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# LEARNING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE: ERRORS AND MISTAKES OF INDIAN STUDENTS

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**Abstract**:
There is continuous hue and cry for failure of any kind of plan of learning of Second Language English in India. The average non-native learners' of English always try to find short-cut ways to learn English. This is really impossible. The ability to learn English depends on our use of language in different contexts. This requires our proficiency in vocabulary, construction, grammar, pronunciation and performance and competence in contexts. It has been amply argued and brought out that an alien language study would involve the influence and interference of the elements of the native language with those of the target language. It has further been made clear that such impact and interference would result in certain learning difficulties of the target language. These areas of difficulties and learning problems result in the learners' committing 'mistakes' in using target language. The present paper aims at analyzing the errors and mistakes that the learners' of India make while learning and using English as their second language.

**Keywords**: Error, Mistake, Second Language, Grammar, Competence, Performance.

**Introduction:**
The students in our nation have studied up to tenth standard in their regional medium languages. There are also some states in which the students in senior secondary classes learn courses in regional or national language. For them, English is introduced only from standard three onwards. They learn the language skills from their own mother tongues. They develop their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and the use of language in their regional languages. Later on to accumulate the second language they face a lot of problems. When they start to learn English they try to accustom to the sounds of English but it seems strange in the beginning. The features of their mother tongue interfere in English speech. The sound system, the structure and the vocabulary of English do not have similarities in any of the various languages of India. It is significant to point out that the students of India make errors and

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mistakes while learning the second language English. It is pertinent to note that language on these points such as phonology, morphology, syntax and  grammar and the use in social contexts have play a major role.

**Error and Mistake:**

An, error, a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflects the competence of learner. A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to utilise a known system correctly. A distinction is always made between errors and mistakes where the former is defined as resulting from a learner's lack of proper grammatical knowledge, whilst the latter as a failure to utilize a known system correctly.

**S.P. Cordor (1967:161)** an eminent researcher of language focuses the importance of error interpretation in language learning process. Error analysis in language acquisition process stimulated major changes on learning foreign language. In teaching English language, the English language experts should concentrate on the errors made by the students in order to eradicate their basic problems. The modern Indian grammarians and language experts have investigated that the cause of error is the lack of knowledge in the target language and the interference of mother tongue. Errors signify three things, *first* to the teacher, in that it tells him/her, if he or she undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards that goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him/her to learn. *Second*, it provides the researcher with evidence of how language is learned or acquired, and what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his/her discovery of the language. *Third* it is indispensable to the learner himself/herself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn

**Kacher** (1965: 34) points  out that error is a mistake or inaccuracy in speech, opinion or action. To him it may contain deviations from the varieties of English and those formations which are considered as mistakes or sub-standard formations.

**J.C. Richard (1972:96-113)** remarks that the errors are categorized into three types: *inter-lingual*, *itra-lingual* and *developmental errors*.

- *Inter-lingual* errors are caused by the interference of learner's mother tongue.
- *Intra-lingual* errors are the errors which originate within the structure of the target language itself.
- *Developmental* errors are caused due to the learners' limited exposure to the target language.

**Noam Chomsky** (1965) made a distinguishing explanation of competence and performance on which, later on, the identification of mistakes and errors will be possible, Chomsky stated that '*'We thus make a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in*

*concrete situations)*'' ( 1956, p. 4). In other words, errors are thought of as indications of an incomplete learning, and that the speaker or hearer has not yet accumulated a satisfied language knowledge which can enable them to avoid linguistics misuse. Relating knowledge with competence was significant enough to represent that the competence of the speaker is judged by means of errors that concern the amount of linguistic data he or she has been exposed to, however, performance which is the actual use of language does not represent the language knowledge that the speaker has. The actual state of the speaker somehow involves and influences the speaker's performance by either causing a good performance or mistakes. Thus, it is quite obvious that there is some kind of interrelationship between competence and performance.

**Views on Error and Mistake**

**Brown** suggests that the process of second language learning is not very different from learning a first language, and the feedback a L2 learner gets upon making errors benefits him in developing the L2 knowledge. He terms these mistakes as performance errors. Mistakes of this kind are frequently made by both native speakers and second language learners. However, native speakers are generally able to correct themselves quickly. Such mistakes include slips of the tongue and random ungrammatical formations. On the other hand, errors are systematic in that they occur repeatedly and are not recognizable by the learner. They are a part of the learner's inter-language, and the learner does not generally consider them as errors. They are *errors* only from the perspective of teachers and others who are aware that the learner has deviated from a grammatical norm. That is, mistakes (performance errors) can be self-corrected with or without being pointed out to the speaker but systematic errors cannot be self-corrected.

**Keshavarz** (2008, p.49) also noted that there is a distinction between errors and mistakes. Errors are rule governed, systematic in nature, internally principled and free from arbitrariness. They show learner's underlying knowledge of the target language that is his transitional competence. In contrast to errors, mistakes are random deviations and unrelated to any system. They are related to performance of the learner and might occur in the speech and writing like slip of the tongue, slip of the ear, slip of the pen, and false start.

**Understanding mistakes in written language**

Learning a language involves becoming proficient in the four skills of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Mistakes are an inevitable part of this process and neither the teacher nor the student should become fixated on them. It is useful for both, however, to have an understanding of the variety of typical errors in written English, since these are the most amenable to correction. Written errors can be categorized as errors of *mechanics*, *grammar* and *usage*.

**Mechanical mistakes** are those of orthography of spelling and punctuation. Everyone who writes in English makes such mistakes, whether native speaker or ESL student.

**Grammar mistakes** rarely occur in native speakers' writing but very commonly do in the work of less proficient ESL students, whose mother-tongue "interferes" with the production of correct English. ESL students make numerous mistakes in the use of verbs (for example, incorrect tense choice, incorrect tense form), the articles (*a/an, the* - particularly Asian students in whose languages these words do not exist), and word order.

**Usage mistakes** A usage mistake is a word or a string of words in a sentence that is grammatically possible, but not usual in Standard English. Hence native speakers rarely make usage mistakes, but ESL students very often do.

**Learn Language from Making Mistakes**

It is observed that language learning *can* happen with few mistakes. Isn't speaking and writing with mistakes an effective way to learn a foreign language? After all, "practice makes perfect", doesn't it? Those who believe mistakes are a good way to learn language, they will become very accurate and exact in the use of language.  The learner says a sentence, makes some mistakes, the teacher corrects them, and the learner memorizes the proper way to say the sentence. Next time around, the learner will hopefully make fewer mistakes. The process is repeated until the learner is error-free. Look at the following model:
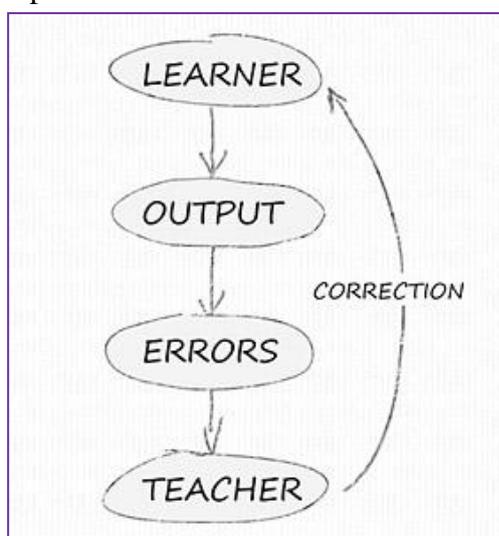


**Feed-back based learning**

The output-based learning method actually contains two feedback loops:

1.  When the teacher corrects you and you try to remember that a given phrase is wrong (this correction will not always occur).

2.  Whenever you say an incorrect sentence.

The second effect (reinforcement) is probably weaker than the first one (correction), but it further slows down learning methods that are based on speaking. If a learner spends most of

his/her time listening to poor grammar (produced by himself/herself and other students), and he/she gets little other input, one cannot expect good results.
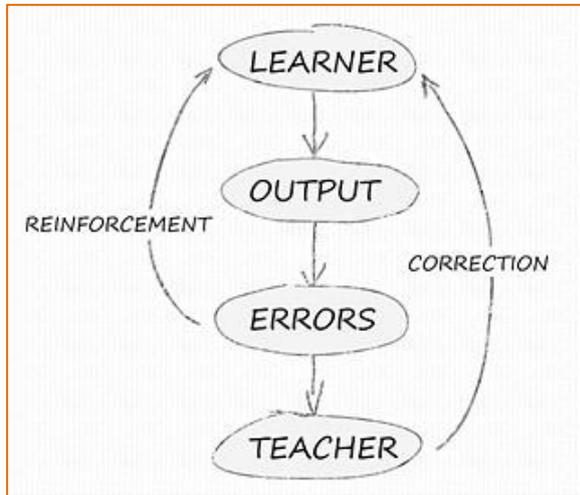


**Output-Based Learning**

**Levels of Errors:** The errors may occur in different levels. They are discussed below:

- **Morphological Level:** At the morphological level, the students get confused with the bound forms. They make errors while trying to create new words by adding prefix, infix, and suffix.

|        | Incorrect          | correct             |
|--------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Prefix | Innecessary        | Unnecessary         |
| Infix  | Cupfuls, Spoonfuls | Cupsful, Spoonsful  |
| Suffix | Beautiness         | Beautiful           |

- **Inconsistency of the Target Language:** The students make errors due to the inconsistency of the English language whereas in their mother tongue, they do not find this kind of inconsistency. The students often make errors in adding the suffix '-er' to the verb in order to get the noun form.

| Words  | Correct  | incorrect |
|--------|----------|-----------|
| Cook   | Cook     | Cooker    |
| Report | Reporter | -         |
| Drive  | Driver   | -         |

- **Irregularity in Plural Suffix:** The students from non-native speakers of English have the lack the knowledge in the second language even though they learn English as a second language from third standard onwards. They are unaware of the irregular forms of plural. They do not practice and/or memorize the rules of the grammar. For examples, they frame sentences like these listed below.

i.      The cattles are grazing in the field.
ii.     The childrens play in the garden.
iii.    The staffs went for a tour.

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Cattles | Cattle |
| Childrens | Children |
| Sheeps | Sheep |
| Oxes | Oxen |
| Staffs | Staff |

- **Irregularity in Tense Markers:** The students are not aware of the English language exceptions in morphological rules. This is due to learning English as a second language /foreign language. The main cause of morphological errors is due to deficiency in teaching/learning. Inconsistency of the English language patterns also contributes this condition since the students and teachers do not find such patterns in their mother tongue.

**Correct**

| Present | Past | Past Participle |
|---|---|---|
| Do | Did | Done |
| Put | Put | Put |
| Read | Read | Read |
| Rise | Rose | Risen |
| Sing | Sang | Sung |

**Incorrect**

| Present | Past | Past Participle |
|---|---|---|
| Do | Did | Dided |
| Put | Putted | Putted |
| Read | Rid | Rided |
| Rise | Rised | Rised |
| Sing | Runed | Runed |

- **Syntactic Level:** At the syntactic level, the Indian students find difficult to frame even simple sentences. They do not know the basic structure of sentence in English. They have the lack of basic knowledge in English grammar. For examples: The exam started today (Error).  The exam starts from today (Correct). I lost your English class (error). I missed your English class (correct).

- **Error in Grammar Level:** Grammar is the set of rules that describe the structure of a language and control the way that sentences are formed. It encompasses both diction (word choice) and syntax (word order). It also encompasses the varieties of sentence structures and the principles of subject-verb agreements. Children learn grammar through experience and exposure. Mostly through conversation with other native speakers of their own dialect. But to learn the grammar of second language (English), it is essential to learn different aspects of grammar and its usage in written and spoken communication.

- **Error in parts of speech**

- **Noun**

  - **Nouns usually used as plural**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Under the circumstance you had better take leave. | Under the circumstances you had better take leave. |
| The economic condition of the country is not good. | The economic conditions of the country is not good. |
| Give him my best regard. | Give him my best regards. |

  - **Plural nouns with no singular**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Please accept my congratulation. | Please accept my congratulations. |
| He gave me thank for my help. | He gave me thanks for my help. |
| He has received a summon to appear in court tomorrow. | He has received a summons to appear in court tomorrow. |

  - **Nouns used as singular only in a special sense**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Write in details what you have to say. | Write in detail what you have to say. |
| I always keep my words. | I always keep my word. |
| He has no issues. | He has no issue. |

  - **Uncountable wrongly used in plurals**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Answer any five of the followings. | Answer any five of the following. |
| During my illness I ate nothing but fruits. | During my illness I ate nothing but fruit. |
| Who gave you these wrong informations? | Who gave you these wrong information? |

- **Pronouns**

A pronoun is used in the substitution of a noun. We have to be very careful to use the pronoun. Let us look at in detail.

- Personal Pronoun:
(i)      Subject pronouns.     I, We, You, He, She, They, It.
(ii)     Object pronouns.     Me, Us, You, Him, Her, Them, It.
(iii)    Possessive Pronouns. Mine, Ours, Yours, His, Hers, Theirs.

An object pronoun is used instead of a subject pronoun after the verb 'be'. Example:

Who broke that window?
It wasn't me. (Not  it wasn't I.)

- Impersonal Pronoun-'It'
Weather...............It is raining.
Time....................It is 5o'clock now.
Distance.............. It is not so far.
Dummy subject....It is better to keep distance.
Emphasis..............It is you who began the quarrel.

- **Reflexive and Emphatic Pronouns**

The subject and the object refer to the same person or thing.
e.g.; He fell off the bike and hurt himself.
     The town itself is not large. (Emphatic)

'They' is used to talk about persons or things.
Examples; They pay me a visit every week.
          Take these books; they might be useful.
          'They' and 'Their' are also used to talk about one person.
          e.g.; everyone has to bring their own food.

          'Who' is used as object.
          Incorrect; Whom are you speaking to?
          Correct:   Who are you speaking to?

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| This book is her's. | This book is hers. |

Whenever any object is in the possession of a pronoun we don't use apostrophe s ('s).

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Your's  faithfully. | Yours faithfully. |

When permission is given to anyone to take anything or use anything we say "Take it".

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| Sunita- Take. | Sunita-Take it. |

My brother and myself went to Puri.  (Incorrect)
My brother and I went to Puri. (Correct)

- Don't use a reflexive or emphatic pronoun alone as the subject of a verb. Use it with its accompanying noun or pronoun.
  Example-She herself solved the problem.
          The song itself was not good.
- The transitive verbs e.g. 'avail'& 'absent' are never used without a reflexive pronoun.
  Example-
  Incorrect- I availed of a six month's leave.
  Correct-     I availed myself of a six month's leave.
  Incorrect-He absented for a day.
  Correct-He absented himself for a day.
- 'They' is used not only for persons but also for things.
  Incorrect- There are some pens on the table. These are red.
  Correct- There are some pens on the table. They are red.
- When we talk about only two, we should use 'either' in the positive sentences and 'neither' in the negative sentences. 'Any' or 'none' is used in the case of more than two.
  Incorrect- None of the two books were available there.
  Correct- Neither of the two books was available there.
- When there is any reference to all the people we use "everybody" instead of "all".
  Example-
  Incorrect- All are present.
  Correct- Everybody is present.

- **Error in Adjectives:**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| It is a true fact. | It is a fact. |
| I am hopeless to pass. | I have no hope of passing. |
| Cricket is my most favourite game. | Cricket is my favourite game. |
| The economical condition of our country isn't so good. | The economic condition of our country isn't so good. |

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|  |  |
|---|---|

- **Error in verbs:**

| Incorrect | Correct |
|---|---|
| I will come as soon as I will receive your letter. | I will come as soon as I receive your letter. |
| I am born in India. | I was born in India. |
| The examination will begin tomorrow. | The examination begins tomorrow. |
| I shall be grateful to you if you grant me leave of absence. | I would be grateful to you if you granted me leave of absence. |
| I am sending a form of application herewith. | I send a form of application herewith. |
| Call to the police immediately. | Call the police immediately. |
| He resigned from his post. | He resigned his post. |
| I look forward to hear from you. | I look forward to hearing from you. |
| Do you know swimming? | Do you know how to swim? |
| Kindly exempt the fee. | Kindly remit the fee. |
| I can not come. | I cannot come. |
| He gave me a visit yesterday. | He paid me a visit yesterday. |
| The teacher made a test. | The teacher took a test. |
| Sit. | Sit down. |
| I had a dream/I dreamt a dream. | I saw a dream. |

*Writing and speaking in English as a non-native speaker has its own set of problems. Grammatical errors come in many forms and can easily confuse and obscure meaning.*

**Incorrect:** Myself I am Sudhir Sharma.
**Correct:** I am Sudhir Sharma.
While introducing oneself, it is usually observed that the users mix up both the possessive pronoun 'myself' and the subject pronoun 'I'.

**Incorrect:**  "Today office is there?" (Question)
          "No office is not there. Today is Bharat bandh." (Answer)

**Correct:**  "Is today a working day?" OR "Are we working today?" (Question)
"Yes we are working today or No, we are not working today."  (Answer)

**Incorrect:** I came to office by walk.
**Correct:** I came to office on foot.

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We can say "by car", "by bike", "by bus", "by train" and "by flight". However, we cannot say "by walk", as it is the "foot" which is being used to travel and not "walk".

**Incorrect:** His son-in-laws have come home.
**Correct:** His sons-in-law have come home.
In plural form, it is always mothers-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law.

*It is noticed that English spellings are difficult to learn for the second language learners. Some of the instances are given below:*

| *Incorrect Spellings* | *Correct Spellings* |
|---|---|
| *Fabourite* | *Favourite* |
| *Purchaging* | *Purchasing* |
| *Massenger* | *Messenger* |
| *Website* | *Website* |
| *Intrest* | *Interest* |
| *Grate* | *Great* |
| *Profecer* | *Professor* |
| *Discipline* | *Discipline* |
| *Saikologi* | *Psychology* |
| *Bekoz* | *Because* |
| *Taip* | *Type* |
| *Sum time* | *Sometime* |
| *There four* | *Therefore* |
| *Use full* | *Useful* |
| *Finaly* | *Finally* |
| *Face book* | *Facebook* |
| *Help full* | *Helpful* |
| *In put* | *Input* |
| *Impotant* | *important* |

It is difficult to observe their singular and plural forms English nouns.

| Singular | Plural |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| criterion | criteria |
| basis | bases |
| alumnus | alumni |
| datum | data |
| focus | foci |
| phenomenon | phenomena |
| stimulus | stimuli |
| oasis | oases |
| bacterium | bacteria |

*Some words in the English language have been borrowed from Latin. Some nouns of Latin origin that end in –us form their plurals by adding –es. For examples, circuses, campuses, viruses.* Compound nouns are generally form their plurals by adding **-s** to the main noun. *For examples,* Father-in-law    fathers-in-law  Step-daughter   stepdaughters

Some compound nouns do not follow this rule. For examples: grown-up ----- grown-ups, go-between-------- go-betweens, cupful-----cupfuls, spoonful-----spoonfuls.

Some Latin nouns have two plural forms, one  English and one Latin. For examples:

| Singular | English plural | Latin plural |
|---|---|---|
| Cactus | Cactuses | Cacti |
| Radius | Radiuses | Radii |
| Hippopotamus | Hippopotamuses | Hippopotami |
| Stadium | Stadiums | Stadia |
| Syllabus | Syllabuses | Syllabi |
| Index | Indexes | Indices |
| Antenna | Antennas | Antennae |
| Millennium | Millenniums | Millennia |
| Gymnasium | Gymnasiums | Gymnasia |

Some words of French origin too have both English plurals and French plurals. For example,

| Singular | English plural | French plural |
|---|---|---|
| Bureau | Bureaus | Bureaux |
| Plateau | Plateaus | Plateaux |

| Chateau | Chateaus | Chateaux |
|---------|----------|----------|

## Conclusion

Learning a foreign language demands not only willingness, but also practice and commitment by both learner and teacher. That's why, indisputably, error analysis is a fundamental and relevant tool in language teaching, in order to reorganize and transform the teacher's point of view and reader's methodology, with the aim of fixing and filling the students' gaps. When a teacher realizes the nature of his/her students' errors and their possible sources, s/he can make better decisions, which will positively affect his/her performance and fulfil current pedagogical and professional demands. Indeed, the process of language learning depends on the decisions and involvement of the students, based on their experience of life and of language as individuals. A better understanding of the learner can help the teacher to understand what elements are playing a role in the students' learning process. Likewise, by analyzing and recognizing students' errors we may come to value the fact that errors are the most significant evidence of their efforts to follow the path of the learning process.

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