

THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT IN ENGLISH AND MARATHI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Language teaching practice often takes into consideration the first language interference as the reason of many errors made by learners while learning English as a second language. Second language learners often commit errors in the area of syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary. They tend to superimpose their first language habits on to the second language consciously or unconsciously. For instance, they tend to map first language grammatical structures inappropriately onto the second language.

An analysis of the similarities and differences between the first and the second language can help us in predicting the possible interference errors committed by L2 learners. A close analysis of the linguistic similarities and differences in the morphological and semantic properties of the progressive aspect in English and Marathi can enable us to understand the first language interference among Marathi speakers of English while learning English as a second language. In the present study, the formal and functional features of the progressive aspect in English and Marathi are compared and contrasted with the primary objective to understand the features of English progressive that are more difficult to acquire than others for Marathi learners of English. An effort is made to trace the interference errors made by the second language learners in the light of the comparative study of the first language (i.e. Marathi) and the second language (i.e. English).

Keywords: *Interference, proactive inhibition, comparative study, first language, second language.*

THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT IN ENGLISH AND MARATHI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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There are many branches of linguistics that deal with comparison of languages. However, they differ in their objectives and scope. An analysis of the similarities and differences between the first and the second language can help us in predicting the possible interference errors committed by L2 learners. Language teaching practice often takes into consideration the first language interference as the reason of many errors made by learners while learning English as a second language. Second language learners often commit errors in the area of syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary. They tend to superimpose their first language habits on to the second language consciously or unconsciously. For instance, they tend to map first language grammatical structures inappropriately onto the second language.

George (1972) asserts, 'The learner's mother tongue intervenes in the organization of the learning of the foreign language also. The beginner's mother tongue, being his previous learning experience, may promote or hinder the learning features of English, as they seem compatible or incompatible with those of previous experience. In the latter case, to use the terminology of psychology, features of the mother tongue cause proactive inhibition of the learning of some features of English' (p.40). The first language acts as a filtering language and the second language as a filtered language. Of course, the first language influence is not the only reason for the mistakes committed by the second language learners of English. But the first language interference plays a very important role in the formation of interlanguage among second language speakers of English.

English is a Germanic language whereas Marathi is an Indo-Aryan language. Marathi is morphologically more complex than English. Every word is usually morphologically marked in Marathi. That is why the word order is less significant in Marathi. A change in the word order usually does not bring about a change in the basic meaning of the original sentence. For example,

- (1) (a) ramanaoravaNaalaamaarlao,
/ ramneravənalamarəle /
(Ram killed Ravana.)
(b) ravaNaalaaramanaomaarlao.

/ ravənalaramnemarəle /

(Ravana killed Ram.)

On the contrary, in English, syntax plays a very important role. Most of the times a change in the word order lead to a change in the meaning of the original sentence. For example,

(2) (a) Ram killed Ravan.

(b) Ravana killed Ram.

According to Crystal (1985), the verb in a sentence shows morphological contrasts of tense, aspect, mood, voice and number. To understand the verbal system, it is necessary to grasp the difference between the two key concepts – tense and aspect. Grammatical tense and aspect represent a formal distinction encoded in the grammar of a language. Both are morphological categories. Both deal with time but with a difference. Tense is used to locate a situation grammatically in time and aspect is used to show the internal temporal constituency of a situation. Tense which is represented by a grammatical form shows relationship between the time of event, the time of reference and the time of utterance. Here, the event is viewed as a whole and not as beginning, continuing or completed e.g. any event in present time is represented by the present tense form of the verb. Here, the event may be a general truth (e.g. The sun sets in the west), may be in progress (e.g. I am reading a book) or completed (e.g. I have cleaned the car). All these events are represented by the present tense as they are located in present time. Thus tense has a deictic function to perform in a sentence. It is the aspect which is concerned with the internal temporal distributions of an event. Therefore, aspect refers to the manner in which the action denoted by the verb is regarded or experienced e.g. in progress, completed etc. That is the reason Comrie (1976) refers to tense as ‘situation external time’ and to aspect as ‘situation internal time’. Aspect is both a semantic and grammatical notion. Semantically, it refers to the internal temporal structure of the action referred to by the verb, i.e. whether the action or state referred by the verb is ongoing or completed. Morphologically, aspect refers to the way this semantic meaning is reflected in a language using verbal inflections.

Morphologically English has only two tenses – present tense and past tense. There is no future tense form of a verb in English. In English future time is expressed by auxiliaries and other tenses. Different analyses of the aspectual system have been offered. However, it is generally agreed that English has two aspects – progressive (be + -ing) and perfect (have + -en). (See, for example, Quirk et al., 1972 and Comrie, 1976). English language allows the following combinations of tense and aspect– present perfect, present progressive, present perfect progressive, past perfect, past progressive and past perfect progressive..

For example,

- (3) (a) I am polishing my shoes.
(b) I have polished my shoes.
(c) I have been polishing my shoes for 15 minutes.

All the above sentences are in the present tense but they differ in aspect. Sentence (a) is in the progressive aspect, i.e. the situation is viewed as going on at the present time. Sentence (b) is in the perfect aspect. The situation is viewed as complete in the past but its result is seen in the present time, i.e. the shoes are polished now. Sentence (c) shows combination of perfect and progressive aspect. Here the action denoted by the main verb "polishing" started 15 minutes ago and is still going on.

- (4) (a) I am teaching English now.
(b) I have been teaching English since 2004.

The two sentences given above, too, are in the present tense but vary in aspect. Sentence (a) is in the progressive aspect. The activity is ongoing. Sentence (b) is in the perfect progressive. It indicates that the action started at some point of time in the past and is still continuing.

According to Palmer (1974), 'For almost any language the part that concerns with the verb is the most difficult' (p.1). The present study focuses on the learning of the English progressive by Marathi speakers of English. A close analysis of the linguistic similarities and differences in the morphological and semantic properties of the progressive aspect in English and Marathi can enable us to understand the first language interference among Marathi speakers of English while learning English as a second language. In the present study, the formal and functional features of the progressive aspect in English and Marathi are compared and contrasted with the primary objective to understand the features of English progressive that are more difficult to acquire than others for Marathi learners of English.

The progressive aspect is represented by an appropriate tensed form of the auxiliary 'be' and '-ing form' of the main verb. It is often considered as the canonical form of the progressive aspect in English. "Progressive", as the name suggests, refers to an ongoing activity. Comrie (1976) defines progressiveness to be "the combination of progressive meaning and non-stative meaning" (p.35). However, it has been observed that the use of progressive has been expanding over the years. Comrie (1976) also asserts that "...in English the meaning of the Progressive has extended well beyond the original definition of progressivity as the combination of continuous meaning and nonstativity" (p.38). The progressive aspect forms the following combinations with tenses in English: a) *Present progressive*, b) *Present perfect progressive*, c) *Past progressive* and d) *Past perfect progressive*. Some of the main uses of progressive in British English are as follow.

- a) Progressive to refer to a situation that is in progress, ongoing, incomplete
For example,
He is playing cricket.
I was reading a book when he came yesterday.
- b) Progressive to suggest a pejorative attitude.
For example,
She is always losing things.
- c) Progressive to refer to a future happening anticipated in the present. Its basic meaning is 'fixed arrangement, plan or programme.'
For example,
I am visiting my dentist tomorrow.
- d) Progressive for persistent situation
For example,
Rita has been cooking since 8 o'clock.

Marathi language formally distinguishes three tenses, viz., present, past and future. The major aspectual contrasts shown in Marathi language are Perfect (purna), Progressive (chalu) and Habitual (riti). The tense and aspect categories in Marathi are combined in various ways. Marathi language allows the following combinations – present perfect, present progressive, present habitual, past perfect, past progressive, past habitual, future perfect, future progressive and future habitual.

Usually, the tense suffix is attached to the root form or stem form of the verb. Then it is followed by the concord suffix. For example, /bəs/ + present tense suffix + concord suffix (first person singular masculine) is /bəsto/. The progressive aspect is marked by 'verb + -t suffix' followed by an appropriate form of the auxiliary 'as.' It represents an ongoing activity. For example,

- (5) (a) mal kama k rtaAaho. (Present Progressive)
/ mi: kamkərətahe /
(Meaning: I am working.)
(b) malkama krtahaotao. (Past Progressive)
/ mi: kamkərəthote /
(Meaning: I was working.)
(c) mal kama krtaAsaona/ la.(Future Progressive)
/ mi: kamkərətəsel/n/
(Meaning: I will be working.)

Marathi speakers of English use the progressive aspect to indicate that the action denoted by the verb is in progress or is incomplete at the particular moment.

For example,

- (6) (a) They are playing.
(b) They were playing when we came.

The Habitual aspect in Marathi is marked by 'verb + -t suffix' followed by the appropriate form of the auxiliary 'as.' It represents a habitual activity. Some other forms are also used to express habituality in Marathi. For example,

- (7) (a) malraojakama k rta Asatao. [Alternative form: malraojakamakrtao.]

(Present Habitual)

/ mi: rojkamkərətəsəte / [Alternative form: / mi: rojkamkərəte]

(Meaning: I am used to work every day / I work every day.)

- (b) malraojakama k rta Asao /k rayacao / krI. (Past Habitual)

/ mi: rojkamkərətəse / kərayce / kəri: /

(Meaning: I used to work every day.)

- (c) malraojakama k rtaAsaola / na. (Future Habitual)

/ mi: rojkamkərətəsel /n /

(Meaning: * I will be working every day.)

In English, the present simple is used to convey the meaning of the habits in the present time. In Marathi, however, the same meaning is conveyed by the habitual aspect marked by 'verb + -t suffix' followed by the appropriate form of the auxiliary 'as.' This first language habit interferes with the second language acquisition. When the Marathi speakers wish to express the meaning of the habits in the present time, they tend to translate this meaning in English using the progressive aspect.

For example,

- (8) (a) I am coming to college every day.
(b) She is usually calling me in the morning.

In English, the present progressive is used to express a pejorative attitude.

For example,

- (9) She is always disturbing me.

However, this emotional colouring seems to be absent when Marathi speakers use English.

To express that an action started at a prior point of time and continues up to the later point of time, Marathi speakers usually use progressive aspect. For example,

- (10) (a) tal daona vaajalyaapasaUna tyacal vaaT pahata Aaho.

/ti: don wajəlyapasu:ntyaci: vat pəhatahe /

(Meaning: She has been waiting for him since two o'clock.)

- (b) mal caar vaYaa-MpaasaUna iSakvata Aaho.

/mi: car wərsanpasu:nsikvətahe/

(Meaning: I have been teaching for four years.)

Sometimes the perfect and the progressive aspects are combined in order to emphasize continuity. For example,

(11) (a) tal daona vaajalyaapasaUna tyaacal vaaT pahata basalaI Aaho.

/ti: don vajalyapasu:ntyaci: vat pəhatbəsəli: ahe /

(Meaning: She has been waiting for him since two o'clock.)

(b) mal caar vaYaa-MpaasaUna iSak vata AalaolaI Aaho.

/mi: car vərsanpasu:nsikvətaleli: ahe/

(Meaning: I have been teaching for four years.)

In all the above aspects, the whole verb phrase i.e. the non-finite verb followed by an auxiliary shows aspect whereas the tense is marked on the auxiliary verb.

Thus, the combination of the perfect aspect and the progressive aspect exists in both the languages but the use of the perfect progressive is less in Marathi. In English, the perfect progressive construction and an appropriate prepositional phrase (since/for + adverbial of time) are used to convey the meaning of a persistent situation for dynamic verbs. In Marathi, the perfect progressive construction is used to convey the meaning of a persistent situation when the speakers of Marathi wish to emphasize the continuity of the activity shown by the verb phrase. This use is not very frequent. The progressive construction along with an appropriate postpositional phrase is usually used to convey this meaning in Marathi. This first language habit interferes with the second language behaviour and as a result most of the Marathi speakers of English use the progressive construction along with an appropriate prepositional phrase to convey the meaning of a persistent situation as far as the dynamic verbs are concerned.

For example,

(12) a. tal daonavaajalyaapaasaUnagaataAaho.

/ ti: don vajlyapasu:n gat ahe /

* b. She is singing since 2 o'clock. (She has been singing since 2 o'clock.)

The use of prepositions 'since', 'from' and 'for' creates a problem for Marathi learners. The prepositions 'since' and 'from' are used before a phrase denoting starting point of time and the preposition 'for' is used before a phrase denoting duration. But in Marathi, the postposition 'paasaUna' (Meaning: since / from) is used for both. They use the prepositions 'since' or 'from' inappropriately before both the starting point and duration due to first language interference. Also, the Marathi speakers cannot distinguish between the use of 'since' and 'from.' The preposition 'since' is used with perfect, whereas the preposition 'from' is used with all other tenses except the perfect. The Marathi speakers use the preposition 'from' in a perfect progressive construction due to interference. For example,

- (13) * (a) I am teaching from 2004.
* (b) I am teaching from four years.

Thus, while dealing with the past simple, the present perfect and the present perfect progressive, it is better to introduce the difference between 'since', 'from', 'for' and 'ago' as they cause problems for Marathi learners. The teacher has to give more training to the learners in this construction.

The distinction between stative verbs and dynamic verbs exists in English. Stative verbs refer to relatively permanent physical or psychological states. They are not normally used in the progressive, whereas non-stative verbs may be used in the progressive. It is observed that the Marathi speakers tend to use the stative verbs with the progressive aspect. This could be because the equivalents of these verbs in Marathi are used with the progressive aspect in Marathi.

For example,

- (14) (a) I am seeing a cat in the room.
(b) He is knowing it.

It is very fruitful if the teacher keeps the linguistic difference between Marathi and English at the back of his/her mind while teaching English grammar to Marathi students. The language trainer should grade the grammar components according to their level of difficulty for the learners. The present perfect progressive should be taught after introducing the present progressive construction to the students. The teacher has to make this semantic difference clear to the students so that they use appropriate constructions at right places.

As discussed earlier, Marathi learners have a tendency to use the present progressive along with a prepositional phrase instead of the present perfect progressive construction. The teacher has to give more training to the learners in this construction. After introducing the perfect progressive for persistent situation, the teacher can introduce the use of perfect for a persistent situation. Also, it is better to introduce the difference between 'since', 'from', 'for' and 'ago' as they cause problems for Marathi learners.

As far as teaching of tenses is concerned, the use of time diagrams is very fruitful in making the learners understand the difference between different tenses. It is advisable to use the inductive approach while teaching grammatical constructions. The language instructor should use the cyclical approach while teaching grammatical constructions and not the linear approach. The teacher is advised to adopt the student centred approach while teaching and not the traditional teacher centred approach. The teacher should motivate the students to use different tenses in context. In fact, he/ she should create

communicative situations where students have opportunities to use different tenses. Above all, the teacher should try to provide learners with comprehensive inputs in anxiety-free situations. It is very important that the learners find themselves relaxed and confident before learning any linguistic structure.

Both formal and informal exposures contribute to the learning of English. The teacher has to make sure that he / she uses these grammatical structures correctly while conversing with the students. Students unconsciously grasp the usage followed by the teacher in the class more as compared to the formal rules taught by the teacher.

In the present scenario, the compound bilingualism prevails in Maharashtra, i.e., the speakers operate English through a process of translation from Marathi. This leads to the negative transfer in the form of interference. The teachers should ensure that they help their learners to move from the stage of compound bilingualism to the stage of coordinate bilingualism.

This study is based on the observations of the use of English progressive by the Marathi speakers of English. The study identifies the importance of the learner's knowledge of the syntactic structures of the first language, which cause difficulty in acquiring a second language. It is indeed fruitful to look at the first language interference in the light of the comparative study of the first language and the target language. It is hoped that the present study assists the teachers in tracing interference errors in Maharashtrian students' performance relating to the progressive aspect in English and helps them to deal with these errors in an efficient way.

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