

Generation 1.5 and ESL Learners' Use of Past Participles:

A Corpus-based Comparison

Lisa Mikesell

University of California, Los Angeles

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While the label Generation 1.5 (G1.5) has grown to include quite a large diversity of English language learners (McCollom, 2006), the term has generally been used to refer to learners who fall somewhere in between first-generation adults and second-generation children (Rambaut & Ima, 1988). Although diverse, they seem to share at least a few characteristics. G1.5 learners can all accurately be classified as long-term U.S. residents and often have much of their formative schooling in the U.S. In general, they learn English through natural interaction and as such are frequently described as “ear” or “relational learners” as opposed to “eye” or “analytical learners” reflecting the fact that they do not typically learn English formally in classrooms or by rules (Destandau & Wald, 2002); indeed, unlike their ESL counterparts they usually have strong intuitions about English grammar (Holten, 2002). They are typically fluent in spoken English and may be, at least superficially, native-like in speech (Thonus, 2003). Their learner needs are as a result often specific to academic settings and written varieties of English (see Holten, 2002). As the term G1.5 expands to include more types of long-term resident learners, these characteristics may less and less provide a general and true description of the G1.5 population. Nevertheless, they do accurately portray the typical G1.5 student at UCLA, where the data for this study was collected.

There is a growing need to better understand G1.5 learners. This need for greater attention is, in part, due to the unique learning experiences of this population, and is, in part, due to the fact that G1.5 learners are entering colleges and universities at a rapidly growing rate (Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Vandommelen, 2002; Roberge, 2003) where their language skills are

often re-assessed. Upon re-assessment, they may equally find their way into ESL, basic writing, as well as English composition courses. Because there are often few or no resources at universities and colleges dedicated specifically to meet the needs of G1.5 learners, they are often forced to enroll in classes designed for other learner populations with different needs. This research, by examining the use of past participles (PPs) in both ESL (the ESL corpus) and G1.5 essays (the Resident corpus), attempts to demonstrate how the linguistic abilities of this population, which reflect their learning experiences, are indeed unique and thus deserving of specialized resources.

#### *Two Mini-Corpora: The Resident Corpus and the ESL Corpus*

The Resident corpus contains 58 essays (59,348 words) written by students classified as G1.5 at UCLA<sup>1</sup>. These students spent at least seven years in the U.S. and had much of their formative schooling in the U.S. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years, averaging 19.4 years; their length of residence (LOR) extended from seven to 18 years, with an average of 13.26 years. In comparison, the ESL students were between the ages of 17 and 41, with an average age of 22.98 years; their LORs ranged between less than one week and six years, averaging 2.84 years. While the language backgrounds of the students varied, it should be noted that the majority of students were of Asian language backgrounds in both corpora; this should be kept in mind given that it is likely to influence the linguistic trends.

#### *Distributional Patterns of the Resident and ESL Corpora*

In the ESL corpus, there were a total of 1,209 uses of the past participle (PP), of which 1,066 instances were used correctly (88.2% of the total uses of the PP). Of the 143 incorrect

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<sup>1</sup> This classification at UCLA is based on the results of their SAT verbal exam, their Subject A exam, their English as a Second Language Placement Exam (ESLPE), which is required by all English learners at UCLA, a report of being bilingual, and the number of years they have spent in the U.S. (please see Holten, 2002 for more information).

uses, 90 (62.9% of the total number of errors) were contextual errors (see extracts (1) and (2)) and 53 (37.1%) were form errors (see extract (3)):

- (1) *Evaluation system has been **existed** from elementary school.*
- (2) *Ordinarily, students who **admitted** to those universities by accident or perhaps by cheating, they somehow have to find a way to graduate.*
- (3) *Have they [ivy] league schools exclusively **evaluate** her admission based upon her excellent grades only?*

Although there were fewer essays in the Resident corpus, there were nearly as many uses of the PP: 1,103 total uses. Of these uses, 970 (88.1%) were used correctly. The remaining 131 uses of the PP were incorrect: 46 contextual errors (35.1%) as shown in extract (4) and 85 form errors (64.9%) as shown in extract (5):

- (4) *It is the exposure and exploration of the adult responsibilities to these children at an early age that allows these children to better **adapted** for the real world.*
- (5) *The media has profoundly **change** society both good and bad.*

Table 1: Summary Comparing Distributional Patterns of ESL and Resident Corpora

Correct Uses	ESL	Resident		Incorrect Uses	ESL	Resident
Verbal	918	824		Contextual Errors	90 (62.9% of errors)	46 (35.1% of errors)
Adjectival	148	146		Form Errors	53 (37.1% of errors)	85 (64.9% of errors)
Total	1,066 (88.2% of total PPs)	970 (88.1% of total PPs)		Total	143 (11.8% of total PPs)	131 (11.9% of total PPs)

Interestingly, the two populations made nearly the same percentage of errors (approximately 12%) even though the average G1.5 learner had spent more than ten years longer in the U.S. than the average ESL learner. Although the percentage of errors is similar, it is important to note that the type of errors made is quite different. While the majority of errors in the ESL corpus were contextual errors, the majority of errors in the Resident corpus were form

errors. Given the language learning experiences of these students, this comes as little surprise, especially when taking a closer look at the form errors made by G1.5 learners. In the Resident Corpus there were 85 form errors of which 75 involved verbs with PPs that would be pronounced in speech as a simple /t/ or /d/ phoneme as in *the students are **suppose** to learn ...* and ... *she is only **concern** with the title ...* In addition, many of these PPs were followed by a preposition or infinitival *to* which further reduced the phonetic saliency of the PP itself (egs. *compared to, forced by, used to, passed down*). Only two errors involved a phonetically salient PP in which an entire spoken syllable would represent the PP morpheme (i.e., /əd/) as in ...*[they] could be **trust**...*

While it has been suggested that discourse-based approaches to grammar instruction are best for G1.5 writers, because they tend to find traditional grammar exercises confusing or unnatural, the errors of G1.5 learners may center on precisely the grammatical details and forms that may seem to require the sort of instruction these students rebuff. The reality of this situation puts teachers in a difficult position. With more collaboration among all types of writing instructors, we may be able to collectively develop more innovative materials to address these issues.

#### *Comparison of Contextual Errors in the ESL and Resident Corpus*

The contextual errors were further broken down into several categories:

Table 2: Comparison of Contextual Errors in the ESL and Resident Corpora

Type of Contextual Error	ESL: Number of Instances	ESL: % of Contextual Errors	Resident: Number of Instances	Resident: % of Contextual Errors
Inappropriate use of passive	32	35.6%	9	19.6%
Omission of aux <i>be</i>	18	20.0%	7	15.2%
Other aux error	15	16.7%	6	13.0%
Unnecessary use of PP	9	10.0%	<b>14</b>	<b>30.4%</b>

Miscellaneous (idiom/lexical)	7	7.8%	5	10.9%
Inappropriate use of active	6	6.7%	5	10.9%
Adj. form instead of PP	2	2.2%	0	0%
No <i>by</i> phrase in passive	1	1.1%	0	0%
Total	90	100.1%	90	100.0%

The three most common contextual errors found in the ESL corpus involve inappropriate uses of the passive voice as in extract (6), omissions of the auxiliary *be* as in extract (7), and other auxiliary errors when forming complex tenses as shown in extract (8):

- (6) *Students do not learn seriously if grades are **disappeared**.*  
 (7) *They **taught** to understand the importance of keep virginity...*  
 (8) *By the time people get to college, their moral issues should already **been dealt** with.*

In comparison, the most common contextual errors made by G1.5 learners in this study were the unnecessary use the participle (see extract (9)), followed by inappropriate uses of the passive voice, and omissions of the auxiliary *be* similar to the ESL extracts in (6) and (7) above.

- (9) *Having very few friends that she can **relied** on I can see her agony...*

Although G1.5 learners made far fewer contextual errors than the ESL learners, the general distributional pattern followed a similar trend in which inappropriate uses of the passive voice and errors with auxiliaries were among the most frequent types of contextual errors. The notable difference between the two corpora concerns unnecessary uses of the PP. When the instances of this error type were examined in greater detail, an interesting pattern emerged. The majority of these errors in the Resident corpus involved the use of a PP following a negated verb as in (10) or following a modal as in (11):

- (10) *Grades **don't signified** how much a student has learned...*  
 (11) *Students **should acquired** education for their success in the future...*

Contrastively, none of the unnecessary uses of the PP in the ESL corpus resembled those of the Resident corpus. Most of the instances of this error type in the ESL corpus involved using a PP inappropriately as an adjective. For example, in extract (12) *recovered* is used instead of the adjectival form *recoverable*.

(12) *A lot of people died by this terrible illness that is hardly **recovered**.*

While the explanation for the large number of form errors in the Resident corpus was straightforward, their unnecessary uses of the PP is much more difficult to account for; it seems unlikely that these errors are due to how English speech is naturally produced and thus heard (or misheard). Some audience members at the conference suggested that such errors may be the result of an overcompensation strategy.

### *Conclusions*

Clearly the sociocultural and language learning experiences of G1.5 learners are quite different from more traditional English language learners, and this shows in their written language output. This research provides additional evidence that language instruction should be incorporated into classes that serve G1.5 writers, and that this instruction should not merely be ESL language instruction at an advanced level; the linguistic needs and abilities of this population, at least as evidenced by their use of PPs, are unique and should be treated as such.

Undoubtedly we need more research examining in closer detail the language output of G1.5 learners, especially as it relates to their L1, as well as collaboration among all writing instructors working with G1.5 students. Such collaboration is essential to better understand what works for this population. ESL instructors and composition teachers are often segregated, but we may be able to merge our respective resources and training to better meet the needs of this population. Additionally, given that many, if not most, institutions offer few resources for this

population, it may be worthwhile to more thoroughly consider how to best address the needs of two different learner populations in one classroom.

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