PERFECTIVE ASPECT OF VERBS IN ENGLISH & ODIA: A CONTRASTIVE

LINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

My work has aimed at making a comparative and contrastive study of the grammatical treatment of the perfective aspect of verbs in English and Oriya languages, and by that I have explored relevance of the study for the Odia learners of English as a Second Language or a foreign language. In my study I have used the principles and practices of both comparative and contrastive linguistics. Several such studies have been made between English and other oriental and European languages but a very minimal work has been done in this regard between English and Indian languages though some work has been found to have been done between Hindi and English, and Urdu and English but these studies have been limited to the study of form and pronunciation aspects only. My study, in my opinion, is a unique one as no work has been done so far, as has been found from the extensive study of literatures, with regard to comparative and contrastive study of the linguistic concept of the perfective aspect. Influence of L1 in learning a second language (English in our context of study) has largely been addressed in my research domain with the help of Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer principles and practices. After extensive study of grammaticalization of verbs forms, tense forms and aspectual forms of verbs of the both the languages, English and Odia, I have come to the conclusion that the perfective aspect in Odia differs in form and semantics from that of English which if appreciated by the teachers of English and are driven home to the learners of English in the vernacular medium schools will certainly help their students learn and use the language for communicating effectively.

KEYWORDS: Comparative and Contrastive Study, Perfective Aspect of Verbs, Review of Literature, Research Hypotheses, Research Methodology, Results and Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This study, investigates the conceptualization of the Perfective Aspect in Odia language, compares and contrasts the same with English in order to find the proximity of both the languages in form, semantic and pragmatic usages. The study will help the students whose home language is different to that of English and who often fail to catch up quickly with the academic subjects due to differences in the two languages as compared to their peers who speak English with high cognitive linguistic proficiency.

There are ample evidences to show that equal access to the prevailing curriculum and the development of the specific kinds of competence needed to learn successfully in different subjects or domains require time and forms of explicit linguistic support in English, particularly to those for whom the language of schooling is not English. At the same time there is a risk that the learner's progress in school may suffer if competence in the first language is not adequately developed in the first instance, which has been observed to be the case very often in view of extra emphasis laid on

learning of English, resulting in a 'subtractive' approach to plurilingual education. Modern time needs Indian learners to augment fluency and proficiency in English language so as to reach a level almost approximate to the native English speakers because of its elevated status as the international language of business, science, technology and other socio-cultural-diplomatic exchanges.

Long association of all Modern Indian Languages and English in all spheres of social, political, business and administrative contexts has led to development of an English language variety in India which best fits the definition of Inter-language of Larry Selinkar. Selinkar refers Inter-language as the type of language (or linguistic system) used by second and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a target language. Larry Selinker, an American professor of applied linguistics whose article "Inter-language" appeared in January 1972 issue of the journal *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* has proposed the *Inter-language pragmatics* which is the study of the ways in which non-native speakers acquire, comprehend, and use linguistic patterns (or speech acts) in a second or foreign language. Since learning was largely a question of acquiring a set of new language habits, most of the errors in this process of learning were ascribed to 'interference' and consequently a major part of applied linguistic research was devoted to comparing the mother tongue and the target language in order to predict and explain errors made by the learners of any particular language background.

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Historically it has been used to establish language genealogies. Contrastive Analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and early 1970s, as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviorist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study of Systemic functional linguistics of both English and Odia (one of the major Modern Indian Languages spoken in the Easter region of the Indian Sub-continent) and assessing their social semiotics is of paramount importance in order to let the native Odia people appreciate the similarities and dissimilarities of both Odia and English and build a strong linguistic foundation to facilitate acquisition of English language at the desired proficiency level. The term systemic refers to the view of language as "a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning", whereas the functional linguistics refers to the view that language is as it is because of what it has evolved to do (Michael Halliday) reflecting the multidimensional architecture of language expressing human experience and interpersonal relations.

All languages have resources for construing experience (the ideational component), resources for enacting humans' diverse and complex social relations (the interpersonal component), and resources for enabling these two kinds of meanings to come together in coherent text (the textual function). Each of the grammatical systems proposed by Halliday is related to these meta-functions. For instance, the grammatical system of 'mood' is considered to be centrally related to the expression of interpersonal meanings, 'process type' to the expression of experiential meanings, and 'theme' to the expression of textual meanings.

Review of literature has led me to understand that Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) is a major source of errors

in foreign language learning and use particularly in a context where the target language is a minority language like English in India. Both Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis in the field of linguistics studies have been trying to make useful pedagogical contribution. It is important to have the knowledge and skill of grammar in both the languages in a bi-lingual learning setting for meaningful communication. People may not pass the intended message meaningfully unless they arrange words in at least their minimum acceptable order and use appropriate forms. The notion a 'natural resource' for second language learning is now widely accepted with considerable support from experimental evidence. (Pit corder)

Although researchers have attempted to investigate the difficulty in the acquisition of English tense and aspect by the non-native learners of English particularly in the Indian sub-continent, the primary causes of learners' difficulty still remain unclear. However, research suggests that tense and aspect errors result from learners' lack of understanding of the referential relationships that exist between time reference and aspectual properties in association with their grammatical markers. In acquiring the English tense-aspect system, learners need to learn all the grammatical forms designated for all tense-aspect combinations. They also need to have clear conceptual understanding of the time reference and aspectual property encoded in each form in order to choose the one that best fits a certain situation. This probably explains why ESL/EFL learners struggle so much with understanding and producing the correct form of the verb for a particular situation.

For the second-language learner, the acquisition of meaning is arguably the most important task; meaning that it is the heart of a language and not the exotic sounds or elegant sentence structure. There are several types of meanings: lexical, grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic (Lexical meaning – meaning that is stored in our mental lexicon; Grammatical meaning – comes into consideration when calculating the meaning of a sentence; usually encoded in inflectional morphology, for example- ed for past simple and -'s for third person possessive; Pragmatic meaning – meaning that depends on context, requires knowledge of the world to decipher; for example, when someone asks on the phone, "Is Mike there?" he doesn't want to know if Mike is physically there; he wants to know if he can talk to Mike; Semantic meaning – word meaning); all contributing to the acquisition of the meaning integral to second language possession.

The theoretical foundations for what became known as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis were formulated in Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957). In this book, Lado claimed that "*those elements which are similar to* [the learner's] *native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult*". Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. This involved describing the languages (using structuralist linguistics), comparing them and predicting learning difficulties. During the 1960s, there was a widespread enthusiasm with this technique, manifested in the contrastive descriptions of several European languages. It was expected that once the areas of potential difficulty had been mapped out through Contrastive Analysis, it would be possible to design language courses more efficiently. Contrastive Analysis, along with Behaviorism and Structuralism exerted a profound effect on Second Language Acquisition curriculum design and language teacher education, and provided the theoretical pillars of Audio-Lingual Method.

While on this I have also reviewed Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar and its relevance to Second Language Acquisition. From the field of linguistics, the most influential theory by far has been Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar (UG). The UG model of principles, basic properties which all languages share, and parameters, properties which can vary between languages, has been the basis for much second-language research. From a UG perspective, learning the grammar of a second language is simply a matter of setting the correct parameters. Take the *pro-*

drop parameter, which dictates whether or not sentences must have a subject in order to be grammatically correct. This parameter can have two values: *positive*, in which case sentences do not necessarily need a subject, and *negative*, in which case subjects must be present.

In German the sentence "*Er spricht*" (he speaks) is grammatical, but the sentence "*Spricht*" (speaks) is ungrammatical. In Italian, however, the sentence "*Parla*" (speaks) is perfectly normal and grammatically correct (Cook, Vivian, 2008). A German speaker learning Italian would only need to deduce that subjects are optional from the language he hears, and then set his *pro-drop* parameter for Italian accordingly. Once he has set all the parameters in the language correctly, he can be said to have learnt Italian from a UG perspective, i.e. he will always produce perfectly correct Italian sentences. Universal Grammar also provides a succinct explanation for much of the phenomenon of language transfer. Spanish learners of English who make the mistake "Is raining" instead of "It is raining" have not yet set their *pro-drop* parameters correctly and are still using the same setting as in Spanish.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This study was instigated by the fact that the most effective materials for foreign language teaching are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. It is assumed that English language teaching in India and particularly in Odisha can be improved by comparing and contrasting the learner's native language (Odia) with the language to be learned (English). The main assumptions are summarized as below:

- First language acquisition and foreign language learning differ fundamentally, especially in those cases where the foreign language is learnt later than a mother tongue and on the basis of the full mastery of that mother tongue.

- Every language has its own specific structure. Similarities between the two languages will cause no difficulties ('positive transfer'), but differences will, due to 'negative transfer' (or 'interference'). The student's learning task can therefore roughly be defined as the sum of the differences between the two languages.

- A systematic comparison between mother tongue and foreign language to be learnt will reveal both similarities and contrasts.

- On the basis of such a comparison it will be possible to predict or even rank learning difficulties and to develop strategies (teaching materials, teaching techniques, etc.) for making foreign language teaching more efficient.

In this study I have looked at the definition of the concept of category and aspect, and then at the comparison and analysis of perfective aspect in English and Odia from the perspectives of form composition, meaning expression and specific use so as to find out the similarities and differences between them and to analyze the cause of differences, thus achieving a new understanding of English perfect aspect and Odia perfect aspect and also of the grammatical category of aspect.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by the natives. Influence of L1 in learning a second language has largely been addressed in the major research domain of

Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer. Most Indian learners of English face a great deal of difficulty in appreciating the aspect of the English verb tense forms and often use them wrongfully which in turn affects their communication.

With this problem as the back drop I have thought it worthwhile to undertake a comparative and contrastive study of the verb tense forms in both English and Odia to facilitate the effective teaching and learning of English Verb tense forms. My study therefore has a two-pronged approach: (1) Locating errors and (2) locating learners' difficulties. My research comprised of designing and development of suitable research instruments, identifying the participants, data collection and finally data analysis and conclusion with particular focus on the analysis of the verb forms, the tense forms and aspect and perfective aspect analysis

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In my study I have explored this phenomenon contributing to cross-linguistic perspectives. I have compared and contrasted perfective aspect interpretations in Odia and English. I have used a variety of predicate types and tested the predications of a semantic account of perfective interpretation, which predicts clear-cut differences between Odia and English as well as clear patterns for certain types of predicates. My result indicates that a semantic account in Odia is inadequate to capture speakers' interpretations of these perfectives, and suggest that a variety of factors, including contextual ones, may be at play.

Sample Results

English and Odia are of different language families. English belongs to the Indo-European Language Family, while Odia to the Indo Aryan Language Family. English is between an analytic language and a synthetic language, whereas Odia is the most typical analytic language. They are different at all levels, especially in terms of the form, meaning and function of grammatical categories. A comparison of English and Odia has revealed the similarities and differences between them, and deepen the understanding of Odia and English.

This contrastive study has shown us that English and Odia verb systems differ from each other at the morphological, lexical and syntactic levels with regard to expression of the perfective aspect. The research finds that the basic genus of Odia verbs is the combination of components which indicate verbal characteristics such as tense, aspect, voice, and mood, person and number which is not available in English in such elaboration as in Odia. As such, the Odia verbal system is quite elegant.

The most fundamental combination is aspect and tense/mood. Usually, an aspectual component (usually a participle) is combined with a copula (form of the verb "to be") to create a combination of aspect and tense/mood. The aspectual component does not indicate gender, and the copula indicates tense (and person, number, and mood).There are three basic aspects in Odia which by and large match with that English. Odia has a present perfect and past perfect in addition to the past perfective. Odia also has several verb forms which have no distinct aspect such as the future tense verbs and the imperative mood verbs.

Traditional English grammar regarded the prescriptive Latin grammar as a model, in which no distinction is made between tense and aspect, and only tense is emphasized while aspect is always ignored. It assumed that aspect is included in tense. There is no exaggeration that it is an oversight in the field of linguistics and leads us to a vague understanding of aspect and a confused use of terminology. As a result, we cannot explain scientifically and reasonably some grammatical

phenomena that are related with aspect.

It is observed that in English and Odia as well, aspect is first a grammatical category of verb. It presents the inner time structure of a certain event. Aspect is also observed to be different form tense: tense is used to describe the relationship between the time an action occurred or a state existed and the time of speaking, whereas aspect uses specific verb forms to show situations of action and process in a situation within a certain time and also to show methods for carrying out actions. For example, it can be used to indicate whether the action is going on or has been completed; whether it is continuous, transient or repetitive.

Aspect is also a semantic concept. Semantic aspect is the inherent property of the action expressed by verb or verb phrase. A verb itself contains the necessary time on which the action expressed by the verb rely, namely, the "implicit time". A verb has certain properties of aspect. Aspect property is the lexical-semantic category of English and Odia verbs, and it is the situation type of verb or verb centric phrase and it is about the type of the inner structure of situation, primary of the inner time structure. Grammatical aspect reveals the speaker's different ways of observance towards the inner time structure of the situation, while semantic aspect is determined by other constituents of the sentence. Thus we observe that both English and Odia seem to have a lot of similarities with regard to the lexical-semantic of aspect property.

In Odia, the simple perfective verb form (SV) can describe eating events with arbitrary endpoints. Odia has a second perfective, the complex verb form (CV). The main verb appears in bare root form, and is followed by a light verb in the perfective. This construction only describes events terminating at their natural endpoints. It is also observed that in Odia there is a need to invoke a new type of perfective, the neutral perfective which is realized as the Simple Perfective Verb (SV) form. It imposes bounded aspect on events, but not necessarily at their natural telic endpoint. I assume a homo-morph-ism approach; parts of the affected theme object are mapped onto parts of the event such that the theme object is affected incrementally as the event proceeds. For the neutral perfective, only part of the theme object need be affected.

To produce the natural end point reading of the Complex Verb Form (CV), a totality operator is used. When totality Operator is applied, the entirety of the object must be subjected to the event. This is the standard perfective type in English, but only arises with the presence of the light verb in Odia. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that the difference between Odia and English lies in whether the neutral perfective is available or not. Because it relies on homo-morph-ism, the neutral perfective accounts for the phenomenon of partial completion interpretations, but only in accomplishment predicates with incremental themes. This account makes several clear predictions: 1. Only accomplishment predicates involving an incremental theme should show the SV/CV distinction.2.Thepartial completion interpretation that arises with the SV should be one in which the theme is incrementally affected; 3. All predicates with incremental themes should behave uniformly in showing this distinction; 4.Clear distinctions are expected between Odia, which has the neutral perfective, and English, which does not.

CONCLUSIONS

The formation of the verbs in the perfective however differs with respect to inflections. Odia learners of English may benefit by an explicit knowledge of these differences between their language and English. By means of such a comparative and contrastive exposition of the perfective aspect of the verb tense forms of English and Odia is expected to result in an accelerated and effective acquisition of communicative competence in English by the Odia learners of English as a second language. Course designers and materials producers who design course and produce materials for Odia

speakers learning English as a second or a foreign language would also be benefited by the results of this study.

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