

**Error Analysis in ESL Writing: A Case Study at Academic English Program at St.
Michael's College, VT**

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Abstract

Analyzing and evaluating linguistic errors in students' English writings have been an interesting attempt in the field of second or foreign language teaching and learning. Error analysis and evaluation provide a change on direction toward a more positive treatment on student linguistic errors in their writings. It enables language teachers to depict and understand how language learning takes place in the minds of learners. This study seeks about the error analysis made by an ESL student at Academic English Program at St. Michael's College, VT, USA. The essays and interview were used to take data on student's grammatical errors and his preferable types of feedback in his writing revision process. The result showed that the negative transfer from mother tongue does have negative influence to student's ESL writing. In addition, the student prefers direct feedback better than indirect feedback in correcting their errors. Direct feedback is considered more beneficial because he can directly focus on the error and do immediate correction.

Keywords: error analysis, feedback, ESL writing

All language learners have possibility to make mistakes regardless the language they are learning, which is normal for those who study a second or foreign language. Identifying and analyzing students' errors become crucial as it enables teacher to diagnose the difficulty the students may encounter in the classroom. While for students, showing their error can be a significant input as a learning tool to improve their studying. Weireesh (1991) argues that learners' errors is particularly importance as the making of errors can be a device that the learners use in order to learn.

Error analysis has become an interesting topic in the study of a second language acquisition. It has been proven by the number of studies focusing on the students' errors in writing. Bett (2010) states, "The majority of the difficulties faced by ESL learners is

attributed to errors in the process of language employment, especially in writing.”

Identifying errors are significant aspects in teaching and learning process of ESL learner, especially because there is a tendency for ESL learner to be interfered by their mother tongue. In addition, there are three parties will be significantly benefited from studying students' errors including:

1. The teacher as it can be used to see the progress of the learners. It also can be used as teaching materials.
2. The researcher as it can be used to provide evidence of how language is acquired and other factors that might contribute to the language acquisition.
3. The learner as it can be used as devices to learn better.

By describing, classifying, and evaluating the students' error in linguistic terms, the writer can build up the picture of the feature of the language, which is causing the students' learning problem. Therefore, this study mainly concentrates on types of errors made by the students in English as Second Language (ESL) writing. In addition, the sources of errors and the preferable feedback are also investigated.

Literature review

Bett (2010) investigated the sources, the nature and the amount of errors made by students in Kalenjin secondary school in Kenya, who were in the final year. He involved 92 final year student respondents and 8 teacher respondents. The study identified the following amount of errors: grammar (232), substance (245), lexical (80), semantic (86), and syntactic (125). Regarding the sources of errors, it was identified that language transfer caused many problems for the respondents of the study.

Guo, Liu and Chen (2014) explored the effect of Chinese negative transfer on English writing. They found that the biggest problem faced by the students in English writing was the negative transfer from their mother tongue. Therefore, they suggest three ways to help teacher and learner improve the teaching and learning process such as enlarge vocabulary and strengthen grammatical exercise, get a better understanding of cultural differences, and make comparison between L1 and L2.

Mahmod (2005) in Bett (2010) investigated 42 essays written by Arabic-speaking university students majoring in English. He presented a systematic and in-depth analysis of Arab learner's lexical errors in general and of collocation error in particular. The result of his study showed that 61% of the incorrect combinations were due to negative transfer from Arabic.

Wul and Garza (2014) conducted a research on the types and attributes of English writing errors in the EFL context. They explored the EFL learners' major writing problems by analyzing the nature and distribution of their writing error and investigated the source of errors through email communication. They found that the students tended to make mistakes on interlingual error than on developmental errors. Finally they state that the identification on EFL learners writing benefits both students and teacher, as it becomes information of which point of errors that should be included or emphasized in the learning process.

Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 EFL college students and then categorized the errors according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors can be due to L1 transfer. Furthermore, she found that most of the

learners rely on their mother tongue in expressing their ideas. She added that although the rating processes showed that the participants' essays included different types of errors, the grammatical errors and the mechanical errors were the most serious and frequent ones.

Definition of error analysis

Candling (2001) considers error analysis as the monitoring and analysis of language performed by students. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 184) defines errors analysis as “The study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners”. From these explanations, the writer concludes that error analysis is a type a linguistic analysis that focuses on the process of identifying, and describing the learner’s error in target language learning.

According to Crystal (1999) as cited in Sawalmeh (2013), EA refers to an investigation of someone’s unacceptable form when they are learning a foreign language. In addition, Richards and Schmidt (2002) as cited in Mungungu (2010, p.28) define EA as “the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners. This is inline with the definition given by Brown (1980) as cited in Ridha (2012, p.26) saying that ER is “the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviation of the rules of the second languages and then to reveal the system operated by learner”.

Sources of errors

Richard (1971) cited in Kaweera (2013) divides three sources of errors including interference, intralingual and developmental errors. Interference error is the error, which is resulted from negative transfer from mother tongue. Intralingual error is caused by incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language. Developmental error occurs when a learner postulates about the target language according to their limited

language. Later, Schacheter and Celce-Murcia (1997) cited in Kaweere (2013) state that intralingual and developmental are related. They both refer to the errors produced when the learner haven't fully reached advanced level of a target language.

This research aims to see whether the errors committed by the students is due to the intralingual or interlingual error.

Types of writing correction feedback

The types of writing correction feedback used in class may vary depend on purpose, situation, material or approach that is needed. Ellis (2009) categorizes the types of feedback into six as follows:

Direct feedback. It is used when the teacher provides the students with the correct form.

Indirect feedback. It is used when the teacher indicates the error that exists, but doesn't provide the correction.

Metalinguistic errors. It occurs when the teacher provides clues or codes in the margin to identify the type of error.

The focus of the feedback. It includes unfocused and focused correction feedback. This happens when the teacher wants to correct all students' error or just want to focus on one specific area.

Electronic feedback. This kind of feedback used when the teacher use electronic devises to give a correction on students' writing.

Reformulation. It involves native speaker's correction on students writing.

In this paper, the writer focuses the selection on direct and indirect feedback. It aims to compare which one is more beneficial for students when they need to give

immediate uptake on the error correction.

Goals of error analysis

Sujoko (1989) listed the practical used of error analysis as follows:

1. Errors provide feedback; they tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques.
2. They show him what parts of the syllabus he has been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention.
3. They enable him to decide whether he must devote more time to the item he has been working on. This is the day- to- day valve of errors. But in term of broader planning and with new group of learners.
4. They provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a program of re- teaching.

Methodology

This section includes research questions, research method, participants, instruments, and procedure.

Research questions

This paper aimed primarily to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types of errors that the student made? Which one are the most systematic?
2. What are the sources of errors, interlingual (negative L1 transfer) or intralingual (developmental)?
3. What type of error correcting feedback more preferable, direct or indirect?

Research method

As for the research method, mixed method were adopted in this . Quantitative research was to find out the errors, which are made by the student, and also to determine the systematic errors committed in the student's essay. Qualitative research was used to describe and analyze the sample of student's essays in order to get further understanding on the potential errors as well as how the errors would be addressed by the teacher.

Participants

The participant in this paper involved a Chinese student in Academic English Program (AEP) level 2 at Saint Michael's College. He has been studying for four years in the United States. The level of his program and the length of his studying were considered appropriate to conduct this kind of study.

Instruments

Essays and interview were the primary data collection in this paper.

Essays. Essays were used to identify student's errors in his writing. The writer used two essays that have been assigned in that class. The prompts of those essays are as follows:

Essay 1:

In your essay, please talk about some of the challenges you have faced/are facing as a new student studying abroad. Additionally, please discuss how schools can help international students with their adaptation to their new environments and overcome some of those challenges? Use specific reasons and examples to explain your answer.

Essay 2:

Describe evidence of globalization that you have noticed in your country. What

are some positive and negative effects of globalization in your country? Give specific example. You can also talk about the technological changes/advancements as evidence of globalization.

Interview. Interview was used to find out what are the sources of potential errors committed in the student's essays. This also was used to identify the preferable correcting feedback based on student's point of view.

Findings and Discussions

The following is the result of identification of the student's problem in writing. The writer, then, would use the table to identify most systematic errors committed by the students based on the number of its occurrence.

Table 1

Type of error	Example	No. of occurrence
1. Omit/misuse article	I can't believe it is already my fourth year studying in US. When I am in Saint Michael's College, I still do not have American friends,	13 times
2. Subject-verb agreement	In China, all the kids starts to learn English in primary school. ... but it will causes the single culture	8 times

3. Tense	When I was sit in the classroom with American students and American teachers in the first time,	6 times
4. Parallelism	I need to make new friends and learning more knowledge in class.	5 times
5. Gerund	Have a healthy diet is become very important	1 times
6. Comma splice	The word globalization is including a lot of meaning, it can be defined as social, culture, economic, and also technology.	3 times
7. Fragment	When the last speaker of that language dies, which means the language also dies.	2 times
8. Missing verb	It not about being fit; it's about being adaptable to change.	3 times
9. Misuse active voice	But I still get confused of some points that teacher was mentioned in class.	1 time

According to the table above, it can be identified that the most systematic errors that the student produced includes omit or misuse articles, time tense, parallelism and subject verb agreement. It can be discussed as follows.

1. Omit or misuse article

This student tends to omit or misuse article very frequently in both his essays. According to the research conducted by Guo, Liu and Chen (2014), it is reasonable if a Chinese student commits an error in using the articles due to the fact that Chinese language

doesn't have articles.

2. Time tense

In English, tense is used to indicate or express an event based on the time it occurs. Therefore, tense is usually referred to the time. According to the English grammar rule, the form of a verb should be changed depending on the tense used. However, Chinese language doesn't have a tense structure. Therefore, it is assumed that this error is made because of the negative transfer of the Chinese language.

3. Parallelism

Parallelism is also one of the most systematic errors found in the student's essays. The problem in this structure is that the student was not aware with the concept of parallelism. It seemed that the student didn't have a comprehensive understanding on this topic.

4. Subject verb agreement

According to Guo, Liu and Chen (2014), English and Chinese are similar in terms of sentence order: subject-verb-object. However, the difference lies on the changing of the verb. The sample of error can be seen in the following sentence:

... *but it **will causes** the single culture ...* . In English, the original or base form should follow the modal *will* regardless the third person singular *it* in this sentence. However, in Chinese, the verb will never change no matter how the tense and the subject change.

Conclusion

The writer concluded that the biggest problem faced by the Chinese student was due to the interlingual errors. The negative transfer from mother tongue does have negative influence to student's ESL writing. The result of this study echoed the recent

study conducted by Guo, Liu and Chen (2014).

Also, the data collected from the interview showed that the student prefers direct feedback better than indirect feedback in correcting their errors. Direct feedback, according to the student's perspective more beneficial because he can directly focus on the error and do immediate correction. Unlike direct feedback, indirect feedback is seemed difficult for the student because it take time to find the error and sometimes they are confused which part to be corrected.

Limitation and Suggestion

The limitation of this study was due to the time constraint, the experiment, and the analysis. Since the number of data was small and the time to conduct this study was very limited, it is suggested to the further researchers who are interested in the same field to conduct comprehensive research with the bigger data. Regardless all limitations mentioned, the finding of this study can be beneficial not only for the student but also for the teacher to see the areas where the students and the teacher should work more.

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