

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

The data collected is analysed according to three main error categories, namely, selection errors, omission errors and addition errors, as outlined in Corder's (1981) taxonomy of errors. A discussion of the errors in the use of the simple past and past progressive tenses found in the corpus is also dealt with in this chapter.

#### **4.1 DATA OF SIMPLE PAST AND PAST PROGRESSIVE TENSE ERRORS**

The researcher collected 40 scripts of free-writing essays from 40 Chinese Form Four students of Sekolah Menengah Tanah Merah Site 'C', a semi-rural school in the state of Negeri Sembilan. These students were also given a structured test devised by the researcher which test the usage of the simple past and past progressive. The essays and the test papers were then marked for errors in the simple past tense and past progressive tense. The list of errors in the simple past tense and past progressive tense in the test is shown in Appendices B and C. Samples of the essays written by the students are included in Appendix E. A total of 1379 correct and incorrect usage of the simple past tense were found in the essays. For the past progressive tense, a total of 132 correct and incorrect usage were found in the essays. In the test,

on the other hand, there were a total of 1440 (36 testing items x 40 students) correct and incorrect usage each in the use of the simple past tense and the past progressive tense. This is shown in Table 4.1.

**TABLE 4.1 Data of Correct and Incorrect Usage in the Simple Past and Past Progressive Tenses in the Essay and the Test**

	Essay				Test			
	Simple Past	%	Past Progressive	%	Simple Past	%	Past Progressive	%
Correct Usage	502	36.4	63	47.7	745	51.7	271	18.8
Incorrect Usage	877	63.6	69	52.3	695	48.3	1169	81.2
Total Usage	1379	100	132	100	1440	100	1440	100

Upon closer examination of Table 4.1, it can be observed that in the essays, the subjects committed the most number of errors in the simple past tense, making up a total of 877 errors or 63.6%, while there were 69 errors in the past progressive tense or 52.3%. The test, on the other hand, yielded 695 errors in the simple past, which constituted 48.3% of the total number of errors. There was 1169 or 81.2% incorrect usage of the past progressive tense.

It can be seen from the data above that more errors occurred in the simple past tense compared to the past progressive tense in the essays, but in the tests, there were more errors in the past progressive tense compared to the simple

past tense. This occurrence could be attributed to the avoidance strategy employed by the students. The students could have avoided using the past progressive tense in the essays, as they were probably not confident in using it, whereas they were 'forced' to use the past progressive tense in the tests. Therefore, the past progressive had a much higher percentage of errors, that is, 81.2% in the test compared to the essay (52.3%). This shows that the past progressive tense poses more difficulty to the students.

The higher occurrence of the simple past tense errors (877 errors) in the essays compared to the tests (695 errors), could be due to the fact that the students were concentrating more on the contents of the essays rather than grammar. Such being the case, the grammatical aspects of the essays were neglected. As a result, more errors were committed in the use of the simple past tense in the essays. The tests, on the other hand, required students to fill in the blanks with the base verbs given in parentheses. So, the students tended to be consciously aware of the verb forms to be used. Hence, less number of errors were committed in the use of the simple past tense in the tests.

As the research topic focuses on errors in the use of the simple past and past progressive tenses, a further detailed analysis of the incorrect usage of the two tenses is carried out as illustrated in Table 4.2. The errors are categorised into three main error categories, namely, selection errors, omission errors and

addition errors. The following table shows the distributions of errors in the three categories, as found in the essays and the tests.

TABLE 4.2 Distributions of Error Categories in the Essay and the Test

Error Categories	Essay				Test			
	Simple Past	%	Past Progressive	%	Simple Past	%	Past Progressive	%
. Selection Errors	649	74.0	20	29.0	695	100.0	912	78.0
. Addition Errors	159	18.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
. Omission Errors	69	7.9	49	71.0	0	0	257	22.0
Total No. Of Errors	877	100.0	69	100.0	695	100.0	1169	100.0

Table 4.2 indicates the breakdown of the simple past tense and past progressive tense errors into three error categories. The highest percentage of the simple past tense errors in the essays is found in the selection category, which has a total of 649 errors or 74% of the total number of errors (877 errors). The second most number of errors is in the addition category which yields 159 errors or 18.1% of the total number of the simple past tense errors; followed by the omission category which constitutes 69 errors or 7.9% of the total number of the simple past tense errors.

In the essays, the past progressive tense has the highest occurrence of errors in the omission category with a total of 49 errors or 71% of the total number of past progressive tense errors (69), followed by the selection category



constituting 20 errors or 29% of the total number of errors. There are no errors in the addition category.

The structured test on the simple past tense yields 695 errors or 100% of the total number of errors in the selection category. No errors are found in the addition and omission categories respectively. The highest occurrence of errors in the test for the past progressive tense is found to be in the selection category with a total number of 912 errors or 78% of the total number of past progressive tense errors (1169 errors). This is followed by errors in the omission category, which yields 257 errors or 22% of the total number of errors. There are no errors committed in the addition category.

The selection category has the most number of errors in the simple past tense both in the essays (74%) and the tests (100%). This category, too, has the highest occurrence of errors in the past progressive tense for the test, which constitutes 78% of the total number of errors. However, in the essays, there are more errors in the use of the past progressive tense in the omission category (71%) compared to the selection category (29%).

It can be deduced from the data that the students face a serious problem in selecting the correct verb to indicate the correct time reference. This indicates that students probably do not know how to demonstrate the concept of time, both for the simple past tense as well as the past progressive tense.

The three categories of errors in the simple past tense and the past progressive tense will be further discussed in detail below.

## **4.2 SIMPLE PAST TENSE**

### **4.2.1 SELECTION ERRORS**

A high percentage of the past tense errors made by the subjects were in the selection category. This indicates that the students have selected the incorrect verb forms. The total number of simple past tense selection errors in the essays is 649 or 74% of the overall number of errors found in the corpus, while the test yields 695 errors, which constituted 100% of the total number of errors. The distributions of selection errors of the simple past tense are shown in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3 Distributions of Selection Errors in the Simple Past Tense  
in the Essay and the Test

Selection Errors	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. The use of simple present for simple past	510	78.6	225	32.4
2. The use of past progressive for simple past	71	10.9	54	7.8
3. The use of incorrect verb forms	25	3.9	329	47.3
4. The use of singular verb for plural verb	19	2.9	9	1.3
5. The use of plural verb for singular verb	11	1.7	7	1.0
6. The use of to-infinitive for simple past	8	1.2	0	0
7. The use of adjective for a verb	5	0.8	0	0
8. The use of -ing form for simple past	0	0	71	10.2
Total	649	100.0	695	100.0

Table 4.3 shows that the highest frequency of selection errors of the simple past tense in the essays is in the use of the simple present tense instead of the simple past tense, making a total of 78.6% errors. In the test, it is the second highest frequency of selection errors (32.4%).

It can be noted that a high percentage of the selection errors (the use of simple present for simple past) were in the essays (78.6%) rather than in the tests (32.4%). More than twice as many errors were committed in the essays than in the tests. This could probably be due to the fact that students were not consciously aware of using the verbs in the simple tense. The students used the simple present tense instead of the simple past tense to express an action

completed in the past at a definite past time. Typical examples taken from the essays and the tests are as follows:

<u>Essay</u>	
*The man <u>knocks</u> on the door again and again. (knocked)	
*Suddenly, I <u>shout</u> very loudly. (shouted)	
*I <u>hear</u> my mother calling me. (heard)	
*So I <u>take</u> out my photos. (took)	

<u>Test</u>	
No.2	*James <u>prefer</u> singing to dancing when he was a child. (preferred)
No.15	*Sue <u>visit</u> her cousin last week. (visited)
No.23	*The actors <u>bow</u> to the audience at the end of the play. (bowed)
No.27	*Mariam <u>beg</u> to come with us this morning. (begged)

The high occurrence of errors in this tense (the use of the simple present tense or the simple past tense) could be due to redundancy. According to Richards (1974), redundancy reduction may occur "...with items which are contrasted in the grammar of the language but which do not carry significant and obvious contrast" (p. 175). He further adds that the '-ed' marker may seem to carry no meaning since pastness is usually indicated lexically and in narrative the idea of sequence can be expressed in the present, as in the example, 'Last week, I

go to the shopping complex and I buy a dress'. This helps the learner to cut down the tasks involved in sentence production.

The second highest frequency of selection errors in the essays is in the use of the past progressive tense for the simple past tense making a total of 71 errors or 10.9%, while the test yielded 54 errors or 7.8%, which constituted the fourth highest frequency of selection errors. The examples are illustrated below:

<u>Essay</u>
*It <u>was happening</u> . (happened)
*We <u>were waking</u> up early. (woke)
*I felt that something <u>was falling</u> on my face. (fell)

<u>Test</u>
No.6 *She <u>was preparing</u> lunch before she went out. (prepared)
No.10 *He <u>was drinking</u> a cup of coffee before class this morning. (drank)
No.23 *The actors <u>were bowing</u> to the audience at the end of the play. (bowed)

The above sentences are incorrect as the students used the past progressive tense to express an action completed in the past at a definite past time. These errors could be attributed to the learners' hypothesis of false concepts induced

by teaching materials. It is not uncommon in English teaching materials to see a series of pictures illustrating a sequence of actions, with the caption in the continuous tense although the use of the tense in this context is unnatural. Such teaching materials could have led learners to presume that the progressive form in English is a narrative tense for telling stories and for describing series of events in either the present or the past (Richards, 1974).

From Table 4.3, it can be seen that the third highest frequency of selection errors in the essay is in the use of incorrect verb forms making a total of 25 errors or 3.9%. In the test, this occurs with the highest frequency (329 errors or 47.3%) which makes up about half of the total errors found in the test items. The higher percentage of errors in the test compared to the essay could be because the students were forced to use the structures. Errors revealed the fact that students did not know the past tense form of the verbs. In the essay there was no forced usage, so students only used the verbs which they were familiar with. Many errors in this category were those of incorrect spelling of the regular and irregular verbs.

Table 4.4 below shows the distributions of incorrect regular and irregular verb forms in the simple past tense in the essay and in the test.

**TABLE 4.4** Distributions of Incorrect Regular and Irregular Verb Forms in the Simple Past Tense in the Essay and the Test

Incorrect Verb Forms	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
Regular verbs	0	0	53	16.2
Irregular verbs	25	100.0	276	83.8
Total	25	100.0	329	100.0

From table 4.4, it can be seen that there were more incorrect usage of irregular verbs than regular verbs. In the essay there were 25 incorrect usages of irregular verbs, which constituted 100% of the total number of incorrect usage. The students could have avoided using the irregular verbs in the essays because they were not familiar with these verbs, thus accounting for the low frequency of errors in these forms in the essays. Instead, they substituted the simple past tense with the simple present tense, which accounts for the high occurrence of selection errors in this aspect in the essay. There was no such occurrence in regular verbs. It could be that students only used regular verbs that they know for sure.

the test, there were 276 incorrect usage of irregular verbs, which constituted 3.8% of the total number of incorrect usage compared to 53 incorrect usage of regular verbs or 16.2%. As explained earlier, students were 'forced' to use the structures in the test. Thus, contributing to a higher percentage of errors in the test compared to the essay. The test showed that students did not know the correct spelling of the irregular verbs. Table 4.5 shows some of the types of errors in the spelling of the irregular verb forms found in the test:

Table 4.5      Types of Errors in the Irregular Verb Forms based on the Spelling Rules for Irregular Verbs

Spelling Rules for Irregular Verbs	Base Form	The Past Form	Incorrect Verb Forms
1. Suffixation is used and there is a change of base vowel.	leave	left	leaved
	lost	lost	losed
	catch	caught	catched
	hear	heard	heared
2. No suffix or change of the base vowel.	cut	cut	cutted
	hurt	hurt	hurted
3. No suffix but there is a change of base vowel.	drink	drank	drinked
	freeze	froze	freezed
	fall	fell	failed
	give	gave	gived



	find	found	finded
	drive	drove	drived

The incorrect spelling of irregular verb forms in the examples above, might be the result of over-generalization. This process could be attributed to intralingual confusion where the students used the past tense marker 'd' and 'ed' of regular verb forms for irregular ones, resulting in the generalized forms such as 'falled', 'heared', 'gived'.

These intralingual errors (incorrect spelling of irregular verbs) could also be caused by learners' failure to observe grammatical restrictions. These rule restriction errors might have resulted from false analogies or from rote learning of rules (Tan, 1978). Learners may not know that irregular verbs differ from regular verbs. For example, the word 'drink' (in the simple present tense) does not have a /d/ or /t/ inflection in the simple past tense and moreover, irregular verbs, typically, but not necessarily, have variation in their base vowels. Therefore the simple past for the verb 'drink' would be 'drank' as there is no suffixation but a change of base vowel.

The following table shows the types of errors in the spelling of regular verbs found in the test:

**TABLE 4.6** Types of Errors in the Regular Verb Forms based on the Spelling Rules for Regular Verbs

Spelling Rules for Regular Verbs	Correct Verb Forms	Incorrect verb form
1. If the verb ends in a consonant, add '-ed'.	lifted	liftted
2. If the verb ends with a final '-e', the 'e' is regularly dropped before the '-ed' inflections.	braked	brakeed
3. If the verb ends in a consonant-vowel-consonant combination in one-syllable words, double the final consonant and add '-ed'.	stopped begged	stoped beged
4. Do not double one-syllable words ending in '-w', '-x' or '-y'.	mixed bowed	mixxed bowwed
5. If a verb ends in a consonant-vowel-consonant combination in words of two or more syllables, double the last consonant only if the last syllable is stressed.	preferred	prefered
6. If the last syllable is not stressed, do not double the last consonant.	visited	visitted

7. If the verb ends in a consonant + 'y', change 'y' to 'i' before '-ed'.	hurried  carried	hurried  carried
8. If the verb ends in a vowel + 'y', the 'y' remains. Just add 'ed' as in the word 'played'. However, there are three exceptions for this rule. The 'y' changes to 'i' after these three words; pay, lay, say.	paid	payed, paid,

The errors committed in the examples above could be due to students' ignorance of the rules for simple past. In rule no. 4 from Table 4.6, the students wrongly spelt 'bowed' as 'bowwed'. This could be attributed to performance errors due to carelessness or ignorance of the spelling rule. The last example showed that students do not know the inflectional spelling rules, which include the treatment of '-y'. The students spelt the simple past of 'pay' as 'payed'. They are probably not aware that 'y' is changed to 'i' after a vowel instead of just adding 'ed' to the word. Therefore, the simple past of 'pay' is 'paid'. In bases ending in a consonant + 'y' as in example no. 7, the following change occurs before an inflection that does not begin with 'i': carry – carried. In rule no. 5, the students could be ignorant of the rule for the doubling of consonant, whereby final base consonants (except 'x') are doubled if the last syllable is stressed. Therefore, the simple past tense of 'prefer' is 'preferred'.

the third highest frequency of selection errors in the test is in the use of *-ing* form for the simple past with a total number of 71 errors or 10.2%. There was no such occurrence in the essay. Typical examples are illustrated in the following sentences:

Test
No.3 *She <u>learning</u> English without much difficulty when she was young. (learnt)
No.8 *The cook <u>mixing</u> the vegetables before frying them. (mixed)
No.23 *The actors <u>bowing</u> (bow) to the audience at the end of the play. (bowed)
No.33 *The students <u>appointing</u> (appoint) Lucy as the head prefect last week. (appointed)

The above sentences are incorrect because the '*-ing*' form is used instead of the simple past tense. It is incorrect to use the '*-ing*' form because the sentences refer to an action completed in the past at a definite past time. This could be due to learners' failure to learn conditions under which rules apply or they could have interpreted the sentences as a continuous or progressive action and thus incorrectly used the '*-ing*' form to indicate the progressive tense.

Errors are also found in the use of singular verb for plural verb, making a total number of 19 errors (2.9%) in the essay and 9 errors (1.3%) in the test. The following sentences illustrate this:

<u>Essay</u>
*They <u>was</u> so fast. (were)
*We <u>was</u> very happy on our journey. (were)
*My parents <u>was</u> not at home. (were)

<u>Test</u>
No.54 *There <u>was</u> a few customers inside the shop. (were)

The above sentences are ungrammatical because the students have selected the wrong verb to agree with the subject. This type of errors could be due to L1 interference. In English, there is a system of agreement in which the finite verb must agree with its subject in person and number. However, in Mandarin, there is no number indication for verbs so there is no agreement or concord between English and Mandarin. Learners could have been confused in this aspect of grammar.

The next type of selection errors in the essay and the test is in the use of plural verb for singular verb making a total number of 11 errors (1.7%) in the essay and 7 errors (1.0%) in the test as shown below:

<u>Essay</u>
*His head <u>were</u> hurt. (was)
*Ah Huat <u>were</u> knocked by the small rocks. (was)

<u>Test</u>
No.59 *It <u>were</u> a robbery. (was)

The errors above do not show concord between the third person singular subject and the verb. In English, the third person singular subject requires a singular verb instead of a plural verb. However, the verb in Mandarin never gives any indication of person and number, so Chinese students do not have this grammatical construction in their native language. Therefore, Chinese students can be expected to make mistakes in this aspect of conjugation.

another type of selection errors found in the essay is in the use of *to*-infinitive for the simple past with a total of 8 errors (1.2%) as cited in the following examples:

<u>Essay</u>
*We quickly <u>to build</u> our camp. (built)
*We just <u>to climb</u> up Bukit Terisek. (climbed)

In the examples given above, the learners used 'to-infinitive' instead of the simple past to describe a past event. This intralingual form of errors could be due to the overgeneralisation of rules. The learners extended the application of 'to-infinitive' to contexts where they do not belong.

The next type of selection errors is in the use of adjective for a verb as cited below:

<u>Essay</u>
* My friend <u>dead</u> one by one. (died)

Overgeneralisation of rules could have attributed to the above error. Because of this, learners could have failed to discriminate the different forms and thus, produced deviant forms where an adjective is treated as a verb.

## 2.2 ADDITION ERRORS

The total number of simple past tense errors under this category is 159 or 3.1% of the overall number of errors found in the essay. No errors were found in the test. The distributions of addition errors in the simple past tense are shown in Table 4.7 below:

TABLE 4.7 Distributions of Addition Errors in the Simple Past Tense  
in the Essay and Test

Addition Errors	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
1.Addition of BE (was) before the simple past verb	39	24.5	0	0
2.Addition of BE (were) before the simple past verb	34	21.4	0	0
3.Addition of BE (are) before the simple past verb	31	19.5	0	0
4.Addition of BE (am) before the simple past verb	23	14.5	0	0
5.Addition of BE (was/were) + base verb for the simple past verb	20	12.6	0	0
6.Addition of BE (was) + to + -ing participle for the simple past verb	12	7.5	0	0
Total	159	100.0	0	0

An examination of Table 4.7 shows that the addition errors in the simple past tense occur only in the essay and not in the test. This could be due to the fact that in the test, students were provided with the base form of the verb in parenthesis. Hence, the students just had to change the base form of the verb to the simple past tense. As a result, no addition errors were found as the



students were aware of the fact that no other word is to be added before the verb.

On the other hand, the high frequency of addition errors in the simple past tense in the essay could be due to the overgeneralisation of the use of BE in English. It can be concluded from error categories (1) to (4) in Table 4.7 that the majority of students knew that the simple past tense should be used. However, it seems that the students were confused when it came to the use of BE in English.

Table 4.7 shows that the highest frequency of addition errors of the simple past tense in the essay is in the addition of BE (was) before the simple past verb. This forms a total of 39 errors or 24.5% of the total number of errors. The following examples illustrate this error:

<u>Essay</u>
*I <u>was</u> sat near the door. (I sat near the door)
*She <u>was</u> woke up at 6a.m. (She woke up at 6a.m.)
*He <u>was</u> decided to follow his father. (He decided to follow his father)
*The boy <u>was</u> arrived before noon. (The boy arrived before noon)

The second most number of addition errors is in the addition of BE (were) before the simple past verb, with 21.4% or a total of 34 errors. The following are some of the examples that were found in the data:

<u>Essay</u>
*My friend and I <u>were</u> went camping.
*We <u>were</u> also went to the rooms.
*Soon Hock and I <u>were</u> put our things.

In the above examples, the learners inserted an unnecessary verb BE before the main verb. This can be considered an overgeneralisation and a redundant insertion of the auxiliary BE. Perhaps it could be due to ignorance of rule restriction on the part of the learners. They may have incorrectly hypothesised the forms of BE as tense-markers and used 'was' as past-tense markers with the past tense form of the verb.

The third highest frequency of addition errors is in the addition of BE (are) before the simple past verb, with a total of 31 errors or 19.5% of the total number of the addition errors. The following examples are found in the data:

<u>Essay</u>
*We <u>are</u> set up our camp.
*They <u>are</u> went there.
*We <u>are</u> saw a wooden house in front of us.
*We <u>are</u> felt frightened.

Another type of addition errors of the simple past committed by the students is in the addition of BE (am) before the simple past verb, with 14.5% or a total of 23 errors. Some of the examples found in the corpus are:

<u>Essay</u>
*I' <u>m</u> ran as fast as I could.
*I' <u>m</u> told the story to her.
*I' <u>m</u> quickly went there.

further type of addition errors is in the addition of BE (was/were) + base verb for the simple past verb with a total number of 20 errors or 12.6%. The examples below illustrate this error:

<u>Essay</u>
*I <u>was dial</u> the police. (I dialed the police)
*I <u>was stand</u> up. (I stood up)
*We <u>were bringing</u> the mat. (We brought the mat)
*The king <u>was use</u> the knife. (The king used the knife)

In addition to the above, another type of addition errors is in the addition of BE (was) + to + *-ing* participle for the simple past verb with 7.5% or a total of 12 errors. These errors are illustrated in the following examples:

<u>Essay</u>
*I <u>was to camping</u> in the forest. (I camped in the forest)
*She <u>was to playing</u> there. (She played there)
*My uncle <u>was to flying</u> in from Australia two days ago. (My uncle flew in from Australia two days ago)

The errors in categories 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Table 4.7 could be attributed to incomplete learning of rules. The students failed to use the simple past tense verb for a past event.

## 2.3 OMISSION ERRORS

Errors in this category are found only in the essay. The total number of the simple past tense errors in this category is 69 or 7.9% of the overall number of errors found in the essay. There were no omission errors found in the test at all. The distributions of omission errors of the simple past tense are shown in Table 4.8.

TABLE 4.8 Distributions of Omission Errors in the Simple Past Tense in the Essay and the Test

Omission Errors	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
1.Omission of copula BE (was)	30	43.5	0	0
2. Omission of copula BE (were)	23	33.3	0	0
3.Omission of main verb	16	23.2	0	0
Total	69	100.0	0	0

From Table 4.8, it can be inferred that the omission errors in the simple past tense occurred only in the essay. This could be attributed to students not being aware that in writing sentences in English, the subject is followed by a verb. The highest frequency of omission errors in the simple past tense is in the omission of copula BE (was), with 43.5% or a total of 30 errors. The second highest frequency of omission errors in the simple past tense is in the omission of the copula BE (were), which yields 23 errors or 33.3% of the total number of errors; followed by the omission of the main verb with 23.2% or a

total of 16 errors. There are, however, no omission errors found in the test. This is mainly because the students had to fill in each blank with an answer. So, they did not miss out any item in the test.

The following examples illustrate the first and second type of errors, which are the omission of the copula, BE (was) and the omission of the copula BE (were) found in the essay.

<u>Essay</u>
*I^ really so scared. (was)
*I^ worried. (was)
*All the residents in my village ^ shocked. (were)
*The bad news ^ still around us. (was)
*Only my car ^ on the road. (was)

It can be noticed from the above examples that BE as the main verb, is omitted before an adjective phrase and a prepositional phrase. In the first three examples, the verb BE is omitted before an adjective phrase and in the fourth and fifth example, the verb BE is omitted before a prepositional phrase. A closer examination of the data revealed a higher occurrence of verb BE omission before an adjective phrase.

The omission of BE as a copula could also be attributed to interference from the learners' L1, which is Mandarin. The learners could have used the grammatical pattern of Mandarin to write in English. Often a word in English becomes associated with one in Mandarin, and then reused as if it was a Chinese word. Since the verb BE is nonexistent in Mandarin, it was totally omitted. For example:

wo gao xing

I happy                      instead of *I was happy*

ta sheng qi

She angry                      instead of *She was angry*

Some of the examples of errors in the omission of main verb that were found in the corpus are:

<u>Essay</u>
*Then we ^ ready for dinner. (got)
*When I ^ back to the car. (went)
*We refused to allow them and we ^ ready to escape. (got)

Other than students not being aware that in writing sentences in English, the subject is followed by a verb, these errors could be due to L1 interference where the students forced a sentence in English into the grammatical pattern of Mandarin. For example:

ran hou wo men zhun bei yong wan chang

Then we ready for dinner instead of *Then we got ready for dinner*

dang wo hui dao che shang

When I back to the car instead of *When I went back to the car*

### 3.3 PAST PROGRESSIVE TENSE

#### 3.3.1 SELECTION ERRORS

A relatively large number of selection errors in the past progressive tense is found in the test in comparison to the essay. Very few errors are found in the essay. The total number of selection errors in the past progressive tense in the test is 912, which constituted 78% of the total number of errors found in the corpus. The essays yield 20 errors or 29% of the total number of errors. It can be deduced that students have difficulty in the use of the past progressive tense as shown in the high frequency of errors committed in the test. There were not as many errors in the essay because students could have avoided using the past progressive structures when writing their essays.

In the test, however, students were forced to produce the past progressive structures, hence, the high frequency of errors. This could probably be due to the students not knowing when and how to use the past progressive structures.



The distributions of selection errors in the past progressive tense are shown in Table 4.9:

**TABLE 4.9 Distributions of Selection Errors in the Past Progressive Tense in the Essay and the Test**

Selection Errors	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. Use of simple past for past progressive	0	0	607	66.6
2. Use of simple present for past progressive	0	0	217	23.7
3. Incorrect spelling of the -ing participle	0	0	37	4.1
4. Use of present progressive for past progressive	20	100.0	29	3.2
5. Use of incorrect subject-verb concord	0	0	22	2.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>100.0</b>

A close examination of Table 4.9 shows that the highest frequency of selection errors of the past progressive in the test is in the use of simple past for past progressive with a total of 607 errors or 66.6%. However, there were no such errors in the essay. The high percentage of errors in the test shows that students do not know the usage of the past progressive. It can be deduced that the students do not know the concept of time, that the past progressive expresses an action that was in progress at a point of time in the past. The following are typical examples of errors in the use of simple past for past progressive that occurred in the data collected:

Test
No. 34 *When they <u>argued</u> , the teacher walked into the class. (were arguing)
No.30 *As she <u>crossed</u> the road, she saw an accident. (was crossing)
No.22 *We <u>listened</u> to the radio when the disaster occurred. (were listening)
No.26 *While you were talking, the child <u>cried</u> . (was crying)
No.29 *While Rosie was reading, they <u>enjoyed</u> the play. (were enjoying)

he above answers in the test are incorrect because the simple past tense is used instead of the past progressive tense. In the first three sentences, the past progressive tense should be used as both actions occurred at the same time, but one action began earlier and was in progress when the other action occurred. As for questions 26 and 29, the past progressive tense should be used in both parts of each sentence because two past actions are in progress simultaneously. These errors seem to stem from some confusion regarding the form and use of the simple past and past progressive tenses.

the second highest frequency of selection errors in the past progressive tense in the test, is found in the use of the simple present instead of the past progressive tense, making a total of 217 errors or 23.7%. These errors were also not found in the essay. The possible reasons for this occurrence could be the same as those given earlier. The following examples illustrate this error:

<u>Test</u>
No.12 *My sisters <u>mop</u> the floor when she arrived. (were mopping)
No.32 *While the boy <u>ties</u> his shoelace, a dog bit him. (was tying)
No.25 *The accident happened while we <u>visit</u> a friend. (were visiting)
No.13 *She <u>lights</u> a candle when the wind blew out the match. (was lighting)

Instead of using the past progressive tense, the students have used the simple present tense to express an action in progress in the past. These errors could also be attributed to students' ignorance of the concept of time, that is, the simple present tense is used for present events while the past progressive tense is used for an event that was in progress at a certain time in the past.

It can be seen in Table 4.9 that in the test, students committed errors in the spelling of the *-ing* participle in the past progressive. There is a total of 37 errors or 4.1%. There is no such occurrence in the essay. This is probably due to the avoidance strategy employed by the students where students mainly wrote the past tense instead of the past progressive tense. The possible cause

For these spelling errors could be attributed to students' ignorance of the spelling rules for the *-ing* participle form. The rules for the *-ing* participle form and the types of errors are shown in Table 4.10 below:

**Table 4.10 Types of Errors in the *-ing* Participle Forms based on the Spelling Rules for the *-ing* Participle**

Rules	Correct Forms	Incorrect Forms
1.If the verb ends in an 'e', drop the 'e' and add '-ing'.	arguing	argueing
2. If the verb ends in two vowels + a consonant, just add '-ing'.	raining	rainingg
3. If the verb ends in one vowel + one consonant (one syllable verb), double the consonant to form the '-ing'.	mopping sitting	moping siting
4. If the verb ends in one vowel + one consonant (two syllable verbs), and the first syllable is stressed , do not double the consonant.	listening	listenning
5. If the verb ends in one vowel + one consonant (two syllable verbs), and the second syllable is stressed, double the consonant.	beginning	begining
6. If the verb ends with '-ie', change 'ie' to 'y' and add '-ing'.	tying	tiing

The spelling errors are illustrated in the following examples:

<u>Test</u>	
No. 32	*While the boy was <u>tiing</u> his shoelace, a dog bit him. (tying)
No. 18	*It was <u>rainning</u> when they set off on their journey. (raining)
No. 22	*We were <u>listenning</u> to the radio when the disaster occurred. (listening)
No.12	*My sisters were <u>moping</u> the floor when she arrived. (mopping)
No.34	*When they were <u>argueing</u> , (argue) the teacher walked into the class. (arguing)

A closer examination of the spelling errors shows that the errors were made in the *-ing* participle. This shows that some students do not know the spelling rules when the *-ing* is added to the base verb to form the past progressive tense.

In question number 32, the word *tying* was spelt as *tiing*. The students incorrectly deleted the final *-e*, whereas the spelling rule for the *-ing* participle is that in bases ending in *-ie*, the *-ie* is replaced by *y* before the *-ing* inflection.

In question number 18, the consonant *n* is doubled before the *-ing* inflection. The rule for the *-ing* participle should be that if the verb ends in two vowels and a consonant, an *-ing* is added.

In question number 22, the word *listening* was spelt as *listenning*. The students incorrectly doubled the consonant *n* before the *-ing* inflection. The consonant should not be doubled as the rule for the *-ing* participle states that if the verb ends in one vowel and one consonant (two syllable verbs), and the first syllable is stressed, the consonant is not doubled.

In question number 12, the consonant *p* is not doubled. According to the rule, if the verb has one syllable and ends in one vowel and one consonant, the consonant has to be doubled to form the *-ing*.

Question number 34 is incorrect as the students did not delete the final *-e*. There should be deletion of final *-e* in the verb 'argue'. The *e* is dropped before the *-ing* inflection if the verb ends in an 'e'. Therefore, final *-e* should be deleted from the word *argue* before the *-ing* inflection.

The above errors could be due to learners' ignorance of L2 rule constraints and learners who committed these errors seem to have not internalized the rule for the *-ing* participle.

The next type of selection errors in the past progressive is in the use of present progressive for the past progressive, both in the essay and the test. In table 3.9, it can be observed that there were 20 errors, which constituted 100% of the total number of selection errors found in the essay. This is the only type of selection errors found in the essay. This is because most of the students used mainly the simple past tense to narrate the story. Those students who used the progressive form in the essay did not use the past progressive tense. Instead they used the present progressive tense as they do not know this tense is used for a present event in progress.

The test, on the other hand, yielded 29 errors or 3.2% of the total number of errors. This could be because students were provided with the base form of the verb and they only had to change the base form of the verb to the past progressive tense. Hence, the fewer number of errors. Also, since most of the students do not know the concept of time in relation to the past progressive tense, they had completed the test using mainly the simple past tense or simple present tense. The examples below illustrate the use of the present progressive tense for the past progressive tense:

<u>Essay</u>
*Ah Meng and I <u>are</u> going to find some food to eat. (were)
*The victim <u>is</u> shouting. (was)
*We <u>are</u> talking about the presentation. (were)

<u>Test</u>
No.21 *As Sam and Aaron <u>are</u> climbing the tree, some ants bit them. (were)
No.1 *He jumped off while the bus <u>is</u> moving. (was)

The final type of selection errors of the past progressive tense in the test is the subject -verb concord selection errors with a total of 22 errors or 2.4%. Again, there were no such errors found in the essay because the students could have avoided using the past progressive structures. These errors are illustrated in the examples below:

<u>Test</u>
No.12 *My sisters <u>was</u> mopping the floor when she arrived. (were)
No.14 *The boys <u>was</u> studying when the thief entered. (were)
No.26 *While you were talking, the child <u>were</u> crying. (was)
No.30 *As she <u>were</u> crossing the road, she saw an accident. (was)

It can be seen that the errors show a lack of concord between the subject and the verb. Questions 12 and 14 show that students used the singular verb "was" with a plural subject. In questions 26 and 30, students used the plural verb "were" with a singular subject. Errors of this type could be due to negative transfer from the L1 as there is no subject-verb agreement in Mandarin. However, the percentage of errors is comparatively quite low. This could



indicate that students do have a basic understanding of subject-verb concord, although they still make errors. The errors could probably be due to carelessness.

#### 4.3.2 OMISSION ERRORS

In this category, there is a high occurrence of errors in the test compared to the essay. There were 49 past progressive tense errors in the essay or 71% of the overall number of errors and the test had 257 errors or 22% of the total number of errors found in the corpus. There are approximately 5 times more errors in the test compared to the essay. This could probably be due to the fact that in the essay, there was a lower percentage of usage as students could have avoided using the past progressive structures, as they might not know how to use them. In the test, students were 'forced' to use the past progressive structures. The distributions of omission errors in the past progressive tense are shown in Table 4.11.

TABLE 4.11 Distributions of Omission Errors in the Past Progressive Tense in the Essay and the Test

Omission Errors	Essay		Test	
	No.	%	No.	%
1. Omission of auxiliary BE	26	53.1	229	89.1
2. Omission of -ing form	23	46.9	28	10.9
Total	49	100.0	257	100.0

A review of Table 4.11 shows that the errors that figured prominently in the students' answers are the omission of auxiliary BE in the past progressive tense, both in the essay and the test. More errors are committed in the test. There are 229 errors or 89.1% in the test compared to the essay, which had 26 errors or 53.1% of the total number of errors. This could most probably be attributed to the students' ignorance of the form of the past progressive tense which is formed by BE + *V-ing*. The following are some of the examples that were found in the essay and the test:

<u>Essay</u>
*The monster ^ <u>calling</u> my name. (was)
*I ^ <u>running</u> as fast as I could. (was)
*My parents ^ <u>sleeping</u> . (were)

<u>Test</u>
No.18 *It ^ <u>raining</u> when they set off on their journey. (was)
No.4 *While you ^ <u>painting</u> he was weeding the garden. (were)
No.32 *While the boy ^ <u>tying</u> his shoelace, a dog bit him. ( was)

Another type of omission errors of the past progressive tense is the omission of *-ing* form with a total of 23 errors or 46.9% in the essay and 28 errors or 10.9% in the test. The lower percentage of errors in the test compared to the

essay could be because students were given some form of guidance in the test. Some examples of these errors are illustrated below:

<u>Essay</u>
*Then I felt that something was <u>fall</u> on my face. (falling)
*God was <u>help</u> me. (helping)
*The little girl in the picture was <u>cry</u> . (crying)

<u>Test</u>
No. 25 *The accident happened while we were <u>visit</u> a friend. (visiting)
No. 16 * The girls were <u>cut</u> the soya-bean curd when the stranger entered. (cutting)

The deletion of *-ing* progressive marker may not be the result of mother-tongue interference, but could be the result of intralingual transfer, that is, the incomplete learning of the rules for the past progressive tense. The students failed to see that auxiliary BE (were) and the verb stem in question 25 cannot be combined together such as 'were visit'. When they combined 'were + cut' in question 26, they do not know that such a structure is a passive construction and, is thus, not appropriate in this context.

## 4.4 CONCLUSION

The researcher found that the free-writing task and the structured test have given her an overall picture of her students' level of proficiency in the use of the simple past tense and the past progressive tense. The findings revealed that there were different error types and frequency in both the free-writing task and structured test.

The higher frequency of the simple past tense errors found in the essay did not indicate the level of difficulty but rather the distribution of usage. The lower frequency of the past progressive tense errors in the essay could be because of the avoidance strategy employed by students in the free-writing task. The students could have avoided using structures that they were not familiar with and as a result, commit less errors. The higher percentage of certain error types found in the essay could also be due to the students concentrating more on the content, and not being aware or conscious of the grammatical rules.

More errors in the past progressive tense were found in the test as students were 'forced' to use the structures. This shows that students have more difficulty with this tense. They were 'forced' to use the simple past too and fewer errors show that they know the simple past tense better than the past progressive tense. This could be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the rules for the past progressive tense.

The findings further revealed that the students made the most errors in the selection category in both tenses because they were also making hypothesis about the language.