When It Makes Little or No Difference: The Influence of Instruction on the Acquisition of the English Past Tense among Tanzanian Learners

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Abstract
Much research on the acquisition of tense aspect morphology has been largely associated with learners of a foreign language being immersed in the target language environment. Interest in this area is gradually shifting towards gaining an understanding of instructed learners within the same boundaries but with limited focus on similar learners in a purely foreign language-learning environment. Moreover, studies have reported a relationship between pedagogy and the natural sequence of acquiring the English tense-aspect (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995b). Using narratives written by 309 study participants from a cross-section of Tanzanian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the study sought to determine whether the potential effect of instruction on Tanzanian learners is correlated with the appropriate use of the past tense and its pedagogical implications for Tanzanian learners of EFL. Generally, the study findings point out that there is a significant effect of instruction across groups of learners F (9,299) =39.776, p=.000 r=.54.However, post-hoc analysis showed that a number of the cross-sections were not significantly different from each other. Moreover, the data displayed distributional bias that can be attributed to the saliency and frequency of instruction on particular tenses.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL); language in Africa; language instruction; Tanzania

Introduction

The lack of ultimate attainment of the target language temporality has been well documented and explained by several scholars who have studied this phenomenon in non-native speakers as they learned various languages. For example, various studies have looked at Arabic and Moroccan English as a Second Language (ESL) learners of English (Bardovi-Harlig 1992a, 1994; Klein et al, 1995, Véronique, 1986), Spanish and Italian ESL learners of English (Schumann, 1987; Bardovi-Harlig, 1992b; Klein, 1995; Trévise, 1987) and other native speakers of languages such as Finnish, Portuguese, Swedish, French, Vietnamese, Turkish, Korean and Chinese as they learned English (Meisel, 1987; Sato, 1990). Very few studies have, in fact, been dedicated to investigating the same phenomena concerning native speakers of African languages. Some examples can be drawn from a study done on Chichewa, a language spoken in Malawi that investigated modality (Giacalone-Ramat, 2002), Tanzanian learners of English (Upor, 2009), and a more recent one on Ibibio learners of English (Willie, 2012). In many cases English language learning in a number of African countries is viewed as foreign language learning, i.e., EFL. This particular study intends to contribute to the general body of knowledge on language learning by investigating whether the development of tense-aspect[1] morphology in learners can provide empirical information to address three broad questions

[1]Tense-Aspect refers to the grammatical system in a language that covers the expression of tense (*the absolute location of an event or action in time, either the present or the past and it is marked by an inflection of the verb*) and aspect (*how an event or action is to be viewed with respect to time, rather than to its actual location in time– a single block of time, continuous flow of time, or repetitive occurrence*).

concerning foreign language learning: (1) Can foreign language attainment be measured by the tense-aspect of the verb: (2) Can the effects of foreign language instruction be seen in tense-aspect analysis? (3) Is tense-aspect of the verb a valid measurement of foreign language acquisition?

Drawing attention to the second question on the relative effect of instruction, arguments that surround this question tend to rely on the distinction of achievement in instructed EFL learners and uninstructed learners. On the one hand, Salaberry (2000a) makes a distinction between these two types of learners by defining uninstructed learners as natural learners, because language development occurs in the natural setting of communication of the target language (i.e. normal social interaction). On the other hand, he distinguishes two types of instructed learners: foreign language students (with access to classroom instruction only) and second language students (with access to both classroom and natural setting). For classroom learners in particular, language development occurs in an environment with access to different types of interactional settings and where there is no immediate need for the functional use of the second language. Analyses based on such distinctions provide information on the effect of differences in language input, formal and functional requirements, and interactional frameworks on the sequence and acquisition rate of target temporality and grammatical markers as well as their eventual attainment (Salaberry, 2000a; Weist, 1991).

The Tanzanian EFL environment is a predominantly foreign language learning setting. English language learning occurs almost entirely in the school environment with little functional requirement in the daily lives of the learners. Moreover, English enjoys the status of being one of the official languages of the country alongside Kiswahili and is used as a medium of instruction at the secondary school and tertiary level. With such a prominent status and prevalence, English can be regarded more like a second language by most Tanzanians rather than a foreign one. However, greater understanding is still needed of the processes involved in non-native speakers of English learning tense-aspect morphology. The practical significance of such a study would include gaining a new understanding of how the tense-aspect marker is acquired, which in turn could inform the instruction of EFL learning in the country. It is also suggested that the selection of inappropriate pedagogical intervention and its timing must follow the stages in which learners develop inflectional morphology (Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995).

A study on how the English tense-aspect is acquired by Tanzanian EFL learners is important precisely because this type of analysis has not been done. Previous studies aimed at language learning have focused on how class-related activities and methods enhanced achievement in learning a second language (Komunte, 1995; Brock-Utne, 2004; Qorro, 2012; Vuzo, 2012). The present study is important for the following reasons: (1) no empirical study has been done which addresses how tense-aspect morphology is acquired by Tanzanian EFL learners, (2) the present study provides a cross-sectional analysis of data that reflects the progression and achievement of tense-aspect, and (3) the study provides an analysis of tense-aspect across language tasks focusing on written tasks, i.e., narratives.

Problem Statement

The temporal categories of tense and aspect have received a lot of attention in linguistic literature. Emergence of the tense-aspect system of world languages has continued to be of significance to upcoming linguists who are interested in either first language acquisition or second language acquisition. For learners of foreign languages, and especially EFL learners in Tanzania, tense and aspect play a crucial role in their acquisition and use of the language since it features strongly in the

school curriculum. Regardless of the ubiquitous tense and aspect topics in the English syllabus, it is perceived and has been observed that much is yet to be understood about how these learners acquire English tense-aspect categories and how they put them to use. Although they continue to make use of these categories, errors are still evident even after years of education and exposure to them. A number of studies have been done to explain why learners' performance falls short in English language examinations, such as the following: 1) poor ability to converse in the language, 2) lack of fluency has been reported even among the few elites who make it to tertiary education, and 3) below average skills in using the language. These are some of the on-going consequences cited as the Tanzanian education system is trying to grapple with how to alleviate problems associated with the learning of the language that enjoys official status alongside the major lingua franca - Kiswahili (Rugemalira, 1990; Rubagumya, 1990; Yahya-Othman, 1990; Roy-Campbell, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2000; Brock-Utne, Desai & Qorro, 2006).

In general, conception of the limited success EFL has been associated with the language teaching and learning environment rather the whole education system. Other efforts aimed at gaining an understanding of the challenges of EFL have been restricted to debating the appropriateness of English as the medium of instruction (Batibo, 1990; Yahya-Othman, 1990; Roy-Campbell, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2000; Brock-Utne, Desai & Qorro, 2006). This leaves very little room for gaining an understanding of learners' capabilities and how they feature in providing an explanation for the lack of English language fluency in the country. Such an approach inadvertently takes the focus off the learner's linguistic ability. As one attempt to find a solution to the problem, it is thought important to amass studies that focus on deconstructing the Tanzanian language learner. This would demonstrate the importance of studying how learners acquire the English tense-aspect. Equally important is the need to find out whether a potential difference is made by the current English language instruction.

Literature Review

A review of previous empirical studies on the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology by mostly instructed learners provides preliminary support for the argument that second language learning and foreign language learning have more similarities than differences (VanPatten, 1990). These similarities have been highlighted by the similarity in the theoretical frameworks that have been used in the analysis and the data obtained. However, two interesting facts stand out.

First, tense-aspect marking is influenced by a number of factors, such as level of proficiency, individual variations, number and mode of language samples, subject selection, choice of task and nature of analysis, and first language (Shirai & Andersen, 1995; Weist, 2002; Robison, 1995; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995, Andersen, 1991; Giacalone-Ramat, 2002; Robison, 1995; Collins, 2005; Salaberry, 2000a, 2000b; Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Kecskés, 2000; Gass, 1990; Langacker, 1987; Di, 2005).

Secondly, it appears that tutored learners, like untutored learners, are sensitive to lexical aspectual class with respect to tense use, not only in the early stages of acquisition but at higher levels of proficiency as well. Instructed non-native learners appear to be more similar to child learners than to untutored adults who have studied previously. Classroom instruction cannot be dismissed and it seems unlikely that it could be the main factor determining the way in which learners associate form with meaning. There is evidence from three sources: 1) the environment of the learners; 2) the existence of similar patterns in other learners, and 3) general research on the influence of instruction

on acquisition (classroom-oriented research has argued that instruction can alter the rate but not the route of acquisition). It is important to note that, although instruction is referred to broadly, instruction is not homogenous with regard to type, setting, length or intensity of exposure. Although the findings suggest the influence of instruction, they cannot be generalised to all cases of instruction (Salaberry, 2000b; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Andersen, 1991; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig, 2000; Harley, 1989; Schmidt, 1990).

The Role of Instruction

Various studies on the acquisition of temporality indicate that, apart from factors such as lexical semantics and discourse grounding, instruction has a significant effect on the development of tense-aspect morphology (Salaberry, 2000b; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Andersen, 1991). However, other studies on classroom learning show that instruction on verbal morphology is associated with its extended use (Salaberry, 2000b). Aspect studies point out similar patterns across language learning environments, emphasising the similarity among learners and the crucially linguistic nature of the process of acquiring a second language, regardless of the background of the learners (Andersen & Shirai, 1994; Bardovi-Harlig, 1998; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995; Shirai, 1995; Hasbun, 1995). Bardovi-Harlig (2000) confirms that studies on temporal expression provide additional evidence for Gass's (1990) claim that second language acquisition is essentially the same psycho-linguistic process, regardless of the environment.

In terms of the pedagogical conditions, Salaberry (2000b) suggests that the instruction provided in verbal morphology has to reinforce the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology. He cites conditions provided by Kaplan (1987), Schmidt (1990) and Harley (1989), which are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Appropriate conditions for development of Tense-Aspect morphology through instruction

Kaplan (1987)	**Schimdt (1990)**	**Harley (1989)**
1. Frequency of instruction 2. Saliency of instruction 3. Sequence of instruction	1. Task demands 2. Frequency 3. Saliency of the feature 4. Individual skills & strategies 5. Expectation created by the native language	1. increased frequency and saliency in the input 2. appeal of students' meta-linguistic awareness 3. greater and more focused opportunities for output 4. goal-directed interaction in small group contexts

These authors seem to share similar sentiments concerning the appropriate pedagogical conditions for the acquisition of verbal morphology. Additionally, Harley (1989) points out that successful second language learning of past tense aspectual distinctions may depend on defining features of the target grammar structure and functional communicative demands of linguistic interaction.

There is no doubt that instruction can be a positive influence on the acquisition of a target-like tense-aspect system. However, it does not affect any change in the sequence of acquisition nor does it affect any form of skipping stages in the acquisition process. Instructed learners exhibit similar pragmatic and lexical stages of temporal expression to uninstructed learners. Although instructed and uninstructed learners enter a stage of morphological development, instructed learners seem to

go further in the same amount of time and it can therefore be concluded that the rate of acquisition is faster among instructed learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

Research Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional design. This design tends to amplify analytical issues which, although present in longitudinal studies, become more salient in cross-sectional studies. Emergence of a form tends to be easier to record in a longitudinal study, although typically cross-sectional designs have compared accuracy rates across levels of learners, thereby introducing a comparison between the target language and the developing inter-language. These differences are important in understanding what different studies reveal about the acquisition process. However, one difficulty that seems to remain with cross-sectional studies is the lack of true beginners in foreign language and second language settings. Like longitudinal studies, cross-sectional studies have the potential for demonstrating that the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology as part of the system of temporal expression is often a slow and gradual process (Bardovi-Harlig, 2000).

A total of 309 participants were selected from different education levels, i.e., primary school, secondary school and university. The sample obtained from primary schools included $2P^{ndP}$ grade students and $6P^{thP}$ grade students. The rationale for making this selection was based on the fact that first graders may not exhibit tense-aspect morphology since at the time of the study they were only in the sixth month of instruction. Secondly, the 7^{th} grade students were preparing for the national Primary School Leaving Examination (PLSE) and it was specifically requested that they be excluded from the study by the school authorities. The sample that was obtained from secondary schools included Form 2 students ($10P^{thP}$ Grade) and Form 4 students ($12P^{thP}$ Grade). A similar rationale to that of the $2P^{ndP}$ grade students applied to the Form 2 students, since Form 1 students had also received instruction in English as the medium of instruction for six months. The shift at that point was hypothesised in that it did not provide measurable effects since these incoming Form 1 students would have only been introduced to English as the medium of instruction for all subjects for only six months. However, it was possible this time to involve true final year students, i.e. Form 4 students, since their final school leaving exams were a number of months away, unlike the $7P^{thP}$ grade students who were expecting to take their exam in two months' time.

The sample obtained from the university included first-year and final-year students. It is important to note that the sample of primary and secondary school learners included participants from both Dar es Salaam region and Mara region, thereby representing urban and rural areas, respectively. This was intended so as to capture the differences between learners based on their locality as well as their experience of acquiring temporality, since rural conditions are considered less favourable for EFL learners than urban conditions. However, the university sample could not represent rural areas because most universities in the country are in urban or semi-urban locations. Table 2 provides a summary of the sample.

Table 2: Summary of Study Participants

Participants	N	Percent
$2P^{ndP}$ Grade Rural	30	9.7
$2P^{ndP}$ Grade Urban	33	10.7
$6P^{thP}$ Grade Rural	30	9.7
$6P^{thP}$ Grade Urban	30	9.7
Form Two Rural	31	10.0

Participants	N	Percent
Form Two Urban	30	9.7
Form Four Rural	30	9.7
Form Four Urban	30	9.7
First-Year Students	32	10.4
Second-Year Students	33	10.7
Total	**309**	**100.0**

One major experimental task was performed by the participants who were asked to write a narrative based on picture stories. Three excerpts from *Picture Stories* written by N. Radlov (1960) were selected for this study. The book *Picture stories* was first published in 1960 in almost all Indian languages and was easily available for a few rupees. The book contains child-friendly picture stories. As the stories are wordless with only a series of pictures, readers can make up their own linguistic representation of them. The participants were required to write a narrative based on the following three picture story excerpts (1) Two Foolish Goats, (2) Toy Rat, and (3) Bad Luck! (See Appendices). The selected excerpts were chosen for the following reasons. First, the picture story tasks were open-ended, requiring the students to write a narrative about the picture sequences, which means that the participants would look at the picture stories from an individual perspective. Secondly, the picture stories were ordered and depicted a series of sequential actions. Third, the picture stories were selected based on the assumption that the participants and the researcher were familiar with the content. All the picture stories involved animals that were common to the participants' environment *i.e. cat, dog, rat, goat*. Bardovi-Harlig (1995a) asserts that the use of a story whose content is known to both the researcher and participants makes the task of analysing inter-language data easier and more reliable.

Results

To further analyse the use of English tense-aspect morphology by Tanzanian EFL learners at different educational levels, a set of null and alternative hypotheses was operationalised.

HB_{0B}: The potential effect of instruction on Tanzanian EFL learners is independent of the appropriate use of past tense marking.

HB_{1B}: The potential effect of instruction on Tanzanian EFL learners is correlated with the appropriate use of past tense marking.

By focusing on the potential effect of instruction, this study relies on the fact that all its participants are classroom-instructed learners with limited contact with the target language outside their learning environment. To account for the potential effect of instruction, tests of significance were done to determine how they appropriately use morpho-syntactic marking of the past tense within and across group differences. To determine the tests of significance, appropriate past tense marking was coded based on the correct suppliance in obligatory contexts. Unlike other studies (Shirai, 1991; Salaberry, 2000b; Bardovi-Harlig & Reynolds, 1995) that have also researched the appropriate use of morpho-syntactic marking of temporality, this study has incorporated the use suppliance in obligatory contexts as a means of accurately marking appropriate use.

Before determining the potential effect of instruction, an ANOVA test was run to determine if there was a significant difference in the correct suppliance of the past tense among the participants in the study. Table 3 displays the results of a one-way ANOVA test of significance on the appropriate use of the past tense between groups.

Table 3: Results of ANOVA test of significance on past tense correct suppliance

Item	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	P
Between groups	9818.901	9	1090.989	39.776	.000P[*p]
Within Groups	8200.982	299	27.428		
Total	18019.883	308			

* Significant at .05

At an alpha of .05, the analysis of variance revealed a significant difference between the groups of participants, F (9,299)=39.776, p=.000 r=.54. Although the ANOVA results are significant, they do not express how the means of the groups are significantly different from each other. The Games-Howell test for multiple comparisons was employed to capture the difference in terms of the effect of instruction on the groups of participants. Table 4 presents a summary of multiple comparisons of means between each group.

Table 4: Games-Howell multiple comparison test for past tense correct suppliance

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2nd Grade Rural	2nd Grade Urban	.067	.046	.904	-.09	.23
	6th Grade Rural	-.533	.290	.706	-1.52	.45
	6th Grade Urban	-2.800*	.433	.000	-4.28	-1.32
	Form Two Rural	-2.578*	.463	.000	-4.15	-1.00
	Form Two Urban	-4.400*	.878	.001	-7.40	-1.40
	Form Four Rural	-4.367*	1.133	.018	-8.24	-.49
	Form Four Urban	-2.800	.822	.051	-5.61	.01
	First-Year Students	-15.340*	1.360	.000	-19.97	-10.71
	Final-Year Students	-15.600*	1.839	.000	-21.84	-9.36
2nd Grade Urban	2nd Grade Rural	-.067	.046	.904	-.23	.09
	6th Grade Rural	-.600	.286	.543	-1.58	.38
	6th Grade Urban	-2.867*	.431	.000	-4.34	-1.39
	Form Two Rural	-2.645*	.460	.000	-4.22	-1.07
	Form Two Urban	-4.467*	.877	.001	-7.47	-1.47
	Form Four Rural	-4.433*	1.132	.015	-8.31	-.56
	Form Four Urban	-2.867*	.820	.042	-5.67	-.06
	First-Year Students	-15.406*	1.359	.000	-20.03	-10.78
	Final-Year Students	-15.667*	1.838	.000	-21.91	-9.43
6th Grade Rural	2nd Grade Rural	.533	.290	.706	-.45	1.52
	2nd Grade Urban	.600	.286	.543	-.38	1.58
	6th Grade Urban	-2.267*	.517	.002	-3.98	-.56
	Form Two Rural	-2.045*	.542	.014	-3.84	-.25
	Form Two Urban	-3.867*	.923	.006	-6.98	-.75

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	Form Four Rural	-3.833	1.168	.064	-7.79	.13
	Form Four Urban	-2.267	.869	.250	-5.19	.66
	First-Year Students	-14.806*	1.389	.000	-19.50	-10.11
	Final-Year Students	-15.067*	1.860	.000	-21.36	-8.77
6th Grade Urban	2nd Grade Rural	2.800*	.433	.000	1.32	4.28
	2nd Grade Urban	2.867*	.431	.000	1.39	4.34
	6th Grade Rural	2.267*	.517	.002	.56	3.98
	Form Two Rural	.222	.630	1.000	-1.85	2.29
	Form Two Urban	-1.600	.977	.822	-4.86	1.66
	Form Four Rural	-1.567	1.211	.949	-5.64	2.51
	Form Four Urban	.000	.927	1.000	-3.09	3.09
	First-Year Students	-12.540*	1.426	.000	-17.33	-7.75
	Final-Year Students	-12.800*	1.888	.000	-19.17	-6.43
Form Two Rural	2nd Grade Rural	2.578*	.463	.000	1.00	4.15
	2nd Grade Urban	2.645*	.460	.000	1.07	4.22
	6th Grade Rural	2.045*	.542	.014	.25	3.84
	6th Grade Urban	-.222	.630	1.000	-2.29	1.85
	Form Two Urban	-1.822	.991	.708	-5.12	1.48
	Form Four Rural	-1.788	1.222	.898	-5.89	2.31
	Form Four Urban	-.222	.941	1.000	-3.35	2.91
	First-Year Students	-12.761*	1.435	.000	-17.58	-7.94
	Final-Year Students	-13.022*	1.895	.000	-19.40	-6.64
Form Two Urban	2nd Grade Rural	4.400*	.878	.001	1.40	7.40
	2nd Grade Urban	4.467*	.877	.001	1.47	7.47
	6th Grade Rural	3.867*	.923	.006	.75	6.98
	6th Grade Urban	1.600	.977	.822	-1.66	4.86
	Form Two Rural	1.822	.991	.708	-1.48	5.12
	Form Four Rural	.033	1.432	1.000	-4.69	4.76
	Form Four Urban	1.600	1.201	.942	-2.35	5.55
	First-Year Students	-10.940*	1.617	.000	-16.28	-5.60
	Final-Year Students	-11.200*	2.037	.000	-17.97	-4.43
Form Four Rural	2nd Grade Rural	4.367*	1.133	.018	.49	8.24
	2nd Grade Urban	4.433*	1.132	.015	.56	8.31
	6th Grade Rural	3.833	1.168	.064	-.13	7.79
	6th Grade Urban	1.567	1.211	.949	-2.51	5.64
	Form Two Rural	1.788	1.222	.898	-2.31	5.89
	Form Two Urban	-.033	1.432	1.000	-4.76	4.69
	Form Four Urban	1.567	1.398	.980	-3.05	6.18
	First-Year Students	-10.973*	1.769	.000	-16.79	-5.16
	Final-Year Students	-11.233*	2.159	.000	-18.36	-4.10
Form Four Urban	2nd Grade Rural	2.800*	.822	.050	.00	5.61
	2nd Grade Urban	2.867*	.820	.042	.06	5.67
	6th Grade Rural	2.267	.869	.250	-.66	5.19
	6th Grade Urban	.000	.927	1.000	-3.09	3.09
	Form Two Rural	.222	.941	1.000	-2.91	3.35
	Form Two Urban	-1.600	1.201	.942	-5.55	2.35
	Form Four Rural	-1.567	1.398	.980	-6.18	3.05

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	First-Year Students	-12.540*	1.587	.000	-17.79	-7.29
	Final-Year Students	-12.800*	2.013	.000	-19.50	-6.10
First-Year Students	2nd Grade Rural	15.340*	1.360	.000	10.71	19.97
	2nd Grade Urban	15.406*	1.359	.000	10.78	20.03
	6th Grade Rural	14.806*	1.389	.000	10.11	19.50
	6th Grade Urban	12.540*	1.426	.000	7.75	17.33
	Form Two Rural	12.761*	1.435	.000	7.94	17.58
	Form Two Urban	10.940*	1.617	.000	5.60	16.28
	Form Four Rural	10.973*	1.769	.000	5.16	16.79
	Form Four Urban	12.540*	1.587	.000	7.29	17.79
	Final-Year Students	-.260	2.286	1.000	-7.78	7.26
Final-Year Students	2nd Grade Rural	15.600*	1.839	.000	9.36	21.84
	2nd Grade Urban	15.667*	1.838	.000	9.43	21.91
	6th Grade Rural	15.067*	1.860	.000	8.77	21.36
	6th Grade Urban	12.800*	1.888	.000	6.43	19.17
	Form Two Rural	13.022*	1.895	.000	6.64	19.40
	Form Two Urban	11.200*	2.037	.000	4.43	17.97
	Form Four Rural	11.233*	2.159	.000	4.10	18.36
	Form Four Urban	12.800*	2.013	.000	6.10	19.50
	First-Year Students	.260	2.286	1.000	-7.26	7.78

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The Games-Howell comparisons revealed that not all means were significantly different from each other in terms of correct suppliance of past tense. This meant that some groups of learners were not significantly different from other groups despite their educational level and/or geographical location. Although Table 4 reveals that university students had significantly higher past tense correct suppliance ratings, the two groups were not significantly different from each other. This is an indication that instruction at their level of education at the time of the study does not have any potential effect on correct suppliance of past tense marking, despite the fact that the overall results indicate there is a potential effect of instruction across groups. This finding emphasises the point that university students complete their education with the same proficiency of past tense use that they had when they joined the university.

When comparing 2nd grade students, Table 4 reveals that they are not significantly different from each other. However, when you compare the 2nd grade groups (mean diff. = .067, -.067) to other groups, you will discover that they are not significantly different from the 6th grade rural group (mean diff. = -.533) and Form 4 urban group (mean diff. = -2.800). These results highlight the impact of the language learning situation on the acquisition of language in the foreign language learning situation. The prediction for the 2nd grade rural group would be that they would still be at the same level of acquisition of the past tense when they get to the 6th grade.

The impact of the language learning situation is amplified when a comparison of the 6th graders comes into play. Despite the resemblance between the 6th grade rural group and the 2nd graders (both urban and rural groups), the 6th grade urban group registered a significant difference between themselves and the lower-level participants, i.e., 2nd graders and the 6th grade rural group, and the first and final-year university students. However, the 6th grade urban group was no different from

the Form 2 groups or the Form 4 groups. One major contributing factor was the length of the narratives written by the 6th grade urban group. Apparently, they wrote narratives comparable in length to the narratives written by the Form 2and 4groups. Due to the length of the narratives, the 6th grade urban group performed relatively well and showed depth in their narration that can be assessed at a proficiency level close to that of the Form 2 and 4groups.

As regards secondary school students, i.e., Form 2 (mean diff. = -.033, 1.788) and 4 groups (mean diff. = 1.567, 1.600), the Form 2 groups were significantly different from the 2nd graders, 6th grade rural group and the university students. Moreover, they were found to be at the same level of competence as fellow secondary school students, regardless of the geographical location. This could be attributed to the fact that the narratives written by the Form 4 students were relatively short. The same sentiments apply in this case since their competence rivals that of the lower-level classes. The evidence for this analysis can be seen in Table 4, where the Form 4 rural group is not significantly different from 6th graders and their secondary school colleagues. Overall, $2P^{ndP}$ grade participants performed very poorly in the correct suppliance of the past tense. This is an indication that there was no potential effect of instruction to aid their suppliance.

Discussion

Salaberry (2000b) suggests that instruction in verbal morphology is associated with the extended use of verbal morphology. In saying this, the tendency of advanced learners to outperform lower levels is expected; however, the underlying question is how different are these learners from one another? By determining the variance among participants, we are also demonstrating the potential effects of instruction, since all the participants are at particular grade levels of their schooling. Essentially, on completion of a grade level, the expectation is that there has been an increase in proficiency in terms of past tense marking.

From the review of the syllabus for language instruction, with a specific focus on tense-aspect morphology, the simple present was ascertained as the front runner among other tense forms in the lower levels of instruction, due to its frequent inclusion in the syllabus. The frequency of its instruction and its saliency is clearly shown at the lower levels, in which there was evidence of consistent use of the simple present in the form of the copula. This result accords with Kaplan (1987), Schmidt (1990) and Harley (1989), who maintain that increased frequency and saliency of input increases the chances of acquiring the features.

Performance in past tense suppliance was selected to test the potential effect of instruction. The findings revealed a significant difference among the groups of participants $F(9,299) = 39.766$. $P=.000$, $r=54$. The effect size was larger than typical across groups of participants, although post-hoc analysis needed to be done to determine how groups were significantly different from each other. Post-hoc analysis revealed that the lowest levels ($2P^{ndP}$ graders) were not significantly different from each other. In other words, for instruction at this level, it did not matter where the participant hailed from in terms of rural-urban locality. Moreover, the $2P^{ndP}$ grade rural students were not significantly different from the $6P^{thP}$ grade rural students, although they were different from the $6P^{thP}$ grade urban students. This is highly indicative in that there is no potential effect of instruction on$2P^{ndP}$ grade to $6P^{thP}$ grade rural students in terms of correct suppliance of the past tense, despite instruction in past tense surfacing in $3P^{rdP}$ grade instruction continuing well into the $6P^{thP}$ grade. Interestingly, it was not reflected in their suppliance of the past tense.

Other groups that were not significantly different from each other were the advanced participants, i.e., first and final-year university students. This can be attributed to the almost equal suppliance of the past tense by the groups and the equal length of narratives. One important thing to note about these groups of advanced learners is that none of the groups received instruction in English as a course except for attending a compulsory communication skills course in their first year at the university.

The middle-level participants, i.e., Forms 2 and 4students, were not significantly different from one another. These are the groups where oscillating production of verbal morphology was noticeable across the board. Interestingly, 6P^{thP} grade urban students were also not significantly different from these middle-level groups. This indeed speaks volumes in that there is no potential effect of instruction. These groups do not show a considerable amount of variance even though they are more than a grade level higher than the other participants. Although there may be evidence of an improvement in the appropriate use of past tense marking noted from the lower proficiency level to the higher proficiency level, it does not reveal whether these groups in particular are different from one another in terms of the potential effect of instruction.

Implications for English Language Pedagogy

From the analysis and the results of this study and other studies (Bardovi-Harlig (1995b; Smith's (1981, 1991), we realise that tense-aspect morphology forms an integral part of a learner's grammar. It provides a learner with the tool with which to express infinite thoughts, ideas and propositions in time. This may be through references to the present, future, past, something completed in the future, past action in the past or the past affecting the present. Bardovi-Harlig (1995b) attributes the success of instruction on tense-aspect morphology to timing. She noticed success in the acquisition of the pluperfect due to instruction, whereby the learners' inter-language had reached stability with respect to formal accuracy and appropriate use of the simple past. However, she also underscores the fact that there were other learners where instruction did not cause emergence of the pluperfect. She attributed this finding to the potential of instruction to the rate and not the route of acquisition. In the study, she made use of Smith's (1981, 1991) two-feature description of input where the instruction was elaborate but not explicit (i.e., teachers did not teach learners language rules). It was found that timing was important in the case of instruction that aimed at the under-generalisation of the simple past. Instruction was timed to coincide with group scores that reflected mastery of the past tense with telic verbs. At that stage, core understanding of the past could be attributed to the learners. Therefore, the learners were said to have been ready for instruction that expanded the core meaning of the past, facilitating its generalisation throughout the system (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995b).

From this study, it is evident that learners at the same level were at different stages of linguistic development. We cannot claim that instruction was homogenous since the study participants' environments were varied, but we can claim that the same standard of instruction was followed due to the presence of the English language syllabi. The results show different instructional effects, although affected by geographical location. The key thing to note is that there is acquisition of the past tense. However, even within groups, evidence of outliers was found, with some students being more productive than others. This is supported by Bardovi-Harlig (1995b), who argues that learners who received instruction after meeting the prerequisites for acquisition show a positive influence of instruction. For those who were not ready, instruction made no apparent difference.

Furthermore, the study was able to note that there is a distributional bias in the emergence of the present tense, although it was not part of the analysis and data presentation. The present tense accounted for 41.2% (N=1,378) of the total verbal tokens in the data. In his attempt to explain the observations found in second language acquisition of tense-aspect morphology, Andersen (1986 cited in Bardovi-Harlig, 2000) proposed the Distributional Bias Hypothesis, which claims that the patterns found in learners' inter-language also exist in adult native speakers' speech. In other words, the biased distribution of tense-aspect morphology across the four verb classes is also found among native speakers. The distributional bias tends to account for the higher frequency and proportion of certain verbal types against others. However in this case, the only source of English tense-aspect input is the classroom. In a brief review of the English syllabi, it was noted that the present tense is overemphasised in instruction (Upor, 2009). This may account for its bias in the data. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance in the number of topics on verbal types and the probable sequencing of topics in the syllabus so that pupils attain full acquisition of every separate verbal type. Support for this conclusion can be found in the arguments raised by Kaplan (1987), Schmidt (1990) and Harley (1989), who have previously written that appropriate pedagogical conditions for the successful acquisition of verbal morphology are needed. They also pointed out that successful second language learning of past tense aspectual distinctions may be dependent on defining features of the target grammar structure and functional communicative demands of linguistic interaction. Pedagogical emphasis should be placed on target form-meaning connections as well.

Conclusion

The acquisition of tense-aspect morphology by EFL learners represents an area of study that is rapidly gaining popularity for both theoretical and practical purposes. With the variety of participants involved in this study, this paper brings insights to research on the acquisition of tense-aspect morphology. The results of the analysis of the data – although far from conclusive –may represent an incomplete explanation of the development of EFL among non-native learners of an African origin in an instructed setting.

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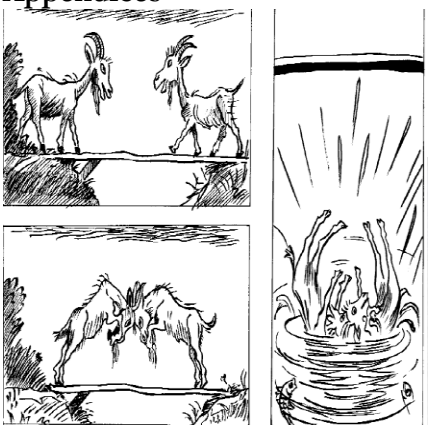
Appendices



One day one two goats were meet in bridge all of the goats waht pass first. So they started to fight each other while they were at the center of bridge. After goat fight and goats were fall down in the river. And no those goats are foolish goat.

CAT AND THE DOG

One upon time there was a cat and the dog. the cat was saw the rat and the dog was saw the rat too. The cat was left hand side while the dog was right hand side. The rat was between of them, but the dog and the cat were in a distance with rat. Every one there they like to catch it in order to eat.

The second picture show that they have already catch the rat and they started to eat.

The third picture show that they are pulling the intestine of a rat.