

## DO ERRORS TAKE THE REINS INTO THEIR HANDS?

Şebnem SÜSLÜ\*

### ÖZET

Bu makalede, İngilizce dili öğreniminde yapılan hataların sebepleri, hataları incelerken karşılaşılan sorunlar ele alınmıştır. Bu dili öğrenirken yapılan hataların sebepleri genel bir bakış açısı ile ele alınmıştır. Hataların sebepleri dört ana başlık altında toplanmıştır. Her ana başlıkta kendi içinde bölümlere ayrılmıştır. Ayrıca makalede, Türkçe dilini konuşan öğrencilerin karşılaşılabilecekleri hatalara da yer verilmiştir.

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, the sources of errors in learning English and the problems of analyzing errors are studied. The sources of errors are studied in general. Four main sources of errors are found. Each source is analyzed under different headings. Also, the article covers the errors that Turkish students can encounter while learning English.

*Key Words:* Error, Interlingua, Intralingual.

### Introduction

*Error* is a short word, however, it is found everywhere, it means in the structure, the pronunciation, the entire language. So, the place of the error in language learning shouldn't be looked down on.

### Sources of Error

Corder remarks that language is a system of systems, with all parts being interconnected, therefore, nothing can be '*fully learned*' until all the parts are fully learned (edited by Norrish, 1983:14). The students are allowed to learn the rule systems of the target language by presenting them with sentences that illustrate the rules in order to develop a competence. Students are wanted to be aware of the situations in which utterances are used. Nevertheless, a communicative style of teaching takes the bulkiest part so the success decreases when the language is presented to the learners to build up the rules of production and use.

There are some factors influencing the learning ability. The students' state of mind is the important one which the teachers are familiar with. A learner can be in good mood or distracted by the outside effects. These kinds of personal factors can be the reasons of the unnecessary mistakes. It is called '*inherent error*' which arises from the language learning activity. This kind of

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error is the necessary part of learning a language. For instance, a German who is learning English can place the verb at the end of the clause in a subordinate clause as he has not learned that this is not done in English. It is referred as an inherent error.

Errors occur for many reasons. The first main cause is *interference from mother tongue*. A student supposes that the target language and his native language are similar so he makes errors. This kind of overgeneralization is the main sources of errors. The next cause is *an incomplete knowledge of the target language*. *The complexity of the target language* is the third common cause. Some certain aspects of English such as the 's' in the third person singular present tense are difficult. Also, spelling is another problematic area for non-native speakers of English.

The sources of the errors arise from the choice of the material itself, the structure of the language and teaching materials used.

*Below a more comprehensive classification of the sources of errors is presented.*

#### **1. Interlingual Errors**

Learning a language is believed to be a matter of habit formation as a behaviorist notion. According to the behaviorist theory of language, if language is essentially a set of habits, then when we try to learn new habits the old ones will interfere with the new ones (Norrish, 1983:22). It is called 'mother tongue interference'.

In early stages of learning a second language, before the system of the second language is familiar, the native language is the only linguistic system in previous experience upon which the learner can draw (Brown, 1994,:213).

Interlingual errors arise from the transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexico-semantic, and stylistic and cultural elements of a mother tongue learner to the learning of the target language.

##### *a) Transfer of Phonological Elements of the Mother Tongue*

Pronunciation is one of the cases of mother tongue interference. The tendency of learners is to transfer the characteristic of pronunciation of their native language to the sound system of the target language. For example, a Persian learner of English pronounces words such as 'school', 'student' as /eskul/ and /estjudent/. In Persian, no initial consonant cluster is used. In this language, each consonant in the initial position is either preceded or followed by a vowel (Keshavarz, 1994:103). Another example is a Turkish learner of English. In Turkish, students pronounce the words how they see such as 'know', as /knov/, 'key' as /key/.

*b) Transfer of Morphological Elements*

‘There are a lot of book on the table.’

The erroneous sentence results from the fact that in Turkish some nouns do not agree in with quantifiers. As a result of this, the omission of the plural morpheme occurs.

*c) Transfer of Grammatical Elements*

‘Where  $\phi$  you learned English so good?’

In Turkish, auxiliaries are needed to change a statement into an interrogative sentence. The reason of the omission is that auxiliaries in Turkish are added to verbs.

*d) Transfer of Lexicon-Semantic Elements*

There are two subcategories in this category:

● Cross-Association

Cross-association occurs when the single word is used in two senses in the target language. Cross-association refers to cases where there are two words in the target language for which only one word in the learner’s mother tongue (Keshavarz, 1994:104).

‘Here is too silent. Can you open the radio?’

This error occurs because in Turkish the equivalent of ‘open’ is used for ‘turning on’ electronic equipment in addition to its ordinary use.

● False Cognates

Because of phonological similarity with a mother tongue, similarity in form and not in meaning, incorrect use of the word in the target language occurs.

‘She is so cute, sympathetic and beautiful that he wants to marry her.’

The word ‘sympathetic’ in this sentence is used because of the influence of its cognate ‘likeable’ in Turkish.

*e) Transfer of Stylistic and Cultural Elements*

\*Miss Ayşe is coming.

\*Mr. Ahmet, can you explain it again?

This type of error is due to the fact in Turkish, unlike English; titles such as ‘Mr., Mrs., Miss, are sometimes used with names not surnames. Also, the following uses are common in Turkish such as; Ayşe Hanım, Ahmet Bey.

**2. Intralingual and Developmental Errors**

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The predominance of intrefrence (interlingual transfer) is known to be a major factor at the early stages of second language learning, however, when the learner has started to acquire the parts of the new system, more and more intralingual transfer occurs.

“Rather than reflecting the learner’s inability to separate two languages, intralingual and developmental errors reflect the learner’s competence at a particular stage, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition” (editor Richards, 1974:173).

The attempt of a learner is to build up the concepts and hypotheses about the target language from the limited experience. Therefore, the error occurs.

#### *a) Overgeneralization*

To generalize means to infer or derive a law, rule or conclusion, usually from the observation of particular instances (Brown, 1994:91).

At a particular stage of learning English as a native language, children overgeneralize regular past tense endings (opened) for all past tense forms (goed) until they learn the groups of verbs that belong in an irregular category. Similarly, second language learners will overgeneralize the target language after they familiarize with the second language.

In other words, this type of error refers to the *blend* of two structures in the ‘standard version of the language.

The following deviant structures are created by students.

- a) They are have a picnic.
- b) He can swims.
- c) Yesterday I go shopping and buy some...

Learners create one deviant structure instead of two regular structures. For (a) and (b), overgeneralization is removing the necessity for concord. For (c), ‘yesterday’ a time reference is sufficient for the learner so –ed is omitted. ‘(c)’ is different from the other two examples in that the redundancy (the additional information which any natural language incorporates) is removed (Norrish, 1983, 31).

There are some certain kinds of teaching techniques which give rise to the overgeneralization. Many pattern drills and transform exercises which the learner is asked to complete.

*Exercise*

He sings. (can)

*Response*

He can sings.

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He walks quickly. (now)

He is walks quickly.

Overlearning can lead these kinds of errors. The general pedagogic motto is ‘never teach together what can be confused’.

*b) Incomplete Application of Rules*

According to Richards (1974), there are two possible causes. One of the common teaching devices is questions. Through a transform exercise, the learner is asked to repeat the question or part of it in the answer. During these kinds of exercises, one of the transformations in a series may be omitted or a question word may be added to the statement form.

*Teacher*

*Student Response*

Do you read much?

Yes, I read much.

What was she saying?

She saying she would ask him.

Another cause is that learners realize that they can communicate effectively without mastering the elementary rules of question usage.

*c) Material-Induced Errors*

There are two kinds of errors arise from teaching materials. The first one is *ignorance of rule restriction*. In this type of error, the learner ignores the general target language structures (Keshavarz, 1994, 108).

‘The man who I saw him’ violates the limitation on subjects in structures with ‘who’.

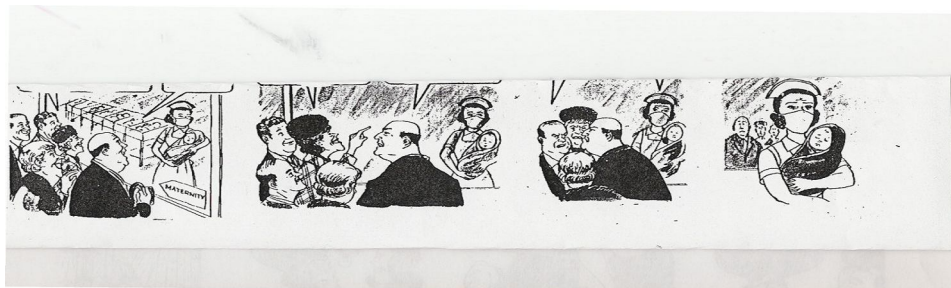
There are many sheeps in the field.

These sentences can be types of generalization because the learner is applying a previous acquired rule in a new situation. Some rule restriction errors result from analogy. When the learner’s previous experience is thought, they know *subject + verb + object* construction. So, by analogy, they feel that there is something incomplete about ‘the man who I saw’ and he adds the object *him*.

*False analogy* hypothesized is another material-induced error. Motivation, naturalness and a sensible context for the language are important. We do not want our students to be misled in his assumptions.

In English teaching materials, to use a series of pictures illustrating a sequence of actions is common. If the following series of pictures is shown to teach present continuous, it will be taught in a wrong situation.

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Instead of this, a radio commentary or a detective reporting over the phone the actions of suspect would be a more appropriate context. The context leads the learner make the false hypotheses about the structure of the target language.

Analogy is thought to be the main cause of errors in the misuse of prepositions. For instance, after explaining '*worship*' as a general word for '*pray*', the teacher asks the students to use it in a sentence. Students attach the same preposition that is required with the familiar one to the new word and write '*worshipping to God*'. So, certain teaching techniques can lead to erroneous sentences by learners.

### **3. Language Learning Strategies**

Overgeneralization and transfer of rules from the mother tongue are thought to be language learning strategies as the learners use their previously acquired knowledge.

Another language learning strategy is *simplification*. The reduction of the target language to a simpler system is known as redundancy reduction. The omission of the verb and the article does not prevent the meaning from being understood.

*I am student English language.*

*I begin my work afternoon usually.*

### **4. Communication Strategies**

This strategy is used when the learner expresses himself with the limited linguistic resources. By using elements which are not linguistically appropriate for the context, learners tried to bridge the gap between his limited target language linguistic knowledge and communicate needs. In order to communicate, a learner can make up for lack of knowledge of grammar or vocabulary by paraphrasing, using gestures also borrowing words from his native language. A learner may not able to say *handkerchief* so he may say *a cloth for my nose*.

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According to Tarone (Keshavarz, 1994:115), communication strategies are classified into groups.

### a) Paraphrase

- Approximation

It means to use a single target language vocabulary item or structure which is wrong. However, this word shares enough semantic features with the desired item in order to give the message to the listener.

e.g. pipe for *waterpipe*

Let us work for the well done of our country. (the sentence has an incorrect approximation of the word 'welfare'.

- Word Coinage

A new word is created to communicate a desired concept.

e.g. *airball* for balloon.

- Circumlocution

The learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate target language item or structure (Brown, 1994:119).

e.g. She is, *uh*, eating chocolate. I don't know what its name is. That's, *uh*, Persian, and we use 'a lot of' in Turkish.

### b) Borrowing

- Literal Translation

The learner translates word by word from the native language.

e.g. I cannot come; I'm full *for Gelemem, doluyum*.

- Language Switch

The learners do not bother to translate and he uses the native language terms.

e.g. When I went to İsparta (one of the cities in Turkey), I bought some *gül* (rose) seeds.

Learners avoid complete sentences. Instead of complex sentences, two simple sentences are used.

e.g. *Having finished his homework, he went to bed.*

Instead of this the learner writes

*He finished his homework; he went to bed.*

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Sometimes, learners memorize stock phrases or sentences without knowledge of the components of the phrases. These stored items can lead learners make errors. Prefabricated patterns are memorized by rote. Instead of saying *How are you?* a learner can say *Who are you?*.

#### **Problems in Analyzing Errors**

Language constantly changes and develops so the thing which is considered wrong today can be correct tomorrow. The following sentence can be claimed to be wrong

*...and it is always my prayer that my country will develop.*

because it is translated from the learner's own language. Of course, it cannot be a logical reason not to accept it because there are situations when the use of this natural communicative strategy is acceptable in English sentences.

A further problem in classification error is the teacher's interpretation of the nature of error. For instance, the learner may write '*chose*' for '*choose*' so how should be classified? Should it be considered as spelling or as an incorrect tense? Other errors of this type are such as *man /men, run /ran, loose/ lose*. Using the context to reach some interpretation or asking the learner what he thought he had written can be done.

Correction may develop something like a barrier. Students will be afraid of making errors and will not speak or study the language with pleasure. As teachers, we should not lose the value of positive reinforcement of free communication. We should avoid giving too much attention on errors. The negative impact of correction on student's confidence and motivation is one of the reason why teachers do not want to correct the errors made by students.

When a learner avoids a particular sound, word, structure or discourse category, he is supposed, incorrectly, to have no difficulty in these subjects. This situation misleads the teachers to draw conclusions about errors. Thus, the lack of errors does not reflect the competence in the target language.

#### **Conclusion**

Learning to speak another language is similar to learning to play a musical instrument. Intellectual effort, new physical skills and a lot of practice are needed. No one can deny that without many errors in the process a person cannot learn to play a musical instrument; similarly nobody should expect to learn a language without making errors.

We can see the type of difficulty that learners have with an error analysis. An error analysis is useful information about a new class. In a class -or country- with different first languages, it can indicate problems common to all and problems common to particular groups (Norrish 1983:80). An error analysis



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can be thought as a monitoring device. By this, the teacher can evaluate objectively how his teaching is helpful for the students.

The typical behavior of the student is to be unwilling to make an opportunity to use the target language. Because of a fear of appearing 'stupid' is the reason of this. This fear occurs when the perfect accuracy is demanded before communicative activities are encouraged.

Native speakers make lapses when using their own language but these are different from the errors made by foreign learners (Norrish, 1983:19). All in all, both the learner's first language which can lead to errors in both syntax and pronunciation and other psychological are factors affecting the learner.

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