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**Identifying Difficulties Made by Advanced
Iraqi EFL Learners when Applying
English Verbs**

**Key Words
(Difficulties Iraqi EFL Applying Verbs)**

**By
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Abstract

English verb is a very important item in English sentence construction. The typical English sentence is SVO and no sentence structure can be appropriate without a verb. The difficulty of learning and applying correctly the verbs shows learners' competence and performance in English as a foreign language. This paper shows the source of errors and barriers which affect the learners' acquiring English as a foreign language.

This study is divided into four sections:-

Section One deals with the problem that any learner of English language as a foreign learner faces the difficulty of learning and applying correctly the English verb, the aim the hypothesis of the study, and the limitation of the study.

Section Two describes the kinds of verbs and their function in sentences.

Section Three deals with the source of errors and barriers which affect the learners' acquisition of English as a foreign language and their types.

Section four is the procedural part of the paper, including the test, and the analysis of the students' performance, followed by a number of conclusions.

Section One

1.1 The problem

Throughout the years of teaching, It has been found that learners in Iraqi universities/ Department of English language encounter many difficulties in performing the English verbs correctly. Because of the complexity of the system of the application of the verbs, learners are liable to find difficulties in choosing the correct form of the verbs.

Not only do Iraqi learners commit errors of various kinds in the area of the English verbs but also do most learners of English as a foreign language.

(Mukattash, 1983:11)

1.2 Aims of the study

It is clear that students of English Department who are learning English as a foreign language are facing difficulties mainly in:-

- 1- Choosing the correct verb.
- 2- Choosing the correct tense.

1.3 The hypothesis

It is hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the performance of morning and evening classes in the achievement test.

1.4 Scope of the study

1-The measuring of performance is of the correct usage of English verbs.

2- Fourth year students of both classes morning and evening are involved in the test.

1.5 Limitation of the study

It is limited to investigate the performance of fourth year students of college of Arts / The University of Mustansiriah / Department of English Language and Literature and College of Education, College of Languages / University of Baghdad / Departments of English Language, for the academic year (2011-2012) for both morning and evening classes.

Section Two

2.1 Types of verbs

2.1.1 Predicating (linking) verbs

Frank(1993:45)&Löbner (2002: 102)&Yule(2010:10) point out that a predication verb is the main word in the predicate which tells something about the subject. It is called traditionally as a verb action like (babies cry), but has actually been interpreted to include non-action verbs that are non-linking verbs, e.g., (I remember him).

A linking verb is a verb of incomplete predication. It just shows that the real predicate follows the word in the complement

which is usually - an adjective as, e.g., (The girl is pretty) or a noun, e.g., She is a pretty girl).

Linking verbs have been divided into verb (to be) and all other verbs which are followed by many types of complements. Whereas predicating has been divided into two kinds, the first one is called dynamic verbs (action verbs).

The second is called stative verbs (non-action verbs). Verb (to be) is one of the stative verbs. See fig. 1

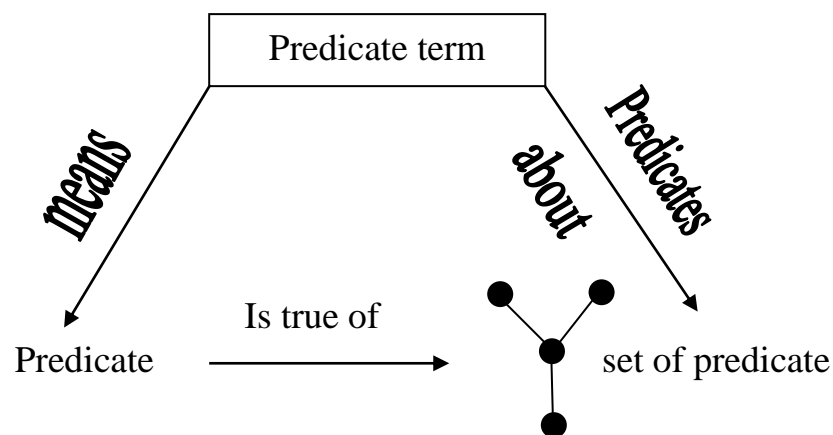


Fig. (1) The semiotic triangle for predication

Adopted from Löbner (2002: 102)

The verb has the key role in any sentence .It is the main part of the sentence. It occupies the center of the network like a spider in its web holding all the threads.

2.1.2 Transitive and intransitive verbs

2.1.2.1 Transitive verbs

Eckersley and Eckersley (1980: 154) observe that an action is expressed by a verb, which reflects the action that joins the doer to the object. For instance when one says (I hit the ball) the action of hitting is confined to the doer and goes over from (I) to (the ball). When the action is expressed by the verb which goes from a subject to an object, that verb is called a transitive verb.

Frank (1993: 46) denies the transitive verbs as those which take a direct (single) object, for instance (he is reading a book).

Some transitive verbs of motion require not only an object but also an adverbial of place usually, as in (she put the money in a safe place).

The transitive verbs may take more than one object as in (he gave his wife a present).

There is also direct object complement, e.g., (they elected Mr. Smith president), (Ibid).

2.1.2.2 Intransitive verbs

Collins (1990: 137) states that in this kind of verbs there are two involved elements, the subject (the doer) of the action and the action itself (the verb), e.g., (the girl screamed) or (I waited). When one says (the sun rose), (the child cried), the actions do

not go beyond the persons or objects, these verbs have no objects, they are intransitive verbs.

The only object that intransitive verb can have is a cognate object for instance (He lived a happy life).

2.1.3 Ergative verbs

This is a special kind of verbs which can be used in transitive and intransitive clauses. In this group of verbs, one can describe an action from the point of view of something, which is affected by the action, e.g. 1-When I opened the door, there was Laverne.

2-Suddenly the door opened.

This first sentence (the door) is the object of the verb (opened) but in the second sentence (the door) is the subject of (opened) and there is no mentioning of who (opened) the door.

(Collins, 1990: 155 , Yule, 2010:64)

2.1.4 Finite and Non-Finite verbs

2.1.4.1 Finite verbs

Eckersley and Eckersley (1980: 143) and Frank (1993: 43) agree that the verbs which can form the predicate by themselves are finite verbs, and the ones that cannot form the predicate are non-finite verbs.

A finite verb is a lexical verb, with or without an auxiliary that acts as the full verb in the predicate. It is limited by all the

grammatical properties; a verb may have (person, number, tense, etc.).

2.1.4.2 Non-finite verbs

Infinite are complete verb forms that function as other parts of speech. These verbs are the infinitives, e.g., (to speak, to write, etc).The present participles and gerunds. All other parts of the verbs are finite verbs. The forms which are called verbal are not limited by person or number but they have voice and tense

(Eckersley and Eckersley, 1980:143 , Frank, 1993: 43)

2.1.5 Auxiliaries

Foley and Hall (2005:200) explain that there are three auxiliary verbs in English, these verbs are:-

Have, be, do. Have and be are used to make perfect, continuous and passive forms.

Have, do, can be used as main verbs e.g. ,

He didn't have any brothers and sister.

In British English have can be used without auxiliary do in questions and negatives.

Has the government any real intention of addressing the crime problem head on?

I haven't a clue what they're talking about.

2.1.6 Modals

Modal verbs are verbs which can be used as main verbs or as auxiliaries in the sentences. They can be confusing for learners because each verb can be used to express many different meanings as ability, possibility, deduction, arrangements, suggestions, and offers...etc. These verbs are:

Can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, must, ought to.

(Foley and Hall, 2005: 174,182,190)

Modals are very wide subject if you are interested in, you can check the previous mentioned book of grammar.

2.1.7 Simple and Complex verb phrases

Quirk et al (1985: 151) point out that the finite verb phrase is simple when it consists of one word, it can be present, past, imperative or subjunctive. , e.g., 1- He works hard, 2-He worked hard 3-Work harder!

It is important that in

4-He insisted that he work hard.

The verb (work) is subjunctive. Whereas (work) is considered to be complex verb when the verb phrase consists of two or more words as

5-John has worked hard, 6-John should be working hard, 7-They may have been sold.

The constructions of complex verb phrase are four basic types:

- a- (Model) consists of a model auxiliary + the base of a verb
e.g. (must examine).
- b- (Perfective) consists of the auxiliary have + the-ed
participle of a verb e.g. (has examined).
- c- (Progressive) consists of the auxiliary be + the-ing
participle of a verb e.g. (is examining).
- d- (Passive) consists of the auxiliary be + the-ed. participle of
a verb e.g. (is examined).

2.2 Positions of the verbs

Frank (1993:49) maintains that the verb is used after a subject or before an object or complement. The verb appears before the subject in most questions and in sentences or clauses that begin with a certain type of negative adverbs.

2.2.1 Positions of the auxiliaries

Thomas (1965: 32) Akmajian and Heny (1976: 65) stress the idea that the verb phrase may contain one or more auxiliaries plus the main verb of the sentence

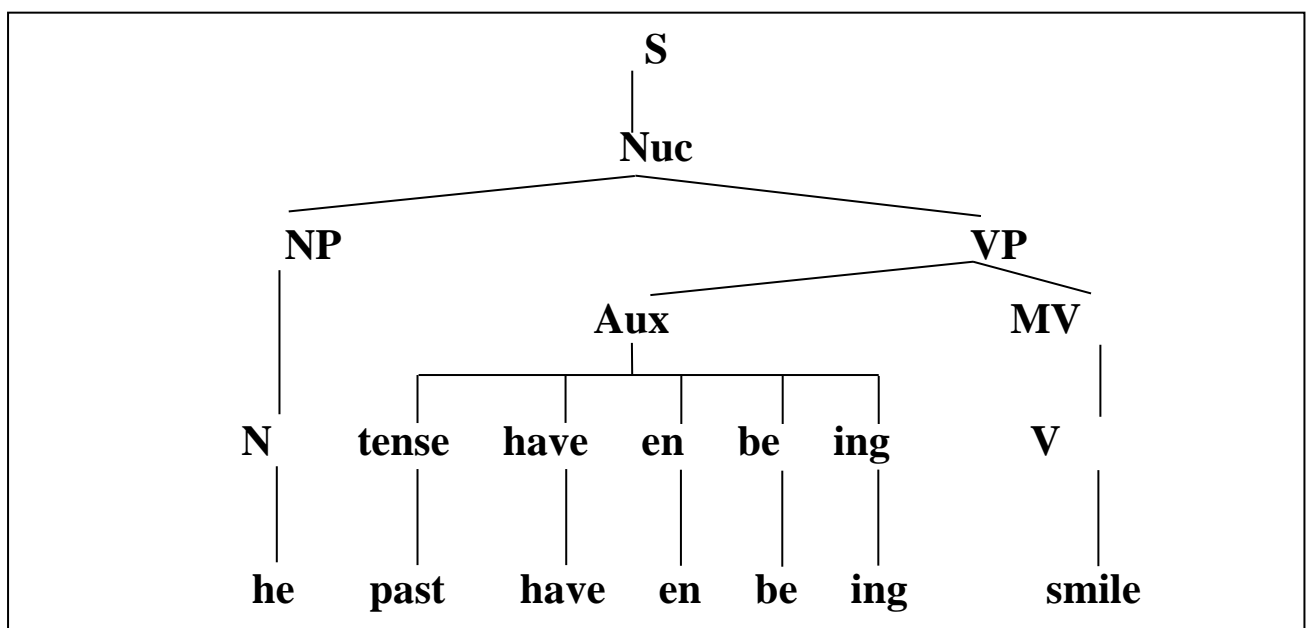
VP —————> Aux + MV (main verb)

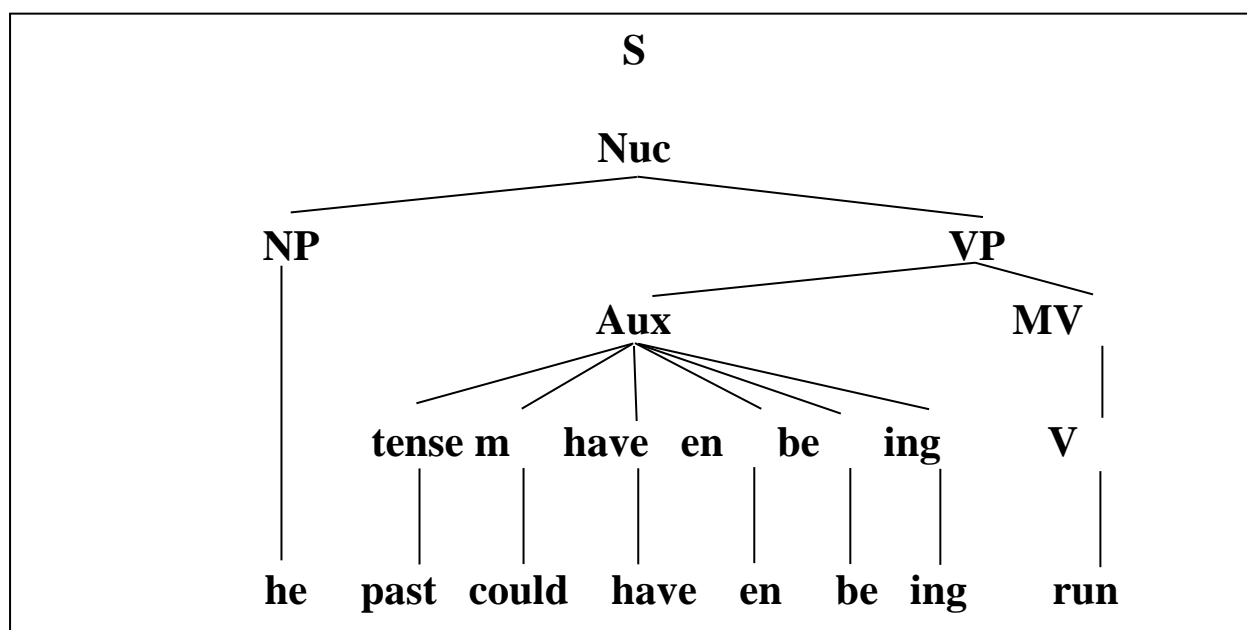
e.g. (Children may sleep).

Liles (1971:21) observes that auxiliaries can be extended into many parts which precede the verb, e.g., (he had been

smiling), (he could have been running). Here the auxiliaries (had been) are preceding the verb (smile) and (could have been) preceding the verb (running). See fig.(2) which shows the expansion of the auxiliaries.

(8)He had been smiling. (9) He could have been running.





**Fig (2) Two tree diagrams show the expansion of the (aux) -
Adopted from Liles (1971:21)**

These parts are preceding the main verb of the sentence and under the control of the (Aux) which is a part of the verb phrase in the tree diagram.

2.3 Tense of verbs

2.3.1 Tense and Time

Eckersley and Eckersley (1980:158) point out that a clear distinction should be made between tense and time. The notion of time (present, past, future time) is universal, and is independent of any particular languages or of languages at all, whereas tense is a linguistic device, varying from one language to another.

Nesfield (1982: 55) points out that tenses show:

- a- The time of an action
- b- Its degree of completeness.

Alexander (1997: 159) states that some grammarians believe that tense must always be shown by the actual form of verb, and that in many languages present, past and future tenses are indicated by changes in the verb forms.

Crystal (2004:224) points out that one of the functions of the verb is to indicate the time at which an action takes place. This term is used traditionally to refer to the way verbs change their form to express this meaning.

Depending on this, English language has only two tenses present and past, it has no future tenses ending but can expressed by variety of other means as (will, shall, ...etc.).

Whereas time can be shown as a line, on which the present moment is located as a continuously moving point, but there is no identity between tense and time.(ibid)

Radford (2006a:480) sheds light on the tense of English verbs which is a binary (two-way) tense contrast which is traditionally said to be between present-tense forms and past – tense forms. The alternative classification that most linguists prefer is [+past] e.g. watched, slept, hated ... etc. [-past] e.g. watch, sleep, hate ...etc. This present /past – tense distinction correlates (to some extent) with time – reference, so that past-

tense verbs typically describe an event taking place in the past, whereas present-tense verbs typically describe an event taking place in the present or future.

2.4 Aspect

Crystal (2004:225) defines aspect as the way of expressing how the time of the action of the verb is regarded –such as whether it is completed, in progress, or showing duration.

Radford (2006b:322) gives a detailed description of aspect, he says it is a term typically used to denote the duration of the activity described by a verb whether the activity described is going on or completed. In the following sentences;

10-He has taken the medicine

11-He is taking the medicine

The auxiliary (has) in (10) marks (perfect aspect) it shows the perfection, the completion or termination of taking the medicine. Similarly, (is) in (11) works as an auxiliary which marks progressive aspect because it relates to an activity which is

going on or in progress, thus due to this reason (is) in (11) is also referred to as a progressive auxiliary.

2.5 Ways of expressing Tenses

Tenses can be shown through actions;

- a- An action is done at the present time as: (he sees a star).
 - b- An action was done in the past time as: (he saw a star).
 - c- An action will be done in the future time as:(he will see a star).
- (Nesfield,1982: 56)

A verb then has three main times or tenses (present, past, future). To each tense there are four different forms:

1. Indefinite; which denotes present, past or future time in its simplest form as (I love), (I loved), (I shall love).
 2. Continuous, which denotes the event in present, past, future is still continuing or not yet completed as (I am playing), (I was playing), (I shall be playing).
 3. Perfect which denotes the event in present, past, future is in completed or perfect as (I have loved), (I had loved), (I shall have loved).
 4. Perfect continuous: which combines the meanings of the two preceding forms as (I have been playing), (I had been playing), (I shall have been playing).
- (ibid)

2.6 Verbs in Idioms

Dixon (2002: 64) shows a particular difficulty experienced by learners. It is the incorrect handling and using of expressions consisting of verbs in combination with prepositions or adverbial particles. For example (take off, leave out etc.) such verbs occur frequently in all types of English and especially in everyday spoken English. They are called two – word verbs. Sometimes the combination of (verb + preposition or particles) results in a unit of meaning which is an idiomatic expression; It is very problematic, because the meaning of the combination may carry no relationship to the meaning of the individual words of this combination. , e.g., the verb (Pack something in) presents no difficulty in the sentence (she opened her suitcase and packed all the clothes in). But in the sentence (he decided to pack his job in) the individual meaning of 'pack' and 'in' do not give the meaning of (leave).

The verb (take off) means take someone off (take away to another place), as in (as soon as Tom arrived, Bob insisted on taking him off). It may mean (imitate humorously), which cannot be guessed from the individual meaning of (take and off) as in;

12- Liza can take the Queen off very well . (Ibid)

Any combination may have several idiomatic meanings depending on its collocation.

The other difficulty problem is that to know how the combination is used in sentences ,i.e., the problem of word order, which depends on whether the verb is followed by a preposition or by particle, e.g.:

A

B

13- I read the letter through

I saw the plan through

14- I read through the letter

I saw through the plan

In (13) 'through' is a particle in both sentences and because it is a particle so there is no difference in meaning.

(Dixson, 2002:64)

In (14) 'through' is a particle in (13) and in (14) it is a preposition, so there is an important difference in meaning between the two sentences.

(13b) means I preserved until the plan was completed.

(14b) means I recognized the deception of the plan.

(Ibid)

Section Three

3.1 Factors affecting learning foreign language

3.1.1 Motivation

There are several factors affect learners of second language to learn successfully.

1-Postive orientation towards school learning which involved persistence, high level of aspiration, positive academic self-concept, and positive feelings about past performance at school.

2-Needs for social recognition (seeking positive reinforcement from the teacher).

3-Motive to avoid failure (fearing failure).

4-Curiosity(both epistemic and perceptual).

5-Conformity (working because it is a 'demand' by the teacher or by parents, or, if relevant, by peer pressures).

6-A language-learning situation which helps and encourages success and achievement must consequently be more helpful than one that stays on errors and corrections.

7-The learner who is ready to guess, risk making mistakes, and tries to communicate in the L2 will have a tendency to, be more successful.

(Yule, 2003:195 &
Ball,1977:190)

Gleason & Ratner (2009:441) argue that after teenagers, acquiring a new language is very difficult. Most researchers agree that motivation to learn a second language becomes more crucial with age; the child is motivated to learn in order

to communicate, but for the adult it is more complex. There are factors for motivation are involved; cultures for example that of French Canada, where there is great financial reason to speak French like a native speaker a substantially greater percentage of Anglophones can sound like native speakers of French despite acquiring L2 after teenagers.

Other researchers, point out that the child has more time to devote to acquiring a language, whereas the adult is not able to focus energy on acquisition. They found the speed of language acquisition in younger children is slower than that in older children and adults when syntactic ability is compared.

3.1.2 Factors cause errors in learning

Brown (1980:172) points out that there are four factors cause errors, these factors are:-

- 1- Interlingual Transfer.
- 2- Intralingual Transfer.
- 3- Context of learning.
- 4- Communication strategies.

3.1.2.1 Interlingual Transfer

Yule (2003:195) mentions that the language which is produced by the learners of any second language is filled with errors. These errors have no connection to the forms of either the first language (L1) or the second language (L2).

Yule(ibid) continued his explanation that "there is some in between system used in L2 acquisition which certainly contains aspects of L1 and L2,..., this system is called an interlanguage and it is now considered to be the basis of all L2 production."

Fromkin et al (2007:347) point out that the order of (L1) structure affects the order of (L2) structure, the result would be a structure which belongs neither to (L1) nor to (L2), it is a new structure and this is the interlanguage grammar.

Students as learners of English as (L2) whose first language is Arabic language (L1) they are confused by using, for instance, verb (to be),because Arabic language does not contain this kind of verbs, thus when the learners are using the second language they do not use this kind of verbs. They also do not use third person singular (-s). So when they try to use (L2) grammar the effect of (L1) is very strong and they would produce interlanguage grammar. They would say;

What you doing? Instead of saying;

What are you doing?

The structure of English language (interrogative form) information question;

QWORD + Be +S+DO

The structure of Arabic language (interrogative form)

QWORD+S+V

ماذا تفعل ؟

The other example is the use of the 3rd person singular (-s).

Suha studies German language.

The verb form in English language needs (-s) if the tense of the sentence is present.

In Arabic, which is (L1) there is no such rule in Arabic language. So Arabic learners of English language would say; Suha study German language.

In which the verb is used without the 3rd person singular (-s), this is the intrelanguage form.

3.1.2.2 Intralingual Transfer

Brown (1980:173f) points out that this source of errors has nothing to do with the mother tongue of the learner. He mentions that "...once the learner has begun to acquire parts of the new system, more and more intralingual transfer...is manifested... because as the learner progresses in the second language, his previous experience and his existing subsumes begin to include structures within the target language itself.

Three types of intralingual transfer are mentioned in this paper:

- 1-Errors of overgeneralization
- 2-Errors of Ignorance of rule restrictions
- 3-Errors of simplification

(Brown,1980:173f)

3.1.2.3 Context of learning

Context refers to the classroom with its teacher and materials (in school learning) or the social situation (in untutored L2 learning). The teacher or the textbook may lead the learner to make faulty hypotheses about the language he or she is learning.

(ibid:174f)

3.1.2.4 Communication strategies

It is defined by Brown (ibid:178) as "the conscious employment of verbal or nonverbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when precise linguistic forms are for some reason not readily available to the learner at appoint in communication

3.2 L₂ Learning Barriers

Elign (1979: 150) provides two main reasons for problems of acquiring L2. First, most people try to learn another language during their teenage or adult years. Second, the learners tongue (the adult tongue) get stiff pronouncing one type of language.

3.3 Types of barriers to language acquisition and learning

Ddeubel (2010) sheds light on the types of barriers to language acquisition and learning saying that there are many types of barriers these are as the following;

3.3.1-Social

A-Peer group

B-Socio-economic status

C-L1 education and literacy

D-Parental /family support

E-Access and support

3.3.2-Psycho/emotional

A-Affective factors (anxiety, social bias)

B-Self belief

C-Motivation (low intrinsic and extrinsic forces)

D-Attitude towards language and learning

E-Social disposition /character

3.3.3 Biological

A-Psycho motor skills

B-Cognitive function

C-L1 development / childhood development factors

D-Physical impairments (deaf, blind etc...)

E-Psychological fitness

F-Age and health

3.3.4 Pedagogical

A-Type and method of instruction

B-Improper materials and curriculum

C-Little access to input (native speakers / audio material)

D-School and classroom culture

E-Lack of learning skills, strategies

F-Teacher / student relationship

G-Planning and use of time

3.3.5 Cultural

A-Language transfer and interference (L1-L2 closeness)

B-Cultural values regarding risk taking, openness

C-Government policy and investment

D-Dislocation, movement, war

(Ddeubel, 2010 internet)

Section Four

The procedural part

4.1 The Achievement Test

A scale has been designed to be applied upon (60) random students.

(10) Students of morning class, (10) students of evening class /fourth year/ Department of English / College of Arts / the University of Mustansiriyah.

(10) Students of morning class, (10) students of evening class/fourth year/ Department of English / College of Education/ the University of Baghdad.

(10) Students of morning class, (10) students of evening class/fourth year/ Department of English/ College of Languages/ University of Baghdad.

A (T- test) is carried out to measure the students' knowledge of using the English verb correctly of both morning and evening classes.

The students have been asked to answer two questions, each question contains (7) items. The questions are recognition and productions (see appendix 1).

Table 1 shows testees' scores knowledge of English verbs.

P	F	SD	X	Sample	DF
1.96	7.92	3.50	9.38	Evening classes	Significant
		3	8.10	Morning classes	P < 0.05

Table(1) T- test
The scores of the testees'

4.2 Results

1-According to the analysis of the testees' answers (see table1) , it appears that the evening classes' students get higher scores than morning classes' students.

2- It shows that the evening classes group shows a better performance than the morning classes group. Hence the hypothesis is rejected.

3- It seems that the evening classes' students have a higher score of motivation to learn English language than the morning classes' students. This gives the idea that they are highly motivated to learn a foreign language, i.e., that the experience of evening students may affect their learning because most of them have academic degrees in other fields of studies and this affect their learning and performance of other language.

1.3 Conclusions:-

In the light of results being achieved, a number of conclusions have been made:-

- 1- English verbs are very problematic for (EFL) students.
- 2- Most of the students face difficulty in comprehending and using English verbs correctly.
- 3-The evening classes students have a high motivation to learn English language.
- 4-The poor performance can be attributed to the sources of errors:-
 - a- Interlingual transfer
 - b- Intralingual transfer
 - c- Context of learning
 - d- Communication strategies
- 5-The reason behind the subjects' errors maybe due to the carelessness, indifference, haste of the subjects.

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Choose the correct answer

1-The Lake was near bursting point as itheavily for weeks.

A-had been raining B-has rained C-rains

2-This time next Tuesday afternoon IOn the beach.

A-will be lying B-will lie C-lied

3-Bettya lot of work for charities since last year.

A-will do B- is doing C-has been doing

4- I.....that your wife doesn't come to the tea party.

A-noticed B- notice C-am noticing

5-Litwania.....part of the Soviet Union before 1995.

A- is B-will be C-used to be

6-How long....living there before the war?

A-have you been B-had you been C-were you

7-from whomthe defendant accept the payment that night?

A- do B-did C-does

Fill the blanks with the correct form of the verb between brackets.

1-My family.....in this country for 2 years. (live)

2-Ihow to play chess for a year. (learn)

3-JillT.V. twice that week. (watch)

4-Look at those black clouds . It..... (rain)

5-She always.....in the Waldorf Astoria on visits to New York.
(stay)

6-Julius CaesarBritain in 55 B.C. (invade)

7-Whoin that amazing house? (live)

List of abbreviations

Aux	Auxiliary
Be	Verb to be
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MV	Main Verb
Qword	Question word
S	Subject
SVO	Subject ,Verb ,Object
V	Verb
VP	Verb Phrase

الملخص

يعتبر تركيب الفعل من اهم العناصر في الجملة الانكليزية .يأتي الفعل ثانيا في الجملة والتي تبدأ بالفاعل ثم المفعول به . ويوضح استخدام الفعل الفهم والاداء الصحيح للمتعلمين لهذه اللغة الاجنبية.

مشكلة البحث هي الصعوبة التي تواجه متعلم اللغة الانكليزية في تعلم و تطبيق الفعل الانكليزي بصورة صحيحة.

قسمت الدراسة الى اربعة اقسام

القسم الاول ويشمل : المشكله ، فرضية البحث ، هدف البحث ، حدود البحث

القسم الثاني : يتناول انواع الفعل

القسم الثالث: يوضح العوائق التي تؤثر على متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية

القسم الرابع: يشمل على اجراءات البحث والاختبار الذي تم تطبيقه على المتعلمين لهذه اللغة ، النتائج التي توصل لها البحث والتحليل لهذه النتائج . واخيرا الاستنتاجات التي توصل اليها البحث.