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ERROR ANALYSIS IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF PRE-SESSIONAL ARAB STUDENTS AT IIUM

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF HUMAN SCIENCES IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated written errors in the area of lexis in a corpus of 40 scripts written by a group of pre-sessional level students at CELPAD (Centre for Languages and Pre-university Academic Development) of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Each script was read and then an analysis of the lexical errors was conducted for each error category classified. The learners' lexical errors has been explained by means of error analysis and contrastive analysis (to show the role of the mother tongue interference). Actual frequency has been used for the scoring of errors.

The study found that the student's written output contained diverse types of lexical deviants such as collocational mismatch, semantic overlapping, lexical omissions, errors due to phonetic and orthographic similarities, word formation errors, unacceptable use of idioms, circumlocution and miscellaneous errors. Generally, it has been found that the students experienced much difficulty due to the confusion of sense relations, especially on the grounds of collocational restrictions which in turn led to the misselection of lexis. This has underlined the importance of undertaking an error analysis approach which does propose an inventory of areas of lexical difficulty which the learners encounter. The value of this inventory is to direct the teachers' attention to these areas, so that they might devote special attention to them and emphasize them in their teaching to overcome or avoid lexical difficulties.
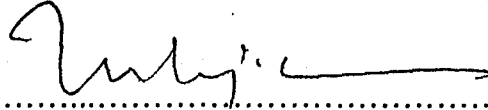
ملخص البحث

تناولت هذه الدراسة بالبحث الأخطاء الكتابية في مجال المفردات من خلال دراسة أربعين نصّاً كتب من قبل مجموعة من الطلاب العرب ممن هم في مرحلة تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في مركز اللغات والتطوير الأكاديمي للإعداد الجامعي في الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بماليزيا. وقد تمت قراءة كل نص وتحليل الأخطاء في المفردات حسب أصنافها. كما جرى تفسير تلك الأخطاء بواسطة منهج تحليل الأخطاء والتحليل المقارن وذلك لإبراز أثر اللغة الأم في ارتكاب تلك الأخطاء. وحسبت التكرارات الحقيقية كوسيلة لمعرفة نسبة كل خطأ.

وقد وجدت الدراسة بأن هناك أنواعاً مختلفة من أخطاء المفردات في النصوص التي كتبها الطلبة مثل: عدم التناسق الجمعي، والتداخل الدلالي، وحذف بعض المفردات، وأخطاء منشؤها التشابه في النطق والإملاء، وأخطاء في تكوين الكلمات، والاستخدام غير المقبول للعبارات الاصطلاحية، والإسهاب، وأخطاء أخرى.

وأظهرت الدراسة عموماً بأن الطلبة واجهوا صعوبات أكثر بسبب سوء فهم معنى العلاقات وخاصة فيما يتعلق بالشروط الجمعية الأمر الذي أدى إلى سوء اختيار المفردات. وتشير هذه النتيجة إلى أهمية طريقة تحليل الأخطاء التي تقترح وضع قائمة تضم المجالات التي يواجه فيها الطلبة صعوبات في التعامل مع المفردات. وتكمن أهمية هذه القائمة في أنها توجه انتباه المعلمين نحو هذه المجالات حتى يولوها اهتماماً خاصاً ويركزوا عليها أثناء عملية التعليم بهدف التغلب على الصعوبات المفرداتية أو تجنبها.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in English as a Second language.
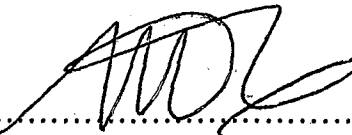
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Haja Mohideen
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in English as a Second language.

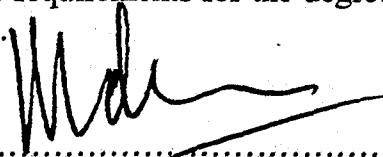..

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by proper citations giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

NAME: **HALLAT R. EBRAHIM**

Signature.............................. Date..8 - 1 - 2004....

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF READING-LISTENING ON READING AND PRONUCIATION DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL ESL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

Signature   Date

To

My husband and lovely son Aram

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction and Review of Literature

CHAPTER TWO: Methods of Analysis

CHAPTER THREE: Discussion and Explanation of Errors

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion, Pedagogical Implication and Recommendations

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Review of Literature

1. 1 Introduction

1.1.1 Background

Arabic is the national language in all the Arab countries. It is the medium of communication and instruction in all the educational institutions. It is often stated that a "strong unifying factor for Arab countries is Arabic, the language of their religion, art, history and culture" Yazigy (1994, p.68). It is the national language of the Arab countries in the Middle East - Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Kuwait and some countries of north Africa- Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Egypt and Sudan. In the Arab world, Arabic rather than English is the main interest of the students. So this exclusive focus on Arabic has led to the decline in the standard of English of the Arab students.

Yemenis, Iraqis, Sudanese and Saudi students are taught English from standard five i.e. from the age 10 of until the tertiary level. English is taught as a minor subject in all the schools and tertiary institutions.

Unfortunately there is no compulsory measure to make students obtain very high scores in English to be promoted to a higher level. For this reason students lack the motivation to master English.

In Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, the teaching hours for English are limited to 45 minutes, three to four times a week. Exposure to English is little since English is only used

in the private sector and on selected TV programs such as the news.

The target Arab students (including Iraqis, Yemenis, Sudanese and Saudis in this research who consist of both girls and boys) face obstacles when entering universities where English is the medium of instruction such as the IIUM. The university itself faces problems in admitting students who are weak in English and who have to cope with English as the medium of communication and instruction.

In order to help Yemenis, Iraqis, Sudanese and Saudi students to master the language and to offer some guidelines to tutors, error analysis should be conducted and the written errors of these students should be analyzed systematically.

1.1.2 *Error Analysis*

Error analysis is the investigation of learners' erroneous structures in both the written and spoken medium. Brown (1994) defines error analysis as the examination of learner's errors which are attributable to diverse sources and not merely the interlanguage sources (mother tongue interference). "Only some of the errors a learner makes are attributable to the mother tongue" (Brown 1994, p. 206).

, Error analysis is the examination of those errors committed by the students in the spoken and written medium. It is the observation, analysis and classification of errors to reveal something of the system operating within the learner as postulated by Brown (2000).

According to Sharma (1981, p.21) "Error analysis is a process based on analysis of learner's errors with clear objectives: evolving a suitable and effective teaching learning strategy and remedial measures necessary in certain clearly marked out areas of the foreign language" as (cited in Mohideen,1984).

The causes and the sources of errors are many. They could be psychological, sociological, linguistic or even pedagogical. Therefore when error analysis is undertaken, learners' problems will be highlighted, so that the teacher can attempt to set up new teaching strategies, techniques, materials, syllabuses and devise suitable remedial programs to reduce or minimize the learners'deviant expressions.

1.1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite several years of instruction from primary to secondary school, Arab students who are from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia are still weak in English, especially in their productive skills of writing. Studies by El- Hibir (1976), Mattar (1978), Touba (1981) and Ageli (1984) have provided evidence of this. Although they have enough background in English, they still seem to commit errors which might be traced to various sources. Previous studies on analyzing the written errors of Arab learners' have shown that their writing is full of erroneous structures especially lexical errors. This means that they have serious problems in getting their productive skill of writing correct. According to James, lexical errors are the most serious and frequent type of errors that are committed. James (1998, p.143) said "Lexical errors are the most frequent category of errors".

Lexis or vocabulary is a very important part of the learner's language. It can be emphasized that vocabulary items are the main ingredients of any language. Vocabulary deals with the content meaning of words. When a vocabulary item is wrongly chosen, the meaning could be greatly compromised.

James (1998) has maintained that lexis has to take a central role in language study for various reasons: the first reason is that there is no more the assumption which states that there is too much clear-cut distinction between lexis and grammar. Some aspects of words such as the morphological aspect is considered as part of the word and not just as well be viewed as part of grammar. This is particularly practicable for derivational morphology, whereby words of different form classes can be derived from the same root: adjective "bright", noun "brightness", adverb "brightly". Besides, many lexical items consist of more than one morpheme and one word, and have a structure of their own. This is the case

with idioms like "*pull my leg*". The second important reason is that the learners themselves believe that vocabulary is very crucial in language learning. Finally, for some learner groups, lexical items are their major problem.

James has supported his claim by giving this example: "Grauberg (1971) analyzed the errors of the group of advanced learners of German with MT English and commented on 'the performance of lexical errors': 102 out of 193 (53 per cent) recorded errors were lexical" (1998, p.143).

The literature on error analysis has shown that lexical errors are the most serious type of errors. James has referred to a study conducted by Santos (1988) which will support this claim. James has explained how Santos "compared the ratings given by English NS (English native speakers) and Japanese NNS (non native speakers of English) professors (in the American sense experienced tertiary level teachers) of two students' essays, one of them Japanese and the other Korean. One of the findings was that the lexical errors were deemed the most serious since it is in lexis that language impinges with content". (1998, p. 229).

James (1998, p. 229) has suggested a universal hierarchy of errors as follows:

Most Severe   **Least Severe**

Lexis > spelling >negation >word order >   prepositions>verb forms >concord
Errors in lexis are regarded as the most severe therefore; the main objective of this study is to analyze the lexical errors of Arab learners, who are from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia through the process of error analysis.

1.1.4 Significance of the Research

This study will propose an inventory of areas of lexical difficulty which the learner will encounter and the value of this inventory will be to direct the teacher's attention to these areas so that he/she might devote special attention to them and emphasize them in his/her teaching to overcome or avoid these predicted difficulties. Corder maintains:

In the field of methodology there have been school of thought in respect of learner's errors, the school which maintains that if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method, the errors would never be committed in the first place, and therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques. (1967, p. 20).

As a result of studying errors, teachers could develop or change the materials or the syllabus and devise a remedial program to avoid or rather minimize the percentage of the errors committed by learners. In other words, it can be said that error analysis involves a pedagogical application. Besides, this study is useful for understanding the errors produced in the written work of second language learners. Finally, it is of importance to the target sample. It will play a crucial role in helping them to develop their language awareness and improve their language competence.

1.1.5 Objectives of the Research

In view of the preceding discussion this study attempts:

1. To analyze lexical errors in the written medium of the Arab (from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia) pre-ssesional students at IIUM in the context of second language learning of English.

2. To identify the plausible sources of lexical errors.

3. To propose an inventory of areas of lexical difficulty which the learner will encounter.

1.1.6 Research Questions

The study will address the following research questions:

1.   What are the plausible sources of lexical errors?

2.   Does native language interference play a crucial role in producing lexical errors?

3.   Which type of lexical errors is the most common?

1.1.7 Hypotheses of this Research

The following descriptions will serve as the research hypotheses of this study:

1.   Native language interference plays a crucial role in producing lexical errors.

2.   Semantic overlapping i.e. "the meaning relations existing between words" (James: 1998, p.151) is the most common type of lexical error.

1.2 Review of Literature

1.2.1 Second Language Acquisition

There are a variety of ways to acquire a second language at any age and for a variety of purposes. Two ways of language learning had been mentioned and distinguished: "spontaneous" (untutored) and "guided" (tutored) language acquisition. The former is used to refer to the language acquisition in everyday speech, in a natural way away from any systematic guidance, whereas, guided language learning refers to any language acquisition guided by certain factors such as teaching and learning materials.

Ellis (1986) sees the process of second language acquisition as a difficult one. It indicates the learning of an additional language after acquiring the first language. Ellis adds that first language and second language studies began together. Moreover, second language acquisition (SLA) is not contrasted with foreign language acquisition. SLA is brought into use as a general term that involves both untutored (or 'naturalistic') acquisition and tutored (or 'classroom') acquisition.

Mohideen (1991) has supported Ellis by stating that acquiring a second language is difficult. It is a lifelong process. One can attain near- native speaker competence only after years of adequate exposure to the target language. "Depending on the need to acquire a second language and individual motivation, some learners become highly proficient, whereas some become satisfied with what they can get along with, the minimum communicative ability they have" (p. 73).

1.2.2 The Significance of Analyzing Learners' Errors

By the late 1960s, the Error Analysis approach had supplanted the contrastive analysis hypothesis which attributes all the learners' errors to the negative transfer of the first language onto the second language. By the beginning of the 1970s, there was a resurgence of interest in error analysis among the linguists. Error analysis has become the basis of many linguistic studies for its value in understanding the development of second language learning.

Lado (1957) has emphasized that learners' errors are a part of the methodology of language learning study and they serve as additional information in designing a course syllabus in the sense of the selection of items which would be incorporated into the syllabus.

As Corder (1967) puts it, they give hints to the system of the language that the learner is adopting. He felt "The longitudinal study of language development of a second language learner would rely heavily upon the techniques of Error Analysis" (1971, p.165).

Similarly, Richards (1974) states the importance of learners' errors by maintaining that learners' linguistic deviance is viewed to be intralingual and developmental deviance and reflects the general features of "rule learning such as overgeneralization, incomplete application of target language rules. Failure to learn the conditions under which, rules apply and the development of false concepts" (1974, p.157).

Stenson (1974) considers error analysis as the process which involves many variables in that the language learner's errors can be explained by either the interference of the native

language or the internal rules of the target language or even by both of them.

Richards (1974) emphasized the pedagogic relevance of error analysis in the sense that by analyzing the main types of intralingual and developmental errors "overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and the building of false systems or concepts," (p.181) would help teachers to examine their teaching materials, syllabus and strategies.

Stenson (1974) had said that through learners' errors, teachers will be able to know at least something about the level of the students' language competence. Besides, these errors are worthy of study since they are easy to overlook. If they are not studied, then misunderstanding and problems will be caused.

Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977) saw a very crucial role for error analysis in learning and acquiring a second language. They emphasized that if there is preference to improve and make progress in the study of language learning, acquisition and language pedagogy, we should encourage and reinforce the study of error analysis for developing teaching materials and designing new language acquisition strategies. Besides, ESL/EFL teachers should be aware of EA since it is of help to view their students in a new light.

Learners' errors are considered as noticeable and recognizable factors in second language learning. According to Corder (1981) learners' errors are significant in three different ways: They are important to the teacher, researcher and the learners themselves. First to the teacher, since they inform him, if he "undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to

learn" (p.11). Besides, learners' errors do serve the researcher by giving him evidence about the way of learning or acquiring the language and "what strategies and procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language" (p.11). Finally, they are significant to the learner himself since they help him to learn and because the committing of errors can be regarded as "evidence the learner uses in order to learn. It is the way the learner has of testing hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning"(p.11)

, By examining learners' errors, a teacher may "enter more fully into the environment of teaching and put on, as it were, his pupils' linguistic spectacles" Robinett and Schachter (1983, p. 153). This will help him to see his way clearly in terms of language teaching since "each error will show clearly what is most difficult in the second language" (p.156).

Error analysis recently is considered to have become one of the basic ways of assessment of "the pupil's learning in general and of the level of match between his learning 'syllabus' and the teacher's teaching one" (Candlin, 1974) as cited in Mohideen (1984, p. 13).

The long term value of error analysis is that it investigates the learners' errors with plausible objectives which have significant effects on both the processes of language learning and acquisition. Sharma (1984) as cited in Mohideen (1984, p.14) observes "Error analysis is a process based on analysis of learner's errors with a clear objective; evolving a suitable and effective teaching - learning strategy and remedial measures necessary in certain clearly marked out areas of the foreign language".

Furthermore, James (1988) argues that error analysis is mainly associated with the field of foreign language teaching. Recently, it has been associated with other domains of