

# TENSE ERRORS OF SOME JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1. Orientation to the Problem

Learners of English are required to learn and master four skills, reading, writing, hearing, and speaking. Writing is particularly a difficult activity for Japanese learners of English, because it involves psychological, linguistic and cognitive aspects. In this study, English tense is to be explored as one of the problems of written language for Japanese learners of English. Quantitatively, errors of tense are not as many as those involving articles or agreement of subject and verb. However, errors of tense should not be regarded as less significant. They involve the logical process of mind, and if a writer confuses tense, a reader cannot often understand exactly what the writer wants to say.

### 2. Areas of Grammatical Weakness

Ney (1962) shows the distribution of errors in the analysis of the written English statements of Japanese students. His dissertation, *A morphological and Syntactic Analysis of English Composition written by Native Speakers of Japanese*, gives the following data:

Total Errors (Ney, Table 25, p. 203)<sup>2</sup>

The errors with verbals	14%
The errors with possessive words	18%
The errors with structure of phrase and clause	17%
Miscellaneous errors in morphology and syntax	6.4%
The errors with determiners	30.7%
The errors with plural morpheme	9.5%
The errors with the third singular	3.4%

In his research, determiners occupied one-third of the total errors and thus they were considered to be the weakest area of Japanese learners of English. However, if the frequency of determiners is taken into account, these errors in the use of determiners may not be such a significant problem as the figures suggest. Quality of errors may be considered as being more significant than quantity of errors.

### **3. Review of the Literature**

Studies of error analysis from the pedagogical point of view developed in English teaching beginning in the late sixties. Contrastive analysis had prevailed until that time with the aim of error prediction and subsequent avoidance. Contrastive analysts basing their viewpoint on behaviourism had assumed “interference” of the native language on the target language: language learners were assumed to carry over the patterns of the mother tongue into their target language when they used it. However, not all errors are the result of only one possible source of errors. Native language interference came to be considered as only one possible source of errors. The hypothesis that most errors were the result of interference from native language patterns became dubious.

In the early seventies, the cognitive process of first language acquisition came to be considered as the same as that used in second language learning. There was a shift in viewpoint among the investigators of second language acquisition (SLA) from behaviourism to mentalism mainly due to the influence of Chomsky. Chomsky (1965, 1981, 1986) claims that language acquisition is primarily the result of mental mechanisms that are specifically linguistic. He explains the language processing of the young child in terms of an independent language faculty, a language acquisition device that contains a knowledge of linguistic universals. This innate faculty makes it possible for the child to acquire the grammar of the language he is exposed to — a set of innate principles guides language processing. This set of principles is

called Universal Grammar, which is common to all natural languages and all language learners.

Chomsky's language acquisition device in first language acquisition has also been used to explain second language acquisition. The Universal Hypothesis, as Ellis (1985) explains, means that "the nature of the rules that learners construct is determined by the mental mechanisms responsible for language acquisition and use. In so far as these mechanisms are innate, first language acquisition and second language acquisition will proceed in the same way." This mentalistic view of the SLA investigators implies that SLA and first language acquisition both involve transitional competence.<sup>3</sup> Transitional competence or interlanguage, is the approximate processing system that learners construct on their way to the mastery of a target language. It represents the unstable state of a learner's version of a target language. In relation to transitional competence, the mentalists assume from the evidence of the morpheme studies that there is "natural" sequence of development in SLA.<sup>4</sup> The sequence of development is common to both first language acquisition and SLA, whereas the order of development is different. The morpheme studies seem to give strong evidence for this interlanguage hypothesis, but in order to make this more acceptable further studies are anticipated.

Chomsky's idea that a language acquisition device operates in first language acquisition has influenced the Universal Hypothesis of SLA. Chomsky (1986) distinguishes core language from periphery language, "where a core language is a system determined by fixing values for the parameters of Universal Grammar (UG) and the periphery is whatever is added on in the system actually represented in the mind/brain of a speaker-hearer." (in his page 147) The Universal Hypothesis states that second language learners find it easier to learn core grammar than language-specific rules. It also suggests that the effects of first language transfer may be restricted to noncore features.

The Universal Hypothesis used Chomsky's idea of "markedness" as SLA order. It is likely that the child learns unmarked rules before marked rules in first language acquisition, i.e. he constructs a core grammar before a peripheral grammar. The Universal Hypothesis considers that markedness factors can influence SLA and that the markedness scale is able to predict the order of development in SLA. Investigators of the Universal Hypothesis have given second language negation, *wh*-inversion, the aspectual system, and transitive-intransitive verbs as example of markedness factors of SLA. However, so far the study of UG is still progressing and has not yet been fully developed so that the distinction of marked/unmarked rules has not been shown as definite.

Zobl (1983, 1984) claims that learners fall back on their first language when the second language rule is obscure. He give two factors in which obscurity can arise. The first is when the second language is typologically inconsistent so that the universal implication patterns are broken – the learners try to resort to their first language, particularly if the equivalent in the first language is unmarked. The second cause of obscurity results from typological indeterminacy. This arises when the setting of a particular parameter is idiosyncratic, for example, the position of adverbs. Thus the Universal Hypothesis claims that the condition for transfer to take place is whether the target language rather than the first has a marked construction.

#### **4. The Purpose of Study**

Language-learners make errors. Errors let us know how much the learner has mastered. Errors are not only an important source of information about SLA but also a significant target of language teaching. There are two primary goals in this study. One goal is to explore the process of target language learning by studying a phenomenon of errors within a scientific framework that is consistent with both linguistic theory and learning theory. An other goal is pedagogical: to find errors leads to discovery of the

weak points of the language-learners. Teachers can then produce an effective remedial program based on an analysis of these errors.

## 5. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following are research questions.

- (1) When and where are tense errors made?
- (2) Is there "interference" of the mother tongue on the target language in tense errors?

The following hypotheses are given to answer the above questions:

Hypothesis 1: The English tense system involves complex periphrastic verb forms. These make it difficult for learners to master the tense system easily: not only are there syntactic complexities but also there are processing complexities.

Hypothesis 2: Limitation in the syntactic processing capability of learners may explain one reason for errors;

Hypothesis 3: Learners often cannot express explicitly certain grammatical forms even though they know them, that is have knowledge of them, so that "Intake will have more significance than interference of the first language."<sup>5</sup>

## 6. Overview of the Study

This chapter began with an orientation to the problem. Tense was noted as one grammatical weakness of Japanese learners of English because tense errors have qualitative significance though they are not as frequent as determiner errors. With linguistic innovation by Chomsky and the development of studies of second language acquisition and teaching, error analysis has changed. The hypothesis of "interference" of the native language has lost its creditability. In the recent studies of error analysis an "interlanguage" hypothesis has been proposed as an abstract development process of the learner. Selinker (1972) termed this as the systematic knowledge of a

second language which is independent of both the learner's first language and the target second language. The interlanguage hypothesis needs further study and more empirical proof of its existence. However, the Universal Hypothesis, which is the mentalistic interpretation of SLA proposed, provides a promising account of how the linguistic properties of the target second language and the learner's first language may influence the course of development. The Universal Hypothesis is adopted as a fundamental framework in this study.

## **CHAPTER 2. EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

### **1. The Methodology of Error Analysis**

Sridhar (1981, p. 222) gives the following as the stages in traditional error analysis.

- (1) Collection of data (either from a "free" composition by students on a given theme or from examination answers);
- (2) Identification of errors (labeling with varying degrees of precision depending on the linguistic sophistication brought to bear on the task, regarding the exact nature of the deviation, e.g. dangling preposition, anomalous sequence of tenses, etc.;
- (3) Classification into error types e.g. errors of agreement, articles, verb forms, etc.;
- (4) Statement of relative frequency of error types;
- (5) Identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language;
- (6) Therapy, e.g. remedial drills, lessons, etc.

Furthermore, other investigator (Dusková, 1969) included on or both of the following:

- (1) Analysis of the source of errors, e.g., mother tongue interference, over-generalization, inconsistencies in the spelling system of the target



language, etc.;

- (2) Determination of the degree of disturbance caused by the error, or the seriousness of the error in terms of communication, norm, etc.

With the inclusion of these two extra stages the scope of error analysis is broadened and gains greater relevance. Accordingly, the method of error analysis used in this study will follow Sridhar's outline and in addition employ the two stages given by Dusková and Rossipal.

There are two types of research, cross-sectional and longitudinal. The former divides subjects into some groups according to age or proficiency level and the attempts to determine a natural sequence of development in SLA. Although the morpheme studies previously mentioned adopted cross-sectional research, it has been criticized in that the determination of "accuracy order" does not always correspond to actual acquisition order. Also there is some danger in assuming that the results gained from independent groups represent the general development of language acquisition. Contrastively, longitudinal research tries to account for the gradual growth of competence in terms of the strategies used by a learner at different developmental points. Ellis (1981, p. 58) claims that longitudinal research has an advantage over cross-sectional research because it provides data from different points of time and therefore permits the construction of a reliable profile of the SLA of individual learners. However, its drawback is that it takes more time to collect data than cross-sectional research does. Accordingly, in spite of its defect the cross-sectional method is adopted in this study.

## 2. Test Methods

The students were assigned three types of test: free, mixed, and controlled.

### **2.1. Free tests**

Students were twice assigned homework: a letter (Test 1) and an essay (Test 4). The former was a pilot test to determine just what the problematic weakness of the students might be with regard to the use of English verb forms. This was assigned at the beginning of the academic year. The latter was designed to investigate the general weakpoints of the students in this area after a further year of study. The semantic content of the two tests were thus restricted. At the same time students would have to use their abstract knowledge of grammatical tense, and aspect and phase in a practical way while their focus was on communication.

### **2.2. Mixed tests**

In the mixed test which involved translating given Japanese sentences into the nearest English equivalents, students could freely choose words and combinations of them although the syntactical content was restricted and the verb forms strictly regulated. In this way it was thought that a better analysis of the student's real ability would be found, since they would be focusing on the communicative aspect of the task and thus firstly concerned with transferring the same message into English and secondly with finer grammatical points of tense, aspect and phase in the target language.

### **2.3. Controlled tests**

One of the merits of a controlled test is that examiners can get objective results easily, by restricting questions and answers to that particular theme that they wish to examine. However, this may not necessarily be a merit in determining the actual level of ability of the student: controlled tests evaluate the knowledge of the examinee with respect to a particular theme, in this case a grammatical rule, rather than the examinee's ability in applying this rule particularly. So there is a danger that the data obtained from the answers may be misleading. Furthermore, the students' knowledge

of a particular rule may not be accurately measured if examinees do not understand the actual test questions very well and what is expected of them. Because of these failings an attempt at compensating for any inconsistencies was made by uncontrolled or free tests.

It is often said that controlled tests are designed to investigate the students' abstract knowledge of rules of grammar rather the application of such rules in actual communication. Yet there is no denying the pedagogical convenience of controlled tests in relation to a method of learning a second language. Thus the three types of test — controlled, free and mixed — were employed to try to obtain an accurate representation of the students ability in this area.

### 3. The Experimental Design

The cross-sectional approach is adopted in this research. The following is part of the classroom schedule for the group of students chosen for this study.

Test 1: June 14, 1986,

Homework: a letter to a family in American about Kabuki

Test 2: July 5, 1986,

First term examination

(a) controlled test on the letter about Kabuki

(b) translation from Japanese into English

Test 3: November 25, 1986,

Second term examination

(a) controlled test

(b) translation into English from Japanese

Test 4: January 12, 1987,

Homework: an essay on "my friend"

(Writers had to refer to what they recently did.)

Test 5: January 27, 1987,

Third term examination

- (a) controlled test adopted from a narration taken from a textbook
- (b) construction test
- (c) paraphrase test of the subjunctive and the indicative moods
- (d) translation from Japanese into English

It can be seen that the schedule, which forms the basic framework for this study, includes two homework assignments. The homework was collected, corrected, and the errors recorded before it was handed back to the students. Subsequently, the errors with respect to tense were also collected from the three term examinations to form the raw data for the study.

#### 4. Diagnostic Test

The letter and essay homework assignments given on June 14 and January 12 respectively, were adopted from a textbook, *Revised Unicorn English Composition II-C* published by Buneido. The three term examinations were mainly dependent on this textbook, too. *A Shorter Guide to English Grammar*, Kaitakusha, was used as a reference book from the students' second year. Three chapters — those on tense, concord and sequence of tenses, and subjunctive use -- were assigned for review during the winter vacation.

Test 1, the first homework, was assigned as a pilot test. Students had to write a letter from an American student in Japan to his family in the U.S.A. about his experience at a Kabuki play. The opening three sentences of the letter were given in the textbook. The students were required to complete the letter. To make their task easier thirteen additional sentences were listed in the text as aids in the completion of the letter. The tenses of the verbs in these sentences included present, and past, as well as perfect forms, gerund, and "future" auxiliaries. The aim of this test was to determine the students' knowledge of tense at that time.

Test 1.

Dear everyone,

Last Friday I went to the *Kabuki* Theater. *Chusingura* was on. I had never seen *kabuki* before. *Kabuki* is full of traditions.

— HINTS —

1. *Kabuki* is very popular in Japan.
2. It appeared about 300 years ago.
3. It is very colorful.
4. There is singing, dancing and acting in *Kabuki* plays.
5. *Shamisen* is played.
6. Men play women's parts.
7. All actors wore heavy make-up.
8. The play lasted about three hours.
9. I will send you the English program.
10. I did not understand what the actors said.

Test 2 (a) was given as part of the first term examination. It was a controlled test on the same topic of *Kabuki* as Test 1. There were two aims, to ascertain and investigate the depth of the students' knowledge of tense, and to find any differences that occur as a result of the test being controlled rather than uncontrolled.

Test 2 (a)

Change the verb to the correct form and use the auxiliary verb if necessary. This is a letter from Kate to her family in America.

Dear everyone,

Last Friday I (1. go) to the *Kabuki* theater. *Chusingura* (2. be) on. I (3. never see) *Kabuki* before. *Kabuki* (4. be) full of traditions. It (5. appear) about 300 years ago, and (6. be) very popular in Japan. At first I (7. surprise) to see the actor's faces. All of them (8. wear) heavy make-up. They (9. speak) in a special way. I (10. mean) it (11. not sound) natural to me. I (12. not understand) what they (13. say) at all.

The play (14. last) about three hours. There (15. sing, dance, and act) in the play. It (16. be) so colorful that I (17. not feel) sleepy until the end.

I (18. send) you the English program in a few day. Please (19. write) me soon after reading it.

Yours,

Kate

Test (2b) contained three translation tests from Japanese to English. The aim of these was to examine the students' knowledge of tense, particularly the present tense in an adverbial clause (i) and subsequently the sequence of tenses in complex sentences (ii) and (iii).

Test 2 (b). Put into English.

- (i) 寒冷前線が北へうごけば、明日は晴れでしょう。

If the cold front moves north, tomorrow will be fine.

- (ii) 東京の道路がニューヨークのそれと同じくらい混んでいるとは思わなかった。

I didn't think/never thought that the streets in Tokyo were/would be as crowded as those in New York.

- (iii) その日に嵐がくるとは我々のうち誰も考えなかった。

None of us thought that we would have a storm that day.

Test 3 was in three parts: (a) a paraphrase test changing a simple sentence to a complex one designed to discover the students level of attainment in using the past tense with a past adverb, (b) a translation test to examine how well the students can handle the tense form of a verb in a restrictive relative clause in a past context, and (c) a translation test to determine knowledge of the pastperfect phase, the pluperfect, in a past context involving one happening, or state subsequent to another.

## Test 3.

- (a) He seems to have finished his book report last night.

(Paraphrase the above sentence into a complex sentence with *it*.)

(answer) It seems that he (had) finished his book report last night.

- (b) Put into English.

1週間前に前の2倍の値段の新しい望遠鏡を買った。

A week ago I bought a new telescope which was twice as expensive as the old one.

- (c) Put into English.

レオナルド・ダ・ヴィンチが飛行機の設計図をかくまで人間は数世紀にもわたってただ飛ぶことを夢見続けていただけでした。

Before Leonardo da Vinci drew a plan for a flying machine, man had only been dreaming of flying for some centuries.

Test 4 is an essay test of about 100 words on “my friend”. Here students were required to include information on what they had recently done with friends. The aim of this essay was to examine students’ ability in differentiating the usage of present tense from past tenses.

## Test 4.

Write an essay on a title “my friend”, under the following conditions.

1. Include a strong point and a weak point of your friend.
2. Include what points you like about him or her.
3. Include what you did with your friend recently.

Test 5, the final term examination, was in 3 parts. The first part (a) was divided into two sections (ai) and (aii), which were both applied tests adopted from the textbook. (ai) was designed to examine knowledge of the use of modal auxiliaries in a dialogue. Previously, during regular class the students had been required to fill in blanks made in sentences, of a narrative with the same content as a dialogue that they had read in class and which was subsequently used for 5 (ai).

Test 5 (ai) Change the verb into the appropriate form and use auxiliary verbs if necessary.

A: I (1. go) shopping downtown now. Will you come along?

B: I want a tennis racket, but I (2. get) it next Sunday, I think.

A: Why not today? I want you to help me find a nice pair of shoes. You (3. have) such wonderful taste in the things you wear.

B: I don't have much taste in women's shoes.

A: If I were you, I (4. come). I (5. buy) you a racket if it (6. be) not too expensive.

B: Will you, really? Then I'll go.

A: Come on. The sooner we (7. start), the more time we (8. have) for shopping around.

The second part (aii) was a controlled test to examine tense forms of verbs in a narrative. As for its content, students were familiar with it to some extent since they had completed an essay in the classroom based on the same information given in a series of pictures in the textbook.

Essay

I had an amusing experience in France last year. After I left a small village in the south of France, I drove to the next town. On the way (                      ). I wondered (                      ) but I stopped. As soon as (                      ) in French. So I said (                      ), too. Then he asked (                      ). On the way we did not say anything. I could hardly speak French. When we reached the town, (                      ). We were very sorry we had not thought of each other as Englishmen.

Test 5 (aii) Change the verb into the appropriate form and use an auxiliary verb if necessary.

I (1. have) an amusing experience in France last year. After I (2. leave) a small village in the south of France, I (3. drive) to the next town. On the



way I (4. see) a gentleman standing beside the road (5. wave) his hand. As soon as he (6. get) into my car, he said good morning to me in French. So I said good morning in French, too. Then he asked me if I (7. take) him to the next town. So I said O.K. On the way we did not say anything. I could hardly speak French. When we reached the town, he asked me slowly in English if I (8. speak) English. We were very sorry we (9. not think) of each other as Englishmen.

The second part 5 (b), was a construction test using given words with the addition of one word. Here Japanese translations were provided as an aid.

Test 5 (b) Make a sentence adding one word.

if, he, he, had, acted, had, great, a, shock

彼はあたかも大きなショックを受けたかのようにふるまった。

The third part, 5 (c) was divided into two sections all involving paraphrase tests. In 5 (ci) a given subjunctive past sentence had to be rewritten with a verb in the indicative mood following the words *As he ...* 5 (cii), a given negative past sentence, had to be rewritten with an if-clause and subjunctive use of past tense verb forms. 5 (ciii) involved paraphrasing an affirmative sentence in the indicative into a negative one in the subjunctive. All the students had previously practiced both tests (cii) and (ciii) in the classroom. In addition, some students had practiced paraphrasing affirmative past tenses. The objective of including 5 (ci) (cii) and (ciii) in the final term examination was to examine the students' knowledge of tense switch and affirmative-negative logical switching.

Test 5 (c). Paraphrase each sentence.

- (i) If he were here now, he might tell us what to do.

(Begin with *As he...*)

(As he is not here now, he cannot tell us what to do.)

- (ii) She did not have enough money, so she did not buy the record.

(Use if...)

(If she had had enough money, she would have bought the record.)

(iii) The girl was in a yellow cap, so the driver noticed her.

(Use if...)

(If the girl had not been in a yellow cap, the driver would not have noticed her.)

Test 5 (d) was a translation test from Japanese into English. The aim of this was to determine whether students could use the past perfect form of a verb in a subjunctive sentence. They had already practiced this as an exercise in class.

Test 5 (d) Put into English.

私の甥は友人の助けがなかったら、事業に失敗していただろうとよく言う。

(My nephew often says that he would have failed in business without the friend's help.)

## 5. Subjects

The above three homework assignments were given to three classes of students. Each class consisted of about forty native Japanese male speakers in their third year of high school. (As such they were all in the 17-18 years age range.) Only a few students had studied in foreign countries at some time, but they were not so proficient in English as to be called bilingual. A difference in proficiency among the three classes could not be observed. All the students were enrolled in English II-C as part of their foreign language course requirements:

Required Course	Units* per year			Electric Course
	1st	2nd	3rd	
English I	4			speaking English
English II-1		3		reading in English
English II-2		2		writing in English
English II-A	4			German
English II-B			3	French
English II-C			2	
Special Course	(1)	(1)	(1)	

\*1 unit = 50 minutes a week

The four skills of hearing, speaking, reading, and writing are the goal of each course, but reading is the major goal of English I, II-1, and II-B, whereas writing is the major goal in English II-2, II-A, and II-C, although English II-A does include one unit for speaking English. Students in the third year can also choose one of the elective courses. The special course is obligatory for those students who do not attain a specified grade.

All the subjects of this study, then, had a writing course two hours a week in both their first and second year. In addition, some students were taking the elective course in writing for two hours a week.

During Test 2, 3, and 5, the term examinations, students were not permitted to use a dictionary. The instructions for each test were given in English, but students were allowed to ask questions on these instructions. As for the homework assignments, they were permitted to consult any source that they wished in order to write them.

Test 1 was returned to each student after the teacher had corrected the errors. As for Test 4, after the teacher had pointed out certain incorrect sentences, students in classes A and B were required to correct the errors by themselves. In class C students had to remedy their errors after the teacher had pointed out what kind of errors were made. Some students in classes A

and B asked the teacher and other students about the errors because they were unable to recognize them by themselves.

## CHAPTER 3. TEST RESULTS

### 1. Determination of Error

Corder (1967) argues that the notion of “error” is a function of the traditional practice of judging the learner’s performance from a teacher-centered viewpoint in terms of the norms of the target language. Sridhar (1981, p. 224) explains: “From the perspective of the language learner, the observed deviations are no more errors than the first approximations of a child learning this mother tongue are errors. Therefore errors show not only the process of first language acquisition but also the process of development of SAL.” In this study, not all deviances indicate developmental errors, even though an attempt has been made to find errors which show development of the learning process.

At this point, it is worthwhile deciding which deviances actually constitute errors. Errors have to be distinguished from mistakes. Sridhar (1981, p. 224). makes the distinction “mistakes are deviations due to performance factors such as memory limitations (e.g., mistakes in the sequence of tenses and agreement in long sentences), spelling pronunciations, fatigue, emotional strain, etc. while errors are systematic, consistent deviances characteristic of the learner’s linguistic system at a given stage of learning.” However, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a deviation is in fact an error or a mistake. Systematic errors are not so overtly observable as are mistakes even if data from subjects are collected longitudinally from several different examination sources. Sometimes the subjects will give correct responses, but other times they will give incorrect ones even though the questions asked contain the same grammatical factors. In spite of this difficulty, this study has attempted to make the distinction between mistakes and error in accordance with Sridhar’s definition.

## 2. Results

One aim of this study is to explore the proficiency of learners with respect to tense. Test 1 was a pilot test designed to know what type of errors were produced and what kind of errors were frequent. Test 1 was a letter which the students had to write by employing certain sentences given as an aid, and their own imagination, to construct a free composition in grammatical terms. It was expected, therefore, that different students would have different errors and that certain errors would be more common than others. Errors were first classified and then their number of occurrences recorded. Table 1 shows the errors that were made by the greatest numbers of students.

Table 1. Most typical tense error in Test 1. (An underline indicates the error.)

- (1) It is colorful because all actors wore heavy make-up.
- (2) It's a long time but I was not tired because of excitement.
- (3) There is singing, dancing, and acting, but I didn't understand what the actor said.

Table 1 shows 3 cases in which the tense is inconsistent with context. It seems that the students didn't notice that they had to change the tense of the verbs in the sentence given as aids.

Table 2 shows the 5 cases in Test 1 where tense sequence was violated.

Table 2. Violation of tense sequences in Test 1.

- (1) It appeared about 300 years ago, and it isn't change.
- (2) It was surprised that men play women's parts and all actors wore heavy make-up.
- (3) I felt very strange that there is no woman but men play women's parts.
- (4) When I saw it, I thought it is very colorful and strange.
- (5) I thought I don't think that I want to see Kabuki again.

Example (1) may not be called violation of tense sequence in a strict sense, since the verb is in the correct present tense – no account of the perfect aspect in the passive voice has been made – but it is included because the form is influenced by the tense of the former clause. In (3) the students forgot tense sequence in play while they gave the past verb form *wore* because in the textbook the former was given in the present verb form while the latter was given in the past form. It was thought that the students had insufficient knowledge of the usage of verb forms even though they had studied the grammar relationships involved in tense sequences.

Test 2 (a) was a reproduction test of Test 1. Errors were classified in accordance with the grammatical violation. Table 3 shows the percentage of appropriate answers with the most frequent incorrect verb form and its rate of occurrence.

Table 3. The rate of appropriate answers of Test 2 (a)<sup>6</sup>

Question Verb	Tense	Aspect Voice Phase	Cor/Incor. occurrence
19. write	present	active imper.	88
18. send	future simple	active	87
4. be	present simple	active	57 *was 36
10. mean	present simple	active	14 *meant 58
6. be	present simple	active perfect	34 is 36
2. be	past simple	active	87 was 5
16. be	past simple	active	99
1. go (+adv)	past simple	active	99
5. appear (+adv)	past simple	active	87
8. wear	past simple	active	81
9. speak	past simple	active	85
13. say	past simp/prog. simp.	active 77/12	89
14. last	past simple	active	71
11. sound (+neg)	past simple	active	45 other past form 16
12. understand (+neg)	past simple	active	89
17. feel (+neg)	past simple	active	61
7. surprise	past simple	passive	72
15. be	past continuous	active	40
3. see (+neg)	past	active perfect	58
Average			70

Table 3 shows some interesting results:

1. The verb form correctly given the least number of times was the present simple, in particular that for (10. mean). This suggest that students didn't notice that the form was to express the writer's present state of the mind. 58% of the students used past simple form, i.e., *I meant*.
2. The next verb form least correctly given was the present perfect of (6. be). Here it seems that students didn't notice the correlation be-



tween the tense of the verb in the preceding sentence and that within the compound sentence. These two results indicate that the students were unsure of the use of present tense within a narrative context.

Test 2 (b) was the translation of three sentence from Japanese into English. The aim of Test 2 (bi) was to examine the distribution of the present tense in an adverbial clause. The aim of Test 2 (biii) was to investigate the use past tense and the future auxiliary. Table 4 shows the percentage of correct answers in Test 2 together with the most typical errors.

Table 4. The Percentage of Correct Answers to Test 2b

Test Quest.	Sentence (*shows typical errors)	Attainment %
Test 2 (bi)	If the cold front <u>moves</u> , tomorrow <u>will</u> be fine.	78/76
	*move	*21
	*will move	*2
(bii)	I didn't think that the roads in Tokyo were . . . . .	60/37
	*I didn't think that the road in Tokyo is . . . . .	*20
(biii)	None of us thought that the storm would come that day.	98/44
	*None of us thought that the storm came that day.	*32

Here a few acceptable answers were approved as appropriate answers. Table 4 shows that in (bi) the most typical error was not one of tense or aspect, but rather one of omission — 3rd person singular suffix *s*. Incidentally, only three students out of 126 students used the auxiliary indicating future instead of the present simple form. The most frequently given incorrect answer to (bii) shows that some students have not yet learned tense agreement of verbs in a complex sentences. This is also the case in (biii) where students didn't notice that an auxiliary verb to express future time was required. The results of Test 2b (i-iii) show a higher percentage of

correct answers for verb forms in the matrix sentence, 82% on average, than for Test 2 (a), 70% on average, but a lower attainment rate for those in the subordinate clause, 57% on average. This may be due to the complexity of Test 2 (b). Test 2 (a) involves the formulation of the correct verb form within a given English text. Test 2 (b) involves this, but only after translating a Japanese text into English with appropriately correct semantics, word order, and spelling. The task was more complex because of this.

Test 3 (a), a paraphrase test involving changing a simple sentence to a complex one, was to explore competence in use of the past simple together with an adverb indicating past time. Test 3 (b), a translation test from Japanese, was to examine competence level with respect to tense sequence in a relative clause. Test 3 (c), a translation test from Japanese, was to examine competence in use of the past tense perfect aspect form of a verb. Table 5 shows the distribution of the results of Test 3.

Table 5. The distribution of the tenses in Test 3.

	Attainment %
Test 3 (a) past simple	30
It seems that he <u>finished</u> his book report last night.	
*present perfect (the dominant error)	*31
Test 3 (b) past relative clause	
A week ago I <u>bought</u> a new telescope which <u>was</u> twice as expensive as the old one.	100/18
Appropriate answers	48
*present relative clause (the dominant error)	*31
Test 3 (c) past perfect continuous	
Before Leonardo da Vinci <u>drew</u> a plan for a flying machine, man <u>had</u> only <u>been dreaming</u> of flying for some centuries.	98
Appropriate answers	58
*present perfect continuous (the dominant error)	3
	*11

In Test 3 (a), one-third of students seem to have ignored the significance of the time adverb *last night* and used the present perfect in the complex sentence as it was given in the stated simple sentence. In Test 3 (b) nearly half of the students avoided using a relative clause in their translations. Many students who did use a relative clause made an error. All students were familiar with tense sequence in a noun clause, but there were only a few who knew of tense sequence in an adjectival clause. In Test 3 (c) the results were slightly less for the verb forms in the subordinate clause, 61% compared to 66%.

Test 4 was an essay test. The data were classified according to grammatical categories; the incorrect answers made and their frequencies are listed below in Table 6.

Table 6. Total errors in Test 4.

	%			%	
articles	32	spelling	9	object drop	2
concord	15	structure	4	relative clause	1
tense	10	category	3	case	1
semantic appropriate	10	sg./pl.	3	deletion	0.2
preposition	9	conjunction	3	punctuation	0.2

There were 353 errors in all. Each essay was about 100 words long and was assigned to test the students' ability in use of past and present tenses. However, it should be noted that other errors were equally prominent, in particular those of categories, articles, concord, and prepositions.

As for tense, about one-third of such involved simple sentences with past time adverbs, while another one-third violated the rules of tense sequence in complex sentences. Table 7 shows their distribution.

Table 7. The distribution of tense errors

simple sentences with a past adverb	35%
complex sentence with tense sequence	35%
context (present tense in past time)	23%
subjunctive mood	7%

Test 5 (ai) examined the use of modal auxiliaries in a dialogue. Table 8 shows the percentage rates of appropriate and inappropriate answers.

Table 8. The verb forms and their percentage of occurrences and answers

Attainment %		Attainment %	
(1) will go	32	(5) will buy	64
am going	36	*would/could buy	25
go	26	*buy	5
*goes	6	other	6
(2) will get	82	(6) is	62
am going to set	5	*were	25
*get	3	*was	6
other	10	other	13
(3) have	85	(7) start	72
must/may/can/have	6	*will start	11
*had	4	*started	11
		other	6
(4) would come	92	(8) have	48
*came	3	will/can/must have	36
*will come	2	*would have	5
*inappropriate	3	*had	5
		other	5

Table 8 shows that except in (5) more than 75% of the students gave appropriate answers where a verb form indicating future time was required, and that 91% of the students gave appropriate answers in (3) where the context demanded the present tense form of a verb. The reason for accuracy of verb forms where future time was indicated may be explained by question 4, where the correct answer was given by 92% of the students. This question involves the use of the auxiliary in a context where the subjunctive use must be predicted. The teaching of this had been greatly emphasized in the reading, writing, and grammar textbooks of the students in the second year of high school. Furthermore, their writing textbook for the third year contained four chapters at the end of the book, some 15 pages, which dealt with this feature, and they had reviewed it in their grammar books during the winter vacation prior to the test, so it may be said that they were highly aware of the verb form required in this question, and this supposition is somewhat born out by an examination of the errors made in questions (5) and (6) where only present tense forms are needed. Even so, approximately 25% of the students gave the past tense forms as if the context demanded subjunctive use of such. It seems that they were so conscious of the subjunctive use of past tense forms that they failed to differentiate this type of conditional sentence contexts, that is an unreal situation, from the regular type of conditional context, even though the latter is much more common.

Test 5 (aii) was designed to test knowledge of tense, voice, aspect and phase in a connected narrative. The students were familiar with the content of this narrative since they had to complete an essay based on a series of pictures showing events within the narrative. Table 9 shows the results of Test 5 (aii).

Table 9. The verb forms and their percentage of occurrences.

(1)	had	87%	(6)	got	90%
	*have had	6		had got	3
	*had had	3		*others	7
	*others	4	(7)	would take	44
(2)	left	63		*took	36
	had left	33		*had take	8
	*have left	2		*others	12
	*others	2	(8)	could speak	53
(3)	drove	61		spoke	26
	was driving	29		*can speak	8
	*drived	7		*others	13
	*had driven	5	(9)	had not thought	38
	*others	5		*didn't think	49
(4)	saw	93		*couldn't think	7
	could see	2		*other	16
	*have seen	2			
	*others	2			
(5)	waving	96			
	*waved	2			
	*others	2			

Table 9 shows that the vast majority of students could understand which verb form to use in a narrative passage set in past time. However, there was some confusion concerning the appropriate form in indirect speech in a past context, (7), as well as the use of the past form in (9), where the sequence of events determines a past perfect phase for the verb in the relative clause.

Table 5 (b) was a test in which students had to rearrange words and add one other to make a correct sentence. The objective was to determine whether they understood the use of past forms for the subjunctive.

Table 10 shows the sentences given as answers, together with the percentage rates.

Table 10. The results of Test 5 (b) (underline shows an added word)

	%
He acted <u>as</u> if he had had a great shock.	75
*He had acted as if he had a great shock.	17
*Others	8

75% of the students understood the subjunctive use of past tense forms in an *as if* clause. It is noteworthy that 17% used the past tense form of the auxiliary with the main verb before the *as if* clause. This indicates that they associated this subjunctive use with *as if* rather than with the unreality of the situation.

Test 5 (c) was a paraphrase test designed to test ability in switching the form of the verbs from past to present. The original sentence had been given in the textbook as an example of subjunctive usage. Table 11 shows the paraphrased sentences given as answers.

Table 11. Paraphrase Test 5 (ci)

	%
1. As he is not here now, he cannot tell us what do do.	78
2. *As he is here now, he may tell us what to do.	3
3. *As he is here now, he cannot tell . . . . .	2
4. *As he was not here, he couldn't tell . . . . .	2
5. *As he isn't here now, he may tell us . . . . .	2
6. *Others	17

78% of the students paraphrased the sentence correctly. Also another 9% switched tenses correctly but failed either to change the sentence from

negative to affirmative, 2, or to complete the logical switch between negative and affirmative, 3 and 5. 4 was a tense error.

Test 5 (cii) was a paraphrase test involving changing a negative indicative sentence into an affirmative subjunctive one. The students had practiced this kind of switch during regular class time and were familiar with this particular sentence. Table 12 shows the sentences given as answers for this test.

Table 12. Paraphrase Test 5 (cii)

	%
If she <u>had had</u> enough money, she <u>would have bought</u> the record.	79/72
*If she had had enough money, she <u>would/could buy</u> the record.	9
*If she <u>had</u> enough money, she <u>would buy</u> the record.	7/16
*Others	14

72% of the students made the switch correctly. Some 9% made the switch only in the apodosis and failed to make the tense switch in the protasis correctly. The error was in supplying the correct form of the auxiliary rather than one in logic.

The third paraphrase test 5 (ciii), involves changing affirmative indicative sentence into a negative subjunctive one. The students had previously practiced this kind of switch in class and this particular sentence. Table 13 shows the answers given.



Table 13. Paraphrase Test 5 (ciii)

	%
If the girl <u>had not been</u> in a yellow cap, the driver <u>would not have</u> noticed her.	79/77 74
*If the girl had not been in a yellow cap, the driver had not noticed her.	3
*If the girl had not been in a yellow cap, the driver would have noticed her.	2
*Others	21

Table 13 shows that 77% of the students paraphrased the sentence correctly. 2% of the students made a logical mistake involving the apodosis. Mistakes in tense switching were almost negligible.

Test 5 (d) was a translation test from Japanese designed to find out whether the students could use the past perfect form of the verb in a subjunctive sentence. Table 14 shows the answers given as translation.

Table 14. The answers of Translation Test 5 (d)

	%
My nephew often says that he would have failed in business but for/without his friend's help.	76
if his friend hadn't helped him.	73 } 92 19 }
*if his friends didn't help him	5

76% of the students gave the correct verb forms for the verb in the matrix sentence, whereas 92% gave correct answers for the dependant clause/noun phrase. 73% of the students opted for the noun phrase, meaning that only 27% of the students preferred to use a conditional clause with forms for past perfect phrase being used subjunctively. 19% of the students correctly gave these forms.

## CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

## 1.1. Present Tense Form for Present Time

Table 15. Present tense form for present time

sm/cm Test	Sentence	Attainment %
Simple 2a	4. Kabuki (is) full of traditions.	57
	(*was)	(*36)
	5. It (appeared) about 300 years ago, and	
	6. (has been) very popular in Japan.	34}
	(is)	36} 70
	(was)	5
Complex	10. I mean it . . . . .	14
	(*meant)	(*58)
3a	Paraphrase: He seems to have finished his book report last night.	
	It seems that he finished/had finished his book book report last night.	90
5ai	3. You (have) such wonderful taste in the things you wear.	85
	(*had)	(*4)
	7. The sooner we (start), the more time we (have/will have/can have).	72
		48/36/1 85 <sup>7</sup>
5ci	(paraphrase) If he were here now, he might tell us what to do.	
	As he is not here now, he cannot tell us what to do.	78
	No negative in the (matrix) clause	(*6)
	(embedded)	(*9)
	(either)	(*6)
	*As he was (not) here now	(*5)
	he told/didn't tell us. . .	(*4)
	*As he is here now, he may tell us what to do.	(*4)

The attainment levels for present tense forms for present time show much variation.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

Test 2a is a text in the form of a letter. The letter describes a previous visit to the Kabuki theatre. In sentence 10, where only 14% attainment was recorded, the greater majority of students did not realise that the writer of the letter is providing amplification now of the past experience for the benefit of the reader. The tense of the verb in the clause is relevant not to the experience of going to the theatre but to the state of affairs now, in which the writer is communicating to the reader. Many students were unaware of the necessity to switch tense forms to discriminate between the past experience of going to the theatre and the present state of affairs in the Kabuki theatre today. In sentence 6, 5% attainment level for the past tense form was obtained. But in this instance the forms are grammatically acceptable since they may suggest the writers point of view that Kabuki is not popular now.

In Test 5ai, sentence 3, there was 85% attainment. This test was based on a conversation occurring in present time. The state of affairs at this present time with which the content of sentence 3 is concerned is indicated not only by the main verb, but also by the verb in the relative clause.

Test 3a was a paraphrase test based on one simple sentence. The attainment level of 90% for the tense form of the verb in the matrix clause is a reflection that other textual considerations were not thought necessary. The students assumed that the verb forms would not change, even though an adverbial time phrase indicative of past time was present. In fact, 62% of the students ignored this and used present tense forms of the verb in the embedded clause.

In general, the students seem not to be aware of textual complications involved in reporting past events, and assumed that tense agreement

is the main factor in deciding which verb form to choose.

5ci is a paraphrase test requiring the students to change a subjunctive sentence into an indicative one. This required two operations: changing the verb forms, and the addition of negative forms. As such the margin for mistakes is greater since it is possible to make a mistake in either operation or even in both of them.

A figure of 9% was obtained for mistakes involving negatives missing from the embedded clauses, indicating that some students did not really understand the subjunctive use of the verbs in the given sentence. Indeed there were two major patterns here: 5% of the students did not understand that present tense forms were necessary and merely used the tense agreement rule to predict regular past tense forms in both clauses; another 4% understood that indicative forms were needed but did not use negatives in either clause.

## Factor 2. Tense agreement.

The mistaken tactic of relying on tense agreement of forms without consideration of existential relations is thought to be responsible for the varying levels of attainment in predicting present tense verb forms used for present time. This has led to almost contradictory attainment levels for verbs in similar syntactic constructions and with similar semantic and communicative functions, such as *mean* (14%) and *seems* (90%). These verbs are used here to present a comment in present time on an event in past time. As such relative time sequence is of importance.

## 1.2. Present Tense Forms for Future Time

### 1.2.1. Simple sentences

English does not have a future tense, often auxiliary verbs are used to express events relating to future time, which may be indicated as such by an adverbial phrase. Certain of the tests contained simple sentences wherein events were related to future time. The sentence reference numbers are

listed below with the correct auxiliary and main verb forms, as well as the adverbial phrases and the percentage of students who correctly wrote the answers.

Table 16. Present tense forms for future time in simple sentences

Test	Ques	Aux	Main	Adverb	Attainment %
2a	18	will	send	in a few days	87
5ai	1	will	go	now	32
		am	going		36 68
			go		26
	2	will	get	next Sunday	82
		am going to	get		5 87

In contrast to Table 15, the results for present tense forms for future time in simple sentences are highly consistent with a high level of attainment. This is thought to be due to the two factors of type of textual discourse and tense agreement.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

Test 2a was in the form of a letter being written in present time about a past event, and Test 5ai was a conversation occurring in present time essentially concerned with a future event.

In test 2a, although the topic of the letter was a past event, there was an 87% attainment level for question 18. This is considerably higher than that for present tense forms indicating present time. The inclusion of an adverbial time phrase referring to future time explains this higher attainment level. It serves as a reference point comparative to the time of writing.

In test 5a, sentence 2, there is also an adverbial time phrase which serves as a relative reference point comparative to the time of the conversation, and the attainment level is likewise 87%. Sentence 1,

however, is slightly different. The adverbial time phrase, “now” may suggest future time as in “from this time” or present time as in “at this time”. Therefore, a greater variety of answers should be expected, since the students have more choice in predicting. This is the case and the total attainment rate is relatively higher at 94%: 26% of the students who chose the “at this time” alternative, and 68% chose the “from now” one.

#### Factor 2. Tense agreement.

With present tense forms for future time in simple sentences, it was not necessary for the students to rely on the tense agreement tactic since adverbial time phrases were given which were suggestive of future events relative to present time. It is noteworthy, that given an adverbial time phrase with ambiguous reference, some 32% of the students avoided using present tense forms indicative of future time. Even so, given the adverbial time phrases the attainment levels, were much more consistent.

#### 1.2.2. Complex sentences

A complex sentence is composed of two clauses, matrix and embedded. The verb forms in the matrix are usually context dependent, but those in the embedded clause are often relative to the matrix verb forms, as shown in 1.1 above.

Table 17. Present tense forms for future time in complex sentences

	Attainment %
Test 2 (bi) translation from Japanese into English	
If the cold front <u>moves</u> north, tomorrow <u>will be</u> fine.	97/76
Test 5 (ai) I (5. will buy) you a racket if it (6. is) not too expensive.	64/62
(5. *could buy) (6. *were)	*25/25
The sooner we (7. start). the more time	72
we (8. have/will have/can have)	48/36/1 85

The attainment level for present tense forms for future time in complex sentences show less consistency and more variation than levels for these forms in simple sentences.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

Test 2bi was a translation exercise involving the translation of one complex sentence which included an adverbial time phrase, "tomorrow". Compared to the results in Table 16 for simple sentences with an adverbial time phrase the 76% attainment level is significantly lower. The factor influencing this seems to be that the exercise itself is more complex. All previous sentences given as reference involved paraphrasing a given sentence, or a verb as the context required. The semantic context was strictly controlled and students were able to focus only on the verb form which the context required. However, with translation the students main focus is on meaning with considerations of grammar subsumed to this. Translation is thus more complex.

In light of this, the attainment levels for Sai, 5 and 6 appear to be contradictory, for this test was a verb conversion test within a dialogue in present time. However, study of alternative answers reveals that while another 25% of the students recognize that the context calls for use of forms indicating future time, these same students mistook the context for one of unreal time demanding the subjunctive use of past tense forms. If the figures for mistaken subjunctive use are added to those for the correct indicative use, then the attainment level is much higher than for the translation test, being equivalent to the level for present tense forms in simple sentences shown in Table 16.

Factor 2. Tense agreement.

In Test 5ai, Questions 7 and 8, 37% of the students who gave correct answers had verb tense forms "have" and "start", agreeing in the matrix and embedded clauses. It is significant that only 36% of the students posited the form used for events in future time for the verb in the

clause. That is to say 49% of the students avoided using such forms. The comparatively low level of 72% attainment for forms in the embedded clause may well be the difficulty in recognizing this as such, as indicated by the 11% of students who used “will start” as if this were the matrix clause.

The factor of tense agreement in Test 2bi is compensated for by the adverbial time phrase “tomorrow”, and the embedded clause is identified by the conditional “if” in both Test 2bi and Test 5ai, Questions 5 and 6. The margin of error for present tense forms for future time in complex sentences is 20% for verbs in the matrix clause, and 24% for those in the embedded clause.

## 2. Past Tense Forms for Past Time

### 2.1. Simple sentences

Table 18. Past tense forms for past time

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %	
2a	2	Chusingura (was) on.	87	
	7	At first I (was surprised) to see the actor's faces.	72	
		(*surprised)	*24	96
	8	All of them (wore) heavy make-up.	66	
		(were wearing)	15	81
	9	They (spoke) in a special way.	84	
		(were speaking)	1	
			85	
	14	The play (lasted) about three hours.	71	
		(*had lasted)	*6	
		(*was lasting)	*5	*11 82
5aii	4	On the way I (saw) a gentleman . . .	93	
		(could see)	2	95



Table 18 suggests at first glance that there is some inconsistency in the attainment levels for past tense forms for past time in simple sentences without an adverbial time phrase. But if certain variables are considered the apparent inconsistency can be dispelled.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

Both Test 2a and 5aii were narratives of an experience in the past. However, there was a difference. The narrative in Test 2a, was being related in present time in the form of a letter, whereas the narrative in Test 5aii had no present time reference in relation to its telling. Thus the tense relation in Test 2a were more complex than those in 5aii, as we have already seen above. A similar feature in both is that those sentences which do not contain an adverbial time phrase will have verb tense and forms which are dependent, relatively on context and verb forms in sentences in the same environment. The inconsistency in the attainment levels is not due to this fact in any way.

Factor 2. Tense agreement.

As shown previously students appear to rely on tense agreement to predict forms when no indicator, such as an adverbial time phrase or the conditional marker “if”, is present. This appears to be a successful tactic except when consideration of temporal sequence is called for. Indeed, if consideration of passive voice, and progressive aspect are ignored the rate of attainment in Table 18 is much higher than is initially apparent. In Test 2a, Question 7. 24% of the students failed to consider passive voice as being called for. In Question 14, 6% of the students incorrectly posited passive voice, while 5% predicted aspect form. The time adverbial “about three hours”, and the semantic connotations of the verb “last” both suggest duration and may explain the use of the progressive aspect, and in part the abandoning of the tense agreement tactic.

If the variable features of passive voice, and progressive aspect are

discounted, and only the constant feature of past tense considered the attainment levels are in a range from 81% to 96%. This gives an error percentage level for past tense forms for past time in simple sentences of 13%.

Table 19. Past tense forms for past time in simple sentences

Test	Quest	Aux	Verb form	Adverb	Attainment %
2a	1		went	last Friday	99
	3	had	seen	never before	58
		(*have	seen)		*40
	5		appeared	300 years ago	87
5aii	1		had	last year	87

The attainment levels for past tense forms for past time in simple sentences containing an adverbial time phrase are consistently high, except for Question 3, Test 2a.

#### Factor 1. Type of textual discourse

Test 2a was in the form of a letter describing a visit to the Kabuki theatre prior to the act of writing the letter itself. This adverbial phrase in Question 1, "last Friday", clearly established the time relation of the visit with the writing of the letter. As for the phrase "300 years ago", this likewise establishes the foundation of the Kabuki theatre relative to the time of writing. However, the phrase "never before", in Question 3 does not show a time relation relative to the act of communication itself, but rather one relative to the act of visiting the Kabuki. In other words it shows relation of time prior to the event in the past. 42% of the students failed to recognize this.

Test 5aii was a temporal narrative set in past time. The phrase "last year" unequivocally sets the time relation to the time of narration.

## Factor 2. Tense agreement.

With an adverbial time phrase included within the simple sentences, students do not have to rely on the tense agreement tactic to determine that the verb forms required are those used for past tense. However, when given one associated with perfect phrase, 41% of the students ignore considerations of time sequentiality that relate the sentence to experience prior to the past event of going to the Kabuki theatre.

Students seem to be adopting the tactic of referring to the time adverb to determine tense, rather than considering the time relationships as such. The rate of error for this category was 16% overall.

Table 19 shows a level of attainment in predicting past tense forms for past time very similar to Table 17, except in Test 2 (a) Question 3, which shows a rate of attainment similar to Table 18. It would seem that a factor of complexity is involved. This is indeed the case for the appropriate form of the verb in this sentence is not just that of the past tense but also one of perfect phase. However, students were aided in ascertaining the correct forms by a given adverbial time phrase *never before*. In spite of this 42% were unable to predict the correct form. It seems, then that in simple sentences students are generally quite able to predict the correct verb forms but not to the same extent if the feature of phrase must be considered.

## 2.2. Complex sentences

### 2.2.1. Past tense forms for past time in complex sentences (without adverbials phrase)

Table 20. Past tense forms for past time in complex sentences

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %	
2a	10/11	I (mean) it (did not sound) natural to me.	14/61	
		(*meant) (*not to sound)	*58/*14	
	12/13	I (did not understand)	89	
		what they (said) at all.	77	
	16/17	(were saying)	12	89
		It (was) so colorful	99	
2bii		that I (did not feel) sleepy until the end.	61	
		(*could not feel)	*24	85
		(*had not felt)	*11	
		(translation) I didn't think	60	
		(never thought)	0	
		that the roads in Tokyo (were) as crowded	37	
		(would be)	0	
		(are)	8	45
		as those in New York.		
5aai	2/3	After I (had left) a small village	33	
		(left)	63	96
		in the south of France		
		I (drove) to the next town.	61	
		(was driving)	29	90
		6 As soon as he (got) into my car,	90	
5aai		(had got)	3	93
		he said good morning to me in French.		
	8	. . . he asked me slowly in English if I		
		(spoke) English.	26	
		(could speak)	53	79
		(*speak/can speak)	*12	
	9	We were very sorry we (had) not (thought)	38	
		(*did) (think)	46	
		(*could) (think)	7	53
		86		
5b	(rearrange)	of each other as Englishmen.		
		He acted as if he had had a great shock.	77	
		(*had acted)	*17	

The attainment rate for past tense forms for past time in complex sentences without an adverbial time phrase marker seems to vary considerably, in a range.

Factor 1. Types of textual discourse.

As mentioned before, in order to posit the correct verb forms for Question 10 and 11, Test 2a, the students must understand that the letter is being written in present time even though its content concerns an event in past time. The 58% attainment level for the positing of the past tense forms for the verb in the matrix clause indicates that many students have not really understood this fact. Furthermore, there is no adverbial time phrase marker serving to clarify the matter. In addition some of the students, at least 14%, have the infinitive form of the verb in the embedded clause which results in a different syntactic construction with a different meaning. This misunderstanding of the semantic importance of a different syntactic construction, wherein the subject of the embedded verb has been mistaken as the object of the main clause verb, together with the lack of an adverbial time phrase, coupled with ignorance of the forms being dictated by temporal sequence and the subsequent mistaken employment of tense agreement, are all thought to be relevant to the comparatively low attainment rate. In Questions 12/13, the tense is based on the actual event in the embedded clause occurring simultaneously in the past with the experience described in the matrix clause. An 89% attainment level was obtained. Likewise in 16/17, the tense of the verbs is related to two events which occurred simultaneously in past time. 85% of the students gave the correct verb forms in both clauses.

Test 2 bii, was a translation of one sentence. As mentioned earlier this is usually a more complex operation than conversion of a given verb form. The relatively low attainment rate for this seem to be related to the ambiguity of the Japanese sentence itself. It is a single sentence

without any contextual background. It also lacks any adverbial time phrase which would serve to place it temporally. Without these two factors it is very difficult to say that any one translation is correct, and that the attainment levels reflect the students real understanding of tense and verb form in English. Accordingly, the results of this are not included in this analysis.

Test 5a<sub>ii</sub>, was a narrative of a past event and was reported in past time. Questions 2/3 and 6, in Test 5a<sub>ii</sub> show a consistently high attainment level. This may due to the past time context of the narrative wherein events may be interpreted as occurring serially, so that the principle of tense agreement between the matrix and embedded clauses seems to operate and demands past tense forms. Thus Question 8 is context dependent, and with the use of an “if” marker there was a 79% attainment level. It is interesting to note that even given the context dependency, 12% of the students failed to recognize that this was an example of reported speech demanding past tense forms.

#### Factor 2. Tense agreement.

In Test 5a<sub>ii</sub>, Question 9, some 53% of the students failed to realise that the event described in the embedded clause had occurred prior to that in the main clause, and thus demanded forms showing not only past tense but also perfect phase. The 55% attainment level for incorrectly posited past tense forms may be related to the lack of an adverbial time phrase as marker and over-reliance on tense agreement, at the expense of considerations of time sequence.

This was also the case for Test 2a, 10/11. In Test 2a, 16/17 where application of tense agreement brings the correct forms, 11% of the students incorrectly posited past perfect phrase forms. The presence of the adverbial time phrase “until the end” may be associated with this, for “until” often occurs as a conjunction after perfect phrase forms which are in matrix clauses at the head of a subsequent embedded

clause. This is not so in 16/17, where the adverbial time phrase is at the end of the embedded clause.

### 2.2.2. Past tense forms for past time in complex sentences (with adverbial time phrase).

Table 21. Past tense forms for past time in complex sentences with an adverbial phrase.

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %
3a	(paraphrase)	It (seems) that	90
		(*seemed)	*6
		he (finished) his book report last night.	30
		(had finished)	8 38
3b	(translation)	A week ago, I (bought) a new telescope	100
		which (was/cost) twice as much as the old one.	18
		(*is/costs)	*31
3c	(translation)	For several centuries man (had) only dreamed	3
		(been dreaming) of flying	58 61
		before Leonardo da Vinci (drew) a plan	98
		for a flying machine.	

In spite of adverbial time phrases being included in the sentences to serve as markers of events in past time the attainment levels vary from 18 to 100%.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

The paraphrase test, 3a, has been explained in 4-2 above where 62% of the students ignored the past tense marker in the embedded clause and used present tense perfect phase forms agreeing with the tense of the matrix verb, as in the original sentence.

The translation, test 3b, contained an adverbial time phrase as marker of the matrix clause verb. This was so powerful that a 100% attainment

level was recorded. However, the attainment level for the verb forms in the embedded clause was only 18%. Two features characterize this low figure. One is that 38% avoided using an adjectival clause altogether, the other is that 39% incorrectly posited present tense forms, and failed to observe tense agreement required for adjectival clauses modifying an NP. It may be that they have failed to notice that it refers to one specific example of an object and not the object in general. The complicating feature here seems to be the nature of the text itself, a Japanese sentence.

Test 3c, is also a translation test. The 61% attainment level for the verb forms in the embedded clause seems low when compared to the 98% one for the verb in the matrix clause and in light of the adverbial time phrase "before". Actually, 11% of the students erred by only predicting present perfect phase forms, while 14% made the mistake of using only past tense forms which agreed with that in the matrix clause, and thus failed to observe time sequentiality.

#### Factor 2. Tense agreement.

The most distinctive feature of the forms given in Table 21 is the apparent reliance to a high level degree on the tense agreement tactic. In 3a, time sequentiality in the embedded clause was only considered by 38% of the students, 62% following the tense agreement tactic in spite of an adverbial time phrase marker suggesting the former. In Test 3c, the attainment level for past perfect forms was 61%, but here they occur in the matrix clause which precedes the embedded clause with the conjunction "before" at its head. The tactic may well be that which was erroneously applied in the embedded clause of 16/17, Test 2a by 11% of the students. Here its application to the matrix clause verb will provide the correct forms. Of note is that 14% erred by applying the tense agreement rule in both clauses. (See Chapter 3.)

The attainment level for Test 3b, a translation, seems to be enigmatic.



Application of the tense agreement rule to both clauses would give the correct past tense forms of the verbs. Yet, the attainment level was only 18% for those in the embedded clause. The nature of the embedded clause deserves consideration for it is the only example of an adjectival clause included in the tests. Many of the students, some 38% avoiding using this construction in their translations. 39% assumed that the verb tenses in such clauses are equivalent in both English and Japanese and gave incorrect present tense forms instead of using the tense agreement rule.

### 2.3. Past tense forms for future time in the past

As present tense forms are used to indicate events, states, and actions anticipated or predictable in the future, past tense forms are used to indicate such which were in past time, but after another relevant event, state, or action in the past.

Table 22. Past tense forms for future time in the past

Test	2bii (translation)	Attainment %
	None of us thought	98
	that the storm would come that day	44
	(*came)	(*32)
	(*come)	(*10)
5a	Then he asked me	
	if I (would take) him to the next town.	44
	(*took)	(*36)
	(*had taken)	(*8)
	(*take)	(*6)

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

The attainment levels for both sentences are quite consistent, regardless

of the different types of text used for the tests, with only a 44% attainment level for forms in the embedded clause.

#### Factor 2. Tense agreement.

A significant number of students have applied only tense agreement, and ignored time sequentiality wherein the event described in the embedded clause occurred later in time than the event in the matrix clause. In 2biii, the 56% level of non-attainment, and in 5aii, Question 7 the similar 56% level of non-attainment reflects the failure to understand this concept. The cause in both questions was caused by application of tense agreement in embedded clauses, 32% and 36% respectively. The average level of error for verb forms in the embedded clauses was 56%, due mainly to application of tense agreement.

### 2.4. Past tense forms for unreal time

Besides being used to indicate events, states and happenings which were in the past time, past tense forms are also used to indicate such in unreal time. In this paper this is referred to as subjunctive use of verb forms.

#### 2.4.1. Subjunctive use of past forms in unreal future time

Table 23. Subjunctive use of past forms in unreal future time

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %
5ai	4	If I were you, I (would come).	92

#### Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

Question 4, 5ai is contained in a dialogue taking part in present time. The high level of attainment seems to suggest that the predictability of the verb form was highly contextual. Indeed the form of the matrix verb is given indicating that subjunctive use is called for. Considering this, it is not surprising that the rate of attainment 5ai is so great.

Factor 2. Tense agreement.

Considerations of tense agreement application do not seem so important in 5ai, given the context in which it occurs. However, applying the tense agreement rule by analogy with present tense forms will provide the correct forms for this sentence.

#### **2.4.2. Subjunctive use of past forms in unreal past time**

As events in unreal future time are referred by use of certain auxiliary verb forms, those in unreal past time are likewise treated.

Table 24. Subjunctive use of past forms in unreal past time

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %
5b		(rearrange the words and then add one other (as) to form a grammatically correct sentence.)	
		He (acted) as if he (had had) a great shock.	75
		(*had acted) (*had)	*17
5cii	(paraphrase)	She did not have enough money, so she did not buy the record.	
		If she (had had) enough money,	79
		(*had)	*4
		she (would have bought) the record.	72
		(*would buy)	*9
5ciii	(paraphrase)	The girl was in a yellow cap, so the driver noticed her.	
		If the girl (had not been) in a yellow cap,	79
		the driver (would not have noticed) her.	77
		(*would not notice)	(*4)
		No negative in (matrix) clause	(*4)
		(embedded)	(*4)
		(both)	(*1)
		(either)	(*5)
5d	(translation)	My nephew often says that he (would have failed) in business	76
		(*would fail)	(*10)
		but for/without his friend's help	73
		if his friend had not helped him	19 92
		(*did not help)	(*5)

The attainment levels for past forms of verbs used to indicate unreal past time are very consistent with an average of 82% for those in the embedded clause and 75.5% for verb forms in the matrix clause.

**Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.**

The three paraphrase tests show little or no variation in attainment for the correct forms, but there are variations in the mistakes due to the slightly different nature of the tasks. In 5b the mistake was to place the auxiliary in the matrix clause instead of the embedded clause, thus violating time sequentiality. In 5b the mistake was in not supplying the correct forms for the verb in the matrix clause, those obscuring the notion of unreality.

In 5cii, the greatest mistake was to posit forms used to show indicative future in the past. In 5ciii, the biggest mistake was to omit a negative form in either of the clauses, thus destroying the logical relationship between them and the given sentence.

Test 5d, the translation test, has an exceptionally high attainment rate. However, the figures are marked by a preference not to use an embedded clause. 73% of the students preferred to avoid this construction.

**Factor 2. Tense agreement.**

Consideration of tense agreement does not seem relevant to the results of the subjunctive use of past tense forms in unreal past time. There are many single mistakes but few patterns of mistakes which may be called errors. The major-mistake is confusion of past tense forms with past perfect forms used to show future events in unreal past time, where the error level is 8% of the total answers (5cii, iii, d).

### **3. Phase**

Forms which are used to express the feature of perfect phase are those which contain a form of "have".

Table 25. Forms used to indicate perfect phase.

Test	Quest	Sentence	Attainment %	
2a	6	It appeared about 300 years ago, and (has been) very popular in Japan. (is) (was)	34 36 5	75
	3	I (had) never (seen) Kabuki before. (*have)	58 *40	98
3a	(para)	It seems that he (had finished) his book report last night.  (*has/have) (finished)	8  *56 (30)	64
3c	(trans)	For several centuries man (had) only (dreamed/been dreaming) of flying (*have) before Leonardo da Vinci (drew) a plan for a flying machine.	61 *11 (98)	72
5aii	2/3	After I (had left) a small village in the south of France, (left) I (drove) to the next town (was driving)	33 63 54 29	
	6	As soon as he (had got) into my car (got) he said good morning to me in French.	3 90	
5aiii	9	We were very sorry we (had) not (thought) of each other as Englishmen (*could) (*think) (*did) (*think)	38 (*7) (*49)	
5b	(rearr)	He acted as if he (had had) a great shock	77	
5ciii	(para)	If she (had had) enough money, she (would have bought) the record.	79 72	
5ciii		If the girl (had) not (been) in a yellow cap, the driver (would) not (have noticed) her.	79 77	
5d	(trans)	My nephew often says that he (would have failed) in business. (but for/without his friend's help) (if his friend had not helped) (*have)	76  73 19 *1	20

The attainment levels for perfect phase exhibit wide variation ranging from 3% to 98%. However, this wide range is not due just to error, but also to the previously mentioned feature of avoidance. Considering both these features the average level of attainment for perfect phase forms is 58%.

Factor 1. Type of textual discourse.

The paraphrase tests do not exhibit any avoidance features but show a consistent level of attainment for perfect phase forms, except for 3a. Considering the attainment levels for correct answers, avoidance seems to have taken place. In actual fact the alternative forms are those most likely to be predicted in this context given the adverbial time phrase “last night”. The high figure for phase attainment merely reflects the use of the tense agreement principle rather than any understanding of phase as a concept.

The two translation tests exhibit a 7% range of attainment for perfect phase forms, in the matrix clause. Prediction in 3c may be based on the assumption that the conjunction “before” is a marker of previous time. In 5d, the level of attainment for the verb forms in the embedded clause is only 20%. This is due to avoidance. 73% of the students opted for a construction made up of a prepositional phrase rather than a clause.

In the reported narrative, Test 5aii avoidance and error involving perfect phase forms are evident. In Questions 2/3 a 33% attainment level was achieved. In Question 6, a 3% attainment level was achieved. This narrative can be interpreted as a series of events in the past rather than a related sequence of happenings. This also serves to explain the low attainment figures for 9, where only 33% of the students gave forms indicating that the event described in the embedded clause happened before the relative experience stated in the matrix clause.

The other reported narrative, Test 2a, shows a great divergence in attainment levels for perfect phase forms. Both error and avoidance

particularize the figures of attainment. The narrative is being reported in present time, but the events described have already occurred, therefore the past perfect phrase forms should be used in Question 3, where the adverbial time phrase “before” serves as a marker of phase. In Question 6, there is no marker of phase as such. Avoidance figures of 41% were obtained here.

#### Factor 2. Tense agreement.

The application of the tense agreement feature is thought to be responsible for the 56% level of attainment for the error of positing present perfect phase forms in the paraphrase test 3a, and for the 56% level of error in positing past tense agreement also explains avoidance of past perfect forms in 5a<sub>ii</sub>, 2 and 6.

The average level of error attainment for all questions involving perfect phase forms was 28%.

Summarising the figures for perfect phase, it seems that the students do not fully understand the use of past tense perfect phase forms to indicate time sequentiality, to the same extent that they understand the subjunctive use of these to indicate past events in unreal time. Furthermore, as was previously stated in 4.2.4. some students confuse the subjunctive use with regular indicative use in certain contexts. However, if a time adverbial phrase strongly associated with perfect phase is given a higher attainment level can be expected, although factors of time sequentiality may be ignored.



# CHAPTER 5. TEST TYPES

Table 26. Test types and average attainment levels for verb forms.<sup>8</sup>

Test Type	Text Type	Sentence Type		Avoidance	
	Time Sequence	Simple	Complex	Matrix	Embed
Conversion					
2a	Present Narrative				
	Past Event	83	67	78	—
5ai	Present Dialogue				
	Fugure Event	91	78	86	—
5aai	Past Narrative				
	Past Event	91	83	69	—
	Average	90	76	78	—
Translation					
2bi	Present				
	Future Event		76	97	
2bii/iii	Past Time				
	Fugure Event		79	40	
3b	Past Time				
	Past Event (+Adj. clause)		100	18	48
3c	Past Time				
	Past Event		61	98	
5d	Past Time				
	Future Event		76	19	73
	Average		78	54	30
Paraphrase					
3a	Present Time				
	Past Event		90	38	
5b	Past Time				
	Unreal Event		75	75	
5ci	Present Time				
	Present Event		78	78	
5cii	Unreal Time				
	Presented Past Event		72	79	
5ciii	Unreal Time				
	Presented Past Event		77	79	
	Average		79	70	

## 1. Conversion Tests

The three conversion tests show consistently similar average attainment levels for verb forms occurring in simple sentences, and quite similar ones for those occurring in complex sentences.

The variation in the levels of attainment for complex sentences is specifically related to the type of event and the time sequence involved. The relatively lower attainment level for 2a matrix clause verb forms is due to the fact that the narrative is being told in present time, but the events described occurred in past time. A fact was ignored by some students.

Similarly, the lower attainment level for 5aii embedded clause verbs is related to the nature of the past time narrative and the sequence of events described: some events occurred prior, and some events occurred subsequent to other related events in past time. This aspect was likewise not considered by some students.

The relatively lower attainment levels for 2a matrix clause verbs and 5aii embedded clause verbs are thought then to be related to a lack of consideration for the time sequence of events described in the respective texts and its explication by different verb forms.

The comparatively high attainment level for verb forms in embedded clauses attained in 5ai is related to the events described in the present time dialogue, wherein present verb forms in the matrix clause described future time events, and those in the embedded clause describe present time events, states and happenings, so that the verb forms are all present simple tense. The nature of the dialogue itself, and the time sequence of events described in it are thought to be relevant to the higher attainment level in 5ai.

## 2. Translation Tests

The translation tests show much inconsistency in attainment levels in both matrix and embedded clause verb forms.

The relatively lower level of attainment for matrix clause verb forms in

3c is thought to be due to lack of consideration for the relationship between time sequence and verb form in English. The largest number of mistakes concerned the correct positing of perfect phase as suggested by an adverbial time phrase in the matrix clause, but the incorrect use of present phase forms. The second largest number of mistakes involved positing past tense forms instead of past perfect phase forms. Both these mistakes reveal a lack of consideration for time sequence: the state of affairs described in the matrix clause existed prior to the event stated in the embedded clause. Verb forms in Japanese do not explicitly reflect this relationship.

In contrast, there was 100% attainment for the verb form in the matrix clause of 3b. An adverbial time phrase indicating past time was included in the sentence and the event stated in the matrix did not have to be related temporally to the state of affairs given in the embedded clause as in 3c. Thus with a marker of past time no necessity to consider time sequence and all the students were able to posit the correct past tense form of the verb in the matrix.

However, this was not the case for the verb in the embedded clause. Unlike other embedded clauses in any of the tests, this was the only example of an adjectival relative clause. The low attainment level for the verb forms in this clause is distinguished by avoidance of the relative clause itself in favor of a prepositional noun phrase as given in the Japanese sentence. The cause of the low attainment level appears to be related to the syntactical differences of Japanese and English.

In 5d, an even higher level of avoidance was recorded than in 3b. The reason seems not to be related to any syntactical difference between Japanese and English but rather to a familiarity with this construction which was contained in similar sentences in the student textbooks. In light of this it is significant that some 25% of the students did opt for the embedded clause alternative, with an 80% attainment level (19% overall).

The attainment level for 2bii/iii embedded clauses reflects the low

number of students who considered that the vent described in the embedded clause could occur subsequent to that non-state of mind given in the matrix clause. In 2bii, not one student considered this possibility, which is not explicitly shown in the Japanese sentence as it is in 2biii. In 2biii, lack of consideration for temporal sequence will give an incorrect translation. This is not the case for the ambiguous sentence 2bii.

Although the translation tests results vary greatly indicating the complexity of factors involved in the task, the overall attainment level for correct forms and avoidance alternatives compares favorably with the conversion test averages. A major feature of the variance is task related, choosing acceptable alternative syntactical constructions. Another feature is a lack of consideration for time sequence and its manifestation in verb forms.

### 3. Paraphrase Tests

The level of achievement of verb forms posited in the paraphrase tests was, except for 3a, very consistent.

Test 3a was a complex sentence with the verb form in the matrix clause the one for present tense and that in the embedded clause the one for either past tense or past perfect phase. A correct paraphrase involves understanding the relative time sequence — that a comment is being made now (matrix clause) on an event or state of affairs that existed previously (embedded clause). The majority of students did not seem to understand that this had to be reflected in the different forms of the verb. The low attainment level for the embedded clause verb forms reflects this failure.

### 4. Test Types and Attainment

The average levels of attainment for correct forms, including syntactical avoidance, in the three kinds of test were found to be quite consistent with each other.

In most cases, variance between test results of the same kind of test were found to be due to student error in not considering the relationship of time sequence and different verb forms. However, the varying results of the translation tests were also thought to be due to the nature of the task — its complexity — as well as the semantic ambiguity of the original sentence and the syntactic diversity of the Japanese sentences, resulting in avoidance of embedded clauses.

## CHAPTER 6. ATTAINMENT LEVELS OF VERB FORMS USED FOR TENSE AND PHASE

Table 27. Average attainment levels of verb forms used for tense and phase.

Tense	Preset			Past			Phase		
Time	Pres.	Fut.	Past	Fut. in past	Unr. Fut.	Unr. Past	Pres.	Past	Unr. Pa
S. type							(AV)		
sm. -adv	63		87				34 (41)		
+adv		81 (9)	83					58 (40)	
cm. -adv	M66	59 (10)	88	98	92	75			75
	E	71	69	44	—	64 (18)		23 (51)	64 (18)
cm. +adv	M78		81					61 (*11)	
	E78		69 (9)					88 (15)	
								(*56)	

Table 27 gives the average attainment levels for verb forms. It shows several general tendencies.

### 1. Tense

1. For present tense verb forms used to show present time in sentences without a time adverbial phrase the type of sentence does not seem to be significant, but the inclusion of a time adverb is associated with a higher level of attainment in clauses of complex sentences. However, compared to past tense verb forms used to show past time the attainment levels are much lower.

The factors influencing this attainment are thought to be: (1) a lack of consideration for past events being reported in present time, and (2) misuse of the tactic of making the tenses of verb in the same complex sentence agree, at the expense of time sequentiality, (3) inclusion of an adverbial time phrase.

2. For present tense verbs used to show future time the inclusion of an

adverbial time phrase seems to be significant since it serves to mark the time and suggests the tense form required. However, if this marker is ambiguous, e.g., now, meaning either “at this time”, of “from this time”, avoidance of the forms for future time may occur. Such avoidance serves to demonstrate that the adverbial time phrases serve as markers for the student in positing the verb forms.

Considering this, it is not surprising that the attainment level for these forms in complex sentences without an adverb is slightly lower. The matrix verb form attainment levels are consistent with those for forms in complex sentences which indicate present time. Avoidance also occurs when the sentence may be interpreted as an eternal truth (Test 5 (ai), 8).

The factors influencing attainment are: (1) the inclusion of an adverb, (2) the lack of an adverb, (3) reliance on the tense agreement tactic when either the adverb or the context may be interpreted ambiguously.

3. For past tense verb forms to show past time the average level of results is consistent whether an adverbial time phrase is present or not. The average results for all forms except those in the embedded clause of complex sentences vary within narrow range. These levels reflect the nature of contexts in which the sentences occur. Contrastively, the level of attainment for verbs in the embedded clauses, while consistent, is noticeably lower than those in the matrix clauses and the simple sentences.

The factors influencing attainment in (a) simple sentences are reliance on the tense agreement tactic except when adverbial time phrases and present. These may be so powerful that even tense agreement considerations are ignored.

The factors influencing attainment in (b) complex sentences are: (1) reliance on the tense agreement tactic which will give correct forms for most matrix verb forms, but in some embedded clauses may result in forms which do not reflect time sequentially, (5aii (9) and 3a), (2) avoidance of an adjectival relative clause in favor of a prepositional noun phrase, (3b).

4. The average attainment levels for past tense forms used to show an event occurring in future time in the past relative to a past event are based on only two text sentences for verb forms in embedded clauses, and only one test sentence for verb forms in matrix clauses. The average level of attainment for the latter is not then ideally representative. However, that for the former does have some significance since the type of tests in which the sentences were used, were different. In spite of this textual difference the same level of attainment was achieved for both sentences. This level of attainment was the lowest for any positing of verb forms.

It is of interest to note here that the attainment level for present tense forms used in the matrix clause to signify events occurring in future time is also relatively low, and distinguished by avoidance. In this connection, the results obtained from the translation test 2biii, although not included in the figures, have some significance. Not one instance of the use of past tense forms to indicate an event occurring in future time in the past was recorded, although this is a completely acceptable translation.

In light of this the lower level of attainment for past tense forms used in embedded clauses to show an event occurring in future time in the past is quite consistent.

The major factor influencing this low level of attainment was employment of the verb tense agreement tactic for forms in the embedded clause. This obscures the time sequence of events wherein that described in the latter clause occurs later in time than that stated in the matrix clause. (The sequence is reversed for present tense forms — the later event is stated in the matrix clause.)

5. Only one example of past tense forms used to express events in unreal future time in the past is given. This is in a matrix clause of a complex sentence. The embedded clause verb form is given. Employment of the tense agreement rule, by analogy with real future time in the present forms, will produce the correct verb forms. The high attainment level is thought to



reflect this.

6. The attainment levels for past tense forms used to show unreal past time events reflects the general tendency of the attainment levels for matrix clause verb forms being higher than those for embedded clause ones in complex sentences. However, the figure for unreal past time is a little distorted since the tactic of avoiding an embedded clause in favor of a prepositional noun phrase was employed in a translation test, 5d.

The factors influencing the results are (1) employment of the tense agreement tactic at the expense of perfect phase considerations (5cii, iii, d), (2) avoidance of an embedded clause, (3) misunderstanding of the use of "have" forms to show perfect phase as part of a time sequence (5b).

## 2. Phase

The average attainment levels for forms indicating perfect phase are lower than those forms indicating tense alone (not including unreal past tense forms.)

1. There was only one example of a simple sentence without an adverb where present perfect phase forms might be used. The level of attainment was much lower than present tense forms in general, and was marked by the feature of avoidance, which was greater than the attainment level.

2. For past perfect phase forms in simple sentences the feature of avoidance was not recorded. Quite the opposite, an attainment level of 98% was recorded for perfect phase forms in such syntactical constructions with an adverbial time phrase. However, a 40% level was attained for present perfect forms, when the context demanded past perfect phase. It seems that the adverbial time phrase was recognized as a marker of perfect phase, but that time sequentiality was not considered by many students.

The factor influencing the attainment level was the tactic of utilizing an adverbial time phrase as a marker of perfect phase without consideration of the temporal sequence of events described in the text itself.

3. In complex sentences without an adverbial time phrase the feature of the avoidance of perfect forms in embedded sentences in preference for past tense forms, in accordance with the tense agreement tactic (Saii, (2, 6, 9)) is very noticeable. This will give acceptable forms in 2 and 6 but unacceptable ones in 9.

4. In complex sentences with an adverbial time phrase the attainment levels for perfect phrase forms are affected in a contrary manner. In 3a the time phase suggests past tense so that there is avoidance of past phase forms, where in 3c it suggests perfect phase where a 72% attainment level is recorded for this feature, but only 61% have also considered temporal sequence and posited past perfect forms. The factor of tense agreement seems to be operative in 3a where in spite of the past tense marker 56% of the students posited present perfect forms agreeing with the present tense forms of the verb in the matrix sentence.

5. The use of perfect forms in past time contexts have been discussed in 5.1. above. It is of note that the attainment level for these forms is much better than for other perfect phase form uses and contexts. However, they still follow the general tendency of having lower average attainment levels than past tense forms in general.

6. The average attainment levels for perfect phase forms are marked by three distinguishing characteristics:

- 1) a relatively high level of avoidance
- 2) the positing of present phase forms instead of past ones
- 3) a consequent relatively low level of attainment compared to tense forms in general.

### 3. Time Sequence

The tactics of relying on tense agreement or adverbial time markers to posit verb forms are thought to be responsible for not only correct and incorrect verb forms which express the relative time sequence of events, but

also avoidance of such forms. This is reflected in the attainment levels for (a) matrix clause verbs in complex sentences using past tense forms to express future time events, (b) embedded clause verbs in complex sentences using past tense forms to express past time events relative to the past or future events relative to the past. It is also reflected in the average overall attainment levels for complex sentences in which the main clause verb is in the present tense, but the embedded clause has past tense verb forms to express past time events relative to the present.

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 2a. 10/11 I (mean) it (did not sound) natural to me.    | 14 |
| 3a. (paraphrase) It (seems) that he (finished) his book | 38 |
| report last night (had finished)                        |    |

Avoidance itself may even become a tactic when confronted with a confusing sequence of events. Rather than attempt to posit the verb forms in an embedded clause an alternative grammatical construction such as a prepositional noun phrase may be employed as in the translation tests 3d, and 5d.

The main cause of lack of attainment is postulated as failure to fully understand the use of certain verb forms to express the relative time sequence of events and states. As a result three tactics are employed:

- 1) positing a verb form agreeing in tense with another verb;
- 2) positing a verb form associated with a particular adverbial time phrase,
- 3) using grammatical structure which avoids positing a verb form associated with tense and phase, and relative time sequence.

Similarly, the main cause of attainment is thought to be due to employing:

- 1) the verb tense agreement tactic
- 2) the adverbial time phrase tactic
- 3) the clause avoidance tactic.

#### 4. Conclusion

The subjects of this study were native Japanese males aged 17/18 years old who were thought to be in a stage of transitional competence in the English language. That is they were learners who had constructed an approximate processing system on the way to complete mastery of English. As such it was implied that they had found it easier to master some features of English, because they were represented in core grammars, but had been finding it more difficult to master other features because these were English language-specific. Error would be more likely to occur in this English-language specific area due to the effects of first language transfer. The notion of marked was introduced to devote language-specific areas and that of obscurity was given to predict that first language transfer would take place when English, the target language, had a marked construction such as the tense and phase system, that the second language, Japanese did not. Thus it was hoped to explore the process of target language learning and discover the "weak points" of the language-learner.

It was hypothesized that the English tense system involved complex verb forms making it difficult to process, and it also involved syntactic complexities with regard to complex sentences that would also tax the learners processing ability, because even though they may not have been processed as grammatical input.

This study has followed these hypotheses to discover where and when tense error is made and to determine whether there is interference from Japanese language features responsible for such error.

Generally, the subjects of this study appear to understand the English verb tense system quite well particularly the use of past tense forms to show an action in past time. (In this respect Japanese is similar to English.) This is taken as being an unobscure feature of English grammar for Japanese first language speakers. This study shows that attainment for forms expressing perfect phase is much lower than the general attainment level for other

forms. This feature is English-language specific, as such it is a marked feature, and was hypothesized as being obscure for Japanese first language learners. Not only the attainment levels for perfect phase forms, but also the levels of avoidance of these indicate that this is indeed so.

However, it is not thought that obscurity of perfect phase forms alone is responsible for error. Perfect phase forms are used in English to show an existing condition or state of affairs relative to a specific point in time. Implicit in this is the indication of relative time sequence. In English the relative time sequence involves three time periods past – present – future, but there are only two tenses past and present. Auxiliary verbs are often employed to express future time. Perfect phase forms are used to show relative time sequentiality between and within the three time periods. However, they are not the only means of doing this. Relative time sequence may also be indicated by the simple use of present and past tense forms. Two sentences showing such a relationship were included in this study. The attainment levels for the verb forms in these sentences were the lowest recorded in this study. For this reason, together with the low attainment levels for perfect forms and the avoidance of such forms where other forms could be used, it is believed that the main cause of error is failure to understand the nature of time sequence and its manifestation in the tense and phase system of English. It seems that the notion of grammatical input, rather than first language interference has relevance here. But the notion of interference cannot be discredited completely. In the translation tests avoidance not of a particular verb form but of a syntactical construction, an embedded clause, in favor of a prepositional noun phrase was twice noted as a distinguishing feature. The reason was given to be in the case of Test 3b that the original Japanese sentence did not contain a relative adjectival clause. The low attainment level for the verb form in this clause is then thought to be syntactical interference through transfer of first language syntax.

The relatively high level of attainment then is not thought to due to a thorough understanding of the relationship between time sequence and tense/phase forms. It is thought that the majority of subjects relied on two very simple, but quite successful tactics to predict verb forms. These were to posit (1) a verb form agreeing in tense with another verb in the same sentence, or in a preceding or subsequent sentence, and (2) a verb form closely associated with a particular adverbial time phrase. These two tactics are thought to be responsible both for above average and below average attainment levels, except with regard to forms used to express unreal time relations. The attainment levels for these are generally higher than those for other perfect phase forms, yet the two tactics described above are not generally applicable for high attainment although tactic (1) does explain some of the mistakes. The anomaly can be explained by the amount of class time spent on this feature during the previous class year.

The error made by subjects in this study was a failure to understand relative time sequence and its relation to verb tense and phase forms. It is related to grammatical input. Avoidance taken by subjects in this study was responsible for positing alternative grammatically correct syntactical constructions and verb forms. This has relevance to first language interference. (cf. translation tests)

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## NOTES:

1. We would like to express our gratitude to Prof. E. Kobayashi, Prof. R. Linde, and Prof. M. Muraki.
2. Errors with verbals include past tense, participle morpheme, the omission of auxiliary, progressive tense, infinitive, gerund, and ellipsis in coordinate structures. Errors in the structure of phrases and clause include word order, and omission of subjects and object pronouns. Miscellaneous errors include category errors, comparative and superlative errors, and others like *much*, *many*, *vs.*, *a lot*, and usage of *hope*, *want*, and *wish*.
3. First Corder (1967) used "transitional competence" to refer to interim rule systems that learners develop in the process of SLA. Selinker (1972) refers to "interlanguage" which is almost identical in meaning. It is defined as the structurally systematic learner's version of target language. "In the early statement of the interlanguage hypothesis the learner is assumed to replace features of his mother tongue gradually as he acquires features of the target language. Therefore the interlanguage is a restructuring continuum. However, the empirical research changed this to a recreation continuum." (Ellis, 1985, p. 54) Corder (1981) claims that first language learning is a creative process and yields in the individual a purely developmental continuum, but second language learning in any particular individual is probably a mixture of varying proportions of the properties of restructuring and recreation.
4. Dulay and Burt (1975) provided the a acquisition hierarchy of second language in child second language acquisition.
5. Krashen (1981, 1982) meant "intake" when he stated that comprehensible input, a rule, is not a sufficient condition for SLA. Even if a grammatical rule is understood, it may not be processed by the learner's internal mechanisms.
6. This classification follows F.R. Palmer, *The English Verb* (Longman, 1965)
7. See 1.2.2. Table 17. Present tense forms for future time in complex

sentences.

8. The figures showing average attainment levels do not represent absolute values. They are used to show tendencies to highlight features only.