WRITING DIFFICULTIES: AN INVESTIGATION OF IRREGULAR MORPHEME ERRORS AMONG THE STUDENTS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

As a follow-up of a previous study that investigated the inflectional errors made by the students in the Faculty of Arts & Culture (FAC) of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (Navaz and Sama, 2016), this paper examines further as to how the students use irregular inflectional morphemes in writing, especially plural nouns and verbs. Writing has been a difficult skill and many errors are noted in the irregular forms. In the previous study students made a large number of errors in forming past tenses and plurals which have been noted as two of the frequent used grammar items in student writing.

Hundred (100) third year students from the Faculties of Arts & Culture and Islamic & Arabic Studies participated in the study. This study was conducted in two stages with an intervention in-between. Regular and irregular nouns and verbs were used to test students' knowledge on making plural and past tense forms at the pre-intervention stage. Irregular nouns and verbs were used at the post-intervention stage. Students made less errors in regular forms of plural nouns and past tense, while many errors occurred in irregular forms of nouns and verbs. Most of the errors belong to mis-formation type. Through an intervention it was identified that even though students could improve their knowledge of making plurals, their knowledge in forming irregular forms of past tense did not improve. A study of this nature, it is envisaged, will shed light for future research and help make changes in the instructional methodology, especially in teaching writing skills.

Key words: Inflectional morphemes, irregular forms, intervention, mis-formation, writing skills

INTRODUCTION

Dealing with learner errors has been a problem for all second language teachers either in schools or universities. Our personal acquaintance with the enormous errors undergraduates make in their writing has been a concern in the process of investigating the learner errors in a previous study. In the previous study by the researcher, the Inflectional Morphemes (IM) errors made by the students in the Faculty of Arts & Culture (FAC) of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka was investigated. Hence, a brief description of the previous study is given below.

The previous study investigated the inflectional morphemes errors made by the students in the Faculty of Arts & Culture (FAC) of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Writing has been a difficult skill to master for the undergraduates irrespective of their faculties. Since, writing is being regularly tested as part of the end-semester

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examinations for English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, it is important for students to master the skill. It is believed that writing skills can be improved by identifying and analyzing the most prominent errors the learners make. Forty five first year students of the FAC were given different writing tasks that included free writing compositions and grammar-based activities. At the end, the errors in their writings were identified, categorized and analyzed. Special attention was paid to inflectional errors. The study revealed that the most prominent errors in free writing were the use of third person singular inflections. The students made considerable errors in writing past tense form too. The majority of the students added the past tense 'be' form along with the past tense verb. In addition, the students made other errors like noun-verb (past tense 'be' form) agreement or missing 'be' form completely. The study also revealed that the students' grammatical knowledge of noun and adjective/adverb inflection was weaker, mainly in using possessives for irregular plural forms and abstract nouns as well as using comparative and superlative forms. A post-test follow-up focus group discussion was held with the students to find the reasons for making such errors. However, they were unable to give a satisfactory explanation. In this study, attempts were also made to analyze the cause of the errors as intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors.

An important finding of the study was that students made more errors in the irregular morphemes. As observed in students' writings the areas such errors were prevalent are third person singular forms, plurals, past tense forms, possessions, etc., as shown in the table below. Hence within the scope of the present study past tense and plurals are considered. These two morphemes, as Akande (2003) suggests as a result of a study, are the highly used morphemes in writings of the students.

Table 1: Types of Inflectional Morpheme (IM) errors made by students

IM Type	Numbers present
Plural markers	32
Possessions	129
Third person singular	172
'ing' participle	47
'ed' inflection for past tense	151
'ed' inflection for participle	3
Comparative form – er	87
Superlative form – est	80
Total	**701**

(Navaz & Sama, 2016)

In the next section a brief literature review is represented from our previous study to get some idea of inflectional morphemes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inflectional morphology has been identified as a problematic area to learners of English as a second language when there are no overt inflectional markers in the mother tongue of the learners (Akande, 2003). Many of the work on error analysis revolved around this inflectional morphemes (e.g. Richards, 1971; Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, Akande, 2013, Yordchim and Gibbs, 2014) though in different overseas contexts.

The eight inflectional morphemes can be divided into three categories (Ballard, 2013):

1. Noun inflections: Nouns can be inflected to show plurality and also to indicate possession.

        I. Plural markers   II. Possessions

2. Verbal inflections: III. Third person singular or subject-verbal concord

        IV. -ing participle – continuous tense

        V. -ed inflection for past tense

        VI. -ed inflection for participle

3. Adjective and Adverb inflections:

        VII. Comparative form – er

        VIII. Superlative form – est

These inflections can take a regular form or irregular form as well. Examples for irregular inflections are given below as presented in Ballard (2003).

Table 02: Irregular plural forms

Irregular inflection type	Explanation	Singular / plural examples
zero inflection	the singular form is the same as the plural form	sheep / sheep
vowel mutation	the vowel within the word changes	tooth / teeth mouse / mice man / men
voicing of final consonant	a regular –s plural is added but also the last consonant in the stem is pronounced with a vibration of the vocal cords, changing the quality of the sound	sheaf / sheaves hoof/ hooves bath / baths
irregular plural inflection	a handful of nouns retain an Old English inflectional form	child / children ox / oxen brother / brethren

Table 3: Patterns of irregular verb inflection

Base form	-ed past tense	
	regular	irregular
show	showed	
make		made
lose		lost
speak		spoke
swim		swam
hurt		Hurt

Studies that focused on error analysis in general and inflectional morphemes have been conducted in different contexts.

Using inflectional morphemes, especially irregular inflections, has been identified as a problematic area to learners of English as a second language since there are no overt inflectional markers in the mother tongue of our subjects (Akande, 2003).

Brown (2000:217) defines error as "a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker." He differentiates errors from mistakes – a slip of the tongue or a performance error. While errors, according to Brown, exhibits a kind of competency a learner has achieved, differentiating between mistakes and errors need a systematic procedure (ibid).

The studies that systematically investigate errors the second language learners make were conducted from the 1980^s with the study of Pit Corder (1982). Previously the second language acquisition (SLA) theories were influenced by behaviourists' view that it considers SLA as an imitation of adult language. The behaviourist's believed that when the patterns of language in the learners' first language (L1) is similar to the second or foreign language (FL) which the learner intends to learn a positive transfer takes place. On the other hand, when the patterns of the SL or FL is different from that of learner's L1 a negative transfer takes place. That is, the learning is easier when positive transfer takes place and learning will be difficult when negative transfer takes place (Yordchim and Gibbs, 2014). When behaviourists' view was not accepted as adequate, an alternative explanation was required – the error analysis tends to replace the behaviourist view. Thus error analysis supersedes the contrastive analysis. The latter gives explanation for errors based only on negative transfer (Brown, 2000). Contrastive analysis hypothesis explains that the main barrier to SLA is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and that 'a scientific, structural comparison of the two languages in question would enable people to predict and describe which are problems and which are not.' (Fang and Jiang, 2007: 10).

According to Corder (1967), better techniques should be developed for the identification as well as the description of errors. Traditionally errors are described 'superficially' which Corder assumed as inadequate. Those kinds of classifications are:

I.   Errors of omission where some element is omitted which should be present.
II.   Errors of addition where some element is present which should not be there.
III.   Errors of misformation where the wrong item has been chosen in place of the right one.
IV.   Errors of ordering where the elements presented are correct but wrongly sequenced. (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982).

This is a kind of description only, while there are other categories too like global vs local. According to Burt (1975) 'global' errors hinder communication and prevent the learner from comprehending the message conveyed. 'Local' errors only affect a single element of a sentence, but do not prevent a message from being heard.

In addition to identifying the categories of errors, sources of errors are also important. Brown (2000) presents four sources of errors: Interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, communication strategies, of them I give below two main sources.

1) Interlingual Transfer

This type or errors occur as a result of interference from the learners' L1 (first language). According to Brown, 'The beginning stages of learning a second language are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer from the native language, or interference.' (224).

Hence, if the teacher is familiar with the learners' L1 he or she can analyse the error in the second language (L2) in terms of the L1.

2) Intralingual Transfer

This type of errors occur when the learners develop their L2 to a certain extent, mostly occurs as a result of partial learning (Brown, 2000). Overgeneralization is a source of this error where the learners apply the rules of the L2 in a faulty situation. "He goed to the market" is an example of such a situation. Here the learner adds 'ed' for an irregular verb. According to Richard (1971) ignorance of rule restriction (e.g. *The man I saw him*) also causes this kind of errors.

When the categories of errors are of different types, Ellis (1997) identifies different sources of errors. They are omission, overgeneralization and transfer errors. In omission students omit certain grammatical items (e.g. article), whereas in overgeneralization they try to apply the language rules in an inappropriate situation (e.g. adding 'ed' for past tense – goed, eated, here it is applied to irregular morphemes such as went and ate). Transfer errors occurs as a result of mother tongue influence of the learners.

Even though these categories are basic they were unable capture the kinds of errors made by second language learners. At this juncture, an analysis of inflectional morphemes has a role to identify and categorize the errors too. Inflectional morphology has been identified as a problematic area to learners of English as a second language when there are no overt inflectional markers in the mother tongue of the learners (Akande, 2003). Many of the work on error analysis revolved around this inflectional morphemes (e.g. Richards, 1971; Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, Akande, 2013, Yordchim and Gibbs, 2014) though in different overseas contexts.

Studies that focused on error analysis in general and inflectional morphemes have been conducted in different contexts.

Akande (2003) examined the use of the eight inflectional morphemes and errors in the use of morphemes among the senior secondary students in a Nigerian school. Those inflectional morphemes are listed above. The study revealed that the most occurring errors were the past tense and the plural markers. Also, the pupils generally had very poor competence in the use of the past participle, possessive inflection, past tense inflection and plural inflection as these four had high percentages of errors of occurrences.

In another study Yordchim and Gibbs (2014) tried to identify the Errors made by a sample group of 83 Thai university students majoring in Business English at the end of their 3rd academic year. A test paper was given to these students and completed by them. The results show that inflectional errors in using nouns had the highest percentage at 88.89%, followed by adjectives at 83.33% and verbs had the lowest percentage with 66.67%.

Jayasundara and Premarathna (2011) identified errors made by students from Uva Wellassa University in the central part of Sri Lanka. Their study focused on both speaking and writing and they classified the errors into broad categories as Grammar, Syntactic, Semantic, Lexical, Orthography, Morphology and Phonology. These categories seem overlapping because grammar covers all kinds of errors such as morphological and syntactic errors, whereas lexical and morphological errors are related (Ballard, 2013). Neither did the researchers define their error categories. Therefore, the

results were not taken into discussion in the present study. A previous action research conducted by Navaz (2016) identified errors as broad categories as wrong tense usage and spelling errors and the study was undertaken as an intervention study on improving students' writing skills at the same faculty where the present study is conducted. To the knowledge of the researcher any systematic study on errors, especially identifying inflectional errors was not carried out in Sri Lanka. Hence, observing the occurrence of abundant errors made by the students in the South Eastern University, mainly the errors in forming irregular inflectional morphemes, the present study was undertaken to systematically look into the learner errors and to find whether an intervention would improve the situation.

Based on the previous study in this study the focus was to find whether students make more errors in the area of using irregular inflectional morphemes. Hence, the following research questions were used.

Research Questions:

1.   Do the students make more errors in irregular inflectional forms compared to regular inflectional forms?

2.   Does a direct teaching of irregular inflectional morphemes increase the knowledge of correct use of irregular inflectional morphemes?

METHODS

For this study 3 student groups were used. Two groups of students are from the Faculty of Arts & Culture, while another one was from the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic. All students are from third year of their academic study. These two faculties are the largest faculties in the campus. A description of the university is given in the previous paper (Navaz & Sama, 2016). These students had previously studied two years of English, for four semesters in the university. Hence, their proficiency level varies as shown in the table 1 below.

Table 4: Basic details of student sample

Study Groups	A	B	C
No of students (total 100)	36	32	32
Year	3rd	3rd	2nd
Stream	Arts	Arts	Islamic Studies and Arabic
Proficiency level (1-5 level) 1 top; 5 weakest	2	5 (1-5)	5 (1-5)

At both stages same 100 students participated. Students were given two different task sheets at two different stages, namely stage 1 and 2. At stage 1, Task sheet 1 was given which contained 15 singular nouns for which irregular plural forms were required as well as 15 regular nouns. Similarly they were given 20 irregular verbs and 20 regular verbs for which students had to write the past tense forms.

These words were selected based on the experience of the instructors. Four instructors were asked to list down the most frequent regular and irregular nouns and verbs that are

used by students in their usual writing tasks. Out of the list of nouns and verbs, common list of 15 nouns and 20 verbs were selected, regular and irregular forms each.

An intervention was made two weeks of administering the stage 1 task sheets and identifying the number of errors. Having identified higher number of errors students made in irregular inflectional morphemes the intervention focused on teaching the rules of making plurals and past tense verb forms. It covered several irregular verbs and plurals including the ones used at stage 1. The stage 2 was administered 5 weeks after the intervention.

Even though it was decided to have the intervention after 3 weeks, involving the same 100 students was a difficult task. As a result, stage 2 had to be delayed for another two weeks. At stage 2, the same irregular nouns and verbs were used and students had to construct sentences using those words. Previously they had to write only the correct forms of plurals and past tense verbs. The nouns and verbs used in this study are given in table 2 and 3 below.

Table 5: Nouns used at stage 1

Irregular nouns	Regular Nouns
Man	Trip
Woman	Culture
Foot	Place
Mouse	Subject
Child	Teacher
Tooth	Lady
Leaf	Hobby
Sheep	Potato
Syllabus	Roof
Fruit	Photo
Thief	Human
Shelf	Activity
Scarf	Watch
Person	Story
Life	Class

Table 6: Verbs used at stage 1

Irregular verbs	Regular verbs
Drink	Arrange
Feel	Enjoy
Hurt	Stay
Leave	Like
Throw	Slip
Wake up	Study
Teach	Marry
Wear	Cry
Spend	Open
Send	Play
Choose	Fry
Deal	Stop

Break	Hop
Draw	Apply
Fall	Smile
Meet	Obey
Sweep	Talk
Bite	Explain
Build	Mention
Drive	Copy

At stage 2 the same irregular nouns and verbs that were used in stage 1 were used. At each stage the number of errors students made were counted.

FINDINGS

Findings for forming irregular plural nouns

The number of errors for both regular and irregular nouns are presented below in table 7. There were 861 errors for irregular nouns and 170 regular nouns were found. Average errors were 8 and 1.7 for irregular and regular plurals respectively. Higher number of errors (96) was found for the words 'sheep' and 'fruit'.' Students had used 'sheeps' and 'fruits' assuming them regular plural words but the word 'sheep' requires zero inflection. Students had difficulties in using words end in 'f' which require 'ves' form too. Most students used 's' to make plurals for such words.

Table 7: Total errors for regular and irregular nouns before intervention

Irregular nouns	Total errors	Regular nouns	Total errors
Fruit	96	photo	20
Sheep	96	potato	35
Scarf	88	watch	00
Thief	82	Human	10
Mouse	78	Subject	10
Shelf	74	Activity	10
Life	69	Class	00
Leaf	64	Hobby	10
Foot	59	Place	5
Syllabus	36	Roof	25
Tooth	32	Lady	10
Person	24	story	10
Woman	24	Culture	10
Child	23	Teacher	5
Man	16	Trip	10
Total	**861**		**170**
Average errors/student	**8.5**		**1.7**

After Intervention

The overall errors found after intervention are given below in table 8. As shown in the table, the total errors for the irregular words came down to 470 from 861, nearly 50%. For each word the most common error form has been given against each word. All these errors indicate the error type of misformation where student had used a wrong form. Hence, this error occurs as a result of overgeneralization.

Table 8: Overall errors for irregular plural nouns after intervention

Words	Number/per centage	Most frequent error form
Leaf	60	*Leafs*
Scarf	60	*Scarfs*
Shelf	60	*Shelfs*
Sheep	55	*Sheeps*
Mouse	40	*Mouses*
Life	35	*Lifes*
Thief	35	*Thiefs*
Foot	30	*Foots*
Tooth	20	*Tooths*
Fruit	15	*Fruits*
Person	15	*Persons*
Syllabus	15	*syllabus*
Child	10	*Childrens/ childs*
Man	10	*mans*
Woman	10	*Womans*
Total	**470**	
Average error/student	**4.7**	

The next table (table 9) presents the results before and after the intervention. As can be seen after the intervention the number of errors have been reduced for all the words. This implies that students have mastered the rules for making irregular plurals. However, even after the intervention several errors were found for the words ending in 'f' (e.g. scarf, leaf).

***Table 9: Comparison of errors for regular and irregular nouns before and after the
intervention***

Irregular nouns	Errors before intervention	Errors after intervention
Fruit	96	15
Sheep	96	55
Scarf	88	60
Thief	82	35
Mouse	78	40
Shelf	74	60
Life	69	35
Leaf	64	60
Foot	59	30
Syllabus	36	15
Tooth	32	20
Person	24	15
Woman	24	10
Child	23	10
Man	16	10
Total	**861**	**470**
Average errors/student	**8.6**	**4.7**

Table 10 below compares the errors group-wise. Of the three groups higher number of errors were found in Group C which is relatively a weaker group compared to the other two groups. This indicates that the language proficiency influences the errors made in students' writing. Further, high frequent errors were also found as indicated in table 11. These words were ranked 1 to 5 and found to be differing from group to group according to their rank. For example, sheep, fruit and scarf are the highest frequent error words for the groups A, B and C respectively.

Table 10: Errors in irregular nouns given group-wise

Groups	A		B		C	
Words	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Fruit	33	92^2	32	00_1	31	97_2
Sheep	34	94^1	31	97_2	31	97_3
Scarf	28	78^3	28	79_5	32	100_1
Thief	22	61^4	29	91_3	31	97_4
Mouse	21	58^5	28	88_4	29	91
Shelf	20	56	23	72	31	97_5
Life	17	47	21	66	31	97_5
Leaf	15	42	22	69	27	84
Foot	13	36	19	59	27	84
Syllabus	8	22	13	41	17	53
Tooth	7	19	7	22	18	56
Person	4	11	7	22	13	41
Woman	7	19	9	28	8	25
Child	5	14	6	19	12	38
Man	2	5	5	16	9	28
Total	236		280		347	

X^2 Superscripts indicate the rank of higher number of errors for each group

Table 11: High frequency errors of irregular plurals

word	A		B		C		Number of Errors
Fruit	33	92[2]	32	100[1]	31	97[2]	96
Sheep	34	94[1]	31	97[2]	31	97[3]	96
Scarf	28	78[3]	28	79[5]	32	100[1]	88
Thief	22	61[4]	29	91[3]	31	97[4]	82
Mouse	21	58[5]	28	88[4]	29	91	78
Shelf	20	56	23	72	31	97[5]	74
Life	17	47	21	66	31	97[5]	69

Findings for forming irregular past tense verbs

The table 12 shows the errors for irregular verbs as well as regular errors. Compared to regular verbs irregular verb forms had higher number of errors. Most of these error occurs as a result of unawareness of the rule for these verbs. They can be categorized as misformation and occurs as a result of overgeneralization. The average error/students is 11 for irregular, while it is around 6 for regular verbs. The errors in regular verbs occurred when students failed to double the last consonant. (e.g. hop – hopped)

Table 12: Total errors for regular and irregular past tense verbs before intervention

Irregular verbs	Number of Errors	Regular verbs	Number of Errors
Meet	20	Obey	35
Drink	26	Arrange	00
Send	34	Play	10
Leave	37	Like	10
Hurt	38	Stay	20
Build	42	Mention	15
Break	50	Hop	90
Spend	50	Open	30
Sweep	51	Talk	35
Fall	53	Smile	15
Bite	54	Explain	10
Feel	55	Enjoy	10
Draw	57	Apply	40
Throw	62	Slip	80
Drive	63	Copy	40

Teach	65	Marry	10
Wake up	80	Study	40
Choose	85	Fry	30
Wear	90	Cry	30
Deal	91	Stop	95
Total	**1103**		**645**
Average error /student	**11**		**6.4**

AFTER INTERVENTION

After the intervention the number of errors for irregular verbs were reduced but the extent to which the reduction occurred is not as expected (table 13). The total number of errors reduced from 1103 to 934 only. The word 'deal' has the highest number of errors. 95% of the students had used 'dealed.' This is a misformation error occurring as a result of overgeneralization. Students also had confused with the words 'feel' and 'fall'. Looking across the verb forms students presented, it can be easily identified that all these forms are produced by adding 'ed'. Adding 'ed' is the known simple rule for students.

Table 13: Overall errors identified for Irregular verbs after intervention

Irregular verbs	Number of Errors	Examples
Bite	40	bite/bited
Break	38	break/ breaked
Build	55	build/builded
Choose	55	choosed
Deal	95	deal /dealed
Draw	60	drawed/ drow
Drink	20	Drunk
Drive	55	drived
Fall	60	Felt / falled
Feel	37	Falled/ feeled
Hurt	30	Hurted
Leave	30	Leaved
Meet	10	meeted
Send	30	Send/ sended
Spend	37	Spend/ spended
Sweep	45	Sweeped
Teach	60	teached
Throw	65	throw/throwed
Wake up	51	waked up
Wear	61	wear/weared
Total	**934**	
Average error /student	**9**	

The table below (table 14) compares the errors before and after intervention. Contrary to the prediction of reduction of errors, for some words there has been an increase in number of errors. Even though the actual reason is not obvious this increase indicates that students would have confused with irregular past tense forms.

Table 14: Overall errors identified for irregular verbs before and after intervention

Irregular verbs	Number of Errors before intervention	Number of Errors after intervention
Bite	54	40
Break	50	38
Build	42	55
Choose	85	55
Deal	91	95
Draw	57	60
Drink	26	20
Drive	63	55
Fall	53	60
Feel	55	37
Hurt	38	30
Leave	37	30
Meet	20	10
Send	34	30
Spend	50	37
Sweep	51	45
Teach	65	60
Throw	62	65
Wake up	80	51
Wear	90	61
Total	**1103**	**934**
Average error /student	**11**	**9**

The errors for irregular past tense is given group-wise in table 15. Higher number of errors were found in the writing of group C. It is the weakest group in terms of language proficiency. This finding is similar to the findings of plural forms where the group C had made many errors in making irregular plurals.

Table 15: Errors in irregular verbs given group-wise

Words/Groups	A		B		C	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Deal	34	94^1	25	78^3	32	100^1
Choose	26	72^2	28	88^1	31	97^2
Teach	20	56^3	28	88^1	31	97^2
Drive	19	53^4	17	53^5	27	84^5
Bite	19	53^5	20	62^4	15	47
Wear	17	47	16	50	28	88^4
Hurt	17	47	7	22	14	44
Throw	16	44	20	63	26	81

Sweep	13	36	12	37	26	81
Fall	11	31	16	50	26	81
Draw	10	28	17	53	30	94
Wake up	9	25	17	53	25	78
Drink	6	17	8	25	12	38
Leave	5	14	5	16	27	84
Break	5	14	10	31	23	72
Feel	5	14	13	41	19	59
Build	4	11	12	37	26	81
Spend	4	11	10	31	23	72
Meet	3	8	3	9	14	44
Send	2	6	12	38	20	63
Total	**245**		**296**		**475**	

Table 16 presents the high frequent errors. They are same for A and B. For the group C another word appeared to have high frequency, the word wear.

Table 16: High frequent errors in all three groups

Words/Groups	A		B		C	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Deal	34	94[1]	25	78[3]	32	100[1]
Choose	26	72[2]	28	88[1]	31	97[2]
Teach	20	56[3]	28	88[1]	31	97[2]
Drive	19	53[4]	17	53[5]	27	84[5]
Bite	19	53[4]	20	62[4]	15	47
Wear	17	47	16	50	28	88[4]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study identified the errors in making inflectional errors, especially regular and irregular forms of plural nouns and verbs. Compared to errors in making regular forms of plurals students made higher number of errors in verb forms both regular and irregular.

Dulay et al. identified four types of errors: addition, omission, misformation and misorder, as given in the literature review section. As this study deals with words only misformation errors were identified.

The errors made in making irregular plurals are mainly of 4 types as explained by Dulay et al. (1982) (i) Zero inflection: no plural markers are needed, whereas students had supplied 's' e.g. sheeps and fruits (ii) Vowel mutation: the vowel within the word changes. Here students made errors by supplying 's' e.g. mouses and tooths (iii) Voicing of final consonants: the word final consonant, usually 'f' is changed into 'ves'. But students failed to make this change and supplied only 's' form e.g. leafs and thiefs (iv) Irregular plural inflection. This changes the word into a different form, usually by supplying 'en' but students supplied only an 's' form e.g. childs instead of children. All these examples indicate that students have learnt a rule that an 's' should be used for

making plurals and they have not mastered the other 4 types of rules for making irregular plurals. These are overgeneralization errors.

Similarly for verbs also overgeneralization errors occurred. Students tend to supply 'ed' for all the past tense forms irrelevant of regular or irregular verbs. This error is known as misformation. Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure (Dulay et al., 1982). Three types of misformation are listed by them: (i) regularization (ii) archi-form (iii) alternating form. Of these three, only regularization errors are applicable to words, whereas other forms are for clauses or sentences.

The intervention adopted in this study did not bring desirable results. Even though students could improve their errors in irregular plurals, they couldn't make correct irregular verbs. This is due to the fact that unlike irregular plural forms, the irregular verb forms cannot be bounded by handful of rules. Students managed to make the past tense for regular verbs by adding 'ed' e.g. explain and enjoy. Similarly whenever they wanted to add 'd' only they did not make error. e.g. arrange. But they had problems for regular verbs too, especially in making 'y' into 'ied' e.g. copy, study. Also, whenever they wanted to double the last consonants they made errors. e.g. stop, slip. 95 and 80 percentage of students made errors on these words respectively.

This study, which identified the students' use of irregular inflectional morphemes inform us that there are problems for students in using such morphemes, especially in using irregular verbs. Therefore, ELT practitioners have to pay more attention to such grammatical items and design and plan their teaching accordingly. The outcome of the study, therefore, is useful for teachers and practitioners who work with L2 learners not only at tertiary level but also at secondary level too.

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