



# ERROR ANALYSIS OF ABSOLUTE TENSE IN LANGUAGE USE BY MANAGEMENT STUDENTS OF THE POLYTECHNIC, BALI

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on “ Error Analysis of Absolute Tense in Language Use by Management Students of The Polytechnic, Bali” which aims at investigating error of Tense. The participants were 73 and all students of Business Management Department, in the study area. They were between the age of 20 -25 in this study. This work adopts both qualitative and quantitative approaches which dwell on written text by some selected students in their subject area to see how Use of English improve their written communication and

## INTRODUCTION

Second language learners such as Business Management Students in The Polytechnic, Bali consider grammar as one of the most important part of learning English not only as General Studies but also as a language of instruction in Nigerian Polytechnics. It is quite significant to improve the linguistic competence of learners especially grammar in general English and their study area. This is because grammar is always inseparable with the act of communication such as writing. It is one of the four language skills that need be obtained by the L2 learners. Textual information always comes through writing skill and is expected to be read and understood by readers for effective communication. Hornby (2003) as cited in Dharmapaul & Subramanian (2021) believes that writing refers to a process through which one can express his/her ideas into an utterance for effective communication. Therefore, writing remains an essential element of communication that need to be improved by second language learners. Moreover, writing provides a means by which learners share their thoughts, ideas, experiences and knowledge with others. The higher National Diploma students improve their linguistic competence as part of their subject and future purpose of the study the better for them. In a similar opinion, Brown (2001) asserts that writing could be process of not only thinking, drafting, but also reversing need for special skill which helps to initiate and organize communication coherently. This is no doubt clarifies meaning in a written text with appropriate grammar that makes the product of writing comprehensible. Moreover, Harmer (2002) opines that apart from grammar and words, writing requires other essential elements such as text forming, tenses, concords, spelling, punctuation etc which need to be studied by L2 learners. This implies that writing has an important role to play in language learning. Therefore, this improves the learners’



where they have issues. Theoretical framework underpins this study is Error Analysis (EA) which aims at assessing, identifying, describing and explaining the errors of learners in language use. Considering the claim of EA, this study uses Darus (2009) surface structure of error categorisation. The criterion in this study asserts that any error that has attained a mean score of 1.0 and above is to be considered as a significant finding. The results showcase that the participants struggle most with errors of simple present and past tense than simple future tense. Therefore, the errors of present and past tense are considered significant while error of simple future is insignificant finding in this study. Some useful recommendations in respect to that are made.

**Keywords:** Error Analysis, Error, L2 Learner, English Language, Absolute Tense

lexis, grammar and appropriate expressions of the learners' comprehensibility into written communication. To cap it all,, Javed, Juan, and Zlu (2013) cited in Dharmapaul & Subramanian (2021) draw a conclusion that writing as a skill has some significant roles which improve the learners' communicative competence. In the above contest, this study believes that carrying out research on the error analysis of absolute tenses in language use by students of business management in The Polytechnic, Bali has a significant value for identifying, categorizing and explaining the problem of learners in the study area. Therefore, this contributes to the existing knowledge in the field of Languages like any other good empirical research.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

English serves as a Language of Instruction for L2 learners in Nigerian system of education at all levels. Nevertheless, English as a L2 tends to be difficult task in the study area. More to that, assertion is made that to master the English language, learners need to be exposed adequately to four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (Brown, 2001). In Nigeria, a quite number of people struggle with English as a second language especially in the north where The Polytechnic, Bali dwells. Above all, the English standard among the participants in the study area is declining despite learning it as General Studies and language of instruction. Business Management students' English is weak, especially in their written communication. The participants seem to commit most errors in absolute tenses and probably other aspects of language. Based on this problem, this paper intends to address such issues to fill the existing gap in the literature.

#### **Research Objective: To**

- I. Identify the simple tense errors use by the Management Students of the Polytechnic.
- II. Describe the three tense errors use by the Management Students of the Polytechnic.
- III. Analyse the three tense errors use by the Management of the Polytechnic.

#### **Research Questions:**

- I. What are the simple tense errors commit by the Management Students of the Polytechnic?



- II. What kind of the three tense errors commit by the Management Students of the Polytechnic?
- III. What are the analyses of the three tense errors commit by the Management Students of the Polytechnic?

#### **Literature Review:**

##### **The Concept of Error Analysis**

Gass and Selinker (2008) define the concept as ‘a type of linguistic analysis that focusses on the errors learners make’. This suggests that data of spoken or written language of a learner can be collected and analysed in order to identify certain errors and why these errors occur; and what are the implications for pedagogical purpose and learner’s target language development. Moreover, Ellis and Barkhuize (2005) claim that error analysis has three important implications: to serve research purpose, to serve pedagogical purpose, and to act as learning purpose where learners can discover the rules of the target language.

Ellis, (2008, p. 5) refers to error as an act of deviating from the cultures of the language in focus. Added to that he emphasised that an unusual or error is a technical term which occurs due to a lack of knowledge that resulted to deviation in a target language (TL) which refers to a particular style that is the aim of learning, for example, English (Saville-Troike and Barto, 2015, p.2). James, (2013, p. 5) sees an error as the students “interlanguage” (i.e. the variety of their language in focus) and TL itself in connection to the two, to see mismatches. Added to that, he stressed that errors could be described regarding the language in focus without the involvement of the L1 of the learners. Ludeling et al. (2017, pp.110-111) define error as a technical annotation of ungrammatical use of particle verb or possibly another aspect of language in learner text.

Ellis, (2008, p. 47) argues that the learners’ error can be categorised into comprehension and production. Ellis, further stresses that a comprehension error refers to a misunderstanding of a sentence by the learners, for instance, “pass him the paper” as “pass him the pepper” is due to an inability to differentiate the sounds /eɪ/ and /e/. Ellis believes, is not easy to figure out the cause of learners’ inability to produce some linguistic features of a misunderstood expression. He further believes that a productive error could be found in learners’ interview or a written composition which is the focus of this research work (Ellis, 2008).

Summarily, an error could be divided into children’s fault, which is known as a transitional form while adult native speakers’ error is a slip of the tongue and L2 learners’ error is an unwanted form (Corder 1967).

##### **The difference between error, mistake and a slip of the tongue**

The distinction between error, mistake and a slip of the tongue is that an error is when the L2 learner lacks the idea of the TL which let him produces an incorrect form of language while the mistake refers to the failure of linguistic knowledge of the learner to do an act (Ellis, 2008). Dell (1986 p. 284) sees a slip of the tongue as perhaps an unintended deviation from speech pattern which is not habitually. Based on this, “a slip of the tongue” can be identified “as an error” that is reversible or repairable (Poulisse, 2000, pp. 136-137). From this, error and mistake can be probably associated with both writing and speaking while a slip of the tongue is associated with speaking only as a kind of error.



### **The integration of Error Analysis to English language Teaching (ELT)**

Learning English either L2 or an FL requires a process of stages, during which errors, mistake or a slip of the tongue are likely to occur during the process of learning (Darus, 2009, p. 487). Some researchers (e.g. Corder, 1967) believe that errors can be concrete evidence that education usually takes place. Moreover, he emphasises that if incorrectness is studied systematically, this can lead to insights significantly into how a learner learned a second or foreign language. He further asserts that studying learners' errors of performance or usage could have practical application immediately for English teachers.

An attempt was made to explain some causes of errors in the learning of L2 such as English for many years. As a result of these, theories evolved for error analysis. One of the approaches includes error analysis. This theory pays attention to languages in a practical contact situation. Bamgbose (1994) posits that there is an existence of the language contact situation in Nigeria due to the interaction between the L1 and English as L2.

Based on this view, errors are providers of feedback because they provide some information about how useful is their language (Darus, 2009). Ancker (2000) agrees that unusual or wrong use of a word is part and parcel of the language learning process in reality. Therefore, they can be accounted as one of the cognition ways of acquiring a language. According to this view, errors are directly related to teaching and learning a language. And so, they are relevant to ELT.

According to the proponents of CA, it is argued that learners tend to transfer some features of their L1 to the TL thereby associating errors in learning a language with the influence of L1 interference. The critical point is a comparison of more than one expression with the aim of determining their similarities and dissimilarities. They believe that when the structures of the languages are alike, they could either be a positive transfer or facilitated results. Nevertheless, where the structures are different, they could either be negative transfer or interferences in context (Lado, 1957). In SLA, the term transfer could either be negative or positive. The "positive transfer" takes place when the influence of the first language (L1) proves helpful or beneficial in the process of acquiring the second language (L2). For instance, when a learner can understand or notice specific lexical items in a particular style with nearly the same system of writing like English and French. Consider the English word "doubt" and the French word "doute" (Robinson, 2013, p.151).

Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) assert that Error Analysis in SLA is a technique which can be used for identification and interpretation of the unusual forms produced by L2 learners of English with which language experts make provision for principles and procedures for language to be learned. Error Analysis regarded as one of the most influential theories of SLA which overshadowed Contrastive Analysis, an earlier focus of SLA.

### **The L2 Learners of English**

The learners of second language (L2) include children and adults. Therefore, L2 refers to any added language onto native language of the learner such as English. In Nigeria, English language is second language (L2) to majority of Nigerians. It is also called a target language (TL) because it is a language commonly used for communication and instruction at all levels of education. The English language serves several purposes in Nigeria, especially in tertiary institutions like the polytechnics



where it serves not only for communication purposes, but it is also a language of instruction in conjunction with technological aspects of teaching and learning (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017,p.2).

### **English as a Language of Instruction in Nigerian Polytechnics**

The goal of English language instructors at the polytechnics is to help learners become successful in their learning process. Since technology is at the heart of education now, and the polytechnic educational system centres on technical education, instructors and learners need these new technologies to support their language teaching and learning in the twenty-first century and tense remains the important part of the learning for effective communication. These technologies will not only help learners to become successful in the classroom, but they would also be able to communicate in the target language in real-world situation. However, this may be challenging for both instructors and learners to achieve this success without the new technologies. It is therefore imperative for instructors and learners to familiarize themselves with appropriate tenses in connection to the technology for professional interaction. Perhaps this would help L2 learners in Nigerian polytechnics to tap into these enormous opportunities, to be able to achieve the desired L2 learning process in today's digitally connected and globalized world for the appropriate application of absolute tenses in their written communication in the study area. Based that, some kinds of linguistic elements such as absolute tenses are to be addressed in this study. Therefore, this can improve the teaching and learning of grammar such as the tenses which are the bedrock of communication in English particularly in Business Management.

### **The Concept of Tense**

There are many definitions of tense and some of which include: Jabbar (2013) who argues that tense is a grammatical category which correlates with distinctions of time. Therefore, tense is considered as one of difficult materials when students learn grammar. It is proved by some researchers who studied tenses. For instance, Swan asserts that tenses are formed either by changing the verb (e.g: cook, cooked, cooked and see, saw, seen) or by inserting auxiliary verb such as (e.g: has been known, is moving). Considering the above claims. This paper agrees with Situmorang, Saragih, & Karisma, (2018) who assert that tense is a verb form or series of verb forms which are used to express a time relation, and tense refers to the time of the situation relating to the situation of the utterance. Therefore, linguistic perspective sees the tense as morphologically marked (bound morphemes such as – ed1, -ed2 (-en), -s, -es) or zero inflectional element for a plural present tense like go, teach, talk and many more. For instance, go indicates simple present tense for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural as in: Walida and Khairat go to school everyday. On the other hand, Nana goes to school everyday. This indicates that -es is an inflectional element attached to go for 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular present tense. Therefore, go remains unmarked simple present as a base form while goes is marked simple present and so all past tense markers such -ed are also marked. To cap it all, any bound morpheme that is added to the base form such as come, talk, and many more is morphologically marked. So, it is possible to argue that tense as a linguistic element which is used in our daily communication and so needs reasons for its usages in English. The segment below provides some useful information about the absolute tense which is the focus of this paper.



### **Absolute Tense**

Tense is divided into three different groups, namely; (a) Absolute tense, (b) Relative tense and Combination options. However, this paper is only concerned with the absolute tense which is its main focus. Absolute tenses are: present, past and future and they qualify as deictic category. That is as a grammatical category which locates a situation on a timeline and always judging from the moment of utterance. The most significant part of it is to find out some errors commit by some students in Polytechnic which is quite directly related to the tenses in written Communication. Therefore, this paper investigates absolute tense errors in written communication of those selected participants in this study Aliyu, Jalo & Bello (2022).

### **Method/ Approach**

The study involves both qualitative and quantitative methods with a focus on analysing absolute tense errors in students' texts. Investigation is the purpose of the quantitative in this study and it is to find out what kind of errors occurs regarding the absolute tense usage in their text. The aim is to collect, identify and describe those errors in their written communication and also to find some pattern if there is one, which makes this the qualitative dimension in this study. The primary instrument used for data collection for this research is the students' written essays which focus on business corresponds such as letters, descriptive and explanatory writing during their examinations.

It all depends on their syllables. The collection of the 73 participants' texts dwells on capturing the learners' linguistic competence of grammatical tense and how they use it in written context of their writing. The analysis determines if the participants know the distinction between past, present tense and future tense and use it appropriately. Therefore, the results also reveal if they can shift tenses in respect to different events and time.

### **Participants**

The participants for this work are all ND students in the business management departments of Federal Polytechnic Bali, during the 2021/2022 session. The participants' size is (73) seventy three and all from the departments of business management, Federal Polytechnic Bali, respectively.

### **Results and Discussions**

**Table: Cumulative Total Frequency and Mean Scores of Absolute Tense Errors that Were Found in the Participants' Essays.**

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>No of errors/frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Cat.1 Present Tense	*The manager function <sup>^</sup> as a controller .	356	487.7	4.9
Cat 2 Past Tense	*The customer buy some goods yesterday.	228	312.3	3.2
Cat.3 Future Tense	*Some entrepreneurs <sup>^</sup> Supply it so soon.	54	74	0.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100.0</b>	





The above table portrays the cumulative total and mean scores and the frequency of errors made by the students in the Department of Business Management federal polytechnic Bali concerning the categories of errors that were identified for analyses. The mean scores were calculated to establish the significance or insignificance of each error category. The calculated mean score of the detected error categories (variables); error of present tense and past tense were put at 1.0 and above. It means that future tense error category which has a mean score of 0.7 is less than 1.0. Therefore, both present and past tenses are regarded as significant findings, while future tense is considered insignificant finding in this study.

Going by the criterion, the errors that are in the domain of present tense which recorded a frequency of 356 occurrences in the students' essays had a mean score of 4.9. The errors of past tense had frequency of 228 with a mean score of 3.2. They are, therefore, considered most significant findings. The mean score of the remaining error category is less than 1.0. Based on the information in the table. So, this category of error is future tense which had a frequency of 54 with a mean score of 0.7. It is therefore, consider insignificant finding if the set criterion of this study is taken into consideration.

Based on the findings of this research, it is clearly that the students of business management of the study area struggle with some grammatical issues such as present tense and past tense due to inadequate linguistic competence. For instance, the error of present : The manager function as a controller. The issue associated to this error is inappropriate tense (function) which is only for third person plural. Therefore, the inflectional element (-s) is not attached to the verb (function) to make it grammatically appropriate for third person singular present tense. As in: The manager functions as a controller. This shows that the participants lack the morphological idea of the bound morpheme (-s) and become the source of this category of error in this findings.

On a similar note, the second significant finding which is the error of past tense proves to be the issue at the time. For instance, The customers buy some goods yesterday. In this analysis, the problem discovered to be associated with this category of error is inadequate linguistic competence. As a result of that the participants committed in which the morphological marker of past tense (-ed) is found to be missing in their essays. This implies that the verb (buy) most always be used with the tense marker (-ed) to indicate past tense in English. So, buy + -ed = bought which is an appropriate form of past tense of buy in standard English and so it is also found to be issue in the study.

Nevertheless, even though the error of future tense found to be insignificant, it is also good to account for it in this study. Take for instance, Some entrepreneurs ^ supply so soon. This indicate that the future tense marker (will) is found to be missing in their written communication and therefore become an error of tense. Moreover, this paper discover that inadequate linguistic competence and mother tongue influence are the major reasons for the participants errors in this study.

#### **Conclusion:**

Finally, it obvious that the participants of this study commit error of absolute tenses in the study area ; and the causes of such kind of errors are found to be inadequate linguistic competence with affect their use of tenses in written communication in their study area. Also the poor background of them it is also another cause due their mother influence linguistic nature which is not the same



as English as L2. Method of teaching could also be additional cause. Therefore, the study of Error Analysis of Absolute Tense proves to be significant as a result of having three important implications. These serve as research purpose, pedagogical purpose, and act as a learning purpose where learners can discover the rules of the target language in respect of absolute tenses in their study area.

### Recommendations:

In the end, this study recommends that the general English course caters for the language skills of listening and reading in order to speak and write well; ELT methodology should be introduced in Nigerian Polytechnics such as The Polytechnic, Bali Taraba State so that English teaching can reflect the students' area of specialism and mastery of linguistic competence. It is because the learners need language items such as absolute tenses that are relevant to their study purposes.

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### Appendix

	Cat 1	Cat 2	Cat 3	
N/persons	Present Tense	Past Tense	Future Tense	Total
1	2	2	0	4
2	4	3	1	8





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3	2	4	0	6
4	4	3	2	9
5	5	3	0	8
6	7	4	0	11
7	3	3	0	6
8	5	4	0	9
9	5	3	0	8
10	6	4	0	10
11	5	4	3	9
12	7	3	0	10
13	4	4	0	8
14	3	3	0	6
15	6	5	0	11
16	6	4	0	10
17	4	4	0	8
18	6	4	1	11
19	5	3	0	8
20	4	3	2	9
21	6	5	2	13
22	5	6	0	11
23	5	3	0	8
24	4	4	2	10
25	5	3	0	8
26	6	2	1	9
27	4	5	1	10
28	6	3	2	11
29	4	4	2	10
30	6	4	0	10
31	6	3	1	10
32	4	3	2	9
33	4	3	0	7
34	6	3	1	10
35	6	3	2	11
36	5	5	2	12
37	4	5	1	10
38	2	2	0	4
39	5	3	0	8
40	8	4	1	13
41	5	4	0	9
42	2	2	0	4
43	8	3	0	11
44	5	2	0	7
45	4	2	1	7
46	4	3	2	9
47	5	4	0	9
48	10	4	1	15
49	4	3	1	8
50	4	3	1	8
51	4	3	0	7
52	6	2	2	10
53	4	2	1	7
54	3	2	1	6
55	5	3	0	8
56	7	4	1	12
57	4	2	2	8
58	6	3	1	10
59	3	1	0	4
60	8	3	1	12



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61	3	2	0	5
62	9	2	0	11
63	2	3	1	6
64	4	2	0	6
65	5	4	3	12
66	6	2	2	10
67	2	3	0	5
68	4	2	0	6
69	4	1	1	6
70	5	4	0	9
71	7	3	0	10
72	4	2	0	6
73	6	3	3	12
Total	356	228	54	638
Mean	4.9	3.2	0.7	8.7
Percentage	487.7	312.3	74	874