



Students' Problems with -Ed / -Ing Adjectives and Their Root Verbs: A Case Study with University Students

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Abstract

Psych verbs cause problems for learners of English as a foreign language, as in many other languages. The problem-causing aspect of these is that the person who is defined as the experiencer and who has the emotion is sometimes used in the sentence in the case of the subject and sometimes the object. Some problems arise when experiencer is used as an object in English. Foreign language learners sometimes think of these verbs as intransitive verbs, from which -ed / -ing adjectives derived. As a result, these verbs are also misunderstood. In our study with university students on this subject, it was concluded that students misunderstood the verbs from which these adjectives were derived. After these mistakes were corrected, it was seen that the subject was better understood by the students together with the corresponding lesson.

Keywords: -ed / -ing Adjectives, Psych Verbs, Subject Experiencer, Object Experiencer

Introduction

Psych verbs are verbs with different lexical features. In these verbs, the person who has the emotion is called the experiencer and sometimes comes in the position of the subject and sometimes the object. Verbs are transitive verbs when experiencer is the object. However, as some students consider these verbs intransitive, -ed / -ing adjectives derived from them are also misunderstood. This study approaches the problem of misunderstanding of these adjectives from a different perspective.

Literature Review

Psyche Verbs in English

Psyche verbs are widely used in languages. These verbs express the mental state. These verbs, which are used to describe the psychological states of living things, are expressed with different names. They are also given names such as psychological verb,

mental verb, experiencer verb, and emotive verb. These verbs are found in English as state verbs and have experienced in their subject or object when expressing a psychological state. The experiencer mentioned here is a being like human or animal and is attached to psyche verbs in the position of subject or object (Rozwadowska & Willim, 2016).

Syntactically, there are two variants of these verbs. In the first, the experiencer comes as a subject, and in the second, as an object. For example, in the sentence "She likes cakes", "she" is in the subject position as an experience. On the other hand, "Presents on my birthday please me." In the sentence "me" is in the object position as an experienced (Van Gelderen, 2014).

These verbs are also called psychological verbs and are important verbs from a theoretical and cognitive perspective. When we compare these verbs with agentive verbs, we see that psych verbs do not give thematic role to agent or patient. In other words, in agentive verbs such as "kill" and "write", the work of the subject is seen by an outsider and the subject is in an active action. However, it is not possible to talk about such an action for psych verbs. These verbs express the psychological state of a person or an animal as an experienced (Van Voorst, 1992). The experiencer, who holds the emotion on itself, can be a subject or an object in different verbs. For instance,

"The boy loves films."

In this example, "the boy" is the experiencer, and he takes the emotion onto himself. Likewise, if you say, "I fear dogs very much", you use the person as experiencer in subject position.

But in another example,

"Dogs frighten me very much."

We use the experiencer (me) in object position. In these examples, the experiencer is the first person singular, and it is used in subject and object positions with different psych verbs. We should emphasize the point that the positions bring about important semantic differences, and when they are used interchangeably, they change the meaning dramatically (Rozwadowska, 2017). These are the psych verbs which take the experiencer in subject position:

1. like, hate detest, admire, love, enjoy, despise, honor, esteem.

The following psych verbs take the experiencer in object position.

2. satisfy, terrify, annoy, please, horrify, thrill, scare, frighten, amuse, excite, bore, astonish, interest, amaze, disappoint, frustrate, depress, exhaust, tire, confuse, fascinate, shock, embarrass (Levin, 1993).

There is a main problem with the psych verbs listed above in second order, and we should clarify that point.

Starting from the following example, we will handle the problem.

"Alex reads books."

In this example, the subject of the sentence is "Alex", and he is the agent / doer of the action. In the same example, the word "books" is described as the patient in grammatical terms. When we look at the next sentence, the subject is described as having the thematic role onto itself.

"Alex likes books."

Since there is no action in this verb and it is named as state verb, the subject is not described as the agent / doer but described as having the thematic role onto itself (Alexiadou & Iordăchioaia, 2014). Moreover, Alex is the experiencer in this example sentence. The point here to be underlined is that Alex's psychological state against the book which is called as the theme was revealed with the verb "like". The point with the second group of the verbs above like satisfy, terrify...etc, is that the thematic roles change, and it may be quite challenging for English learners. The point is exemplified in the next sentence.

"Such books amuse Alex."

In this case, the theme which is "such books" became the subject, and the experiencer which is Alex became the object. There are such dichotomies in English that vary in the use of experience in either subject position or object position like the examples below.

"I like comics." vs. "Comics please me." or "Comics amuse me."

There is also the same relation between the verbs "fear / frighten".

For instance,

"Alex fears snakes." vs. "Snakes frighten Alex."

Object Experiencer Verbs

The main problem of confusion comes out with this kind of verbs in English for foreign learners. The group of verbs numbered (2) above are from this kind. All of these verbs are transitive verbs, which means the subject does the action and the object is affected by the action. In other words, the subject does the action on the object or manipulating the object. Although this is a general explanation for these verbs, there are some changes in sub-categorization because the subject is not always a real agent or doer of the action. It is quite clear in the verbs above, and this example clarifies it.

"The gift surprised him very much."

In this example, the subject "the gift" is not a real agent or doer of the action, but it is in a passive position to do it. For this reason, it is named as the theme, as it was shown above. Arad (1998) comes up with three different interpretations of object experiencer verbs:

1. Agentive: There is an agent which intentionally does the action and causes changes in the mood of the experiencer as the object. For instance,
"Alex frightened his wife."

In this example, Alex is agentive, and the doer intentionally does the action of frightening.

2. Eventive: There is an unintentional change in the experiencer by the theme subject.
"The noise frightened his wife."

In this example, "the noise" is the eventive subject, and it does not intend to do it, so there is no action by the noise. It is also called non-agentive subject.

3. Stative: In this case, there is no agent nor any change in mental state.
"Alex's behavior frightens his wife."

When the experiencer is the object of the sentence, all these verbs are in the category of transitive verbs. These verbs show the emotion or psychology on the object experiencer. This type of verbs is especially difficult for foreign language learners when they are made into -ed / -ing adjectives (Hirakawa & Suzuki, 2014).

-ed / -ing Adjectives

These adjectives are directly derived from the psych verbs of the second type, and the subject of the sentence is described with the -ing adjective and the object of the sentence is described with -ed adjective (Namtapi, 2018). For instance,

"The noise frightened the cat."

In this sentence, the noise is described with the adjective "frightening", and the cat is described with the adjective "frightened".

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study was conducted on students who speak English at A2/B1 level. This is because they have already learned about -ed / -ing adjectives and repeated at this level. Students have some difficulties in learning these adjectives. It is within the scope of this study to investigate the causes of these difficulties and to put forward some hypotheses. Our hypothesis in this study is that the first reason why students misunderstand and make mistakes about -ed / -ing adjectives is that the verbs from which these adjectives are derived are not known correctly. Although all of these verbs are transitive verbs, students should be considering some or all of these verbs as intransitive by mixing them. As a result, students do not know which noun takes -ed adjective and which noun takes -ing adjective, and they make mistakes. First of all, the sentences in which these verbs are used as

intransitive verbs were given to the students. Although these sentences were incorrect, the students were asked to decide whether the sentences were correct or not. After determining this, this subject was explained to the students in the experiment group, starting with the verbs, and it was explained that the subjects of these verbs took -ing adjective and their objects -ed adjective. Afterwards, more exercises were done with the students. The students in the control group only learned as much as it was explained in the book, and as a result, the same exam was applied to both groups. The exam results obtained were evaluated quantitatively.

Sample Selection

First year students studying at Tishk International University were used in this study. The English level of these students is A2 / B1. The reason for choosing this group of students is primarily because they know about -ed / -ing adjectives. In addition, the same subject is mentioned again in their textbook Scope 2. We explained this subject to the students in a different way than the book shows and compared the results of our exams with the other two classes, which were the control group. These students are university freshmen who also take an English course for 10 hours per week. 16 students were in experiment group, and 36 students were in control group. The number of the control group is more than double the experiment group because we used two classes as control group to get better results.

Data Collection

For data collection, we chose these groups because they already know the subject and have an idea about it. The book explains the topic superficially and does some examples. On the contrary, we chose our experiment group and explained the topic to them from a different perspective. We firstly started with the verb forms and their meanings. Before the classes, we gave them a test to check if they know that these verbs are transitive or intransitive. We detected that majority of them mix up the real transitive meaning, and they attach them an intransitive meaning. For instance, this majority knows the verb “scare” as “fear”. We firstly explained the transitive meanings of these verbs and did some exercises about it. Then we explained that when we construct any sentence with these verbs, the subject takes -ing adjective, and the object takes -ed adjective and it becomes the feeling, so -ed adjectives are unique to animals and humans because they have feelings. After doing some exercises, we gave the same test to experiment group and the control group which is other two classes. In the end, we evaluated the results.

Findings

The Explanation of the Coursebook

It is important to mention that the coursebook, *Scope*, does not handle this topic with the verb forms; it makes a short explanation and gives exercises to do. The explanation of the coursebook is as follows:

“A lot of adjectives are made by adding -ing or -ed to a verb.

-ed adjectives describe feelings.

I was surprised by the end of the film.

-ing adjectives describe people or things.

The film has a surprising ending.”

After that it gives extra 10 exercises to do. The control group studied the adjectives as the book introduces and took the exam in the end.

Pre-test and Results

Before everything, we gave them a test about the verb forms to check if they really know that these verbs are transitive verbs. As it was explained in the literature review, the experiencer in these verbs is the object of the verb and it takes -ed adjectives. We gave a quiz to them with sample sentences showing as if these verbs are intransitive and asked them to choose if this sentence is true or false. The questions and the results are given below.

Table 1: Test results of the experiment group

		TRUE	FALSE
1	I scared very much when I saw the dog.	12	4
2	I pleased when you gave me that gift.	11	5
3	I embarrassed when my son called my friend with his nickname.	14	2
4	I shocked when I heard the news.	12	4
5	I annoyed when he stole my pen.	14	2
6	I bored because the film was too long.	8	8
7	I excited when they gave me the certificate.	8	8
8	I amused very much when she told me a story.	10	6
9	I confused because the problem was difficult.	7	9
10	I surprised when I saw him in front of me.	6	10

Out of 16 students, the average of 10.2 students gave the answers as true to these questions. In fact, all of them are wrong in these examples, but the students felt very strange with the uses of some verbs, and they answered as false to some questions. Especially with the verbs “scare, embarrass and annoy”, they generally think that these are the verbs with the subject having the feeling. As for the results of control group, there are similar answers.

Table 2: Test results of the control group

		TRUE	FALSE
1	I scared very much when I saw the dog.	29	7
2	I pleased when you gave me that gift.	28	8
3	I embarrassed when my son called my friend with his nickname.	31	5
4	I shocked when I heard the news.	32	4
5	I annoyed when he stole my pen.	31	5
6	I bored because the film was too long.	22	14
7	I excited when they gave me the certificate.	21	15
8	I amused very much when she told me a story.	25	10
9	I confused because the problem was difficult.	26	9
10	I surprised when I saw him in front of me.	17	19

There are similar results here, and mostly they confuse the meaning of these verbs, and we think that they do the -ed and -ing adjectives wrongly because they do not know the real meaning of these verbs that are the root for these adjectives. If they knew it better, they would do much better.

Explanation of the Topic

We explained this topic to the experiment group later. Firstly, we wrote example sentences and explained the true nature of these verbs.

“The dog scared me very much when it barked at me.”

“Your gift pleased my son.”

“My son embarrassed me when he called my friend with his nickname.”

“The news shocked the audience.”

“I annoyed my mom when I stuck my tongue out to her.”

“The film bored everybody.”

“The match excited the fans.”

“The story amused the children.”

“The question confused us all.”

“She surprised me when she suddenly appeared in front.”

Based on these examples, we elaborated on the answers and gave the students the opportunity to come up with their own answers. Then based on the examples, we explained that the objects in these sentences take the -ed adjectives, and the subjects take the -ing adjectives. For instance, in the first example above, the dog takes the -ing adjective, and “I” take the -ed adjective.

“The dog was scaring.”

“I was scared.”

We did the same thing with all the verbs like:

“The film was boring.”

“Everybody was bored.”

We also explained some situations in drama methods such that when I was a small child, I was walking on the pavement hand in hand with my dad and suddenly, a man stopped us and he started to have a chat with my dad. At that time, I nudged my dad and asked who he was. My dad gave his name with reverence saying he is an uncle. When my dad gave his name, I cried out his nickname. In this situation, my dad was embarrassed, and I was embarrassing.

Then we went on doing the exercises on the book explaining the situation again. After these sessions, we gave a test to both groups about these -ed and -ing adjectives.

Test Results

The results of the experiment group are given below.

Table 3: The results of the experiment group

	Out of 15
Student 1	15
Student 2	15
Student 3	15
Student 4	15
Student 5	14
Student 6	14
Student 7	14
Student 8	14
Student 9	14
Student 10	13
Student 11	13
Student 12	12
Student 13	12

Student 14	12
Student 15	12
Student 16	12
Average	13.5

In relation to the pre-test, they gave better results and they seemed to master learning this topic. When we look at the results of the control group, we come across quite different outcomes.

Table 4: The results of the control group

	Out of 15
Student 1	15
Student 2	15
Student 3	14
Student 4	14
Student 5	13
Student 6	13
Student 7	13
Student 8	12
Student 9	12
Student 10	12
Student 11	11
Student 12	11
Student 13	10
Student 14	10
Student 15	10
Student 16	10
Student 17	10
Student 18	9
Student 19	9
Student 20	9
Student 21	9
Student 22	9
Student 23	9
Student 24	9
Student 25	8
Student 26	8
Student 27	8
Student 28	8

Student 29	8
Student 30	8
Student 31	8
Student 32	8
Student 33	8
Student 34	8
Student 35	8
Student 36	6
Average	10.05

Their average is quite low in relation to the other group. It seems they still have problems with the correct use of these adjectives.

When we compare the results in SPSS, it gives us these results.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Experiment	16	12	15	13.50	1.211
Control	36	6.00	15.00	10.0556	2.32925
Valid N (listwise)	16				

The mean for the experiment group is 13.5 and for the control group, it is 10.05. For the standard deviation, the experiment group gave better results because they are closer to the average. There is no significant difference between the best and the weak students. But the case is quite different for the other group. The standard deviation is bigger, and the difference is much bigger in this group. It means there are some students who learned the topic well, but there are still some others who could not learn it as it should be. But when we look at the pre-test results, the two groups gave quite similar outcomes. As for post-test, the experiment group did much better.

Discussion

The subject of -ed /-ing adjectives is one of the subjects that students have difficulty with. Generally, students who do not know which adjective to use and where to use are confused about this issue. The problems of the students on this subject have been tried to be overcome in different ways in different sources. This study emerged with a different hypothesis. According to this, the main problem of the students is that they misunderstand the verbs that are the source of these adjectives. At this point, it has been shown that students generally evaluate the verbs that are the source of -ed / -ing adjectives mentioned in this study as intransitive verbs. The verbs that students confused the most

were "scare/frighten" and "embarrass". Students' misunderstanding of these verbs causes them to misunderstand the adjectives derived from them. In the study conducted with students, firstly, the correct forms of verbs were taught to the students, and then when we made sentences with these verbs, it was shown that the subject of the sentence takes -ing adjectives and the object takes -ed adjectives. In the later exam, it was seen that the students who learned in this way got much higher scores. However, the pre-test results applied to the students were very close to each other.

At this point, it is seen that the correct knowledge of these verbs, which are the source of adjectives, will help the students to understand the subject. In addition, the textbooks approach this subject casually and pass it on with a simple explanation without giving any details. However, it has been shown in this study that students can understand more quickly if this is explained in detail. Therefore, our hypothesis was confirmed.

Conclusion

Some new approaches are required in teaching these adjectives to students. Otherwise, it is only possible for the students to understand this topic in higher levels. However, this subject is mostly given at A2 level, including the textbook mentioned above. However, students often misunderstand because the explanation of this subject takes place superficially. Since students misunderstand the verbs that are the source of these adjectives, they also learn these adjectives wrongly. To overcome this problem, new approaches to the teaching of these adjectives are required.

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