

Crosslinguistic influence versus intralingual interference : A pedagogically motivated investigation into the acquisition of the present perfect

Abstract

This paper discusses the extent to which both crosslinguistic and intralingual differences may be considered as factors causing errors committed by Malay learners in the acquisition of the present perfect which has been identified as an area of considerable difficulty in the learning of English grammar. Using elicitation procedures that probe into learners' intralingual and interlingual confusion, the researcher offers some useful data that can provide new insights into the design of activities appropriate to learners encountering difficulty in acquiring tenses. Percentages of errors made in the use of the present perfect, in particular, were analysed and explained by (1) identifying the differences between the subjects' mother tongue and the target language, (2) considering the subjects' tendency to use certain verb forms in various situations, and (3) referring to the rules governing its use in English. The findings suggest that a large portion of the errors can be ascribed to both crosslinguistic differences in the use of perfective verb phrases and intralingual difficulties in differentiating the temporal references of certain verb forms. Based on the findings, the researcher has come up with important recommendations on how the learning of the present perfect may be facilitated by comparisons and contrasts of the rules governing its use and how a different pattern of exercise that stimulates conscious internalisation of crosslinguistic and intralingual differences can be given to learners. © 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.