

**ANALYSIS OF PAST TENSE IN PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER:  
A CASE STUDY IN GILGIT-BALTISTAN, PAKISTAN**

Language & Literature

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**ABSTRACT:**

*The existing status of English in Pakistan unfolds its importance as it enjoys the status of a Second Language (L2) and almost all the official correspondence is carried out through English (Baumgardner, 1993). Keeping its prestige, English is being taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan aiming at getting command over English particularly in written composition. In this regard, it becomes essential to find out whether the Pakistani ESL learners get full command over written English, which has been observed so far in other way round. However, these aspects of the area have not been focused in true spirit in Pakistan. Keeping the psychological and social gender differences that affect the process of L2 learning, the present study investigates the gender differences in language learning to find out whether male learners gain more command over written English than female learners or vice versa. For this purpose, Quantitative paradigm was used employing the domain of non-experimental case of causal-comparative method. Furthermore the subjects were selected through systematic random sampling method from master level studying at Karakoram International University, Gilgit, Pakistan. Clinical Elicitation Method was used for the data to be collected in which participants were asked to write a composition based on free writing containing 200 to 250 words. After the analysis, the data was presented and tabulated in graphic forms which testified the hypothesis that female learners comparatively committed fewer errors*

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*in L2 writing. At the end, pedagogical suggestions were also given to lessen the frequency of errors in writing.*

**Key words: Past Tense, Gender, Language proficiency**

### **Introduction**

Human learning is fundamentally a process that involves making of mistakes. Mistakes, misjudgments, miscalculations and erroneous assumptions form an important aspect of learning any skill or acquiring information. The writing mechanism of L1 is quite different from that of L2. People are proficient enough in L1 with a least possibility of errors being committed in writing. L1 is acquired; the mechanism and other aspects of L1 are mastered with no or less chances of making errors. On the other hand, the process of learning L2 is deliberate one which starts after mastering mother tongue. It may be one of the reasons that L2 writing becomes a challenge for ESL learners. Besides, there are many other differences between L1 and L2 writing ranging from mechanical knowledge of writing to sociolinguistic knowledge of writing. Silva (1993) in a review of differences between first and second language writing writes that second language writing tends to be more constrained, difficult and less effective than writing in a first language. Writing like speaking is not a naturally acquired skill. It is most often learned in a formal and instructional setting.

Generally, the learners of Second Language produce texts containing grammatical errors which need to be identified and corrected. It is also a general observation that more the creative text has greater chances of lexical and syntactical errors. Commonly these kinds of errors are committed by those writers who have a lot of ideas but inadequate language knowledge to express. Gender differences cannot be ignored in the process of learning second language. Griffith (1992) differentiated 'males' being Field Independence to perform well in formal setting while 'females' being Field Dependent to perform well in informal setting. Tennen (1990) described the difference between male and female style of speech stating that males always try to have upper hand and try to be dominant while females were found to be supportive and try to create an intimacy in their speech. Lakoff (1975) claimed women's language being very close to the standard language as compare to men's. The present study was an attempt to investigate the performance of both i.e. male and female by conducting a comparative study of L2 writing at Master level at Karakoram International University, Gilgit, Pakistan.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

### Main Question

1-Who do more grammatical errors i.e. male or female students?

### Sub-Question

1- Is there any difference in kinds of grammatical errors made by male and female Students?

### LITERATURE REVIEW:

In this section a review of error analysis and two main different theories pertaining to error have been discussed. A distinction has also been made between error and mistake. Since, gender is the main variable of the study, theories as well as researches regarding gender difference have been stated to highlight the difference between two gender. According to Corder (1974) committing error is an inevitable part of language learning. Errors occurred in learning of L2 are similar to the acquisition of L1. These errors evidently show the learning progress of language. According to Behaviourist point of view, learning or a change of behaviour on the part of the learners is brought about by a process known as operant conditioning which is the result of repeated training. Operant means '*voluntary behaviour*' which is the result of learner's own free-will and is not forced by any outside person or thing. The learner demonstrates the new behaviour first as a response to a system of reward or punishment and finally as an automatic response. Behaviourists considered 'errors' as a sign of failure on the part of the learners as well as teachers. Mueen (1992, p.136) presents behaviourists' point of view in these apt words, "The behaviourists deny that errors have any positive contribution to learning. They regard errors as evidence of failure, ineffective teaching or lack of control." Noam Chomsky (1975) propounded mentalist theory of learning language and claimed that a child learns his/her first language through cognitive learning. Moreover, language is governed by rules and is not a haphazard thing, to be. According to Chomsky (1975) a child is born with a mental capacity for working out the underlying system to the jumble of sounds which he hears. He constructs his own grammar and imposes it on all the sounds reaching his brain. This mental grammar is part of his cognitive framework and nothing he hears is stored in his brain until he has matched it against what he already knows and found a 'correct' place for it within his framework. Mueen (1992) describes mentalists' view as, "The conviction is that error is inevitable. It is an integral part of the learning process and developing competence. It should not be regarded as a sign of failure but as evidence that the student is working his way towards the correct rules". (P.136)

Error is a linguistic term gives the concept of a "breach of code." (Corder 1967) or a "deviation from the norms of the target language" (Ellis, 1994) or "any

deviation from a selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristic or cause of the deviation might be." (Dulay et.al (1982). On the contrary to errors, mistakes are committed on surface level i.e. the learners fail to use the grammatical knowledge of the target language. Brown (2000) defines mistake as, "A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a 'slip' in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly." (p. 217). Ellis (1994) describes mistakes as, "mistakes occur when learners fail to perform their competence" (p.51). Actually, when a learner is taught a rule in the target language, sometimes learner follows it and sometimes not, it is called mistake.

It is said that male and female use language in a different way from one another. There are, though, in reality far more similarities in their language than differences yet some of the variations have been found in different researches. According to Jespersen (1922) male use more Hypotaxis sentences while female Parataxis. Similarly, male are also noticed to use more straightforward form of Imperatives than females do. Sachs (1987) did his study on two-to-five year old Chinese in which he noticed that female showed an obvious tendency to soften their imperatives while boys' imperatives were very straightforward..

Shuy et.al. (1967) in her study on speakers of American English in Detroit found that male used more multiple negation (*Ain't nobody going nowhere noways*) 30% more than women used. As far as language acquisition is concerned, several evidences show different tendencies in males and females. Gleason (1987) observes that at the age of four, boys were found imitating male forms while girls followed female pattern, a process which may begin as early as the age of eighteen months. Lakoff (1972) found female using more tag questions that shows lack of confidence.

Ghani (2007) taking the Lakoff's linguistic features, held a study on Pakistani women. She studied 56 subjects', "Hedging Devices" and finally supported Lakoff's classification of the features of women speech and concluded that Pakistani women's speech is also very close to standard language and that women are very conscious of their speech.

Baxter (2003) tried to find out the differences in male and female brain pertaining to language and found that female brain performed better in analogy and vocabulary activities while male brain in analytical studies. Kaiser (2007) in a similar kind of studies noticed that male brain is larger than female in size but small brain performed well in language based activities.

Gender differences in language were also studied in the description of retrospective pain. Strong (2009) concluded that female used more enriched figurative language in their description. Moreover, female described more physical while male emotional pain. They also differed in the quantity of their description. Male used 56 words while female 84 in average.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative research paradigm was used by the researcher in which categorical Independent Variable (IV) was M.A students of different departments at Karakoram International University, Gilgit, Pakistan, while Quantitative Dependent Variable (DV) was the errors of L2 writing. The present study fell into the category of Descriptive research as the descriptive research design aims at providing a description of the problem under investigation and provides concrete and factual information about the characteristics of any phenomena and the situation under which it takes place (Thakur, 1993).

According to Corder (1974) composition is the best tool to assess students' proficiency in writing. Moreover, if free writing test is given to students, it provides an open opportunity to students to express their feelings freely. Thus, data which is collected in this way provides significantly true results. So, in the present study, students were asked to write a composition of 200 to 250 words.

### **3.1 SAMPLING**

According to the main variable of the present study, the data was consisted of both male and female students studying at Master level. The data was collected from different departments of KIU by using random sampling method. Total number of students who were selected randomly for the study was 450 consisting of equal number of male and female students i.e. 225 of each. Out of this amount, 23 sample tests were excluded from the main sample because either they wrote less than 200 words or more than 250. Thus, finally 427 students' samples were selected for main data analysis. Out of this amount, 20 students' sample from both male and female were selected randomly for pilot study. So, from remaining 407 samples, 50 sample tests were selected by following systematic random sampling technique in which the sampling interval was kept as 03. Thus, every fourth test was selected for final data analysis.

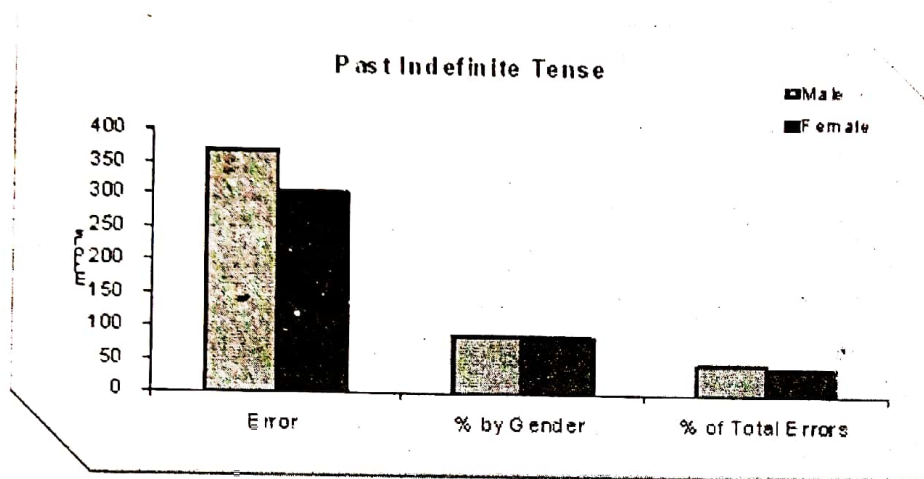
## **ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 PAST INDEFINITE TENSE**

The results in the table 4.1 show that both male and female have committed highest number of errors in the use of Past Indefinite Tense. Male students committed 368 errors with a percentage of 88.03% with respect to total errors made by male students and with a percentage of 48.16% with respect to total amount of errors made by both male and female students. While the female students committed 306 errors with a percentage of 88.43% with respect to total errors made by female students and with a percentage of 40.05% with respect to total errors made by both male and female students. Students seemed to have no

appropriate knowledge of the use of Past Indefinite Tense. They mostly used present form to describe past incidents. Errors were also committed due to the L1 interference as in test number 216. Errors also seemed to occur due to overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules.

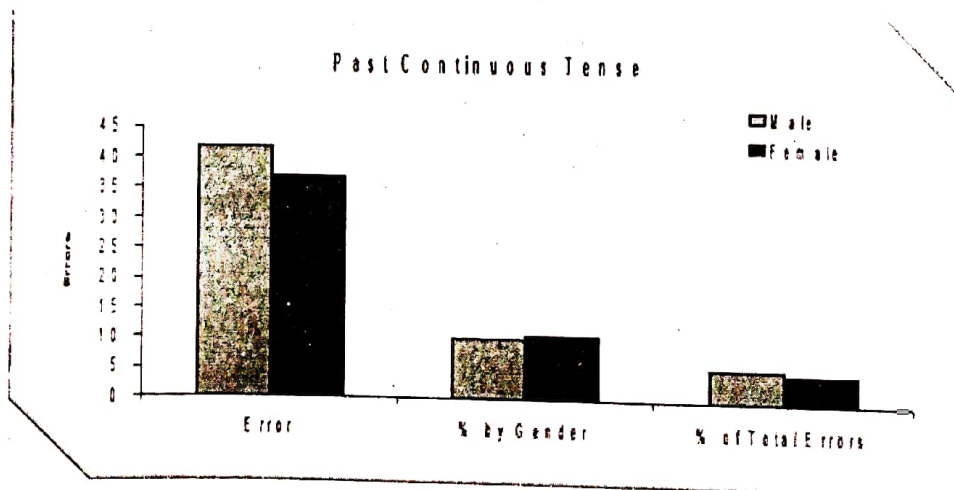
Graph 4.1



#### 4.2 PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

The results in the table number 4.2 show that the second highest number of committed errors in both male and female students is in the use of Past Continuous Tense. Male students committed 42 errors with a percentage of 10.04% with respect to total errors made by male students and with a percentage of 5.49% with respect to total errors made by both male and female students. Similarly, female students committed 37 errors with a percentage of 4.84% with respect to errors made by female students and with a percentage of 4.84% with respect to total errors made by male and female students. In most of the errors students used auxiliary verbs *is, am, are* instead of *was and were*. In some of the cases omission of auxiliary verbs was also noticed.

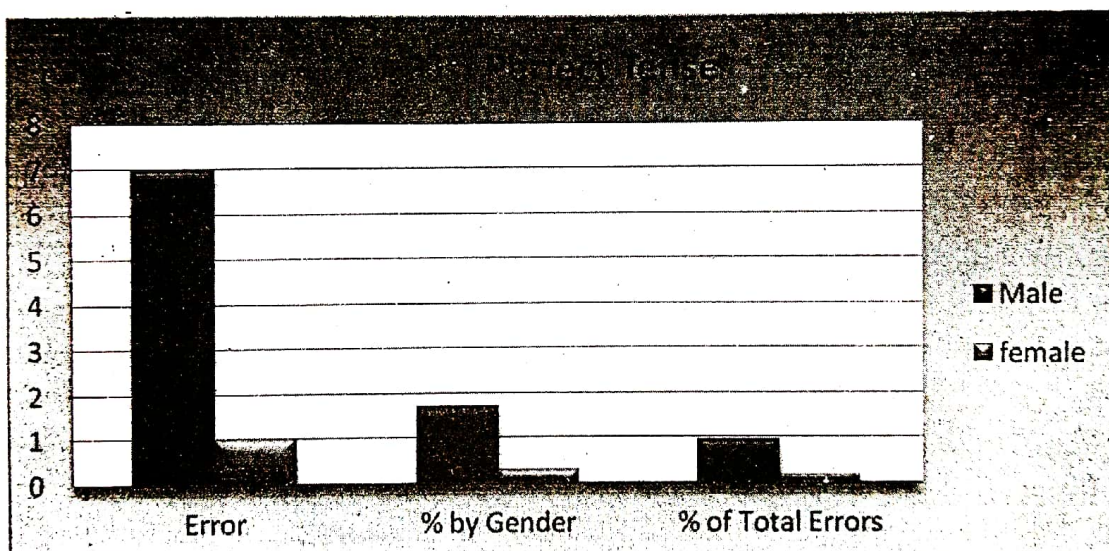
Graph 4.2



### 4.3 PAST PERFECT TENSE

The results in the table 4.3 show that both male and female students committed lesser number of errors in using Perfect Tense as compare to Indefinite and Continuous tense. Male students committed 07 errors with a percentage of 1.67% with respect to errors made by male students and with a percentage of 0.91% with respect to total errors made by male and female students. Female students committed only 01 error with a percentage of 0.28% with respect to errors made by female students and with a percentage of 0.13% with respect to total errors made by both male and female students. But, it does not mean that the students were proficient in this tense. In fact, hardly did they use Perfect tense in their compositions. In some cases when students mentioned two actions in a sentence they did not use correct structure of past tense. In few cases students used *has/have* instead of *had*. These errors occurred due to the ignorance of the rules restriction.

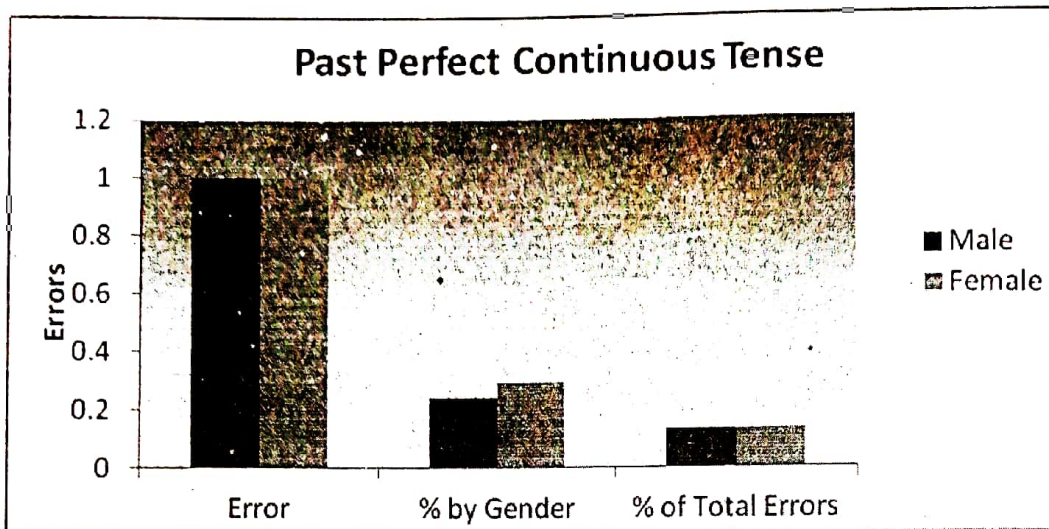
Graph 4.3



### 4.4 PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSE

Table 4.4 shows rapid decline in committing errors both by male and female students. Hardly did any student use this tense. Male students committed 01 error with a percentage of 0.23% with respect to errors made by male students and with a percentage of 0.13% with respect to total errors made by both male and female students. Female students also committed 01 error with a percentage of 0.28% with respect to errors made by female students and with a percentage of 0.13% with respect to total errors made by male and female students.

Graph 4.4



### FINDINGS:

After the analysis of the data it was found that the male students committed more errors in the use of Past tense as compare to female students. Male students committed total 418 errors while female students committed total 346 errors. It clearly shows the low level of proficiency of male students in L2 writing.

The students of both gender i.e. male and female committed highest number of errors in the use of Past indefinite tense. Male students committed 368 errors out of 418 errors in the use of Past Indefinite tense with a percentage of 88.038% with respect to errors made by male students while female students committed 306 errors out of 346 errors just in the use of Past Indefinite tense with a percentage of 88.439%. These highest percentages show that the students on the whole are unaware of the use of Past Indefinite tense. Sometimes they used Present Participle to describe a past event the other times they started a sentence with a proper past form and then switched to present form. Thus, committed errors. For example,

I \*attend my cousin marriage in 25 March 2008. (Test No.205)

As far as the use of Past Continuous tense is concerned, students of the both gender committed second highest percentage of errors in its use. However, there is a great difference of the percentage in committing errors in the use of Indefinite and Continuous tense. Male students committed 42 errors with a percentage of 10.047% while female students committed 37 errors with a percentage of 10.693%. In most of the cases students either omitted auxiliary verb *was, were* or they used auxiliary verb but did not use *ing* form. For example

\* Indicates error



Everybody \*(was) enjoying the party. (Test No. 224)

Male students committed only 07 errors with a percentage of 1.674 % in the use of Past Perfect tense while female students committed only 01 error with a percentage of 0.289%. But it does not mean that the students were proficient in its use. On the contrary, hardly did they use this tense in their compositions. Some students who tried to show continuity of two actions, they committed errors. For example,

\*.The people have do well when I reach the party. (Test No. 117)

The least errors were committed in the use of Past Perfect Continuous tense. Both, male and female students committed only 01 error each. Like Past Perfect tense this tense was hardly used by the students. It seemed that they were quite unaware of its right use. They were not aware of the right use of *since* and *for*. For example,

\*We are preparing this schedule wedding ceremony last two months. (Test No.204)

As far as the sources of errors are concerned, it was observed that the errors were generally caused as described by many linguists i.e. L1 interference, overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules and false concept hypothesis. After a profound thinking on the difference of errors between male and female students as male students committed more errors as compare to female students, it can be assumed that females are more conscious about their use of language. Their language is more sophisticated and very close to standard language and boys are careless about their language use. After the analysis it was also observed that female students used varied kinds of adjectives for describing things like dresses, colours and jewellery as compare to male students.

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\* Indicates error

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