

# *Children's Acquisition of Past Tense Verbs*

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**Abstract:** Language acquisition is a major process for children as they grow up. They start to learn the grammar, the use of sounds, and the words, and try to use language to express themselves. This study, will discuss the past theories on language acquisition of past tense verbs, and combine these theories with the present suggestions on how to improve teaching methods and children's learning. Past tense verbs contain a variety of changes in word forms, generally including regular changes and irregular changes. Regular changes are the addition of the -ed suffix after the original form of words, while irregular changes are diverse and can be divided into different types. Errors will keep occurring as kids learn these types of grammatical rules. Nonetheless, children will progressively acquire the terms and grammar over time. Thus, it will be exceptionally helpful for students to acquire and generalize the acquisition of past tense verbs to increase their learning efficiency.

**Keywords:** Language acquisition, past tense verb, overgeneralization error, partial regularity

## 1. Introduction

The research on discovering the process of language acquisition of past tense verbs was done mainly in the 1900s. In this period, scientists focused on building the basic and primary models of human behaviors.

The irregular past tense inflection (-ed) is learned before its regular suffix (-ed), according to Brown's research on the longitudinal study of three children's first language acquisition [1-3]. This suggests that children acquire more unprincipled relationships more easily than a single regular rule. This hypothesis was supported by previous studies on past tense inflection [4]. However, in that research, only two of the three children in the sample proved it, raising doubts about its reliability. Meanwhile, based on Slobin's theory of universal grammar, it is assumed that children use verbs such as "hitted" and "putted" instead of the correct forms of "hit" and "put" [5-6]. Slobin proposed that partial regularity, a combination of regular and irregular conjugation patterns—for instance, adding a final dental consonant when forming the past tense—influences the overgeneralization of regular past tense inflection [7]. He divided the irregular verbs into five main types: verbs that only involve internal vowel change (e.g., "bite" to "bit"), verbs that involve both internal vowel change and the addition of a final dental consonant (e.g., "lose" to "lost"), verbs in which a final consonant is changed to a dental consonant (e.g., "have" to "had"), verbs that have no change (e.g., "hurt"), and verbs that have dramatic changes (e.g., "go" to "went").

This study mainly discussed these four hypotheses and how different theories of language acquisition of past tense verbs can explain the circumstances based on a previous study. Also, this

study will look into some suggestions for teaching past tense verbs. Therefore, this study is mainly discussing children's acquisition of past tense verbs.

This study can help to organize the previous research and provide suggestions for future research on the children's language acquisition of past tense verbs. Therefore, children can learn past tense verbs more easily and quickly [8]. What's more, these manners can also be helpful in cases of children with defects in language acquisition.

## 2. Literature review

In a study he released, Kuczaj explored four primary theories on the development of regular and irregular past tense forms [9]. These are: the irregular past tense is easier to learn than the regular past tense form; the two types of overgeneralization errors (gone vs. wented) have acquisitional relevance; partial regularity prevents overgeneralization errors; and the irregular forms "hit," "let," and "put" are more likely than other irregular forms to be overgeneralized by the regular rule for the application of -ed.

Two of the four hypotheses that Kuczaj investigated in his research turned out to be falsifications. Fifteen children made up the research sample. Two kids were monitored every six months, making a cross-sectional sample of 14 kids spanning the age range of 2 to 6 (years and months) to 5 to 6. Conversely, Abe, the other youngster, participated from 2; 4 to 5;1, providing longitudinal information [10].

For six weeks in a row, the study recorded one hour of spontaneous speech every week from the participants in the cross-sectional sample. Additionally, it captured one hour of Abe's unplanned speech every week between 2:4 and 4:11, and half an hour between 4:11 and 5:1. Subsequently, investigators used dependability scores to assure correctness in the transcription of the talks. Another rater in the study transcribed parts of 250 morphemes at random and compared them to the researcher's transcripts. The outcome demonstrated that the reliability scores ranged from 90.4% to 100%.

In the research, it utilized some of the main procedures that were in Brown's research. The study measured the mean length of utterance (MLU) of each child and measured the scores in Brown's manner, only scoring on verb forms that indicated earliness. It also used the criterion of 90%, which is recognized as having been required. As data were collected, they were divided into separate syntactic categories, including regular word form base without "-ed" suffix (e.g., "walk"), regular word form base with "-ed" suffix (e.g., "walked"), irregular verb form base when the past tense form is appropriate (e.g., "eat"), irregular verb form base with "-ed" suffix (e.g., "eated"), irregular past tense verb form (e.g., "ate"), and irregular past tense verb form with "-ed" suffix (e.g., "wented"). The research found that 13 children achieved a 90% success rate on regular past tense inflection, while only 3 children achieved a 90% success rate for irregular past, whereas even words such as "hit", which remained the same, were counted. have to more children have an 85% success rate. For the longitudinal investigation, Abe takes 20 months longer to achieve a consistent 90% success rate in irregular forms, contradicting Brown's hypothesis [11].

In the overview of the appearance of different types of overgeneralization errors, even though some of them did not reach the 90% requirement on the regular form, all children carried out one or both of these kinds of mistakes [12]. The data indicates that overgeneralization errors are more common in the initial acquisition process. In the cross-sectional sample, the nine youngest children exhibited this tendency, as did Abe until age 4. However, there appeared to be more errors of the "ated" type of overgeneralization errors than the "eated" type during the later acquisition process. The tendency was shared by four of the five eldest children in the cross-sectional sample, as well as Abe in the latter half of his fifth year. To sum up and make a short conclusion about the relevance between the two types of overgeneralization errors, it is that there is an age-related change, and the relevance

did exist. Kuczaj explains that as a child gains stable control of the regular past tense rule, they will stop using generic verb forms to express pastness. Therefore, errors like "buy", "bring", and "swing", will disappear, but errors like "bued", "bringed", and "swinged" will occur.

When examining the relationship between partial regularity and overgeneralization errors, it was found that three children in the cross-sectional sample showed that partial regularity exhibited proportionally fewer overgeneralization errors than others. The study found that one child displayed the reverse trend, while the other 10 children overgeneralized the application of -ed to lesser extents. However, the application of -ed was more frequent than expected, and Abe did not provide convincing evidence either. At varying points, Abe overgeneralized "-ed" to the partially irregular forms to a lesser extent than to the other irregular forms. At other times, he did not. Over-viewing the data, two partially regular verb types show less overgeneralization than the verb type that just includes an internal vowel change. However, these two partially regular verb types have overgeneralization errors more often than the verb types, which have no change or total change. Therefore, this research fails to provide unequivocal support for the notion that partial regularity blocks overgeneralization errors.

Kuczaj proposed a possible solution to the relationship between partial regularity and overgeneralization errors. As partial regularity blocks overgeneralization errors, words like "felt" should not occur since the verb form "felt" already exhibited partial regularity. Nevertheless, the prerequisite should be that children have already learned the pastness of the word "felt". According to the performances of the children, words like "felt", "feeled", and "felted" were used randomly by the children at the same time in the past in appropriate contexts. This means that children already understood the pastness of the word "felt". Then, another question will be led out: why do children change the word forms they use in past-tense situations frequently? Kuczaj suggested that children often engage in linguistic play. They acquire exceptions from their parents sometimes and retain some of these exceptions in their speech. However, they will gradually learn to recognize correct irregular forms. For the last hypothesis, it was found that of the 14 children in the cross-sectional sample, 8 never applied the -ed suffix to these irregular verbs (e.g., let), 5 children used the regular suffix on these verbs 14.3–25% of the time, and 1 child made such errors on 66.7% of the possible occasions. Overgeneralization errors in irregular verbs do not occur more frequently than expected, and their incidence varies with age, with Kuczaj arguing this hypothesis is unnecessary.

However, Kuczaj's research also has limitations, including a small sample size for a longitudinal investigation. The reason for children to change their forms of past tense verbs, the relationship between overgeneralization errors and partial regularity and the "nonchange" irregular verbs, and the cause for the age-related change in overgeneralization errors. The answers to these questions are still equivocal.

### 3. Discussion

Kuczaj's research helps to provide a simple model and theory of the language acquisition process of past tense verbs. This allows people to discover better manners of teaching past tense verbs to children. Meanwhile, many researches on games on learning past tense verbs were raised[9-10]. A previous research conducted by Paramita suggested using matching games to improve students' ability to understand irregular past tense verbs. The research result shows that matching games successfully boost students' ability to learn irregular past tense verbs [11].

A matching game is one of the instructional approaches that can be utilized in cooperative learning, in which students must find a partner. The pupils are divided into two groups, group A and group B. A card is given to each student in A group. Students in Group B receive the answer cards, and the students in Group A receive the question cards. The teacher will then ask students to find any matches, and they will be asked to construct sentences using the words on their cards.

In this study, the teacher uses a matching game to teach irregular verbs in the simple past tense [12].

Teaching vocabulary -irregular verbs- is certainly more than simply providing new terms. The teacher must be careful in deciding on the vocabulary or verbs that he or she will teach. Teachers and students need to understand the different stages of language acquisition of irregular past tense verbs so that teachers can find the best method to teach. Since teachers are more knowledgeable than the students in the case of irregular verbs, they have to fully understand the theory of the language acquisition process to educate effectively.

To get students more engaged in studying English, particularly irregular verbs, teachers should incorporate enjoyable activities into the lesson, including games or engaging activities, to prevent the students from becoming bored. A matching game is among the games. According to Hadfield's theory, playing matching games can help to increase students' interest in their studies and keep them from getting bored.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study provides a summary of the theories and hypotheses based on the previous studies and suggests using matching games to help improve children's ability to learn past tense verbs. By using matching games in teaching past tense verbs, children can become more engaged in studying and increase their learning ability. Also, the procedure is very simple; teachers only need to provide different stages of verbs and ask the children to match them. However, learning the language acquisition process is very necessary in the game since good word choice can improve efficiency, which is especially precious in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. In addition, the ecological validity of this teaching method is very high, and it can be widely used in classes.

However, this study lacks first-handed data, and cannot ensure the accuracy of the research results. Research on discovering the experimental hypothesis, which is that matching games in teaching improves the time children fully acquire. The comparison between the time of the language acquisition measured should be compared clearly to support this hypothesis. Furthermore, accurate research on which kind of word choice in the game can best improve children's ability to learn should be done. Meanwhile, other manners of teaching to improve the learning process can be proposed with empirical evidence. There is also a variety of research based on this topic that was extended [13-14].

After reviewing the past research, it can be predicted that future research will mainly take place in discovering the methods that can help to boost students' acquisition of language and how knowledge of the procedure of language acquisition can help to improve. Focusing on using the model to find therapy to help children with defects learn past tense verbs will also be an aspect scientists will focus on in the future [15]. These methods can be used to hold on to children with intellectual disabilities and see if they can help improve the learning process.

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