



THE SIGNICANCE OF ERROR IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION BY L2 LEARNERS: AN OVERVIEW OF ELT

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Abstract:

In teaching and learning a second language, it is generally believe that the inadequate linguistic competence of students in their communication portray some deviations which should not be left uncorrected as a result of their effects on mutual intelegebility and social accepterbility in a classroom situation and beyond (see, Ellis, 2001). Therefore, this could be a very complex issue which has to do with many internal and external factors affecting the language acquisition and learning process, Language teachers, Learners, and the society at large. This article focuses on errors in construction within the context of ELT. It hopes that the positive influence that corrective feedback has in ELT may be useful for practitioners, researchers and learners. The theoretical framework underpins this study is Error Analysis (E A) by (Corder, 1967). The effects of errors are highlighted and some solutions are proposed for corrective measures.

Keywords: *E L T, Grammar, Error, Error in Language construction*

Introduction

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a latest linguistic course which comprises of theory and practice. Its main aim is to familiarise learners, practitioners and researchers with the sub-branches of linguistics and encourage to consider how they relate to teaching and learning. ELT covers the following areas: sounds and sound patterns (phonetics and phonology), word and sentence structure

(morphology and syntax), and linguistic meaning (semantics and pragmatics). Emphasis is placed on applying the theories, methods and techniques from each of these sub-disciplines to the analysis of language data which include grammatical errors (Winchester, 2017). Therefore, the concept ‘grammar’ and ‘error’ are fully addressed in this paper as an attempt to justify their values as the main constructs.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is Error Analysis (EA), which aims at identifying and explaining the errors in language construction for effective communication.

Grammar

The concept ‘grammar’ could be a bit difficult to explain. However, an effort is made to see that it becomes clear for an effective utilisation in our daily communication. The term ‘grammar’ means different things to different people. To ordinary citizen, it connotes to correctness or incorrectness of the language that he or she speaks. To a school student, it means an analytical and terminological study of sentences. Knowledge of grammar helps students in the correction of mistakes and improvement of written works. A person can’t learn a foreign or a second language accurately only through a process of unconscious assimilation. Grammar is a sure ground of reference when linguistic habit fails us. So grammar is indispensable for the students. In reference to this, this study aims to draw the attention of the language teachers as well as the learners about the real utility of grammar in teaching English language in order to notice when the linguistic habit fails us. Therefore, it can be used as a judgement rule to put corrective measures in place (Depata, 2013). The term grammar designates a set of rules with the aim to describe the way language structure entails mastering the grammatical units and how they are combined (or arranged) in order to convey meaning (Usman,2019.p.3).

Types of grammar

Grammar could be divided into or ‘prescriptive’ or ‘descriptive’. The prescriptive approach to grammar is concerned with establishing norms of correct and usage and formulating rules based on these norms to be followed by users of the language. This principle entails that the long existed grammar rules

created by the native speakers are correct. On the other hand, the descriptive approach to grammar is concerned with describing the use of language by native or non-native speakers without reference to propose norms of correctness or advocacy of rule based on such norms. This principle entails that the language usage can vary according to varied speakers. In this way, it does not consider what is correct based on norms. Therefore, rules are made according to the daily usage of the language by the speakers in which we are inclusive. Based on this reference and in line with lingua franca perspective, the descriptive grammar is considered to be more relevant to this work (Reynolds, 2018).

Error

The concept error in ELT as claimed by Brown (1994), is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of the native speaker, reflecting the inter language competence of the learner. He cites an instance, “Does John can sing?” where proceedings ‘do’ auxiliary verb has been used as an error. In a lighter note, an error is an unintended deviation from the standard rule of a particular language made by a second language learner. Such errors results from the learners’ lack of knowledge of the target language (Richard, 2018).

Error in Language construction

Grammatical error is also known as error, usage error or grammar error. It is term usage in prescriptive grammar to describe an instance of faulty, unconventional controversial usage such as in appropriate verb tense, misplaced modifier, wrong preposition, misspelling, faulty punctuation, lack of agreement between elements of sentence such as subject and predicate and many more. However, linguists call our attention to order in respect to the term grammatical error; for instance, Baker believes that an expression or a structure cannot be grammatical and erroneous at the same time which seems to be paradoxical. For this reason, we should avoid saying ‘grammatical error’ rather we say error in construction or error in English (Baker, 1901, p.113). Those faulty linguistic habits are tantamount to ‘error’. Therefore, the main focus of this paper is error in construction.

The difference between error and mistake

Errors is defined as a lack of learner’s knowledge of the language which he uses (Corder,1967). On the other hand, mistake refers to faulty of performance and

unsystematic which can be self-corrected. So both errors and mistakes are as a result of inaccuracy of language construction. Even though, error is more relevant to written work.

Some categories of errors in language construction

This section presents some errors which include the following categories, namely:

Verb tenses Example: A year ago, I need (needed) to stop from studying because my parents cannot (could not) afford sent me to school.

Preposition Example: He wanted to go out to (from) the room, but he was scared.

Article Example: I felt gap between me and him. I felt **a** gap between me and him.

The second part encompasses the analysis determining the syntactical errors. All examples mentioned here are taken from Lasaten (2014).

a. Fragment Example: Myself undesirable and unwanted.

I am undesirable and unwanted. (sentence)

b. Run-on sentence

Example: The sale was in full swing in the store people crowded the aisles.

The sale was in full swing. In the store, people crowded in the aisles.

c. Misplaced modifier Example: A man fell over a rock running in a race. A man **running in race** fell over a rock.

d. Dangling modifier Example: To go to the game, seats must be reserved. To go to the game, **you** must reserve seats.

e. Faulty parallelism Example: Planning, drafting and revision are three steps in the writing process.

Planning, **writing**, **revising** are three steps in the writing process.

Third, mechanics refers to “the technical parts of constructing sentences.” All examples mentioned here are taken from Lasaten (2014).

- **Capitalization**

Example: The instructor began by saying, “music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.” The instructor began by saying, “Music is a way of painting a picture with melodies.”

- **Punctuation**

Example: In our relationships we encounter several struggles. (omission of comma) In our relationships, we encounter several struggles. (comma inserted)

- **Spelling**

Example: I beleive that someday I can make a difference. (believe)

I saw him with his redish eyes. (reddish)

For an error to be well positioned in ELT, it must reflect one of the four linguistic properties:

- **Error of grammar:** showcases syntactic deviation. For instance,
Dr. Hussain buy a new car now. (-s)

- **Error of meaning:** Portrays a semantic deviation. For instance,
Auwal is a long man. (tall)

- **Error of appropriacy:** Refers to the suitability of the word in context. For instance, My father's mother is no more. (grandmother)

To sum it all, errors of grammar, meaning and appropriacy has to do with accuracy of language in use, while error of pronunciation has to do with fluency of language expression.

Causes of learner's errors

Learners in ELT have more than enough problems to contend with without their teachers (and the materials their teachers use) making things worse. A majority source of error is unfortunately, teachers and material. In a nutshell, the major causes are following: Ignorance, analogy, L1 influence, teacher and environment).

Effects of errors in language construction

Speakers of other languages have to learn English language when they are enrolled in an institution whose medium of instruction is English. English to these students for academic purposes have proved to be difficult. Learners produce errors of various linguistic and non- linguistic kinds. Some of these reveal abnormalities, which placed the learners at disadvantage in class due to their fear and anxiety of error. This limits their interaction in class with their mates and teachers as well. The effect of this on the learners has theoretical implication as a result of denying them access to procedural knowledge without which learning cannot be intake. On the side of the teachers, errors can hold them back socially and on the job. It can make them look awkward and hide their true intellect.

Significance of errors in learning language and some techniques for corrections

Before looking at importance of error in language learning, let us look at the codes that are expected to be used for correction.

Example of a correction code

Sp	incorrect spelling
W.O.	wrong word order
W.F.	word form
W.W	wrong word
T	wrong tense
S/P	singular or plural form wrong
^	something is missing
[] or /	something is not necessary
?M	meaning is not clear
P	punctuation wrong
//	new paragraph needed
++	good word/sentence

(Adopted from UCLES 2009)

The learners' errors are recognised as an integral part of learning a target language. This approach seems to reject error corrections completely. Nevertheless, it does not mean that errors should be left uncorrected, but they should be corrected tactically. Mackey, (1967), emphasised that error and correction in their process examine the writing and attempt at hinting on effective ways of rehabilitating originally intended meaning of the re-writing stage through re-writing, or at directly rewriting to make it more meaning-forward. Doff (1990), in his study of error correction, noted some aims of his study which could help teachers develop sensitivity in correcting errors, which are concerned with the following techniques:

- To make teachers more aware of the significance of the learners' error.
- To help teachers develop positive strategy of error correction.
- To help teachers arrange some techniques for correcting oral and writing errors.
- To help teachers notice the level of improvement of learners.

He added that this would help encourage the teachers to develop a positive attitude towards their students' errors and suggested ways of correcting errors that will help, rather than hinder, the learning process. Moreover, Horner (1988), reported suggestions regarding the correction of language error as follows:

- Correct the output of the students if appears to have some effects.
- Do not correct overtly, if the student cannot be self-corrected, try other members of the class.
- Do not try to correct everything, students are learning the language to be able to communicate with the outside world, therefore, the primary concern is with error which render communication difficult or unclear.

Conclusion

In conclusion, grammar, error, error in Language construction and some techniques for correction are fully addressed. Language instructors are hoped to find this work useful as it may help them to pay particular attention on error-prone areas, with visible positive result in the communication outputs. It equally hopes to improve the learners' grey areas in ELT. With this, an error is brought to the notice of the language teachers as an indicator of learning progress and needs to be treated accordingly, for a better writing and speaking in English.

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