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SOME SOURCES AND TYPES OF COMMON ERRORS IN SERBIAN LEARNERS' ORAL PRESENTATIONS IN ENGLISH

This paper is concerned with Serbian students' errors in their oral presentations in English and it is based on Error Analysis and the assumptions that many errors can be ascribed to the following sources: mother tongue, L1 (interlingual errors), the target language, L2 (intralingual errors) and the strategies by which the learner acquires the language (developmental errors). All three sources can be permanent or temporal and they affect levels of the language system which will be focal in the study (morphology and syntax). The study reported in this paper offers an account of common errors in intermediate level students' oral presentation in English in the Second Grammar School in Kragujevac. The errors in question are neither accidental nor a result of the classroom situation which may induce errors (e.g. anxiety, low self-esteem) but which are rather recurrent in everyday language production. The overview of errors along with their classification based on sources and types offers a certain teaching methodology for error prevention and their remedy which is based on a comparative study of the two languages in question: Serbian as L1 and English as L2. The study's findings can contribute to language pedagogy and the teaching process itself because they suggest where to search for the sources of errors.

Key words: interlingual errors, intralingual errors, Error Analysis, Serbian, English

1. Introduction

The identification and analysis of students' errors in their everyday language production have traditionally been among the major preoccupations of language teachers. Error Analysis with its theoretical and practical background provides a methodology for investigating a learner's language. It provides insight into what is going on within a target language while it is being used inappropriately by a student. Error Analysis is a process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, consequences and sources of unsuccessful language which is necessary for an understanding of the process of second language acquisition (James, 1998:1). Error Analysis provides a triple feedback to a language researcher as re-

gards students' progress, a teacher's method of teaching and the devices by which a learner discovered the target language system of rules (Ellis, 1994).To prevent and remedy students' errors successfully, it is important not only to detect them but to reveal and determine their sources as well.

There are several classifications of errors based on their sources. Corder (1967) maintains that a learner's errors provide evidence of the target language system the student is using at a particular point in the learning process, i.e. his transitional competence. The majority of errors can be ascribed to the following sources: the mother tongue, L1 (interlingual errors), the target language, L2 (intralingual errors) and the strategies employed by the learner in L2 acquisition (developmental errors). As for interference from the mother tongue, Lado, a pioneer of Contrastive Analysis (1957:2) states: "Those elements that are similar to the (learner's) native language will be simple for him and those areas that are different will be difficult." Richards (1984) claims that interference errors occur when a student uses elements of one language while speaking another. If there are more similarities than differences in the two language patterns, learning will benefit from *positive transfer* of the L1 and vice versa (Odlin, 1989).

Richards (1971) states that many errors derive from the mutual interference of items within the target language. Rather than reflecting the influence of L1, intralingual and developmental errors illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition and a learner's competence at a particular stage. Their origin is within the structure of L2 itself and the strategy by which L2 is acquired. Intralingual errors reveal the general characteristics of the rule learning, while developmental errors are the results of a learner's attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of his limited experience (*Ibid*).

This paper offers an account of common errors at two levels of the language system (morphology and syntax) in students' oral presentations in English. The counted errors are not a result of the classroom situation but they are rather recurrent in everyday language production and performance. The research carried out among grammar school students at the intermediate level provides the classification of errors based on their sources and types, regardless of whether they reflect defects in knowledge or result from inadequate habit formation, i.e. fossilization which is defined according to Hyltenstam (1988: 68) as a process that may occur in the second language acquisition context as opposed to first

language acquisition and which covers features of the second language learner's interlanguage that deviate from the native speaker norm.[2]

The paper also presents an attempt to determine which type of errors is more frequent. The findings can contribute to a better understanding of the influences which the mother tongue has on second language acquisition, which is a very important issue to language pedagogy and the teaching process itself.

2. *Methodology*

The methodology of this paper is based on Corder's (1974) manifold research procedure consisting of:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors
3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors
5. Evaluation of errors

Corder (1981:1) views Error Analysis as a theoretical approach, a study or even a method of treating errors which is an inseparable part of learners' language study. Therefore, the study carried out among 62 intermediate level students in the Second Grammar school in Kragujevac went through the following phases:

1. Various inputs (pictures, topics, texts) for oral presentations were given to three groups of grammar school students at intermediate level (group A: 20 students, group B: 22 students, group C: 20 students).These groups actually represented three different classes of students who have been studying English as L2 for seven years.
2. Having recorded the students' presentations, the teacher-researcher detected, identified and categorized the errors within a corpus of errors. The corpus consisted of more than 200 phonological and morpho-syntactic errors. For the purpose of this paper only the most frequent errors were listed.
3. The errors were classified first into types of errors (morphological and syntactic) and then into groups based on the very source of errors (interlingual and intralingual). Afterwards, they were evaluated according to the criterion of frequency (James, 1998:206).

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2   Selinker (1992), who coined the term in 1972, states that fossilized linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which L2 learners tend to keep in their interlanguage relative to a particular target language.

4. A statistical procedure was used for the errors' quantifications including counting followed by evaluation of errors.

3. Results

Having identified students' errors, the teacher-researcher first organized them into a corpus of errors and classified them into phonological, morphological and syntactic errors (Table 1 and Table 2) and, then, into interlingual and intralingual types of errors (Table 3 and Table 4). The subclassification of errors was taken from Richards (in Robinett 1996: 209).

It is important to emphasize that phonological errors are the most frequent and numerous. They can mainly be ascribed to the interference from the mother tongue or even from the second foreign language taught at school (in this case French). This issue deserves more attention and it may be thoroughly analyzed through an additional study.

Table 1. Morphological errors

MORPHOLOGY	Group A	Group B	Group C	TOTAL
Plural of Nouns	10	8	9	27
Disagreement between Subject and its Verb	5	5	6	16
Errors in the production of Adverbs	6	8	8	22
Dis agreement between Adjective and its Noun	4	2	2	8
Errors in the production of verb groups	9	10	8	27

Table 1 presents the most common types of morphological errors and their frequency within each group alongside the total number of errors for each error type. The plural of nouns and errors in the production of verb groups are the most frequent morphological error types these intermediate level grammar school students have made in their oral presentations.

Table 2. Syntactic errors

SYNTAX	Group A	Group B	Group C	TOTAL
Questions	8	6	6	20
Negation	7	8	10	25
Inappropriate indirect object	6	3	5	14
Indirect Speech (questions)	5	4	5	14
Imperatives	4	2	2	8
Wrong choice of Tenses	8	8	11	27

Table 2 presents the most common types of syntactic errors and their frequency of occurrence within each group along with the total number of errors for each error type. Wrong choice of tenses and negation are the most frequent syntactic error types students have made in their oral presentations.

Table 3 and Table 4 present morphological and syntactic errors with the most typical examples classified into interlingual (errors caused by interference from L1 and L3) and intralingual errors (errors resulting from the target language rules and structures previously acquired) respectively. The subtypes of errors within interlingual and intralingual classification of errors were taken from Richards (*Ibid*).

Table 3. Interlingual errors

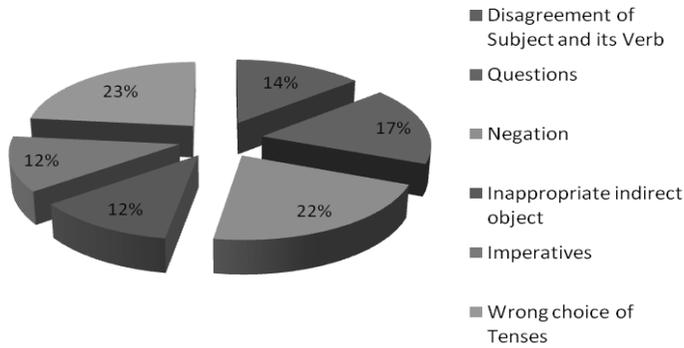| INTERLINGUAL ERRORS		A+B+C
Disagreement of Subject and its Verb	Few men is engaged; A lot of people is in the street.	16
Questions	What you are doing?; How many fingers you see?	20
Negation	There isn't nobody to help.; Unless she doesn't come.	25
Inappropriate indirect object	Check me this paper, please.	14
Imperatives	You do it!; You close the door, please!	14
Wrong choice of Tenses	How long are you standing here?	27
TOTAL		116

Figure 1. Percentage of Interlingual errors

Figure 1 displays the percentage of interlingual errors: 23% errors in wrong choice of tenses, 22% errors in negation, 17% errors in questions, 14% errors in disagreement of subject and its verb, 12% errors in imperatives and 12% errors in inappropriate indirect object.

Table 4. Intralingual errors

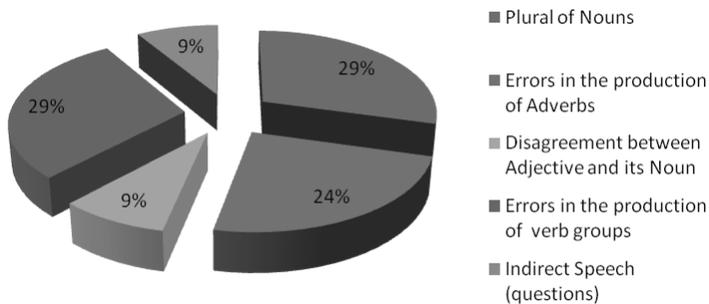| INTRALINGUAL ERRORS		A+B+C
Plural of Nouns	Mouses, datas, informations	27
Errors in the production of Adverbs	Why did you come lately last night?; He played fairly.	22
Disagreement between Adjective and its Noun	This papers, that men; that people	8
Errors in the production of verb groups	He can sings.; He weared a new suit.; I spoked to him.	27
Indirect Speech (questions)	He asks will you help him.; She asked where are you going.	8
TOTAL:		92

Figure 2. Percentage of Intralingual errors

Figure 2 shows the percentage of intralingual errors: 29% errors in the production of verb groups, 29% errors in plural of nouns, 24% errors in the production of adverbs, 9% errors in indirect speech and 9% errors in disagreement between adjective and its noun.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study show that interlingual errors are more frequent and more numerous than intralingual errors. It also proves that some areas of the language system are more likely to be influenced by interference from other languages, L1 in particular, while others are more prone to be affected by previously acquired rules within the target language as well as by defects in knowledge or inadequate habit formation. Errors in wrong choice of tenses are the most frequent interlingual errors, while errors in the production of verb groups are the most numerous intralingual errors that the intermediate level grammar school students have made in their oral presentations in the reported study.

The findings of the study can contribute to a better understanding of the sources of students' errors in that they suggest a detailed method to language pedagogy as regards students' L1, since teaching L2 rules should involve a comparative analysis of L1 and L2 from an interlingual perspective. Second language teaching does not merely involve a clearing up the confusion which is caused by L2 structures which are nonexistent in a student's L1. Error Analysis is a starting point for a teaching methodology which will contribute not only to error correction but also to error prevention.

Further research into this matter could cover other types of errors in the fields of lexis, semantics and the like. It could also focus on Error Analysis of grammar school students' written presentations. Ellis (1994) argues that exploring errors and their possible sources presents a multi-faceted task because of the quite complex and ambiguous nature of errors. Therefore, a researcher should be more careful when ascribing errors to certain types and sources.

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О ИЗВОРИМА И ТИПОВИМА НАЈЧЕШЋИХ ГРЕШАКА У УСМЕНИМ ПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЈАМА НА ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ УЧЕНИКА ГИМНАЗИЈЕ КОЈИМА ЈЕ МАТЕРЊИ ЈЕЗИК СРПСКИ

Резиме

Овај рад је заснован на анализи грешака и претпоставкама да се многе грешке могу приписати следећим изворима: матерњем језику, L1 (међујезичке грешке), циљном језику, L2 (унутарјезичке грешке), као и стратегијама којима ученик усваја страни језик (развојне грешке). Фокус овог рада биће на међујезичким и унутарјезичким грешкама, чији извори могу бити трајни или тренутни и они врше утицај на нивое језичког система који ће бити предмет овог рада (морфолошки и синтаксички). Истраживање, које је спроведено у Другој крагујевачкој гимназији и које је обухватило 62 ученика другог разреда који уче енглески као први страни језик, нуди преглед најчешћих грешака у усменим презентацијама на енглеском језику, које нису случајне, нити су резултат атмосфере коју окружење у учионици намеће (нпр. узнемиреност, недостатак самопоуздања), већ се више пута понављају. Истраживање је показало да су међујезичке грешке чешће и бројније. Овим прегледом, односно класификацијом грешака према изворима и типовима, нуди се одређена методологија којом би се грешке могле спречити и исправити, а која се базира на упоредној анализи српског и енглеског језика. Резултати истраживања се могу искористити у педагогији језика, јер нуде предлог где тражити узроке грешака које се јављају у усменим презентацијама, као и у самом наставном процесу.