The Role of Error Analysis in Teaching and Learning of Second and Foreign Language

Aqsa Jabeen

Department of English Language, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

E-mail: aqsa.jabeen@uog.edu.pk

Bahram Kazemian (Corresponding Author)

Department of English, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

E-mail: bahram_kazemian@yahoo.com

Muhammad Shahbaz

Assistant Professor, Majmaah University, Al Zulfi Campus, KSA

E-mail: m.shahbaz@mu.edu.sa

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate errors made by second and foreign language (L2) learners so as to understand the strategies and techniques used in the process of second and foreign language learning. Error analysis is a very important area of applied linguistics as well as of second and foreign language learning. It is also a systematic method to analyze learners' errors. Errors are not always bad, rather they are crucial parts and aspects in the process of learning a language. They may provide insights into the complicated processes of language development as well as a systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining students' errors. Errors may also help to better understand the process of second and foreign language acquisition. This study tries to investigate why *Pakistani ESL* and *Iranian EFL* learners fail to produce grammatically correct sentences in English, in spite of having English as a compulsory subject at all levels in their learning institutions and schools. What are the reasons for their poor English written performance? In the present study, the writing assignments of university students as well as intermediate English learners were analyzed for

the purpose of error analysis. Results of the analysis suggest that students lack grammatical accuracy in their writing and are not sure of the grammatical rules that may apply in their writing in English. The study concludes that they are highly influenced by the rules of their first language (L1).

Keywords: Error Analysis, Language Transfer, Errors, Mistakes, Contrastive Analysis, EFL, ESL.

1. Introduction

Error analysis is a very important area of applied linguistics and of the second and foreign language learning. Applied linguistics, as a field, tries to deal with the problems and issues related to language, as well as to its learning and teaching; it also attempts to give solutions for these problems and issues. Error analysis provides a deep insight for understanding of the process of language learning. Attempts for better understanding the process of language acquisition and learning have been made for a long time (Richards, 1971, 1974; James, 1989, 1998; Norrish, 1983; Ellis, 1995; Ziahisseiny, 1999; Keshavarz, 2003, 2006; Darus, 2009). Results of these studies were applied in the second and foreign language teaching and learning. It was assumed that (Corder, 1967, 1971 & 1974) the learners learn the second and foreign language in the same way, to some extent, as the children acquire their first language. While acquiring their first language, children also make a lot of errors and mistakes. Corder made a distinction between the error and mistake (Corder, 1974: 259). The difference is listed below:

Errors are the result of incomplete learning and linguistic incompetency of the learners and errors cannot be self-corrected.

Mistakes are the results of poor performance of language due to many factors like fatigue and carelessness on the part of learners etc. Learners have the knowledge of the correct linguistic form and they can self-correct themselves on the basis of their linguistic knowledge. This is the basic difference between errors and mistakes. And, for the correct analysis, one should be very much clear about the identification of errors. They produce ungrammatical and semantically incorrect sentences at the very earlier stage of their acquisition and later on, by getting the instructions and feedback from their adults they correct themselves. L2 learners also go through the same process while learning any languages. That's why there is no much difference between the processes of learning the second or the foreign language and the first language acquisition (Corder, as cited in Richards, 1971, 1974).

Error analysis plays an important role in second and foreign language teaching as well. It helps teachers in understanding the new ways of teaching by giving the feedback on the errors made by the learners. It is certain and understood that learners make mistakes in the process of learning. These mistakes provide new insights and techniques to the language teachers and linguists in sorting out the problems related to language learning. In short, the role of the error analysis is no doubt very important in second and foreign language teaching and learning.

According to behaviorist learning theory of language, language learning is a habit formation and the errors in the second and foreign language learning are due to the hindrance of the rules and habits that are formed in the first language learning. These learned and formed

habits of the first language resist and interfere in the process of forming the habits of the second and foreign language. Thus, the errors of the learners are the result of the interference of the first language according to the behaviorist theory (Corder, 1967, 1971 & 1974; James, 1989, 1998; Ziahosseiny, 1999). In this study, the written performance of the university students in *Gujrat, Pakistan* and some intermediate students in *Unique Language Centre* (located in Tabriz, Iran) are analyzed and different wash back effects are suggested for producing accurate and proficient second and foreign language learners.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This paper is very much significant in its subject matter of the research. It aims to provide the knowledge about the different errors committed by the learners and also highlights the causes and reasons behind those errors. Error analysis is basically the linguistics analysis and it throws light on the different underlying processes that are involved in the very complex phenomenon of language learning. It is the major area of applied linguistics and tries to resolve the problems and issues related to the second and foreign language learning as well as teaching and it also offers practical solutions for the language related problems. The paper is also an attempt in providing different strategies to the language practitioners and teachers for making their teaching effective. It also highlights the importance of using the meaningful material for language teaching. It provides the learners an opportunity of self-correcting by making them aware of their mistakes. The study also tries to find out the reasons behind the poor performance of these students in language learning area. Thus, by keeping in mind all these points it can be said that the present study can be of highly significant in its nature.

2. Literature Review

In the past, the field of error analysis was highly influenced by the behaviorist learning theory of language, and the learner's errors were considered the result of the existence and interference of the rules of the first language. Teachers and linguists focused on contrastively analyzing two languages. And the errors of the learners were taken into account based on contrastive analysis of languages. Later on, the contrastive analysis could not provide the sufficient grounds for the errors of the learners.

It was realized that the errors are not only the result of the interference of the mother tongue rather many other universal and underlying structures are responsible for the errors of the learners. The cognition of the learner and many other factors are responsible for the errors and mistakes of the learners. According to Keshavarz (2003, 2006), the field of error analysis is divided into two branches:

a) **Theoretical Analysis of Errors:** Theoretical analysis of the errors tries to find out the problems and issues related to language learning and explore the underlying structures that work in the process of language learning. It investigates the reasons of the errors in the process of learning.

b) **Applied Error Analysis:** It deals with designing material and other remedial courses and methodologies for resolving those problems that are highlighted by the theoretical analysis of the errors.

The present study deals with the errors committed by some university students in Gujrat, Pakistan and some intermediate students in Unique Language Centre (located in Tabriz, Iran). It tries to explore the weak areas of students language use in written form. It draws light on

the importance of giving error analysis-based feedback to the students. It provides various strategies to the language teachers for using in language classrooms. This study would analyze different categories of errors committed by the graduate and intermediate students. It would focus on the reasons behind these errors and would also make the students aware about the mistakes that they made in the process of language learning and would explore the underlying processes that are involved in language learning. The focus of this study is also to facilitate the teachers in their teaching by adopting different methodologies and materials for making their teaching more effective.

2.1 Historical Development of the Field of EA

As discussed above, during the period of the 1940s, error analysis was highly influenced by the behaviorist theory of language learning and it was considered that mostly the errors committed by the learners are the result of the interference of learners' first language rules. It was considered that language learning is a process of habit formation and once the habits of one language are being formed, they put resistance in learning the rules of the second and foreign language. The contrastive analysis was formed for understanding the errors committed by the learners in the light of the rules of both languages. On the basis of similarities of the rules of two languages, when there was a positive and constructive effect on the learning, it was considered the positive transfer, and on the basis of difference of rules, when there was resistance in language learning, it was considered the negative transfer (Ellis, 1995; Norrish, 1983; Şanal, 2007; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014). However, the contrastive analysis could not define all the causes of the errors and it was realized that the process is not as simple as elaborated by contrastive analysis, rather there are various underlying processes that are working behind the language learning. Language learning is a very complicated and complex phenomenon and error analysis is basically the linguistic analysis.

Later on, Chomsky's nativist theory gave the new direction to the study of error analysis and language learning. According to that theory, language learning is not simply the process of habit formation rather there is a universal grammar and learners have the capacity of learning any language rules. This theory proposed that there are many cognitive processes that are involved in language learning. In this perspective, Corder points out that some of the learning techniques and strategies that are being used by the second and foreign language learners are the same as the learners of the first language used during the process of first language acquisition (Corder, as cited in Richards, 1974: 22).

Additionally, there are different reasons behind errors committed by the learners. One reason can be the insufficient material for language teaching or the lack of teachers' adequacy in language teaching. Some other causes of error analysis given by the researchers are listed below (James, 1989, 1998; Ellis, 1995; Ziahosseiny, 1999; Kashavarz, 2003, 2006; Şanal, 2007; Darus, 2009; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014):

a. Language transfer
b. Overgeneralization
c. Simplification
d. Underuse
e. Fossilization

f. Lack of the knowledge of the rules

g. Interference

Now, we would elaborate some of them one by one to see how these factors are bringing about errors in the language learning.

Language transfer refers to the position in which one language is learned in the presence of other language. Sometimes on the basis of similarities in two languages, this has a positive effect on language learning and in the form of language differences, it interferes the second and foreign language learning (Selinker, 1972 as cited in Richard, 1974, p.37).

Overgeneralization refers to the situation in which one form or rule of the language is overgeneralized over the other forms. The extending use of certain forms refers to the overgeneralization and becomes the cause of errors in language learning. This phenomenon is also observed in children while learning their first language (James, 1998, pp.178-179).

Simplification refers to the situation when learners avoids the use of the complex structure and prefers to use the very simple forms. Sometimes, this also results in the form of errors.

Fossilization refers to the situation when linguistic or grammatical development in certain areas is stopped while as, in other linguistic areas, the learner is developing his/her knowledge. This can also be the cause of learner's errors.

Lack of the knowledge of the rules is also one of the major reasons of learners' errors. Sometimes, learners do not have sufficient knowledge about the rules of the language, and this phenomenon results into the errors and mistakes in language and hinders the language learning.

This is a brief overview of the area of error analysis. Now, the current study would take into account all these reasons and causes of error analysis and would analyze the errors made by some university students in Gujrat, Pakistan and some intermediate students in Unique Language Centre. This study attempts to throw light on the role of error analysis in teaching and learning second and foreign language.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Regarding the theoretical framework to the study of error analysis, first of all, errors should be identified and then they should be described. A number of categories are suggested for the error analysis. Corder (1967, 1971 & 1974) classifies the errors into four different categories. The categories are given below:

a. Addition

b. Omission

c. Selection

d. Ordering

Addition refers to the addition of any grammatical item. E.g. ***The sparrows is flying.*** Here is the addition of morpheme **"s"** with sparrow that is not required. The true construction is: *The sparrow is flying*.

Omission occurs when the linguistic item that is required in the sentence is omitted. E.g. ***He go to school.*** Here the morpheme **"es"** is omitted that was required for the correct construction of the sentence.

Selection refers to the problem of wrong selection of the certain forms. E.g. * ***I am biggest than her.*** Here, the superlative degree is used instead of the comparative degree and it is the

example of wrong selection of the degree of adjective.

Ordering refers to the wrong order of the words in the sentence. E.g. * ***He is a dear to me friend.*** Here the order of the sentence is incorrect and is becoming the reason of error.

So, these are the four categories of the descriptions of the errors and are regarded as the theoretical background of the study. The data would be analyzed according to these four categories.

2.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to analyze the errors made by some university students in Gujrat, Pakistan and some intermediate students in Unique Language Centre (Tabriz, Iran) in their writings. Some specific aims and objectives of the study are given below:

a. To define the role of error analysis in teaching and learning second and foreign language;

b. To analyze the errors made by the students;

c. To provide the language teachers with new techniques and methodologies of language teaching by analyzing the learners' errors;

d. To make the learners aware about their errors;

e. To define the deeper underlying structures that are working in the process of language learning.

2.4 Research Question

Based on the main purpose of the research and the scope of the study, the researchers would try to find logical answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the general features of the errors in learners' English writing?

2. What are the reasons and causes of those errors?

3. What are the factors behind the poor and grammatically incorrect writing of English by these students?

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in its nature and the method used for the analysis is of content analysis. This method is used for analyzing the contents of any texts and for finding out the occurrence of definite words containing certain meanings in the text. The content analysis is a widely used research method in social sciences.

The data is collected in the form of answer copies of the examinations of the students in *University Of Gujrat* and the *Unique Language Centre (ULC)* in Tabriz, Iran. The university students are from BS program studying the course ENG-102 titled as Communication Skills and the students in *Unique Language Centre* are in intermediate levels studying Interchange 2 book. The purpose behind teaching these courses is to improve the communicative skills and abilities of the students in English language. The data is collected from the students of many other departments of the university and various classes in *ULC*. 150 answer copies are analyzed for the identification and description of the errors. The errors are divided into four categories of *addition*, *omission*, *selection* and *ordering*. Errors in different aspects of language are found in the collected data. Two questions are taken into account for the analysis of learner's errors. One question is of *précis* writing and the second is of translation in which the learners are asked to translate the given *Urdu* or *Persian* passages into English. These questions are very typical in order to investigate the deeper underlying structures in the

process of second and foreign language learning and also analyze the cognitive factors involved in language learning.

4. Data Analysis

The data is analyzed according to the four categories given by Corder (1974) viz *addition*, *omission*, *selection* and *ordering*. It is observed that students have done a lot of mistakes in different areas of grammar and also noticed that they have problems in creating a logical connection in their writing. The impact of SMS writing is also observed in the students' academic writing. The analysis of the translated passage throws light on the contrastive analysis of errors that is based on the similarities and differences in the rules of the two languages.

Most of the errors are found in the use of the incorrect forms of the verbs according to the tense. The lack of subject verb agreement is also the dominate error found in the answer copies of the students. Furthermore, many spelling mistakes, and the wrong use of the different parts of speech are also found in the written scripts of the students. These errors throw light on the problems that learners face during second and foreign language learning and also help the teachers in giving wash back effects to the learners in making their learning most effective. The following table is the representation of the total errors that are found in learners written scripts.

Table 1. The representation of the total errors found in learners written scripts.

Type of writing	addition	omission	Selection	ordering
Précis writing	47	59	72	19
Translation passage	39	42	88	7
Total mistakes	86	101	160	26

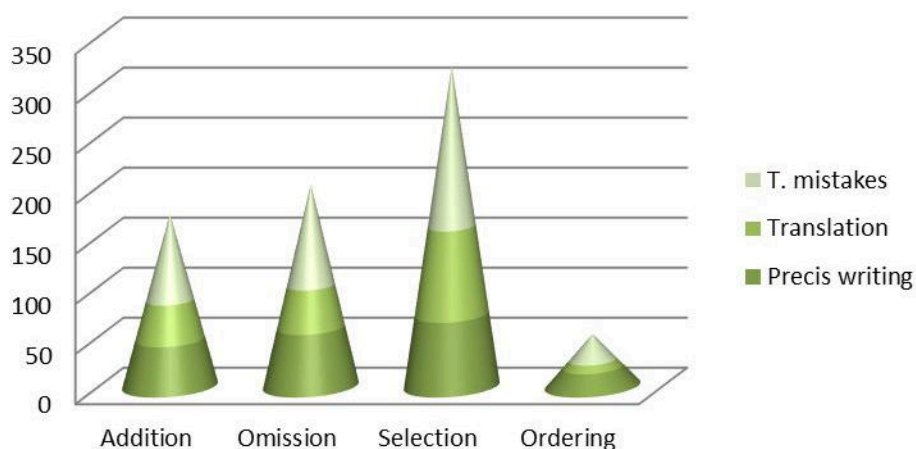Here, a graph is also drawn for the presentation of the errors that are analyzed:

Figure 1. The presentation of the errors

The above mentioned graph shows that the frequency of errors in the category of *selection* is higher as compared to the other categories of the error analysis.

Many factors are responsible for affecting the learner's language. One such phenomenon which is also analyzed in the study is the use of the short wording and Roman language use in the writing that is not allowed in the formal writing. Examples of some of these words are given below:

Plz for *please*, *b/w* for *between*, *&* for *and*, *b4* for *before*, *thnx* for *thanks* and *thanku* for *thank you*, and many other such mistakes are found in the analysis of the errors. It also highlights the phenomenon that SMS language is used so rapidly that students use them unconsciously in their academic writing, due to the vast use of that language nowadays.

So, the analysis of these errors also describes that how deeply the structure of language is internalized in human's mind.

4.1 Sample Sentences of Error Analysis

There are some sample sentences given for describing different types of errors and the causes of those errors. The sentences are given below:

1) **a.** *People plays a very important role in the progress of any country.*

   b. *Students does not working hard and failing.*

   c. *Ali had not went to the station because he awake late.*

The first sentence (1a) written by some students is incorrect and is the example of *addition*. In this sentence, the morpheme **"s"** is used additionally. The reason can be the overgeneralization of the rules or the insufficient knowledge about the rules. The second sentence (1b) is also an example of addition in which some students are not clear about the formation of negative of present indefinite and have overgeneralized the rule of affirmative sentence and have written "**does**" instead of "**do**". It also highlights the lack of grammatical awareness of learners about the incorrect use of present participle form of the verb in present indefinite tense. The third sentence (1c) also identifies the errors in the proper use of verb and illustrates that some learners are not aware about the rule of subject-verb agreement and have overgeneralized the rule of past indefinite while writing a sentence in past perfect.

2) a. *This happen for first time and it is not clear.*

   b. *They will going to party in this night.*

   c. *Writer has writing this story from two years.*

The first sentence (2a) written by some students is the example of the *omission* of the morpheme "**ed**". It shows that some students are not aware about the use of the past sentence. The second sentence (2b) also exemplifies the error of *omission* in which some students have not used the linking verb "**be**" according to the rule of the future continuous. It highlights one more mistake of using '**in this night**" instead of "**tonight**". The third sentence (3c) shows the incapability of some students in using the proper forms of the verb according to the tense. It also highlights another error of using incorrect preposition "**from**" instead of "**for**". This error is due to the negative transfer and interference of the mother tongue.

Similarly, there are another example of the incorrect order of the sentence, and they might be the result of linguistic interference in the process of language learning.

3) a. *We decide this quickly that how we made a nation.*

   b. *About this incident unluckily no one is aware.*

c. *Will not be he get the reward of his efforts?*

This incorrect order of the sentence shows that some learners do not have the clear knowledge of the arrangement of the sentence and they are not capable of producing semantically correct sentences. The second sentence (3b) is also a good example of incorrect word order of a sentence. Though, the sentence is conveying its meaning but some students have not used the adverb, subject and object in a proper order and it shows their incompetency of the target language. The proper use of punctuation is also missed. The third sentence (3c) shows that some students are not aware about the correct conversion of auxiliary verbs for making interrogative and negative sentences. There is an error in the formation of interrogative sentence. Same like, there are so many other examples of the mistakes made by the learners in their written scripts. Even the highly qualified learners are also observed in committing such mistakes. These are the few examples of the sentences that are analyzed in this study for describing different errors and their reasons. The analysis of these errors is very essential for understanding the process of second and foreign language learning.

5. Findings of the Study

This study finds that it is essential for learners to make mistakes in the process of language learning and the systematic analysis of these errors is very important because the error analysis serves as a linguistics analysis and it provides a deep insight in the process of language learning; it also suggests many solutions to various language learning-related problems. Error analysis along with the contrastive analysis is the major field of Applied Linguistics and of second and foreign language acquisition. The findings of the present study about the different errors found in different areas of language can help the language teachers as well as the course and syllabus designers in designing the material and in adopting the techniques and methodologies that perform the essential role in making the language learning and teaching more effective.

6. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This paper explores the relationship between error analysis and second and foreign language learning. It describes the various strategies that learners use in the process of language learning. It also explores how error analysis has its impact in understanding the language learning process and describes the difficulties that learners face in the process of language learning and helps the teachers in designing different remedies for supporting the learners' learning. The division of categories of error analysis gives teachers ideas and knowledge about the weak areas of learner's language and helps them in focusing on those points, particularly. It provides the deeper insight in different areas of language.

Some limitations of the study are that it only explored the four categories of the learners' errors and the study was limited only on the analysis of the two questions. There are many gaps such as grammatical and lexical errors made by students in advanced levels etc. that need to be covered by the future researches. There is much scope of research on this area. Errors of the spoken language can also be analyzed in order to improve the learners' communicative skills.

References

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *Int. Rev. Appl. Linguist., 5*, 161-169.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161

Corder, S. P. (1971). *Idiosyncratic Dialects and Error Analysis* (p. 14). Groos, Heidelberg. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/iral.1971.9.2.147

Corder, S. P. (1974). *Error Analysis*. In J. P. B. Allen, & S. Pit Corder (Eds.), *Techniques in Applied Linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.

Darus, S. (2009). Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study. *Eur. J. Soc. Sci., 8*(3), 483-495.

Ellis, R. (1995). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second Language Acquisition: An introductory course*. New York and London: Routledge.

James, C. (1989). *Contrastive analysis*. London: Longman.

James, C. (1998). *Errors in Language Learning and Use*. London: Longman.

Kazemian, B., & Hashemi, S. (2014). A contrastive linguistic analysis of inflectional bound morphemes of English, Azerbaijani and Persian languages: A comparative study. *Journal of Education & Human Development, 3*(1), 593-614.

Keshavarz, M. H. (2003). *Contrastive analysis and error analysis*. Tehran: Rahnama Publications.

Keshavarz, M. H. (2006). *Error Analysis: A Practical Course for English Students and Teachers*. SAMT, Tehran.

Norrish, J. (1983). *Language Learners and Their Errors*. Macmillion Publishers.

Richards, J. C. (1971). A noun-contrastive approach to error analysis. *English Language Teaching, 25*(3), 204-219. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXV.3.204

Richards, J. (1974). *Error Analysis and Second Language Strategies*. Longman.

Şanal, F. (2007). A Learner Based Study on Second Language Lexicology of Turkish Students of English (Doctoral Thesis). Çukurova University.

Ziahosseiny, S. M. (1999). *A contrastive analysis of Persian and English and error analysis*. Tehran: Nashr-e Vira.

Copyright Disclaimer