

UNRAVELING THE INTRICACIES OF TENSE AND ASPECT OF TELUGU FOR AN EFFICACIOUS LEARNING OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Dealing with inflectional phrases in the context of teaching and learning setting requires a careful attention so as to demonstrate the complex domain of tense inflection. The strategies employed in teaching apart, the tense system of the L1 determines the learning of the system of L2 with either positive or negative evidences which in turn immensely influences the efficacy of teaching-learning practice of tense and aspect system. Languages that do not have a regular paradigm in terms of tense system and/or aspectual marking on the Verb Phrase (VP) overtly are many in number which obviously poses a challenge for the teacher dealing with the phenomenon. The paper concentrates on teaching simple, perfective and progressive aspect of English to learners from the Telugu linguistic community in whose language the tense system is not morphologically or clearly expressed. Finally, the paper suggestively proposes an analysis that comes to the aid of teaching-learning practice of the phenomenon of tense and aspect in second language learning classroom.

KEYWORDS: Aspect, Second Language Learning, Telugu Linguistic Group, Tense, Verbal Phrase (VP)

INTRODUCTION

Languages share many features in common which are, in other words, principles, and there are also parameters which determine the variability across languages as said in principles and parameter theory. Languages parameterize genetically or typologically and every language, being a unique mechanism in itself, needs a special treatment when dealing with its manifestations at different levels. The critical period, during which the acquisition of L1 takes place, establishes a language faculty in the mind of the learner from the lens of which the learner attempts to look at the system of L2. Since no two languages behave alike in all their forms and manifestations, even within the language family, the second language learning is undoubtedly an arduous process.

The derivational system, across languages, is not as abstruse as inflectional one for the tense inflection is not realized morphologically in the verbal phrase in many languages. In languages in which there is no any regular paradigm in terms of tense variation, past and non-past or future and non-future distinction is resorted to. As for aspect which is, in a way, an extension of tense, it is a substitute for tense indicating completion or non completion in languages that do not possess an overt tense morphology.

We will now take up tense phrases from Kannada which expresses a consistency in tense and aspect system.

Aspect	Present/Future	Past
Simple	baruttaane (he comes)	bandanu (he came)
Prog	baruttiddaane (he is coming)	baruttiddanu (he was coming)
Perf	bandiddaane (he has come)	bandiddanu (he had come)

(Nadimpalli, S.K., 2016)

In the aforementioned Kannada VPs, the inflection of tense and aspect is morphologically marked. L2/English learners from Kannada linguistic group find it easy enough to learn corresponding English expressions with a complete idea on tense and aspect.

On the other hand, Telugu, which is richer than Kannada morphologically, does not possess a clear, tense system and therefore scholars, in general, make future or non-future (Hariprasad, 1998) or past and non-past distinction through temporal adverbs. In other words, the adjuncts or adverbs determine the tense of the VP in Telugu.

- **(ninna)** atanu vaccaDu
(yesterday) he.nom come.pst. 3sm
He came yesterday
- **(ivaala)** atanu vaccaDu
(today) he. nom come. pst. 3s
He has come today.
- **(ninna)** atanu pustakamu caduvutunnaaDu
(yesterday) he nom book.acc read.prog. be. 3sm
He was reading a book yesterday.
- **(ippudu)** atanu pustakamu caduvutunnaaDu
(now) he. nom book.acc read. prog.be. 3sm
He is reading a book now.

The aforesaid expressions stand evident for us to arrive at a conclusion that Telugu does not have a morphologically realized tense system. In (1), the VP *vaccaDu* is taken to be in past tense based on the temporal adverb *ninna* 'yesterday' while the same VP in (2) is taken to be in the perfective aspect depending on the adjunct *ivaala* 'today'. Similarly, in (3) and (4), though there is a clear continuous aspect marked by the morpheme *tu* 'to be', it is devoid of tense specification in the absence of an adverb. In other words, in both (3) and (4) sentences, it is the adverbial phrase that supplies tense. Though it may sound to be complex for non native speakers of Telugu as to what tense a given sentence is in, the native speakers don't even feel that there is an abstract tense system that is realized through an adverbial phrase/linguistic support or contextual support.

Well, when it comes to learning English as L2, the Telugus find it a tough nut to crack to understand the inflectional phrase in English. The teachers, from the same linguistic background or another, need to explore ways in which the infection can be taught clearly. The present paper suggestively proposes those ways that ameliorate the teaching-learning process of inflectional phrase.

TEACHING TENSE AND ASPECT OF ENGLISH

As mentioned in the introduction, the abstract or unclear tense system in Telugu- a parametric variation- stymies the understanding of that of English. Since it is the temporal adverb or adjunct that determines the tense in Telugu, we need

to resort to the presence of adverbs so as to teach English. Aspect, an extended form of Tense is also not realized clearly in the absence of an adverb.

We will first look at the English sentences.

Set-1 (English)

Present Tense	Past Tense	Future Tense
I read books (Simple Aspect (SA))	I read books	I will read books
I am reading books (Progressive Aspect (PA))	I was reading books	I will be reading books
I have read books (Perfective Aspect (Perf. A))	I had read book	I will have read books
I have been reading books	I had been reading books	I will have been reading books

We will now take up the corresponding Telugu examples.

Set-2 (Telugu)

Sl. No.	Present Tense	Past Tense	Future Tense
1	nenu putakaalu caduvutaanu (SA)	nenu pustakaalu cadivaanu (SA)	nenu pustakaalu caduvutaanu (SA)
	I.nom books.acc read.pres.1s	I.nom books.acc read.pst.1s	I. nom books. acc read.fut. 1s
2	nenu pustakaalu caduvutunnaanu (PA)	nenu pustakaalu caduvutunnaanu (PA)	nenu pustakaalu caduvutuunTaanu (PA)
	I.nom books.acc read.pres.prog.1s	I.nom books.acc read.pst.prog.1s	I.nom books.acc read.prog.fut.be.1s
3	nenu pustakaalu cadivaanu (Perf. A)	nenu pustakaalu cadivaanu (Perf.A)	nenu pustakaalu cadivestaanu (Perf.A)
	I.nom books.acc read.pres.perf.1s	I.nom books.acc read.pst.perf.1s	I.nom books.acc read.fut.perf.1s

We will now make a comparison between the English sentences of three aspects –simple, continuous and perfect- on the set-1 and the corresponding counterparts of Telugu on the set-2 with a perspective to precisely determine the way the grammatical aspect is realized in both of them.

As discussed in the introduction part, the tense system is not morphologically realized on the verbal phrase (VP) in Telugu because of which many learners of English from the Telugu linguistic community mistake the English expressions of past reference to be present and vice versa. We will discard the supposed tense reference for two obvious reasons: the first one being future reference is in fact an extension of the present one and the second being the fact that Telugu allows only past and non-past in loose terms or completion and non-completion, which is a grammatical aspect.

The simple aspect (non-completion) present in Telugu is quite intelligible to all in its meaning as in (1) of (a) of set-2 but the sentence (1) of (b) of set-2, which has a reference of the completion of action, is ambiguous in its tense because of which, there arises a need for an adverb of time reference like *yesterday*, *today* and so on in order to express tense while teaching Telugu students the English tense system. The periphrastic construction of this kind in Telugu with an adverb can accurately direct the learners to past or present time of the action. Such a phenomenon requiring an adjunct of time reference doesn't exist in English since it has a clear, tense system that is realized on the VP as in 1 (a) and 1 (b) of set-1. Between the sentence 2 (b) of A of set-2 and 2 (b) of B of set-2 too, the tense reference is quite absent in Telugu and therefore an adverbial assistance is required for the learners of English while they make a match between the two languages in this respect.

As for the perfective aspect, the past and present expressions of tense are the same in Telugu as in 3 (c) of A of set-2. This phenomenon drives many English learners from Telugu group to mistake present perfect for past perfect and vice-versa. For this too, there requires an adverbial form so as to make the expressions semantically unambiguous.

CONCLUSIONS

‘The structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world.’

-Ronald Wardhaugh

As quoted above, the structural system of one’s mother tongue has its sway over the perception of the structural patterns of the target language which is ignored in the language classroom for the teaching is carried out in out and out direct method. It is undeniable that the learners make a comparison or match between the L1 and L2 with respect to whatever phonological, morphological and syntactic phenomenon of target language is taught in direct method. Keeping this in view, the teacher needs to shed some light on the mechanism of the L1 of the learners while dealing with L2, which can expose certain parametric variations present between them to the students.

As dealt with the system of tense and aspect in this paper, the English teacher needs to make sure that the learners from Telugu background supplement adverbial phrases to certain expressions in Telugu while they translate sentences from English to Telugu in order to obviate the problem of committing mistakes in terms of tense.

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