

Case study on the Analysis of Albanian Students' English Copular Clauses

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to analyze some difficulties that Albanian students face when using the English copular clauses.

The acquisition of a foreign language is not an easy process, but it is difficult and progressive. As a result, students have difficulties in this long journey of the learning process. Part of this journey is even the errors. Analyzing the latter ones, we understand that it is difficult to find their source, given that the errors of the students are of different natures. But, one of the main sources in the fallibility of linguistic rules is the influence of the mother tongue. This fact is already proven by researchers, as well as teachers involved in the teaching process of a foreign language. Through our studies, it emerged that Albanian students most frequently make errors in structures designed by copular constructions in English. This happens because the Albanian students use the English copular clauses, based on their linguistic intuition of the native language and not the rules of English grammar. The researcher was motivated to make a study on the kinds of errors that Albanian students make, while using these English linguistic constructions.

Key words: *Copular Clauses, Errors, Second Language Acquisition*

Introduction

Most of the researchers pay attention to the analysis of grammatical errors in the foreign language acquisition. Corder (1974:15) is among the first researchers who stress the importance of finding and correcting errors in students' written assignments or in communication. According to him, the errors are important for students. Errors are necessary during language acquisition, because fallibility is part of the learning process. Corder states that the difference between errors and mistakes lies on the fact that students' error is due to the lack of knowledge of grammatical rules, whereas students' mistake is due to their tiredness or lack of attention.

According to Norrish (1987:8); Richards (1973:97), errors' analysis offers us a clear view of

students' language development and gives us clear instructions to the learning process. Gass and Selinker (2001:6) are more critical of errors. According to them, errors reflect a lack of students' language skills. Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) describe errors as student's disabilities to acquire linguistic forms properly.

Ellis (1970:710) and Brown (2002: 220) distinguish cover and over errors. Cover errors are grammatically correct, but not interpretable in the context of communication, while overt ones are not statements formulated based on the grammatical rules. Ellis (1993: 879-903) connects kinds of errors to the level of students and types of activities. He says that beginners make more errors, because of the influence of mother tongue interference, while the most advanced students, due to lack of language skills or incorrect application of the rules. Nicole argues that the mother tongue interference affects not only the beginner level students, but also to those of advanced level.

Researchers emphasize the source of errors. Richards (1971) states that there are four sources of students' errors:

- Generalization of linguistic rules;
- Lack of knowledge of language rules;
- Incomplete implementation of linguistic rules;
- Linguistic concepts error obtained by the students.

In his later studies, in addition to these sources of errors students, Richards adds other types of errors sources as: the influence of native language, errors in the use of linguistic structures. In their research studies Kutz, Groden, Zamel (1993: 879-903) claim that the factors that influence students' errors are the translation of sentences from their native language to the foreign one, generalization of grammatical rules of the language and above all their uncertainty to express what they aim.

Saito and Beecken (1997: 363-370) argue that students make errors as a result of some pragmatic factors as:

- Teaching materials - teaching materials do not provide adequate information, as well as insufficient exercise and activities in the acquisition of a linguistic phenomenon.
- Method of teaching - Many teachers don't use appropriate methods in foreign language teaching process.
- The environment where a foreign language is studied - Classes are the only areas where a foreign language is acquired and where students develop their communication skills
- The ability of teachers - Many teachers are not trained enough to develop their communication skills in the foreign language that they teach students. As a result, the students have difficulties in communication process.

Laurell (1987: 367) classifies interlanguage errors as follows:

Linguistic subsystems	Examples of errors	Description	Category
Morphology	He was call. Why didn't you came to work?	Verb misapplication	The student who studies English as a second language acquisition hasn't acquired the past participle and the past simple of the verbs.
Syntax	What this is?	Word order misapplication	The student hasn't acquired the syntactic rules of the language.
Semantics	She is a sensible person.	Word substitution sensible / sensitive	The student is affected by the mother tongue interference in the use of vocabulary. French "sensible" English "sensitive"

Despite the various sources of students' errors, researchers and Methodist stop and discuss beyond the influence of the mother tongue in foreign language acquisition. The concept of "mother tongue interference" was further developed during the contrastive Analysis. The term mother tongue interference is used for the first time by Corder (1974: 15). Later Sharwood Smith (1986: 1-9.) used another term, cross-cultural influence, because according to him not only the mother tongue interferes in the use of a foreign language, but a third or fourth foreign language interferes as well.

Many studies have shown that students who acquire a second language make mostly misuse the morphological features of this language. It is believed that the cause of these errors is lack of some morphological features in their native language. Although some scholars reject this approach, they think students' errors associate with some difficulties that they encounter during the morphological and syntactic structures acquisition process.

Given her experience as a teacher of English, the researcher thinks that the errors of students are of different nature, so it is difficult to make a clear separation to their source. Studies conducted on the knowledge and use of morphological features in the second language by children and adults bring interesting data. Most of them are related to verbal inflections.

Lardier (1987: 367), after conducted his study, concluded that morphological knowledge of a second language acquisition does not affect the syntactic structures. He interviewed a girl who spoke, whose mother tongue was Chinese, and had been living in USA for more than 18 years. Lardier noticed that although the girl's English level was at a very advanced, she didn't

use the correct verb inflection in the third person singular number. Her accuracy in using the verb inflection was less than 5% and accuracy of syntactic structures was 100%.

Another study conducted by Hsieh Fu-Tsai (2009:46-57) considers the acquisition of inflection -s of the verb in the third person singular, -ed inflection of regular verbs, and use of copula "be". Participants in this study were twenty (20) students aged 11-14 years. The task of the students was to retell a story they had heard previously. Hsieh Fu-Tsai's study showed that only 17% of students had used the correct inflection of the third person singular, while 78% of students did not use the -s inflection after the verb. Meanwhile, 5% of students had used correctly -ed inflection and 95% of them did not use it to form the past tense. In the alignment of data on the use of copula in copular clauses, Hsieh Fu-Tsai noted that the percentages of using copula in sentences were higher than the rates of its absence.

A similar study, concerning the analysis of English copular clause errors, I conducted with Albanian students who learn English as a second language.

Research Methodology

Objectives

The aim of this study was to test the level of knowledge of Albanian students who learn English as a foreign language in relation to linguistic structures of copular clauses. Linguistic structures investigated were related to the acquisition of grammatical forms of verbs in copular clauses as the inflections of the present and past simple tenses, the use of auxiliary verb "do/ does" in a negative and interrogative sentences, subject and copula and the use of the predicative after the copula.

Participants

Participants in this study were forty-five (45) students. Twenty-five (25) students were at a beginner level, whereas twenty (20) of them were at intermediate level. The students' mother tongue was Albanian. Selection of students was completely random. Students were made known that their task would not be evaluated with a grade, but it simply would serve for study purposes.

Instruments

Instruments used in the study which helped in the collection of data were: observation of students and grammar exercises which consisted of predicational, specificational and identificational clauses.¹

In the first phase the students made a preliminary review of clauses features. In the second phase the students were provided with three exercises.

In the first exercise lacked the proper form of the verb in copular clauses. Each verb was given in brackets. The task of the students was:

¹ Copular clauses are classified into predicational, specificational and identificational clauses.

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- To use the copular verbs in their proper form;
 - To use the auxiliary verb do/ does in the interrogative form of copular clauses;
 - To use the proper form of the auxiliary verb do/does and negative particle "not " in negative form of the copular clause.

In the second exercise lacked the proper form of the past tense of the copular verbs. Each verb was given in brackets. The task of the students was:

- To use the copular verbs in brackets in the past tense;
- To use the auxiliary verb, "did" in the interrogative form of the copular clauses;
- To use the proper form of the auxiliary verb did and negative particle "not" in negative form of the copular clause.

In the third exercise lacked the proper form of the word after the copular verb. The words were given in brackets.

- The task of the students was precisely to select the correct form of the word after the copular verb.

Data analysis

The purpose of the exercises was enabling and the control of students' knowledge in the use of copular verbs in English. In general it was observed that students had sufficient knowledge on linguistic structures of copular verbs. But some other students reflected errors of different natures. Some of their errors witnessed the interference of Albanian language in English language acquisition. However it was observed that some of the students' errors testified for the lack of recognition of English morphological and-syntactic structures. The following tables present the exact number of student answers for each exercise.

Table 1. (Exercise I)

Total. No. St (45)	S (1)	S (2)	S (3)	S (4)	S (5)	S (6)	S (7)	S (8)	S (9)	S (10)	S (11)	S (12)
% Correct answers of beginner st. (25)	60%	69%	58%	60%	40%	65%	70%	72%	65%	69%	60%	60%
% Correct answers of intermediate st. (20)	98%	100%	80%	85%	60%	90%	91%	90%	92%	90%	95%	98%

Table 2. (Exercise II)

Total. No. St (45)	S (1)	S (2)	S (3)	S (4)	S (5)	S (6)
% Correct answers of beginner st. (25)	60%	45%	65%	69%	60%	40%
% Correct answers of intermediate st. (20)	90%	85%	95%	95%	90%	80%

Tabela 3. (Exercise III)

Total. No. St (45)	S (1)	S (2)	S (3)	S (4)	S (5)	S (6)	S (7)	S (8)
% Correct answers of beginner st. (25)	40%	10%	50%	43%	20%	40%	50%	60%
% Correct answers of	64%	35%	80%	70%	60%	80%	85%	85%

intermediate st. (20)								
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The data of table.1 shows that most of the students of beginner and intermediate level were successful in completing the exercise. However some of the beginners didn't use the inflection –s after the verb in the third person singular, whereas some others didn't use the auxiliary verb do/does in interrogative or negative copular clauses.

Analyzing table.2, it is observed that the same phenomenon occurred in exercise two. Some of the students didn't use the inflection –ed to form the past simple of the regular verbs and some others didn't use the auxiliary did in interrogative and negative copular clauses. The lack of use of English auxiliary verbs do/does/did from Albanian students is due to the interference of mother tongue as in Albanian and English languages, the syntactic structures are not alike.

Despite the rather small number of correct answers, I think that the errors are significant in number, if we consider that the first two exercises reflect a slight degree of difficulty.

Table 3. above presents the percentage of the correct answers of students in exercise three. Studying the data from this table, it is noticed that students have difficulties in distinguishing the part of speech. Most of the students did not manage to recognize the use the predicative after the copular verbs in predicational, specificational and identificational clauses.

During the correction of these exercises were observed these types of errors:

1.Errors in the use of predicational clauses

- Non-shifting of copula “be” in the initial position of copular clauses.
*Example: Andrew is a painter?**
 Correct form: Is Andrew a painter?
- Disuse of inflection –s in the third person singular.
*Example: Mr. Blake look too young for his age.**
 Correct form: Mr. Blake (look) too young for his age.
- Disuse of the auxiliary verbs do / does.
*Example: Look I fine?**
 Correct form: Do I look fine?
- Misuse of the auxiliary verb in the third person singular
*Example: Her voice don't sound peculiar on the phone.**
 Correct form: Her voice doesn't sound peculiar on the phone.
- The use of the auxiliary verb “does” in the third person plural.
*Example: They doesn't seem confused.**
 Correct form: They don't seem confused.
- Disuse of –ed inflection after the regular verbs in the past simple tense.

Example: She turn blue from the cold.*

Correct form: She turned blue from the cold.

- Disuse of the auxiliary verb “did” in interrogative copular clauses in the past

*Example: Looked your furniture new after being reupholstered?**

Correct form: Did your furniture look new after being reupholstered?

- The use of an adverb after the copular verbs.

*Example: You seem sadly.**

Correct form: You seem sad.

- Misuse of the possessive pronouns.

*Example: The fault was my.**

Correct form: The fault was mine.

- Disuse of indefinite article before a noun which has the function of predicative.

*Example: My mother is teacher.**

Correct form: My mother is a teacher.

- The use of indefinite article when not necessary

*Example: He became a president of this country**

Correct form: He became president of this country.

2. Errors in the use of specificational clauses

- Copula agreement to the noun positioned after the verb.

*Example: Our problem are the statistics.**

Correct form: Our problem is the statistics.

3. Errors in the use of identificational clauses:

- Misuse of the object pronoun after the copula ‘be’.

i.

*Example: Open the door. It is I.**

ii.

Correct form: Open the door. It is me.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through this study we conclude that the interference of the Albanian language in English language acquisition is inevitable and involuntary. We believe that the teacher plays a key role in overcoming the difficulties of students. It is important for the teacher to understand the source of errors and to explain them according to individual needs of each student.

The comparison of the native language to the foreign one when explaining the various language forms would facilitate student learning the grammatical structures of the second language. Contrastive analysis between Albanian and English language provides interesting data. This comparison highlights the differences and similarities between the two languages.

Discussion of some repeated errors in the learning process is important for students. Analysis

of errors that originate from the mother tongue interference helps students overcome difficulties related to linguistic structures. The teacher must know when and how Albanian language affects Albanian in English one. (S)he should not waste time trying to eliminate the use of native language in the class, but instead, the teacher should try to find ways how the native language could be beneficial in second language acquisition.

Appendix

Exercise 1

Put the verbs in brackets into their correct form in the present simple.

S1. I (look) fine.

_____?

S2. He (be) the best soccer player in the world.

_____.

S3. They (seem / not) confused.

_____.

S4. The food (taste) delicious.

_____.

S5. The cause (be / not) his excuses.

_____.

S6. Jenny (grow) taller every day.

_____.

S7. Andrew (be) a painter.

_____?

S8. The coat (look) too small for you.

_____.

S9. Her voice (sound / not) peculiar on the phone.

_____.

S10. Mr. Blake (look) too young for his age.

_____.

S11. Our problem (be) the statistics.

_____.

S12. This (be / not) my house.

_____.

Exercise 2

Put the verbs in brackets into their correct form in the past simple.

S1. She (turn) blue from the cold.

_____.

S2. Your furniture (look) new after being reupholstered.

_____?

S3. The foghorn (sound) strange in the darkness.

_____.

S4. They (remain) cheerful in spite of their hardships.

_____.

S5. Ken and Murray (stay) business partners for many successful years.

_____.

S6. Pierce (seem / not) upset.

_____.

Exercise 3

Choose the correct word in brackets.

S1. Open the door, please. It is _____. (I / me)

S2. He became _____ of this country. (a president / president)

S3. You seem _____. (sad / sadly)

S4. I found him _____. (careless / carelessly)

S5. That 's _____. (she / her)

S6. She is _____ beautiful. (extreme / extremely)

S7. My mother is _____ (a teacher / teacher)

S8. The fault was _____. (my, mine)

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