

Herzegovina has no other way but to go forward, along with its citizens. Consequently, people will become more aware of diversities that all of us share in terms of language, culture, race, religion etc, and more of them will realize the importance of learning languages and being bilingual or multilingual.

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UDC 372.881.111.1

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### **APPROACHES TO THE ERROR COMMITTING IN THE SECOND (FOREIGN) LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

**Abstract.** This article aims to briefly review theoretical concepts which are related to the error commitment in the second (foreign) language acquisition process such as Interference, Interlanguage, Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA) and introduce some strategies that teachers should use in error correction.

**Key word:** language acquisition, error correction, error analysis.

#### **Introduction**

Although it is impossible to set the precise date on when researches on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) were first established, some scholars claim that it took place around the end of 1960s. The starting point is generally held to be Corder's influential article "The significance of learner errors" together with Selinker's work on language transfer and interlanguage as a linguistic system in its own right—both of which, in very similar ways, challenged the view prevailing at that time that second language (L2) acquisition was like any other learning, namely, just a matter of habit formation. However, nowadays the significance of the Second language acquisition itself and the impact of mother tongue on it and the role of errors in SLA have been changing and investigations on these spheres have been broadening.

#### **Interference**

“When writing or speaking the target language (L2), second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2” [1]. Thus, the greater differences between two languages the more negative the effects of interference are likely to be and interference inevitably occurs in any situation when learner has an imperfect command of a second language (L2). Many researches have already been done in the area of native language interference on the target language. For instance, Dulay defines interference as “the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language”[2]. Lott defines interference as “errors in the learner’s use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue”[3]. Ellis refers to interference as ‘transfer’, which he says is “the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2”[4]. He argues that transfer is governed by learners’ perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. “In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible”[5]. It appears to be much more difficult for an adult to learn a second language system that is as well learned as the first language. Usually, “a person learns a second language partly in terms of the kinds of meanings already learned in the first language” [6]. Beebe suggests that in learning a second language, L1 responses are grafted on to L2 responses, and both are made to a common set of meaning responses. Other things being equal, the learner is less fluent in L2, and the kinds of expressions he/she uses in L2 bear telltale traces of the structure of L1.[7] Carroll argues that the circumstances of learning a second language are like those of a mother tongue. Sometimes there are interferences and occasionally responses from one language system will intrude into speech in the other language. It appears that “learning is most successful when the situations in which the two languages (L1 and L2) are learned, are kept as distinct as possible” [8]. To successfully learn L2 requires the L2 learner to often preclude the L1 structures from the L2 learning process, if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different. Beardmore suggests that “many of the difficulties a second language learner has with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from L1”[9]. The formal elements of L1 are used within the context of L2, resulting in errors in L2, as the structures of the languages, L1 and L2 are different. The relationship between the two languages must then be considered. Albert and Obler claim that “people show more lexical interference on similar items”[10]. So it may follow that languages with more similar structures (e.g English and French) are more susceptible to mutual interference than languages with fewer similar features (e.g English and Kazakh). On the other hand, according to claims of scholars as Selinker in 1979; Dulay et al in 1982; Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1983; Faerch & Kasper, 1983, Bialystok, 1990 and Dordick, 1996, we might also expect more learning difficulties, and thus more likelihood of performance interference at those points in L2 which are more distant from L1, as the learner would find it difficult to learn and understand a completely new and different usage. Hence the learner would resort to L1 structures for help.(in Bhela B. Native language interference in learning a second language) [19]. Dechert suggests that “the further apart the two languages are structurally, the higher the instances of errors made in L2 which bear traces of L1 structures”[1]. In both cases the interference may result from a strategy on the part of the learner which assumes or predicts equivalence, both formally and functionally, of two items or rules sharing either function or form. More advanced learning of L2 may involve a greater number of rules or marking features for distinguishing between the two languages. Sometimes learner can create ‘other language’ by mixing mother tongue and target/second language which is called interlanguage.

### **Interlanguage**

Interlanguage is a language created by learners of a second language which is between the target language and the learner's first language (L1). An interlanguage is an emerging

linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of a second language (or L2) who has not become fully proficient yet but is only approximating the target language: preserving some features of their first language (or L1) in speaking or writing the target language and creating innovations. An interlanguage is uniquely based on the learners' experiences with the L2. It can ossify in any of its developmental stages. The learner creates an interlanguage using different learning strategies such as language transfer, overgeneralization and simplification. Interlanguage is based on the theory that there is a "psychological structure latent in the brain" which is activated when one attempts to learn a second language. Larry Selinker proposed the theory of interlanguage in 1972, noting that in a given situation the utterances produced by the learner are different from those native speakers would produce had they attempted to convey the same meaning. This comparison reveals a separate linguistic system. Richards refers interlanguage as "the rule-based linguistic system that has been developed by a learner of a second language (or L2) who has not yet reached proficiency" [11]. A learner's interlanguage preserves some features of their first language (or L1), and can also overgeneralize some L2 writing and speaking rules. These two characteristics of an interlanguage result in the system's unique linguistic organization. As interlanguage is idiosyncratically based on the learners' experiences with the L2, it can "fossilize", or cease developing, in any of its developmental stages. The interlanguage rules are claimed to be shaped by several factors, including L1-transfer, previous learning strategies, strategies of L2 acquisition (i.e., simplification), L2 communication strategies (i.e., circumlocution), and overgeneralization of L2 language patterns. Interlanguage can be variable across different contexts; for example, it may be more accurate, complex and fluent in one domain than in another. To study the psychological processes involved one can compare the interlanguage utterances of the learner with two things: Utterances in the native language (L1) to convey the same message produced by the learner; utterances in the target language (L2) to convey the same message, produced by a native speaker of that language. It is possible to apply an interlanguage perspective to a learner's underlying knowledge of the target language sound system (interlanguage phonology), grammar (morphology and syntax), vocabulary (lexicon), and language-use norms found among learners (interlanguage pragmatics). By describing the ways in which learner language conforms to universal linguistic norms, interlanguage research has contributed greatly to our understanding of linguistic universals in second-language acquisition.

### **Contrastive Analysis & Error analysis**

Up to now, many scholars have pointed out the importance of second/foreign language learners' errors. Pit Corder, for instance, in his influential article states that "they are significant in three different ways. First, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn"[12]. Concerning the difficulties and errors in language acquisition, there are two systematic studies as Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error analysis (EA). Contrastive analysis and error analysis are two different studies that attempted to facilitate second language acquisition. Contrastive analysis aims at predicting the errors of the second language learner by the comparison of L1 and L2 peculiarities. In contrast, error analysis focused on observing the learner's errors in an endeavor to understand how second language is cognitively processed. However, both approaches contributed much to understanding some of the reasons behind L2 learners' errors.

The main idea of Contrastive Analysis, as propounded by Robert Lado in his book "Linguistics Across Cultures", was that it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language by systematically comparing the two languages and cultures. Where the two languages and cultures are similar, learning difficulties will not be expected, where they are different, then learning difficulties are to be expected, and the greater the difference, the greater the degree of

expected difficulty [13]. On the basis of such analysis, it was believed, teaching materials could be tailored to the needs of learners of a specific first language. As this approach aimed at predicting difficulty it was equated with predicting second language learners' errors. Though difficulty does not necessarily lead to produced errors if the learner is aware and controls these difficult features. This shows that CA ignores the learner's active role in the acquisition of L2."The learners in their attempt to deal with difficulties can avoid using the difficult feature, can infer or test hypotheses based on the knowledge of L1, L2 or of a third language"[14]. Another limitation of CA is its ability to predict all kinds of errors that can be produced by second language learners since not all errors are due to differences between the learner's native and second language. "Some errors were found to be common across learners of different first languages or relevant to similar features rather than different ones between L2 and the learner's L1. Such errors occur due to communication or learning strategies" [15]. Moreover, one impact of difficult L2 features is avoidance which is very difficult to be predicted by CA. Many of the errors predicted by CA do not actually occur and many occur only unidirectional, in other words not by both learners of the two contrasted languages. "The errors may occur by English speakers of French rather than French speakers of English."[16] All learners of various L1 background tend to follow the same developmental order of structures and errors in the acquisition of specific language structures such as that of the interrogative, subordinate clauses or negation. [17] It was revealed that CA can predict only a limited percentage of the learner's errors, only those due to interlingual (L1 interference) influence. Nevertheless, James argued that "CA allows teachers to realize the reasons behind some of the learners' errors"[16]. If the errors do not result due to L1 interference then CA has guided to observing other reasons. Generally speaking, knowing the reasons behind errors helps the teacher to provide feedback and can even guide the student to correct and avoid them later. Later, the approach of CA was replaced by Error Analysis (EA).

In turn, error analysis (EA) as an alternative to contrastive analysis (CA), demonstrates that learner errors were not only because of the learner's native language but also they reflected some universal learning strategies, and it deals with the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they receive from the target/second language. Therefore, a primary focus of error analysis is on the evidence that learners' errors provide with an understanding of the underlying process of second language acquisition. Comparing with CA, error analysis starts with errors in second language learning and studies them in the broader framework of their sources and significance. Moreover, EA unlike CA provides data on actual attested problems and so it forms a more efficient basis for designing pedagogical strategies, and CA studies interlingual error (interference) whereas EA studies intralingual errors besides interlingual. After the inability of CA to interpret all learners' errors, the error analysis approach was adopted by many researchers in 1970s. The purpose of the error analysis hypothesis (EA) was to explore what learners know about L2 through the analysis and description of learners' errors. CA tried to predict the learners' errors through comparing L1 and L2 language systems; however, error analysis observed learners' errors in an attempt to explore how the second language learner process and acquire second language. EA compared the acquisition of second language by adults to that of L1 by children. Both have a language system with its own rules. "Many of the adult second language learners' errors were similar to those of children developing their L1, such as the use of -ed with irregular verbs in the past tense"[18]. However, in this approach has been also found some limitations, because identifying the errors are not always that easy since many of them requires awareness of the learner's intentions. Moreover, distinguishing between errors of competence and that of performance is very difficult due to the fact that they can be consecutive. Another challenge is classifying the errors. Since many errors can be relevant to more than one level or included in another error, for example the error can be relevant to phonology and semantics at the same time. Finding the psycholinguistic reasons behind errors is very challenging as well because the same error can occur due to L1 transfer (interference), and communication

strategies or the Interlanguage subsystem, for example. And above all, avoidance cannot be even revealed as an error.

### **Error Correction**

It is obviously that committing errors is inevitable in second language acquiring process, also according to some scholars as P. Corder for instance, it is defined as steps toward progress or some kind of tool, which is beneficial in SLA. Anyways, we think errors are beneficial if they are possible to be corrected and serve as identification of language learning gaps to teachers and learners as well. Mendelssohn added that error correction is divided into two very broad categories: linguistic correction and sociolinguistic correction (in Bhela B. Native language interference in learning a second language) [18]. The first includes correction of grammar, pronunciation and other linguistic system. Sociolinguistic correction includes register, tone of voice and body language. Providing linguistic feedback and sociolinguistic one are important in the foreign language teaching. However, it must be noted that sociolinguistic correction is much more important than linguistic correction. In normal communication, even when people talking in their mother tongue, linguistics errors often exist without breaking the communication. In regard with linguistic correction, there are main errors and mistakes that should be corrected: Here are the main types of mistakes that need to be corrected:

- Grammatical mistakes (mistakes of verb tenses, preposition use, etc.)
- Vocabulary mistakes (incorrect collocations, idiomatic phrase usage, etc.)
- Pronunciation mistakes (errors in basic pronunciation, errors in word stressing in sentences, errors in rhythm and pitch)
- Written mistakes (grammar, spelling and vocabulary choice mistakes in written work)

Concerning these errors there are strategies that teachers should lead in giving feedback to learners. Here, it is important for teachers to select right strategy in particular situations and take into account learners' reaction to error correction. Sometimes, strict correction may 'frighten' learners to make steps towards progress in language learning, that is why teacher should be able to point to the errors and mistakes, so that learner could correct himself. Therefore, the main error correction strategies as follows:

- Explicit correction: Clearly indicating that the students' utterance was incorrect, the teacher provides the correct form.
- Recast: Without directly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correction.
- Clarification request: By using phrases like "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand", the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance contained some kind of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.
- Metalinguistic clues: Without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance (for example "Do we say it like that", "That's not how you say it in English", and "Is it feminine?").
- Elicitation: The teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g. "How do we say that in English?", by pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance (e.g. "It's a.....) or by asking students to reformulate the utterance (e.g. "Say that again"). Elicitation questions differ from questions that are defined as metalinguistic clues in that they require more than a yes/no response.
- Repetition: Teacher repeats the student's error and adjusts intonation to draw students' attention to it

### **Conclusion**

Drawing conclusions, due to the endeavor to understand the process of second language acquisition, predict learners' difficulties and facilitate the process of L2 learning, the mother tongue's impact, i.e. Interference and theory of interlanguage, as well as CA and EA contributes a lot. They proved to be complementary. James claimed that "CA can guide

realizing if the error observed is due to L1 transfer or other interlanguage influence. In his attempt to support the use of CA, he also claimed that the developmental processing of language features in the interlanguage from simple to more difficult can be guided through determining simple features that are similar to the learner's L1"[16]. In spite of the limitations of each approach, they can still guide second language acquisition process.

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