

The Acquisition of the Perfect Progressive Construction in English by Management Students: A Study in Error Analysis

Leena Jadhav, Research Scholar, Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur
E-mail : leenajadhav.harale@gmail.com

Tripti Karekatti, Associate Professor, Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur
E-mail : leenajadhav.harale@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Error analysis has been one of the most significant concepts in ESL studies and has stimulated curiosity of researchers hitherto as it provides an empirical evidence to the study undertaken. The present study aims to study the acquisition of the English perfect progressive construction by the first year management students whose first language is Marathi. The data for the present research is based on a grammaticality judgment test. The result of data received from the test is calculated using the SPSS software. The tool of error analysis has been used to analyze the linguistic behaviour of the participants in the present paper. An effort is made to trace the interlingual errors made by the second language learners in the light of the comparative study of the first language (i.e. Marathi) and the second language (i.e. English).

Keywords: *Error analysis, interlingual errors, intralingual errors, language acquisition,*

Introduction

Error analysis is one of the most prominent approaches to the acquisition of a second language. It functions as a tool in analysing the errors made by the second language learners and provides an insight into the possible causes of the errors. Furthermore, it also provides an empirical evidence to the study undertaken.

The present paper aims to study the acquisition of the English perfect progressive construction by the first year management

students located in Pune. The tool of error analysis has been used to analyze the linguistic behaviour of the participants in the paper. An attempt is made to analyze the interlingual errors made by students while using the perfect progressive construction in English.

Literature Review

Corder (1967) in his seminal paper entitled "The Significance of Learners' Errors", proposed the linguists to focus on L2 learners' errors as sources of insight into

the learning process and not as 'bad habits' to be eradicated. Saville-Troike(2006:38), refers to errors as windows to the language learners' mind. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:61),

“From an EA perspective, the learner is no longer seen to be a passive recipient of TL input, but rather plays an active role, processing input, generating hypotheses, testing them and refining them.”

Corder (1967) views errors as valuable information for three beneficiaries, namely, teachers, researchers and students. It gives teachers clues on the progress of the students. The researchers get an insight into how the language is acquired or learned. Furthermore, it gives learners resources in order to learn. Error analysis, as an approach to second language acquisition, has stimulated curiosity of many linguists and ESL experts hitherto. Gass and Selinker (2008: 103) state that there are two main sources of errors within the error analysis framework, namely, interlingual errors and intralingual errors.

- Interlingual Errors –The interlingual or interference errors are the errors due to learners' first language. They involve cross-linguistic comparisons. These errors refer to negative interlingual transfer.
- Intralingual Errors - The intralingual errors result from the language being learnt. They are due to partial or faulty learning of the target language.

Richards (1984) distinguishes the intralingual errors made by the learners into the following categories

- a. Over-generalization
- b. Ignorance of rule restrictions
- c. Incomplete application of rules
- d. False concepts hypothesized

Ellis (1994) gives the following procedure to be followed in Error analysis.

- Collection of Samples of learner language
- Identification of Errors
- Description/Classification of Errors
- Explanation of Errors
- Error Evaluation

Research Methodology

Objectives

- To compare and contrast the formal and functional properties of the perfect progressive construction in English and Marathi
- To deduce the points of convergence and divergence in the perfect progressive construction in English and Marathi
- To analyze the interlingual errors made by the participants while using the English perfect progressive construction in the grammaticality judgment test based on the relationship between the two languages

A Grammar of Contemporary English (1972) by Quirk et al has been used as the model for English Grammar in this research. The book entitled *Marathi* (1997) by R. Pandharipande has been used as the standard Marathi Grammar. Both these theoretical grammars used in the study are descriptive corpus-based reference grammars in the respective languages. The areas of interference deduced from the comparative study of the syntactic and semantic properties of the perfect progressive construction in English and Marathi have been used to analyse the interlingual errors made by the participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for the present paper was based on a grammaticality judgment test. Hundred MBA students belonging to ten different management institutes in Pune were selected for the elicitation of data. The students are pursuing a professional degree in management and are expected to have higher level of proficiency in English language. The increasing number of MNCs in the fast globalizing Indian corporate sector assumes effective English communication skills an indispensable quality in any successful manager's life. The hundred participants were selected based on the following parameters.

- a. Class: First Year MBA students from the management institutes located in Pune
- b. First Language: Marathi
- c. Medium of instruction in school: Marathi
- d. Marks in Graduation: 50% - 70%

- e. Gender: 50% Male and 50% Female, i.e., 50 male students and 50 female students

The data for the present research is based on a grammaticality judgment test. The test consisted of eight meticulously designed questions aiming to judge the use of the verb phrase in English by the first year MBA students. A higher degree of uniformity in the preparation of the grammaticality judgment test could be achieved as the items were targeted at subjects who shared the same mother tongue, i.e., Marathi.

The questionnaire and the grammaticality judgement test were administered to 100 MBA students belonging to different management institutes in Pune. The researcher made the students understand that it was not an examination and that the responses given by them would be used to improve their teaching modules and materials. The test consisted of both the closed ended and open ended questions. The test consisted of eight questions based on the use of the verb phrase in English. The eight questions in the test were arranged as per the relative order of difficulty. They are as follow.

Question 1

Select the correct answer from the given alternatives and fill in the blanks.

This was a multiple choice question where the students were asked to select one of the four options of the verb form in the given sentence. This question aimed to examine the learners' ability to select the proper form of the verb as per the requirement of the

given sentence. The advantage of the multiple choice test is that it requires the participants to discriminate among alternatives which need a level of mastery that a free response item might not be able to detect.

Question 2

Use the appropriate forms of the verbs in the brackets and fill in the blanks.

In this question, the students were expected to use the correct form of the verb given in the bracket based on the meaning of the sentence.

This question aimed to examine the students' ability to use tense and aspectual forms at the intra-sentential level. It did not require any other context to determine the selection of the appropriate verb form.

Question 3

Underline the correct option in the following sentences.

This was a multiple choice question where the students were asked to select one of the three options, namely, since, from and for. It aimed to examine the students' ability to use the right preposition of time.

Question 4

State whether the following sentences are grammatically correct or incorrect. If the sentences are incorrect, correct them and rewrite them.

This was a correction exercise where the students' knowledge of the verb forms and

their functions was judged. They were expected to understand the mistake in the verb form used in the given sentence and correct it. This question attempted to examine the linguistic competence of the subjects in the given area.

Question 5

How do you express the following meanings in English?

This was a translation exercise where the students were given Marathi sentences and were asked to give English counterparts of the meanings conveyed in the Marathi sentences. This question aimed to examine whether students operate through compound bilingualism or co-ordinate bilingualism.

Question 6

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of the verbs given in the bracket and complete the following dialogues.

This was a dialogue completion exercise. This question was designed to judge the students' ability to use the correct verb forms at inter-sentential level. Here the context determined the selection of the appropriate form of the verb as any form of tense was based on the other sentences.

Question 7

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of the verbs given in the bracket and complete the following passage.

This was a cloze exercise where the students were given a paragraph and they were asked

to fill in the blanks using the appropriate forms of the verbs given in the bracket. This question also examined the students' ability to use the correct verb forms at inter-sentential level. Here, the contextual knowledge was necessary for the selection of the appropriate forms of the verbs.

Question 8

Write an essay on the following topic using the points given below.

My Favourite Sport

This was a guided composition exercise where the students were asked to write an essay on their favourite sport using the points provided in the question. This was an open ended exercise. It aimed to examine the students' ability to form their own sentences and move from one point to the other.

Data Analysis

The data received from the results of the test was evaluated. It consisted of both correct answers and wrong answers. The errors made by the students were analysed in the light of the comparative study of the structural and semantic features of the verb phrase in English and Marathi. A simple descriptive statistical method was used where the data was first converted into a percentage of errors which were further compared and systematically analyzed to identify the extent to which the first language interferes with the second language while acquiring the verb phrase in English. The result of the data received from the test was calculated using the SPSS

software. The tool of error analysis by Corder (1967) was used to differentiate the responses given by the participants into the following four categories

1. Correct Responses

The first objective of the paper is to understand the proficiency of the subjects as far as the use of the verb phrase in English is concerned. Hence, the number of correct responses is very important to get the complete picture of the linguistic competence of the learners.

2. Interlingual Errors

The researcher attempts to understand the errors the subjects make due to the influence of their first language, i.e. Marathi.

3. Intralingual Errors

The intralingual errors are also recorded as they also form a crucial part in understanding the overall proficiency of the subjects.

4. Unattempted Questions

The number of questions which are not answered by the participants is also recorded.

Thus, the primary objective of the current paper is to understand and analyse the interlingual errors made by the MBA students while using the perfect progressive construction in English. Thus, the responses given the questions related to the use of the perfect progressive construction in the test are used in this paper. The tool

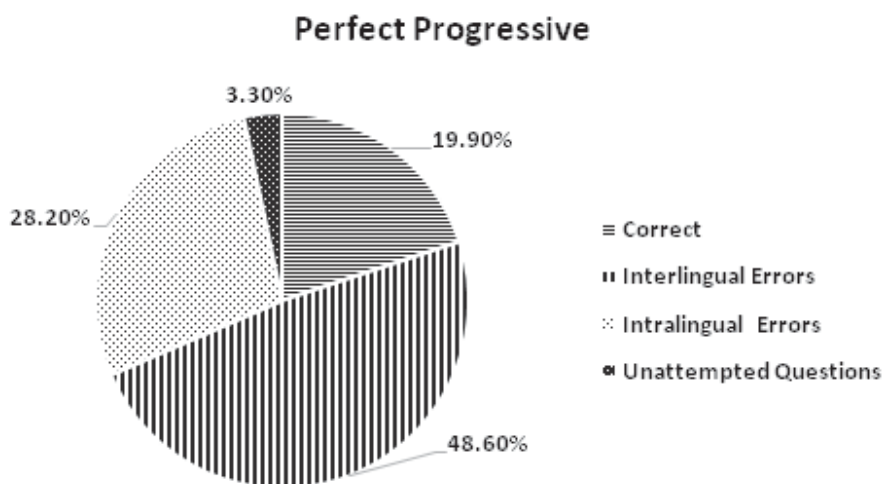
of error analysis was used for the same. These results were further analyzed in order to understand the role of Marathi in the acquisition of the perfect progressive construction in English. Of course, the first language interference is not the only reason of the errors made by students, others being transfer of training, overgeneralization etc. However, reference is made to these errors wherever it is found necessary. The detailed analysis and discussion on the intralingual errors made by the students lies outside the scope of this paper.

Findings

The perfect progressive is used for a persistent situation in English, whereas in Marathi, this use is less frequent. In fact, the progressive aspect is usually used along with an appropriate postpositional phrase to express the meaning of a persistent situation in Marathi. If we apply the principle of Markedness Differential Hypothesis (MDH) by Eckman (1977), the progressive aspect is less marked as compared to the perfect progressive

construction and hence this first language habit is transferred to English. That is the reason why most of the Marathi speakers of English tend to use the present progressive and an appropriate prepositional phrase to denote an activity started in the past and continuing up to the later point of time. This point of language transfer deduced from the comparative study of the verb phrase in English and Marathi was verified in the test given to the students.

The students' ability to use the perfect progressive construction appropriately was examined throughout all eight questions given to the students. The perfect progressive is used for a persistent situation in English. It was appropriately used in 19.9% responses. On the other hand, 48.6% gave interference induced responses, that is, the progressive construction was used instead of the perfect progressive. The intralingual errors comprised of the 28.2% of the total responses whereas 3.3% questions were not attempted by the respondents.



This result proves that the participants have not learnt the use of the perfect progressive construction. The progressive construction is typologically less marked as compared to the perfect progressive construction and hence this first language habit is transferred to English. That is the reason why most of the Marathi speakers of English tend to use the present progressive and an appropriate prepositional phrase to denote an activity started in the past and continuing up to some later point of time. This point of language transfer deduced from the comparative study of the verb

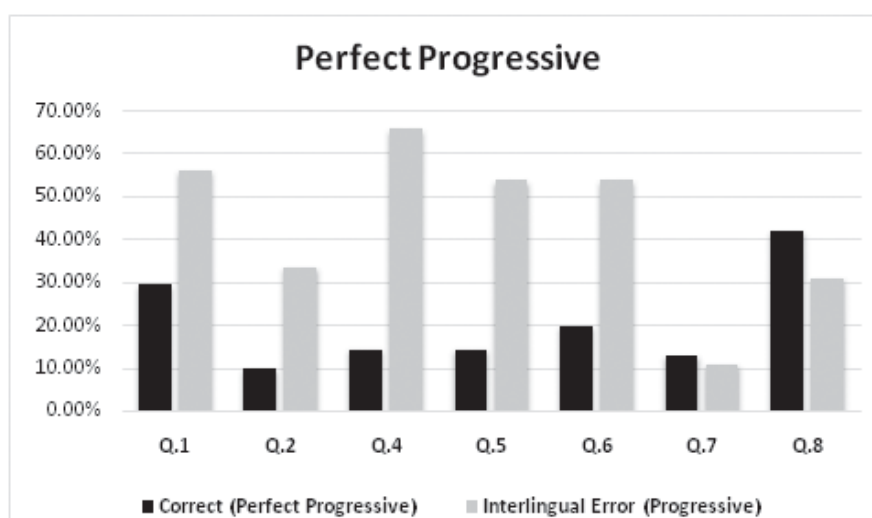
phrase in English and Marathi was verified in the test given to the students. For example,

Q.2.1 You _____ (sit) in the room since morning. You need a break so go out and get some fresh air.

Here, only 14% students gave correct answer, i.e. 'have been sitting' whereas 45% students used the present progressive, i.e. 'are sitting.'

The question-wise performance of the students in the perfect progressive construction is given below

No	Correct (Perfect Progressive)	Interlingual Errors (Progressive)	Intralingual Errors	Unattempted Questions	Total
Q.1	29.60%	56.40%	14%	-	100%
Q.2	10%	33.70%	54.30%	2%	100%
Q.4	14.50%	66%	10%	10%	100%
Q.5	14.50%	54%	25%	6.50%	100%
Q.6	20%	54%	25%	1%	100%
Q.7	13%	11%	69%	7%	100%
Q.8	42.20%	31.10%	26.70%	-	100%



This seems to be a pan-Indian feature. In British English, there is an element of redundancy as both the perfect progressive and the prepositional phrase express the meaning of a persistent situation. Gokhale (2003:49) opines that 'in IE simplification is achieved by eliminating this redundancy. In IE the verb phrase in the progressive form conveys durativity and the prepositional phrase expresses the meaning of a persistent situation.'

The difference between the prepositions 'since', 'from' and 'for' is also quite confusing for Marathi speakers of English. For example,

Q.3.1 They have lived in that house (since/ from/for) five years.

The correct answer, i.e. 'for' was opted by 51% students whereas the preposition 'since' was used by 33% participants and 15% students selected the alternative 'from.'

Q.3.2 She has been in Paris (since/from/ for) Monday.

The responses to this question comprised of 34% correct answer, i.e. 'since' whereas 57% students gave interference induced response 'from.'

Thus, difference in the use of prepositions 'since', 'from' and 'for' creates a problem for Marathi learners. The results of the test indicate that 56.10% students gave interference induced responses. The reason for this kind of linguistic behaviour could be found in the differences in the structures of English and Marathi. The perfect for a

persistent situation in English involves the use of the preposition 'since' before an adverbial indicating the starting point of time and the preposition 'for' before an adverbial of duration. But in Marathi, the postposition 'pāsūn' (Meaning: since / from) is used for both. That is the reason why many Marathi speakers of English cannot maintain the distinction between 'since' and 'for' and use the preposition 'since/from' for both as it is a translation of the postposition 'pāsūn' in Marathi. Furthermore, the preposition 'since' occurs in perfect aspect whereas the preposition 'from' occurs in other tenses. The performance of the participants in the test indicates that Marathi speakers of English find it difficult to understand this difference and use 'from' instead of 'since' in the perfect aspect.

Conclusion

The findings of the research indicate that the Marathi speakers of English selected for the study, i.e., the first year MBA students from Pune district have not mastered the perfect progressive construction in English. They tend to operate through compound bilingualism. They first think in Marathi and then translate it in English. The progressive construction is used in Marathi for a persistent situation whereas English requires the perfect progressive construction to communicate the same meaning. The progressive construction is typologically less marked as compared to the perfect progressive construction and hence gets transferred to the target language. The results of the data analysis prove that

Marathi speakers show a tendency to use the progressive aspect for a persistent situation in English.

Thus, the study identifies the importance of the learner's knowledge of the syntactic structures of the first language, which cause difficulty in acquiring a second language. The results obtained from the error analysis provide substantial empirical evidence to the research undertaken. It proves that the management students have not mastered the use of the perfect progressive construction in English. The poor performance of the students in using the verb phrase after almost ten years of language learning calls for drastic pedagogical changes and intensive remedial language teaching.

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