

The Use of Progressives in Pakistani Learners' English: A Corpus Based Study

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Abstract

English language has many varieties, one of its, is Pakistani English. There are some deviations from the Standard English in Pakistani English. It has been noted that Pakistani users of English had been found using Perfectives (stative verbs) in Progressive situation and the present research aims at finding out the hypothesis. For this purpose, data had been collected from Pakistani learners of English as second language at graduation level from various universities and colleges in the form of argumentative essays keeping in view the instructions given by ICLE (International Corpus of Learners English) for compilation of learners' argumentative essays. Hand written text was converted into text files. Antconc 3.2.1 was used to extract specific examples from the bulk of data. Data was further manually processed and results were compiled. The research approved this hypothesis as set out earlier; the Pakistani learners of English language use certain progressives frequently in place of perfectives.

Keywords: Perfectives, Progressives, Stative, Pakistani English, Second language learners

1. Introduction

English language has two aspectual categories, one is Perfectives and the other is Progressives. Perfective is a state of verb that deals with the situation which is complete in itself. Perfective depicts a situation which has beginning, middle and ending. Progressive deals with the situation which is continuous, it does not necessarily have to tell about beginning and ending as the situation continues. Progressive aspect judges the situation from within while Perfective takes an overall view of situation. Lexical associations of statives are widely accepted phenomena. Stative verbs (i.e. believe, be) are associated with Perfective aspect and Dynamic verbs (i.e. run, walk) are associated with Progressive aspect.

This research has been conducted to find out certain stative verbs in the argumentative writings of Pakistani learners which are being used in progressive construction. These verbs are in marked contrast with the aspect selected to take the stance or to give the meanings on the whole. Lexical associations of statives are widely accepted phenomena. It has been noticed by the researchers (Virtanen, 1997. Hahn, 2000) that 2nd language learners make wrong use of stative verbs with the progressive aspect in the formal or academic writings which do not fulfill the norms of Standard English. The present research has been conducted to find out this issue with the help of Pakistani learners' corpus data. It investigates whether Pakistani learners of English language observe lexical-grammatical associations of statives.

2. Literature Review

Aspect is an important feature of verb in English language. It is difficult to acquire by learners. Understanding of this feature of language requires special attention. It will be seen what aspect is and how it is called a feature which is verb-oriented.

The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (2002) defines Aspect;

“The term aspect applies to a system, where the basic meanings have to do with the internal temporal consistency of the situation” (p. 117).

Biber et al (1999) say that

“From semantic point of view, tense and aspect primarily relates to time distinction in the verb phrase. Tense primarily refers to past and present time orientation, aspect relates to consideration such as completion or lack of completion of event or state describe by a verb” (p. 460).

According to Comrie (1976) aspect is the way of “viewing the internal temporal consistency of a situation”. He stated that “English has two aspectual oppositions that pervades whole of the verbal system that is between progressive and perfective” (p.36). According to Biber (1999) “The progressive aspect is used to describe activities or events that are in progress at a particular time, usually for a limited time” (p. 437).

Aspect is verb related feature; grammars give a set of verbs with progressives. The matter which has caught the attention of researchers is the issue that some of the stative verbs have been used in progressive construction frequently. Progressive indicates limited duration, it can be with and without an accompanying time adverbial, there is repetition of momentary verbs like Hit, Knock, and Tap. Verbs of ongoing change occur in progressive like Change and Grow etc. Such expressions are used that indicates a process of change e.g. more and more, gradually. The verbs that express bodily sensation are also included in progressives. Progressives is a marked

form both formally and semantically, formally in the sense that it has ‘ing’ specifications and semantically in the sense that it has narrow temporal implications than the simple form.

Most advanced students do not consciously ponder the choice of aspect when they write. Instead they use their intuition, producing constructions that ‘feel right’ to them. (Axelsson. 2003).

Grammarians give a specific set of verbs which come with the perfective aspect.

These verbs refer to states, as states are permanent actions and these are not likely to change. Lakoff (1970) had given verb typology in this respect. He says that semantically stative verbs should be syntactically stative as well. Some verbs are not used with progressive aspect. These verbs are called statives as they refer to states (experience, condition) rather than to actions. (Alexandar. p 160).

Alexandar (1992) gives an example through a sentence,

“She loves her baby more than anything in the world”. In this example, “love describes a state over which the mother has no control. It is an involuntary feeling. We could not use the progressive forms (is/was loving) here. Dynamic verbs refer to actions, “which are deliberate or voluntary or they refer to changing situations which have a beginning and an end” (p 160).

Some authors of grammars, Hirtle (1967), Vendler (1968) speak of stative and dynamic uses of certain verbs, rather than of stative and dynamic verbs. This seems to be slightly circular step, as any verb can have a stative or dynamic use, depending on the context.

Smiecinska (2003) states in her article on statives that according to Comrie (1973), Joos (1964), and Ota (1963) certain lexemes express, unlimited duration in themselves and as such are hardly ever used in the progressive. (p. 188-189)

It can be argued that an increasing number of progressive form tokens of so-called stative verbs occur in contemporary spoken English. On the other hand, it can also be found, what Bzche and Nielsen (1997) say about the verbs BELIEVE, KNOW, and MEAN, namely that they do not normally take gently to the progressive form.

2.1 The Historical Background of the Problem

For a number of reasons, English aspect has been a centre of dispute and interest among researchers (Alexandar 1992, Quirk 1985, Biber 1999. Leech, 2009) ‘Change in Contemporary English’ (2005) has given three reasons for its popularity among researchers,

“First, it is unclear, how it is originated. Second, over the last several centuries, it has developed a rather complex meaning, no set of meanings by comparison with progressive construction in other languages. A third reason, probably resulting from the second, is that progressive has enjoyed a meteoric increase in frequency in modern English period” (p. 118).

An observation of the use of stative in progressive construction was made by Kakietak (1997) based on the corpus of American and British novels. ZydatiB (1976b) states that this linguistic item “is certainly one of the elements within English language whose syntax and semantics have remained rather elusive concepts for most learners of English as a second language” (p. 352).

The increase of progressive in American and British English is up to 30 %. Hahn and Axelsson have done a research on Swedish and German advance learners’ use of progressives. It was a corpus based study. They have come up with the results that the Progressive is a difficult feature of language to be handled by non native speakers. It is used in wrong place by non native users of English ,the reason for this is described to be the over emphasis of this feature in textbooks as well as in teaching. The researcher says that argumentative text is not an ideal text for the analysis of progressive since progressive is sensitive in register variations. Biber et al’ (1999) overviewed of four genres, i.e. academic writings, text, conversation and fiction. The progressive was frequently found in conversation and fiction and least frequently in academic writings or text. Imaginative writing is favorable and academic writings are not favorable for this feature of language. The frequency of progressive is twice in literature essays than in argumentative essays (Biber et al.1999). An observation of the use of stative in progressive construction was also made by Kakietak (1997) based on the corpus of American and British novels. According to Virtanen(1997), progressive is an infrequent phenomenon in English. Only 5% of verb phrases are progressive and rests are non progressive (Quirk et al, 1985). According to Virtanen progressive is a new construction for learners of English.

There are some of the corpus based evidences of the use of progressive in modern American and British English. The mean score of progressive was 3000 per 1 million words in 1990. It was a bit higher in British English. It is noted that it is more frequent in press and general prose. As far as learned writing is concerned, it is resistant to change and no significant growth can be seen in British learned writings and there is a decline in the use of progressive in American academic writings.

The fact is that even the native-speakers’ use of the progressive or non progressive sometimes ‘seems to go counter to rules offered in previous studies’(Ljung 1980, p.5) indicates that we cannot discard these constructions as ‘incorrect’ English. Virtanen’s conclusion was that this variation is conditioned by the students’ mother tongue. We know that the progressive is more frequently in informal genres (Mair and Hundt 1995), and so it can be assume that the language produced by the American students is more informal than that in the British

students' essays. The foreign learners choose a middle register or are less decisive as to the choice of register.

3. Material and Method

The data for the present study was collected under the guidelines of ICLE. The students were asked to write argumentative essays. The word limit for essays was up to 1000 words per participant. As the target size of corpus for ICLE is 200,000 words, at least 200 essays, each having at least 1000 words, were supposed to be collected. But in Pakistani settings, it seems very difficult for students to write an argumentative essay of 1000 words, so the word limit was reduced to 500 words and two essays from each participant were allowed. For data collection, variables were limited according to the guidelines of learner profile set by ICLE.

Antconc 3.2.1 was used to extract examples from data. The extracted examples were further scrutinized manually to separate dynamic and Stative verbs. Only those verbs which seemed stative but were used in Progressive construction (ING) were kept for analysis. Rest of the data was left as it was irrelevant for present research.

4. Analysis

Progressive aspect of English language is a difficult field of learning for most of the learners. It was hypothesized by the researchers (Virtanen, 1997) that Statives are used in Progressive situations which semantically oppose it, here are the examples extracted from the data of Pakistani Learners corpus. These are only those verbs which were somehow labeled as stative. All the verbs which referred to some action or ongoing activity were excluded while compiling this list.

Accepting	Adding	Adopting	Behaving
Being	Believing	Blaming	Blessing
Caring	Causing	Commanding	Committing
Competing	Complementing	Consisting	Containing
Contributing	Damaging	Dealing	Diverting
Dooming	Dying	Enhancing	Eradicating
Exposing	Expecting	Experiencing	Exploiting
Firing	Facing	Fading	Feeling
Flying	Following	Forgetting	Giving
Getting	Gaining	Hunting	Importing
Indulging	Lacking	Living	Looking
Leading	Leading	Meeting	Misusing
Noticing	Parenting	Performing	Polluting
Parenting	Passing	Providing	Proving
Prevailing	Promoting	Referring	Selecting
Setting	Seeing	Seeking	Shaping
Sinking	Spoiling	Spreading	Sitting
Stressing	Striving	Studying	Starting
Suffering	Supporting	Thinning	Threatening
Telling	Wasting	Worrying	

It has been noticed that only few Statives are frequent in Progressive construction. Only 17% examples have been used more than 5 times in the whole data. 33% examples have been used between 2 times to 4 times. 50 % examples were used just once in the whole data. The examples which have been analyzed are also those verbs which occur more than 5 times in the whole data.

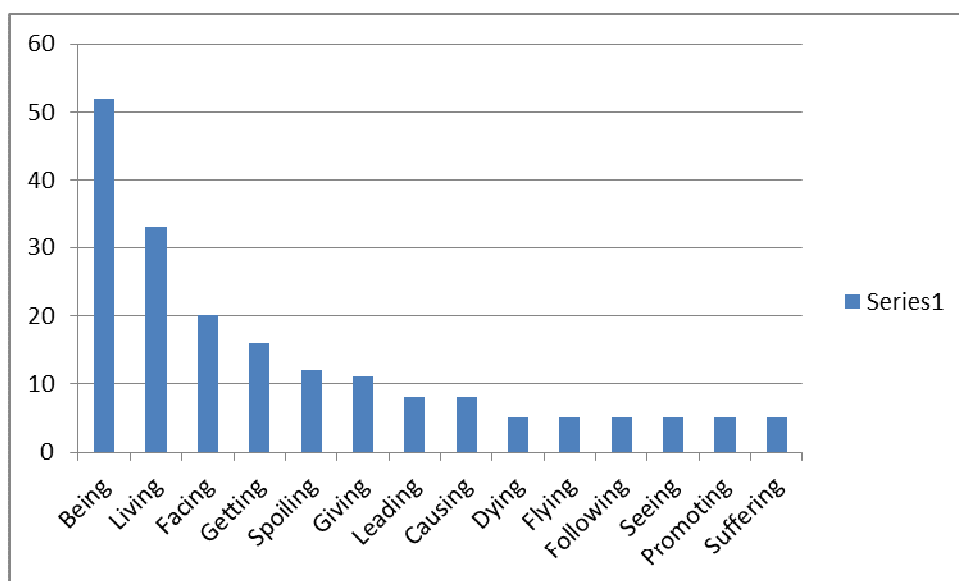


Figure 1: most frequently used Stative verbs in Progressive construction.

Now it will be seen how some of the above mentioned stative verbs have been used in progressive construction, why writer has selected to choose aspectual perspective which semantically contradict it. Out of 88 verbs, only those verbs have been taken for analyses which have been used more than 5 times in the whole data. Some of the examples are given below from the data.

- The excessive use of fire arms in the wars that are **being** fought in the various parts of the world is also another factor in the increase of the global temperature. PACJ1012
- Politician that are commanding the race of the country, they spend their term in boasting and roasting they have weared the mask of democracy, but internally they are **living** in cave age. PAGF1049
- As Pakistan is **facing** a lot of problems and among these problems terrorism is the major problems. PALW1014
- The harmful effects of media can't be denied because it is **spoiling** the reputation of the country as well as it is major cause of making and creating a hollow generation. PAAO1013
- If player are **giving** good performance then they would assuredly get more money form. PAVL1017
- Electronic media, i-e radio and television and modern media i-e cable and internet are **leading** our young generation towards a wrong path. PALW1014s
- Animals are **dying** in an Iraqi zoo and bombing on zoo must be stopped. PACJ1007
- They are seeing our youth and **giving** wrong message. PALW1016
- Unfortunately, our generation is **suffering** education problems, like there is no a single syllabus for every schools. PAGF1024

It can be concluded that these are some of the individual differences amongst the learners. In any particular situation, writer may be prone to emphasize the situation by taking Progressive aspect.

This hypothesis is true that the learners of English as a 2nd language overuse the Progressive aspect and in doing so they do not observe the semantic boundaries of the verb. The reason behind this overuse can be the 1st language interference. When equivalent is present is the mother tongue, it makes easy in learning the same form in foreign language, negligence on the part of teachers can also be the reason behind it.

The statement of Williams (2002) is falsified that Progressives disappear in formal context. If the collective number of Progressives is seen, with Dynamics and with Statives, learners use Progressive aspect very often as compare to Perfective aspect.

(2)

5. Discussion on Findings

The basic purpose behind the choice of progressive aspect can be to show the gradual changes which are taking place in the society, the changing behavior of people, the changing norms of society and the changing trends in the living style of the modern world. 'Being' is a special case in the data of Pakistani learners English. 'Being' has been used with passive voice and it gives a sense of putting stress on the situation, the changing trends of the world etc. "Live" is stative verb, yet modern man uses it in progressive perspective to show the gradual change and development in things.

'Getting' and 'Facing' shows the living condition of human beings, which has changed on large scale. 'Spoiling'

has been particularly used with reference to the effects of media on the younger generation and the change in their personality formation due to access to knowledge. As the process of spoiling is gradual, so writer has opted for progressive aspect. 'Giving' puts emphasis on situation. 'Leading' also shows emphasis on situation. 'Causing' shows the general validity of some action. Dying shows gradual change. 'Seeing' is a perception verb which is considered as stative, but in the above mentioned examples it has been used as progressive verb to put stress and to show negative attitude of society. 'Promoting' refers to gradual change of behavior of countries. 'Suffering' refers to various multiple meanings and purposes, somewhere it refers to emphasis, somewhere gradual change in behavior and situation, somewhere it shows negative attitude. There is not a single function performed by the verb in progressive construction. People use it according to their mood and meaning they want to deliver.

In the corpus data of Pakistani learners, verbs of sensation and perception have been used with Progressive form. Seeing, Proving, Flying, Feeling, Facing, Fading, Containing, Complementing, Causing is some of the verbs of sensation used by Pakistani learners with progressive form.

It can be concluded that register variations are the reason of it. Earlier no research has been conducted to find out stative verbs in argumentative style of writing. That is why finding matches were difficult. Pakistani learners of English have used a different set of verbs to meet the demand of the topic discussed. Pakistani learners' essays are more descriptive and narrative in nature than argumentative. It is revealed here that they find descriptive or narrative writings easy as compare to argumentative writings.

6. Conclusion

It is a well established phenomenon that the users of English neglect the boundaries that were earlier drawn by the researchers in the area regarding the verb distinction as dynamic and stative. Comrie (1976) strongly recommended the idea of separate aspectual categories of verbs in year 1976, but that notion has lost its significance now. With the dawn of 21st century, people use all kinds of verbs in all kinds of situations, neglecting the idea of aspectual boundary. Reason of this change has been defined as that now people want to be more explicit. They want to make their opinion more clear, that's why they use Progressive aspect more often. This analysis carried out on the Pakistani learner's corpus reflected that it is not frequent with most of the verbs. Many verbs appear just once in the whole data, referring to the individual differences among the users regarding the choice of vocabulary. It is a common observation among the grammarians that Progressives occur with speech or spoken data more frequently, it doesn't occur in written language as written is formal expression and Progressive gives an air of less authenticity to the situations.

It has been observed that only 5 to 7 verbs are there in the whole data which have been used frequently. It can be proved, keeping in view those verbs occurring more than 10 times, that stative verbs are being overused by Pakistani learners of English with Progressive aspect. The reason of this change is that English has become lingua franca in many countries. Modern approach towards the changes occurring in 2nd language learning, says that the deviation in the language should not be taken as 'an error'. This notion has no strong grounds. In the end it can be said that the hypothesis is proved that Pakistani learners of English make overuse of Stative verbs with Progressive form in their formal writings. Learners are not aware of the syntactic and semantic relationship of the verb of English language.

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