

## TEMPORAL MISMATCHES: UNDERSTANDING TENSE ERRORS IN ALBANIAN L2 ENGLISH LEARNERS



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### Abstract

This study explores the challenges Albanian learners in Kosovo face while acquiring the English tense system, focusing specifically on common difficulties with tense usage. The research gathered data from questionnaires and written texts, revealing a high incidence of errors in tenses such as the Past Simple, Present Simple, Present Perfect, Past Perfect, and Future Simple. Incorrect tense constructions emerged as the most frequent issue, with native language interference and rule overgeneralization contributing to the learners' difficulties. Mistakes were particularly prominent in the Past and Present Simple tenses, suggesting that these areas require targeted attention in language instruction. The study emphasizes the need for more comprehensive research, especially through longitudinal and spoken data analysis, to improve teaching strategies for Albanian ESL learners in addressing tense-related errors.

## 1. Introduction

The English tense system is widely regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of the learning process for Albanian learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). The complexity and broad scope of the tense system often lead to confusion and frustration among students, who find it difficult to grasp and apply the rules consistently. This challenge is not confined to students alone; many instructors and teachers also struggle to effectively teach and address the nuances of English tenses in the classroom. This research is designed to identify the specific areas within the English tense system that are particularly prone to errors when acquired by Albanian learners of ESL. By analyzing the language produced by these learners, this study aims to uncover patterns of mistakes that can help explain why certain tenses are more difficult to master. The findings from this analysis are expected to provide valuable insights that can inform better instructional strategies and support more effective learning outcomes for Albanian ESL students.

The study of temporality, which refers to the expression of time within language, has a long history, dating back to Aristotle, who famously stated that “verbs are predicates and their prediction is relative to time—past, present and future.” (Klein, 1994, p.14) Despite centuries of linguistic inquiry, there is still no consistent and universally accepted theory of tenses and time. Today, misconceptions, controversies, and differing theories continue to surround the understanding of tenses, making them one of the most debated areas in both academic and educational contexts. As a result, tenses and temporality have remained some of the most controversial and challenging aspects of language learning, both inside and outside of the classroom. Difficulties with tenses can arise from the inherent complexity of the system itself, as well as from a variety of internal and external factors that influence the language acquisition process. These factors include differences between the mother language (ML) and the target language (TL), the overgeneralization of rules, and the learners' motivation and mental and physical states. Even in the absence of emotional or external linguistic issues, tenses are often perceived as difficult,

confusing, and complex. Through this research, we intend to explore and clarify the reasons why tenses are considered a burden by both teachers and learners. Additionally, the study will classify and analyze the errors found in the interlanguage of Albanian ESL learners, providing a detailed examination of where and why these mistakes occur. The results of this research have the potential to contribute significantly to various practical and scientific discussions. Practically, the findings could influence the development and improvement of ESL curricula, as analyzing learners' language will reveal what has been mastered and where gaps in understanding remain. This could lead to changes in teaching materials and techniques, particularly those tailored to the needs of Albanian ESL learners. Scientifically, the research could serve as a valuable reference for other scholars interested in the tense systems of Albanian and English, as well as the process of acquiring English tenses by Albanian learners of ESL.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Errors and mistakes

Errors are an intrinsic part of the human learning process, particularly in language acquisition. However, not all errors are treated equally, as they do not uniformly represent the underlying linguistic knowledge of the learner. According to Chomsky's model of language acquisition, there is a distinction between a learner's competence (their inherent knowledge of the language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations). This distinction has been explored by linguists such as Corder (1981), Brown (2000), Dulay & Kreshen (1982), and Johansson (1975), who emphasize the difference between systematic and unsystematic deviations in language use.

Following Coder (1981), unsystematic deviations, commonly known as mistakes, are typically the result of performance-related issues such as physical states, memory lapses, or psychological conditions (p. 10). These mistakes generally do not reflect the learner's underlying language knowledge and can often be self-corrected. Systematic deviations, on the other hand, are referred to as errors. These errors reveal "the learner's language knowledge" (Coder, 1981, p. 10) and are not easily self-correctable without additional input or learning.

Building on this distinction, Jain and Edge (1989) (as cited in James, 2013, p. 81) introduced the concept of asystematic errors, which occur when learners are uncertain about how to use certain functions or forms of the target language and lack control over their language production. Although the primary focus of error analysis has been on identifying systematic and unsystematic errors, asystematic errors are also significant, though they are more difficult to identify and predict. The key difference between

errors and mistakes lies in "their frequency and whether they are repeated" (Brown, 2000, p.17) with errors being consistent and typically not self-correctable

### 2.2 Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is a branch of applied linguistics that gained prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is concerned with identifying, describing, and explaining the errors produced by L2 or FL learners within the context of their language use. EA plays a crucial role in understanding how learners acquire a second language and what common pitfalls they encounter.

#### 2.2.1 Phases of Error Analysis

The process of conducting EA generally involves three phases:

1. **Identifying Errors:** This phase involves pinpointing instances where the learner's language deviates from the target language norms. The learner's interlanguage is compared to reconstructed native-like sentences. Corder (1973) introduced a distinction between overt errors, which are grammatically incorrect, and covert errors, which are grammatically correct but inappropriate within the context.
2. **Describing and Classifying Errors:** Once identified, errors are described and classified using specific taxonomies. Two primary taxonomies are used: the Linguistic Taxonomy and the Surface Structure Taxonomy, which have initially been used in error analysis studies by Coder (1981), Dulay, Burt & Dulay (1982), James (2013), and Ellis & Barkueizen (2005). These taxonomies help in categorizing errors based on their nature and the linguistic categories they affect.
3. **Explaining the Sources and Causes of Errors:** The final phase involves determining the sources and causes of the errors. Errors are analyzed to understand whether they result from the learner's attempts to learn and acquire the language or from other influences, such as their native language.

#### 2.2.2 Taxonomies of Error Classification

Error classification in EA is typically done using two main taxonomies:

1. **Linguistic Taxonomy:** This taxonomy categorizes errors based on the linguistic categories affected by the deviation. The categories are drawn from a descriptive

grammar of the target language and focus on the linguistic elements that are incorrect.

2. **Surface Structure Taxonomy:** Initially developed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), the Surface Structure Taxonomy categorizes errors based on how the learner's language differs from the target language's surface structure. The principal categories in this taxonomy include:

- Omissions: a form, morpheme, or particle is missing.
- Additions: unnecessary elements are added.
- Misformations: incorrect forms, morphemes, or structures are used.
- Misorderings: elements are placed in the wrong order.
- Blends: two or more semantically related forms are combined, resulting in an incorrect form.

These categories allow for a systematic approach to understanding the nature of the errors and how they deviate from standard language use.

### 2.2.2 Sources of Errors

The sources of errors can generally be traced back to their systematicity. Following the work of Corder (1981), Richards

(1984), Selinker (1985), Jain & Edge (1985), James (2013), Brown (2000), and Ellis (1997), it is understood that errors in L2 learners often arise from similar causes, even though the terminology used to describe these causes may differ. These causes are typically categorized into two broad groups:

1. **Interlingual Factors:** These are errors caused by the influence of the learner's native language (L1) on the target language (TL). Also referred to as language transfer or interference, these errors occur when learners apply rules or structures from their L1 that do not apply to the TL.
2. **Intralingual Factors:** These are errors that result from the complexities and rules within the TL itself. Overgeneralization of TL rules, ignorance of rule restrictions, and the application of incorrect analogies are common intralingual factors.

The table below summarizes the main causes of errors and factors influencing L2 learning, as identified by various scholars:

**Table 1.** Factors influencing L2 learning

Scholars	Cause/Factor
Selinker (1985)	Language transfer, overgeneralization of the TL, communication strategies, transfer of training, L2 learning strategies
Corder (1982)	Interference, developmental, and analogical errors
Richards (1985)	Interference, intralingual, and developmental errors
James (2013)	Interlingual errors, intralingual errors, communication strategy-based errors, induced-based errors
Brown (2000)	Interlingual and intralingual errors, communication strategy errors, and context of learning errors
Brown (2000)	Interlingual errors, intralingual errors, affective variables

## 3. Methodology

This cross-sectional study focuses on Albanian learners of English as a Second Language (ESL). The research aims to identify, classify, and analyze errors in the use of English tenses among this population.

### 3.1 Participants

This study targeted two distinct groups: Albanian learners of English as a Second Language (L2) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. The sample included a total of 69

participants, comprising 59 learners and 10 teachers. Each group contributed valuable insights into the study's objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of both the learning and teaching perspectives.

The learner group consisted of 59 participants, selected after excluding three incomplete submissions. The majority of the learners were female, with 37 participants (66.1%) identifying as female and 19 participants (33.9%) identifying as male. The average age of the participants was 24 years, ranging from 17 to over 30 years. Educationally, the learners were diverse in their

academic backgrounds: 6 participants had recently completed high school or were newly enrolled in undergraduate studies, 38 were either currently enrolled in or had completed undergraduate studies, and 12 were involved in or had completed postgraduate studies. All learners had completed their primary, secondary, and high school education in Kosova, with many coming from cities such as Peja, Gjakova, Prishtina, and Prizren. Furthermore, 46 participants had pursued or were pursuing their undergraduate or postgraduate studies in Prishtina, while 4 had studied abroad in countries such as Norway, Germany, Turkey, and the UK. Meanwhile, the teacher group comprised 10 ESL and EFL teachers and trainers who participated in the study. These participants have been practicing their profession for several years at various educational levels. Of these, 5 teachers (50%) work with primary and secondary school pupils, 3 teachers (30%) work with high school students, and 2 teachers (20%) deal with students across different educational levels. None of the teachers in the sample worked exclusively with undergraduate or graduate students. These teachers and trainers are based in different cities across Kosova, reflecting a diverse geographic representation. Specifically, 3 teachers (30%) teach in Gjakova, 2 teachers (20%) in Peja, another 3 teachers (30%) in Prishtina, and the remaining 2 teachers (20%) teach in Prizren.

This dual-group sample provides a well-rounded view of the challenges and experiences related to English language learning and teaching in Kosova. The inclusion of both learners and teachers allows for an in-depth analysis of the discrepancies between perceived and actual difficulties in tense usage, as well as the strategies employed by teachers to address these challenges in various educational settings.

### 3.2 Instruments

The study utilized two primary instruments: questionnaires and written compositions. The questionnaires were designed to gather demographic data, educational background, and insights into the participants' experiences with learning and teaching English. For learners, the questionnaire explored their perceptions of tenses, the influence of Albanian as a first language (L1) on their acquisition of English tenses, and any difficulties they faced with tense identification. The questionnaire for teachers focused on their background, teaching experience, and perceptions of tense difficulty, as well as their views on whether Albanian affects learners' acquisition of English tenses and the reasons behind common learner errors.

The written compositions provided unmonitored samples of the learners' English language use, offering insights into their practical application of English tenses. This comprehensive

approach allowed the study to gather valuable data from both learners and teachers, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in learning and teaching English tenses among Albanian speakers.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved identifying, classifying, and quantifying errors found in the participants' written compositions. These errors were categorized using two taxonomies: the linguistic taxonomy and the surface structure taxonomy. Errors were then coded, and their frequency of occurrence was calculated and presented as numerical data.

## 4. Results

The results of this study are presented in two main sections: Questionnaire Results and Learner's Language Results. The questionnaire results provide insights into how participants perceive the difficulty of various English tenses, their accuracy in using these tenses, and their ability to identify tense structures and terms. The learner's language results focus on analyzing written compositions to identify and classify errors related to verb tense usage.

### 4.1 Learners' Language Results

In this study, written compositions from 56 Albanian learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) were analyzed to identify and classify errors related to verb tense usage. Out of the 54 essays initially collected, three were excluded due to improper formatting or insufficient length. A total of 116 errors were extracted from the 56 essays included in the analysis.

The errors were classified based on two combined taxonomies: the linguistic taxonomy and the surface structure taxonomy. Errors were first categorized according to the grammatical tense that should have been used, rather than the tense that was incorrectly applied.

The analysis revealed that the most commonly misused tense was the Past Simple tense, accounting for 45 errors, which represents 38.8% of the total errors. This was followed by the Present Simple tense, with 33 errors (28.4%). The Present Perfect and Past Perfect tenses each had 11 errors (9.5%), while the Future Simple tense had 10 errors (8.6%). The least frequently misused tense was the Present Perfect Progressive, with 5 errors (4.3%). No errors were found in the remaining tenses, including the Present Progressive, Past Perfect Progressive, Future Progressive, Future Perfect, and Future Perfect Progressive.

**Table 2. The frequency of descriptive errors**

<b>Descriptive Error Categories</b>		
Error category	Frequency	(%)
Past Simple	45	38.80%
Present Simple	33	28.40%
Present Perfect	11	9.50%
Past Perfect	11	9.50%
Future Simple	10	8.60%
Present Perfect Progressive	5	4.30%

In terms of surface structure errors, the majority of the errors (95 errors, 81.9%) were due to misformation, where the wrong form of the verb was used. There were 5 instances (4.32%) of addition errors, where unnecessary elements were added, and 4 instances (3.45%) of omission errors, where necessary elements were left out. Although no pure misordering errors were identified, there were 12 instances (10.34%) classified as blends, which involved

a combination of error types. Specifically, 9 errors (7.76%) were a result of both misformation and omission, 1 error (0.86%) was due to misformation and addition, 1 error (0.86%) was a combination of misformation and misordering, and 1 error (0.86%) involved misordering and omission.

**Table 3. The frequency of surface structure errors**

<b>Surface Structure Error Categories</b>		
Error category	Frequency	(%)
Misformation	95	81.90%
Addition	5	4.32%
Omission	4	3.45%
Blends	12	10.34%

## 4.2 Questionnaire Results

### 4.2.1 Learners' Questionnaire Results

#### *Perception of Tense Difficulty*

In exploring the ease with which learners handle English tenses, our study reveals a gradient of perceived difficulty across different tenses. Here's how the learners evaluated each tense:

- **Simple Tenses:** These tenses, representing basic actions and states, generally appear less challenging. For instance, the Present Simple—used for habitual actions and general truths—was deemed very easy by 37 participants and easy by 16, indicating a strong grasp among most learners. Similarly, the Past Simple and Future Simple tenses also skewed towards the 'easy' spectrum, though the Future Simple presented slightly more difficulty, as 15 learners rated it as medium in difficulty.
- **Progressive Tenses:** The introduction of progressive aspects, which indicate ongoing actions, marks a

noticeable increase in complexity. The Present Progressive was found more challenging, with a balanced spread of perceptions from easy to difficult. This trend was mirrored in the Past Progressive and Future Progressive, where a small but notable number of participants found these tenses difficult, highlighting the challenge of conveying ongoing actions in different time frames.

- **Perfect Tenses:** As we delve into the perfect aspect, which links past actions to present consequences, learners' difficulties escalate. The Present Perfect and Past Perfect tenses saw a near even split across the easy to medium categories, with a few finding them difficult. The Future Perfect tense was mostly rated as medium or difficult, suggesting a struggle with conceptualizing actions completed by a future deadline.
- **Perfect Progressive Tenses:** Representing the pinnacle of tense complexity, these tenses combine aspectual

nuance with temporal depth. Notably, the Present Perfect Progressive and Past Perfect Progressive were frequently rated as medium to very difficult, indicating significant challenges in mastering these forms. The Future Perfect Progressive was especially

daunting, with the majority finding it difficult or very difficult.

These insights are visually summarized in Table IV, which maps out the perceived difficulty of each tense.

**Table 4.** Perceived Difficulty of English Tenses

Tense	Very/Easy	Medium	Difficult
<b>Present Simple</b>	50	5	1
<b>Past Simple</b>	47	7	2
<b>Future Simple</b>	43	10	3
<b>Present Progressive</b>	34	15	7
<b>Past Progressive</b>	33	15	7
<b>Future Progressive</b>	31	17	8
<b>Present Perfect</b>	33	15	8
<b>Past Perfect</b>	34	13	9
<b>Future Perfect</b>	32	16	8
<b>Present Perfect Prog.</b>	19	24	13
<b>Past Perfect Prog.</b>	20	21	15
<b>Future Perfect Prog.</b>	20	17	19

*Frequency of Incorrect Tense Usage*

Accuracy in tense usage paints a complementary picture of learner proficiency. The **Present Simple** emerged as the most accurately used tense, aligning with its perceived ease. Conversely, as tenses increase in complexity, errors become more frequent. Notably, the **Future Perfect Progressive** saw the least accurate usage, with many learners often or frequently making

mistakes, underscoring the challenges identified in the perceived difficulty ratings. Table V provides a detailed breakdown of how often learners inaccurately use each tense, offering a clear indication of where targeted instructional support could yield significant improvements.

**Table 5.** Frequency of inaccurate tense usage

Tense	Accurate Use	Some Errors	Frequent Errors
<b>Present Simple</b>	50	5	1
<b>Past Simple</b>	47	7	2
<b>Future Simple</b>	43	10	3
<b>Present Progressive</b>	34	15	7
<b>Past Progressive</b>	33	15	8
<b>Future Progressive</b>	31	17	8
<b>Present Perfect</b>	33	15	8
<b>Past Perfect</b>	34	13	9
<b>Future Perfect</b>	32	16	8
<b>Present Perfect Prog.</b>	19	24	13
<b>Past Perfect Prog.</b>	20	21	15
<b>Future Perfect Prog.</b>	20	17	19

*Understanding of Tense Terms and Structures*

Our participants also reflected on their ability to identify and understand tense terms and structures. Approximately two-thirds reported ease in recognizing tense terms, while a smaller proportion, about 40%, found it challenging to grasp the semantic functions of tense structures. This suggests that while tense terms

are generally familiar, their practical application and deeper semantic implications pose greater challenges for a substantial segment of learners.

*Interference Between Language Tense Systems*

Exploring potential interference, slightly over half of our participants felt that their native language tense systems did not

conflict with English tenses. However, the remaining participants noted interference, attributing it to differences in how tenses are used to convey time, aspect, or both. This indicates a significant cross-linguistic challenge that could be influencing tense mastery.

#### 4.2.2 Teachers' Questionnaire Results

##### *Perception of Tense Difficulty*

Teachers were asked to rank the difficulty of various English tenses based on their students' experiences. Their responses reveal a noticeable pattern: the simpler, more frequently used tenses like the Present Simple and Past Simple were generally considered easier for students, whereas tenses involving more complex aspects, such as the perfect and progressive forms, were perceived as significantly more challenging.

- **Present Simple:** This tense, often used in day-to-day conversation and for describing habitual actions, was predominantly considered easy. Five teachers rated it as very easy and three as easy, though two teachers did note that some students found it more difficult. This suggests that while most students grasp this tense well, there might be specific learner groups who struggle with its rules or application.
- **Past Simple:** While slightly more challenging than the Present Simple, the Past Simple tense, crucial for recounting events, was still perceived as relatively straightforward by most teachers. The majority rated it as either very easy or easy, though a small number of teachers identified medium to high difficulty for some learners, possibly pointing to challenges with irregular verbs or past tense formation.
- **Future Simple:** The Future Simple was largely seen as an easy tense to master, with five teachers rating it very easy and two as easy. However, a couple of teachers found it more challenging for their students, indicating that while the basic future construction is

simple, perhaps the various ways of expressing future time in English (such as "going to" or using the present continuous) cause some confusion.

- **Progressive Tenses:** As the focus shifts to the progressive aspect, teachers reported a mixed experience. For instance, the **Present Progressive** was rated across the spectrum from very easy to difficult, indicating varying levels of student proficiency. This may reflect the complexity of explaining ongoing actions and differentiating between simple and progressive forms. Similar trends were observed for the **Past Progressive** and **Future Progressive**, where a significant number of teachers identified these tenses as medium to difficult. These forms may present challenges because they require students to grasp the concept of actions in progress, which is conceptually distinct from Albanian.
- **Perfect and Perfect Progressive Tenses:** The **Present Perfect** and **Past Perfect** tenses, often tricky due to their link between past actions and present consequences or past states, were viewed as difficult by a majority of teachers. Five teachers rated these tenses as difficult, reflecting the struggle students face with the perfect aspect, which doesn't have a direct equivalent in many languages, including Albanian. The **Future Perfect** and the **Present Perfect Progressive**, in particular, were noted as some of the most challenging tenses, with the majority of teachers ranking them as medium to very difficult. This is likely due to the combined complexity of perfect and progressive aspects, which require a deeper understanding of both time and aspect in English.

Table VI below summarizes the teachers' perceptions of the difficulty of English tenses, revealing a clear correlation between tense complexity and perceived difficulty.

**Table 6.** Teachers' Perception of Tense Difficulty

Tense	Very/Easy	Medium	Difficult
<b>Present Simple</b>	8	9	2
<b>Past Simple</b>	5	3	2
<b>Future Simple</b>	7	2	1
<b>Present Progressive</b>	5	2	3
<b>Past Progressive</b>	6	2	2
<b>Future Progressive</b>	5	3	2
<b>Present Perfect</b>	2	3	5
<b>Past Perfect</b>	2	3	5
<b>Future Perfect</b>	2	4	4
<b>Present Perfect Prog.</b>	2	3	5

<b>Past Perfect Prog.</b>	2	3	5
<b>Future Perfect Prog.</b>	2	2	6

### *Tense Interference and Reasons for Errors*

In addition to assessing tense difficulty, teachers were asked whether they believed Albanian tenses interfere with students' acquisition of English tenses. The results indicate that the majority (7 out of 10 teachers) did not believe there was significant interference. However, 3 teachers reported that they saw interference, particularly in the way students use tenses across both languages.

Among those who observed interference, only one teacher explicitly attributed it to atypical semantic functions, hinting at the subtle yet impactful differences in meaning between Albanian and English tenses. This observation suggests that interference might not always be directly noticeable but could stem from how different tense structures carry meaning, leading students to misapply English tenses when translating from Albanian.

The questionnaire also explored the reasons behind common student errors in tense usage. Multiple factors were identified:

- **Semantic Functions:** Some teachers pointed to similarities or differences in semantic functions between the two languages as a source of confusion. When tenses share similar meanings across languages, students might mistakenly assume they function identically, leading to overgeneralization or inappropriate tense choices.
- **Structural Differences:** A few teachers indicated that differences in tense structures also contributed to errors. These differences, particularly between the progressive and perfect aspects in English, often require students to make distinctions they may not be familiar with from their native language.
- **Overgeneralization:** One of the most commonly cited reasons for errors was the overgeneralization of rules. Four teachers noted that students tend to apply a learned rule across all contexts, resulting in mistakes when exceptions occur or when more nuanced uses of tenses are required.
- **Atypical Functions and Structures:** A few teachers highlighted that atypical tense functions and structures could confuse students, especially when they try to map Albanian structures directly onto English. This leads to inaccurate use of tense structures and functions, further compounding errors.

These findings suggest that while students may not always face direct interference from Albanian, the more abstract differences in how tenses are used in each language present a challenge. Addressing these areas through targeted instruction could help reduce errors and improve tense acquisition.

## **5. Discussions**

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into the common errors made by Albanian learners of English, particularly in the use of tenses. The most frequently misused tenses were found in the present and past temporal spheres, with fewer inaccuracies observed in the future tense. This pattern suggests that learners struggle more with expressing actions and states in the present and past than they do with future events.

### **5.1 Frequency and Types of Errors**

The Past Simple tense emerged as the most inaccurately used tense, which is notable given that both students and teachers generally perceive it as an easy tense. Despite this perception, the analysis showed that learners frequently misformed the Past Simple, often using unnecessary structures or adding incorrect particles. This indicates a misunderstanding not only of the tense's structure but also of its functions. The incorrect use of the Present Simple and Past Perfect tenses in place of the Past Simple further underscores the confusion among learners. This finding aligns with previous research, which suggests that learners may overgeneralize the rules or apply them incorrectly due to a lack of deep understanding (Ellis, 2005).

The Present Simple tense, although ranked as easy by most participants, also showed a high frequency of errors. These errors were often due to confusion with the Present Progressive tense or misformations. The tendency to substitute the Present Simple with the Present Progressive or even the Past Simple suggests that learners may struggle with differentiating between habitual actions and ongoing events—an area that requires further instructional focus.

The Present Perfect and Past Perfect tenses were equally problematic, with both being used incorrectly in a significant number of instances. These tenses are often regarded as more challenging due to their complex temporal relations, which involve not only the timing of actions but also their relevance to other events. The confusion between the Present Perfect and the Past Simple or Present Progressive, as well as the frequent misordering of verb phrases, indicates that learners may not fully grasp the perfect aspect's function in conveying completed actions that have implications for the present.

The Future Simple tense, despite being perceived as straightforward, was also frequently misused. Learners often confused it with the Present Simple, or omitted future markers,



which may be due to a lack of understanding of how future intentions and predictions are expressed in English. The errors in the Future Simple suggest that while learners may feel confident in their ability to use this tense, their actual application in writing reveals gaps in their knowledge.

Lastly, the Present Perfect Progressive was the least frequently misused, yet it still posed challenges for learners. All identified instances were misformed and often confused with other tenses that express different temporal relations. This indicates that the continuous aspect, combined with the perfect aspect, adds a level of complexity that learners find difficult to navigate.

## 5.2 Causes and Sources of Errors

The causes of these errors can be attributed to a combination of interlingual interference, intralingual factors, and false hypotheses formed during classroom instruction.

Only 4.3% of the errors in this study could be directly traced to language transfer from Albanian to English. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that only a portion of L2 learners' errors can be attributed to language transfer since only "1/3 of the deviant structures produced by L2 learners can be attributed to language transfer" (Richards & Sampson, 1975, p.5). The errors that did occur in this category were primarily with tenses that do not have direct equivalents in Albanian, such as the Present Perfect Progressive, Past Perfect Progressive, and Future Perfect Progressive. These tenses were rarely used incorrectly, but when they were, it highlighted the lack of a straightforward equivalent in the learners' L1, which may have led to confusion. On the other hand, apart from errors observed with tenses without any equivalent pair in Albanian, the majority of the inaccuracies were encountered with tenses with similar functions. This phenomenon, according to Jackson's theory, is fully acceptable, since "the interference can happen even when structures and functions of the ML and the TL are similar," (Jackson, 1987, p. 101, cited in James, 1999, p. 81) on the basis that their differences cannot easily be noticed. In the case of English and Albanian tense systems, this may be considered as a credible assumption because the tense resemblance is not straightforward, since not all Albanian tense functions and forms can be easily expressed by the English equivalents and vice versa, even though they express similar temporal meanings on various levels. As a consequence, learners are faced with more than one choice from which they can express a particular temporal meaning.

Secondly, when these errors are interpreted based on intralingual influences, they can be explained in terms of general learners' learning strategies that are used by all language learners, no matter the NL or the TL, or their learning situation. From the

retrieved results, it can be noticed that most of the errors are a result of misformation, semantically where learners use the incorrect tense instead of the right one, and structurally where the learners misform their structures, particularly, they either omit, add certain verb particles, or they alter the order completely. Semantically misformation errors, apart from being confused with the Albanian functions, occur even with ESL learners with different language backgrounds. According to Ellis & Barkueizen (2005), most of the learners go through a stage of learning where they substitute the simple forms of the verb with the past tense forms, as well as the simple forms with the progressive ones. This phenomenon occurs, based on Richards (1984), because of redundancy or ignorance of rule restriction, "since the learners' output may be organized in terms of what they find easiest to say, which is not necessarily identifiable with what they know" (p. 14). As a consequence, the learners avoid structures or functions that they find difficult. On the other hand, the addition and omission errors may be a source of overgeneralizations. In the learners' essays as mentioned above, third person markers were missing, the past -ed inflection in certain cases was omitted and in others added, particularly in irregular verb forms. Similarly, based on Ellis (2005), learners commit errors of omission by leaving out forms or overgeneralize forms that they find easy to learn and process. Additionally, some of these cases may be a result of ignorance of rule restriction where the learners use rules that do not apply to the context they are describing or telling. In these cases, according to Richards, the already acquired rules are used to completely new situations. Both errors of omission and overgeneralization are common in L2 learners' speech, irrespective of their L1, while according to Coder (1981) and Dulay, Burt & Kreshen (1982) these are similar to errors found in the L1 learning context as well.

Finally, apart from intralingual influence, the identified errors may be a cause of false hypotheses set in the classroom context. The majority of the learners, as can be seen in the previous chapters, rated the Present Simple, the Past Simple, the Present Perfect, the Past Perfect, and the Future Simple as tenses that are learned quite easily. On the other hand, only half of the teachers conveyed that these tenses do have a moderate or a high level of difficulty, while the rest conveyed that the mentioned tenses are seen as tenses with a low level of difficulty. Similarly, more than half of the participants declared that they never commit any error while using the mentioned tenses. In cases when they did, they did it on rare occasions, and the tenses that were mostly mistaken, according to the learners' responses were not the simple tenses, but the complex ones. As such, discrepancies between the gathered data were shown. The differences between what learners and teachers conveyed, and how the learners really practice the English language are quite controversial. Based on this, it can be

said that these tenses are mostly incorrectly perceived as easy, in most cases overgeneralized, and their complexity is completely ignored, not only by learners but by teachers as well. Through this, it may be hypothesized that the identified errors may have been caused by false induced assumptions and interpretations. However, in order to prove this assumption, the research has to be extended in both sides, to see how learners acquire the English language in classroom situations, as well as see how teachers practice their language knowledge and how do they assess their students in real situations.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to teaching English tenses, particularly focusing on the present and past temporal spheres where most errors occur. The findings suggest that while some errors can be attributed to interlingual interference, the majority are due to intralingual factors and misconceptions formed during instruction. To address these issues, teachers should emphasize the functions of tenses alongside their forms, providing ample opportunities for learners to practice these tenses in varied contexts.

### 6.1 Implications

The study's findings carry important implications for ESL teaching practices. Teachers should prioritize providing clear explanations and ample practice opportunities for the tenses that learners find most challenging. This could involve the use of contrastive analysis to emphasize the differences between Albanian and English tense systems and the development of targeted exercises that focus on these areas. Additionally, teaching materials should be adapted to address the specific needs of Albanian learners, potentially incorporating more examples and exercises designed to address common error patterns.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Future research should consider conducting longitudinal studies to monitor learners' progress over time and include a larger sample size to validate the findings. Moreover, incorporating spoken language analysis could offer a more comprehensive understanding of tense usage and errors, as discrepancies may exist between spoken and written language errors. It is also recommended to explore the impact of different teaching methodologies on the acquisition of English tenses by Albanian learners. By implementing these recommendations, educators can develop more effective strategies for teaching English tenses, ultimately improving learning outcomes for Albanian ESL students. This research serves as a valuable foundation for future studies and underscores the importance of understanding the

specific needs and challenges faced by learners in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

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