A Data Based Study on Language Transfer of Verb Tenses in Tibetan EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to investigate the effect of language transfer in adult Tibetans learning English as a foreign language based on data analysis. The study focuses on Tibetan verb tenses. The author collected data by assigning a survey for a large amount of Tibetan college freshmen in mainland China. Results show majority of the participants perform well in simple past, present and future tenses, but worked poorly in identifying present perfect tenses. The data clearly shows similarities shared between Tibetan and English verb tenses facilitate comprehension of English grammar, or positive transfer, whereas the differences produce interferences or negative transfer.

Keywords: *language transfer, Tibetan, English, verb tenses, data analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of learning a new language, the effect of mother tongue (first language) has had a controversial background. Such influences are usually referred to as language transfer [6].

Researchers reveal language transfer lead two contrasting results. On the one hand, it can impede comprehension and performance, or result in production errors and "interferences" [9], or "negative transfer" [8]. On the other hand, the source language facilitates the comprehension or production of the target language, or "positive transfer" [7].

This article investigates how language transfer affects in adult Tibetans learning English as a foreign language (EFL). I am interested in verb tenses of the two languages, specifically action verbs. Tibetan action verbs basically indicate future, present, and past tenses. Based on comparing similarities and differences between Tibetan and English verb tenses, this study will collect data from the internet, by assigning two tasks to a large amount of Tibetan college freshmen in mainland China. The tasks are called grammaticality judgement task and a translation task. The goal of the tasks is to find out whether the similarities and differences in verb tenses of the two languages that affect Tibetan EFL learners acquiring the target language.

2. TIBETAN VERB TENSES

Before we start the data presentation and its analysis, let us first take a brief overview on Tibetan verb tenses, and the similarities and differences between English and Tibetan verb tenses. Generally, Tibetan verb tenses are classified in three times (dus gsum): past, present, and future. Principles of the three times can be identified from forms of the auxiliary particles: བྱ <bya> "will do", བྱེད < byed >"do/does", and བྱས<byas> "did". The particle བྱ <bya> "will do" denotes an action will happen in future time, while བྱེད <byed> "do/does" refers to a general action, and བྱས<byas> indicates the action is past (Yangcan, 2002; Situ, 2008).These three forms of particles are placed at the end of any action verbs to signify the past, present and future tenses [4], as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Verb tenses with auxiliary particles.

Future	Present	Past	Verb meaning
གཅད་བྱ <gcad bya>	གཅོད་བྱེད <gcod byed>	བཅད་པ <bcad pa>	cut
དགར་བྱ <dgar bya>	དགར་བྱེད <dgar byed>	བཀར་པ <bkar pa >	divide
གསད་བྱ<gsad bya>	གསོད་བྱེད<gsod byed>	བསད་པ <bsad pa>	kill

The three examples above show forms of the verbs <gcod>"cut", < dgar> "divide" and <gsod>"kill " in respective tenses. The first verb is related to the meaning of "cut", its future tense is expressed as གཅད་བྱ <gcad bya>, the present tense གཅོད་བྱེད<gcod byed> and the past tense བཅད་པ<bcad pa>. The verbs' endings are particles "bya", "byed" and "pa". The particle "bya" signifies future or will cut, and "byed" indicates present state of cut, and the past form is ended with the particle "pa", which functions as same as "byas".

The second verb is related to the meaning of divide, དགར་བྱ<dgar bya> signifies the future form of "divide", equivalent to English verb "will divide", དགར་བྱེད<dgar byed>denotes the present form of "divide", བཀར་པ<bkar pa>is the past form of divide, equivalent to simple past "divided".

The third verb is related to the meaning of kill. Its first form གསད་བྱ<gsad bya> denotes the future form of kill, གསོད་བྱེད<gsod byed> is the present form of kill, while བསད་པ<bsad pa> indicates the past form of kill, equivalent to simple past "killed".

In brief, the auxiliary endings <bya>, < byed > <byas> or <pa> are important in discriminating the future, present and past tenses.

2.1. Similarities and Differences between Tibetan and English verb tenses

2.1.1. Similarities

The main similarities between Tibetan and English verb tenses are both languages keep certain rules in tenses. In Tibetan the tenses could be recognized with auxiliary particles བྱ <bya> "will do", བྱེད < byed >"do/does", and བྱས<byas> "did". These particles indicate the time of present, future, and past, equivalent to basic English verb tenses, simple present, future and past.

Furthermore, they share similarities in their morphological rules of the forms. Like English, Tibetan action verbs keep a sense of regular and irregular verb forms. The regular verbs reserve certain grammatical rules. One such a rule is shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Verb forms of rule one.

Future	Present	Past	Glossary
<bskyang> བསྐྱང	<skyong> སྐྱོང	<bskyangs> བསྐྱངས	nurture
<bskang> བསྐང	<skong> སྐོང	<bskangs> བསྐངས	fulfil
<brgyug> བརྒྱུག	<rgyug> རྒྱུག	<brgyugs> བརྒྱུགས	run
<bsgom> བསྒོམ	<sgom> སྒོམ	<bsgoms> བསྒོམས	meditate

<brtag> བརྟག	<rtog> རྟོག	<brtags> བརྟགས	exam
<bklag> བཀླག	<klog> ཀློག	<bklags> བཀླགས	read
<bsgrub> བསྒྲུབ	<sgrub> སྒྲུབ	<bsgrubs> བསྒྲུབས	do
<bsdeb> བསྡེབ	<sdeb> སྡེབ	<bsdebs> བསྡེབས	mix
<bsrung> བསྲུང	<srung> སྲུང	<bsrungs> བསྲུངས	keep
<bsgug> བསྒུག	<sgug> སྒུག	<bsgugs> བསྒུགས	wait

As it shows in Table 2, the verbs keep a consistent form depending on grammar rule one.

Some verbs, the future form is made up of a prefix, a root and a suffix, and the prefix is the letter བ /ba/. Such verbs are like the following ones:

<bskyang> བསྐྱང " will nurture"
<bskang> བསྐང " will fulfil"
<brgyug> བརྒྱུག " will run"
<bsgrub> བསྒྲུབ "will do"
<bsgug> བསྒུག" will wait"

Their present forms consist of a root word and a suffix, as shown below:

<skyong>སྐྱོང "nurture"
<skong> སྐོང "fulfil"
<rgyug> རྒྱུག "run"
<sgrub> སྒྲུབ "do"
<sgug> སྒུག"wait"

Their past forms comprise a prefix, a root, a suffix, and a post-suffix, especially the prefix is usually the letter བ /ba/ and the post-suffix is the letter ས /sa/, see below:

<bskyangs> བསྐྱངས "nurtured "
<bskangs> བསྐངས "fulfilled"
<brgyugs> བརྒྱུགས "ran"
<bsgrubs> བསྒྲུབས " did "
<bsgugs> བསྒུགས"waited"

The verbs change their forms in future, present and past tenses, and they follow certain grammar rules. The rules are very similar of the rules of simple future, present and past forms of English verb tenses.

Particularly in the areas of present and past verb forms, both languages share very similar grammatical rules. Following gives some further examples of such similarities, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Verb forms of rule two.

Present	Past	Glossary
<gsod> གསོད	<bsad> བསད	kill
<gzhar> གཞར	<bzhar> བཞར	shave
<gcog> གཅོག	<bcag> བཅག	break
<'khrid> འཁྲིད	<khrid> ཁྲིད	teach

<'bru> འབྲུ	<brus> བྲུས	dig
<'bod> འབོད	<bos> བོས	call
<skur> སྐུར	<bskur> བསྐུར	send
<bzhad> བཞད	<bzhad> བཞད	blossom
<bzhengs> བཞེངས	<bzhengs> བཞེངས	build
<shar> ཤར	<shar> ཤར	rise

Verb form rules in relation to tense, Table 3 presents three types of disciplines.

One type is when a verb's present form begins with a prefix ག /ga/, its past form changes into the prefix བ /ba/:

Present   Past
<gsod> གསོད "kill"   <bsad> བསད "killed"
<gzhar> གཞར "shave"   <bzhar> བཞར "shove"
<gcog> གཅོག "break"   <bcag> བཅག "broke"

Another type is when a present tense begins with the prefix འ /a/ and a suffix, its past form usually changes into a root and a suffix:

Present   Past
<'khrid> འཁྲིད "teach"   <khrid> ཁྲིད "taught"
<'bru> འབྲུ "dig"   <brus> བྲུས "dug"
<'bod> འབོད "call"   <bos> བོས "called"

Or a verb without any prefix in present form, its past form ends with the prefix /ba/:

Present   Past
<skur> སྐུར "teach"   <bskur> བསྐུར "sent"

The third type is the static form of the verbs, these verbs have no changes under any conditions:

Present   Past
<bzhad> བཞད "blossom"   <bzhad> བཞད "blossom"
<bzhengs> བཞེངས "build" <bzhengs> བཞེངས "build"
<shar> ཤར "rise"   <shar> ཤར "rise"

It can be said that Tibetan verb tenses, usually the prefix determines the verb forms. Words begin with a prefix letter ག/ga/, its past form usually starts with the prefix བ/ba/, for instance, the present of <gsod> གསོད "kill" and its past form is <bsad> བསད "killed". Some verbs are static, like the verb <tshar> ཚར "finish", which is very similar to the irregular verbs such as "bet", "cost", "cut", "hurt", and "put" in English.

2.1.2. Differences

The differences between Tibetan and English verb tenses mainly fall in perfect and progressive tenses. In this section, I will discuss present perfect tense and present progressive in Tibetan verb tenses.

Present Perfect Tense

There are no classifications of past participles in traditional Tibetan verb tenses. Some modern scholars

follow English grammar to reidentify Tibetan past participles with auxiliary particles, as shown below:

Perfect: བཏང་བ
         བཏང་ཚར་བ   } To have sent [5]
         བཏང་བ་ཡིན་པ
         བཏང་ཡོད་པ
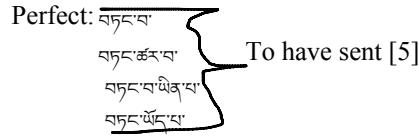
The basic verb form of the above example བཏང <btang> "send" can be appreciated as present perfect tense with the aid of its auxiliary particles བ/ba/, and བཏང་བ <btang ba> , or in other verbal phrases བཏང་ཚར་བ <btang tshar ba>, "finished sending" or "to have sent", བཏང་བ་ཡིན་པ <btang ba yin pa>or བཏང་ཡོད་པ <btang ba yod pa> "be sent". Here the verb ཡིན་པ <yin pa>and ཡོད་པ <yod pa> "to be" are used to affirm the past activity of "send" is completed, and the verbal phrases indicate past actions at some unspecified time. They often occur in Tibetan colloquial language. Hannah's identification of the verb forms in present perfect tense is crucial in modern Tibetan grammar. Such cases can be found in other auxiliary verbs like ཟིན <zin>"end" and ཚར <tshar> "finish" with past verb forms, as shown in the sentences below:

ཡི་གེ་བསྐུར་ཟིན <Yi ge bskur zin>
The message has been sent.

ངས་ལས་བྱ་བྲིས་ཚར <ngas las bya bris tshar>
I have finished my homework.

Some studies also reveal that present perfect tense could be perceived from context:

"(One) is watching the dance, where the show has started." [1].

In the sentence above, the actual verb form is simple past བརྩམས <brtsams> "started", yet based on context, the show began at an unspecified time in the past. It could be appreciated as a present perfect tense. However, present perfect tense is not classified in traditional Tibetan grammar, many indigenous Tibetan grammarians do not accept the new classifications of present perfect tense, and rarely use it in practice.

Present Progressive Tense
Another difference between Tibetan and English verb tense is the classification of progressive or continuous tense, which is included in present tense in Tibetan grammar. But even traditional Tibetan grammar does not independently classify present continous, there are auxiliary particles that show continuous actions. Particles like བཞིན <bzhin>, གིན <gin>, གྱིན <gyin>, and ཀྱིན <kyin> annexed to the verb, and denote activities in progress now:

ཚེ་རིང་གིས་ཡི་གེ་འབྲི་བཞིན་ཡོད <tshe ring gis yi ge 'bri bzhin yod>
Tsering is writing.

ཁོ་བོས་ཞིང་འདེབས་ཀྱིན་ཡོད <kho bos zhing 'debs kyin yod>
He is sowing the seeds in the field.

ཁོ་མོས་མེ་ཏོག་ལ་ཆུ་གཏོང་གིན་ཡོད། <kho bos chu gtong gin yod>

She is watering the flowers.

གླུ་བས་གླུ་ལེན་གྱིན་འདུག <glu bas glu len gyin 'dug>

The singer is singing.

Overall, the similarities and differences of the verb tenses between the two languages can be seen from the chart, as shown below:
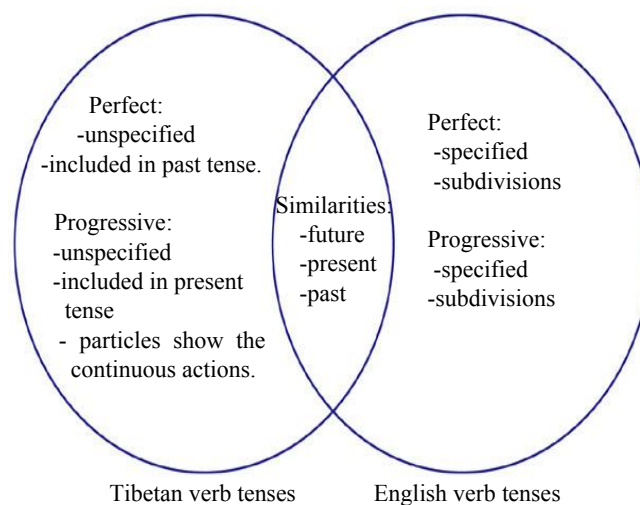

Chart 1: Overall comparison of the verb tenses.

Similarities between Tibetan and English verbs can be appreciated in simple past, present and future tenses, especially the two languages share prominent grammatical rules in simple past. The major differences are present perfect and present progressive tenses, which are not independently classified in Tibetan traditional grammar. Particularly present perfect tense is unspecified in Tibetan grammar, it is normally included within the past tense. Present progressive tense is usually integrated in present tense. One can perceive progressive actions through auxiliary particles annexed to the root verbs. In contrast, in English, perfect and progressive tenses are not only specified, but they are further divided into subdivisions.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Since grammar is crucial in learning a foreign language, it is equally important to compare similarities and differences between the source language and target language. This is because EFL learners often encounter language transfer from their mother tongues. The transfer might show negative or positive effects. To investigate the effect of language transfer in Tibetan EFL learners in identification of verb tenses discussed above, the author conducted a survey, using research methods including contrastive analysis and error analysis. The participants are freshmen who graduated from Tibetan middle schools in Tibetan areas in mainland China, basically the Tibetan populated areas. 95% of the students acquire Tibetan, Chinese and English. However, their English level varies as many of them start English language course in grade three or four, approximately one to two hours of English lessons per week at middle schools. Thus, the average English level

of the participants are between beginner to pre-intermediate. Their age range was between 18 and 21. Initially we distributed over one thousand of the assignments and received 341 of them with complete answers.

To this study, the survey was conducted on two tasks: grammaticality judgement task (GJT) and translation. The former was applied to find out whether effect of first language transfer is present in verb tense identification errors of Tibetan EFL learners. There are 20 sentences (Table 4) in GJT. The sentences are mainly designed for evaluating students' grammar knowledge on present, past, future, perfect, and progressive verb tenses in English. Students read the sentences and judge their acceptability of each sentence whether it sounded correct or incorrect to them. The translation task includes five Tibetan sentences in past, perfect and progressive forms (Table 6). Students are required to translate them into English. The translation task is used for the purpose of participants' proficiency in present progressive, present perfect, simple past and future. In the task, there were 25 sentences in total, and five sentences for each tense. We selected the verbs of the tasks from Tibetan verb tense examples presented in previous sections of this article.

4. DATA PRESENTATION

First, the author assigned 20 sentences, students chose right or wrong based on verbs tenses in underline, as shown below:

Table 4 Findings of grammaticality judgement task assignment.

1. John <u>runs</u> faster than anyone else in the team.
   R:90%
   W:10%
2. Your wishes will be <u>fulfil</u> if you have the passion in them.
   R:30%
   W: 70%
3. She <u>read</u> a lot of novels in her spare time.
   R:30%
   W:70%
4. To make the butter tea, <u>mix</u> butter with milk tea.
   R:80%
   W:20%
5. They <u>waited</u> at the train station yesterday.
   R:90%
   W:10%
6. He <u>is waiting</u> for the bus at the bus station.
   R:81%
   W:19%
7. She <u>has</u> did a lot for us.
   R:57%
   W:43%
8. The nomads <u>will</u> <u>shave</u> their sheep's fur in this summer.
   R:81%
   W:5%
9. He <u>broke</u> the cup when it dropped on the floor.
   R:96%
   W:4%
10. She <u>taught</u> English in New York for a long time.
    R:75%
    W:25%
11. He <u>will call</u> me later.
    R:80%
    W:20%
12. The headmaster <u>finish</u> the meeting in this morning.
    R:6%
    W:94%
13. Flowers <u>blossoms</u> in spring.
    R:28%
    W:72%
14. At university, you <u>will</u> <u>build</u> friendships with many people.
    R:76%
    W:24%
15. She <u>is watering</u> the flowers.
    R:79%
    W:21%
16. The workers <u>building</u> a road near the town now.
    R:56%
    W:44%
17. The coronavirus <u>killed</u> thousands of people.
    R:88%
    W:12%
18. She <u>sang</u> the most beautiful song I had ever heard of.
    R:91%
    W:9%
19. Mr. Li <u>teach</u> biology at a university in Xining.
    R:11%
    W:89%
20. The researcher's book <u>rose</u> to the best-seller lists.
    R:83%
    W:17%

R=right. W=wrong

After collection of the data, the author checked students' performance on the assignments, and calculated the proportion of their choices on right and wrong answers.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1. Tenses and Design of the assignments

In this assignment, there are five simple present sentences (sentence no.1,3, 4, 13, and 19), four simple past sentences (no. 5,9,12 and 18), four simple future sentences (no. 2, 8, 11 and 14), four present perfect (7,10, 17 and 20), and three present progressive sentences (no.6, 15 and 16), as shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5: summary of the tenses in assignment one (GTJ).

tenses	Sentence no.
Simple present	1,3,4,13,19
Simple past	5,9,12,18
Simple future	2,8,11,14
Present perfect	7,10,17,20
Present progressive	6,15,16,

In the 20 sentences, 10 of them were grammatically correct and 10 of them are incorrect. I am interested in finding students' performance on error discovery of the verb tenses from the given assignment. It is also important to evaluate areas where they work well. Based on their strengths and weaknesses, we may find out evidence on the effect of language transfer.

5.2. Participants' performance on task one

Following provides a summary to the proportion of the participants' utterances in their choices for task one, see Figure 1:
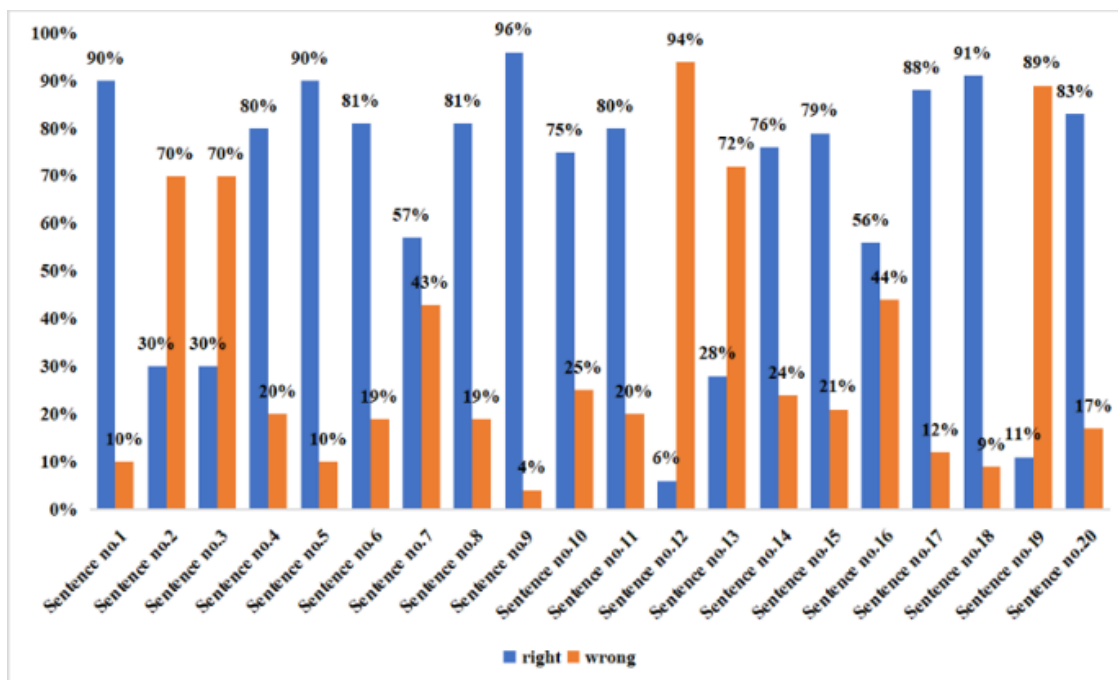

Figure 1: Students' utterances in their choices of the answers.

According to Figure 1, the blue columns represent students' choices for the sentences sounded right to them, while the red ones portray the sentences sounded wrong to them. The figure shows participants' performance on identifying simple present, past, and future tenses, as well as present perfect and present progressive tenses.

5.2.1. Simple present

There are three grammatically incorrect sentences in the simple present tense presented in sentence no.1, 3, 4, 13 and 19, see below:
No.3:

She read a lot of novels in her spare time.

No.13:

Flowers blossoms in spring.

No.19:

Mr. Li teach biology at a university in Xining.

Seventy percent of the students chose sentence no.3 as a wrong sentence; seventy-two percent of them felt sentence no.13 was incorrect, and eighty-nine percent of the participants found sentence no.19 was grammatically wrong. Thus, majority of the students detected the errors in these sentences.

5.2.2. Simple past and future

Over ninety percent of the students worked very well on identifying simple past tense, see sentences no.5, 9, 12 and 18, especially ninety four percent of the participants found out the errors in sentence no.12:

The headmaster finish the meeting in this morning.

An average of seventy five percent of the students answered correctly on their choices in identifying simple past tense presented in sentence no. 2, 8, 11 and 14. Seventy percent of them were aware of the error in sentence no.2:

Your wishes will be fulfil if you have the passion in them.

5.2.3. Present perfect

The hardest identification of verb tenses from the data for the participants is present perfect. Sentences no. 7, 10, 17 and 20 are particularly designed for the purpose of students' judgment in discriminating simple past and present perfect. Since these two tenses are all included in the past tense in Tibetan grammar. Four of the sentences are grammatically wrong.

Sentence no. 7:

She has did a lot for us.

The grammar form of this sentence is incorrect. However, 57% of the participants failed to notice the form.

No. 10:

> She taught English in New York for a long time.

This sentence is present perfect because it denotes the teaching activity has begun in the past and continues at present. Only 25% of the students found it incorrect.

No. 17:

> The coronavirus killed thousands of people.

The correct verb tense of this sentence should be present perfect because the disease happened in the past at an unspecified time. Only 12% of the students found it incorrect.

No. 20:

> The researcher's book rose to the best-seller lists.

The correct tense of this sentence is present perfect, since the fame of the researcher's book has risen in past at an unspecified time. Only 17% of the students found it wrong.

5.2.4. Present progressive

The assignment designed three sentences for present progressive tense, in which sentence no.6 and 15 are grammatically correct, and sentence no. 16 is incorrect. Around 80% of the students sounded the verb forms of sentence no.6 and 15 are correct to them, and 44% of them found the error form in sentence no.16, as shown below:

> The workers building a road near the town now.

The sentence lacks verb be, it is a common phenomenon for Tibetan EFL learners to neglect the verb be.

Overall, from students' performance on task one, it shows a general scale of their strengths and weaknesses in verb tense identification. The strengths and weaknesses reflect language transfer of Tibetan verb tenses in identifying English verb tenses. They performed well in simple present, future, and past tenses, which share similarities with Tibetan verb tenses of the three times discussed in previous section (see Section 2). Students also worked good on present progressive. Here, we can find out some evidence on positive transfer in similarities of the verb tenses shared between the two languages. However, many of the students worked poorly in identifying present perfect tense, most of them cannot discriminate it from simple past, which might indicate interferences from mother tongue or a negative language transfer.

5.3. *Participants' performance on task two*

To find out further examples on verb-tense transfer in Tibetan EFL learners, we conducted a second survey by assigning translation task to the same participants. There are five sentences in Tibetan, students translate them into English. The sentences apply tenses including present progressive, present perfect, simple past and future. The translation is also designed for the purpose of students' proficiency in mother tongue and English verb tenses. Following Table 6 is the findings of the translation task:

Table 6: Findings of translation task.

Sentence	%
21.ཁོ་མོས་དབྱིན་ཡིག་གི་བརྩམས་སྒྲུང་(novel)ཞིག་ཀློག་བཞིན་ཡོད། T: She is reading an English novel.	75%
22.ཁོ་ཡིས་འཕྲིན་ཡིག་དེ་བསྐུར་ཟིན། T: He has already sent the letter.	35%
23.ཤིང་མཁན་(carpenter)གྱིས་ཤིང་པོ་ཞིག་གཏོད་བཞིན་འདུག T: The carpenter is cutting a wood.	62%
24.ཁ་སང་ཞིང་པས་ཞིང་ནང་དུ་ས་བོན་བཏབ་འདུག T: The farmers sowed seeds in the field yesterday.	89%
25.ཁོ་མོས་ཡུལ་ལ་ཁ་པར་གཏོང་རྒྱུ་རེད། T: She will call her home.	79%
T for translation	
	% of correct answers

Since task two is a continuous assignment of task one for the same participants mentioned above, I numbered the sentences 21 to 25. The percentages presented in the table show the proportion of correct answers.

As we see from Table 6, the five translation sentences cover progressive, perfect, simple past and future. Sentence no.21 and 23 should be perceived as present progressive. This is because the main verb ཀློག <klog> "read" is a present form (see Table 2), the auxiliary particle བཞིན<bzhin>denotes the reading action is going on now. Thus, the sentence could be translated as:

> ཁོ་མོས་དབྱིན་ཡིག་གི་བརྩམས་སྒྲུང་(novel)ཞིག་ཀློག་བཞིན་ཡོད།
> T: She is reading an English novel.

75% of the participants translated it correctly into English.

Sentence no.23 is like 21, the main verb གཏོད<gcod> "cut" is a present tense form (see Table 1), from its

auxiliary particle བཞིན་<bzhin>, we learn the action is happening now. It could be translated as:

ཤིང་མཁན་(carpenter)གྱིས་སྟོང་པོ་ཞིག་གཅོད་བཞིན་འདུག

T: The carpenter is cutting some wood.

62% of the students worked well on translating sentence no.23.

The present perfect tense is shown in sentence no.22. The main verb <bskur>བསྐུར"sent" is a past tense form. In modern grammar, auxiliary particle<zin>ཟིན signifies past particle. The sentence denotes an action happens in an unspecified time in the past, it functions as a present perfect tense. Therefore, the sentence could be translated as:

ཁོ་བོས་འཕྲིན་ཡིག་དེ་བསྐུར་ཟིན།

T: He has already sent the letter.

only 35 percent of the students translated the sentence correctly, and 65% of them perceived it as a simple past tense.

The simple past and future tenses are presented in sentence no.24 and 25. The percentages of the correct answers for these two sentences were 89 percent and 79 percent, respectively.

Based on students' performance on identifying verb forms in different tenses shown in Table 6, we clearly see language transfer of verb tenses. Majority of the students performed well in translating sentences related to simple present, past, future, and progressive tenses. The main errors were occurred in the identification of present perfect and its usage. Many of them confused the differences between simple past and present perfect tenses.

5.4. Summary of task one and two

To present an overall finding of the data, the following figure is a summary of the two tasks. It presents the proportion of participants' performance on the tasks. There are twenty-five sentences in total, five sentences for each tense. The number of correct answers for each verb tense are shown in percentages.
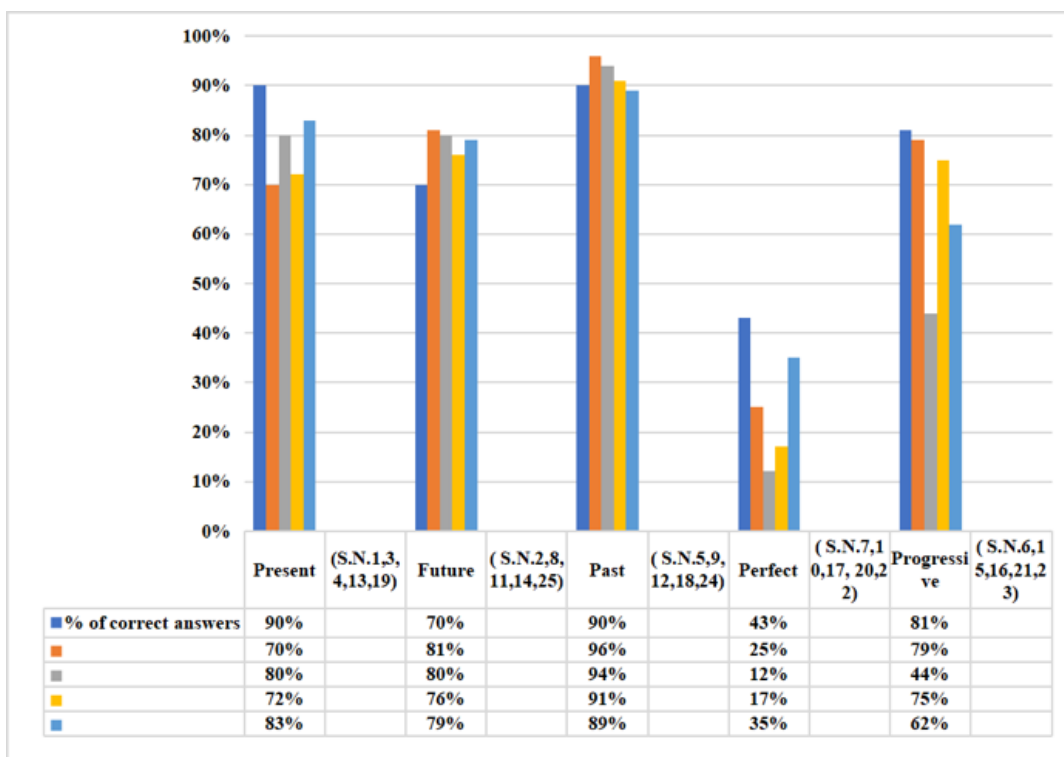

	Present	(S.N.1,3, 4,13,19)	Future	(S.N.2,8, 11,14,25)	Past	(S.N.5,9, 12,18,24)	Perfect	(S.N.7,1 0,17, 20,2 2)	Progressi ve	(S.N.6,1 5,16,21,2 3)
% of correct answers	90%		70%		90%		43%		81%	
	70%		81%		96%		25%		79%	
	80%		80%		94%		12%		44%	
	72%		76%		91%		17%		75%	
	83%		79%		89%		35%		62%	

Figure 2: Summary of the data.

From the summary of the data in Figure 2, we see an overall proportion of the participants' correct answers for each sentence in each tense. There is a high percentage of the correct answers in simple present, future, and past tenses. Particularly, the highest proportion of the right answers is five sentences in simple past tenses, in which the lowest proportion was 89 percent and highest was 96 percent. On average, students' performance on identifying present progressive is also high. In contrast, there is a marked

fall in participants' performance on identifying present perfect tense, of which the highest proportion was 43 percent, and the lowest is 12 percent.

5.5. Language transfer of verb tenses

The data presentation and its analysis presented in previous sections, show a clear evidence of language transfer in verb tenses from the first language. Such transfer is mainly linked to similarities and differences

shared between Tibetan and English verb tenses. The reasons on why many participants worked well in simple past, present and future, may be explained from the similarities between the verb tenses in both languages. As we overviewed Tibetan verb tenses in section two, Tibetan verb tenses are traditionally divided into three times, past, present, and future. The grammar rules of the three times reflect similar disciplines in the simple present, past and future tenses of English grammar. Thus, verb tenses that appear like the first language facilitated students to work well, which can be inferred from the high percentage of correct answers on simple past, present and future tenses of task one and two. Specifically, as the degree of similarities are closer, the better the students' performance on identifying the target language. Such examples can be seen from students' identification on simple past presented in the data, which accounted the highest proportion of the correct answers in the two tasks.

However, the differences in verb tenses of the two languages result errors in grammar. Such examples could be clearly found from the present perfect tenses shown from the data above. There is no classification of perfect tense in traditional Tibetan grammar, people normally regard it as a past tense. Thus, many of the students are ambiguous in discriminating the simple past and present perfect.

Although some modern scholars reidentify present perfect based on English grammar rules, it rarely used in practice. The notion of Tibetan present perfect tense is often found in modern Tibetan grammar, and it requires proficiency in both languages of the grammar. This may explain 35 percent of the students translated the Tibetan sentence no.22 in task two correctly. They are familiar with the present perfect, and proficient in both Tibetan and English grammar.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Tibetan verb tenses are traditionally divided into past, present, and future. Both English and Tibetan action verbs share many similarities, particularly in past, present and future forms. Yet there are dramatic differences in notions of perfect tense, which is included in past tense in Tibetan grammar. The similarities and differences of verb tenses between the two languages shed light on effects of language transfer in Tibetan EFL learners. Findings of the data reveal the potential reasons of the errors of verb form identification in English made by Tibetan EFL learners. Similarities in verb tenses such as simple present, past and future facilitate students identifying similar grammar rules, and avoid errors. The differences of verb tenses in both languages interfere in comprehending the target grammar, which can be clearly seen from the number of errors produced in perfect verb forms. Therefore, similarities bring positive language transfer in learning English, while the differences result negative language transfer. It is important to note that, from the data above, we may suggest that one's language proficiency both in mother tongue and the target language lead positive language transfer, especially in literary translation.

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