

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ERRORS IN ORAL PERFORMANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT--While learning a new language, the learners make a lot of errors related to syntax and semantics. The present study aims at analysing the errors made by learners of English language. This study analysed students' errors and the causes during speaking performance by 7 students learning English at Integral University, Lucknow. The audio recordings of the students, introducing themselves after 2 weeks of language classes, were used to find errors. The data was analysed by identifying the errors, and by grouping and tabulating those into category codes. The four category method of speaking errors was used to analyse and interpret the data. The four categories of speaking errors used were incorrect omissions, redundancy, misused words, and confused forms. The study also analysed various causes of errors that influenced the learners in speaking namely interlingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer, learning context, and communication strategies.

Key Words--Speaking Performance; Errors; Causes; Language learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Error Analysis (EA) is a branch of linguistics which studies and analyses the errors made by second language learners. Error analysis is basically an investigative method used to evaluate the errors in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It also tries to describe and categorise the errors made by a second language learner. A learner of a new language is not aware of the rules of the second language - syntactic or semantic and therefore, tends to make errors in the process of learning. Error Analysis studies these errors, and tries to determine the causes of the errors. In this field of study the output of the learners is examined in order to explain how the learning occurred. EA aims at finding and analysing the differences between the speech of a native speaker and the speech of a learner who is learning the second language. The native speakers also make mistakes but those are majorly because of performance deficiencies whereas the errors of the second language language learners are majorly because of competence deficiencies. The concept of EA has been researched and studied very extensively over the last two decades. It came into existence in the 1960s as a reaction to contrastive analysis (CA) which considered the interference of the mother tongue as the major reason for errors in SLA. EA, unlike CA, reveals that there are certain universal factors which cause errors in the output of the learners of second language. While learning a second language learners make syntactic as well as semantic errors. They tend to choose wrong words or wrong phrases to communicate. The limited knowledge of grammar of the second language also leads to errors. According to J. Richards, there have been some universal factors that lead to language errors namely overgeneralisation,

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ignorance of rules, incomplete implementation of rules, and using wrong concepts. Sometimes learners create structures on the basis of his/her knowledge of other structures of the target language. The learners also fail, at times, to restrict themselves to the existing structures. Errors are also made because of ignorance of or incomplete knowledge of the grammatical rules of the target language. Some errors are the cause of faulty understanding of the structures and rules. EA, thus, assesses the errors and the causes. It is a systematic investigation of the successes and failures in Second language acquisition. It tries to identify the strategies learners use to learn L2, assesses the errors made by the learners and finds out the common problems in language learning negating the common perception that errors are caused only because of the interference of the mother tongue of the learners. It thus, facilitates teaching of second language and also helps the teachers in developing teaching material.

Speaking is one of the most important aspects of language learning and, in a way, the most difficult skill to acquire. Speaking is a productive skill wherein the learner or the speaker has to produce messages orally. Speaking is an activity wherein the speaker has to be spontaneous. There may be some preparation in some cases but speaking is, most of the time, a spontaneous activity. Therefore, most of the errors which are made by learners while learning a new language are made while speaking. According to Tuan and Mai, many language learners do find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language (Tuan and Mai, 2015). There may be various elements of errors which may influence or affect the production of language while speaking. It has been stated that while learning to speak a new language the learners have to navigate through a complex process of committing errors (Hossain and Uddin, 2015). The errors made are majorly related to pronunciation, grammar, articles, prepositions, wrong terms used, and auxiliaries.

Errors, according to Rod Ellis, reflect gaps in the learner's knowledge of the target language. These errors occur because the learner may be not aware of what's the correct structure or rule (Ellis, 1997). Errors may also occur because of lack of practise and the learner may not be able to use even the known correct structures. There may be multitude of factors due to which the learners make errors while speaking. As per the study conducted by Tuan and Mai, there had been several factors that affected the oral performance of the learners including subject knowledge, ability to listen properly, motivation, teacher's feedback, confidence, the stress of performing well, and the preparation time.

The language learning process is a complex one and the learners require a lot of exposure to the target language to be able to understand the basic nuances of the language. In the Indian context or in the context any other nation where English is not the native language, exposure to English is limited and thus learning becomes a challenge. The learners in the current paper are from Indonesia and Thailand and they are learning English language in India. It is important to know the kind of errors the learners make and the factors affecting the oral performance of the learners. The aim of the present study is to analyse the errors made by the learners.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has taken care of almost all the aspects while analysing the data in order to get accurate results. The study was conducted on 7 students - 5 from Indonesia and 2 from Thailand. The learners from Indonesia are staying at an Arabic University in Lucknow where they are studying a certificate course in Arabic and for English language learning they attend 2 hours language classes 5 times a week at Integral University, Lucknow. Other 2

students from Thailand are studying B.Tech (Bachelor of Technology) and BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) courses at Integral University, Lucknow and attend 2 hours English language classes 5 times a week. The learners had almost nil proficiency in English language when they joined the language classes. At the time of the data collected, the learners have been learning English for 2 weeks days. They use English language just for 2 hours while they are in the English class and at the hostel where they are staying they use their native language only. The major aim of the study is to find out errors made by the learners while speaking English language and to analyse the errors and factors affecting the oral performance. The purpose of conducting this study has been to further help these students and other students learn English language more effectively.

Data was attained and analysed by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The oral presentations of the learners while they are introducing themselves have been audio-recorded. The percentage of errors was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{n_1}{\sum N} \times 100\%$$

In order to find the errors of the learners were transcribed.

and analyse the data, the audio-recordings the researcher transcribed the record to

find out the causes of speaking errors. The researcher conducted the following stages while understanding and analysing the data:

- 1) listening to the audio-scripts
- 2) Shaping the talking data
- 3) Interpreting the data
- 4) Reconstructing the data

The whole process is quite an exhaustive one wherein the data is observed very minutely and with an incisive eye to grab the details and even the minor mistakes. Widodo recommended the steps in order to transcribe an interview effectively and accurately (Widodo, 2014).

III. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The audio-recordings of the students were observed and analysed in order to find the errors the learners made while speaking the target language i.e. English in this case. The errors may be further categorised into the following four criteria:

- 1) incorrect omissions
- 2) redundancy
- 3) misused words
- 4) confused forms

The analysis of the data lead the researcher to the following findings:

A. On the basis of the analysis, the total errors made by the learners were 48 which can be further classified into four different categories.

- 1) incorrect omissions: 14
- 2) redundancy: 12

- 3) misused words: 11
- 4) confused forms: 11

Tabular Representation:

Table 1: Errors in Oral Performance

| S. No. | Category | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|----|
| 1 | Incorrect Omissions | 14 | 29 |
| 2 | Redundancy | 12 | 25 |
| 3 | Misused Words | 11 | 23 |
| 4 | Confused Forms | 11 | 23 |

1. The errors related to incorrect omissions were identified as relating majorly to the omissions of articles, pronouns, infinitive, clauses, conjunctions and prepositions. The learners while speaking mistakenly missed the words of the mentioned categories. These incorrect omissions make the language very incorrect and confusing. The wrong omissions of articles, pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions lead to failed communication since the receiver is not able to understand the exact meaning of the message. The learners need a lot of practice and understanding of such usages to make language more effective and clear. Articles are quite difficult for the new learners to understand as these are used as the sounds and not letters. For example, *a* is used before consonant sounds and *an* is used before vowel sounds. The new learners get confused in English because there are various words which start with vowels in terms of spellings but in spoken English the pronunciation of these words start with consonant sounds and vice-versa for instance University, Europe and Euphoria start with letter ‘e’ which is a vowel but the pronunciation starts with consonant sound and the words like Hour, Honour, Honest, Heir start with letter ‘h’ which is a consonant but the pronunciation starts with vowel sounds. No wonder, maximum errors were made in this category itself.

Incorrect Omissions Errors:

Table 2: Errors related to Incorrect Omissions

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|--------------|---------------|------|
| 1 | Articles | 5 | 36 |
| 2 | Pronouns | 4 | 28.5 |
| 3 | Infinitives | 3 | 21.5 |
| 4 | Conjunctions | 1 | 7 |

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|--------------|---------------|---|
| 5 | Prepositions | 1 | 7 |

2. Errors related to redundancy are based on grammatical concord, tenses, singular and plural forms, in fact the errors were related to both syntax and semantics. Redundancy in language means using unnecessary words or phrases while speaking. For example, fall down, PIN number, ATM machine, actual facts, advance warning and so on. New learners are not aware of the basic nuances of the language and therefore, tend to make mistakes related to redundant structures and words very often. Some examples of redundancy in sentences - He fell down while walking; The officer rose up to attend the call; I met my next door neighbour in the morning; Please withdraw some money from the ATM machine; etc. the learners make a lot of mistakes in subject-verb agreement and other grammatical concord. For example, some of the errors related to subject - verb agreement are: He don't know; They does the work; I is studying; The Teacher, along with the students, are in the class; Both the sister is in the party; One of the books are on Literature; etc. In addition to this a lot of mistakes occur because of tenses and the misunderstanding of voices i.e. active and passive voices. For example of mistakes, The students have been installed; The students book read; Please gave me your pen, and so on.

Redundancy

Table 3: Errors related to Redundancy

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|---------------------------|---------------|----|
| 1 | Redundancy in Words/Terms | 7 | 58 |
| 2 | Redundancy in Sentences | 5 | 42 |

3. The next category of errors is misplaced or misused words. It was observed that the learners were misplacing or misusing the words of the language. During the initial stages of learning this happens since the learners try to learn many new words and then they try to use those words in their language. Since, they are still not very good at it, they tend to make mistakes while using words. Major errors were found to be related to adverbs, adjectives and word orders. Errors because of confusion with prepositions used with different words were also rampant during oral performance.

Misused Words

Table 4: Errors related to Misused Words

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|---------|---------------|----|
| 1 | Adverbs | 2 | 18 |

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|-------------|---------------|----|
| 2 | Adjectives | 3 | 37 |
| 3 | Word Orders | 5 | 45 |

4. The errors related to the wrong forms were also very prevalent in the oral performance of the learners. The learners make a lot of mistakes in subject-verb agreement and other grammatical concord. For example, some of the errors related to subject - verb agreement are: He don't know; They does the work; I is studying; The Teacher, along with the students, are in the class; Both the sister is in the party; One of the books are on Literature; etc. In addition to this a lot of mistakes occur because of tenses and the misunderstanding of voices i.e. active and passive voices. For example of mistakes, The students have been installed; The students book read; Please gave me your pen; The teacher was taught in the class; and so on.

Wrong Forms

Table 5: Errors related to Wrong (Confused) Forms

| S. No. | Types | No. Of Errors | % |
|--------|---------------------|---------------|----|
| 1 | Tenses | 4 | 36 |
| 2 | Grammatical Concord | 5 | 45 |
| 3 | Voice | 2 | 19 |

IV. CONCLUSION

English language is one of the most important languages in the world today. It functions as a link language. In almost all the countries the people keep trying to learn this language. There have been various approaches used to teach and learn this language and there have been a lot of research, too, to find out which approach or method is best suited to teach English as a second/foreign language. There have been research to analyse the role of motivation in learning language and also the anxiety factor in learning English language. The current study aims at analysing the errors made by the new learners. In the field of error analysis too there have been a lot of research but the present paper attempts to find errors in the oral performance of learners from Indonesia and Thailand studying English language in India. There is no doubt that all the four major skills namely Speaking, reading, writing and Listening are important and the learners must work on all of these to become an effective user of English language but it is also important to realise that mastering spoken language is comparatively more difficult as the speaker doesn't get time to think while speaking in most of the situations. Speaking is more spontaneous and needs a lot of practise. The present paper attempts at finding errors in the spoken English of the learners. The errors made by the learners in their oral performance have been identified and categorised. The four categories that have been deployed in the paper are incorrect omissions, redundancy, misused words and confused forms. It has

been observed that the learners make a lot of errors related to these categories. Since, the learners' proficiency level was almost nil when they started learning English, their understanding of the basic nuances of English language was very low. The learners were asked to introduce themselves adding basic information and their likes and dislikes. Their oral performances were audio-recorded and later transcribed in order to find errors. In total 48 errors were captured in the spoken language of the learners. Most of the errors were related to Redundancy and incorrect omissions. Apart from these, errors were also made which were related to wrong forms including voice and wrong usage of words.

The total number of the errors found this study were 48 of 7 students. The errors result in 29% of incorrect omissions, 25% of Redundancy, 23% of misused words, and 23% of confused forms. The highest frequency of the finding errors was the incorrect omissions.

V. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

The foremost limitation of the study was the number of learners itself i.e. 7. The same study may be conducted on more number of learners. Secondly, the researcher has not taken into consideration the errors related to pronunciation and enunciation. There have indeed been many errors related to pronunciation but that part needs a separate and detailed study. The factors affecting pronunciation may be analysed more deeply. Apart from it, at the time of audio-recording, the learners were informed about the recording and that might have made them a little more nervous leading to perhaps more errors.

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