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Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL learners in Using Past Tense

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Abstract. Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners typically spend around eight years studying English before entering university. During the last four years of high school, students get frequent and rigorous instruction in English tenses. In addition, when they Upon entering the institution, students enroll in the English department where they engage in a rigorous four-year study of the English language. The curriculum is built with a focus on teaching tense. Grammar is taught for a total of three hours each week over a span of thirty weeks per year during these four years. However, Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have significant difficulties in many grammatical aspects, particularly in the understanding and use of tenses. This article is a data analysis research that seeks to detect grammatical mistakes, including their nature, kinds, and origins. It is presumed in this context that you are now experiencing a difficulty, and I would want to know what specific issue you encountered in the past. The Past tense is used to describe previous activities that occurred either at a precise point in time, which may be indicated by a time phrase or inferred from the surrounding context. The past continuous tense is used to depict acts or occurrences that occurred at a period prior to the present moment.

Keywords: Iraqi English, Past Tense, grammatical mistakes, grammatical aspects

1. INTRODUCTION

Tense is a major challenge for English learners worldwide. The applied linguistics literature also emphasizes EFL learners' syntactic proficiency as a key L2 level. Gender inequalities among learners have driven theoretical and practical discussions. Brown (Brown, 2000, 259) argues that sex is a key aspect in learning communicative ability in any language. Since it affects language creation and reception, it has garnered attention. Research shows that men and women employ various syntactic variations in every society. According to the encyclopedia of applied linguistics (Menard, 2013, p. 1), gender and language learning research has followed the gender theory trend in applied linguistics for decades. labels the language-difference paradigm. The feminist and diversity paradigms try to combat dominance, whereas this paradigm tries to find men-women distinctions in specific circumstances. He suggests that gender and SLA studies should expand to include foreign language courses globally. According to Deutsch (2001:15), it would be advantageous.

Iraqi EFL students study English for approximately eight years before attending university; they study English tenses frequently and extensively in high school for four years. When they attend university English departments, they work hard. Tense is an English grammar category. For tenses, a student must understand the grammar of a verb-form and how to employ it. Learners must understand how to build, define, and employ a tense in diverse scenarios. Understanding English tenses is crucial to communication. However, EFL learners

of English suffer greatly when doing so. This research is practical and avoids theoretical trespassing. own constraints; it's a diagnostic endeavor to identify an EFL learning and teaching issue in Iraq. (Amini,2017;12).

Due to academic and widespread English usage, English teaching and learning has become popular. English has become a worldwide language thanks to technologies that enabled multi-cultural communication. Alzebaree (2021, 170). English dominates foreign language study and instruction in Iraq. According to Crystal (2003;53), speaking English is an internationally recognized language, providing access to job, further education, and travel. These findings raised an important topic in applied linguistics, particularly in language education, language learning, and mistake analysis, particularly L2 challenges experienced by EFL learners. All L2 learners differ in target language proficiency. Davis (2004, 525) cites Ellis. pointed highlighted that language learners vary greatly in speed and accomplishment. (ibid:527).

Problem of the Study:

The Past tense is used to describe previous activities that occurred either at a precise point in time, which may be indicated by a time phrase or inferred from the surrounding context. The past continuous tense is used to represent acts or occurrences that started in the past and were still ongoing when another event happened. Hence, the subsequent questions arise:

- a. What challenges do Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have when utilizing the past tense?
- b. Do Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have challenges while utilizing the past tense?

Objects of the Study:

- a. Investigating the challenges encountered by Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners while using past tenses.
- b. Examining the challenges encountered by Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners while using past tenses.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The past tense

To explain or demonstrate something that has already happened, one uses the past tense of the verb. Note that when used in the past tense, certain verbs don't follow the usual pattern of adding the suffix 'ed' to form the past tense. If you want to learn everything there is to know about the past tense, go at the verbs that use it and the meanings of it. References: (Comrie, 1976;141).

English verbs may be conjugated into the preterite, sometimes known as the past tense. Regular verbs may be transformed into the past tense by adding the suffix -d or -ed to their basic form. Still, there are other ways to create the past tense of irregular verbs, such as by switching out vowel sounds or using whole new phrases (for example, see→saw, go→went, be→was/were). Certain irregular verbs have the same past tense and past participle as regular verbs. For a thorough understanding of how the past tense evolved in English, see the section devoted to verbs. Page 140 of the very same source has the reference.

As an example of the present perfect construction being used to refer to past occurrences, one often hears the phrase "I have finished" (also called present in past). However, this is not seen as an example of the past tense; instead, it is seen as a combination of the present tense and the perfect aspect, indicating a situation that exists now as a result of an action that happened in the past. On the same source's page 142, you can find the citation. "Past tense" is defined as the grammatical form of a verb that is used to express events that happened in the past according to the Oxford Learner's Dictionary. The past tense of a verb is used to indicate activities that have already been finished in numerous languages, according to the Cambridge Dictionary. The cited work is Sakoda (2003: 38).

The past tense is defined simply by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a grammatical structure used to indicate an event or action that took place in the past. The Macmillan Dictionary states that the "past tense" is used to describe verb forms that show how often something happens or how long ago something happened. The citation "Sakoda, 2003;44" is made available.

Categories of Past Tense

There are four distinct forms of the past tense that capture the diversity of what has already happened. What follows are the components:

- a. The first application of the simple past tense is to describe something that happened long ago.

- b. When something was happening in the past, you might say that it was in the past continuous tense.
- c. When two events occurred in the past, one after the other, we employ the Past Perfect Tense to indicate that the first event occurred before the second.
- d. To indicate a continuous action or event that was happening in the past until another event or action occurred in the past, the Past Perfect Continuous Tense is employed. Holm (2000;6) is cited as the source for this data.

The past tense and the progressive element, which denotes continuous activity, may be combined in a number of different multi-word constructions. It is also possible to combine the past tense with the ideal aspect using these structures, or even the progressive and perfect aspects at the same time. See below for a list of these and other often used past tense forms. On the sixth page of the same source, you may find the citation.

"He walked" or "they flew" are examples of simple past tense verbs formed by using the preterite form. "Did he walk?" is an example of a phrase that uses the periphrastic form with the auxiliary verb "did" to deny, emphasize, or invert the simple past tense. The term for this occurrence is do-support. To get more information about this, see Comrie (1976; 29). If you want to describe something that happened a long time ago, something that happened repeatedly, or anything that happened emotionally or physically but has no bearing on the here and now, then you should use the simple past tense. On the same source's page 7, you can find the citation.

Combining the past tense of the verb "be" (either "was" or "were") with the present participle (also termed the "-ing" form) of the main verb forms the past progressive (past continuous). Take the sentence "He was going." as an example. "I was in the midst of taking a shower when you called," is an example of an action that was halted in the past, yet the past continuous tense shows that the activity was continuing. Refer to Comrie (1976, p. 33).

Blending the auxiliary verb "had" (the basic past tense of "have") with the main verb's past participle forms the past perfect tense. An example of this would be the statement "We had shouted." This serves a purpose similar to that of the pluperfect tense in other languages by indicating that an event took place before a specific point in the past.

Combining the past simple tense of "had" with the past participle of "be" and the main verb's present participle creates the past perfect progressive, also called the past perfect continuous. Take the phrase "You had been waiting." as an example. It denotes a continuing action that continued up to a certain point in the past. According to Watkins (1937;56), this data comes from.

To describe a state that was common in the past, you may use the expression "used to" with the main verb's infinitive. "When I was younger, I used to play football." Nevertheless, it just denotes the situation's ongoing presence when coupled with a stative verb. For instance, "I used to be a part of that club." It is often used to stress that something occurred in the distant past and is hence no longer relevant. (Watkins, 1937;60) is the cited work.

Another way to indicate a former event that has occurred again is using the auxiliary verb "would," as shown by I used to practice the piano every day when I was little since I knew it had several uses. For a more comprehensive grasp, I recommend looking at the topic of English modal verbs.

Please see the "Uses of English verb forms" section for more detailed information on the use of various grammatical structures to denote past occurrences. To address hypothetical situations that aren't necessarily related to the past, you may utilize the past tense with expressions like "if I tried" or "I wish I knew." (The English subjunctive provides insight into the possibility of using "were" instead of "was" in some contexts.) Comrie will be cited as the source for this data (1985, p. 32).

4 Structure of Past Tense

In order to understand the structure of the past tense, take a look at the following table:

Positive	Negative	Interrogative	Negative Interrogative
Subject + Past tense form of the verb	Subject + Did not / Didn't + Base form of the verb	Did + Subject + Base form of the verb	Didn't + Subject + Base form of the verb
For example: She sang a song.	For example: She did not sing a song.	For example: Did she sing a song?	For example: Didn't she sing a song?

It would be advantageous for you to acquire knowledge of how the syntax of a phrase changes when using the past tense form of the verb in positive, negative, interrogative, or negative interrogative forms. (Seo, 2021; p. 34).

Structure of Past Tense			
Simple Past Tense	Past Continuous Tense	Past Perfect Tense	Past Perfect Continuous Tense
Subject + Verb + ed / verb in the past tense + the rest of the sentence	Subject + Helping Verb (was/were) + Main verb+ing + the rest of the sentence	Subject + Helping Verb (had) + Past participle of the main verb + the rest of the sentence along with the time frame	Subject + Had + Been + Verb+ing + the rest of the sentence
For example: Nathan met me at the park.	For example: It was raining .	For example: Tony had eaten his dinner before we reached the venue.	For example: Sharan had been practising the guitar when the teacher called for him.

Common mistakes ¹ when using the past tense

Employing the simple past tense in conjunction with a past participle. Using the simple past tense form with a past participle for most verbs is grammatically wrong. Let's illustrate this with an example: The sentence "I had ate at McDonald's yesterday" is grammatically wrong since "had" is the past participle of "have" and "ate" is the simple past tense of "eat." The sentence "I had eaten at McDonald's yesterday" is accurate since it has a past tense verb (had) and a present participle verb form (eaten). The citation (Brown, 2001; 21) is provided.

Improper use of Auxiliary Verbs

Another frequent mistake in the past tense is the inaccurate or superfluous inclusion of auxiliary verbs before verbs in the simple past tense. Example — "I should have gone to the bakery last night" The grammatical error in this statement lies in ¹⁸ the use of the auxiliary verb "have" before the simple past tense of the verb "go" (went). The appropriate format would be "I should have" (Corder, 1974;34). I visited the bakery yesterday night. It is important to always use an auxiliary verb. using a past participle instead of the basic past ⁷ tense form of a verb. comparison between the simple past tense and the past continuous tense then discussing a previous routine or recurring behavior in the past the past simple tense should be used (ibid:23).

The statement "I was cycling to church every day for 4 years" is inaccurate because the speaker refers to a certain time period while discussing a past routine. The grammatically accurate phrase would be — "I rode my bicycle to church every for the source states that the duration is "4 years" (Talif.R,1989;44).

²⁷ The choice between Present Perfect Tense and Simple Past Tense

"I have not yet washed the dishes." Does that sound peculiar? That is because it is a mistake in the past tense. This expression refers to a task that was supposed to be finished ⁸ previously but remains unfinished. When referring to recent past occurrences, it is more appropriate to use the present perfect tense rather than a simple past tense verb. The phrase should be written as follows: "I have not yet completed the task of washing the dishes."The reference Rohayu (2001) is cited with a page number of 100.

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Usage of the simple past tense.

Frequently, individuals use the past continuous tense, such as "I was calling her last night," to refer to events or actions that have already concluded. This sentence has a grammatical error. When referring to events or actions that have already happened in the past and are finished, it is more appropriate to use the simple past tense. Hence, the grammatically accurate version of the statement is "I called her last night." (Norhayati, 2002; p. 76).

Past simple – common mistakes		
Common mistakes	Correct version	Why?
I was work in London.	I worked in London.	In positive sentences, a helping verb such as <i>was</i> or <i>did</i> is not used.
He worked in London?	Did he work in London?	The helping verb <i>did</i> is used in past simple questions.
Worked he in London?	Did he work in London?	The helping verb <i>did</i> is used in past simple questions.
Did he wrote a letter?	Did he write a letter?	The main verb is used in the infinitive form in questions and negatives.
He didn't wrote a letter.	He didn't write a letter.	The main verb is used in the infinitive form in questions and negatives.
He wrote a letter.	He wrote a letter.	Some verbs are irregular. Not all verbs end in -ed in the past simple form.

3. CONCLUSION

We can draw exact inferences from the results of this investigation. Even at high levels of competence, Iraqi EFL learners do not demonstrate expertise in employing tenses, despite having studied English for a long amount of time. When people make mistakes with the tenses and verb forms, it might be hard to show how things happened in a certain order. This supports the study's initial conclusion that Iraqi EFL students are more likely to make mistakes with verb forms and tenses.

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The usage of various tenses, aspects, and moods in written sentences and phrases is lacking in the works of advanced EFL learners. Based on these texts, it is clear that the past tense is the most common and least error-prone of the verb tenses. The correct use of tenses connected to aspects and modals in complicated verb formations is a challenge for many students. As a result, instead of using the past perfective or present perfective progressive tenses, pupils opt for simpler tenses like the simple past. The past, present, and perfective progressive tenses are not often used by them.

Verb phrase formulations that are less complex are often used by students when using these tenses. This trend could be explained by the course of study these students have been

following for over 40 years to improve their English language skills. Students may struggle if the structural method is used, as it stresses the need of memorizing verb forms and tenses via repetition. Ironically, every single English as a Foreign Language instructor in Iraq has graduated from a school that has implemented this program. As a result, EFL instructors who struggle with verb tenses are educating pupils with varying levels of proficiency in the language. There is a serious concern that some EFL teachers utilize Arabic as their main language of instruction, which might cause students to start thinking in Arabic instead of English. This has a negative impact on the ability to communicate via language. To successfully transform their memorization of English tenses into a thorough knowledge, students need to immerse themselves in the language to a sufficient degree.

Based on what has been previously said The purpose of this study is to examine the difficulties that Iraqi EFL students have while trying to use the past tense in their writing. The students' grasp of the past tense is clearly inadequate.

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