GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND MENTAL ASSOCIATIONS: A STUDY IN EFL

Muhammad Athar Khurshid[1], Zainab Tasneem[2], Fatima Riaz[3], Latiba Khanam[4]

Original Article

1. Assistant Professor, Govt. Graduate College Model Town, Lahore
   Email: atharbwp@hotmail.com;
2. Department of Education and Psychology, Kohat University of Science and Technology
3. Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
4. Department of Educational Training, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Abstract

This paper describes some cognitive strategies EFL learners adopt in their usage of English. The researchers designed a translation test from Urdu to English and administered it in a grade-XIII class of a public-sector college. They tried to access the reasons for the participants' errors by three techniques: (1) contrastive analysis of the chunks of faulty translations; (2) interviews with the learners about the reasons for their errors; (3) comparing every participant's translation of different sentences. The data was interpreted in the light of the theory of Interlanguage. In findings, the most unexpected source of errors was learners' fixations.

Keywords: Interlanguage, Fossil, Error Analysis, L1 interference, Overgeneralization, Transfer, Tense, Aspect

1 INTRODUCTION

Public institutions of Pakistan use Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for the teaching of English. In view of the socio-economic condition of this country, GTM is, probably, the most viable method. The researchers themselves have been teaching English language by this method for years. Teaching by word-for-word translation of English into Urdu and vice versa, and by deductive instruction of grammar would produce a learning style. The learners would definitely adopt some mental strategies to cope with the task of learning a completely new language. This paper describes what some of those strategies are, and how they create problems for the learners.

The researchers had been noting the following errors since the day they started teaching English. They wanted to know why the learners inserted *is* in the present simple and *was* in the past simple tenses; what confused them in differentiating the present perfect tense from the past simple tense; why they used incorrect form of verbs; and what made them forget using correct auxiliary etc.

When data was collected, many reasons were learnt. Two basic reasons were: *L1 interference*, and *Mental Associations*. In most of the cases, L1 interference was predictable, but mental associations were unexpected strategies of the learners which were unique in many cases, but still some patterns were noted in them. Many reasons behind the errors were repeated and formed a pattern. The researchers inferred that those reasons had become fossilized in the learners' minds.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study relies mainly on Corder's (1968) theory of error analysis and Selinker's (1972) theory of Interlanguage and fossilization.

Corder (1968) has described four stages of error analysis:

1. Identifying the error: picking the faulty area.
2. Describing the error: describing what is wrong with it
3. Explaining the error: trying to reach the reason for the error
4. Classifying the error: assigning types to errors.

Corder (1981) himself has described the role of interlanguage in error analysis

Interlanguage (IL) by Selinker (1972, p. 215) is a hypothetical intermediary stage between NL and TL. This term has variously been described. Song (2012) says IL is used:

1. to refer to the series of interlocking systems, which Corder (1967) called the learner's "built-in syllabus" (Ellis, 1985).
2. to refer to the system that is observed at a single stage of development ("an interlanguage").
3. to refer to particular L1/L2 combinations (for example, L1 French/L2 English v. L1 Japanese/L2 English).

Mitchell and Myles, (1998), Larsen-Freeman (2003), Al-Khresheh (2015),have given some additional assumption about IL. Al-Khresheh (2015) phrases them as:

1. TL learning is a continuum from NL to TL.
2. A body of rules which neither belong to NL nor to TL can be developed by the learner at every stage of the language learning process. This system is a separate linguistic one.
3. The language learning process includes hypothesis-testing or rule formation.
4. L2 learner's errors are natural.
5. Many language learners do not achieve the TL competence. (p.125)

Selinker (1972), quoted by Al-Khresheh (2015), suggests analysis on three levels to understand existing IL of an individual learner. He proposes the following system:

1. Utterances in the learner's MT produced by the learners.
2. IL utterances produced by the learners.
3. TL/FL utterances produced by NL speakers of that TL. (p.125)

The interlanguage theory describes some permanent (fossilized), semi-permanent (stabilized) phases in second language learning. Selinker (1972) called this phenomenon *fossilization*. Wei (2008) describes how this term is interpreted variously. He notes:

> The notion of fossilization has been interpreted differently. For instance, there are terms like backsliding, stabilized errors, learning plateau, typical error, persistent non-target-like performance, de-acceleration of the learning process, ingrained errors, systematic use of erroneous forms, cessation of learning, structural persistence, ultimate attainment, long-lasting free variation, persistent difficulty, and inability to fully master target language features describing the similar meaning, which lead to confusion for quite a long time (p. 127).

He further says about the phenomenon of fossilization:

> (1) it may appear at different language levels;
> (2) it may occur at different learning stages among age groups;
> (3) it may be either structure fossilization or competence fossilization;
> (4) it is usually manifested as the deviant forms from the TL norms; (5) there are soft and hard degrees of fossilization. (p. 127)

Moreover, fossils may fall in the domains of phonology, morphology, syntactic, semantics, and pragmatics. They are titled according to their respective domain. The present study will explore errors, and possible fossils, in the domain of morpho-syntax. Their preferred definition here is 'half concepts' or 'distorted concepts'. Out of the different versions of Interlanguage, this study will rely on interlanguage as "the system that is observed at a single stage of development."

Wei (2008) enlists following causation factors of fossilization:

***Language Transfer*.** This refers to L1 interference.
***Training Transfer*.** Mistakes inherited from the teachers or teaching method.
***Learning Strategy*.** This is the main focal point of the present study. We will point out individualistic strategies that caused errors. Since the learners are almost beginners, we classify their usage strategies as learning strategies.
***Communication Strategy*.** In communicative discourse, language users may use shortcut too. This area is not the focus of the current study.
***Overgeneralization*.** Incorrect use of the previous TL knowledge. The current study is going to challenge the utility of this term in analyzing the data obtained from GTM background.

Mostly the scholars have described the theory of interlanguage as the phenomenon that occurs between L1 and L2 in the social context of L2. SLA literature focuses the interlanguage that develops when L2 is acquired without any classroom instruction. But one cannot say interlanguage does not exist in the Foreign language learners, especially those who learn it in the classroom, via GTM.

Richards (1971) studied systematic errors across the usage/use of learners with different native languages. He focused weak concepts of rules, not unique errors, and called them *developmental errors*. He also excluded the errors of L1 interference. He describes them as:

1. ***Overgeneralization.*** If an error occurs because of a misplaced rule of L2, it is attributed to the effect of overgeneralization. For example, *He didn't went there. Here Ved variant of verb is incorrectly inserted in a negative sentence of the past simple tense. The current study has presented overgeneralization in a different way. The data obtained also carries the examples of overgeneralization of intra-lingual correlations.
2. ***Ignorance of rule restriction.*** For example, the error in *She made me to speak has occurred because the structure of She wanted me to speak is extended to the former.
3. ***Errors of transitional competence*** are caused by an incomplete, not distorted, concept of a structure. For example, often learners avoid auxiliary inversion in the interrogative constructions.
4. ***A false concept hypothesized*** refers to the situation when a learner cannot fully differentiate between two similar rules. For example, the insertion of *was* in the past simple tense, as an example of overextension of the past progressive tense.

The current study is different from Richards (1971) in many ways: (1) it does not analyze data from the speakers of different native language; (2) it does not restrict itself to systematic errors only; (3) instead of analyzing developmental errors, it aims to study synchronic errors; (4) the participants of the current study have been learning English by GTM, while Richards has not mentioned the method of teaching used in his study. Therefore, we can't rely on Richard's terminology to analyze the data of the current study. However, it can be useful in some other ways. The concept of L1 interference can safely be borrowed from it; but the other major concept, overgeneralization, is difficult to apply as it is. We are going to point out how it was incompatible with our data. In the end, we will demonstrate how the term Mental Associations can more conveniently be applied to explain the errors resulting from Grammar Translation Method.

To study learner's weak concepts, this study partially follows the technique of Chan (2004), and Bennui (2008). The outlines of their works are given below.

Bennui (2008) studied the errors of 28 Thai students of grade-XIII, with English as L2. His test consisted of two questions: one about simple and compound structures, and the other about paragraph writing. He analysed errors at the levels of word, sentence, and discourse. He noted:

Negative Transfer in the lexical items.

Lack of agreement in subject and verb, and its impact on tense

Chan (2004) conducted quantitative research on Chinese adult learners of English. She collected writing samples from 710 ESL students in Hong Kong of different grades. Her tool consisted of a few translation questions, from Chinese to English, and interviews. The participants explained the reason for their translation. They admitted that before they wrote an English sentence, they had thought of the corresponding situation in Chinese.

We compared the type of errors with the findings of some Indian and Pakistani researchers. Almost same types of errors were noted in the data of the present study. Findings of Sridhar, Rehman, and Karim are given below.

Sridhar (1996) studied errors in the L2 (English) of Kannada speaking female undergraduates of India. His data showed sharp resemblance with the 'corresponding' features of NL. He considered Negative Transfer to be the main reason for the errors. One major error pointed out in his study was lack of Number agreement between subject and verb. The current study also presents many such examples.

Rehman (1990) prepared an inventory of the generally found errors in Pakistani English. It includes subject-verb agreement errors, over-generalization of the progressive aspect, avoidance of dummy auxiliaries, avoidance of auxiliary inversion and so forth. Though Rehman's (1990) findings pertain to advanced learners, yet some basic errors were discovered in them too. For example, some of Rehman's participants skipped auxiliary inversion in wh- question. Rehman (1990) has accounted for his respondents' errors as the process of *creolization*.

We have carried out this study in the pedagogical background. Our participants have beginners like competence. We have tried to study the individual learners' concepts.

Karim (n.d.) studied the errors of the Grades-XI, XII (secondary school students), and grade-XIII, XIV (undergraduate students) of Bahawalpur district. The data of the present study is collected from a college of the same district. He prepared a list of the percentage of errors in each part of speech. But he did not assign any reason to the errors. He simply pointed out most frequently occurring errors and suggested areas of special focus for the researchers.

The literature cited above points out following major errors in the writings of the learners of English from different socio-educational backgrounds:

Lack of subject-verb agreement

Incorrect use of article

Incorrect use of prepositions

Lack of auxiliary inversion

Faulty insertion of *be.*

3 METHOD

This study is in qualitative paradigm. Qualitative approach is good for developing in-depth understanding of an existing phenomenon. The teachers in Pakistan know what types of errors the learners do during the process of learning, but, there is a dearth of research that can answer why students make errors. The researchers have tried to explore this phenomenon qualitatively. We hope this study will prepare the

ground for a quantitative, and generalizable research. We explained the errors in the light of the theory of Interlanguage. We preferred interlanguage because the participants of our study had been learning English by GTM, i.e., they were developing their target language in parallel comparison with their native language.

For data collection purposes, Grade-XIII (roughly freshmen) male students of a public sector college of Pakistan, were the population of this study. Participants were selected by convenience sampling technique. The first author was teaching English language course to these students at the time of research. The tools of research were: (1) an Urdu-to-English translation test, and (2) the unstructured interviews with the participants. Chan (2004) has also used translation-interview technique. The test consisted of 48 Urdu sentences, 4 for each tense. The four types of sentences were: (1) affirmative sentences, (2) negative sentences, (3) yes/no questions, and (4) wh- questions. After the translation test was over, the participants were interviewed. They explained the reasons for their translation. We noted down their comments. We avoided gadgets because the students were getting conscious of them. We analyzed their answers in the test and interviews and tried to reach underlying reasons for their errors. The data was analyzed from three angles: (1) participants' confessions, (2) contrastive analysis of the faulty chunks of text. (3) cross matching of a participant's translation of different tenses and moods. The reasons collected by this method were organized and classified.

Some annotations were used for two reasons: (1) to label the type of construction; and (2) to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Following signs were used to annotate the tenses: the present simple tense (P1), the present progressive tense(P2), the present perfect tense (P3), the present perfect progressive tense (P4); the past simple tens (Pt1), the past progressive tense(Pt2), the past perfect tense(Pt3), the past perfect progressive tense(Pt4); the future simple tense(F1), the future progressive tense(F2), the future perfect tense (F3), the future perfect progressive (F4). Affirmative, negative, yes/no (polarity) questions, and *wh* questions were abbreviated as a, n, p, w respectively. Instead of the participants' names, three-lettered code names were used.

In addition to above annotations, five variants of the verb are symbolized as: Vo, Vs, Ved, Ven, Ving. Their examples are: *go*, *goes*, *went*, *gone*, *going*, respectively (Leech, 1982).

3.1 Reliability of the Tool

The researchers took care not to make contents of the test too difficult for the participants. For this reason, all the questions were selected from a workbook of Grade-X (Chishti & Hashmi, 2010). All the participants had already gone through it three years ago, because it was a compulsory partof their syllabus in matriculation. Moreover, the participants were allowed to ask the English expressions for Urdu words. To verify the reliability of the test,we compared our participants' errors with the data available in literature, and found it similar. The data of the current study was compared with that of Bennui (2008), Chan (2004), Karim (n.d.), Rehman (1990), Sridhar (1996). They describe almost all types of errors which are described in the current study, and explain them in terms of the L1 interference and over-generalization.

3.2 Validity of Inferences

The researchers used the techniques of triangulation and member-check to maintain validity. First, we tried to maintain descriptive and interpretative validity by repeating our understanding of the respondents' answers before them. Second, the answers of a participant, his errors, and his reasons were cross-matched to ascertain his consistency. Third, the researchers carried out the contrastive analysis of the chunks of L1 and L2, where necessary, and compared it with the participants' reasons. Fourth, the inferences were finalized only after member-check.

The current study is based on the qualitative paradigm and convenience sampling which inherently allow limited generalizability. However, partially it was ensured when two MPhil researchers, Ali (2015) and Raza (2016), replicated our research in a different population frame, and they came up with similar results.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The detail of the errors based on mental associations is given below. All the examples cited here are taken from the source study (Khurshid, 2010,pp. 209-223). This was the second largest, but the most important, group of errors in the above mentioned study.

4.1 Mental Associations

In linguistics, there is a debate over formal and functional approaches to grammar. Both schools try to establish the primacy of syntagmatic order or paradigmatic choices in learning. In this study, which is usage-based, learners' reliance on syntagmatic sequences is revealed to be the most frequently recurring cause of errors. This study has unearthed and classified different patterns of such sequencing. They are: (1) *Continuity Associations*, and (2) *Occurrence Associations*. The former means the fixation of faulty linear collocations between two words; the latter refers to the co-occurrence of two or more words, two or more concepts, or a word and a concept, at any point in the sentence.

4.1.1 Continuity Associations

Sometimes, learners develop a habit of writing two lexical items together in a linear order, or simply closely. When such combinations are used in violation of some other rule/s of grammar, errors occur. This sub-category was further divided into 4 sub-categories whose detail is given below:

4.1.1.1 Person Agreement Continuity

In literature (Sridhar, 1996; Rehman, 1990),the most frequently cited error is the lack of subject and verb agreement. This study has explained some of the reasons for such errors. A few participants remained focused on maintaining person agreement, but they totally ignored the agreement of number and/or tense. 5participants committed 18 errors of this type. The errors occurred because of the participants' faulty use of the following mental associations:

The participants confessed they used the following combinations because of their nearer familiarity with them. The combination *I am* was used in the present simple tense, and the future simple tense, 1 time each. The combination *I have* was used 1 time in the future progressive tense. The combination *I do* was used1 time in the future perfect tense. The combination *I did* was used 1 time in the present simple tense. The combination *you does* was used 1 time in the past simple tense. The combination *you have* was used in the past perfect tense, and the past simple tense, 1 time each. The combination *you were* was used 1 time in the past perfect progressive tense. The combination *he Vs* was used 3 times in the past simple tense, and 1 time in the past progressive tense. The combination *he has* was used in the present simple tense, and the past simple tense, 1 time each. The combination *he will has* was used 1 time in the future progressive tense. The combination *they will have* was used 2 times in the future progressive tense.

In order to point out any possible pattern in the data, I re-arrange it in the form of the tables below. The purpose is to highlight that the learners were not confused here over the choice of correct auxiliary verb; they were, rather, tempted to overgeneralize a familiar collocation. Different auxiliary combinations with *I* attracted different learners. Their detail is given below:

Table 1: List of Chunks

	The combination	Used in	Frequency		Total
1	*I am*	The present simple tense	1		
		The future simple tense	1	2	
2	*I have*	The future progressive tense	1	1	
3	*I do*	The future perfect tense	1	1	
4	*I did*	The present simple tense	1	1	
5	*You does*	The past simple tense	1	1	
6	*You have*	The past perfect tense	1		
		The past simple tense	1	2	
7	*You were*	The past perfect progressive tense	1	1	
8	*He Vs* (tensed main verb)	The past simple tense	3		
		The past progressive tense	1	4	
9	*He has*	The present simple tense	1		18
		The past simple tense	1	2	
10	*He will has*	The future progressive tense	1	1	
11	*They will have*	The future progressive tense	2	2	

Table 2: Tense-wise errors

	Tense	Errors	Combinations
1	The present simple tense	3	*I am*; *I did*; *he has*
2	The past simple tense	6	*You does*; *you have*; *He Vs*; *He has*;
3	The future simple tense	1	*I am*
4	The past progressive tense	1	*He Vs* (tensed main verb)
5	The future progressive tense	4	*I have*; *He will has*; *They will have*
6	The past perfect tense	1	*You have*
7	The future perfect tense	1	*I do*
8	The past perfect progressive tense	1	*You were*
	08	18	11

Most of the above-cited combinations are unique cases. Individual participant repeated the same error 2 to 4 times in one or two different tenses. In spite of the fact that many combinations are used only

one time, the underlying idea, the mental association of two or more lexical items, was observed in all the 18 examples. Though eighteen is not a big figure, yet its smallness does not restrict its importance. The tools of the present study were designed quite loosely, with the purpose of exploring as many reasons as possible. A more focused test may bring up a variety of confusions in this area.

4.1.1.2 Number Agreement Continuity

Sometimes, learners ignore agreement of person and/or tense, and remain focused on the agreement of number between subject and verb. 5 participants committed 8 errors of this type (Khurshid, 2010, pp. 211-12).

The combination of a plural subject with *does* occurred 1 time in the future simple tense, 2 times in the present progressive tense, 3 times in the present perfect tense. *Does* is skipped 1 time in the present simple tense. The combination *Are these class* was used 1 time in the present progressive tense.

For a closer focus, the data is rearranged in the table below.

Table 3: List of Chunks

	The combination	Used in	Frequency		Total
1	*Plural subject precedes* '*does*'	**The present perfect tense**	3		
		The patients does not….	(2)	6	
		We does not buy...	(1)		
		The present progressive tense	2		
		Children does not throwing…			8
		Does this class taking…			
		The future simple tense	1		
		Does people run after…			
2	*Does* (skipped)	**The present simple tense**	1	1	
		What he eats…			
3	*Plural auxiliary precedes a singular subject*	**The present progressive**	1	1	
		Are these class…			

The above table shows, different participants used the combination of a plural subject with *does*, 6 times in different tenses. All of them tried to maintain number agreement. Familiarity prevailed over

rules. As the learners' concept of agreement was incomplete, this association became fossilized in their minds.

4.1.1.3 Auxiliary-Auxiliary Continuity and Auxiliary-Verb Continuity

Some learners make a syntagmatic combination of (1) two auxiliaries, or (2)an auxiliary and a main verb. Some of these combinations are grammatically correct and other are incorrect. The learners often use the correct combinations in a wrong environment. In the current study, 14participantsconfessed that they made such usage 23 times (Khurshid, pp. 212-14).

The combination *are Vs* occurred 1 time in the present progressive tense. The combination *are Vo* occurred 3 times in the present progressive tense, and 1 time in the present perfect tense. The combination *was / were Ved* occurred 2 times in past progressive tense. The combination *did Vo* occurred1 time in the past progressive tense. The combination *did Ved* occurred 2 times in the present perfect tense. The combination (*Where*) *will be* occurred 2 times in the future progressive tense, 1 time in the future perfect tense, and 1 time in the future perfect progressive tense. The combination *will have*(*the guests*)occurred 4 times in the future perfect tense, and 3 times in the future perfect progressive tense. The combinations *hall not have Vo* occurred 1 time in the future perfect tense. The combination *would not have Vo*occurred1 time in the future perfect tense.

To cast a closer look at the correlation of errors and tenses, we see them in the form of a table.

Table4: List of Chunks

	The combination	Used in	Frequency		Total
1	*are Vs* (present tense main verb)	The present progressive tense	1	1	
2	*are Vo* (tenseless main verb)	The present progressive tense	3		
		The present perfect tense	1	4	
3	*was/were Ved* (past tense main verb)	The past progressive tense	2	2	
4	*did Vo* (tenseless main verb)	The past progressive tense	1	1	
5	*did Ved* (past tense main verb)	The present perfect tense	2	2	
	(*Where*) *will be*	The future progressive tense	2		
6		The future perfect tense	1		
		The future perfect progressive tense	1	4	
	will have (*the guests*)	The future perfect tense	4		
7		The future perfect progressive tense	3	7	23
8	s*hall not have Vo* (tenseless main verb)	The future perfect tense	1	1	
9	*would not have Vo* (tenseless main verb)	The future perfect tense	1	1	

There is no strict one-to-one correlation between chunks and tenses. The learners admitted, and the lack of any correlation and pattern suggests that the learners merely used familiar combinations. Apparently no competence issue causes these errors. As the possibilities for personal familiarity are

infinite, any predictability about them is not possible at this stage. But a more focused study may help to know this phenomenon in detail, and some patterns may be discovered.

Table5: Tense-wise distribution

	Tense	Errors	Combinations
1	The present progressive tense	4	*are Vs*;
			are Vo(3)
2	The past progressive tense	3	*Was/were Ved*;(2)
			Did Vo
3	The future progressive tense	2	(*Where*) *will be*;
4	The present perfect tense	3	*are Vo*
			did Ved; (2)
		7	(*Where*) *will be*;
5	The future perfect tense		*Will have (the guests)*;(4)
			s*hall not have Vo*;
			would not have Vo;
6	The future perfect progressive tense	4	(*Where*) *will be*;
			Will have (the guests); (3)
	6	23	09

We find many unique and group examples of the combinations mentioned above. 2 or more participants applied one combination *will have* in the future perfect progressive tense. This is a violation of an L2 rule. In the light of available literature, we can explain this error merely as an issue of over generalization. But, now, the question arises as to why this particular rule was over generalized. The present study provides us a reason. The participants reported that they had used these combinations because it was very familiar to them. So, they comfortably inserted it. Therefore, the closer logic to explain the above mentioned error should be given in terms of auxiliary-auxiliary or auxiliary-verb collocations.

4.1.1.4 Aux-Negation Continuity

Some learners make collocation-based combinations of the element of negation, *not*, with an auxiliary. If their mind is more familiar with *did not* combination, they may tend to insert it in any tense, more frequently, without any grammatical logic. It is not necessary they always use this combination because many other puzzles also exist, but they may use such combinations quite often.5participants committed 15 errors of this type (Khurshid, pp. 214-15).

The participants reported three combinations as their fixations: *does not* occurred 1 time in the present progressive tense, and 1 time in the past perfect progressive tense; *do not* occurred 1 time in the present perfect progressive tense. *did not* occurred 11 times: 1 time in the present simple tense, 4 times in the present progressive tense, 2 times in the past progressive tense, 1 time in the present perfect tense, 1 time in the past perfect tense, 1 time in the past perfect progressive tense, 1 time in the future

perfect progressive tense. All 5 participants incorrectly applied *did not* combination. All of them thought *did* to be the best pair for *not.* 1 participant used *will be not* combinations in the future progressive tense.

Table6: List of chunks

	Comb.	Used in	Freq.		Total
1	*does not*	The present progressive tense	1	2	
		The past perfect progressive tense	1		
2	*do not*	The present perfect progressive tense	1	1	
3	*did not*	The present simple tense	1		
		The present progressive tense	4		
		The past progressive tense	2		
		The present perfect tense	1	11	
		The past perfect tense	1		15
		The past perfect progressive tense	1		
		The future perfect progressive tense	1		
4	*will be not*	The future progressive tense	1	1	

Table7: Tense-wise distribution

	Tense	Errors	Combinations
1	The present simple tense	1	*did not*
2	The present progressive tense	5	*does not*; (1)
			did not (4)
3	The past progressive tense	2	*did not*
4	The future progressive tense	1	*will be not*
5	The present perfect tense	1	*did not*
6	The past perfect tense	1	*did not*
7	The present perfect progressive tense	1	*do not*;
8	The past perfect progressive tense	2	*does not*; *did not*
9	The future perfect progressive tense	1	*did not*;
	09	15	04

If we rely on the terminology available in literature, we will interpret this error as a phenomenon of overgeneralization, which is misleading. Overgeneralization means the faulty application of a rule of L2. In the above examples, the participants have overplayed their prior familiarity with the *did not* combination.

So, at the end of the section *Continuity Associations*, we observed four types of syntagmatic orders:

Person Agreement Continuity

Number Agreement Continuity

Auxiliary-Auxiliary Continuity and Auxiliary-Verb Continuity

Aux-Negation Continuity

Theses chunks exist as fossils in the learners' minds. Every learner makes their own fossilized chunks, but reason for their existences is one. The learners received insufficient practice in different structures. So, they began to use the rudimentary chunks by hit and trial. The more familiar the chunk, the more frequent the usage.

4.1.2 Co-Occurrence Associations

This is the learners' tendency of using two or more concepts together in a sentence, not necessarily sequentially. Such errors have been grouped as**:** *association of verb form* and *tense*; *association of adjunct* and *tense* or *aspect*; *association of verb form* (misconception about the form of verb). In this category, 11 participants admitted that they made 28 usages of this type.

4.1.2.1 Association of Verb Form and Tense

We observed that the learners try to identify the present tense with the Vs or Vo variant of main or auxiliary verb. In other words, they associate the concept of a tense with a verb-form. 2 participants committed 5 errors of this type (Khurshid, pp.215-16).

In Urdu, [hɛ], [ɦɛ̃], [ɦũ], are the present tense variants of *be*. Their equivalents in English are: *is, are, am,* respectively. The participants might have transferred a rule of L1 to L2. In the available literature, such errors have been described as *developmental errors* (Ellis, 1994, p. 58). Richards (1971) says that native speakers of English also insert *be* in the present simple tense in their early stages. He termed it as *transitional competence.* It is difficult to say how the native speakers would account for their error, the participants of this study described it the result of taking Vo variant of verb or auxiliary as the present tense. In my opinion, they acquired this idea from their teacher. Most of the teachers in the public sector institutions of Pakistan make word-for-word, and feature for feature correlation of Urdu and English. These correlations become fossilized, and learners begin to apply them blindly, sometime correctly, but mostly incorrectly.

In the available data, 5 participants admitted they had this confusion.2 used *is / are / am Vo* combination in the present progressive tense. 2 used *have Vo* combination in the present perfect tense. 1 used the *does Ved* combination in the past simple tense, and the past perfect tense. Though the small data indicates lack of consistency in the use of this combination, yet this type of confusion exists. In some other sample frame, its size may increase.

Table8: List of Chunks

	Combination	Used in	Frequency	Total
1	**Is/are Vo** ***Is** this class **take** interest…* *Why **are** the students **come** from…..*	The present progressive tense	2	
2	**have Vo** *have not listen….* *Mouse s**have make**…..*	The past simple tense The present perfect tense	2	05
3	**does Ved** *The players **does** not **entered**….*	The past perfect tense	1	

From the participants' answers, we may draw the inference that the learners did not receive detailed drills in subject-verb agreement. They used only those combinations which were very familiar to them. Some of their usages were correct, but others were incorrect. The correct combinations also became erroneous when they are placed in the wrong environment. Teachers may eradicate these type of errors by helping the learners to memorize new combinations so that they stop relying too much on the previously learnt combinations. To achieve this end, teachers should help the students memorize the clauses of everyday use, and given them oral and written exercises.

4.1.2.2 Association of Adjunct with Tense or with Aspect

Some learners try to get clue to the reference time (R),or event time (E), (Michaelis, 2006) from the adjunct phrases. Some detail as to how they made links between tense and adjunct phrases is given below. 4 participants committed 9 errors of this type (Khurshid, pp. 215-16).

3 participants associated the interrogative *When* with future tense. They thought the use of *will/shall* redundant after when. Some others associated the time sense of the temporal adjunct with the past perfect tense. 1 participant skipped the auxiliaries *had been* twice, supposing they were already implied in the temporal adjunct phrase. 1 participant used *had Ving* combination 4 times, and considered it the indication of the past perfect tense. This error arises from the mental association of temporal adjunct with the verbs/auxiliaries marking tense/aspect. This concept is tricky. Simple memorization may not help to eradicate this type of error. It is advisable the concepts of *speech time* (S), *event time* (E), *reference time* (R) (Carnie, 2013; Michaelis, 2006) be discussed in the classroom.

Table9: List of Chunks

	Combination	Used in	Frequency	Total
1	When—future *When you publish…* (1) *When you print…* (2)	The Future Simple tense	03	
2	Had been Ving skipped. *Students noise for half an hour.* Had been skipped. *Where they collect money since six years.*	The Past Perfect Progressive Tense	02	09
3	Had- Ving 1.*Students had making….* 2. *M y brother had not examining…* 3. *Had your brother advising….* 4. *Where they had collecting…*	The Past Perfect Progressive Tense	04	

4.1.2.3.Confusion of verb forms

EFL learners often remain confused over the forms of irregular verbs. They may confuse the variants Ved and Ven. The authors have described their confusion as the faulty association of a grammatical concept with a verb variant. 11 participants committed 14 errors of this type (Khurshid, pp. 217-18).

The participants used variants Vo, Ved and Ven,incorrectly.2 used *run* as Ved. 4 used *torn* as Vo. 1 used *take* as Ved. 1 used *seen* as Ved. 1 used *came* as Ven. 1 used *sitted*, and 2 used *sit* as Ven. 1 used *thought* as Vo. Sometimes, their concept of tense was good but they inserted an incorrect form of verb because they didn't know any other.

Table 10: List of Chunks

	Combination	Used in	Frequency	Total
1	**Vo as Ved**			
	*He **run** for his ….* *He **run** away for …..*	The past simple tense	02	
	*Patient was not **take*** (Ved) *medicine.*	The present perfect tense	01	
2	**Vo-Ved confusion**			
	*Why did he **torn**(Vo)…*	The past simple tense	01	
3	**Irregular as Regular**			14
	*Has he **leaved** the village for good?*	The present perfect tense	01	
	Will the guests have sitted **(Ven)**…	The Future perfect tense	01	
4	**Ven as Ved**			
	*Why he **torn*** (Ved).	The past simple	03	
	*Where you **wasseen*** (Ved) *this man.*	The present perfect tense.	01	
5	**Ved as Ven**			
	Why had the people came (Ven) *back…..*	The past perfect tense	01	
6	**Vo as Ven**			
	Will have the guests sit (Ven) ….	The future Perfect tense	02	
7	**Ven as Vo**			
	When officer will thought (Vo) ….	The future perfect tense	01	

Co-occurrence errors come from the fixations based on faulty pairings. The presence of one item/concept is incorrectly associated with another. Such errors, too, cannot be explained with the help of the existing terms like over-generalization or transfer. The term *mental associations* better describe them.

In the available literature we hardly find any example of mental associations. Probably, this type is specific to Pakistani educational background. The present research describes the problems of learning English by GTM. The researchers usually do not mention the method and technique they used to teach their respective foreign languages.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Mental associations describe two types of errors: (1) lack of subject verb agreement, and (2) making of faulty collocations. 7 cognitive reasons are suggested to account for the above mentioned 2 errors, and this is not the whole story. Many other reasons are classified in other sections. For further detail, please see (Khurshid, 2010; Khurshid, 2016a; Khurshid, et al, 2016b; and Khurshid et al, 2016c; Khurshid et al, 2020; Khurshid et al, 2021).

The researchers have pointed out that it is not necessary the learners apply a faulty pattern every time. Sometimes, they come up with correct structures. Neither they were consistent in their use of correct structures, nor in that of the incorrect ones. Neither it is predictable when a learner will translate a sentence right or wrong, nor when a learner will adopt which of the above mentioned strategies. But the data shows that the learners committed more errors in the negative sentences, and in yes/no questions. This suggests that only a little change in the basic structure may confuse the learners. Teachers should take care to give the learners detailed exercises in the four basic structures of every tense: affirmative sentences, negative sentences yes/no questions, wh questions. The learners become confused over inserting an auxiliary in front of *not.* Sometimes, they rely on the most familiar combinations which they blindly insert in any tense. They also try to avoid auxiliary inversion either because of their preference for using unmarked structure (developmental error/transitional stage) (Richards, 1971), or because their L1 lacks auxiliary inversion, or because of the combined effect of the two.

This study also describes how Richards's (1971) concept of overgeneralization is insufficient to describe errors that result from the teaching of English through Grammar Translation Method. If we had not interviewed the participants, we might analyze part of the above data as the manifestation of overgeneralization, and would have remained misled.

Mental associations are corrector incorrect concepts of grammatical combinations which are inserted in the wrong slots. Such errors cannot be eradicated merely by teaching the rules of grammar. They can be overcome by helping the learners to memorize important word combinations. Oral drills may be more useful to achieve this target.

This study describes the *interlanguage* of the Urdu-medium learners of English formed in the educational context of Pakistan. In the learners' strategy, synchronic approach was noted very frequently. A few traces of paradigmatic approach were also noted, but they were not the part of the current topic. The distorted concepts pointed out in this study are not rigid fossils. We identify them as such because individual learners used them repeatedly. Each trend was also noted in a number of learners. So we labelled them as *flexible fossils*. They are not predictable; but once they are identified, they keep appearing off and on. Nobody knows when and where a particular fossilized expression would be used; however, if exploration in this direction continues, some predictability about theses flexible fossils can be achieved.

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