



ERROR ANALYSIS: AN OVERVIEW



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ABSTRACT

Making errors can be considered as an essential part of learning. In this sense, Brown stated that language learning, as any other human learning is a process that related with making errors. So in order to understand the process of L2 learning, the errors that learners made in the process of

learning another language should be carefully examined. Hence, the error analysis can be defined as a procedure that is based on an analysis of learners' errors.

KEYWORDS

Errors, L2 Learning, language, Language Learning

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction of Error Analysis

Making errors can be considered as an essential part of learning. In this sense, Brown (1987) stated that language learning, as any other human learning is a process that related with making errors. So in order to understand the process of L2 learning, the errors that learners made in the process of learning another language should be carefully examined. Hence, the error analysis can be defined as a procedure that is based on an analysis of learners' errors.

Error analysis approach emerged after the dominant of contrastive analysis method which used in dealing and conceptualizing the learners' errors in the 1950s. This approach had often involved with the concept of L1 Interference and specifically the interlingual effect. (Anefnaf Z. 2017). It stated that the fundamental cause of committing errors in the second language learning process was L1; in other words, the linguistic background of the language learners had bad effect on the production in the target language. Contrastive analysis influenced by behaviouristic theory which held the view that human language learning was about changing old habits and building new ones and applied linguists through which attempted to use the formal differences between the learners' first and second languages to predict errors.

Error analysis approach overwhelmed and declared the fall of the Contrastive Analysis which was only successful in phonology. According to Richard et al. (2002), in the 1960s EA established as a branch of Linguistics and it came to light to argue that the native language was not the main and the only cause of the errors made by the learners. Error analysis revealed that a large majority of errors could not be predicted by contrastive analysis, although its valuable aspects that were integrated into the study of language transfer. A key finding of error analysis was that many learner errors are produced by learners making incorrect inferences about the rules of the new language. James, (1998: 5) said that EA originated as a reaction to the Contrastive Analysis (CA) interference hypothesis in the 1960s that the difference between EA and CA was that the mother tongue was not supposed to be used. It was claimed that errors might be completely described in the target language (TL) without referring to the learners' first language (L1).

James (1994: 180) also distinguished between contrastive analysis and error analysis in the following way that some characteristics of the L1 can be explained by comparing the L1 to the L2, this is predictive CA. The other is identified when IL is compared to L2, this is EA. Error analysis became differentiated from contrastive analysis by its analyzing of errors related to all possible sources, not only those which result from negative transfer of the native language. Error analysis easily replaced contrastive analysis, after finding that only some of the errors made by learner are due to the native language, that learners do not certainly make all the errors expected they should by contrastive analysis, and that learners from different language backgrounds generally make similar errors in learning one foreign language. Errors analysis first used to confirm the predictions made by contrastive analysis, gradually superseded CA in the 1960s and became the primary tool for conducting an SLA research. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Corder (1967: 19-27) was the first to promote the importance of examining the errors in student writing. Error analysis became an important part of applied linguistics in the 1960s when Professor S.P. Corder helped to establish it in the field of SLA. Also he assumed that an analysis of errors can show what he called a “built-in syllabus” a natural sequence in which the learner acquires the second language (1967: 169).

Corder has contributed tremendously to write that the analysis of the language acquisition process includes the study of error. It is methodologically similar to the study of the acquisition of the native language in this regard. It gives us a picture of the learner's linguistic progress and may provide us clues about the learning process. (1967: 125).

Schumann and Stenson (1974) suggested that many linguists have adopted EA because CA is insufficient to account for learners' errors. Schachter and Celce-Murcia appear to agree with Schumann and Stenson that EA is receiving growing attention due to the failure of CA. They stated that due to the widespread criticism of both the methodological and theoretical foundations of CA, it's no surprise that believers of the hypothesis are quickly decreasing, and the theory that explains it has lost its credibility and popularity. It's also not strange that a new method should be favourably appreciated. In this context, a recently developed methodological instrument, EA, closely follows the psycholinguistic study for a replacement to the behaviourist's habit formation theory of language acquisition. (1974: 442).

The Definition of Error Analysis

Several definitions of error analysis are available. Richards (1971: 12) said that EA is a field that deals with the contrasts between how people learning a language speak and how native speakers use the language. Then, Brown gave a more formal definition of EA. He (1987) noted that learners make errors and that these errors can be observed, analysed and classified to discover something of the learner's system operating. This led to a rise of study of learners' errors called “*error analysis*”.

According to Ubol (1988: 8), error analysis is a methodical description and explanation of errors made by learners or users in their oral or writing work on the TL. It means that error analysis is involved with the clarifying of the occurrence error and the production of their oral or written expression distinguishes from that of native speaker or TL standard. The error analysis movement is defined as an attempt to measure learners' error that could not be anticipated or predicted by contrastive analysis. Error analysis contributed significantly to the theoretical awareness-raising of applied linguistics and language professionals. Error analysis provided a methodology to investigate the learner language. It is one of the most important fields of second language acquisition and it studies the errors committed by L2 learners.

Moreover, Keshavarz (1997) defined error analysis in two divisions: (i) theoretical, and (ii) applied. Theoretical error analysis firstly discusses the process and strategies of language learning and its parallels with first language acquisition. In other words, it aims to examine what happens in the minds of learners as they learn new language. Secondly, it seeks to explain the techniques that used by learners such as overgeneralization and simplification; and thirdly, it also

tries to come up with a conclusion on the universals of language learning system. On the other hand, applied error analysis, involves preparation remedial courses, and designing appropriate materials and teaching strategies on the basis of the findings of theoretical error analysis.

Error analysis contrasts “learner English” with English (L2) itself and judges “ignorant” of learners (James, 1998:304). As said by James, the process of determining the occurrence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language is error analysis. (1998: 1). Furthermore, Crystal (1999) stated that the study of the incorrect forms created by someone learning a foreign language in the language teaching and learning is error analysis.

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that emphasis on the errors learners committed and it analyzes the errors made by L2 learners as Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) defined it that Error analysis is the study of analyzing the errors committed by EFL learners.

Again Crystal defined error analysis as employing any of the concepts and processes provided by linguistics to discover, classify, and systematically interpret the inappropriate forms produced by someone learning a foreign language. (2003:165).

Another view of the hypothesis of error analysis is that acquiring the first language is similar to acquiring the second language. It is cantered on the notion that learning is a creative process. As Erdogan pointed out that error analysis examines the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes they employ in recognising or coding the target language's input. As a result, the evidence that learners' errors give with knowledge of the fundamental process of second language acquisition is a key focus of mistake analysis. (2005:263).

The Uses of Error Analysis

The use of the EA is to recommended appropriate and efficient teaching-learning strategies and remedial measures to be taken in the context second language learning. This process is a multidimensional involving much more than just analysing the errors of learners. That is why; EA is differentiated from CA in that it examines all possible sources of errors.

Chan (2004) argued that the study of error analysis is one of the most valuable methods based on the errors committed by learners in their written or spoken discourse. After examining these errors, the researcher will have a better understanding of the participants' linguistic weaknesses so that instructors, syllabus designers, and textbook writers will be able to address these problems in the future.

In Corder's point of view (1974:96), error analysis (EA) was productive because it allowed an insight into the language learning process of learner and a gauge to show how far the learner has progressed. It could also measure how much the learner has yet to learn; the techniques being use to explore the language and how errors are used by the learners in the learning process. It also became clear through EA that the same errors were often made by learners from different backgrounds. These intralingual or developmental errors (Richards 1971), noted that it was more productive or regarded errors from a developmental perspective rather than a contrastive one.

EA existed in the context of the changing emphasis in language teaching and learning from a form to a function-based approach with the focus on the use of the language in communicative situations. The Chomskyan revolution in linguistics (Chomsky 1957) also had consequences in the classroom and the shift to a consideration of the psychological aspect and the universal factors related to language learning changed how the process of IL was perceived. From being viewed as a passive repetitive process, language learning developed into a dynamic process (Chomsky 1959, McNeill 1966) with errors of learners as part of a continuum that offered a measure of learner development through various stages of language learning (Bickerton 1976).

Corder (1974:93) found all learners' errors are significant because they are proof that he is learning a language, and indeed, the errors are the most crucial evidence for anyone attempting to characterise his language understanding at any phase in its progress.

The learner has the inherent grammar with the assistance of which he uses specific techniques to learn a language. Unconsciously, the learner formulates an involuntary hypothesis in his mind based on his second language primary study. If this hypothesis is correct, then learner does not make error and the hypothesis becomes a rule for the learner and if it produced errors then he correct it on the basis of more evidences, while errors play a positive role in the language learning process. Taylor (1997:3) stated that error analysis is the investigation and assessment of measurement uncertainty. It indicates that error play a useful role in language learning since it is the signal that a language learner does not learn the rules of the target language efficiently.

J. Richard et al. (2002) suggested the objective of study EA as following:

1. Identify techniques that are used by learners in language learning, in respect to the methods and strategies used in both of teaching and learning.
2. Try to determine the sources of learners' errors, to examining the factors behind making these errors as the first attempt to eliminate them.
3. Obtain data on basic problems in Language Learning, as a teaching aid or in the preparation of the teaching materials.

Error analysis approach identified the two main causes of error, are the Interlingual error which is an error made by the Learner's Linguistic background and Native language interference, and the Intralingual error which is the error committed by the learners when they misinterpret some Target Language rules, so the error cause lies within and between the target language itself and the Learners wrong use of certain target language rules. Error analysis studies the types and causes of language errors in second language acquisition.

The students face a lot of problems in learning English because Arabic and English language have many differences in terms of grammar, vocabulary, etc. As Lado (1977) said that errors revealed the learner's difficulty with specific areas of the language. Error Analysis study of learners' errors has been a main emphasis of foreign language research.

Error analysis plays an important role in language learning and teaching. As a result of exposure to faulty language input a learner may produce an incorrect form. As Corder (1967: 167) noted that learner errors are significant because they provides the researcher with evidence of

how language is learnt or acquired, as well as what techniques or procedures the learner is applying in the language discovery process. It can educate teaching methods and connected them to the learning process, thereby producing for a learner-centred technique of language instruction. Errors analysis can close the gap between language learning and teaching and communication strategies. The study of error analysis can assess the ability of students on understanding grammar writing.

Al-Haysoni (2012) claimed that EA researchers benefit learners and teachers with finding of their studies at the same time so their studies provide important information to the teachers on the error of their students in order to correct these errors and develop their teaching approach by concentrating on these areas of students' deficiency. And at the same time, students increase their knowledge about the type of errors in their linguistic productions so learners may benefit from findings and thus concentrate more effective on these types of errors in future.

Error analysis is the best tool to identify and explain the errors made by speakers of other languages (Johanson, 1975) in order to know the causes of these errors and the sources behind their constant occurrence with different groups of learners year after year. According to Lee (2004), students expect to receive feedback from their teachers and believe that it will be very helpful for them to have a good result to be good writers. Therefore, by evaluating the errors, teachers would be able to have knowledge of what areas should be emphasized on and what types of materials are used in their teaching. They should be able to develop curricula design such as remedial teaching, and select materials to help students to learn English. Teachers need to know the causes of errors and the reasons behind their occurrences.

Error Analysis Procedure

Corder (1974) indicated that many of the researchers who conducted error analyses in the 1970s continued to be focus on language teaching. Indeed, many of those who tried to find out more about L2 acquisition felt that the study of errors was itself motivated by a desire to develop pedagogy. That is why Corder recommended five steps in error analysis research in order to achieve that goal. These steps are:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language.
2. Identification of errors.
3. Description of errors.
4. Explanation of errors.
5. Evaluation of errors.

On other hand, Ellis & Barkhuizen, (2005), proposed four stages in error analysis research in order to discover more about learners' error. These steps are: data collection, error identification, error description and error explanation.

All five steps in error analysis that proposed by Corder (1974) will discuss with Ellis & Barkhuizen, (2005) steps, in the following points with more details:

1. Collection of a Sample of Learner Language

The first stage in error analysis is the selection of a sample of learners' language. Researchers have identified three wide kinds of error analysis according to the size of the sample. These types are: massive, specific and incidental samples. All of them are important in the collection of the corpus but the relative advantage and competence of each differ in relation to the main objective. In other words, the researcher must be aware of his research in this first step and the main goal of this stage is to choose a proper collection system.

The first type is massive sample which involves collecting several samples of language use from a large number of learners to produce a comprehensive list of errors, representative of the whole population. The second type is specific sample which is a particular sample consists of one sample of language used, collected from a specific number of learners.

Third type is an incidental sample which uses one sample of language supplied with a single learner. In fact, the most popular samples used by researchers are specific and incidental to prevent the difficult task of processing, organizing and evaluating the large quantities of samples taken in a massive sample collection.

On other hand, Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:7) call the data that is most commonly collected and analyzed in the error analysis "clinically elicited data". A method belonging to the structuralism paradigm, focuses on the bilingual comparison of the learner's mother tongue and the target language, and on the belief that learners' errors can be predicted by observing the differences and similarities between the two systems (Corder, 1987; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Dulay & Burt, 1972/1974) which is the data that was written specifically for the purpose of the research or analysis.

With clinically-elicited data, researchers, for instance, often make use of big volumes of data that were produced for the purposes of language testing or the data collected for language corpora (Šebesta & Škodová, 2012). In addition, clinically elicited data is further supported by some researches who argue that this data can be considered genuine and natural because, for instance, writing an essay at school is very much an activity that occurs in the real world practice (Šebesta & Škodová, 2012).

The second part of the data collection step includes data processing – which nowadays usually means transcribing texts into an electronic version and other processes involved in the digitalization of media.

2. Identification of Errors

After a learner language corpus has been collected, it is important to identify the errors. So, you need to learn how to classify them. Indeed, it relies on four critical questions to identify of errors. The first question is to determine what target language should be used as the point of assessment for the study.

The second is about the differences between "errors" and "mistakes or slips". An error is made when the deviation occurs due to lack of knowledge while a mistake or slip occurs when learners fail to perform to their competence in the target language. Usually, a mistake or slip is

corrected immediately by the learner. As stated in Ellis and Barkhuizen that some researchers claim that both errors and mistakes are significant for pedagogic purposes and that from a theoretical approach, it might be claimed that learners have not fully mastered a form until they can employ it with the same level of precision as native speakers. And this is considered that distinction between errors and mistakes irrelevant. (2005:64).

The third question is related to interpretation. There are two kinds of interpretation: Overt and covert. The former is easy to identify due to a clear deviation in form and the latter occurs in utterances that are syntactically and semantically well-formed but pragmatically peculiar. The fourth question is focused on deviations. There are two kinds of deviation: correctness and appropriateness. Their difference is very simple: the first is a deviation on the form of the language usage and the other is a deviation of the language use.

3. Description of Errors

The description of learner errors involves a comparison between idiosyncratic pronouncements of learner and a reconstruction of those utterances in the target language. There are two descriptive taxonomies of errors proposed by researchers that: linguistic categories and surface strategy.

Linguistic categories are strongly linked with a traditional error analysis carried out for pedagogic purposes; they can be selected to closely match to those found in structural syllabi and language text books. This type of description makes it possible to describe specific errors in details and also to quantify a corpus of errors. As Richards says (1971), in Linguistic categories, learners' errors were the result of L1 interference.

From different perspective, surface strategy taxonomy illustrates how surface structures are altered by means of such operations as omissions, additions, misinformation and disordering. Omission is known as the absence of an item that should occur in a well-formed utterance; addition is regarded as the appearance of an item that should not appear in well-former utterance; misinformation is the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure, and finally disordering is define as the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.

From Ellis & Barkuizen point of view, Description of errors is involved firstly with the categorization of errors according to error taxonomy, and secondly, it is concerned with the recording of the error frequencies in the individual error categories (2005). As regards the categorization of error, there are two types of taxonomies that have been traditionally used for coding errors – a linguistic taxonomy and surface structure taxonomy (Granger, 2003).

Linguistic taxonomy is based on linguistic categories that are obtained from the descriptive grammar of the target language (Ellis & Barkuizen, 2005). Most of the benefits of this taxonomy are it's potentially very detailed and systematic nature, and as Ellis and Barkuizen suggested, in its strong base in well established grammatical categories which enables a simple application of the findings of the error analysis. (2005: 61)

Otherwise, the descriptive categories of surface structure taxonomies, concentrate on how learners have changed the surface structure. (Granger, 2003: 2). These alterations involve omissions and additions of certain parts of the structure, their misordering, misformation, and also the sub-types of these errors, such as the regularization (e.g. regularization of irregular verbs), or their double marking (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:62) noted that this type of taxonomy has an advantage the linguistic taxonomy does not have, and that is its pedagogical value in assisting teachers in illustrating to students how their productions differ from target language norms.

4. Explanation of Errors

The purpose of the error explanation stage is to attempt to determine the causes why the identified errors were made and thus indirectly show the strategies adopted by the learner in the process of learning. In foreign language learning, there are two main roles on the source of errors. One argues that errors are due to interference from the mother tongue. The other, the "creative construction" theory, suggest that the methods used to acquire a first and a foreign language are the same and that errors of foreign language learners will match those of learning child language as his mother tongue. A third possibility is that some errors cannot be related to L1 interference and L2 developmental strategies.

Corder (1967) claimed that inter-language grammars, idiosyncratic dialects or approximate systems improve by language learners, and that errors will not necessarily be dependent on either the mother tongue or the target language. As Ellis & Barkhuizen stated there are many error groups existed based on their source, such as sociolinguistic errors, induced errors associated with the process of instruction, or those associated to the study materials. Within these, error analysis distinguishes between interlingual and intralingual errors. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Interlingual errors are those that are promoted by the interference from the mother tongue and whose commitment is either a result of learner's learning strategy or of their communicative strategy of resource expansion. (Corder: 1987). Whereas intralingual are those errors that are evident in all learners irrespective of their first language. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005: 65). Such errors are the result of the creation of incorrect hypotheses. Error analysis is often accompanied by a supplementary procedure of error evaluation. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Gráf, 2015).

There is no need to be inconsistent with these views. In particular, inter-language systems might include errors based on L1, L2 and other forms. Moreover, a strong view of the creative construction theory, as held by Dulay & Burt (1972; 1974) indicates that almost all errors will be developmental in children below puberty who are learning a foreign language. In support of this position, they found that only 4.7% of their child subjects' errors were due to interference, while 87.1% were developmental and the rest were "unique". (Dulay & Burt, 1974). A weaker perception of the two main positions, mentioned above, would probably estimate something about the proportion of errors to be anticipated from each source: if errors are due primarily to interference, more interference errors will be expected but if they are due primarily to developmental strategies, a majority of developmental errors should occur.

In error analysis, a difficulty arises in attempting to identify source of error, particularly as many errors seem to have multiple sources. Developmental errors are those which mimic forms created by children learning the language in question as their mother tongue. For example, the absence of possessive /-'s/ is not due to interference but appears in the utterance of children learning English as their first language.

5. Evaluating Errors:

The gravity of errors is evaluated in order to determine which errors should be addressed by the teacher and the learner in order to remedy the greatest weaknesses in the performance of learner. Error evaluation studies increased in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, motivated quite especially by a desire to improve language education. Judgments In these studies were centred on three basic categories: comprehensibility, seriousness and naturalness of the grammar and the lexis. Judges must bear in mind in this in this judgment process that there are two kinds of errors: global and local. Global error is the error which affecting overall organization on the sentence, and local error is the error which affecting single elements in a sentence.

The evaluation of learner error poses a great number of problems. It is not clear what criteria judges have used when asked to assess the categories of an error. Indeed, error evaluation is influenced by the context in which the errors occurred.

There is no universal procedure for the evaluating errors these days. The traditional procedure that was common in the 1970s and the 1980s, and in which at least two judges graded the errors of students according to some evaluation measurements (e.g. Linkert scale) was rejected because it provided some rather subjective and inconclusive. (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Many researchers have used error analysis to determine the occurrences and frequency of various types of errors. According to Richards et al. (1996: 127), Error Analysis is used to classify techniques used by learners in language learning, to identify the sources of learners' errors, to collect data on common language learning problems, or conduct teaching material. It produces information on students' errors that successively assists teachers in correcting students' errors and developing the efficiency of their teaching.

Conclusion

This paper presents historical and theoretical background of error analysis and its definition, uses and procedures. Conducting error analysis is one of the most effective ways to describe and justify EFL learners' errors. This type of analysis will identify the source of these errors as well as the reasons that contribute to their frequent occurrence. It will be possible to evaluate the solution and sequence of future instructions once the sources and reasons of errors are established.

Error analysis can be a very helpful device for a foreign language teaching program. If it is undertaken from the beginning level, error analysis will reveal to the teacher the possible problematic aspects of the language confronting the students. The frequency counts of errors also can be considered as a useful tool in establishing teaching priorities.

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