INTERLANGUAGE VARIABILITY IN VERB TENSE/ASPECT

DIANE SWIT LING CHEAH

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Summary

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This thesis presents a study of interlanguage variability in the use of three tense/aspect forms: the simple present, simple past, and the present perfect. The need for research in this area comes from the problems encountered in the classroom. Language performance in one task sometimes does not reflect that in another. How and why this occurs is what this thesis aims to discover.

A preliminary study explores the viability of using the Labovian variable model to elicit and explain variability. Difficulties highlight problems which help refine the methodology used in the main study. A review of past research point the direction in which this study should go.

Armed with a sample of 17 Chinese Singaporean university students, whose first language is Chinese or a dialect of Chinese, the investigation began with the elicitation of variability to be found in four tasks. Using the attention-to-speech framework, these four tasks are designed to reflect varying degrees of required attention to language form.

The results show that there is variability in the use of tense/aspect in all the tasks. However, the framework on which the tasks are based cannot explain the variability pattern. Further analyses of contextual factors, primarily pragmatic ones, point to a complex interplay of factors affecting the variability found in the results.

Key Words - Interlanguage
            Variability
            Tense/Aspect
            Contextual temporality
            Pragmatic temporality

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In second language acquisition studies, the notion of variability has been receiving considerable attention over the past twenty years. Interest in this phenomenon took shape largely from the perspective of variability between individuals. Gradually as the language of learners became more defined as a language with its own system of rules, the focus of variability shifted towards a focus on this system of rules that allows variation from within its own parameters. It is the variability that is manifest within the individual's language that is of interest and concern in this study.

In the context of a real situation, as opposed to a theoretical one, the issue of variability becomes almost urgent. When a language learner is faced with the frustration of attaining the seemingly unattainable level of desired proficiency in only some areas of language use, but not in others, the need to deal with this variable nature of language learning is real and essential. For the teacher, the tools must be ready to assist him/her. For the learner, the necessity to understand the variable nature of language in the language learning process is a step towards mastering it.

This 'real' context in this study is the classroom situation consisting of second language learners of English in Singapore. To understand the problems posed in

this thesis, it is necessary to consider the background to how English is used.

In Singapore, the most distinctive features pertinent to the study of language learning are the multiracial and multilingual characteristics of the country. Three major races make up the population in the proportions of: 76.4% Chinese, 14.9% Malays, and 2.3% Indians out of a total of two and three quarter million. The remaining 6.4% consists of other ethnic groups. Within each group there are further sub-groups. For the Chinese, the main dialect groups from the largest to the smallest numbers are the Hokkeins, Teochews, Cantonese, Hakkas, and Foochows. Among the Malays are the Javanese, Boyanese, and Bugis. The Indian sub-groups comprise the Tamils, Malayalis, and Punjabis.

Such ethnic diversity naturally presents language problems of no small proportion. With the colonization of Singapore by the British in the nineteenth century, a major shift in the language focus took place. English became the administrative language as well as the medium of communication in the upper echelons of society. Over time in the post-colonial days, English has remained the main working language in Singapore, and the main lingua franca for communication across and within ethnic groups. Simplistic though it seems from this description, numerous language policies have been made and remade to achieve the goals of eliminating communication gaps between groups in the population, and of improving the standard of English.

The language situation as it stands is still very complex. Although the government has made English the medium of education at all levels, students

entering university are still the product of previous policies. Chinese students, who are the majority, have gone through one of three types of systems: the English stream, the Chinese stream, and a mixed stream including the SAP stream (Specially Assisted Plan).

The English stream is one in which English is used as the medium of instruction and is assessed as a 'first' language. Chinese, which is Mandarin, is only one subject in the curriculum and is assessed as a 'second' language.

The use of 'first' or 'second' language is different from the normal usage. The 'first' just means that English is taught and assessed at a higher level than that as a 'second' language. The labelling reflects very little of the students' language backgrounds as those opting for either of these streams need not have acquired English as a first or second language in the real sense. Similarly, if the students are doing Chinese as a 'first' language, they may not be using it as a first language at all since many of them use their own dialects as the main medium of communication outside the classroom.

The Chinese stream, on the other hand, is not a direct reversal of that offered in the English stream. It is surprisingly close to the English stream in that everything is the same except that Chinese is assessed as a 'first' language and English as a 'second' language. Some schools, though, teach other subjects in Chinese. Generally, the Chinese stream inevitably attracts students weak in English.

The mixed stream refers to a situation where students have been through both the above streams, usually the Chinese stream at primary level and English stream at secondary level. The SAP students belong to a group of students who have gone from a Chinese stream at primary level into a SAP school where English and Chinese are taught as 'first' languages. In these schools, half the subjects are taught in English and the other half in Chinese. The students are supposed to be good at both languages.

Despite the attempts to push all students through an education system which uses English for the most part, there are definite problems with the use of English when some of the students enter university. These are the ones who are the subjects of this thesis.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The aim of this research is to investigate interlanguage variability in the written and oral language of Chinese Singaporean students learning English as a second language at university. What is of interest is the nature of variability that actually takes place in the classroom and the extent to which it occurs and affects the use of English. However, since it will be beyond the scope of this thesis to consider all aspects of language use, the focus here is on the verbal tense/aspect system, looking specifically at the simple present, simple past, and the present perfect.

In the search for variability in the learners' language output, Labov's variable

model is initially adopted with some modifications. Basically, the attention-to-speech framework is used to elicit variability. This is followed by a contextual approach that borrows from many disciplines, the most important being pragmatics. The convenience of eclecticism is matched by its usefulness in providing the depth and breath of discussion for this study.

The research questions examined in this thesis are as follows:

a) Is there systematic variability in the learners' language when performing tasks designed to reflect varying amounts of attention that is paid to form?

b) Using accuracy rates to measure variability, does the hypothesis that predicts a higher accuracy rate for tasks requiring less attention to language form apply to the pattern of variability in this study?

c) How far can the attention-to-speech framework go as an explanatory tool for variability studies?

d) How does the context of use affect the use of tense/aspect in the different situations set up to elicit variability?

1.3 Rationale

The main motivation of this study is the desire to explain the apparent differences found in the written and oral language of students learning English. Identifying problems which produce variable results in the students' language will

help in their understanding of the language process. This will allow specific remedial work which might have a better chance of success than random application.

The choice of studying the behaviour of verb tense/aspect is made based on the fact that it was the most problematic language item found in students' writing, based on a survey of 10 essays. Since the use of the English tense/aspect system is a common problem among learners of different language backgrounds, it would be interesting to see how the Singaporean sample fare in their use of tense/aspect. A complicating factor that adds to the difficulty for the students in this study is the lack of a tense system in their first language, Mandarin or any of the Chinese dialects. With these reasons, this particular language item becomes a compelling choice for study.

1.4 Limitations

The findings of this study can be generalized only to Chinese Singaporean university students needing remedial work in English. No attempt is made to apply the findings to Singaporeans in general.

The study does not include an analysis of the subjects' overall proficiency in the language. Thus, the findings do not comment on all types of errors found in the data. Very specifically the focus is only on three tense/aspect verb forms, the simple present, simple past, and the present perfect.

1.5 Organisation of the Study

This thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter One is the introduction which has five sections: background, the statement of the problem, rationale, limitations, and organisation of the study.

Chapter Two provides a report on a preliminary study designed to test out the method of investigating interlanguage variability. Difficulties in the methodology are identified and suggestions made for improvements to be included in the main study.

Chapter Three presents a literature review of research covering a broad spectrum of areas. A brief historical background begins this review, followed by the progress made in the area of variability found in interlanguage. How tense/aspect function in the language of learners is explored in the research spanning many approaches. They include non-discourse, discourse, and pragmatic approaches.

Chapter Four describes the methods and materials used for the elicitation of variability in the main study. The results of this part of the study are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five takes the study into the contextual dimension where many forms of contextual factors are discussed in explaining the variable pattern found in the results. The most important of the contextual clues are the pragmatic factors ,

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followed by   discourse constraints, morphophonological, and semantic factors.

Chapter Six concludes with a summary, the main conclusions, implications, and last of all suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

PRELIMINARY STUDY

2.1 Introduction

This preliminary study is an attempt to establish a viable method of investigating the problem of interlanguage variability and identify difficulties in the methodology. These difficulties can then be remedied and the method refined in the main study. With the approach being based on a study conducted by Tarone (1985) (reviewed in Chapter 3), this preliminary study also aims to test some of the hypotheses she has established. Once verified, they become the basis for further investigation.

2.2 Aims

While the general aims of this study have already been discussed above, this section will cover the specific aims. Studies (reviewed in Chapter 3) testify that foreign language learners produce variable grammatical, morphological and phonological forms in systematic ways when performing different tasks at any one time. Based on this notion of variability, this preliminary study aims to show that:

a) second language learners systematically vary in their use of tense/aspect in oral and written tasks which correspond to the different styles of interlanguage as

suggested by Labov (1970);

b) there is systematic variability in the different styles within the written mode, and not just between the written and the oral modes;

c) the different styles range along a continuum based on the amount of attention paid to language form required by the tasks with the language test representing the task requiring the most attention and the interview the least;

d) the variability in the subjects' performance on the tasks is reflected in their different accuracy levels;

e) there is a correlation between the amount of attention that is paid to language and the accuracy of the language item being studied: when more attention is paid to language, the accuracy rate will decrease and vice versa.

2.3 Method

2.3.1 Subjects

The subjects used in this study were all second year pure Science students i.e. majoring in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc. at the National University of Singapore. Their ages at the time of the study ranged from 19 to 22 years. In all, a total of 61 students (19 males and 42 females) took part in this study.

These students are second language learners of English who are native speakers

of Mandarin and/or one or more Chinese dialects. The majority of them are Chinese-stream students (refer to Chapter 1 for explanation). Their proficiency in English varies, though not by a great deal since they are all students of a remedial English class from which they were selected. Although their standards are not homogeneous, their similar language background provides justification for inclusion in this sample.

2.3.2 Tense/aspect

In this investigation, a decision was made to use the full range of labels for tense and aspect customarily employed by language teachers. The fact that they teach all the main tense/aspect types justifies this choice. They are: the simple present, simple past, present perfect, past perfect, future, conditional, and conditional perfect.

These so-called 'teachers tenses' do not offer an adequate or accurate description of the grammar of the English verb phrase. However, it was felt appropriate to use a taxonomy of this sort since it is with these labels that the students are most familiar. It may also be presumed in consequence that it is with these labels in mind that the students make their choices.

There are glaring difficulties here. Most significant for the purposes here is the question of which, if any, modal auxiliaries to acknowledge as 'verb tenses'. It will be seen from the list above that 'will' and 'shall' have been recognised as markers of futurity, that is, as the traditional 'future tense'. And that 'would' and

'could' ('would be able') are recognised as markers of condition, that is, as the traditional 'conditional tense'. The problem here is obvious. Grammatical descriptions are essentially formal in nature. This is to say that a grammatical label can be assigned to a unit of language on the basis of purely formal criteria such as the shape of the word and its position in a sentence. However, in recognising, for instance, will/shall as markers of futurity and not of anything else (eg. of annoyance in a sentence like 'He will keep interrupting!'), there is a danger of judging grammatical statements too narrowly. These types of difficulties have been analysed by Barber (1962) and the problems and confusions discussed by Swales (1971).

2.3.3 Tasks

In the design of the preliminary study, the subjects were required to complete three different types of tasks, ranging from the one which is supposed to show the most attention paid to language to the least. The rationale for the use of the attention factor is fully considered in the Literature Review (Chapter 3).

The three tasks below are listed in order from the task requiring the most attention paid to language to the least:

a) a language test comprising two passages;

b) an essay; and

c) an interview with the researcher.

Task 1. Language Test

The subjects were given two passages (see Appendix 1) from which they were tested on their ability to provide the appropriate tense/aspect for a given verb. There are 19 blanks in Passage A and 21 in Passage B. and the subjects were asked to fill in the blanks where verbs have been deleted from the texts. They were, however, given the base verb for each blank so that they would just concentrate on choosing the appropriate tense/aspect.

The topics of the passages were general in nature and not directly related to their Science subjects. This was deliberate since university students could be expected to be able to read a text for general consumption. It also ensured that differences in scientific understanding did not influence results.

It is recognised that the language test as a task is not comparable to the essay and the interview in that the production of learner output is very limited. However, as a test for eliciting language forms based on the attention to language factor, it serves a needed and useful function. The one-dimensional quality of the language test is duly noted but it is not the purpose to explore other accompanying aspects of language use at this stage.

Task 2. Essay

The subjects were asked to write a 300 to 500-word essay on matchmaking, titled 'Horse and Carriage' (see Appendix 2). As part of the topic, they were given some background information about matchmaking and its functions in society, particularly among the Chinese. In addition, one brief section, titled

'Opinions' was included to feature four different viewpoints to give the students some assistance in planning their essays. The topic choice was motivated by its potential ability to generate interest since it was a very provocative national issue at the time. Since it is also a general topic, it again does not prejudice any student for a lack of knowledge in any technical area.

They were not given a time limit but they had to do it in class which limited them indirectly as the slower students were then pressured into finishing on seeing their classmates finish. The entire period was three hours in length but all of them took between two to two and a half hours to complete.

Task 3. Interview

The interview was one-to-one, with the cassette recorder prominently placed. This took place in a classroom different from the one where the rest of the class was located. Each interview lasted on average between ten and fifteen minutes. The participants were asked about how they felt about their learning of English, university life, plans for the future and events in the past. The interviewer was also the researcher.

All these tasks were performed in a classroom during their remedial English classes. For tasks 1 and 2 the subjects did not know that they were participating in this study as the tasks were not any different from what they would normally do in their English class. As task 3 could not be disguised as an activity that was part of their curriculum, they were invited to take part in this study. However, they were not told of the actual purpose. The data collection took place over three weeks at

the end of the first academic term. By this time familiarity had already been established with the participants.

A detailed comparison was made of the essays and the language tests. However, only a small sample, a total of six interviews, was transcribed. In the course of carrying out this preliminary study, it was found that the interview was overloaded with too many features for it to fit neatly into the attention continuum based on the attention factor. It is first an oral task. Then it combines both formal as well as informal features because the interview was set up so that it was a fairly formal event, yet at the same time it was casual. When a student is called up individually by a teacher, the student is bound to feel a certain amount of anxiety that can be translated into more attention given to language. With the cassette recorder as an obvious reminder that they are being taped, the anxiety level is certain to rise even more, at least initially. Yet, on the other hand, the interviewer's familiarity with the students seemed to have quickly relaxed the students during the interview. This combination proved to be rather confusing for this investigation of interlanguage variability based on the attention continuum. Given this problem, the entire set of interviews was not used but from a reduced sample, brief tentative conclusions were drawn to point the way for the main study.

2.4 Comments about Procedure

2.4.1 The Notion of Error

A basic decision that has to be made in all studies of this type is whether to work

with the notion of 'error' or not. The advantages of being able to quantify the relative accuracy of different subjects or of the same subject under different conditions are clear. The drawback, however, is equally clear and quite significant. It is that one is constrained to decree a particular verb form, or at best a range of verb forms, as 'right' and everything else 'wrong'. This, however, is not always very satisfactory and in studies of this type there is always the certainty of marginal cases, and the danger of a student making a choice at blank 3, for instance, which has consequences for his/her selections at blanks 4 and 5. As a result, s/he may end up with a set of choices which are internally consistent, but absolutely false because of the arbitrary nature of the system. Sometimes there may also be more than one interpretation of a tense/aspect sequence. To say one is 'right' and the other 'wrong' would be to stretch the notion of error. However, the advantages of using this notion far outweigh the disadvantages, though it does not mean a total disregard of the problem thus highlighted. Where possible, ambiguities and potential problems were eliminated by removing a particular item from the data.

For the language test, the obligatory tense/aspect answers were taken from the original text. For the essays and the interview, a reliance on what is considered the most natural and grammatical tense/aspect choices provided the guidelines to appropriacy for the given context.

2.4.2 Passive Verbs

In this study, passive verbs are not treated differently from active ones. Errors in voice, and not tense/aspect, are not considered errors for the purposes here.

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Voice, as defined by Quirk et al. (1972: 801), is 'a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in two ways, without change in the facts reported...' The two ways are the active and the passive voice where the active- passive relationship involves the verb phrase and the clause. The changes in the verb concern the use of the auxiliary verb 'be' and the past participle of the main verb. In the clause, the active subject becomes the passive agent; the active object becomes the passive subject; and the preposition 'by' is introduced before the agent.

Basically, the use of the passive means only a change in the perspective of subject and agent. The tense/aspect used in a particular situation does not change at all. In fact, for every tense/aspect in the active voice, there is an equivalent in the passive. There may be many types of constraints that allow the use of either the passive or the active, but these constraints do not affect the temporality of the sentence. Hence, it is justifiable to ignore errors in the use of the passive voice in the study of tense/aspect.

2.4.3 Progressive Aspect

As with the use of the passive voice, the use of the progressive is also another aspect of the verb that is not treated differently from the rest of the indicative verbs. Again, errors in the use of the progressive are not treated as such in this study.

According to Quirk et al (1972: 92), the progressive aspect 'indicates temporariness - an action in progress instead of the occurrence of an action or the existence of a state...' Going by a less traditional definition of the progressive, its important characteristic is seen to be change or changes of state, rather than its continuous nature (Bland 1988). The usage of the progressive is very complex and since it is not the purpose here to discuss this issue, it will suffice to rely on fairly general characteristics for this study.

Given two sentences: 'Joan sings well' (simple present) and 'Joan is singing well' (present progressive), only the aspect is different and not the tense. The meaning in the two sentences are also different but this does not affect the tense as the differences are the same in the present or past. Like the passive, the progressive can be added to any tense/aspect form. With the progressive, it is accompanied by numerous concomitant meanings and overtones such as limited duration, incompletion, simultaneity, vividness of description, emotional colouring, and emphasis. Although there are these many ways of using, applying and interpreting the progressive, none of them directly alters the tense of a particular sentence. This is the justification for not treating the progressive differently.

2.4.4 'Have Got'

This is yet one more grammatical item that is not treated differently from the rest of the verbs. 'Have got' is considered a semi-auxiliary (Quirk et al 1972: 68), but this does not mean that 'have' does not function like any other perfect aspect.

Because the temporal quality of 'have' is the same, it is not considered differently from the other verbs using the perfect aspect.

2.5 Results

<u>Key to Tables and General Comments</u>

ps   - present simple

pt   - past simple

pspf - present perfect

ptpf - past perfect

fu   - future

cd   - conditional

cdpf - conditional perfect

(The future perfect is omitted because none was used nor required as an obligatory tense/aspect form).

In the interview, certain formulaic expressions were not included in the verb count since the verbs would have been learnt as part of the expression. They are:

I don't know, you know

I guess

I think, I don't think

I mean, you mean

I see, you see

I hope

let's say

that's all

isn't it?

Where a verb is repeated, in an apparent attempt at correcting it, only the second verb is counted.   Errors in spelling are not considered errors in this study unless there is an ambiguity in the user's choice of tense/aspect, in which case the whole verb phrase is not counted as part of the data.

	Total No. of Verbs	Total No. of Errors	%	Accuracy Rate %
Lang. Test	2440	942	38.6%	61.4%
Essay	2942	367	12.5%	87.5%
Interview	248	85	34.3%	65.7%

Table 2.1 Overall Accuracy Rates for the Three Tasks

Tense/Aspect

	ps	pt	pspf	ptpf	fu	cd	cdpf
L=Lang.T.	549	610	549	305	244	122	61
%	22.5	25.0	22.5	12.5	10.0	5.0	2.5
E=Essay	1649	531	108	17	146	172	6
%	56.1	18.1	3.7	0.6	5.0	5.8	0.2
I=Interv.	129	83	14	1	1	6	1
%	52.0	33.5	5.7	0.4	0.4	2.4	0.4

Table 2.2 Verb Forms Required

Tense/Aspect

	ps	pt	pspf	ptpf	fu	cd	cdpf
L	609	771	452	173	180	138	34
%	25.0	31.6	18.5	7.1	7.4	5.7	1.4
E	1800	383	115	22	162	159	5
%	61.2	13.0	3.9	0.8	5.5	5.4	0.2
I	192	33	2	0	5	2	0
%	77.4	13.3	0.8	0	2.0	0.8	0

Table 2.3 Verb Forms Used

Tense/Aspect

	ps	pt	pspf	ptpf	fu	cd	cdpf
L	172	328	161	95	36	63	22
%	7.1	13.4	6.6	3.9	1.5	2.6	0.9
E	215	48	19	11	30	35	-
%	7.3	1.6	0.7	0.4	1.0	1.2	-
I	67	13	0	0	4	1	0
%	27.0	5.2	0	0	1.6	0.4	0

Table 2.4 Verb Forms Used Wrongly

Tense/Aspect

	ps	pt	pspf	ptpf	f u	cd	cdpf
L	437	443	291	78	144	75	12
%	17.9	18.2	11.9	3.2	5.9	3.1	0.5
E	1585	335	96	11	132	124	5
%	53.9	11.4	3.3	0.4	4.5	4.2	0.2
I	127	22	2	0	2	2	0
%	51.2	8.9	0.8	0	0.8	0.8	0

Table 2.5 Verb Forms Used Correctly

Tense/Aspect

	ps	pt	pspf	ptpf	fu	cd	cdpf
L	112	167	258	227	100	47	49
%	4.6	6.8	10.6	9.3	4.1	1.9	2.0
E	64	196	12	6	14	48	1
%	2.2	6.7	0.4	0.2	0.5	1.6	0.03
I	4	62	11	1	0	5	1
%	1.6	25.0	4.4	0.4	0	2.0	0.4

Table 2.6 Required Verb Forms on Occasions when Errors were made
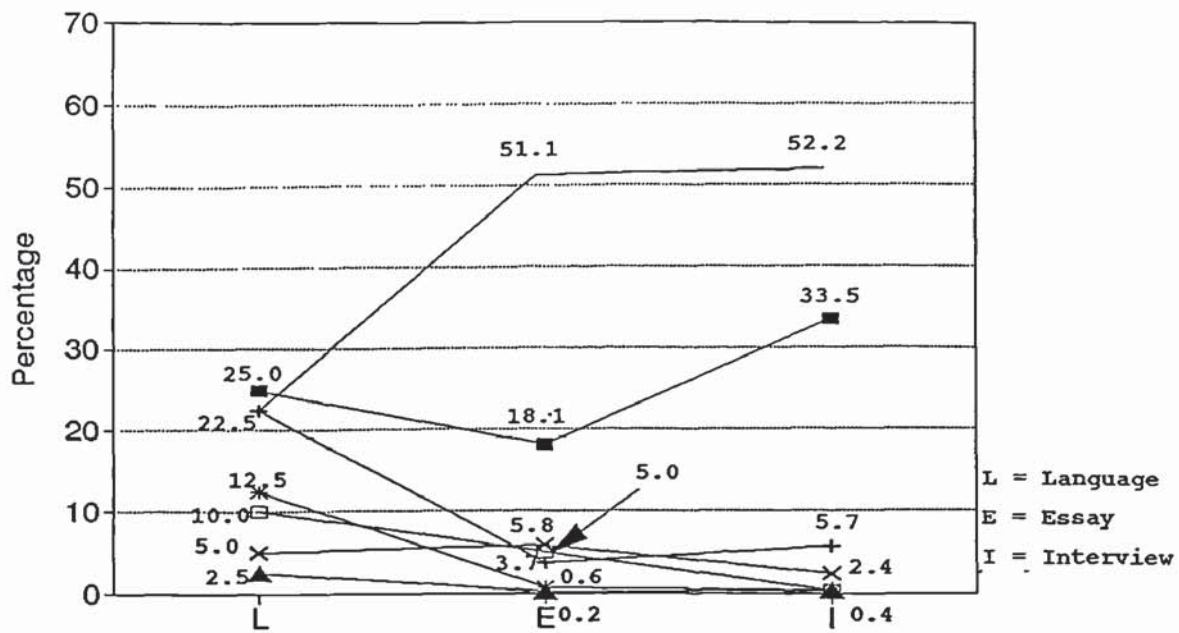
Figure 2.1 Verb Forms Required

— present simple

—■— past simple   —+— present perfect   —*— past perfect
—□— future   —×— conditional   —▲— conditional perfect

L = Language
E = Essay
I = Interview
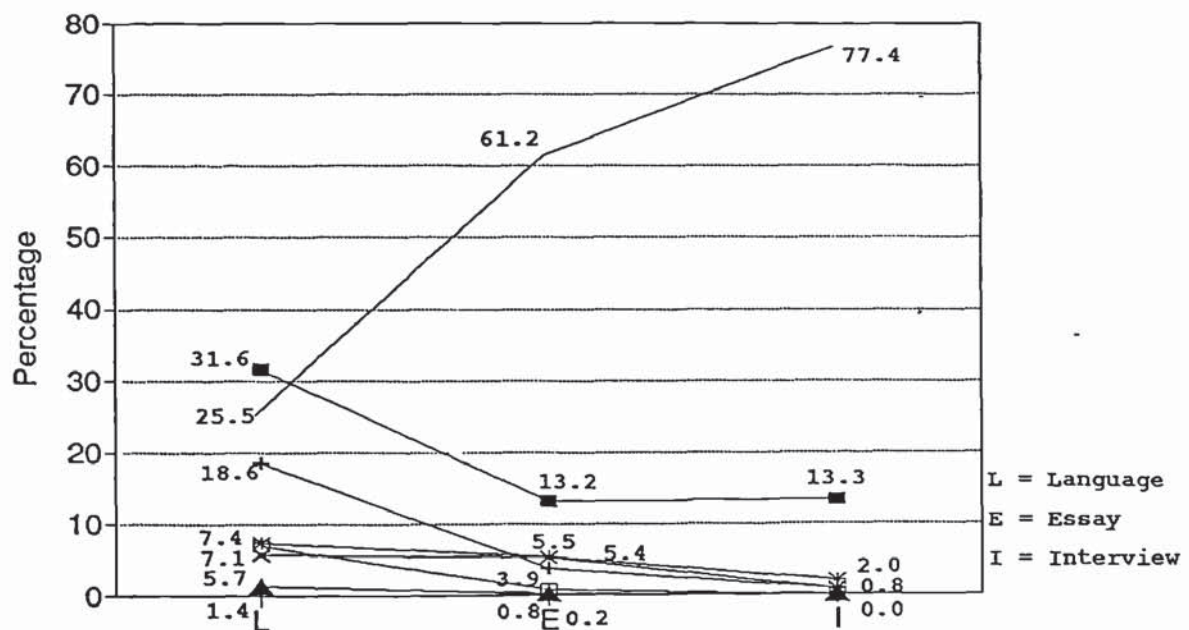
Figure 2.2 Verb Forms Used

— present simple

—■— past simple   —+— present perfect   —*— past perfect
—□— future   —×— conditional   —▲— conditional perfect

L = Language
E = Essay
I = Interview

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a) Overall Accuracy Rates for the Three Tasks

It is clear from the Table 2.1 that the essay is the most accurate task with 87. 5%. This is followed by the interview with 65.7% and the language test with 61.4%. The last two percentage scores are relatively close.

b) Verb Forms Required

As was expected, the essays set up the most situations which require the use of the present simple with 56.1%, although the interview score comes close with 52.0%. The language test has the lowest with 22.5%. What is significant is the drop in percentage requirement of the use of other tense/aspect forms in the essay, decreasing from 56.1% to the next highest 18.1%, and thereafter to levels below 6.0%.

c) Verb Forms Used

For this category, the present simple was the most frequently used for the essays and the interview, with 61.2% and 77.4% respectively and in the language test, the past simple has the highest percentage at 31.6%. These figures are only meaningful if they are compared to those which show what is required, i.e. the above category. For the language test, the present simple and the past simple are 'overused' whereas for the essay and the interview only the present simple is used more than it is required. This seems to indicate that where the subjects have greater control of the verbs and the situation, the present simple is always the popular choice, and the other tense/aspect forms are used less than what is required.

d) Verb Forms Used Wrongly

As the language test requires more past simple forms, and as the subjects tend to overuse this particular tense, it has the most number of errors. In the essay and the interview, the present simple has the most errors.

e) Verbs Forms Used Correctly

As in the above category, it is the past simple that has the highest percentage in the language test, and the present simple in the essay and the interview.

f) Required Verb Forms on Occasions when an Error is made

The tense/aspect categories that have the highest percentages are the present perfect for the language test, the past simple for the essay and the interview.

2.6 Discussion

From the tables, one of the most important comparisons is between the number of occasions when the tense/aspect is required and when it is correctly used. In general, the difference between them is greatest for the language test which shows that for almost all the tense/aspect forms that are required, the subjects only use half or less than half correctly. In the essays and the interview, the gap is not so great, particularly in the essays. In the interview, only with the past simple is there a substantial gap, with 33.5% needed and 8.9% used (refer to Tables 2.2 and 2.5).

All this seems to suggest that the language test is the most prone to error of the

three tasks, and the essay the least prone. Thus, when the subjects are given the most control over their language, the accuracy rate goes up, partly because avoidance strategies can be used. This bears out one of Tarone's (1985) findings concerning certain grammatical features. If more attention is paid to language, more errors are made. So, even though tense/aspect is given the most attention in the language test, it does not ensure that this task has the highest number of required tense/aspect forms.

On the other hand, the interview, which is supposed to require the least attention, is not the task with the least number of errors. It has been suggested by Tarone (Ibid) that fewer errors are made because concern about the subject matter encourages the learner to put their grammatical knowledge into context thus minimising errors. And since the subjects have more control over their language, it also should minimise errors further. But the contrary occurred. Perhaps the subjects were overly conscious of the fact that they were being interviewed in a language that they were not comfortable with. A more obvious reason for the relatively low accuracy rate could be due to the fact that it is an oral activity. The numerous differences between the written and the oral modes are likely to account for the accuracy outcome. While the tasks are supposed to range on the attention-to-language continuum, the mode differences create difficulties that are not accounted for in the continuum. These difficulties will be dealt with in the main study as a pragmatic consideration.

Thus, the essay has the least number of errors. Some of the reasons could be: the subject is in control of the choice of verb tense/aspect, though constrained by

the topic; s/he is not required to be totally spontaneous; s/he has to produce a complete text and not just discrete words. Creating a whole text has the advantage of writer involvement while filling in blanks is a more detached exercise. In addition, some of the words in the language test may even be unfamiliar to the subject, thus making it more difficult and more error-prone.

The other significant pattern in the results is the overuse of the present simple in the essay and the interview. Because it is used more than it should have been, it has the highest scores for correct as well as incorrect uses, compared to other tense/aspect forms. It shows that given a choice, the subjects feel more comfortable with the present simple, resulting in the high error rates. The present simple offers the simplest tense/aspect morphologically and conceptually. Moreover, the present simple also provides a wide range of possible uses which could mean that it becomes an all-purpose tense/aspect.

The past simple is the next most popular choice in the essays and the interview. Again, this might be attributed to morphological as well as conceptual simplicity. Where the present simple does not fit, the past simple is the next choice.

The results for the language test reveal a different pattern from the other two tasks. The past simple is the most frequently required and used tense/aspect. This difference is largely governed by the demands of the passages. There are more blanks requiring the past simple than the present simple. Overall, a wider range of tense/aspect types are used in this task and again, this would be because of the passage requirements.

2.7 Conclusion

From the results of the preliminary study, some general, though restricted, conclusions can be drawn.

The general conclusions below are in answer to the aims set out in section 2.2.

a) Systematic variability did occur in the second language learners' use of tense/aspect between the written and spoken tasks, based on the different styles of interlanguage use. However, the pattern of systematicity is not as clear as was hoped.

b) There is also systematic variability within the written mode, as well as across modes, as shown by the difference seen in the two written tasks.

c) The different styles represented by the tasks are not as clearly defined on the attention-based continuum as was anticipated. Hence, there is some blurring in the assumptions made about the amount of attention required in the tasks , in particular the interview.

d) The accuracy rates of the three tasks are different which indicates that there is variability.

e) The correlation between the amount of attention that is paid to language and the accuracy rates is not so obvious. When only the two written tasks are

considered, the results bear out the hypothesis of more attention bringing about lower accuracy. The interview, however, does not fit into this neat pattern as it is not the task with the highest accuracy rate (assuming that it is the task requiring the least amount of attention).

The conclusions made here point to other factors for explanations of variability. Relying solely on the attention factor is far too limiting.

2.8 Modifications for the Main Study

a) One of the problems with the preliminary study is the design of the interview task. It is important that all the tasks have more specific characteristics that define their place on the attention continuum. The role of each task has to be clearer.

b) Although the results have shown that the attention factor is not the only factor that accounts for the interlanguage variability, it is still a viable way of eliciting variability. The types of tasks selected on the basis of the attention factor are generally classroom activities. That being the case, the attention factor need not be discarded as a theoretical consideration and a practical means of eliciting variability in the language of second language learners.

c) Since the attention factor is not the only factor explaining the interlanguage variability, it will be necessary to extend the main study to include other factors.

d) As the nature of interlanguage variability is complex, a more detailed investigation of the data is necessary. Hence, the sample size could be reduced, taking a more qualitative approach.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Interlanguage

This review begins with a summary of interlanguage since any attempt to place the English as spoken by the second language learners in this study must fall into the purview of interlanguage.

The term 'interlanguage' originated from Selinker (1969, 1972). Although there were other terms such as 'approximative systems' (Nemser 1971) and 'idiosyncratic dialects' (Corder 1976), it is 'interlanguage' which has remained in use. These different terms basically refer to a similar phenomenon. Since interlanguage became an area of linguistic interest in the late sixties and early seventies, considerable work has been done to date. Hence, this review will note the early research and the subsequent progress and changes made to the understanding of interlanguage, in particular interlanguage variability.

Selinker, very early on, identified in his seminal paper (1972) five principal cognitive processes that operate in interlanguage. They are:

a) language transfer;

b) overgeneralisation of target language rules;

c) transfer of training (i.e. a rule enters the learner's system as a result of instruction);

d) strategies of second-language L2 learning (i.e. 'an identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learned' (Ibid. :37));

e) strategies of L2 communication (i.e. 'an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers' (Ibid.).

These processes are seen as ways in which the learner tries to internalize the L2 system. However, while these processes may be seen to assist the learner achieve target language competence, the language development is not a clear linear progression until the goal is reached. Unlike in first language acquisition, there is a likelihood that fossilization will occur in the second language, according to Selinker. This happens when the learner fails to reach target language competence, that is, when learning of some L2 rules has stopped despite repeated effort on the part of the learner to learn a particular rule, or the teacher to teach it. Occasionally what the learner appears to have mastered may not be consistent. Such occasional slips are part of a process referred to as backsliding (Ellis 1987b, McLaughlin 1987). These two features, fossilization and backsliding, are understood to characterize the manifestation of interlanguage.

While these two features have come to be accepted as part of interlanguage, Selinker's five cognitive processes are by no means definitive since they are psychological processes and are difficult to prove. An alternative to this cognitive emphasis is Adjemian's linguistic approach (1976). Interlanguage is treated like any other natural language where universal linguistic constraints apply. His focus was on systematicity of the interlanguage whereas Selinker concentrated on the learner's system between the first and the target language. A lengthy

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analysis of the differences between the two perspectives on interlanguage will not be provided here but what is important is the similarities.

The two characteristics of interlanguage, fossilization and backsliding, are comparable with Adjemian's notion of permeability. Because an interlanguage is 'incomplete and in a state of flux' (Adjemian 1976:308), it is permeable to rules or forms of the first language or the target language. This means that the learner's knowledge of rules and forms is not fixed; changes can be made to the system similar to the changes that occur in backsliding. The merging of these two concepts draws attention to two related issues.

One of them is that if there is permeability in the interlanguage system, then it is undergoing constant revision and extension of rules. Or if there is some progress in the learning process hindered by some backsliding, then the development path is constantly shifting. Such changes create a certain dynamism which has become an accepted description of interlanguage (Ellis 1985).

The second is the apparent contradiction between fossilization and permeability. Selinker, Swain and Dumas (1975) considered stability to be one of the few 'observables' that underlie the interlanguage hypothesis. They saw stability as the lack of change of certain errors and surface forms in the learner's language over time, that is, fossilization. Permeability, on the other hand, allows rules learnt to be changed or revised as the learner progresses. However, reconciling the two concepts is not impossible. Selinker et. al. seemed to suggest that fossilization does not occur for all the language rules. There is a

certain stability but at the same time there can be a constant revision of some language features. Hence, fossilization can exist simultaneously with permeability at any point in the language learning process. The combination of both stability and change highlights the two essential issues of systematicity and variability. Both these concepts will be explored below.

3.2 Systematicity and Variability

To return to the early understanding of language learning, systematicity was viewed as a result of the transfer of language rules from the first language. Difficulties that resulted in the incorrect form were taken as variation from the expected norm. However, with the decline in the popularity of interference to account for second language learning, an inevitable shift to other approaches took place.

A swing to the other extreme is the mentalist approach to language learning. Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974a, 1974b, 1974c) who are staunch advocates of the mentalist view to language, or more accurately, the Chomskyan approach, put forward the idea that with children the second language is learnt using the language acquisition device (LAD) that is activated in the first language learning process. They claimed that the interlanguage used in their studies was systematic because a regular sequence of a number of grammatical morphemes could be identified, a pattern put down as the 'natural order' hypothesis. However, this hypothesis has been criticised for its lack of methodological validity. McLaughlin (1987) presented counter evidence from several sources

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(Larsen-Freeman 1975, Hakuta 1976, Rosansky 1976, Hakuta and Cancino 1977, Hatch 1983) that question the use of this hypothesis. Without going into a lengthy critique of the problematic 'natural order' hypothesis, it is quite clear that the issue of systematicity and variability is still not easily explained.

Closely related to the natural order hypothesis is the Monitor theory whose proponent is Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985). Although it is a theory of second language acquisition, it has implications for the understanding of interlanguage. Basically, the Monitor model is based on five central hypotheses:

a) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

b) The Monitor Hypothesis

c) The Natural Order Hypothesis

d) The Input Hypothesis

e) The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Essentially, this theory assumes that there are two independent systems of linguistic knowledge making up interlanguage: acquisition and learning. Acquisition occurs automatically when the learner is using an implicit knowledge system in natural communication and the focus is on meaning where L2 rules are subconscious. Learning takes place as a result of formal study and the focus is on formal language features. Hence, variability is accounted for in the dichotomy between the learner's performance when s/he is monitoring or not monitoring his/her speech. This theory has been criticized extensively by several people, principally, McLaughlin (1978, 1987) for weaknesses in its explanation of the second language learning process. One of the main criticisms is that the

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acquisition-learning distinction is not clearly defined and it is impossible to check empirically which process is operating at any one time. There is no need to list the other criticisms since they are not pertinent to this discussion. What is relevant is the fact that not only is the theory virtually impossible to test empirically, the acquisition- learning distinction is too limited a concept to explain the range of difficulties that learners have with the target language. The either-or option does not take into consideration the complexity of the interlanguage variation which occurs at various levels that will be discussed at length a little later.

Returning to the studies relating directly to interlanguage, theories that have developed from the Chomskyan approach centre around two ways of categorising language: the learner's understanding of the linguistic knowledge or competence, and the actual production of language or performance. It was first established by Adjemian that interlanguage is incomplete and permeable to rules or forms of the first language. This notion of interlanguage explains variability as resulting from performance error when the learner's competence becomes influenced by or permeable to the rules of the target language (Adjemian 1976). The difficulty with this explanation of interlanguage variability is attributing the cause to either competence or performance. Intuitions are supposed to best reflect competence, and intuitive data, however, can never really indicate the actual competence because the data have to be elicited in one form or another that cannot possibly call up the true state of the learner's competence which encompasses conscious and unconscious knowledge.

3.2.1 Inner Processing Theories

Further attempts at explaining systematicity and variability include an approach that belongs to a group of theories which Tarone (1988) has called the 'inner processing' theories. (She has also categorised Krashen's Monitor Theory as an 'inner processing theory; its psychological approach finds a place here amongst all the inner processing theories). This approach borrows research findings and methodologies from experimental psychology while at the same time staying within the Chomskyan assumptions. One such theory is propounded by McLaughlin (1978) who distinguishes between 'controlled' and 'automatic' processing of information that relates to second language acquisition. As the learner tries to produce the target language, the process is initially controlled because it requires concentrated attention to use what is unfamiliar or new. But as the new information becomes more familiar, automatic processes take over. The two processes are not two separate states but are two extreme conditions of a continuum that allows a gradual movement from the controlled to the automatic. Although it is not clear how variability is accounted for, it seems to suggest that movement between the two states does not always proceed in one direction, that is, from the controlled to the automatic. However, this notion is not further developed by McLaughlin.

Bialystok and Sharwood-Smith (1985), however, have taken the same direction as McLaughlin and describe the process of second-language acquisition as one which has two basic components: the second-language learner's knowledge of the language, and his/her ability to use or control that knowledge in

communicative performance. Variability in interlanguage, according to an earlier version of this theory from Bialystok (1982), results from the different tasks or situations that a learner encounters which require different types of knowledge and control systems.

One advantage of this theory, according to Tarone (1988), is that it is possible to account for empirical data which show that grammatical accuracy differs with the type of task the learner has to perform. And this corresponds with whether the knowledge is more analysed where greater control is exerted or that the knowledge is more automatic. However, Bialystok and Sharwood-Smith are not as clear about this in the later version (1985). Diachronic variation is due to change in the learner's knowledge of the language over time. Synchronic variation, on the other hand, is a reflection of the processing constraints that operate on the learner's knowledge of the system. The criticism made by Tarone (1988) that the distinction between knowledge and control is becoming less clear, is valid. The influence from both knowledge of the old and the new language forms should not affect just diachronic variability. What actually occurs in synchronic variation is not very clear.

Another objection put forward by Tarone is that learning a language is not exactly the same as processing information. Where the latter involves skills that are used to look up a reference in a library (a metaphor they have used to describe this theory), the former utilises skills that are likened to those when learning to ride a bicycle. Having knowledge about a skill and then using it is different from using knowledge of general information. Whether or not Tarone's

analogy of riding a bicycle is any more accurate than Bialystok and Sharwood-Smith's is not as important as realising the difference between the two and that there are problems verifying one or the other empirically.

Another group of studies that are also termed 'inner processing' are the Labovian models. Labov's (1966 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972) main aim was to describe the systematically variable patterns of native speakers' language produced in different situations. He presented evidence in support of the idea that variable rules are an integral part of a speaker's language competence. This means that the user's knowledge of language rules closely corresponds with his/her knowledge of when, where, and with whom s/he uses them. This is broadly taken to be contrary to the Chomskyan position which states that linguistic knowledge is separate from non-linguistic knowledge and that the latter cannot be taken into account for the explanation of how a speaker uses his/her linguistic knowledge. A system of rules or 'competence' that the language user has is considered homogeneous whether s/he manifests the ideal system or not. Even if non-linguistic knowledge is systematic, it is of no consequence when explaining linguistic competence. As a result all variability is classified as non-systematic, at least in mainstream Chomskyan linguistics (Chomsky 1965). However, Labov suggests that variability is not always non-systematic. Some of the variability can be derived from the user's knowledge of how to use language appropriately, and this itself is systematic, making it part of the user's competence.

Generally, Labov's work is empirically orientated. To elicit data showing the variable speech patterns, which he terms style-shifting patterns in the different

situations, he focuses on varying several factors: verbal task, topic, interlocutor, setting or participant roles. The different styles come about with the differing amounts of attention paid to language in the varying situations. This whole concept of attention-linked variability is based on the assumption that a certain situation will produce a style that reflects the amount of attention that is paid to language. Certain factors such as whom one is talking to and under what circumstances are likely to elicit certain patterns of speech that affect the style are important considerations. There would be a 'careful' style for a formal interview and a 'casual' one for a conversation with a friend.

To obtain such data, Labov (1970) offers a model from which to study language use. He outlines five axioms which have been summarised by Ellis (1985b:77).

a) All speakers possess several 'styles'. That is, they adapt their speech to make it fit the social context.

b) 'Styles can be ranged along a single dimension, measured by the amount of attention paid to speech'. A language user varies in the degree to which he is able to monitor his speech in different situations.

c) The vernacular is the style in which minimum attention is given to monitoring speech. It is the style associated with informal, everyday speech. It provides 'the most systematic data' for linguistic study.

d) It is not possible to tap the vernacular style of the user by systematic observation of how he performs in a formal context (such as an experiment).

e) The only way to obtain good data on the speech of a language user is through systematic observation.

Labov's approach to the variable patterns of speech focuses on the systematicity more overtly than the other theories so far discussed. The axioms above hint at the cause of variation which serve as a basis for a large number of studies of systematic language variation, not just in native speakers but also foreign and second language learners. Based on this notion of variability, Ellis (1985b:76) summarises in the diagram below the different types of variability in any natural language, including interlanguage:

individual variability
(i.e. product of individual
learner factors

systematic
variability

linguistic
context

contextual variability

Variability in
interlanguage

situational
context

free variability

non-systematic
variability

performance variability
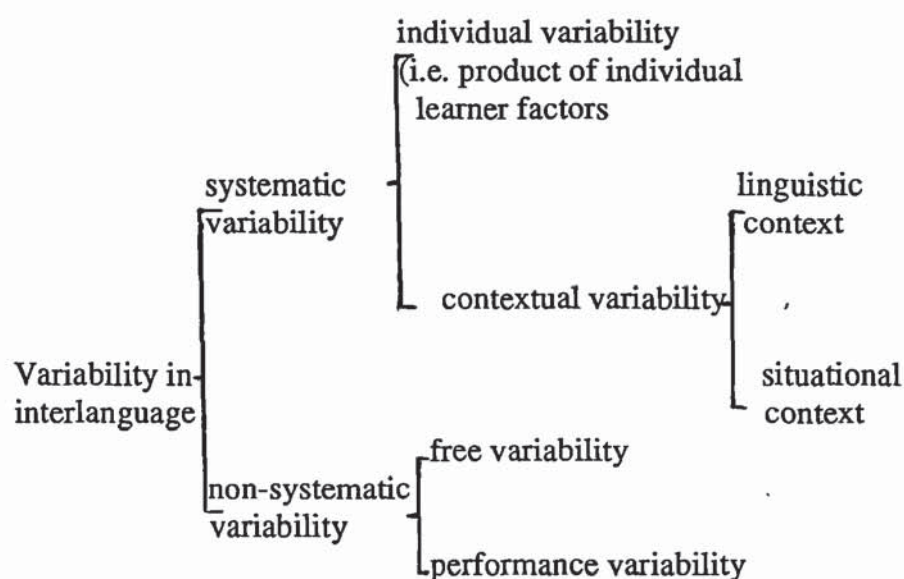
Figure 3.1 Types of Variability

Here the various types of variability show that the user's knowledge of language rules works together with his/her knowledge of when, where, and with whom to use them. Hence, all that is part of communicative competence, and not just part of performance. The type of variability that Labov was interested in is the contextual variability in a situational context.

How variability operates in any situational context involves manipulating a

dynamic series of systems within a larger system as the learner moves towards the target language. The system will have a number of competing rules with one rule guiding performance on one occasion and another rule on a different occasion (Ellis 1985b). To illustrate this concept, the diagram below shows how variability is contained within a system. This model is a modified version of the one presented in Koo (1988). As the learner moves towards the target language horizontal as well as vertical variability occur (indicated by the arrows). The horizontal arrow represents the time taken for the learner to move towards the target language. The vertical arrow shows that at any one time there is a choice of rules. The competing rules (indicated by the dots) are simultaneously available to the learner at any stage of development. At the same time there are linguistic forms that are in free variation which means that they are not guided by any rules and are not systematic (indicated by the stars).
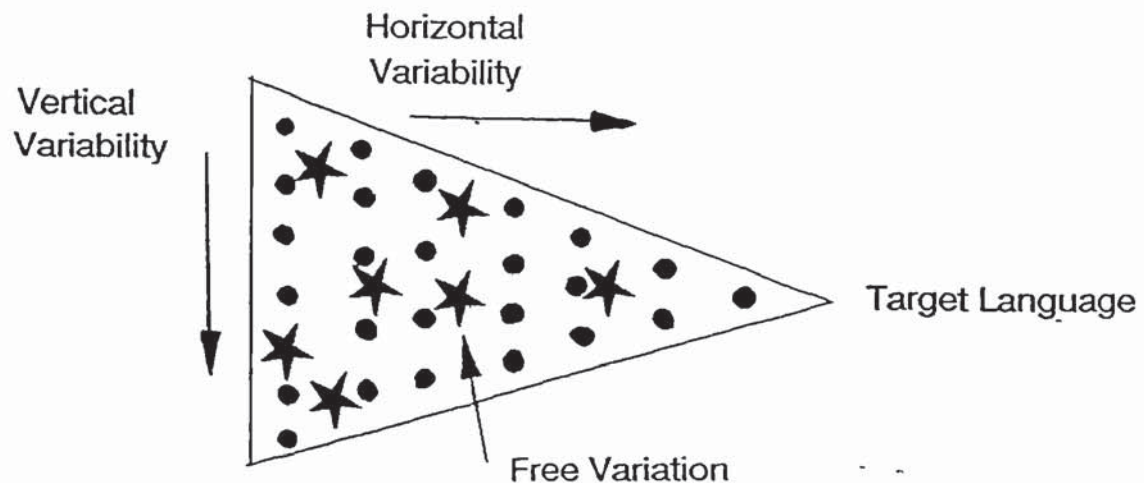
Figure 3.2 Diagrammatic model of Systematic Variability

This diagram, apart from it being a graphic illustration showing the essential features of the interlanguage system, also demonstrates its fluidity which

Tarone has described as a quality resembling a 'chameleon' (1979). The constant change presents practical problems concerning the collection of data when the learner's performance varies from one activity to the next. The model offered by Labov, discussed earlier, has been used for studies of interlanguage variability because Labov has taken this variable nature of language into consideration.

To recapitulate, the fundamental feature in this model is the attention factor. The different styles that emerge revolve around setting up tasks that elicit speech at the different stages of the continuum of styles. The vernacular style would be taken as the one requiring minimum attention and the formal needing maximum attention. Although this approach has its problems which will be discussed in a later section, its contribution to the study of interlanguage is substantial. Included in the numerous studies which have borrowed this approach to elicit variability is this present one.

One of the earlier groups of studies that made use of Labov's model was the work of the Dickersons (1974, 1975, 1976, 1977). Dickerson (1974) examined the pronunciation pattern of ten Japanese ESL learners at university level. The occurrences of /z/, /th/, /r/, and /l/ were studied over nine months. Three types of tests were used: 1) free speaking, 2) reading dialogues aloud, and 3) reading word lists aloud. Dickerson found that the correct target language variant was used most frequently in the third task, followed by the second task, and least frequently in the first task. This means that the learner's language was most target-like when the learners were able to audio-monitor their speech.

Another similar study was carried out by Schmidt (1977) who looked at the acquisition of /th/ in Arabic-speaking students of English. The students were found to be more accurate in their use of /th/ in more formal tasks. Schmidt also discovered that these learners showed the same style-shifting pattern in their first language, which is Arabic, as in their second.

In Gatbonton's (1978) study, her results were different from the Dickersons' and Schmidt's. She attributed this to the fact that hers was a cross-sectional study, which focused on different aspects of variability which are not directly relevant here. Such contrary evidence was also found in Sato's (1984) research which looked at the production of consonant clusters by two Vietnamese learners of English on three tasks: free conversation, oral reading of continuous texts, and elicited imitation of words and phrases. She found that her subjects were producing more target-like pronunciation in the 'vernacular style' (free conversation) than in the 'careful style' (reading aloud) in two of her four examples. This reversed pattern is also evident in Oyama's (1976) study. When her subjects were more casual in activities such as telling spontaneous stories of frightening incidents in the subjects' lives, their pronunciation was more target-like. Conversely, when they were doing a more careful task such as reading a paragraph aloud, there was less target-like production.

Beebe (1980) also found evidence of a direct transfer of a formal feature in the first language to the second when the style shifted from the less formal to the formal. She examined the acquisition of /r/ in Thai learners of English. They were producing fewer instances of the target sound in formal than in informal

occasions because they were using the prestige Thai [r] variant, which they associate with formal use in their own language, in their formal English. The findings of this study are consistent with those of the Dickersons and Schmidt.

The studies of phonological patterns so far seem to suggest that the consistent pattern of behaviour, ie. the production of more target-like language when a more careful style is used, is not without exceptions. However, the majority support the view that the careful style tends to produce more target-like language.

Examples of studies that look at the linguistic context and not just the situational context also include Labov's (1972) investigation of a New York sample. His interest was in the use of the copula 'be' in utterances produced by speakers of Black English Vernacular. He found that the presence or absence of the copula was largely systematic depending on the specific linguistic context provided by the utterance.

As Labov moved between situational and linguistic contexts for investigating variability, his study of the copula 'be' extended beyond the phonological aspects of language. This together with other studies to be discussed below provided new impetus for exploring variability.

Larsen-Freeman (1975) was the first to extend the 'morpheme studies' which did not deal with task variation specifically. She used five different tasks: reading, writing, listening, imitating, and speaking tasks to elicit data from 24 instructed adult learners. The results showed no significant correlation in the rank

orders for accuracy production of ten morphemes across the five tasks. There were, however, inconsistencies with the methodology which raises questions about the results. The study did pave the way for other similar studies (Houck, Robertson and Krashen 1978; Krashen, Sferlazza, Feldman, and Fathman 1976; Fuller 1978; Krashen, Butler, Birnbaum, and Robertson 1978). The aim in these studies was to search for answers about the 'natural order' of acquisition of English morphemes.

A relatively early study of interlanguage that also moved well away from phonology was one by Hyltenstam (1977, 1978). It was a study of negation by adult learners of Swedish as a second language, with the linguistic environment playing an important role in affecting the variability pattern in the interlanguage. His results showed that the learners varied the placement of the negator systematically depending on whether the clause it occurred in was dependent or independent, and whether the finite verb was auxiliary or lexical. With the subject-verb inversion as well, the linguistic context played a significant part in influencing the variable pattern of occurrence. In 'yes-no questions', inversion was more frequent when the finite verb was an auxiliary than when the finite verb was a lexical verb.

One of the pertinent morphological studies that is central to this thesis is one conducted by Tarone (1985). She based her study on Labov's methodological axioms, described earlier. She placed all speech styles on a continuum from the vernacular, which is the unattended speech style, to the highly monitored, careful style. Since she sees interlanguage as a chameleon, varying with the subtlest

shifts in situation (1979), the data- gathering methods have to be equally subtle to accommodate the shifts in style and attention. Labov's axioms provided a means of gathering data bearing in mind the 'observer's paradox'.

In this study, twenty subjects took part in the experiment: 10 Arabic and 10 Japanese adults. Three types of tasks were used: a written grammar test, an oral narration, and an oral interview. For all her three tasks, Tarone measured the percentage of target-like productions of two bound morphemes: third person singular -s on present tense verbs and noun plural -s; and two free morphemes: definite article 'the' and direct object pronoun 'it'. One of her hypotheses was that the interlanguage style least influenced by the target language would be the vernacular style which is produced in the narrative task and the style most influenced by the target language would be the careful style that is produced in the grammar test. The hypothesis was surprisingly not upheld. She found that target-like accuracy, according to the order of hypothetical degree of attention paid to language, did not increase as a function of degree of attention to language, as was the case with the phonological studies in interlanguage variability.

There were some inconsistencies in the results for the two bound morphemes. The formal tasks elicit more target-like production in some cases, but no difference in others. The results for the article and the direct object pronoun are, however, consistent in going against the trend found in the phonological studies: the more formal tasks elicit fewer target-like forms than the less formal ones. Tarone speculated that the inverse relationship may have been due to the textual cohesion necessary to produce forms like the article and the direct object pronoun. The

use of the obligatory contexts constrained the learners and hence they produced fewer target-like forms.

The Labovian model that Tarone used has come under criticism for its inadequacy in explaining interlanguage variability. One strong opponent of the theory is Gregg (1990). He launched a forceful attack on the use of the 'variable competence model' for second language acquisition, identifying both Tarone and Ellis as the two main proponents of this model. Many points were raised but only a summary of his main contentions are given below.

a) One of his main criticisms is the lack of distinction that is made between performance and competence which amounts to a rejection of the principles of generative grammar. This is considered a serious violation of a fundamental prerequisite to progress in the study of language acquisition. Gregg sees a host of problems with the variable competence model related to this rejection.

b) The use of variable rules as part of linguistic theory and the acquisition of variable rules as part of second language acquisition present problems of inconsistency and conceptual difficulties. Gregg's interpretation of Tarone's variable rules describes the learner having a knowledge of how to realise any given rule/form/structure in output depending on the specific task or situation. In this case, a grammar based on variable rules has not been adequately addressed in this model.

c) The last contention has to do with what Gregg sees as a preoccupation of the

variable competence model with production of forms. Variability is hinged on the acquisition of structures and not on the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. He felt that the process of this acquisition has not been sufficiently dealt with.

Ellis's (1990) answer to Gregg is cogent, tackling the issues raised with pertinent background information. The important point made by Ellis is that Gregg is basically arguing from a linguist's perspective, one that concentrates on theories rather than what is actually happening. Similarly, in Tarone's (1990) thorough response, she sees Gregg as sticking narrowly to a rationalist approach to second language acquisition.

Both Ellis and Tarone argue that the blurring of performance and competence according to the rationalist's view is not at all undesirable. Ellis goes on to explain that a learner's competence can be variable, just like a native speaker, and in fact more so because the interlanguage is changing all the time in the learner's learning process. What is more, s/he has knowledge of how to use a structure according to the task or situation. Basically, his position as he expresses it is that 'the learner's competence is variable (as a result of anomalous knowledge) and that her proficiency is variable (as manifest in systematic variation according to task and situation). There is also performance variability, which is relatively unpredictable because it arises when slips occur as a result of processing difficulty' (Ellis 1990: 387).

The explanation of acquisition using this variable approach, as seen by Gregg, is a problem because variable rules cannot be a component of interlanguage

competence of a learner. The variation seen is not variable knowledge/competence because it is part of production. Ellis, on the other hand, would prefer to explain the acquisition of L2 from both the functional and the mentalist approaches. Innate knowledge is important, and at the same time, the contribution of the functional, variationist approach cannot be ignored. Concurring with this view, Tarone closes her argument by saying that the 'rationalist approach has been strongest in its ability to point to areas of the grammar which may be innate...' but the variationist approach is able to incorporate this view. At the same time it can 'provide very specific proposals as to how forms are initially assimilated into the IL system and how forms 'spread' over time to new and more complex linguistic contexts and acquire new and more specific functions'. (Tarone 1990: 398)

Basically, Gregg's attack on the variationist approach is one from a mentalist position on a functional one. The two schools of thought bring with them their different understanding of language and language acquisition. Arguing strictly from one position without seeing the other would inevitably result in a stalemate. Progress in the understanding of second language acquisition can only be made if flexibility is adopted, so that the pool of knowledge from both the theoretical and the functional contributions can be widened to help one understand this complex process.

Other criticisms of the Labovian variation model come from more methodological concerns. The use of obligatory contexts as a tool to measure data have since been discredited by researchers. Originally, obligatory contexts were devised by Brown (1973) for the use of mapping the progress in the acquisition of language

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in children. Used for interlanguage variability studies, obligatory contexts have very definite limitations which Bley-Vroman (1983) vehemently pointed out.

His reaction stemmed mainly from a study by Tarone, Frauenfelder, and Selinker (1976) which he regarded as a significant attempt at applying systematicity to actual interlanguage data. They devised a method of looking at what is systematic and what is not, using obligatory contexts as a framework for measuring what is 'correct' and 'not correct'.

He outlines four main criticism:

a) The measure of systematicity described does not discern subcases of obligatory contexts.

b) The definition depends on the accidental statistical structure of the corpus.

c) The applicability of the measure is unknowable because one cannot tell whether the learner is faced with a binary choice.

d) The TFS (Tarone, Frauenfelder, and Selinker) perspective is at odds with sociolinguistic variation theory. (Bley-Vroman 1983: 6)

The first criticism rightly points out that the systematicity measure lumps together all target language obligatory contexts for a single binary opposition. Subsystems are therefore not taken into account. This suggests that many things are at work. But in a case where grammatical items are under investigation, these items are measured against a target language grammar on one system of right or wrong. This becomes a major problem because the interlanguage system cannot

be measured against another system, that is, the first or second language (Jordens 1980, Ellis 1985b). This argument has become increasingly important as greater support for looking at interlanguage from within is mounting. It seems more logical not to assume that variation is predetermined by the target language forms as given strictly in obligatory contexts since it is generally accepted that interlanguage is an idiosyncratic dialect which is systematic because it has its own rules. At the same time it is also unstable because it is changing creatively as it uses rules unique to itself. (Corder 1971)

The second criticism highlights the possible misrepresentation of the systematicity of the learner language. Whether a specific language item is systematic or not depends on chance. If it is used more often then it will affect the statistical structure of the corpus.

As for measuring the unknowable, it is impossible to guess the kinds and types of choices a learner is faced with when s/he attempts to produce the target language. Once again the binary choice system is totally inadequate for describing interlanguage.

Finally, Bley-Vroman's last point criticizes how TFS dichotomised systematicity and variability. As discussed earlier, variability in interlanguage is to be regarded as systematic variation that is an integral part of interlanguage. Bley-Vroman claimed that TFS did not adequately present the two notions as one, that is, systematic variability as part of the system of interlanguage but there is insufficient discussion by him to substantiate this criticism.

Long and Sato (1984) also identified four issues concerning the use of obligatory contexts that need consideration.

a) Researchers should focus on the process, not just the product to obtain their findings. They provide the example of go-went-goed to illustrate that with the product approach, the past tense form 'goed' is at once taken to be incorrect and 'went' as correct without considering the process of acquisition. In the process approach 'goed' would indicate that the learner has successfully learnt to apply the regular past tense marker. This criticism is shared by Bley-Vroman.

b) The function and not just the form of the language has to be considered. A learner may be able to manipulate a form without fully mastering the function of the form.

c) Multiple levels of linguistic analysis are necessary. The move away from morphemes might open areas that could provide scope for a better understanding of what takes place in interlanguage use. Areas such as lexis (Morrison and Low 1983) and cohesion (Tarone 1985) are suggested.

d) There is also a need to look at the context of the learner's performance. What takes place in the context of situation is not detected in the use of obligatory contexts.

These criticisms highlight the limitations of using obligatory contexts as a

means of gauging variability.   The simplicity of the obligatory context system is bound to invite such censure since a language in use is not likely to fall neatly into black and white categories.

However, a modified version of an obligatory context may be useful. In order to judge variation from the expected or the appropriate form, some guidelines must be set and that is where the obligatory context comes in. It could, for example, be modified in the way it is used. Instead of accepting only what is in the obligatory context, variations can be made acceptable if the context of the variations allows them.   Other factors need not be ignored.

Further criticisms of the Labovian model include its being explanatorily inadequate (Bialystok and Sharwood-Smith 1985). The empirical   evidence of variation does not delve into the psychological processes.   Tarone (1985) maintained that the 'attention to language' factor as the cause of style-shifting and hence, variation in language, is a psychological   process. However, she acknowledged that relying solely on the attention factor provides a narrow view of language variation although the attention   factor   might satisfy the psychological requirement. This psychological explanation, as with other ones already discussed, is not absolutely empirically verifiable. There is no definitive way of judging the extent to which one task requires more attention than the next. It is circumstantial.   Wolfson (1976) cogently argues that, indeed, the monitoring of speech is psychological and therefore unclear. Rightly, she despairs of the actual things people monitor when they pay attention to their speech. It is not a one-to-one correspondence between formality of style and the amount of attention

paid to speech. There can be many other factors. Hence, this psychological problem is compounded. Not only is the amount of attention difficult to measure but it is not so easy to equate it with a style.

This criticism is shared by Rampton (1987). He launched a vehement attack on the use of Labov's theory of stylistic variability. Much of the criticism cited by him is actually taken from Gal (1979) and Bell (1984). A summarised version is given below:

a) The results of the white noise experiments on which Labov bases his theory are ambiguous. Bell (1984),who reanalysed the data, found different results.

b) The empirical difficulties involved in measuring attention to speech have been underestimated.

c) The notion that people attend to their speech in order to sound only more formal is questioned.

d) 'The attention-to-speech model is deficient in focusing only on the private states of the speaker;'... 'it ignores the addressee and overlooks the social interaction between them.'

e) This model also 'ignores the speaker's communicative intentions and deemphasizes the rhetorical, symbolic and expressive functions of stylistic variation. It takes no cognisance of impression-management.' (Rampton

1987:47-48)

In short, Rampton's view is that 'what really motivates intra- individual/stylistic variability is the speaker's relationship with the hearer, the meanings he wants to express and the impressions he wants to create.' (Ibid)

These criticisms span many aspects of research. If taken at face- value, they are serious accusations against an approach generally accepted as valid, with some modifications. Therefore, it is vital to give them full consideration.

In response to a) there may or may not be ambiguity in the findings in Labov's study but it is no longer a critical issue. Other studies (refer to studies reviewed in this chapter) have since used this approach to find it yielding systematic variability. The ambiguity in the first instance is no longer as important as proof of the approach's viability.

Issue b) which says that the empirical difficulties are underestimated is a reasonable criticism as initial studies using this attention-to-speech approach focused very narrowly on certain language items. Since the amount of attention cannot be quantified, there are added difficulties.

Issue c) is clearly valid because it is certainly possible for one to monitor one's own speech so that the style becomes more natural, therefore more informal and colloquial. In fact, Trevise and Noyau (1984) reported on a Spanish speaker who did just this to gain acceptance.

Issue d) is not entirely true because the addressee cannot be ignored when the formality level, as defined by this approach, depends on the addressee's relationship with the speaker. However, conceding that this consideration is somewhat superficial, the social interaction between the speaker and the addressee is after all overlooked. There are certainly many other factors involved.

Issue e) is similar to that in d). One possible counterargument would be that the attention-to-speech method did not set out to be a comprehensive measure of variability. It would be an unfair criticism to note all the other aspects of a written/oral interaction that the method has not intended to consider.

Basically, the thrust of Rampton's criticism is that the attention-to-speech approach is simply not an adequate construct to deal with stylistic variability because the speaker-hearer relationship is missing. The contextual social environment is virtually ignored.

Even though the attention factor may not be a good index for stylistic variability, there is a definite link between the activities and the position they hold on the attention-to-speech continuum. What is being represented may not be attention to speech alone but certainly this and other factors do bring about variability. While Rampton has raised many good questions, not all of them are valid.

It is quite clear that the attention-to-speech approach cannot be the sole cause of

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variability. This becomes an important factor in pointing the way for all studies, including this present one, of interlanguage variability. A discussion of studies which have looked beyond the attention factor follows below.

In some of the Labovian-based studies, the attention factor was not the only factor tested. The linguistic context, taken as a variable, was also found to affect the variability of the interlanguage forms. In the earlier studies of the Dickersons (1974, 1975, 1976, 1977) already discussed, the phonological environment made a difference in their results of the learners' pronunciation of /z/, /th/, /r/, and /l/. For instance, the /r/ occurred most frequently immediately before a mid vowel, and less frequently before a high vowel. Dickerson's assumption that the second-language learner begins by using a particular language form indiscriminately in all environments was found to be erroneous. Her results showed that the learner is capable of producing the correct target variant in some or all environments, and variably approximating that form in some or all environments.

In a similar but more recent study by Wolfram (1985), the phonological context is also examined for its influence on variability. He makes a point concerning the surface-level constraints in the linguistic environment affecting variability instead of attributing variation to higher-level constraints such as discourse and pragmatic factors. His concern here is with the use of the past-tense forms in the interlanguage of 16 Vietnamese learners of English. A fuller review of this study appears in a later part of this chapter (3.3.1.2). Basically, Wolfram concludes that it is not enough to just consider the high-level language

organisation without the surface constraints if one hopes to provide an empirically valid account of tense marking alternation in interlanguage.

Another earlier study which looked at the linguistic environment as a source of interlanguage variation is one already discussed. Hyltenstam's (1977, 1978) focus on the linguistic context moved away from the phonological patterns and into grammatical forms.

In a more recent study, Ellis (1988) found further evidence to support the argument for the influence of the linguistic context on interlanguage variability. His longitudinal study of three children, one Portuguese and two Pakistani, acquiring English as a second language, covered a period of two years. Two forms were examined: third person singular -s, and copula -s. He found that the learners were acquiring forms first in one linguistic context which then extended progressively to other contexts. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that what the learners appear to have acquired may be misleading if the criterion for acquisition is based on their ability to fit in with native speaker variable norms.

Although these studies thus reviewed focused on the linguistic context which is already extending beyond the attention factor, there are other theories that bring together a range of other variables.

3.2.2 Socio-Psychological Factors

A significantly different perspective on language acquisition and interlanguage is one that includes socio-psychological factors. This influence of the broader context comes from the studies that consider factors like social distance, attitude and motivation important in the understanding of second language acquisition. Some of these factors will also feature in the main study of this thesis.

One of the more often cited studies using this model of variation is by Meisel, Clahsen, and Pienemann (1981). They look at factors like social distance, attitude, and motivation to gauge the type of strategies that the learners would use in the different situations. The emphasis given to the explanation of variation is individual-oriented. As Tarone (1988) noted, this study omits any explanation for the lack of grammatical accuracy in task-variation performance. However, the type of factors used certainly give an added dimension to variation studies. A recent study by Skehan (1991) surveys developments in language aptitude, motivation, learner strategies, and learner styles. This useful overview of developments brings into focus individual differences in second language learning.

The most prominent group of studies using this socio-psychological approach is the Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT). The principal proponent has been Giles who integrated established social psychological theories and applied them to the study of variation in language use and acquisition. Working with him to develop SAT are linguists Beebe, Bourhis, St. Clair, Genesee,

Lambert, Hildebrand, and many others. (Beebe and Giles 1984, Beebe and Zuengler 1983, Bourhis and Giles 1977, Bourhis, Giles, and Lambert 1975, Hildebrand and Giles 1980, Giles and Smith 1979).

The major determinant of linguistic behaviour, in this approach, is the interlocutor. The concepts of convergence and divergence explain the adjustments made when one's speech comes to resemble that of the interlocutor (convergence) and when it shifts away (divergence). When there is no change, it is a case of speech maintenance, but it is also regarded as a subtype of divergence because it is likened to a failure or a refusal to converge. In this process of speech accommodation a number of linguistic domains can be involved at the same time. They could include phonological, lexical, grammatical, content, and pragmatic changes or variation such as the amount of talk, rate, duration, pause and utterance length, stress, pitch, intonation, etc. These occurrences take place within changes in speech segments referred to as speech shifts as opposed to style shifts which is a term described earlier in the Labovian paradigm (Beebe 1988a).

There are similarities between the two approaches but what the proponents of SAT have pointed out is that the focus in style shifts is very limited (Beebe 1982) because the emphasis has been on phonological differences, grammatical correctness and general grammatical aspects. Furthermore, the attention factor in style shifts is not based on specifically determinable social and social-psychological factors which relate to the individual's identity in a group. Basically, the Speech Accommodation Theory is more comprehensive in its scope that takes

into consideration many factors affecting variation in speech. Many studies have been done using this theory (Natale 1975, Bourhis, Giles, Leyens, and Tajfel 1979, Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire 1982 to just name a few) with each looking into certain aspects of the theory. However, as Tarone (1988) remarked, the major difficulty with this theory is that most of the studies deal with dialect speakers of English in language-contact situations and not with second (or foreign) language learners. But this is an area that the theory is slowly moving into. Other reservations about the Speech Accommodation Theory include criticisms about its reliance on the interlocutor as the main determinant of variation in speech shifts. There could be other reasons such as the need to meet communicative needs of different situations or genres. Hence, the importance for the individual to display convergence or divergence in his/her speech in order to gain or withdraw from some group identity should not be as significant as the theory proposes.

A more recent social-psychological model is the 'discourse domain' model of Selinker and Douglas (1985). Basically this model sees *interlanguage as* domain specific in that the use of language differs with the social context. The range of styles is similarly defined by the amount of attention paid to speech which is a Labovian premise for the variation that occurs in *language*. The *problem* with this model is the difficulty in defining a domain specifically for language scrutiny. As there are natural overlaps between the different domains and the social roles played by the language user, a tight definition of each domain is not easily attainable.

In considering the socio-psychological factors that can account for the variation that occurs in language, the individual factors of the user also contribute to the differences. Some of these factors include motivation, aptitude, personality, attitude, age/maturity, language background, and the learning strategies of the user. While these are important factors for looking at differential success among individual second language learners, its importance is minimized in this study. From the type of studies so far reviewed, individual differences do not appear to be critical in affecting groups of subjects that take part in such studies. If the effect of these differences made a sizeable impact on the individual performance of the learners, there would have been very little systematicity found in the language of learners. As this is not the case, the argument for a diminished role of these individual factors must be maintained.

3.2.3 Functional Approach

This last approach concerning interlanguage variability is perhaps the most useful and practical way of dealing with this issue. Its significance is fully recognised and will be applied to the interpretation of the data in this thesis. The term 'function' has been used to refer to many aspects of the language. One of the more practical ways of defining it, for the purposes of looking at interlanguage variability, is to consider, first of all, Pfaff's (1982) definition. Pfaff made distinctions between three types of functions: semantico-grammatical, pragmatic, and discourse. The semantico-grammatical deals with surface grammatical functions and their underlying semantic functions. The pragmatic functions include notions of assertion, denial, question, command, etc.

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and the discourse functions concern matters like topicality, focus and cohesion in text. This three-way distinction of the term function is too rigid, particularly for the pragmatic and the discourse functions. What is proposed here is a two-way distinction in which the pragmatic and the discourse functions are collapsed into one category owing to the overlap between the two. If discourse is generally taken to be meaning in context, then pragmatics is not very different from looking at language from a discourse perspective except that pragmatics would ensure that the context is not just textual.

One of the studies that Pfaff cited as having a functional approach using the semantic notion is Bickerton's investigation of the use of pidgins and creoles. A more detailed review is found in a later section (3.3.1.3) titled, 'Language Universals and the Bioprogram Hypothesis'. Basically, the bioprogram revolves around the study of verbal tense and aspect using four semantic categories.

Another early study that adopted the functional discoursal approach to interlanguage was Hakuta's (1974a, 1974b, 1975, 1976) investigation of a five-year-old Japanese girl learning English as a second language. He discovered function-form relationships influencing one another over time. The systematicity in the child's language was linked to the identification of 'prefabricated patterns' which are regular, patterned segments of speech. The child could use them at the appropriate situation without knowledge of the underlying structure (Hakuta 1976). Since these segments were invariable they could not be adapted to different situations and were thus prone to misuse in this way. Hakuta believes

that these prefabricated patterns served to express a wide range of functions that the child's linguistic system could not yet handle. These chunks of memorised segments were slowly replaced by another prefabricated form more recently learnt or by more analysed forms as the child's mastery of the language increased. The analysed forms may not necessarily be appropriate or correctly used all the time.

The variability seen in this type of approach occurs when the replacements take place. The process of second-language learning is one that shifts "either toward the maintenance of an internal consistency within the structures which the learner possesses, or in the direction of an external consistency, where the learner attempts to fit the internal system into what is heard in the input." (Hakuta 1976: 331) Hence, with this functional approach, the need for obligatory contexts is obsolete. Only the functional needs for communication are of prime concern and therefore the focus of the variability is not on the target language but the individual interlanguage.

This approach to looking at variability in interlanguage is consistent with earlier established characteristics of an interlanguage which is dynamic and constantly shifting. The process of replacement of language segments also explains the notion of 'backsliding' when there is some form of regression in what has apparently been learnt.

A more recent study by Huebner (1983a, 1985) uses this functional approach in his investigation of an adult Hmong acquiring English. In this longitudinal

study, word order, topic markers, 'da' vs. 0 article, and pronoun vs. 0 anaphora were looked at. He found that 'da' was used in one type of function (classified according to Bickerton's (1981) semantic categories) at the first stage of development, out of four. From the first to the last stage, the use of the 'da' changed its functions with no apparent pattern that relates to linguistic rules in the target language. This seeming unpredictability appears to indicate that the functional needs of the language learner dictate the use of the specific language item.

Parrish (1987) who studied a Japanese ESL learner for her use of the article system over four months used three systems of analysis: Huebner's (1979, 1983b) system based on semantic types, an adaptation of his system, and an analysis based on supplying morphemes in obligatory contexts.

Her results show that the learner's use of articles is not target-like, but neither is it random. Systematicity is found to be governed by the semantic function of noun phrases, lexical categories of noun phrases and attempts to keep linguistically related forms consistent with one another.

The use of obligatory contexts allowed Parrish to make judgements on the accuracy rates of the use of articles. However, this said nothing about the process underlying the changes in the learner's interlanguage. Using Huebner's dynamic paradigm, many of the irregularities in the rate of acquisition of articles were accounted for. This system explained the use of the article in all contexts of pre-noun positions. The system describes 1) the semantic function of each noun

phrase used and which article is used with that noun phrase function; 2) the way in which this article and noun phrase changes over time. Other modifications in the methodology, such as going through the data for lexically determined uses of the article, helped describe the variability.

Tarone (1988), in view of the problems highlighted since her experiment reported in 1985, returned to her data for a reanalysis of the use of articles using the functional approach. Similar to Parrish (1987) Tarone also made use of Huebner's system of analysis based on semantic types. She found more meaningful results to explain the task-related variation in interlanguage. The conclusion was that the single variable, attention to form, was too limited and a complex set of factors were at work. One of these is the communicative function of certain forms in the language and the way the function may vary with the demands of the situation.

A number of other studies that have taken this approach include Pfaff (1987b) who examined the narratives of Turkish pupils learning German; Williams (1987) who looked at the use of subject pronouns by second-language learners of English; and Bartelt (1987) who investigated the use of the marked and the unmarked forms in Navajo English to express the past. They all found that the variation in the use of language forms corresponds with the functional needs of communication and patterns of systematicity could be identified.

An interesting and useful study that brings together a few different approaches to looking at interlanguage variability is the one by R. Young (1988). He

proposed a multivariate model to analyse variation in the acquisition of the English -s pluralization rule by native speakers of Chinese.

This model involves four factors:

a) the situational context;

b) the informants' overall proficiency in English;

c) the semantic and syntactic features of the noun phrase and the phonological environment of the -s plural marker; and

d) the tendency to eliminate redundant marking of number in the same clause.

In the context of situation, variables that are considered important include the type of interlocutor: native speakers or non-native speakers, as well as their social attributes such as ethnicity, age, sex, educational attainment, occupation, and place of origin. The second factor is measured against standardized TOEFL tests. In the linguistic category, two semantic features of nouns are used as measures of variability: definiteness and animacy. The last factor is based on a 'functional hypothesis' proposed by Kiparsky (1972) and Poplack (1980). This hypothesis states that if information concerning the semantic number of the noun can be retrieved from any other part of the surface structure, then there will be a tendency not to mark such information redundantly by means of an -s plural inflection of the noun.

The complex nature of these variables inevitably produced complex results. He found that redundant plural marking on numerals and demonstratives, and adverbials or complements strongly favoured -s plural marking at all levels of

proficiency which is an apparent contradiction of the 'functional hypothesis'. The pattern of marking is more structural rather than functional because instead of having just one inflectional marker of plurality, there is either marking everywhere or nowhere.

There are other patterns which have emerged such as the influence of the proficiency levels of the learners and the related factor of collocation of certain types of words that occur with the plural marking. Also, it was apparent that inanimate nouns favour -s plural marking in the low proficiency group and certain phonological environments.

The main thrust of the findings demonstrates the necessity of looking beyond one factor to explain variation in interlanguage. With the use of more sophisticated tools for the analysis of multidimensional variation by the VARBUL computer program, a more complex representation of interlanguage variability has been possible. (VARBUL is a multivariate procedure applicable to situations of multidimensional variation. Conventional techniques, such as ANOVA, are inadequate in these situations because of the large number of cells containing zero or very few tokens. These cells also represent linguistically impossible or improbable combinations of factors (Young 1988)). The use of probabilistic rules in accounting for variation that might initially appear to be unsystematic is a significant contribution to the field of interlanguage variability.

Another group of functional studies of variability involves the degree of planning time as the main factor of variation, and how this can affect various aspects of

discourse.

Some of the differences noted are discourse aspects such as the way evidence is used to build an argument, measures of complexity in how words, types of clauses, and various parts of speech are used in planned and unplanned spoken language (Danielewicz 1984). Some other studies concentrate on morphosyntactic structures (Ochs 1979). Two more recent studies on planning by Ellis (1987a) and Crookes (1989) are more directly relevant to this study here.

Ellis examined style shifting in the use of three past tense morphemes by 17 intermediate L2 learners of English. He confined his study to one discourse mode, the narrative discourse. Three tasks were set up according to the amount of planning time available to the subjects. Ranging from the most to the least, they were (a) planned writing, (b) planned speech, and (c) unplanned speech.

The three past tense morphemes Ellis looked at were the regular past, irregular past, and past copula 'was' and 'were' (used as main and auxiliary verbs). The three tasks he set up did elicit style shifting but with different results for each of the different morphemes. His principal hypothesis is that past tense forms occur as a product of the difference in opportunities to plan narrative discourse. He found this to be true but not in the same degree of consistency for all the three morphemes. The table below shows the variable accuracy pattern.

	Regular past(%)	Irregular past(%)	Past copula(%)	Total(%)
Task 1	77	60	76	70
Task 2	57	57	75	62
Task 3	43	55	60	54

Task 1 = written narrative

Task 2 = planned oral narrative

Task 3 = unplanned oral narrative

Table 3.1 Overview of accuracy rates (%) (Ellis 1987: 8)

The results here show that for the regular past tense forms there is a definite pattern of decrease in accuracy from Tasks 1 to 3. For the irregular past tense forms, the accuracy rates are more or less constant. As for the past copula, the accuracy levels on Tasks 1 and 2 are very similar, but markedly lower on Task 3.

Ellis provides some reasons for this apparent pattern of variation which he has attributed to style shifting. For the regular past tense forms style shifting occurred consistently across the three tasks. He has suggested that this is owing to the fact that the regular past tense is easy to remember and use when attending to form because it is so simple and regular. However, when the-time given for planning decreases, it is understandable that the learner reverts back to an even simpler form - the base form which is the first verb form that is learnt.

The irregular forms on the other hand, are not as simple as the use of the regular forms. Each irregular form requires a special effort to be remembered as a unique form. However, many of the verbs, such as 'said', 'went', 'stood', 'saw', 'took', are

frequently used. Because they are so well practised, they do not style shift as much. Planning is hypothesized to have less effect on irregular forms.

The past copula's behaviour is not like the other irregular forms in that there is style shifting but not between the three tasks. It is evident only between tasks 2 and 3. Ellis suggests that it is the learner's familiarity with the content that matters and not just the planning time. In his task 3, which is the unplanned oral narrative, a semantic simplification occurs in the majority of cases when there is copula deletion. Examples such as 'The child very upset and he stop,' and ' The child crying' are cited. Since the copula does not carry the meaning of the verb, deletion seems acceptable for the learner as s/he struggles to convey his/her message. Therein lies the difference between the irregular past tense forms and the past copula.

Ellis's study shows very clearly that planning affects the performance of learners on the use of the past tense under different style conditions. The overall accuracy rates demonstrate that there is a systematic variational pattern of style shifting.

However, contrary to Ellis's findings, the planning time is not always a critical factor in affecting the accuracy rates of learners' performance. This was found to be so in a study by Crookes (1989). His study reports on an experiment with 40 Japanese learners of English as a second language performing two tasks with and without planning time. Amongst other things found, what is interesting is that the general measures of accuracy used in his study (such as the number or

length of error-free T-units) did not show significant differences between conditions. The availability of time did not improve the accuracy rates for most of the grammatical items.

The lack of consistency between Crookes's results and Ellis's has prompted the former to highlight some of the possible problems with the latter's study. Crookes points out that the use of a consistent past context for the written and the spoken productions may have sensitized the participants to the past tense forms. At the same time he notes that Ellis's method of counting correct occurrences is problematic. He does not generally count the occasions of correct use of the past tense if they occur after an initial incorrect use. This was earlier noted by Preston (1989). In Crookes's own study, a consideration is made for the fact that the effects of planning may not show up as clearly with learners who have been exposed to the language only through the formal channels as compared with a group of 'exposure-only' learners (Crookes 1989:378). Since his subjects were Japanese, they would have learnt their English primarily through formal instruction. Crookes also mentions the fact that the difference between Ellis's results and his could be accounted for in the learners' level of proficiency. With beginners, such as those in Ellis's study, the effects of planning might be more prominent than if they were intermediate or advanced learners, such as those in Crookes's study.

This functional approach to understanding variability in interlanguage offers a wide range of possible levels of analysis. From just the few studies that have been reviewed here, it is clear that functions can be based on semantic categories,

the communicative needs of the language user, the user's proficiency level, the interlocutor's characteristics, the phonological environment, and so on. The essential point of the functional approach is the change of perspective from the target language in assessing interlanguage to the interlanguage itself. What appears to be unsystematic when compared with the target language might be systematic when the interlanguage is taken on its own terms as was the case in Schachter(1986). She re-examined an earlier study by Cazden, Cancino, Rosansky & Schumann (1975) who investigated five second-language learners' use of negation but at a sentential level. Schachter took the data through a semantic/pragmatic analysis and found that what was initially considered free variability is in fact systematic.

3.2.4 Free Variation

What is of particular interest in this thesis is systematic variability, hence the extensive review on this issue. However, it is important to note that not all variation occurs systematically. Ellis (1985b) has been involved in much of the earlier work in free variation. He found that non-systematic variation occurs not just in the language of learners but also in that of native speakers. For example, native speakers may use certain forms such as /iy/ and /ay/ for 'either', interchangeably (the transciption style is taken from Ellis (Ibid)). This type of occurrence is, however, not frequent compared with the type of free variation found in the language of learners.

Ellis suggests that such free variation found in interlanguage is likely to be part of

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the learning process. It could be that as new forms are acquired, there is a stage when the new forms co-exist with the old ones. Before the learner sorts out the two forms, they function in free variation. When s/he begins to replace the old with the new, this next stage may be more restricted and free variation for this form disappears. One of the usually cited examples of free variation found in Ellis's study is the one with a Portuguese boy learning English (1985b). The utterances:

> No look my card.
> Don't look my card.

were made within minutes of each other. They were uttered in a context where the subject was focused on meaning rather than form. Ellis hypothesizes that this is a case where 'no + V' and 'don't + V' are alternative forms that exist in free variation.

This phenomenon of free variation is one that should not be overlooked as a factor in accounting for some of the variation that occurs in language, in particular interlanguage.

Having provided a general review of interlanguage and interlanguage variability, which covers the development of our understanding of interlanguage from more simplistic approaches to ones that give richer representations of what occurs in interlanguage variability, the review will now move specifically into the area of verbal tense and aspect which is the focus of this study. It will become apparent in this part of the review that in the study of verbal tense and aspect the functional approach is a useful and effective perspective to adopt.

3.3 Verb Tense and Aspect

A prominent characteristic of interlanguage is the absence of tense and aspect marking. It is often cited as a noticeable feature of English L2 acquisition and learning. Hence, it is used here as a measure of interlanguage performance.

The studies that pertain to the understanding of variability in the use of verb tense and aspect are varied and multi-faceted. The question explored here concerns the possible explanation of why tense and aspect are used differently in different situations. However, while not all the studies reviewed here were designed to deal with this issue, they nevertheless make useful contributions that shed light on the present matter.

This part of the review will cover studies that explain the use of tense and aspect at sentence, discourse, and discourse- pragmatic levels.

3.3.1 Non-Discourse Approach
3.3.1.1 L1 Transfer and Interference

To account for the process of second language acquisition the notion of language transfer and contrastive analysis has exerted a major influence especially in the sixties and seventies. Since then, its influence has waned. It would be appropriate to consider the contributions made in this area only with regard to ESL interlanguage studies on tense and aspect marking. Hence, this section is

very short and deals with only a few studies that show some relevance. They are included in acknowledgement of the influence from L1 in the second or foreign language learning process.

It is assumed in the theory of language transfer that most of the difficulties facing the learner of a second language is the result of interference from his native language. Where there are similarities, transfer is positive; where there are differences, transfer is negative. In the case of Chinese L1 learners of ESL, it is believed that because the L1 lacks tense- marking though it marks aspect, the learners tend not to mark tense. Ney (1962), who made a study of tense and aspect errors of some Japanese learners of English, observed that they had little difficulty with this grammatical item. He hypothesized that it was possibly due to the fact that the 'present' and 'past' forms are differentiated in the Japanese verb. Tan (1987) also suggests that this L1 influence is related to the L1 differences between two groups of Singapore Chinese L1 learners of ESL, with two different language backgrounds: the Chinese-educated and the English-educated. (Refer to Chapter One for an explanation of the terms). The percentage of tense errors is allegedly higher for the Chinese-educated than for the English-educated group. However, she concedes that thorough cross-sectional and longitudinal data comparing the different L1 groups of ESL learners are needed. If the different L1 groups are not carefully selected, they could confuse the issues. For a start, the so-called English-educated may not be using English as a first language in the domains outside the school environment.

Studies in L1 influence have not been entirely consistent. While the traditional

assumption is that interference occurs only when a particular aspect of the target language is not found in the first language, research has shown that similarities between the two languages present the greatest problems (Koutsoudas and Koutsoudas 1962).

However, it is very easy to lay blame on the L1 transfer for all types of learner difficulties. That alone does not account for the variability that takes place in the learner's interlanguage. Concurring with Tan (1987) it seems that using the transfer theory as a blanket explanation for all sorts of difficulties is superficial and inadequate. This is especially so since studies in language universals and language development have provided a serious challenge to the L1 transfer and interference phenomenon (Romaine 1988). By itself, it was found to be a poor predictor of learner errors. The studies in developmental errors, notably those of Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974b), showed a large percentage of errors (85%) attributable to developmental errors and a negligible 3% to interference. However, these results have not been replicated to such a high proportion but, they do indicate that the L1 transfer and interference theory should not occupy central position in the explanation of tense-aspect variability. Furthermore, the problem of interpreting the results lies in the difficulty of distinguishing interference from developmental errors. As suggested by Romaine (1988), the influence from the first language is perhaps stronger in the early stages of L2 development, rather than later when more target language resources are available to the learner.

The need to search beyond the reliance on L1 transfer and interference for

explanation is further motivated by the fact that interlanguage should be recognised on its own merit.

3.3.1.2 Morphophonemic Considerations

Another non-discourse approach to understanding tense-aspect variability involves looking at the surface linguistic environment surrounding the verbs.

Wolfram (1985) (first reviewed in an earlier part of this chapter, section 3.2.1) studied the interlanguage of 16 Vietnamese learners of English, aged between 10 and 55. They had resided in the United States for 1 to 7 years. Informal interviews were conducted with each subject for about an hour and then transcribed.

He showed that there are systematic constraints which favour or inhibit the variable marking of tense and that these constraints are an essential dimension of the dynamic process of tense marking in interlanguage. He named a number of constraints:

a) regular and irregular verb forms;

b) phonological form of regular and irregular forms;

c) phonological context; and

d) the frequency of the verb form.

A number of studies (Dulay and Burt 1974a; 1974b; Krashen 1982) cited by Wolfram, and including his own here, demonstrate a preference for marking

irregular forms. There is general consistency in most studies showing this pattern of marking past tense. However, Wolfram goes on to elaborate on the neccessities of considering the phonological shapes of the past tense forms because the regular and the irregular past tense forms have different phonological structures. He illustrates with a discussion of just the regular past tense forms.

Wolfram considered three phonological shapes: consonant clusters (the /t/ or /d/ following a voiceless or voiced consonant as in kissed /kIst/), /d/ singletons, and the 'long form' /Id/ (the transcription style originally appears in Wolfram's study). To explain how these phonological shapes behave differently, the phonological context has to be considered in conjunction with the grammatical. When a grammatical process such as past tense marking and a phonological process function independently to produce the same surface form, then a situation called 'convergent processes' occurs. It is also possible that just one of these processes dominates at various stages of language learning.

Looking at the case of consonant clusters, it was found that cluster reduction is favoured when the following word begins with a consonant rather than a nonconsonant, eg. kissed me is more likely to become /kis me/ than for 'kissed it' to become /kis It/. A way of checking whether one or both the phonological and/or grammatical processes are at work is to look at what Wolfram calls lexical clusters which appear to be nonverbs (he has not defined them explicitly), eg. list or wind. If the phonological process is more dominant then cluster reduction will occur irrespective of whether the words belong to lexical clusters

or past tense clusters. Wolfram found that the grammatical process appears to be stronger than the phonological. The words belonging to lexical clusters were less likely to be affected by cluster reduction than past tense clusters. It means that the learners were aware of the need to mark nouns in lexical clusters despite any phonological difficulty. However, in the later stages the phonological processes seemed to show greater significance.

The next phonological shape, the final consonant /d/, is affected by an additional factor. This particular phoneme does not have an isomorphic correspondence in the L1 which is Vietnamese. But, there is a voiceless counterpart /t/ which is close to the /d/ and when the absence or presence of /d/ is monitored, the /t/ is usually considered a realisation of /d/. Therefore, with this phoneme the absence of /d/ should be less than other types of final consonants. Given this consideration, Wolfram also found that the lexical /d/ deletion is much less prominent than it is for the past tense /d/. Hence, the grammatical process is stronger than the phonological process in this convergence of processes.

As for the long past tense form /Id/, the outcome is similar to the other two phonological shapes. The absence of the past tense forms is quite high, ranging from 61% to 88%, for the whole range of subjects based on their length of residence in the United States. In contrast, the phonological elision on lexical /Id/ forms such as stupid /stupId/ and hundred /hundrId/ is quite infrequent where the percentage for one of the two groups of subjects is 12% (no mention has been made of the other group).

It appears that the variable marking of the regular past tense form is not so easily placed into one unitary type and that there are phonological and grammatical constraints acting upon it. Given these constraints to explain the behaviour of the regular past tense form, it is necessary to compare it to the irregular forms. It has been mentioned earlier that the irregular forms are more frequently marked than the regular forms. A possible reason for this is explained by Wolfram.

To study the behaviour of irregular verb types, five most frequently-occurring irregular verbs: be, have, do, come, and go, were classified into four categories: 1) suppletive forms (is/was); 2) internal vowel changes plus a regular suffix (do/did); 3) internal vowel change (come/came); 4) final consonant replacement (do/did). He found that the non-marking of the past tense was greatest for replacive forms, followed by internal vowel change, then internal vowel change with a regular suffix, and the most frequently marked form was the suppletive types. The principle of saliency appears to apply to this hierachy of phonetic distance in the past irregular formation. In other words, the more distant phonetically the past tense irregular form is from the non-past, the more likely it will be marked for tense. There is, however, some individual deviation from this ordering.

If this saliency factor applies to the marking of the past tense for the various levels of irregularity in irregular verbs, it is not clear why it should not apply to the regular past tense forms. Wolfram makes use of two separate sets of explanations for the two categories of verbs. It seems possible that this same explanation may be used when comparing the non-marking of regular with the irregular past

tense forms. Since the regular past tense forms are phonetically closer to the non-past, it should follow that they are marked less frequently than the irregular forms. Greater effort is required to memorize the "deviant" forms and hence, they are more easily remembered. Conversely, applying the set of possible explanations used for the marking of the regular past tense forms to that used for the irregular forms is not so simple since finding the lexical equivalents to check if phonological or grammatical processes are at work is very difficult. Hence, what Wolfram offers is dichotomized and not entirely complete in its explanation of the variation in past tense marking.

Although Wolfram strongly advocates the importance of surface constraints in the explanation of the marking of past tense verbs, paying particular attention to the phonological shape of the verb, the phonological context, and the frequency of the verb form, his study shows that grammatical processes in no way play an insignificant role. But, as Wolfram himself emphasizes, tense marking is not easily explained by one factor alone. While he has explored one linguistic level, there are still other levels that may provide a fuller explanation.

In another study which also concentrates on the morphophonemic environment of past tense forms, Platt (1977) set out to consider the acquisition of "standard" past tense marking by 42 Singaporeans with different levels of English-medium education. It was also his aim to demontrate that the acquisition of categorical past tense marking is highly implicational and therefore scalable. Data were collected from half-hour interviews with each subject, focusing on eight verb types: 1) get; 2) be; 3) go; 4) have; 5) consonant plus ed

(start/started); 6) vowel plus d(try/tried); 7) vowel change (break/broke); 8) consonant plus d/t (pass/passed).

The order in which the past tense forms have been marked for the above verbs, from the highest frequency to the lowest, is:

whole group	above GCE
get	get
be	be
go	consonant +ed
consonant +ed	vowel change
have	go
vowel change	have
vowel +d	vowel +d
consonant +d/t	consonant +d/t

It is difficult to compare these results with Wolfram's for many reasons. To begin with, the verb categories are not entirely similar. Platt does not distinguish between regular and irregular verbs, unlike Wolfram. For instance, Wolfram included only three phonological verb types for the regular past-tense forms. Platt, on the other hand, also has three categories (consonant +ed, vowel +d, and consonant +d/t) but they are not equivalents since these categories can include irregular verbs as well. Similarly, where Wolfram chose five most frequently used verbs to talk about irregular past tense forms, Platt does not single out irregular verbs alone but there are some verbs that overlap with Wolfram's list.

Comparisons are difficult, given this lack of direct correspondence, but nonetheless, there is some consistency. In Wolfram's study, the irregular verbs are the most frequently marked. Generally, most of Platt's irregular verbs belong in the upper end of the marked forms except for 'have'. Where Wolfram's regular clusters are the least often marked, Platt's equivalent consonant +d/t are also the least marked. The only category that shows the greatest discrepancy is Wolfram's regular /d/ and Platt's equivalent of vowel +d. Wolfram found that his subjects were marking these verbs more than his other regular past tense verbs, whereas in Platt's study, this category proved to be one of the least frequently marked past tense verbs. The last comparable category is Wolfram's regular /Id/ and Platt's consonant +ed. This category falls in the middle for both studies. A loose comparison of the categories reveals some degree of similarity at the extreme ends of the scale. The most frequently marked verbs are generally the irregular verbs and the least frequently marked verbs are the regular clusters or consonant +d/t.

From the results of these two studies, there seems to be an argument for the influence of the phonological shapes of the past tense verbs in the marking or non-marking of the past tense forms. However, these broad categories should be further defined. It is not adequately discriminating to just consider individual words. In connected speech, there is greater variation in the pronunciation of sounds. For example in British English, with consonants such as the alveolar plosives, elisions are common. When the /t/ or /d/ is the middle one of three consonants and has the same voicing as the first consonant of the sequence,

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elision takes place. It is common in such examples as 'next day', 'raced back', 'last chance', 'first light', 'moved back', 'gazed past', 'served sherry', 'finished late', etc. (Gimson 1989)

Whether or not the first language has certain equivalent phonemes also affects the frequency of the past tense marking. And although the influence of the 'principle of saliency' has not produced results that are entirely consistent, there is some indication that learners produce the past tense forms for the frequently used irregular verbs more readily than the regular ones. All these surface constraints, which will also be considered in this current study, cannot be ignored in the explanation of variable tense marking in interlanguage.

3.3.1.3 Language Universals and the Bioprogram Hypothesis

The bioprogram hypothesis, put forward by Bickerton (1981), brings together language acquisition, and the development of pidgins and creoles. Providing a definition of a pidgin and a creole is necessary but difficult since there is considerable disagreement amongst linguists on this matter. Some definitions are based on function, some on historical origins, and other ones on more formal linguistic aspects. But, basically a pidgin represents a language which has been stripped of everything but the bare essentials necessary for communication (Romaine 1988). A creole, originally referring to a person of European descent born and raised in a tropical or subtropical country, now applies to certain languages spoken by creoles (now including indigenous natives and others of non-European origin) in and around the Caribbean and West Africa. Other

languages which have also arisen under similar circumstances are also called creoles (Ibid.).

Although the interlanguage in this study is neither a pidgin nor a creole, it has been claimed that pidgins and/or creoles share a number of features in common with first and second language acquisition. Similarities in linguistic structures found in child and pidgin/creole grammars, and similarities in process such as in the developmental stages characterising acquisitional phases provide reasons for drawing parallels. One of the most important similarities is the notion of variation and change. Both the interlanguage and the creole continua are not static and in fact vary and change in different ways.

Bickerton sees pidginization as second language acquisition with restricted input and creolization as first language acquisition with restricted input (Bickerton 1977). He based his controversial bioprogram hypothesis on the view that language acquisition follows universal principles. It reflects Bickerton's belief that 'the semantic distinctions whose neural-infrastructure was laid down first in the course of mammalian development will be the first to be lexicalized/grammaticalized in the course of human development' (Romaine 1988: 257). It means that if a creole-like language is the product of a long period of biological evolution, it is part of the genetic inheritance of every individual member of the species to produce language of this type.

Although the bioprogram hypothesis remains highly controversial owing in part to the rigid set of data used as evidence and the fact that this hypothesis is still

undergoing revision, it offers another approach to looking at interlanguage variability. An added reason for exploring this approach is that the morphophonemic factors do not explain the non-marking of verbs that undergo vowel change in the past tense. It is particularly relevant to the topic of verbal tense and aspect since much of the bioprogram is devoted to this grammatical category. This approach to language understanding is essentially semantic, as opposed to syntactic, as in Chomsky's notion of 'core grammar'. The bioprogram contains four semantic distinctions:

a) specific/non-specific

b) state/process

c) punctual/non-punctual

d) causative/non-causative.

Two of the four categories, the state/process and the punctual/non-punctual distinctions, apply directly to verbal tense/aspect. The state/process distinction is basically the difference between verbs used statively such as 'like', 'seem', and verbs like 'work' and 'hit'. The punctual/non-punctual verbs further define non-stative verbs. Punctual verbs describe actions that happen once in one instance eg. Tom kicked the door. Non- punctual verbs are like punctual verbs but the action is iterative or has some form of continuation in the action, eg. John kicked a record number of goals this season; or we talked for hours that day.

The other two categories, the specific/non-specific and the causative/non-causative distinctions, will not be discussed since they concern other language categories which are not dealt with in this thesis.

In addition to the four semantic distinctions, Bickerton (1975) proposes that the creole verb expresses one tense opposition [+ anterior], one aspectual opposition [+ punctual], and one modality distinction [+ irrealis]. These three aspects of the verb become the basic semantic categories that human beings use in their verbal representation of the world around them. These categories operate in communicative events

a) to show the temporal order of the occurrence of the past events,

b) to tell whether an event occurred once or is protracted, and

c) to distinguish between sensory input and one's own imagination. (Romaine 1988)

Using this bioprogram hypothesis, Platt and Ho (1988) analysed Singapore English and discovered that the variable marking of verbs for past tense is not merely a surface morpho-syntactic problem. They recorded interviews with 100 ethnically Chinese speakers with five different levels of English-medium education. They found that the non-stative verbs used non-punctually had the lowest scores for marking past tense amongst all the five groups. For some of the verbs the degree of marking for past tense went up significantly when this same set of verbs was used punctually. They came to the conclusion that Singaporean Chinese are more inclined not to mark past tense on verbs used statively or non-punctually in their spoken English.

The + or - anteriority feature mentioned earlier is a device that "alerts the listener to backward shifts of time in a narrative or a conversation, thus enabling him to

preserve the correct sequence of reported events..." (Bickerton 1981:286), eg. after he <u>had sold</u> his old typewriter he bought a word processor. Often +anteriority is indicated in English by the use of the perfect aspect. Platt and Ho illustrate how this distinction appears to operate in two passages where the verbs marked for past tense were the ones that were anterior to other events, and conversely, those which depicted habitual actions in an ordered sequence were not marked. However, these passages provided extremely limited data on which to base any solid conclusion about the function of the anterior distinction. Furthermore, there is a certain amount of subjectivity as to how anteriority is defined.

This use of semantic categories to explain the marking of tense and aspect in interlanguage adds a further dimension to the understanding of this aspect of language. Bickerton's semantic approach is useful not just as a means of tracing the manner of development of tense, aspect, and mood in pidgins and creoles but it has also provided the basis of analysis in the more recent studies of interlanguage variability, reviewed in the earlier section 'Functional Approach'.

3.3.2 Discourse Approach

In this section, the issue of interlanguage variability is examined in the larger context of its use. So far, only a limited use of the context has been made, focusing on the linguistic context or the anteriority feature of the verb. 'Discourse' for the purposes here refers to a contextual use of a whole discourse as opposed to looking at discrete items of a language.

Much of what is reviewed in this section is not directly related to the topic in this present thesis. However, it is useful to consider these studies, if only briefly, since they provide the broader perspective on how tense and aspect function in discourse.

Basically, the studies in this section focus on the use of the simple past tense and the present historic. The genre used in most of these studies is the narrative.

One of the first studies of this nature is Godfrey's (1980) investigation of adult second language learners' error rates against their proficiency level. He found that the tense continuities were affected by the topic changes in the text. Using a modified method originally proposed by Chafe (1972), Godfrey judged tense continuities according to topically relevant tenses. This means that once a tense is used representing a particular temporal reference central to the topic, the tense will continue until the topic with which it is associated is exhausted. The new topic is then initiated by a new tense which is in turn accompanied by a temporal or other adverbial.

Results show that the learners were distracted by the intrusion of forms immune to continuity such as timeless generics. Subtopics also distracted the learners from retaining the identity of the continuity. Attention to manipulating complex or newly acquired structures and selecting from an increasingly varied lexicon created some degree of difficulty. Other minor factors affecting tense continuity include the deliberate maintenance of tense and attention paid to extralinguistic details at episode boundaries.

This study can be criticised for its multitude of variables. There were five proficiency levels based on scores on a placement test. Although no details were given of specific cut-off points for each level, five levels might be too many for clear breaks in the proficiency continuum. Also, the number of subjects were spread too thinly at each proficiency level and having four or five at each level is rather limited. Finally, the term 'episode boundary' is not defined which makes a replication of this study difficult..

Kumpf (1982) took a similar approach to Godfrey in looking at higher level organisation to explain interlanguage tense and aspect. Her study revolves around one Japanese subject who learnt English by contact. Her data consisted of a conversational narrative. Kumpf found that completed action in the foreground was expressed with the base verb form. Verbs used in the background were marked, with the majority of the stative verbs marked for tense and the active verbs marked for habitual and continuous aspect, and only irregularly for tense.

In an attempt to replicate this study, Wolfram and Hatfield (1986) found that Kumpf's narrative foregrounding and backgrounding did not occur in their learners' oral and written discourse. The obvious danger with Kumpf's study is her singular subject who cannot be the basis for universal application.

However, there are other studies which hold to this understanding of verb tense and aspect having the function of providing foregrounding and backgrounding information in narratives (Hopper 1979, Hopper and Thompson 1980). Tan

(1987, first discussed in section 3.3.1.1, on the subject of L1 transfer) more recently also studied this function of verb tense/aspect with Singapore subjects but focusing on where tense-switching occurred, and not on the marking and non-marking of tense and aspect. The foregrounding and backgrounding factor appeared to play a significant role in highlighting and segmenting narrative information.

Wolfson (1982), who also examined the issue of tense-switching, focused on native speakers of American English, and not second language learners. She came to the conclusion that tense-switching from the simple past to the present historic and vice versa was typical of the conversational narratives she had her subjects relate, even though it was possible to narrate entirely in the past. There was no violation of discourse level constraints as the speakers maintained a high level of control over the use of the historical present. The tense-switching served to introduce new events or separate the episodes in the narrative.

Schiffrin (1981), who expanded on Wolfson's study, looked at 73 narratives which produced complex results.

a) Clauses were classified into different types and the present historic was restricted to mainly one type, the complicating action clauses which tell the story by relaying a series of temporally-ordered narrative events.

b) There was a tendency for verbs in the same tense to cluster together with hardly any tense alternation between the present historic and the past.

c) It was rare for the subjects to tell the story entirely in the past tense.

d) In sentences with subordinate when-clause the past tense was almost always

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used both in the when-clause and in the head clause because in these cases they represented one event.

e) In coordinated clauses, there is less tense-switching in verbal coordination than in clausal coordination.

f) The frequency of tense-switching increased when clauses were introduced by temporal conjunctions.

g) Lastly, the direction of tense-switching made a difference. Switching from the historic present to the past is more frequent than staying in the past when the clauses were introduced by temporal conjunctions. And the presence or absence of temporal conjunctions had no influence over the switching of the past tense to the historic present nor the maintenance of the past tense.

In this discourse approach, the macro view of looking at the possible causes for the difficulties learners have in using tense and aspect have concentrated on tense-switching in narratives which does not pertain directly to interlanguage variability. But, in looking at the tense/aspect behaviour of the learners in these studies, the importance of considering the factors outside the sentence level constraints is highlighted. All of the studies reviewed relied heavily on the context which was helpful in providing possible factors for explaining both problems in the use of tense and aspect as well as the path of the language development. What is particularly relevant for the current study is the function of the temporal adverbial and its effects on the use of tense and aspect. While there are some problems with the methodology of some of the studies which are difficult to replicate, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the contextual differences in the discourse affect the use of tense and aspect. In addition,

Schiffrin combined both the discoursal elements with the grammatical factors to show their effect on tense and aspect.

3.3.3 Pragmatic Approach

This last approach encompasses a vast area of research whose definition defies conciseness. However, the potential strength of diversity in definition might better serve the purposes of this study. Hence, Verschueren's definition suffices:

> ...pragmatics is a perspective on any aspect of language,
> at any level of structure. The foundation for the coherence
> of this perspective we should be looking for is the notion
> of functionality,... (1987: 5)

This view of pragmatics allows one to interpret and thereby understand the different aspects of language from the various perspectives or disciplines of linguistic theory.

How this definition is particularly useful is its flexibility to accommodate the functional notion reviewed in an earlier section under the general discussion of interlanguage systematicity and variability. What is central to these two approaches is the reliance on the context to explain all aspects of language as a function of communication.

Milroy (1987) did just that when she investigated linguistic differences between different areas of Belfast, between different social and cultural groups, and between men and women, as well as differences between the

characteristics of particular linguistic variables. She compared two approaches: Labov's and Gumperz's. The former tends to see a variational phenomenon from a macro perspective and the latter from a micro, descriptive, situational perspective. She found that the former, while useful, is not as comprehensive in its explanatory features as the latter.

Wildner-Bassett (1989), who embraces such a pragmatic approach, makes a list of all the groups of factors to be considered in a pragmatic analysis of situations especially in second language acquisition. They include:

a) participants: sex, age, social role, hierarchical status, authority, and familiarity;

b) setting: time and place;

c) the why and wherefore: the reason for the meeting, discussion, or interaction;

d) contextual restrictions: *of sequentialization and stylistic homogeneity;*

e) concomitant activity: e.g. gestures, facial expressions. (Ibid: 253)

While these elements are important in an interaction, they are still only part of what can be considered under pragmatics. The studies reviewed here will demonstrate this. An interesting consideration and an extension of point (c) 'why and wherefore' is the user's subjective understanding of a task or situation. This point was raised by Kasper and Dahl (1991) in a review of methods of data collection employed in 39 studies of interlanguage pragmatics. The results can obviously be affected by the user's understanding. The search to find a way to consider many factors and at the same time make relevant

generalisations goes on.

In this section, the studies will be shown to adopt an approach not entirely different from that in the previous section. These two sections remain separate for a convenient reason. All the studies reviewed under 'discourse' have used narratives as a source and reason for investigating tense/aspect. The focus was on the use of the discourse as explanation for linguistic patterns, while the pragmatic approach takes on even more contextual elements in its explanatory process.

With regard to applying the pragmatic approach to the tense/aspect issue, more recent research in tense/aspect and temporality has supported such a move. As cited in Schumann (1987), several European researchers such as Klein 1981; Dittmar 1982; von Stutterheim 1982; Aksu, Dittmar, Klein, & von Stutterheim 1982; and Perdue 1984 have shown that tense/aspect is quite divorced from the notion of temporality. Temporality can be expressed in learner varieties that lack inflectional morphology and even verbs. Hence, various means of conveying temporality are used to convey time, certainly in ways beyond the limited parameters of verb tense and aspect.

Perdue (1982), in an extensive study of adult immigrants in Europe learning a second language in their respective countries of abode, relied on more pragmatic functions of temporality to investigate time reference and verb use. It was the situational context or the general knowledge of the speech partners that provided the time reference. In all the languages of the project, the devices used to indicate

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reference times and temporal relations were tense systems, time adverbials, and discourse principles. The results show that inflection seems to have been acquired very late; the tense usage in descriptive grammars was often not very reliable; and the tense usage appeared to depend on or is linked to specific discourse types. Generally, tense played a minor role in the early stages with the adverbials taking over the role of providing reference times and temporal relations. With regard to the nature of the acquisition problem and the use of adverbials, no details will be given here since they are not directly related to the theme being discussed, nor are they directly relevant for the acquisition of English as a second language. What is more significant is how the subjects used discourse principles to convey temporal meaning. They were found to rely on features of discourse such as the linear order of clauses which is absolutely essential in narrative, their knowledge of the world, and other more general pragmatic principles such as the Gricean maxims.

Dittmar (1981) also proposed the use of a tentative pragmatic framework consisting of conversational principles for his study of tense markers in German by Spanish migrant workers. His work demonstrated the inadequacy of the traditional grammatical analysis of tense to account for the wide range of expressions for temporal relations. However, owing to the exploratory nature of the study, he could only draw a tentative conclusion that basic semantic and pragmatic aspects of the language have a greater effect on the language production of subjects than the exact matching of the second language to the target language (for the elicited translation task), or the frequency of occurrence, etc. But, the realisations of tense could involve other types of strategies which are part

of his goal to describe. They could include overgeneralisation, avoidance, circumlocution, hypercorrectness, over- and underspecification, reduction of redundancy, particular semantic compensation strategies, etc.

With Wallace (1982) the focus of emphasis was the interrelationships between linguistic categories. He believes that one cannot begin to understand the meaning of a linguistic category until one comprehends its function in a text. The discussion in this paper became the basis for many other studies that took the discourse approach to understanding grammatical categories. Although Wallace considered many types of linguistic categories, the most salient point singled out for the discussion here is his approach to the interpretation of the present and the past tenses. He argued that the distinction between the present and the past tense is not so much temporal as it is modal: " immediate-direct-certain 'present' mode versus remote-indirect- hesitant 'past' mode" (Wallace 1982: 203). This notion is shared by a few other people such as Rauh (1983) who sees tense as deictic. The temporal dimension pulls together the coding time and the other time intervals. Similarly with Bach (1981) the pragmatic approach to understanding time, tense and aspect involves not just the time of utterance but also the time of evaluation. It is in the context of what is happening at the time of evaluation in terms of the language user's understanding, knowledge, and background that gives the temporal framework to the use of tense and aspect. In this sense it is deictic.

Before focusing on a closely related contribution to this approach to tense and aspect, one more point has to be made concerning Wallace's treatment of

this subject. The deictic nature of tense and aspect functioning in discourse could be seen to be used as foregrounding and backgrounding devices. This feature has already been dealt with in the last section and will not be discussed again here, except to say that it is a natural extension of the deictic quality of tense and aspect.

This use of the deixis in tense has been extensively considered by many researchers. Already highlighted are two views of tense deixis which rely heavily on the context of the situation to give tense its temporal deictic meaning. However, while more researchers (Rauh 1983, Parret 1983, D. Young 1988) share the view that the deixis is an essential part of tense, some would look at it from another perspective. Lo Cascio (1986) argues that the deixis is time-related. Tenses always give sequential relations; time adverbials give sequential relation and quantification of temporal distance as well; and duration is independent of sequential relation. Richards (1989) recognises that there are two ways of sorting out the semantics of tense and temporal quantification; one which sees temporality as an essential part of tenses and temporal quantifiers, and the other which sees temporal reference as irrelevant. However, he has found the second to be more useful in his explanation of tense and time adverbials. While there is no dispute as to the tense deixis, it does seem rather limited to use the context for just deictic temporal interpretations. Richards admits that tensed sentences are 'in a sense context sensitive' (Ibid: 14) and he does note that there can be non-temporal deictic relations as well. Semantic relations of tense and temporal quantifiers can easily be confined to certain rigid meanings if one chooses to make limited assumptions about tense as Lo Cascio has done. But if tense and temporal quantifiers are regarded as part of the entire

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discourse, many more contextual factors have to be considered. It is this view that is more appealing to the pragmatic-oriented researchers who go beyond the confines of time-centred tense explanations.

The move away from looking at verb tense and aspect prescriptively includes the literature that advocates the discourse view for pedagogic purposes. One such contribution is found in Pennington (1988) who emphasizes the need to not view tense as temporal in nature. Similarly Fleishman (1989) thoroughly shares this view in her paper on temporal distance. Tense, as seen as operating in a functional model of language, carries not only referential functions of locating events in time, but also pragmatic functions. She argues that temporal distance can operate along conceptual or cognitive axes depending on the language. Modality, assertiveness, social/interpersonal distance, evidentiality, and speaker subjectivity are the types of pragmatic functions that tense can be used for. This broadened view of tense can better account for some of the quirks in the language.

Without using as extensive a range of pragmatic tense functions as Fleishman, Lewis (1986) and Riddle (1986) explain tense in a similar way. By removing the basic assumption of time, present, past, or future, something else has to fit in to give tense meaning. What is suggested is the use of the context surrounding the verb to explain its use. The gist of this discourse view is that the tense plus the context can express a certain temporal or aspectual meaning such as repetition, habit, or generality. The tenses themselves do not carry such specific meanings. The 'pure' tenses such as the simple present and past are unmarked

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for time. As Lewis elaborates:

> The essential characteristics of the "present simple"
> is that it expresses the speaker's view of the event as
> a timeless fact. Paradoxically, not only is the present
> simple not about Present Time, but it is not about time
> at all. This is a characteristic which it shares with
> "the past simple". Each of these forms is "simple" in
> the sense that the speaker sees the events described as
> single, simple entities, unities, totalities. The
> "present simple" and "past simple" contrast with each
> other in that in the first the speaker sees the event
> as immediate, and with the "past simple" the event is
> seen as remote... (Lewis 1986: 66)

As for the perfect aspect, what Lewis calls the 'third form of the verb with (have)' (Ibid: 75), it is explained as having limited retrospection. The present perfect looks back from the point NOW and the past perfect from a particular point BEFORE NOW or in the past time. Further restrictions can be provided by adverbials or other contextual cues eg. 'I haven't seen him for 3 months/since I last met you' (Ibid: 77). The traditional explanation that suggests that the present perfect refers only to the recent past does not provide a true picture of the use of the present perfect. Given this approach, the context is just as important for understanding the present perfect as it is for the pure tenses.

Lewis (Ibid: 38,47) provides examples such as:

I speak quite good French. - Present for general time

We leave at 4 o'clock tomorrow. - Present for future time

What name was it please? - Past for present time

to demonstrate that tense does not always fit nicely into the time specified by

the tense itself. Not only that, one of the traditional approaches of dealing with these quirks is to label them as various categories of exceptions. For instance the present tense is supposed to be used to refer to the habitual, timeless, future, and factual, in addition to the present time. This explanation only serves to confuse the learner and does not provide a clear cut way of dealing with tense and time. Lewis's use of contextual discourse to help define tense and its temporal reference point appears to make good sense since it is the context that gives tense its meaning. The studies below will illustrate and effectively support this approach.

A study which is critical to the development of this thesis is one by Schumann (1987). He examines temporality in the basilang speech (the earliest stage of second language development) of adult learners. In this study, five subjects were used. They had all gone to the United States as adults and lived there for at least ten years, acquiring English largely without instruction. The sample consisted of one Chinese, one Japanese and three Spanish speakers. The expression of temporality is considered from three perspectives: morphology, semantics, and pragmatics.

In the first analysis, Schumann used what he calls target-like use (TLU) analysis which is a modification and improvement on the obligatory context analysis. This means that TLU considers all contexts where a morpheme is used and not just the context in which it is required. In this analysis, he found that the subjects generally lacked verb phrase morphology and were far from expressing temporality by means of the English tense system.

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In the semantic analysis, the work of Bickerton (1975) on creole language and Kumpf's (1982) research were used. The details of both studies have been covered in the previous section of this review. Schumann's conclusions are that 'while aspectual distinctions are possible in basilang speech, they do not characterize the interlanguages of the subjects and may, in fact, be atypical of basilang speakers in general.'

Finally, it is in the pragmatic analysis that Schumann found some way of describing the means of expressing temporality in the speech of the subjects. He used four categories to talk about temporal reference: adverbials (now, tomorrow, always, prepositional phrases), serialization (the fixing of a temporal reference point and allowing the sequence of utterances to reflect the actual temporal order of reported events), calendric reference (dates, days of the week, months, and numbers), and implicit reference (temporal reference inferred from a particular context or situation). His conclusion from the three analyses is that temporal reference is made by discourse pragmatics alone. Verb morphology which exists in basilang speech is not used to make aspectual nor tense distinctions. It is basically unsystematic.

Exploring this pragmatic-functional approach are three more studies that have developed this notion further. The first of these is by von Stutterheim and Klein (1987) who discussed at length the idea of a concept-oriented approach to second language studies with particular reference to temporality and temporal reference in language. Their basis for this idea stems from the understanding that

'Every utterance, no matter what communicative purpose it fills, involves the expression of various concepts such as temporality, modality, and locality' (Ibid: 194). As a second language learner, s/he does not have to acquire the underlying concepts but only the specific means of expressing them. S/he has options of marking a specific feature in the language and there are basically three:

a) selective versus obligatory marking within a given utterance;

b) implicit or explicit marking where implicit means are left to some principle of contextual inference;

c) the choice of a specific linguistic device.

(summarised from Ibid:195)

These options are influenced by conceptual categories, three of which are discussed. One criterion is the degree to which a particular temporal category can be conveyed implicitly since in most cases a temporal reference must be established explicitly. The first language must affect the choice of devices since the first encounter with the marking of a specific language aspect will influence selection in the second language. The final factor is the learner's need to express complex temporal structures in discourse since s/he has already mastered the means of doing so in the first language.

How learners encode temporal reference is divided into two types: the explicit representation by means of lexical or grammatical devices, and the use of pragmatic devices where the temporal component is not overt. It is the second one that they focus on and which is categorised into discourse organisation principles and implicit reference. The most important of the discourse organisation principles is the principle of chronological order. This appears to

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be heavily relied upon by learners since the order of events can help organise discourse significantly, especially in narratives. The second principle is the bracketing principle which basically describes the temporal embedding that allows a number of time frames to operate together at different levels. The user can return to an earlier time frame after having gone into another time frame.

With the implicit reference, there are two categories: inherent temporal reference and associative temporal reference. The first refers to inferred temporal meaning from specific semantics of a verb or noun group. The example below is used to illustrate this point:

(1) Turkey vacation come back, my husband ill.
(2) Turkey vacation, my husband ill. (Ibid: 201)

There is no overt temporal relation between the two events, but the two sentences are clearly saying two different things. What is different is the "come back" which implies the temporal boundary for the first part of the first sentence. Whereas the second sentence is not interrupted and hence there is only one time frame to interpret the two events. This method of implying temporal reference makes use of the organisation of utterances such as chaining, framing, and contrasting, based on the inherent aspectual characteristics of lexical items denoting events, states, and processes.

The associative temporal reference is based on shared knowledge that makes it possible to interpret the utterance.

Von Stutterheim and Klein have provided useful ways of dealing with temporality in this concept-oriented approach. The application of the categories they have come up with are found in their examples of speech taken from other studies as well as their own. A similar approach is taken by Meisel (1987) whose concern is with the way in which adult learners of German express reference to events or actions which are situated in the 'not- here', 'not-now,' prior to the time of utterance.

The data for this study come from two research projects. The first was a cross-sectional study of 45 immigrant workers from Italy, Portugal and Spain, who were residing in Germany. Most of them had little formal education. The study is based mainly on informal free conversation, with some additional elicitation techniques and oral language proficiency tests. The second one was a longitudinal study spanning between 57 to 80 weeks. This was based on 12 subjects of similar background to the first study and the same techniques and methods were used.

Meisel attempts to describe the development of German as a second language, distinguishing between developmental patterns which can be predicted for all learners, and others which are claimed to be specific to certain types of learners. In achieving the latter, social-psychological factors are considered. They include demographic information about the individual's contact hours at work, outside work, IQ tests, personality tests, and an assertion test to determine motivations and attitudes.

The focus in this study is to look first at the developmental patterns before analysing the learner-type-specific variation which is discussed in other studies, one of which is Clahsen, Meisel, and Pienemann (1983), as cited by Meisel (1987).

Again, what is pertinent for this thesis is Meisel's discussion of how reference is made to the past as part of the subjects' developmental patterns. The functional approach he has adopted allows him to go beyond the surface features which he has deemed too limited to be reflective of the true developmental patterns. The results show that there was no systematic use of the target language inflectional system in the early stages and at the same time simplification strategies were used. The lack of formal temporal marking and omission of verbal elements meant that functional devices were utilised instead.

One of the ways in which temporal references are made is what Meisel has called scaffolded discourse which is actually like a multiple-choice selection. The interaction between the learner and the interlocutor provides the former with the necessary items to choose from. The second is implict reference which is similar to von Stutterheim and Klein's category. The third is a contrast between two or more events which presumes the utilisation of implicit reference to make the link in the contrast. The fourth is the order of mention. When reference to the past is made explicitly, adverbials are used exclusively. What is interesting is the use of the locative adverbials to set time. However, this happened with only three of the subjects discussed in detail and it may be an

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individual idiosyncratic phenomenon. Another linguistic device used to help in ordering events is the use of connectives with the most frequent being 'and, then, but'.

As the learners progressed with the acquisition of a more elaborate system of linguistic devices, some of the earlier devices became less frequently used. The reliance on the interlocutors decreased; temporal references were made explicit on more occasions; and the order of mention was not strictly adhered to.

One final comment made in relation to temporality is that the observations in this study did not bear out any systematic use of an aspectual system, characterised by the distinction between perfectivity and nonperfectivity in the actions expressed by the verb. This appears to be contrary to some of the studies reviewed earlier that showed that aspect played a significant role in the interlanguage of learners. There is no immediate explanation for this except that, according to Meisel, the aspectual system does play a part but it is not as significant as some have claimed. This seems a reasonable way of looking at it given inconclusive evidence to indicate one way or the other.

The functional approach taken by Meisel is very similar to von Stutterheim and Klein's study in that most of the discourse organisational principles are similar. They also fit in well with many of the studies on the discourse approach to temporality in interlanguage, so far discussed. What would complete this study is to have a clearer picture of how the individual characteristics and the socio-psychological features are factored into the study explicitly.

Another related study using the functional approach is a longitudinal study of past tense reference carried out by Sato (1986). Her study hinges on two concepts: parataxis and syntacticization. The first term refers to 'extensive reliance on discourse-pragmatic factors in face-to-face communication and minimal use of target language morphosyntactic devices in expressing propositions. Discourse-pragmatic factors include shared knowledge between interlocutors, collaboration between interlocutors in the expression of propositions, and the distribution of propositional content over a sequence of utterances rather than a single utterance' (Ibid: 24). Syntacticization refers to 'the process through which the target-like use of morphosyntactic devices in IL increases over time, while the reliance on discourse-pragmatic context declines' (Ibid). Sato's aim is to monitor the extent to which past tense reference in interlanguage is characterised by parataxis, and if syntacticization occurs over time.

Two subjects of Vietnamese extract, one about 10 years old and the other 12, were used for this study. Data were collected over a period of 10 months and they were taken from spontaneous conversation.

The analysis is based on identifying and quantifying utterances according to:
a) Obligatory contexts of past-tense in English
b) Past-tense marking on verbs, both inflectional (regular) and lexical (irregular)
c) Temporal and locative adverbials
d) Unmarked past-time contexts

e) Discourse-pragmatic indicators of past-time reference:

   - Learner's immediately preceding utterance

   - Other's immediately preceding utterance

   - Non-immediately preceding utterance

   - Situational context (objects, actions, or events in the immediate physical
     setting)

(Summarised from ibid: 25)

The results show:

a) lower proportions of linguistically encoded than contextually indicated past-
time reference;

b) low frequencies of lexical past verbs and no inflectional past verbs, marked
for past time;

c) heavy reliance on interlocutor establishment of past-time reference; and

d) little signs of syntacticization over time. (Ibid: 40)

The results in a) and c) are consistent with many of the studies already
considered in this review. They also bear out expectations of how learners
would behave given certain assumptions about human behaviour. The second
result listed above seems to indicate some similarity with Platt's (1977) and
Wolfram's (1985) studies, both of which showed that generally the irregular
verbs are the most frequently marked. However, in Sato's study the phenomenon
is rather slight but it is the relative frequency that is significant. As for the last
finding, Sato herself admits that the 10-month period is perhaps too short a time
to make a conclusive statement about the decrease of syntacticization over

time as she may have overestimated the rate of development. Two to three years would be better for investigating this process.

Generally, the discourse-pragmatic devices facilitate the learners' communicative performance in conversation. Although there are instances of linguistically encoded devices being used, it is the context that is relied upon more frequently.

3.4 Summary

In this review, some of the major characteristics of interlanguage have been identified as important elements in the pursuit of understanding the language of learners. Systematicity and variability are two essential features that are recognised to be the basis for such studies.

One of the main contributions to this area is Labov's variable model based on the amount of attention that is paid to language form. Criticisms of this approach, ranging from attacks of its theoretical soundness to its methodological viability, were examined. The resounding conclusion from all the studies is the fact that the attention-to-speech factor is not comprehensive enough to explain the variability found in language. The other aspects reviewed include socio-psychological factors and the elements in language that respond to the functional needs of users.

Various approaches have been explored for the way in which tense/aspect forms

have been used. L1 transfer, morphophonemic environments, language universals as described in the bioprogram hypothesis, various discourse features, and finally the pragmatic situational factors are shown to have effect on tense/aspect usage.

To sum up, it is quite clear that the direction of interlanguage studies of tense and time must go the way of the functional-pragmatic approach which is adopted in the main study of this thesis. Increasingly more studies indicate the need to go beyond strict linguistic features to explain interlanguage. The studies reviewed have shown that at many levels and for many aspects of language, this approach provides the key to understanding the interlanguage phenomenon.

CHAPTER FOUR

VARIABILITY AND ATTENTION TO SPEECH

4.1 Introduction

From the Literature Review in Chapter 3, it is clear that research in interlanguage variability has been varied and diverse. Its extensive coverage of the topic from many approaches has highlighted their relative strengths and weaknesses. The aim in this thesis is to extend even further the knowledge of interlanguage variability by adopting the attention- to-speech method of eliciting variability and then using a contextual approach to account for the variability observed.

4.2 Attention to Speech

The attention-to-speech factor has received much notice as well as criticism. Although there are problems with it, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this approach is be used here for a number of reasons.

Provided the attention-to-speech factor is not embraced as the sole theoretical framework for explaining interlanguage variability, it can be successfully used for elicitation purposes for the study of this subject. Some of the studies already reviewed point to the attention factor as a means of eliciting variability in language. Although as Wolfson (1976) noted, when one pays attention to

language, it is not clear what is actually being monitored, this so-called attention can be charted arbitrarily on a continuum. Even though what is being monitored is unclear, there is no doubt that variability occurs under the changing circumstances along the continuum.

The activities devised to fit along this continuum for this study are a language test, an essay, an interview, and a peer-group discussion. Apart from fitting into this abstract notion of attention to speech, these activities primarily resemble classroom activities. Teachers use them for various purposes such as teaching, learning practice, getting feedback, and more critically for the students, assessing them for their language skills. That such a range of tasks will elicit variability in any one individual doing these tasks is justification for using them in this study. Even though the attention factor has limitations, it should not be discarded since it opens up many other avenues for studying variability.

4.3 Method
4.3.1 Subjects

The subjects in this study, as in the preliminary study, were second‑year Science students at the National University of Singapore, majoring in Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, or a branch of these disciplines. They were between 19 and 24 years old.

These students are all second language learners of English who speak
- only Mandarin and/or a dialect of Chinese with their parents;

- Mandarin and/or a dialect of Chinese, and/or English with their siblings; and

- Mandarin and/or a dialect of Chinese, and/or English with their friends.

The subjects' language background during the years at school is a mix of various language streams: English, Chinese and/or SAP (refer to Chapter 1 for explanation). From this perspective, the students do not appear to be homogenous. However, as explained in Chapter 1, the differences between the streams are not very great in terms of instruction. But, what is significant is the type of students the English and the Chinese streams attract. (The SAP stream is only available at secondary level and students are selected for entry). The English stream has students both weak and strong in the language. The Chinese stream usually attracts those weaker in English. As a result, the students in this stream are less likely to use English outside the classroom.

Although the students in this study may not share the same language stream, they do share similar language backgrounds in the home domain. However, the main justification for grouping them together is because of their failure to pass a qualifying English test at the required level, at the start of their university education. The subjects were randomly selected from a language proficiency course they had to take in their second year.

Seventeen subjects took part in this study. Nine of the 17 are males and eight females. The number of subjects has been reduced from that in the preliminary study in order to allow a more descriptive type research which combines both qualitative and quantitative elements. The sample size need not be very large as

can be seen in many other studies which have successfully combined the two methods of analysis. Just to name a few, they include Ellis (1987) with also 17 subjects, Young (1988) 12 subjects, Schumann (1987) 5 subjects, Tarone (1985) 20 subjects, Beebe (1980) 9, and Dickerson (1975) 10. This smallish number of 17 is both manageable and justifiable for the type of study conducted here.

4.3.2 Tense/Aspect Choice

The decision to use tense/aspect as a focus of variability remains the same for this main study for the same reasons discussed in Chapter 1. However, the range of tense/aspect used is reduced from the preliminary study. They are the simple present, the simple past, and the present perfect. The other tense/aspect forms have been omitted mainly because it is very difficult to obtain a full range of verb tense/aspect forms under more or less natural circumstances. Hence, the choice of the three is based on the frequency with which they are used in both written and oral speech.

4.3.3 Tasks

The tasks used for this study have been devised to satisfy the aim of eliciting variability in the interlanguage of L2 learners in a classroom situation. At the same time, they also fit into the attention-to-speech continuum discussed in section 4.2.

Four tasks, the language test, essay, interview, and peer-group discussion are used for this main study, instead of three. The above order indicates the decreasing amount of attention that is required to perform each task. As mentioned in the preliminary study, the tasks that have been devised to reflect the amount of attention that is paid to language are simple one dimensional representations of just this one factor. They do not pretend to do more. This is to say that this continuum does not take into consideration the mode differences, that is, the written and the oral modes of the tasks. The differences that arise from this limitation will be considered at a later stage.

The tasks, similar to those in the preliminary study, have been refined to overcome some of the problems encountered in their original forms. The language test is exactly the same, that is, the same two passages have been used (refer to Appendix 1). However, not all the original blanks are used as the problematic ones have been discounted. The expected problems that come with the use of obligatory contexts are not applicable here because of types of answers supplied by the subjects. They were clearly not options that could be used. The essay topic is similar to that used in the preliminary study but modifications have been included (refer to Appendix 3). The interview is also similar except that the interviewer is not the researcher. One additional task has been included: peer-group discussion which has been put in for two reasons. One, it is easier and clearer to have two oral tasks to balance the two written ones. Two, this task is set out to be the last task on the attention-to-speech continuum which dictates that it should reflect the least amount of attention needed to perform this task. One of the problems with the interview task in the preliminary study was its lack of

definition in the role it is supposed to play on the attention-to-speech continuum. The researcher's involvement in the interview made it difficult for the subjects to maintain the distance needed for this task, as they were very familiar with the researcher. This ambivalence is eliminated with the inclusion of a total stranger as the interviewer and the addition of the fourth task to fully represent the position on the continuum showing the least amount of attention required in a task.

As in the preliminary study, all the tasks were performed in the classroom during the subjects' remedial English class. The data collection process took place over a period of three weeks.

Task 1 - Language Test

The subjects were given the same two passages (see Appendix 1) used in the preliminary study. They had to provide the appropriate verb tense/aspect for the given blanks and the given base verbs. Passage A has ten blanks and Passage B 13 blanks. Ample time was given for the completion of this task which took about an hour for all to finish. They were not aware that this was part of this study as it was an exercise not too different from what they normally did.

Task 2 - Essay

The subjects were instructed to write a 300-500-word essay on 'Matchmaking' (see Appendix 3). This is a modified version of the topic used in the preliminary study. Since this topic could provoke fairly strong feelings from the students, and it was a general issue that did not put anyone at a disadvantage, the topic was

retained for use.

In this version, background information is also given in three paragraphs, covering both traditional and modern issues. The subjects were asked to discuss their thoughts on matchmaking in general and the SDU (the official agency to help singles meet one another) in particular. The 'Opinions' section was omitted from this version because there was a tendency for the students in the Preliminary Study to rely heavily on it. This meant that they were using less of their own words and phrases which would make this study of tense/aspect usage less reliable.

No specific time limit was given to the subjects but they had to do it in class which gave them three hours at a stretch. All of them took between two and two and a half hours to complete the task.

Task 3 - Interview

This task took place on the pretext that it was to give the students practice in interview situations. The actual purpose of the interview was not revealed to them until it was over.

Each subject was interviewed, one-to-one, by an interviewer who is a native speaker of Singapore English as well as Mandarin and a number of Chinese dialects. He was someone whom they had not met before and who was older than them to make sure that a certain amount of anxiety is present so that the subjects would pay more attention to their speech. The assumption is that if the

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subjects are not familiar with the interviewer and have to focus on an oral activity, the anxiety caused would make them more conscious of what they are saying, both language and content. Although it has been established that formality may not be equated with more attention to speech, it is valid in this case to assume that the subjects are paying more than normal attention to their speech for two reasons. First, the activity is focused on their oral output and gives them practice for something as important as a job interview where the subjects' oral performance could be the deciding factor in getting the job. It could be argued that this first reason pertains more to the subjects' attention to content rather than language. However, the language in which the content is conveyed has to necessarily play a part. And second, the use of a tape recorder for the sessions would increase their awareness of their speech. In this case the attention would be more on language than content since the tape recorder can appear to be a monitoring device that will track not only the content be also the language in exactly the way it is produced. The entire task was tape-recorded with the tape recorder in full view of the subjects.

The interviews were conducted in an empty classroom next to the one where the rest of the class was occupied with other work while waiting for their turns. These sessions took three days to complete. Each interview took between ten and twenty minutes. The subjects were questioned about various topics that allowed them to talk freely about themselves and their experiences. The topics ranged from descriptions of leisure activities to specific experiences and topical issues (see Appendix 4 for the detailed list of topics). The interviewer was given this list as a guideline, allowing him a choice of topics to help him keep the interview

going. He was also given some background information about each subject's personality or hobbies to help him select topics to match the personality for the interview. The only important thing he had to bear in mind was the goal of eliciting the full range of tense/aspect, paying particular attention to past situations in contrast to the present.

Task 4 - Discussion

This task involved small groups of two to three subjects who were grouped as either all males or all females. They were given an article to read and respond to (see Appendix 5). This article was first pre-tested on another group of similar students and was found to be extremely successful in provoking very strong reactions from them, both positive and negative. The small groups were asked to discuss their reactions amongst themselves in preparation for a class discussion to take place between the male and the female students. They were told to be prepared to defend their positions. For the purposes of this study, only the small group discussions were used and this activity took about half an hour to complete.

To ensure the success of eliciting language that was supposed to be natural with little attention being paid to the language form, some preliminary work was needed. The tape-recording had to be very discreet, keeping in mind Labov's 'observer's paradox'. The only way to carry out this task was to recruit students who were normally quiet to tape-record these small group discussions. There would be one such member in the small group, on the pretext of taking notes for the others, and they were not expected to participate in the discussion. Small tape recorders, the size of a Sony Walkman, were handed to them before class. These

were to be casually placed with the rest of their things, but close enough to pick up the voices. At the end of the session, the students were informed of the tape recording. Permission to use the data was sought and none of them objected.

4.3.4 Comments about Procedure

The oral tasks were all fully transcribed (see Appendix 6 for samples of data for all the four tasks). They were checked twice through to eliminate errors. Places where sounds could not be deciphered are indicated with question marks. Pauses are represented by full-stops, and longer pauses of more than five seconds, by three full-stops.

In counting up the verb forms, repetitions were omitted to prevent distortion of the data. In places where corrections were made, only the second or last verb form is counted. Where there was ambiguity in the phonological ending eg. manage(d) to, the word is omitted from the count. Only finite verbs were included, except for the modal auxiliaries. The other exceptions are formulaic expressions, imperatives, and not properly formed tense/aspect eg. he given up. The list of formulaic expressions is the same as that in the preliminary study (see p.28). -

The next four items that need comment have already been sufficiently discussed in Chapter 2. The decisions on the notion of error, the use of passives, the progressive aspect, and 'have got' are retained for this main study. In sorting the verb forms for analysis, the notion of error is useful for categorising those forms. Passive verbs will be treated no differently from the other

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active verbs. Similarly, the progressive aspect is categorised according to the tense it occurs with, and is not treated separately. The 'have got' phrase is also given no special treatment.

4.4 Results

The accuracy results for the use of tense/aspect and a breakdown of the proportions for each task are given below.

	Total No. of Verbs	Total No. of Errors	%	Accuracy Rate %
Lang. Test	379	106	28.0%	72.0%
Essay	568	43	7.6%	92.4%
Interview	2644	443	16.8%	83.2%
Discussion	1135	53	4.7%	95.3%

Table 4.1 Accuracy Rates for the Four Tasks

	Present	%	Past	%	Present Perfect	%
Lang.Test	64	16.9%	35	9.2%	7	1.8%
Essay	18	3.2%	20	3.%	5	0.9%
Interview	364	13.8%	71	2.7%	10	0.3%
Discussion	11	0.9%	43	3.6	-	-

Table 4.2 Inaccurately Used Verbs in Each Tense/Aspect Type

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	Present	%	Past	%	Present Perfect	%
Lang.Test	123	32.5%	99	26.2%	51	13.5%
Essay	411	72.1%	71	12.5%	43	7.5%
Interview	1871	70.8%	279	10.6%	49	1.9%
Discussion	1058	88.8%	19	1.6%	5	0.4%

Table 4.3   Accurately Used Verbs in Each Tense/Aspect Type
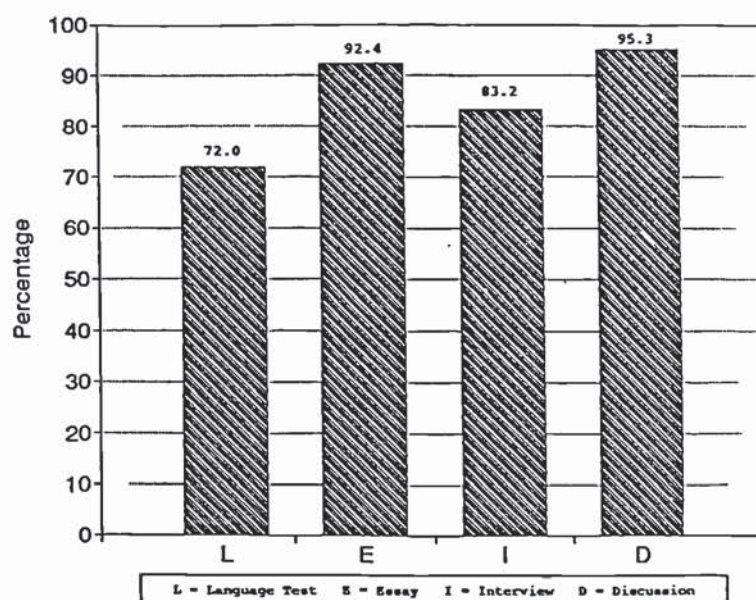
Figure 4.1 Accuracy Rates for all Four Tasks

In Table 4.1 which provides the accuracy rates for all the four tasks, the most accurate task is the discussion with 95.3%. This is followed by the essay with 92.4%, and the interview with 83.2%. The language test is the worst with 72.0%. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show the breakdowns of the overall accuracy rates in the three tense/aspect types.

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It is clear that there is variability in the interlanguage of subjects in this study, evident from the different accuracy rates. This variation appears to correspond with the different tasks the subjects were required to do.

Since the theoretical framework is based heavily on the capability continuum proposed by Tarone (1985, see Chapter 3 for review), an initial comparison of results will be made with those of her study.

What is significant in the study is whether the hypothesis based on Tarone's experiment has been upheld. The different styles represented by various tasks are supposed to range along a continuum defined by the amount of attention paid to language form. Tarone's hypothesis states that the style produced when the learner is paying the least attention to language should be the least accurate; and conversely the most careful style should elicit the highest accuracy. She found this not to be true for any of the grammatical forms she looked at except for the third person -s morpheme. However, she did discover the reverse occurring where a greater amount of attention correlated with a higher accuracy rate.

Based on Tarone's results, it was anticipated that when more attention is given to speech, the higher the accuracy rate will be. However, this was not the case; in fact, neither hypothesis was upheld. The results here do not fit into any defined pattern. The tasks, from the most accurate to the least accurate, are: the discussion, the essay, the interview, and the language test.

Referring to Table 4.1, the percentage error rates for the essay and the discussion are very close with 7.6% and 4.7% respectively. The interview scores more than double the two above with 16.8% and finally the language test score is the highest at 28.0%.

It seems quite clear that the variable attention to language form cannot be used as a sole criterion for predicting the accuracy rate of a grammatical item such as the tense/aspect form. There is no direct correlation between the accuracy rates and the amount of attention paid to language form. Hence the grammatical variation is not attributable to one factor alone and one must look beyond this variable for explanation, as other studies have done (R. Young 1988, Parrish 1987, Tarone and Parrish 1988).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the exploration of the use of the context to explain interlanguage variability. Although much of what comes under this approach has been referred to as pragmatic in direction and background, there are still other aspects that have not been considered.

The main analysis of the data will rely on the approach used in Schumann's (1987) study of temporality in the basilang speech of five adult second-language learners. A more detailed analysis of this study is provided in the Literature Review, Chapter two. Schumann found that a pragmatic analysis of his data proved to be most telling of the way in which his subjects could use their limited knowledge of the language to express temporality. (It appears that he uses 'pragmatic' in the broad sense to mean contextual). Similarly, this approach is adopted here as the use of tense and aspect appear to be affected by how temporality is perceived in the context of when it is used, owing to the inherent link between tense and time. Although the level of learner competence here is very much higher than in Schumann's study, this approach is useful in investigating tense and aspect at a discourse level.

5.2 Pragmatic Categories

Schumann used four categories to describe temporality and they are: adverbials, serialization, implicit reference, and calendric reference. For the current study, some of the categories are adopted with some modifications. The categories and their operational definitions are listed below.

a) Adverbials

This category refers to temporal adverbials alone. *The adverbial governs only one* clause at a time. This category also includes any calendric references.

b) Serialization

This occurs when the temporal reference point is fixed by the sequence of events and reflected in the actual temporal order of reported events.

c) Implicit Reference

When the time frame is inferred from a particular context or situation, the implicit reference category is applied to it. This category broadly includes references to knowledge of the world, shared knowledge between speaker and listener, writer and reader, on-going discussion of a topic, and any other reference to events or states not directly mentioned in the clause. The use of the implicit reference category will not apply to a 'serialized' verb.

d) Verbal Aspect

This verbal aspect category applies mainly to the present perfect. It has been

singled out because it is governed by conditions of the verb, rather than the surrounding context. When the present perfect is used, the temporal reference is set by the verb itself, unlike the simple present or past. The perfect aspect has the generally accepted feature of limited retrospection (Quirk et al 1972) which means looking back from the point NOW. It does not require additional temporal adverbials or contextual cues to set the time frame although they can provide further restrictions on the time reference.

It is also generally recognised that the perfect aspect has the element of result apart from the inherent temporal function (Jespersen 1934). For example, in a statement, 'He has gone to town', the temporal aspect is clear: the speaker/writer's perspective is now. The resultative aspect is also present in the implication that he is no longer here since he has gone to town. While the temporal element is clear, the resultative aspect confirms the temporality of the use of the perfect aspect.

Brinton (1988) who examined many studies on the perfect aspect, has simplified the descriptions of the different uses of the perfect aspect into two comprehensive yet well-defined types: the resultative and the continuative. The resultative, similar to that above, refers to a past situation which has present results, effects, or relevance while the continuative refers to a situation that began in the past and persists up to, and perhaps even beyond the present. An example of a continuative perfect is, 'he has been a student for years'. Very clearly the two types of the perfect aspect as described by Brinton have definite temporal elements. The continuative and the resultative uses both bring out the temporality

of the verb. It is thus justifiable to describe the verbal aspect as one category in which the temporal element is largely verb-generated.

Basically the four pragmatic categories describe four possible ways in which verb tense and aspect appear to operate at a discourse level. It is hoped that they can provide a window to the difficulties learners might have with tense and time. At the same time this investigation can help explain the variability that has occurred in the accuracy rates of the tense and aspect used in the four tasks.

5.3 Hypotheses

The four categories can be ranked in order of how they influence the accuracy rate from the least accurate to the most accurate: verbal aspect, adverbial, serialization, and implicit reference.

a) Verbal Aspect

This category is hypothesized to be the most problematic mainly because of interference from the first language though it is not the only reason for the difficulties learners have with the target language.

This verbal aspect category includes predominantly the present perfect. In Chinese there is no aspect marking in the verb form; instead a complex system of aspectual markers are used. Differing situations expressing different aspectual meanings, such as progression, perfection, experience, or repetition, to name just a few, require different aspect markers (Kwok 1971).

In English the perfect aspect is expressed in the verb together with the tense. In addition further temporal references can be given at the same time. But most importantly the perfect aspect does not occur by itself. In Chinese, since there is no tense system, the perfect aspect is indicated by separate markers that are not part of the verb form. Temporality is less closely linked with the perfect aspect although it is implicit since the perfective function necessarily implies prior time. There is a clearer distinction between the perfect aspect and temporality in Chinese than in English. Hence, this could be a cause for confusion. An example of the comparison in the two languages is shown below:

Eg. He has come home.

He come back home aspectual marker (already)

他 回 家 了

It would seem that if the present perfect is problematic for the learner, the past tense would also be difficult, though probably simpler because tense is non-existent in Chinese. Conceptually, the simple past tense includes fewer semantic features than the perfect aspect, which could be a reason for it to be easier for the learner. Hence, it seems reasonable to suggest that if one of the categories had a higher number of situations that require verbs expressing the perfect aspect, that category is likely to have a lower accuracy rate. The verbal aspect category, which includes principally the present perfect, is therefore likely to be the category with the lowest accuracy rate.

b) Adverbial

This category is probably the second most problematic. An explanation for this once again relates to the first language interference. As explained earlier, temporality is expressed through contextual cues such as adverbials and various parts of speech other than the verb. Therefore, one can hypothesize that if this use of the context to indicate temporality is carried over to the target language there will be a higher incidence of non-marking of the verb for time or any form of aspectual relationship. For instance, sentences with the simple present and an adverbial indicating past time such as, " ... I remember the first year the latest is until 7 o'clock ..." are common.

This argument that reliance on an adverbial to provide a temporal anchor in a clause removes the need for verbal tense marking echoes the redundancy hypotheses that many have put forward. One such hypothesis is the functional hypothesis (Kiparsky 1972, Poplack 1980). They, however, discussed this redundancy factor in relation to nouns and plural-marking and not tense-marking. Nevertheless, the idea of redundancy applies to both. If the required information of remoteness is already conveyed by the use of an adverbial, then the need to mark the verb to indicate distance from the present or current reference appears to be greatly minimised. This phenomenon also reflects a learner's attempt to simplify the process of making himself/herself understood by removing the clutter of unnecessary information. Thus, the non-marking of the verb with the use of the adverbial can be attributed to not only first language interference but also the influence of this redundancy factor.

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c) Serialization

This third category is likely to be the next most problematic. There could be two possible explanations.

The first of these is that with serialization, the use of tense and aspect hinges on a previously fixed temporal reference point that sets the time frame for the sequence of events. Hence, if in the first instance, the verb has not been marked for tense or aspect and relies entirely on adverbials to set temporal references, then what follows may present some confusion to the learner, as in the example below:

> (1) S1: ...at first join in this first Red Cross society is when I finish my 'O' Levels I have plenty of time for one month so I just find I just join ...
>
> (underscoring not part of data)
> (Please refer to Appendix 7 for the longer excerpts of the examples that are cited in the body of this thesis.)

The 'at first' puts the context into the past but the simple present tense is used with it. Subsequent verbs in this passage are in the same temporal context but because the first verb is in the simple present, it seems that the subject finds it reasonable to use the same tense for all the verbs. Hence, they are all inaccurately used. The accuracy factor in this category is closely linked to the initial accuracy of the first verb tense/aspect as that can affect the subsequent tense/aspect choices.

The second possible explanation applies mainly to the interview task. When narrating an event in the past, quite often there is a choice between using the simple past and the simple present or the historic present. For a proficient user of

English, s/he would know how to apply the rules that govern tense/aspect usage. However, for a learner, and in this case, a learner who is perhaps more comfortable with the simple present tense or the unmarked form, the tendency might be to rely heavily on this tense to narrate. When it happens it could be a combination of the two reasons: the fact that s/he is choosing the easiest option and that the present historic allows the simple present tense to be used in a narrative about past events. Hence this might be the cause of extra confusion.

d) Implicit Reference

This fourth category should be the least problematic or the most accurate. However, the difference between this category and serialization is not likely to be great because the pragmatic differences between the two are not as distinct as they are in the verbal aspect and the adverbial categories. For serialization and implicit reference categories, there is no adverbial in the immediate clause of the verb under consideration. The temporal framework is thus set from a wider context. However, the slight difference could lie in the fact that with the implicit reference category, the learner might be more conscious of marking the verb for tense/aspect. This is because the temporal indicators are less tangible in serialization where the time reference has been specified earlier. Using the adverbial category as a guide, it seems that the more overt the temporal reference, the less likely the verb is marked for tense.

5.4 Results and Discussion

Based on the pragmatic categories discussed above, the data were analysed for error

rates. The results below show the percentage breakdown of verbs used and wrongly used in terms of tense/aspect within each of the pragmatic categories for the four tasks.

The results from Table 5.1 give a rough indication of how the categories might influence the acccuracy rates of the tasks. They show that:

a) the verbal aspect category is indeed the most problematic with the percentages of wrongly used verbs being the highest for all the four tasks (refer to #).

b) the adverbial category is clearly the second most problematic having the second highest percentages for all the tasks except in the discussion which is not critical because only 1.0% of verbs were categorised under adverbial (refer to #). Hence the low 0.1% in this category is a relatively insignificant aberration in the apparent trend.

c) serialization has the third highest percentages for wrongly used verbs in the essay and the interview, the second highest for the discussion, and the lowest for the language test (refer to #).

d) the last category, implicit reference, has the lowest percentages for wrongly used verbs in the essay and the interview, and the second lowest for the language test and the discussion (refer to #).

Verbal Aspect

	Used	%	Wrongly Used	%	*	#
Language Test	81/379	21.4	48/81	59.3	2	1
Essay	38/568	6.7	5/38	13.2	4	1
Interview	74/2688	2.8	32/74	43.2	3	1
Discussion	27/1135	2.4	22/27	81.5	1	1

Adverbial

	Used	%	Wrongly Used	%	*	#
Language Test	117/379	30.9	41/117	35:0	1	2
Essay	55/568	9.7	5/55	9.1	3	2
Interview	193/2644	7.3	65/193	33.7	2	2
Discussion	11/1135	1.0	1/11	9.1	3	2

Serialization

	Used	%	Wrongly Used	%	*	#
Language Test	81/379	21.4	4/81	4.9	3	4
Essay	291/568	51.2	24/291	8.3	2	3
Interview	1261/2644	47.7	231/1261	18.1	1	3
Discussion	445/1135	39.2	14/445	3.2	4	2

Implicit Reference

	Used	%	Wrongly Used	%	*	#
Language Test	100/379	26.3	13/100	13.0	1	3
Essay	184/568	32.4	9/184	4.9	3	4
Interview	1116/2644	43.2	117/1116	10.5	2	4
Discussion	652/1135	57.5	16/652	2.5	4	3

* Ranking within each pragmatic category for the percentages of wrongly used verbs for the four tasks.

\# Ranking across the pragmatic categories for the percentages of wrongly used verbs for each of the four tasks.

(1=highest 4= lowest)

Table 5.1 Table showing error rates for the pragmatic categories
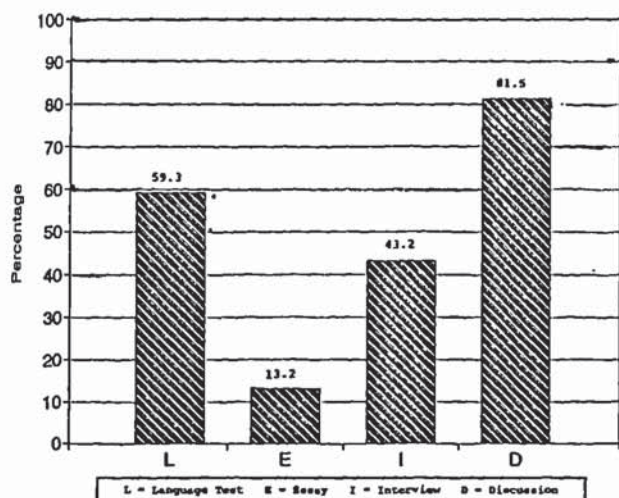
Figure 5.1   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each task for the Verbal Aspect category
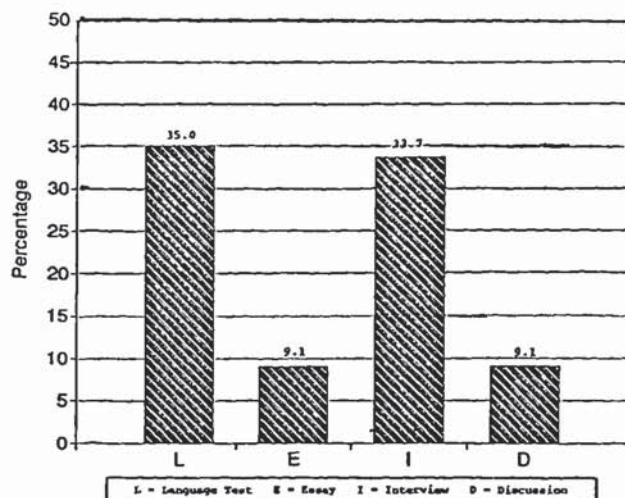
Figure 5.2   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each task for the Adverbial category
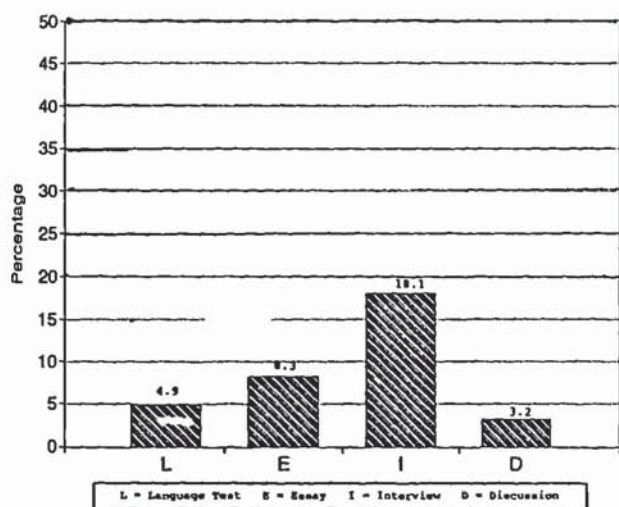
Figure 5.3   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each task for Serialization
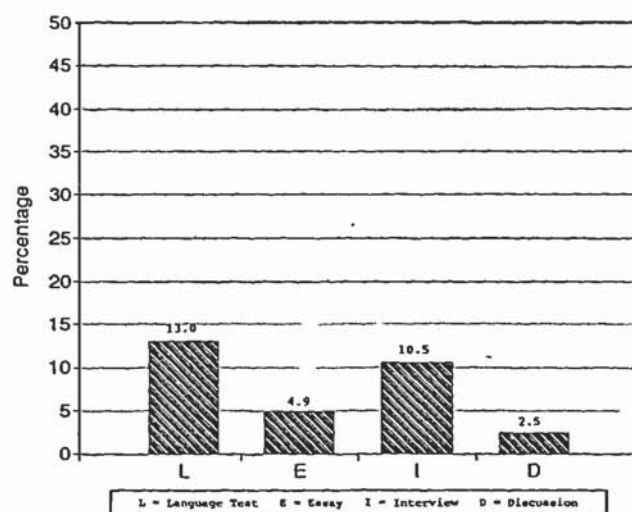
Figure 5.4   Percentages for wrongly used verbs for Implicit Reference
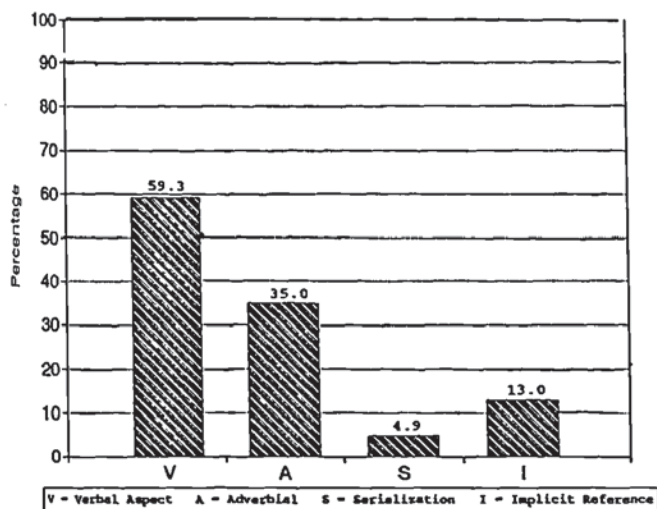
Figure 5.5   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in
each pragmatic category for the Language Test
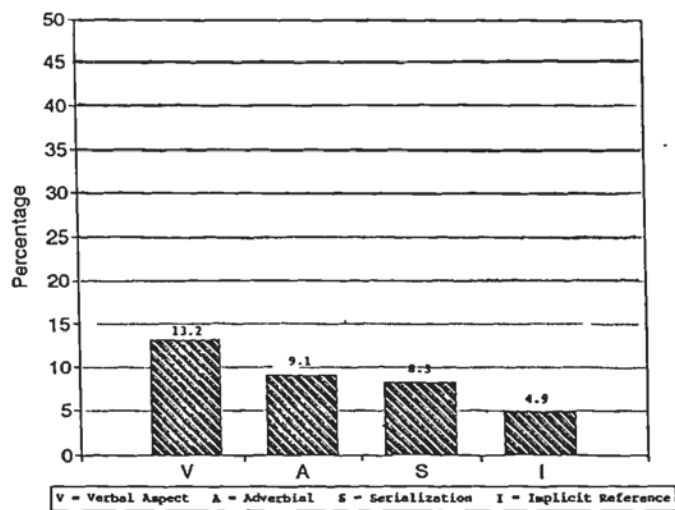
Figure 5.6   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each
pragmatic category for the Essay
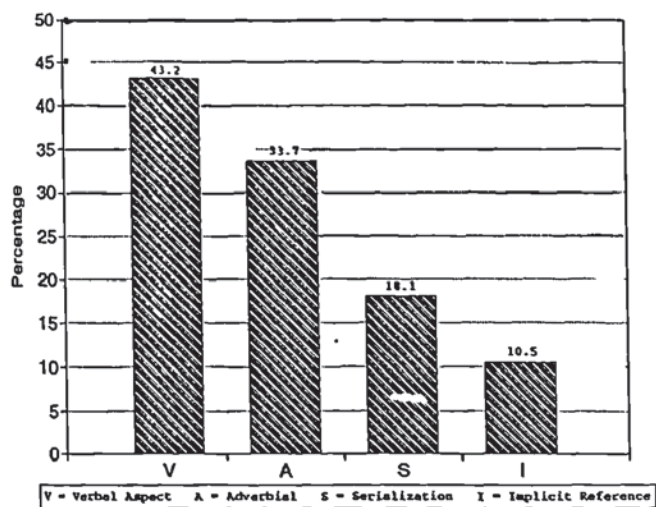
Figure 5.7   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each
pragmatic category for the Interview
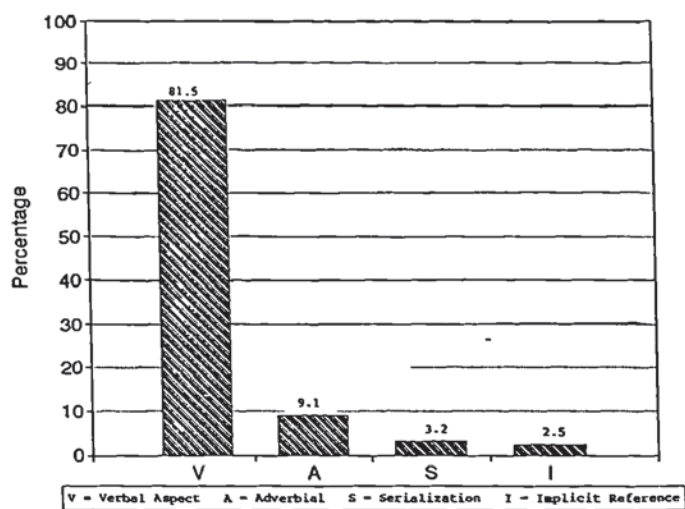
Figure 5.8   Percentages for wrongly used verbs in each
pragmatic category for the Discussion

From the indication given in Table 5.1, it is important to validate the apparent differences in the degree of influence of the four pragmatic categories over the accuracy rates. Using the percentage means as given in the table does not reflect the subjects' true pattern of behaviour in their use of verbs according to the pragmatic classification. The averages alone cannot be relied on to account for any variation in the pattern because if the distribution of individual scores is too wide, the average does not reflect the extremes.

To confirm or reject the ranking of the pragmatic categories for the four tasks, apparent from the table, two statistical procedures are used. The first is a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by a multiple comparison of means to give the confidence level for the degree of difference between the means.

5.5 ANOVA

The one-way ANOVA is a method that allows a comparison of means of more than two groups on one variable. This will show whether the differences between the means are results of chance or treatment by the various categories.

It is the aim here to statistically show that the four different pragmatic categories bring about different results in the accuracy rates. To achieve this there must be significant differences in the means for each of the four groups to show that they are not from the same population. It is not enough just to have different means since the means of four groups are unlikely to be exactly the same

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even if they are from the same population.

One way to prove there are significant differences between the groups is to reject the null hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference between them. An underlying assumption about the spread of individual scores is that it is the result of normal distribution.

The formula to test this hypothesis is:

$$F_{obs} = \frac{S^2 between}{S^2 within}$$

In any group there will be variation owing to individual differences and this is the error variability for within a group. The S squared within is an unbiased estimate of population variance because it does not take into account the treatment effect of the categories.

The S squared between takes into account the differences between groups if the methods are differentially effective. The variability here involves:

" 1. Random, unsystematic, or chance variation between groups which is error variability.

2. Nonrandom, systematic variation between groups due to the treatment effect. Therefore, between-group variance will be

Error variability + treatment effect = between-group variance=

S squared between" (Hatch & Farhady 1982:130).

Since the desired result is to show that the categories have differential effects over the accuracy rates, the between-group variance should be larger than the

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within-group variance. If this is not the case then the treatments are all similar and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. However, just saying that the means are different is not adequate because they have to be different enough not to be a result of chance. In order to establish the necessary difference, the F ratio must be compared with the F-distribution (Ibid.).

An analysis of variance of the data for the four pragmatic categories is set out in the table below:

Total number of observations in data set = 68

source of variation	sum of squares	degrees of freedom	mean square
between treatments	15291.0457	3	5097.0152
within treatments	11217.7103	64	175.2767
total about the grand average	26508.7560	67	

F-ratio(observed) = 15291.0457/11217.7103 = 29.08

Table 5.2 The ANOVA Table

If the F-ratio (observed) is larger than 1, then there is some treatment effect. But, to establish whether the value is large enough for the given number of groups and size of the group, it has to be checked against the F-distribution table. This is obtained by checking the ratios for 3 degrees of freedom for groups and 64 degrees of freedom for observations. For a 0.0001 level of probability, which is the computed F value, the F-ratio for a significance level of 0.05 is about 2.75 and

4.10 for a significance level of 0.01. Since the observed F-ratio 29.08 is far higher than the ones given in the F-distribution, it is safe to reject the null hypothesis. Thus it can be concluded that the treatment effect from the pragmatic categories has a definite influence over the accuracy rates.

5.6 Multiple Comparisons

Having established that there are treatment effects, a multiple-comparison procedure is needed to show the degree of difference each pragmatic category makes on the accuracy rates. There are many methods that can be used, with different advantages and disadvantages for different conditions. The one used here is the Duncan multiple range test which is very effective for the type of comparisons being made in this study.

Basically, the Duncan multiple range test ranks, from highest to lowest, the amount of variation that is dependent on the pragmatic categories. The procedure consists of ranking t sample means which have been obtained by using the t-test. The t-test is used for comparing two means from very small sample sizes. (Comparing pairs of means using the t-test alone and then ranking them is not adequate because, first of all, many tests are required to compare all means. Secondly, with each individual comparison a level of significance is used and the overall level of significance will increase with each test. The implication is that the probability of accepting the null hypothesis becomes a lot higher. Hence, the Duncan multiple range test is used instead.) Having ranked the t sample means, two population means are declared significantly different if the absolute

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of their sample differences exceeds the given formula for this procedure:

$$W_r^{'} = q_\alpha^{'}(r,v)\sqrt{\frac{s^2 w}{n}}$$

The results are given below:

Alpha (significance level)= 0.05

Degree of freedom = 64

Mean square error = 175.277

Means with the same letter are not significantly different.

Duncan Grouping	Mean	N	Category
A	45.084	17	1 (Verbal Aspect)
B	25.196	17	2 (Adverbial)
C	9.113	17	3 (Serialization)
C	8.202	17	4 (Implicit Reference)

Table 5.3 The Multiple Comparisons Table

The groupings clearly show that Verbal Aspect has the greatest influence over the accuracy rates in the tasks with 45.084, followed by Adverbial with 25.196. The C groupings show that Serialization and Implicit Reference are not significantly different as the means are very close.

From this statistical analysis, the hypothesis that Verbal Aspect is the most problematic is true. It is also true that the second most problematic category is

Adverbial. While Serialization and Implicit Reference cannot be ranked third and fourth respectively, they together, make up the third most problematic categories.

These results do not considerably alter the original premise about the use of pragmatic categories as a means of explaining the learner's use of tense and aspect. There is still a close correspondence between how temporality is understood in pragmatic terms and the way tense and aspect is used. Before discussing the results, a recapitulation on the purpose of looking at the functional aspects of tense/aspect use is necessary. It is the aim of this study to explain the variablity that occurs when learners are performing different tasks. As the accuracy rates in the use of tense/aspect are not easily explained by the attention factor, this pragmatic approach provides a means of accounting for some of the results. A discussion of the tasks is given below (refer to Table 5.1 for the details of the % scores):

a) Language Test

This task has the highest percentage of wrongly used tense/aspect. This may be attributed to the high percentage of verbal aspect categories (21.4%) and adverbials (30.9%), relative to the other tasks. With the high concentration of these two categories in the language test, it is understandable that this task has the lowest overall accuracy rate.

b) Interview

The task with the second lowest accuracy rate has the second highest percentage of verbs used under serialization (47.7%) and implicit reference (43.2%). The

percentages of wrongly used verbs for these two categories are the highest (18.1%) and the second highest (10.5%) respectively. Only a small percentage of verbal aspect and adverbial categories were used.

c) Essay

The essay has the third lowest accuracy rate. The category with the highest percentage used is serialization (51.2%) but it has the second highest percentage of wrongly used verbs (8.3%). The implicit reference category is the third highest used (32.4%) and the third highest wrongly used (4.9%). The verbal aspect and adverbial categories constitute only a small proportion of verbs used and wrongly used under these categories.

d) Discussion

This is the task with the highest accuracy rate. The percentage of verbs used for the implicit reference category is the highest (57.5%) but it has the lowest percentage of verbs wrongly used (2.5%). Serialization has the third highest used (39.2%) but the lowest wrongly used (3.2%). For verbal aspect and adverbial, the percentages used are the lowest (24% and 1.0% respectively) but the highest wrongly used for verbal aspect (81.5%) and the lowest for adverbial (9.1%).

It is apparent that how tense and aspect function in a sentence is an important consideration in explaining the accuracy rates of the learners' performance in the four tasks. The most significant correspondence between the pragmatic functions of the use of tense and aspect is seen in two of the tasks: the language test and the discussion. Clearly the two categories that have exerted the most influence over

these two tasks are the verbal aspect and the adverbial categories.

With the language test, the difficulty appears to be due to the preponderence of the verbal aspect category which has the most influence over the accuracy rates as given in the Multiple Comparisons table. As discussed earlier, the L1 use of aspect is different from how it is in English in that the aspect marker is separate from the verb in Chinese. Quite often what is different is perceived as difficult for a learner. In addition, the aspectual system used in English is considered relatively difficult for most ESL or EFL learners as it is not as conceptually straightforward as the past or present tense. Even in cases where the first language has an aspectual system that is similar to that in English, the use of the present and past perfect aspect is often considered more difficult than that of the simple past. Since learners so obviously have problems with the verbal aspect which is used most compared to the other tasks, the language test is clearly affected by it. It is not surprising that it has the lowest accuracy rate.

The use of the adverbial category is the next most influencing one and in the language test, this is the second most used category. As hypothesized, the adverbial appears to function as the temporal anchor of a clause and the tendency to mark the verb for any past tense is greatly reduced. This simplification process, in the attempt to cut out redundant information, is adopted by the learner, bringing down the accuracy rates of the language test.

Conversely, with the discussion task, the accuracy rates are affected by the same two pragmatic categories, the verbal aspect and the adverbial. While the language

test has the highest percentages of use for these two categories, the discussion has the lowest. If the influence of these categories is as significant as the multiple-comparison procedure suggests, then the discussion task is responding consistently with the low percentage use of the two categories, resulting in the highest accuracy rate of all the four tasks.

As for the other two tasks, the essay and the interview, their differences in the accuracy rates are not so easily explained. Both these tasks have in common their minimal use of the verbal aspect and the adverbial categories. With both these categories in only limited use, their accuracy rates are not obviously accountable. The categories used are predominantly serialization and implicit reference. These categories are not significantly different in their influence over the accuracy rates, as evident from the multiple-comparison procedure.

What has resulted is a reversal of the anticipated order of accuracy rates for the two tasks. The essay has higher percentages for the use of the verbal aspect, adverbial, and serialization categories than the interview. Although the differences are not very great for the first two categories, one could understandably expect the essay to have a lower accuracy rate than the interview. However, this is not the case. The essay, in fact, has fewer errors than the interview.

What has drawn the two categories, serialization and implicit reference, together in the multiple-comparison procedure is probably their pragmatic functions. Both are not temporally explicit in that the temporal reference has to be obtained from somewhere other than the clause where these categories are

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situated. However, despite the similarity there are differences and perhaps the subtlety of their pragmatic functions has brought about the difference between the essay and the interview.

Examining the tasks based on the pragmatic categories alone has not yielded answers to explain the entire variation pattern. The key to this problem must rest with the many other factors that affect language learning. A discussion of these possible factors will sort out the apparent pattern of variation in the tasks.

5.7 Other Factors

Where the two pragmatic categories, verbal aspect and adverbial, are not the predominant categories in the tasks, other factors come into play. One of the most important is the mode of the task and its discourse type. To recapitulate, the four tasks - the language test, the essay, the interview, and the discussion - were devised to elicit variation in the performance of learners on verb tense and aspect accuracy. The types of tasks range on a continuum based on the attention factor. But as it turned out, the variational pattern does not indicate that the attention factor can affect the accuracy of the performance. It was then discovered that the pragmatic functions accounted for much of the variation. However, as the pragmatic functions do not entirely account for the variation, a return to a discussion of the mode and the discourse type used is necessary.

The most basic consideration is the oral/written dichotomy, which has been noted first in the preliminary study and then in the description of the tasks used for

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this main study. The differences between the modes are now looked at in more detail. Broadly speaking, whether the mode is spoken or written could affect how the context is perceived. In a spoken mode, many assumptions are made. The place of utterance need not be specified; the time of utterance is understood by the participants in the discourse; the visual information is available , such as the emotional states of the participants, and their status and relationship to one another. All this additional input to the discourse may not be explicit but it is available to the participants. However, with the written mode, so much more has to be included by the writer, if such information is required in the text, before it is understood. The content and the organisation are automatically affected. So as to maintain a high level of cohesion in the written discourse, many necessary linguistic devices are adopted and these are discussed below.

5.7.1 The Planning/Non-planning Factor

The differences between oral and the written discourse can be described in terms of planned and unplanned discourse. This dichotomy emphasizes the time element allowed in the production of the discourse. Initially it might seem that this description juxtaposes only two extreme ends. A useful appliction of this approach is to look at it as a continuum as Ellis (1987a, reviewed in Chapter 3) has done. The written mode would necessarily and automatically allow more planning time than the oral mode. However, with the former, the degree of planning depends on the time that is given for preparation and revision. But no matter how little time there is, the process will take more time than an impromptu oral discourse. As for the oral mode, it can be planned or unplanned.

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Using Ellis's planning/non-planning factor to look at the data in this present study, it was found that the results are not consistent with those of Ellis's. To recall briefly, Ellis found that the accuracy of the regular past tense forms decreased from Task 1 to 3 (Task 1, being the task with the greatest planning time and Task 3, the least). The irregular past tense forms were more or less constant and the past copula showed that there was a marked difference in accuracy levels between the planned and the unplanned activities.

The four tasks in this study: the language test, essay, interview, and discussion, can also be placed in this order on the planning/non-planning continuum, similar to the continuum charting the amount of attention paid to language. The similarity is unavoidable because when time is given for planning, it also means that they have more time to pay attention to language. Hence, on a continuum the language test demands that the planning time be focused on a particular grammatical item, in this case the tense/aspect. The essay, on the other hand, is open to both content and grammar. The interview gives the subject less time for planning because firstly it is an oral task and secondly, the interviewer sets the pace of the interaction. The discussion is also oral and similarly no time is allowed for planning though the subjects themselves set the pace of the interaction.

Table 4.4 below shows the percentage breakdown of verbs into the three categories of regular and irregular verbs, and the copula. Only the simple past tense-marking is considered, to be consistent with Ellis's study.

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Tasks	Regular past(%)	Irregular past(%)	Past copula(%)
Lang. Test	58.8	91.2	82.4
Essay	65.2	68.0	87.8
Interview	17.8	54.2	56.2
Discussion	16.7	95.0	100.0

Table 5.4 Overview of accuracy rates (%) using planning time

Tasks	Regular past	Irregular past	Past copula
Lang. Test	10/17	31/34	56/68
Essay	15/23	17/25	43/49
Interview	29/163	143/264	104/185
Discussion	1/6	19/20	5/5

Table 5.5 Frequencies of correct forms over total no. required

The results show that for the regular past tense forms there is very little resemblance in the pattern of accuracy rates to that found in Ellis's study. For the latter, this particular tense form had a very clear pattern of style-shifting according to the amount of planning time. Whereas in the case here, a different pattern is evident. There is a distinct gap between the two written and the two oral tasks, where the accuracy rates are considerably higher for the written than the oral. The percentages for the oral tasks are very close, showing very little style-shifting. For the written ones, the accuracy rates are relatively close but what is curious is that the difference is not in the expected direction. According to Ellis's hypothesis, the greater the amount of planning time, the higher the

accuracy. If there is any style-shifting at all, then one would expect the language test to have a higher accuracy rate than the essay since the subjects have to concentrate on fewer items in the language test for an unlimited amount of time than in the essay. The opposite occurred. The regular past tense form is not as straightforward here as in Ellis's study. Other pragmatic functions that relate to the mode differences and that are not accounted for in the planning/non-planning factor are likely to be at work.

As for the irregular past tense forms the pattern is also not consistent with Ellis's which is more or less constant for all his three tasks. (The assumptions about the difficulty learners might have with the use of the irregular forms are the same as those made in Ellis's study: although the irregular forms are difficult to learn because they are different, once learnt they appear to become easier for the learner because of the frequency with which most of the irregular verbs are used.) There is style-shifting in the use of this particular tense form but in no expected pattern. The language test has a very high accuracy rate of 91.2% to be matched only by 95.0%, the percentage in the discussion task. There is a decrease in the accuracy rates from the language test to the essay and the interview, with 68.0% and 54.2% respectively. The percentages for the essay and the interview are in sharp contrast to those of the other two tasks.

The possible reasons for the difference between the two sets of results could be due to the number of times irregular past tense forms are required and the various types that are used. For the language test, the discussion, and the essay, the number of irregular forms required is not very high which could account for some

of the unexpected results. However, a more revealing factor could be the type of irregular forms used and the frequency with which they are used.

For the language test and the discussion, both of which have high accuracy rates in the use of the irregular form, the types of irregular verbs used are limited. In the language test, 'have' and 'begin' are the only two types of irregular forms asked of the subjects. In the discussion, the predominant verbs used were 'gave', 'thought', and 'got'. With such a small selection of types, it is not surprising to find that the accuracy rates are high for these two tasks.

As for the essay, the range of irregular forms is certainly more varied. They include 'saw', 'kept', 'found', 'drew', 'brought', 'came', 'forbade', and a few more types. Similarly, in the interview, the irregular forms used are 'got', 'caught', 'went', 'took', 'spent', and the list goes on. This variety must have some unmistakable effect on the accuracy rates of these two tasks. While the irregular forms that have been used are by no means difficult or are rare, they still pose some problem for the subjects since the accuracy rates are not very high. When the variety goes up, together with the increased frequency of use, the likelihood of the subjects making an error with the irregular forms increases.

An additional consideration that has to be made is the lack of comparability between all the irregular forms. Unlike the regular forms which have standard inflections, the irregular ones do not, hence, using the irregular forms as measures of accuracy might not give a true reflection of the variable pattern.

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With the past copula, the pattern is similar to Ellis's except for the discussion task. The accuracy rates for the language test and the essay are within a similar range but the accuracy rate drops significantly for the interview which is consistent with the decrease found in Ellis's study. But the rate almost doubles with the discussion task which throws off the similarity. The problem with the past copula in the discussion task is the size of the verb sample. With only five, any claims made about this task would be unreliable.

Using the planning/non-planning factor seems to partially explain the accuracy levels of the essay and the interview. To recapitulate briefly, the accuracy rates of the essay and the interview could not be accounted for with the pragmatic categories. The accuracy pattern here indicates very clearly the higher accuracy levels for the three verb types in the essay than those in the interview. The percentage differences are very significant for all three types of verb forms (a 47.4% drop from the essay to the interview for the regular past; 13.8% for the irregular past; and 33.0% for the past copula).

The planning time does explain the essay and interview accuracy levels for the simple past tense. This explanation, however, has to be looked at in terms of just one tense/aspect even though this is compelling evidence for one to generalise about the other tense/aspect forms.

Looking at the entire set of results, they do not neatly fit into a consistent pattern. Dealing with just the simple past tense form and categorising the verbs into regular, irregular, and copula forms have produced patterns of accuracy different

from the results of this main study. With Ellis's hypothesis, more planning time should produce higher accuracy. This, in fact, goes against the hypothesis set up for this study. Although it is the attention factor that has governed the choice of tasks, the similarity of the attention factor and the planning time, as discussed earlier, allows a comparison. If planning time is the main factor, then one would expect the highest accuracy rate to occur in the language test, followed by the essay, then the interview, and finally the discussion. Furthermore, the two written tasks should be quite close since the difference in planning time is not very great. Similarly, the other two oral ones will also be quite close in their accuracy rates for the same reason. This pattern of accuracy has not occurred. The results are in fact closer to the hypothesis based on the attention factor except for the essay and the interview. Hence, it is clear that the planning time is not absolutely crucial in deciding the accuracy levels of the tasks, although it did make some difference to the essay and the interview tasks. This lack of consistency is not too different from Crookes' (1989) findings (reviewed in Chapter 3), pointing to the more diminished role of planning time as a critical factor of variability.

The difference between Ellis's results and those taken from this study can be attributed to some of the problems already discussed in the review. The nature of the tasks in Ellis's study where the subjects might have been sensitised to the consistent use of the past context, and the different proficiency levels of Ellis's subjects and those in this study, could have contributed to this difference in the results. But also the many discourse types used in this study might be another strong factor. Ellis raised the problem of comparability of performance on some of the structures. Different types of discourse can influence the type of

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language use. The reason for the choice of tasks used here has already been discussed. Despite this problem the planning/non-planning factor does still play a part in accounting for the accuracy rates of the four tasks.

Having looked at the planning time as a contributing factor in the variability of the tasks, the added problem of the different discourse types in the present study has to be considered. As Ellis has noted, the type of discourse the learner is involved in can make a difference in the frequency and type of variability that occurs. This aspect of the tasks will be examined in relation to a number of constraints, such as discourse structure, discourse topic, external temporal control, and contextual temporality.

5.7.2 Discourse Structure

Thus far, it has been found that the variability in the accuracy rates in the four tasks in this study are not governed by either the attention factor alone nor are the pragmatic categories able to explain the pattern that has occurred. The planning time examined earlier extends the attention factor by concentrating on the time aspect rather than the perceived amount of attention that is given to language. In looking at discourse structure, the aim is to show the influence exerted by the type of structure that is peculiar to the discourse type on the variational pattern in the use of tense and aspect. This is also one of the factors examined in Perdue's (1982) extensive study of the pragmatic functions of temporality (reviewed in Chapter 3). What is of particular interest is the forces that act upon the two discourse types: the essay and the interview, that somehow resulted in the higher accuracy rate of the

essay over that of the interview.

a) Essay

The essay as a genre makes use of numerous linguistic devices that help provide temporal links within the text as a whole. Just as in any discourse type, adverbials are the most obvious markers of time. It was noted earlier in Table 5.1 that more adverbials are used in the essay than in the interview. But, the difference is not great, with 9.7% of verbs being governed by adverbials for the essay and 7.3% for the interview. What is interesting is how these adverbials work in the entire discourse to create temporal cohesion in the text.

For any discourse, whether written or spoken, it will be defined by, amongst other things, the temporality of the utterance. In expository writing temporal markers are used just as in other types of writing but there are other factors that pertain to its discourse structure that make it different from other discourse types.

All types of writing follow certain conventions deemed appropriate for its discourse type. For any written compositon in continuous development, there must be some form of organisation of the content for it to make sense. As the text unfolds, there will be a progression of ideas, assertions, examples, and qualifications connected in various ways. One of the devices used to shape a written text is to paragraph the points. This is an established convention expected of most well-written texts. Books on writing teach students to paragraph their essays so that the reader will find them more accessible (Kane 1983). With this visual organisational device, related ideas are held together within paragraphs and

points are able to develop progressively through the text. Where points become a little removed, then new paragraphs signal the transition from one point to the next (Nash 1980).

The paragraph does not just organise the content alone. What goes along with it are the temporal organisers. Depending on the context, time indicators may very well structure the whole text for a more chronological emphasis. The paragraphs assist the writer in fitting in the content coherently and at the same time help put the content into a temporal frame of reference that is appropriate for the information developing through the text. For example,

> (2) S1:   In the older day women did not socialise with the men, thus when there came an age of marriage the couple was alway matched by a matchmaker.
>   Nowadays people mention about matchmaking again ...

(underscoring not part of text)

Time adverbials such as the ones above are used to open the paragraphs which also provide a way of developing the topic in this essay. It is suggested here that, while time adverbials do not rigidly structure the text into paragraphs, they can be used to define them. With the points visually segmented into paragraphs, the writer is likely to be more conscious of the structure of the text and hence also the temporal frame of reference. The fact that an essay is a continuous piece of structured writing must make certain demands on the writer to fit his/her points into these expected constraints, different from those of other discourse types. These constraints may actually contribute to the higher accuracy rate of the essay over the interview since the writer is assisted by the visual indicators as

well as the awareness of the discourse conventions.

It is important to note that the use of the adverbial does not appear to increase the frequency of unmarked verbs for past situations under the conditions discussed above. This indicates that the adverbial as a pragmatic category does not strictly function in the same way in all contexts.

Apart from time adverbials, there are other kinds of devices that help pull together a text. These include enumerative terms such as 'the first place', 'secondly', 'furthermore', 'in short', which structure the text. They provide direction as well as definition to each point being discussed which then ensures the temporal continuity. Fleischman (1991), who examined indexing devices in discourse involving spatial and temporal expressions, sees planned discourse containing "'traffic signals" whose function is a purely pragmatic one of providing information about the organisation of a text, principally by means of anaphoric and cataphoric cross-references' (Ibid: 291). The enumeratives discussed here are like the 'traffic signals' that point the way for the reader.

In the example below the enumerations help indicate very clearly the time reference which is present for the entire discussion of the reasons.

> (3) S2: ...There are two main reasons which lead to the failure in finding a suitable mate. They are as follow:
> Firstly, Singaporeans are very busy, nowadays. They do not have time to look for their life partners...
> Secondly, most Singaporeans prefer to stay with their parents. They prefer to have somebody to cook, wash and care for them...

In the three paragraphs from which this example has been taken, there were instances of inappropriate tense/aspect used. Having the enumerations does not mean a failproof way of eliminating inappropriacies. However, these structural markers do provide some guidelines for temporal structuring.

So far what have been discussed are certain characteristics that occur in written texts, in particular essays. Paragraphs are found only in written texts and enumerative terms are used very frequently in essays, though not exclusively. The latter is commonly used in oral texts too, though not quite so obviously in non-lengthy oral pieces. These two features have been examined in relation to how they add to the cohesion of the text in which the temporal marking is made easier, thereby encouraging greater accuracy in the use of tense/aspect.

If the cohesion of a text does make a difference to the temporal continuity, then many other devices are also working simultaneously to hold a text together. However, these other cohesive devices, such as the semantic relation between words and sentences, the use of reference, the binding effect of conjunctions, etc., function in both oral and written texts. Since the purpose of this thesis is not to examine general cohesion in the four tasks, it suffices to say that in a written text where the type of cohesion used is more visual, temporal marking appears to be more easily controlled lending itself to greater accuracy.

b) Interview

The discourse structure of this discourse type is starkly different from the essay. Apart from the obvious difference of one being oral and the other written,

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the interview necessarily introduces one more participant into the text: the interviewer. The interaction between the interviewer and the subject interrupts the continuity of any one person's contribution to the text, be it frequently or occasionally. If the entire interview is regarded as one text, then the subject no longer presents one complete text as in the essay. The shorter pieces of discourse that now make up the interview could make it more difficult for the subject to adhere to his/her sense of temporal coherence. There are no paragraphs to signal changes in themes or enumeratives that make use of the paragraphs to indicate the direction of an argument. While the writer of an essay is probably more conscious of the temporal links in the temporal world s/he is creating in the written text, the participant in an interview is perhaps less careful about the temporal reference owing to his/her lack of control over the whole text. This is illustrated in the example below:

> (4) INT: so how <u>was</u> lunch
> S1 : lunch ah quite okay but cause I <u>had just finish</u> I just
> <u>rush</u> from my terminal room you see so just <u>rush</u>

The interviewer begins this topic with fairly overt temporal cues: the reference to lunch and the use of the past tense to indicate remoteness. Subject 1 breaks the temporal frame of reference with her reply by using the past perfect which is inappropriate for the reference to the same lunch event. There could be a number of reasons for the inappropriate use of the tense here but it does illustrate either the subject's choice of not picking up the interviewer's cues, the possible lack of knowledge in the use of the past perfect, the lack of time available to the subject to carefully consider her options, or a combination of the above. Being part of an interaction can make it very difficult for the learner who might be very distracted

by many factors.

In an interview, the structural pegs are different from those in the essay, and without the clear sense of complete coherence from start to finish the temporal coherence could be harder to maintain. Hence, this could explain the lower accuracy rate of the interview as compared with that of the essay.

c) Discussion

This particular oral task is similar to the interview in that the text is not one continuous piece with visual markers and pauses in the form of paragraphs as in the essay. With the interview, there were two participants, the interviewer and the subject. In this task, the number goes up to three, with only one or two groups of two's.

The fact that there are a number of participants in this interaction makes the exchanges rather brief unless there are dominant speakers, in which case only one participant's speech is lengthy. Because the exchanges are generally brief, and the entire discussion is also fairly short, the opportunity for the participant to display his/her oral command of the tense/aspect under these conditions is limited. The excerpt below is an example of the type of exchange that is very common in this task.

(5)   S8: like so many activities on how can we
       S10: how can we show our interest?
       S7: they don't really understand us
       S10: terrible .. no interest in others' activities
            no interest in men . wearing T-shirts and
            jeans.
       S7: because we don't smile
       S10: we can't smile at everyone 'gila' is it?

This exchange not only shows the brevity of the participants' comments but also the type of sentence structures and verbs as well. Sentence fragments are used quite often without verbs as in S10's second comment. This 'short-form' way of communication which can be easily understood by her peers allows a strategy of avoidance of verbs or full sentences. Hence, the accuracy rate for this type of exchanges becomes very high since the participants are not engaged in texts revealing of their ability to use tense/aspect. Furthermore, in some of the exchanges modals are used but this verb type is not within the discussion of this thesis.

The discourse structure of this task which contains short exchanges and sentence fragments assists the subjects in producing or at least gives the impression of their producing a higher accuracy level in the use of tense/aspect. Whether they are actually more proficient in their mastery of this grammatical item when conversing with their peers is questionable. But what is clear is their ability to use adequate avoidance strategies to communicate without committing obvious errors in tense/aspect. The degree of familiarity among the subjects has made it acceptable for them to use sentence fragments. Perhaps one might even say this is part of the syntax of Singlish (which is considered a variety of English found in Singapore). This pattern is further aggravated by the nature of such interaction. In an interview, the object is to encourage the subject to speak, whereas in this peer-group discussion, the subjects are all theoretically given equal chances to speak. While some will dominate, others will retreat into silence if s/he does not feel like contributing to the discussion for whatever reason. Without the interviewer probing, the quieter subject will not feel the pressure to either compete for speaking

time or to volunteer points of his/her free will. And, the other participants are also not likely to patiently wait for the quieter ones to speak. Thus, under such circumstances, it is understandable that this task has the highest accuracy rate compared with the other three tasks.

d) Language Test

This last task is similar to the essay in that it is, first of all, a written text. This task also makes use of lengthy pieces of prose that observe the conventions of normal expository writing. Furthermore, structural indicators such as paragraphs and other cohesive devices are also present in the two passages used in this task. What is starkly different is that the passages are provided and not generated by the subjects.

The similarity of the discourse structure in this task compared to the essay has no strong positive effect on the subject's performance. This task has the lowest accuracy rate of all the four tasks. The difficulty does not appear to lie with the discourse structure of the passages since they are like essays. What has significantly affected the accuracy rate is the preponderance of verbs requiring the use of the present perfect. Not that the longer continuous passages do not help the student, but it is the relatively overwhelming number of verbs requiring the present perfect, in proportion to the entire passages, that has pushed the level of accuracy down. The difficulty these learners have with the present perfect has already been established in the discussion on the pragmatic categories. As indication of this pattern of behaviour, Table 5.5 below shows the distribution of correct and deviant answers for all the blanks in the two passages.

Passage A	Tense/Aspect Required	No.Correct	No.Deviant
Q 1)	simple present	17	-
2)	simple past	14	3
3)	present perfect	4	13
7)	present perfect	2	15
8)	simple present	17	-
9)	simple present	16	1
11)	present perfect	4	13
12)	simple present	13	4
13)	simple present	17	-
17)	simple past	17	-

Passage B

Q 1)	simple past	9	8
2)	simple present	15	2
3)	present perfect	10	7
5)	simple past	16	1
6)	simple past	16	1
7)	present perfect	7	10
8)	present perfect	5	12
9)	simple present	13	4
11)	simple past	10	7
14)	simple past	15	2
15)	present perfect	7	10
17)	present perfect	12	5
18)	simple present	16	1

Table 5.6 Distribution of Correct and Deviant Forms in the Language Test for the 17 Subjects

It is very clear from just looking at the Deviant column that all the verbs requiring present perfect, except two, have double digit scores out of a total of 17 for the 17 subjects. This is a clear indication of where the problem lies to the exclusion of other possible influences.

5.7.3 Discourse Topic

This next constraint that contributes to the variability in the tense/aspect performance in the four tasks concerns the relationship between the temporal coherence of the text and the discourse topic. This is one more contextual factor that.has to be considered. What is found to make some impact on the temporality of the tasks is the use of the narrative style within the four given discourse types, that is, the tasks studied here. However, the topic specified in each of the tasks will dictate the type of writing style used and not in every instance will the subjects find the need to narrate events in the past. This difference in the tasks will affect their accuracy levels. A detailed study of this possible effect is given below.

a) Essay

In the essay, the topic given to the subjects was 'Matchmaking' (see Appendix 3 for the complete instructions). They were given two paragraphs of background information about matchmaking over the years, and an additional paragraph on the current matchmaking issue in Singapore. Their task was to discuss their opinions of matchmaking in general and the SDU (the official agency to help singles meet other singles) in particular.

The essay, given this topic, requires certain rhetorical features that allow the writer to develop an argument dictated by his/her opinion. Where the writer is asked to give an opinion, the temporal reference point often begins at the time of writing. The currentness of the opinion would require the use of the present tense more

often than any other tense. This is not to say that an opinion can be expressed only in the present tense, as there are numerous ways of developing an argument based on one's opinion. However, the more direct way of expressing one's thoughts on a given issue is often dealt with in the tense that allows expression of immediacy, currentness, and sometimes timelessness of an event or state. The simple present tense is the only one that permits this range of temporal references.

Apart from the present tense, the present perfect is another tense/aspect form which solidly puts the reader into the current context. However, as this is not an easy verb form to use, a point established earlier, the present perfect is not frequently a choice of tense/aspect for the weaker learners.

Also in this type of discourse where an opinion is sought, very often modals are employed to convey the sense of involvement of the writer. Modals are afterall used to express uncertainty, possibility, probability, obligation, and various other states of involvement.

In arguing a case for a certain current issue, it would not be unusual for the writer to relate the discussion to current events. This further encourages the use of the simple present tense. With this tense being the predominant one, it is not unexpected that the accuracy rate should be higher than those in the other tasks except the discussion.

To illustrate the interplay of temporal references between statements of opinion and descriptions of current events, an excerpt from Subject 3's essay is

presented below:

(6) S3

> In Singapore, matchmaking business has not been privatised yet. I think it is a good idea to make matchmaking a business because this will make the matchmaking activities popular. In general, matchmaking should be taken seriously. It is not a laughing matter because it will affect your whole life. In my opinions young people should feel good to join the matchmaking activities. Young people should mix around indiscriminately before they settle down for marriage. The matchmaking agencies provide a lot of opportunities for us to socialise and befriend with people. Therefore, I think matchmaking really plays a important role in a conservative society such as Singapore.

In this paragraph, the writer begins with a clear temporal positioning by referring to Singapore in the present day with the use of the present perfect. The affirmation of his thoughts on the subject of matchmaking is very firmly framed in the current time reference. This is made so in the way he prefaces two of his sentences with 'I think' and 'In my opinion', respectively. Interspersed within the paragraph are modals which help pin the statements on the current frame of reference. They include the non-past use of modals such as 'should' rather than 'should have been' and 'will' which is a reference to a state still relevant. Even the use of pronouns such as 'your whole life' and 'a lot of opportunities for us to socialise' provide definite signals for the reader to respond to an immediate reference point. In all, this paragraph is securely placed in the current time frame.

This example shows how the essay task is locked into a temporal frame of reference that does not fully display the learner's ability to use his/her knowledge of tense/aspect. But what it has also shown is the ease with which the subjects can communicate in the present tense to write coherent essays. An avoidance of

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reference to past events and states can totally disguise the subjects' proficiency in their use of tense/aspect.

Although the expository writing style described above is predominant in the essay, instances of brief narrations occur within the essay. 'Narrative' is used loosely here to refer to any recounting of events or recalling of past situations, real or imagined. This non-technical treatment of this genre of discourse serves the purposes of this investigation. The whole narrative genre has been extensively studied focusing on many and varied aspects, such as the type of cohesive devices that are used, the differences between oral and written narratives, and more relevant for the purposes here, the relationship between time and tense/aspect. Most of the work done in this field studies narratives as complete pieces where the main purpose is just to narrate, with the exception of conversational narratives where the narrative is interspersed with normal dialogue. What is different in this essay task is that the writers include only brief segments of narration and certain established conventions do not apply to this type of narrative.

Before returning to the discussion on the essay task, a recall of the review on the discourse features in narratives in Chapter 3 is pertinent here.

Godfrey (1972) found that with his second language learners the temporal continuity in their oral narratives was disrupted by numerous factors. They include the insertion of timeless generics, the introduction of subtopics, the use of complex or newly acquired structures, and other extralinguistic details at episode boundaries. Kumpf's (1982) findings are more specific. Basically, the

foregrounding and backgrounding factor is what motivates the alternation in the use of the simple past and the present historic in her subject's conversational narrative. This was found to occur in a few other studies (Tan 1987, Hopper 1979, Hopper and Thompson 1980) and it appears that this factor has come to be accepted as a significant consideration in narratives. In the conversational narratives of native speakers, Wolfson (1982) concludes that there is a lot of tense-switching without any violation of discourse constraints. The switching serves as a means of introducing new events or separating episodes in the narratives. Schiffrin (1981) who expanded on Wolfson's study provides a complex set of results indicating the types of situations in which tense-switching occurs.

This brief recapitulation of one part of the literature review can be classified into two groups: the narrative studies of non-native and native speakers. The focuses of the studies are different as the former concentrates on the problems the learners have with the use of tense/aspect and the maintenance of temporal cohesion in fairly artificial situations, while the latter looks at the verbal behaviour of proficient users of the language in interactive situations.

To return to the discussion of the essay task, the two major observations must be reiterated. First, there are not many narrative segments in this task, and second, they are brief. These two observations can partly explain the fairly high accuracy rate of this task compared with that of the interview. With fewer narrated passages, the need to switch time frames is reduced. The possible problems such as those encountered in Godfrey's study are, to a large extent, avoided. There is less of a need to go into the past from the present reference point which is the

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predominant time frame of the essay.

As for the second observation, the brevity of the passages means that not many of the usual problems with narratives apply. For example, there is no story that is being narrated and hence, there are very few episode boundaries which are focus points of tense-switching. And because no story is being told, a general switch to the past may be easier. If the first verb is correctly marked for the past, then the rest of the passage follows the same tense. The example below will show that the use of the narrative form has not meant more inappropriate use of tense/aspect.

(7) S4

> In the traditional Asian societies, where education was not universal and very few girls were given the chance of receiving a higher education. Their parents set a high priority for the marriage of their children. Those marriages were either arranged through matchmakers or by parents themselves.
>
> With arranged marriages, the parents and matchmakers were assumed to be wiser. They had a pool of potential partners and their life experience to draw on. However, *the one that they had chosen might not be suitable for their sons or daughters.*

This example shows that even though two paragraphs are devoted to a narration of the past, the topic sets limits on how the narration is structured. There is no need for foregrounding or backgrounding and hence the chances of problematic tense-switching are lessened. And in this particular example no errors are made at all in the marking of the verbs for the past. If there were, no legitimate case can be made for what would appear as random switching.

The ease with which the subject above has managed to use the past reference is repeated in many of the other subjects' essays. However, for those who did not share this ease, their problems arose from a combination of factors, not necessarily related to problems of narrative structures. The example here shows such a combination.

(8) S6

> Matchmaking is probably one of the oldest profession of the world. In the olden times, in China, for example, the matchmaker, who is usually a woman, . would go around the village looking for suitable couples to pair up and get a remuneration in return if she succeeds in getting them to get married. To them, this profession is not only interesting and exciting but also rewarding.

The subject was not able to backshift when he moved from a description of the matchmaking process to a generic comment about the matchmaker. This is a problem noted by Godfrey in his sample of narratives. Following this is an 'if' clause which was not marked for the past even though an appropriate backshift was made for the preceding modal, 'would go around'. The last sentence in the example also suffers from a non-marking of the past. It is a general comment made about the matchmaking profession from the perspective of the matchmaker, indicated by the first two words, 'To them'. Hence, the temporal shift to the past still applies. But the subject did not see the need for this. This situation is one that could be explained by referring back to the pragmatic functions of the temporal props such as adverbials. The phrase, 'In the olden times', serves as the past time marker, relieving the writer of the need to put the following verbs into the past. In a similar way, the temporal link to the past, in the last sentence, is held with the prepositional phrase, 'To them'. Since the need to maintain temporal

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coherence appears to be satisfied, the writer might then take the easy way out by not marking the verb. This argument is supported by the statistics comparing the pragmatic categories which show that when adverbials indicating past time were used, the subjects tended not to mark their verbs. An excerpt from Subject 7's essay is another example of this reliance on adverbials.

(9) S7

> In the past, parents usually have the authority to decide the marriages for their children through matchmaking. In such a scheme, a pair of couple don't have any opportunity to know each other well before they get married...

These two examples showing the non-marking of the verb for the past are not the norm in this essay task. Most of the subjects who included segments of narration in their essays did not have this difficulty with the use of the past tense. The general accuracy level is relatively high for reasons already discussed. It is clear in this task that the discourse topic has made it possible for the subjects to attain higher accuracy rates which is in contrast to the interview task discussed in the next section.

b) Interview

With the interview task, the range of topics covered is certainly more flexible as the interviewer did not have a specific agenda. However, he was instructed to encourage the subjects to speak widely on current issues as well as events in the past in order for them to demonstrate their ability to use their tense/aspect knowledge in an oral situation.

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In the previous section, the general constraints of the discourse structure of the interview task and their possible effects on the accuracy levels of this task were dealt with. The discussion now moves on to the specific constraint of the narrative structure which is linked to the demands of the topic set by the interviewer. The interviewer took the approach of getting to know more about the subject, not unlike a job interview assessment of an applicant's interpersonal skills. The subjects, conversely, were told to expect general questions about themselves, their hobbies and whatever current issues the interviewer found interesting. The suggested list of questions given to the interviewer included topics such as descriptions of leisure activities, hostel life, university life, clubs and societies, fee increases, future plans, experiences as a national serviceman (for males), and a description of a terrifying experience. (See Appendix 4 for the detailed list of questions). This list was provided only to assist the interviewer and he was free to choose what he wanted from the list. The only specification was that he had to try to elicit the full range of tense/aspect, paying particular attention to the past and the present.

In this interview task, the occasions requiring the use of the past tense, and in particular the past in narratives are certainly more than in the essay. In addition, the probability of finding narrative segments in the interview is very much higher.

In contrast to the narratives within the essays, those in the interview are more problematic for the subjects. Because the interview is an oral task, different rules apply. Since this is an interview conducted like a conversation, it is appropriate to look back at the two studies, mentioned earlier, on the use of the conversational

present historic. In a conversational narrative, frequent tense-switching is possible without violating discourse rules as long as it is done systematically. Wolfson (1982) and Schiffrin (1981) found that native speakers did maintain systematic rules of tense-switching. For a narrative to make sense, it is essential that the speaker maintains tense continuity once the choice of the past or present tense is made, unless the sequence of events is interrupted in some way, such as by providing background or by starting another episode. Consistency within an uninterrupted episode is absolutely necessary.

This governing requirement in oral narratives is observed usually without problems with native speakers. However, with learners, in particular, with the subjects here, inconsistency is observed. Most second or foreign language learners have difficulty with the use of the past tense compared with the present. When they alternate between the present and the past, they quite often have problems. This might be attributed to one of two possible reasons or a combination of both. One of them could be the incomplete mastery of tense-switching skills in such narratives, and the other the lack of ease in using the past tense causing involuntary slips. It is not inconceivable that the two factors jointly cause the inconsistency in the tense-switching. However, it seems rather unlikely that the tense switching results from an attempt at using the present historic for narrating, except maybe for some more proficient subjects. For the learners to know how to break rules systematically , they must first know the rules very well. Examples below will show that the tense- switching does not follow any discourse rules.

(10) S7

> INT: ...tell me about your work experience
> S7: actually I'm a staff clerk . sometimes I deal with

salesperson . then is regarding doors ah sales of
doors and I have to ???
INT:door? d-o-o-r-s?
S7: d-o-o-r
INT:oh I see I thought dogs
S7: and it's quite a good experience for me because
previously I <u>didn't involve</u> in any work . except
operator . and then . I face many kind of people

The subject was asked to relate her work experience from her last vacation which obviously is not current. She began with the present tense and this is maintained throughout except for the underlined verb 'didn't involve'. Two things are apparent.

First, it is generally accepted that when conversational present historic is used, it is used in the foreground of the narrative, while the past tense is used for the background. In this example, the present tense is used for background information about the subject's position in the company and her duties in general. It is jarringly inappropriate.

Second, the switching to the past tense in the second last verb is unexpected because of the persistent use of the present tense for much of the past situation. It is doubly unexpected because under the pragmatic categorisation, 'didn't involve' has also been classified under the adverbial category because of the preceding adverb 'previously'. And with adverbials referring to past time, the subjects have generally tended not to mark the verbs, believing that the time reference is already clear and that perhaps there is no real functional value to marking the verb for the past as well. However, this is not the case here. It could have been a fortuitous choice on the part of the subject or that a real contrast is made

between the comment about a time before her job as a staff clerk and her current opinion about her job. The subject appears to evaluate her experience and this can be appropriately done in the present tense. This experience is juxtaposed against her lack of it before this time, though she does recall having worked as an operator after a brief pause. Perhaps subconsciously, she made an effort to distinguish the two time frames. However, once it seemed quite clear that she had not moved from this second time frame, she switched back to the present tense. The 'and then' provided this link and the present tense is used for the description of the type of experience she faced, which is background-type information.

It is clear that in this example the use of the present tense is not a case of switching to the conversational present historic. The acceptable rules for using the conversational present historic were not observed, and instead other functional rules applied. The use of the present tense for the past in the short narration appears to rely on the situation for temporal clarity. As long as the interlocutor knew where she was on a time scale, she did not use verb-marking to reinforce the time reference.

This reliance on the situation in the narrative segments in the interview is prevalent in most of the data. Two more examples below illustrate this phenomenon,

(11) S6

        INT: after your BMT where were you then?
        S6: after BMT I went to on course signaler . actually
            my my vocation is radio relay operator . that take
            about seven week course and then I go for another

course . do driving then driving
INT: driving?
S6: ya . because my vocation I <u>need</u> to drive my own
    vehicle . so and then <u>take</u> another seven hours ah
    seven weeks and then I <u>go</u> to my unit after that

(12) S3

INT: tell me about your NS experience
S3: NS experience . for me I think is quite
    interesting because after after my artillery
    course <u>I've been posted</u> to ah instructor team . I
    I I will <u>I'm</u> under HQT Safti so in HQT ??? <u>I'm</u> in
    the training cadre department
INT: I see
S3: this is the instructor team and we <u>are</u> responsible
    ah ah teaching those recruits in unit not ITD or
    ??? all this

(Note: BMT=Basic Military Training
      NS =National Service
      HQT=Head Quarters Training
      ITD =Infantry Training Depot)

In example (11), the subject appears to move between giving background and foreground information. Unlike Subject 7 in example (10), not all the verbs provide background information. Hence, the verbs that show a sequence of completed action that is in the foreground could allow the use of the present tense. For instance, after telling the interviewer that the radio operator course takes about seven weeks, he goes on to talk about two other separate sets of events. These two events could conceivably be in the present historic. But the description about the radio operator course before that is ambiguous. It could be a general statement in which case it would then be background information, or the start of the sequence of events that could be part of the foregrounded

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information. But with this confusion of purposes, and a consistent use of the present tense for most of the description pertaining to his past NS (national service) experience, it is probable that no conversational present historic is used here. But rather, it is a careless use of tense/aspect, relying on other cues to provide the temporal coherence to the text.

Similarly, with example (12), Subject 3 uses the present tense in the same off-handed way characteristic of the other two examples. The main concern is to communicate, not to answer in grammatical sentences. In this example, there are shifts in purposes, from making evaluative statements to descriptions of the NS experience, and to explanatory asides. He comments on the experience being interesting, and then later, explains what the training cadre department is. The rest is about what he did. These shifts are not differentiated by any changes in tense/aspect. Once again, these narrated segments prove to be problematic in terms of tense/aspect marking.

In the interview task, the narrative structure has certainly contributed to the lower accuracy level. As mentioned earlier, the higher number of occasions for the subjects to recall past events, coupled with the fact that this is done orally, create more inappropriacies in the use of tense/aspect. The ease with which most of the subjects refer to past events in the essay task using the past tense is definitely not demonstrated in the interview task. Thus, this discourse constraint has a definite impact on the accuracy levels in this task.

c) Discussion

Similar to the interview task, the topic is certainly more flexible than that in the essay, but it is not as free ranging as in the interview. As the subjects were given an excerpt from a letter in a student magazine to read and respond to, the topic is confined to what has been given and its related issues. (See Apppendix 5 for the excerpt).

As the nature of this task is afterall a discussion among peers, there is very little guidance or external prompting concerning how the subjects should express tense/aspect and time. They were left to their own devices to discuss in their small groups with only an unobtrusive tape recorder to be a witness to their interaction. There was no interference from anyone outside their own groups.

To pick out narrative structures specifically for close scrutiny requires little effort because they are non-existent. The topic, in the first place, is current and provocative. Responding to it meant examining the issues relevant to the subjects at the time of the discussion in a current mode. This mode automatically means the use of the present tense more than any other tense/aspect.

Inevitably, this task must gain from the subjects' predominant use of the present tense. The fact that it has the highest accuracy rate compared with those of the other tasks must be related to the paucity of past events that need recalling. Since there is no one to prompt them to talk about the past, this task remains relatively free from tense/aspect problems.

d) Language Test

While the discussion and the interview tasks are relatively flexible in imposing the topics for discussion, the language test is totally restricted. With the passages given to the subjects to fill in, there is virtually no opportunity available to them to include any discourse of their own. (See Appendix 1 for the passages). The topic demands in this task are, thus, stringent yet lax. The subjects must fill in the blanks with the prescribed verbs which is taxing since they cannot choose to say the same thing in another way to avoid any difficulty they might encounter. But, they also need not worry about the rest of the discourse and in this sense it might seem easier for them. Most people, let alone learners, dread writing lengthy pieces like essays and a language test like this one is often a more welcome task.

The two passages given to the subjects are narrated segments. However, there are not many blanks in these segments for the subjects to fill in. Whatever there are, the distribution of correct and deviant answers do not correspond convincingly with the verbs in the narrated segments. (Refer to Table 5.5). The verbs used in these segments for Passage A are 2, 3, and 17. For Passage B, they are 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, and 14. Both types of verbs, the ones used for describing background information as well as those in the foreground, are included in this list. It is also important to note that this is a written task, and the more rigid rules of written narratives apply here; that is, no conversational present historic can be used.

In Table 5.5 , the verbs that are problematic as evident from the high numbers of deviant answers, are 3, 7, and 11 for Passage A. For Passage B, they are 7, 8, and 15. Those scores which are 10 and above (out of 17) are considered high.

None of these blanks tally with the verbs found in the narrated segments of these passages, except for blank number 3 in Passage A. The obvious reason for this lack of correspondence boils down to the required use of the present perfect. This has already been extensively dealt with, so it suffices to say that once again the present perfect is a strong factor bringing down the accuracy levels in tense/aspect use. Even the discourse constraint of the narrative structure has no strong negative impact on the accuracy levels of the subjects' performance. Only in Passage B are there two blanks with a relatively high deviant rate. In blanks 1 and 11, the deviant scores are 8 and 7 respectively. The rest of the scores are very low. There is no doubt that in this task, the use of the present perfect is the strongest influencing factor over the accuracy rate.

5.7.4 External Temporal Control

This next factor is relatively minor but it can affect the accuracy levels of the tasks in varying degrees. It refers to the amount of control the writer or speaker has over the temporal setting as s/he writes or speaks. The hypothesis here is that where the writer/speaker has more control over the discourse s/he is responsible for, the higher the accuracy rate. However, the influence would be secondary to other stronger forces already discussed.

This factor is not too different from those looked at in SAT (Speech Accommodation Theory, reviewed in Chapter 3). This theory, which revolves around the adjustments made to one's speech to resemble that of the interlocutor, is useful in explaining the external temporal control. Although what is happening here

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under what has been termed 'external temporal control' does not directly deal with the notion of convergence and divergence, it does highlight the fact that the interaction between the participants involves a dynamic interplay of control over a situation. In any interaction where there is more than one person involved, many other factors become important. Different people will bring with them their own personalities, style, background information, etc. to create a situation that reflects these qualities. The amount of control exerted from each speaker over his/her speech is one of these qualities that can affect temporality and tense/aspect use.

a) Essay

In an essay, the writer is in full control and s/he chooses whatever temporal framework that s/he deems suitable. The difficulty of fitting into a given time frame is eliminated, and thus the accuracy level is not affected by this factor.

b) Interview

This task, unlike the essay, introduces the interviewer who guides the interaction and, to some extent, controls the temporal direction. His questions and choice of topics lead the discussion and the temporal reference. Example (13) shows a possible occurrence of this in conjunction with a few other factors.

(13) S4

        INT: then what do you do on weekends then?
        S4: I read I went out with my friends
        INT: I see . what about what do you all normally do NUS
           students during the long vacation break when you
           have three months?
        S4: three months we work
        INT: oh so you work last year
        S4: I work last year

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INT: where where at?
S4:  I work in a school
INT: beg your pardon
S4:  I work in a school
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The interviewer asks a question about a current habitual activity. The subject's response is rather confusing. First the 'read' is appropriately used in the present tense but this is followed by 'went' in the past tense. The remoteness and the specificity of the past tense render it inappropriate as a reply. As to whether this is the result of the interviewer's imposing his temporal reference thereby causing the confusion in the subject's use of tense/aspect, is not entirely clear. It could be one possible factor, with other factors working simultaneously to cause the tense-switching. One of them could be that the subject is for a moment confused about this element of remoteness. The use of the simple past is to indicate remoteness in relevance, not necessarily in time which is how the subject could have taken it.

In the next few exchanges in example (13), the non-marking of the verb 'work' may be attributed to a few possible reasons. The question about the long vacation break has an appropriate response. But when the interviewer specifically asks about 'last year', the subject does not change her use of the present tense to the past. This continues in her two subsequent responses as well. One possible reason is that the interviewer has changed the time frame, and the subject has failed to respond immediately to it, grammatically, though not cognitively. The fact that she repeats the adverbial 'last year' shows that she is cognisant of the change to a specific time in the past. However, this has not brought about a corresponding change in the tense. This can be explained by the pragmatic function of the

adverbial. As discussed under the pragmatic categories, the adverbial is the second most problematic category because the subjects tend not to mark the verb for past time when the adverbial is already there to do the job. Another possible factor could be that the end consonant in the past tense form, 'worked' is not voiced and hence it is not apparent to the listener. Finally, one more possible, though improbable reason could be the fact that the interviewer did not mark his 'work'. The influence from this is unlikely to alter or mislead the subject since she is not likely to be so phonologically atuned.

At the outset, it was mentioned that this external temporal control is not going to be an obvious influencing factor. In addition, proving it is even harder as there are many other factors that appear to affect the use of tense/aspect, as demonstrated in example (13).

c) Discussion

The external temporal control in this task is not unsimilar to that in the interview but instead of the interviewer, the interlocutors are the other subjects in the small group. In these small groups, it is apparent from the data that a dominant interlocutor would emerge as the discussion progressed. This particular participant would then behave like the interviewer in that s/he would lead the discussion and pose questions to the group as in the example below.

(14) S6 and S11

> S11: misconceptions .. so start with your list .. so
> start with your list ah . what do you think they
> they what do you think they girls think which you

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don't agree with them
S6: so what do you think?
S11: it's not true lah . you start with your list
first ah

S11 takes charge with some resistence from S6 but the latter is not able to manoeuvre himself into a more dominant position. Although there is usually some dominant speaker in each group, s/he is different from the interviewer in that s/he does not pressure his/her group to speak. In this way, this external force is not as great as in the interview. The fact that this discussion task is the one with the highest accuracy rate owes more to the other factors already discussed than to this external temporal control factor. Nevertheless, it could be useful to note that despite the similarities between the interview and the discussion with the presence of a dominant speaker, the accuracy rates for the two are very different. This confirms the influence of other stronger factors acting on the use of tense/aspect.

d) Language Test

In contrast to the rest of the other tasks, the temporal element in the language test is completely controlled externally. The subjects have no way of determining the temporal cues although they have to respond to them with what they think are appropriate tense/aspect choices. Knowing that the accuracy rate of this task has been greatly affected by the required use of the present perfect and the presence of adverbials, the external temporal control factor would probably have limited effect on the results. However, the fact that this task offers the subjects no control over the temporality of the passages does coincide with its low accuracy rate. With this tenuous link, this factor might have made some small contribution to the difficulties

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encountered by the subjects.

5.7.5 Contextual Temporality

In the pragmatic approach to explaining the variability of the accuracy rates in the results for this study, four categories have been used: the verbal aspect, adverbial, serialization, and implicit reference. These categories are going to be further explored here in relation to specific task constraints found in each of the tasks. The pragmatic categories were devised to capture the relationship between the contextual temporality of a clause and the temporal functions of the verb. These categories have been shown to correlate significantly with the accuracy rates for two of the tasks, the language test and the discussion. The other two tasks have not been adequately accounted for. They both did not have a preponderance of the verbal aspect and the adverbial categories as in the language test, nor a dearth of them, as in the discussion. Together, the two tasks fall between the language test and the discussion. However, the ranking between the essay and the interview is not easily explained using the categories as they are. Many factors have already been discussed in this chapter. Their contribution to the explanation is tied closely to the task constraints. A similar exploration of the categories here will also be linked to the tasks in this manner.

a) Essay & b) Interview

Both these two tasks will be discussed together as they share the same middle position in the accuracy ranking. A comparison of the two tasks together will show how the differences, not apparent from the analysis of the pragmatic

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categories alone, can explain a higher accuracy rate for the essay over the interview.

Beginning with the verbal aspect category, more of this appears in the essay than in the interview. Given that learners have difficulty with the present perfect, they are more likely to avoid using it. In the interview where the language is less tightly controlled by the subject than in the essay, fewer verbal aspect categories are expected, which indeed occurred. The essay, which allows the writer more planning time, appears to encourage the present perfect to be used more frequently as well as more accurately. Conversely, for the interview, fewer verbal aspect categories were used but the percentage of deviant forms is very much higher at 43.2% compared with 13.2% for the essay (refer to Table 5.1). However, the differences do not have a significant impact on the overall accuracy rates of the two tasks as the number of present perfect forms used is relatively negligible.

For the adverbial category, a similar pattern is seen. The essay has more of this category than the interview, but more subjects use them inappropriately in the latter than the former. It has been suggested earlier that the discourse structure of the essay has helped the subject to produce a higher accuracy rate for this task. Also, time adverbials are often used to structure an essay where a comparison of past and current events is made. Although it has been established that the verbal aspect and the adverbial are the two most problematic categories, they are not unaffected by the other factors. The fact that the essay has more of these two categories without incurring more deviant forms suggests this to be the case.

As for serialization, again there are more of this category in the essay than in the

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interview, but the difference is not great. While the difference in the percentages of this category is not significant, the percentage of it being wrongly used is far greater. The essay has 51.2% and the interview 47.9% for it being correctly used, and 8.3% and 18.1% respectively for it being incorrectly used (refer to Table 5.1).

The possible reason for this difference could lie in the way this category has been defined. Serialization is when the time frame has been set by a preceding situation, and the tense/aspect that is required is the same as the preceding tense/aspect. When the preceding tense/aspect is appropriately used, then what follows will also be correct. Hence, in the essay, where subjects fare better in their use of the verbal aspect and adverbial categories, they are likely to also do better in serialization. Moreover, as there are fewer narrative segments and more discussion or description of current situations in the essay, the likelihood of inappropriate use of tense/aspect is reduced.

The implicit reference category is the only one which has a lower percentage used in the essay compared with the interview. For the essay, it is 32.4% and the interview 42.1%. Consistent with the pattern in other categories, the essay has a lower percentage of wrongly used verbs in the implicit reference category, with 4.9%, and 10.5% for the interview. The percentage difference for the wrongly used tense/aspect, between the two tasks, is also consistently higher than that for when it is correctly used.

Why there are fewer implicit reference categories used in the essay could be because it is a written task. More explicit temporal cues are generally needed

when one does not have an immediate audience as in an oral interaction. The fact that more adverbials appear in the essay than in the interview bears out this observation. Of course, the degree of explicitness is not just because one is written and the other oral. The discourse structure also makes a difference. With the interview, there are questions that require answers and many of these replies are classified under this implicit reference category since the time frame is implied from an external source, that is, external to the subject. References to events are often deictic to the interviewer or subject and explicit time references are not needed. For instance, example (15) below, taken from the interview, shows the current relevance of the question at the time of asking without the use of an explicit time reference.

(15) S11

> INT: do you still have vacancies in Eusoff College?
> S11: we have a lot . because and one of the more
>   crucial reason why we need to shift is that being
>   the only off campus hostel lah we have you know a
>   lot first years and our seniors they prefer to
>   move into campus to be convenient for them to

Why there are again fewer inappropriacies in the essay compared with the interview can be attributed to a few factors already considered. They include the discourse structure, the topic, and the external temporal control. The discourse structure for the essay is more controlled which helps keep the writer in the right temporal framework. The essay topic requires a discussion of a current situation which often means using the simple present when the implicit reference category is needed. Since this is the easiest tense for the subjects, the accuracy rate is bound to increase. The interview, on the other hand, has more references to past events

with the range of topics controlled by the interviewer. The chances of the subjects making an inappropriate selection of tense/aspect when implicit references are required are higher under these circumstances. As for the essay, the external temporal control is solely held by the writer himself/herself, which is likely to produce a more accurate use of the implicit reference category. The subject need not use what s/he does not want to in an implied situation. All these contributing factors appear to promote the accurate use of tense/aspect in the essay over the interview.

What is interesting about the implicit reference category is the way in which it has been used. How the temporal reference is made implicitly differs in different situations. The range of differences between the essay and the interview is worth noting, although there does not seem to be any apparent correlation between the types of implied situations and the accuracy rates of the two tasks.

In the essay, the implicit reference is used in explanatory, descriptive, and discussional situations. Opinions are often also given with an implicit time reference. The occasions where inappropriate tense/aspect forms have been used are recurring situations of cataphoric and anaphoric reference, situations when narrative time is used, when knowledge of the world is implied, when the topic imposes constraints, or when the perceived reality is not matched by acceptable tense/aspect representations to express that reality.

Examples of these situations are given below. S4 here has used the present tense 'has' inappropriately and it is not apparent until the following clause.

(16) S4

> The SDU can be said to be a modern matchmaker performing a necessary role which may seen to be ridiculous , ... and not appealing to some people. It <u>has</u> its moment of glory when many graduates are able to find their life partners.

Another example of this is:

(17) S13

> Matchmaking, the traditional way of bringing couple together into the marriage wedlock, has come a long way. In China, for instance, matchmaking <u>has been</u> practised for thousands of years. <u>In those days</u>, it was the duty of the parents to find partners for their sons and daughters, otherwise, they would employ a matchmaker. Today, although people advocate the so called "true love" ideology, that is freedom of choosing their own partners, yet matchmaking still plays a significant role.

The writer of example (17) zigzags from the past when talking about the traditional way of matchmaking to the present when he says it has come a long way. Then the reader is led into believing that he talking from a present perspective when he talks about China using the present perfect. But one only realises that it is used inappropriately when he refers to China remotely with 'In those days'. Given the rest of the text, it appears that the switch to a present reference does not occur until 'Today'. It is not likely that the time reference changed from the present in sentence two to the past in sentence three. The use of 'those' which is deictic indicates that the reference is still to the situation that has just been described. Again it is a case of the implicit reference being too vague. The context has not initially supplied enough information to the reader and it is only clear after the event. The implied rules of using the contextual situation to provide the temporal framework have been broken.

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In a similar situation, example (18) shows the writer marking his verb for the past when the context given is clearly in the present.

(18) S12

> Just recently I received a booklet entitled, 'Venus   III'. This booklet encourages the receiver to   participate in the ... computer science project which   helps to matchmake couples in campus. The questions it   <u>contained</u> are, I feel, too superficial to determine if   the couple is compatible.

Situations that use the narrative time to set the temporal framework have already been discussed, and will not be repeated here.

As for the reliance on knowledge of the world to find the time frame, two examples show how there is a mismatch and it is only from the external knowledge the reader brings to the essay that can clarify the situation.

(19) S9

> As it <u>was</u> a government sponsored project, the SDU definitely drew much attention such that an   unintentional effect was the result.

(20) S17

> The SDU which was set up by the government in 1984 with   the purpose of helping people between 25 and 35 age   group to find their mates. Even though the activities   that are organised by SDU <u>were</u> interesting , preferably   like overseas trips, barbeques and etc. the success   rate of SDU is very, very low.

In example (19) it is common knowledge that SDU <u>is</u> a government sponsored

project and it has not relinquished this responsibility. The description of the status of SDU is inappropriate in the past even though the intention is to contrast how SDU was received in the beginning and how this attitude has changed. In example (20), the situation points to the interpretation that the activities are still interesting because there is no indication that the quality of the activities has changed. Since the success rate is referred to in the present tense, the application of the previous statement must still be valid.

As for the interview, the situations where implicit references are made are obviously going to be similar to those in the essay. However, what remains distinct is that with the interview, the exchanges involve questions and answers which often fall into the implicit reference category. Possible problems with such replies have already been dealt with under the section on external temporal control.

The range of situations where the subject has used tense/aspect inappropriately because of mismatching what is implied temporally with what is used appears to be more limited. There are some instances of inappropriate uses determined through cataphoric references in the text. But, one of the main sources of problems has to do with the higher number of narrative segments in the interview compared with the essay. Again, this has already been extensively discussed.

The way the implicit reference category has been used shows some diversity of situations. While there seems to be more variety in the essay, the frequency of making the wrong implicit reference is less than in the interview. Hence, this diversity does not lower the accuracy rates of the tasks.

Having discussed the essay and the interview in terms of how the pragmatic categories work within their respective task constraints, it is clear that no one factor has determined the accuracy levels of the tasks.

c) Discussion

In this task, there are very few verbal aspect categories and this is probably because the subjects were in control of their discussion and could avoid the use of the present perfect. The external temporal control is weak and the choice of tense/aspect is entirely in their own hands. With the adverbial, the topic is likely to be the main influence. Since the discussion is centred around a current issue, there is less of a need to make constant references to the time frame. As these two categories which are the most problematic are used infrequently, problems with accuracy in the use of tense/aspect are consequently reduced. Even though the verbal aspect category has a high percentage of being wrongly used with 81.5%, the fact that it is used only 2.4% of the time means that the impact on the accuracy rate for this task is negligible (refer to Table 5.1). As for the adverbial category, it is both infrequently used as well as wrongly used.

When the time frame for this task is basically current, much of the temporal referencing would be implied. Hence, the implicit reference category is likely to be the most used which it is. It has a very high percentage, at 57.4%, of it being used and 2.5% wrongly used. The subjects, obviously, have no problems with making temporal references implicitly. What has helped is that the tense/aspect most likely to be used is the simple present which is the simplest choice for them. The

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exchanges are short and with each break, the implied temporal frame of reference is carried over, thus explaining the high percentage obtained for this category being used. The types of situations in which this category is used are similar to those in the interview. They range from questions, replies to questions, explanations, opinions, and instructions.

When most of these categories are generally accurately used, the verbs used in the serialization category are also likely to be correct. If the head verb, that is, the first verb used to talk about a situation, is correctly used, then what follows under the serialization category is likely to be correct most times.

d) Language Test

As this task is prescribed by the researcher, how the pragmatic functions interact with the task constraints is very restricted. This task has the lowest percentage of the implicit reference category being used with 26.3% and the highest wrongly used with 13.0% (refer to Table 5.1). However, the actual number of instances of it being used is not very large and even less frequently is it used wrongly. For the most part, it remains correct. The implicit reference category is used mainly in explanations and opinions. Since the overriding factor that has proved to affect the accuracy rate is the difficulty the subjects have with the verbal aspect, there is not much need to consider in any great depth the influence from other factors.

5.7.6 Influence of the Bioprogram Hypothesis

Bickerton's (1981) Bioprogram Hypothesis, which has already been reviewed in

Chapter 3, is being considered here as a possible means of explaining the variable patterns found in the results. Although the bioprogram does not rely on the use of the context for its interpretations of the verb tense/aspect, it still makes use of contextual clues to help define its semantic features (referring to the four semantic distinctions: specific/non-specific, state/process, punctual/non-punctual, causative/non- causative). The contextual approach to language understanding should rightly be multi-dimensional to reflect the complex nature of language learning, especially as a second or foreign language.

Basically only two of the bioprogram's four semantic distinctions are relevant for the study of tense/aspect: the stative/non- stative, and the punctual/non-punctual. Platt and Ho (1988, reviewed in Chapter 3), who used these semantic features to look at data on past-tense marking in a Singaporean sample, found that verbs which functioned as non-stative punctual verbs were more likely to be marked. The stative and the non-punctual were less likely to be marked.

With Platt and Ho's results as an indicator of how learners might use tense/aspect, the same two semantic distinctions are used to look at the variability found in this study. However, since these semantic categories only apply to past-tense marking, the outcome will have only limited value for the purposes here.

The use of 'stative' refers to the traditional notion of verbs such as 'like' and 'seem' that generally describe states. 'Punctual' verbs describe actions that happen once in one instance, as in the example, 'He knocked down the door'. And 'non-punctual' verbs are like punctual ones except that the action is iterative

or continuous. With these definitions, data for the four tasks are examined for their accuracy rates.

Table 5.7 Accurate Past-Tense Marking according to Semantic Distinctions (continues over the page)

a) Language Test (total no. of verbs = 37)

	Stative	Non-Stative Punctual	Non-Stative Non-Punctual
Total Required	17 (100%)	51 (100%)	51 (100%)
No. Correct	16 (94.1%)	48 (88.2%)	33 (64.7%)
No. Incorrect	1 (5.9%)	3 (11.8%)	18 (35.3%)

b) Essay (total no. of verbs = 568)

	Stative	· Non-Stative Punctual	Non-Stative Non-Punctual
Total Required	131(100%)	17 (100%)	18 (100%)
No. Correct	46 (35.1%)	16 (94.1%)	14 (77.8%)
No. Incorrect	85 (64.9%)	1 (5.9%)	4 (22.2%)

c) Interview (total no. of verbs = 2644)

	Stative	Non-Stative Punctual	Non-Stative Non-Punctual
Total Required	285 (100%)	111 (100%)	230 (100%)
No. Correct	122 (42.8%)	70 (63.1%)	102 (44.3%)
No. Incorrect	163 (57.2%)	41 (36.9%)	128 (55.7%)

d) Discussion (total no. of verbs = 1135)

	Stative	Non-Stative Punctual	Non-Stative Non-Punctual
Total Required	13 (100%)	16 (100%)	5 (100%)
No. Correct	12 (92.3%)	13 (81.2%)	3 (60.0%)
No. Incorrect	1 (7.7%)	3 (18.8%)	2 (40.0%)

Table 5.7 Accurate Past-Tense Marking according to Semantic Distinctions (continued from the previous page)

The results show a number of things, the first of which is that these semantic distinctions, which appear in the essay and interview, bear out the hypothesis tested by Platt and Ho. In both these tasks, the non-stative punctual verbs have the highest accuracy scores compared with those of the stative and the non-stative non-punctual. With 94.1% for the essay and 63.1% for the interview, these percentages are significantly higher than those for the other two semantic categories. There is a marked drop in accuracy for the next highest score in the non-stative non-punctual category. But for the last category, the stative, there is another large decrease only for the essay but not for the interview.

The results for these two tasks show that learners mark the non- stative punctual verbs more frequently than the other two types of verbs. Between the two tasks, the essay has higher accuracy rates than the interview except for the stative category. Again, this seems to be a recurring pattern throughout all the different analyses of the accuracy rates. Given that the non-stative punctual verbs have a

higher tendency to be correctly marked, this factor alone again does not explain the overall higher accuracy rate for the essay task as this category of verbs only take up 3.0% (17 out of a total of 568) of the three verb types used. For the interview, the proportion is 4.2% (111 out of 2644). One would expect that the interview should have a higher accuracy rate as it has more non-stative punctual verbs. But it does not. And in any case the percentage of simple past tense is not very high, which in turn reduces the number of non-stative punctual verbs. Hence, the results are neglible.

As for the other two tasks, the language test and the discussion, they do not seem to be affected by the semantic distinctions. For both tasks, the non-stative non-punctual has the lowest accuracy rate and the stative the highest, leaving the non- stative punctual in the middle-ranking position. The percentage scores are very similar for the two tasks in all the three categories.

There is an obvious explanation for the results of the language test and the discussion. The sample sizes of the required past tense verbs are very small which can give a false picture of the situation. Moreover, in the stative category in the language test, there is only one token type: the verb 'be'. With an 'easy' sentence, the use of the past tense of 'be' would not be a problem, ensuring a high accuracy rate.

The semantic distinctions borrowed from the bioprogram hypothesis are shown to affect past-tense marking in only two of the tasks. Even though the other two tasks do not share the same pattern, the validity of the hypothesis may not be entirely

false owing to the problems with the data, as discussed in the previous paragraph. However, the overall effect of the semantic distinctions on the accuracy rates shown in the essay and interview tasks is limited. They do not account for the higher accuracy rate of the essay over that of the interview. Given this outcome, the marking or non-marking of the simple past tense forms cannot explain the overall accuracy rates in these two tasks.

5.7.7 Morphophonemic Considerations

In response to a plea from Wolfram (1985, reviewed in Chapter 3) not to ignore surface features when explaining interlanguage variability, the influence from the linguistic context is considered here for its possible influence of the accuracy results in this study. Like the previous section, such morphophonemic considerations are not strictly heavily context- reliant in the broad sense. However, in a limited way, these considerations are part of the entire context of language in use. The morphophonemic aspects are an important inclusion in the analysis of interlanguage variability because with subjects whose L1 has a more restricted final consonant system, there are always claims that inflections in English are more problematic for these learners. In Chinese, only six consonants can occur as end-consonants: the nasal /m/, /n/ and /ɔ/ and the voiceless stops /p/, /t/ and /k/, and the latter are generally glottalized (Hancock 1980). Platt and Weber (1980) also points out that this restricted end-consonant system in Chinese may be the cause of the high frequency of omissions of consonants. Wolfram (1985), mentioned earlier, certainly shares this view of a possible L1 interference on interlanguage.

To investigate the value of these claims, the data from the four tasks of this current study will be looked at for indicators showing the influence of the linguistic context.

Wolfram's list of constraints considered as surface features include the regular/irregular verb forms, the phonological forms of the regular and the irregular, the linguistic context, and the frequency of the verb being used. A discussion of both the regular/irregular verb constraint and the frequency of verb use will precede that of the other two constraints.

The regular/irregular dichotomy has already been discussed in an earlier section on planning time (5.7.1). The general belief about the irregular verbs is that they tend to be marked more frequently because of two reasons. One, most of the irregular verbs are frequently used and when the irregular forms have been learnt, its frequent requirement reinforces the correct use of these forms. And two, the 'principle of saliency' is said to apply, where the irregular past tense form is more distant phonetically from the non-past, the more likely it will be marked for tense. Wolfram's (1985), and Platt and Weber's (1980) studies have indicated a vague similarity in the hierarchy corresponding to the principle of phonetic distance. However, in Ellis's (1987) study, the regular/irregular distinction is not so marked. The irregular verbs were more or less constant while the regular verbs style-shifted so that in one of the tasks the frequency of past-tense marking is higher and in another the frequency is lower. As for the frequency rates of the four tasks in this study (refer to Table 5.4), they show that the irregular verb forms have a

higher frequency of accurate tense-marking than the regular forms. However, the frequency rates decrease according to the tasks but, the rates for the irregular are still higher than those for the regular in each task. It seems evident that the principle of saliency does affect the past-tense marking to some degree. It cannot be entirely ruled out but neither can it be a single definitive force influencing the marking of tenses.

As for the phonological forms and the linguistic context in which these forms occur, Wolfram's results indicate that consonant clusters, /d/, and /Id/ are not affected only by phonological factors. Grammatical processes are also at work. The omission of the end consonants occurs mainly in verb forms and not in nouns.

As for Platt (1977, reviewed in Chapter 3), the four main past tense phonological categories he looked at are consonant +ed, vowel change, vowel +d, and consonant +d/t. The irregular verbs he singled out are: get, be, go, and have. A list of these categories in the order of the most frequently marked *accurate past tense* forms to the least is given below. The figures refer to his subjects taken as a whole.

Verb	Totals	%	Order
get	26/28	92.9	1
be	118/149	79.2	2
go	61/79	77.2	3
C+ed	50/71	70.4	4
have	34/52	65.4	5
Vw ch	179/282	63.5	6
Vw+d	23/55	41.8	7
C+d/t	24/128	26.6	8

Table 5.8 Frequency of Past-Tense Marking (adapted from Platt and Weber 1980:60)

The possiblity of direct influence of the phonological shapes of the past tense verbs on past-tense marking is worth considering given Platt's results. The past tense verbs in the essay and the interview tasks are categorised using Platt's phonological types, with one addition of 'do'. The other two tasks are not included as not all the types are represented for a comparison. However, the focus on the essay and the interview tasks is appropriate since their accuracy rates are not easily explained. For some of the phonological types in the essay task, a comparison is not possible because they are not used by the subjects. Where the numbers are too negligible, the phonological type is not ranked.

Verb	Totals Essay / Interview		Per cent Essay / Interview		Order Essay/Interview	
get	-	19/25	-	76.0	-	1
go	-	31/43	-	72.1	-	2
do	1/2	41/69	50.0	59.4	-	3
be	43/49	104/185	87.8	56.2	1	4
Vwch	13/15	49/99	86.7	49.5	2	5
C+ed	5/7	12/41	71.4	29.3	4	6
Vw+d	1/1	9/34	100.0	26.5	-	7
Have	3/7	3/28	42.9	10.7	5	8
C+d/t	10/15	8/88	80.0	9.0	3	9

Table 5.9 Frequency of Accurate Past-tense Marking for the Essay and the Interview Tasks

From Table 5.9, similarities are evident between the results here and those in Platt's. Most obvious is the higher frequency of past-tense marking for the irregular verbs: get, go, and be (looking at only the interview). The categories which are marked the least often in the interview are C+ed, Vw+d, Have and C+d/t in decreasing order. These phonological types are not ranked in this order coincidentally. Except for 'have', the rest are mainly regular verbs. Even for the essay, again except for 'have', the regular phonological types are marked less often than the irregular types. This pattern highlights once again the principle of saliency and the frequency of verb use affecting past-tense marking. This more detailed analysis of the phonological types has not altered previous conclusions about the different treatment of the regular/irregular verbs.

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Another point worth noting is the difference in the frequency rates for the essay and the interview. Even though the essay is not represented for all the phonological types, it is clear that for those that are available, the frequency rates are very much higher than those for the interview. This pattern is consistent with all the other analyses of the data where the subjects invariably do better in the essay than in the interview.

5.8 Summary of Analyses

This chapter which concentrates on the contextual approach to interlanguage variability has investigated a number of ways to look at this subject. The principal means of examining the way the learners/subjects in this study have approached the tense/aspect issue is a pragmatic one.

Four pragmatic categories: verbal aspect, adverbials, serialization, and implicit reference, have been devised as measures of variability in tense/aspect. It was hypothesized that the categories listed in the above order from the most to the least difficult, matches the hierachy of difficulty faced by the subjects. Using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Multiple Comparisons procedure, the hypothesis was partially substantiated. The categories, when ranked in the order of the degree of influence over the accurate use of tense/aspect, are the verbal aspect, adverbial, and in equal third position, serialization and implicit reference.

Using the outcome of these two analyses to explain the accuracy rates of the four

tasks, the relationship between the pragmatic categories and the rates is obvious for two tasks: the language test and the discussion. The language test which has the lowest accuracy rate uses the verbal aspect and the adverbial categories the most, and conversely the discussion which has the highest accuracy rate uses these two categories the least. The essay which has the second highest accuracy rate is followed by the interview. Their respective ranking is not explained by the pragmatic categories which are the highest for serialization and the implicit reference. Since these two categories are not differentiated in the degree of influence, they are not able to account for the accuracy rates.

In an attempt to explain the essay/interview problem, other factors have been considered within this contextual approach. Discourse features such as the discourse structure, discourse topic, external temporal control, and contextual temporality are looked at. An inherent feature of the tasks that has been considered is the planning time required in each task. Finally, two non-discourse oriented factors, which are the bioprogram hypothesis and the morphophonemic influence also accounted for the data.

The discourse features considered include discourse conventions that govern each discourse type such as paragraphs, expected length, and cohesive devices. It is suggested that the features of the essay help the subjects produce a more accurate use of tense/aspect, compared with those for the interview. The discourse topic also tends to encourage higher accuracy in the essay than in the interview owing to the type and range of temporal references required by the topic. This has led to the more frequent use of the narrative structure in the interview which

is more problematic for the subjects. As for the external temporal control, the essay allows absolute control of the output compared with the interview. This may have helped the subjects sustain the higher accuracy level. However, it is recognised that this is not critical. If it were, the interview and the discussion would have similar accuracy rates since these two tasks allow the subjects similar degrees of control, and this is not the case. The contextual factors in the essay point towards an easier job of maintaining a higher accuracy rate for the essay over the interview.

Planning time is found to partially affect variability in the tasks. It is not critical as style-shifting did not correspond with the amount of planning time available for each task.

As for the semantic distinctions borrowed from the bioprogram hypothesis, they have been shown to affect past-tense marking in two of the tasks: the essay and the interview. The overall effect is limited since this factor cannot account for the higher accuracy rate of the essay over that of the interview.

The last factor, the morphophonemic influence, also appears to affect the accuracy rates in a limited way. After having considered the phonological and grammatical processes, it is apparent that past-tense marking is governed to some degree by whether the verb is regular or irregular. The irregular verb is more frequently marked compared to the regular. But this again will not explain the overall accuracy rates of the essay and the interview.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

The present study began with the stated aim of investigating interlanguage variability in second language learners of English in Singapore, focusing on three tense/aspect types: the simple present, the simple past, and the present perfect. Using the variability studies that went before, one of which is Tarone's examination of variation in a sample of foreign language learners, a framework similar to Tarone's was set up for this study.

A preliminary study was conducted using this framework in which three tasks were designed to reflect points on a continuum that shows varying degrees of attention given to language form. The tasks are a language test, an essay, and an interview, in order of the task requiring the most attention to the one requiring the least. The findings were clear in indicating variability in the accuracy rates. However, the cause of the variability could not be identified. This pointed to the need to extend the preliminary study with the use of various analyses of such data and a modification of the methodology.

The essential outcome from the preliminary study is the conclusion made about the attention-to-speech factor. It raised questions about its use in the study of variability. But, given the variable results in the preliminary study, the attention

factor was assessed to be useful as a methodological tool in eliciting variability. It allowed in its framework the use of activities that are normally used in the classroom to draw out variable patterns in written and oral speech. If the theoretical framework is not adopted in its entirety, it could still be used with modifications and extensions.

For the main study, the same attention-to-speech continuum is used. Four tasks were designed to elicit variability to reflect the varying degrees of attention on the continuum. They are a language test, an essay, an interview, and a peer-group discussion. In the attempt to account for the outcome, various analyses were done. The conclusions that are drawn from them are given in the next section.

6.2 Conclusions

The conclusions resulting from the analyses of the data must be viewed within the limitations presented in Chapter 1.

One of the most important outcomes of this study is to show the absolute need to return to the context to explain variability. While it is not a new notion, it is sometimes forgotten in the pursuit of a narrow aspect of theory, as evident in many of the non-discourse based research in this area. This study has demonstrated the limitations of certain approaches, while highlighting the importance of others.

A summary of the conclusions is given below.

a) Systematic variability is seen to occur across tasks that have been designed to

reflect points on the attention-to-speech continuum.

b) The pattern of variability as measured by the accuracy rates of the four tasks does not indicate a one-to-one correspondence with the hypothesized pattern of variability. The hypothesis which predicts a higher accuracy rate corresponding to a lower amount of monitoring of one's speech is not upheld. The ranking of the tasks from the highest accuracy rates to the lowest is as follows: the discussion (95.3%), the essay (92.4%), the interview (83.2%), and the language test (72.0%). An adherence to the hypothesis would have produced a different ranking order where the discussion would come first before the interview, followed by the essay and finally the language test.

c) The limitations of the attention-to-speech framework are once again highlighted in this study. Its inability to explain the multiple facets of interlanguage has demanded a many-pronged approach to interlanguage variability, and that is the contextual approach.

d) Within this contextual framework is the pragmatic approach which was used to divide the data according to pragmatic categories: verbal aspect, adverbial, serialization, and implicit reference. A means of sorting out the degree of influence each pragmatic function, as defined by the category, had over the use of tense/aspect was possible with the use of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the multiple comparisons procedure.

e) The results from this pragmatic approach show that the verbal aspect category

has the strongest influence over the use of verb tense/aspect. This is followed by the adverbial, and last of all the other two categories, serialization and the implicit reference category.

f) Applying the ranking order of the pragmatic categories to the tasks takes the explanation of the varying accuracy rates a little further. The language test, having the highest occurrence of verbal aspect categories and adverbials, undestandably incurs the lowest accuracy rate. Conversely, the discussion which has the lowest occurrence of the same two categories has the highest accuracy rate. The essay and the interview tasks are not dominated by either of these categories but by the other two, serialization and implicit reference. A blurring of attributable categories is inevitable since these two categories belong to the same ranking order. Hence, this points the way to yet other means of explanation.

g) Planning time is found to cause variability in the data. Although the results do not indicate a consistent variable pattern corresponding to the amount of planning time, there is some indication for the explanation of differences between the essay and the interview. For two simple past tense forms: regular and copula 'be', there is a significant gap in the accuracy rates between the written and the oral tasks (except for the copula 'be' in the discussion which is too negligible in number to be valid). This suggests that the modes of language production have some effect on the accuracy rates of the verb tense/aspect. However, the accuracy rates for this analysis do not consistently vary to explain the overall variability found in the tasks.

h) Discourse constraints are another set of factors that partially affect the use of tense/aspect in the tasks. Discourse conventions, discourse topic, external temporal control, and the combination of all these contextual factors operating with the pragmatic categories are seen to have some causal effect on the variability pattern in the four tasks.

i) Semantic distinctions in the use of verbs such as the stative/non- stative and the punctual/non-punctual distinctions also contribute to the explanation of the variable pattern of accuracy rates. Given some difficulties with the data, there is a general pattern indicating the tendency for the subjects to mark the past tense in non-stative punctual verbs more than in stative and non-stative non-punctual verbs. However, again even this factor does not account for the differences between the essay and the interview.

j) The last factor considered was the morphophonemic influence on the data. The regular/irregular dichotomy of the past tense forms appear to make some difference such that the irregular forms are more likely to be marked than the regular. This factor, similar to the other ones, is not singularly important in the explanation of the accuracy rates of the essay and the interview.

The overall conclusion one can draw from this study is that while the attention-to-speech is useful for eliciting variability, a contextual approach is needed to take into account all the various forces at work. A combination of factors is therefore necessay to explain the variable pattern found in the subjects' use of tense/aspect in the different tasks.

6.3 Implications

6.3.1 For Classroom Language Teaching

As with all variability studies, the implications for the classroom are clear. The variable approach to language learning opens up many avenues of teaching language as well as assessing it. It is no longer acceptable to view 'errors' in the language of a learner as the incomplete learning of the target language and as statically reflecting a stage of acquisition regardless of the context.

The variable approach demands a teacher make full use of various instructional types to match the various goals of the learner or goals set by the teacher. These goals as defined by Ellis (1985) refer to the type of language use the leaner needs so that if it is conversational skills that are required, then the situation that best helps the leaner would be to set up more spontaneous type activities requiring less focus on the language form. Creating such opportunities in the classroom would enhance the variable nature of language and language learning. The learner's varied ability could be taken advantage of in this approach.

In line with this approach, assessing the learner would mean not judging his/her proficiency in a language by using just one or two styles related to one or two situations. There is also a need to move away from allowing an assessment of one type of task to influence the assessment of another type of task. Such a bias would only demonstrate a narrow understanding of language and the process of language learning at the expense of the learner's sense of progress and

achievement.

6.3.2 For Research

This study has shown that research in interlanguage variability must follow a more comprehensive approach to account for all the numerous factors that occur in producing such variability. Any attempt to do otherwise would only result in inconclusive explanations of this phenomenon.

When using the attention-to-speech method of elicitation, the modes of delivery have to be carefully considered. The results from this study indicate difficulties that are not easily accountable when comparisons are made across modes, that is, between oral and written discourse.

Not only do the different modes cause added difficulties but also the different discourse types. Each discourse type brings with it different conventions in language use. If these differences are not considered in the design of a study, then the results could be less conclusive. The conditions for studying variability need to be more tightly controlled.

This present study on variability in the language of second language learners raises questions about L1 and L2. The variability that occurs in language use is often treated more critically in L2 than in L1. While variation in L1 might be explained as quirks in the language or attempts at using language creatively, the same type of variation might be treated as serious errors to be corrected. The variable approach

might present a way of harnessing such variation as deviations that may have specific functions in a specific style of language use.

6.4 Suggestions for Future Research

To pursue the study of interlanguage variability from the contextual-pragmatic approach, a useful way of collecting data would be to videotape oral activities. The entire context can be fully considered. Since non-verbal messages are also part of communication, it would not be unreasonable to incorporate these features in a study of language learning. The information provided by the use of a videotape would throw light on other accompanying forms of variability that occur with oral speech. At the same time it could also provide possible reasons for verbal variability.

Another suggestion for the extension of this research is the inclusion of more micro aspects of this pragmatic approach. Individual characteristics such as motivation, language aptitude, sex, age, social role, and status, are some of the factors that have been discussed as having possible effects on the language production of learners.

It is useful in language acquisitional studies to first look at a phenomenon synchronically for the purposes of identifying what is actually happening at a particular stage of learning. Thereafter, a diachronic study would provide a neat follow-up of what has been discovered. The suggestion here is to have such a study to chart the progress of the learners.

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With these suggestions, it is hoped that the contribution made to the study of interlanguage variability will be useful in the understanding of the language learning process.

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Below are the two passages used in the Language Test.

Passage A

<u>A Man's Heart</u>

Heart attacks 1. ____ (be) fairly chic nowadays. In Hollywood, where I 2. ____ (have) some years ago, you are nobody if you 3. ____ (have not) a triple or quadruple bypass. At the Polo Lounge, my regular hideaway, when I protested that my attack almost 4. ____ (kill) me, even though I 5. ____ (have not) surgery; the other guys glared dismissively. Scars 6. ____ (make) a better story if I had had any to show them.

It reminds me of how my Chicago pals used to demand blood proof of my street fighting. Having a heart attack in Los Angeles, in the last few years 7. ____ (replace) boasting about how much alimony you pay to how many wives.

Men in particular 8. ____ (be) now part of a "cardiac event culture" in which the shame and anger of heart disease become transformed, through gossip and mutual advice and even childish comparisons, into a true support network.

In Britain, men 9. ____ (seem) much more embarrassed about sharing the experience. They 10. ____ (withdraw, probably) if they were questioned about it. In America, I'm constantly on the phone not to my doctors but to other writers and similar professionals who 11. ____ (have) heart attacks. We 12. ____ (offer) each other off-the-cuff medical advice, consolation and jokes that render this terrifying accident into something more familiar and even to cosy street corner chat.

My particular group never physically meets, except by phone, and not everyone knows everyone else. They 13.   (be) just guys who   14.   (hear) about my predicament at some point. Before I   15.   (fully recover) they were already calling regularly with encouragement, advice - but most usefully, their own stories. There is a tendency for hear-attack men to take things more seriously. It was after I 16.   (see) the light, that I stopped smoking and 17.   (begin) spending more time with my family. From Victor, the university librarian, the advice was : "Don't eat and talk at the same time;" Norman, the movie producer,: "If someone gives you chest pain, walk out of the room;" Mike, the agent,: "Don't try to give yourself a new life by disguising yourself in a new expensive wardrobe, you 18. (end) up looking like a rich pimp the way I did."

In other words, we have discovered an adult substitute for the street corner chat we 19.   (try) unconsciously to find since we were kids.   Now we can easily and unashamedly talk without fear of losing face or points.

Passage B

The Heart of the Immune System

"The simple presence of a partner is not equivalent to a supportive relationship." Not, that is, according to Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, a psychologist from Ohio State University, in a statement made some months ago. She 1. (just not talk) about the psychological effects of being in an unhappy marriage. It seems that having the wrong partner can also have a harmful effect on your immune system.

For the past five years, Kiecolt-Glaser and her husband, Ronald Glaser, who 2. (be) an immunologist, 3. (investigate) aspects of psychoneuroimmunology, ie. the way in which the "mind" or brain influences the body's immunity to disease.

In one study, they found that medical students who 4. (feel) stressed by examinations when they were approached for the study, showed a fall in the activity of natural killer (NK) cells. This is a group of white blood cells whose function is to destroy infectious organisms. Students who were lonely as well as stressed 5. (be) even worse off and their NK activity 6. (reduced, passive).

Researchers 7. (know) for years that the loss of support from friends or relatives increases an individual's susceptibility to illness. Men who 8. (lose) wives recently are more likely to die than married men of a similar age, and divorce 9. (lead) to increased mortality from pneumonia and tuberculosis in both sexes.

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Kiecolt-Glaser and Glaser studied a group of women who 10. (just separate or divorce), in order to find out whether this increased mortality results simply from self-neglect following bereavement or if it is caused by some underlying immune defect. They found that the women's immune systems were depressed. The number of NK and other immunological active cells were reduced and white cells that normally produce antibody 11. (show) a reduced response. The shorter the time of separation and the greater the women's fondness for their (ex)husbands, the greater was the disturbance to their immune systems.

But "adequate social support" does not mean simply having a partner - any partner - in your life. If one lived with the wrong person, it 12. (produce also) its own immunological problems. In a group of 38 married women, those who beforehand 13. (say) that their marriages were poor, 14. (find, passive) to be more psychologically depressed. They had depressed levels of white cells and responded badly in laboratory analysis designed to measure their immune responsiveness.

This is the first time that anyone 15. (examine) the immune consequences of being separated from someone you care for, or of being forced to live with someone you don't. The results 16. (publish, passive) soon, but only after Kiecolt-Glaser and Glaser 17. (do) more work to show that immune defects lead to physical diseases. One thing 18. (be) clear: in time, most people get over bereavement or divorce. But, if you 19. (marry) someone who is unsuitable, you 20. (have, probably) problems of reduced immunity. So once you realise that getting a divorce means only a temporary drop in your immunity,

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you   ~~21.   (consider)~~ it a better option than being stuck with one partner for life.

Note:

Data were collected for all the numbered blanks for the language test used in the preliminary study. The blanks which have been crossed out are the ones deleted from the language test used in the main study.

APPENDIX 2

The essay topic used in the preliminary study:

Horse and Carriage?

Love, something we so readily associate with marriage these days, was never the main motive in marriage. Marriage was a means by which people maintained racial homogenity, social power, economic security and social status. For something as important as marriage, it was not left up to chance. Many societies had their own special way of dealing with this matter and for the Chinese, the tradition of match-making held an important place in their society for many centuries.

It was not until the middle of this century that changes began to take shape. In China, it was the Revolution in 1949 that altered the course of marriage practices such as match-making which was simplified or done away with. For the overseas Chinese, the influence of western modernization became all too strong and so the practice of match-making, in general, was becoming outdated.

Today, match-making in its strict traditional form is only a practice of the conservative.

Opinions

Student: Of course I am glad that match-making is a thing of the past. We now get to pick whom we want to live with for the rest of our lives.

Another Student: It's more fun these days!

Parent: These days young girls and boys do whatever they want. They think we are busy-bodies when we suggest a suitable person for our son or daughter. What's wrong if we want the best for our children?

Contributor to a magazine: There are pros and cons to match-making. Before, we never got a choice when choosing our mates, but we could be fairly sure we were getting someone. Now, we get the choices but we may not end up marrying because there are too many choices.

Task

Write an essay expressing your opinion about the value of match-making.

The essay topic used in the main study:

<u>Matchmaking</u>

Love, an emotion we so readily associate with marriage these days, was never the main motive in marriage. Marriage was a means by which people maintained racial homogeneity, social power, economic security and social status. For something as important as marriage, it was not left up to chance. Various societies had their own special way of dealing with this matter and for some societies it was the tradition of matchmaking that held an important place for many centuries.

Today, matchmaking in its strict traditional form is less widely practised. However, modern forms of matchmaking, such as computer dating, have evolved over the past few decades. One of the most recent additions, in Singapore, is the creation of the Social Developing Unit (SDU) which has been commonly referred to as a modern matchmaking agency.*

<u>Task</u>

Write an essay discussing how you feel about matchmaking in general and SDU in particular. (Do you see matchmaking as an unnecessary practice? Or do `matchmaking agencies' like SDU have very real benefits for people these days?)

* The SDU was set up by the Singapore government in 1984, pincipally to

help people between 25 and 35 to meet other people of that age group. This scheme is only available to employees of government-related bodies. Some of the activities the SDU organises include parties, overseas trips, car rallies, barbecues,etc.

APPENDIX 4

The suggested questions given to the interviewer for the interview task in the main study:

1) What do you do in your spare time?

2) Do you live on campus? If yes, which hall? How do you like being a hostelite ?

3) How is life as a university student? What preconceived ideas did you have before you entered NUS? Have your expectations of university life been met?

4) Have you joined any clubs, societies here at NUS?

5)(If male) Have you done national service? How would you describe your experience as a national serviceman?

6) Do you look forward to leaving the university for good? What are you hoping to do once you finish your course?

7) What do you think of the increase in the university fees?

8) Is there something you have always wanted to do but never had a chance to do it? Describe.

9) Describe a terrifying experience.

APPENDIX 5

The article given to the subjects as the topic for the Discussion task:

The following is a letter to a student magazine written by a student at the NUS (National University of Singapore). Read the letter and say how far you agree with the views expressed in this letter.

Our government is greatly concerned about the large number of women with tertiary education who remain unmarried. The number of college and university educated women who are single in every age group, but particularly in the older age group, is indeed surprising and alarming. One of the reasons given for this state of affairs is that the male graduate does not like to marry an intellectual equal; he wants to have a woman who will look up to him as a superior. This is just nonsense! I speak as a male undergraduate at the NUS. Being a normal male I crave for female companionship, not just physical companionship but also intellectual companionship. In all my three years at the university, I have tried to find friendship and a possible life partner. But what do I find? Indifference, coldness, frozen ice wrapped in skirts and jeans - no interest in the opposite sex, no normal female interest in men. I meet the silly ones,always giggling in childish amusement. I meet the serious ones sheltered behind thick-rimmed glasses who apart from their intense concern with passing examinations have no other interest in life. I meet the matter-of-fact specimens who extinguish all romantic inclinations. I ask an undergraduate if she would like to go to a dance and what is her reply? "Sorry, no time" or "Not sure, but if I go will you pick me up in a car?

Ah yo, no car ah, how to go? Lose face lah!" I send a New Year greeting card to a girl I met at a party. When I meet her a few days later, there is no mention of the card, no thank you. I cannot but conclude that the higher institutions of learning in Singapore attract only sexless females.

When female undergraduates choose to stifle their natural instincts and needs and later get into the working world they find to their regret and distress that graduate men are in short supply. Unwilling to marry men inferior to them in education and intellectual attainment they find themselves single for the rest of their lives, left on the shelf. Well, you want my opinion? They deserve their fate.

Appendix 6 provides a sample of the data collected for the main study. One complete set of data for the four tasks taken from one single subject (S1) is given below.

Language Test

Answers to Passage A

1. are
2. have
3. had
7. replace
8. are
9. seem
11. have
12. offer
13. are
17. began

Answers to Passage B

1. was not just talking
2. is
3. have investigated
5. were
6. was reduced
7. have known
8. lost
9. lead
11. showed
14. were found
15. has examined
17. have done
18. is

Essay

Matchmaking

In the older day, girl women did not socialise with the men, thus when there came the age of marriage the couple was alway matched by a matchmaker.

Nowadays people ~~mantion~~ mention about matchmaking again because more and more women are getting unmarried. ~~This is especially~~ The government is especially worry about this problem because of the shrinked in the population. Thus they established SDU (Social Developing Unit) in 1984 to help people between 25 and 35.

In fact people do conduct matchmaking here and there in an invisible ~~where~~ manner when new friends with opposite sex being introducinged to each other. ~~Certain kinds se~~ Many organisations such as community youth groups, clans and another private societies or associations etc do organise ~~mo~~ various kinds of activities or courses in which boys and girls are mixed around when they are participated in these activities. Therefore all these ~~organis~~ organisations are just acting like a ~~match centre~~ matching centre in which ~~one can~~ people can choose their partners ~~freedly~~ freely.

~~However For~~ For the case of SDU if has organised the similar kind of activities in order to bring boy and girl come together. However, ~~some people in reject its activities~~ the response may not be good because it has done the things purposely and stated its aim clearly ~~thus~~ which make people feel unnatural to take part in its

activities and ~~alway~~ think that they might get the stigma if they were jointed in SDU. Consequently it might turn ~~turn~~ out fruitless. Therefore although there is no harm to set up SDU but,it ~~might~~ could be unnecessary.

~~There~~ Hence it ~~would~~ may be ~~more appro~~ suggest to shift the fund and effort spend on the SDU onto other organisations to make ~~them~~ these activities more attractive to single woman or single man.

Interview

Interviewer - INT

S1 - KKB

(Tape Side A 0 - 163)

INT: you're Miss Koh Kwee Buay?

KKB: ya Koh K-O-H

INT: so how was lunch

KKB: lunch ah quite okay but cause I had just finish I just rush from my terminal room you see so just rush

INT: I see you are a second year doing?

KKB: Science

INT: I know Science but which major ?

KKB: not major but we now I'm doing Chemistry Maths A and CP CPA

INT: I see KKB: ya three subjects

INT: CPA is computer applications

KKB: yes yes

INT: computer what?

KKB: computer CPA should be um Computer Programming Application

INT: I see Isee

KKB: just a minor subject it's not a major subject

INT: oh I see

KKB: but we have to spend a lot of time on it

INT: your major subject is what? is

KKB: is should be Chemistry

INT: ah so Chemistry is very interesting

KKB: um I . sometime you might think it's interesting but I don't think I really find is interesting

INT: does it does it take a lot of memory work?

KKB: I'm not I think you'll need the memory you need to memory something as a same time you need to understand without understand you cannot memory

INT: of course of course do you stay on campus in the hostels?

KKB: no I didn't stay in the campus I because you need to spend extra money if you stay in campus

INT: so where where do you stay outside?

KKB: quite far away from here . is in Chua Chu Kang

INT: oh I see

KKB: that's near Bukit Batok

INT: so it does take you some time to come to campus

KKB: yes need roughly one hours . shortest is fastest is 45 minutes longest maybe 11/2 hours .

INT: I see I see during the the break last week what do you all normally do?

KKB: last week ? stay at home

INT: I know stay at home but

KKB: ya catch up some of the work for example we got a lot of things we got a lot of um extra not really not really homework lah for example we have to read up some text because sometime we can't catch up you see so we have to spend this within this times we are able to read up some and then do some tutorial . um just catch up lah I mean I didn't spend I didn't spend extra time for outing

INT: so you spend a lot of your time actually

KKB: no I didn't say a lot of time spend most of the time

INT: I see how many hours do you actually

KKB: ???

INT: on on studying

KKB: per day?

INT: per day

KKB: ..at least . I think .. depend because depend if we got attend any activity then say let say I don't have anything tonight by the time I reach my house it'll be roughly evening time so roughly 5 hours . should be more than that including Saturday and Sunday roughly 5 hours

INT: I see before you came to university you must have some expectation of a a university life

KKB: not really I just like I enter here because I got to enter here that's all

INT: you mean you didn't want to come or your parents asked you to come

KKB: I didn't mean I don't want to come just a process of education you see just you go out you carry on and on until you cannot go further that's all

INT: but the expectations you had are the expectations being met?

KKB: um I don't have any expectation in fact I just just follow ??? but I find that you really experience different kind of life you are totally independent I mean you have to because it's not like school last time schooling your teacher will tell tell you what to do excuse me tell you what to do and then give you all kind of information but here if you are not aware of the . certain of information you I mean you are lost you see so I find that you need you learn to be independent if you are very inde you are very dependent you'll really get mad you know you have to rush for lecture and then ???

INT: do you find do you all all organise small study groups to help get along?

KKB: no um my ??? so far I don't have any study group . up to it's up to individual you see some people they like to they like to have a group of people to study might be effective but for some sometime we I find that it's not very effective so up to the individual you see

INT: I see

KKB: but I used to study alone if you got question you can approach a friend lah or approach a lecturer or tutor

INT: I see .some students prefer to study in the library some students prefer to study in the park on the bench what is your style like?

KKB: I prefer to find a place which is quiet can concentrate for example a room in fact a room in fact I don't I don't really used to stay in the library to study I stay in the library study because I got lecture later on so I got to find a place to read up or to do some things you see so I don't suggest to stay in the library I used to study because for my case I got a study room at home you see so there's no problem for me for some people they find it's very noisy at home so they got to stay in the

library study but I find as long as you can a suitable place which is sufficient right and not so hot and quite comfortable you can concentrate that's good enough any place can do

INT: when you graduate in two years' time if you do your honours

KKB: it's too far

INT: what do you expect to do? what would you like to do?

KKB: in fact I intend to go to IE

INT: oh good

KKB: my aim is to go to IE anyway most of the Science students there you know their aim is to study in Science Fac because ??? in fact it's not true to say but most of us might think people have the kind of idea that you are intend you are intend to go to IE because because if you intend to go to industry it's not so um

INT: relevant

KKB: as compare to Engin it's not so bad

INT: I see

KKB: maybe is because mostly we study is base on it's very theoretical

INT: how many students does IE take every year

KKB: I have no idea but I if I'm not wrong I think it's few hundred I can't remember

INT: there are always the Ministry of Education is always short of teachers every year there are so many students going for

KKB: IE

INT: (interruption) there are so many students going for BA and BSc and then how is that how is that you mean a lot of teachers actually drop out is it after they have qualified they teach for a while and then they

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KKB: that I have no I have no this kind of I don't know this kind of information but I I one thing I don't understand is that they take in certain number of teachers you see for training and then they still short of teachers I do not understand I do not understand maybe they have their own kind of systems maybe the way they I have no idea because I never go into this kind of but anyway there is a limited number of people I think the enrollment is limited but I think .. but I think now they keep changing they find that the system keep changing

INT: maybe because they require more teachers for smaller classes

KKB: I have ho maybe especially I think is due to the change of the education they change a lot they change a lot I think they need more teachers

INT: which is your toughest period? is it the O `Level' period the A `Level' or university level?

KKB: I it's very hard to say you see but I find that university is the hardest university is the hardest you you get a lot of pressure you see ah if you enter here you spend you know huh for one years you spend now fees increase so you have to spend more double you see so you can count one lecture is is if I'm not wrong it's few hundred dollars one week or one lecture I can't remember it's quite expensive lah so if cannot study properly if let say you cannot pass you see then you go out it's just like your A `Level' student because you don't have certificate you if you tell people you enter U what course you don't have certificate so if for those people if they enter U for few years let say they suppose to go for three years let say they enter they can go up until second years third year they fail they don't have certificate so it's very it's very unfair for them you see it's some kind of wasting of time although you come to university you learn extra thing besides this kind of . extra things ah but I it's very unfair

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INT: what do you think people say going to university is a different experience you don't really have to study let say History or Geography or Biology it doesn't matter what you study because it's the exposure the training of the mind it is a whole new experience um what do you think?

KKB: you mean you mean those you mean they say you come to university is quite free it's up to you to choose in a sense it's true but I'll say it's quite true that you can choose whatever you like but I think there's still some restriction you see when you talk in term of your subject combination for example in Science Fac you'll still have to let say for example if you say you'll take . say you . so for in a sense I say first year for example you have to take CP second years you want to Economics you won't be allowed because because you haven't take Economics for the first year so second years it's very hard for you take Economics similar for CP for CP for those who want to those who want to carry on those that will want to do CP for the second years ah . in fact the restriction is quite not very big lah but I still there is restriction lah they just cannot any how choose they still have some combination right but you take Chemistry mostly you take Maths also

INT: does this heavy academic schedule give you time to do your own work? social work I mean

KKB: oh

INT: social activities

KKB: oh extra beside studying . ya. I myself in fact I myself involve some kind activity some kind of society but I think it's up to individual lah some people find that there are a lot of time

INT: I see

KKB: some people they can attend a lot of activity you see some of us for me I can

attend one or two . there's two is more than enough if attend more than that you are you find that you can't concentrate so I won't be able to answer that question it's up to individual

INT: ya but I understand that you are very active in some first aid society

KKB: how?   .

INT: Mrs. Koo gave me some background

KKB: oh I see this is this is um at first join in this first this Red Cross society is when I finish my `O' Levels I have plenty of time for one month so I just I just find I just join myself you got to do something so I just accidently I found the they some how have enrolment so I just enter just join in until now is three years ah so far I stop??? because I got difficult to study

INT: what is the society do?

KKB: basically is in fact this because we have difficult detachment you see so in my detachment which is detachment 2 mostly we do training ah teach you how to do first aid and then if you if you can pass of course you have to go for test and if you pass you can get your IC and then you can go for duty . usual usual duty for example there's ???

INT: sorry?   .

KKB: for example usually we go out for some some kind of duty for example those that

INT: the hotel collapse

KKB: ah ya I went there also . and then ah some National Days parade those big occasion you need they might they just they might they might happen that some people might faint some some accident might happen so we just stand by in case anything happen we just help them so this is the kind of duty

INT: oh I see . it's not Red Cross ah?

KKB: it's Red Cross

INT: this is Red Cross

KKB: yes

INT: oh I see I see . so you're not not very active now because of the heavy workload KKB: not I'm not active at the moment ya I'm not active at the moment

INT: but you intend to uh

KKB: but I think

INT: restart the activities

KKB: sorry?

INT: you intend to restart your your activity

KKB: you mean restart this Red Cross activity?

INT: ya once your your workload allows

KKB: ya I think I think I will carry on lah . I will carry on . because I find that it's a it's a continuous process you'll learn something you'll learn more when you're starting . I find that it sometime help . help ???

INT: does afternoon classes make you all sleepy?

KKB: in a way but I'm not really lah . I don't think it it make me sleepy of course you feel tired especially when the weather is very hot but anyway we stay in the air-con when we go for lecture it's a air-con room so is not really affect

INT: do you all have night lectures?

KKB: no . the lectures is I remember first year the latest is until 7 o'clock the rest I don't know so far I came across until 7 now we have change to 6 three days is until 6 o'clock in the evening

INT: I see . you know most people have some dreams like uh scaling Mount

Kinabalu or going diving in the Maldives do you have any of these ambitions or dreams to do something away from work and study?

KKB: away from work?

INT: away from work and study

KKB: and study? .. ya I would I would like I would like to learn Psychology

INT: Psychology

KKB: ya but I think that's impossible because now this when this may be come back to the kind of restriction because if you do in Science Fac you cannot do Psychology I mean

INT: you can can you not Psychology is Science

KKB:I don't know I don't think you can study Psychology . as far as I know I don't think there's no such there's no such kind of combination you go Science Fac unless you study . no lah I don't think they have this kind of combination they can study Maths those Art Fac they can go to Science Fac to study Maths

INT: why is it that you like to do Psychology? it's very interesting

KKB: I think most of a lot of people like like to study Psychology right?

INT: to understand the

KKB: ya study human beings is very interesting thing right you know human being is one kind of animal . there's different kind of people is so I think is interesting if you are able to study the behaviour of people why they behave in this kind of way because if you understand more you are able to interpret you are able to see why they behave in such a way you are able to know why

INT: I see . thank you very much thank you very much

Subgroup 3

An extra - RNS1 - KKB

S4 - LLL

RN: they think that girls want them to pay all the time which is not true I mean for example for for my case I I would rather you know from my point of view I rather think that you know each one pay you know one time each

KKB: you mean share

RN: ya share go dutch that kind of thing

KKB: I see I see

RN: I think that'll be better . otherwise because one thing as students most of us have no ??? so what we are using is our parents' money you know so it'll be unfair if he keeps paying using his parents' money . when you're enjoying it

LLL: in this case you mean you pay for yourself or you pay him after?

RN: either you it'll be best if they they can pay they'll pay the bill lah

LLL: pay the bill first then after that

RN: then after that you return him either that of

KKB: we take turns to pay

RN: take turns to pay ya

KKB: ???man will think that men are weaklings you see they are very weak . is it true?

RN: some of them I think . that's hey that's another point already another misconception that they always think we can't do a lot things

KKB: ya can't do a lot of things correct

LLL: I can't stand some boys they they like to the open doors

KKB: very chauvinistic

RN: but that is good what that is being

LLB: gentleman

RN: that is being gentlemanly

LLL: sometimes they offer to help to carry the books

RN: good what

KKB: I think this is okay

LLL: I don't like but

KKB: no . not to I think that's okay right?

RN: I think that's okay in fact I think if you have a lot of things to carry you'll appreciate them

LLL: we can do it since since we can do it ourselves it's not necessary let them doing it

RN: I would ya perhaps perhaps not necessary but I think I think it'll be good if they can do it lah

KKB: I think it is good for them to share too you see but not to have the misconception that we are really

LLL: we can't do it

KKB: weaklings we can't do anything you see without them

RN: I think it's a matter of um their attitude and actually action ah they're two different things you know if they have this kind of attitude that you know they they think that we are weakling then they they help us that means they are actually helping us because we are not able to carry it you know but on the other

hand if they are just helping with the general with the genuine attitude to help up because they just want to help you to carry something then I think it's okay

KKB: I agree ..

(interruption)

LLL: it's quite true

RN: say again

KKB: guys will always think girls are always late for everything late for appointments

RN: which is not true I think

KKB: late for activities that's what they think you see

RN: wait till wait till you have a I heard from army I mean from girls who have army boyfriends the army guys will be late for 45 minutes to one hour you know

KKB: . but it's true they think that girls will take a lot of time for make-up all that you see

RN: not true ah

LLL: sometimes it's true

KKB: I think that's misconception . because some people are very punctual you see by nature they are very punctual

LLL: some in this case you can't say all all the girls are punctual or say or we say that they are always late

KKB: all of them

LLL: some it's a small portion of them are late . I think most of them are quite punctual

RN: I think you are saying that because you are punctual yourself but I from experience I have a few there were a few occasions when I have to wait for girls 45

minutes to one hour ayoh

(interruption from other groups)

RN, LLL, KKB: that's a misconception

RN: I think ya generally some guys ha when they . I don't know how to say , just that they think that girls always want to attract attention all the time things like that (interruption from other groups) this fellow very horrible

KKB: I can't talk with him

RN: don't don't listen to him lah . he's always like that one . hey you better behave yourself ??? I report you ah . I report him to someone . (interruption) .. you watch out I report

KKB: what else?

RN: let's think straight don't don't listen . do you think it's a misconception that a lot of guys thinks that um girls want to marry a rich husband

KKB: why do you say that say that?

RN: partly because I've come across people some guys like for example you know this girl is going along with another guy so you know you're with another guy now you all are just friends and you're commenting oh this girl is going together with this guy you know then the guy will say of course he has cars he has houses you know he has whatever lah . he will just list out his wealth you know that fella's wealth and then he makes he makes it seem as if the girl is going with the guy just because of his wealth and

KKB: status

RN: ya status riches whatever lah . and

KKB: but that is not purely conception misconception because some females they want security you see they look out for security right

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RN: but I won't say that all everybody everybody is like that because I think you cannot pass this kind of I mean you may see going with a rich guy but what if she doesn't go for his wealth he's she's just going for his personality and or rather that they can communicate well I mean the tendency for people to think I mean they tend to think that it's because of his wealth that's why she's going after him or she's going with him

KKB: ya I think it's a misconception

RN: I think it's a misconception there lah

KKB: it's a misconception

RN: because there are cases whereby okay um I I've come across say this girl okay she's say wooed wooed by two guys . okay . and then um one guy is not so well-off one guy is very well-off okay so the not-so-well-off one will tell her . maybe you'll end up with him because he's so well-off you know things like that I think that's a misconception

LLL: but maybe he just wants um he just wants to says .. he just wants to tell that the girl doesn't like him not because of his personality but only because he's not so rich

RN: ya that's that's that's what I was trying to say

KKB: maybe another misconception apart for this is for females to look ˉ for ˉ people that must be higher standard and higher status than this girl the guy always ??? inferiority complex you see the guys usually have a inferiority complex if they are not better off than we are . is it true?

LLL: you mean you find what . finding uh

KKB: ya finding ah unless finding a

LLL: girlfriend

KKB: ya correct they will always look out for people for females that are lower than them . it's because they've misconception that the girls will want people higher than them you see and they will submit to people if they are of higher status that's what I learn from people

RN: I don't know I mean from my own point of view I feel that's not a misconception but rather that's more of a fact because you if you ever try and experience yourself ah you find you cannot look up to someone who is not better than you in certain ways you know it's very difficult to respect the person and especially for a girl it's very difficult to lead a guy you know it's very difficult to lead a guy in decisions in uh things that are important and in direction it's very difficult I mean if initially you may be able to do it but sooner or later you get very tired . I don't know but it's just ..

KKB: so that's not a misconception

RN: ya I say it's a fact that's a true fact

KKB: ??? ya this one I agree with you actually I mean let say you go for dinner with person for few times they the person will think differently already but you just thought we're just real friends you see real classmates and friends

RN: I think they're easily I agree

LLL: think that you're interested in them

KKB: ya . as long as you accept their invitation

RN: they take it as a yes ah KKB: yes for everything that's a misconception

RN: it's terrible

KKB: what else? ..

RN: let's say now you see a girl okay she's wearing um very clinkish clothes you know those kind that clings onto your body and she looks very sexy so what what

the thing that will go through your mind that will run into your mind is that um this girl is someone who is not serious in studies things like that right?

LLL: in this case is not really apply to males right? we also think that

KKB: I think

LLL: we also think in that way . they are not interested in studies they like to

RN: I think generally this uh this does this misconception is not only for guys but for girls also because I feel that um there are some girls huh if you get to know them they dress they may dress very outrageously but inside them they are just like any ordinary person any simple other ordinary simple girl

KKB: it's quite true but this one I don't think so it's a misconception this kind you see unless that girl get more . show herself you see in certain ways in your personality . maybe in your clothings you may dress more outrageously but if you can show that your personality is good everybody will accept who you are you are you see and we don't have the misconception but if you just keep quiet and just behave in those abnormal ways ah

RN: say I'm talking about ah say just by one look that misconception will be there just by you know this girl passing by

LLL: but what you think which which already shorn in what you wear what you talk

RN: show in what you wear and talk ya

KKB: it's express in this way you see like what you think inside is express outside outwardly you see and how you dress up and comb your hair all this right?

RN: I don't know I used to think of it that way you know that girls who dress outrageously they must be you know those who cannot study one I mean not serious in their studies those who don't hardly care about their studies those who

won't stay in the library and those who always go out and play but as I grow older I

I've learnt that you know it's not the case . some people may just like to dress

differently from other people

KKB: just to attract attention is that all?

RN: maybe not to attract attention but just to please themself

APPENDIX 7

One-page long excerpts are provided for all the examples cited in the text of this thesis. The complete set of data used in this thesis is available in the Language Studies Unit, Aston University, Birmimgham, UK.

Example (1) (p.144)

(the cited example appears within [ ])

Interview - (S1)

S1: some people they can attend a lot of activity you see some of us for me I can attend one or two . there's two is more than enough if attend more than that you are you find that you can't concentrate so I won't be able to answer that question it's up to individual

INT: ya but I understand that you are very active in some first aid society

S1: how?

INT: Mrs. Koo gave me some background

S1: oh I see this is this is um [at first join in this first Red Cross society is when I finish my 'O' Levels I have plenty of time for one month so I just I just find I just join] myself you got to do something so I just accidentally I found the they some how have enrolment so I just enter just join in until now is three years ah so far I stop??? because I got difficulty to study

INT: what does the society do?

S1: basically is in fact this because we have difficult detachment you see so in my detachment which is detachment 2 mostly we do training ah teach you ...

Example (2) (p.169)

Essay - (S1)

[In the older day girl women did not socialise with the men, thus when there came the age of marriage the couple, was alway matched by a matchmaker.

Nowadays people mention about matchmaking again]   because more and more women are getting unmarried. ~~This is especially~~ The government is especially worry about this problem because of the shrinked in the populations. Thus´ they established SDU (Social Developing Unit) in 1984 to help people between 25 and 35.

Infact people do conduct matchmaking here and there *is an invisible manner* ~~where~~ when new friends with opposite sex being introduc~~ing~~ed to each other.   ~~Certain kinds~~ Many ~~se~~ organisations such as ~~community~~ youth groups, clans and another private socities or associations etc. do organise ~~mor~~ various kinds of activities or courses in whch boys and girls are mixed around when they are participated in these activities.   Therefore all these ~~organise~~ organisations are just acting ˉlike a matchcentre ~~matching centre~~ in which   one people can can choose their partners ~~freedly~~ freely.

~~However For~~ For the case of SDU it has organised the similar kinds of activities in order to bring boy and girl come together. However, ~~some people in reject its activities~~ the response may not be good because it has done the things purposely ...

Example (3) (p.170)

Essay - (S2)

Matchmaking serves as a alternative route to these unfortunate Singaporeans' who failed in their attempts. Matchmaking still remains as a necessary practice in Singapore. [There are two main reasons which lead to the failure in finding a suitable mate. They are as follows:

Firstly, Singaporeans are very busy, ~~nowadays~~ They do not have time to look for their life partners.] Work, shifts and overtime have take up a lot of a person's time. They only have weekends for rest and recreation. Limited time and chances to meet the opposite sex thus hinder the prospect of finding a suitable partner. Matchmaking can solve this problem. For shy and conservative Singaporeans they can approach matchmakers or matchmaking agency for help. For the bold and sociable type of Singaporeans, they can join the SDU activities and hopefully put in more efforts in finding ~~ones~~ one. Both of the sexes should put in equal efforts in the activities planned for them.

[Secondly, most Singaporeans prefer to stay with their parents. They prefer to have somebody to cook, ~~for them,~~ wash and care for them.] They do not wish to take the ~~ris~~-risk of marrying ~~which~~ someone who may ~~ensure them~~ remove their conforts at home. They may ~~only~~ wish to know the opposite sex only if somebody can "guarantee" them the choice is right. Matchmaking ~~should~~ may serve as a bridge to join two suitable persons who are unable to meet because of various reasons...

Example (4) (p.172)

Interview - (S1)

INT: you're Miss Koh Kwee Buay?

S1: ya Koh K-O-H

INT: so how was lunch?

S1: lunch ah quite okay but cause I had just finish I just rush from my terminal room you see so just rush

INT: I see you are a second year doing?

S1: Science

INT: I know Science but which major?

S1: not major but we now I'm doing Chemistry Maths A and CP CPA

INT: I see

S1: ya three subjects

INT: CPA is Computer Applications

S1: yes yes

INT: computer what?

S1: computer CPA should be um Computer Programming Application

INT: I see I see

S1: just a minor subject it's not a major subject

INT: oh I see

S1: but we have to spend a lot of time on it

INT: your major subject is what? is

S1: is should be Chemistry

<u>Example (5) (p.173)</u>

Discussion - (S7, S8, S10)

S10: ya we have to but although we are serious it doesn't mean that we ignore all activites that's going on right? we still going out . so boring how about boring?

S7: ??? I think it's ???

S10: she's boring that means we must how do we know that she is boring or not we must know that person first then we'll know she is boring or not

S8: [like so many activities on how can we

S10: how can we show our interest?

S7: they don't really understand us

S10: terrible . . no interest in other's activities no interest in men . wearing T-shirts and jeans

S7: because we don't smile

S10: we can't smile at everyone 'gila' is it?]

S8: ???

S10: that means we must be very materialistic .. so I don't think it's right ??? because actually we are not poor it's just that because traditional ??? we smile to those we are familiar to to those we don't know ??? ignore them ..???..

S8: ???

S10: you mean our character .. it's just because our appearance is like that but it's just

S8: ??? like my case haw??? because???

S10: because of what? what is it? I mean you all don't want to talk to I mean ...

Example (6) (p.179)

Essay - (S3)

Some sophisticated means, such as computer dating, have been invoked to do matchmaking. Today, people have to know how to adapt a new environment and take up the new things because our society is improving in a very fast pace. ~~Due~~ Base on this fact, the criterions of choosing a marriagemate ~~will~~ are changing from times to times. One of the main factors affecting the criterion of choosing a marriagemate ~~is~~ are the academic qualification and the working status. Therefore, in Singapore, a lot of modern ~~matchm~~ matchmaking agencies are organised according to their members' educational levels. ~~One~~ Most of these the agencies and the activities inolved in matchmaking are ~~cont inche in~~-charged by community centres. ~~In Singapore, matchmaking business has not been privatised yet.~~

[In Singapore, matchmaking business has not been privatised yet. I think it is a good idea to make matchmaking a business bacause this will make the matchmaking activities popular. In general, matchmaking should be taken seriously. It is not a laughing matter because it will affect your whole life. In my opinions, young people should feel good to join the matchmaking activities. ~~because~~ Young people should mix around indiscriminately before they settle doown for marriage. The matchmaking agencies provide a lot of opportunities for us to socialise and befriend with people. Therefore, I think matchmaking really plays an important role in ~~our soci~~ a ~~conversative~~ conservative society such as Singapore.] ...

<u>Example (7) (p.182)</u>

Essay - (S4)

[In the traditional Asian societies, where education was not universal and very a few girls were given the chance of receiving a higher education. Their parents set a high priority for the marriage of their children. Those marriags were either arranged through matchmakers or by parents themselves.

With arranged marriages, the parents and matchmakers were assumed to be wiser. They had a pool of potential partners and their life experience to draw on. However, the one that they had chosen might not be suitable for their sons or daughters.]

Many older couples whose marriage were arranged do not seen to have much in common or much to say to each other. This is all right for a generation whch saw marriage more as a working relation than as a romantic relation. Marriage was perceived as a division of labour: the husband provided for the house home, the wife kept the home going by doing the housework and looking after the kids.

Today, however, marriages through matchmaking are rarely ~~arranged~~ seen in Singapore. We have imbibed western notion of romantic love, accepting the right of a person to choose his or her life partner. A successful marriage includes a sharing of interests, of world views, of and of intellectual horizons. All this cannot be achieved through a simple ~~matching~~ matchmaking process whereby a most of the time, the initial attraction to a girl or a boy is on the basis of physical attraction...

Example (8) (p.183)

Essay - (S6)

[Matchmaking is probably one of the oldest profession of the world. In the olden times, in China, for example, the matchmaker, who is usually a woman, would go around the village looking for suitable couples to pair up and get a remuneration in return if she succeeds in getting them to get married. To them, this profession is not only interesting and exciting but also rewarding.]

Today, matchmaking is still in existence, except that it is a lot different from the kind at the old times. Modern matchmaking may include a small organisation set up to encourage single men and women to sign up and know one another or video matchmaking, which is growing in popularity in the United States. Then there is computer dating, which is becoming more popular in Singapore especially in the government departments and even in the higher educational institutions, like the NUS.

In 1984, the social development unit (SDU) was set up by the government to organise various activities for the single available and desperate. Although at present, the SDU is only open to men and women between the age or 25 and 35 in the government sectors, it will soon be opened to public, which may help the present situation of declining population rate.

The SDU organises many activities like social dancing , tea parties, outdoor camps...

Example (9) (p.184)

Essay - (S7)

For many centuries, matchmaking has been playing an important role in the societies helping people to get a marriage. The strict traditional form of matchmaking, however, creates many tragedies. [In the past, parents usually have the authority to decide the marriages for their children through matchmaking. In such a scheme, a pair of couple don't have any opportunity to know each other well before they get married,] they may find difficultie in getting along with the life partners. This type of matchmaking is not encouraged and thus was replaced by a modern way of matchmaking as time passes.

Modern form of matchmaking, such as computer dating and the creation of Social Developing Unit (SDU), which is a modern matchmaking agency are now more widely practised. I think these modern types of matchmaking should be encouraged and were necessary. Now, Singapore is facing a problem that arising number of Singaporeans were single. Matchmaking could be a remedy to it. Marriage, was a means by which people maintained racial homogeneity, social power, economic security and social status. With the help of matchmaking, people have more chance to find their marriage mate. In this modern way of matchmaking, people have their own choice and right to choose their life partner, not compelling by their parents, their previous tragedies can be avoided.

For instance the SDU, it helps people between 25 and 35 to meet other people ...

Example (10) (p.186)

Interview : (S7)

INT: so you work in a company . tell me tell me about   this work because I think the most interesting thing about about working during the vacation is that the work experience enriches you so that later when you become somebody big after university you recall on the simple job that you work as work in during your holiday . it becomes very very interesting . [tell me about your work experience

S7: actually I'm a staff clerk . sometimes I deal with salesperson . then is regarding door ah sales of doors and I have to ???

INT: door? d-o-o-r-s?

S7: d-o-o-r

INT: oh I see I thought dogs

S7: and it's quite a good experience for me because previously I didn't involve in any work . except operator . and then . I face many kind of people]

INT: problem

S7: problem also because I'm not very socialise

INT: you look okay

S7: then I have to mix around with my colleagues . they are all very . they are much older than me . we have a communication breakdown . then um those saleman . I think they are very cunning . sometimes then I don't know how to

INT: take advantage of you

S7: ya . and I have to face my boss he's very close to me so I felt very pressurized . because he examine . ah my work and all that lah

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Example (11) (p.188)

Interview - (S6)

INT: tell me about your BMT training

S6: BMT . ah BMT I was in ITD . I was in Tekong Pulau Tekong

INT: tough?

S6: ya BMT is more tough

INT: [after your BMT where were you then?

S6: after BMT I went to on course signaler . actually my my vocation is radio relay operator . that take about seven week course and then I go for another course . do driving

INT: driving?

S6: ya . because my vocation I need to drive my own vehicle . so and then take another seven hours ah seven weeks and then I go to my unit after that]

INT: I see . and then you stayed there for the rest of your two years

S6: ya . two and a half years

INT: ya that's right two and a half . have you been back for reservist training?

S6: haven't . after . I mean after I ROD I mean two or three weeks I get into NUS

INT: are you still keeping fit for your IPPT test?

S6: no I never exercise after that

INT: what do you think of this National Service the two and a half years?

S6: just take it as a training . ??? because every guys have to go every Singaporeans have to go . so just take it

INT: now now the problem now is we are short of babies so in 18 years' time...

Example (12) (p.189)

Interview - (S3)

INT: in the army which arm were you attached to?

S3: I'm in the artillery formation

INT: oh artillery I was in the combat engineers

S3: combat engineers

INT: [tell me about your NS experience

S3: NS experience . for me I think is quite interesting because after after my artillery course I've been posted to ah instructor team . I I I will I'm under HQT Safti so in HQT??? I'm in the training cadre department

INT: I see

S3: this is the instructor team and we are responsible ah ah teaching those recruits in unit not ITD or ??? we are teaching those I would say quite lowly-educated gunner ??? all this]

INT: do you have problems dealing with them?

S3: I don't think so because I know how to speak Hokkein . in fact in fact our our commander want us to conduct our lesson in English so ah we try but most of them can't understand because those gunner can't understand

INT: during my time we have what you call Hokkein Platoon that means this platoon the platoon commander will speak Hokkeing everything is in Hokkein

S3: ya

INT: even the charge orders are in Hokkein but now this Hokkein Platoon has been dismantled

Example (13) (p. 194)

Interview - (S4)

INT: so you are not taking part this year what about other clubs?

S4: no no time

INT: tough huh?

S4: tough very tough

INT: [then what do you do on weekends then?

S4: I read I went out with my friends

INT: I see . what   about what   do you all   normally do NUS students during the long vacation break when you have three months?

S4: three months we work

INT: oh so you work last year

S4: I work last year

INT: where where at?

S4: I work in a school]

INT: beg your pardon

S4: I work in a school

INT: in a school

S4: school club

INT: oh I see they they were willing to employ on a temporary basis

S4: ya ya because they have a actually they have one clerk there also a permanent clerk then the other one was on leave so they ask from MOE for one more then I went there to apply so they sent me there

Example (14) (p. 196)

Discussion - (S6 and S11)

S11: [Misconceptions .. so start with your list .. so start with your list ah . what what do you think they they what do you think they girls think which you don't agree with them

S6: so what do you think?

S11: it's not true lah . you start with your list first ah]

S6: I think we combine ours and put in . right?

S11: okay okay ..

S6: or maybe we . what they think of us first?

S11: no what ??? leave it to them lah . we don't have to worry

S6: but how how are we going to talk about is not true . we refer to something right?

S11: okay what do you think they think about us? .. sexy? .. true true

S6: don't want

S11: not macho .. not macho .. not masculine

S6: m-a

S11: s-c-u-l-i-n-e they don't know we all go for weight training . every   Monday Wednesday Friday . not caring and then you speak okay?

S6: you speak yourself

S11: not caring . unromantic . irresponsible . unloving . immature . you know why. immature

S6: immature

Example (15) (p.201)

Interview - (S11)

INT: I think many students have not even don't even know where Eusoff College is

S11: they confuse Yusoff Ishak with Eusoff College . when we mention that we come from Eusoff College and then they say oh Yusoff Ishak got a hostel there . you began directing some place some corner .. true lah but this can't be help lah because it's just that we are off campus they don't know

INT: [do you still have vacancies in Eusoff College?

S11: we have a lot . because and one of the more crucial reason why we need to shift is that being the only off campus hostel lah we have you know a lot first years and our seniors they prefer to move into campus to be convenient for them to]

INT: near the library

S11: move around go to library or go to lectures or but from our hostel to here we need to take a bus the journey will take 20 minutes at least and about the bus will come every hour . so a lot of conveniences . but personally I for me I prefer this because every time like 5 o'clock when I finish finish my lecture I wait for my bus when my internal shuttle bus come then I board the bus then I leave this place you know . so the process of leaving this place although I'm not going back to my actual home I'm leaving this place . some sort of soothing you know that you have

INT: theraputic

S11: yes . psychological it play a part . so rather than if you are living in Sheares after the lecture you just walk a few steps and then you are in your room .. so so you are not really out of it . so I feel after 10 hours in the campus

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Example (16) (p.203)

Essay - (S4)

Further more, there is a imbalance in the distribution of boys and girls population in our tertiary institutions. The Engineering Faculty has few girls, whereas the Arts and Science Faculty has few boys. This imbalance is prolonged into the working world where women predominate in many service side jobs, in the personnel and administrative departments of large firms, yet few women can be found in eg engineering department. Hence there would be few opportunities for a 'large proportion of graduate ma men and women to meet at their place of study an working.

The SDU (Social Development Unit), formed by the government, has organised many parties, discos, trips, outings to promote interaction between the sexes. It provides a chance for people to know their future spouses elsewhere. In addition, there are no communication problems ~~in~~ among the participants as all of them ~~will be~~ are graduates.

[The SDU can be said to ~~act as~~ be a modern matchmaker performing a necessary role which may seen to be ridiculous ~~to some people~~. and not appealing to some. It has its moment of glory when many graduates are able to find their life partners. ~~The~~ Who know? Something you may need it too!]

<u>Example (17) (p.203)</u>

Essay - (S13)

[Matchmaking, the traditional way of bringing couple together into the marriage wedlock, has come a long way. In China, for instance, matchmaking has been practised for thousands of years. In those days, it was the duty of the parents to find partners for their sons or daughters,] otherwise, they would employ a matchmaker. Today, although people advocate the so called "true love" ideology, that is freedom in choosing their own partners, yet matchmaking still plays a significant role. Of course, as society advances and progresses, the methods and strategies of matchmaking have changed over the years. Today, we don't see matchmaker around so ofter, but modern forms of matchmaking such as computer dating, have come into existence to replace human beings. Recently in Singapore, we see the formation of the Social Developing Unit, a SDU in short, which is a modern matchmaking agency.

In my opinion, I think matchmaking may be necessary in certain cases. Matchmaking will apply to people who are not sure to find their life partners. This may be due to the fact that the nature of their work do not allow much opportunities for them to interact with people of the opposite sex. For example a researcher spends most of his/her time in the laboratory and hardly interact with any people. There are also people who are too career-minded, or they are too engrossed in their work, and so find little time or no time at all for social interaction. Of course, there are also people who are simply too shy. In such case, I think matchmaking ...

<u>Example (18) (p:204)</u>

Essay - (S12)

... However, I changed my view after I had attended one of the SDU program. The people who participated that social gathering were young, attractive and full of vitality. I guess no one there had any problem in socialising at all. Thus the atmosphere was indeed light and pleasant, not the kind which was tense and embarassing. This made me realised one point - that if the participants feel pressurised and eager to find the suitable partner, the atmosphere will not be that I had experienced, and the effects may not be at all fulfilling.

[Just recently I received a booklet entitled, 'Venus III'. This booklet encourages the receiver to participate in the ~~SDU program~~ computer science project which helps to matchmake couples in campus. The questions it contained are, I feel , too superficial to determine if the couple is compatible.] For instance, questions such as what kind of build and character you wish to see in your partner, are less than sufficient to pair up a couple. Furthermore, this matching is performed by a computer, which gives me the feeling that finding a life-partner is no more a personal affair.

In conclusion, I prefer social gatherings than the matchmaking. Perhaps greater concern should be put in making the gatherings more rewarding and spontaneous, while eliminating the wastage of the resources used to print those booklets and invent those machines.

Example (19) (p.204)
Essay - (S9)

For the past few years, the government of Singapore has been particularly concerned with the falling birth rate in the country. One of the reason for this decrease in birth rate is ~~married couple simply~~ that the 'Stop at two children' campaign was too successful. However, beside that, the cause for alarm is be mainly due to the present situation - which is , Singaporean are delaying their marriages or simply refused to tie the nuptial bond. Whatever the case is, the government is very upset over the falling rate. And to solve the problem she has no choice but to do 'matchmaking' for the thousand of unmarried singles in the country. The SDU was thus, set up to help these singles as well as ~~the country~~ to elevate the situation of falling birth rates.

~~Personally~~, [As it was a government sponsored project, the SDU definitely drew much attention such that an unintentional adverse effect was the result.] People tended to shy away from it since the initial impression of the SDU was that it was for those who are must be unmarried due to the reasons that either they are unimpressive in looks and ~~attitudes~~ mentality or ~~one way or another~~ they're so poor, etc. Anyhow, the SDU brought alone a stigma of dealing with ~~badlooki~~ ill-looking, boring unfriendly and unhappy people. Consequently, the SDU has defeated its own original purpose.

How As time goes by, the public grows mature enough to accept the idea of SDU.

Example (20) (p. 204)

Essay - (S17)

But modern matchmaking is very different from the old one. This is because eventhough both the guy and girl and matchmaker they still have a choice wheather or not to get marry. [The SDU which was set up by the government in 1984 with the purpose of helping people between 25 and 35 age group to find their   mates. Even though the activities that are organised by SDU were interesting, preferably like overseas trips, barbecues and etc. the sucess rate of SDU is very, very low.]

There are basically 2 reasons to it. Firstly, there are very few guys participating in this project. This is because of the 'ego problem' that they have. They feel embarass, once their   colleagues and friends come to know about it. In fact, they even term SDU as 'single, desperate and unwanted'. So with this thought many of them just shiver away even though they would really like to participate.

The other reason is because of the girls who are now more educated and thus they are more independent and carrer-minded. Even though in SDU activities, there are more girls than guys but there are still many single girls who didn't participate in SDU. There are various reasons given but the main ones are, couldn't afford the time due to work commitments, do not believe SDU can provides good husband and etc.

In my conclusion, the older time of matchmaking are no longer applicable to our modern society. But the modern matchmaking is a very good idea but the Singaporeans need to be educated to be able to accept it.