

ERROR ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' PERSIAN – ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Batoul Sabzalipour

Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University,
Tonekabon Branch, IRAN.
b.sabzalipor@yahoo.com.

ABSTRACT

This study was to identify and classify errors by analyzing students errors and a class of 10 were the subjects of the study. These students were considered advanced level. The study was also done to see how many errors exist in their translation from Persian into English and to identify the type of errors. Many subjects referred to their Persian- English dictionaries when they do translation. Some of them actually translated word by word into English. Such phenomenon caused them to come up with awkward expressions in their writings. They took for granted that whatever, written in the dictionary, was absolutely appropriate and correct as well as direct translation. The study revealed that approximately 31% of errors of these subjects resulted from L1 transfer. Other major errors involved intra-lingual errors which was 68%. Results and implications of the findings were further to be discussed.

Keywords: Inter- lingual errors, Intra- lingual errors, Transfer

INTRODUCTION

When learning a foreign language, it is indispensable to learn vocabulary of the language and since a level of certain vocabulary is strongly needed for translation, many learners rely heavily on the use of bilingual dictionaries when they are faced with uncertainty of words and expressions. These learners, including of advanced level, are expected to make various errors.

There are a number of studies done on vocabulary acquisition. Grabe & Stoller's (1997) case study of L2 Portuguese vocabulary learning suggests the effectiveness of using bilingual dictionaries when they are used in a consistent and appropriate manner. Frazer (1999) also emphasizes the importance of consulting a dictionary as an explicit L2 vocabulary learning strategy, especially when the learner wants to verify his/her inference of the meaning. The results of Park's (2001) study on Korean EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning Strategies show that 84.5% of her subjects used bilingual dictionary for their vocabulary learning. If such dependence creates errors and awkward unnatural acquisition of the language due to transfer, then the transfer errors should be analyzed in depth to implement a desirable way of teaching them to acquire the language with minimum errors. Moreover, when teachers of L2 understand the types of learners' errors, they will be better able to assist them according to the learners' needs.

This study was done to identify and classify errors of students' writings. The purpose of it was to find out the most common errors and the frequency of errors the subjects made, to see if advanced students translated Persian sentences into English with less errors or more and to see what implications could be made from the results.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Richards (1971) argues that many of the learners' errors come from the strategies that they use in language acquisition and the reciprocal interference of the target language items. Error Analysis (EA) would allow teachers to figure out what areas should be focused on and what kind of attention is needed in an L2 classroom. So the language teachers can be better able to develop curriculum and select materials that can facilitate L2 learning processes (Richards, 1995; Schachter & Celce-Murcia,

1977).

It is important to understand what constitutes an error. An error refers to a systematic error of competence, both covert and overt, that deviates from the norms of the target language. Covert errors are grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context of communication whereas overt errors refer to the obviously ungrammatical utterances (Brown, 1994; Corder, 1967; Ellis, 1996).

Errors need to be explained as to whether they are interlingual or intralingual. Generally interlingual errors can be identified as transfer errors which result from a learner's first language features (e.g., lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic, etc.). Intralingual errors are subdivided as overgeneralizations, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized (i.e., learners fail to comprehend fully). Overgeneralization errors occur when learners yield deviant structures based on other structures of the target language. Ignorance of rule restrictions refers to the application of rules to inappropriate contexts. Incomplete application of rules arises when learners fail to develop a structure fully. False concepts hypothesized occur when learners do not completely understand a distinction in the target language. (Ellis, 1996; Richards, 1995). However, it is not always possible to distinguish transfer errors from intralingual errors. Classification of intralingual errors can also be problematic. Quite a number of researchers, such as Brown (1994), Littlewood (1995), Lococo (1976), White (1977) have found that L2 learners at a beginning level produce a large number of interlingual errors. As these learners progress in acquiring the norms of the target language, more and more intralingual errors are manifested. Moreover, adult learners more commonly produce transfer errors than child learners.

There are some previous studies on Error Analysis based on learners' written work. One of them, done many decades ago, was by Duskova (1969) who identified a total of 1007 errors based on the writings of 50 Czech learners of English and analyzed them in terms of 9 categories. She discovered that errors in articles (260) were most frequent, followed by errors in lexis (233) while there were 54 errors in syntax and only 31 in word order. Kim (1987) identified a total of 2455 errors in the English compositions of 12th grade Korean EFL learners. The findings showed that errors in BE and auxiliaries were most common (419), followed by errors in prepositions (287) and that intralingual errors arose more than transfer errors. In the following year, Kim (1988) investigated errors in English verbs with reference to tense, mood, and voice. The 120 subjects were the 11th grade Korean EFL learners who were asked to translate 42 Korean sentences into English. Results revealed that errors in mood were most frequent (903), followed by errors in voice (885) and tense (720), among the total of 2508 errors. With regard to the sources of the errors, overgeneralization (65%) occurred the most while L1 transfer occurred at 22% and simplification at 13%. Kim (1989) conducted EA with 200 10th grade Korean EFL learners, using their English translations of 30 Korean sentences. She identified 1122 errors in which transfer errors resulting from L1 structures were higher (24%) than overgeneralization errors (23%). In the essay writings of 200 10th grade Korean EFL learners, Kim (1998) identified 2122 errors and classified them in terms of 6 domains and subdivided them into 22 linguistic categories. Her findings revealed that errors in articles were most common (354) and that there were only 8 errors in word order and 2 in voice. There are some more studies done on spoken errors by Lennon (1991), Kim (1997), Chin (2001) to name a few.

According to Peyton (1988), Reid (1993), Staton (1988), it is shown that while routinely conveying ideas and/or messages closely related to themselves, students involved in writing tasks are able to become real individuals actually participating in social, communicative acts with meaningful, authentic purposes as much as possible.

Error Analysis research has limitations of providing only a partial picture of learner language and

having a substantive nature that it does not take account avoidance strategy in L2 acquisition since EA only investigates what learners do. Learners who avoid the exact structures they find difficult due to the differences between their native language and the target language may be viewed to have no difficulty with them as Brown (1994), Ellis (1996) pointed out.

Statement of the Problem

In Iran there are many language institutes in which English is being taught as a foreign language. In these institutes, advanced students face with a lot of problems in translation i.e. finding the exact equivalent for words and phrases as they are used in first language. The product of their work is not comprehensible enough and there are a lot of errors in their translations. These errors can be as a result of transfer from L1, intralingual, or over-generalization of L2 system or intra lingual error. There are approaches of assessing learners translation ability (using, integrative testing and communicative testing) (Buck, 2001) both for the linguistic forms and comprehension. Many learners can easily find the meaning of the words and phrases from the dictionaries and recognize the linguistic form, but they cannot have a correct comprehension of the text.

Further, the problem which is the main focus of this study is the problem of translation that has led to the reluctance of the translation trainees, after graduation, to be attracted toward practical translation. Rahimy (2009), quoting from many scholars, discusses Iranian undergraduate and graduate translation trainees' problems in translation, and believes that the main reason of such a problem is the deficiencies in the curriculum for translation program at undergraduate and graduate levels in Iran.

The primary purpose of the study was to analyze what errors advanced level learners at an institution make in their translation from Persian to English by reviewing their translated sentences. The subjects' writing was evaluated and the sentences with errors were recorded to identify the types and frequency of errors.

METHOD

Participants

The subjects in the present study were intermediate to advanced level students in Shokouh Institution. There were 10 students participated in this tests. The majority of the subjects were high school students, but 3 students were graduated from college. They were all female and enrolled in English classes in spring semester of 2012.

Procedures

The participants of this study were given 10 Persian sentences to translate them into English. The results were reviewed and analyzed to see the types of errors made. The papers were all nameless and the students were told to ask the English equivalent of Persian words that they didn't know. Their written sentences were correlated with the scores. Each of their writing was reviewed by checking errors in different category and their frequency.

Every sentence in the subjects' letters was reviewed. The total of 100 sentences that contained errors were then recorded. Of them, most of the sentences had multiple errors. Then all the recorded errors were individually re-examined in order to determine the categories of errors. Teachers of L2 should be concerned what causes them to produce errors and how to help them with it. All 100 sentences were marked either I (incomprehensible) or C (comprehensible) to determine how many of them were seriously erred in conveying what they meant. Of these 100 sentences only 8 sentences was translated correctly into English.

RESULTS

The results of the description and frequency of errors are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Sub-Categorized Errors Into Fourteen Groups

	Description	Frequency
1	incorrect use of word order caused by transfer or awkward expressions and words	(106 errors, 26%)
2	incorrect selection of word	(64 errors, 16%)
3	incorrect use or deletion of preposition	(60 errors, 15%)
4	omission or incorrect use of article	(54 errors, 14%)
5	incorrect plural	(25 errors, 6%)
6	incorrect use of tense	(24 errors, 6%)
7	incorrect use or omission of pronoun	(18 errors, 4%)
8	subject verb agreement	(16 errors, 4%)
9	incorrect use of noun	(12 errors, 3%)
10	redundant use of words	(9 errors, 2%)
11	incorrect use of verb BE	(4 errors, 1%)
12	incorrect use of gerund	(4 errors, 1%)
13	incorrect use of auxiliary	(3 errors, 0.7%)
14	incorrect use of voice	(1 error, 0.2%)

In this category of errors, omission of indefinite , Incorrect use of definite article and whereas incorrect indefinite article incorrect tense, subject-verb disagreement, redundancy, plural, BE, auxiliary verbs, and voice errors.

Table 2. Type of errors in percent

Type of errors	Percent
Iterlingual errors	31%
Intralingual errors	63%

Table 2 represents the type of errors learners made in percent. It is shown that 31% of learners' errors are inter- lingual and as a result of transfer from L1 and 63 % of their errors are intra- lingual and as a result of overgeneralization in L2 system..A comparison show that most of Iranian EFL learners' do intara- lingual errors than inter- lingual.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The strong motivation for this study was to examine what kind of errors EFL learners advanced level at college make in translation by reviewing their writings and their frequency rates in order to determine what teachers of English should do to help learners minimize those errors. The results reveal that these errors were multiple types.

It was learned from the study that these learners tended to translate from Persian to English word by word when they wrote and used bilingual, that is persian/English dictionary for their reference. About (31%) of learners made errors that were resulted from transfer, which is similar to the study done, showing 32% errors from transfer, by Chin (2001) and higher than Kim's (1997) showing 15% and 68% of their errors are intralingual rather than interlingual. As a conclusion, it can be inferred that most of Iranian EFL learners' errors are systematic errors or as a result of overgeneralization.

Selection of a certain word may be interfered if direct translation prevails. Therefore, such errors can be reduced if teachers discourage such practice and let them be aware of the awkward expressions. Learners should be exposed to such examples with or without having similar situations. As the results of the study turned out similar to the other recent studies including the most recent one done by Chin (2001), the types of Iranian students' errors are similar other than the rates of incomprehensible sentences regardless of their levels achieved in an official test. If teachers of English can produce a guide-book on what errors most of them make in their writing and let them study along with their English study, their errors are expected to reduce because of their error patterns.

REFERENCES

- Brown, H.D. (1994). Principles of language learning and teaching (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Chin, C. (2001). Error Analysis: An Investigation of Spoken Errors of Korean EFL Learners.
- Duskova, L. (1969). On sources of errors in foreign language learning. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 7, 11-36.
- Ellis, R. (1996). The study of second language acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frazer, C.A. (1999). Lexical processing strategy use and vocabulary learning through reading. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 21(2), 225-241.
- Grabe, W. and Stoller, F.L. (1997). Reading and vocabulary development in a second language: A case study. In Coady, J. and Huckin, T. (Eds.), *Second language vocabulary acquisition: A rationale for pedagogy* (pp. 98-122). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, H. (1987). An analysis of learners' errors made in their English composition especially in the high.
- Kim, H. (1987). An analysis of learners' errors made in their English composition especially in the high school level. Unpublished master's thesis. Chungbuk National University, Chungju, Korea.
- Kim, I (1988). A study of the errors in the use of the English verbs with special reference to tense, mood, and voice. Unpublished master's thesis. Busan National University, Busan, Korea.
- Kim, M. (2001). The Use of Written Dialogue Entries in a College EFL Composition Classroom. *English Teaching*, 56(4), 31-53.

- Kim, Y. (1997). A study of errors and intelligibility of Korean college students' utterances. Unpublished master's thesis. Kangwon National University, Chuncheon, Korea.
- Lennon, P. (1991). Error: Some problems of definition, identification, and distinction. *Applied Linguistics*, 12(2), 180-196.
- Park, J.E. (2001). Korean EFL Learners' Vocabulary Learning Strategies. *English Teaching* 56(4) 3-30.
- Peyton, J.K. (1988). Mutual conversations: Written dialogue as a basis for student-teacher rapport. In Staton, J., Shuy, R.W., Peyton, J.K. and Reed, L. (Eds.), *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social, and cognitive views* (pp. 183-201). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Reid, J.M. (1993). *Teaching ESL writing*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Reid, J.M. (1993). *Teaching ESL writing*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents. Staton, J. (1988). Contributions of the dialogue journal research to communicating, thinking, and learning. In Staton, J. Shuy, R.W. Peyton, J.K. and Reed, L. (Eds.), *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social, and cognitive views* (pp.183-201). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Staton, J. (1988). Contributions of the dialogue journal research to communicating, thinking, and learning. In Staton, J. Shuy, R.W. Peyton, J.K. and Reed, L. (Eds.), *Dialogue journal communication: Classroom, linguistic, social, and cognitive views* (pp.183-201). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.