

The characterization of “Have” in the English writing of second language learners in an Interlanguage framework

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The grammatical structures and meanings in English writing of second language learners (ESL) are often viewed as “errors” in a negative light when they do not comply with the rules of the target language (TL). However, the learners’ use of language; often a hybrid of linguistic features of English and their first language (L1), and thus referred to as “interlanguage”, indicates significantly about the students’ developmental stage in the learning process. Hence, the focus of this study is to critically analyze the use of the verb “have” in the writing of undergraduates whose L1 is Sinhalese, with a view to facilitating student centered learning. Ninety writing samples, written in a time span of eight weeks, by thirty undergraduates who have an intermediate level of competency in English were descriptively analyzed. In the analysis, rules of L1 and target language in relation to form, for example, inflections (number, tense), negative formation and, meaning were used to interpret the learners’ use of “have” both as an auxiliary and a main verb. In identifying patterns in the use of language, those that consistently appear in all writing samples were taken into account excluding patterns that are not regular which can be performance errors. Concerning meaning, use of “have” to simulate the governing meaning; /tɪyənəvΛ/ in Sinhalese not only for possessions but also for concepts and ideas; e. g - “I have self-control”, were prominent. In terms of the use of “have” as an auxiliary verb, the common difficulty students have encountered in inflecting the verb according to the number of the subject, seemed to have roots in the influence of Sinhalese which is devoid of clearly identifiable auxiliaries compared to English.

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