Urdu-Medium Learners' Confusions in Learning English Past Simple Tense

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Abstract

This paper describes learners' confusions in the usage of the Past Simple Tense of English. The study is based on the qualitative paradigm. Selinker's theory of Interlanguage is used to analyze data. The participants belonged to a public sector college of Pakistan where Grammar Translation Method is used to teach English. The researcher administered an Urdu-to-English translation-based test to a sample of 25 participants. Then the researcher collected the learners' reasons for making word combinations. He also performed contrastive analysis of the faulty chunks of translated text as an alternative technique of data analysis. Findings highlighted the following reasons for errors in usage: (1) *over-extension of the one-to-one correlation of L1 and L2 items*, (2) *over generalization of collocation patterns*, (3) *superimposition of personal time scale*, (4) *structure transfer of verb phrase*, (5) *over emphasis of pastness by repeating the finite verb*.

Key Words: Errors, Fossilization, Transfer, Overgeneralization

1. Introduction

Most of the public sector schools of Pakistan use Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to teach English. Working in a public sector college, the researcher observed many conceptual issues of the learners. To explore them in detail, I conducted a PhD study (Khurshid, 2010). To finalize this paper, my co-authors also made their valuable contributions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As a teacher of English, the researcher observed that the learners often relapse into old errors. It is probably because the basic reasons for their confusions remain unnoticed, and unaddressed. In order to understand the nature of

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communication gap between the teacher and student, it may be helpful to study the reasons underlying learners' errors. For this purpose, we may ask the learners directly as to why he has structured a phrase or clause in a specific way. Only after knowing the precise reasons for their confusions, can we arrive at a suitable remedy.

The present research is significant for three reasons: (1) it describes the impact of GTM on the learners' *interlanguage* (2) it describes the nature of distorted concepts, induced by GTM method; (3) it explores whether the errors arising from GTM-based learning of English can be described through the available terms like *overgeneralization* and *transfer* etc.

1.2 Research Questions
1. Why do the learners insert *was* in the past simple tense?
2. Why do the learners insert Ved form after *did*?
3. Why do the learners get confused over negative and interrogative sentences of the past simple tense?
4. How many errors can be attributed to L1 interference and overgeneralization?

1.3 Delimitations
1. Data for this study is collected from only one public sector institution.
2. Only male students are the participants of this study.
3. The Participants are the first year undergraduates, with humanities major.

1.4 Research Framework
This study follows a combination of two theories: Selinker's *Interlanguage* is incorporated into Corder's theory of error analysis. Corder's theory is used to organize the data. It comprises the following postulates:
1. Identification of errors
2. Description of errors
3. Explanation of errors

4.   Classification of errors

Interlanguage theory is used to interpret data, explain reasons, and to draw inferences. Interlanguage is the intermediary stage between Native Language (NL) and Target Language (TL).

2. Review of Literature

Ellis (1994, p. 82) has described three stages in the development of L1 and L2. They are: (1) *the silent period*, (2) *formulaic speech*, and (3) *structural and semantic simplification*. Formulaic speech consists of 'memorized chunks'. Lyon (1968, p. 177) says, '*Formulaic expressions are learnt as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions*'. Hakuta (1976), and Krashen and Scarcella (1978) term them as *routines* and *patterns*. The former refers to the whole utterances like *I gotta go*; while the latter brings up the utterances which may have one or more open slots like *Would you please …..*? Some *formulaic patterns* were found in the present study too; but they were different from the ones described above. They comprised grammatical collocations. The researcher has labelled them as *inter-lingual correlations* and *mental associations* etc.

Selinker (1972, p. 215) described *fossilization* in his article on *interlanguage* which is a hypothetical intermediary stage between NL and TL. This term has variously been described. Wei (2008, June) has given a list of the interpretations of this term. He says:

> The notion of fossilization has been interpreted differently by different scholars since it was proposed. 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).

The present study uses this term in the sense of 'half concepts' or 'distorted concepts'.

Richards (1971) describes the following sources and causes of 'competence errors':

1. *Interference errors* result from L1 interference.
2. *Intra-lingual errors* are caused by incomplete application of a/the rule/s of L2.
3. *Developmental errors* occur from an incorrect hypothesis which a learner makes about his L2 because of his 'limited experience'.

However, some researchers can't see much difference between intra-lingual errors and developmental errors, and prefer to operate between the other two terms (Ellis, 1994, p. 59).

Richards (1971) sub-divides the intra-lingual errors into four categories:

1. *Overgeneralization.* If an error occurs because of a misplaced rule of L2, it is attributed to the effect of overgeneralization. For example, *He <u>didn't went</u> there*. Here Ved[1] form 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 <u>to</u> speak* occurred because the learner tried to structure it like *She wanted me to speak*.
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, some learners insert *was* in the past simple tense because of their greater familiarity with the past progressive tense.

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[1] Leech (1982) has used following signs to describe five variants of English verbs: Vs, Vo, Ved, Ven, and Ving.

The categories described above are good to read but not easy to apply. For example, it is not easy to differentiate 2 from 4 above.

Dulay et al. (1974) have tried to categorize errors as:

1. *Developmental errors* are similar to those which are noted during L1 acquisition.
2. *Interference errors* occur because of the transfer of L1 structures.
3. *Unique errors* are idiosyncratic errors.

Again, researchers think this categorization is difficult to apply. Therefore, the author preferred to devise his own set of terms to classify his findings.

The terms described above give too broad a concept of cognitive reasons. They are not much helpful to grasp the individual learners' confusion. They need to be studied at a closer focus. Moreover, the ideas described above belong to European culture, educational context, and social scenario which is much different from Pakistan. It is necessary to assess how much helpful the findings of European researchers are in understanding the phenomenon of Foreign Language Learning in Pakistani context where English is taught through Grammar Translation Method.

2.1 Contemporary Research
Bennui (2008) studied 28 Thai students of grade-III. To collect data, he administered a test comprising questions to write: (1) simple and compound structures, and (2) a paragraph. He combined the techniques of *contrastive analysis*, *error analysis*, *interlanguage analysis*, and *contrastive rhetoric* for data analysis. His data displayed various types of errors; two of them were also found in the present study.

- Direct translation from NL (Thai) to English
- Faulty subject-verb agreement.

Chan (2004) studied 710 adult Chinese learners of English. His tool consisted of a test and interviews. The learners verified that they had called upon their NL before they wrote English structures. Moreover, most of the errors were closely related to the learners' NL. Chan's research highlights the importance of NL interference in the learning of TL. The current study also displays similar findings.

Sridhar (1996) studied female undergraduates of Bangalore. Their NL was Kannada and TL was English. He observed that most of the errors in his data were transfer errors. The present study also carries many transfer errors. One common observation in both studies is the presence of *lack of subject-verb agreement*. In the current study, this error was observed as:

- Singular subject and plural auxiliary.
- Plural subject and singular auxiliary.
- Singular subject noun and plural pronoun or vice versa (p. 61).

Rehman (1990) studied errors in the writings of advanced learners of English in Pakistan. Some points in the present study are common with Rehman's (1989) research: *avoidance of auxiliary inversion*; *omission of dummy auxiliaries*; *lack of subject-verb agreement*. Rehman has explained these errors to be the result of the process of creolization. In contrast with Rehman's sociolinguistic approach, the researcher has tried to study the cognitive aspect of errors.

Talif et al (1989) studied error in Corder's (1967) framework. They studied the language errors of the Form Four students of Malaysia. They collected data and established the percentage of errors in different areas. But no reasons for the errors were suggested.

Raza (2016) replicated Khurshid (2010). He closely focused the present simple and the present perfect tenses. He classified his reasons in eleven main categories. Eight of these categories, he borrowed from the researcher's thesis. This suggests that the classification of errors which the researcher arrived at in 2010 was valid still in 2016.

Ali (2015) also replicated Khurshid (2010). He studied the errors of O level students. Though his instrument did not include translation items, yet a large part of his data showed transfer errors. The instrument consisted of fill-in-the-blank questions. Many learners showed tendency to translate the English sentences into Urdu in their minds, and then re-translated the Urdu

finiteness markers into English. They had pre-conceived one-to-one correlation of Urdu and English items. In Addition to this, he also noted errors consisting of mental associations. Both of these errors are mentioned in the researcher's dissertation (Khurshid, 2010). Some of them will appear in this paper.

The present study is different from all other pieces of research mentioned above in that it explains the errors, while the others described them.

3. Method

Research Design. The present study follows qualitative research paradigm.

Framework. The framework used for analysis was the combination of Corder's (Ellis, 1994, p. 47) theory of error analysis and Selinker's theory of Interlanguage.

Population. Population of this study was Govt. S. E. College, Bahawalpur where English is taught by Grammar Translation Method (GTM).
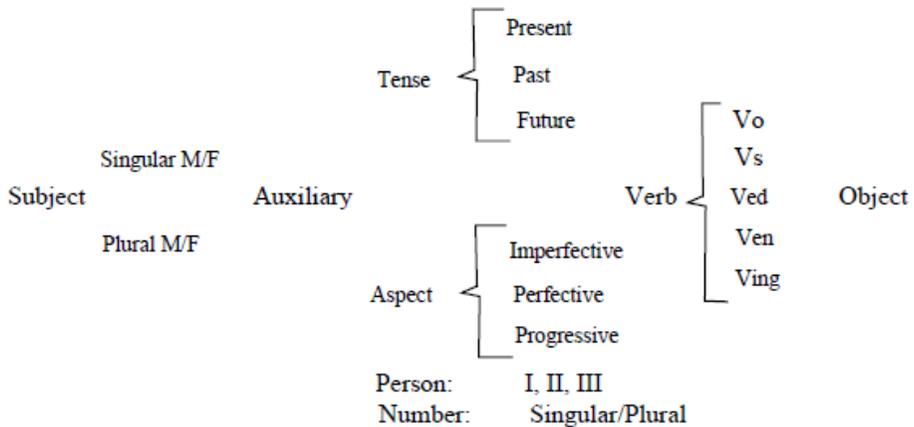
Sample. A convenience sample of 25 participants was used for this study. All the participants were male students of grade-XIII. All were from Urdu-medium background.

Tool. The tool consisted of a test and interviews.

Test. The tool consisted of an Urdu-to-English translation test, and unstructured interviews, with open ended answers, with every participant. The sentences for translation were taken from the workbook of grade-IX and X (Chishti at el, 2010). All the participants had already studied that book three years ago. This book was purposefully selected so that the test should not exceed the competence level of the learners. To understand the participants' confusions closely, it was necessary to have them apply their minds freely. In this way, they would have been able to explain more clearly as to what logic they had applied to make different combinations.

The researcher started his work with the presumption that the learners had too many choices at every slot which they could not handle properly, and therefore, they committed errors. This idea was drawn from the systemic

grammar (Muir, 1972; Berry, 1975, 1977, Halliday, 1994). The researcher framed a model of the paradigmatic choices which is given below:

```
                                        Present
                                        
                               Tense    Past                          Vo
                                                                       Vs
           Singular M/F                 Future
Subject                  Auxiliary                          Verb       Ved     Object
           Plural M/F                                                  Ven
                                        Imperfective                   Ving
                               Aspect   Perfective
                                        Progressive

                               Person:      I, II, III
                               Number:      Singular/Plural
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Model of Paradigmatic Choices in the Declarative Mood

The above model is derived from the systemic approach. However, the terms *Imperfective*, *Perfective*, *Progressive* are borrowed from Generative Grammar (Butt et al., 2003; Butt et al., 2008). These two contradictory approaches are not going to clash in this work. They will rather complement each other. The researcher wants to study learners' behavior at each syntactic junction where they come across a variety of choices. *Vo, Vs, Ved, Ven, Ving* are abbreviations for the variants of main verb (Leech, 1982). Their examples are: *go*, *goes*, *went*, *gone*, *going* respectively. The above model is by no means a complete schema of the paradigmatic choices of English syntax. It only presents a simple picture of the complexity involved in concept-making.

3.1 Interviews
The purpose of the interviews was to know the participants' rationale of making certain combinations.

The above model led the researcher to design a test that carried a variety of grammatical choices the Declarative and Interrogative Moods. The researcher prepared an Urdu-to-English translation based test. Each tense was tested in the *affirmative*, *negative*, *polarity-interrogative*, and *wh-interrogative* structures. The participants' answers were assessed; the errors were identified. The researcher asked the participants to describe as to how they had combined the words together. All the participants gave their reasons with full confidence.

3.2 Reliability

Reliability of the test was established by selecting sentences from the tense exercises of a workbook of grade-IX (Chishti et al., 2010). The workbook is published by Punjab Textbook Board, a government institution which is responsible for designing and publishing syllabus books for government schools and colleges. Moreover, the errors collected in the present study were compared with the findings of other researchers whose detail is given in the section literature review. They matched well. To establish the reliability of the interpretation of data, the researcher repeated his own understanding of the respondents' answers before them. Only after they verified the researcher's understanding, did he note it down.

3.3 Validity

Validity of the inference was established by discussing them with three colleagues. Moreover, the author tried to keep a neutral check on his own thinking. External validity of the findings was strengthened by the results of two more studies, Ali (2015) and Raza (2016) who replicated the researcher's main study, Khurshid (2010), and explored the reasons in different institutions, and analyzed their data in the researcher's terminological framework. It means that the classification technique which was used in 2010 was still helpful in 2016.

The main study (Khurshid, 2010) tested all the twelve tenses; the present paper presents the findings related to the past simple tense only.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher followed Corder's framework (Ellis, 1994, p. 47) for data analysis. Errors were described with the help of glosses, and by elaboration. Contrastive analysis of Urdu and English structures, and the participants' reasons were used as evidence to explain the reasons for errors. With the help of the above mentioned technique, the following reasons were discovered.

4.1 Inter-lingual Correlations
This refers to the situation in which one-to-one relationship is established between the grammatical and lexical features of L1 and L2. (Khurshid, 2010, p. 166).

a) [hɛ]-*is* Correlation
In English verbs may be classified into two groups: (1) the auxiliary verb, and (2) the main verb; whereas in Urdu verbs are of three types: (1) the main verb, (2) the light verb, and (3) the auxiliary verb. Moreover, English has two variants of finite verb which determine the present and past tenses. In Urdu, the system of present and past tense markings is comparatively complex. In Urdu, one, two, or all the three verbs may have tense markings. Sometimes, the tense is determined by the marking on the main verb only. For example,

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[ʋo                 gəˈj -a]
P.3.Nom.           went. 1.s.m.perf.past.
He went away.
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In some cases, the auxiliary verb determines the tense. For example,

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[ʋo                 gəˈj -a           hɛ]
P.3.Nom.           went. 1.s.m.perf.   be.1.s.pres.
He has gone away.
```

In some other cases, tense is determined by the marking on the light verb.

[ʋo	ro	pəˈʈ-a]
P.3.Nom.	cry.imperative.	fall. 1.s.m.perf.past.

He began to cry.

As shown in the above examples, [a] functions as a perfective marker in the presence of the present tense marker [ɦɛ]; but in the absence of [ɦɛ], [a] functions as the perfective, as well as the past tense marker. [ɦɛ], [ɦɛ□], [ɦũ] are the corresponding present tense variants of *be* in Urdu. They are translated as *is*, *are*, *am* respectively. But this one-to-one correlation does not work in every situation. 1 learner over-extended the above correlation and committed 1 error.

7.6 n Pt1

[tʊm ne	ˈmer -i	baːʈ	-	nə.ˈɦĩ	ˈsu.n -i]
P.2.s.Erg.	P.pos.f.1.s.	talk.f.3.s.Nom.		not	listen.Perf.f.s.

You did not listen to me.

Usm: *You are* [ɦɛ] (*did*) *not hire* (*hear*) *my talk.*

Usm said he had translated [ˈsu.ni] as [ˈsu.ni ɦɛ]. In this way, he translated the past simple tense as the past perfect tense (Khurshid, 2010, p. 176).

Learners make one-to-one correlation between (1) auxiliaries, (2) the case markings, (3) auxiliary/case marker of both the languages. Such unsystematic correlations often lead to errors (Khurshid, 2010, p. 175). The Urdu auxiliaries [ɦɛ], [ɦɛ□], [ɦũ] are the literal translations of *is*, *are*, *am* respectively. This literal translation creates fixed correlations in the learners' mind. In the above example, though [ɦɛ] was not the part of the original Urdu sentence, yet the learner presumed it present and substituted *did* with *are*.

b) [ga]-*will* Correlation
The habitual correlation of the Urdu future tense auxiliary [ga] with its English counterpart *will* sometimes creates funny situations. 3 learners

translated three sentences of the past simple tense into the future simple tense for a strange reason:

7.5a Pt1

[ʋoh   d͡ʒaːn -   bə'ʧan -e   k   -e   lɪ'je   'bʱaːg-a]

P.3.Nom   life.f.s.Nom.   save. Obl.   Gen.obl.   for.Post.   ran.   Perf.m.s.

He ran to save his life.

Aun: *He will run to save his life.*

Aun translated Urdu verb ['bʱɑː.ga] as *will run*. His reason was that he mistook [ga] in ['bʱɑː. ga] as an Urdu modal which is the equivalent of *will*.

Jam: *He will go* (ran to) *to save his life.*

Same reason as Aun's above.

Nav: *He will run* (ran to) *save his life.*

Same reason as Aun's above.

In Urdu language, the variants of the Future tense auxiliaries are pronounced as [ga], [ge], [gi], [gĩ]. In the question 7.5, the past tense of an Urdu verb ['bʱɑː.ga] *ran* is used. The closing sound [-ga] is similar to the masculine variant of the Urdu future tense auxiliary [ga]. Because of this resemblance of sounds, three learners got confused. Their pre-conceived correlation of *will* and [ga] made them translate a past simple sentence into a future simple sentence. Therefore, this case is an example of overgeneralization by inter-lingual correlation. (Khurshid, 2010, p. 191).

Both types of correlation errors discussed above have not arisen from the confusion of choice. They rather arise from the learners' fixation of mind.

Bennui (2008) also records errors of direct translation from L1 to L2. Chan (2004) gave the evidence of L1 interference. Sridhar (1996) holds transfer to be the main reason of errors.

Richards (1971) and Dulay et al (1974) would consider the above two types as *interference* error. But the idea of L1 interference is too broad. It may further be classified. For detailed discussion on this topic, see Khurshid (2010).

4.2 Mental Associations
Like Inter-lingual correlations, learners also make some intra-lingual links. They develop a fixation with two items/features/concepts of L1. For example, if a learner has developed a fixation with writing *I* and *am* together, we may expect him to use this combination in any tense or aspect. The researcher has termed this phenomenon as *mental associations* and sub-divided them into 11 groups. Two of them account for the usage errors of the past simple tense, too. 11 learners committed 15 errors of this type.

a) Person Agreement Continuity
Some learners develop a quasi-collocation link between a subject and a finite verb. Instead of maintaining person, number, or tense agreement, they make only person agreement and ignore the other two (Khurshid, 2010). 6 learners committed 9 errors of this type.

7.5 a Pt1:

[ʋoh	d͡ʒaːn -	bə'tʃan -e	k -e	lɪ'je	'bʱaːɡ-a]
P.3.Nom	life.f.s.Nom.	save. Obl.	Gen.obl.	for.Post.	ran. Perf.m.s.

He ran to save his life.

Akm: *He runs* (ran) *away for saving life*.

Bil: *He runs* (ran to) *save his life*.

Was: *He runs* (ran) *to save his life*.

7.6 n Pt1:

[ʈʊm ne   ˈmer -i   baːʈ   -   nə.ˈfiĩ   ˈsu.n -i]

P.2.s.Erg.   P.pos.f.1.s.   talk.f.3.s.Nom.   not   listen.Perf.f.s.

You did not listen to me.

Abd: *You are* (did) *not **to** listen* (to) *me.*

Akm: *You does not* (did not) *listen my….*

Was: *You have* (did) *not listen*ed to *me.*

7.7 p Pt1:

[kɪˈja   ʈʊm ne   pərˈʋaːz -   se   lʊʈf   -   ʊˈʈʰaːj-a]?

Int.   P.2.s.Erg.   flight.f.3.s.Nom   Ins.   joy.m.3.s.Nom.   lift.   Perf.m.s.?

Did you enjoy flight?

Abd: (Did) *Do you enjoy **to** flight*?

Nav: (Did) *Do you enjoy life* (flight).

Zaf: (Did) *Do you enjoy flying* (flight)?

(Khurshid, 2010, p. 211)

The learners had incomplete concept of subject-verb agreement. They did try to maintain some agreement, but only partially. They remained focused on agreement of person, but ignored agreement of number and tense. This error is an example of overgeneralization of mental association.

b) Verb Form Associations
Learners often remain confused about the forms of irregular verbs. They become confused over the usage of Vo, Ved, and Ven forms. 6 learners committed 6 errors of this type.

7.5 a Pt1:

[ʋoh	d͡ʒaːn -	bə'tʃan -e	k -e	lɪ'je	'bʱaːg-a]
P.3.Nom	life.f.s.Nom.	save. Obl.	Gen.obl.	for.Post.	ran. Perf.m.s.

He ran to save his life.

Ajm: *He* (ran) **run** (Ved) *for his saving.*

Usm: *He* (ran) **run** (Ved) *away for save life.*   (Khurshid, 2010, p. 218)

Both of them considered *run* as Ved.

7.8 w Pt1:

[ʋs ne	'kaːɣəz	-	kɪ'jũ	'pʰaːɽ -a]?
P.3.s.Erg.	paper.m.3.s.Nom.		why	tore. Perf.m.s?

Why did he tear the paper?

Ami: *Why* (did) *he* **torn** (Ved) (tear) *paper.*

Fia: *Why did he* **torn** (Ved) (tear) *the page?*

Qmr: *Why* (did) *he* **torn** (Ved) (tear) *the paper?*

Was: *Why* (did) *he* **torn** (Ved) (tear) *the pages.*   (Khurshid, 2010, p. 218)

Ami, Qmr, Was held *torn* as Ved form, and Fia took it as Vo form.

The leaner mistook Vo form of verb for Ved and Ven forms. In this way, they overgeneralized a false concept.

If the teacher is not aware of this confusion of his students, he will make them revise the rules of grammar again and again and confuse them further. In spite of this hassling he should simply tell him the correct form. The rule is already known to him. (Khurshid, 2010, p. 219)

4.3 Structural Fluency Errors

In some cases, learners prefer an unmarked or less marked structure to a marked one. In the present study, the researcher tested four structures: the affirmative, the negative, yes/no questions, and wh- questions. To the learners, the most familiar of the four structures are the affirmative sentences. The other structures involve insertion of *not*, or auxiliary inversion. Sometimes, learners extend the familiar or unmarked structures to the marked ones. The typical example is avoiding auxiliary inversion in wh- questions. In SLA literature, this phenomenon is known as *linguistic development* (Ellis, 1994). The errors resulting from this are termed as *developmental errors* Dulay et al (1974). The researcher has assigned two more reasons to this phenomenon:

a. To a Pakistani learner of English, auxiliary inversion in yes/no questions is understandable, but in wh- questions, he finds it unnecessary because the semantic need of question is already satisfied lexically (Khurshid et al, 2014).

b. Wh- interrogatives in Urdu undergo no such inversion of auxiliary. The Urdu structure may transfer negatively, and resists the learning of auxiliary inversion in English wh- questions.

The above discussion is based on the contrastive analysis of Urdu and English interrogative structures, and on circumstantial evidence. No learner could suggest a reason for avoiding auxiliary inversion in the undermentioned sentences. 7 learners committed 7 errors of this type.
7.8w Pt1:

[ʊs	ne	ˈkaːɣəz	-	kɪˈjũ	ˈpʰaːɽ -a]?
P.3.s.Erg.		paper.m.3.s.Nom.		why	tore. Perf.m.s?

Why did he tear the paper?
Akm: *Why* (did) *he toar* (tear) *paper.*
Ami: *Why* (did) *he torn* (tear) *paper.*
Aun: *Why* (did) *he tore* (tear) *the paper?*
Muh: *Why* (did) *he tore* (tear) *paper?*

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Nav: *Why* (did) *he tear the paper?*
Sha: *Why* (did) *he tore* (tear) *the paper.*
Usm: *For what* (Why did) *he tore* (tear) *the paper?*   (Khurshid, 2010, pp. 234-35)

4.4 Superimposition of the Personal Time Scale

Languages, usually, differ in the concept of time and aspect. So are Urdu and English. Learners take the time scale of their L1 as the absolute time scale. Moreover, their existing situational time scale also dominates their mind. They often transfer both of these time scales to L2. 3 learners committed 3 errors of this type.

7.6n Pt1:

[ʈʊm ne	ˈmer -i	baːʈ	-	nə.ˈfiĩ	ˈsu.n -i]
P.2.s.Erg.	P.pos.f.1.s.	talk.f.3.s.Nom.		not	listen.Perf.f.s.

You did not listen to me.

Kas: *You do* (did) *not listen* (to) *me.*

Kas gave the reason for using the present simple tense that the act of listening and reporting in the Urdu sentence occurred simultaneously; and reporting, in his opinion had occurred in the present tense. He interpreted the meanings of [ˈsu.ni] as [ˈsu.ni hɛ] and identified the latter structure as the present simple tense.

Shb: *You* (did) **do** *not listen to me.*

7.7p Pt1:

[kɪˈja	ʈʊm ne	pərˈʋaːz	-	se	lʊʈf	-	ʋˈʈʰaːj-a]?
Int.	P.2.s.Erg.	flight.f.3.s.Nom	Ins.	joy.m.3.s.Nom.	lift.		Perf.m.s.?

Did you enjoy flight?

Bil: (Did) *What you enjoy flight?*

In Bil's opinion the time of enjoyment (Event time) and the time of the test (Reporting time) occurred at the same point on time scale. As the Reporting time existed in the present tense, so he translated the sentence accordingly. Just as, in the above example, Kas interpreted [ˈsu.ni] as [ˈsu.ni hɛ], in the same way Bil interpreted [lʊʧ ˈʊtʰ.ɑː.ja] as [lʊʧ ˈʊtʰ.ɑː.ja hɛ] and identified the latter as the instance of the present simple tense.

The learners confused the SER system (Michaelis, 2006) in the following way:

Normal paradigm	Distorted paradigm
The Present Simple tense: SER.	
The Past Simple tense: ER_S.	SER

(Khurshid, 2010, p. 229)

Because of the weak understanding of the Speech time, Event time, and Reporting time, (SER), system of English, the learners committed this error.

The teacher should make it clear with the help of examples from everyday life.

4. 5 Intensification

Similar to double negative sentences, some learners made double-tensed structures. This tendency was noted mostly in the usage of the past simple tense, and the past and future perfect tenses. 3 learners committed 4 errors in the usage of the past simple tense. For detailed information, see Khurshid (2010).

7.7p Pt1:

[kɪˈja ʈʊm ne pərˈʋaːz - se lʊʧ - ʊˈʈʰaːj-a]?
Int.   P.2.s.Erg.   flight.f.3.s.Nom Ins. joy.m.3.s.Nom.   lift.   Perf.m.s.?

Did you enjoy flight?

Irf: _Did you enjoyed_ (Ved) _flight?_

Was: _Did you enjoyed_ (Ved) _flight._

Was's translation of 7.19, 7.31 suggest that he has sub-conscious understanding of the did-past link. Here, when the researcher asked him whether he had tried to magnify the past tense he answered, after some thinking, in affirmative.

7.8w Pt1:

[ʊs	ne	ˈkaːɣəz	-	kɪˈjũ	ˈpʰaːɾ -a]?
P.3.s.Erg.		paper.m.3.s.Nom.		why	tore. Perf.m.s?

Why did he tear the paper?

Irf: _Why did he torn_ (Ved) _the paper?_

Irfan admitted intensification.

Moh: _Why did he tour_ (Ved) _the page._

Moh said he had used Ved form _tore_ (spelled as _tour_) after _did_ to intensify the past tense.

(Khurshid, 2010, p. 265)

Remedy. Extensive and combined oral and written drills in the four basic structures of all the tenses, affirmative, negative, polarity interrogative, wh-interrogative.

4.6 Reasons for the Errors of the Past Simple Tense

In my personal experience, the most frequently repeated error in the usage of the past simple tense is the insertion Ved form of verb after _did._ The reasons for this error have been described in the points 3, 4, and 5 below:

The data suggests that the following confusions create hurdles in the learning of the past simple tense:

1. Learners' naïve understanding of the partial correlation between Urdu and English auxiliaries causes tense errors. They often cross the limits, and overextend that correlation. For example, the chunk [ɡa] appeared in the NPs [ɡɑõ] and [ˈbʰɑːɡa], and it triggered their [ɡa] - *will* correlation. As a result, two learners interpreted [ɡa] as the equivalent of *will* and translated the past simple tense as the future simple tense.

2. In a few examples, learners translated the past simple sentences as *You are*; *Do you*; *He runs.* They tried to maintain person agreement between subject and finite verb, and inserted Vo/Vs forms of verb instead of Ved.

3. The learners have incorrect verb forms in their memory. Therefore, sometimes, they take Ven for Ved or Vo. For example, *torn* for Ved, and *tore* for Ven, and so on. So, they commit this error because of his weak grip of irregular verbs.

4. Sometimes, learners form strong association of the present tense with Vo, and that of the past tense with Ved. Therefore, they use Ved form after *did*. For example, a learner may use *He did not went* because of the above mentioned confusion.

5. Sometimes, learners use Ved form both in the auxiliary and main verb. For example, they may write *He did not went* in order to intensify the past tense.

6. Sometimes learners can't differentiate between time scales of Urdu and English. In this confusion, some of them translated the past simple tense as the present simple tense.

7. Sometime, learners transfer the Urdu structure and skip an auxiliary. For example, the negative and interrogative structures of the Urdu past simple tense do not have any auxiliary. Some learners wrote *Why he tore the paper*? They skipped *did* because they transferred the corresponding Urdu structure.

5. Findings

The researcher observed seven confusions of the learners. The sample consisted of 25 subjects only, and the test carried only 4 sentences of the past simple tense. A bigger sample, and a more focused test could produce more reasons. Though the above mentioned reasons are not exhaustive, but still they are indicative of a few trends. We can make a few generalizations from our analysis.

1. The researcher had started his work with the supposition that the learners had too many choices and they might not be able to make right decision at right time (Muir, 1972; Berry, 1975, 1977). Please see the section 'Test'. But the data told a different story. Most of the errors emerged from syntagmatic orders, learners' pre-conceived linear combinations.

2. The participants of this study held only a rudimentary concept of the past simple tense. Some of them translated one or two sentences correctly, and others incorrectly. They often got confused over auxiliary inversion, and insertion of *did.* We may surmise that they had received a little more practice of the affirmative sentences than the negative and interrogative. I drew the wisdom from this point that language can't be taught by systematic reasoning. It comes by practice; and that even a trivial change in the basic structure often demands a learner's strong effort to accommodate and assimilate it.

3. I think teaching of English by grammar adds to the learners' confusions. We should rather engage the learners in the memorization of the simple sentences of everyday life. We should give them maximum exposure to English plays, movies etc. Language taught in context, and with entertainment may give far deeper understanding of grammar than a workbook.

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