

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors in Iranian Students of English as a Foreign Language

Shohreh Shahpoori

Abstract

The present study aims to identify Persian-speaking EFL learners' error types of oral production. The participants consisted of a female English-speaking teacher and 100 EFL Persian speaking learners, whose mean age is 17. Through topic-based, interactive communication between the teacher and students, data were collected. Errors were coded by sentence and error types were stored into two categories: Interlingual and Intralingual errors. This study implies that Iranian EFL learners in classroom setting make different types of errors which function to indicate learners' complex process of language development. For pedagogical implications, errors treatment should be taken into consideration.

Introduction

Learners make errors in both comprehension and production. However, comprehension errors have received scant attention, for, as Coder (1974:125) has pointed out, although we have test comprehension in general terms, 'it is very difficult to assign the cause of failures of comprehension to an inadequate knowledge of a particular syntactic feature of a misunderstood utterance'. There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between comprehension and production in processing terms.

The study of errors is carried out by means of *Error Analysis* (EA). In the 1970s, EA supplanted *Contrastive Analysis* (CA), which sought to predict the errors that learners make by identifying the linguistic differences between their L1 and the target language. The underlying assumption of CA was that errors occurred primarily as a result of interference when the learner transferred native language 'habits' into the L2. Interference was believed to take place whenever the 'habits' of the native language differed from those of the target language. CA gave way to EA as this assumption came to be challenged. Whereas CA looked at only the learner's native language and the target language, EA provides a methodology for investigating learner language.

EA was, of course, not a new development. The analysis of learner errors had long been a part of language pedagogy. French (1949), for example, provides a comprehensive account of common learner errors.

Proceedings of The Research in Language Science

Lee (1957) reports on an analysis of some 2,000 errors in the written homework of Czechoslovakian learners, which were 'hurriedly grouped into categories, (wrong punctuation, misuse, or omission of articles, misspellings, non-English constructions, and wrong use of tenses). Lee argued that such an analysis put the teacher in 'a better position to decide how teaching time should be spent'. But such traditional analysis lacked both a rigorous methodology and a theoretical framework for explaining the role played by errors in process of L2 acquisition. It was not until the 1970s that EA became a recognized part of applied linguistics, a development that owed much to the work of Corder.

Review of literature

In the 1970s, a methodology in second language acquisition research, Error Analysis, was used to study learner language. It replaced the Contrastive Analysis claiming to predict the errors learners make by making comparison between the native language and the target language (Ellis, 1995). In Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, learning is facilitated when "learners benefit from positive L1 transfer are encumbered by negative transfer" (James, 1998, p.179). In studies of contrastive analysis, it was assumed that errors occur due to the interference of learner's mother tongue and consequently, contrastive analysis may be most predictive at the level of phonology and least predictive at the syntactic level (Richards, 1974).

According to Ellis, although what constitutes L2 errors remain unclear, it is important to establish the source of the error to understand the process of L2 acquisition. L1 interference or L1 habit might be the causes of learner errors.

Traditionally, the analysis of learner errors are concerned with the language pedagogy, for instance, needing how much time spent in language teaching. In Error Analysis, learner language errors also pedagogically inform what learners have learnt and what needs to be improved. In addition to the pedagogical purposes, the error information help to discover the process of second language acquisition and how second language is developed * Ellis, 1995, p. 48). In children's developmental course of L2 English learning, many errors might derive from their generalizations and learning strategies employed when children are exposed to what is being taught (Richards, 1974, p. 212).

A number of different sources or causes of competence errors have been identified, Richards (1971 b) distinguishes three:

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

1. Interference error occur as a result of ‘ the use of elements from one language while speaking another’ .An example might be when a German learner of L2 English says *’I go not’ because the equivalent sentence in German is ‘Ich gehe nicht’.

2. Intralingual errors ‘reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply’.

3. Developmental errors ocure when the learner attempts to build up hypotheses about the target language on the basis of limited experience.

Transfer errors can be further subdivided. Lott (1983) distinguishes these categories:

1. Overextension of analogy occurs when the learner misuses an item because it shares features with an item in the L1 (for example, Italian learners use ‘process’ to mean ‘trial’ because Italian ‘ processo’ has this meaning).

2. Transfer of structure arises when the learner utilizes some L1 features (phonological, lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic) rather than that of the target language. This is what is generally understood as ‘transfer’.

3. Interlingual/Intralingual errors arise when a particular distinction does not exist in the L1 (for example, the use of ‘make’ instead of ‘ do’ by Italian learners because ‘make/do’ distinction is non-existent in Italian.

4 . In spite of this, none of the above scholars accounts for those errors produced by the literal use of the native language word instead of the foreign one. I have included them in a different group that I label as substitution errors.

It is third category that has caused so many of the problems in determining whether an error is transfer or intralingual.

Intralingual errors are also often further subdivided. Thus, Richards (1971 b) distinguishes the following:

1. Overgeneralization errors arise when the learner creates adeviant structures in the target language. It generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures (for example, * ‘ he can sings’ where English allows ‘ he can sing’ and ‘ he sings’).

2. Ignorance of rule restrictions involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. An example is *’ he made me to rest’ through extension of the pattern found with the majority of verbs that

Proceedings of The Research in Language Science

take infinitival complements (for example, ‘ he asked/ wanted/ invited me to go’).

3. Incomplete application of rules involves a failure to fully develop a structure. Thus, learners of L2 English have been observed to use declarative word order in questions (for example, * ‘ you like to sing?’) in place of interrogative word order (for example, * ‘ do you like to sing?’). This type of Intralingual errors correspond to what is often referred to as an error of transitional competence (Richards, 1971 a).

4. False concept hypothesized (i.e. the learner fails to comprehend fully) arise when the learner does not fully comprehend a distinction in the target language. For example, the use of ‘was’ as a marker of past tense in * ‘ one day it was happened’.

It is not easy to distinguish transfer and Intralingual errors, and even more difficult to identify the different types of Intralingual errors that Richard described.

Research Questions

1. What types of errors intermediate Persian-speaking EFL learners make in oral communicative classroom?

2.How teachers and students can benefit from the results of EA and CA?

Methodology

Subjects

In this study, the participants consisted of a female English-speaking teacher and about 100 students (five class) who are at the intermediate level of proficiency. Most of them are high school students, studying English as a second language. With regarding to age, they are between 15-20. They study interchanges by Jack C.Richards in Jahad Daneshgahi Institute.

Materials

The research material used is students’ oral production. In classroom setting, through topic-based, conversational communication between the teacher and the students or students and students, data were elicited. Obtained data were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

Procedure

The students were asked to speak about topics of their book. Teacher and other students are co-communicators. They usually don't correct speaker's errors when she/ he is speaking.

Coding and data analysis

Step 1: data were coded by sentence. 35 erroneous sentences were coded.

Step 2: errors were identified on the basis of the rules of English language.

Step 3: errors were identified into two categories- Interlingual errors and Intralingual errors. Each of these categories has some subcategories too. Intralingual error (transfer errors) are of four categories: Overextension of analogy, Transfer of structure, Interlingual/Intralingual errors, Substitution. Intralingual errors are of four categories too: Overgeneralization errors, Ignorance of rule restrictions, Incomplete application of rules, False concept hypothesized.

Discussion of Data

Interlingual Errors

Overextension of Analogy

Overextension of analogy occurs when the learner misuses an item because it shares features with an item in the L1 (for example, Italian learners use 'process' to mean 'trial' because Italian 'processo' has this meaning). I don't find any example of this error in Iranian students of English as a second language. I think the reason is that there is not such similarity between Persian and English.

Transfer of Structure

Transfer of structure arises when the learner utilizes some L1 features rather than that of the target language. This is what is generally understood as 'transfer'.

1. Incorrect: I wanted from her to bring for me a glass of water.
Correct: I asked her to bring me a glass of water.
2. Incorrect: my mother told me that I come back home soon.
Correct: my mother asked me to go back home early.
3. Incorrect: I wanted from shopkeeper discount.
Correct: I wanted the shopkeeper to offer me a discount.

Proceedings of The Research in Language Science

4. Incorrect: can't we talk for some more time?
Correct: can we talk more?
5. Incorrect: he was in vocation.
Correct: he was on vocation.
6. Incorrect: if they want our help, we should help them.
Correct: if they need our help, we should help them.
7. Incorrect: where is my jeans?
Correct: where are my jeans?

In all of these examples the structure of sentence, the order of words and the word which are used are transferred from Persian to English. Here students use the structure of Persian and they translate Persian sentences word by word in order to produce English sentence.

Interlingual/Intralingual Errors

Interlingual/ Intralingual errors arise when a particular distinction does not exist in the L1.

8. Incorrect: my father bought a machine yesterday.
Correct: my father bought a car yesterday.

This sentence is not correct because Persian speakers don't distinguish between machine and car, but in English they have different meanings.

9. Incorrect: when you called me, we were waiting for a guest.
Correct: when you called me, we expecting for a guest.

In this example, Persian speakers don't distinguish between 'expecting' and 'waiting', but for English speakers, 'expecting' can be used just for other situations, too.

10. Incorrect: what is your profession?
Correct: what is your job? Or what is your occupation?

Here, the words job, occupation and profession have the same meaning in Persian. English language, on the other hand make a distinction between them.

11. Incorrect: I have got photos, films and a cam on my website.
Correct: I have got photos, movies and a cam on my website.

In this sentence, Iranian speakers use film and movie instead of each other, but in English, film is not correct.

Substitution

Substitution errors are those errors produced by the literal use of the native language word instead of the foreign one.

12. Incorrect: during my education, I lived in خوابگاه .
Correct: during my education, I lived in dormitory.

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

13. Incorrect: my father is the man sitting on کاناپه .

Correct: my father is the man sitting on sofa.

14. Incorrect: our city doesn't have a مترو .

Correct: our city doesn't have a subway.

In these sentences, students didn't know the English words sofa, subway and dormitory. So, in their speaking, they switch to Persian words.

Intralingual Errors

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization errors arise when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language. It generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures.

15. Incorrect: she cans play guitar.

Correct: she can play guitar.

In this sentence, students are not allowed to use 's' with modal verbs but this student uses it because he/ she knows that when subject is singular third person, we add 's' to the verb. Here he/ she overgeneralized this rule and added 's' to modal verb.

Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Ignorance of rule restrictions involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply.

16. Incorrect: she gave to me my book.

Correct: she gave me my book.

17. Incorrect: she stayed at home.

Correct: she stayed home.

Incomplete Application of Rules

Incomplete application of rules involves a failure to fully develop a structure. Thus, learners of L2 English have been observed to use declarative word in questions in place of interrogative word order. This type of Intralingual errors correspond to what is often referred to as an error of transitional competence.

18. Incorrect: Is he looking for a barbershop? No, he didn't.

Correct: Is he looking for a barbershop? No, he isn't.

19. Incorrect: he studing English this summer.

Correct: he is studing English this summer.

Proceedings of The Research in Language Science

20. Incorrect: I a software engineer.
Correct: I am a software engineer.
21. Incorrect: I face with a huge challenge but I didn't give up.
Correct: I faced with a huge challenge but I didn't give up.
22. Incorrect: you at home or café?
Correct: are you at home or café?
23. Incorrect: I just turned 21.
Correct: I have just turned 21.
24. what do you do?
Incorrect: I still a student.
Correct: I am still a student.
25. Incorrect: why say 'some'?
Correct: why do we say 'some'?
26. Incorrect: I here.
Correct: I am here.
27. Incorrect: you be here when me gone.
Correct: you will be here when I go.
28. Incorrect: am fine.
Correct: I am fine.
29. Incorrect: don't know if it in or out?
Correct: don't you know if it is in or out?
30. Incorrect: weather is nice.
Correct: the weather is nice.

In all these examples, we have omission. Although students learned the rules, they omitted some parts of sentence. This shows that they learned the rule but didn't show it in their performance. Maybe the reason is that they didn't have enough practice.

False Concept Hypothesized

False concept hypothesized arise when the learner does not fully comprehend a distinction in the target language.

31. Incorrect: what is jack looking for? She is looking for a grocery store.

Correct: what is jack looking for? he is looking for a grocery store.

Here learner has used 'she' instead of 'he'. This shows that he/she doesn't learned difference between these two.

32. Incorrect: Ghana is one of the peacefully country in Africa.

Correct: Ghana is one of the peaceful country in Africa.

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

In this sentence, learner didn't know the difference between adverb and adjective and where to use which one.

33. Incorrect: did you ever been to Africa?

Correct: did you ever go to Africa?

Here, two verbs, been and go have different meaning and applications. But learners didn't know it and used 'been' instead of 'go'.

34. Incorrect: I just want to be carefully.

Correct: I just want to be careful.

This sentence is like sentence number 32. There exist some difference between adverb and adjective.

35. Incorrect: if you want, I can awake you by talking.

Correct: if you want, I can keep you awake by talking.

In this sentence, the student didn't know the difference between 'awake' and 'keep awake'. So he/she uses it incorrectly.

Analysis of the Data

The analysis of thirty-five erroneous sentences gave the following results.

Table 1: types and percentages of interlingual errors

ERROR TYPE	OCCURENCE	PERCENTAGES
Overextension of analogy	0	0
Transfer of structure	7	20
Interlingual/Intralingual	4	11.42
Substitution	3	8.57
Total	14	39.99

Table 2: types and percentages of intralingual errors

ERROR TYPE	OCCURENCE	PERCENTAGES
Overgeneralization	1	2.85
Ignorance of rule restrictions	2	5.71
Incomplete application of rules	13	37.14
False concept hypothesized	5	14.28
Total	21	59.98

Conclusion

The most common type of Interlingual errors is constituted by transfer of structure deviant forms. Interlingual/Intralingual errors form the second most frequently occurring group. Substitution is the third most frequently occurring group and overextension of analogy does not exist in Persian

Proceedings of The Research in Language Science

speaking learners of English. These results show that the structures of the mother tongue represent the main factor of interference in the L2. Syntactic or semantic similarity to the items in the L1 is also problematic for Iranian students.

With regard to Intralingual errors, the most common type of Intralingual errors is constituted by incomplete application of rules. False concept hypothesized form the second most frequently group. Ignorance of rule restrictions is the third most frequently occurring group and overgeneralization is the last group.

From a didactic point of view, the teacher of English as a foreign language should then focus on the commonest type of deviant forms and should try thus to eliminate the transfer of structure errors committed by the students. This can be done by means of exercises oriented to the practice of the use of linguistic structures and the wordclasses, where these interference phenomena must be tackled.

REFERENCES

- Ellis, Rod. (1995). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- French, F. 1949. *Common errors in English*. London : Oxford University Press.
- James, Carl. (1998). *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis*. N. Y.: Longman.
- Lee, W. 1957. 'The Linguistic Context of Language Learning'. *English Language Teaching Journal* 11:77-85.
- Lott, D. 1983. 'Analysing and Counteracting Interference Errors'. *English Language Teaching Journal* 37:256-61.
- Richards, J. (1971 b). A Non-contrastive Approach to Error Analysis. *English Language Teaching Journal* 25: 204-19.