
ERROR ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN ENGLISH BY OMANI STUDENTS: A REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract

Identifying students' errors is indisputably the essential aspect of language learning. Finding these errors is the basic step to learn the problem areas of a target language. These errors are the springboard to the teaching-learning situation, syllabus design and remedial classes. It is imperative to the teacher to be familiar with the errors frequently made by learners, different types of errors and reasons for these errors. Errors could be due to linguistic variation of L1 and L2 and many other factors. Looking into approaches on error analyses would help to handle the errors in classroom effectively.

(Key words: Error, mother tongue interference (MTI), Contrastive Analysis, Inter language Theory)

1. Introduction

Language learning involves a lot of errors. If these errors are identified, corrections can be thought of which would result in appropriate language usage by the learners. It is quintessential to know the errors, error types and the reasons, if any, for these errors. Errors could be due to mother tongue interference (MTI), ineffective learning strategies or due to different linguistic features of languages. Before analyzing and classifying the errors, it is wise to examine the existing knowledge so that it will avoid reinventing the wheel. This paper attempts to dig into three approaches viz. Contrastive Analysis approach (CA), and Inter language Theory (IL), which are presented in the following sections.

2. Contrastive Analysis Approach

In 1945, C.C Fries who was an American linguist introduced the study of contrastive linguistics. A few years later, Robert Lado(1957) had taken up this assumption and established the foundation theoretically for Contrastive Analysis (CA) in the book "Linguistics Across Cultures". Thus, CA was developed to study the variances between two languages to figure out the students' problem areas in learning the target language. The researchers who supported CA believed that the similarities and dissimilarities of L1 and L2 were sufficient to solve the problems in teaching them (Ghadessy 1980).Lado (1957) claimed that if the aspects of both the languages are similar, it is easy for the students to learn and if those aspects are different, it is challenging for them to learn.

Therefore, Contrastive Analysis got more significance to explore learners' errors in the area of L2 acquisition.

Numerous studies established on CA tried to look into the similarities and differences in the systems of L2 and L1 in the transformational generative model frame work or structure models of language description. The impact of CA on L2 teaching and learning can be: "The description of practical grammar which is made up of sum of differences between the grammar of source language and that of the target language" (Nickel, 1971, p.9). Els van T, et al (1984:38) summarized the objectives of CA as mentioned below:

- a) Highlighting the differences and similarities of L1 and L2
- b) Predicting as well as explaining L2 learning challenges
- c) Preparing required language course material for teaching

Bose (2005) opined that the MTI is one of the main causes for errors by learners. It is defined as positive and negative transfer between L1 and L2. This positive language transfer takes place when the forms of both the languages are similar. In contrast, the negative transfer takes place when these forms are different. He, furthermore, added that, after collecting the writing samples of the learners and collecting the errors that are common, a teacher can design a remedial teaching for the learners. Ferguson (1965) pointed out that the MTI produced by the contrast in structures between L1 of the learners and the L2 is one of the main difficulties in a L2 learning. An accepted conviction is that a cautious CA of L1 and L2 suggests rational platform for planning of remedial courses, preparing course material, and developing different techniques for real classroom teaching. Mackey (1965) said that CA was identified as a basic premise of applied linguistics that all the learners' errors in using the L2 are because of the reproduction of their L1 in L2, which is evidently incorrect. Many errors made by the learners have no equivalent in L1. Moreover, he told that learners of the same L1 make a variety of errors though they come with the same language background. He further debated "the first language itself is not the only influence on second language learning" (Mackey, *ibid*, p. 4).

For learning and teaching of a foreign language, Fries (1945, p.9) proposed that impressive materials are prepared based on linking the specific expressions of L2, judiciously with a similar expressions of learner's L1.

The following table depicts some of the examples of errors made due to the contrast between L1 and L2:

No	Excerpt	Correction	Reason of correction
1	"I go to the college"	"I go to college"	'the' is written where no article is needed
2	"I get up in morning at 7:00."	"I get up in the morning at 7:00."	'the' is missing where it is needed
3	"I go to the bed"	"I go to bed"	'the' is written where it is not needed
4	"I have a classes"	"I have classes"	indefinite article 'a' is written where it is not necessary

Articles is one tricky area which needs to be learned with care and attention. The students have definite article in L1 and do not have indefinite article. Even the usage of the definite article in English and Arabic is not the same.

I went to college. (With obvious purpose)

I went to a college. (As a visitor)

I went to the college (specific college)

All the three sentences are syntactically correct in English. However, the meaning differs. This distinction in meaning is something which the L1 speaking student must know to avoid errors while using articles. This particular student will commit errors in this area because, it is evident from the examples 1 – 4 from the student's writing that the student's mother tongue is either used or interfering in the L2 production. This is one of the subtle and highly recommended areas in grammar that the material producers can focus on while preparing materials to the Arabic speaking English learners.

3. Error Analysis

A linguistic analysis concerning with the learners' errors is known as Error Analysis (EA). It includes grammar rules of L2 and the errors made by the learners in L2. Error Analysis (EA) highlights how important the errors of learners in L2 are. It is essential to understand that learners' mother tongue's interference (MTI) is not the sole reason for the errors by the students.

Richards (1971) categorized the errors in second language learning as follows:

- 1) Overgeneralization: it takes place when learners produce structure generalizing based on the knowledge they have about certain structures of L2. As Little wood (1984) mentions in his example of generalizing the "ed" past form, also forming plurals by suffixing "s" to even irregular plural forms of nouns.
- 2) Ignorance of Rule Restriction: it happens owing to the inability to notice the nuances or prevailing structures;
- 3) False Concept Hypothesized: this kind of errors arises from wrongly understanding the differences of L2 items.
- 4) Incomplete Application of Rule: this error takes place as the learners could not use certain structures and grammar rules needed introducing meaningful and acceptable sentences.

In the words of Sharma (1980), "Error analysis can thus provide a strong support to remedial teaching". Furthermore, in the course of the remedial program, EA could expose not only the program's failures but also successes. Dulay et al (1982) defined 'error' as talking about a regular deviation from existing norms or a selected norm. EA can be helpful in creating remedial tasks and give more attention to the problematic areas. Corder (1974, p125) mentioned "The study of errors 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." Richards et al (1992) specified-

studying students' errors is instrumental in (1) finding out the learners' language learning strategies. Following is a list of different categories of spelling errors in second language learning:

No	Excerpt	Correction
1	activitis	activities
2	coffe	coffee
3	colleg	college
4	viwemenits	few minutes
5	vrots	fruits
6	tack shower	take a shower
7	wack up	wake up
8	brack	break
9	vegetable	vegetable

In the examples 1, 2, 3 and the second word in example 4, the letter 'e' has been dropped. A similar problem with the letter 'e' can be seen in the examples 6 and 7. All these errors are due to the inability to notice the nuances in the English spelling. In addition, where there is a word ending with /k/ though the word ends with the letter 'e' (for example: 'take', 'wake'), a consistent pattern of spelling using 'ck' in the end of the word can be observed in the examples 6, 7 and 8. In example 9, the pronunciation of the word helps us to understand the reason behind the spelling mistake if the word 'vegetable'/'vedʒ.tə.bəl/ which is written as "vegetable" again dropping the letter 'e'.

4. **Interlanguage Theory**

Selinker (1972) conceptualized the Inter language theory to focus on the likelihood that the students' language is considered to be a separate linguistic system or a variety of specific rules and features within (Jie,2008). According to the Inter language, learners build up a separate system for themselves while learning a second language. This system in some ways, it is different from learners' L1 system and their L2 system. Interlanguage is a system what the learners create for themselves in the middle of their L1 and their L2. Inter language had seen the development of the language as a blend of several features which includes environment, nature of input, learner's internal process, and influence between mother tongue and target language.

Tarone, et al(1976) suggested the features of inter language productions as follows:

- a) The L2 speakers hardly confirm what is expected from the native speaker of TL to produce
- b) Inter language production is not the same as interpretation of L1 expression
- c) Expressions in L2 are not randomly formed,
- d) Improper synchronization of L2 acquisition with L1 results in learners speaking interlanguage.

Selinker (1972) proposed "fossilization" to mention the preference of several L2 learners to avoid formulating grammar of inter language as a part of the process of acquiring L2. He

advocated that inter language can be said as a distinct language structure developed from the attempts to produce the learners' standard target language. He recognized the following five types of "fossilization". The first one is Language Transfer which means the rules of inter language sometimes may be due to the transfer of the language system from the learners' L1. The second type of fossilization, Transfer of Training, is explained as the specific structures that are produced in the inter language because of the language training that is given in the teaching of target language. This is followed by another type of fossilization due to the strategies of learners using the background knowledge of the L1 to learn the specific material of L2 which is Strategies of Second Language Learning. The fourth type of fossilization could be due to different ways of learning to communicate using the target language of the native speakers. This is termed as Strategies of Second Language Communication. Finally, inter language is produced as a result of applying the general rules of grammar even to exceptions and meaning making of L2. This is labelled as **Overgeneralization of the Target Language.**

For example:

No	Excerpt	Correction
1	First, take 2 table spoons from the custard powder ...	First, take 2 table spoons of custard powder ...
2	Next, you should be add ¼ cup from the milk in another bowl and ...	Next, you should be add ¼ cup of milk in another bowl and ...
3	Then, add ¼ cup from the sugar to the milk, ...	Then, add ¼ cup of sugar to the milk, ...

The examples clearly show the learner's expressions in L2 are not randomly formed. Though they are erroneous, they are systematic in the sense, every 'from the' should be replaced by 'of'. The learner is trying to write – a portion of – for which 'from the' is used. This learner's attempt of improper synchronization of L2 acquisition with L1 resulted in learner's interlanguage. Material producers need to explicitly mention of the usage of the English prepositions in the course materials to help the students and teachers to work on errors related to learner's interlanguage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the aforementioned theories discussed are treated as vital factors in the acquisition of L2. Whatever has been discussed in the earlier sections can be a rewarding experience in terms of learning to support language learners to develop their linguistic skills and apply them effectively. It is important to keep it in mind that the concepts of the three theories are needed to comprehend the process happened in the L2 acquisition. Moreover, these theories mainly concentrate on the type of learners' performance.

Errors are considered as the fundamental aspect of acquiring a language, which are instrumental in pedagogy, linguistics, and psychology. Hence, integrating the three theories

is required to succeed in solving the difficulties in L2 acquisition, and give practical suggestions for syllabus designing and development, preparation of teaching methodology and designing techniques for teaching English language in classroom and thereby improves second language acquisition.

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