

Chapter 3

3.0 Description of Errors in the Use of Tenses

Here the errors in the use of tenses are discussed showing how the learner deviates from the standard norms of a sentence construction.

3.1 Tense and Agreement

It is proposed that in English a finite verb inflects for tense and agreement. For example:

- 1) They worked in company.

In the above sentence the verb is in the past tense. Here, the verb *work* has inflected for past tense and *-ed* is the inflection. However, a verb doesn't inflect only for tense. A verb also inflects for agreement with the subject. To find it out let's examine sentences below:

- 2) They eat apples
- 3) She eats apples

The difference between the above two sentences is that we say they eat.... but she eats.... the inflection *-s* in *eats* doesn't stand for present tense because if it stands for tense we should say they eats... instead of they eat but we don't say so. Because in *she eats*, *-s* actually stands for the 3rd person singular subject *she*. Based on the above discussion we can say that a finite verb agrees with the subject. So we can say that the *-s* in *eats* is an agreement marker and we can say that a verb inflects for both tense and agreement.

English doesn't have many overt agreement markers but languages like Spanish and French and most Indian languages have a number of agreement markers.

English	Telugu
I ate	tin anu
We ate	tin amu
You (singular) ate	tin avu
You (plural) ate	tin aru
He ate	tin adu
They ate	tin aru

An inflected verb in Telugu is composed of stem + tense/mood suffix + personal endings. The stem is identical with the verb root.

3.1.1 Tense

Tense is a grammatical category of verbs used to express distinctions of time of verb's action or state of being, such as present, past or future which are one of the important things when constructing a sentence; given that without using proper tenses, our speech or writing will not be understood by other people.

Errors of present tense can be divided into the categories like:

- a. Past instead of present
- b. Future instead of present
- c. Present continuous instead of present simple

Throughout the data it is observed that the errors include when the learner is referring to a present action and the words in past are used, and sometimes future tense is used referring to present tense. Another most frequent instance is that the learners use present continuous tense to refer to present (everyday) action.

3.1.2 Word order

Word order could be defined as the syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence, clause, or phrase. In other words, it is the order in which words occur in sentences that in many languages, including English, plays an important role in determining meanings expressed and if it is not used correctly, it leads to ungrammaticality. Moreover, it is related to the different ways in which languages arrange the constituents of their sentences relative to each other.

As the rules of word order change from one language to another, the learner tends to depend on the structures of L1 unconsciously to create a sentence or to communicate a message in L2. This dependency leads to error production if the word order of the two sentences is different. Studies on language transfer claim that the word order of L1 influence the structures of L2.

For example;

- 4) *Exam I am writing.

In the above sentence we can observe the object *Exam* is fronted instead of being after the verb. The word order of English is SVO. But in Telugu the word order is SOV. And it is possible not to mention who is performing the action as it is reflected the on the

inflection of the verb. So it is clear that the sentence is syntactically wrong and this is because of the transfer from Telugu.

Learners tend to transfer negatively and make errors in word order as it was previously evidenced, as they make assumptions that the structures in L2 will be the same as their L1.

3.1.3 Verbs

The syntactic errors concerning the use of verbs committed by the participants can be divided into categories such as:

- a. Absence of main verb or an auxiliary
- b. Redundant use of auxiliaries

3.2. Errors in the Use of Tense and Agreement

Errors in this category arise because of the learners' limited exposure to the target language. The source of these errors is intralingual as the learners don't have enough command over the rules of the structures related to the specific tenses.

3.2.1 Description of Errors in Tense and Agreement

We will see some of the wrong constructions in the use of tense and agreement. The below are the translation for some of the Telugu sentences.

5) He drink milk every day (See the answer for the question 1

అతను ప్రతిరోజు పాలు త్రాగుతాడు.

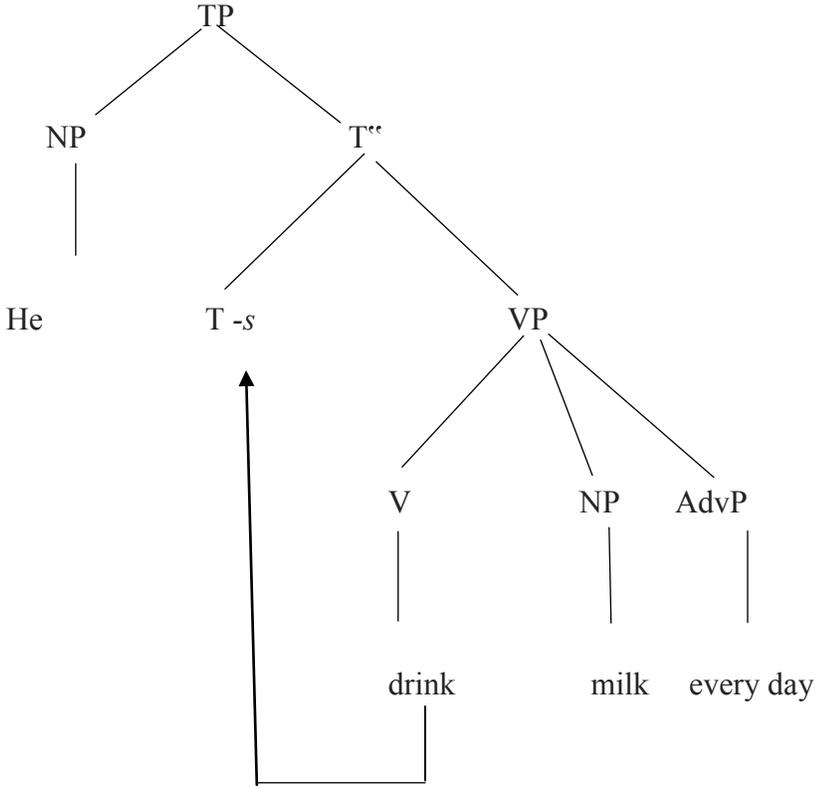
He-nom every day milk-acc drink-pres 3rd Sg

of script 2 of Appendix A)

The given sentence is fulfills the condition of the S V O construction of English sentence. But the sentence is faulty. Because the verb DRINK doesn't agree with the subject He. The verb in the simple present tense takes s, es or ies when the subject is He, She, it or singular noun. Here, the subject is the third person He which takes the inflected verbs in the present tense. For the sentence to be grammatical it should agree with the person number gender rules. The correct formation of the sentence is He drinks milk every day. Let's see another example for the same sentence.

Let's see the tree diagram for the sentence.

6)



7) He is tomorrow go to Bangalore (See the answer for question 2

అతను రేపు బెంగుళూరు వెళ్తాడు

He-nom every day Bangalore go-fut 3S

of script 13 of Appendix A)

The above sentence is syntactically wrong as the sentence violates the English sentence structure. Here the student has completely followed the structure of Telugu which is S O V. But still misses agreement factor of the verb. In the above example the tense of the verb is correct but the order of the words is missed. One more thing we can observe in the above sentence is that there is an unnecessary addition of auxiliary IS. As it violated the phrase structure rules of the sentence -----> NP, VP the sentence results in ungrammaticality.

8) He tomorrow going to Bangalore.

see the answer for the question 2

అతను రేపు బెంగుళూరు వెళ్తాడు

He-nom every day Bangalore go-fut 3S

of script 12 of appendix A)

The above example is deteriorated because of the wrong use of the verb *go*. The student has used the verb as a gerund. In English future action are conveyed through the use of auxiliary *will* and verb in its simple form. Here the student has omitted auxiliary and used the verb in its wrong form. Another error in the above sentence is the use of the adverb of time in wrong place because in English adverbs of time come at the end of the sentence.

9) I give pen to she. (Please see the answer for the question 10

నేను ఆమెకి పెన్ను ఇచ్చాను.

I-nom to her pen give-past 1st Sg

of script 4 of appendix A)

The above sentence clearly show the error produced in tense. The verb *ichanu* in Telugu indicates the action in the past. But the student used the verb *give* in its present form. According to the theory of argument structure the verb can take three arguments. Here, the student has used the three arguments but the indirect argument of the verb *give* is in its subjective form. As it receives the objective case from the preposition „to“ it should be in objective form *her*. Another common error that is often found in the writings of Telugu students is the use of articles. This is because in Telugu there are no articles. In the above sentence the singular noun *pen* takes the article „a“. The correct construction of the sentence is I gave pen to her or I gave her a pen.

10) He read novels every day. (Please see the answer for the question 9

అతను రోజూ నవలలు చదువుతాడు

He-nom every day novels-acc read- pres 3rd Sg

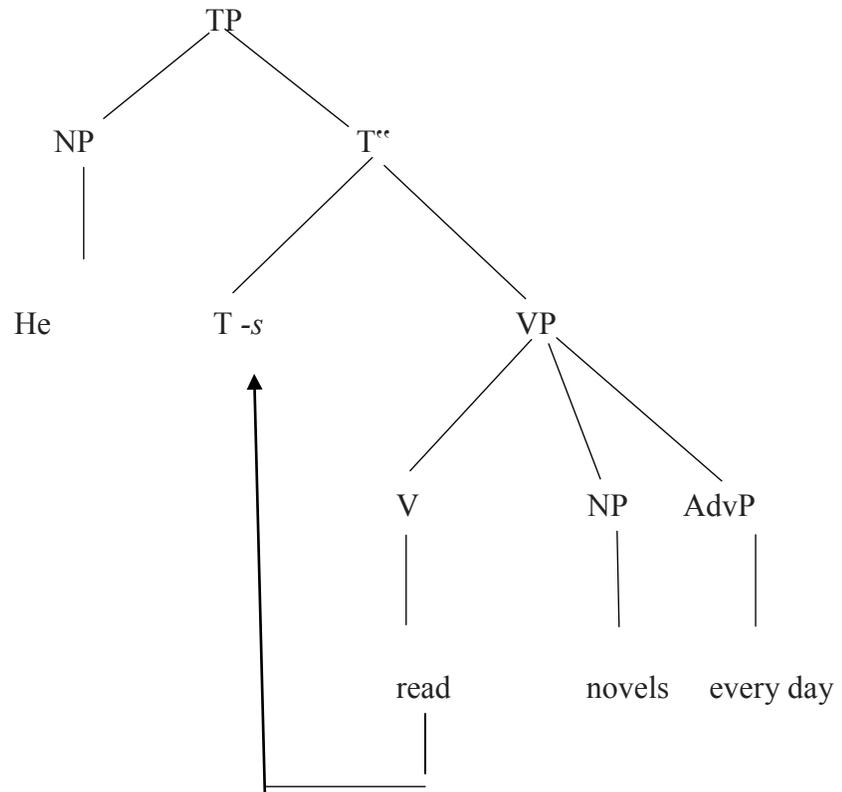
of script 4 of appendix A)

The above sentence clearly violates the rule of agreement. In English all the verbs should agree with the subject. Here, the verb *read* in English should agree with the person. As we know when the subject is *he*, *she*, *it* or a singular noun all the verbs in present tense take affix *s*, *es* or *ies*. This happens through affix hopping. The affix *s*, *es* or *ies* is lowered on to the verb to agree with the subject.

The correct form of the sentence construction is *he reads novels every day*.

The underlying syntax structure for the sentence is:

11)



In the above tree diagram we can see that the verb which exists in V position is raised to T so that it agrees with the third person subject *he*. But in the sentence the student has

constructed there is no agreement. Thus the sentence violates the rule of agreement and is ungrammatical.

12) She is daily go to temple. (Please see the answer for the question 3

ఆమె రోజూ గుడికి వెళ్తుంది.

She –nom daily to temple- go-pres 3rd Sg

of script 13 of appendix A)

The above sentence violates the phrase structure rules of a sentence in English. An unnecessary inclusion of *is* and the verb which is not in agreement with the subject *she* make the sentence syntactically faulty. The main problem in the sentence is the unnecessary use of the be form *is*. The constituents of the sentence are an NP, a VP and AdvP and VP-PP. We can also find the misplacement of the adverb *daily*. The amended sentence might be „she goes to temple daily.

13) I am going to college every day.(Please see the answer for the question 7

నేను ప్రతిరోజు కాలేజీకి వెళ్తాను.

I – nom daily-adv – to college- loc go-pres 1S

of script 9 of appendix A)

The sentence in Telugu indicates the action which happens every day or the action which will happen in future. Because the aspect *a* in the verb *veltanu* can be used to show the present and future time. So the answer for the question should be *I go to college every day* or *I will go to college every day*. But here, the student has chosen the wrong construction which violates the phrase structure rules of the sentence. It has been observed in the written scripts of Telugu students that be form *is* is generally taken as the present form which

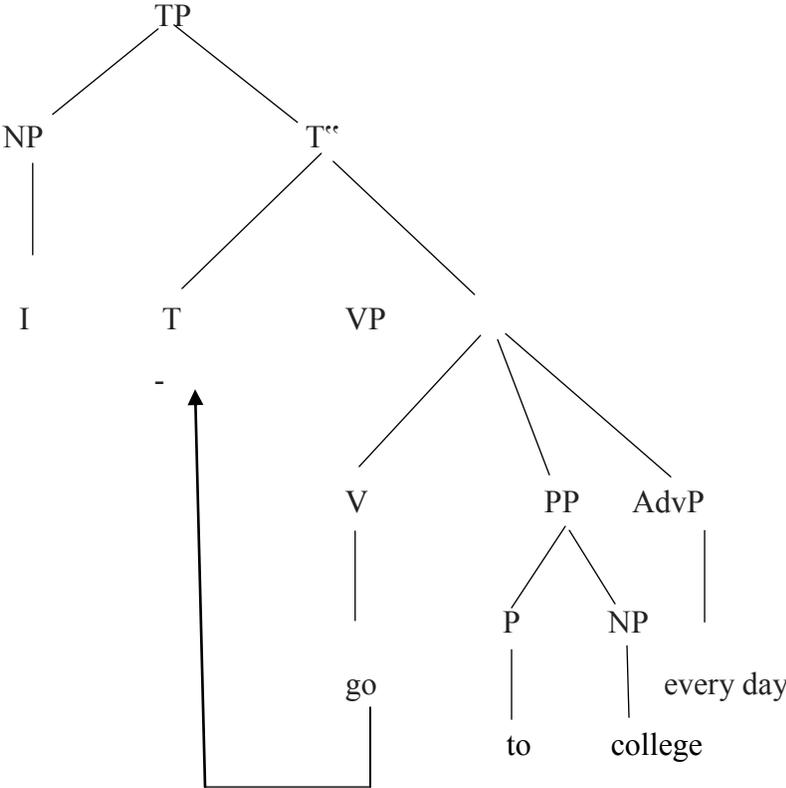
signifies the present action. In a similar way, sometimes, be form *was* is used to indicate the past action. Consider the below example:

14) She was bought books.

These kind of errors indicated that the learners have not internalized the rules of the TL.

Let's see the tree diagram for the above sentence:

15)



3.3.0 Description of Errors in the Use of WH-questions

Here, the errors in the use of WH-question are described showing how the learner deviates from the standard norms of an interrogative sentence.

3.3.1 Introduction

WH-questions are a type of questions that ask for information. These are different from yes/no type questions which ask for agreement or disagreement. The information that is asked for is replaced by a specific WH-word and it is fronted. There are two types of wh-questions in English. They are WH-pronominals and WH-sententials. WH-pronominals like *what*, *who* and *where* stand for a missing constituent in a sentence and require an answer that give information about the constituent.

For example, in question like

16) What are you doing?

The WH-word *what* might be replaced for the information as in I am doing homework. Here the person who is asking the question knows that the person who is being asked the question is doing something and wants to know what it is. So if we assume a declarative sentence for

17) What are you doing?

it will be something like

18) You are doing something

and this *something* is replaced by the wh-word *what* and then it is fronted.

Telugu learners of English are often found committing errors in subject auxiliary inversion. They produce errors in inverting the auxiliary with the subject. They usually produce sentences like

19) What she is doing?

instead of

20) What is she doing?

They often miss the inversion so that the sentence becomes ungrammatical. Mainly there are two types of auxiliary inversion errors, one, errors where the auxiliary is omitted and the tense and agreement is marked on the main verb like in the sentence *what you bought?* In English questions, tense and agreement are always marked on the auxiliary. If there is no auxiliary present in the corresponding declarative sentence, tense and agreement is marked on the dummy DO. Another type of auxiliary errors is double marking where tense and agreement are marked on auxiliary and again on verb or undeleted auxiliary.

The Principles and Parameters theory assumes that everyone is born with innate linguistic principles with which one can learn any language equally and innate linguistic parameters which will be applied to the specific properties of a particular target language when one is exposed to the use of that language. This theory also says that errors are produced when these parameters are not set properly because of insufficient exposure to the target language. Because of this children take time to imbibe these parametric options of the second language.

There is another type of WH-question called WH-sententials such as *why, how and when*. These WH-sententials don't stand for any missing constituent in a sentence and they ask for reasons.

To understand how the questioned constituent is replaced by WH-words and how these WH-words are fronted along with auxiliary inversion to form WH-questions in English it would be better to assume a declarative sentence for the asked WH-question.

Consider the following examples:

Question	Declarative
21) Who takes coffee?	Rama takes coffee.
22) What did he buy?	He bought a book.
23) Where did she go?	She went to Bangalore.
24) Why is she calling him?	She is calling him because she needs help.
25) When do they watch movies?	They watch movies on weekends.

From the above examples we can understand that in sentence (20) the WH-word *who* is questioning the subject element and as it is questioning the subject element WH-word is not moving from anywhere instead it remains in situ.

In sentence (21) the WH-word *what* is questioning the object of the verb *buy*. So we can understand that the WH-word is generated under VP and it is moved to the sentence initial position. Apart from the movement of the WH-word *what* we can also find that a dummy

auxiliary is inserted in the question to carry tense and agreement and it is inverted with the subject *he*.

In sentence (22) also the WH-word *where* is questioning the object element which is generated under VP and it is fronted. Along with that, auxiliary inversion is also made to mark tense and agreement since there is no existing auxiliary in the corresponding declarative sentence

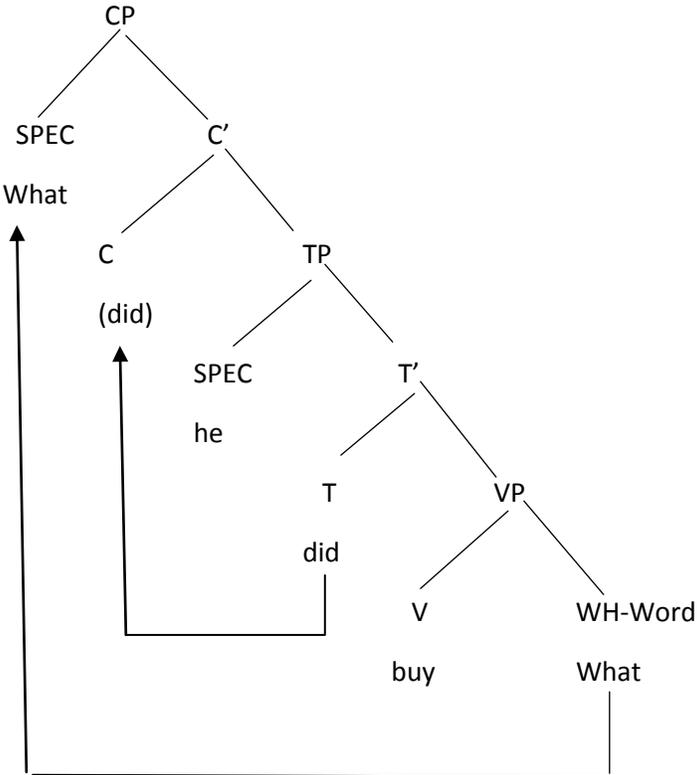
But in sentence (23) and (24) we find WH-sententials. These WH-sententials don't question any single element from the corresponding declarative sentence but ask for extra information and reasons thus replace the part of the sentence of the corresponding declarative sentence. Here too we find the inversion of auxiliary with subject. In sentence 4 we have an existing auxiliary *is* and it is inverted and in sentence e we don't have any auxiliary in corresponding declarative sentence so we have used a dummy DO to carry tense and agreement.

As is evident from the above examples, we can understand that the WH-word moves to the sentence initial position along with the auxiliary inversion. This famous theory was proposed by Chomsky (1977). According to Chomsky when the WH-movement rule is applied, the WH-question word moves from the object position, if it is object WH-question, from the D-structure position of the sentence to sentence initial position in the S-structure.

3.3.2 Description of Errors in WH-questions

Before we see the error, it is useful to see how the actual movement takes place when the declarative sentence (*he bought*) is changed to interrogative with the WH-word *what*.

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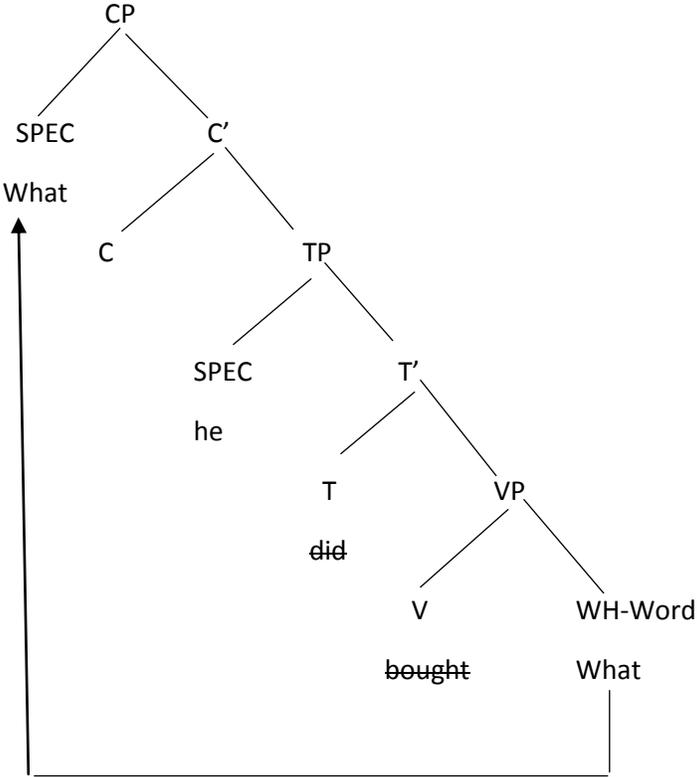


The above diagram clearly shows that the WH-word *what* has moved from the TP internal position to the Spec of CP and the auxiliary word *did* has also moved from the T position to C.

Now let's see how the learner has deviated from the above mentioned rules.

27) What he bought? (see the answer for question 2 of script 1 of appendix B)

28)



The above sentence clearly violates the rules proposed in principles and parameters theory of wh-movement. Here the student got succeeded in moving the wh-word to the sentence initial. But as all the interrogative sentences are CPs and the C position carries a Q+ feature it has to attract auxiliary which carries the tense. Since there is no auxiliary word present in the sentence a dummy DO must be inserted so that it can carry tense. In the above sentence the tense is still on the main verb even after the sentence is transformed to interrogative one.

In the above sentence we don't see any movement of the auxiliary from T to C and so doesn't fulfill the movement of auxiliary. Hence the sentence is ungrammatical.

A similar example we can see here.

29) What did he bought? (see the answer for the question 2 of the script 30 of appendix B)

In this example the student has used the auxiliary *did*. But the above sentence is grammatically wrong due to the wrong verb form. Here the student has correctly moved the WH-word *what* and the auxiliary *did* but according to Transformational generative grammar the moved auxiliary carries the tense features of the verb. It means that the tense and agreement will be realized on the auxiliary only. So the lexical verb should remain in its simple form *buy*. For the sentence to be grammatical, it should be like

30) What did he buy?

31) Where he went? (see the answer for the question 5 of script 2 of appendix B)

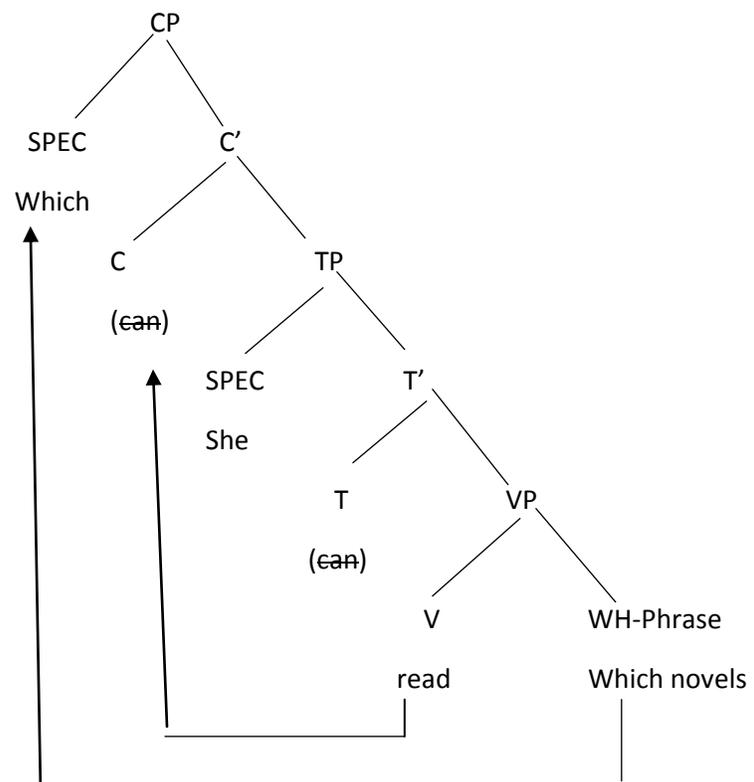
Above example is also flawed because the student has not used any auxiliary and inverted it with the subject. In the above example too, the tense remained on the main verb. It is a kind of uninversion error. The student, here, followed the correct step in moving the wh-word to the beginning of the sentence but failed in using and inverting the auxiliary. As there is no auxiliary in the sentence we need to take dummy „do“ and invert it with the subject. The suggested correct form of the sentence is *where did he go?* These repetitious errors of auxiliary movement indicate that the learners did not grasp the rules of L2.

32) Which can she reads novels? (see the answer for the question 3 of script 5 of appendix B)

The above sentence is syntactically faulty. The use of incorrect form of auxiliary and unchanged form of lexical verb makes the sentence unacceptable. When we change the sentence into interrogative sentence the first step is to move the WH-word to the sentence initial and when there is no auxiliary we have to take the help of dummy *do* and invert the auxiliary. But when we move the auxiliary tense feature also moves with the auxiliary and the tense of the sentence is realized on the auxiliary. Here, the learner has used the wrong auxiliary i.e. *can* in place of *does*. In the above sentence, inflection of the verb still remained on the lexical verb so the tense is still on the main verb.

When there is a WH- word inside a noun phrase or an adjective phrase the moved WH-word pulls the entire WH-phrase to the front of the clause. But in the above sentence only the WH-phrase is moved to the sentence initial position leaving the noun phrase in situ. Let's see the tree diagram for the sentence.

33)



In the above diagram, we can see that the entire WH- phrase did not move to the Spec, CP instead only the WH-word has moved to the Spec, CP. We can also point the wrong selection of auxiliary *can* which is struck through. The selection of the incorrect auxiliary and wrong movement of WH-phrase makes the sentence ungrammatical.

34) Who did you like? (see the answer for the question 4 of script 11 of appendix B)

Here, the student has successfully moved the WH-word and auxiliary but the above example shows the clear deviation of tense. The underlying deep structure is in present tense so the auxiliary should also be in present tense. But, here, the past tense of auxiliary *do* is taken. Hence, the sentence becomes ungrammatical.

Now let's see some of the wrong constructions for the same question.

35) Who like you? (see the answer for the question 4 of script 16 of appendix B)

The above construction is deteriorated because of two things. First, there is no auxiliary used in the sentence. As a rule, when there is no existing auxiliary in the corresponding declarative sentence a *do* support must be taken to form an interrogative sentence and it should be inverted with the subject. Second the subject is wrongly placed. Here, the subject is wrongly placed in the object position of verb *like*.

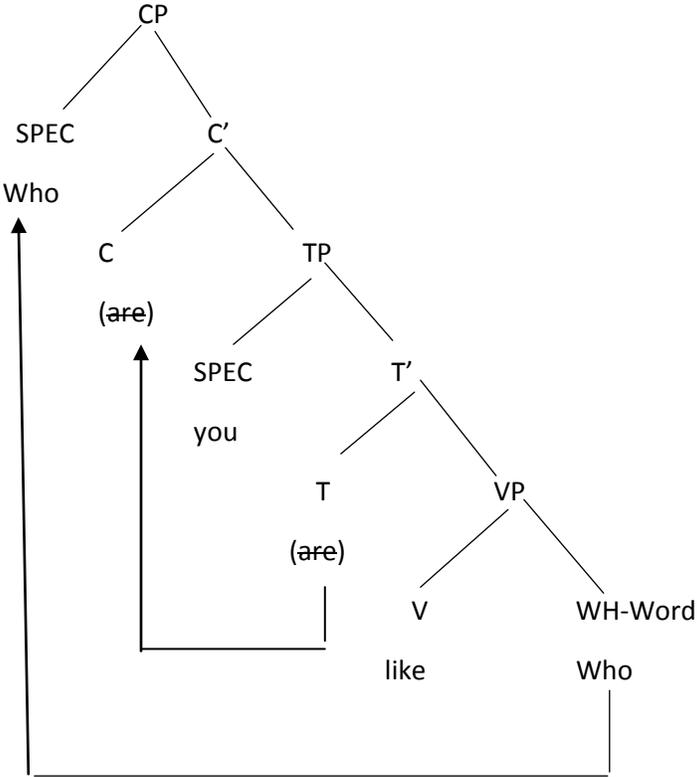
36) Who are you like? (see the answer for the question 4 of script 17 of appendix B)

The above error is a clear example of agreement. As stated above, in the absence of auxiliary element in the underlying declarative sentence a dummy *do* is used to form interrogative sentences. But here, a wrong auxiliary *are* is used. Hence, the sentence

becomes ungrammatical. The actual interrogative sentence is *who do you like?* Had the student used *do* in place of *are* the sentence would have been correct.

Now let's see a tree diagram for the sentence.

37)



38) When she will come? (see the answer for the question 6 of script 18 of appendix B)

The above sentence is an error which results from uninversion of auxiliary. In the corresponding declarative sentence there already exists the auxiliary so the student need not take the dummy *do*. But it just has to be inverted with the subject. In the above sentence the WH-word *when* is moved to the initial position of the sentence but the auxiliary did not move. So it violates the rule of auxiliary movement, hence, becomes ungrammatical. This error may be occurred due to the misapplication of L2 rules or negative transfer from L1.

39) How the song is? (See the answer for the question 8 of script 30 of appendix B)

The above sentence violates the rules of pied-piping and auxiliary movement. When there is a WH-word inside a noun phrase or an adjective phrase the WH word moves to the sentence initial position taking the noun phrase or the adjective phrase along with it. But, here, only the WH-word *how* has only moved and the student has omitted the adjective *nice*. Another problem in the sentence is that the auxiliary is not inverted with the subject. This type of error may occur because of the negative transfer of L1 syntactic knowledge to L2 sentence formation. So, this uninversion of auxiliary element breaks the syntactic correctness of the sentence.

40) They why sell their house? (See the answer for the question 7 of script 38 of appendix B)

The violation of WH-movement and the omission of auxiliary disrupt the sentence structure syntactically. While asking the questions in English it is required to move the

WH-word to the sentence beginning i.e. to Spec of CP. In interrogative sentences an auxiliary is a compulsory element. If there is no auxiliary it is required to employ dummy „do“. But in the corresponding declarative sentence the auxiliary *will* already exists. But the student has not used the auxiliary and inverted with the subject. This is because the student has not internalized the rules of WH-movement and auxiliary movement.

41) Why they will sell their house? (See the answer for the question 7 of script 29 of appendix B)

The above sentence shows us that the learner has moved the WH-word *why* but not the auxiliary. Most of the students are going wrong with the auxiliary inversion only. This indicates us that the learners are good at moving the WH- words but they are facing problems with the auxiliary movement. In fact in Telugu we don't find any movement of auxiliary and interrogative words. It's just an interrogative particle that is used to form questions in Telugu. There is a possibility of committing errors because of this parametric difference in Telugu and English.