

## **Tense, Voice and Modality Systems in Telugu and English: A Sample Contrastive Study**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper based on Contrastive Analysis in English Language Teaching, identifies the difficult areas in English which may cause problems to Telugu learners of English as a Second/ a Foreign Language. The main focus is on the differences between English and Telugu in Tense, Aspect, Voice, Finite-Non-finite verb forms, Modality and Causative functions and structures. Telugu does not have perfect and perfect continuous tenses. Similarly, passive voice is not native to Telugu. In Telugu, there are not as many helping and modal verbs as there are in English. These disparities are likely to be problematic to Telugu learners of English as they interfere with the process of learning. It is suggested that a special remedial course on the lines of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) will be useful in helping Telugu learners of English to overcome these problems.

**Keywords:** Tense, voice, modality, finite and non-finite verbs, causative.

This paper attempts to compare and contrast the systems of tense, voice and modality in English and Telugu with a view to focusing on the problematic areas faced by Telugu speakers learning English as a Second or Foreign Language within the broad rubric of English Language Teaching.

Linguists and language teaching experts like Robert Lado (1967) and S. P. Corder (1973) have emphasized the need for contrastive studies for an effective Second or Foreign language teaching. They pointed out that in the process of second language learning the native language of the learner exerts its influence positively at certain times and negatively at certain other times. The positive influence of mother tongue or L1 is called Transference and its negative influence is known as Interference. For instance, learning the difference between nouns in singular and plural

numbers in English may be easy for a Telugu learner because such a distinction of singular and plural numbers also exists in Telugu. Likewise the gender distinction in English, i.e. Masculine, Feminine, Neutre and Common genders, also may be easy for a Telugu learner since such gender difference is found in Telugu also.

On the other hand, a Telugu learner of English may not be able to clearly grasp the difference between simple past and present perfect tense, active and passive voice, finite-nonfinite verbs, causatives and modal helping verbs because such differences do not exist in modern Telugu. In a similar fashion the appropriate use of articles may pose a problem to Telugu learners of English as there is no system of articles in Telugu.

### Tense

The grammatical category of tense in English is bi-partite in the sense that the main verb is inflected only in the present and the past while there is no verb inflection to indicate the future tense. Similarly in English the aspectual system is four-fold: simple or indefinite, progressive or continuous, perfect and perfect progressive or continuous. Furthermore, in English most of these tenses and aspects also operate in the Passive Voice (Quirk et. al. 1972).

In Telugu also the tense system is bi-partite consisting of past and non-past tenses, the latter including the present and the future tense in terms of meaning, even though the grammatical inflection is the same (B. H. Krishnamurthy and Gwynn 1971).

### Voice

Secondly, the aspectual system in Telugu is not so varied as in English which consist of four aspects, whereas in modern Telugu there are only two aspects viz. indefinite and continuous. That is, the Telugu learner of English has to capture the English tense system which is more complicated than the tense and aspectual system of his native language. He has to come to grips with a more complex system with the help of his own native system which is simpler. This disparity of grammatical categories of tense and aspect in L1 (Telugu) and L2 (English) is likely to cause problems to the Telugu learner of English.

Thirdly, Passive Voice is not native to Telugu just as in the case of the other languages in the Dravidian family of languages to which Telugu belongs. Only in modern Telugu we find the

use of the Passive Voice, that too, in a limited manner under the influence of Telugu journalism mostly shaped by the original data in English provided by Reuter. The Passive Voice is also used in Telugu in scientific prose after the fashion of English style since most of the scientific discourse in Telugu is more or less translation of its English original. As mentioned above, the grammatical category of voice in English is as varied as its tense-aspectual system. This is another area in English structure which may pose problems to the Telugu learner of English.

The following illustrations will confirm the remarks made above.

### **Tense and Aspect**

#### **I. Present:**

##### **1. Simple or Indefinite**

English: Lata speaks French well.

Telugu: lata french chakkaga: ma:TLa:Dutundi.

##### **2. Continuous or Progressive**

English: Anil is writing a story.

Telugu: anil katha ra:stunna:Du.

##### **3. Perfect**

English: Lata has drawn a picture.

Telugu: lata bomma gi:sindi.

##### **4. Perfect Continuous or Progressive**

English: Anil has been watching the TV.

Telugu: anil TV chustunna:Du.

Here we can see that against the four aspects in English in the present there are only two aspects in Telugu because has drawn is equivalent to gi:sindi in Telugu, which is also used for the simple past in Telugu. Similarly, against the continuous and the perfect continuous in English there is only one aspect in Telugu viz., present continuous used for both. These systemic gaps will cause problems for Telugu learners of English.

II. Past:

1. Simple or Indefinite

English: Lata spoke French well.

Telugu: lata french chakkaga: ma:TLa:Dindi.

2. Past Continuous or Progressive

English: Anil was writing a story.

Telugu: anil katha ra:stunna:Du.

3. Past Perfect

English: Lata had drawn a picture (before she went to bed).

Telugu: lata (nidra po:ye:mundu) bomma gi:sindi.

4. Past Perfect Continuous or Progressive

English: Anil had been watching the TV. (when his father returned home)

Telugu: (va:LLa na:nna inTiki tirigi vachina samaya:niki) anil TV chu:sunna:Du.

The examples above clearly illustrate that there are gaps in the Telugu tense system vis-à-vis., that of English. Against the English tense-aspectual constructions of present continuous and past continuous there is only one construction in Telugu. Present perfect, simple past and past perfect in English are expressed in Telugu by only one verb forms viz., simple past. This may be shown as follows:

English	Telugu
Simple present	Simple present
Present continuous Present perfect continuous Past continuous Past perfect continuous	Present continuous
Present perfect	

Simple past  
Past perfect

Simple past

This systemic disparity between L1 and L2 is very likely to create problems for the Telugu learner of English. Similar is the case with the English future tense-aspectual system also. Consider the following:

### III. Future

#### 1. Simple or Indefinite

English: I shall meet you tomorrow.

He will go to Mumbai next week.

Telugu: ne:nu re:pu ninnu kalusta:nu.

athanu vacche: va:ram mumbai veLta:Du.

#### 2. Continuous or Progressive

English: I shall be travelling by train next Monday.

He will be writing his final exams next month.

Telugu: vacche: so:mav:aram ne:nu railulo: praya:Nistu: unTa:nu.

vacche nelalo atanu chivari parikshalu ra:stu: unTa:Du.

#### 3. Perfect

English: I shall have finished B. Tech. by the end of the next year.

She will have completed her project by the end of this week.

Telugu: vacche samvastram chivarlo: nenu B. Tech. pu:rti che:sta:nu.

i: va:ram chivariki a:me tana pro:ject pu:rti che:stundi.

#### 4. Perfect Continuous

English: We shall have been travelling by air for two hours at 8 p.m. tomorrow.

They will have been repairing roads for ten days by the end of next month.

Telugu: re:pu ra:tri 8 ganTaku me:mu 2 ganTala pa:Tu vima:namulo: praya:NistunTa:mu.

vacche: nela:varaku va;LLu 10 rojula pa:Tu ro:Dlu marammattu  
che:stu:nTa:ru.

From these examples, it can be noted that in the future tense also Telugu has a limited number of verb forms against a variety of verb forms in English. For instance, Telugu has the same verb form for simple present and simple future unlike in English which has two forms. Furthermore, in English there is a difference of the auxiliary verbs shall and will in usage, according to the difference of first, second and third person subjects. This difference does not exist in Telugu, because Telugu has a limited number of auxiliaries unlike English which has as many as 24 helping verbs of which some are primary and some others are modal.

As mentioned above, the disparities between the tense-aspectual systems of English (L2) and Telugu (L1) cause problems to the Telugu learner of English. As a result, Telugu students at almost all levels of formal education are likely to commit errors like the following:

- Present Tense: Present Perfect  
\*My uncle has returned from Mumbai yesterday.  
Present Perfect Continuous  
\*They are living in Hyderabad since 2010.
- Past Tense: Past Perfect  
\*He had finished his homework.  
Past Perfect Continuous  
\*They had been cultivating lands.
- Future Tense: \*I will meet you tomorrow if you will call me.

These are only a few possible mistakes because there may be many others as a result of the learner's ignorance of English tense-aspectual system.

#### Finite and Non-Finite Verb Forms

Fourthly, the finite and non-finite distinction which is crucial in the expression of tense-meanings will also be a problematic area for the Telugu learner of English because of the finite and non-finite differences in English and Telugu. This may be shown as follows:

In English a verb can have six forms of which three forms are finite and another three forms are non-finite, excepting ‘be’ forms.

Write, for example:

English:	Finite	Non-finite
	write } writes } [present]	writing [present participle]
	wrote [past]	written [past participle]
		to write [infinitive]

Note: An \*asterisk indicates that the following expressions are ungrammatical and unacceptable.

Telugu:	Finite	Non-finite
	ra:sta:Du [male] } ra:stundi [female] } present ra:sta:ru [plural] }	ra:stu: [present participle]
	ra:sa:Du [male] } ra:sindi [female] } past ra:sa:ru [plural] }	ra:si [past participle]
		ra:yaTa:niki [infinitive]

The two tables of finite and non-finite verbs, viz., ‘write’ in English and ‘ra:yu’ in Telugu respectively illustrate that there are disparities between the two languages in the finite and non-finite forms of verbs. These disparities are likely to create problems for Telugu learners of English. Consider the following:

Finite [Present]	Finite [Past]
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English: He/she <u>writes</u> stories.	English: He/she wrote a story.
Telugu: ataDu kathalu <u>ra:sta:Du</u> . [M]	Telugu: atadu katha <u>ra:sa:Du</u> . [M]
a:me kathalu <u>ra:stundi</u> . [F]	a:me katha <u>ra:sindi</u> . [F]
va:LLu kathalu <u>ra:sta:ru</u> . [PI]	English: They <u>wrote</u> stories.
English: They <u>write</u> stories.	Telugu: va:LLu kathalu <u>ra:sa:ru</u> .
Telugu: va:LLu kathalu <u>ra:sta:ru</u> .	

Non-finite [present participle]	Infinitive
English: He/she <u>is/was writing</u> a story.	English: He/She wants <u>to write</u> a story.
Telugu: atanu katha <u>ra:stunna:Du</u> . [M]	Telugu: atadu katha <u>ra:ya:lanukunta:Du</u> . [M]
a:me katha <u>ra:stunnadi</u> . [F]	a:me katha <u>ra:yalanukuntunnadi</u> . [F]
English: They <u>are/were writing</u> stories.	English: They want <u>to write</u> stories.
Telugu: va:LLu kathalu <u>ra:stunna:ru</u> .	Telugu: va:LLu kathalu <u>ra:yalanukunta:ru</u> .

These examples illustrate a number of differences between English and modern Telugu in the use of finite and non-finite forms of verbs. For instance there is a difference of gender in Telugu as reflected in the verb forms. In Telugu there is no difference between simple present and simple future unlike in English. Further, there is no difference between present continuous and past continuous in Telugu whereas such a difference exists in English. These differences are likely to pose problems to Telugu learners of English.

### **Auxiliaries/Modality Meanings**

Fifthly, the systems of auxiliary verbs in English and Telugu, because of their differences, will create additional problems to Telugu learners of English as discussed below. In English, primary auxiliaries can also be used as main verbs whereas modal auxiliaries cannot be so used as main verbs. The following are the primary auxiliaries in English: 'be' forms, 'do' forms, and 'have' forms.

In Telugu, the category of helping verbs has not been clearly specified by grammarians. However, we can identify some auxiliary verbs in modern Telugu in which the primary and



modal distinction is not very clear. The following may be described as auxiliary verbs in modern Telugu.

peTTu, paDu, po:vu, gala, le:, konu etc.

1. Telugu: na: kodukki oka bomma konipeTTa:nu.  
English: I bought a toy for my son.
2. Telugu: pillava:Du chikaTLo: bhayapaDDa:Du.  
English: The boy was afraid of darkness.
3. Telugu: pillava:Du nidra po:ya:Du.  
English: The boy slept.
4. Telugu: atanu English ma:TLa:DagalaDu.  
English: He can speak English.
5. Telugu: a:me French maTLa:dale:Du.  
English: She cannot speak French.
6. Telugu: a: vidyarthi ganTa sepu chaduvukonna:Du.  
English: That student studied for two hours.

These examples indicate that there is no one-to-one correspondence between English and Telugu regarding helping verbs which may create problems for Telugu learners of English. Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is a distinction between primary and modal auxiliaries in English. There are no exact equivalents in Telugu for the modal auxiliaries of English. However modality meanings can be expressed in Telugu also. Look at the following:

#### Futurity

English: I shall meet you tomorrow.

Telugu: ne:nu re:pu mimmalni kalusta:nu.

English: He will go to London next week.

Telugu: a:yana vacheva:ram landan veLta:Du.

#### Ability

English: She can speak French.

Telugu: a:me frenchi ma:TLa:dagaladu.

### Probability

English: It may rain this evening.

Telugu: i: sa:yantram varsham paDavacchu.

### Obligation

English: You have to/ought to/should/must respect your elders.

Telugu: mi: peddalanu: ni:vu gauravincha:li.

In English many of the modal helping verbs have tense forms very often with differences of meaning compared to the meanings of their present tense forms. That is, some modals in their past tense forms can have past tense meaning or present tense meaning with a difference.

e.g. He can swim very fast. (present)

He could swim. (past)

### Politeness

Could you tell me the meaning of sophomore? (present)

In Telugu, which has a limited number of modal helping verbs, there is no possibility of their secondary or additional meanings. This disparity causes problems for Telugu learners of English to come to grips with the appropriate use of modal verbs in English.

### Causative verbs

Both in English and Telugu, there are causative verb forms to express the meaning of getting something done by others which is normally known as causative meaning. In English, this can be accomplished by the use of the verb forms of get, have, and make. That is, causative meaning in English can be conveyed by means of a limited number of causative verbs, as illustrated below:

English: e.g. 1. I made him copy the essay.

2. I had her post the letter.

3. They got him educated.

In Telugu, a causative verb -‘inchu’, can be used as a helping verb in a universal manner, i.e. with a large number of main verbs. For example:

1. ne:nu atani che:ta vya:sam nakalu ra:yincha:nu.
2. ne:nu a:me che:ta uttaram post che:yincha:nu.
3. va:LLu ataNNi chadivincha:ru.

The causative verbs in English have a limited use in written form, whereas they may be used more extensively in spoken English (get in particular). On the other hand, in Telugu, the causative, -inchu can be used as a helping verb with almost all transitive verbs. This difference will cause further difficulties for Telugu learners of English.

### **Finite and Non-finite Clauses**

In English, a subordinate clause can be either finite or non-finite, in the sense that a finite clause is marked with a finite verb whereas a non-finite clause has only a non-finite verb. A finite verb is limited in its tense and aspectual meanings while a non-finite form can be used in all tenses and continuous and perfective aspects. Consider the following:

S1: The boy started climbing the tree and fell down. (two finite verbs and two clauses)

S2: When the boy was climbing the tree, he fell down. (two finite verbs and two clauses)

S3: While climbing the tree, the boy fell down. (one non-finite verb and one finite verb and two clauses)

According to traditional grammar of English S1 is a Compound sentence because it has a main clause and a coordinate clause. S2 is a Complex sentence because it is made up of a subordinate clause and a main clause. In these two sentences the verbs are finite and hence the clauses are also finite. In contrast, S3 has a non-finite clause and a finite clause and consequently it is called a Simple sentence because it has only one finite clause. In this way, sentences in English are classified structurally into compound, complex and simple sentences on the basis of their finite clause structure. The number of non-finite clauses does not affect this kind of structural classification of sentences in English. In Telugu also such a structural classification of sentences is possible. But native speakers as well as grammarians of Telugu do not seem to have

paid adequate attention to the non-finite clauses in Telugu, and they seem to have considered them to be phrases. Therefore, the non-finite clause formation is likely to be problematic for Telugu learners of English. Consider the following:

S1. English: Returning from the market, my mother bought some bread. (one non-finite and one finite clause: a Simple Sentence)

Telugu: ma:rkeTTu nunchi vastu: ma: amma bred konnadi. (one non-finite and one finite clause: a Simple Sentence)

S2. English: Having returned home, he changed his clothes (one non-finite and one finite clause: a Simple Sentence)

Telugu: inTiki tirigivacchi atanu baTTalu ma:rchukunna:Du. (one non-finite and one finite clause: a Simple Sentence)

In English there is a difference of meaning between the two non-finite clauses in S1 and S2. In Sentence 1 ‘returning’ indicates an incomplete and continuous action while in Sentence 2 ‘having returned’ indicates a completed action. The meaning of the non-finite clause in S2 can be translated as ‘tirigivacchi’ which is a non-finite form of the compound verb tirigi-vach which has two past participle forms as against one present participle and another past participle in English having returned. This disparity makes matters more complicated for Telugu learners of English.

For similar reasons as mentioned above, sentence and clause structure in English is often confusing for Telugu learners of English. Conditional sentences are a case in point in this context. English can have three types of conditional sentences viz. Real or Possible condition, Past-unfulfilled condition and Impossible or Hypothetical condition. In contrast, Telugu has only one type of conditional sentence. This difference also causes difficulties to Telugu learners of English.

This situation calls for a well-designed remedial teaching. For instance, the teacher may, after introducing and illustrating the structure and function of the English tense-aspectual, voice, modality, causative verb, finite and non-finite clause structure systems draw attention of the learners to the differences between L1 and L2 in this respect and illustrate the probable errors in

this area due to the gaps. Then the teacher may give intense practice of oral drills followed by written exercises. After giving sufficient and repeated practice, the teacher may assign independent, individual and pair/group tasks through which the learners will be able to come to grips with these structural and functional features of English. Oral drills and written practice can be at the sentence, paragraph and discourse levels.

This kind of remedial teaching method may look structurally oriented but it can be adopted as a task-based activity within the framework of Communicative Approach, as part of classroom interaction between the teacher and the taught as well as between pairs and groups of students. Such remedial teaching calls for not only a committed attitude but also an innovative approach on the part of the English teacher.

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