A Constrastive Approach on Foreign Languages: German and English Tenses

by Ambo Dalle

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Abstract

Since very studies focusing on German and English tenses comparison, this research aims to fill the research gaps where not much publication is found on a contrastive analysis on English and German tenses. This research aims to describe the similarities and differences between English and German language tenses in terms of structural elements: past, present, and future tenses. The approach to compare these languages was a contrastive analysis. The result of the analysis shows that there are several differences between English and German. The future tense sentence is that German has a different verb position from English. German verb was placed at the end of the sentence, while English is positioned in the middle of the sentence following auxiliary. The present tense sentence is that German has different collocation from English. All German verbs must be collocated with the subject, while, in English, the only third singular subject has to be collocated with the subject. Concerning the past tense sentence, both English and German have to employ past tense verbs. This research has the implication of the teaching and learning German as both foreign language within Indonesian contexts. This study contributes to the understanding of tenses in both languages. Research on views of the teachers and lecturers as practitioners of both languages is recommended to further explore to build a comprehensive understanding of English and German differences in the context of teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Contrastive Analysis, German, English, Tenses*

Introduction

Contrastive analysis is one of the important types of analysis tools used in language teaching. It is also one of the key subjects that are taught in German and English units. This research aims to examine the grammatical difference between German and English including future tense, present tense, and past tense.

Johansson (2008, p. 9) defines contrastive analysis (CA) as "the systematic comparison of two or more languages, to describe their similarities and differences. CA has often been done for *practical/pedagogical* purposes. The aim has been to provide better descriptions and better teaching materials for language learners." Also, Abdi, (2019) define a contrastive analysis as an approach to compare two languages by focusing on particular similarities and differences. These definitions provide the lens for conducting CA in language teaching particularly to enhancing understanding teaching materials and pedagogical purposes.

Globally, several researchers have researched contrastive analysis. For example, Liang & Han (2005) use a contrastive analysis approach to comparing politeness strategies of disagreement between American English & Mandarin Chinese. Akram (2008) conducted a study on contrasting speech acts of Urdu languages and English. Sebüktekin (2017) compared the Turkish morphology in corresponding to the English structure. Flöck (2016) conducted a contrastive analysis between requests in British English and American English. These investigations show that contrastive analysis has been applied in many contexts. In addition, Liang and Han (2005) conducted a contrastive study on disagreement strategies for politeness between American English & Mandarin Chinese.

In Indonesia, research on contrastive analysis was conducted in several areas. For instance, Daeng and Weda (2019) applied the contrastive analysis approach to comparing the syntax of three languages: Indonesian, Macassan, and English syntax. Also, Hamsa and Weda, (2019) conducted a comparative study on Indonesian and English through the identification of linguistics elements. Specifically, Saud and Weda (2019) carried out a comparative study of English and German syntactic variation on complex predicates in Indonesian university contexts.

From these studies in Indonesian contexts, it shows that none of the studies focuses on German and English tenses comparison. This study aims to fill the research gaps where not many studies have been conducted on a contrastive analysis on English and German tenses. Therefore, this study aims to compare English and German tenses within educational contexts. This paper is significant for lecturers to understand the comparison between grammatical features German and English language teaching.

Literature Review

In the search of the literature, there are several important references related to a contrastive analysis recently(Johansson, 2008; Lennon, 2008; Memon, Abbasi, & Umrani, 2016). This literature works to become the underpinning research concept for this paper.

The first, Johansson (2008) proposed a comprehensive model for contrastive analysis in language teaching. Using a corpus-based analysis model, he compared two languages: English and Norwegian languages. The paper focused on the contrastive analysis for undergraduate students' levels. The findings suggest that parallel corpus-based between English and Norwegian provided a new lens for conducting similar analyses for different languages. Thus, the author recommends that such a corpus-based contrastive analysis can be a model for other languages.

Second, Lennon (2008) investigated the relationship between contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interference. The research is based on the theory of contrastive analysis, structuralist linguistics, and behaviorist psychology. Lennon identified that contrastive analysis is based on the notion of the audiolingual approach, and the application of contrastive analysis is important to predict language errors. Lennon further argued that contrastive analysis tends to reveal learners as passive users rather than active users of the language. This is due to the contrastive analysis that does not provide a set of language learning tasks for learners rather than a set of errors made by learners.

Thirdly, Memon, Abbasi, &Umran (2016) explored the contrastive analysis of two teaching methods: Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). They investigated the effectiveness of these two teaching methods to teach grammar. The research design used a Likert scale questionnaire to twenty teacher participants in Pakistan. The finding suggests that GTM is much effective in teaching grammar compared to CLT. It indicated by 60% of the participant prefer GTM compared to 40% of them like CLT. From the literature works, it indicated that comparative analysis is an important tool to compare and contrast two languages. None of the previous studies has investigated the contrastive analysis between German and English. This paper aims to explore the tenses differences between German and English.

Methods

Research question

This research is to respond to the following questions:

a. What are the similarities and differences between past tense elements of German and English?
b. What are the similarities and differences between past tense elements of German and English?
c. What are the similarities and differences between past tense elements of German and English?

Data collection and analysis

Data in this paper were taken from the corpus of two books: *Studio D for German* and *Headway for English.* The reasons for choosing these books because they were used for teaching at university levels both in German and English departments. Data collection aimed to provide, as suggested by Johansson (2008): a) to describe and compare tenses between German and

English; and b) to foresee difficulty level and c) to use the results to improve teaching materials.

The data analysis follows the suggestions of Johansson (2008):

a. Selection of texts from two languages, in this case, German and English
b. Comparing two language sources
c. Identifying differences between two language sources
d. Provide a comprehensive picture of two languages.

Results

Future tense

English	**German**
I will go to my school.	Ich werde zu der Schule gehen.
My father will go to the office.	Mein Vater wird zu dem Büro fahren'
He will go to the theater.	Du wirsd in das Kino gehen

The sentence of future tense use *will/going to* (English) and "werden. .+ infinitive" (German). There are several differences between German and English: a) The auxiliary verb in English does not change as the auxiliary of German; b) The auxiliary verb in English is followed directly by a verb. On the other hand, the auxiliary of German has to suit the main verb at the end of the sentence: "wird .... gehen.". The examples as follows:

English	German
I will go to the theater.	Ich werde .in das Kino gehen
I will go to the theater	Du wirdst .in das Kino gehen
He will go to the theater	Er wird in das Kino gehen.
She will go to the theater	Sie wird in das Kino gehen.
It will go to the theater.	Es wird in das Kino gehen
We will go to the theater.	Wir werden in das Kino gehen.
They will go to the theater.	Sie werden in das Kino gehen

Present tense

English	**German**
Your mother buys some sugar.	Deine Mutter kauft den Zucker.
My daughter studies English.	Meine Tochter lernt English.
His son plays football.	Sein Sohn spielt den Fussball.

In this present tense, both English and German the verb must be collocated with the subject, for example, third-person singular must be followed by an appropriate verb. In German, all verb must be collocated with the subject. The example is as follows:

English	German
I go to school every day	Ich gehe jeden Tag in die Schule.
You go to school every day	Du gehst jeden Tag in die Schule.
He goes to school every day.	Er geht jeden Tag in die Schule.
She goes to school every day	Sie geht jeden Tag in die Schule.
It goes to school every day	Es geht jeden Tag in die Schule.
We go to school every day	Wir gehen jeden Tag in die Schule.
They go to school every day	Sie gehen jeden Tag in die Schule.

In English, only third singular persons (she, he, it) has to be followed by certain verbs (s, es, ies). In German, all sentences have to be matched with the subjects, such as Ich stam + e, Du stam + st, Er, Sie ,Es stam + t, Wir stam + en, Ihr stam + t, dan Sie, Sie stam + en.

Past tense

English	**German**
She bought an apple.	Sie kaufte einen Apfel.
We drunk a cup of coffee.	Wir tranken eine Kaffeetasse.
You asked the teacher.	Du fragtest den Lehrer.

The past tense sentence is "Rahmat ging in das Kin" (German), and "Rahmat went to the theatre" (English). Both English and German used "past" verb. In German, all verb must be collocated with the subject of the sentence. The examples are as follows:

English	German
I went to school yesterday.	Ich ging gestern in die Schule.
He went to school yesterday.	Du gingst gestern in die Schule.
He went to school yesterday.	Er ging gestern in die Schule.
She went to school yesterday.	Sie ging gestern in die Schule.
I went to school yesterday.	Es ging gestern in die Schule.
We went to school yesterday.	Wir gingen gestern in die Schule.
They went to school yesterday.	Sie gingen gestern in die Schule.

Discussion

From the findings, it reveals that the similarities of German and English can help to predict what Johansson (2008) claim as a way to predict difficulty level and to use the contrastive analysis results to improve the preparation and delivery of teaching materials. The finding of this study extends what Lennon (2008) argued understanding the similarities and differences of two languages can be used as a way to understand the type of errors in language learning and a way to formulate the solutions or feedback to language errors.

The contrastive analysis between German and English tenses can help learners to understand the syntax of two languages. This is due to that tenses are part of the syntax elements in both languages. Mair (2018) argues that the research on using a contrastive analysis approach especially German and English can improve several areas of both languages: the teaching foreign language, translations of both languages, benefits for the language communities, and complement the knowledge body of contrastive analysis. On the other hand, conducting contrastive analysis as Mair (2018) claims can be a source of difficulty for both learners if they do not pay attention to the similarities and differences of the two languages.

The contrastive analysis shows the linguistics differences among the two or more languages compared. The linguistics differences between German and English as it is suggested by Abdi (2019) that it can relate to the different meanings semantically and culturally. It means that the contrasting two languages may mean dissimilar semantically and culturally.

The understanding of comparative tenses in both English and German can help teachers to deliver writing effectively (Setyowati, Sukmawan, & El-Sulukkiyah, 2020) in both languages effectively. The theme of comparison in this study can be a source for professional development (Rosmaladewi, Abduh, & Basri, 2020) for teachers in both languages so that they can work in their teaching practice professionally. The mastery of both language tenses can

help students to be bilingual competence (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018) for at least English and German grammar section. Further, the mastery of English and German tenses can improve both students and teacher' cognitive skills (Setoodeh & Jadidi, 2020) because the mastery of bilingual tenses involve the cognitive process and development.

Conclusion

Both English and German have similarities and differences. The similarities are that both languages used auxiliary and verbs and verbs changes according to the situation. The differences are seen from the present, past, and future tenses of two languages. The future tense sentence is that German has a different verb position from English. German verb was placed at the end of the sentence, while English is positioned in the middle of the sentence following auxiliary. The present tense sentence is that German has different collocation from English. All German verbs must be collocated with the subject, while, in English, the only third singular subject has to be collocated with the subject. Concerning the past tense sentence, both English and German have to employ past tense verbs.

By looking at similarities and differences, the teaching of tenses of the two languages relies on the creativity of teachers to deliver appropriate teaching materials that suit student levels. The findings of this research recommend conducting further research on the experience of teachers teaching tenses, the use of media in teaching tenses, and the current implication of curriculum changes to the teaching of tenses in both languages; German and English.

Pedagogical Implications

There are several pedagogical implications for this study:

a. Lecturers and researcher need to understand both language tenses to be able to teach them properly in many different contexts.
b. The comparison of both German and English tenses can help teachers identifying the differences and the similarities of two languages so that they can teach both languages in foreign language contexts comprehensively.
c. Understanding the two tenses of the two languages (German and English) can help learners to learn both language tenses fasters
d. Mastering two language tenses can assist the learners to become a competent person in two languages or being bilinguals.
e. Teachers of English and German need to pay attention on the grammatical differences and similarities to deliver contrastive teaching effectively.

f. Teachers have now basic references for the comparison between English and German tenses so that they use for the basis of future research references.
g. For student teachers, this research result provides a comparative description between English and German, so that they can utilize for their teaching practicum and inform their students about the similarities and differences.

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