

Saudi EFL Learners' Use of Alternative Forms to the English Past Tense: An Aspectual Analysis

Ahmed Yahya Almakrob¹

¹ Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities in Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj 11942, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Ahmed Yahya Almakrob, Department of English, College of Sciences and Humanities in Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj 11942, Saudi Arabia.

Received: August 20, 2022

Accepted: October 25, 2022

Online Published: October 28, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v12n7p157

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v12n7p157>

Abstract

This study explores the alternative forms to simple past produced by Saudi learners of English across different proficiency levels, with a particular focus on the lexical aspect. Based on the analysis of 62 Saudi EFL learners' responses to a cloze test, findings showed that learners' alternative patterns were of six types: base and present, progressive, aux+ present/past, perfect, blank and other forms. The main competing patterns to simple past were the base and present, progressive and aux + present/past forms. The lexical aspect appeared to have a partial influence on the production of the alternative patterns in the past context, whereby progressive was highly used with activity, which is consistent with the Aspect Hypothesis, but it was also overused with states, which is not in line with the Aspect Hypothesis. Evidence of the learners' L1 influence was displayed in their inaccurate use of progressive with states, overuse of base/present forms and their low frequency of the perfect.

Keywords: Saudi EFL learners, English past tense, alternative forms, lexical aspect

1. Introduction

The L2 acquisition of English tense-aspect system by L1 Saudi learners of English has been the focus of earlier research (e.g., Alruwaili, 2014; Al-Thubaiti, 2015; AlZahrani & Othman, 2020; Farag, 2015; Mazyad, 1999; Shami, 2010; Zaho & Shirai, 2018). In particular, these studies examined the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis (Shairai & Andersen, 1994) which states that the inherent meaning of the verbs, the lexical aspect, determines the acquisition of the temporal morphology. The predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis were based on Vendler's (1967) classification of the verb, the most commonly known categorization of the verb classes (states, activities, accomplishments and achievements). The acquisitional path of the past marking, according to the Aspect Hypothesis, initially spreads from achievements to accomplishments and finally to states and activities. The validity of this assumption was examined by different researchers among Arabic EFL learners.

In this line of research, the findings of the previous studies on the L2 acquisition of the English tense-aspect system by Arabic EFL learners were not consistent. Some studies (e.g., AlZahrani & Othman, 2020; Farag, 2015; Zaho & Shirai, 2018) supported the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis, some others were partially in line with the assumptions of the Aspect Hypothesis (Alruwaili, 2014; Shami, 2010) and some others rejected the Aspect Hypothesis (Mazyad, 1999). More importantly, these studies also found that even advanced L1 Arabic learners of EFL encountered difficulties in producing the correct form of the English past tense. However, none of these studies has investigated the Saudi EFL learners' use of alternative forms to the English past tense, revealing the determinants of the acquisition of the past markings, i.e., lexical aspect, or L1 influence, or some other factors.

Pedagogically, associating the correct form of the verb with an appropriate meaning is challenging for L2 learners (Weist, 2002). Hence, identifying the sequence of acquisition of the English past tense across the aspectual classes is crucial because it allows instructors to reason out with which category (i.e., states or activities or accomplishments or achievements) students struggle more. More importantly, exploring the learners' alternative patterns to the past is needed to find out why learners follow such inappropriate patterns because the primary purpose of acquisitional research is to provide instructors in the classroom with research-based data (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995). Thus, investigating the learners' inappropriate use of the English past inflections would help teachers identify the interlanguage patterns that learners follow, and in turn, this would help them increase the learners' awareness of the

target language grammar.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the alternative forms to English past that Saudi EFL learners may produce. Furthermore, contrary to previous studies, it looks at the distribution of these alternatives across the four aspectual categories, and thus, a systematic analysis of the alternative responses to simple past tense is provided, revealing the possible learners' L1 influence on the use of such forms.

2. Literature review

2.1 Lexical Aspect

Lexical aspect refers to the semantic properties of the verb, and it is sometimes called *aktionsart* or situation aspect (Smith, 1997). Particularly, it carries the inherent meaning of the verb or the verb phrase (Comrei, 1967). Thus, lexical aspect is not explicitly marked by morphological inflections or copulas. For instance, the phrases *feel happy* and *build a house* encode state and accomplishment events, respectively, relying on their inherent meaning rather than the grammatical context. Vendler (1967) classified lexical aspect into four classes, namely, states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. These four categories differ from each other in terms of three common semantic properties: telicity, punctuality and dynamicity (Vendler, 1967). The distinction between these three semantic features is explained below:

Telicity	A telic verb designates having a natural inherent endpoint. Achievement and accomplishment verbs fall under this category, such as <i>build a house, die, break, ... etc.</i>
Punctuality	A punctual verb designates having no duration; if a verb is punctual, it is instantaneous, e.g., <i>lose, find, fall out, ..etc.</i>
Dynamicity	A dynamic verb designates activity and action, e.g., run, live and cook as opposed to static or unchanging verbs (e.g., <i>know, feel, and realize</i>)

Table 1. Semantic features of aspectual classes (Based on Smith, 1991)

Situation	Telic	Dynamic	Durative	Example
State	-	-	+	know, realize
Activity	-	+	+	run, walk
Accomplishment	+	+	+	run a mile, draw a circle
Achievement	+	+	-	win a race, die

Based on Table 1, according to their meanings, verbs can be classified into telic and atelic. Telic verbs are grouped into accomplishments and achievements. Atelic verbs are also subdivided into states and activities. Having discussed the semantic features of the aspectual classes, we give an independent investigation of the four aspectual classes of the verbs as they are the core of this study.

Activities are verbs that express an event that "consists of successive phases following each other in time" (Vendler, 1967, p.18). In other words, activities (e.g., walk, run, work, etc.) express an action in progressive, in a sentence like (Sam is running). They can be differentiated from states (e.g., know, understand, recognize, etc.), in terms of continuation, whereby states lack the continuous tense (e.g., *I am knowing, loving, and so forth) while activities possess progressive tense (e.g., I am walking, writing, etc.). Accomplishments, according to Vendler (1967, p.100), should (have a "climax," which has to be reached if the action is to be what it is claimed to be). Finally, achievement verbs (e.g. reach the top, win a race, die and so on), unlike states, take place at a short and specific time. In other words, they occur instantaneously (Binnick, 1991). Furthermore, one can distinguish achievements from accomplishments and activities in that achievements lack the feature of progressive tense (Dowty, 1979; Klein, 1994)

2.2 Previous Work on the Production of Alternative Forms to the English Past Tense

It was pointed out earlier that none of earlier research related to L2 acquisition of English past morphology by Arabic EFL learners has addressed sought the alternatives to past. Furthermore, little research has investigated the alternative forms to simple past, in which two studies have examined the suppliance of alternatives to simple past by L2 learners of English.

One of the leading works in this field is Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolde's (1995) cross-sectional study, which investigated the L2 acquisition of the English past marking by 182 learners of English from different L1 backgrounds. Concerning the analysis of the inappropriate use of simple past, findings showed that learners supplied different alternative forms to the past, namely simple present /base forms, progressive, perfect and miscellaneous forms. Learners used the present simple more frequently with state verbs and progressive with activity verbs. These patterns consolidate the effect of the lexical aspect. Perfect instances were very low.

Collins' (2002) research is another important study whose part of its analysis looked at the alternative forms to past produced by Francophone university learners of English. Learners' responses to the cloze test revealed that learners supplied different forms as alternatives to past whereby the most competing pattern of these forms were present and base forms, progressive and perfect. Collins found that learners attached base and present forms more frequently with states and progressive with activity verbs, in which such a distribution confirms the effect of the lexical aspect. She also attributed the inappropriate use of the perfect as an alternative to simple past to the influence of the learners' L1 (French) as perfect is expressed similarly (in terms of form, not function) in both English and French.

Although studies that examined L2 acquisition of English past marking by Arabic EFL learners did not explore the alternative forms to simple past, some of them (Alruwaili, 2014; Shami, 2010) pointed out the possible impact of the learners' L1 in the discussion sections. For instance, Alruwaili (2014) concluded that L1 grammar had a positive influence on the learners' recognition of the English past marking because they appeared to have no difficulty in recognizing and establishing this form. This finding was attributed to the learners' prior knowledge about the past morphology as it is considered the base form in Arabic. However, this justification may not be accurate because the past is realized covertly in Arabic whereas in English it is realized overtly. Such a difference could constitute a problem for EFL Arabic learners, particularly at the level of production, rather than recognition.

In short, it is worth addressing this issue from a different angle, giving a systematic analysis of the learners' suppliance of non-past forms. Crucially, analyzing the learners' alternatives to simple past, with particular reference to lexical classes, would unveil with which verbal category learners struggle more. Furthermore, analyzing the inappropriate responses of the learners gives a tangible explanation for the possible influence of the L1, instead of relying on speculations and theoretical predictions. From an instructional point of view, exploring the inaccurate uses of simple past in relation to the meaning of the verbs yields essential pedagogical implications to teachers in the classroom because the ultimate goal of the research in hand is to provide instructors with research-based recommendations and implications.

To meet these objectives, two main research questions guided the investigation of this study:

- 1) What are the alternative forms to the English past that Saudi EFL learners will provide? And are these alternatives consistent with the Aspect Hypothesis principles?
- 2) Does the learners' L1, Arabic, have an influence on their uses of the alternative forms?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Sixty-two Saudi EFL undergraduate learners took part in this study. They were all male students enrolled in an English B.A. program. A biographic questionnaire, in the target language, showed that learners' ages range from 19-22 years, and they all had had at least seven years of studying English. Learners belonged to five levels, in which they were chosen from levels 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in order to account for their proficiency. Learners' placement to proficiency was determined independently according to the distribution of their institution, given the fact that level 3 and level 4 learners (n= 20) are beginners, level 5 and level 6 learners (n=20) are intermediate and level 7 and level 8 learners (22) are advanced.

3.2 Data Collection

Different tasks, based on the relevant literature, can be used to elicit information on the use of the English past tense, with a particular reference to the lexical aspect. One of the useful tasks that can provide a context in which expressions with the past time reference can be elicited is the cloze test (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000, 1992). Thus, to address the research questions of this study, a cloze test was utilized. In this written task, learners were asked to complete the passages by using the given base form of the predicates in the appropriate tense according to the context, so it allows the researcher to examine the learners' appropriate and inappropriate forms of the past markers of English.

The written series of cloze passages task were adopted from Collins' (1999) study. This task is a revised version of Bardovi-Harlig and Reynold's (1995) cross-sectional study. In this cloze task, 56 of the 82 items targeted the simple past and are distributed across the four lexical aspectual categories of verbs: 14 states, 14 activities, 14 accomplishments and 14 achievements, as shown in the example (1) below. Students were administered this task during one of their sessions of the first semester of the academic year (2019). Each level of the students was administered the task separately during their classes. To perform the cloze task, participants were instructed to read the single passage of the cloze task and then to complete it by using the given base form of the predicates in the

appropriate tense according to the context.

- (1) *This watch is very special so I don't wear it very often. My mother (give) _____ it to me for my sixteenth birthday. It (belong) _____ to her grandmother.*
- (2) *Last night, Louise (work) _____ very hard. She (write) _____ two papers and (finish) _____ all of her grammar homework.*

3.3 Data Analysis

Based on the learners' responses, the non-simple past responses were grouped into six forms: base form and present, progressive form, perfect, aux+ past or present, blank and other forms. These forms were coded with numbers 0 – 6 in an Excel sheet. That is, base form and present = 1, progressive form=2, perfect= 3, past or present without auxiliary = 4, blank = 5 and other form=6. Then data was entered into the excel sheet. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the elicited data to examine the overall use of the non-simple past responses and their distribution across the four aspectual classes.

4. Results

4.1 The Overall Use of the Alternative Forms

The purpose of this analysis was to explore the patterns to what learners were getting wrong at different levels of proficiency. Data showed that learners' responses were of six types: present/ base form (like *belongs, tell*; the majority of these items were base forms), progressive (which included a verb + ing with no auxiliary, present progressive, and past progressive), perfect (which included all perfect forms), aux + present or past (e.g., **was like, *was know*), blank and others patterns (which included low-frequency alternatives such as passive, conditional, future and adjectival forms).

As Table 2 shows, it is clear that the base / present forms were the most common responses provided by learners in the three levels. It is also noticeable that progressive form was preferred most by beginning learners compared with intermediate and advanced learners. Perfect form was highly used by intermediate and advanced learners. Aux +present or past forms were provided by advanced learners more than the other learners. Beginners tended to leave blanks more than intermediate learners, and as expected advanced learners' unanswered items were the least. In short, it can be clearly seen that learners tended to use the base / present forms the most as an alternative form to the English past.

Table 2. The percentages of alternatives to simple past across levels in the cloze test

Level	N	base/ present (%)	Progressive (%)	Perfect (%)	aux with present or past (%)	blank (%)	other (%)
Beginners	20	41	28	4	13	6	8
Intermediate	20	53	20	7	13	4	3
Advanced	22	46	22	8	19	2	3
Total	62	47	24	5	14	4	6

4.2 Distribution of The Alternatives to Past Across the Lexical Aspect

This analysis is devoted to investigating the alternative responses learners used to replace the simple past across the four lexical aspectual classes (states, activities, accomplishments and achievements) in the obligatory contexts of the cloze task in order to find out the possible impact of the lexical aspect on the production of the aforementioned alternatives.

4.2.1 States

Table 3 shows that the base form/simple present forms were used the most, and perfect was the least by learners at all levels of proficiency. Interestingly, base/present was preferred by intermediate learners more than beginning and advanced learners. It is also noticeable that intermediate and advanced learners used aux + present or past forms more than beginning learners. The use of progressive was higher in the beginning level than intermediate and advanced levels where it was provided with similar frequencies. Overall, there was a preference for the base/present forms with states.

Table 3 .Frequencies of alternatives for states by learners at different levels in the cloze task

Level	States					
	base/present	progressive	perfect	aux + present or past	blank	other
Beginners	83	21	3	15	4	14
Intermediate	93	12	8	19	7	1
Advanced	24	12	6	21	2	5
Total	200	45	17	55	13	20

4.2.2 Activities

Of all the non-simple past responses, progressive was the most common form followed by base form/simple present across all levels (see Table 4). Progressive was highly preferred by beginners compared to high-level learners. Interestingly, the perfect form was never supplied by beginning learners whereas it only appeared two and four times in the advanced and intermediate learners' responses, respectively. The supplience of aux+ present or past increased with proficiency. Advanced learners appeared to rarely leave blanks whereas beginner and intermediate learners left 5% of their answers to activities blank.

Table 4. Frequencies of alternatives for Activities by learners at different levels in the cloze task

Level	Activities					
	base/present	progressive	perfect	aux + present or past	blank	other
Beginners	52	63	0	12	5	8
Intermediate	59	50	4	17	5	5
Advanced	17	30	2	19	2	0
Total	128	143	6	48	12	13

4.2.3 Accomplishment

Table 5 displays the non-simple-past responses for accomplishments. It is observable that two main results can be outlined: (1) the most commonly used forms by learners to mark accomplishments were base / simple present forms and (2) lower-level learners used the progressive form to mark accomplishments more than higher-level learners. The use of aux+ present or past was recorded the highest in the intermediate level compared with beginning and advanced learners. Unlike state and activity categories, perfect occurred 26 times, whereby its use increased with proficiency. It is also seen that advanced learners appeared, to a large extent, not to prefer leaving accomplishment verbs unmarked, in comparison with beginner and intermediate learners.

Table 5. Frequencies of alternatives for accomplishment by learners at different levels in the cloze task

Level	Accomplishment					
	base/present	progressive	perfect	aux + present or past	blank	other
Beginners	34	38	7	8	12	12
Intermediate	53	4	9	22	5	7
Advanced	24	9	10	4	1	2
Total	111	51	26	34	18	21

4.2.4 Achievements

According to Table 6, the base /simple present were the most common forms at all levels in comparison with the other alternative responses. In particular, advanced learners produced base form and simple present more than the other levels. Progressive and perfect forms were only recorded in the beginning and intermediate learners' production whereas they were absent in the advanced learners' responses. Aux+ present or past forms were used more by beginning-level learners than intermediate ones, and they were not preferred at all by advanced learners.

Table 6. Frequencies of alternatives for achievements by learners of different levels in the cloze task

Level	Achievements					
	base/present	progressive	perfect	Aux + present or past	blank	other
Beginners	23	9	8	25	9	6
Intermediate	38	28	9	2	1	0
Advanced	40	0	0	0	0	0
Total	101	37	17	27	10	6

5. Discussion

5.1 The Alternative Forms to the English Simple Past

Findings revealed that learners provided some alternative forms to simple past. These non-simple past patterns were of six types: present/ base form, progressive, perfect (a combination of present and past perfect, but the present perfect forms were more frequent), aux + present or past, blank and other patterns (e.g., passive, conditional and

vague patterns; by which were very infrequent). These categories are similar to those reported by Collins (2002) and Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds (1995), with the exception of the *aux+ present or past* form. In general, the use of alternatives with state verbs was higher than any other aspectual classes by learners at all levels of proficiency. This means that learners struggled more with state verbs. Nonetheless, these forms were found more in the responses of lower-level learners, indicating that higher-level learners used the simple past better than the lower ones.

5.2 Distribution of the Alternatives across the Lexical Aspect

Findings showed that present and base form patterns were the most common non-simple past forms across the four aspectual classes of the verb, states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. More specifically, it was found that base/present form was highly provided with state verbs. This finding of Saudi EFL learners supports the Aspect Hypothesis and is in line with previous studies (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Collins, 2002). It was observable that even high-level Saudi learners of English kept using the base and present forms with a high percentage which suggests that even proficient Arabic-speaking learners of English have a difficulty in marking the English simple past.

As for progressive, it was found that learners tended to use it more with activity verbs than with state, accomplishment and achievement verbs. The preference of using progressive form with activity verbs consolidates the claim of the Aspect Hypothesis (Anderson & Shirai, 1994) in that L2 learners would associate progressive more with activity verbs than any aspectual category. Additionally, this is also consistent with earlier research that employed the similar task to elicit information from L2 learners of English (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Collins, 2002) and to some previous Arabic EFL research that employed corpus data (AlZahrani & Othman, 2020). Results also showed that progressive was marked with states by all learners, but with a greater frequency by beginners. However, this is inconsistent with the Aspect Hypothesis (Anderson & Shirai, 1994). A possible interpretation of this pattern could be attributed to the inappropriate overgeneralization of the progressive form to states which is a result of the learners' insufficient grammatical and lexical knowledge (Collins, 2002) or learners' L1 influence (discussed in the following section).

Aux + present or past forms were the third salient pattern provided by learners in replacement of simple past. Overall, the learners' inaccurate frequency rate of this alternative form was similar among beginners and intermediate learners, but higher in the advanced level. More specifically, learners' preferences of aux + present or past forms spread from states to activities to accomplishments and finally to achievement verbs. This pattern might be the result of learners' L1 influence.

With respect to the use of perfect as an alternative to simple past, results showed that it was supplied less frequently compared to the other alternatives, and it was highly infrequent with activities. The less use of perfect might be due to its difficulty as an English form for Arabic-speaking learners because it has been found that its suppliance increased with proficiency as higher-level learners have received more instruction and have been exposed to English more than the beginning and intermediate learners, so they provided more instances of perfect. This finding is not congruent with Collins' (2002) study, and in addition to its difficulty, this could be attributed to the dissimilarity between English and Arabic. Hence, the low frequency of perfect forms could be due to the learners' L1 effect (discussed in the following section).

Blanks were considered a separate category in this analysis because they may explain the different findings in the four categories. Results showed that blank responses declined as learners' proficiency increased. However, unlike Collins' (2002) finding, blanks' frequency rates were higher with accomplishment verbs than the other three categories. An explanation for the learners' preferences to leave accomplishment items blank might be due to their unfamiliarity of the semantic meaning of such verbs or verb phrases. This unfamiliarity may stem from the similarity in form between activity and accomplishment verbs. For example, students might get confused about verbs like '*read stories*' and '*read a story*'.

To sum up, findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners highly preferred to use the base/present forms with state verbs, and progressive with activity verbs. However, learners also associated the progressive with states. Therefore, these findings suggest that the influence of the lexical aspect on the Saudi EFL learners' use of the simple past is not consistent.

5.3 Learners' L1 Influence

The interaction of the learners' L1 (Arabic) influence with the development of the English past tense was confirmed by three pieces of evidence: the overuse of the base and present forms, the use of progressive with states, the auxiliary + present or past, and the use of the perfect.

First, learners' L1 language influence emerged through the overuse of base and present forms by learners at all

proficiency levels, in which these forms were the main competing patterns to simple past (almost 50% of the alternatives). This sort of influence is twofold: first, present tense in Arabic can be expressed in a similar way to its English counterpart, particularly in terms of form; second, the use of the base form might have resulted from the lack of Arabic for the third person singular inflection 's', and thus, learners frequently appeared to drop the 's' and provide the uninflected form, the present (Mazayed, 1999). Nevertheless, the base and present forms were the most common forms for state verbs, and the use of this form was mediated by the learners' proficiency level. That is, it appeared with higher rates in the beginning and intermediate levels compared to the advanced level.

Another robust evidence for the influence of Arabic on the use of the English past tense is the overuse of the progressive form and the aux + present or past with state verbs, especially by beginners. In Arabic, states are compatible with progressive where the form '*kaana + imperfective*' is used to express both state and activity situations. However, this form is ungrammatical in English, so this explains why learners were getting this wrong. Some examples are (**was know, was rained, was like, was drop, was eat, is know, was eat, was taste, was belong, and so on*). Thus, learners might transfer the Arabic progressive-states pattern into the simple past contexts. Likewise, progressive was attached to achievement verbs, and this pattern is a result of the learners' L1 influence because English achievements are not marked with progressive. These findings are in line with earlier research (e.g., Mazyad, 1999).

Third, the low-frequency rates of perfect as an alternative form to simple past could be also attributed to the influence of Arabic. In Arabic, the perfect (present or past) can be expressed by the past tense with some adverbs of time like '*qad*' (Gwagza, 2009, 2016; Seiny, 1986). It is noticeable that high-level learners' use of the perfect was far greater than the beginning and intermediate learners, and this, in turn, supports our proposal for the influence of Arabic in that beginning and intermediate learners' L1 grammar interferes with L2 grammar. Advanced learners have received more instruction and have been exposed to English more than the beginning and intermediate learners, so they provided more instances of perfect as an alternative to the past. This finding is in line with Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds' (1995) where learners did not prefer to replace the past with perfect. However, the current findings and Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds' are inconsistent with Collins' (2002) findings in that it was found that Francophone learners of English produced the perfect form the most as an alternative to the past. According to Collins, such interference is due to the similarity between English and French in terms of the form of perfect. Reversely, in this study, a better explanation of the infrequent production of the perfect, as mentioned, could be due to the differences of the perfect realization in Arabic and English.

Based on the above findings, it can be said that Saudi EFL learners' L1 plays a role in the acquisition of the English past tense. This influence is more visible in low proficiency level learners, and thus, this influence decreases as proficiency increases. These results, in turn, showed that Saudi EFL learners of English experienced developmental patterns of acquisition of simple past through their years of study.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the Saudi EFL learners' production of alternative forms to simple past. It particularly aimed at exploring the relationship between the productions of these alternative forms and the lexical aspect and the learners' L1. Findings revealed that Saudi EFL learners at different proficiency levels produced six different non-past forms, namely base and present, progressive, aux+ present/past, perfect, blank and other forms. The lexical aspect had a partial influence on the learners' use of alternative forms to the past; learners associated the progressive with activities more than the other aspectual classes, which is congruent with lexical aspect predictions; learners highly marked progressive with states, but this pattern does not support the lexical aspect assumptions. Learners' L1 appeared to have an impact on Saudi EFL learners' acquisition of the English simple past morphology. This influence manifested itself in the use of base /present forms, progressive with states and the production of aux +present/past forms as well as the low frequency of the perfect. This influence was robust with low proficiency level learners, indicating learners' L1 influence was mediated by proficiency.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the current study suggest four important pedagogical implications for EFL Saudi classroom language instructors.

First, the purpose of this study was not to find out how past tense morphology is taught in the classroom. Moreover, no research to date has existed to examine the best practices in teaching tense-aspect system to Saudi EFL learners of English. Thus, a crucial pedagogical implication of this study is the need for more research focusing on the methods and approaches of instruction relevant to teaching and learning English tense and aspect morphology in an Arabic

(Saudi) context.

Second, for Saudi EFL learners of English, L1 influence resulted in the high rates of inaccurate uses of the base and present forms, aux + present/ past forms and progressive with state verbs in simple past contexts. In this case, because learners' L1 grammar constitutes part of the target language, these findings suggest that positive evidence would be an efficient teaching strategy (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995). In classroom instruction, positive evidence, which refers to any kind of teaching, treatment, or data that describes "what is possible and appropriate in the target language" (Oliver, 2018, p.1) would help learners reconsider their interlanguage patterns by identifying a difference between what is presented to them and what they produce. Thus, instructors should carefully present contextualized, authentic, meaningful examples of past tense with states (*he knew; it belonged; he liked*). The effectiveness of the positive evidence in language acquisition has been confirmed by some previous empirical studies (e.g., Muñoz, 2012; Norris and Ortega 2001).

Third, results also revealed that state verbs were the most problematic category for learners. It seems that learners are not fully aware of the aspectual classes of the verb, and thus, they faced difficulty in mapping the correct form to the appropriate meaning. If positive evidence is not realized by learners, focused instruction is thought to be efficient to increase their awareness of the aspectual classes of verbs (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995). Thus, mapping form-meaning appropriately could be enhanced by focused examples and exercises. One of the teaching approaches that integrates both positive evidence and focused instruction is task-based language teaching (Pérez-Paredes Mark and O'keeffe, 2020), whereby the focus is on exposing learners to input about the target language (i.e., positive evidence) as well as providing them with feedback about their own productions (i.e., focused instruction).

Finally, a further pedagogical implication is related to the proficiency level of the learners. Results showed that beginning level learners' rates of alternatives to past were the highest, compared to intermediate and advanced learners. These results provide a crucial suggestion to classroom teachers, whereby they can implement scaffolding instruction to help struggling students. Cooperative learning strategy is one form of scaffolding where learners can establish zones of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD refers to the gap between what can be learned independently and that which can be acquired with the assistance of more competent learners (Ellis and Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Hence, placing low-level students in groups with high-level students would allow them to learn from their peers who have a better understanding.

Acknowledgments

This project was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University under the research project number 2021/02/17494.

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