

An Analytical Study of Errors made during Learning Second Language

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Abstract:

Error Analysis can be considered as a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself. Many scholars in the field of Error Analysis have emphasized the significance of second language. Corder (1967:161), for example, in one of his articles, says that "they are significant in three different ways. He starts with the teacher in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learners is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn".

The present paper mostly illustrates fundamental background studies done in the field of Error Analysis. There is a hope that the present work helps EFL teachers and educators to become familiar with the most frequent errors made by EFL learners leading them to make more objective decisions about how to go about adapting a appropriate teaching strategies to help EFL student learn better.

Section One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Error Analysis

Error analysis is a method used to document the systematic errors that appear in learner language. Human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes. They form an important aspect of learning any skill or acquiring information. Language learning is like any other human learning. It is obvious to any EFL teacher that errors form a significant part of the English output of language learners. Some of them we consider to be of great importance, others not nearly as important. Some we recognize as something that an L1 (mother tongue) learner would make, others seem to be of a nature quite different from L1 learner errors. Learners' errors give insight to the teacher about the

difficulty of the learners in their learning so they are considered indispensable in learning teaching process. Errors of all kinds are an important ingredient in the language learning process. Not only do they provide feedback for the language learner, through learner errors we can obtain important insights into the processes governing second language acquisition, and our knowledge gained from this may be applied to improving language instruction in the classroom.

It is generally agreed among second language researchers that learners are active participants in their own language learning process. According to LodonVasques (2007:117) Error Analysis can be considered as a fundamental tool in language teaching in order to recognize teacher's point of view and regardless his/her methodology for fixing and fulfilling the students' gaps . In other words, as Corder(1967) defined Error Analysis is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample , describing these errors , classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness. The purpose behind Analyzing errors is , in fact, to find "what the learner knows and does not know" and to "ultimately enable the teacher to supply him not just with the information that his hypothesis is wrong, but also importantly , with the right sort of information or data for him to form a more a adequate concept of a rule in the target language " Corder (1974:170)

1.2 The Pertinence of Analyzing of Error

First of all, by analyzing errors we can get information about how a language is learned, errors reflect the learner internal constructs, which for Selinker form an independent language system called interlanguage (Selinker, 1992), and the amount of knowledge a learner has of a language.

Another reason that justifies the analysis of errors is language teaching. In the evolution of language teaching methods, the study of errors has played a very great role, the first formal methods considered errors as the evidence of mislearning a language, they were avoided at all costs, and impeccable oral and written production was the objective for learners.

When describing learner language, the observation of the learner output conveys certain generalizations on how a second language is learned, but what researchers look for is the reasons for the phenomena observed. In this perspective, Selinker (1972:209-231) attributes five

reasons to the process of learning a second language; these reasons are briefly explained as follows:

Language transfer: the output is explained as a result of the interaction with the learner mother tongue.

1. Transfer of training: the output is explained in terms of the type of training to learn the language the learner has had.
2. Strategies of second language learning: the output is explained by the association the learner makes with the material to learn.
3. Strategies of second language communication: the output is explained by the association the learner makes with communication with native speakers of the target language.
4. Overgeneralization of target language linguistic material: the output is explained by the overgeneralizations the learner makes of syntactic rules and semantic aspects of the target language.

1.3 English as a second or foreign language

English as a second language has great reach and influence; it is taught all over the world. Richards and Schmidt (2002:472) refer to the term second language (L2) as any language learned after one has learnt one's native language. According to Krashen (1981:1), adults develop language competence in two different ways: language acquisition and language learning. Language learning and language acquisition differ in various respects.

English as a Second Language (ESL), also called English as a Foreign Language (EFL), is an English language study program for nonnative speakers. Most ESL programs have small classes so that students receive individual attention from their teachers. Students study English and also participate in the cultural and social activities of the school and community where they study.

Most of L2 learners start learning the English L2 at school level, while they have already become fluent in their L1 from home. To find out learning strategies which learners use in L2 learning and identify difficulties they encounter, error analysis has to be carried out (Richards & Schmidt, 2002:184).

Language learning, on the other hand, according to Brown (2002:278) is a conscious process in which “learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process.

1.4 Errors in Second Language: Code, Norm and Setting

An error is regarded as an infringement or deviation of the code of the formal system of communication through which the message is conveyed. Nearly eighty percent of error definitions have taken the form of code of English language as reference in order to judge the linguistic level affected. An example of this is Dulay ,et al. definition of error (1982:139). They defend the creativeness and systematicity of errors but at the same time they define them as “the flawed side of learner speech or writing that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance” .

Quirk and Greenaum (1973:2) refer to the existence of many varieties of the English language with distinct norms of their own; such as : regional , educational and status varieties, standard British English as opposed to American, Australian or Indian English.

So, in regard to form correctness we can place the terms covert errors and overt errors . The former have been defined as errors which do not appear on the surface of the utterance but are present within the message. The structure is well formed while the message does not convey the addresser’s intention. These errors are difficult to detect and may passed without being noticed. Overt errors on the contrary are clearly easily observable in the surface structure of a sentence and judged as either incorrect or inappropriate.(Corder, 1974:75)

In regard to context , it is worth mentioning the concepts of error domain and error extent. The former is defined by Lennon (1991:191) as “the rank of the linguistic unit which must be taken as context in order for the error to become apparent”. While the later is defined as “the rank of the linguistic unit , form minimally the morpheme to maximally the sentence”

Section Two

CATEGORIZATIONS OF ERRORS

2.1 Categorizations of Errors

Muriel (2006:39) emphasized the idea that accounting for why an error was made is the most important step in any attempt to understand the process of second language acquisition and to improve the way a second language is learned (pedagogical purpose).Learners errors can be classified by different ways:

1. One of these is to depend on the type of linguistic item that is involved in the error. Linguistic categories of such a classification would

include phonology/pronunciation, syntax and morphology/grammar, semantics and lexicon/meaning and vocabulary. This kind of classification is of great use to curriculum developers and language researchers .

2. Another way of categorizing errors is according to how the surface structure of a sentence or expression is altered by the error. This type of classification include the process of omissions (*This is book*); additions such as regularizations (*two deers*) and double markings (*I didn't ate it*); misinformation errors subcategorized into regularization errors (*two childs*), archi-forms (*this dog here, this dogs here, this dog there, this dogs there*), and alternating forms (*this dogs, those dog*), and misordering errors (*Always I go / Where you are going*). This kind of classification can be found in Burt and Kiparsky (1972:121).

3. The third classification of errors is a communicative one. It focuses on the role of errors on the decoder (i.e., on the listener or reader). Burt and Kiparsky (1972) devised the first communicative classification, creating two major divisions: global errors, which affect overall sentence organization and significantly hinder communication, and local errors, which affect a single part of the sentence and are only a minor "irritability" (Johansson, 1975:29) to communication.

4. The final classification of errors is called a comparative classification. Such a classification compares L2 (target language) learner errors with other types of errors. L2 errors are most frequently compared with 1) errors made by children learning the same language as their mother tongue and 2) equivalent phrases or sentences in the learner's mother tongue. Comparisons of these types have produced two main categories of errors – developmental and interlingua errors. Two additional categories produced, though more minor, are ambiguous and other errors.(Poltizer&Ramirez ,1973:18).

It is suggested that most second language learner' errors resulted from differences between the first and second languages. This was the basis of the long-popular contrastive analysis theory. Now, researchers have learned that the first language has a far smaller effect on second language syntax than previously thought.

2.2 Comparative Classification of Errors :

2.2.1 Developmental Errors:

There are two important points that underlie the interest in comparing L1 and L2 acquisition errors. We can summarize them as follows:

1) If characteristics common to both L1 and L2 acquisition can be identified, we can apply L1 theoretical inferences to L2 acquisition theory as well.

2) Since L1 acquisition errors are not possibly as a result of language interference, when the same errors are made by L2 learners, it is reasonable to believe that mental processes of general language development are at work, not the grammar rules of the L2 learner's L1. Shaffer (2005) as taken from (Zobl ,1980:469-479).

2.2.2 Interlingual Errors:

According to (White ,1977:13) interlingual errors are considered similar in structure to semantically equivalent phrases or sentences in the L2 learner's L1. They refer to L2 errors that reflect L1 structure, without considering the internal processes or external conditions. The origins of interlingual errors are all conditions that result in the premature use of the L2 by the language learner. These contain pressure to perform in the L2, living in an environment where the use of the L2 is very limited, conscious L2 language processing, and so forth.

It can be assumed that this type of error is attributed to transfer from Arabic .Example:

هل نام احمد جيذا " ليلة البارحة ؟

Will Ahmed sleep well last night ?

Was Ahmed sleep well last night ?

2.2.3 Ambiguous Errors:

This type of errors reflect errors that an L1 learner commonly makes while at the same time reflect the structure of the L2 learner's mother tongue. This kind of error seems to appear at the earliest stage of development and is ,at first , generalized to all instance of negation. For example Iraqi pupils said:

- No play here .
- The teacher no will punish him.

2.2.4 Context of Learning Errors:

These "induced error" are judged to have been made by learners possibly because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in a text book , or even because of a pattern that was rottenly memorized in a drill but not properly conceptualized.

Example: Ali wasn't come to school.

No did a doctor.

Iam don't a happy man.

In this type of error "**Iam**" is learned as unanalyzed chunk, a phenomenon which is very common at the earliest stage of learning. This is classified under "context of learning" because the over-emphasis of the repetition of "**Iam**" in the early stage, due to the nature of the structural approach adopted, leads to the inaccurate hypotheses on the part of the learner that "**Iam**" is one and only one unit with "**he**" or "**they**". This also explains why Iraqi learners of English produce sentences such as "**Iam is a doctor**". (Al-Jumaily 1982).

The last error may also be looked upon as an instance of unanalyzed "**don't**" where the learners take "**don't**" as the negative operator.

2.2.5 Other Errors:

They do not fit into any of the four categories of developmental, interlingual, ambiguous, and context learning errors. Dulay and Burt (1974a:8(2)). An example of such an error would be *She not a teacher* uttered by an Iraqi learner (Arabic) L1 speaker who is learning English. This error is not one that an L1 English learner would make, nor is it one that mirrors the syntax of the English learner's L1 (Arabic). On the other hand, an error of the structure *She not a teacher* would be classified as an interlingual error because it is very similar in syntactic structure to the

Arabic: (هي ليست معلمة).

Section Three

Errors and Mistakes

3.1 Kinds of Errors

It is assumed that there are two types of errors:

1. Performance errors: it refers to those errors made by learners when they are tired or hurried. This kind of errors are considered to be not serious and can be overcome.

Competence errors: those errors are more serious. They reflect inadequate learning. (Burt & Kiparsky, 1974:27)

3.2 Causes of errors and their treatment:

In second language learning there are two important sources of errors. The first one interference from the native language where as the second one can be attributed to intralingual and developmental factors. Of course native language has a basic role in learning another language. (Lado ,1957:56)

It is advised that teachers should not correct all errors committed by their students . In addition , the frequent correction of errors disrupts the process of language learning and discourages shy students from communicating in the target language.

Corder (1974:125) emphasizes the importance of studying errors made by second language learners:

“The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process”.

3.3 . Errors and Mistakes:

How can someone determine the difference between a language learner's errors and the language learner's mistakes? Many scholars in the field of error analysis differentiated between errors and mistake. These terms are associated with Corder. An error is a breach of the language's code, resulting in an unacceptable utterance; with L2 learners this might occur because ‘the learners have not yet internalized the formation rules of the code’ (1973: 259). Mistakes are ‘the result of some failure of performance’ (1967: 18). They occur when the language user (who might be a native speaker) makes a slip such as a false start or a confusion of structure. Self-correctability is another criterion taken by James(1998:57) to make a distinction between errors and mistakes. According to James “mistakes can be corrected by the learners if their attentions were drawn to them, but errors cannot be self-corrected”.

3.4 Writing Errors VS Writing Mistakes:

When talking about L1 interference, we understand that it is related to mistakes and errors made by L2 writers. Thus, it is necessary to clarify these two terms. Brown (1994, as cited in Petter, 2000) describes mistakes as an unsuccessful use of grammatical rules; that is, learners study the language structures comprehensibly but fail when using them. This failure is perceived as a mistake, while errors refer to “a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner” (p. 6). It is reasonable to say that in language learning, an error is what learners make in their L2 writing because they do

not know the syntactic as well as lexical structures, whereas a mistake is in relation to the learners' low competence in using a foreign language. Jie (2008:37) also notes, "a mistake occurs as the result of processing limitations rather than lack of competence while an error is the breaches of rules of code". According to Jie, an error happens from a lack of requisite knowledge of a language learner. As such, he/she makes such errors in his/her writing because he/she does not know grammatical properties in a new language. The rules of L1 knowledge are then employed in the use of L2 writing, which causes the mother tongue interference.

3.5 What Comparison Studies Tell Us:

It is assumed that there is a difference between languages – syntactic, phonological, lexical, etc. – was the main cause of learner errors and of difficulty in learning a language as an L2. This perception began to change with the research results of Dulay and Burt (1974a:129-136), which observed that the number of errors in second language performance that could be attributed to first language influence was far smaller than had previously been believed. One of these studies showed that less than 5% of all errors in five-year-old L2 learners were interlingual while over 93% were developmental. Their later studies yielded similar results, supporting the same general conclusion: The majority of errors made by second language learners are developmental errors, not developmental errors. Similarly, a study by Garcia and Trujillo supported Dulay and Burt's conclusions (cited in Chavez-Chavez, 1984:11(3)).

Studies also show that the majority of errors produced by adult L2 learners are not of the interlingual type, but developmental. However, the proportion of interlingual errors is higher in adults than it is in children. In White (1977: 42-58) and LoCoco (1975:96-124), the occurrences of interlingual errors range from 8% to 23% in adults, and in some of these cases, only a few of the individuals were responsible for the majority of the interlingual errors in the data collected.

Rather than focusing on one type of sentence structure until it is mastered, it seems more useful and realistic to expose EFL students to a larger range of structure types in a much shorter amount of time, even though this may cause more local errors to initially be produced. Once the student realizes that he can actually communicate, it becomes much more meaningful for him to focus on the elimination of local errors. Johansson (1975:330-336).

3.6 The Role of the Mother Tongue

This section is an attempt, to answer the question, whether the learner's mother tongue, Arabic, is responsible for the Iraqi learner's poor performance in English, i.e., interference with the learning process. A lot has been said about the influence of Arabic on the learners' attempts to learn English, i.e. mother tongue interference or transfer, especially in the area of do-support. Transfer errors on translation task in negative constitute only 35% of the total number of errors on translation. 55% of these transfer errors were made by the learners at the first stage of the learning continuum.

Transfer errors represent 80% of the errors made by the learners at this stage. This proportion of transfer errors drops sharply at second stage to 18%, while at third stage it decreases to mere 5% of the total number of errors produced by the learner at this stage. On translation. Transfer error formed 62% of the number of errors made by many started learner (that refer to developmental errors) which are transfer ones. On recognition & correction task though the number of transfer errors is similar to that on translation task. 70% of the transfer errors are made by the learners at the third stage of the continuum. The proportion of transfer errors to the learners' performance is the highest at stage one (9%) while at stage four the rate drops to 5% only. As for changing task, there are few errors of transfer in the performance of the learner at the age of 13 years. In interrogative, the role of the mother tongue can be found clearly in changing task when the learners non inverted Yes- No question. Transfer errors made by the learner in changing task constitute 25% of the total number of errors made by the pupils of intermediate school. Transfer errors drop sharply at stage two to 28%. On translation task transfer errors formed 10% of the number of errors made by learners.

The above evidence indicate that mother tongue presence is restricted to the earlier stages of development in both negative, and interrogative structure, and are greatest at the earlier stage. It also retracted to a lower stage of development especially in translation task in negative and changing task in interrogative. Transfer, at least in the case of our learner is more a strategy of communication than one of learning, since the learners only restore to it when they are forced to produce in the target language structures that have not been internalized by them.

This is the case where the communicative burden is beyond the learner's knowledge in the L2. i.e. the learner is required to perform beyond his implicit knowledge. In other words what is happening here could better be coined as "borrowing to use" Corder's term (1981:18). Thus learner's

avoidance could be explained through their awareness of the greatness of the language distance which will eventually lead them to discover the relative unborrowability of much of their mother tongue. There seems to be no difference between foreign language and second language learners regarding the way the target language is processed. Similar learning strategies seems to be employed in the learning process. The dominant phenomenon is that of overgeneralization. It is worth noticing here that we share Corder's belief that overgeneralization, though widely regarded so, is not a learning strategy but rather another feature of simplification, thus it cannot be intentional since the learner doesn't know that he is overgeneralizing. Kashavarz(1999:175).

At the earlier stages there is more evidence of rule elaboration, i.e. when the use of an interlanguage rule is extended to include more linguistic environments. Reliance on over - generalization is directly proportional to proficiency in the target language. Evidence shows that the use of the mother tongue is not due to a learning strategy of transfer but rather to a communication one of "borrowing" simply resulting from the performer being called on to perform before he has learned the new behavior. The learner in fact is "padding", using old knowledge, supplying what is known to what is not known.

The evidence seems to support Krashen's point of view (1976:157-168) in that what is happening is that the L1 "substitutes" for the acquired L2 as an utterance initiator when the performer has to produce in the target language but has not acquired enough of the second language to do so.

Section Four

CONCLUSIONS

4-1 Conclusions

It is not easy to determine if an error is a cause of transfer or intralingual nature but as far as linguistic and psychological explanations can be provided we can expect to attribute certain validity to results. What is true is that transfer (on a large scale) and intralingual (on a small scale) do play a role in the learning of an L2 by adult people.

Drawing students' attention to every error has the potential to destroy their confidence and wastes time, while it provides no guarantee that they will learn from their mistakes. Additionally, learners who make errors while creating language may not even be aware of what a correct form looks like or be cognitively ready to comply with the morphological, syntactic, or lexical rules associated with the error. As Dulay and Burt (1974a:8(2))

suggests, learners may acquire structures in a natural order, so elements that are beyond their language capabilities cannot be acquired until the particular language learner is linguistically capable. In other words, correcting these types of unfamiliar errors may be ineffectual.

Error analysis is not only beneficial to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers by showing them a student's progress, but it is also significant to researchers and to the learners. It can show researchers what strategies learners use to learn a second language and also indicate the type of errors learners make and why. When a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him or her the correct forms is not by simply giving it to a learner, but by letting the individual discover the error and test different hypotheses.

Studying learner errors could be a first step to introduce teachers to the knowledge of learner's language, but it is just a starting point to discover the multiple nuances learning an L2 entails. At the same time, studying learner errors involves approaching learning in an intimate way; this would enable teachers to promote appropriate pedagogical tools: it is by understanding the nature of a phenomenon that we can better explain it and tackle it

Regardless of this opposition, it still seems safe to conclude that 1) all or nearly all learner errors should not be corrected and 2) that the instructor should be selective in the errors corrected, including global errors for correction and excluding errors that are beyond the learner's level in the natural order of acquisition. We may also assume that interlingual errors are more frequent among EFL learners than among ESL learners and that they are also more frequent among adult learners than among children learning an L2.

4-2 Pedagogical Implications

The teacher should not be discouraged when their student fail to produce a structure intensively practiced , because this structure may be , as it were, waiting for its turn to be acquired. Second language teachers, then, should plan to provide large quantities of input materials (listening and reading activities) for their students before they ask them to produce language associated with the structures being studied.

The results of the many researches highlight the importance of analysing the performance of the learners especially in making negative and interrogative constructions. In the analysis of (AL- Jumailu 1982:p:175) may provide a valide guide for the preparation and sequencing of language teaching materials.It will also provide valuable diagnostic information

concerning the progress of learners along the development trajectory leading to target language competence , and help the teachers themselves to better understand the process of SLA.

Language teachers can develop a class atmosphere in which the learners expose the language they know to the teacher , and classmates in a way that tends to lower the learner's affective filter. Since 'error' is a necessary factor in learners development towards the target language norm, a class where learners are encouraged to expose their knowledge of the TL will certainly lead to a better and faster acquisition of the TL.

For the purpose of better performance by the teachers in assessing and diagnosing difficulties ,it is recommended that a course in error analysis must be included in teacher preparation and training courses. This should also involve familiarization with the basic statistics necessary for such assessment. It is also essential to educate teachers to tolerate learners' errors and appreciate the significance of such errors as true indicators of learners' development in the target language.

Although translation is a separate skill that is not included with the four basic skills of language learning namely ,(listening ,speaking ,reading , writing), the present research recommended that language teaching text books must include translation element that will train the learners to translate. This is so ,because translation plays a significant part in the learner's development and assessment.

Translation should be adopted as a testing device for measuring both proficiency and achievement in the learning of a second language.

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دراسة تحليلية للأخطاء التي تحدث في أثناء تعلم اللغة

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الملخص:

يمكن اعتبار تحليل الأخطاء كنوع من التحليل اللغوي الذي يركز على الأخطاء التي يرتكبها المتعلمين، وهو يتكون من المقارنة بين ارتكاب الأخطاء في اللغة الهدف (لغة الغرض) والأخطاء المرتكبة في هدف اللغة نفسها. لقد أكد العديد من الباحثين في مجال تحليل الأخطاء على أهمية اللغة الثانية. كوردر (1967: 161)، على سبيل المثال، في إحدى مقالاته، ذكر بان الأخطاء " ذات أهمية كبيرة في ثلاث طرق مختلفة. مبتدأ بالمعلم التي تبين له مدى تقدم المتعلم نحو الهدف. ثانياً، بالنسبة للباحث فإنها توفر الأدلة حول كيفية اكتساب المتعلم للغة، والأساليب التي يتبعها ويعرضها المتعلمين في تعلمهم للغة. وأخيراً، فإن الأخطاء هي أكيدة وحتمية وغير قابلة الجدل للمتعلم نفسه لأنها تعتبر كوسيلة يستخدمها المتعلم من أجل التعلم ".
أن هذا البحث يقدم نظرة عن الدراسات التي عرضت في مجال تحليل الأخطاء. متأملين أن هذا العمل يساعد معلمي وتدريسي اللغة الانكليزية (كلغة أجنبية) على التعرف والتأقلم مع الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعاً التي يقوم بها متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية ، مما يساعدهم في اتخاذ قرارات مصيرية وموضوعية حول كيفية تبني أساليب تدريسية حديثة لمساعدة متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية على التعلم بصورة أفضل.