Error Analysis in the Teaching of English

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Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of error analysis in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Although errors are bad things in learning English as a foreign language, error analysis is advantageous for both learners and teachers. For learners, error analysis is needed to show them in what aspect in grammar which is difficult for them, where as for teachers, it is required to evaluate themselves whether they are successful or not in teaching English.

In this article, the writer presented some English sentences containing grammatical errors. These grammatical errors were analyzed based on the theories presented by the linguists. This analysis aimed at showing the students the causes and kinds of the grammatical errors. By this way, the students are expected to increase their knowledge on the English grammar.

Keywords: *errors, mistake, over orrer, covert error, interference, overgeneralization, grammar, interlingual, intralingual, idiosyncrasies.*

Introduction

In recent years, we have recognized some new theoretical and methodological concepts in foreign language teaching. These concepts are linguistic analysis, contrastive analysis, and error analysis. Linguistic analysis is the work done by linguists in providing a descriptive grammar of a language. Contrastive analysis covers phonology, morphology and syntax. For example we can contrast between the noun formation in English and Japanese, and this is of course the area of morphology. The last to be taken into account is error analysis which is defined as a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable form produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.

Errors in foreign language teaching especially in English are the cases which are difficult enough to avoid. Many aspects that can cause the learners of English as a foreign language make errors. These aspects are interference, overgeneralization, markers of transitional competence, strategies of communication and assimilation and teacher-induced errors. As teachers of English as a foreign language, we should improve the way we teach to reduce the errors which are always made by the learners.

Further, it is necessary to state that although errors are bad things in learning English as a foreign language, error analysis is advantageous for both learners and teachers. For learners, error analysis is needed to show them in what aspect in grammar which is difficult for them, whereas for teachers, it is required to evaluate

themselves whether they are successful or not in teaching. Thus, error analysis should not be neglected in foreign language teaching.
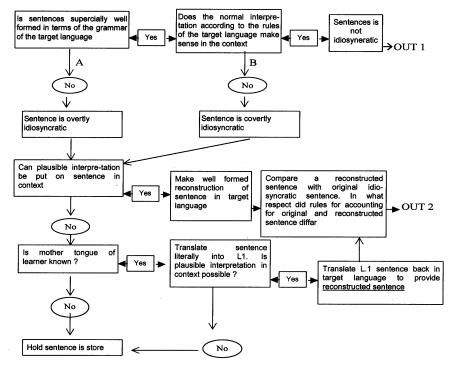
Concept of Error Analysis

Error analysis is an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking. Richards et.al (1985:96) state that error analysis is the study of errors made by the second and foreign language learners. Error analysis may be carried out in order to (a) find out how well someone knows a language, (b) find out how a person learns a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. This definition stresses the functions of error analysis.

Another concept of error analysis is given By Brown (1980:166). He defined error analysis as the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learner. It seems this concept is the same as the one proposed by Crystal (1987:112) i.e. error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. The three definitions above clarify that error analysis is an activity to identify, classify and interpreted or describe the errors made by someone in speaking or in writing and it is carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by someone in speaking or in writing English sentences. Another thing, which should be noticed is the procedure of error analysis.

Identifying Errors

Corder in Brown (1988:168) provides a good model for identifying erroneous or idiosyncratic utterances in a second language. This model is presented below.

Corder in Brown (1980:168)

According to this model, any sentence uttered by the learner and subsequently transcribed can be analyzed for idiosyncrasies. A major distinction is made at the outset between overt and covert errors. Overtly erroneous utterances are those that are unquestionably ungrammatical and covertly erroneous utterances are grammatically well formed but not interpretable within the normal context of communication. The model indicates that in both cases if a plausible interpretation can be made of the sentence than one should form a reconstruction of the sentence in the target language, compare the reconstruction with the original idiosyncratic sentence, and then describe the difference. If the native language of the learner is known the model indicates using translation as a possible indicator of native language interference as the source of error. In some cases, of course, no plausible interpretation is possible at all, and the researcher is left with no analysis of the error (OUT 3).

These are the examples of idiosyncratic utterance of learners which can be identified through Corder's procedure for error analysis:

a. *Does John can sing ?*
   A. *No*
   B. *YES*
   C. *Can John Sing ?*
   D. *Original sentence contained pre-posed do auxiliary applicable to most verbs, but not to verbs with modal auxiliaries. OUT 2.*
b. *I have studied medicine for several years but I have not got my tittle yet.*
   A. *YES*
   B. *NO (Context was in a conversation about a degree someone got after finishing his studies at the university)*
   C. *NO*
   D. *YES, Bahasa Indonesia*
   E. *Saya telah belajar kedokteran selama beberapa tahun tetapi saya belum memperoleh/mendapat titel.*
   F. *I have studied medicine for several years but I have not got my degree.*
   G. *Degree was translated to false cognate title. OUT 2*
c. *We know that we study one of the universities have much advantages.*
   A. *NO*
   B. *NO*
   C. *YES, Bahasa Indonesia*
   D. *No plausible translation or interpretation*
   E. No analysis, OUT 3

Describing Errors

Brown states further that on a rather global level, errors can be described as errors of addition, omission, substitution, and ordering, following standard mathematical categories. In English a "do" auxiliary might be added (*Does can he hinge?*), a definite article omitted (*I went to movie*), an item substituted (*I lost my road*), or a word order confused (*I to the store went*). But such categories are clearly very generalized. Within each category, levels of language can be considered: phonology or orthography, lexicon, grammar, and discourse.

Concept of Error

Various definitions of error have been presented by expert. Basically those definitions contain the same meaning while the difference lies only on the ways they formulate them. That is way the writer only puts forward two definitions of error in this research. These two definitions are adequate to reveal the errors showing up in the written texts.

The two definitions are (1) error is a systematic deviation, when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong' (Norrish, 1987:7) and (2) errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned (Cunningworth, 1987:87). It seems that the phrase 'systematic deviation' in these definitions is a key word which can be interpreted as the deviation which happens repeatedly.

Further, it is necessary to differentiate between error and mistake. A mistake is also a deviation of the norms of the language but is not systematic. It means that the use of the norms of the language in sentences is sometimes true and sometimes wrong. Norrish (1983:8) says that a mistake is an inconsistent deviation that is sometimes the learner 'gets it right' but sometimes wrong. Richards et.al (1985:95) state that mistake is made by a learner when writing or speaking which is cunsed of lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or other aspects of performance. From these two definitions, it can be concluded that a mistake is made by a learner because he does not apply the rule (s) that he actually knows, in other words, a mistake is a non systematic deviation from the norms of the language.

Sources or Causes of Errors

There are three terms which overlap one another. These terms are 'sources of error' (Brown, 1980:173), 'types of error' (Richards, 1973:173), and 'causes of error' (Norrish, 1983:21-33) To have a clear understanding, the following explanation will be helpful.

Sources of Errors

Brown (1980:173-181) classifies sources of error into, 1) interlingual transfer, that is the negative influence of the mother tongue of learner, 2) intralingual transfer, that is the negative transfer of items within the target language. In order words, the incorrect generalization of rules within the target language; 3) context of learning, which overlaps both types of transfer, for example, the classroom with its teacher and its materials in the case of school learning or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. In a classroom context the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make wrong generalization about the language; 4) communication strategies. It is obvious that communication strategy is the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learner for some reasons. There are five main communication strategies, namely :

1) Avoidance

Avoidance can be broken down into several subcategories, and thus distinguished from other types of strategies. The most common type of avoidance strategy is 'syntactic

or lexical avoidance' within a semantic category. When a learner, for example, cannot say "I lost my way" he might avoid the use of way' and says "I lost my road" instead. "Phonological avoidance' is also common, as in the case of a learner of English who finds initial /I/ difficult to pronounce and wants to say "he is a liar" may choose to say" He dose not speak the truth". A more direct type of avoidance is "topic avoidance", in which a whole topic of conversation is entirely avoided. To avoid the topic, a learner may change the subject, pretend not to understand, or simply not respond at all.

2) Prefabricated patterns

Another common communication strategy is to memorize certain stock phrases or sentences without understanding the components of the phrases or sentences. "Tourist survival" language is full of prefabricated patterns, most of which can be found in pocket bilingual "phrase" books which list hundred of stock sentences for various occasions. The examples of these prefabricated patterns are "How much does it cost?", "Where is the toilet?". "I don't speak English" and "I don't understand you".

3) Cognitive and personality style

One's own personality style or style of thinking can be a source of error, highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of many learner errors. A reflective and conservative style might result in very careful but hesitant production of speech with perhaps fewer errors but errors indicative of the conscious application of rules. Such a person might also commit errors of over formality. A person with high self-esteem may be willing to risk more errors, in the interest of communication, because he does not feel as threatened by committing errors with a person with low self-esteem. In answer to "How did you get here?" a person might be heard to say, "I drove my bicycle" while another might say, "I pedaled my bicycle" in an attempt to be precise. Language errors can thus conceivably be traced to sources in certain personal or cognitive idiosyncrasies.

4) Appeal to authority

Another common strategy of communication is a direct appeal authority. The learner may directly ask a native speaker (the authority) if he gets stuck by saying, for example, "How do you say?" Or he might guess and then ask for verification from the native speaker of the correctness of the attempt. He might also choose to look a word or structure up in a bilingual dictionary.

5) Language Switch

Finally, when all other strategies fail to produce a meaningful utterance, a learner may switch to the so-called language switch. That is, he may simply use his native language whether the hearer knows that native language or not. Usually, just a word or two are slipped in, in the hope that learner will get the gist of what is being communicated.

Causes of Error

Norrish (1983:21-26) classifies causes of error into three types that is carelessness, firs language interference, and translation. The three types of causes of error will be discussed briefly below.

1) Carelessness

Carelessness is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the student's fault if he loses interest, perhaps the materials and/or style of presentation do not suit him.

2) First language

Norrish states that learning a language (a mother tongue or a foreign language) is a matter of habit formation. When someone tries to learn new habits the old ones will interfere the new ones. This causes of error is called first language interference".

3) Translation

Translation is one of the causes of error. This happens because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression in to the target language word by word. This is probably the most common cause of error.

Another expert who discusses the sources of error is Richards in Schumann and Stenson (1978 : 32) in his article "Error Analysis and Second language Strategies" . He classifies sources of errors into (1) interference that is an error resulting from the transfer of grammatical and/or stylistic elements from the source language to the target language; (2) overgeneralization, that is an error caused by extension of target language rules to areas where they do not apply; (3) performance error, that is unsystematic error that occurs as the result of such thing as memory lapses, fatigue, confusion, or strong emotion; (4) markers of transitional competence, that is an error that results from a natural and perhaps inevitable development sequence in the second language learning process (by analogy with first language acquisition); (5) strategy of communication and assimilation that is an error resulting from the attempt to communicate in the target language without having completely acquired the grammatical form necessary to do so; and (6) teacher-induced error, that is an error resulting from pedagogical procedures contained in the text or employed by the teacher.

In another article "A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis", Richards (1971: 19-22) classifies causes of error into 1) overgeneralization, 2) incomplete application of rules, 3) false concepts hypothesized, and 4) ignorance of rule restriction. To make it clear, the four classifications above are explained briefly below.

1) Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures, for examples, "*He can sings*", "*We are hope*", "*it is occurs*".

2) Incomplete Application of rules

An example of incomplete application of rules can be seen in the question forms. Very often they are used, not to find out something, as they should, but as a means of eliciting questions through a transform exercise.

The use of question may also be unrelated to the skills it is meant to establish.

Teacher's questions	Student's responses
Ask her how long it takes	*How long it takes ?*
How much does it cost ?	*It cost five dollar*
What does he have to do ?	*He have to do write the address*

3) False concepts hypothesized

False concepts hypothesized are something due to poor gradation of teaching items. The form '*was*' for example, may be interpreted as the marker of the past tense, as in *"one day it was happened"*.

4) Ignorance of rule restriction

Closely related to the generalization of deviant structures is failure to observe the restriction of existing structures, that is, the application of rules to context where they do not apply. *They man who I saw him* violates the limitation on subjects in structure with *who.* This is again a type of generalization of transfer, since the learners is making use of previously acquired rule in a new situation.

Analyzing Grammatical Errors

Below are some examples of the grammatical errors found in the sentences and the ways to analyze them. These ungrammatical sentences were taken from the abstracts of the post graduate students' theses, Hasanuddin University.

1) Errors in using adjective

"Successful of the implementation' in the sentences 'the purpose of this research was to ascertain and evaluate the successful of the implementation of housing renovation of integrated villages …"

contain errors in using adjective. The use of adjective 'successful' in this sentence is wrong because it is the head of the phrase. That way 'successful' must be changed with the noun 'success'. Thus, this sentences should be written :

"The purpose of this research was to ascertain and evaluate the success of the implementation of housing renovation of integrated villages …."
The cause of the error above can be classified as 'overgeneralization'.

2) Errors in presenting subject and incorrect agreement

"Furthermore, to ascertain the strategic variables which was determining the influence of "ABRI Masuk Desa" on the community participation in the regional development'.

contains two types of the grammatical errors, i.e. error in presenting subject and incorrect agreement. Thus, it will be meaningful if we put a subject, for examples. 'another objective of this research'. And then the word 'variables' in the noun phrase 'strategic variables' does not agree with the auxiliary verb 'was' because it is plural. That is why 'was' must be changed with 'were'. So, the sentences above will be correct if we write:

"Furthermore, another adjective of this research was to ascertain the strategic variables which were determining the influence of ABRI Masuk Desa on the community participation in the regional development'.

The cause of the errors in presenting subject can be classified as 'interference' because this sentence is the translation of the sentence in Bahasa Indonesia.

"Selanjutnya untuk mengetahui variabel-variabel strategi yang menentukan pengaruh "ABRI Masuk Desa" terhadap partisipasi masyarakat dalam pembangunan daerah". While the cause of the incorrect agreement in the sentence above can be classified as "overgeneralization" that is the writer of this sentence overgeneralized the use of 'was'.

3) Error is using question word 'how far'

"To describe how far was the role' in the sentence This research was conducted in Sedenreng Rappang Regency with objectives to know and to describe haw far was the role of Tudassipulung institution in connection with the leadership, program and societies participation factors for rural development could increase the farm product, income and societies 'prosperity'.

contains error in using question word 'haw far'. This is caused by the influence of the word "sejauhmana" in Bahasa Indonesia. In this sentence the question word "how far' should not be used. Thus, his sentence should be written :

"This research was conducted in Sidenreng Rappang Regency with the objectives to know and to describe the role of Tudassipulug institution in connection with the leadership, program and societies' participation factors in increasing the farm product, income and societies prosperity".

This sentence can be actually be simplified as:

"the objectives of this research were to describe.......'. It is not necessary to say 'this research was conducted in Sidenreng Rappang Regency' because it is quite clear where this research took place.

The cause of the error above can be classified as 'interference' that is the writer of this sentence transferred stylistic elements from the source language to the target language.

4) Error in using preposition

*'with the aims at identifying' in the sentence 'this research was carried out in Banteng Regency with the aims at identifying (1) the kinds of ability possessed by…'

contains error in using preposition 'at'. In this context 'at' must not be used because 'aims' here is not a verb but is a noun. So, this sentence should be written:
This research was carried out in Banteng Regency with the aims of identifying (1) *the kinds of ability possessed by…'*

Or it could be simplified by saying only:
The aims of this research were to identify (1) ……….'
The cause of the error above can be classified as 'overgeneralization'.
That is the writer of this sentence overgeneralized the use of verb 'aim at':

5) Error in using passive voice

*'It was happened' in the sentence 'it was happened because most of the farmers sold their cashew nut to the collectors in the village'.

contains an error that is incorrect use of passive voice because 'happen' is an intransitive verb. So, this sentence will be meaningful if it is written:
"It happened because most of the farmers sold their cashew nuts to the collectors in the village'.
The cause of the error above can be classified as 'false concepts hypothesized' that is the writer of this sentence probably interpreted 'was' as the marker of the past tense.

Conclusion

After talking much about error analysis in language learning, the writer then conclude that error analysis is required in developing or increasing the techniques in teaching English. By doing the error analysis, a teacher can concentrate on the materials in which most learners made error; a teacher can also evaluate himself whether he succeeds in teaching or not; and finally he can improve his techniques in teaching by preparing systematic materials.

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