



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Education**

**DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AFFECTING COMMON ERRORS IN TENSE IN ENGLISH AMONG NINTH STANDARD STUDENTS**

**KEY WORDS:** English tense error, Anomalous finites, Differential effect.

<b>Alex, A.</b>	Asst. Professor, Anna Vinayagar College of Education, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu-629502.
<b>Apsara, P. A.</b>	Asst. Professor, Teacher Education Centre, University of Calicut, Thrissur-680018.
<b>Arjunan, N. K.*</b>	Principal, Adi Sankara Training College, Kalady, Kerala-683574. *Corresponding Author

**ABSTRACT** This descriptive study aims to find out the differential effect of gender, residential locale and medium of instruction on the errors made by the ninth grader students in the usage of English tenses. Three null hypotheses were tested by collecting data from a random sample of 291 ninth grade students from schools in Coimbatore district. The English Tense Error Analysis Test was administered to find out the common errors committed by the students in using the language. Independent sample t-test revealed significant differential effect of gender, residential locale and medium of instruction on common errors in English tense usage of ninth grade students. Boys compared to girls, rural students compared to urban students and Tamil medium students compared to English medium students make significantly high mistakes in English tense.

**INTRODUCTION**

Teaching grammar has been regarded as crucial to the ability to use language. Grammar gains its prominence in language teaching, particularly in English as a foreign language and English as a second language, in as much as without a good knowledge of grammar; learners' language development will be severely constrained (Soud, 2018). Practically, in the teaching of grammar, learners are taught rules of language commonly known as sentence patterns. According to Ur (1999), in the case of the learners, grammatical rules enable them to know and apply how such sentence patterns should be put together. In English language teaching process, teaching grammar is one of the stressed points that teachers cannot disregard. Despite the various views whether grammar should be presented or not, there is a general agreement that a systematic and purposeful teaching of it vital to master the target language. Grammar which is composed of tenses is an indispensable part of a language and it constitutes the bone of the body, language. Hence, they need to be learned or acquired by the learner either consciously or subconsciously (Cakir, 2011). In spite of burgeoning classroom methods and strategies, English grammar, particularly the tenses, remains as challenging task for the teachers to teach and students to learn (Lin, 2002; Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000; Kao, 1999).

The major problem in learning English language in India is that it has to fight fiercely with the regional languages to get the identity (Sekar, 2017). The language learners are mostly first or second generation category. They are exposed to mother tongue most of the time. In the state sponsored school system existing in Tamil Nadu today, tenses are learnt from middle classes. The secondary school students at IX Standard level are supposed to know the proper use of Tense and Forms without which no grammar exercise can be done. In tense, apart from learning the past, present and future tense, they are to learn forms namely simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous tenses of each tense. Especially in simple tense, they are confused with the use of the third person singular subjects. Also the learners find much confusion when the auxiliary verbs are used in verb phrases. In passive construction altogether new rules applied much to trouble the second language learners with the primary auxiliaries. In the word order analogy, anomalous finites are not properly placed in the construction of the sentence. Thus the students show less interest in learning the grammar of English. In order to know the reasons for their disinterest for learning tense, and their difficulties in answering any test item pertaining to

Tense and Voice forms, the present study is undertaken for IX students.

**OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the study is to identify and analyze the errors made by the IX standard students in the usage of English Tenses with respect to gender, medium of instruction, levels of achievement in English, and type of tense.

**Hypotheses**

**The Following null hypotheses were tested for the study:**

H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error.

H<sub>0</sub>2: There is no significant difference between English medium and Tamil medium students with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error.

H<sub>0</sub>3: There is no significant difference between rural and urban students with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error.

**METHODOLOGY**

The present study made use of a random sample of 291 Ninth Grade students (92 boys and 192 girls) selected from different secondary schools in Coimbatore district (Tamil Nadu, India). The common errors committed by the students in using English Tenses were measured by using a 150 item English Tense Error Analysis Test (ETEAT) developed by the investigators. The data were analyzed by employing independent sample t-test with the help of SPSS.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The data collected by using ETEAT were subjected to descriptive analysis to estimate the arithmetic mean and standard deviation of the scores for total test as well as component tests viz., past tense, present tense, future tense, modals and anomalous infinite, for both boys and girls. The two-tailed test of significant differences between means was further applied to find out the significant differences, if any, between boys and girls in the errors in different tenses. The data and result of the analysis carried out is given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Comparison of Tense Errors made by Boys and Girls**

Gramatics	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	Sig.
Past Tense	Boys	92	25.18	4.67	0.82	NS
	Girls	199	24.72	3.91		
Present Tense	Boys	92	26.78	4.55	4.15	0.01
	Girls	199	24.18	5.76		
Future Tense	Boys	92	25.91	2.91	4.10	0.01
	Girls	199	24.10	4.48		
Modals	Boys	92	17.90	1.42	5.68	0.01
	Girls	199	16.70	2.11		
Anomalous Finites	Boys	92	16.61	2.03	1.84	NS
	Girls	199	16.07	2.88		
Total Tense Error	Boys	92	112.40	12.07	3.90	0.01
	Girls	199	105.78	15.96		

The obtained t-values presented in Table 1 reveals that there exist significant differences between boys and girls in the total score of tense errors ( $t = 3.90; p < 0.01$ ). This gender differences are found to exist in using present tense ( $t = 4.15; p < .01$ ), future tense  $t = 4.10; p < .01$ ), and the modalities ( $t = 5.68; p < .01$ ). In all these cases boys were found to make more errors compared to girls. The groups are, however, found to almost alike in making errors in past tense and anomalous finites.

The second basal variable considered in the study is the medium of instruction. The means ETEAT scores of English medium and Tamil medium students are compared by taking the scores in total and separately for the sub-tests. The data and result of the analysis are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Comparison of Tense Errors made by the Tamil and English Medium Students**

Gramatics	Medium	N	M	SD	t-value	Sig.
Past Tense	Tamil	181	26.19	3.62	7.36	0.01
	English	110	22.69	4.10		
Present Tense	Tamil	181	27.25	4.11	9.66	0.01
	English	110	21.30	5.61		
Future Tense	Tamil	181	26.14	2.68	7.62	0.01
	English	110	22.26	4.91		
Modals	Tamil	181	17.87	1.31	8.97	0.01
	English	110	15.77	2.23		
Anomalous Finites	Tamil	181	17.08	2.01	6.90	0.01
	English	110	14.86	2.99		
Total Tense Error	Tamil	181	114.55	10.21	10.60	0.01
	English	110	96.89	15.55		

As evident from Table 2, all the t-values obtained on comparing the tense errors of the secondary school students are significant at 0.01 level, showing that medium of instruction is a decisive factor in discriminating the secondary school students in terms of the tense errors they make. A closer observation of the mean ETEAT scores show that students from Tamil medium schools made more errors than their English medium counterparts.

In order to find out the differential effect of residential locale on errors in using tense in English, the mean scores on the English Tense Error Analysis Test, obtained by the rural and urban participants were compared by applying the t-test. The data and result of the analysis carried out in this context is given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Comparison of Tense Errors made by the Rural and Urban Students**

Gramatics	Locality	N	M	EDUCATION	t-value	Sig.
Past Tense	Rural	77	26.29	3.81	3.73	0.01
	Urban	214	24.35			
Present Tense	Rural	77	27.66	3.50	6.41	0.01

Future Tense	Urban	214	24.04	5.82	5.01	0.01
	Rural	77	26.19	2.41		
Modals	Urban	214	24.13	4.47	7.62	0.01
	Rural	77	18.18	1.18		
Anomalous Finites	Urban	214	16.68	2.08	4.94	0.01
	Rural	77	17.31	1.95		
Total	Urban	214	15.86	2.77	7.02	0.01
	Rural	77	115.64	9.12		
	Urban	214	105.08	15.90		

The result of the analysis given in Table 3 indicate that all the t-values obtained are greater than the critical value for significance at .01 level, showing that the rural and urban students differ significantly in making errors in using tense in English. Scrutiny of the mean ETEAT scores reveals that rural students committed more errors than the urban students.

**CONCLUSIONS**

1. There is a significant differential effect of gender in the total tense errors made by secondary school students. Significant differences between boys and girls exist in errors made in the use of present tense, future tense and modals. In all these cases, boys commit more mistakes than girls. No significant gender difference, however, was observed in the use of past tense as well as anomalous finites. The null hypothesis,  $H_01$  (there is no significant difference between boys and girls with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error) is, therefore, rejected.

2. The medium of instruction is a significant decisive factor in discriminating the ninth-grade students on the basis of the total tense errors they make in tense usage in English. The observed difference exists in a significant level in all the tense components considered. The Tamil medium students made more mistakes in all the tense components compared to their English medium counterparts. The hypothesis formulated in this context, viz.,  $H_02$  (there is no significant difference between English medium and Tamil medium students with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error) is, therefore, rejected.

3. Residential locale is found to have a significant influence on the correct usage of English tense. Comparison of rural and urban students produced a significant difference, which goes in favour of urban students. Compared to the urban students, the rural students made considerably more mistakes in the English Tense Error Analysis Test. The null hypothesis formulated in this context, viz.,  $H_03$  (there is no significant difference between rural and urban students with respect to the errors made in the usage of English tense such as past tense, present tense, future tense, modals, anomalous finites and in total tense error) is, hence, rejected.

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