

Linguistic and Social Factors Affecting Saudi First Year University Students; A Close Look at Common Errors.

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SUMMARY:

In reviewing the literature of teaching English as a second language, learner's errors have become of prime importance. Linguists have recently considered them as an indicator of how the learner approximates and internalize a system that is intermediary between the learner's mother tongue and the target language. It has shown also, that learner's errors are classified into two kinds interlinguistic and intralinguistic. During the course of the researcher's years of teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, some common errors were found to be present in the linguistic output of the learners. Those errors are found to be common among other Arabic speaking learners. By using quantitative and qualitative analysis, the errors of the students that are in the beginning stages of their learning have to be examined. The purpose of the study is to identify those linguistic errors among Saudi student and the effect of social organization on the students. The distribution and the frequency of the errors of composition written by first year students at the University of Taif were examined closely and analyzed in an effort to find the best way to combat those errors.

To that end, the students were given an impromptu to write a composition to elicit, the errors. The errors were then identified, described and explained.

1.0. Related literature:

In the past 40 years many studies have been conducted in the field of applied linguistics. The learner of the second language has been the centre of attention of the researchers. The aim is to find the nature of the errors displayed by the students, analyze them and the ultimate goal is to evaluate the input and the method of dissemination of the input. However let us define the process of Second Language Acquisition; it is the process of learning another language other than the learner's first language consciously or subconsciously. (Ellis, 1994 p.6) That includes the development of knowledge of grammar, lexis, phonology and pragmatics.

1.1. Interlanguage theory:

This theory is considered as a phenomenon and it indicates that the learner “transfers” past behaviors in an attempt to produce new responses in the target language. Before we go further let us take the term transfer and give it a proper definition. Transfer ‘is a term used in Applied Linguistics to refer to a process in Foreign language learning whereby learners carry over what they already know about their first language to their performance in their new language’ (Crystal 1987 p.62). Transfer can be negative or positive Interference, however, refers only to negative transfer. The distinction can be made between negative transfer and positive transfer in the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the two linguistic systems (Corder 1971 p.73).

1.1.0. Positive transfer:

Positive transfer refers to those instances of transfer of old habits resulting from the learners' mother tongues to the target language that results in correct performance because the new behaviors is the same as the old (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982 p.100).

1.1.1. Negative transfer:

Negative transfer refers to those instances of transfer where an error occurs because old habitual behaviour is different from the new behaviour that is being learned (Duly Burt and Krashen 1982 p.102).

From the definitions above, one can assert that if the two languages have features in correspondence, there will be positive transfer or facilitation; and where the two systems are not in correspondence, the cases of negative transfer will occur or what is called “interference” will happen (Corder 1971 p.112).

However there are other instances where errors occur as a result of the learner's system, a system that is intermediate between the native language and the target language. (Selinker 1972 p. 201). Those errors are seen as a sign of transition towards the “rule-system” of the target language.

According to Brown There are four stages of interlanguage development. The first stage where the learner makes” random errors’ the student is not aware that his or her errors are systematic. The second stage is called the “emergent stage” errors in which the learner becomes consistent in his or her linguistic production. The third stage is called the “systematic stage” in which the learner shows more consistency. However when the learner reaches the fourth stage s/he is able to correct himself or herself and this stage is called the “stabilization stage” (p.232).

1.2.Approaches to interlingual study:

In a pursuit to find solutions to problems faced by learners, two approaches were created in an effort to find a paradigm to try and analyze the sources of these problems. These two approaches are Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis.

1.2.0. Contrastive Analysis:

In the late 60s and in the seventies a number of researchers studied second language acquisition in ways based on their previous knowledge of first language acquisition. Contrastive analysis was proposed to account for the role the first language plays in learning a second language. Where the structures of first and second language are similar no problems were expected, and when differences were found difficulties were expected. However, difficulties aroused when similarities existed, and where differences were found learners did not make mistakes. (Lado 1964 p. 64). When put to the test, contrastive analysis failed to predict difficulties faced by learners.

1.2.1. Error analysis:

In the late 80s researchers took an interest in learner’s errors because they found that learners committed errors in a predictable manner and by analyzing the errors researchers acquired an insight into the learner’s system i.e. learner’s strategy to learn a second language. By studying an intralanguage or otherwise known as developmental errors, teachers and instructors can see away towards teaching procedures that take account of the learner’s strategy for acquiring a second language. Many problems were discovered as to the causes for learner’s errors, these include:

- Overgeneralization
- Ignorance of the rules of restriction
- Incomplete application of errors
- False concepts hypothesized (Corder 1971 p.175).

-The error is analyzed according the following criteria;

- Omission
- Addition
 - ` Over/ double marking
 - ` Unnecessary insertion
 - ` Overgeneralization
- Wrong or inappropriate combination
- Inappropriate construction
- Misordering or inversion

The concept of tenses in Arabic is different from English. For instance, there is no such a concept of an action that happened and finished in the past i.e. the present perfect.

The research started with Aims of the research then an assumption is made as to the reasons (hypothesis) behind such problems. The problems are classified as either “inter-linguistics” meaning that the learner uses what he or she knows about his or his other tongue to speak or write the target language and when the two systems are not compatible errors will result. The researcher used the already existing knowledge of reading and writing Arabic to judge whether the error is resulting from interference from the mother tongue. As for the resulting from the process of learning itself or as known as “intralinguistics” the researcher depended on experts in the field such as Richards and Corder who is known as the father of error analysis. By analyzing the errors the origin of those errors is determined and recommendations were made to avoid the danger of fossilization.

2.0. Sample collection:

As away of eliciting texts from students, whereby analysis of the errors could be done, the researcher took the sample students to a fair organized by the University of Taif. The fair is organized every year. The theme was “Global Warming” The students were taken for a tour, listened to presentations done by various participants, and asked to write a paragraph of what they have seen and heard. The resulting paragraphs then were gathered and analyzed.

2.1. Students’ Profiles;

The sample students are newcomers to the university; nevertheless; they are the equivalent to second year university students in other universities. The students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia take a one-year English instruction course consisting of 500 hours. They are taught remedial courses emphasizing the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. The schools are segregated so the gender effect has no social effect on the learning process but the effect of society and its views on foreign language might have an effect on learning.

Because the researcher is a native speaker of Arabic, direct translation of Arabic structures to replace their parallel structures in English, is easy to recognize. In an attempt to find out the percentage of the errors committed due to negative transfer, it would be essential to distinguish them from errors of intralingual nature. Once the problem is identified, adjustment can be done to pedagogical practices to incorporate the knowledge resulting from the analysis.

2.3. Social effect on language learning:

The learning process is influenced by many factors that are considered psychological . One of those factors is the motivation of the learner and the second is the social effects on the learner i.e. society's views on language learning Hymes, 1972, stressed the relation between ethnography and speaking stressing the the importance of looking at cultural organization of language use in a given society. He emphasized that “ learning is shaped by sociocultural participation in a given community”(308). Another factor is the extent to which learners believe that society in which they live values foreign language learning (Gardner, 1985p. 78).

3.0. Bases for the analysis:

The analysis is going to be based on a simple grid starting with intralinguistic/developmental errors and then interlingual errors or transfer errors are going to be tackled soon thereafter. Some verbs may appear twice because they are considered according to more than one category. Both types of errors are going to be categorized in terms of the following consideration:

- Verb
- Noun and pronoun
- Preposition
- Article
- Conjunction

Results:

<u>Identification of Error</u>	<u>Definition and source of Error</u>	<u>Classification of Error</u>
1-They <u>are open</u> the week culture	Verb intralingual	Addition unnecessary insertion /
2- Many activities <u>have done</u> by the students	Verb intralingual	Omission
3- what are the <u>activities which is</u> on the section	Verb/noun intralingual	Wrong combination
4- The University <u>doing big</u> gallery.	Verb intralingual	Inappropriate construction
5- On Monday we <u>are visit</u>	verb	Inappropriate construction
6- Each activities group <u>explain</u> and <u>make</u> booklets.	Verb intralingual	Omission
7- Culture week <u>was started</u> this week	Verb intralingual	Addition Unnecessary insertion
8- They <u>create</u> magnifieds.	Verb intralingual	Inappropriate construction
9- They <u>explain</u> and <u>show</u> how are they create this magnifieds	Verb Intralingual/developmental	Inappropriate construction
10- They explain and <u>show how are they</u> create this magnifieds and <u>what are made</u> from.	Verb Intralingual/developmental	Inversion/misordering
11- I <u>was interest</u> because I saw many nice and great things.	Verb Intralingual/developmental	omission
12- The <u>student tell</u> for any visitor	Verb/noun Intralingual/developmental	inappropriate construction

13- Some of them are for cultural and some of them are <u>for buy</u> .	Verb Intralingual/developmental	omission
14- What are the <u>activities</u> which <u>is</u> on the section?	Verb Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination
<u>Identification of Errors</u>	<u>Definition and Source of Errors</u>	<u>Classification of Error</u>
1- On Saturday they are open the <u>week culture</u>	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Inversion/misordering
2- I like the way to receive <u>them</u> visitors.	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate construction
3- I can explain <u>for you the show</u> .	Noun	Inversion/misordering
- I can explain--- <u>for you the show</u> .	Noun	Omission
4- The section was decorated to give some <u>advices</u> to my work to have good and nice work.	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Addition Unnecessary insertion
5- There are a lot of groups that participated in.-----	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Omission
6- They were <u>tolerance</u> .	Noun Intralingual/developmental	Inappropriate construction
7- <u>Many of activities</u>	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Addition unnecessary insertion
8- <u>Many of activities</u> *participate	Noun/verb Intralingual/developmental	Wrong combination
9- <u>Each</u> activities group explain and make booklets.	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Addition unnecessary insertion
10- <u>Some</u> of <u>them</u> are <u>student</u> .	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination
11- <u>Some</u> of <u>them</u> are <u>employee</u> from companies.	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination

12- I saw <u>many booth</u> .	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination
13- <u>This activities</u> help the fair.	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination
14- <u>There are exhibition</u> of marking	Noun Interlingual/transfer	Wrong combination
<u>Identification of Error</u>	<u>Definition and Source of Errors</u>	<u>Classification of Error</u>
1- <u>From Saturday</u> till the twenty two of the current month.	Preposition Interlingual/transfer Such errors are referred to by Richards as intralingual or Developmental (185).	Inappropriate combination
2- I like the activities which is <u>on the section</u> .	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
3- <u>Learned</u> a great thing <u>for that section</u> .	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
4- I can <u>Explain</u> for you.	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
5- I <u>enjoyed with</u> them.	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
6- You can <u>buy it in</u> a suitable price.	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
7- Culture week was started in university <u>in</u> 11 of <u>April</u> 2009	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Wrong construction
8- The students <u>explain for us</u> .	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Inappropriate combination
9- The students explain for us <u>about it</u> .	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Addition Unnecessary insertion
10- and contribute to success--this culture exhibition.	Preposition Intralingual/developmental	Omission
11- The university organized exhibition of cultural week <u>in this semester</u> .	Preposition Interlingual/transfer	Addition Unnecessary insertion

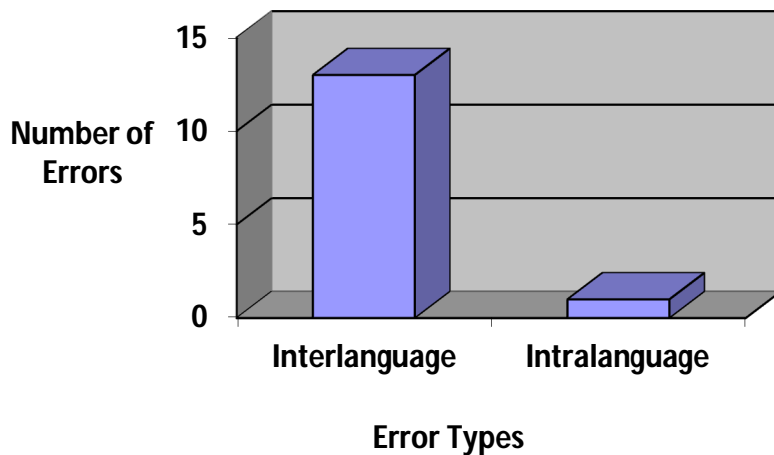
<u>Identification of Error</u>	<u>Definition and Source of Errors</u>	<u>Classification of Error</u>
1- We saw many parts like [^] Ministry of Environment .	Article/determiner Such errors referred to by Richards as intralingual or developmental (186).	Omission
2- We stopped at [^] Economy group.	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
3-After that we moved to [^] shopping section.	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
4- This cultural exhibition is a feature of [^] university	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
5- On Monday we went to [^] Exhibition	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
6- I admired [^] nursing club.	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
7- Culture week was started in [^] University	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
8- Participate in [^] culturalExhibition	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission
9- Contribute to [^] success this culture	Article/determiner Intralingual/developmental	Omission

There is also some spelling errors which are going to be classified according to their occurrence in the writing:

<u>Spelling Errors</u>		
1- beatful	Grapheme (developmental)	beautiful
2- peactuer	Grapheme (developmental)	picture
3- particibated	Substitution (transfer)	participated
4- swa	Grapheme (dyslexia)	saw
5- recieve	Substitution(developmental)	receive

Table 2

Distribution of Noun Errors in the Sample



4.0. Analysis and recommendations:

Based on the kinds and distribution of errors found in the composition of Saudi students it is found that both interlinguistic and intralinguistic errors were present and there are ways to deal with each of these errors as they occur. Teachers however are faced with the delima of how often to correct the student's errors especially where there is the issue of motivation first, and the issue of social constriction second in addition to other social issues are at play in the learning process in a Saudi society.

4.1. Interlinguistic errors:

Based on the sample collected for the study it was found that interference from the mother tongue plays a minor role in the use of verbs and the preposition. but the study suggests that there is more transfer errors when it comes tonouns and prepositions That implies the freedom of expression and indicates that the students are uninhibited since the nouns are used in a more expressive structures. Non-the less the danger of transferring structures from the mother tongue exists and was evident in the sample taken; and the danger of fossilization of those errors is not to be underestimated by teachers, however, there are some points to be taken into account when dealing with such errors:

1- When such erors are found instant correction should be provided to learners especially when it comes to written output provided by the students, like composition. Conferencing plays a major role in realizing the mistakes commited by them and taking steps in the future to avoid such mistakes.

2- Corrections make students aware that special expressions and idioms require attention during aquiring and applying. Similar expressions from the student's own language is to be avoided by advising them to learn the target ones and use them with care empasizing the slogan "think in English" rather than "traslate to English " as learners tend to do.

4.2. Intralingual errors:

When dealing with errors resulting from the learning process itself, the study shows that preposition s and verb errors are minimal. That indicates that students are able to learn prepositional and verbal expressions as they occur in the lessons and that should be encouraged not to modify them. Some helpful hints are also useful in eliminating such errors :

1- Such errors are common to all learners and it should be noted that in order to emphasize some points it is best to imprompt the students to produce structure, through the use of interesting and challenging materials.

2- Invite the students to learn socially and internalize individually. Such a technique is emphasized by a number of linguists such as Ellis, 1994 p.75 who suggests that language learning is affected by individual and contextual facts. Language is best learned through collaboration of learners and through discussion of interesting linguistic situations.

3- Teachers should help develop and promote the right attitude towards language learning. Keeping in mind that learners are both instrumental and integrative in their learning. The learner needs to be helped to position him or herself in the role they might play in the future.

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