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REPORT *on the* TORRES STRAIT CREOLE PROJECT, THURSDAY ISLAND STATE HIGH SCHOOL

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▦ Abstract

This is a slightly abbreviated version of part of a report commissioned at the end of 1995 by the Queensland Department of Education, Peninsula Region, and carried out with the help of teachers at Thursday Island State High School. It analyses some formal language differences between written Standard Australian English and spoken Torres Strait Creole (the language of most of the students) as a basis for workshop writers to develop material in a form suitable for teachers. Looked at objectively, most of the students' errors in written English occur as a result of transference from their first language, or in areas of grammatical complexity which pose problems for *all* English as a Second Language learners. Certain common spelling errors seem also to be a result of transference from the creole.

The report has been fairly widely circulated and is sometimes quoted inaccurately; hence the decision to publish the formal linguistic section here. Some of the material in the report – on the languages of the region, students' language backgrounds and cultural factors influencing language choice and language mixing and issues of classroom management – has been omitted (see Shnukal, 1996; see also Morrison David, 2003). The report fulfilled its main aim of raising awareness of language issues and providing information and rationale for various language and literacy programs now operating in the region (Shopen & Hickey, 2003).

▦ Introduction

At the end of 1995, I was invited by the Queensland Department of Education, Peninsula Region, to analyse the major linguistic differences between Standard Australian English (SAE) and Torres Strait Creole (TSC), the language of the majority of the students, insofar as these affected the students' comprehension and production of written English texts. The consultancy arose in response to a request by the Thursday Island State High School's Management Committee and the brief was to:

- carry out a linguistic analysis of oral forms of TSC currently spoken by adolescents on Thursday Island;
- compare TSC linguistically with written forms of SAE;
- write a report of the findings to be used by workshop writers as a basis for developing material in a form suitable for teachers.

After further consultation, the following sources of information were used:

- informal conversations with Islander and European teachers and other education professionals at the Thursday Island State High School, Thursday Island State School and Thursday Island TAFE, and with advisors, tutors and Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) students at the School Support Centre;
- participant observation of TSC speakers on Thursday Island;
- formal analysis of written English work by Year 8-11 students.

The report was written in early 1996 and was distributed among interested parties. It raised general awareness of language issues and contributed information and rationale for initiating some language and literacy programs (e.g., Shepherd, 2003; Shopen & Hickey, 2003). The following deals at length with formal language differences, some of which are similar to those identified by the Fostering English Language in Kimberly Schools (FELIKS) program (Berry & Hudson, 1997). The report may therefore have wider application for the teaching of English to Indigenous students whose first language is not English.

▦ General context

Islander culture is still predominantly oral and all important knowledge is transmitted orally and in context. Despite the existence of written materials, dictionaries and grammars for all Islander languages, written communication is generally in English, the language of school instruction.

Only a minority of Islander high school students speak English as their first language. Many factors affect the level of students' oral and written English, and as a result their competencies vary widely. School is generally the only context in which students are expected to understand, speak and write in English. Decontextualised written material may appear to lack any practical purpose and therefore students have no incentive to try to understand it. Nor do all students necessarily expect that a given text will make sense.

Students have a greater passive knowledge of English than even 10 years ago, and this exposure will undoubtedly increase. They are also regularly exposed to a far wider range of oral language varieties on Thursday Island than in mainstream communities, including different dialects of the western island traditional language, different dialects of the creole, Standard Australian English, Non-Standard Australian English, Torres Strait English, Aboriginal English and, through television and videos, varieties of American and British English. I mention these to indicate the extraordinarily rich language mix that Islander students regularly cope with. They do this largely unconsciously: they are rarely explicitly made aware of all the different language varieties around them or taught the differences among them. However, most Islanders are highly successful language learners and have a lively interest in language that manifests itself in puns (often multilingual) and other wordplay. Most have developed strategies which allow them to appear more competent in English than is actually the case.

It should also be recognised that Non-Standard Australian English varieties and Torres Strait English have a greater influence on students' acquisition of English than does Standard Australian English, which for most students is limited to the school context. Students are more often exposed to non-standard (and therefore stigmatised) Australian English grammatical forms such as past tense "done" and "seen", than their standard forms "did" and "saw", respectively; they are more likely to hear non-standard agreement "you was/they was" than standard "you were/they were"; the non-standard plural demonstrative article "them boys" than "those boys". These are also features of Torres Strait English (Shnukal, 2001) and students tend to reproduce them in their speech and writing.

The students' *lingua franca*, Torres Strait Creole (TSC), although influenced by English, is a separate language, with a different grammar and lexicon. Because it superficially resembles English, teachers

assume that the students should be able to cope easily with English. However, students say they are continually translating from English into the creole and vice versa and are often embarrassed when called on to perform in English. Teachers with practical experience of communicating in a modern Indo-European language, which would be closer grammatically and semantically to English than English is to TSC, will recall their frustration and empathise with the difficulties faced by their students. They will not be surprised that students use the creole amongst themselves in class, to clarify instructions and explanations, to joke and to reclaim their identity. It has been claimed that to speak in a foreign language is immediately to lose 30 IQ points and half of one's sense of self.

Most beginning high school students have acquired reasonable oral mastery of basic English constructions and vocabulary, though the standard varies according to background. Written English is a different matter. Students find writing much more difficult than listening and speaking, citing difficulties with "the little words that go in the wrong place". Unstressed word endings, prepositions and auxiliary verbs tend to disappear in Australian English speech, but cannot be omitted in written work. This mismatch between oral and written English goes largely unnoticed by native literate speakers, but constitutes a problem for English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers, who are at the same time learning both English grammar and subject content from teachers who rarely model English explicitly.

Students often do not read or pronounce noun and verb endings even when they occur on the page, presumably because TSC lacks these endings and Torres Strait English variably includes them. When Islander students read back their own written work, they may not even notice their mistakes, because it reproduces their spoken English. Or they may insert word endings that are absent from their written work and, if corrected, say they that these are unimportant because the meaning is clear.

Most common errors in the students' written work can be analysed as the result of transference between TSC and English. In some ways TSC has a simpler structure than English: it has few irregularities and very little morphology, i.e., it has no endings for plural, past tense or past participle and lacks the predominantly written constructions, e.g., passive and subordinate clauses, which English gradually developed over a thousand years as a language of literacy. Essentially an oral language, TSC speakers use gesture and facial expression to communicate nuances of meaning.

In some ways, however, TSC is more complex than English. Its personal pronoun system, with three numbers (singular, dual and plural) and formal distinction between inclusive and exclusive first person pronouns, is far more complex than English; it has two ways of asking "why?", distinguishing cause from purpose; two ways of asking "how?", distinguishing manner from way; two ways of asking "which?", distinguishing humans from non-humans; it has six aspects, whereas English has only two;

its spatial grammar of location and direction have only impoverished English equivalents; it distinguishes morphologically transitive from intransitive verbs. However, while you can say anything in TSC that you can say in English and vice versa, the languages privilege different things. English, especially the English of the classroom, uses a rich vocabulary derived from Norman French, Latin and Greek; TSC uses a rich vocabulary derived from the traditional island languages to talk about the natural world and matters of cultural importance, but these generally have no place in the classroom, e.g., *kutikuti* "to dive, swim under water for a while and then surface". TSC innovates internally, usings its own resources to express Latinate vocabulary, e.g., *aute* (from "out") "to extinguish"; *pute insaid* "to insert", and Islanders delight in wordplay and in multilingual puns.

It should be emphasised that spoken and written English are not the same. Although written English is based on spoken English, different conventions apply in the choice of vocabulary and constructions, and in the organisation and sequencing of ideas. Punctuation was developed as a device to show grammatical structure: to mark possessive nouns; to make explicit the ends of clauses and sentences; and to show when a letter has been omitted from a word. From its primary purpose of making written sentence structure explicit comes its secondary purpose as an aid to intonation.

Formal differences between SAE and TSC

Many common errors in Islander students' English pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary clearly result from transference from TSC phonology, grammar and semantics. Others are typical of second language learners of English, whatever their language background.

Rather than list *all* formal differences between SAE and TSC, it seemed more profitable to discuss those areas in which the majority of problems occur. The following notes are based on an error analysis of written English work by Year 8-11 students at Thursday Island State High School and all examples are taken from their writing.

However, I should point out that it is sometimes unclear as to the precise factors which are causing some of the poorest writing. For example, in "Joey Nona wife is name Georgina Nona", it is clear that "Joey Nona" lacks the required possessive ending "-'s", a common error. But "is" might be analysed either as an attempt to add a possessive ending to "wife"; or a misspelling of "his" (for "her", a common confusion); or the student may have meant "is named" and have omitted the past participle ending, "-ed".

Phonology, pronunciation and spelling

TSC has 15 consonants, five vowels and four diphthongs, whereas English has 24 consonants, 12 vowels and eight diphthongs.

TSC Consonants:	p, b, m, t, d, n, l, r, s, z, k, g, ng, y, w
TSC Vowels:	i, e, a, o, u
TSC Diphthongs:	ei, ai, oi, au

TSC words borrowed from English changed their vowel and consonant sounds to bring them into line with TSC sound structure, e.g., *piba* from "fever", *brada* from "brother", *sos* from "church".

The full range of English fricatives and affricates (f, v, th, dh, sh, zh, ch, dj) is used variably today, especially in the TSC used by young people, who have grown more sophisticated about English usage. However, these sounds still constitute a problem both in pronunciation and spelling. Fricatives and affricates are said to be particularly difficult when two or more of them occur in the same word, e.g., sh and z in "shoes", s and z in "schools", dj and z in "judges". Students tended to mix them up and even high school written work shows some evidence of confusion:

> This place is to small to have <u>does</u> [=those] things; I don't know why people <u>tiss</u> [=tease] me for him any way; <u>brozers</u> [=brothers]; when eveary Body finish the dance there all go home to have a <u>bad</u> [=bath].

Initial aspirate h does not occur in TSC. In rapid idiomatic SAE speech, h may disappear, and absence of h is a feature of non-SAE. Since students reproduce what they hear and how they themselves pronounce words, we find such spellings as:

> Badu <u>as</u> lots of job's to do; It's small and <u>as</u> lots of things here; He took <u>is</u> friend and ran down the street; Bruno was a fat, short boy who lived with <u>is</u> Mum and Dad at Norway.

TSC has five vowels, whereas English has 12, represented by five written symbols. Students' written work reveals some confusion between English long and short vowels, especially when they are pronounced the same in unstressed position:

> [quoting teacher] "You can go and <u>seat</u> [=sit] down."; People should <u>live</u> [=leave] the poor animals alone; and now <u>his</u> [=he's] got three stitches; <u>his</u> [=he's] my friend; <u>He's</u> [=his] first name is …; I had <u>hips</u> [=heaps] of fun in my English class; Thank you for coming and <u>will</u> [=we'll] sure to see you next week; At new years day all the man drest up with coconut <u>lives</u> [=leaves]; we were play scidels [skittles] at the big <u>filled</u> [=field]; In <u>these</u> [=this] movie a group of muppets make a trip to Hollywood to follow there dream; I don't know why people <u>tiss</u> [=tease] me for him any way; everywhere in Torres kids <u>a</u> [=are] carrying sling shots to kill birds; One of the drums is in <u>are</u> [=a]

village called Keiwain; it has <u>are</u> [=a] big amount of people living there; because I can't picture <u>are</u> [=a] big woman like her running up and down the court; there <u>a</u> [=are] not many town; we <u>a</u> [=are] going to have a party; they <u>a</u> [=are] to be treat like loveing creature; when eveary Body finish the dance <u>there</u> [=they] all go home.

Written work also shows confusion in spelling words that sound the same or look superficially the same in print: "bin/being/been/bean"; "tied/tired"; "were/wear/where/we're"; "their/there/they"; "our/hour"; "two/too/to"; unstressed "have/of":

The umpire of the game <u>where's</u> [=wears] black t'shirt, black sox, black short and black shoe; In these movie a group of muppets make a trip to Hollywood to follow <u>there</u> [=their] dream; Astley were driving along stop at a ghost town <u>were</u> [=where] <u>there</u> [=they] had a fight with Doc muppet <u>were</u> [=where] animal came big and frighten them away; <u>there</u> [=their] animals; <u>hor</u> [=our] cousins; we were silly and making <u>to</u> [=too] much noise; I <u>would</u> <u>of</u> [=would have] stayed in class; I <u>should</u> <u>of</u> [=should have] done it last night.

Note that some examples of pronunciation errors given by teachers are actually examples of transfer of TSC vocabulary, e.g., "mangru" (*manggru*) for "mangrove", "someway" (*samwei*) for "somewhere".

Most importantly, the sound pattern of TSC does not permit final consonant clusters (except for -lp, -lt, -lk, -ks). Nouns borrowed from English altered their pronunciation to conform to TSC sound structure, e.g., *anis* from "ants", *kol* from "cold", *lep* from "left", *zam* from "jump". In English, however, most of the basic grammatical relations, e.g., noun plural and possessive, verb past tense and past participle, and subject-verb agreement, are signalled by adding the inflectional suffixes, "-s/-ed", which typically result in consonant clusters. It is these endings which cause most of the students' written errors. Moreover, constructions which are needed for advanced written work, e.g., passive and back-shifting, require these forms.

In normal pronunciation most SAE speakers omit one consonant from consonant clusters, e.g., "reco'nise (recognise)", "use'to (used to)", "gues''peaker (guest speaker)". Thus, English suffixes, especially when followed by a word beginning with a consonant, are often not pronounced or so faintly that they are not perceived. Since TSC does not permit final consonant clusters, pronouncing most noun and verb endings runs counter to the phonological structure of their language. TSC also has limited morphology. Grammatical features which in English are shown by inflectional suffixes, are expressed in TSC through independent markers preceding the noun or verb. Therefore, even though teachers model SAE in the classroom, explicit teaching of grammatical form is needed:

Pablo <u>use</u> <u>to</u> live on Mabuiage; my dads dad <u>use</u> <u>to</u> be chairman till his death; I also know that animals aren't <u>surpose</u> <u>to</u> be treated like dirt; because you might get <u>loss</u> by traveling in a bad wheather; our <u>guess</u> speaker.

Phonology, grammar and pronunciation have a complex interrelationship. TSC has few final consonant clusters and signals plurality, tense and aspect by analytic particles preceding the noun or verb. SAE signals grammatical relations by noun and verb inflectional endings, which are manifested in speech as final consonant clusters. However, SAE speakers tend to reduce consonant clusters, although they cannot be omitted in writing, and students do not always hear the endings. This in turn reinforces the grammatical rules the students are continually forming and which they reproduce in writing.

Writing is based on speech, but it does not faithfully reproduce speech. Many student errors in writing and spelling English are caused by reproducing in written form their ways of speaking English. High school students need to be taught the main conventions of written language which differ from spoken language and to revise some simple spelling rules, such as the use of "a/an" ("a ordinary house, a uncle"), and formation of plurals ending in -y ("storys").

▨ Grammar: Morphology and syntax

Because many sounds (especially in consonant clusters) are not normally pronounced by Australian English speakers, because the phonology of TSC permits only the clusters -lp, -lt, -lk to occur in final position, because TSC has reduced morphology compared with English, and because many grammatical relations are indicated in English by morpheme suffixes, many students have major problems with English morphology.

▨ Nouns and pronouns

Like SAE, TSC has a number of different categories of nouns and pronouns, but the categories index different kinds of distinctions in each language. Here it seemed best to focus on the major areas of difficulty.

Noun plurals

English regular nouns indicate plurality by adding the suffix "-s", e.g., "girls, boys". TSC noun plurality is shown through the use of independent grammatical markers, the definite plural article *dem* and the generic plural article *ol*, which precede the noun:

<u>Dem</u> boi plei deya ene sanbis.
The boys were playing on the beach.
<u>Ol</u> boi i sidaun wansaid lo sos.
Boys (in general) sit on one side of the church.

However, if the plural meaning is clear from the context, the articles are usually omitted:

Boi plei deya ene sanbis.
The boys were playing on the beach.
Boi i sidaun wansaid lo sos.
Boys sit on one side of the church.

Students in their spoken and written English also often omit the plural morpheme "-s", when it is clear from the context that the noun is plural:

If the <u>tourist are</u> visiting the Thursday Island; we kill <u>animal</u> up here in the Torre Straight but for good reason; people kill <u>animal</u> for experiment; inside the basket there are thick woods and <u>big</u> <u>coconut</u>; <u>one of main reason</u> I chose to create this magazine is …; they are <u>one of the main thing</u> that make the world a wonderful place; to play <u>marble</u>; or people just put them in plastic garbage <u>bag</u>; Yesterday my grandson ask me <u>all sorts of question</u>. He even ask if <u>witch</u> existed.

If a noun in TSC is preceded by a numeral beyond "one" or other quantifier, it is clearly semantically plural and there is no need for further elaboration:

tu pes
two faces
plenti pusikat
many cats
olgeda man
all the men

Thus, students tend to omit "-s" when the noun is preceded by a numeral or quantifier:

The <u>two island</u> outside of Murray is called Dauar and Waier; The <u>two bloke</u> kept on carrying on until when Jeremy said …; kick in between <u>two post</u>; plus <u>two small shop</u>; about <u>5 drum</u> of petrol; <u>nine finger</u>; there are <u>lots of song</u> written by you; not <u>many town</u>; Yam Island do not have <u>much tree</u> round the place … it only have not <u>mach hill</u> on it; <u>all the man</u>.

Irregular English plurals pose a particular problem for ESL speakers. Apart from the pair *man/pipel* ("person/people"), TSC has no irregular plural nouns, whereas English has a number of common irregular plurals. There are three main ways of forming irregular plural nouns in English:

- by changing the vowel (and the consonant in spelling but not pronunciation), e.g., "mouse/mice"; "louse/lice";
- by voicing the final consonant (and changing its spelling) and adding the plural suffix, "-s", e.g., "wife/wives"; "leaf/leaves";
- by adding the plural suffix is "-(r)en", e.g., "children".

Most of these could be taught as one-off examples, as could the Latin and Greek plurals, like "foci", "criteria" and "phenomena", if needed. The "-en" plurals appear to be a problem for some students who hypercorrect: having learned the rule of putting final "-s" to indicate plurality, they apply the rule inappropriately to irregular plural nouns:

Some of the <u>fishermens</u> goes to fish there; young <u>childrens</u>; The <u>childrens</u> read his books all over the world; it all was about the witches was trying to turn <u>every children</u> into a mouse.

Count vs mass nouns

English has two categories of common noun which cause problems for TSC speakers. The first is the count and mass (unbounded or non-count) distinction, so called because count nouns are thought of as units which can be pluralised, whereas mass nouns (e.g., "sugar", "wood", "flour", "cattle", "information", "destruction", etc.) are thought of as substance and cannot be pluralised, except with specialised meaning. Thus, "two sugars" does not mean "two grains of sugar", but "two lumps/spoonfuls of sugar". Mass nouns take the quantifiers "(how/too) much/little", whereas count nouns take "(how/too) many/few". There is no such distinction in TSC. All common nouns in TSC can be pluralised by using a number, the plural marker *dem* or a quantifer:

wan bred
one loaf of bread
tri bulmakau
three head of cattle
dem ud
pieces of wood
amas plawa
how many tins of flour

TSC speakers are often not aware of which English nouns can and cannot be pluralised and under what circumstances, and are uncertain as to the appropriate quantifier:

<u>equipments</u>; <u>informations</u>; I would like to know more about … how I can help to stop these poor <u>treatments</u> from happening; to make jackets and other <u>clothings</u>; have <u>a tea</u>; inside the basket there are thick <u>woods</u> and big coconut[s]; too <u>many</u> destruction.

Pluralia tantum

There is in English a small class of nouns which are invariably plural, e.g., "trousers", "shorts", "scissors", "glasses", "joggers", "jeans", and therefore cannot be preceded by a singular article:

The umpire of the game where's black t'shirt, black sox, black short and black shoe; he were wearing a joggers; Luke was wearing a blue jeans.

Possessive nouns

Both English and TSC indicate noun possession in two ways. English uses a prepositional phrase with "of" or adds a suffix "-s" to the possessor noun (expressed in writing as "-'s"). TSC also has two possessive constructions: a prepositional phrase with *blo* or simple juxtaposition of noun possessor + noun possessed:

> *bos blo Teliai*
> Teliai's husband/husband of Teliai
> *aus blo mai dadi*
> my father's house/the house of my father
> *Teliai bos*
> Teliai's husband/husband of Teliai
> *mai dadi aus*
> my father's house/the house of my father

Students tend to reproduce the simpler TSC possessive construction in written English:

> Sometime I go to my cousin place to play marble; my dad great granpa name Pablo Ahmat.

Definite and indefinite articles

The correct use of English articles (definite article "the" and indefinite article "a/an") is a common problem for ESL learners. TSC has four articles: definite and indefinite singular; definite and generic plural but, as noted in the section on noun plurals, they are usually omitted, unless the context requires them for clarity:

> *Ai no be eso em po da kaikai.*
> I didn't thank him for the meal.
> *Yupla luk wan gel i kam?*
> Did you see a girl approaching?
> *San i go draye dem klos kwik.*
> The sun will quickly dry the clothes.
> *Ai no sabe wiskain ol man i stap.*
> I don't know how people live.
> *Boi i prait nau.*
> Then the boy got frightened.
> *Smok i basmau.*
> The smoke vanished.
> *I gad waitman deya.*
> There's a whiteman there.
> *Em i gad big bois.*
> He has a loud voice.

When students write in English, they sometimes omit the article altogether, where English grammar requires it, or use the indefinite article inappropriately:

> one of [the] main reason I chose to create this magazine is ...; Luke ... start to go to the English school; If the tourist are visiting the Thursday Island; Boigu Island is also [a] very small island; We had [an] exam to complete; because you might get loss by traveling in a bad wheather; he were wearing a joggers; Luke was wearing a blue jeans; The novel is about a witch who ... act like an ordinary ladies; Then they went to Hollywood and became a movie stars.

Pronouns

The pronominal system of TSC is more complex than English, with more distinctions made: between singular, dual and plural pronouns; and between inclusive and exclusive first person dual and plural pronouns:

	Singular	Dual	Plural
1 (incl.)	*ai/mi* I/me	*yumi* we/us	*yumpla* we/us
1 (excl.)		*mitu* we/us	*mipla* we/us
2	*yu* you	*yutu* you	*yupla* you
3	*em* he/she/it him/her/it his/her/its	*demtu* they/them	*dempla* they/them

High school students do not appear to have difficulty in using the simpler English forms, except in one instance. TSC uses a single pronoun *em* to express the seven different English forms for third person nominative, accusative and possessive pronoun:

> *Em ya kam.*
> He's coming this way.
> *Em blo go.*
> She has to go.
> *Em de ran go.*
> It (the cat) is running away.
> *Yu gibi em da buk!*
> Give him/her the book!
> *po em klas*
> for her/his class

This is probably why some students experience difficulty with the gender of the English third person singular pronoun:

> The novel was about witches and an old lady with his grandson. The old lady kept on telling him grandson about witches; The novel was about a little boy and her grandmother.

Verbs

The general comments made above about the problems many students have with English morphology apply to the production of verb forms. English verb tenses and tense mixing within the same sentence were mentioned by all the teachers as a source of major difficulty for their students. TSC verbs lack morphological endings, with the exception of the transitive marker, which in any case is tending to disappear in adolescent speech and does not occur in English. Thus, English verb morphology, i.e., the verb inflectional endings "-s/-ed/-ing" cause many of the problems students have with English verbs and verbal constructions.

Verb tenses

English is conventionally said to have three tenses: present; past; future (though strictly speaking the English future is not a tense but a modal construction). When the present tense form is the same as the base form of the verb, the students do not seem to have particular difficulties. However, they do have difficulties with irregular verb paradigms, including "be" and "have", the verbs which are used to form the progressive and perfect aspects, respectively.

Future tense

The English future tense is formed by placing the modal "will" before the base form. It poses few problems structurally, since it parallels the TSC future construction, which uses the future tense marker *go* before the verb:

Demtu go luk pamle blo demtu.
They will visit their family.
Mitu go kam timora.
We will come tomorrow.
Ai go meke yu swim apta.
I'll bath you later.

However, if the event is clearly in the future, TSC speakers may omit the *go*:

Mitu kam timora.
We will come tomorrow.
Ai meke yu swim apta.
I'll bath you later.
Ai luk dempla bambai.
Later on I'll go and watch them.

Written English, however, generally requires future tense when future time is meant. Note, however, that English speakers often omit "will" when the future context is clear, e.g., "Tomorrow we leave for the beach"; "He comes back in an hour". Note also that SAE speakers often reduce the l sound to a w sound in sentences like "I'll go", or even omit it altogether, so that again language

learners may receive unpredictable and unsystematic input from which to form their rules of English grammar:

John get here as soon as he can.

Students who omit "will", where it is required by the rules of English grammar, do so mainly because of transference from TSC grammar and unsystematic SAE models. Therefore, teachers should not conclude that students "don't have a future tense and don't seem to understand the concept of future". In fact, the TSC conjunctions meaning "if, when, as soon as" require the future construction when future time is implied (as do many other languages), whereas English requires present tense:

Ip yu go spik, ai no go gibi yu mabol.
If you tell, I won't give you the marbles.
Ip san i go straik, i go draye dem klos kwik.
If the sun comes out, it will quickly dry the clothes.
Wen mitu go kam big man, mitu go sabe langgus.
When we become adults, we'll know our language.

and this is mirrored in their English:

We will get in touch with you later, as soon as we will finish what you needed.

Past tense

TSC past tense is formed by placing the past tense marker *bin* or *bi* before the verb:

Demtu bin go aus apta.
They went home.
Ai bin luk diswan bipo.
I saw this before.
Yestadei ai bi gad piba.
Yesterday I had a fever.
Mislam bi kaikai olgeda pis.
Mislam has eaten all the fish.

Although there are no examples in the written work I looked at, I was told that some students do write, e.g., "I be go"; "you be go".

If it is clear from the context that the event occurred in the past, TSC speakers may omit the past tense marker:

Demtu go aus.
They went home.
Ai luk diswan bipo.
I saw this before.
Yestadei ai gad piba.
Yesterday I had a fever.
Mislam kaikai olgeda pis.
Mislam has eaten all the fish.
Wen wi go deya, bambai plein i kam.
After we got there, the plane arrived.

Students variably use the unmarked form of the English verb where English grammar requires a past tense form, especially when it is clear from the context that the event referred to occurred in the past:

> he <u>dive</u> for pearl or crayfish hunting; Georgina mum <u>pass away</u> last week on the 17-3-95; At new years day all the man drest up with coconut lives and <u>carry</u> baskets; Only ones [once] I <u>get</u> hit; Once my Dad <u>ask</u> if he could look after our dog; My family <u>move</u> there because my grandpa <u>move</u> there; Last time I <u>hide</u> my key in the dining room and I <u>can't</u> find it; My little brother took the key and <u>throw</u> it someway in the garden; Yesterday my grandson <u>ask</u> me all sorts of question; He was born in Norway and <u>shift</u> to England; Bruno was my favourite in the movie he always <u>make</u> me laugh because he always <u>eat</u> foods; Nothing else <u>happen</u> for the rest of the afternoon.

Some students who have learned the rule of past tense formation in English, hypercorrect and add "-ed" inappropriately:

> he had spilt his head open and <u>bleeded</u> to death; Jim Henson <u>camed</u> up with a most fantastic and adventurous movie; Dian Fossey <u>keeped</u> a diary; She slipped, fell and <u>hited</u> her head on a desk. (Two students wrote "hited", despite the written instructions to recast as narrative: "You slipped, fell and hit your head on a desk".)

or use past participles as past tense forms, a grammatical feature of non-SAE and TSE, e.g., "we also <u>seen</u> a picture".

Thus, what teachers see as "an avoidance of the past tense" results from three main factors:

- English past tense is usually formed by adding the suffix "-ed", whereas TSC uses the preverbal past tense marker *bin* and does not change the main verb;
- the "-ed" is not always present in SAE speech, so that input is variable;
- in TSC the past tense is not used if the time context is clear; many common one-syllable English verbs have irregular past tenses, which must be learned individually, e.g., "ate", "bled", "bought", "came", "caught", "cut", "did", "drew", "drove", "fell", "felt", "flew", "forbade", "found", "gave", "got", "had", "heard", "hid", "hit", "hung", "kept", "knew", "lay", "lost", "made", "put", "ran", "said", "sat", "saw", "set", "slept", "sold", "stood", "thought", "threw", "was/were", "went".

Verb tense mixture

Teachers commented on the mixture of tenses in the same sentence. In TSC, once the time reference has been established in the first clause, speakers may or may not choose to use the same tense in following clauses. The tendency is simply to use the base form of the verb:

> *Ai bin ride buk wen em kam.*
> I was reading a book when he arrived.
> *Ip ai bi sabe, ai meke kek.*
> If I had known, I would have baked a cake.

The following may be caused by transference from TSC or by the difficulties with writing past tense forms outlined above:

> Suddenly he <u>noticed</u> that strange people carrying cameras and running through the streets, he <u>decide</u> that he would check it out; That <u>was</u> very funny because I <u>can't</u> picture are [a] big woman like her running up and down the court.

Occasionally students will hypercorrect. Having been taught to add "-ed" to verbs referring to past actions, and wanting to distinguish the time reference of the different verbs, they produce sentences like the following:

> when they <u>arrived</u> on Thursday Island Willie Nelson <u>will take</u> them on the bus to show them around T.I.; Every body <u>have</u> to be in the house when they <u>came</u> out; If you <u>want</u> to go there it <u>took</u> half an hour on the plane.

Verb aspects

"Aspect" is the technical term used to refer to the way a language indicates the type of event, state or relation conveyed by the verb relative to the passing of time, e.g., whether it has been completed or is still in progress, whether it occurred once, was repeated or habitual, etc.

TSC (like the Slavic languages) emphasises aspect over tense distinctions. It has six core aspects: iterative, cessative, habitual, inceptive, continuative, and perfective. English has two aspects, progressive and perfective, which are formed using the auxiliary verbs, "be" and "have", respectively, with the main verb in the appropriate participle form, i.e., "be walking" (progressive) and "have walked" (perfective).

Progressive aspect

TSC does not have progressive aspect, although the preverbal particle *de* has something of the sense of the progressive:

> *Pele de slip.*
> Pele <u>is sleeping</u>.
> *Pizin de plai.*
> A bird <u>is flying</u>.

Usually, however, the context makes clear that the action is progressing at the time of speaking and the base verb form is used:

Ai wase tit.
I'm brushing my teeth.
Em rabe an blo em.
She's rubbing her arm.
Wasmara yu krai?
Why are you crying?
Wiswei da krik i ran?
Which way is the creek flowing?

Students, who are drilled in the use of the progressive aspect from primary school, are nevertheless not always sure when to use it and may omit either the required form of auxiliary "be" or the "-ing" ending on the main verb:

we happy to helping you out; We should take care of our animals and not killing or torturing them; So really is that all you [are] going to be doing; I [was] closing up and went to turn off the airconditioner; I rember one time we were play[ing] scidels [skittles] at the big filled [field]; I am eagerly wait[ing] on your reply.

Perfective aspect

The perfective aspect in English is constructed with forms of the auxiliary "have" plus the past participle of the main verb. TSC perfective aspect is constructed with the perfective aspect marker *pinis* plus the base verb form. *Pinis* may precede or follow the main verb:

Bel i pinis go.
The bell has gone.
Ai pinis pute suka lo ti blo yu.
I've put sugar in your tea.
Em krai pinis.
He's stopped crying.
Demtu meke aus blo demtu pinis.
They have built their house.

The English regular past participle is identical with the past tense, i.e., formed by adding the suffix "-ed". It likewise tends to disappear in SAE speech, especially in three consonant cluster endings, e.g., "asked", "helped". Irregular past participles of common one-syllable verbs, e.g., "been", "bled", "bought", "caught", "come", "cut", "done", "drawn", "driven", "eaten", "fallen", "felt", "flown", "forbidden", "found", "given", "gone", "got", "had", "heard", "hidden", "hit", "hung", "kept", "known", "laid", "lost", "made", "put", "run", "said", "sat", "seen", "set", "slept", "sold", "stood", "thought", "thrown", must be learned individually, since they are not necessarily the same as the past tense forms. The past participle is important, because it is used as a noun qualifier (see following section) and in the passive construction:

Please don't be ashame; because you might get loss by traveling in a bad wheather; he was bit delay this morning; a world renown speaker; I was stupid and shame to go up there.

At times there is hypercorrection, adding the past participle suffix to an irregular past participle:

It is writtened by Roald Dahl.

Thus, student difficulties in correctly reproducing English verb forms (a notoriously complex aspect of English grammar) result from a combination of phonological, morphological and transference phenomena. It in no way signals an inability on the part of the students to grasp the concepts of past and future.

Past participles in noun phrases

Past participles are also used in English noun phrases and in the passive construction. English noun phrases may consist of past participle + noun, e.g., "mashed potato", "blocked pipe". TSC, which lacks a past participle form, juxtaposes base form of the verb + noun:

mabus puteita
mashed potato
blok paip
blocked pipe

Guest, distinguish guests, ladies and gentlemen; and the first publish book was "Kiss Kiss".

Note that the "-ed" ending is usually not pronounced when it becomes part of a three consonant cluster, and SAE is beginning to omit it also, e.g., "mash potato", "mince meat".

▧ Subject-verb agreement

English grammar requires number agreement between singular subject and tensed verb. This is shown by adding the suffix "-s" to present tense verbs, e.g., "She/the girl goes" vs "They/the girls go", or using special third person singular forms of "be" ("is/was") and "have" ("has"). TSC verbs do not take endings to indicate the singularity or plurality of the noun or pronoun subject:

Em wande plei lo dem nada boi.
He wants to play with the other boys.
Dempla wande plei lo dem nada boi.
They want to play with the other boys.

Therefore, the English system is more complicated in this respect than TSC, which has no rules of agreement. Students have learned the English rules, but sometimes confuse them, even within the same sentence:

our island look like a dugong; you have to do as it ask you to; it take you 15 minutes; Every body have to be in the house when they came out; The umpires also is control of the game; When it

rains, the Boigu airport sometimes get big logs and tree in the ways; So today some periods was very fun and some periods wasn't enjoyable; he were wearing a joggers; I really like to follow people that doesn't do the wrong thing, but always do the right thing; When the boat reaches the wharf then everyone comes up and walk on to the wharf; Usually when tourists comes on TI they get to see everything; it all was about the witches was trying to turn every children into a mouse; one person have to go throw the dice; The girls was on the other basketball court; Animals doesn't like to be left alone; People who goes on trips.

Occasionally students hypercorrect, adding an "-s" inappropriately:

> She will tells us more about animals right because she know's more.

Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs do not pose particular difficulties for the students. TSC usage parallels English usage, with adjectives preceding nouns and adverbs following verbs. The exception to SAE usage is that most TSC adverbs have the same form as adjectives (as do many non-SAE varieties):

> *rap win*
> rough wind
> *kwik sapa*
> quick dinner
> *tok rap*
> speak rudely
> *sidaun kwik*
> sit down quickly

Comparative adjectives

In TSC the comparative adjective construction is *mo +* adjective + *lo/den* + noun:

> *Yumpla mo smat lo/den em.*
> We're cleverer than he.
> *Dis stik i mo strong lo/den datwan.*
> This stick is stronger than that one.

which is close enough to the English construction to pose few problems, except in the following few examples:

> It's is more bigger; because I am a little bit short than the others; smaller then the other islands.

Prepositions

Prepositions in any language are one of the most difficult areas for learners to master. However, because they are small words and rarely interfere with the meaning of a text, they are usually not given prominence. The students themselves say that prepositions are not difficult for them, but teachers disagree.

TSC has 24 prepositions, all based on English, though the meanings are not necessarily identical. Transference occurred in the case of *we* (from "where") "with"; *lo* (from "along") "on, at, with, to, by"; *po* (from "for") "on behalf of, about, in … time":

> They can go visit it the "green hill" where [=with] the rainforest and the cannons; Thursday Island is right on top of Australia, the little island where [=with] other small islands around it; At [=on] new years day; I only hade brothers on [=with] me; cruelty on [=to] animals; those *alag* came and throw big sticks to [=at] us; if you want to go on [=by] plane it take you 15 minutes or so; We always travel to Yam island with [=by] dinghy; The story happened at [=in] England; at [=in] Norway; they also … work on [=at] ordinary jobs; he died at [=on] November 1990 by [=at] the age of seventy-four; I don't know why people tiss me for [=about] him any way; which will be held at Cairns for only two days [=in only two days time]; The animals didn't do any harm for [=to] the people that are killing them.

More difficult is the correct choice of prepositions governed by an adjective, verb, or the passive rule. In TSC the choice is limited to *lo, po, prom*. (One teacher commented that the most-used prepositions are "for" and "from"):

> *zeles lo*
> jealous of
> *glad po*
> happy at
> *prait po*
> frightened of
> *tayat po*
> tired of
> *wail po*
> angry with/at
> *prait prom*
> frightened for

Transference from TSC can be seen in the following:

> we have to be very careful from all kind of dangers; Watch out from witches folks; a young man was scabbing through new garbage that was recently throw out from the neighbours.

Clauses

Every grammatical English clause has two basic components, subject and predicate, both of which are obligatory. In TSC the subject is optional in existential and impersonal sentences, but obligatory in equational, descriptive and full verb sentences. Therefore, the students have an implicit knowledge of the notions of subject and predicate, which could serve as the basis for explicit instruction about clause structure.

Here I shall deal briefly with seven types of main clauses which give difficulty to the students: copula; existential; modal; conditional; passive; negative; interrogative.

Copula clauses

TSC, in common with many languages, has no copula or linking verb. In TSC equational, descriptive and impersonal sentences do not contain a linking verb, whereas such sentences in English require some form of the verb <u>be</u> to join subject and predicate:

> *Saiki boi blo Kemuel.*
> Saiki <u>is</u> Kemuel's son.
> *Demtu redi nau.*
> They <u>are</u> ready now.
> *I prapa slaik ya.*
> It <u>is</u> really boring here.

All such sentences in TSC can be put into the future or past tense by using the tense markers, *bin* and *go*, but even then no copula is required:

> *Yu go prapa ol man.*
> You <u>will</u> <u>be</u> a very old man.
> *Olgeda dempla bin deya.*
> They <u>were</u> all there.
> *I go kol timora.*
> It <u>will</u> <u>be</u> cold tomorrow.

Some students variably omit the copula "be" in their spoken and written English:

> because it [<u>is</u>] peaceful;Thursday Island [<u>is</u>] right up the tip of Australia and it is really small; you have to do as it ask you to but if it [<u>is</u>] correct then do what it ask you to; my dad great granpa name [<u>is</u>] Pablo Ahmat; we [<u>are</u>] happy to helping you out; Thank you for coming and will [=we'll] [<u>be</u>] sure to see you next week.

A special case occurs in existential clauses, which in English begin with "there is/are/was/were". In rapid speech, "there are" is usually elided and the second word disappears. Again students tend to reproduce in writing what they hear from teacher, e.g., "<u>There</u> [=<u>there are</u>] two teams in the game".

Existential clauses

Existential clauses predicate the existence of some entity. TSC existential clauses begin with *i gad* + noun and may take past or future tense markers; English existential clauses begin with "there" + some form of the verb "be" + noun phrase:

> *I gad ti deya.*
> There <u>is</u> tea there.
> *I gad tu bed ya.*
> There <u>are</u> two beds here.
> *I bi gad tumas man.*
> There <u>were</u> too many people.
> *I go gad teibel.*
> There <u>will</u> <u>be</u> tables.

TSC *gad* also has the meaning of perfective "have", which may account for the following example:

> on Yam <u>it</u> <u>have</u> [=there is] I.B.I.S. plus two small shop.

In general, however, students do not have difficulties with constructing English existential clauses.

Modal clauses

Modality refers to the way the grammar of a language expresses the contrast between what is and what is not fact. In SAE, modality is commonly expressed by the use of modal verbs, e.g., "can", "could", "may", "might", "must", "shall", "should", "will", "would", followed by the untensed verb. (Some English dialects include "ought", "need", "dare" among modal verbs.) TSC has a number of modal constructions, including six modal verbs, five borrowed from English, i.e., *kan* "can't", *kin* "can", *mas* "have to, must" *spostu* "should have (but didn't)", *sud* "should". These can be followed by present, past or future tense verbs:

> *Dempla sud lesen prapa.*
> They <u>should</u> <u>listen</u> properly.
> *Yu mas go painem.*
> You <u>will</u> <u>have</u> <u>to</u> find it.
> *I spostu bi gad man deya.*
> There <u>were</u> <u>supposed</u> <u>to</u> be people there (but there weren't).
> *Yu sud bi strete me, wen ai bin smol.*
> You <u>should</u> <u>have</u> <u>corrected</u> me, when I was little.

Because of the closeness in meaning, modals are not generally a problem for students, except when they use a modal construction with a tensed verb, but they need to be taught that "can" and "must" become "be able to" and "have to", respectively, when they follow another modal verb:

> he <u>had</u> <u>must</u> <u>of</u> slipped; Can't you tell the boss I'<u>ll</u> <u>can</u> <u>get</u> <u>soon</u> <u>finished</u>; I'll tell him <u>you'll</u> <u>can</u> <u>make</u> <u>it</u>; A cricket match <u>may</u> <u>consists</u> of one or two innings

by each team; She <u>will</u> <u>tells</u> us more about animals right; Eddie said to my brother that he better not tease or Eddie <u>would</u> <u>shot</u> him.

Conditional clauses

The conditional mood in English is shown by the use of the modal verb "would" + untensed verb, e.g., "I would leave", "they would go". In speech, "would" is usually reduced to "'d", e.g., "I'd leave", "they'd go", and disappears when the following verb begins with a consonant. There is no conditional construction in TSC, the meaning being clear from the context, and some students have difficulties with conditional clauses in English:

I['<u>d</u>] rather write my assignment out not type; But I like my English class but I['<u>d</u>] appreciate it if we watch video more often; Now I['<u>d</u>] like to welcome Miss Blanchard.

Passive clauses

The English passive construction is derived from a simple transitive clause, i.e., a clause with a subject and object. It is used for a number of stylistic effects and is common in academic writing. It does not change the meaning of the original clause but it does change the relationship between the subject and object. Any English transitive clause can be made passive by mechanically rearranging its elements, e.g., "The editor wrote a letter" becomes "A letter was written by the editor". The passive rule makes the original object, "letter", the subject of the new passive clause, and the original subject, "editor", the object of a prepositional phrase governed by "by". The auxiliary "be" is kept in the original tense and the main verb becomes a past participle, thus: "A letter was written by the editor".

TSC, like many other languages, has no passive construction. However, it does have a kind of "pseudo passive", sometimes called the "receptive" construction, which is used to avoid having to say who or what carried out the action of the verb. This construction is like an English passive without the "by" phrase and the complicated verb structure of auxiliary "be" + past participle. It consists of a subject noun and a transitive verb in its base form:

Da biliz <u>mas klin</u>.
The village <u>must be cleaned up</u>.
Da dans i <u>bin kansil</u>.
The dance <u>was cancelled</u>.
Teibel i <u>go spoil</u>.
The tables <u>will be damaged</u>.
Dis man i <u>no bin okadikes</u> prapa.
This man <u>wasn't counselled</u> properly before marriage.

The students' problems in using the passive construction arise from omission of some form of "be", lack of knowledge of the correct past participle form, and use of a preposition other than "by":

they <u>called</u> *alag*; This village <u>is call</u> Sigabadu; it <u>is look after</u> by the Noahs family; It should <u>be stop</u> strait away; or people just put them in plastic garbage bag and then <u>being thrown</u> into the sea; How will the design <u>being decorated</u>?; The equipment <u>need</u> in a touch football games are two things; a young man was scabbing through new garbage that <u>was</u> recently <u>throw</u> out <u>from</u> the neighbours; they <u>were kill</u> for meat; His head <u>was bash</u> and he died at November 1990; It <u>was</u> first <u>publish</u> in the year 1983.

However, what was noticeable in much of the work is that a student may have mastered a particular construction and yet not necessarily reproduce it even in the same sentence:

I also know that animals <u>aren't surpose to be treated</u> like dirt that they <u>a to be treat</u> like loveing creature.

Negative clauses

Most negative clauses in TSC are formed by inserting the negative particle *no* before the verb. Other negative particles, *neba* and *nomo*, may also be used in past tense and future tense clauses, respectively, but are not required by TSC grammar. *No* must also be inserted in any clause containing a negative indefinite pronoun, e.g., *nobodi* "nobody", *nating* "nothing", *nowei* "nowhere". A similar rule of "double negation" exists in most European languages and in some non-SAE dialects, but not in SAE:

I <u>no</u> gad <u>nobodi</u> po kam.
There <u>isn't anyone</u> else still to come.
There's <u>no-one</u> else still to come.
Ai <u>no</u> spik <u>nating</u>.
I <u>didn't</u> say <u>anything</u>.
I said <u>nothing</u>.

The rule of double negation is sometimes used by students:

he <u>couldn't</u> see <u>nothing</u> accept a big green frog sitting on a hill;

but more of a problem was the interaction of the auxiliary "do" and negation:

I didn't want to go to school, but <u>didn't realised</u> that it was my birthday; They <u>didn't attacked</u> her; We <u>didn't only learned</u> about gorillas; I think inside I

don't deserved this kind of thing; Sometimes he keep them in cages and not feed them.

Interrogative clauses

English interrogative clauses are formed by complicated grammatical rules. TSC, on the other hand, distinguishes interrogative from non-interrogative clauses simply by raising the voice at the end of the clause or using a question-word at the beginning:

I gad sos we dis strit?
Is there a church in this street?
Yu go sake kaikai po pig?
Are you going to feed the pig?
Yu no swim yet?
Haven't you had a shower yet?
I bin apen diskain?
Did it turn out that way?
Wataim yu go go?
When will you leave?
Weya em i kam prom?
Where does he come from?

or, when the speaker expects wa "yes" for an answer, by adding the interrogative particles *a* or *au* at the end of the clause. This construction is similar to the Queensland sentence-final "eh" with falling intonation:

Yu no laik em a?
Don't you like him?
Em go timora au?
Is she leaving tomorrow?

While most students are familiar with the rules of English interrogative clauses, they occasionally have problems when a form of "do" must be inserted after an initial interrogative word like "how?", "how many?", "when?", etc. In the following examples, students have used the TSC interrogative construction:

How big you want it to be?; How many plants you want us to plant?; what time of the day you would like to start?;

or a mixture of interrogative and statement:

Is that's all that you want us to do?

▨ Conjunctions and clause subordination

Six subordinating conjunctions, "because", "instead of", "when", "what", "who", "which", were used in the students' written work. Coordinating conjunctions were much more common: "and", "but", "then", "after that", "so". Although TSC has 11 subordinating

conjunctions based on English conjunctions and expressing time, cause, condition and purpose, these are rarely used. TSC speakers prefer to juxtapose related clauses without overt grammatical connection, the semantic connection being evident from the context:

Yo go zam tumas, leg blo yu go brok.
[If] you jump around too much, you'll break your leg.
Koknat i kamdaun, i kese yu.
[If] a coconut falls, it will hit you.
Em go wase mi, em go wandem bambai.
She'll watch me (eating) and [as a result] afterwards she'll want some.

TSC influence on subordinate conjunctions is shown in the following passage. The relevant TSC conjunctions are *insted* "instead of", which introduces a full clause, and *wen* "when, while":

Insted em go Danle, em i kam diswei.
Instead of going to Darnley, he came here.

so that instead you and your relations have to carry your bags home, you put your bags at the back of the truck and you just have to walk home when the truck carries your bags home.

Subordinate time clauses in TSC require *wen* (from "when") to follow an initial time conjunction or noun phrase:

Ebritaim wen em kam, em graule mi.
Whenever he comes, he tells me off.

and students often transfer this construction to English:

The last time when I chucked out my rubbish; every time when holiday comes.

Constructing subordinated interrogative clauses is also difficult for students, since in TSC neither the main nor subordinate clause changes the order of elements. Students learn the difficult English rules of asking questions (see above) but not how to embed them in other sentences:

I don't know what do my pals think.

Thus, the construction (but not comprehension) of subordinate clauses poses problems for students, who prefer to avoid them. There are a number of TSC and English constructions in which particular kinds of verbs require special kinds of subordinate clauses, as do clauses governed by prepositions. However, the constructions are not the same in both languages and need to be taught explicitly, along with the basic English subordinating clause strategies and conjunctions for expressing time (e.g., "after", "as soon as", "before", "once", "until", "when",

"while"), place (e.g., "where"), cause (e.g., "because", "since"), condition (e.g., "although", "if", "unless"), result (e.g., "so that"), purpose (e.g., "so that", "so as to", "in order that/to") and relation (e.g., "who", "which", "that").

Relative clauses

Sometimes called adjective clauses, relative clauses are introduced in TSC by *we* and retain a pronoun "trace" of the original object noun phrase which has been relativised. Sometimes *we* is omitted (as it also can be in English when the object has been relativised):

> *Yu baye tiket po eniting we yu wandem.*
> You buy a ticket for anything that you want.
> *Ai lukraun mai klos ai bin luzim.*
> I looked for my dress (that) I had lost.

Students appear to have mastered the English relative clause construction, which is a difficult one for English language learners. One student, however, had difficulty in choosing the correct relative pronoun and retained the pronoun "trace" as does TSC:

> Jeremy wanted somebody who which he would tell him his problems and secrets.

Clauses governed by verbs of perception, e.g., "feel", "hear", "notice", "see", "watch"

In one kind of English subordinate clause construction following verbs of perception, the verb of the subordinate clause adds the "-ing" suffix. (Another possible subordinate construction with perception verbs begins with "that" and takes a full verb, but these have a different meaning.) In TSC such constructions do not require any change to the subordinate verb:

> *Ai bi luk wan man de stanap.*
> I saw a man standing there.
> *Yupla lesen da bot i kam?*
> Did you hear the boat approaching?

Students have some trouble with these constructions and with choosing the correct form of the subordinate verb:

> I see lots of tourists comes here.

or they may confuse the two kinds of clauses:

> Suddenly he noticed that strange people carrying cameras and running through the streets.

Clauses governed by verbs of permission, e.g., "allow", "let", "permit"

In TSC verbs of permission require the subordinate conjunction *po*:

> *Em no lau po go deya.*
> He's not allowed to go there.
> *Demtu no lau po kaikai totol.*
> Neither of them is permitted to eat turtle.

In English, however, these verbs require an object and an untensed verb. Students sometimes hypercorrect: having been taught to use past tense verbs for past time meaning, they generalise this rule to inappropriate contexts:

> Mr James let us played the guitar

Clauses governed by verbs of reporting, e.g., "say", "think", "know"

In English, verbs of reporting demand a grammatical rule known as Backshifting. After main verbs of knowing, saying or thinking in the past tense, subordinate clause verbs must be "backshifted" into either past or pluperfect tense form, depending on the tense of the original clause. Thus, if the original clause was "I like eggs", then a possible subordinated backshifted sentence is: "John said (that) he liked eggs"; if the original clause was "I once liked eggs", the new sentence will be "John said (that) he had once liked eggs". This causes problems even for competent ESL speakers. TSC does not have this rule. Like most other languages, it retains the tense of the original clause as the tense of the subordinate verb. Note that the present tense in the subordinate clause below indicates the belief, "the world is flat"; if it were a past tense verb, it would indicate the belief, "the world was once flat (but is no longer)":

> *Dempla oltaim tingbaut da wol i plat.*
> They used to believe that the world was flat.

> in the second period Mrs Hallewell told us we can't go cause we were silly and making to much noise; Then she went on and told them what time they'll come; Once my Dad ask if he could look after our dog while we're on holiday.

Purpose clauses

Other problems occur in purpose clauses. When a TSC subordinate clause expresses a purpose (to do something with the purpose of achieving an outcome), the conjunction *po* must be used in the sense of "(in order) to/in order that/so that":

Ai go singaut Ada po em kam.
I'll go and [=in order to] tell Ada to come.
Mitu go stap po tok lo dempla.
We'll stay [=in order to] talk to them.

An echo of this construction occurs in some written work:

we can go to the playground <u>for</u> [=in order to] play football; people kill animal <u>for</u> [=in order to] experiment (although the target here might be "for experiments").

Verb chaining

TSC has a construction called "verb chaining" or "verb serialisation", found in many African languages and some dialects of English. This consists of a sequence of two or more main verbs juxtaposed without conjunctions. In TSC this construction occurs with stance verbs, e.g., *stanap* "stand", *sidaun* "sit", the two basic movement verbs, *kam* "to come" and *go* "to go", and *trai* "to try". SAE uses a progressive participle with stance verbs; the coordinate conjunction "and" plus simple verb with "come" and "go"; and either of these or an infinitive verb with "try":

Mipla <u>stanap</u> ya <u>tok</u>.
We'<u>re</u> <u>standing</u> here <u>talking</u>.
Demtu <u>sidaun</u> longtaim <u>wet</u>.
They both <u>sat</u> for a long time <u>waiting</u>.
Da bot i <u>kam</u> <u>anka</u> ya.
The boat <u>came</u> <u>and</u> <u>anchored</u> here.
<u>Go</u> <u>elpe</u> ate!
<u>Go</u> <u>and</u> <u>help</u> your grandfather!
Yu <u>trai</u> <u>spik</u> gen!
<u>Try</u> <u>and/to</u> <u>say/saying</u> that again!

Students variably use the TSC verb chaining construction rather than the English conjoined construction following "go":

They can <u>go</u> <u>visit</u> it the "green hill"; Then <u>try</u> <u>see</u> if the car and the light bulb works; one person have to <u>go</u> <u>throw</u> the dice.

▣ Vocabulary

The rich written vocabulary of English, largely of Anglo-Saxon, Norman French, Latin and Greek origin, causes many problems in comprehension and production for students. TSC prefers to innovate by:

● borrowing from English, including varieties of American and Aboriginal English. This has always been the most common source of words. English words borrowed into TSC during its early development have tended to extend their meanings, e.g., *kese* (from English "catch") can mean "to take, hold, catch, grasp, seize, grab, reach, arrive at, get, pick up, understand, learn, embrace";

● using its own internal resources, e.g., *big win* (from "big wind") "cyclone", *smol slip* (from "small sleep") "nap", *ausaid* (from "outside") "exterior", *poldaun seya* (from "fall down chair") "collapsible chair";

● borrowing from the traditional island languages, e.g., *eskos* "click", *kuridh eya* (lit. "singed hair") "frizzy hair", *mabus puteita* "mashed potato". This is now the least popular source of borrowing. Words of island language origin borrowed into TSC have tended to reduce their meanings.

Thus, the view that TSC has a limited number of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, is valid up to a point, especially when we compare TSC vocabulary with the hundreds of thousands of English words listed in large dictionaries. Islanders say that in TSC "there are four meanings for one word, not like English, and you understand the word's meaning from its context". Nevertheless, it is possible to say anything in TSC that you can in English and vice versa and Islanders take delight in "breaking down" the long words of English and finding simpler synonyms.

Another problem for TSC speakers of English arises from the need to learn different forms for noun, verb, or adjective, whereas TSC has only one form, e.g., *sik* may mean either "sick" or "sickness"; *blok* means either "blockage", "blocked" or "to block". I think this is the reason for the preference for invariant forms, which may alternate with morphologically expanded and correct forms within the same student's text:

it was <u>very</u> <u>fun</u> ... That was <u>very</u> <u>funny</u>; Today was so <u>fun</u>; we didn't do <u>any</u> <u>thing</u> <u>fun</u>.

This "lexical multifunctionality" is a feature of creoles, with their reduced morphology. It is also to an extent a feature of English, which has reduced morphology compared with other European languages, e.g., "clean" as noun ("I'll give it a good clean"), verb ("I will clean the bathroom") or adjective ("The bathroom is now very clean"). Usually, however, English makes morphological distinctions in word category, e.g., "width/to widen/widened", "extent/extension/to extend/extended".

Thus, an important issue is the acquisition of new, especially Latinate, vocabulary, which constitutes a specialised technical classroom jargon, and which students consider unnecessary for the communication of meaning. Even when students consult dictionaries to choose words for essays, their limited experience in reading means that they use them inappropriately. One example given to me was "secluded", with a dictionary meaning of "tucked away", used of a person stuck in a room with poor ventilation.

While the vocabulary used in the written work I looked at was quite restricted, I found only a few minor

instances of calquing from TSC into English, e.g.,"got up from bed" meaning "got out of bed" (from *gerap prom bed*);"when I didn't born" meaning "when I wasn't born" (from *ai no bon yet*); "Sorry one". Most of the transfer involves choosing a slightly inappropriate English translations of a TSC word, although the meaning is clear:

- "stay" (one translation of *stap* "to remain in a place for some time, to stay, to live") as in: I was born there and bought up there and my family <u>stay</u> [=lived] there for a long time;
- "say" (one translation of *spik* "to say, tell") as in: One of my friends <u>said to</u> [=told] another friend about my hideout;
- "come" (one translation of *kam* "to come, become") as in: were [=where] animal <u>came</u> [=became] big;
- "school" (one translation of *skul*, which can be noun "school" or verb "to go to school") as in: Mux doesn't <u>school</u> [=go to school] up here he goes to school at St. Augustin's;
- "too" (one translation of *tu*, which in negative sentences means "either") as in: First period we had maths which wasn't great, then we had typing which wasn't great <u>too</u> [=either].

Idiom

Even when ESL students manage to cope with new and more complex vocabulary, they still have difficulties with idiom, the non-literal use of language. Even when every word is known, certain phrases cannot be understood in a literal way. Examples of idiomatic expressions which puzzled students were:"to rain cats and dogs";"to go to the dogs"; "to throw in the towel"; "to be game for/to do something" – "There's no game in this book", they objected.

Idiomatic expressions usually pass unnoticed by native English speakers, unless they are used for comic effect, e.g.,"The rebel MP Graeme Campbell finds himself in the soup and gets himself canned". But students' unfamiliarity with them can interfere with their learning and reinforce their lack of confidence in English.

Punctuation

Symptomatic of the students' unfamiliarity with language structure is the general failure to use correct punctuation. I know that students are taught that the role of punctuation is to provide clues to spoken intonation and pauses. Its true function, however, is grammatical, to separate clauses and phrases within clauses. Two other functions are to indicate noun possession and the omission of a letter. Teachers complain that the written work consists of phrases "strung together with commas", which suggests that the students do not understand basic clause structure or the basic rules for using commas and full stops. Teachers must explain that the conventions of spoken and written English are different.

Typical of much of the students' written work are the

following extracts:

> Pablo use to live on Mabuiage he to was a great skipper he dive for pearl or crayfish hunting. my dads dad Crossfile Ahmat use to be chairman till his death. then my mum dad Joey Nona took place from 1984 till 1995.

> I rember one time we were play scidels at the big filled and those *alag* came and throw big steacks to us we run down to the water.

> Bruno was my favourite in the movie he always make me laugh because he always eat foods.

> We didn't only learned about gorillas there was whales they were kill for meat.

Because students reproduce in their written work what they speak and hear around them, without understanding the basic structure of words or clauses, they also randomly use and omit apostrophe -'s:

> <u>theres</u> a big creek that go's through Boigu; At <u>new years day</u> all the man drest up with coconut lives and carry baskets.

Most students correctly use -'s to indicate omission of a letter. However, some generalise its use to all noun and verb inflectional "-s" endings, i.e., to indicate noun plurals and possessives and 3rd person present tense verbs:

> I enjoyed myself alot and also to be with my <u>cousin's</u> and to take responsibility for yourself and <u>other's</u>; in <u>zoo's</u> around the world; theres a big creek that <u>go's</u> through Boigu; she <u>know's</u> more than we do; Badu as lots of <u>job's</u> to do; What if they were skinned and their skin <u>get's</u> sold in shops.

Sequencing, signposting and developing an argument

This topic deserves a far more comprehensive and competent treatment than the following but I was asked to make some general comments on the structure of TSC oral texts for possible comparison.

The predominantly oral tradition means that Islander students may not know how to write for an audience which does not share the same background knowledge. But how can they know what an unseen audience knows or does not know, when their life experiences may be quite limited and they have not been introduced to other ways of thinking through literature or travel? What strategies are they taught to use in order to orientate other readers unknown to them? Instead, students in effect transcribe stories as they would speak them, without developing the ability to separate the two modes, i.e., to distance themselves from the spoken language and enter the realm of the written.

This is similar to the phenomenon of incomplete or

fragmentary sentences. Students often begin a sentence but have difficulty in finishing it. This may be because they are uncertain about the actual English construction needed or because they assume that the reader knows or can reconstruct the rest from the context.

It should however be possible to teach with examples some simple rules of sequencing and cohesion. One problem is that most of us have learned to write connected, logically sequenced and signposted text so long ago that we have forgotten how we learned it and can no longer make explicit the strategies we use.

English stories are conventionally said to consist of three parts: a beginning (which provides a setting and characters); middle (which narrates some problem or conflict and is the reason for the story being told); end (which resolves the problem in some way). This is true also of Torres Strait stories, as can be seen in the traditional myths and legends collected and translated by Margaret Lawrie (1970, 1972). Torres Strait stories conventionally have beginnings, middles and ends and storytellers use a number of linguistic strategies to indicate the beginning and end of a story, e.g., the words *wantaim* "once upon a time" and *pinis* "the end". During the narrative, they may use certain grammatical constructions or words like *nau* (from English "now") to focus on particular clause elements or show length of time of an action, when these are important to the story line. They also use adjectives like *seim* "same" to track the story's characters and adverbs like *nau* "now" and *orait* "alright", to shape and sequence the "paragraphs" of the spoken narrative. It may be possible to use written island stories to make explicit the focusing and sequencing strategies used by their authors and translate them into their English equivalents.

Conclusion

Looked at objectively, most of the students' errors in written English occur as a result of transference from their first language, or in areas of grammatical structural complexity, which typically pose problems for all learners of English, such as the use of definite and indefinite articles, copula "be" as a linking verb and negative, passive, relative and backshifted clauses. The construction of subordinate clauses in general appears to be a problem and students avoid them. There are a number of subordinate clause types in TSC but the rules for forming them are different from English. Prepositional usage is also different and students tend to translate from TSC in this regard. Islander students have no problems working from a more complicated to a less complicated system, e.g., from TSC to SAE pronouns or from TSC to SAE transitive verbs. Their difficulties arise in working from a less complicated to a more complicated system, e.g., from TSC to SAE noun and verb forms and in clause constructions not present in TSC, like passive and backshifting.

Certain common spelling errors seem also to be a result of transference from TSC. TSC has fewer significant

sounds than English and its only fricatives are s and z. Spelling English fricatives and afficates, e.g., h, f, v, th, sh, ch, j, can be difficult for students whose language does not have them. With only five "pure" vowels to English 12 (represented by five written symbols), TSC speakers may have problems in differentiating between English long and short vowels, e.g., between "live/leave" and "heart/hut". TSC permits few consonant clusters at the ends of words, whereas the inflectional endings of English, which show grammatical relations within the clause, often result in consonant clusters. Students tend to omit the final consonant in speech, to bring it into line with the sound structure of their own language, and reproduce, for example, plural nouns without "-s" and past tense verbs without "-ed".

Moreover, the students receive unsystematic input for their English language learning, because they are exposed to a number of different English standard and non-standard varieties, and because many consonants disappear or are weakened even in SAE speech. This does not affect native English speakers, who have long since learned the rules of their language; for Islander students, many of whom have not received a thorough grounding in English, this unsystematic input and the lack of explicit modelling or explanation of the intricacies of English grammar add yet another impediment to mastery of English.

When students tell me that writing is difficult for them, because they "miss one word" or have difficulties with "the little words that go in the wrong place", I think that they are referring to the fact that SAE contains articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, etc. which tend to disappear in speech, which are often not taught explicitly, and which do not occur in TSC:

Ai singaut em kam.
I called out to her to come.
Ala em kam pas!
Tell him to come right away!
Em piget po gibi yu!
He forgot to give it to you.
Yu trai spik gen!
Please say it again!
Nancy maret Gerard.
Nancy was married to Gerard.

W had [an] exam to complete; I have ... 4 brothers but we gave 2 away and one [was] adopted to us; The umpires also is [in] control of the game; and all different animals [were] doing something or [had] wires connected to them.

TSC, like other creoles, tends to gain new vocabulary through its own resources: either adding another function to an existing word (as English does when it uses a noun, e.g., "title", as a verb), so that nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs have exactly the same form in TSC; or devising a new compound word or phrase, e.g., *amagel* (from

"grandmother" + "unmarried woman") meaning "girl named after her grandmother" or *an blo krab* (from "hand belong crab") meaning "pincer". It also borrows from other varieties of English. The tendency always is to "break down" complex and Latinate vocabulary into already existing language elements, e.g., *ausaid* (from "outside") for "external, exterior", and teachers must learn to develop this same ability, especially for initial explanation. Better to develop good relationships and leave phrases like "visual image", "poetic imagery", "literate citizen" for later classes.

■ Summary

The kinds of grammatical errors which are usually mentioned by teachers and which often appear in Thursday Island State High School written work have three main sources:

- influence from the students' primary language, TSC, on e.g., singular third person pronoun gender; on production of English inflectional endings: noun plurals, past tense, progressive and past participles; and therefore on correct subject-verb agreement;
- English constructions which typically pose problems for non-native English speakers: e.g., relative clauses; backshifting; choice of prepositions;
- hypercorrection, i.e., using a rule in more contexts than are required.

I could find no consistent pattern in the randomness of verb tense forms. When students are uncertain about which verb form to use, the default appears to be the base or non-tensed form.

■ Recommendations

I would recommend that:

- students be taught how to analyse the major word categories of noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition and conjunction, and how each basic clause consists of subject and predicate
- students be given explicit modelling with examples for the construction of copula, existential, modal, conditional, passive, negative and interrogative main clauses; and taught how main clauses can be conjoined or subordinated to make explicit their semantic connection of time, place, cause, condition, result, purpose, relation
- students be provided with explicit language modelling with examples for:
  - third person singular pronoun reference
  - noun regular and irregular plurals
  - count/mass noun distinction
  - regular and common irregular past tense verb forms
  - regular and common irregular past participle

verb forms and their use in passive constructions
- progressive verb forms and common uses of progressive aspect
- subject-verb agreement
- prepositions
- there be a greater emphasis on general and technical vocabulary formation, with students being encouraged to talk about the differences in meaning between English and TSC vocabulary

■ And finally ...

Thursday Island State High School takes students from Thursday Island and outer island primary schools. Teachers must therefore deal with students speaking a number of different language varieties and with very different levels of oral and written English (Morrison David, 2003). They are in effect teaching larger than optimal ESL classes without ESL training or resources. These difficulties are compounded by cultural and linguistic differences.

My consultancy was designed to deal with the linguistic differences between English and TSC, especially those which impact adversely on the acquisition of English literacy. While at the High School, I was also asked to mention briefly some socio-cultural barriers to the learning of and through English in the classroom. The notes I made on the basis of conversations with teachers, dealing with the languages of the region, cultural factors influencing language choice and language mixing, and issues of classroom management, were published as Shnukal (1996). I fully endorse the High School's practice of using Islander teachers and RATEP students to inservice new teachers about cultural differences and acculturation and suggest that *all* teachers might profitably attend these workshops.

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After a BA (Hons) degree in languages from the ANU and postgraduate qualifications in education and librarianship, Anna Shnukal studied for two years in France, seven years in the US (where she completed an MS and PhD in Linguistics and a GradCert TESOL at Georgetown University) and taught for a year in Nigeria. In late 1980 she was awarded a Postdoctoral Fellowship in Sociolinguistics from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS) to study Torres Strait "Pidgin English". She has been involved with Islander families ever since and has lived in all the island communities except Boigu. Anna is the author of over 50 publications on aspects of Torres Strait language, education and history. She was a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at The University of Queensland until an ARC Australian Research Fellowship allowed her to transfer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit. In 2002 she retired, having just completed genealogies for nearly 400 families and a report on the wages and conditions of Papua New Guineans in the post-war Torres Strait marine industry for the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. She has just finished co-editing a book, *Navigating boundaries: The Asian diasporic experience in Torres Strait*.