

Analyzing Errors in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

In a learning context, an error is very common. When we want to acquire knowledge an error occurs very often. We may say that by making an error, learning is well achieved. Error teaches our learners to perform better and helps the learning strategies to reach certain goal. This paper aims to focus on how error occurs in different learning contexts especially in the second language acquisition. Then it emphasizes some of the common issues related to error analysis and finally it examines how to overcome those problems for which a learning environment becomes erroneous.

Key words: *Error; learning strategy; SLA; context; problems.*

1. Introduction

The study of Error Analysis is very important in the language acquisition context. In contrast to Contrastive Analysis (CA) an Error Analysis focuses on why and how the learners of a second language make errors that are systematic and thus draws the distinction between an error and a mistake. In this paper, my aim is to focus on

various aspects of error analysis, its types and its main sources and then I focus on the issues related to error making and error correction. Finally, there are some problems found in correcting errors made by the ESL learners.

2. Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is the systematic study of deviations from target language in the second language acquisition (SLA), especially in terms of the learner's developing interlanguage. EA in language acquisition was originated by Stephen Pit Corder in 1960s and was influenced by the behaviourism approach. It was an alternative to Contrastive Analysis approach.

If we want to define error we must learn what others say about an error. Corder (1967: 167) noted,

A learner's errors....are significant in [that] they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language.

3. Distinction between error and mistake

It is very important to know for all of us that an error and a mistake are technically different phenomena. They are not the same. An error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker and it reflects the inter language competence of a learner, whereas a mistake refers to a performance error which is either a random guess or a slip. So, a mistake be random or a sudden occurrence. Anyone can make a mistake as a native speaker or as a second language learner. Again mistakes are lapses. When there is a breakdown or imperfection in a language context, we can term it as a mistake. An error, while made by a second language learner, thus reveals a part of a learner's level of competence in the Target Language (TL).

So, in an Error Analysis (EA), the following things are explored;

- How do the learners make errors?
- How these errors are observed and analysed?
- Why do the learners make errors?
- How to overcome the erroneous situations?

An error analysis examines very closely the every source of errors and explores how a positive reinforcement in a learning strategy can help the second language learners overcome those. To sum up, an error occurs from an incomplete knowledge of a learner, on the other hand, a mistake occurs from the learner's lack of attention or carelessness while writing or speaking.

4. Types of error

There are many types of error. They are;

1. Lexical error: When a learner shows his incomplete knowledge to use the vocabulary of a language.
2. Phonological error: Errors made in pronunciation.
3. Syntactic: Grammatical errors made by the learners.
4. Interpretive error: Misunderstanding of speaker's intention.
5. Pragmatic error: Learner's wrong production of a communicative skill.

5. How to identify an error

Lennon (1991) suggests that two related dimensions of error, 'domain' and 'extent' should be considered in any error analysis.

Domain: Domain is the rank of linguistic unit (from phoneme to discourse) that must be taken as context into account in order for the error to become apparent.

Extent: Extent is the rank of linguistics unit that would have to be deleted or recorded in order to repair the sentence.

6. Identifying errors through the interlanguage development

A learner's errors can be analysed from the identification of interlanguage development. According to Corder (1973), we can understand errors made by the second language learners if we know about the four stages of interlanguage development. They are—

1. The stage of random errors: According to Corder, it is the 'pre-systematic' stage. At this stage a learner is vaguely

aware that there is some systematic order to a particular item. For example when a learner will use-

She can to write

Or,

She can writes

Or,

She cans writing- might indicate a stage of inaccurate guessing.

2. The stage of emergent: This second stage finds the learner growing inconsistency in linguistic production. At this stage a learner seems to have grasped a rule and then regresses to some previous stage and the learner is also unable to correct errors when they are pointed out by someone else. Besides he/she avoids structures and topics. For example,

Learner (L): I see my father.

Native Speaker (NS): You've seen your father?

L: [Doesn't understand] what?

NS: You're going to look after your father?

L: yes, yes...

NS: How?

L: In the evening.

Here the learner could not discern any error in his/her speech.

3. The systematic stage: At this stage a learner becomes more self-consistent and is able to manifest more consistency in second language production. For example,

L: A lot of trainee baby-sitters here. They are eating the babies.

NS: Eating the babies?

L: No, no, feeding.

4. The stabilization stage: The last stage of interlanguage development where a learner has relatively few errors and have already mastered the system of using a language. Learners are able to correct errors without waiting for feedback from someone else.

7. Sources of error

Now we need to look for certain issues like why do our learners make errors? By analyzing the sources of errors this paper now will focus on how learners make errors;

1. Interlingua Transfer: Learners make error resulting from language transfer is termed as Interlingua error. When a learner learns a TL, there occurs a good deal of Interlingua transfer from the native language. One example of negative Interlingua transfer is English 'sheep' for 'ship'.
2. Intralingua Transfer: An intralingual transfer or overgeneralization occurs if the learner has faulty or partial learning of the Target Language. It is occurred by the influence of one TL item upon another. For example, if a learner produces-
'He is goes' based on the idea of English structure 'He is going' we can say this is an intralingua error.

8. Consequence of making Errors in learning

If the erroneous features in a language learning context occurs very often then the phenomena becomes 'fossilization'. Fossilization is the process where a learner is permanently incorporating with incorrect linguistic forms. Fossilization results for many reasons. But when a learner repeatedly makes errors, then the learning process becomes freezed or we can say the learners fail to grasp the cognitive and affective factors that lead to faulty communicative competence. The following errors are responsible for a fossilized second language learning environment;

- Stabilized errors (e.g. Schumann 1978)

- Typical error (e.g. Kellerman 1989)
- Ingrained errors (e.g. Valette 1991)
- Systematic use of erroneous forms (Allwright and Bailey 1991)
- Errors made by advanced learners (e.g. Selinker and Mascia 1999)
- Errors those are impervious to negative evidence (Lin and Hedgcock 1996).

9. How errors are viewed in different learning methods of ELT

In English Language Teaching (ELT), there are several methods to learn a language. Now we can have a look on how errors have been taken in different methodologies (Ellis R (1985):

Table : 01

| Methodology | Teacher's role in Error correction |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Audio-lingual method (ALM) | Reinforces and controls the learners, does not punish. |
| The Silent way | Teacher speaks only to correct an incorrect utterance |
| Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) | Teacher motivates to correct the errors and rewards if corrected, errors are ignored and taken as natural phenomena in learning. |
| Content based Instruction | Teacher uses appropriate error correction techniques |
| Grammar Translation Method (GTM) | Errors are not encouraged, but teachers correct the errors by not giving the students the opportunity to self-correction. |
| Direct Method (DM) | Students are expected to self correct whenever possible |

10. Error correction in an ESL classroom

To avoid fossilization and making communication a meaningful one, we must try to correct the errors inside classroom. In CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), the goal of learning is attaining effective communicative competence. We must remember that the purpose of error correction is to improve learners' accuracy and language acquisition. So, importance should be given on error correction in a CLT classroom. The following steps can be taken to correct errors;

- Explaining the error: While working with the learners of tertiary level, the teacher should notice whether they make errors very often or several times. Then the educator should explain them about the errors whether they are occurring due to intralingual transfer or any other reasons.
- Prioritizing the errors: In a large classroom it is not always possible for the teachers to correct all the errors made by the learners. For that case, the teacher can give priority to some of the errors and tries to correct them accordingly.
- Self- correction: The learners should be given the opportunity to correct themselves. Walz (1982) divides error correction into three distinct types; self-correction with the teacher's help, peer-correction and teacher correction.
- Feedback: Providing the learners a positive feedback can ensure the errors to overcome in a SLA classroom. Feedback works as reinforcement and the learners do not hesitate to discuss the errors that they made with the teachers and by getting positive feedback from the teacher they become more confident in using a second language. For example,

Teacher: Who wrote 'Things Fall Apart'?

Student: Can't guess...

T: Come on, he is an African writer..

S: Is it Wole Sonkiya?

T : Not to worry, its Chinua Achebe.[smile].

- Discovering the errors: The most effective way to correct an error in SLA is not that to point out it to the learners but it will be more effective when the learners themselves will find it out.
- Reflection: Reflection –on- action can lead a learner to the error correction methodology.
- Questioning: Questioning can be an effective way of correcting errors. A teacher can ask good questions to reveal the errors made by the learners.

11. Conclusion

Error is inevitable in a language learning context. Because we all make errors and thus we learn a new thing. Education is not fulfilled until the learners make errors. So we should take the errors seriously. But we must keep in mind that errors be corrected with more seriousness. When we will be able to recognise the reason for making an error, we will also be able to overcome those. Thus learning will be facilitated.

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