

Generation 1.5 and ESL

We live in a period of globalization; a time when the forces of economy, technology, politics and more importantly, cultures combine together. In United States, the land full of diverse culture and ethnicities, people emigrate from different countries. According to wikipedia, generation 1.5 are those who immigrate to a new country, yet still hold characteristics of their home country while assimilating and socializing in a new place. From the Generation 1.5 package we received, generation 1.5 students are those who have “immigrated to the U.S. in elementary school or high school”, they have had formal education in learning, but “do not have English as a home language”. In general, these students are “aural and oral learners”. They learn by listening and speaking to other native speakers. As a result, they usually don’t have problems understanding people when they talk and in part, they can speak fluently as well. However fluent they may seem though, generation 1.5 students face immense challenges in reading and academic writing. On the other hand, English as Second Language students, commonly known as ESL, are international students. They generally learn English as a foreign language class, and have learned English “principally through their eyes, studying vocabulary, verb forms, and language rules” (Matsuda, 79). Yet, despite the intensive education in learning English, ESL students contain difficulties in speaking, listening and even writing because of the lack of experience. Equipped with such differences in their practices of learning English, I will focus my paper on some of their usual grammatical mistakes in hopes that future tutors can benefit and improve on their teaching strategies.

Being an “aural and oral learner” is an important aspect that hinders generation 1.5 students from writing academic papers. “Their writing displays the conversational, phonetic qualities of their “ear-based” language learning, as well as their self-developed language rules” (Matsuda 79). As speaking doesn’t involve punctuations, I have come to realize that most generation 1.5 students fall into the bad habit of writing run-on sentences. For example, one of the sentences in an essay was “ Growing up, I realized I don’t know how to communicate with people which I was so shy that I barely speak a word in group project and my group mates found it hard to work with me. ” Clearly, the student was typing out a sentence as how he

or she would present it orally, without contemplating much on how the sentence would seem in text form.

Besides run-on sentences, another limitation of oral learners is their verb problems. As most generation 1.5 students arrived in the United States when they were in elementary or high school, they contain different proficiency levels in formal academic writing. Some never even had any formal education on grammar rules. During one of my tutoring sessions, I was helping a generation 1.5 tutee with an essay. As I was going through some of the grammatical mistakes, I noticed that there was a certain pattern. I then explained the rules and gave my tutee a few exercises; afterwards, my tutee actually said he had not learned such rules when he attended high school. Some of the more common types of verb problems he had difficulty with were subject-verb agreements and tenses, particularly when dealing with past participles. According to a research done by Mikesell, most of the errors involving past participles were related to the simple pronunciation of the 't' and 'd' in a speech. I can not agree more with this explanation because when going through some of the essays, I found similar mistakes. For example, "T here wa s a girl that I brought with me , she was shy and quiet, but then I often chat with her to make her feel comfortable, and introduce her to the others. " Because this student learned through listening and speaking rather than studying the techniques, he couldn't recognize the mistakes made.

Finally, the sentence structures of generation 1.5 students tend to be more colloquial, with idiomatic expressions and vocabulary mistakes. When looking through essays of generation 1.5 students, some of the common vocabulary mistakes include "your" and "you're", "they're" and "their" and "there", and even "to" and "too". Such mistakes occur because they are not familiar with the exact meaning and spelling of the words. They only obtained knowledge of the existence of these words through their conversations with others. In addition to wrong use of vocabulary, generation 1.5 students tend to use "would" and "so" more often than native speakers and even ESL students. Therefore, it is vital to have the student read out the passage to make them realize how repetitive their use of those words are; also, it is important to advise them to work on simple past and simple present verbs instead.

On the other hand though, ESL students are 'eye' learners. According to Matsuda, these students learn grammar rules and reading skills through methodological stages. However, "Their writing skills are often limited because their prior English education has not provided opportunities for composed writing, preferring instead exercises in written grammar or answering questions in single sentences" (Matsuda 79). Without extensive practices on English writing, ESL students incline to be weaker in constructing sentences. They usually translate directly from their mother-tongue into English, often leaving out prepositions, thus causing confusing sentences or awkward phrases.

Similar to generation 1.5 students, ESL students also face difficulties in verb problems. According to Mikesell's research dealing with past participles, ESL students are often involved in "inappropriate uses of the passive voice ... omissions of the auxiliary be ... and other auxiliary errors when forming complex tenses" (Mikesell). In addition, Mikesell insisted that most ESL students use past participles inappropriately as adjectives. For instance, ESL students would write "The book was bored", when "boring" was the word or "I was interesting in the movie", when "interested" should have been used.

Both ESL students and generation 1.5 students face challenges and problems in English writing. Yet, more emphasis is usually put on ESL students rather than generation 1.5 students. Therefore, when the need comes to tutor generation 1.5, fewer resources are to be found to help them. Through citing the different grammatical mistakes ESL students and generation 1.5 students make, I hope future tutors and continuing tutors can devise better strategies to help these students more efficiently.

Works Cited

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Definition of Generation 1.5 Students--- Tutor Training