of future tense. However, in the context of narration, it was noticeable that the L2 learners misused the future tense in the retelling. In the plate, the use of future tense indicated a temporal distance between the narrator and the events to show the character's intentions and plans (Lakoff and Johnson, 2020; Lahir, 2018). Despite the temporal restriction that is featured in narrative text, the learners tend to use the future tense for they may be trying to project events yet to occur in order to create anticipation and to engage the readers (McNeil, 2017).

Although it was evident that using the future tense in narratives may lead to verb tense-aspect inconsistencies, it could also indicate that the participants were employing the character's future experiences and actions which may enable them to convey expectations and aspirations to enrich the narrative with layers of meaning and emotional depth (Herman, 2013).

1.2. Use of time signals

Since the series of events has been an integral part of a narrative, the writer or speaker relates the events in the sequence in which they took place (Badorvi-Harlig, 1992). The time signals pertain to linguistic cues that specify the temporal context of discourse (Brinton and Brinton, 2022). These help the listeners or readers track the chronology of events and the temporal structure in a narrative (Givón, 2022).

1.2.1. Identified time signals

The result also revealed that aside from the inflection markers, it was noticeable that the students used adverbials that signal time reference such as "once upon a time," "when..." "and then..." "finally," "already," and "after..." in emphasizing and referring to actions that already happened and expressing contexts that

have inherent endpoints. In language use, adverbs of time are one of the most widely used to modify the time of action in the verb phrase in the main clause (Agaj, 2015). Narrative composition has been used by many researchers to study the acquisition of a second language particularly the study of tense and aspect. Dahl, (1984; as in cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 1992), emphasized that speakers relate the narrative discourse to series of fictive or real events sequentially which they took place. Thus, the use of adverbials in narration by the learners help to indicate which events happened first in order to suggest the tense and aspect expressed by the verbs.

With the use of the identified time signals, it can be noticed that the learners used the past tense because these were the hints that an action was completed upon narrating it. It also helped them to set the scene in the story. These time signals used to represent the past tense may indicate the learner's level of development as they have not relied on the morphology markings verbs to express inherent tense and aspect (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). Additionally, Hwang & Schubert (2006) noted that compared to other adverbials, '*after*' does not offer a time frame but it simply introduces the orders of temporal episodes or events that are expressed by the main and subordinate clauses, which is still essential in identifying the reference point of each episode that synchronously occurred with other recurrent events.

1.2.2. Adverbial in expressing habitual action

Interestingly, the result showed that students used the adverb "*always*" to express and emphasize habitual aspect along with the use of the simple present. Fafula & Geeslin (2012) noted that simple present also encodes habitual interpretation, which is typically observed in progressive aspect, in some instances, it is the only way to express habitual meaning. Manifestation of the adverbial '*always*' may indicate that the learners perceive habitual aspects even after the context has been completed. Perez-Cortes (2012) noted that the simple present is restricted to the expression of habitual actions.

Basically, it was a default that simple present tense expresses habitual aspect (Payne, 2011), the use of adverbial '*always*' to reiterate repeated actions in the past becomes inappropriate and erroneous. Since the narrative essay was restricted to the past tense, the proceeding information must and can only come from the past tense (Ogihara, 2004).

These findings may suggest that in terms of narrating the past event expressed in a clear terminal point, combined with the contexts that were on the process or had no definite endpoint confused the students because this involved different grammatical aspects and different time references. As a result, the L2 learners tend to commit unnecessary and misused tense-aspect shifting.

2. Learners' interpretation of morphosyntax that encodes tense and aspect

To fully understand the acquisition of the verb tense and aspect of the L2 learners, it is important to also look into their perspectives and to consider their ways of processing the grammatical tense-aspect rules. Thus, the following explains the interpretation of the learners about this matter.

2.1. Present as 'now'

In the unstructured interview, most of the learners interpreted the rule of using the present tense as "*the actions happening at the moment.*" When asked what they knew or understood about the simple present, present perfect, present progressive, and present perfect progressive tense, the students associated these grammatical tense and aspect with the events currently taking place and actions that are not yet finished. This interpretation may indicate that learners failed to draw distinctions between the verb tense and aspect. This is similar to the context of Ali, Ali & Hussain (2021) in which they observed the same instance where ESL learners often confuse perfect tenses with progressive tenses. Meanwhile, Pasaribu (2022) noted that there

were L2 learners who were not familiar with the names of the English tenses.

This kind of interpretation the learners exemplified was also reflected in the result of the cloze test wherein, most of the learners scored higher with the present progressive tense, compared to simple present, present perfect progressive, and present perfect tense. Since the students thought that present tense refers to “*action at the moment*,” this justified that the present progressive tense recorded the highest among the four verb categories. Payne (2011) described the present progressive tense as a progressive (or continuative) which suggested that the learners recognize the present tense with the *-ing* form of the verb as expressed in the progressive aspect. Despite the awareness of the students of the grammatical forms and the morphology markers used for each tense and aspect, the chances of misusing or overusing any of the verb categories are high because each of the verb categories is used in different temporal references. On the other hand, Btoosh (2019) noted that overusing the simple present among L2 learners was not surprising because there are L1 that do not structurally distinguish between simple present and present progressive. This notion explains the reason why learners may have to use simple present when present progressive is required.

The interpretation of the learners also entailed that they expressed the verbs as generally imperfective, perfect, and habitual regardless of the reference time and temporal shape that they intended to refer to, the state of being, and the significant outcomes in the present time that the verbs really expressed. In addition, some students perceived the present perfect *as the action that happened sometime in the present and continuously happening in the past*. In this concept, the student clearly displayed misconceptions or confusion about the rules for using the present perfect tense. Although present perfect indeed is related to the past, the learner somehow missed the idea that this verb aspect mainly focused on the relevant result expressed by the verb in the present time. The learners were confused with distinguishing the usage of past tense and present perfect tense (Rizka, 2017). These perceptions from the L2 learners may pose problems and confusion when they transcend this into writing or speaking.

2.2. Past tense as ‘finished actions’

The same manner of interpretation manifested from the learners about the past tense. Most of the students described the simple past, past perfect, past progressive, and past perfect progressive tense as merely *an action that happened in the past or a completed action*. The perception of the students was partly correct as past tense indeed talks about a completed action, as Payne (2011) described it to be finished contexts presented as occurring before the time of speaking. However, the restricted views of the learners about the past tense have limited their concept of aspect which is more focused on the internal temporal shape of actions and states rather than the relative point in time.

With these limited views of the past tense and aspect, it can be suggested that the students expressed the verb aspects as perfective and completive. The interpretation of the learners also reflected in the result of the cloze test wherein most of the learners got the most correct answers in the simple past, followed by past perfect progressive, past perfect, and past progressive, respectively. In the cloze test, it can be noticed that the learners achieved more correct answers for the past perfect progressive tense. On the contrary, during the validation of these answers through the unstructured interview, some students revealed that they only based their answers on the choices that would fit in or would sound correct for the sentence and pointed out that there should be the word ‘*had*.’ On the other hand, some of the learners described the past progressive as the tense that uses the auxiliary verbs *was/were*. Basically, the interpretations given by the students were misinformation which may be caused by the ignorance of rule restriction. Anwar (2016) noted that misinformation is the most frequent error made by L2 learners. Maniam & Rajagopal (2016) emphasized that L2 learners may have known the grammatical rules but do not fully comprehend them because certain rules have distinct exceptions. Thus, the learners’ errors are usually inevitable when students do not grasp the

exception to the general rule.

2.3. Future tense as ‘after the present time’

Meanwhile, in terms of the learners’ interpretation of the simple future, future perfect, future progressive, and future perfect progressive, most of the participants noted that this is a type of verb category that generally talked about the *actions that will happen in the future*. The students pointed out that in expressing the future tense, the modal verbs *will*, *would*, or *shall* be used. This view about the future tense was partially correct but it was limited to describing only the simple future tense. Ardiansyah (2022) defined the simple future tense as a grammatical form of the verb used to denote an action or event that is yet to commence.

The views of the students about the future tense were evident in the result of the cloze test where the learners excelled most in simple future tense, seconded by the future progressive tense. It was also revealed that most of the students had a limited knowledge about the future perfect and future perfect progressive tenses as most of them got low scores in these grammatical aspects. This result showed that the participants had a hard time answering the test and settled on selecting the simple future tense. Therefore, the students lack awareness of the morphology markers used to future perfect and future progressive tenses as well as their uses in contexts that require these grammatical aspects. Lista & Febriyanti (2020) discovered the same result in their study in which the L2 learners identified the future perfect continuous tense as the most challenging tense. Moreover, there were other participants who admitted that they did not even know the future perfect and future perfect progressive tense which is why most of the students answered the simple future tense.

Furthermore, Payne (2011) emphasized in his book, *Understanding English Grammar* that teaching grammar is not limited to teaching only the grammatical structures or forms, but it also revolves around creating appropriate meaning expressed in the grammatical structures where they are used in certain contexts. Thus, it was evident that the participants did not have a full grasp of the grammatical rules of the verb tense and aspect which was reflected in the limited interpretations of the learners in the morphosyntax that encode tense and aspect, which eventually may cause errors in language use. Meanwhile, the modification of the description of the tense-aspect could also affect its usage because the learners would use another set of grammatical structures when the other must be used (Hasyim, 2002). In addition, the participants were unable to distinguish the contexts where the grammatical aspects are required, although they positively acquired the grammatical structures and morphology markers for the English verb tense and aspect.

The perceptions of the students about the tense-aspect in English may also suggest that language transfer happened. The L2 learners frequently transfer skills and knowledge from their first language to their second language when speaking or writing. The term generally used for this process is linguistic transfer which is also referred to as L1 interference (Alsalmi, 2013). Also, Gabriele & Martohardjono (2005) highlighted that the properties of L1 highly affected successful learning among L2 learners and caused them difficulty acquiring the telicity in English.

Based on the result of the unstructured interview, it strongly suggested that the participants in this study exhibited the L1 interference when they associated the English morphosyntax that encodes aspects to mere actions expressed and anchored to the time axis. The learners interpreted and defined English verb tense and aspect based on their knowledge of the Filipino verb tense and aspect. In the interview, the students associated the present tense with actions that are happening at the moment or an ongoing event; the past tense with actions that already happened; while the future tense was defined as the actions that will happen in the future. Similarly, in the context of the Filipino language, its verbs have also tense which are categorized into three: a) *perpektibo* (actions that are already finished), b) *imperpektibo* (actions happening at the moment and ongoing action), and c) *kontemplatibo* (actions that will happen) (Lartec, Nacin, & Tanawan, 2007). The

similarities between the definition given by the participants with the English verb tense to the description of the verbs in the Filipino language were evident. Indeed, the students manifested L1 transfer. Also, the students may have trouble remembering the complex patterns or forms of the English verb tense-aspect and applying them in real-life contexts (Febriyanti & Listia, 2020).

Clearly, the result showed that the participants ignored the grammatical aspect of the English verb tense that is relative to time, rather than tense, which places an occurrence to its true temporal location. Aspect does not bind the circumstance to the temporal axis and is not intrinsically deictic (Panagiotopoulos, 2015). Second language learning and acquisition have always been a challenging matter encountered by L2 learners. In the study of Damis, Jabu, and Saliha (2024), it was found that the learners' difficulty in learning verb tenses came from their perception and how they view verb tenses and aspects.

The findings of the study imply that there should be more intensive inputs that the learners should receive since there is concrete evidence that the participants were facing difficulties in mastering the English verb tense and aspect concerning the contexts where tense-aspect is required to be used. These inputs should be language samples to which the learners are exposed (Ellis, 1997).

3. Difficulties encountered by the learners in English verb tense-aspect

Second language acquisition is indeed a problematic process for L2 learners, which is why, mistakes, misunderstandings, and confusion happen along the process. Hence, the following subthemes discussed the difficulties encountered by the learners in the verb tense and aspect of English.

3.1. Consistency of verb use

As manifested in the retelling activity, cloze test, and unstructured interview, one of the difficulties encountered by the learners was dealing with the consistency in using the verb tense and aspect. The corpus of the study revealed that the learners tend to shift from one tense-aspect suddenly and inappropriately to another.

The most prevalent tense-aspect shifting reflected in the narratives of the students was using the simple past in narrating and then changing the verbs into the simple present at the end of the sentences. The other inconsistencies were written in simple past then shifted to present progressive, simple past to present perfect, and simple past then simple future. These inconsistencies were remarkably noticed in most of the learners. Tsai (2023) also observed similar instances wherein the L2 learners would use simple past at the first clause while the other clause was formulated using the simple present tense. The other tense-aspect found out was translating verbs from present tense into either future tense or past tense.

The verb tense inconsistency could mean that the students do not have a full grasp and mastery of the English verb tense and aspect. It may also suggest that the learners face difficulties in mastering and successfully acquiring the grammatical aspect of the English verbs. This was evident in the frequencies of unnecessary and inappropriate tense-aspect shifting spotted in each corpus gathered from each participant.

Although the learners considerably acquired the morphological markers, they noticeably had difficulties using them accurately in contexts that require tense-aspect references. In connection, Chetoui & Hammami (2021) emphasized that English language learners frequently make several grammatical mistakes, especially in the verb form. This could be the result of the difficulty of learning twelve-verb tenses. The majority of students struggle with employing complex tenses. These issues stem from finding it challenging to generate sentences in the appropriate tenses and use them in the appropriate contexts.

3.2. Mastery of the verb tense and aspect rules

Aside from the difficulty in being consistent with the verb tense and aspect usage, it was also shown in the corpus and interview that the learners were struggling with the grammatical rules intended for each verb tense and aspect which led to overgeneralizing the rules. Overgeneralization is an error that tends the learners to assume that the rule in English is generally applicable to all (Jassim, 2020). It was obviously shown when the supposed twelve rules in verb tense and aspect, the learners narrowed it down into only three which only included present, past, and future tenses. One example that overgeneralization happened among the learners they perceived the grammatical aspect of present tense as merely action occurring at the moment; the past tense was generalized as pertaining to actions that were already completed, while the future tense was associated with unfinished action related to future time.

Based on the responses of the students in the interview, it was noticeable that they applied only one rule for the present tense even in its progressive and perfect aspects. This could occur because the learners were trying to lessen the linguistic burden due to deviant English structures and therefore would resort to morphological simplification (Lim, 2010). Overgeneralization of the grammatical rules in tense-aspect hindered the students from drawing the line between the differences in the context where each of the categories should be appropriately applied and caused them to commit morphosyntactic errors. Meanwhile, Morakabi (2020) highlighted the processes of inductive reasoning, where students take some specific instances and then infer a general conclusion as in the case of the past tense markers *-ed/-d* — and deductive reasoning, where students infer general principles to specific instances, are the root causes of these overgeneralizations. This is also considered an intralingual error that represents general features of learning rules due to partial exposure to the target language.

Thus, these findings imply that the difficulties faced by the learners need to be addressed in order to achieve effective and quality acquisition of the English verb tense and aspect.

4. Refresher Guide for Tense and Aspect

The findings of the study revealed that the learners had acquired the verb tense and aspect morphology markers and displayed an understanding of the tense in English. However, the results also showed that most of the learners viewed verbs as words merely used to express actions relative to time. This implies that the participants may have a limited concept of the aspect carried on by the verbs they expressed. Tsai (2023) noted that L2 learners already find it problematic to select the appropriate tense, so mastering the aspect was even more challenging for them.

A refresher guide for tense and aspect may be crafted to help the learners grasp the complex relationship between verb tenses and aspect distinctions more thoroughly. The verb tense and aspect not only indicate time but also reveal details about the actions themselves, including their duration and how they relate to other events (Bybee 2006). Therefore, a thorough guide that explains these concepts is essential for promoting clarity and coherence in written communication.

Furthermore, developing a refresher guide reflects that the learners already acquired the grammatical structures of the verb tense and aspect of English. Additionally, it also highlights that language acquisition is an ongoing process demanding a consistent review (Jones, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Considering the results drawn from the study, it can be concluded that the students have acquired the grammatical structures and could represent the English verb tense and aspect, but they have not mastered the context in which the verbs are appropriately required to be used. Also, the interpretation of the learners about

the morphosyntax that encodes tense and aspect was highly influenced by the first language, while the difficulties encountered by the learners in using the tense-aspect led to tense-aspect shifting and overgeneralization of the grammatical rules of the verb tense and aspect. It also showed that the learners lack a good command and mastery of the rules in expressing the tense-aspect accurately. Therefore, is a need for the development of instructional material that may help the learners' successful acquisition of the verb tense and aspect.

Based on the conclusions drawn, the study recommends that there is a need to expose the students to language-learning contexts where the grammatical structures and functions of verb tense and aspect are highly emphasized. Since L1 transferred had occurred, it may also help to use the schema of the learners about verb tense and aspect in the Filipino language as a steppingstone in understanding the verb tense and aspect in English. Emphasize the differences and similarities of the verb tense-aspect usage between the two languages to avoid confusion and misinterpretation of tense-aspect in English. Moreover, immerse the students in the grammatical rules of the verb tense and aspect to avoid unnecessary tense-aspect shifting and overgeneralization of the rules by using various materials such as narrative, informative, expository, fiction, journalistic texts, etc. These materials will allow the students to become particular with the relative time and the temporal dimension used in the text. Additionally, to reinforce the acquisition of verb tense and aspect, a learning guide for English verb tense and aspect may be developed with a simplified explanation of the rules but with more emphasis on how the verb tense-aspect works in language based on the relative time and temporal dimension. Hence, the other researchers may also conduct similar studies focusing on the other grade levels or other forms of media.

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