

Interlingual Transfer and Intralingual Transfer

—Two Most Important Sources of Errors in Interlanguage

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Keywords: Error analysis, Contrastive analysis, Interlingual transfer, Intralingual transfer

Abstract: By analyzing the two most important sources of errors --- interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer, this paper tries to emphasize that errors in the process of language learning are inevitable and significant, and that the language teachers may possess correct attitude towards the students' errors.

1. Introduction

In the process of language learning, errors always go with language learners. Why are certain errors made? There are two important sources of errors: interlingual transfer (errors of interference from the native language), and intralingual transfer (errors within the target language). Before discussing it, we should know what is “error”, what is the significance of errors, “error analysis” and the main differences between “contrastive analysis” and “error analysis”.

2. The formation of interlanguage errors

In the field of applied linguistics, it is known that second language learning began to be examined, and it studied in much the similar way with the first language learning. This kind of learners' second language systems was called “interlanguage”. Interlanguage refers to the second language learner's separateness system, which has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages. It is the type of language produced by second-language and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a language. Its concept of interlanguage assumed that the learner develops his own second language system on the basis of first language.

3. The necessity of interlanguage errors in learning

3.1 Analysis of learners' inertia errors

In the process of learning a language, errors are virtually inevitable. As noted by Brown, an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. In the field of applied linguistics, an error refers generally to the learner's misuse or misunderstanding of the target language. It is the use of a linguistic item in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete

learning. Error is sometimes classified according to vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, misunderstanding of a speaker's intention or meaning, production of the wrong communicative effect through the faulty use of a speech act or one of the rules of speaking. Not only is it almost inevitable, but also it is an essential part of learning. Therefore, errors can be accepted some kind of learning activity taking place in the learner. Furthermore, a learner's errors have their own advantages. A learner's errors are significant in that they provide to the researcher evidence, such as how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing.

According to Brown, error analysis is the fact that learners do make errors and that these errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified within the learner. Error analysis may be carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, how a person learns a language and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

3.2 The difference between first and second language predictive learning

First language learner and second language learner, although usually of markedly different ages, make many of the same kinds of mistakes when learning language. They may go through similar stages and mental processes in building up their knowledge of the language system. The shortcoming of contrastive analysis is that it discovers the differences between the first and second language, and then only predicts that there will be learning problems. It is self-evident that contrastive analysis has been superseded by error analysis.

3.3 The two most important sources of errors

While analyzing errors, there are two important sources of errors. One is interlingual transfer. It is an error which results from language transfer, which is caused by the learner's native language. The other is intralingual transfer. An intralingual error is one which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer. Intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another. There are other general sources existing, such as "the socio linguistic context of communication, psycho linguistic or cognitive strategies, and no doubt countless affective variables."

The second language learners still committed errors which could be traced to first language interference, which were termed interlingual errors by Richards. The weak version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis was regularly invoked to explain a number of errors. What was also found to be the case, however, was that a large number of similar errors were being committed by second language learners. These errors were called intralingual errors by Richards. In what was to become a seminal paper in the second language acquisition field, learners' errors were invaluable to the study of the language learning process. By classifying the errors that learners made, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language acquisition process by inferring the strategies that second language learners were adopting. Such claims motivated a number of error taxonomies. Certain errors were classified as overgeneralization, caused by the learners' failure to observe the boundaries of a rule. Other errors were attributed to simplification or redundancy reduction, such as when a plural marker was omitted from a noun preceded by a cardinal number larger. Still others were labeled communication-based errors, which resulted when speakers invoked communicative strategies. It were brought about by a teacher's sequencing or presenting two linguistic items which created confusion in the mind of the language learner.

4. The sources of errors in Interlanguage

4.1 Wrong tense in Chinese writing

Since Chinese does not have the system of tenses, errors of tenses frequently occur in students' writing. For example, the sentence "He asked me if I talked to his secretary before coming to him" is wrong simply because in Chinese there is no "past tense", not to say "past perfect tense". As a rule in English, it is always better to use the past perfect tense to represent the earlier action when people are speaking of two or more actions that happened at different times in the past. The right sentence should be like this: "He asked me if I had talked to his secretary before coming to him". This kind of mother tongue interference is very apparent among students. Expressions like "The author want to tell us ...", "The story tell us ..." and "The write think ..." are quite common in students' daily writing. Sometimes the students ignore the agreement of tenses. For instance, the sentence "He said that he will repair the bicycle before supper" is wrong. The correct one should be like this: "He said that he would repair the bicycle before supper".

There is another kind of errors, which is called "word-by-word translation". Sentence like this: "The text is revealing the darkness of the current society" is quite typical. There is another sentence: "He will either pick an apple or a banana". In Chinese, adverbs are often put in front of verbs while in the above English sentence, the adverb "either" modifies the verb "pick"; according to the English grammar, the verb "pick" should be in front of the adverb "either". Chinese students tend to make this kind of mistakes without knowing how to make corrections.

4.2 Interlingual errors sources of errors

There is also a common error often occurring in Chinese students' compositions --- "I and my brother went to the skating rink last Sunday". English speakers can understand it; nonetheless, this sentence seems inappropriate to them and they will feel uncomfortable and a little bit awkward just because they always put "the third person" in front of "the second" and "the first one" and the first person pronoun (I, me) should come last. Whereas Chinese people often emphasize on "the first person" both in conversation and writing. Because of mother tongue interference, a large number of errors come into being and some will be exist forever. Though interlingual errors tend to be made especially by the beginners of a foreign language, some will exist no matter how advanced of the learner's level is.

4.3 Intralingual transfer sources of errors

Another important source of errors is intralingual transfer and an intralingual error is one which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer. The sentence "She must goes" is wrong. The error might be made as a result of blending structures learned early in the learning process. In the above sentence, both the modal verb and the standard third person singular "-s" suffix are used. This sentence illustrates that the overgeneralization the rule which states that in the present simple there are no suffixes except for the third person singular.

There are many errors caused by overgeneralization. There is a sentence: "Today's news of troubles in the middle East is very disturbing". While looking at the "s" in the word "news", the learner employ "are" unconsciously without knowing that "news" is a singular collective noun. Therefore, the correct sentence should be like this: "Today's news of trouble in the Middle East is very disturbing". This kind of error is typical because of overgeneralizing the rules. Another example is "The police are investigating the case and hope to make an arrest soon". The learner may be sure while using "is" as the changing form of the verb "be" since in his mind "police" is a

singular noun judged from the surface. Actually, “police” is a plural noun and as a result, the right expression is “The police are investigating the case, and hope to make an arrest soon”.

This sentence “People should be helped each other” is also wrong. Though it is not the typical as the mentioned above, it does occur in the students’ composition. According to the student, he may think that a person in need might be helped by the people around him. Consequently, the error is committed by overgeneralizing the rule of “passive voice”. Generally speaking, intralingual errors tend to be made especially by intermediate learners. Error analysis is a good method in analyzing errors made by second language learners. Nevertheless, everything has two aspects --- its advantages and drawbacks, so does error analysis. According to Brown, error analysis pays too much attention to learners’ errors and it is an overstressing of production data; it also fails to account for the strategy of avoidance; furthermore, error analysis can keep us too closely focused on specific languages rather than viewing universal aspects of language. Therefore, “performance analysis” can also be used in the investigation of errors within the large perspective of the learner’s total interlanguage performance.

Not all errors are equal in their impact on communication. When the focus of a language class is on fluency, the teacher should concentrate on identifying global not local errors for later controlled practice. If the research evidence is to be believed and first language and second language learners both follow a broadly similar developmental route in their learning or acquisition of the language system, then, when planning the structure part of second syllabuses, perhaps the stages followed by first language learners should be considered.

5. Conclusion

There are other sources of errors in error analysis, such as the context of learning, communication strategies. Interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer are the most important sources of errors. From what has been stated above, we know that errors are common things in the process of the second language learning and they are of great importance. Therefore, the language teacher’s attitude towards errors is influenced by his or her view of what he or she is trying to do in class. That is not equal to say that the language teachers should shut their eyes to the students’ errors. There are two points for teachers to remember: First, accuracy is not being thrown out of window; if there are too many grammatical mistakes, the listener may not be able to understand the message, however fluently it is delivered. The second point is that teachers can encourage their students to attempt fluency with the limited amount of the language they have. Even elementary students with a very limited stock of structures and vocabulary can take part in activities which encourage use of the language that has been learned.

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