

## Acquisition of English Tense and Aspect Translation Competence by Behdini Students: An Experimental Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to investigate the acquisition of translation competence of the English tense and aspect system by Behdini learners who are students at the Translation Department at the College of Languages in the University of Duhok. This paper is an experimental study that adopts the Translation Competence Acquisition model. There are many morphological and syntactic differences between English and Behdini tense and aspect and there are differences in terms of the usage of the tense and aspect between the two mentioned languages too. A Judgement Elicitation Task is employed as a tool to collect data in this study. 40 English sentences with their translations into Behdini are included in this task. Behdini learners are asked to make their judgements on each translated sentence. These test items are a mixture of four tenses: present continuous, present perfect, past continuous, and past perfect. Two subgroups of learners are involved in this study: the senior subgroup and the fresher subgroup in an attempt to investigate the effect of participants' English language level and proficiency. Mixed-effects modeling has been used for analysing the data statistically. The lmer package (version is 3.3.1) has been employed with logit link function and binomial variance for the judgement data in R, which is an open-source language and environment for statistical computing. The main hypothesis of the study is that Behdini learners are not expected to attain a complete translation competence regarding the English tense and aspect system due to the differences between the two languages. The main results of the study show that while Behdini learners were able to attain a good translation competence in terms of accepting the grammatical translations, they failed to reject the ungrammatical translations. These findings implicate that Behdini learners' acquisition of translation competence is not attained fully. It is also shown that Behdini students at lower proficiency levels employ their L1 grammar as the first stage of their translation process, but at later stages of proficiency parameter resetting becomes more possible.

### INTRODUCTION

Although it is something universal to express time in any language, the means by which time is expressed are actually language specific. Therefore, the process of acquiring a second language usually involves the acquisition of different linguistic means to express time. In other words, the principle of time expression is universal, yet each language has certain various parameters through which time is expressed.

In general, languages refer to the three divisions of time (past, present, and future) by various means including verbal contrasts (e.g. write: wrote; dinivîsît: nivîsî), nouns (yesterday, now, later), particles, etc. Particular languages also differ in the use they make of these devices. Some languages use more verbal devices than others do; other languages favour non-verbal devices. Combinations of verbal and non-verbal devices are also common, probably more common than the use of these devices separately.

### The Research Problem

What is mentioned above does not only make the acquisition of a second language all the more difficult, but also the translation process. The research problem arises in the researchers' process of translation teaching, in which it has been noticed that students at the College of Languages, University of Duhok face challenges in the translation of tense and aspect from and into English. This problem is because the tense and aspect system works differently between English and Behdini. More specifically, the main differences between the two languages are: (1) morphological realizations are used to form some tenses in Behdini, but not in English; (2) tense in English does not involve any subject-verb or object-verb agreement morphemes except for the present simple third person singular *-s*, but in Behdini the three persons (both in singular and plural) involve certain morphemes as subject-verb and object-verb agreement morphemes; (3) Behdini depends on case to determine whether the verb agrees

with subject (accusative case) or with object (ergative case), but in English the agreement is always between verb and subject; (4) aspect in English is formed by the combination of verbal elements, whereas in Behdini aspect is formed differently. These points of difference are elaborated and discussed in details in the sections below that are related to tense and aspect differences between English and Behdini.

### Aims of the Research

This paper focuses on the Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation (PACTE) to investigate the Acquisition of Translation Competence of the English tense and aspect system by Behdini adult learners in the translation process. The study adopts the Translation Competence Acquisition model (Hurtado Albir, 2015 and Castillo, 2015). The study designs a Judgement Elicitation Task (JET) to collect data. The primary aim is to reveal whether it is possible or not to achieve competence in the translation of tense and aspect. This is aimed to be achieved by observing how the acceptability of translations is evolved throughout the process of acquiring translation competence.

### Literature Review

#### *Translation competence: The definition*

Translation competence (TC) is the professional translator's competence and is different from communicative competence in that it is expert knowledge. Expert knowledge is defined as being categorical or abstract and having a wide knowledge base; it is conscious and can be made explicit. Translation competence is made up of a set of sub-competencies that are inter-related and hierarchic. These sub-competencies are: bilingual sub-competence; an extra-linguistic sub-competence; an instrumental/professional sub-competence; a psycho-physiological sub-competence; a transfer sub-competence; and a strategic sub-competence (PACTE, 2003: 6).

TC is an acquired competence that differs from bilingual competence and affects the translation process and its product, i.e. the translation quality (Albir 2015: 259).

PACTE (2003) cited in Albir (2015: 259) defines TC as the underlying system of knowledge, abilities and attitudes required to be able to translate.

Cao (1996) distinguishes between translation competence and translation proficiency and defines translation competence as "the many kinds of knowledge that is essential to the translation act," and translation proficiency is "the ability to mobilise translation competence to perform translation tasks in context for purposes of intercultural and interlingual communication" (Cao, 1996: 326-327).

PACTE (2000) defines ATC as:

- a dynamic, spiral process that, like all learning processes, evolves from novice knowledge (pre-translation competence) to TC. It requires learning strategies. During the process, both declarative and procedural types of knowledge are integrated, developed, and restructured;
- a process in which the development of procedural knowledge – and, consequently, of the Strategic sub-competence – is essential;

- and a process in which the sub-competencies of TC are developed and restructured.

#### *Some previous studies*

A wide range of research has been conducted on the acquisition and translation competence of the English tense and aspect by L2 learners and due to the differences in tense and aspectual systems between L1 and L2, students face difficulties and challenges in their acquisition and translation process. In this respect, Dürich (2005) investigates the Acquisition of the English Tense and Aspect System by German Adult Learners. For instance, he points out that in German, progressive aspect is not grammaticalized, so lexical means should be used to express progress or duration. Thus, the English progressive aspect poses a major problem on the learners and progressive verb forms will be underused. Furthermore, the study finds out that simple present is used instead of the simple future since in German the *Präsens* is used to convey a factual reference to future situations. Moreover, intralingual generalization and avoidance of structures by the learners were sources for errors. Learners tried to avoid the compound tenses containing future time reference, progressive and perfect aspect.

Group (2003) presents the translation competence model that is the basis for designing the hypotheses of an empirical-experimental study of translation competence. This is the first stage in a larger project to investigate the process of translation competence acquisition.

PACTE (2003:9) explains some tests conducted for the study of translation competence such as exploratory studies, pilot tests and experiments. For these studies, six language pairs are used: English-Spanish; German-Spanish; French-Spanish; English-Catalan; German-Catalan; and French-Catalan. They also present several different instruments which have been designed for these studies such as a commercial software programme (PROXY), protocol texts for translation into and out of the foreign language, questionnaires, a direct observation chart to observe subjects' activities while translating, and retrospective and guided Think-Aloud-Protocols (TAPs).

Ouided (2009) studies problems of translating tenses from English into Arabic and takes present perfect as a case study. She concludes that while translating the present perfect tense from English into Arabic, context should be taken into account because tense does not always mean time. Many university students face difficulties when translating the present perfect into Arabic since students think the present perfect tense is present tense but not a past one which is not true. Moreover, these students may not find its accurate equivalent in Arabic unless by adding some linguistic (lexical) items or particles (Ouided, 2009: 1).

Due to the lack of one-to-one correspondence between tense and aspect system in English and Arabic, learners face difficulties in acquiring different tenses such as present perfect, present perfect continuous, past perfect, future perfect, etc. Consequently, a transfer would occur. Arabic-speaking learners would use various verbal forms to express the func-

tions of English tenses. For example, they use the Arabic past simple tense for the English present perfect (Alsalamy, 2013).

### Tense: A Preliminary Outline

Tense is a grammatical device used by a language to refer to time by means of contrast in verb forms (Fabricius-Hansen, 2006). Thus, in English the contrast between the form 'go(es)' and 'went' points to time; it expresses tense. The first form basically refers to the present and the second to the past. In Behdin the two forms referring to time and tense are 'diçit' and 'çû' for present and past respectively.

### Tense in English and Behdini: A contrastive outline

If we look at the five forms of the English verb: go, goes, went, going, and gone, we find that only the contrast between 'go', 'goes' and 'went' expresses time. The contrast between 'go' and 'goes' denotes person, not time: I go, she goes, both forms refer to the present. The form 'went', on the other hand, refers to the past. The other two forms: -ing and the ed2 (the past participle) (going and gone) are non-finite. They do not normally refer to time but to aspect.

### The simple present tense

The present simple refers to a fact, habit, or regular action. In English, it is expressed by the following formula:

Subject + Present Simple Verb Form.

For example:

- (1) She is an author.
- (2) She writes books.
- (3) They play football very well.

As for Behdini, the present takes the prefix *di-*, and it uses the present stem and the imperfect uses the past stem. The present stem is frequently unpredictable. The present tense is expressed in the following formula:

Subject + (di+ present stem+subject-verb agreement morpheme).

For example:

- (4) Ez ħefti-yê car-ek-ê di-çim-e bazar-î.  
I week-OBL once-IND-OBL PRST-go-3SG market-OBL  
"I go to the market once a week."

- (5) Rwîbar-ê Nîl rûber-ên berfreh ji Misr-ê av di-de-t.

River-EZ.M Nile distance-EZ.PI large from Egypt-OBL water PRST-make-3SG

"The Nile River irrigates large areas of Egypt."

### The simple past tense

The past tense basically refers to the moment before the time of speaking. In English, it is expressed by adding the simple past form of the verb either by adding *-ed* or the irregular verb form.

Subject + Past Simple Verb Form

Examples:

- (6) She was there yesterday.
- (7) He arrived last evening.

In Behdini, past tense is closely related to case whether it is accusative or ergative. If the verb is intransitive, the case is accusative and past tense is expressed as in the following formula:

S (DIR) + (past stem + subject-verb agreement morpheme)

Examples:

- (8) Ez çû-m, ew çû-ø, tu çu-yî, em çu-yîn, ew çû-n, hwîn çû-n.

I went-1SG, he/she went-3SG, you went-2SG, we went-1Pl, they went-3Pl, you went-2Pl

On the other hand, if the verb is transitive, the case is ergative and here is the formula for expressing the past tense:

S (OBL) + O (DIR) + (past stem + object-verb agreement morpheme).

Examples:

- (9) Min tu dît-î.

I(OBL) you(DIR) saw-2SG

"I saw you."

- (10) Wî ez dît-im.

He(OBL) I(DIR) saw-1SG

"He saw me."

For further information and details on ergative and accusative cases in Behdini, see Toma, 2016.

### Aspect: A Preliminary Outline

Aspect differs from tense in that it does not place an event before, simultaneous with, or after a point of reference as tense does; it is not a deictic (pointing) category. It merely expresses the manner of action or event, whether it is long, short, continuous, incomplete, etc. Aspect denotes how the speaker views an event or an action.

### Aspect in English and Behdini: A contrastive outline

The aspects in English are formed by the combination of verbal elements, whereas in Behdini they are not. In English and Behdini separate forms are used for the tenses whose aspects are considered simple. Thus in English and Behdini, we have different forms for tense and aspect.

English has two aspects expressed in its grammar by means of the combination of verb forms: the progressive and the perfective. The progressive aspect is expressed by means of the verb *Be* + *-ing form*. Further, this aspect is combined with the two tenses, the past and the present, resulting in the following combinations:

- (a) Present Tense, Progressive Aspect: as in 11.

(11) I am writing, you are writing, he is writing, etc.

- (b) Past Tense, Progressive Aspect: as in 12.

(12) I was writing, you were writing, he was writing, etc.

The perfective aspect is expressed by the verb *Have* + *the past participle*. Here too the perfective aspect is combined with the two tenses to yield these constructions:

- (c) Present Tense, Perfective Aspect: as in 13.

(13) I have written, you have written, he has written, etc.

- (d) Past Tense, Perfective Aspect: as in 14.

(14) I had written, you had written, he had written, etc.

Like English, Behdini also has two aspects: the progressive and the perfective. However, unlike English, in Behdini

they are not expressed in the grammar by means of the combination of verb forms.

The present progressive aspect is expressed by means of:

- **Ezafe + present tense form**

The past progressive aspect is expressed by:

- **di + past tense form**

So, this aspect is combined with the two tenses, the past and the present, resulting in the following combinations:

**(a) Present Tense, Progressive Aspect:** as in 15.

(15) ez yê dinivîsm, tu yê dinivîsî, ew yê dinivîsît, htd.  
(I am writing, you are writing, he is writing, etc.)

**(b) Past Tense, Progressive Aspect:** as in 16.

(16) min dinivîsî, te dinivîsî, wî dinivîsî, htd.  
(I was writing, you were writing, he was writing, etc.)

The present perfective aspect is expressed by:

- **Ezafe + the past tense form**

whereas the past perfective aspect is expressed by:

- **the past tense form + the suffix “bu”**

Therefore, here too the perfective aspect is combined with the two tenses to yield these constructions:

**(c) Present Tense, Perfective Aspect:** as in 17.

(17) min yê nivîsî, te yê nivîsî, wî yê nivîsî, htd.  
(I have written, you have written, he has written, etc.)

**(d) Past Tense, Perfective Aspect:** as in 18.

(18) min nivîsî bû, te nivîsî bû, wî nivîsî bû, htd.  
(I had written, you had written, he had written, etc.)

For more details on Behdini tense and aspect, see Zaxoyî, 1998.

### Comparison of tense and aspect in english and behdini

Based on the previous sections, it is clear that English and Behdini tense and aspect systems differ from each other. The main differences are outlined below:

1. Morphological realizations are used in Behdini, but not in English, to form the present simple tense. For example, prefixing the progressive unstressed modal marker *di-* to the present stem.
2. Tense in English does not involve any subject-verb agreement morphemes except for the present simple third person singular in which *-s* is suffixed to the verb form. Behdini, on the other hand, employs certain morphemes as subject-verb agreement suffixes with the three persons and with both singular and plural subject pronouns.
3. Behdini past tense depends on the case to determine whether the verb agrees with the subject (when the case is accusative) or with the object (when the case is ergative). However, this is not the case in English.
4. Aspect in English is formed by the combination of verbal elements (*be+ing* for the progressive aspect and *have+pp* for the perfective aspect), whereas in Behdini aspect is realized in different ways involving morphological supplements. The present progressive is formed by adding the Ezafe particle to the present tense form, the past progressive by prefixing *di-* to the past tense form, the present perfective by adding the Ezafe particle to the past tense form, and the past perfective by suffixing *-bu* to the past tense form.

### Theoretical Contribution, Hypotheses, and Research Questions

#### Theoretical contribution

In this study, the following theories and hypotheses will be tested:

The Full Transfer Full Access (FTFA) Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), which predicts that L1 parameter settings will constitute the initial state of L2 acquisition (full transfer), but that L2 learners have full access to universal grammar at all times during the acquisition process (full access), thus parameter resetting is usually possible. This means that Behdini students will transfer their tense and aspect system into English by declining the grammatical translations and accepting the ungrammatical translations at lower proficiency levels (the fresher subgroup). However, the senior subgroup participants are expected to perform better judgements.

The Bottleneck Hypothesis (Slabakova, 2009), which is proposed by Slabakova (2009), answers the question, “What is easy and what is hard in second language acquisition?” The Bottleneck Hypothesis is offered to investigate this question. This hypothesis predicts that functional morphology is the bottleneck of L2 acquisition, meaning that the acquisition of syntax and semantics (and maybe even pragmatics) flows smoothly. That is to say, inflectional morphemes and their features present the main challenge to L2 learners, while syntax and phrasal semantics pose less difficulty.

The Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Howard & Leclercq, 2017) focuses on the interaction of grammatical and lexical (or inherent semantic) aspect and mainly predicts that the L2ers will be initially influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers specifically with perfective and progressive aspects.

Based on the predictions of both the Bottleneck Hypothesis (Slabakova, 2009) and the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Howard & Leclercq, 2017), perfective and progressive aspects are expected to impose difficulties on Behdini learners’ process of translation competence acquisition.

#### Hypotheses and research questions

Due to the differences between English and Behdini regarding the tense and aspect system, this paper assumes that Behdini speaking students at the Translation Department in the College of Languages face challenges in acquiring the right translation of English tense and aspect. More specifically, Behdini learners are expected not to differentiate between simple tenses and progressive tenses on one hand and between simple tenses and perfective tenses on the other. This hypothesis derives the following detailed research questions:

1. To what extent will Behdini learners attain a full translation competence of English tense and aspect?
2. Will students’ English language proficiency play a role? That is to say, will senior Behdini learners be able to acquire the right translation of tense and aspect better than freshers? It is expected that students at lower levels of proficiency will start their translation and acquisition process by taking their L1 grammar to be the grammar

- of L2 based on the Full Transfer Full Access (FTFA) Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996).
3. Which tense and aspect will be the easiest to acquire and which ones will be the most difficult one to be acquired by Behdini learners? It is expected that tenses and aspects involving morphological functions in Behdini will be transferred negatively into English based on the Bottleneck Hypothesis (Slabakova, 2009) which identifies functional morphology to be the bottleneck in L2 acquisition and more difficult than meaning and syntax. This hypothesis is further supported by the Insights taken from the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Howard & Leclercq, 2017), which predicts that L2ers will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs.
  4. Will the grammatical process of sentences have an effect on Behdini learners' translation competence of tense and aspect?

### Design, Participants, and Materials

The Judgement Elicitation Task (JET) involved in this study includes English sentences with their Behdini translations (see Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire). Participants were asked to judge whether the translations were correct or not based on a four-point rating scale: Very Good, Good, Bad, Very Bad. The sentences include a mixture of tense and aspect thus making the four main tenses of the present continuous, past continuous, present perfect, and past perfect. The total number of sentences was 45 sentences. Eight sentences were present continuous, eight sentences were past continuous, eight sentences were past perfect, 12 sentences were present perfect, and nine sentences were filler-gap sentences. Half of the test item sentences were correct translations of the exact tense in the source language and the other half of sentences were incorrect.

The participants consisted of 50 native speakers of Behdini from Iraqi Kurdistan. They were all students at the University of Duhok, College of Languages, Department of Translation, English being their second language. Twenty were males and thirty were females; they ranged in age from 19 to 27.

The variables used in this study are described below followed by an explanation of the coding system.

#### (A) The dependent variable

The dependent variable in this experiment is the acceptability measured on a four-point rating scale encoded as "Rating," including "1," "2," "3," and "4" standing for Very Good, Good, Bad, and Very Bad respectively. The main reason why a four-point rating scale was adopted instead of the traditional binomial way of true vs. false was to make the participants think thoroughly while making their judgements and not only depend on their guessing. For analysis purposes, two dependent variables are employed: Good (combining Very Good and Good) vs. Bad (Very Bad and Bad).

#### (B) Random effects

1. Item.number: 1- 36. This shows the randomised order in which the test items are previewed.

2. Participants: B1- B50. Anonymised Behdini native speakers that are English L2ers.

#### (C) Fixed effects/Predictor variables

1. L2er.level: Senior vs. Fresher. This refers to the academic level of the participant, which has two levels: senior (a fourth-year student) and fresher (a first-year student).
2. Item.type: Present.continuous, Past.continuous, Past.perfect, and Present.perfect. Item.type is the main variable in the study and it refers to the four main tenses mentioned.
3. Grammaticality: TRUE vs. FALSE. This is a fixed variable that refers to grammatical and ungrammatical translations.
4. Grammatical.process: Affirmative, Interrogative, and Negative.
5. Gender: Male vs. Female.

### Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

This section is devoted to the data analysis and discussion of the results based on two aspects. The first aspect reveals a general overview of the results and in the second aspect, a statistical analysis of the results is conducted.

#### A General overview of the results

In general, as shown in Table 1, participants have highly rated all the grammatical translations of tense and aspect; 86% of participants accepted the grammatical translations, and 14% of them rejected the grammatical translations. As for the ungrammatical translations of tense and aspect, participants have still highly rated them; 67% of participants rated the ungrammatical translations of tenses and aspects as good, and 33% rated them as bad. This indicates that the majority of participants have accepted the right translation of all the tenses. However, most of them have failed to reject the ungrammatical translations. This is an indicator that the participants face difficulties in attaining a high translation competence regarding the English tense and aspect system.

While more seniors than freshers have rated the grammatical translations as good, yet more freshers than seniors have been able to rate the ungrammatical sentences as bad (see Table 2 and Figure 1). This indicates that students' English language proficiency level does not seem to have a significant effect on the general ratings.

Below, the results of the four main tenses are previewed distinctly, which are present continuous, past continuous, present perfect, and past perfect. A comparison is made between the senior and fresher subgroups for the entire results.

Starting with the present continuous tense, Table 3 shows that freshers have done better than seniors in that 90% of

**Table 1.** Acceptance rates of grammatical and ungrammatical translations

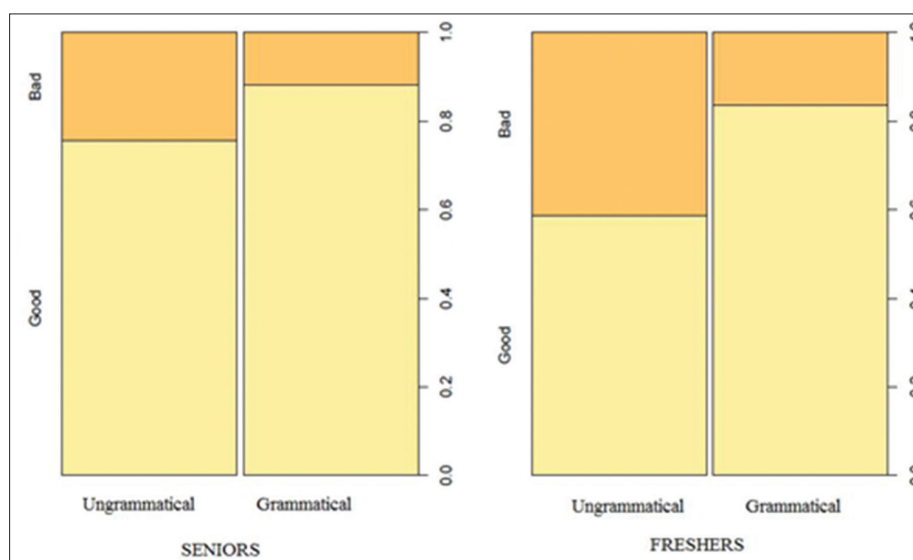
Rating	All the participants			
		Grammatical translations	Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	86%	773	67%	604
B (Bad)	14%	127	33%	296

**Table 2.** Acceptance rates of grammatical and ungrammatical translations by seniors and freshers

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	88%	397	76%	340	84%	376	59%	264
B (Bad)	12%	53	24%	110	16%	74	41%	186

**Table 3.** Acceptance rates of the present continuous sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	86%	86	83%	83	90%	90	77%	77
B (Bad)	14%	14	17%	17	10%	10	23%	23

**Figure 1.** Acceptance rates of the senior and fresher subgroups

freshers but 86% of seniors accepted the grammatical translations. Also, fewer freshers have accepted the ungrammatical translations with 77% compared to seniors with 83%. All in all, the majority of both subgroups have been able to acquire the translation of the present continuous tense, but they have failed to reject the ungrammatical translations which correspond to the simple present tense in Behdini.

As for the past continuous tense, both groups of seniors and freshers accepted more grammatical translations than ungrammatical translations with 87% of seniors and 81% of freshers as shown in Table 4. However, both groups go on having the problem of not rejecting the ungrammatical translations. For this subset of the task, again freshers have shown better judgements than seniors as 50% of freshers accepted the ungrammatical translations, whereas 68% of seniors have failed to reject the ungrammatical translations. This is interesting because the ungrammatical translations correspond to the simple past tense in Behdini.

Table 5 previews the ratings of the present perfect tense. It shows that the ratings of freshers are better than those of the seniors for both grammatical and ungrammatical translations. 87% of freshers accepted the grammatical translations

and 52% accepted the ungrammatical ones. On the other hand, 79% of seniors accepted the grammatical translations and 73% accepted the ungrammatical ones.

As shown in Table 6, seniors have been able to acquire the right translation of the past perfect tense sentences as 93% of them accepted the grammatical translations. However, the majority with 80% have failed to reject the ungrammatical translations which correspond to the past simple tense in Behdini. As far as freshers are concerned, 87% of them accepted the grammatical translations and only 59% accepted the ungrammatical translations.

Now a general overview of the effect of the grammatical process is going to be displayed. This is to show whether participants' ratings would be affected or not if the sentence is affirmative, interrogative, or negative. Table 7 shows the ratings of affirmative sentences. It reveals that seniors' ratings are slightly better than freshers' in terms of accepting the grammatical translations with 88% of seniors and 85% of freshers' acceptance rates. However, when it comes to rejecting the ungrammatical translations, freshers' ratings are better than seniors' with 36% of freshers and 23% of seniors rejecting the ungrammatical translations.

The same paradigm of acceptance rates is repeated with respect to the interrogative sentences, i.e. senior's acceptance rates of the grammatical translations is better than freshers' ratings, whereas freshers have done better with rejecting the ungrammatical translations. This is clear from Table 8, as 87% of seniors but 77% of freshers accepted the grammatical translations of interrogative sentences. On the other hand, 34% of seniors and 54%

of freshers were able to reject the ungrammatical translations.

As for the negative sentences, Table 9 previews that again seniors' ratings show better translation competence concerning accepting the grammatical translations but freshers' ratings show better translation competence regarding rejecting the ungrammatical translations. 91% of seniors and 85% of freshers accepted the grammatical translations, whereas only

**Table 4.** Acceptance rates of the past continuous sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	87%	87	68%	68	81%	81	50%	50
B (Bad)	13%	13	32%	32	19%	19	50%	50

**Table 5.** Acceptance rates of the present perfect sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	79%	119	73%	109	87%	131	52%	78
B (Bad)	21%	31	27%	41	13%	19	48%	72

**Table 6.** Acceptance rates of the past perfect sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	93%	93	80%	80	87%	87	59%	59
B (Bad)	7%	7	20%	20	13%	13	41%	41

**Table 7.** Acceptance rates of the affirmative sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	88%	242	77%	211	85%	235	64%	176
B (Bad)	12%	33	23%	64	15%	40	36%	99

**Table 8.** Acceptance rates of the interrogative sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	87%	87	66%	66	77%	77	46%	46
B (Bad)	13%	13	34%	34	23%	23	54%	54

**Table 9.** Acceptance rates of the negative sentences

Rating	Seniors				Freshers			
	Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations		Grammatical translations		Ungrammatical translations	
A (Good)	91%	68	84%	63	85%	64	56%	42
B (Bad)	9%	7	16%	12	15%	11	44%	33

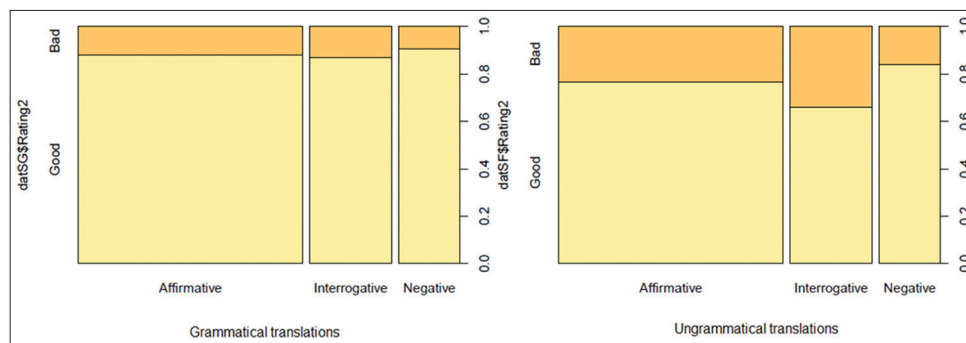


Figure 2. Seniors' acceptance rates of the grammatical process

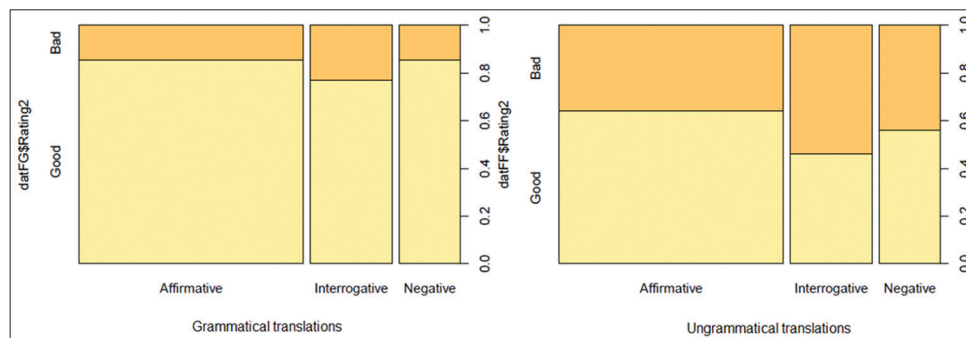


Figure 3. Freshers' acceptance rates of the grammatical

16% of seniors and 44% of freshers were able to refuse the ungrammatical translations of negative sentences.

Figures 2 and 3 visualize the acceptance rates of seniors and freshers concerning the grammatical process factor, which has the three levels of affirmative, interrogative, and negative sentences.

Based on information from Figures 2 and 3, it is clear that grammatical translations show quite similar rates by both seniors and freshers in which both subgroups of learners have shown a high translation competence. However, regarding the ungrammatical translations, the fresher subgroup has rejected more ungrammatical translations than seniors, especially in interrogative sentences.

### A Statistical analysis of the data

The above preliminary analysis of the results shows that most participants, whether seniors or freshers, acquired the correct translation of all the tenses, yet the majority of learners have not been able to reject the ungrammatical translations. The effect of English language proficiency is evident in that seniors' ratings are better than freshers when it comes to accepting the grammatical translations, however, freshers have shown better rejecting rates concerning the ungrammatical translations. It is also shown that the progressive aspect has shown better translation competence than the perfective aspect almost by all the participants. The most difficult grammatical process level to acquire was the interrogative sentences and the easiest ones were the affirmative sentences.

For the analysis below, mixed-effects modeling has been used for analysing the data statistically. The lmer package (version is 3.3.1) has been employed with logit link function and binomial variance for the judgement data in R, which

is an open-source language and environment for statistical computing. The regression design with mixed-effect modeling has been adopted for this study experiment because regression designs are more powerful and more flexible than traditional ANOVAs (e.g. Baayen et al., 2008 and New et al., 2007).

To fit the best model in this statistical analysis, only random effects are added in the beginning. Then, fixed effects are added incrementally. The analysis of the two random effects, item number and participants, is to account for any individual variation in the results that are due to the variation of participants or item number. After that, fixed effects are added one by one and they are retained only if they improve the model's fit. Both fixed and random effects are included so that to make it possible to assess whether group differences are significant over and above differences between individual participants.

In the following modeling, factors are added one by one starting from a model including only random effects. The best mixed-effects model for the data is included in the formula below:

$$\text{Rating2} \sim \text{L2er.level} + \text{Grammaticality} + \text{Item.type} + (1|\text{Participant}) + (1|\text{Item.number})$$

The formula above indicates that acceptability rates vary according to the main effects of L2er's level, grammaticality, and item type. These three elements are the fixed effects of the modeling. Both participant and item number are taken into account as random effects. L2er's level has the two levels of freshers and seniors. Grammaticality has the two levels of TRUE standing for grammatical translations and FALSE standing for ungrammatical translations. Item type has the four levels of present continuous, past continuous, present perfect, and past perfect. Rating2 is set for two levels of acceptability rates which are good and bad.



Table 10 lists the coefficients for the random effect predictors. The table shows that the standard deviation for participant is 0.7137 and for item number is 0.4838. This indicates that the effect of participant accounts for a higher range of the total variance (with 0.5093) in the data than item number (with 0.2341).

Table 11 lists the statistics for the decrease in AIC as different terms are added to the model specification in the data. The table shows that the main effect of L2er's level plus the main effect of grammaticality are the most significant predictors in the model, and the reduction in AIC is 19.2 with a significant p-value. This is followed by the main effect of L2er's level and the reduction in AIC is valued at 8.7 and the p-value is significant. The next significant predictors in terms of reduction in AIC are the main effects of L2er's level, grammaticality, and item type and the value of AIC decrease is 2.7.

As for the elements that ended up to be insignificant and thus led to an increase in AIC are item type as a main effect, the interaction of L2er's level and item type, the interaction of L2er's level and grammaticality, and the main effects of L2er's level, grammaticality, item type, and grammatical process.

Table 12 lists the coefficients for the fixed-effect predictors. The intercept represents the group mean for Rating2 = Good (which denotes acceptance), L2er.level = Fresher, Grammaticality = FALSE, and Item.type = Past.continuous because the intercept corresponds to the combination of the

reference level of each factor. The estimate tells us the probability of an increase in rejection.

Figure 4 illustrates the effect of grammaticality, i.e. whether the translation is grammatical or ungrammatical, and the effect of L2er's level, i.e. whether the participants are seniors or freshers.

As shown in Figure 4, both senior and fresher subgroups have highly rated the true translations with a slightly higher rating for seniors. This is indicated in Table 12 where the estimate value of L2er.levelSenior is -0.81068 and the effect size is (Z value = -3.371,  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that when L2ers are seniors the rate of accepting grammatical translations increases. The estimate value of GrammaticalityTRUE is -1.23590 and the effect size is (Z value = -5.975,  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that when the translation is grammatical and when the students belong to the fresher subgroup, the rate of acceptability is high but not as high as when students are seniors.

Figures 5 and 6 are illustrations for the senior and fresher subgroups' ratings on grammatical and ungrammatical translations that include item type sentences, i.e. the past continuous, past perfect, present continuous, and present perfect sentences.

Figures 5 and 6 show that both subgroups of learners (seniors and freshers) have equally shown a high translation competence when it comes to accepting the grammatical translations. Freshers, however, have been more competent than seniors in rejecting the ungrammatical translations.

Table 12 shows that the only significant effect is the present continuous sentences where the estimate value of Item.typePresent.continuous is -0.78375 and the p-value is 0.011533 \*, so the effect size is (Z value = -2.526,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that freshers have rejected more ungrammatical sentences than seniors in present continuous sentences.

**Table 10.** Coefficients for the random effects of the data

Random effects			
Groups	Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
ParticipantZ	(Intercept)	0.5093	0.7137
Item.number	(Intercept)	0.2341	0.4838

**Table 11.** Model comparison statistics for the data

	df. resid	AIC	Df	Deviance	Pr(>Chisq)	Reduction in AIC
L2er.level	4	1767.0	1	1759.0	0.001086**	8.7
Item.type	7	1768.6	3	1754.6	0.2135	-1.6
L2er.level * Item.type	10	1768.2	6	1748.2	0.09488	-1.2
L2er.level+Grammaticality	5	1747.8	1	1737.8	4.144e-06***	19.2
L2er.level * Grammaticality	6	1747.0	1	1735.0	0.0899	0.8
L2er.level+Grammaticality+Item.type	8	1745.1	3	1729.1	0.03288*	2.7
L2er.level + Grammaticality + Item.type + Grammatical.process	10	1745.8	2	1725.8	0.1869	-0.7

**Table 12.** Coefficients of a generalised linear mixed model fitted to the rejection rates. (Reference levels: Rating2: Good, L2er.level: Fresher, Grammaticality: FALSE, Item.type: Past.continuous)

Fixed effects	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	-0.15718	0.27913	-0.563	0.573371
L2er.levelSenior	-0.81068	0.24046	-3.371	0.000748***
GrammaticalityTRUE	-1.23590	0.20684	-5.975	2.3e-09***
Item.typePast.perfect	-0.54440	0.30764	-1.770	0.076792
Item.typePresent.continuous	-0.78375	0.31026	-2.526	0.011533*
Item.typePresent.perfect	-0.04446	0.27460	-0.162	0.871369

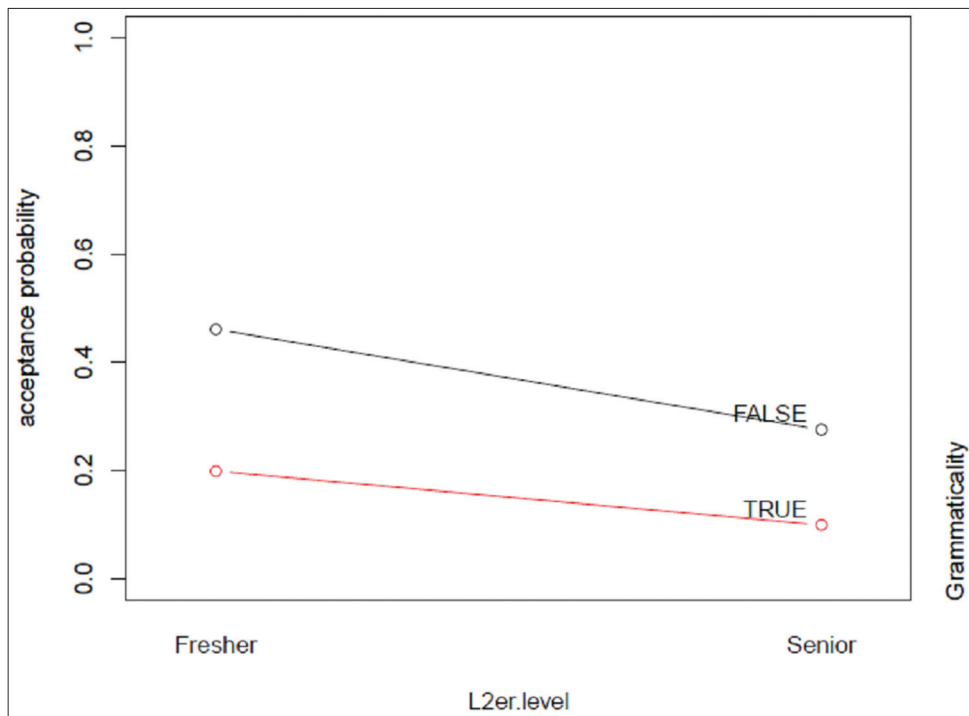


Figure 4. The effect of L2er's level and grammaticality

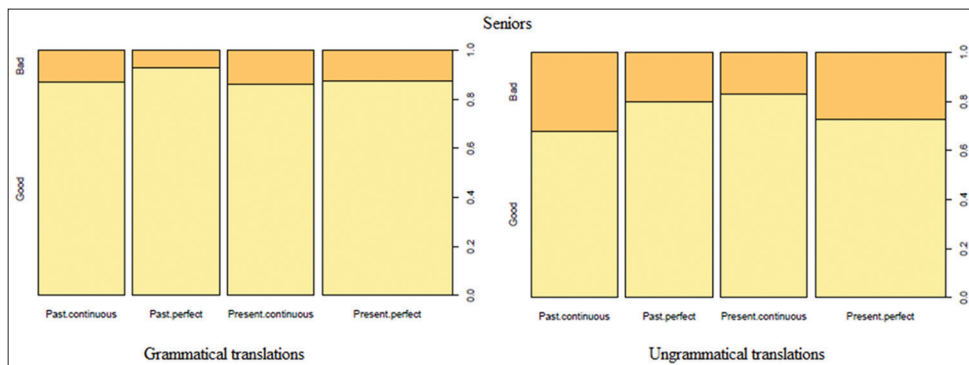


Figure 5. Senior subgroup's ratings on item type

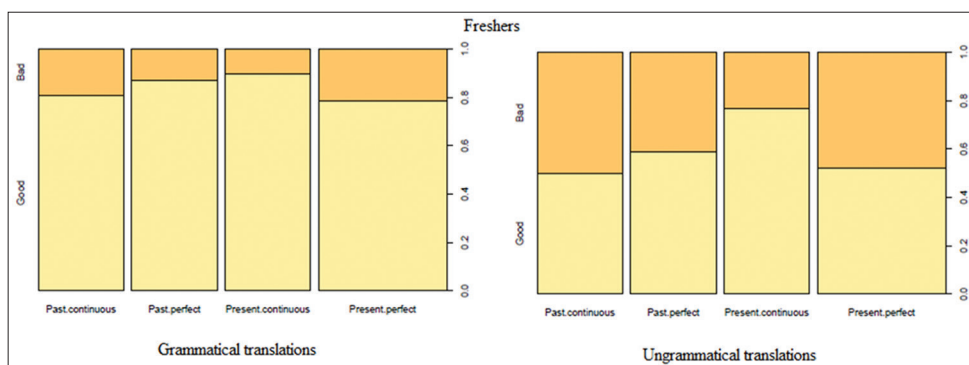


Figure 6. Fresher subgroup's ratings on item type

**General discussion**

The main aim of this study was to investigate whether Behdini learners in the Translation Department at the College of Languages, University of Duhok would attain a full translation competence in the English tense and aspect system. This section discusses the results in an attempt to provide answers

to the research questions and to investigate the hypothesis outlined in this study.

The main hypothesis in this study, which states that Behdini learners are expected not to differentiate between simple tenses and progressive tenses on one hand and between simple tenses and perfective tenses on the other, has been veri-

fied and fulfilled. This is because while the participants were able to acquire the grammatical translations of almost all the tenses, they failed to reject the ungrammatical translations. The ungrammatical translations provided in the JET were designed to align with simple tenses in Behdini. This means that participants accepted simple tense sentences presuming that they correspond to progressive and perfective tenses.

The following detailed research questions are going to be investigated and discussed based on the results shown in the previous sections.

RQ 1: To what extent will Behdini learners attain a full translation competence of English tense and aspect?

Evidence is shown in the preliminary results that there is an overall increase in the translation competence and translation acceptability of the translations for each subgroup, from the first-year students subgroup up to the fourth-year subgroup. In all the components of results shown above, i.e. in the four item types (or tenses) and in the three grammatical processes, the participants showed a high translation competence in terms of accepting the grammatical translations. However, it is inaccurate to conclude that the participants attained a full translation competence because both subgroups of seniors and freshers were not able to reject the ungrammatical translations with slightly better performance by freshers.

RQ 2: Will students' English language proficiency play a role? That is to say, will senior Behdini learners be able to acquire the right translation of tense and aspect better than freshers?

The results of this study provided insight into the efficiency of the translation process. By comparing the senior to the fresher subgroups, we could observe whether senior participants perform better judgements to produce acceptable translations in relation to fresher ones. We could also observe if the process of translation acceptability was a developmental process in that acceptability of grammatical sentences increases with the increase of students' English language proficiency level or decrease with the decrease of their proficiency level.

The effect of L2ers' level was evident in that seniors' acceptance rates showed a better translation competence than freshers'. In this sense, therefore, this hypothesis is fulfilled. On the other hand, almost in all cases freshers rejected more ungrammatical translations than seniors (see Figure 1). Therefore, this hypothesis is not completely fulfilled and thus students' English language proficiency only has a partial insignificant effect on their translation competence of tense and aspect.

RQ 3: Which tense will be the easiest to acquire and which one will be the most difficult one to be acquired by Behdini learners?

In terms of accepting the grammatical translations, the easiest tense that Behdini learners acquired was the past perfect tense by seniors and the present continuous by freshers. In terms of rejecting the ungrammatical translations, on the other hand, the easiest tense for seniors to acquire was past continuous and for freshers it was the present perfect (see Figures 5 and 6).

However, tenses involving aspects (especially the perfective and progressive aspects, not the simple aspect) posed

certain difficulties for the students in general, especially for the fresher subgroup of students. This could be traced back to the differences referred to in the beginning of this study between Behdini and English. English aspect depends on combinations of verbal forms but in Behdini aspect depends on morphological realization.

Getting rid of one's morphological realizations in the process of foreign language acquisition is always harder than the acquisition of semantics and syntax. This goes in line with the Bottleneck Hypothesis (Slabakova, 2009), which argues that the functional morphology is the bottleneck in L2 acquisition because it bundles a variety of semantic, syntactic, and phonological features that affect the meaning and acceptability of the whole sentence.

These morphological difficulties are realized by students' failure to reject the ungrammatical translations that were compatible to the Behdini structures.

RQ 4: Will the grammatical process of sentences have an effect on Behdini learners' translation competence of tense and aspect?

As shown in Table 11, statistically speaking the effect of the grammatical process (i.e. whether the sentence is affirmative, negative, or interrogative) was not significant and the main effect of the grammatical process led to an increase in the AIC value. Therefore, the grammatical process does not seem to have any effects on participants' judgements.

## CONCLUSION

This paper, which adopted the Translation Competence Acquisition model (Hurtado Albir, 2015 and Castillo, 2015), focused on the Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation (PACTE) to investigate the acquisition of translation competence of the English tense and aspect system by Behdini students. The primary aim was to reveal whether it is possible or not to achieve competence in the translation of tense and aspect.

In this section, the conclusions that are derived from the results and findings of this study are going to be listed below to observe how the acceptability of translations is evolved throughout the process of acquiring the translation competence. This study came up with a number of conclusions that are outlined below:

1. In spite of the tense and aspect differences between English and Behdini that are discussed at the beginning of the study, Behdini learners were able to attain a high translation competence in terms of accepting the grammatical translations. However, they failed to attain a complete translation competence as they failed to reject the ungrammatical translations.
2. Behdini learners' failure to reject the ungrammatical translations leads to the conclusion that Behdini learners were unable to differentiate simple tenses and progressive tenses on one hand, and simple tenses and perfective tenses on the other. This is because the ungrammatical translations were designed to be compatible with simple tenses in Behdini. This is traced back to the morphological difficulties involved in second language

acquisition based on the claims made by Slabakova's Bottleneck Hypothesis (2009) and the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (Howard & Leclercq, 2017).

3. Behdini learners' English language level and proficiency seems to have a partial effect in that seniors' performance was better than the fresher subgroup in accepting the grammatical translations. However, freshers performed better than seniors in rejecting the ungrammatical translations. These findings are in line with the predictions made by the FTFA Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), which posits L1 grammar to be the beginning of L2 acquisition, whereas parameter resetting becomes more possible for seniors.

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**APPENDIX 1: A JUDGEMENT ELICITATION TASK**

Age: -----. Gender: (Male – Female). Mother tongue: -----. Year of study: -----

Other languages spoken: -----

Please read the following sentences. How would you rate the Kurdish translation for each of the sentences? Please, check one of the four options provided.

Sentences	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad
1. We had gotten married before 1985. مه بمری سالای 1985 شه هیانا خو کر				
2. They are making plans to study together. ئهو بی پلانی ددانن دا پیکهه بخوینن				
3. I haven't seen you for ages. ئهغه ژمیژه وهره من تو نهیدیته				
4. Until now I have published four books. من ههتا نوکه چوار کتیب بین چاپ کرین				
5. I live in Duhok. ئهمز ل دهوکێ دژیم				
6. Has anyone seen my black pen? ئهری کهمهک پینوسا من یا رهش دیت؟				
7. Have you had breakfast? No, I haven't had it yet. ئهری ته تیشتا سپیندێ خوار بیه؟ نهخیر، هیشتا من نهخوار بیه				
8. She was walking to the school when you saw her. ئهو بهرهف قوتابخانی هه چوو دهمی ته ئهو دیتی				
9. I've worked here for six months. من بو ماوی شمش ههقیال قیری شول کر				
10. I am from Kurdistan. ئهمز ژ کوردستانی مه				
11. She was walking to the school when you saw her. ئهو بهرهف قوتابخانی هه چوو دهمی ته ئهو دیتی				
12. Julie is washing her face and combing her hair. جولی رووی خو دشوت و پرچا خو شه دکهت				
13. Julie is washing her face and combing her hair. جولی یا رووی خو دشوت و یا پرچا خو شه دکهت				
14. Had she eaten the dinner before she went to the cinema? ئهری وئ شیف خوار بوو بهری بچینه سینهمی؟				
15. I went to the city by car. ئهمز ب ترمبیلی چوومه باژیری				
16. The house was dirty. They hadn't cleaned it for weeks. خانی بی پیس بو، ئهو چهند هفته بو وان پاقر نهکر				
17. Have you had breakfast? No, I haven't had it yet. ئهری ته تیشتا سپیندێ خوار؟ نهخیر، هیشتا من نهخوار				
18. The children were growing up quickly. زاروک زوی مەزن دبوون				
19. He is working in a foreign country? ئهو د وهلاتهکی بیانی دا کار دکهت				
20. I passed through the street. ئهمز د کولانی را دهر باز بووم				
21. The machine is working now. نوکه مهکینه یا کار دکهت				
22. Until now I have published four books. من ههتا نوکه چوار کتیب چاپ کرن				
23. I haven't seen you for ages. ئهغه ژمیژه وهره من تو نهیدیته				
24. It hasn't rained this week. رکهه نای ئهتفهه ح ئهف ل ناراب				

(Continued)

Sentences	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad
25. Azad and Hajar are sincere friends. نازاد و هه‌ژار هه‌قالین دلسوزن.				
26. The children were growing up quickly. زارۆک زوی مه‌زن بوون.				
27. What were you doing at 8 o'clock last night? I was watching television. شه‌قا دی ده‌مژمیر هه‌شت ته‌ چ کر؟ من تله‌فزیۆن ته‌ماشه‌ کر.				
28. The machine is working now. نوکه‌ مه‌کینه‌ کار دکه‌ت.				
29. Our neighbor was always telling us funny stories. جیرانا ما هه‌می ده‌ما چیرۆکین ب که‌نی بۆ مه‌ گوتن.				
30. I went home, and I had lunch. ئه‌ز چوو مه‌ مال و من فرافین خوار.				
31. Has anyone seen my black pen? ئه‌رئ که‌سه‌ک پینۆسا من یا ره‌ش دیتیه‌؟				
32. We had gotten married before 1985. مه‌ به‌ری سالا 1985 شه‌هیا نا خۆ کر بوو.				
33. They are making plans to study together. ئه‌و پلانی ددانن دا پیکه‌ به‌خوینن.				
34. Had she eaten the dinner before she went to the cinema? ئه‌رئ وئ شیف خوار به‌ری به‌جیته‌ سینهمه‌؟				
35. Azad is a good guy, but he does not know Kurdish very well. نازاد گه‌نجه‌کی باشه‌، له‌ زمانه‌ی کوردی باش نزانیت.				
36. He is working in a foreign country? ئه‌و یه‌ د وه‌لاته‌کی بیانی دا کار دکه‌ت.				
37. Ivan had finished reading when he put out the light. ئیقانی خواندن تمام کر ده‌مه‌ رو ناھی قه‌مه‌راندی.				
38. Our neighbor was always telling us funny stories. جیرانا ما هه‌می ده‌ما چیرۆکین ب که‌نی بۆ مه‌ دگوتن.				
39. What were you doing at 8 o'clock last night? I was watching television. شه‌قا دی ده‌مژمیر هه‌شت ته‌ چ دکر؟ من تله‌فزیۆن ته‌ماشه‌ دکر.				
40. Rouhat also learns Kurdish music. روهات ژێ فیزی مۆزیکا کوردی ده‌بیت.				
41. I've worked here for six months. من بۆ ماوێ شه‌ش هه‌مفاله‌ فیری یه‌ شۆل کری.				
42. Ivan had finished reading when he put out the light. ئیقانی خواندن تمام کر بوو ده‌مه‌ رو ناھی قه‌مه‌راندی.				
43. It hasn't rained this week. باران له‌ ئه‌مه‌ هه‌فتیه‌ی له‌ نه‌کر بیه‌.				
44. The house was dirty. They hadn't cleaned it for weeks. خانی یه‌ پیه‌س بوو، ئه‌و چهند هه‌فتی بوو وان پاقر نه‌کر بوو.				
45. Siamand did not come on time, so I went home. لام هه‌م‌ای ره‌گه‌ف زه‌ی اروهل، ته‌اهه‌ن اد و خ ئه‌مه‌د د دن هه‌م‌ایس.				