# English Verbs Their Use And Misuse by Iraqi Learners Of English Language

**Rafida Mansoor Mahmood**
**Al-Mustansiriyah University**
**College of Arts**
**Department of English Language and Literature**

## Introduction

English language is one of the most important international languages. To learn this language means to do your best in order to master language, so this paper shows us the difficulties which face the learners of this language as a second language.

# Section One

## 1.1 The problem

One of the most important elements in English sentence is the verb. Any learner of English language should know how to use the verbs correctly, but from literature we find that it is a problematic subject.

## 1.2 The hypothesis

It is hypothesised that young students of morning studies know how to use English verbs correctly far better than old students of evening studies.

## 1.3 Scope of the study

We are measuring only fourth year students of both studies morning and evening.

## 1.4 Purpose of the study

We are comparing the ability and performance of $L_2$ learners (learners of English language) and especially their grammar, whether they can use English verbs correctly or not.

## 1.5 Limitation of the study

Comparing and measuring fourth year students of college of Arts/ English department of Al-Mustansiriyah University for the year (2006), for both studies morning and evening.

# Section Two

## 2.2 Types of verbs

## 2.2.1 Predicating or linking verbs

Frank (1993: 45) points out that a predication verb is the main word in the predicate which tells something about the subject. It is called traditionally as a verb action like (babies cry), but has actually been interpreted to include most non-action verbs that are non-linking verbs e.g. (I remember him).

A linking verb is a verb of incomplete predication. It just shows that the real predicate follows the important word in the complement which is usually - an adjective as e.g. (The girl is pretty) or a noun e.g. (She is a pretty girl).

Grammarians have subdivided linking verbs into (be) and all others which are followed by predicate adjectives while (be) may be followed by many types of complements they have divided predicating into dynamic verbs (action verbs) and stative verbs (non-action verbs) and they include the linking verbs among the stative verbs.

## 2.2.1.1 The semiotic triangle for predication
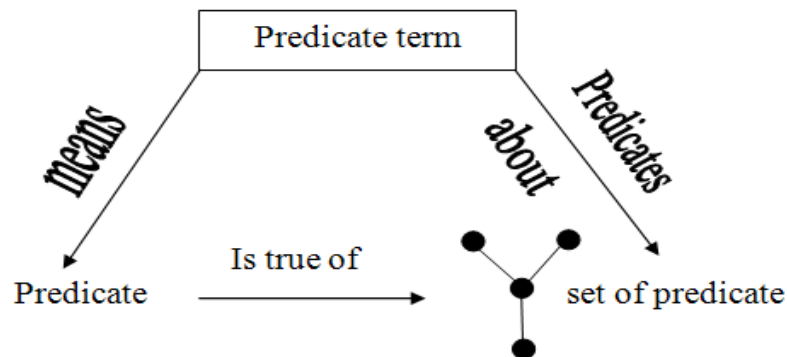


Löbner (2002: 102)

The verb has the key role in any sentence. It occupies the center of the network like a spider in its web holding all the threads.

This role of the verb corresponds to the fact that most verbs are two - or more - place predicates. (Ibid: 119).

### 2.2.2 Transitive and intransitive verbs

Eckersley and Eckersley (1980: 154) shows that an action is expressed by a verb may pass over from a subject to an object for instance when we say (I hit the ball) the action of hitting is not confined to the doer only, but goes over from (I) to (the ball); when the action is expressed by the verb goes from a subject to an object, that verb is called a transitive verb.

Whereas when we say (the sun rose), (the child cried), the actions do not go beyond the persons or objects, these verbs have no objects, they are intransitive verbs.

The only object that intransitive verb can have is a cognate object for instance:

(He lived a happy life).

Frank (1993: 46) explains the transitive verbs as verbs which take a direct (single) object for instance (he is reading a book), but intransitive verbs do not require any object as in (he is walking in the park).

Some transitive verbs of motion require not only an object but an adverbial of place usually, as in (she put the money in the safe place).

The transitive verbs may take more than one object as in (he gave his wife a present).

There is also direct object complement (they elected Mr. Smith presedent) (Ibid).

### 2.2.3 Intransitive verbs
Collins (1990: 137) says that in this kind of verbs there are two elements which are involved, the subject (the doer) of the action and the action itself (the verb) e.g. (the girl screamed) (I waited).

### 2.2.4 Ergative verbs
This is a special kind of verbs which can be used in transitive and intransitive clauses. In this group of verbs, one can describe an action from the point of view of something, which is affected by the action, e.g. (When I opened the door, there was Laverne).
(Suddenly the door opened)
This first sentence (the door) is the object of the verb (opened) but the second sentence (the door) is the subject of (opened) and there is no mentioning of who (opened) the door. (Ibid: 155)

### 2.3 Finite and Non-Finite verbs
### 2.3.1 Finite verbs
Eckersley and Eckersley (1980: 143) and Frank (1993: 43) they all agree that the verb forms that can form the predicate by themselves are finite verbs where as the ones that can not are non-finite verbs.
A finite verb is a lexical verb with or without auxiliaries that acts as the full verb in the predicate. It is limited by all the

grammatical properties, a verb may have (person, number, tense, …, etc).

**2.3.2** Non-finite verbs (infinite) are complete verb forms that function as other parts of speech. These verbs as the following examples (the infinitives, the present participles and the gerunds).

All other parts of the verbs are finites. The forms which are called verbals are not limited by person or number but they have voice and tense. (Ibid)

**2.4 Simple and complex verb phrases**

 Quirk et al (1985: 151) point out that the finite verb phrase is simple when it consists of one word, it can be present, past, imperative or subjunctive.

 e.g. (He works hard)
       (He worked hard)
       (Work harder!)

It is important that he work hard is (subjunctive) while complex verb; is the verb which consists of two or more words as (John has worked hard)

(John should be working hard)

(Don't let's upset her)

(They may have been sold)


The constructions of complex verb phrase are four basic types:

1. (Model) consists of a model auxiliary + the base of a verb e.g. (must examine).
2. (Perfective) consists of the auxiliary have + the-ed participle of a verb e.g. (has examined).
3. (Progressive) consists of the auxiliary Be + the-ing participle of a verb e.g. (is examining).

**6**

4. (Passive) consists of the auxiliary Be + the-ed participle of a verb e.g. (is examined).

## 2.5 Positions of the verbs

Frank (1993: 49) explains that the verb is used after a subject or before an object or complement. The verb appears before the subject in most questions and in sentences or clauses that begin with certain type of negative adverbs.
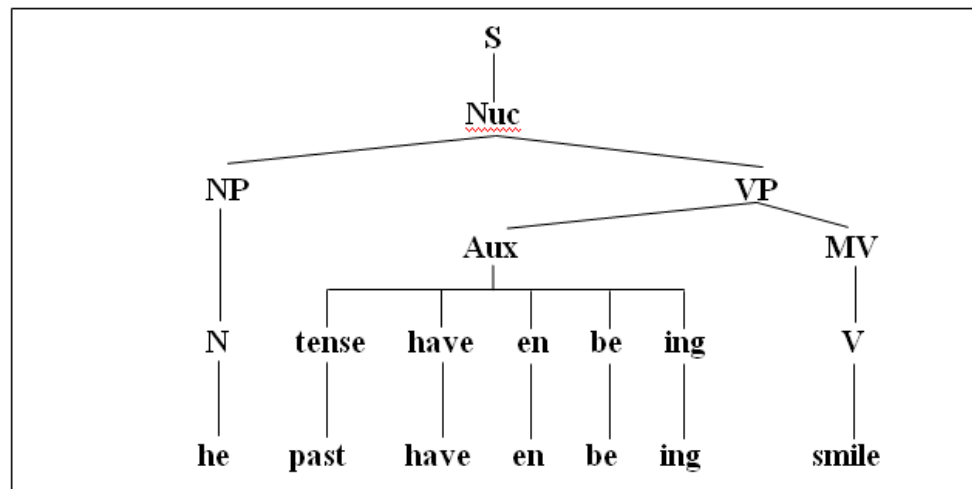
## 2.5.1 Positions of the auxiliaries

Thomas (1965: 32) and Akmajian and Heny (1976: 65) stress the idea that the verb phrase may contain one or more auxiliaries plus the main verb of the sentence
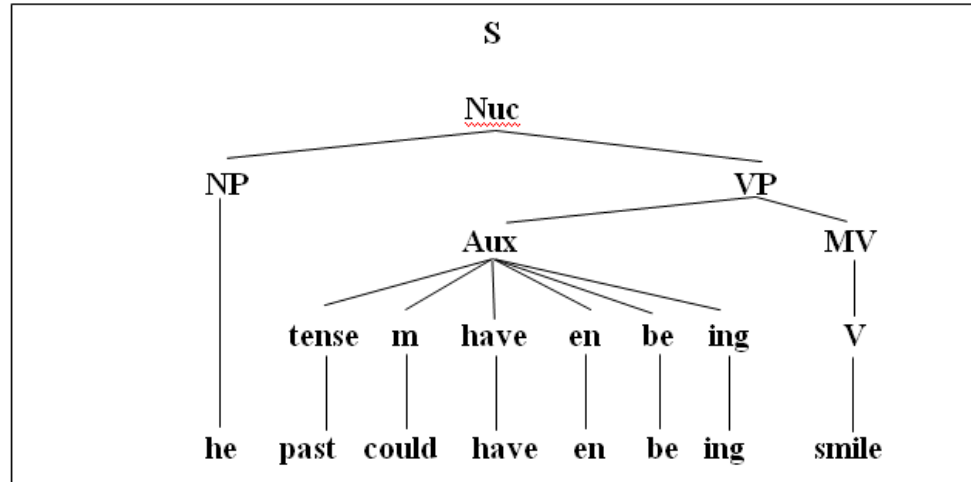
VP ⟶ Aux + MV (main verb)

e.g. (Children may sleep).

Liles (1971: 21) expresses very important point, he mentions that auxiliaries do a very important role in the sentence e.g. (He had been smiling).

Auxiliaries can be extended as in the following example: (He could have been running) (Ibid: 23).

```
                          S
                          |
                         Nuc
               _____
              NP                        VP
              |                  _____|_____
              |                 Aux            MV
              |           _____|_____         |
              |       tense  m  have en be ing   V
              |         |    |    |   |  |  |     |
              he      past could have en be ing smile
```

**2.6 Tense of verbs**

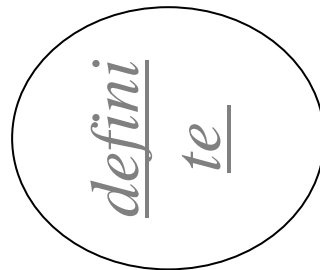**2.6.1 General comparison between time and tense**

Eckersley and Eckersley (1980: 158) point out that a clear distinction should be made between tense and time. The notion of time (present, past, future time) is universal, and is independent of any particular language or of languages at all. Whereas tense is a linguistic device, varying from language to language.

Alexander (1997: 159) shows that some grammarians believe that tense must always be shown by the actual form of verb, and in many languages present, past and future are indicated by changes in the verb forms.
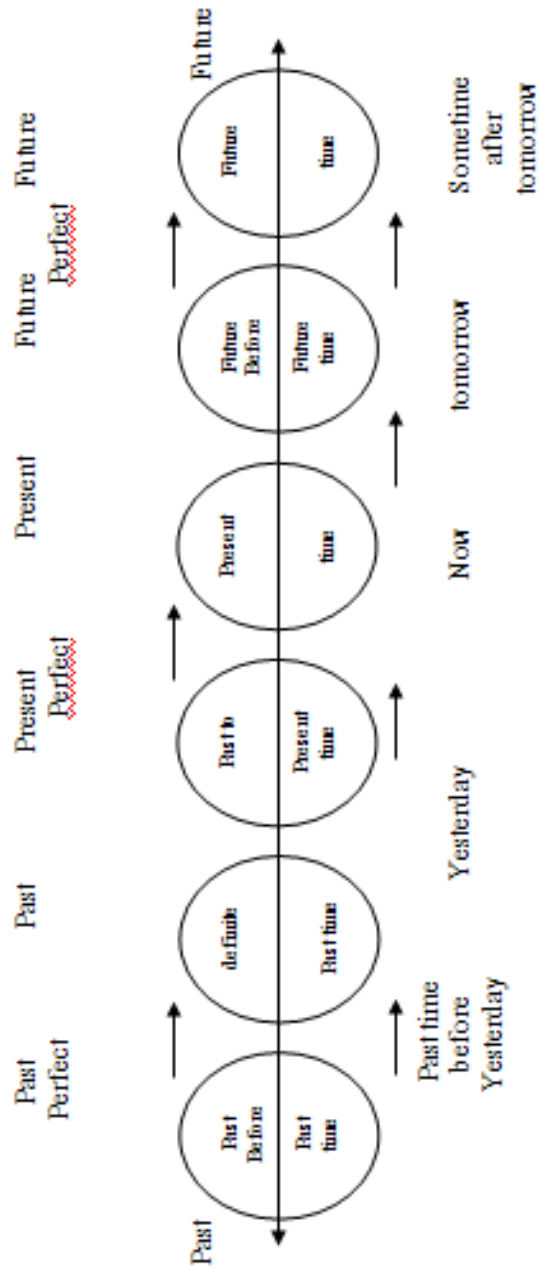
Frank (1993: 66) says that the relationship of time of the six tenses may be roughly indicated by the following diagram.

9

*definite*

Frank (1993: 66)

| Past Perfect | Past | Present Perfect | Present | Future Perfect | Future | Future |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| Past Before / Past time | definite / Past time | Past b / Present time | Present / time | Future Before / Future time | Future / time |

Past time before Yesterday    Yesterday    Now    tomorrow    Sometime after tomorrow

Nesfield (1982: 55) points out that tenses show:
   a.  The time of an action
   b.  Its degree of completeness.

## 2.7 The main tenses

 The verb may tell the following:
   A.  An action is done at the present time as: (he sees a star).
   B.  An action was done in the past time as: (he saw a star).
   C.  An action will be done in the future time as: (he will see a star).

A verb then has three main times or tenses (present, past, future). To each tense there are four different forms:

1. Indefinite; which denotes present, past or future time in its simplest form as (I love), (I loved), (I shall love).

2. Continuous, which denotes the event in present, past, future is still continuing or not yet completed as (I am loving), (I was loving), (I shall be loving).

3. Perfect which denotes the event in present, past, future is in completed or perfect as (I have loved), (I had loved), (I shall have loved).

4. Perfect continuous: which combines the meanings of the two preceding forms as (I have been loving), (I had been loving), (I shall have been loving) Nesfield (1982: 56).

## 2.8 Idioms

 Dixson (2002: 64) shows a particular difficulty experienced by learners is the correct handling of expressions consisting of verbs in combination with prepositions or adverbial particles.

 For example take off, leave out such verbs occur frequently in all types of English and especially in everyday spoken English.

**11**

Sometimes, the combination of both verb + preposition or particles results in a unite of meaning which is a very idiomatic expression something which is very important is that the meaning of the combination may carry no relationship to the meaning of the individual words of this combination, e.g. the verb (Pack something in) presents no difficulty in the sentence (she opened her suitcase and packed all the clothes in). But in sentence (he decided to pack his job in) the individual meaning of (pack) and (in) do not give the meaning of (leave) also the verb (take off) it means take some one off (take away to another place) as in (As soon as Tom arrived, Bob insisted on taking him off). It may mean (imitate humorously) which can not be guessed from the individual meaning of (take and off).
Liza can take the Queen off very well). (Ibid)
 Any combination may have several idiomatic meanings depending on its collocation.
 The other important problem is that to know how the combination is used in sentence, the problem of word order, it depends on whether the verb is followed by a preposition or by particle, e.g.:

|  A | B |
| --- | --- |
| 1. I read the letter through | 1. I saw the plan through |
| 2. I read through the letter | 2. I saw through the plan |

In (A) through is a particle in both sentences and because it is a particle so there is no difference in meaning.
In (B) (through) is a particle in (1) and in (2) it is a preposition, so there is important different in meaning between the two sentences.
(B1) means I preserved until the plan was completed.
(B2) means I recognized the deception of the plan. (Ibid)

# Section Three

## 3.1 Second Language acquisition

Crystal (2003: 8) points out that acquisition used in context of learning a foreign language "second language acquisition" is different from "first language acquisition". Acquisition is sometimes opposed to learning; it is the primary force behind foreign language fluency; the latter is seen as conscious process which monitors the progress of acquisition and guides the performance of the speaker.

Crystal (1992: 344) shows that acquisition is the process of the learning aspect of language. This term is used for reference to both first language acquisition and second language acquisition it may be used also in more limitation within theories of language learning.

## 3.2 L2 Learning Barriers

Elign (1979: 150) explains that there are many reasons for the problem of acquiring L2.

1. Most people try to learn another language during their teenage of adult years.
2. The learners tongue (the adult tongue) get stiff pronouncing one type of language.

Selinker and Lamendella (1978: 149-51) give very important reasons for the problem of acquiring and learning L2.

1. Low motivation for learning L2, as a consequence of lack of opportunity to communicate in L2 or psychological and / or social resistance against cultural

identification with acculturation within the L2 community.

2. Age: older L2 learners usually retain a clearly recognizable foreign accent.

3. Limited range of L2 input may be severely restricted both quantitatively (period of time) and qualitatively (variation).

## Age of learners

In this paper we are measuring two different ages of learners through two different groups the morning studies learners which are younger in age than the other group of evening studies learners.

Els et al (1984: 104) support our idea that older learners acquire language more difficult than younger learners.

They say youngs learn second language more easily and more proficiently than adults do. Those youngs seen to be very efficient in picking up the new language, whereas their parents often seem to experience great difficulty in acquiring the same level of L2 proficiency as their children.

## Other factors affecting L2 learning

In early literature, concerning this subject it is remarked that there are many factors affecting L2 learning one of these factors as Els et al (1984: 49-50) say that L1 affects L2 and problems can be explained on the basis of linguistic differences between L1 and L2. These linguistic differences between L1 and L2 give rise to interference. Other factors as biological factors, psychological factors, and also as we have seen before,

limited range of L2 input (period of time) i.e. shortage of time of the lectures of evening studies. It is well-known that the time of the lectures of morning studies is different from evening studies, it is longer than the evening studies lecture, and this affects negatively on the students of evening studies.

### Procedural part

To find out the difference between morning studies students and evening studies students. The researcher took (50) students from the two studies. The subjects were selected randomly, (25) from morning studies and (25) from evening studies. The two groups were given specific questions to answer. A t-test used to test significant differences between the two groups. The test shows that there is significant difference for the level 0.05 and for the morning studies benefit. The mean ( $\overline{X}$ ) for morning studies is (2.8) whereas the mean for evening studies is (1.2) as the following table shows.

$$t = \frac{\overline{X}_1 - \overline{X}_2}{\sqrt{\dfrac{s_1{}^2(n-1) + s_2{}^2(n-1)}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}\left(\dfrac{1}{n_1} + \dfrac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

t = 2.787 & 0.05

| Sample | $\overline{X}$ | $s^2$ | T |
|---|---|---|---|
| Morning | 2.8 | 0.9 | 6.41 |
| Evening | 1.2 | 0.7 | |

## Conclusions

We conclude from the previous that English language is a difficult language to Iraqi learners due to many reasons as we saw before but concerning our subjects the two main reasons are the age of the learners and shortage of time of the lecture of the evening studies learners.

## References

1. Akmajian, Adrian and Frank Heny (1976). An introduction to the principles of transformational syntax. Cambridge: The MIT press.
2. Alexander L. G. (1997). English Grammar. New York: Longman.
3. Collins, Coubuild (1990). English Grammar. New Delhi: Collins publishers.
4. Crystal, David (1992). An Encyclopedia dictionary of language and languages. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
5. Crystal, David (2003). A dictionary of linguist & phonetics: London: Oxford University press (5th. Ed.).
6. Dixson, Robert J. (2002). Essential Idioms in English. London: Oxford University press.
7. Eckersley, C.E and J.M Eckersley (1980). A comprehensive English Grammar for foreign students. London: Common wealth press.
8. Elign, Suzette (1979). What is linguistics. London: Michigan University press (2nd. Ed.).

9. Els, Theovan, Theo B., Guss. E. Charles V., Anne-Mieke. J (1984). Applied Linguistics and the learning and teaching og foreign languages. London: Edward Arnold publishers.

10. Frank, Marcella (1983). Modern English. A practical reference guide. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

11. Liles, Bruce L. (1971). An introductory transformational grammar. Englewood cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

12. Lobner, Sebastian (2002). Understanding semantics. Oxford: Oxford University press.

13. Nesfield, J. G. (1982). English grammar series. Idioms, grammar and synthesis. London: Macmillan Inc.

14. Quirk Randolph, Sidney Green Baum, Geoffrey Leech, Jan Svartvik. (1985). A comprehensive grammar of the English language. London: Longman Group Ltd.

15. Selinker, L., J. Lamendella (1978). Two perspectives on fossilization in inter language learning; inter language studies Bulletin 3, 1978, 143-91.

16. Thomas, Owen (1965). Transformations grammar and the teacher of English. New York: Hlot, Rinehart and Winston Inc.