An Analysis of Errors in Writing by Students in HRD Classes at YUFL

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the errors made by students who attended twelve-week English language proficiency course at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. It identifies the errors made in writing a paragraph which can be attributed to mother tongue interference. The learners were assigned to write a paragraph on a given topic in about 100 words. Their errors will be classified. Suggestions will be made to overcome these problems. It is expected that this paper helps Myanmar learners who find themselves unconfident and nervous to do writing in English due to lack of language proficiency.
Key words: writing paragraph, error analysis, proficiency

1. Introduction

In learning a foreign language, learners find productive skills (speaking skills and writing skills) most difficult and they lose their confidence in communication. Myanmar learners feel hesitant to commit errors in writing and sometimes they are not willing to express their ideas in English. They feel nervous to communicate in foreign language because they do not realize that they can learn a foreign language through mistakes. As Selinker (1992) in (Ho, 2003) states that errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn'.

2. Literature review

Error analysis

Error analysis (EA) was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. A key finding of error analysis has been that errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. (Rustipa, 2011).

Errors and Mistakes

Brown (1993: 205) differentiates between mistakes and errors. A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or slip in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Corder and Larsen (1992) claim that a mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc. and therefore can be readily self-corrected. An error is a noticeable deviation, reflecting the competence of the learner. It is a systematic deviation made by the learner who has not yet mastered the rules of the target language. The learner cannot self-correct an error because it is a product reflective of his or her current stage of L2 development, or underlying competence (Larsen, 1992: 59). Error analysis is the study of kind and quantity of error that occurs, particularly in the fields of applied linguistics.

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3. Research methodology

Scope of the Research

46 learners were asked to write a paragraph on "How I spend my weekend" in about 100 words for their entry behavior. They are both university graduates and undergraduates who attended English language proficiency course at YUFL. All the students are Myanmar and they studied English for more than 11 years of formal education where they learned English as a compulsory subject.

Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

The errors committed by the students are classified into three different categories. The first category is interlingual and intralingual errors. The Interlingual errors are those that result from language transfer and are caused by the learner's native language whereas the Intralingual errors are those which result from faulty or partial learning of L2, rather than from language transfer (Richards 1973, Gass and Selinker, 2008, Brown, 2007). The second category is language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and over generalization (Selinker 1972, 1992). The third category is addition, fragment, omission, simplification, structure of the sentences, selection of the words, word order and subject-verb agreement (Corder 1973, Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982, & Ellis 1997). The aim of this paper is to focus on the interlingual errors in terms of redundancy reduction, transfer of roots and over generalizations.

Transfer of Rule Errors

According to Manan & Raslee (2016), this type of errors occurs when the writers apply knowledge of their native language to the second language situation when they do not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language. The ESL/EFL writers have the tendency to use their mother tongue experience to structure the information in the target language.

Redundancy reduction

This type of errors is committed by ESL/EFL learners when they remove necessary or add unnecessary items in a sentence due to ignorance. They simplify or modify the L2 sentence structure because they have not fully acquired the language yet. This type of errors is usually committed by beginner level writers. (Manan & Raslee, 2016).

Overgeneralization

Manan & Raslee (2016) states that overgeneralization happens when the learners apply the rules of L2 without taking into consideration the exceptions to the general rules. Lee (1990) classifies overgeneralization errors into four categories namely grammatical, discourse, phonologically-induced and lexical errors.

Setting

The data of the research is collected from 46 compositions written by 46 students attending HRD classes at YUFL.

Participants

The subjects of the research are 46 learners who had studied English as a compulsory subject in high schools and universities for more than 11 years.

Materials and Method

To analyse the data, descriptive method is used. This research paper identifies the errors which are caused by mother-tongue interferences in terms of redundancy reduction, transfer of roots and over generalizations.

Purpose

This paper tries to identify the errors made in writing a paragraph because of mother tongue interference. It also intends to help English language teachers and Myanmar learners who find themselves unconfident and nervous to do writing in English due to lack of language proficiency.

Research Questions

What are the mistakes made by Myanmar learners due to mother-tongue interferences?

How do the teachers help with the problems?

4. Analysis of data

46 conversations are analysed according to the procedure proposed by James (1998). The focus of the study is on interlingual errors (L1 transfer or interference).

Redundancy Reduction Errors

Among 3 categories, redundancy reduction is highest in numbers, 52 errors were made by Myanmar learners. They remove necessary or unnecessary items in a sentence because of they have not acquired the language yet.

Incorrect Form	Correct Form
1.I am studying at *the* YUFL.	I am studying at YUFL.
2.My mother is housewife.	My mother is *a* housewife.
3.My office located in Dawei.	My office *is* located in Dawei.
4. …tell … *to* my friend	… tell my friend..
5. *On* every Sunday, I help my mother	Every Sunday, I help my mother
6. I *like* singer *is* R Zarni.	The singer I like is R Zarni.

Table 1. Examples of Redundancy Reduction Errors

In Myanmar, there is no article like a, an, the. So, the learners use the articles where unnecessary and omit these articles in appropriate places. According to the analysis, articles which are not necessary are added in 26 sentences and articles are left in 6 sentences.

When looking at verb to be, am, is, are, was, were do not exist in mother-tongue. It is found that verb-to-be are put in 10 places where they are not necessary and left in 2 places. Another item the learners made errors is the use of prepositions, adding 12 places and omit 5 prepositions were necessary.

Another area in the mistake is that there are more than one main verb in a sentence. It is because the learners translate word-by-word in that target language.

Incorrect Form	Correct Form
1.… in Sunday	… on Sunday
2. I visit *to* the pagoda.	. I visit the pagoda.
3. *On* every weekend	Every weekend
4. At 10 o'clock, eat my lunch	At 10 o'clock, *I* eat my lunch.
5. … *play* the gym	… *go* to the gym

Table 2. Examples of Transfer of Rule Errors

In table 2, the errors are caused by transfer of rule. In Myanmar, there are 5 prepositions ', hnite, hmar, ka, wei, twin' to indicate time and place. They all can be used to show time, day, month, and year although in English, some specific prepositions can only be used for particular time and places. In Myanmar, when we visit somewhere, 'to' is always used after the verb not in English. One of the significances in English is that no preposition in used before the word 'every'. Another rule in English is that there is always a subject in statements and questions but in Myanmar, the subject is often omitted these sentences. Myanmar people say 'not like cheese" and" what doing?'. In these examples, it is understood that the speaker is talking about himself.

Another area in which learners make errors is the use of vocabulary. The learners translate Myanmar word into English directly. Here, for example, "…yoke shin kyi tel" that means look the movie in Myanmar but in English, watch the movie. In the compositions analysed another example is "gym hmar ka sar tel" (Play the gym). With the lack of knowledge of collocation, students make such kind of errors.

Incorrect Form	Correct Form
1.… Staff*s*	… staff
2. We eat*s*	We eat

Table 3. Examples of Overgeneralization Errors

Table 3 shows overgeneralization errors. This kind of error is found the least in number. In Myanmar, the plurality-s (-myar) is sometimes often omitted or included with the study of English language throughout the life. There is one thing they keep in mind is that in English, the plurality is formed by adding 's'. As a result, in the use of subject and verb agreement overgeneralization can be found like in "We eat" and "She go".

5. Findings and discussion

This paper, according to the error analysis of compositions written by 46 learners, most of the errors are made because of mother-tongue interference. Errors are made in many different areas such as use of articles, verb-to-be, prepositions, extra verbs, subject and verb agreement and wrong use of vocabulary and so on. From this analysis, language teachers should be aware of what learners have already known, what they are confused, what they do not clearly understand and what they need to learn. To overcome the problems mentioned above, the teachers should highlight the different uses of verb-to-be with example sentences. Some learners misunderstand that verb-to-be are used only for existence.

Concerned with the use of articles, explanations should be done with examples and some rules of the use of articles should be learned repeatedly. In English, subject and verb agreement and the formation of nouns and verb into plurality make Myanmar students confused in that adding –s to nouns makes plural but to verbs singular. This characteristic should be made clear by the teachers.

When analyzing the errors of using the extra verbs in a sentence, the errors are made in that case because of the contrast between Myanmar and English in sentence structure. The problem can be overcome while doing reading comprehension. When reading, the teacher should point out the contrast in the structure between two languages. At the same time, the use of vocabulary and prepositions can be developed.

6. Conclusion

Error analysis is done on 46 compositions written by 46 learners who are attending English language proficiency course. The paper focuses on the interlingual errors in terms of redundancy reduction, transfer of roots and over generalizations.

Graduate students are serving in many different offices working on administration and with a little use of English for many years if they do not study English by themselves. As a result, they have made errors, forgetting the rules and some vocabulary. On the very first day of the course, 46 students were assigned to write a paragraph on "How I spend my weekend" in about 100 words. When learners make errors in writing, they should be given chances to discover how the target language works and feedback should be given in details. Due to my partial knowledge of error analysis, this paper may be incomplete.

However, I hope this paper would be useful for further detailed analysis of errors and the teachers who teach English as a foreign language who have not noticed the similarities and differences between the target language and mother tongue.

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