

PROBLEMS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: SOURCES OF ERRORS

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Abstract

Making errors are common among students but it is common knowledge that almost all people consider it as a negative aspect. In fact errors give feedbacks. The paper investigates Errors made by Second Language Learners in Malayalam Medium schools in Kerala. The study primarily examines sources of errors based on the answer sheets of students. This study is based on the theory of Error Analysis. Error Analysis was established in 1960s and it was developed from Contrastive Analysis. This paper mainly investigates four things: Spelling Errors, Addition, Deletion and Grammatical Errors. This study also attempts to answer the following questions; what are the main Sources of Spelling Errors? What are the reasons for the Grammatical Errors? And what all are the common Addition and Deletion Errors among students? This paper mainly concentrates only on students from 8, 9 and 10th classes. This paper also gives an idea about the difference between Errors and Mistakes. People always tend to misunderstand both the concepts. They mostly use the terms interchangeably when there appears to be a heavy amount of semantic load on each of these two terms separately. The major difference between the two is the fact that, Errors are part of competence whereas mistakes are part of performance, as Chomsky would have it termed. So this paper also gives a clear cut idea about the differences of the two concepts. My study draws heavily on the field work conducted in Kerala among 219 students.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Errors, Mistakes, Grant in aid programmes

The English language has always been a part and parcel of the linguistic variety of the people of India. It is not a foreign language. The two official languages used across India for administrative and commercial purposes are Hindi and English. Furthermore, English education played an important role in the development of the English language in India. In city schools, the medium of instruction is English, whereas in villages, even though the medium of instruction is their local language, children study English in addition to their mother tongue. Some students studying in colleges and universities are well versed in English.

Kachru for instance (1997:68-69) states that the use of English in Asian countries is “overwhelming”. He says that around 350 million people use English in Asia. The English speakers in India are probably more than the English native speakers. In India many varieties of English can be seen and the outputs of literature in English have also increased.

English education started in Kerala only after Macaulay’s Minute in 1835 was launched. English education was introduced in Kerala mainly for strengthening women without any discrimination. English education was started first in Malabar because of Macaulay’s Minutes. It envisaged the development of western science and literature through the medium of English. During that time the progress of education was confined only to Travancore and Cochin.

The grant in aid programmes helped people to come up with private schools in Kerala. It happened during the time of 1873-1874, and so it helped the emergence of many private schools in Kerala. Only in 1890 did mass education come up in Kerala. Missionaries also played an important role. They promoted English education because they wanted to spread the Word of God. They also helped women and strengthen their role in the society. One of the important fathers who played an important role was ChavaraKuriakose; he made the decision that every church must have one school. This also led to the flourishing of English education and later, high literacy rate for both men and women

Corder is known as the father of Error Analysis. Error Analysis was established in 1960. Error Analysis developed from Contrastive analysis. According to Lennon (1991) an error is “a linguistic form or combination of forms which in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by speakers native speakers counter parts”. According to Brown (1987) errors are deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker. Errors are part of competence and dialectical difference is not part of Error Analysis. Error Analysis gives importance to the errors of the learners of L2. Corder’s article “Significance of Learners Errors” gave importance to Error Analysis. Pit Corder’s view was that if students are making errors of a particular kind then the teacher should give importance to that particular area in which they make errors.

The differentiation between the two was made by Brown. Mistakes can be made because of slip of tongue or using some rule incorrectly. Native people are able to identify mistakes easily. Corder (1992) claims that “mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue excitement etc. Therefore it can be self-corrected. Errors occur due to the fact that learners are not able to master the language properly. Learners cannot correct the errors himself because he is not aware of the rule and errors are part of competence. According to Corder errors occur due to the lack of knowledge of proper rules, whereas mistakes occur when learners fail to perform their linguistic competence. The truth is that everybody makes mistakes and errors.

Mistake

Mistakes are the use of inappropriate language in a particular context. Mistakes are related to performance. It might be a random guess or a slip. It is a failure to use a known system correctly. The learner knows the system but fails to use it.

Eg. cat > ca (deletion)

Errors

Errors are systematic. They are related to the speaker's / writer's competence. Errors are a deviation from the grammars of native speakers. It reflects the competence of the learner.

Eg. died > dide (mother tongue influence)

Spelling Errors

died > dide

letter > latter

sure > shover

thought > tougt

why > mhy

backyard > bakyard

nothing > notting

you > yo

also > also

Spelling errors are errors of a kind that comes about when wrong letters are used unknowingly in the place of Standard English usage. There are many reasons for spelling errors. Spelling errors can be made because of the influence of the mother tongue.

Eg. character > carecter

Here students write “carecter” because of mother tongue influence. They try to pronounce words based on their mother tongue.

Vowel change is also a reason for spelling errors.

Eg. letter > latter (e>a)

Aspiration also plays an important role in spelling errors. Aspiration means expulsion of breath in speech.

Eg. piller > philler

Here usually 'p' is not an aspirated sound. It gets aspirated when it comes at the first position. Deaspiration is also one of the reasons for spelling errors. Deaspiration means lack of expulsion of breath in speech.

Eg. which > wich

Deletion is a usual thing in errors.

Eg. back yard > bak yard

Substitution also causes errors.

Eg. nothing > notting.

Here 'h' is substituted with 't'

Some time students make overgeneralization.

Eg. also > allso

Spelling errors can be seen among students of classes 8, 9 and 10.

Grammatical Errors

He was not helping > He was not help

You are fine > You is fine

He did his work > He was did his work

His works are good > He works are good

He has done his job > He have done his job

He is facing some problem > He is face some problem

I forgot to do it > I forget to do it

It is made of wood > It is made on wood

Grammatical errors are errors committed because of not following grammatical rules. Grammatical errors occurs mainly because of the wrong usage of tense like past tense instead of present tense, present tense instead of perfect tense, and perfect tense instead of future tense. Grammatical errors can also occur because of wrong usage of pronoun.

Eg. his > he

you > your

Wrong usage of prepositions also leads to grammatical errors.

Eg. of > on

When there is a third person singular noun or a pronoun then 's' is added to the verb. But most students do not follow this rule.

Eg. It contains rice > It contain rice

Grammatical errors were found more in students in class 8. But in 9th class and 10th class the same types of errors were found, but to a lesser extent.

Addition Errors

dying > diying

our > oure

after > afeter

wonderful > wonderfull

plan > plann

super > supper

Addition errors occur when an extra segment is added to a word.

Eg. dying > diying

Some students add vowel at the end it is called vowel addition.

Eg. our> oure

When students add a consonant at the end it leads to errors.

Eg. wonderful > wonderfull

Addition does not only happen at the end. It can also come at the first position or at the middle position.

Eg. super > supper

Deletion Errors

morning > moring

training > traning

native > natve

earth > erth

father > fath

hard > had

friend > frind

Deletion errors are errors caused by the deletion of alphabets from a particular word. It is a common error found among students of classes 8, 9, and 10. The investigator found more addition errors among students of class 10. Deletion errors can be divided into two.

1. vowel deletion
2. consonant deletion.

Eg. passage > passge (vowel deletion)

were > wer

sorry > sory (consonant deletion)

rolling > roling

thanks > tanks

Students make many mistakes when they write English. Most of the errors were made because of overgeneralization and wrong pronunciation. In class 8, most of the student's marks are below 20. If we take an average of their marks then the student's marks are 18. The total mark is 50. Out of 112 students 71 students have scored less than 20 marks. This shows the student's inability to learn English. In class 9, the conditions of students are more or less the same. Here the average mark has increased to 29. Here the total mark is 80. Out of 55 students 31 students have scored below 30. But in class 10, the average mark has increased to 32 and only 23 students have scored below 30 marks.

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