

Investigating Tertiary Students' Auxiliary-Verb Agreement Errors in Forming Simple Tenses

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Abstract:

This study investigates tertiary students' auxiliary-verb agreement errors in forming simple tenses. The study aimed at identifying students' errors in forming negative and interrogative simple tenses. The study used descriptive analytic approach. The sample of the study was (48) final year of EFL students of Faculty of Education and Teachers' College of Dalanj University, batch 2016 in the academic year (2022-2023). The study used (SPSS) Statistical Package of Social Sciences for data analysis. The studies reached that (100%) of the students were unable to change positive simple sentences into negative and interrogative ones. The study recommends that tertiary professors should lay great stress on how to construct correct negative and interrogative simple sentences when they design grammar courses. There should be sufficient drills and exercises that test students' oral and written competence on tenses in question.

Keywrds: lexical verb, auxiliary verb , semantic meaning , property, inflection

التحقق في أخطاء الطلاب الجامعيين لاستخدام الفعل المساعد لتكوين المضارع والماضي البسيط

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مستخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في أخطاء طلاب الجامعيين لاستخدام الفعل المساعد لتكوين المضارع والماضي البسيط. هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على أخطاء الطلاب في تكوين الجمل المنفية والاستفهامية للمضارع والماضي البسيط. استخدمت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. كانت عينة الدراسة (48) طالب وطالبة في السنة النهائية لطلبة كلية التربية وكلية المعلمين بجامعة الدلنج، دفعة 2016 للعام الدراسي (2022-2023). استخدمت الدراسة (SPSS) برنامج الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن (100%) من الطلاب غير قادرين على تغيير جمل المضارع والماضي البسيطة إلى الجمل المنفية والاستفهامية. توصي الدراسة بضرورة تركيز أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية على برامج تدريسية على كيفية بناء الجمل المنفية والاستفهامية البسيطة عند تصميم كورسات قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية. يجب أن تكون هناك تدريبات وتمارين كافية تختبر كفاءة الطلاب الشفوية والكتابية على تكوين الجمل المنفية والاستفهامية للمضارع والماضي البسيط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفعل الأساسي، الفعل المساعد، دلالة اللفظ، خاصية، تصرف

Introduction

Dykes, (2007:49) stated that the word “auxiliary” is derived from the Latin *auxilium* which means “help”, and in grammar it refers to specific verbs that are used to constitute tense. The basic auxiliaries or helpers are taken from forms of the verbs to “be”, to “have”. Most native English speakers face little difficulty with using these forms according to the language that they use. According to Decapua (2008:125) verbs mainly are divided into two main types: lexical verbs and auxiliary or helping verbs. Lexical verbs are kind of verbs that can come alone and do not acquire to be with any other verb. Lexical verbs also constitute the key semantic meaning in any verbal phrase as in: “*I play football*”. “*Hamid plays football*” and “*Musa played football*”. Williams illustrated that “do” auxiliary cannot come with another modal. It is used to change positive simple sentences into negative or interrogative one.

On the other hand, auxiliary verbs come side by side with the main verbs. Auxiliary verbs have no semantic meaning, but

they help the main verb in some way. Leech and Svartvik (2013:187-88) wrote that auxiliary or helping verbs do not form a verb phrase in isolation, but they come with a main verb. They are the smallest unit of word, made up of primary as auxiliary as “be”. Auxiliary verbs are very important, mainly in constructing negative and question clauses, which makes clear distinction from main or lexical verbs. Seaton and Mew (2007:118) mentioned that the auxiliary verbs “do”, “does” and “did” are used as helping verbs to form questions as in “Where did you find it?” and “Do ducks like water?” or to make verbs negative as in “The baby does not look very happy.

Radford (2009:5) pointed that there is another kind of function category that is used in English is the auxiliary verb “do”. It has the structural property that is quite different from the lexical or main verb. The auxiliary “do” can be inverted with its subject in question as “Ali comes early” “Does Ali come early? Where the “do” auxiliary and subject “Ali” said to have been inverted. Kisno (2010:23) mentioned that students usually fail to distinguish the difference between auxiliary verbs lexical verbs in English, in other words they cannot convert positive sentences into negative or interrogative ones.

Statement of the Problem

EFL students of Dalanj University are unable to make correct forms of auxiliary – verb agreement of simple tenses.

Questions of the study

Why do EFL students fail to form correct negative and interrogative sentences in simple tenses?

Objectives of the study

To identify students’ errors in forming negation and interrogation sentences in simple tenses.

Methodology of the study

The study used descriptive analytic approach, in which a

test was administered to (48) EFL students of batch (2016). The study used (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Sciences for breaking down and analyzing the data.

Delimitation

This study was limited to investigate students' ability in forming negation and interrogation sentences in simple tenses in the academic year (2022-2023) to EFL students of batch (2016), Faculty of Education and Teachers' College of Dalanj University.

Literature Review

Leech and Svartvik (2013:203) summarized that main or lexical verbs in English cannot directly be formed into negative or interrogative without auxiliary verbs. They added that there are three functions of auxiliary or helping verbs in English. Firstly, changing affirmative or positive form into negative one as in: "She studies English" (positive). "She does not study English (negative), where the auxiliary verb "do" precede negative word "not". Secondly, it is used to form interrogative sentence as in "Does she study English? In which the auxiliary verb "do" comes before the subject. And thirdly it is used to add word meaning as in "Tom speaks English well. "Tom does speak English well. as in "You do not play football. Anderson (2017: 232) reported that the dummy "do" is used in a sentence that has a lexical verb or main verb, in which it likely helps the lexical verb to form negation or interrogation.

Greenbaum (1996:153) explained that the auxiliary "do" is the dummy operator. It is used in the absence of any other auxiliary verb. It acts as the operator to make for instance, interrogative and negative sentences; such as "*Did they leave?*", *When did he leave? Or "They did not leave"*. All auxiliaries are used to operate for negation, interrogation, emphasis and abbreviation. When it is used for negation, "not" is put after the auxiliary or the negative contrasted form is used as in "He doesn't think that. When is used

for interrogation, the operator comes before the subject as in yes/no questions and in most wh-questions as “*Does the boy have to stay there?*” Or “*Why didn’t you tell me?*” The dummy operator may also be used as abbreviatory device to avoid repetition as in A: *It looks a good car.* B: *It does.* “Do not” and “don’t” are used in front of imperatives as in “*Do hand your coat if you’d like.* Or “*Do not hesitate to tell us.*”

Dykes (2007:129) mentioned that the “do” auxiliary is used to make negatives and questions in simple present and simple past tenses. “do” auxiliary does not give time information as auxiliary verbs “be” and “have” do. It just supports the main or lexical verb by being there in questions or negative statements. That is why is known as “filler” verb in grammar books. As its main verb counterpart, the auxiliary “do” carries different inflections. When the “do” auxiliary comes in a sentence, the main verb takes no inflections; “do” is inflected instead. The “do” auxiliary is only inflected when the 3rd person singular (he, she and it) appear in the sentence in negative simple present tense as in “*He watches TV*”. “*He does not watch TV*”. Or “*Does he watch TV?*” Fasold and Linton (2006: 127) stated that auxiliary “do” movement takes place when a simple question or a negative sentence is built as “*Does the man like movies?*”, “*What does the man like?*” Or “*The man doesn’t like movies*”

The main verb sometimes keeps its base form, which means no “s” ending. In this case, the “do” auxiliary takes no “s” either, whether in negative or interrogative as in “*They play tennis*”. It can be changed to negative “*They do not play tennis*”. Or interrogative “*Do they play tennis?*” Azar and Hegen (2006:87) explained that the lexical verb in questions and negative does not have a final “-s”. The final “-s” is attached to the auxiliary verb “do”. “does”, “doesn’t”, “do” and “do” are used in the short answers to yes/ no questions in simple present, whereas “did” and “didn’t” are used simple past.

The simple past tense has only one inflectional ending for regular verbs, "ed". When a simple past tense verb is used in question or negative, the "ed" inflectional is dropped from the main verb and attached it to the "do" auxiliary with a spelling change, both in negative and question. "Ali played football. *"Ali did not play football."* Or *"Did Ali play football? and" What did Ali play?"*

As reported by Hewings (2002:39) dummy auxiliary "do" is used to construct negative counterpart of a sentence that does not have an auxiliary verb that cannot take "not" as in *"Mona cleans the room everyday"* to *"Mona does not clean the room everyday"*.

Ibid (2002:40) the process of inserting auxiliary verb "do" is known as "do" support in linguistic literature. "do" is also used to make interrogative version of sentences do not contain an auxiliary "do". This inversion process is called "subject-auxiliary inversion, where "do" is inserted before the lexical verb and then this lexical verb with a subject are inserted as in *"Mona cleans the room everyday"* to *"Does Mona clean the room every day?"*

Another use of the dummy auxiliary "do" is in sentences where auxiliary get stranded as in *"Does Ali play tennis? Yes, he does. Or "Kamal likes coffee, and so does Musa. In the above sentence "Yes, he does" and "so does Musa", the auxiliary takes place without its main or lexical verb. This is known as code. Furthermore, dummy "do" is used in so called emphatic context, as in "Mary does go to school"*.

Meyer (2009:150) explained that there is one additional operator that is used in questions containing a lexical verb. When the sentences *"She listens to herself"*, *"They stay at home"* and *"She left it on the shore"* are changed into yes/no questions *"Does she listen to herself?"*, *"Do they stay at home"* and *"Did she leave it on the shore?"* respectively, the lexical verbs and subjects do not change positions, instead the operator "do" comes before the sub-

ject, having the tense of the lexical verb. Present in the first and second examples and past in the third. Thus, when the sentences are negated, “not” will be positioned directly following “does, “do” and “did”, ‘*She does not listen to herself*’, *they do not stay at home*’ and ‘*She did not leave it on the shore*. Swick (2005:57) mentioned that when an auxiliary verb “do” is added to statement, it takes the same form of the main verb whether in negation or interrogation as in “*Ali eats*” becomes “*Does Ali eat?*” or “*Ali does not eat.*”

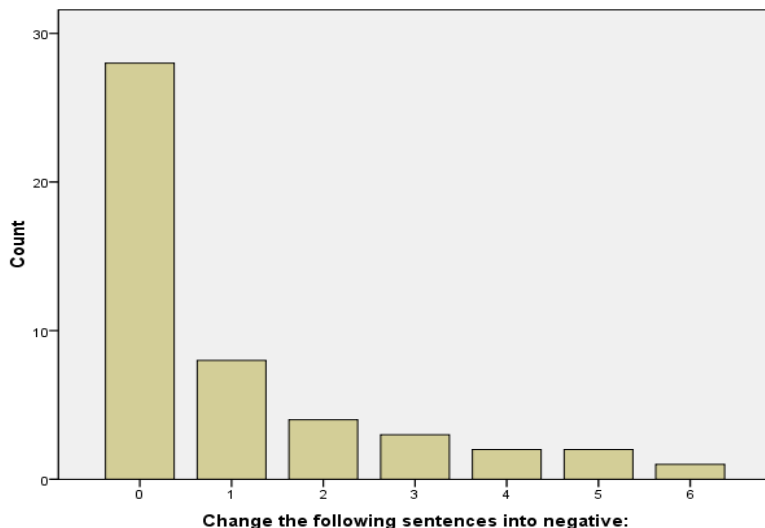
1. Change the following sentences into negative

scores	Frequency of scores	Percentages of scores
Total marks (5)		
0	28	58.3%
1	8	16.7%
2	4	8.3%
3	3	6.2%
4	2	4.2%
5	2	4.2%
6	1	2.1%
Total	48	100%

Table (1) Change the following sentences into negative

Table (1) above, shows students’ scores, frequencies and percentages in changing positive sentences into negative ones. The table shows that (28) students got zero (58.3%), (8) participants got one mark (16.7%), (4) subjects attained two marks (8.3%), (3) students scored three marks (6.2%), (2) students got four marks (4.2%), (2) subjects attained four marks (4.2%) and only one student got six (2.1%). The table also shows that only (8) students (17.7%) were able to change positive sentences into negative one correctly. The table also shows that only (8) students (16.7%) were able to change positive sentences into negative ones.

This shows that most of the subjects find difficulty in changing positive sentences into negative ones. Chart (1) below reinforces the table above.



2. Chang the following sentences into yes/no questions

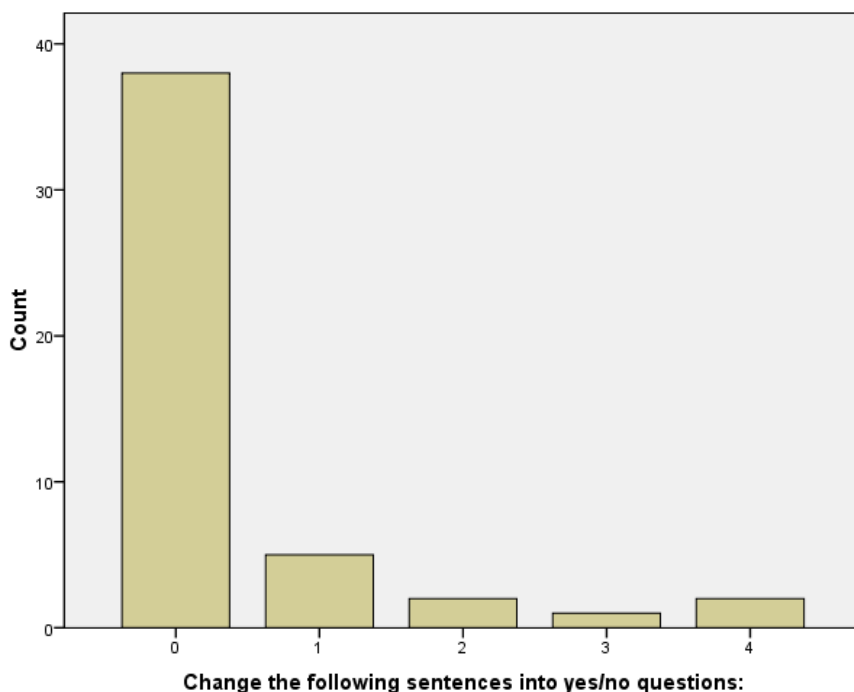
scores	Frequency of scores	Percentages of scores
Total marks (5)		
0	38	79.2%
1	5	10.4%
2	2	4.2%
3	1	2.1%
4	2	4.2%
Total	48	100%

Table (2) Change the following sentences into yes/no questions

Table (2) above shows students' scores, frequencies and percentages in changing positive sentences yes/no questions. The table shows that (38) students got zero (79.2%), (5) participants got one mark (10.4%), (2) subjects attained two marks (4.2%), (1) student scored three marks (2.1%), (2) students got four marks (4.2%).

The table also shows that only (3) students (6.3%) were able to change positive sentences into yes/no questions correctly.

This indicates that most of the subjects find difficulty in constructing yes/no questions. The chart below gives further illustration.



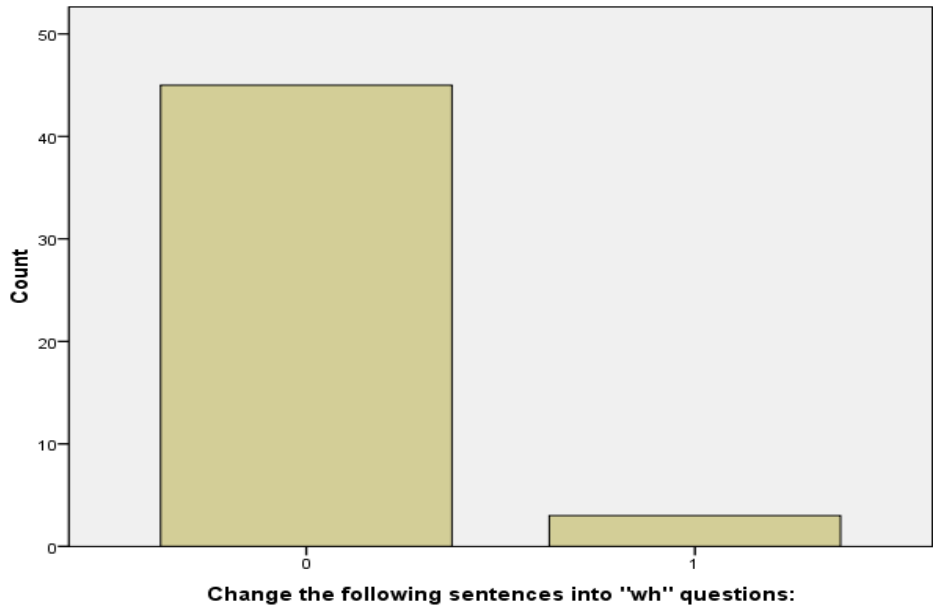
3. Change the following sentences into “wh” questions

scores	Frequency of scores	Percentages of scores
Total marks (5)		
0	45	93.6%
1	3	6.4%
Total	48	100%

Table (3) Chang the following sentences into “wh” questions

Table (3) above explains students’ scores, frequencies and percentages in changing positive sentences into “wh” questions. The table shows that (45) students got zero (93.6%). (3) Partici-

pants got one mark (6.4%). According to the table above none of the students was able to change positive sentences into “wh” question. This indicates that most of the subjects find difficulty in constructing yes/no questions. The chart below gives further explanation.



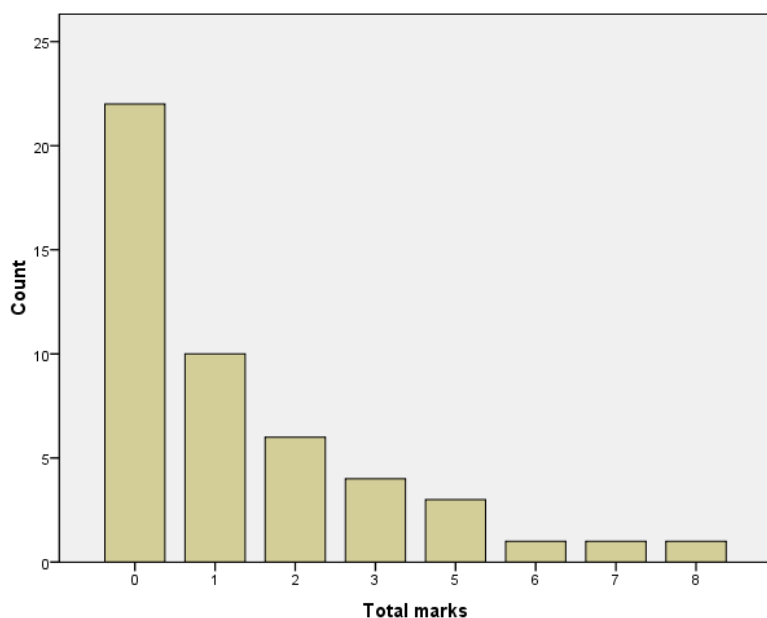
4. Total Marks

Scores	Frequency of scores	Percentages of scores
Total marks (5)		
0	22	45.8%
1	10	20.8%
2	6	12.5%
3	4	8.3%
5	3	6.2%
6	1	2.1%
7	1	2.1%
8	1	2.1%
Total	48	100%

Table (4.) Total marks

Table (4) above shows students' total marks. The table shows that (22) students got zero (45%), (10) participants got one mark (20.8%), (6) subjects attained two marks (12.5%), (4) students scored three marks (8.3%), (3) students got five marks (6.2%), (1) subject attained six marks (2.1%), (1) student attained seven marks (2.1%) The table also shows that only (1) students score eight (2.1%). The table indicates that (100%) of the students failed wh questions.

This proves that all the subjects find difficulty in using correct auxiliary in order to wh-questions correctly
The chart below shows further illustration.



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