

Error Analysis of *~te iru* Form as Japanese Tense and Aspect Marker

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ABSTRACT

In Japanese, tense and aspects are generally marked by a change in predicate into a certain form, such as *~te iru* form. Apart from indicating tense, *~te iru* form is also used to mark various aspects in a sentence. This makes the *~te iru* form have various meanings so that Japanese learners often have difficulty or even make mistakes either in translating or making sentences. This study aims to analyze the learners' errors regarding the use of *~te iru* form in Japanese sentences containing tense and aspect, as well as the factors causing the errors. This research was conducted using descriptive methods, with tests and questionnaires as the instruments. The sample is third- and fourth-year university students with the JLPT level N3 ability standard. Based on the research results, most errors occurred in the use of *~te iru* form as an aspect marker, while only a few errors occurred in the form as a tense marker. The factors causing the error were the students' deficiency of knowledge and understanding regarding the complexity of meaning and usage of *~te iru* forms, as well as interference from Bahasa Indonesia as their mother tongue.

Keywords: *Aspect, error analysis, Japanese ~te iru form, tense.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In learning a second language or a foreign language, students often make mistakes in the use of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Errors in using any language can be detected when the native listener or reader feels unnaturalness in the use of the language he hears/reads (Ichikawa, 2011).

Researchers in the field of applied linguistics, generally divide the errors made by language learners into two, i.e., performance errors and competence errors (Touchie, 1986). Performance errors occur when the learner is exhausted or in a hurry to use the language, but it can be corrected immediately with some efforts of the learner himself. Meanwhile, competence errors are caused by deficiencies or imperfections in language learning and cannot be corrected by themselves. Thus, requiring attention and guidance from other parties (teachers, etc.).

Corder (in Sa'adah, 2016), states that performance errors explained above can be named as "mistakes", and the errors that occur because of the learners' competency are called "errors". The latter occurs systematically in second language (L2) learning, because of the transition between first and second language competencies.

Richards classified the causes of learners' errors in using L2 into two categories, namely interlingual and intralingual errors (Sompong, 2014). Interlingual error is an error caused by the influence of a first language (L1). This kind of error is also commonly called negative transfer or interference, as it hinders the development of L2 learning (Touchie, 1986). However, according to Touchie (1986), an intralingual error is an error caused by the difficulty of the target language (B2) itself.

This study aims to analyze the learner's errors in using the *~te iru* form as a marker of tense and aspect in Japanese sentences, along with the factors that cause those errors. At the basic level of the Japanese language, sentences consisting of verbs with the *~te iru* form are generally understood as an ongoing event. But at the upper level, the use of *~te iru* does not end there. It needs further explanation regarding its other meanings, such as stating habits, repetitive activities, and other uses, especially those found in textbooks (Yamamoto, 2005).

According to Rahmat (2018), as a marker of tense, *~te iru* form is used to show that an event or action is taking place. This meaning of *~te iru* form is called *shinkōchū* (continuous). In the *shinkōchū* meaning, verbs with the *~te iru* form are limited to transitive verbs. As an aspect marker, Machida (1989) stated that *~te iru* is the most

representative form among the others. In this function, there are at least seven different meanings of the *~te iru* form as follows (Iori & Shimizu, 2003; Sutedi, 2011; Tomomatsu, Matsumoto, & Wakuri, 2007).

- 1) *Kekka zanzon* (remaining results)
- 2) *Shikō ni kansuru dōshi* (verbs about thinking)
- 3) *Kurikaeshi* (repetition)
- 4) *Keiken/kiroku* (experience/record)
- 5) *Kanryō* (completion)
- 6) *Hanjijitsu* (counter fact)
- 7) *Tannaru jōtai* (original state)

Regarding those various meanings of *~te iru* form, Sun, Koizumi, Tamaoka, and Miyaoka (2010) and Zhang (2017) have conducted research on Japanese language learners who are native Chinese speakers. The results show that most of the learners easily understand the *~te iru* form as a marker of tense (ongoing events). While in other meanings such as repetition, remaining result, and experience/record, the understanding of the learner is still lacking.

In the study of error analysis, a similar topic has been carried out by Qomariyah (2019) and Diner (2009), regarding Japanese learners' errors in the usage of tense and aspects in general. Qomariyah (2019) concluded that even though students had learned about tenses and aspects, they did not understand the use of tenses and aspects thoroughly. Therefore, students find it difficult to apply it in sentences correctly. Moreover, errors also occur because of the influence of Bahasa Indonesia, which has a different grammatical system. As in showing tenses and aspects, Bahasa Indonesia does not change any verb (predicate) forms.

Regardless of the *~te iru* form, there are quite a lot of other grammatical elements that can be used to express tenses and aspects. Therefore, in the study by Qomariyah (2019) and Diner (2009), the discussion of each element is less detailed. Meanwhile, in Takanaishi (2014), Sun et al. (2010), dan Zhang (2017), the *~te iru* form was explained in more detail, but the problems addressed in the study are limited to the learning problems and learners' proficiency.

Incorporating aspects that have not been discussed particularly in previous studies, this study analyzed the errors among Japanese learners in using the *~te iru* form as a marker of tense and aspect.

2. METHOD

This study was conducted using a descriptive method with a quantitative approach. The instruments are a test and questionnaire given to third- and fourth-year university students with the JLPT level N3 ability standard as the sample. The test consisted of 20 questions regarding the use of the *~te iru* form and 10 questions using the other verb form. The questions were provided in multiple-choice, completion, and true-false questions.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire consisted of 13 questions about students' understanding of the *~te iru* form and factors that were assumed to cause the problems or difficulties in using the *~te iru* form in Japanese sentences.

The data collected from the test and questionnaire was calculated quantitatively, then the results were explained using a descriptive method. From the test results, errors were first identified and explained according to Corder's (in Sa'adah, 2016) error classification, then further analyzed regarding the causal factors based on a theory by Richards (in Sompong, 2014) and Touchie (1986).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Data Analysis

From the tests that have been given to 30 respondents, it can be inferred that the highest percentage of errors was in the questions using the *~te iru* form with *hanjijitsu* (counter fact) meaning as an aspect marker. Meanwhile, the lowest percentage of errors was found in the use of the *~te iru* form as a tense marker, *shinkōchū* (continuous). Overall, the average of errors in each meaning of the *~te iru* form are summarized in Table 1.

Furthermore, an explanation of each meaning of the *~te iru* form based on the highest to lowest error frequency is as follows.

3.1.1. Hanjijitsu (counter fact)

According to Table 1, most errors were found in the meaning of the *~te iru* form. The *hanjijitsu* meaning expresses something that in fact does not exist or does not happen (Iori & Shimizu, 2003). This meaning is included in the test questions to determine the extent of students' knowledge and understanding. The test result shows that from two questions, the errors found were very high, with an average percentage of 78.2%.

Table 1. Average of learner's errors

Meaning of the <i>~te iru</i> form		Average (%)	
Aspect	<i>Hanjijitsu</i>	78.35	59.45
	<i>Kekka zanzon</i>	68.87	
	<i>Keiken/kiroku</i>	68.35	
	<i>Kanryō</i>	60	
	<i>Kurikaeshi</i>	48.9	
	<i>Tannaru jōtai</i>	46.7	
	<i>Shikō ni kansuru dōshi</i>	45	
Tense	<i>Shinkōchū</i>	29.32	29.32

- (1) *Okane ga attara, ano kamera o ... katteiru (kau) noni. Zannen da.*
If only I had money, I would have bought that camera.

The context of the sentence in this question is someone who regrets not being able to buy a camera because he doesn't have money. The reality shown is that the person is not able to buy the camera, so the verb *kau* 'buy' in the sentence means "contrary to reality", which is called *hanjijitsu* in Japanese, and it requires the *~te iru* form.

The error percentage of this question reached 86.7%, making this *hanjijitsu* meaning the highest overall error rate. Most of the respondents chose the verb with a form that is generally used with phrases that mean conditions or presuppositions such as *katta*, *kaeru*, *kaitai*, and *kau tsumori*. This is related to students' competence in using Japanese, thus according to the classification of Corder (in Sa'adah, 2016), all the errors found are also classified as "error".

From further analysis, it can be assumed that the errors are caused by the difficulties in Japanese grammar and its meaning, so it is called an intralingual error. According to Touchie (1986), the factor causing the error in this question was "false concept hypothesized", in which the learner makes a hypothesis from the sentence, that it has a presuppositional or requirement meaning. However, the context of the whole sentence shows a different meaning, thus the hypothesis formed by the students is incorrect.

3.1.2. *Kekka Zanzon (remaining results)*

This meaning of the *~te iru* form shows the result of a change or condition that is still visible at the time the sentence is spoken (Iori & Shimizu, 2003). As an aspect marker, the *~te iru* form which states *kekka zanzon* (remaining results) meaning is included into the test. From three questions, the percentage of respondent's errors was high, with an average of 68.8%. The *kekka zanzon* meaning is one of the basic meanings of the *~te iru* form, so it is quite often found in Japanese texts or conversations. The most common errors were found in the following questions.

- (2) *Tanaka-san wa Tokyo kara jikka ni (modoru / modotteiru)*
Mr. Tanaka has come back from Tokyo to his hometown.

The correct answer to this question is *modotteiru* because the nuance shows that Mr. Tanaka was already in his hometown. However, 25 respondents (83.3%) answered with the wrong choice of verb form. Errors in this question were classified into the "error" category because they occurred in the students' competency.

From the analysis of the causal factors, it can be assumed that the error arises due to the influence of L1,

so it is classified as an interlingual error. This is because the *kekka zanzon* meaning contained in the sentence was not shown explicitly. Many respondents interpret the sentence by matching it with Bahasa Indonesia, which does not change the verb forms to mark aspects.

3.1.3. *Keiken/kiroku (experience/record)*

The *~te iru* form can also state an event that occurred in the past, such as experiences or a record of historical events, which is called *keiken/kiroku* meaning. The percentage of errors in the respondent's answers was high, with an average of 68.35%. This meaning is still rarely known because it is not included in the basic meaning of *~te iru* form as an aspect marker. Most of the errors were found in the multiple-choice questions below, with an error percentage of 86.7%.

- (3) *Kiroku ni yoru to, kono hashi wa ni jū-nen mae ni ichido (kwareta / kowareteiru)*
According to the records, this bridge was once broken 20 years ago.

As clearly shown in the expression *kiroku ni yoru to...* which means "according to the records...", the sentence denotes a record of an event that occurred in the past, thus requiring a verb in the *~te iru* form. However, in this question, only four students answered correctly. This shows that the majority of students do not understand the *keiken/kiroku* meaning of the *~te iru* form.

In terms of causal factors, the errors found were caused by the complexity of the Japanese language itself, so it was classified as an intralingual error. Based on the classification of the causes of errors by Touchie (1986), the factors causing the error were called "false concept hypothesized". In the sentence above, there is an adverb of time that shows a past event namely *ni jū nen mae* '20 years ago'. Thus, respondents form a hypothesis that the correct verb is in the past tense form *~ta*, without noticing that the context of the whole sentence shows the *keiken/kiroku* meaning, which requires a verb in *~te iru* form.

3.1.4. *Kanryō (completion)*

The *kanryō* (completion) meaning expresses an event that has been completed before another event occurs (Iori & Shimizu, 2003). It only consisted of one question from the test. From the analysis results of respondents' answers, it was found that the error percentage reached 60%. *Kanryō* meaning contained in a sentence using a verb with the *~te iru* form, when expressing an event that occurred before another event which is the reference point.

- (4) *Korekara ichi jikan-go eigakan ni tsuita toki, eiga wa hajimatteiru.*
One hour from now, when I arrive at the cinema, the movie will have started.

The reference point of the sentence above is *eiga ni tsuita toki* 'on arrival at the cinema', then another event that is emphasized is *eiga wa hajimatteiru* 'the movie starts'. The condition indicated by the sentence is that the movie has already started before he arrives at the cinema, thus the correct form of the verb is *~te iru*. However, the majority of students do not understand the *kanryō* meaning, but only see it as a past event that is generally indicated by a verb with the *~ta* form. Based on Corder's (in Sa'adah, 2016) error classification, the errors found in this question are classified as "error", because it occurs upon learners' competency.

From the analysis of the causes, this error occurred in learning development and is caused by the difficulty of Japanese as target language (L2). Based on the classification of the causes of errors by Touchie (1986), this kind of error is called an intralingual error.

3.1.5. *Kurikaeshi (repetition)*

This *kurikaeshi* meaning expresses a repetitive activity, and daily activities or habits, and is also one of the basic meanings of the *~te iru* form as an aspect marker (Iori & Shimizu, 2003). From the test result, 48.9% of errors were found among three questions that contain the *kurikaeshi* meaning. The highest percentage of error was in the following true-false question.

- (5) *Michi no ryōgawa ni wa san-meetoru goto ni ki ga uerareru.* (false)
Trees are planted on both sides of the road.

The clause *san-meetoru goto ni* 'every three meters' in the sentence above shows the *kurikaeshi* meaning, because it indicates a repetition. Therefore, the correct form of the verb is *~te iru*, and the correct answer is "false". In this question, 22 errors were found (73.3%). From the analysis, it can be deemed that the errors occurred because students do not understand the sentence's context indicated by each grammatical element. Based on Corder's (in Sa'adah, 2016) error classification, the errors found in this question are classified as "error", because it occurs upon learners' competency.

Meanwhile, regarding the cause of errors, the analysis result shows that the error is caused by interlingual factors, namely the influence of L1. As stated before, in Bahasa Indonesia, the verb form was not changed based on the aspect contained. In the question above, there is a verb in the passive form, *uerareru*, which can be interpreted as 'planted'. When compared with Bahasa Indonesia, a verb with the passive form already has the meaning of repetition. Consequently, the respondents do not notice that in Japanese, the repetition must be expressed by a change of the verbs into the *~te iru* form.

3.1.6. *Tannaru Jōtai (original state)*

This meaning of *~te iru* form is called *tannaru jōtai* (original state). This meaning expresses a state that occurs naturally, or something that has remained in the same condition since the beginning and will continue indefinitely (Sutedi, 2011). In the test questions, there are two items that contain this meaning. The results show that the average percentage of respondent's errors was quite low, which is 46.7%.

Although it is not included in the basic meaning of the *~te iru* form, *tannaru jōtai* meaning is quite often found in Japanese texts and conversations. This makes the *tannaru jōtai* meaning familiar to Japanese learners in intermediate level. In the multiple-choice questions, the percentage of errors only reached 26.7%. It can be concluded that the majority of students were able to understand the *tannaru jōtai* meaning and determine the correct form of the verb to complete the sentence. However, numerous errors were found in true-false questions below.

- (6) *Ie no ushiro ni wa hatake ga hirogaru.* (False)
There is a field behind the house.

The sentence above shows the field naturally exists and has remained in the same state from a long time onwards. However, 20 students (66.7%) could not answer the question correctly.

This indicates that there are other factors that have a potential to influence the occurrence of errors other than students' understanding of *~te iru* form with *tannaru jōtai* meaning, such as differences in the types of questions. Moreover, from the analysis of the causal factors, errors occurred due to interference from Bahasa Indonesia, or what is referred to as interlingual errors. This is because the aspect contained in the sentence is shown implicitly. Hence the students interpret the sentence by matching it with Bahasa Indonesia, which does not change the form of verbs to show aspects.

3.1.7. *Shikō ni Kansuru Dōshi (verbs about thinking)*

The *~te iru* form is also used for verbs that have the meaning of "thought" such as *omou* and *kangaeru* which mean 'to think'. In the two test questions using the *~te iru* form with *shikō ni kansuru dōshi* meaning, several errors were found, with an average of 45%.

The use of the *~te iru* form in *shikō ni kansuru dōshi* meaning depends on the subject and context of the sentence. According to Iori and Shimizu (2003), the subject of a sentence with the *~te iru* form is generally the third person, and in certain contexts the first-person subject can also be used. Therefore, in answering test questions, respondents must pay attention to the subject and comprehend the context of the sentence. Lack of

understanding of these aspects can cause errors. As in the following question.

- (7) A: *Natsuyasumi dō surun desuka.*
 B: *Tokyo e ikō to ... omotteiru. (omou)*
 A: What will you do on summer break?
 B: I think I will go to Tokyo.

The second sentence contains the speaker's intention or plan to do something, so the correct answer is *omotteiru*, which is *omou* in the *~te iru* form.

In this question, there were many respondents who could not understand the context of the sentence. Hence, 60% errors were found, that includes incorrect verb forms such as *omou* and *omotta*. The occurrence of this error is assumed to be influenced by the learners' competence regarding the context and the usage of the *~te iru* form itself, thus the errors found are all included in the "error" category. Then, from the analysis of the factors causing the error, it was found that the error was caused by the difficulty in using Japanese grammar. According to Richards (in Sompong, 2014), this kind of error is called an intralingual error.

3.1.8. *Shinkōchū* (continuous)

The last meaning of the *~te iru* form is called *shinkōchū*, which used to show that an event or action is taking place. As a marker of tense, it was learned by Japanese language learners at the beginner level, along with changing verb forms. Therefore, the *shinkōchū* meaning of *~te iru* form is assumed to be acquired by learners who have reached the upper intermediate level (Rahmat, 2018).

Among five questions of the test that contain the *shinkōchū* meaning of *~te iru* form, only few errors were found, with an average of 29.32%. The errors were mostly in choosing the suitable verb form for the sentence. As in the question below:

- (8) *Chichi wa heya de shinbun o (yomu / yondeiru).*
 My father is reading a newspaper in the room.

Answer choices are provided in two different forms of verbs with the same meaning. The respondents must choose the suitable verb form, so it is related to their knowledge and understanding of grammar. Therefore, based on Corder's error classification, it is included in the "error" category.

Regarding the cause, it can be deemed that the error is caused by interlingual factors, which is the influence of Bahasa Indonesia as learners' first language (L1). In Bahasa Indonesia, the verb form does not change based on when the action occurs. Consequently, a small number of students did not change the form of the verb into the suitable form, *~te iru*.

3.2. Factors That Cause Errors

According to the questionnaire results, the students find it difficult to understand the meaning and the use of the *~te iru* form. They were not able to understand the material given in lectures properly, and or students rarely spend time outside of lectures to study Japanese grammar, especially about the *~te iru* form. Therefore, it can be concluded that the internal factor that causes the errors is students' lack of knowledge and understanding of the meaning and the use of the *~te iru* form.

However, the external factors that caused the errors are the incomprehensive teaching materials regarding the meaning and use of the *~te iru* form in particular, both from what is taught by the teacher/lecturer, as well as those contained in the textbooks. This is in line with a study by Takanashi (2014), where in Japanese textbooks, sentences containing verbs with the *~te iru* form that are considered difficult, often appear outside the explanation section about the *~te iru* form itself. However, this is rarely noticed by textbook authors and or teachers, causing students to have difficulty understanding it, thus errors occur in its use.

Furthermore, errors occurred due to the influence of Bahasa Indonesia as the L1 (mother tongue), which has been acquired by the students. This kind of error is also known as interlingual error (Corder, in Sa'adah, 2016). As stated by Hendra (2012), understanding the form of *~te iru* for Japanese language learners in Indonesia is a complicated problem, because *~te iru* can be understood as a tense marker, as well as an aspect marker. This is not found in Bahasa Indonesia, which does not change the verb form to show tenses and or aspects. These differences make it difficult for students to notice that a sentence has a meaning of tenses or aspects in it, so they are barely aware of the most suitable verb form to use in the sentence.

In addition, the test results analysis showed that errors occurred due to complexity and difficulty of grammar or the structure of the target language (Japanese) itself, or what are called intralingual errors (Touchie, 1986).

4. CONCLUSION

Errors that occur in the use of the *~te iru* form as an aspect marker are more commonly found, resulting in a higher percentage of errors than the *~te iru* form as tense marker. Among the meanings of the *~te iru* form, the majority of the errors occurred in the use of the form as an aspect marker with the *hanjijitsu* (counter fact) meaning. Meanwhile, the least errors were found in the *~te iru* form with *shinkōchū* (continuous) meaning as a tense marker. Almost all the errors found are included in the error category, because they occurred in the students' language competence.

The main factor that causes these errors was the deficiency of students' knowledge and understanding about the complex meanings and use of the *~te iru* form. This causes students having difficulty in determining the verb form and applying the *~te iru* form correctly in a sentence. In addition, errors also occur due to interference (negative transfer) from Bahasa Indonesia as the students' mother tongue. Bahasa Indonesia does not change verb forms to show tenses or aspects. This difference makes it difficult for students to notice that a sentence has a meaning of tense or aspect in it, so that they are barely aware of the use of the *~te iru* form, as well as other forms of verbs that are most suitable to use in Japanese sentences.

From the results of the analysis of the learner's errors in using this form, it can be used as feedback in the Japanese language learning, to identify the extent of the learner's understanding, especially about the various meanings of the *~te iru* form and minimize the possibility of errors in the future.

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