

MOST COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The paper aims at describing some of the most common mistakes that students of English as a Second Language tend to commit. The intent is to make them aware of their problems and mistakes and help avoid and overcome them.

Key words: English as a Second Language, ESL students, most common mistakes

JEL classification: I29

Over the years, I have noticed that students of English as a foreign language, in this case, college students, struggle with almost every aspect of English – speaking, reading and writing. Many of them also make mistakes in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and also punctuation.

This happens because there are quite a lot of aspects of English as a Second Language that make it quite confusing and utterly difficult for non-native English learners.

Some of these aspects, that have become the sources of the most frequent mistakes in English as a Second Language, are listed below:

1. Misuse of Articles
2. Problems with Irregular Plurals and Mistakes in Countable and Uncountable Nouns
3. Misuse of Prepositions
4. Use of the Wrong Tense and Form
5. Wrong Order of Adjectives

1. Misuse of Articles

As straightforward as they look, articles are in fact sources of various mistakes of ESL students.

This happens, because many learners of English as a Second Language are unaware that there are rules to follow when deciding which article is most suitable to use in an English sentence.

Here are some of the rules for choosing the correct article in an English sentence:

A, An (indefinite article) = used for a non-specific, singular, countable noun, **a**, before a word beginning with **a consonant** or **semi-vowel**, and **an**, before a word beginning with **a vowel**

a cat, a poem, an orange, an engineer

The (definite article) = used for specific, singular or plural nouns

the British Museum, the final song, the brown pants

Examples:

Incorrect: I had **cat** when I was little.

Correct: I had **a cat** when I was little.

Incorrect: Tom went **to British Museum** last week.

Correct: Tom went **to the British Museum** last week.

2. *Problems with Irregular Plurals and Mistakes in Countable and Uncountable Nouns*

Some ESL students frequently commit mistakes when forming the plural of English nouns.

It could be because these English as a Second Language users are confused about countable, uncountable nouns and irregular plurals.

Irregular Plurals = nouns that form the plural in a different way than most nouns: child/children, mouse/mice, woman/women, tooth/teeth

Countable Nouns = nouns that can be counted and have a plural form: one/a glass, two glasses, one/a child, three children

Uncountable Nouns = nouns that cannot be counted or are very difficult to count: weather, love, sugar, intelligence

Example:

Incorrect: There are **three childs** playing in the garden.

Correct: There are **three children** playing in the garden.

3. *Misuse of Prepositions*

Many people learning and speaking English as a Second Language, generally commit mistakes in prepositions.

This could be, due to the fact that there are so many prepositions that ESL students must learn and remember.

However, in English, prepositions are very important and should be used with accuracy in order to make ourselves understood.

Thus, in order to avoid prepositional mistakes, it would be best for ESL students to learn more and more English phrases and expressions that make use of the correct prepositions.

Examples:

Incorrect: I want to go **at** the movies.

Correct: I want to go **to** the movies.

Incorrect: Sometimes, she goes to work **with the car**.

Correct: Sometimes, she goes to work **by car**.

4. *Use of the Wrong Tense and Form*

Many learners of English as a Second Language are inclined to make use of the wrong tense and form.

To avoid these mistakes, they must think about which tense of the verb – past, present, future, etc. – would be most fitting in a sentence.

Example:

Incorrect: Yesterday, I **eat** an entire bar of chocolate.

Correct: Last week, I **ate** an entire bar of chocolate.

In addition, many ESL students use verbs ending in –ing in the wrong way. They also tend to use infinitives – to + base form of the verb – in inaccurate ways.

Example:

Incorrect: We **enjoy to play** tennis.

Correct: We **enjoy playing** tennis.

5. *Wrong Order of Adjectives*

In their course of studying English, ESL students learn that several adjectives can be used to describe a subject in a single sentence.

In this case, ESL students must be very careful in placing the adjectives in the correct order in a sentence, because there is such thing as wrong ordering of adjectives.

To be guided, people trying to learn English as a Second Language well must keep in mind the correct order of adjectives.

When we use two or more adjectives together, place them in the following order:

1. **Articles:** a, an, the
2. **Opinion, judgment:** interesting, boring, amazing
3. **Size, dimension:** little, thick, huge
4. **Shape:** square, round, short
5. **Age:** old, new, modern, ancient
6. **Color:** black, blue, scarlet, dark-colored
7. **Nationality, origin:** Romanian, French, English
8. **Material:** velvet, plastic, wooden

Example:

Incorrect: Have you seen my **black velvet new** dress?

Correct: Have you seen my **new black velvet** dress?

While there are so many other errors that ESL students usually make, and so many aspects that the majority of non-native English speakers struggle with, the ones explained above, seem to be the most problematic and hardest to avoid and correct. Due to these facts, many learners of English just give up on trying or just continue in making the same mistakes over and over again.

Still, with a proper dose of optimism, good learning materials, hard-work and perseverance, learning English can be, not only greatly practical, but also a lot of fun.

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