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Error Analysis In Technology-Mediated Communication: Focus On EFL Writing In Synchronous And Asynchronous Modes Of Communication

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Abstract

This study aims to provide a linguistic taxonomy of frequent syntactic-morphological errors in Iranian EFL writings in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. It also provides the most frequent and the least frequent errors among EFL students' writings in these two modes. Error Analysis is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers for diagnostic prognostic purposes. It involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their gravity (Keshavarz, 1999). The researchers conducted a research study on 63 EFL undergraduate university students' writings. Students had to write their ideas on their daily issues. Afterwards, the researchers tried to rank and categorize their erroneous structures. As we had hypothesized, more errors were found in the synchronous mode of communication than in the asynchronous one; however, when investigating the exact types of errors, we noticed that some categories were different in these two modes of communication. Data analysis revealed that the frequency of error types varied with each mode of communication, this same analysis also showed that highly relevant associations could be established for the participants' errors and writing settings.

Keywords: Error analysis, technology-mediated communication, EFL writing, synchronous and asynchronous communications;

1. Introduction

In foreign language learning contexts, errors play a significant role both in learning and teaching. But most of the

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teachers are not aware of this importance. These teachers can not tolerate these errors and they try to find solution for solving them. Many studies have been conducted to emphasize on the significance of errors in teaching and learning processes. Making mistakes and committing errors are natural for language learners. However, teachers can impede making mistakes by realizing them and operating on them properly. The teachers, syllabus designers, test constructors and so many others can benefit from studies and investigations findings of errors. The study and analyze of errors has become a filed in Linguistics. There are various approaches to the study of errors. They divided into two major categories: 1. Linguistic Approaches 2. Non-linguistic Approaches. The approaches of Linguistic field are: (a) Contrastive Analysis Approach, and (b) Error Analysis Approach. Also, the non-linguistic approaches are: (a) Sociological Approach, and (b) Psychological Approach. The main area of this study is Linguistic Approaches so another field will not be discussed. This study aims to provide a linguistic taxonomy of frequent syntactic-morphological errors in Iranian EFL writings in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. It also provides the most frequent and the least frequent errors among EFL students' writings in these two modes. Providing this taxonomy enables teachers to may emphasize on some more difficult areas than others. Furthermore, syllabus designers may plan more appropriate and effective materials and finally it is suitable for test developers to construct satisfactory tests. To provide this taxonomy, the researchers have to answer this question: 1) What are the most and the least frequent synatctico-morphological errors in Iranian EFL writings in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication?

2. Review of Literature

Error Analysis approach is a reliable approach to the study of errors, which is directly concerned with student performance. This approach does not limit itself to linguistic interference. According to Error Analysis, errors in first language acquisition (FLA) and second language learning could not be accounted for in Contrastive Analysis framework. Therefore, investigators hypothesized that the process of second and first language acquisition are essentially the same (Dulay and Burt 1972; Richards, 1971). Keshavarz (1999) mentioned that Error Analysis is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness. There are three underlying assumptions which Error Analysis is based on. Firstly, as a language learner, we have to make errors and they are inevitable. Secondly, we can get benefit from errors. Thirdly, the source of all errors is not the learner's mother tongue.

2.1. Significance of Errors

Richards (1971) stated that errors are significant for linguists, for psycholinguists and for teachers. Chiang (1981) in a study noted other pedagogical implications of Error Analysis: (1). Making use of the hierarchy of difficulty. (2). Making use of the contrastive observations. (3). The usefulness and need of remedial programs. (4). The development of error-based teaching materials and syllabus for use in the composition class. (5). Implication for individualized instruction. (6). Understanding the strategies for the learner. (7). Implications for teaching methodology. Xie and Jiang (2007) stated four aspects of the significance of error analysis in language teaching and learning. In foreign language learning, error occurrence is inevitable; so teachers should tolerate their learners' errors that deal with *error analysis*. Moreover, learners' errors are *valuable feedbacks*, so teachers can do some remedial based on that feedback. Errors are *indispensable* to the learners themselves. Language learners use errors in order to learn new dimensions of the target language. Finally, errors need to be *avoided* from fossilization. Also, Keshavarz (1999) maintains that "an error-based analysis can give reliable results upon which remedial materials can be constructed".

Ashton (2005) in a study mentioned that although the raw results of CA should not be applied to classroom or syllabus-related decisions, it can provide teachers with useful insights into the linguistic backgrounds of learners and a basis for design of materials, especially those aimed at monolingual classes in EFL teaching situations abroad. Such data do, however, seem unreliable without the "feedback" of the result of a CA motivated EA survey. The finer details uncovered by empirical EA data provide a more accurate base on which to decide a sequencing of materials, the relative degree of emphasis to be put on specific linguistic items, remedial lesson and exercises, and the content of proficiency or achievement tests (Fisiak, 1981; Richards, 1974).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

To find taxonomy for frequent syntactico-morphological errors in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication, initially 71 undergraduate EFL undergraduate university students were accepted to participate in this study. By the time, 8 students were given up and the number of participants decreased to 63 (27 male and 36 female) (N=63). All of the students were Iranian undergraduate students. Although they had the different field of studies, but their major was English. The participants were students of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Linguistics, English Language and Literature and Translation Studies. All of the participants studied in Islamic Azad University, Iran. They had different social backgrounds and their ages were ranging from 19 to 36.

3.2. Procedure

The students of two intact courses took part in the current study to let the researchers to find the most and least frequent errors in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication of the EFL students' writings. Overall, 10 sessions were held during the research project, in which students of each class were expected to submit about 10 writing assignments about their ideas on daily issues. The synchronous group has to write about their ideas by Yahoo! Messenger Instant Messaging and asynchronous group has to submit their ideas by email.

It is worth mentioning that to establish the comparability of both classes at the beginning of the term a Grammar test, taken from a Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, with 40 items on various grammatical points including various tenses, prepositions, pronouns, comparative and superlative adjectives, agreements, conjunctions, conditional sentences along with some other grammatical rules was administered.

4. Discussion & conclusion

This study aims to provide a linguistic taxonomy of frequent syntactic-morphological errors in Iranian EFL writings in synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. It also provides the most frequent and the least frequent errors among EFL students' writings in these two modes. The results of the study show that, error in use of articles (27.36%) is the most frequent syntactico-morphological error in synchronous mode of communication and error in distribution and use of verb groups (0.08%) is the least frequent error. In asynchronous mode of communication, error in use of preposition (21.05) is the most frequent syntactic morphological error; and wrong use of negative construction is the least frequent error (0.28%).Conducting such research with this large corpus needs the cooperation of several universities, which in this research persuading some of the universities and higher education institutes was very difficult. Most of the university teachers did not keen on to waste their class time on these projects.

As EFL teachers, we have to be aware about results of error analysis both in theoretical and applied aspects. The learners' psychological process in language learning is an important aspect for language teachers to improve their teaching; thus teachers have to increase their understanding of learners' errors. By learning error sources and their frequencies, teacher can meet their students' needs. It will be easier for them to deal with their affective, cognitive and other important domains of language learning. Consequently, applying more flexible strategies in correcting learners' errors and contributing more to the language teaching and learning classrooms are vital roles of the teachers. Error-based research provides reliable results for syllabus designers, to see what items are important or unimportant to include or exclude in their syllabuses. Providing remedial materials based on identifying learners` linguistic difficulties is one of the fruitful aspect of these kinds of researches. If we believe in the close relationship of testing and teaching in post-method era, so testing should be based on what has been taught and test constructors have to be aware of students` problematic areas and their errors. In my point of view, test developers can use error analysis to construct distracters, but they do not have to put too much emphasize on problematic areas and errors of learners. This may lead to ignoring affective aspects of language learning.

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