

Error Analysis Based on the Theory of Inter-language and Fossilization for Improvement of Second Language Teaching and Learning

(以中介语及僵化理论为基础为提高二语教学进行的错误分析)

I. Error Analysis for Improvement of Second Language Teaching and Learning

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several researches revealed that the language of second language learners is systematic and that learner errors are not random mistakes but evidence of rule-governed behavior.

According to Sharma, "Error analysis can thus provide a strong support to remedial teaching", and he added that during the teaching program, it can reveal both the successes and the failures of the program.¹

Recently, researches of second language acquisition (SLA) have tended to focus on learners errors since they allow for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language. In this way, teachers can be made aware of the difficult areas to be encountered by their students and devote special care and emphasis to them.

Error Analysis is a kind of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It is composed of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself. Error analysis emphasizes the significance of learners' errors in second language. It is important to note here that interferences from the learner's mother tongue are not only reason for committing errors in his target language. Once Richards classified errors observed as follows:

- a) Overgeneralization, covering instances where the learners create a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structure of the target language;
- b) Ignorance of rule restriction, occurring as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures;
- c) Incomplete application of rules, arising when the learners fail to fully develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences;
- d) False concepts hypothesized, deriving from faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language.

Analysis of second language learner's errors can help identify learner's linguistic difficulties and needs at a particular stage of language learning. Generally, error analysis has several implications for the handling of learner's errors in the classroom as follows:

1. Devising remedial measures
2. Preparing a sequence of target language items in class rooms and text books with the difficult items coming after the easier, ones
3. Making suggestions about the nature or strategies of second language learning employed by both first and second language learners.²

II. Analysis Based on the Theory of Inter-language and Fossilization

¹Sharma, S. K. (1980). Practical and Theoretical Consideration involved in Error Analysis. *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. VI, 74-83.

²Richards, J.C. (1971). A Non- Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis. *Journal of ELT*. 25, 204-219.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis lays stress on the interfering effects of the first language or second language learning and claimed that second language learning is primarily a process of acquiring whatever items are different from the first language.

In fact, this is a limited view of interference which ignored the intralingual effects of learning. In recent years researchers have come to understand that second language learning is creative process of constructing a system which learners are consciously testing hypothesis about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge, e.g., limited knowledge of the target language itself, knowledge about

- (1) native language
- (2) communicative function of language
- (3) life
- (4) human beings and universe

The learners, in acting upon their environment, construct what to them is correct systems of language, that is, the structured set of rules which provide order to the linguistic chaos that confront them, according to Brown.

In the past decades, second language learning began to be examined in much the same way that first language learning had been studied for sometimes, that is, the learners were looked on not as producers of malformed, imperfect language replete with mistakes but as intelligent, and creative beings proceeding through logical, systematic stages of acquisition, creatively acting upon their linguistic environment as they encounter its form and functions in meaningful contexts.

In other words, learners, by gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of language. A number of terms have been used to describe the perspective which stresses the correctness of the second language systems by the learners. The best known of these terms is *inter-language*. What is inter-language then? Inter-language refers to the separateness of second language's system that has a structurally intermediate status between the nature and target language, according to Selinker.³

On the other hand, Corder held the idea with the term *idiosyncratic dialect* that the learner's language is unique to a particular individual, i.e., the rules of learner's language are peculiar to the language of that individual alone. The inter-language hypothesis, then led to a significant breakthrough from the contrastive analysis hypothesis. The emphasis here, in terms of second language learners is the form and the function of language.⁴

While according to Brown, the most obvious approach to analyzing inter-language is to study the speech and writing of learners. This stands to reason for production data is observable and presumably reflective of learner's underlying competence, that is, production competence. Thus, the study of the speech and writing is largely the study of errors of learners. Brown continued to declare that correct production yields little information about the actual inter-language system of learners since only information about the target language system which learners have already acquired. It is followed that focus of this study is on the significance of errors in learners' interlanguage systems, otherwise known as error analysis, it is supposed to be possible to be said

³Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language. *IRAL*, 10, (3), 209-231.

⁴Corder, S. Pit. 1971. Idiosyncratic Dialects and Error Analysis. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 9: 147 – 159.

so.⁵

Obviously, learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes. Mistakes, misjudgments, miscalculations, and erroneous assumption form an important aspect of learning virtually any skill or acquiring information. Language learning is like any other human learning, i.e., children learning their first language make countless mistakes viewed from the point of view of adult grammatical language. Many of these mistakes are logical in the limited linguistic system within which children operate, but by carefully processing feedback from others, such children slowly but surely learn to produce what is acceptable speech in their native language.

In actual fact, second language learning is a process and not unlike first language learning in its trial-and error nature. In other words, learners will unavoidably make mistakes in the process of second language acquisition, and even will stop the process if they do not commit errors and benefit in turn from various forms of feedback on those errors, according to Brown.⁶

Once Corder noted that a learner's errors are significant in providing the instructor or researcher concerning: as following:

- (1) evidence of how language is learned or acquired
- (2) what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language⁷

It is crucial to make difference between mistakes and error, because technically they are two quite different phenomena. Brown supposed that a mistake refers to a performance, while error is either a random guess or a slip in that is a failure to utilize a known system of the target language correctly.

In fact, all people make mistakes in both native or and second language situations. Therefore, mistakes are not the result of lack in competence but the result of some sort of breakdown or imperfection in the process of productive language skills. These hesitations, slips of tongue, random ungrammaticalities, and other performance lapses in native speaker production also occur in second language learning.

Then what is an error? An error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, showing the inter-language competence of the learner, according to Selinker⁸. Nemser referred to the same general phenomenon and used his own term as *approximative system*⁹. While each of these designations emphasizes a particular notion, they share the same concept that the second language learners are forming their own self-contained linguistic systems. This is neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two: it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them, according to Brown. So if, for example, a learner of English asks "*Does John can sing?*", he probably is showing a competence level in which all verbs require a pre-posed *do* auxiliary for question formation. It is apparent that he has committed an error, most likely not a mistake, i.e., an error which suggests a portion of his competence in the target language.

Nevertheless, it is hard to tell the difference between an error and a mistake since in the English learning learner says "*Smith cans cook*", for example, but in one or two occasions says

⁵Brown H. D. stated this idea in his *Princip les of Language Learning and Teaching* [M]. Longman, Inc., 2000.

⁶Brown H. D. stated this idea in 2000 in his *Princip les of Language Learning and Teaching* [M]. Longman, Inc.

⁷See Corder, S.P. (1976). The Significance of Learner's Errors. *IRAL*, 5, 161-170.

⁸Selinker, L. (1972). Inter-language. *IRAL*, 10, (3), 209-231.

⁹Nemser, W. 1971. Approximative Systems of Foreign Language Learners. *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 9: 115 – 123.

“*Smith can cook*”. It is hard actually to determine whether *can* is a mistake or an error. If, however, further examination of learner’s speech reveals such utterances as “*Mike wills help*”, or “*Mike may help*”, and so on, we might then conclude that the learner has not distinguished modals from other verbs.

Learners make errors and these errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operated within the learner, according to Brown, which led to a surge of study of learners’ errors, called *error analysis*. Naturally, error analysis became distinguished from contrastive analysis by its examination of errors attributable to all possible sources, not just these which result from negative transfer of the native language.

Errors, as a matter of fact, arise from several possible sources: interlingual errors of interference, from the native language, interlingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic or cognitive strategies, and countless affective variables, according to Brown.

The diminishing of errors, broadly, is an important criterion for increasing language proficiency, and the final purpose of second language learning is the attainment of communicative fluency in the target language. Here, language learning involves speaking and listening, writing and reading of the language. The comprehension of language is as important as production. It so happens that production lends itself to analysis and thus becomes the prey of researchers; but comprehension data is equally important in developing an understanding of the process of second language acquisition, also according to Brown¹⁰.

It was found out by researchers that error analysis can keep us too closely focused on specific languages rather than universal aspects of language. Therefore, Gass once recommended that researchers pay more attention to linguistic elements that common to all languages. This fundamentally draws our attention to the inter-language systems of learners which may have elements that reflect neither the target language nor the native language but rather a universal feature of some kind. And then, in the analysis of learner’s inter-language errors, performance analysis, or more simply called inter-language analysis, is conducted. Certainly, this is less restrictive concept that places a healthy investigation of errors within the larger perspectives of the learner’s total inter-language performance. Thus, we need to remember that production errors are only a subset of the overall performance of the learner.

Once again according to Brown, one of the common difficulties in understanding the linguistic systems of both first and second language learners, is the fact that such systems cannot be directly observed. They must be inferred by means of analyzing production and comprehension data. The problem is, however, is instability of learners’ systems. Therefore, in undertaking the task of performance analysis the teacher and researcher are called upon to infer order in logic in this instable and variable system. To that end, the first step in process of analysis is the identification and description of errors.

And once again Corder provides a model for identifying erroneous or idiosyncratic utterances in a second language. A major distinction is made at outset between *overt* and *covert* errors. Overtly erroneous utterances are unquestionably ungrammatical at the sentence level. While covertly erroneous errors are grammatically well-formed at the sentence level but are not interpretable within the context of communication. Therefore, according to Corder’s model, any

¹⁰Brown, A.L.& Palincsar,A.S.(1982). *Inducing strategies learning for texts by means of informed self-control training*. Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities 1.

sentence uttered by the learner and subsequently transcribed can be analyzed for idiosyncrasies.¹¹

Covert errors, on the other hand, are not really covert at all if attend to surrounding discourse (before and after utterances). For instance, “*I am very well thank you*” is grammatically correct at the sentence level, but if used as a response to “*What are you doing?*”, it is very obviously an error.

In this case, Brown pointed out that on a rather global level, errors can be described as errors of *addition, omission, substitution, and ordering*.

In English a *do auxiliary*, for example, might be added, e.g.,

Does can he cook?,

a definite omitted, e.g.,

I went to dancing ball,

an item substituted, e.g.,

I lost my road,

or a word order confused, e.g.,

I to the dancing ball went.

Likewise, a word with a faulty pronunciation might hide a syntactic or lexical error. An Indonesian learner who says,

May I sit?

if the word *sit* pronounced as *shit* is lexically global error.

Corder also distinguished three different stages, based on observation, what the learner does in terms of errors alone.

The first is a stage of random errors called *presystematic* in which the learner is only vaguely aware that there is some systematic order to a particular class of items. Inconsistencies like *Smith cans cook*, and *Smith can cooking*, said by learner within a short period of time, might indicate a stage of experimentation and in accurate guessing.

The second, or *emergent*, stage of inter-language finds the learner growing in consistency in linguistic production. The learner has begun to internalize certain rules. This stage is characterized by some *backsliding* in which the learner is unable to correct errors when they are pointed by someone else. Avoidance of structure and topics is typical. For example,

A: “*I go to Poznan.*”

B: “*When?*”

A: “*in 2013*”.

B: “*Oh, you went to Poznan in 2013.*”

A: “*Yes, I go 2013.*”

A third stage is a *truly systematic stage* in which the learner is able to manifest more consistent in producing the target language. While those rules inside the head of the learner are still not all well formed, i.e., they are more closely approximating the target language system. That is at this stage the learners are able to correct their errors when they are pointed out even very subtly to them, e.g.,

A: *There are some fish in the pool. These fish will be serving in the restaurants near the pool.*

B (Native Speaker) : *The fish are serving?*

A: *Oh, no, the fish are served in the restaurant.*

¹¹See Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error analysis and inter-language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A final stage is called the *stabilization* stage in the development of inter-language systems. Here the learner has relatively few errors and has mastered to the point that fluency and intended meanings are not problematic. Thus, the fourth stage is characterized by the learner's ability to self-correct. The system is complete enough that attention can be paid to those few errors that occur and correction made without waiting for feedback from someone else.

However, it should be made clear that these stages of systematicity do not describe a learner's total second language system, just due to the actual fact that it would be hard to assert, for example, that a learner is in an emergent stage, globally, for all of the linguistic subsystems of language. One might be in a second stage with respect to, say, the *perfect* tense system, and in the third or fourth stage when it comes to *simple present* and *past tenses*. Nor these stages, which are based on error analysis, adequately account for sociolinguistic, functional, or nonverbal strategies, all of which are important in assessing the total competence of the second language learner.

Finally, it needs to be remembered that production errors alone are inadequate measures of overall competence. They happen to salient features of second language learners' inter-language and present us with a good deal of error-analysis material, but correct utterances deserve our attention, and especially in the teaching-learning process, deserve positive reinforcement.

Sources of errors also should be paid enough attention to. Basically, procedures of error analysis are helpful to identify errors in the target language learner production data and the final step in the analysis of learner work is that of determining the source of error. The analysis itself is somewhat speculative in that sources must be inferred from available data which is the ultimate value of inter-language analysis in general. By so doing, people can begin to understand of how this learner's cognitive and affective self relates to the linguistic system and to formulate an integrated understanding of the process of the target language acquisition. This is called *inter-language transfer*.

Next inter-language transfer should be paid enough attention to. The beginning stages of learning a foreign language are characterized by a good deal of inter-language transfer from the native language or interference. This is because before the system of the target language is familiar, the native language is the only linguistic system the learner can draw. People have heard, for example, English learner say "*sheep*" for "*ship*" or "*computer of Mike*" instead of "*Mike's computer*" in Indonesian native tongue. All of these errors are attributable to negative inter-lingual transfer. It is true that it is not always clear that an error is the result of transfer from the native language; however, many such errors are detectable in learner speech. So, fluent knowledge of a learner's native language of course aids the teacher in detecting and analyzing such errors.

One of the major contributions of error analysis was its recognition of sources of errors that extend beyond just inter-language in learning the target language. It is obvious that intralingual transfer (within the target language itself) is the major factor in learning the foreign language.

According to Brown, once learners have begun to acquire parts of new system, more intralingual transfer – generalization within the target language – will occur. As the learners progress in the second language, their previous experience and their existing subsumers begin to include structures within the target language itself.

In speeches as "*Does Smith can cook?*", "*He goed*" instead of "*He went*", or "*gooder*" instead of "*better*", negative transfer, or overgeneralization, occurred.

In fact, the analysis of intralingual errors in a corpus of production data can become quite complex. Taylor found out that the class of errors in producing the main verb following an

auxiliary made by second language learners yielded nine different types of error:

- (1) past tense of verb following a modal;
- (2) present tense *-s* on a verb following a modal;
- (3) *ing* on a verb following a modal;
- (4) *are* (for *be*) following *will*;
- (5) past tense form of verb following *do*;
- (6) present tense *-s* following *d*;
- (7) *-ing* on a verb following *do*;
- (8) past tense form of a verb following *be* (inserted to replace a modal or *do*);
- (9) present tense *-s* on a verb following *be* (inserted to replace a modal or *do*)

Besides, Richards provided a list of typical English intralingual errors in the use of articles made by different native language backgrounds in learning English, which are:

- (1) omission of *the*, such as
 - (a) before unique nouns, e.g., *Moon is very bright.*
 - (b) before noun of nationality, e.g., *Koreans and Arabs are*
 - (c) before nouns made particular in context, e.g., *at the conclusion of article, He goes to bazaar, She is sister of that girl.*
 - (d) before a noun modified by a participle, e.g., *Answer is given to this problem*
 - (e) before superlative, e.g., *best topic*
 - (f) before a noun modified by an *of-phrase*, e.g., *Faculty of Sinology;*
- (2) addition of *the*, such as
 - (a) before proper names, e.g., *The China, the May*
 - (b) before abstract nouns, e.g., *The friendship, the nature*
 - (c) before nouns behaving like abstract nouns, e.g., *After the class, after the supper*
 - (d) before plural nouns, e.g., *The complex structures are still developing*
 - (e) before *some*, e.g., *The some water*
- (3) *A* used instead of *the*, such as
 - (a) before superlative, e.g., *a best book, a highest price*
 - (b) before unique nouns, e.g., *a sun rises*
- (4) addition of *a*, such as
 - (a) before a plural noun qualified by an adjective, e.g., *an interesting stories, a good news*
 - (b) before uncountable, e.g., *a steel, an oil*
 - (c) before an adjective, e.g., *.....viewed as an attractive*
- (5) omission of *a*, such as, before class nouns defined by adjectives, e.g., *he is qualified teacher, she is pretty girl.*

Besides, context of learning has also been paid enough attention to. A third major source of errors, as Brown pointed out, is the context of learning. Context refers, for example, to the classroom with its teacher and its materials in the case of school learning, or social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. In a classroom context the teacher or the textbook can lead the learner to make faulty hypotheses about the language. Thus, students often make errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in a textbook, or even because of a pattern that was rote memorized in a drill but not properly contextualized. Or a teacher may provide incorrect information out of some ignorance – not an

uncommon occurrence – by way of misleading definition, word, or grammatical generalization.

Another manifestation of language learned in classroom context is the occasional tendency on the part of learners to give improper forms of language. It is said that people have all experienced foreign language learners whose *bookish* language give them away as classroom language learners.

The social context of language acquisition will produce other types of errors. The sociolinguistic context of natural language acquisition may be a source of error. It is basically a constantly evolving theory, having changed considerably since its initial formulation. It is, therefore, not an easy task to produce an accurate account of theory. This idea leads to three major issues in inter-language analysis that has fascinated researchers for many years called fossilization and pidginization, which can be seen nearly at every part of the world.

Then, what is fossilization? Theoretically, fossilization is a common experience to in a learner's language various erroneous features. This phenomenon is ordinarily manifested phonologically in *foreign accents* in the speech of many of those who have learned a second language after adolescence. Researchers also commonly observe syntactic and lexical errors persisting in the speech of those who have otherwise learned the language quite well. These incorrect linguistic forms of a person's second language competence have been referred to as *fossilization*.

Then comes the question: how do items become fossilized? Researchers showed that there are two kinds of information transmitted between sources (learners) and audiences (native speakers): information about the *affective* relation between source and audience, and *cognitive* information – facts, suppositions, beliefs. Affective information is primarily encoded in terms of kinesic mechanism – gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions – while cognitive information is usually conveyed by means of linguistic devices – sounds, phrases, structures, discourse. Basically, the feedback learners get from their audience can be positive, negative, or neutral.

Possibly there are various combinations of the major types of feedback. For example, an audience can indicate positive affective feedback but give neutral or even negative cognitive feedback to indicate that message itself is unclear. It is said that negative affective feedback will likely result in the failure of future attempts to communicate. This is, of course, consistent with the overriding affective nature of human interaction since if people are not at least sure of their communication value, then, there is little reason for communication. So, one of the first requirements for meaningful communication is actually an affective affirmation of the other person.

Negative or neutral feedback will naturally encourage learners to draw a different hypothesis about a rule. Apparently, positive feedback in the cognitive dimension will result in reinforcement of the forms used and a conclusion on the part of learners that their speech is well formed. Thus fossilized items are those *ungrammatical* or *incorrect* items in the speech of a learner which gain first positive affective feedback (“*I like it*”) then positive cognitive feedback (“*I understand*”), reinforcing an incorrect form of language. Thus, learners with fossilized items have acquired them through the same positive feedback and reinforcement with which they acquired correct items.

Selinker once pointed out that the model described above relies on the notion of inner feedback, and certainly there are other factors internal to the learner which affects fossilization since we are not merely product of our environment. In other words, internal motivating factors, the need for interaction with other people, and universal factors could all account for various

examples of fossilization.¹²

Another important topic is about input hypothesis. One of the most widely debated issues of the last decade about second language learning has been Krashen's hypothesis which has had a number of different names. Recently the input hypothesis has been a common term to refer to what are really a set of interrelated hypotheses.

According to Krashen's theory, adult second language learners have two means for learning of the target language:¹³

The first is acquisition, a subconscious and intuitive process, or experiential process of constructing the system of a language, similar to the process used by a child to pick up a language.

The second means is a conscious learning process in which learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own process.

According to this theory, it is also declared that fluency in second language performance is due to what learner has acquired, not what he has learned. Adult learners, therefore, should do as much acquiring as possible in order to achieve communicative fluency; otherwise they will confine themselves into rule learning and pay too much conscious attention to the forms of language.

The input hypothesis shows that appearance of an important condition for language acquisition is due to the fact that the learners by acquiring language understand, through hearing or reading, that what they have learned contains structure a little beyond his current level of competence. In other words, the language which learners are exposed to should be just far enough beyond their current competence that they can understand most of it but still is not so likely to make progress. An important part of the input hypothesis is suggested by Krashen's theory that speaking not to be taught directly in the language classroom since speech will emerge once the acquirer has built up enough comprehensible input. The best acquisition will occur in environments where anxiety is low and defensiveness absent, or where there are less affective factors.

Furthermore, Krashen's theory describes two ways in which comprehension of input containing new linguistic material is achieved: the utilization of context by the learner and the simplified input by the teacher. The learner makes use of context to infer the meaning of an utterance when existing linguistic resources are insufficient for immediate decoding. In fact, three kinds of contextual information are available: extra-linguistic information, the learner's knowledge of the world, and the learner's previously acquired linguistic competence. Krashen's theory, in this case, refers to a number of studies demonstrating the dramatic effects that contextual information can have on the comprehension of written text.

Pidginization is doubtlessly another important issue to be discussed. Another body of research supports the notion of that second language acquisition has much in common with the *pidginization* of language. What is a pidgin? A pidgin is a mixed language or jargon usually arising out of two languages coming into contact for commercial, political, or even social purposes. Naturally, the vocabulary of at least two languages is incorporated into the pidgin, and simplified grammatical forms are used, according to Brown.¹⁴

¹²See Selinker, L., & Lakshamanan, U. (1992). Language transfer and fossilization: The "Multiple Effects Principle". In S. M. Gass, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 197-216). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

¹³See Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice In Second Language Acquisition*.

¹⁴See Brown, A.L. & Palincsar, A.S. (1982). *Inducing strategies learning for texts by means of informed self-control*

Broadly, the inter-language of many second language speakers is much alike to pidginized forms of language. The implication is that what happens over perhaps several hundred years in pidginization is reproduced to some degree in short duration of one learner's acquisition of a second language. In short, the learner instinctively attempts to bring two languages – the target and the native – together to form a unique language, an inter-language, possessing aspects of both languages. Ultimately, it will take considerably long time for learners to overcome this apparently universal pidginization tendency, weed out inter-language forms, and adopt the second language exclusively, according to Brown.

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