
ANALYZING VERB TENSE-ASPECT ERRORS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN READING AND WRITING SUBJECT

Paula Ellaine M. Reginio

Graduate Education Program, St. Mary's College of Tagum, Philippines
reginio.paula@smctagum.edu.ph

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Abstract: This qualitative study analyzed the verb tense-aspect errors committed by Grade 11 senior high school students in their critique papers for the Reading and Writing subject in a private school in Tagum City, Davao del Norte during School Year 2024–2025. Anchored on the framework of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and interlanguage theory, the study examined twelve English tense-aspect categories. Data consisted of 100 student critique papers analyzed through systematic error analysis. Findings revealed that eleven of the twelve tense-aspect forms contained errors, with highest frequency in simple present, simple past, present perfect, and simple future forms. Errors overlapped with subject-verb agreement and missing verb constructions, indicating interconnected grammatical challenges. Results highlight the need for targeted instructional interventions and integrated grammar support in academic writing instruction.

Keywords: verb tense-aspect, error analysis, academic writing, senior high school students, critique writing

I. INTRODUCTION

The mastery of verb tense–aspect is a fundamental component of academic writing, as it ensures clarity, coherence, and logical sequencing of ideas. In English, tense encodes temporal reference (past, present, future), while aspect reflects the internal structure of actions—whether they are completed, ongoing, habitual, or connected to another time reference. The interaction between tense and aspect results in twelve grammatical forms, each serving specific discourse functions. In academic writing, inappropriate tense selection can disrupt argument flow, weaken analytical claims, and reduce overall textual cohesion.

In multilingual contexts such as the Philippines, English functions as a second language (L2) and as a medium of instruction across academic disciplines. However, Philippine languages predominantly encode aspect rather than tense morphologically. This structural difference may influence learners' interlanguage development, leading to recurring difficulties in tense–aspect usage. Consequently, Filipino learners often demonstrate inconsistency in verb marking, auxiliary omission, and misformation of perfect constructions in formal writing tasks.

Previous research in second language acquisition highlights that grammatical errors are not random but systematic reflections of developing interlanguage systems. Error Analysis, as proposed by Corder (1967) and further developed by James (1998), views learner errors as evidence of cognitive processing rather than mere

failure. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) classify English tense–aspect into twelve categories, providing a comprehensive framework for analyzing verb-related inaccuracies in learner texts.

While numerous studies document tense-related errors in narrative and argumentative essays, limited research has focused specifically on critique writing among Filipino senior high school students. Critique writing requires sustained tense control, particularly when alternating between textual analysis (often present tense) and reference to completed studies (past tense). Therefore, this study aims to analyze verb tense–aspect errors in Grade 11 students’ critique papers in the Reading and Writing subject.

A. *The study seeks to answer the following questions:*

1. What verb tense–aspect errors are present in senior high school students’ critique papers?
2. How frequently do these errors occur across the twelve tense–aspect categories?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design using Error Analysis as the primary analytical framework. The method allowed for systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of verb tense–aspect errors in authentic student writing.

A. *Research Participants and Data Source*

The data consisted of one hundred (100) critique papers written by Grade 11 students enrolled in the Reading and Writing subject in a private senior high school in Tagum City during School Year 2024–2025. Each paper ranged from 700 to 1,000 words to ensure sufficient linguistic material for analysis.

B. *Analytical Framework*

Errors were classified according to the twelve tense–aspect forms identified by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999):

- Simple (Present, Past, Future)
- Progressive (Present, Past, Future)
- Perfect (Present, Past, Future)
- Perfect Progressive (Present, Past, Future)

In addition, error types were examined based on intralingual processes such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete rule application, and false concept formation.

C. *Procedure*

The analysis followed four stages:

1. Identification of verb tense–aspect errors
2. Classification according to tense–aspect category
3. Determination of error type
4. Frequency count and pattern interpretation

To ensure reliability, a peer validator with expertise in Applied Linguistics reviewed the classifications.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study on senior high school students’ verb tense-aspect errors in their critique papers. The analysis focused on identifying miscue errors across twelve (12) tense-aspect categories in the Reading and Writing subject. The results show that 11 out of the 12 possible tense-aspect categories contained errors. The findings further reveal that verb tense-aspect errors frequently overlap with subject-verb agreement and auxiliary-related errors, indicating that tense usage is closely connected to overall grammatical competence.

TABLE I
VERB TENSE-ASPECT ERRORS IDENTIFIED IN STUDENTS’ CRITIQUE PAPERS

Tense-Aspect	Essay & Paragraph	Erroneous Statement	Corrected Statement
Simple Present	E14; P5	they teaches us	<i>they teach us</i>
Simple Present	E86; P1	doesn't always goes	<i>does not always go</i>
Simple Past	E16; P9	I accept constructive criticism	<i>I accepted constructive criticism</i>
Simple Past	E86; P1	Why did this happened?	<i>Why did this happen?</i>
Simple Future	E71; P7	will be nurture	<i>will nurture</i>
Present Perfect	E11; P1	had already face	<i>has already faced</i>

Past Perfect		E34; P3	had fail	<i>had failed</i>
Future Perfect		E95; P3	will has learned	<i>will have learned</i>
Present Progressive		E86; P1	Many of us failing	<i>Many of us are failing</i>
Future Progressive		E35; P3	will be navigate	<i>will be navigating</i>
Present Progressive	Perfect	E35; P6	Life have been throwing	<i>Life has been throwing</i>
Future Progressive	Perfect	E87; P3	will has been build	<i>will have been building</i>

The analysis of verb tense–aspect errors presented in Table I reveals systematic patterns in morphological marking, auxiliary sequencing, and subject–verb agreement features. Rather than occurring randomly, the errors demonstrate consistent deviations from the formal grammatical mechanisms required to encode tense and aspect in English. The patterns suggest partial acquisition of morphosyntactic rules, particularly those governing inflectional morphology and auxiliary distribution.

Errors in the Simple Present Tense predominantly involve violations of subject–verb agreement and improper auxiliary support in negative constructions. Several examples illustrate incorrect application of third-person singular inflection (e.g., they teaches us), indicating confusion in aligning verbal morphology with grammatical number features of the subject. In negative constructions such as doesn't always goes, learners demonstrate double marking of tense and agreement, attaching inflection to both the auxiliary and the lexical verb. This reflects incomplete mastery of the structural rule requiring tense features to be realized exclusively on the auxiliary in negated clauses (Subject + does + not + Base Verb). These errors suggest that while learners recognize the need for agreement marking, they have not fully internalized the hierarchical distribution of tense features within the verb phrase.

Simple Past errors reflect difficulties in maintaining tense uniformity and applying correct past tense morphology. In coordinated clauses (e.g., I accept constructive criticism and worked harder), inconsistent tense marking disrupts temporal coherence. Similarly, interrogative constructions such as Why did this happened? reveal double past marking, where learners incorrectly encode past tense on both the auxiliary did and the lexical verb. English grammar requires that tense be marked on the auxiliary alone in interrogative structures (Did + Subject + Base Verb), and the observed errors indicate incomplete understanding of auxiliary–verb division of labor within past tense formation.

Errors in perfect constructions highlight confusion between past tense and past participle forms, particularly in structures requiring auxiliary selection and participial morphology. Constructions such as had already face reflect improper participial formation and auxiliary misselection. These patterns suggest that learners conceptually recognize completion but struggle with the formal realization of the structure Subject + has/have/had + Past Participle (V³). The difficulty becomes more pronounced in multi-auxiliary constructions such as the Future Perfect and Future Perfect Progressive (e.g., will has learned, will has been build), where learners fail to maintain the required auxiliary hierarchy (Modal + Base Auxiliary + Participle). Such errors indicate challenges in coordinating layered grammatical features—futuraity, perfect aspect, and progressive aspect—within a single verb phrase.

Progressive tense errors primarily involve omission of the auxiliary be or failure to apply the -ing participial morphology correctly. Constructions such as Many of us failing demonstrate recognition of the participial form without proper auxiliary insertion, resulting in non-finite structures lacking tense marking. In other instances, agreement mismatches occur between subject and auxiliary, suggesting partial acquisition of the structural configuration Subject + am/is/are + V–ing. These findings indicate that learners may acquire participial morphology earlier than full control of auxiliary distribution.

Taken collectively, the patterns observed in Table I strongly support interlanguage theory, which posits that learner language constitutes a developing grammatical system shaped by rule formation, hypothesis testing, and restructuring. The recurring nature of auxiliary misplacement, double marking, and agreement violations reflects systematic developmental processes rather than random performance errors. Although students demonstrate conceptual awareness of temporal distinctions, their difficulties lie in the morphosyntactic encoding of those distinctions within English verb phrase structure.

The overlap between tense–aspect errors and subject–verb agreement further suggests that grammatical competence operates holistically. Tense marking, agreement features, and auxiliary selection are interdependent components of the verb phrase system. The findings therefore indicate that verb tense–aspect errors in academic writing are not isolated grammatical lapses but manifestations of incomplete structural integration within learners' evolving interlanguage systems.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF ERRORS ON THE TENSE-ASPECT OF THE VERB IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

Tense–Aspect of the Verb	Frequency of Errors	Academic Writing Source	Percentage
Simple Past Tense	8	E16;P9, E17;P6, E25;P8, E26;P4, E37;P2, E74;P1, E86;P1, E98;P3	20.51%
Simple Present Tense	6	E1;P2, E14;P5, E19;P6, E24;P1, E86;P1, E96;P5	15.38%
Present Progressive Tense	5	E9;P1, E11;P1, E86;P1, E93;P2, E99;P6	12.82%
Simple Future Tense	5	E4;P3, E84;P4, E71;P7, E86;P2, E98;P6	12.82%
Present Perfect Tense	4	E11;P1, E17;P1, E89;P2, E97;P2	10.26%
Future Progressive Tense	3	E35;P3, E80;P9, E91;P8	7.69%
Past Perfect Tense	3	E34;P3, E41;P2, E89;P3	7.69%
Past Progressive Tense	2	E32;P6, E78;P5	5.13%
Future Perfect Tense	1	E95;P3	2.56%
Future Perfect Progressive Tense	1	E87;P3	2.56%
Present Perfect Progressive Tense	1	E35;P6	2.56%
Past Perfect Progressive Tense	0	—	0.00%
Total	39		100%

Table II presents the distribution of verb tense–aspect errors identified in the students' critique papers. A total of thirty-nine (39) errors were recorded across eleven of the twelve tense–aspect categories, indicating that tense–aspect inaccuracies are not isolated to a single grammatical form but are distributed across the verbal system. The Simple Past Tense registered the highest frequency of errors (20.51%), followed by the Simple Present Tense (15.38%). This distribution suggests that learners experience greater difficulty in consistently encoding basic tense morphology, particularly when marking completed actions within academic discourse.

The prominence of Simple Past errors may be attributed to the morphological complexity of irregular verb paradigms and the structural demands of tense uniformity in extended writing. Critique writing frequently requires reference to past events, experiences, or previously conducted studies. In such contexts, learners must consistently apply the structural pattern Subject + V² or Did + Base Verb in interrogative constructions. The observed inaccuracies—such as failure to inflect verbs or double marking of past tense—indicate incomplete internalization of past tense morphology and auxiliary–verb division of labor. These patterns reflect intralingual overgeneralization, where learners rely on base forms or apply rules inconsistently within coordinated or complex clauses.

The relatively high occurrence of Simple Present errors (15.38%) is equally significant. In critique writing, the present tense is commonly used for textual analysis (e.g., “The author argues...”). The frequency of agreement-related errors suggests that while learners understand the rhetorical function of present tense in academic discourse, they struggle with the formal realization of third-person singular inflection and auxiliary support. This indicates a gap between functional awareness and morphosyntactic accuracy.

Errors in progressive and future constructions, each accounting for 12.82% of total errors, further demonstrate challenges in managing multi-word verb phrases. Progressive forms require coordination between auxiliary selection and participial morphology (am/is/are + V–ing), while future constructions require modal + base verb sequencing (will + Base Verb). The data suggest that learners encounter increased difficulty as verb phrases become structurally layered. This trend becomes more pronounced in perfect and perfect progressive constructions, where multiple auxiliaries must appear in strict hierarchical order. Present Perfect errors (10.26%) reflect confusion between past tense and past participle forms, reinforcing the view that participial morphology remains unstable within learners' developing systems.

Interestingly, no errors were recorded in the Past Perfect Progressive Tense. However, this absence should not be interpreted as evidence of mastery. Rather, it likely reflects limited usage of structurally complex tense–aspect combinations in student writing. Learners may avoid forms that require multiple auxiliaries and layered aspectual encoding, a phenomenon consistent with avoidance strategies documented in second language

acquisition research. Thus, zero frequency may indicate structural avoidance rather than grammatical competence.

Overall, the distribution pattern aligns with interlanguage theory, which posits that learner language develops through systematic restructuring rather than random deviation. The dominance of simple tense errors suggests that foundational inflectional morphology has not yet stabilized within learners' grammatical systems. At the same time, the decreasing frequency of errors in more complex forms may reflect either emerging control or strategic avoidance of structurally demanding constructions. These findings underscore the need for instructional approaches that integrate tense morphology, auxiliary hierarchy, and discourse-level function, particularly within academic critique writing contexts where tense selection carries rhetorical.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry important implications for grammar instruction in senior high school academic writing contexts. Given that the most frequent errors occurred in simple present and simple past constructions, instructional approaches should prioritize the stabilization of foundational tense morphology before introducing more structurally complex forms. Rather than treating verb tense as a discrete grammar topic, instruction should embed tense–aspect awareness within authentic writing tasks. Integrating grammar within critique writing activities allows learners to connect form, meaning, and discourse function, thereby promoting deeper grammatical competence.

The prevalence of simple past errors suggests the need for explicit attention to irregular verb paradigms and tense uniformity in extended discourse. Teachers may implement focused mini-lessons on irregular verb formation, followed by guided practice in revising narrative or reflective passages. Emphasis should be placed not only on morphological accuracy but also on maintaining temporal consistency across coordinated and subordinate clauses. Activities that highlight the structural rule governing interrogative constructions (Did + Subject + Base Verb) may further reduce instances of double tense marking.

Difficulties observed in perfect and progressive constructions indicate that learners require systematic modeling of auxiliary hierarchy and participial formation. Because multi-auxiliary verb phrases (e.g., will have been + V-ing) impose higher cognitive and structural demands, instruction should scaffold these forms gradually. Contextualized examples drawn from academic texts can demonstrate how perfect constructions encode temporal relationships such as prior experience, completion, or continuity. Teachers may also incorporate contrastive analysis activities that help learners distinguish between past tense and past participle forms within meaningful discourse.

The findings further suggest the importance of written corrective feedback that includes metalinguistic explanation rather than mere error marking. When learners understand why a structure is incorrect—particularly in relation to auxiliary distribution or agreement features—they are more likely to internalize grammatical rules. Feedback strategies such as coded correction, guided self-editing, and peer review sessions focused specifically on verb phrase structure may foster greater learner autonomy.

Finally, because critique writing requires strategic tense shifting—often alternating between present tense analysis and past tense reference—teachers should explicitly address the rhetorical functions of tense in academic discourse. Task-based activities that require students to revise paragraphs for tense consistency or to justify their tense choices may enhance discourse-level awareness. By connecting grammatical form to rhetorical purpose, instruction can move beyond mechanical accuracy toward functional competence in academic writing.

Overall, the pedagogical implications underscore the need for integrated, discourse-sensitive grammar instruction that targets both morphosyntactic accuracy and rhetorical effectiveness. Strengthening foundational verb morphology while contextualizing tense–aspect use within authentic academic tasks may support more stable development of learners' interlanguage systems.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated verb tense–aspect errors in senior high school students' critique papers and revealed that inaccuracies persist across eleven of the twelve English tense–aspect categories. The highest concentration of errors occurred in the Simple Past and Simple Present forms, followed by perfect and progressive constructions. These findings demonstrate that difficulties in tense usage are not confined to isolated structures but extend across the verbal system, particularly in forms requiring consistent morphological marking and auxiliary coordination.

The results affirm that tense–aspect errors are systematic manifestations of learners’ developing interlanguage systems rather than random grammatical lapses. Recurring patterns such as double tense marking, auxiliary misselection, and participial confusion indicate incomplete stabilization of morphosyntactic rules governing English verb phrase structure. Although students appear to possess conceptual awareness of temporal reference, their challenges lie in the formal encoding of tense and aspect within academic discourse.

By focusing specifically on critique writing, this study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the interaction between grammatical form and rhetorical function. Critique tasks require strategic tense control, often alternating between present-tense textual analysis and past-tense reference to experiences or prior studies. The frequency and distribution of errors suggest that learners struggle not only with morphological accuracy but also with discourse-level tense management.

Pedagogically, the findings underscore the necessity of integrating explicit grammar instruction within authentic writing contexts. Instructional approaches that combine focused morphological practice, auxiliary hierarchy awareness, and discourse-based tense modeling may support more stable grammatical development. Consistent, metalinguistic feedback can further assist learners in refining their verb phrase control.

Future research may extend this investigation through longitudinal or intervention-based studies to examine how integrated grammar-focused writing instruction influences tense–aspect accuracy over time. Exploring genre-based approaches to tense instruction may also provide further insight into how rhetorical demands shape grammatical development in second language writing.

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