A Study to Analyze the Fossilized Spelling Errors in Compositions of Second Language Learners at Intermediate Level

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Abstract
The errors committed by second language learners in their compositions have been the focus of current studies of second language acquisition, as these errors anticipate the difficulties faced by them in second language learning. The focus of this paper is to display the common errors in ESL compositions by intermediate students and the reasons behind these errors. Data for this paper was gathered through the administration of a questionnaire followed by a self-written composition. The analysis of the data was based on the classification of errors according to different aspects like vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and grammar syntax. Subsequently, the qualitative data was then quantified. The results reveal that errors are inevitable. Gaining insight into errors would therefore highlight the difficulty faced by learners in L2 learning. It is therefore proposed that the learners must have sufficient exposure and training in L2 to incorporate language rules and to minimize the possibility of errors in their compositions. This paper can also help the teachers to be more conscious of the most common errors committed by intermediate students and to help the students get over the concepts in English that are difficult and problematic for them by offering relevant activities and practice material.
Keywords: Errors, Composition, Second Language Learners, Accuracy

1. Introduction

Error analysis is an approach to determine the errors in the writings of learners who are learning a second language. Errors are not bad at all; instead, they are the way to learn more and more. When a learner commits errors in writing he/she learns from these errors and tries to improve. Some errors are the result of a lack of attention and some errors are due to a lack of understanding. Students commit errors due to different reasons, which are analyzed by a teacher or supervisor using a step-wise technique called error analysis.

According to S. Pit Corder (2012), the errors committed by learners are substantial because they assist the researchers to understand how language is acquired or learned; and which approaches or processes are being utilized by the learners in the discovery of language. According to Richards, (1996) error analysis is done to explore the strategies which a learner uses in the course of learning a second language, to find out the causes of learners' errors, as well as to find out how the teaching material is prepared.

Second language was taught through a behaviorist approach till the sixties which was based on habit formation and on acquiring a new language set. So, Erdogan (2005) claimed that errors are the result of persistent mother tongue habits. In the 1960s error analysis emerged as a subdivision of applied linguistics and it demonstrated that the source of errors was not only the mother tongue but there are some other strategies as well. Contrastive analysis theory suggests that language transfer plays a basic and vital role in learning a second language. On the contrary, error analysis emphasizes on cognitive process of language learning, which a learner uses to recognize of input that he receives from a foreign language (Erdogan, 2005).

In 1960 there was a shift from surface level to cognitivism; this approach was introduced by Stephen Corder. It was an alternative to contrastive analysis, so error analysis emerged as a product of the rejection of CA by linguists. Corder (1967) claims that in second language learning emphasis must shift from teaching towards the study of learning. Selinker (1922) described two main points that Corder gave:

➢ Errors are not accidental but are systematic.
➢ Errors are not undesirable; instead, they are necessary positive factors.

Experts like, linguists, syllabus planners, and teachers have long been interested in topics like the role of errors in the written performance of language learners and its impact on the writing process. The linguists are more concerned with finding logical interpretations for the occurrence of these errors and their effect on the teaching and learning of a language. Brown (1980) states, that it is inevitable to commit errors while learning a foreign language. It is natural to make errors by the learners of any foreign or second language. One cause of the errors made by the learners of a second language is the interference of the native language. Other reasons for such errors are quoted by Richard (1971) as unawareness of rule limitations, not completely applying the rules, false concepts speculated, overgeneralizations, and developmental errors. Therefore, it is essential to study the errors and offer possible suggestions for enhancing learners' performance in learning the English language.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

English occupies the status of a second language in Pakistan. The standard of English among Pakistani learners is on the decline despite learning English for many years. Learning English as a second language is not an easy task. Most students are weak in writing skills and they make errors while writing in English, which is either a result of

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lack of attention or lack of understanding. Learners learning English as a second language make errors in different aspects of language, but here the focus is on the errors committed by learners while writing English language.

The most common and frequent errors committed by learners according to James (1988) are the errors of tenses, prepositions, and poor vocabulary in their writing. In learners' compositions, such mistakes are very obvious. Poor vocabulary, incorrect grammar usage in sentences, etc. are some of the problems the learners are inescapable from (Nik Safiah, 1978). Thus, this paper aims to analyze the errors made by intermediate students and the reasons behind those mistakes.

1.2. The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are;
1.   To analyze errors found in the writings of SL learners of Intermediate level
2.   To explore the sources and causes of the occurrence of errors

1.3. Research Questions

1.   What types of errors are commonly found in the writings of second language learners?
2.   What are the sources and causes of the occurrence of errors that students commit?

1.4. Significance of the Study

It is anticipated that the results from this study will prove beneficial in highlighting the areas of development for the eradication of errors. It is also hoped that this study will make the learners aware of what they should do to minimize their errors in a second language. This study highlights the importance of error analysis as well as of making errors.

2.   Literature Review

Error analysis focuses on learners' ability of creativity to construct language. The use of error analysis could assist in teaching and learning of English language effectively. The learning of a second or a foreign language is a slow and time-consuming process during which errors are expected in all stages of learning a language. Learners make a lot of common errors; the cause of these errors may be the mother tongue interference, transfer, training, and other factors. Learners tend to over-generalize some rules of grammar. Different linguists highlighted the importance of error analysis and also told the reasons why is it necessary to conduct. Conducting error analysis is very useful in the learning process of students who are learning a second language as well as it is also useful for teachers. Corder (1967) highlights the usefulness of error analysis by describing its importance for:

- the researcher or linguist
- the language teacher
- the learner himself

The analysis of errors is useful in the sense that it provides very important information and insight for learners. As Muriel Saville-Troike in his book "Introducing Second Language Acquisition" states "Errors are windows into the language learner's mind." Similarly, Corder (1967) stated that the analysis of errors tells us about the system of language that a learner uses at a particular time in the process of learning. There are two main causes of errors, which a learner makes:

1.   Inter-lingual transfer/ interference
2.   Intra-lingual transfer/ interference

2.1. Inter-lingual transfer

It is the negative influence of the native language, in which students try to transfer their mother tongue to a foreign language during the process of learning a second language.

2.2. Intra-lingual transfer:

It is the negative transfer of grammatical rules and other items within the language that a learner is using. This type of interference reflects the idea that is based on partial covering of the target language.

There is a clear difference between errors and mistakes; we cannot intermingle these two terms because they are not the same things. Corder (1967) gave the difference between errors and mistakes. He differentiated these two terms by declaring errors as systematic and mistakes as non-systematic. He states that when a learner makes an error, it is the result of a lack of knowledge of the target language, and when a learner makes a mistake it is due to some failure in the process of producing language such as the inability to remember something. Corder is of the view that mistakes should not be incorporated in error analysis.

Similarly, Johnson (1988) states that learners can correct mistakes by themselves. James (1998) gave the same view as that of Corder and stated that a mistake can be self-corrected but errors are not corrected by a learner himself. He says that mistakes are random but errors are systematic and they occur consistently, and a learner cannot recognize his errors, they are recognized by the supervisor. Shaughnessy (1977) states that when a learner does not know the rules of a language he commits errors and there is a need to teach that learner.

Oiler and Ziahosseiny (1970) did the first known study on spelling errors in second-language learners. They predicted the resourcefulness of CA (contrastive analysis) and investigated the spelling errors of the learners whose language has a Roman alphabet. They also examined the spelling errors of learners whose native language does not consist of any Roman alphabet. The final result that they found was that the learners' in the first category

have committed fewer errors overall but more spelling errors. This study verified the modest version of contrastive error analysis; that the basic differences between the language systems lead learners to commit more spelling mistakes. Another study was conducted by Hyatt (1973), who studied the writing errors of secondary-level students. The basic purpose of this study was to identify errors that need serious remediation. He has found a lot of errors in the written work of learners but the frequency of spelling errors has been found the greatest and highest. He divided these spelling errors into six major categories. The most common error according to him was vowel misspellings. He has claimed that the learners he has selected for this study were of average English language proficiency.

Another work has been done by Sally (1976), this work was prominent because of its pedagogical implications rather than its findings. Sally has given a step improvement course for the learners and stated that these six steps could improve learners' spelling. In this study he hasn't analyzed spelling errors rather he has used this study to find out the difficulties and problems associated with spelling errors. The basic purpose of this study was to correct those spelling and to find remedies for them.

Ibrahim (1978) has examined the spelling errors of undergraduates at the University of Jordan. According to his perspective, he has given the view that spelling errors are based on causes rather than types. He admits that sometimes his decision and conclusion about error sources become unpredictable because he writes almost eleven lack of experimental evidence about the causes of errors.

Although, in recent years, a lot of studies have taken place about error analysis all of them were different and have varied in their purpose and approaches. A greater part of this research has been done on native speakers. These studies were usually based on differentiating the dialects of English from other languages. Therefore, learners are expected to commit different errors because of their diverse language backgrounds. The need for the instructional procedure has also been observed. Accordingly, a large amount of work has been done on errors but little has been found on fossilization of these errors. Thus, it reveals that the past studies are not enough and more exploration is needed. One cannot be fully dependent on other studies. So, filling this gap requires having a scrutinized examination of the specific problems the learners have in general.

This paper aims to develop an understanding of fossilized errors and their impact on learners. However, the basic purpose of this research was to find out how these errors influence learners' learning process, what are the sources of these errors and what strategies could be adopted to overcome these errors.

3. Methodology and Procedure

Data was collected by the researcher herself to ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

3.1. Research Design

In the present study document analysis was used as a research design. It is a social research method. This research was qualitative in nature, as the compositions of learners were analyzed by the researcher to give voice and meaning to the topic. Document analysis is descriptive research. In descriptive research, subjects are not manipulated. The researcher took things as it is. This design involved the description of naturally occurring things; the collection of information was done without changing the environment. After analyzing the data, the qualitative data was then quantified to get the percentage of the occurrence of different errors.

3.2. Research Tools

Tools are very helpful for the researcher in the process of researching because most of the important information is gathered by using different appropriate tools by the researcher. The document analysis was used as a tool in this study; in which information was gathered in the form of a document.

Two tools were used in this research;

3.2.1. Tests were taken in the form of paragraphs

The selected sample was given a topic on which learners were required to write a paragraph to identify different errors.

3.2.2. Informal interviews were conducted by the researcher

After identifying the errors in the tests of learners, the researcher took informal interviews from the selected sample.

3.3. Sample

The study aimed to explore the errors made by learners of a second language. The participants of the current study were a sample of 20 students of Intermediate level (Part 1) belonging to different private and public sector colleges and currently studying at Tahir Bandagi Academy of Arts and Commerce (TBAAC) in different study groups. The strength of the selected class was around forty. Out of forty, twenty students were chosen using a random sampling technique. The sample was taken randomly including both genders boys and girls, and they were given a topic to write a paragraph on it. The topic was selected according to their level. These participants were selected as the representatives of the total population.

3.4. Procedure

The data was collected from intermediate (Part 1) students. The data in the form of written compositions was collected to determine different types of errors present in the compositions of second language learners. The

participants were given the same time i.e. half an hour to write on the given topic. Students wrote on the given topic under the supervision of the teacher and the researcher. After analyzing the documents, informal interviews were also taken. The rationale for conducting these informal interviews was to find out the reasons for making errors in the writings of second language learners. Students were asked about their errors and then it was identified whether the errors were intra-lingual or inter-lingual, or whether they were conscious or unconscious. The study sample was the same for the tests as well as for the interviews because the students who made errors in the test were required to ask the reasons for making such errors in writing in a second language according to their point of view.

4. Results and Analysis

Table: Calculation of errors

Syntactic errors	28	18.18%
Spelling errors	26	16.88%
Tense errors	23	14.93%
Use of inappropriate words	20	12.98%
Errors of parts of speech	29	18.83%
Singular and plural formation errors	17	11.03%
Linking errors	5	3.25%
Mistakes	6	3.89%
Total errors	154	

4.1. Summary

Errors made by the sample population were identified, described, and presented in the form of a table. After the presentation of errors, they were calculated and at the end, the researcher calculated the percentage of errors.

5. Discussion

The findings based on the paragraphs written by intermediate part 1 students revealed that students made the following errors:
- Syntactic errors
- Spelling errors
- Use of inappropriate words
- Preposition errors
- Pronoun errors
- Article errors
- Auxiliary errors

The discussion is established on the research questions of the study. The research questions reveal that the researcher aimed to explore the types of errors committed by learners as well as the causes of error i.e. whether they were intra-lingual or inter-lingual.

The findings of the data collected revealed that most of the errors committed by students were errors of parts of speech. Out of 154 errors, 29 errors are related to the parts of speech, 28 errors are related to the structure of sentences, 26 errors are related to the spelling of words, 23 errors are related to tenses, 20 errors are related to the use of inappropriate words and 17 errors are related to the singular and plural formation of nouns. Few students committed linking errors in sentences and clauses, 5 errors out of 154 are related to connectors or linkers.

Concerning errors related to the structure of sentences, almost 18.18% of students committed this type of error. This showed that students were not sure about the proper structure of sentences i.e. they were not sure how different parts of a sentence are arranged in a proper order. Sometimes this type of error may arise from literal translation i.e. similar to the structure of the sentence in the mother tongue.

Similarly, as far as tense errors were concerned, almost 14.93% were tense errors committed by students. Most of the time students committed tense errors due to overgeneralization. In 1972, Selinker gave five sources of errors and one of them was overgeneralization. In 1973, Richard also described overgeneralization as the source error. Overgeneralization is the involvement of an unusual structure in a sentence.

Among second-language learners of the English language, it is very common to commit spelling errors and many native-speaker adults have difficulties with spelling. This type of mistake does not usually prevent the reader from understanding what the writer is trying to say, but it can create a negative impression. The data collected from the students showed that almost 16.88% were spelling errors made by learners. Most of the spelling errors are commonly caused by misunderstanding. Spelling errors come under the category of mechanical errors or mistakes. "Mechanical errors are those of orthography (spelling and capitalization) and punctuation. Everyone who writes in English makes such mistakes, whether a native speaker or an ESL student. In many cases, mechanical errors are the consequence of quick writing where the focus is on the content rather than the form." According to Bebout

(1985), it is obvious that not only the orthography but also the sound system of the native language impacts the acquisition of English spelling among the second language or foreign language learner. Bebout, L., (1985) wrote "An error analysis of misspellings made by learners of English as a first and as a second language" in the Journal of Psycholinguistic Research. Mechanical errors rarely hinder comprehension but can show a negative image of the writer, especially in formal settings.

12.98% are the errors in which the learners used inappropriate words in their written paragraphs. According to research conducted by Parisa Farrokh in Iran "Concerning incorrect selection of words, it is necessary to mention that most of the students do not have sufficient knowledge about correct usage of words according to context. For example, the students are not familiar with contextual differences in the set of vocabulary such as "clock and hour", "voice and sound", "mistake and error", "son and boy", "bigger and elder" etc."

18.83% errors were found in the usage of different parts of speech by second language learners. These errors included errors in the usage of articles, prepositions pronouns, etc. Most of the learners did not know about the correct usage of prepositions and articles as well as other parts of speech. They also did not know where to use articles and prepositions. According to research conducted by Wafaa Mokhlos Faisal University of Babylon, "The subjects do not know where to use articles and they generalized using the indefinite article (a) for singular and plural forms."

11.03% errors were committed in the formation of singulars or plurals of nouns. According to research conducted by Gordean Manuela Florentina Tibiscus University, "Some ESL students frequently commit mistakes when forming the plural of English nouns. It could be because these English as Second Language users are confused about the countable, uncountable nouns and irregular plurals."

3.25% errors were found in the process of linking different parts of sentences or clauses. There are no such works on the internet that specifically give the findings on the analysis of linking errors.

6. Conclusion

 The findings of this study were grounded on the data collected from the selected sample of intermediate-level (Part 1 students). It was concluded from this study that all the errors found in the collected sample had the same source i.e. intra-lingual; because errors committed by second language learners were from the same language i.e. English. It was very interesting to note that no errors were coming from inter-lingual sources in all the paragraphs written by the sample chosen. The native language of the selected sample was either Punjabi or Urdu. Although both of these languages had something common in, to some extent with the English language as well as to some extent these languages were also far away from English. It is said that the languages; English, Urdu, and Punjabi have some similarities in them, but almost all the errors committed by the learners were intra-lingual.

It is also noticed that some students were influenced by the excessive use of mobile phone messages; they used short forms of words as they used in informal messages. This type comes under the category of mistakes. As a whole, it is concluded that learners commit errors during the process of learning a second language; these errors come from different sources and their reasons are different.

7. Recommendations

Following are some recommendations to avoid errors in learning English as a second language:
- Second Language instructors should be trained to teach such courses of English properly.
- Learners ought to be told about their errors by identifying their errors in their writing.
- Learners should develop effective writing skills for better expression of thoughts.
- Learners should try to be involved in English learning through newspapers, magazines, and by listening to English programs.
- Learners should be instructed by trained teachers who have upgraded knowledge of the English language.
- Learners should involve themselves in extensive reading of English to enhance their language skills.
- There must be competitions arranged for students to improve their skills used for learning the English language.
- Learners should use the English language as a medium of communication; this will help the learners for minimizing errors.

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