

MOTHER-TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN THE ERROR OF LEARNERS' GRAMMAR

Nely Arif

Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Jambi
Kampus Pinang Masak, Mendalo-Darat Jambi 36361

ABSTRACT

When young learners learnt English as a foreign language, they made many mistakes or errors whether in pronunciation, spelling, grammar or vocabulary. The errors will reveal where learners are particularly likely to make incorrect generalization about the target language. The data were collected either based on the writer's experience when she was studying in junior, senior high school, and on observation to the students when she taught. To support the data, the writer also took the example of sentences about the error from the source book that she thought relevant to the problem discussed. The writer just discusses some of the grammatical aspects such as to be / auxiliary, pronouns, and tenses. The greater the grammatical differences between mother tongue and target language (foreign language), the greater the difficulty faced by learners.

Keywords: Mother-tongue Interference, Young Learners, Grammar Errors

INTRODUCTION

When we learnt English as a foreign language, we made many mistakes or errors whether in pronunciation, spelling, grammar or vocabulary. Wilkins (1987) says that the errors in learning are significant. They are not, however, entirely caused by differences between the native language of the learner and the language he is learning. There is some value in analyzing the reasons for errors, since this will lead at least to a greater understanding of difficulties that learner face, and will perhaps assist in the development of pedagogic strategies. The errors will reveal where learners are particularly likely to make incorrect generalization about the target language.

According to Zaim (2002) interferences happens because the learner makes the similarity between the sentence in English (as target language)

and the sentence in Indonesian (as mother tongue) that he has mastered.

In this writing, the writer just wants to discuss about the errors of grammar that are often made caused by mother-tongue interference. So the question of this writing : What is the grammatical error made by learners caused by mother-tongue interference?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grammatical devices like case, tense, word-order, concord and subordination express the relations between parts of the sentences, and an understanding of them is essential to the understanding of the sentences themselves. We often hear foreign learners and even teachers of English say that English grammar is relatively simple (Wilkins, 1978). When they say this they are equating the learning of grammar with the learning of morphological variation. Compares with

many be fairly straightforward morphologically.

Learners do not often get an overall picture since the linguistic content of language teaching is usually cited as list of items made up of morphological systems or parts of systems. Sections of a text-book may be devoted to the definite article, the indefinite article, prepositions, the past tense, the subjective and so on. There are types of language teaching in which learning is almost entirely the learning of morphological forms.

The basic paradigm of the tense system in English has eight forms (Wilkins, 1978). They are two tenses as such, *touches*, *touched*, respectively Present (simple) Tense and Past Tense, and a number of constructions which we might call “tense-phrases”, since they perform a similar function although they are not tenses in the strict sense of being inflected.

Wilkins (1978) states we can look at some of the salient features of the contrast between present simple and progressive is the described as referring to events in progress at moment of speech and the simple form to habits or general truth. Neither is entirely accurate, though they may serve their pedagogic function. As well as

- (1) Don't interrupt me! I'm working.
and
- (2) I come to work by car
We have
- (3) I am working on a new project.
(spoken while on holiday)
And
- (4) He lives a couple of miles away.
(hardly definable as a habit)

Regardless, however, of the oversimplification in the usual formulation, there are difficulties for the learner of English, since the progressive form is

not incompatible with an habitual interpretation:

- (5) She's always making mistake.

And the simple form is used for activities which apparently are simultaneous with the utterance:

- (6) I (can) hear some music.
- (7) I think it's going to rain.
- (8) She feels ill.
- (9) Mary resembles her brother.

The issue is complicated by the fact that although with sentences (6), (7), and (9) the progressive form would be wrong, the verbs are not simply exceptions to the general rule since in other instances progressive forms are possible:

- (10) I am hearing you loud and clear
- (11) He's thinking about it all the time.
- (12) Mary is resembling her brother more and more.

A progressive form of (8) is possible with little or no change of meaning.

In teaching or learning grammar, there is grammar syllabus. Richards (2002) states grammatical syllabus were superseded by communicative ones based on functions or tasks; grammar-based methodologies such as the Presentation-Practice-Production (p-p-p) lesson format underlying the Situational Approach gave way to function and skill-based teaching. And the, Brumfit (1979) adds that grammar needs are determined on the basis of their performance on fluency tasks rather than predetermined by a grammatical syllabus.

Bellow is a sample of an actual syllabus listing what is to be taught during (part of) one year's teaching of English, proposed by Wilkins (1978). The some of contents of the syllabus will be foundation for the writer in analyzing data next.

Article

- Normal use of definite and indefinite

Nouns

- Nouns and their plural
- Possessive form

Pronouns

- Personal as subject and object
- Possessive
- Demonstrative

Adjectives

- Position of adjective
- Demonstrative
- Possessive
- Quantitative or determinatives (all, some, any, etc)

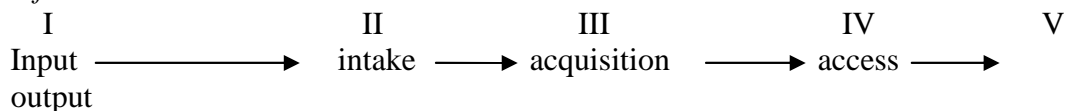
Adverbs

- Most common adverbs (time and place)
- The-ly ending
- Position of adverbs of frequency and others

Preposition

- All common preposition of time, place and direction (such as in, out, to, from, at, on, with, without)
- Omission of article in at home, to school, etc.

Verbs forms



Come back to the error. Wilkins (1978) says that the greater the differences between language the greater the difficulties will be. In this case it is the very similarity that may cause error. Apart from this, examples of morphemes from the mother tongue being used in utterances in the foreign language usually turn out, out closer investigation, to be derived from some other sources. If a learner produces a plural from of the adjective in English by the addition of an {s} morpheme,

- Use of can and must
- Irregular verbs

Verb tense

- Present progressive
- Present simple
- Simple past
- Immediate future

Word order

- Affirmative (basic structure only)
- Negative (statement and request only)
- Interrogative:
 - With question words (who, what, where, when, how much, how many)
 - Without question words
- Request (2nd person)
- Question tags (such as isn't?, don't you?)

Relating to teaching materials above, Van Patten (1993). Ellis (1994), Skehan (1996a, 1996b) and others in Richards (2002) draw five stages of the learning process will be distinguished here in order to arrive at a rationale of grammar-focused instruction in teaching materials: input, intake, acquisition, access, output.

this can be explained as the overgeneralization of to be accounted for in terms of the use of a mother-tongue form. In fact same mistake can be made by pupils who in their tongue, pluralize an adjective by the affixation of something other than an-s. There is simply an over generalization of the form that occurs with all other subjects.

The data were collected either based on the writer's experience when she was studying in junior, senior high school,

and university level or on observation to the students when she taught.

To support the data, the writer also took the example of sentences about the error from the source book that she thought relevant to the problem the writer discusses. Besides, the old note of writer's during studying English also become supporting data to be analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. To Be / Auxiliary

1. You sick
2. You stupid
2. He clever
4. Where you work?

Grammatically the sentences above are not correct. It often happens on Indonesian learners when starting learning English, included the writer herself when she studied English for the first time. In the writer's opinion the error is caused by interference of our mother tongue. We do not have "to be / auxiliary" like English. So as the learners, we tend to follow our mother tongue rule. If we translate into Indonesian, the meaning will be understood;

1. *Kamu sakit.*
2. *Kamu bodoh.*
2. *Dia pintar.*
4. *Dimana kamu kerja?*

In fact, it is incorrect in English grammar. The sentences should be:

1. You are sick.
2. You are stupid.
3. He is clever
4. Where do you work?

B. Pronouns

5. I help you and you help I
6. This books are on the table.
7. I ask she

The pronouns above are wrong. The source of error still come mother tongue interference. In Indonesian whether for subject or object like in no 5 and 7, the pronoun is the same, but it is not in English. Forno. 6 , the demonstrative pronoun in the sentence is still not correct. Again and again, because in our language we just have one demonstrative pronoun referring to "ini", but in English, different nouns (plural or singular) will have different demonstrative pronoun.

The correct pronouns for the sentences above should be:

5. help you and you help me.
6. These books are on the table.
7. I ask her.

C. Tenses

8. My mother see you in the market yesterday.
9. My brother--- at home
10. I am sick yesterday, so I --- not come.

All of sentences above are example of errors in tenses. In no 8, the verb should be 'saw' because it is past tense signed by adverb of time "yesterday". It does not just happen on the beginner of English learners but also advanced learners. We often hear somebody sometimes says verb 1 in present tense. In this case for the advanced learners the writer thinks we cannot say "error" because they know the rule, but they forget when applying it whether in writing or in oral. The suitable term for them is 'mistake'. But for the beginners may be the term 'error' can be accepted because they do not know the concept.

Next, for no. 9 and 10. The problem is the same as no.8 , error in tenses. The correct ones should be:

9. My brother is at home now.

10. I was sick yesterday, so I did not come.

The writer assumes that the learner who makes the sentence of no. 10 has known about the 'to be' in English but in fact there is another thing should he considered before using it, that is about the time. Different adverb of time will have different to be. It does not happen in our mother tongue, Indonesian.

D. Others

The writer quoted from Ellis (1985)

11. I no can swim. (negation)

12. I didn't said it. (negation)

13. What you are doing. (interrogation)

It is clear that the learner who makes sentences of negation in no. 11 is influenced by this mother tongue, Indonesian. If we translate word by word, follow Indonesian rule, the sentence will be “ *saya tidak bisa berenang* “ but it is not correct in English rule. Then in no. 12, there is over in using past tense sings, auxiliary and verb 2.

It seems to the writer that the learner is confused to apply the rule that he has learnt between past tense for positive sentence and when it is transferred to interrogative sentence. He does not find the formula like that in his mother tongue. It also happens on no.13.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From analysis and discussion above, it is clear to us what the grammatical error is made by students caused of mother tongue interference. Actually, so many grammatical aspects such as in the grammatical syllabus that writer has described in related literature (see on page 5) can be explored or discussed to

support the statement that mother tongue interferes the error of learners' grammar in learning L2. However, because of limited time, the writer just can discuss some of the grammatical aspects such as to be / auxiliary, pronouns, and tenses.

The greater the grammatical differences between mother tongue and target language(foreign language), the greater the difficulty faced by learners.

The last, the suggestion to language teaching is it is better to demonstrate the contrast of mother-tongue and target language or foreign language structure to the learners in the class room if the teacher believes that the learners' potential language performance is thereby improved.

REFERENCES

- Ellis, Rod. 1985. Understanding Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, Rod. 1985. The Study Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richards, Jack C. and Renandya, Willy A.(Eds).2002.Methodology in Language Teaching, an Anthology of Current Practice. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkins, D.A. 1978. Linguistics in Language Teaching. London: Edward Arnold.
- Zaim, M. 2002. Kesalahan Sintaksis dan Semantis dalam Terjemahan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Padang: Universitas Negeri Padang Press.