ERROR ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

- **In second language learning, a more positive attitude developed towards learners' errors compared to what was prevalent in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.**

- **Errors were no longer considered as evil signs of failure, in teaching and/or learning, to be eradicated at any cost; rather, they were seen as a necessary part of language learning process.**

- **The research goals are to define error analysis , the distinction between errors and mistakes ,significance of errors, and models of error analysis.**

- **Error Analysis (henceforth EA) emerged in the 1960s by S.Pit Corder and his colleagues as a reaction to the view that language transfer is the central process involved in FL/ L2 language learning, despite the fact that EA is somehow earlier as stated by Ellis (1994:48).**

- **It showed that Contrastive Analysis (henceforth CA) was unable to predict a great majority of errors.**

DEFINITIONS

- **Crystal (2003:165) defines EA as 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"*.**

- **Similarly, Keshavarz (2012:168) asserts that EA is "*a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learner language , identifying errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes ,and evaluating their seriousness"*.**

Errors: Receptive or Productive

- Keshavarz (2012:59f) states that competence in a language is of two kinds: **receptive** and **productive**. These two competences "do not develop at the same rate".

- Errors can also be classified as receptive and productive. **Receptive errors are those which result in listener's misunderstanding of the speaker's intentions**, and **productive errors are those which occur in the language learner's utterances**.

- It is easier to analyze productive errors than receptive ones. Analysis of productive errors is based on learners' utterances , but to investigate receptive errors ,one needs to look at people's reactions to orders, requests, compliments, and the like. To quote Corder's example:

- A: What's your name?

- B: I am twelve.

- He states that B's reply is not a matter of misunderstanding the question, but rather a way of refusing to give his/her name. So, it is somehow related to the B's intentions.

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Errors or Mistakes 1

- A distinction has been made between **errors** and **mistakes**.
- Errors are
1. **systematic**, **governed by rules**, and appear because of learner's knowledge of the rules of the target language is incomplete, since they follow the rules of the learners' interlanguage
2. **indicative of the learner's linguistic system** at a given stage of language learning,i.e., his/her transitional competence or interlanguage development, and
3. **occurring repeatedly** and not recognized by the learner, in the sense that only teachers and researchers can locate them.

Errors or Mistakes   2

○ In contrast, **mistakes** are: random deviations, unrelated to any system, and instead representing the same types of performance mistakes that might occur in the speech or writing of native speakers, such as

1. slips of the tongue or Freudian slips ,as in 'You have hissed all my mystery lectures' instead of 'You have missed all my history lectures'.

2. slips of the ear ,as in 'great ape' instead of 'gray tape'

3. false starts, lack of subject-verb agreement in a long complicated sentences ,and the like (see Keshavarz,2012:61).

4. Non-linguistic factors such as fatigue, strong emotion, memory limitations or lapses , lack of concentration. Here Corder (1973:261) states that such factors are existent in native and non-native speakers.

Errors and Mistakes 3

- **The distinction between learner's errors and mistakes has always been problematic for both teachers and researchers .**

- **To Ellis (1994) frequency of occurrence is regarded the distinctive point; errors which have a rather low frequency are considered mistakes or performance errors and those with high frequency as systematic errors.**

Significance of Errors 1

- **The best authentic treatment of this topic is Corder's "The Significance of Learners' Errors", which was republished more than three times. Let's quote him:**

- *They(errors) are significant in three different ways. **First** to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn.*

- ***Second**, they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language.*

- ***Thirdly** (and in a sense this is their most important aspect) they are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn (1981a:10f).*

Significance of Errors 2

Such significance is of direct relation to:

1- linguists ,since the study of human language is the most fruitful way of discovering what constitutes human intelligence,

2- psycholinguists, since they are concerned with the nature of the mental processes that seem to be involved in language, and

3- Pedagogists and teachers ,since the whole process can facilitate the process of learning, as in:

I-Determining the sequence of the presentation of target language items in textbooks and classrooms, with the difficult items following the easier ones,

II-Deciding the relative degree of emphasis ,explanation,and practice required in putting across various items in the target language ,

III-Devising remedial lessons and exercises ,and

IV- Selecting items for testing the leaner's' proficiency.

Models for Error Analysis   1

○ **Corder (1967 & 1973) identified a model for error analysis which included three stages:**

1-Data collection: Recognition of idiosyncrasy

2-Description: Accounting for idiosyncratic dialect

3-Explanation (the ultimate object of error analysis).

○ **Ellis (1995:51f) elaborated on this model giving practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners' errors. The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors. The errors are then classified. The next step, after giving a grammatical analysis of each error, demands an explanation of different types of errors.**

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Models for Error Analysis   2

Gass & Selinker (2008:103) identified 6 steps followed in conducting an error analysis:

1 *Collect data*. *Although this is typically done with written data, oral data can also serve as a base.*
2 *Identify errors*. *What is the error (e.g., incorrect sequence of tenses, wrong verb form, singular verb form with plural subject)?*
3 *Classify errors*. *Is it an error of agreement? Is it an error in irregular verbs?*
4 *Quantify errors*. *How many errors of agreement occur? How many irregular verb form errors occur?*
5 *Analyze source*.
6 *Remediate*. *Based on the kind and frequency of an error type, pedagogical intervention is carried out.*

Data Collection Procedures

There are basically **two** types of data-collection procedures: spontaneous and elicited (see Ellis,1994:49f).

1-**Spontaneous or unplanned data** for written and spoken language are:

- Unmonitored conversations and interviews
- Free compositions and examination papers
- These include personal information, future plans, religious, social, and political issues , and the like.

2-**Elicited procedures** are:

- Oral and written translation from the native language to the target language
- Multiple-choice test which should be free from the restrictions of the test constructor.

Identification and Interpretation of Errors 1

Corder (1973:149f) maintains that the analysis of collected data involves two stages:

- **The first stage** in the technical process of describing the linguistic nature of errors is to detect and identify them. Such thing is not a simple matter since it involves interpretation in the context.

- The **difficulty** in doing so "lies in the fact that what looks a perfectly acceptable sentence may nevertheless contain errors". For example, 'Fine, thanks' is grammatical and correct at the sentence level, but not when it is used in answers to 'Who are you?'.

- Such answers are called *covertly erroneous* , to be distinguished from "He're John' or 'No understand', as *overtly erroneous* (p.272f).

Identification and Interpretation of Errors 2

The next step is to interpret what the learner has intended to say and to reconstruct his sentence in the target language. There are two types of interpretations: authoritative and plausible. If we cannot interpret and describe a learner's errors:

1-**If we have access to the learner** , we can ask him to express his intention in his mother tongue, and then translate his sentence into the target language. This is called **an authoritative interpretation and an authoritative reconstruction of his sentence.**

2-**If we have no access to the learner**, we have to do the best we can to infer what he intended to say from his utterance. This is called **a plausible interpretation and only a plausible reconstruction.**

3-**If the learner's utterance is ambiguous**, i.e., more than one possible plausible interpretation is available. Corder suggests to put such examples aside, while others, Keshavarz (2012:85) among them, suggest to relate this to the learner's mother tongue, if possible.

Classification of Errors 1

Linguistic-based classification of errors is of four major categories
(Keshavarz,2012:90-106):
Orthographic Errors
- Sound/letter mismatch
- Same spelling. Different pronunciation
- Similar pronunciation. Different spelling
- Ignorance of spelling rules

Phonological Errors
- Lack of certain L2 phonemes in the learner's L1
- Differences in syllable structures in L1 and L2
- Spelling pronunciation of words
- The problem of silnt letters

Lexico-semantic Errors (related to the semantic properties of lexical items)
- * I am working 24 o'clock each week.
- * English is alive language by which everyone can convey his ideas.
- * Iraq is my mother country.

Morphological-syntactic Errors
- Wrong use of plural morpheme
- Wrong use of tenses
- Wrong word order
- Wrong use of prepositions
- Errors in the use of articles

Classification of Errors 2

Process-based classification of errors means the processes through which language earners make errors. Four main processes have been cited in the literature (Brown,2000:288-290):

Omission :leaving out some required linguistic elements
- * My father is doctor.
- * I am learn English well.
- * I bought three book yesterday.

Addition: redundant use of certain elements in a sentence
- * They always discuss about different matters.
- * Please answer to my letter soon.
- * He was going to home when I saw him.

Substitution: replacement of incorrect elements for correct ones
- * I am not afraid from dogs.
- * His bigger brother is a teacher.
- * I always do many mistakes in spelling.

Permutation: incorrect word order
- * We last night went to the cinema.
- * I don't kno why is he late.
- * My brother is a driver careful.

Explanation of the Sources of Errors

Richards (1971a), following Corder' classification (1967), distinguishes three types of errors with respect to their sources:

1-Interlingual errors

- Transfer of phonological elements of L1 as in denTIST .
- Transfer of morphological elements, as in '*There are three clever student in our class".
- Transfer of grammatical elements ,as in '*I'm going to school at 8 o'clock everyday'.
- Transfer of lexico-semantic elements, as in '*We will arrive back to Baghdad after 5 o'clock/watch .
- Transfer of stylistic and cultural elements, as in '*Dr. Al-Najafi is he great doctor'.

2-Intralingual and development errors

- Overgeneralization, as in '*He comed yesterday".
- Ignorance of rule restriction, as in ' *There are many fishes in the lake'.
- False analogy, as in '*He thinks most woman should remain home and grow up children'.
- Hyperextension, as in '*The apples smelled freshly'.
- Hypercorrection, as in '*He doesn't afraid of anything'.
- Faulty categorization , as in '*I enjoy to swim'.

3-Errors which are caused by faulty teaching techniques, and also called transfer of training errors, as in '*I am liking to continue my studies'.

Pedagogical Implications

Teachers, pedagogists ,and researchers can benefit from the findings of error analysis in different ways:

- **Implications for EFL/ESL teachers**, especially in error prevention ,error feedback , and error correction.
- **Implications pedagogists**, especially in test developing, learners' syllabus, teachers' syllabus, positive and negative evidence.
- **Implications for researchers**, especially in assessing the process of learning in general and the degree of match between the learners' syllabus and the required goals.
- **For large classes**, technology can be useful as examining and correction centers in blogs, wikis, interactive network classrooms, and webquests.

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