

The Interference of Second Language Acquisition (English) on Third Language Acquisition (German) Learners in the Indian Context (L1-Indian Languages)

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Abstract – The acquisition of second language influences greatly on the learners of third language acquisition. While acquiring a language, learners find difficulty in grammar and vocabulary. Insofar as there are distinct differences in word order at the syntactic level of German and English, the Indian learners of German as Foreign Language, coming from an ESL background, tend to commit repetitive errors in word order while writing sentences in German and such difficulties can be traced and used to advantage in a GFL context in the ESL background. This article is confined to patterns of sentences in German taught at the basic course in German. In this article the German sentences are correlated with English sentences. The findings of the article are relevant in the translation of both languages. It focusses only on the word order in German and English. The findings of the article are likely to help in the process of translating material relevant to learning tasks with reference to sentence construction and word order

Keywords: Acquisition, Committed Errors, Interference, Structures and Word Order

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the globalisation acquiring a new language has become a fashion and an interest among the students. It makes a great avenue for job opportunity in those countries where a particular language is spoken. In many countries English is taught as second language and German, French, Spanish, and other languages are taught as third language. In India every state has its own language as a first language and English is being taught as second language in the schools and all government sectors whereas German is also taught as third language in many schools and universities. German has been taught since 1914 in India. Goethe Institute, an institute of German is established in 96 countries to provide German language course in the world. Many students and job seekers show a lot of interest to take up German language. While learning German through the medium of English, there is an influence in German language. This article discusses the occurrence of errors in the German sentences especially in the word order. The occurrence of errors and rectification are highlighted.

2. THE OCCURRENCE OF VERBS IN THE SENTENCES

In English the verbs occur together after the subject and the verb agreement is done according to the subject whereas in German the first verb occurs in the second place and other verbs occur at the end of the sentence. The subject can either appear before the first verb or after the first verb and the first verb has to be conjugated according to the subject. Having English as a second language or medium German learners commit mistakes in the occurrence of the verbs due to the interference of English in German language. German learners must work hard in order to overcome these kinds of errors. They face difficulty in the word order because of the interference of the language that is previously learnt. This process occurs because of imitation of the medium language. The behaviourists have explained why it happens.

The behaviourist approach has two fold views of imitation and practice in the language acquisition. The child imitates the parents and caretakers' words, utterances, sound, and their repetition. The child is selective in imitation. Imitation is common to all human beings. Imitation can be either formal or informal observation. Children are good imitators

of someone or something. It is noted that imitation is an important factor for the acquisition of language. Researches show that echoing is also another important factor for language acquisition. In language learning the phonological acquisition is also a very important factor. We can classify imitation into two factors. The primary type is surface structure imitation wherein one repeats or mimics the surface strings. Here the person concentrates on the phonological code. He/she gives less attention to the semantic code. The secondary step is deep structure imitation. The person is certain to concentrate on the meaningfulness of the language. To them language is a communicative tool and there is meaning in it. What they have imitated former is applied in the later without paying attention to the present. The former denotes the second language (English), the later denotes the targeted language German that is to be learnt and the present indicates the German grammar rules which are systematically taught.

Based on a survey at VIT, Vellore, the German learners have committed errors in the occurrence of verbs in the word order. For instance, *Mein Bruder soll essen das Brot mit Butter jetzt* (My brother should eat the bread with butter now). In this German sentence the occurrence of verbs is together like English. The verb 'soll' means 'should' and 'essen' means 'eat'. The verb 'soll' is an auxiliary verb that should occur in the second place of the sentence in German and 'essen' is the main or action verb that should occur at the end of the sentence whereas the students have placed these two verbs together like English. This kind of interference is encountered by German learners. The correct sentence should be 'Mein Bruder **soll** das Brot mit Butter jetzt **essen**'. In this survey, 90% percentage of the German learners have difficulty in using the verbs in the German sentence. To rectify this error the German learners should be instructed the word order especially the occurrence of the verbs in German language.

3. ERRORS IN THE TENSE

It is very interesting to note that German language does not have 'ing' form or continuous tense. While making a sentence in German, the German learners make a continuous tense which is not in German language. It is because of the interference or influence of English. For instance, *Meine Kinder spielen Fussball jetzt* (My children play football now). Many students of German write the same sentence in the continuous form like 'Meine Kinder **sind spielen** Fussball jetzt'. This sentence is absolutely wrong in German. We do not use an auxiliary verb to make a continuous tense. So here the word 'sind' means 'are'. The former one is the correct sentence that could be translated into English as 'My children play football now or my children are playing football now'. The later one is incorrect and the learners are influenced by English as a medium to teach German as a third language. Most of the beginners have this difficulty and tend to commit this kind of error. These

learners should be clearly instructed of the tense in German in order to rectify the errors.

4. USAGE OF INTERROGATIVE FORM IN GERMAN

There are two types of questions in German as well as in English. One is WH questions and another one Yes/No type questions. The major difference occurs while forming a question in both the languages. In English the word order is WH word + an auxiliary verb + subject + an action verb + other elements and then question mark appears. Whereas in German the word order is WH word + action or main verb + subject + other elements and then the question mark occurs. For example, when do you come to Germany? The same question is formed in German as *Wann kommst du nach Deutschland?* Or *Wann kommen Sie nach Deutschland?* In English after WH word an auxiliary verb (do/ be/have) is used and then the subject occurs and after the subject the main verb occurs. In German we do not use any auxiliary verb but we write the main verb after the WH word and then the subject occurs. The main verb is conjugated according to the subject. German learners having English as a second language or medium of German learning have a major interference of the English in German question making. The earlier mentioned question is made in German as *Wann tun/machen Sie kommen nach Deutschland?* Or *Wann tust/ machst du nach Deutschland?* This is an incorrect sentence in German language because no auxiliary verb is used to make a question. In this question 'tun or machen' means 'do/ make'. Because of the interference of English in German they have used these auxiliary verbs before the subject.

While making Yes/No question in English, An auxiliary verb is used to make questions whereas in German it is not used. The Word Order for German is as follows: Main Verb + Subject + Other elements? The Word Order in English is as follows: Auxiliary verb + Subject + Main Verb + Other elements? For instance, do you learn German in Bonn? The same question is made by most of the German learners as "Tun Sie lernen Deutsch in Bonn? (Tun -do, Sie- you, lernen-learn, Deutsch-German)" This sentence is incorrect in German. The correct sentence is 'Lernen Sie Deutsch in Bonn? Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention on the word order in English as well as in German in order to rectify the errors.

5. USAGE OF FUTURE TENSE IN GERMAN

A survey was conducted to identify the committed errors among the German learners who have an influence or interference of English. From the questionnaire one of the items is chosen and is presented in this paper. That is about the usage of future tense. The questionnaire was assessed with

the help of SPSS software. That sentence, its description, and its table are enumerated to show how the errors are committed and what remedy is administered. The item is as follows:

Ich/ werde/ dir/ morgen eine Ansichtskarte/ schreiben . (S+Aux. V+ O+ A+ O+ V (infinitive form))

Item Description:

The tenth item for the study has the word order in German (S+Aux.V+O+A+O+V). It does not have a parallel structure in English. It can be understood in English as "I will write to you a postcard tomorrow" The answer choices given are as follows:

- A. I become you tomorrow a postcard write
- B. I will to you morning a postcard write
- C. I become writing you a postcard tomorrow.
- D. I will write to you a postcard tomorrow.
- E. I can write to you a postcard tomorrow

The word order for Item 10 in German is (S+Aux.V+O+A+O+V) which is indeed considered to be a more challenging item insofar as the word order in English is S+V+A+A. Within the Adjunct, the verbs occur together after the subject in English and the Advgp and other words occur next whereas in German there is a split in the verb occurrence. The first verb occurs in the second place in the sentence and the subject can be placed either before the first verb or immediately after the first verb and then the other verbs occur at the end of the sentence. In item 10 the verb 'werden' is used to indicate future tense but this word actually means in English 'to become'. In this item it is used in the future form 'will'. The percentile and frequency distribution of the responses are presented in the Table 10 below:

Table 10 – Responses of Ich werde dir morgen eine Ansichtskarte schreiben

Options	Frequency	Percentage
A	-	-
B	4	4.2
C	8	8.3
D	78	81.3
E	6	6.3
Total	96	100.0

Item A is eliminated by all the respondents because of their familiarity with English grammar and structure. 4 respondents have chosen B (4.2%) and 8 respondents have selected C (8.3%), 6 respondents have selected E (6.3%), and 78 respondents have selected D (81.3%). Item D is the

correct answer whereas items B, C and E are not the correct answers. The respondents of B face difficulty with the German word order. This is why they selected B. In this sentence the first verb occurs in the second place and the main verb occurs at the end of the sentence. In English all verbs occur after the subject. During the remedial teaching they should be given a special attention in the word order and the structure of the sentence. The respondents of item C have difficulty with verb 'werden' which is used for indicating future tense 'will' and the actual meaning of this word 'werden' is 'to become'. These respondents have thought of the word as 'become'. That's why they have chosen C. during the remedial teaching they should be instructed the variation of 'Werden'. The respondents of item E have problems with the usage of modal and future form of verb. It is very interesting to note that the respondents of B, C, and E have different problems in the word order, clarity of the usage of verb and the structure. The implication may perhaps be that for this structure, the instructor may have to take into account the level of proficiency of the learner in English grammar and structure and accordingly address the need of the learner. Even though the respondents of B, C and E face difficulty to choose the correct English word order, they are confused of German word order that is why they have chosen the wrong answer in English word order.

6. USAGE OF SEPARABLE VERBS

The usage of separable verb is not in English language. Due to this reason many German learners find to make a proper German sentence. They forget to separate the prefix and main verb from the verb. This is the rule that is followed in German language while making a sentence by using a separable verb. When the survey is conducted how the students have committed errors is given below.

Item : 9. Er/ bringt/ sein Essen zur Firma/ mit. (S+ V (bringt....mit) +O+A)

Item Description:

The ninth item for the study has the word order in German (S+V (bringt...mit) +O+A+ Prefix). It does not have a parallel structure in English. It can be understood in English as "He brings his food to the company" The answer choices given are as follows:

- A. He brings to be the food to the company
- B. His food brings he to the company
- C. He brings his food to the company
- D. He brings his food to the company with

E. He brings with his food to the company

The word order for Item 9 in German is (S+V(separable)+O +AA +prefix) which is indeed considered to be a more challenging item insofar as the word order in English is S+V+O+A. In German the separable verb is split and the prefix of the verb is to be written at the end of the sentence and the main verb has to be placed in the second position of a sentence. "Mitbringen" that means "bring with". This word has two different words 'mit' which mean 'with/by' and 'bringen' that means 'bring'. If these words come separately, they have different meanings but if the word comes as a one word as a separable verb, which means 'to bring with'. This kind of the split of the verb is not in the English word order. Due to this, there is a difference between the structure of English word order and German word order. The percentile and frequency distribution of the responses are presented in the Table 9 below:

Table 9 – Responses of Er bringt sein Essen zur Firma mit

Options	Frequency	Percentage
A	3	3.1
B	4	4.2
C	68	70.8
D	15	15.6
E	6	6.3
Total	96	100.0

Items A and B have been eliminated by most of the respondents because of their familiarity with English grammar and structure. 3 respondents have chosen A (3.1%) and 4 respondents have selected B (4.2%) which are not correct. 6 respondents have selected E (6.3%). The respondent of E faces difficulty with separable verbs of German. It is interesting to note that almost 15 respondents have chosen Item D (15.6%) which is close to the correct answer and they are confused with separable verbs of German. 68 respondents have chosen item C (70.8%) that is the correct answer. These respondents have been able to identify the correct word order in English. The implication may perhaps be that for this structure, the instructor may have to take into account the level of proficiency of the learner in English grammar and structure and accordingly address the need of the learner. Even though the respondents of D and E face difficulty to choose the correct English word order, they are confused by German word order that is why they have chosen the wrong answer in English word order. The instructor will have to pay attention to those respondents and instruct them of the correct word order. During the remedial teaching D and E should be given more attention because they are close to the correct answer and they are in a dilemma to choose the correct answer and they face difficulty in the split of separable verbs.

7. CONCLUSION

In so far as there are distinct word order in German and English, there comes the occurrence of errors in the sentence. In both the languages, there are parallel and unparallel structures which have influence or interference in both the languages. This paper has brought out various grammatical pattern where the learners have committed errors and how it can be rectified from the survey that was conducted and assessed with the help of SPSS software. This paper is useful and relevant to the learners who learn German having English as a second language.

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