

Taxonomy of Morpho-Syntactic Errors and Error Analysis

Mahsa Hariri

University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran

Abstract: Error analysis researches have a significant role in the realm of English teaching programs, especially in EFL contexts. They can be in use by teachers, learners, textbook providers, education system and so on. This study investigates the Iranian EFL linguistics taxonomy of morpho-syntactic errors and error analysis. Participants of this study are nine pre-intermediate instructed Persian learners of English, all of them are female with the average age of fifteen studying in an English institute in Rasht, Iran. They are asked to write an essay on the title of "What do you want to do in future?". After collecting the data and categorizing and identifying the erroneous areas in their written work, they are analyzed by the aid of the linguistic taxonomy of errors. The results of this study showed that "use of prepositions" is the most frequent part of their errors and after that the "use of articles". It is noticeable that the minimum frequency is related to errors in the "use of relative clauses" and "relative pronouns" and "wrong use of verbs".

Keywords: EFL learners, error analysis, linguistic taxonomy, morpho-syntactic errors

INTRODUCTION

The process of learning English as a foreign language is actually a process of making errors, correcting errors and promoting the acquisition level. The history of error analysis belongs to 1960s, when Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues established it in second language acquisition. It was influenced by Behaviorism because when applied linguists want to predict errors, they use some formal distinctions between the learner's L1 and L2.

Error Analysis is an attempt to analyse the errors learners make in relation to the target language (Corder, 1971). It is a systematic procedure which attempts to collect, identify, describe, explain and evaluate errors from a collection of language learner data, by analysing learner error and comparing it to that of the target language. It does take into account however, that some errors are made that can be attributed to the learner's first language. James (1998) admits that the analysis of errors attributed to transfer is 'a sub-procedure applied in the diagnostic phase of doing [error analysis]'.

Findings of error analysis were evidence to inefficiency of contrastive analysis, so, error analysis was an alternative to contrastive analysis. For example one of the findings of error analysis is that lots of errors are produced by making faulty inferences about the rules of second language. But also, error analysis has been criticized for a number of practical problems that all belongs to the fact that it always search for the process of language learning just by investigating learner's output and just by incorrect output. According

to Corder (1974), there are five steps in an error analysis:

- Collecting a sample of learner language
- Identifying errors
- Describing errors
- Explaining errors
- Evaluating errors

This study aims to find a solution for better planning of an educational program for Iranian EFL learners who are going to learn English as their second language by analyzing their errors. Following the steps that Corder mentioned, a sample group of learners of an institute of English language were selected and they were asked to write about a given topic and after identifying and describing the errors, finally they were evaluated.

Objectives of the research:

- What are the general features of errors in Iranian English learners' English writing?
- What are the reasons for those errors?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the data were analyzed according to the classifications of morpho-syntactical errors and sources of the errors. The data gathered empirically from different written productions of 9 pre-intermediate instructed Persian learners of English. All the participants are female learners in an average age of 15,

Table 1: Linguistic taxonomy of errors

Linguistic taxonomy	Description	English	Persian
Errors in the use of articles	Omission of the definite article "the"	*I love to see beach. I love to see the beach.	من دوست دارم ساحل دریا را ببینم.
Errors in the use of prepositions	Redundant use of preposition	*We should try to reach to our aims. We should try to reach our aims.	ما باید تلاش کنیم تا به اهدافمان برسیم.
Wrong word order		*I love very much flowers. I love flowers very much.	من گلها را خیلی زیاد دوست دارم.
Errors due to lack of concord	Lack of subject-verb agreement	*My friend say about future: That is very nonsense. My friend says about future: That is very nonsense.	دوستم درباره ی آینده می گوید: آن خیلی بی مفهوم است.
Wrong use of conditional sentences	Errors in the use of conditional sentences	*If I have a flower shop, I pick of a lot of flower for myself and my family. If I have a flower shop, I will pick of a lot of flower for myself and my family.	اگه من یک گل فروشی داشته باشم گل های زیادی برای خودم و خانواده ام می برم.
Typical Persian constructions		*I like exercise in course swimming. I like to exercise in swimming.	دوست دارم شنا کردن را تمرین کنم.
Wrong use of tenses	Simple present tense instead of present continuous	*I go to the Taekwondo class when I was in 2class in primary school. I am going to the Taekwondo class when I was in 2class in primary school.	من از زمانیکه کلاس دوم ابتدایی بودم به کلاس تکواندو می روم.
Wrong use of adverb	Misplacement of adverbs	*I like always eat a ice cream and chips. I always like eat a ice cream and chips.	من دوست دارم همیشه بستنی و چیپس بخورم.
Wrong use of verb group	Wrong use of modals and auxiliaries	*Without aim we can't living very easy and good. Without aim we can't live very easy and good.	ما بدون هدف نمی توانیم خیلی خوب و راحت زندگی کنیم.
Errors in the use of relative clauses and relative pronouns	Retention of subject pronouns	*I can help people when the people be sick I like help them. I can help people when they are sick.	وقتی مردم مریض اند میتوانم به آنها کمک کنم.

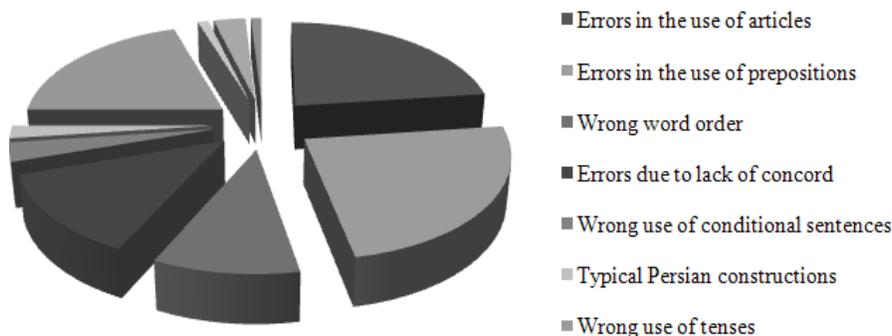


Fig. 1: Pie chart of analysis of morpho-syntactical error

Table 2: Observe frequency of the morpho-syntactical errors

Morpho-syntactical errors	Number of errors	(%)
Errors in the use of articles	23	23
Errors in the use of prepositions	24	24
Wrong word order	10	10
Errors due to lack of concord	13	13
Wrong use of conditional sentences	3	3
Typical Persian constructions	2	2
Wrong use of tenses	20	20
Wrong use of adverb	1	1
Wrong use of verb group	3	3
Errors in the use of relative clauses and relative pronouns	1	1

studying in Vesal English institute in Rasht, Iran. All the writings were under a restricted time, with a unique topic: "What do you want to do in future?". All the written productions were read carefully, the erroneous

parts were identified, finally they were categorized and analyzed according to linguistic taxonomy of errors. The identification of errors involves a comparison between what the learners as nonnative speakers and what a native speaker counterpart would produce in the same context. In this study, the linguistic taxonomy of errors prepared by Keshavarz (2006) was taken into consideration.

According to this taxonomy, the Table 1 shows the items in linguistic taxonomy and their description and also an example of these learners' errors are presented and the erroneous sentence are distinguished by the sign of "*" from its correct form; and in the last column of this table, the Persian translation is available.

Data analysis and conclusion: In this part, after recognition of the errors of students in their writings and categorizing them in the Table 1 now in Table 2 the total number of errors and the frequency of each category and also percentage of errors of each category that is presented in the next category are measured. Finally the results are presented in Fig. 1 as a pie chart of analysis o morpho-syntactical errors and Fig. 2 as a bar-graph of it to make the results tangible to reader.

The most significant and unique findings of analyzing data are highlighted in the below Table 2. As it is evident, the maximum number of the errors is 24 out of 100 that is related to the prepositions and the lowest ones are number 1 out of 100 errors that are

related to the adverbs and relative clauses and pronouns.

Sources of errors: After classifying the errors according to a linguistic taxonomy, now it is the time to classify the errors according to their sources. Table 3 shows the classification of the sources of the errors that contains the main categories and their subcategories and an example for each of them and the number of errors in each subcategory; and the total number of the errors in each main category of sources of the errors are presented in Table 4 with their percentage. Figure 3 is a pie chart which also shows the sources of the errors.

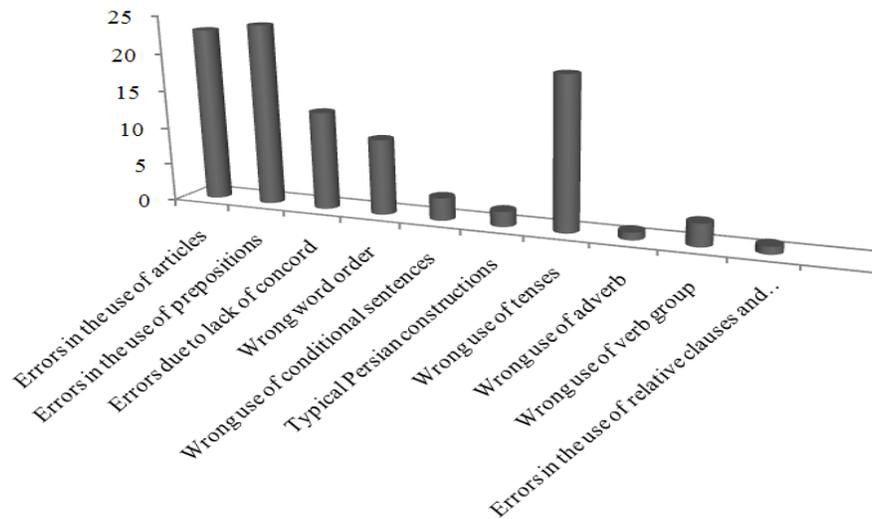


Fig. 2: Bar graph of morpho-syntactical error

Table 3: Classification of errors accoring to their sources

Sources of errors	Examble	No.	
Transfer of morphological elements	In my class I have 10 <u>friend</u> and 1 teacher	13	
Transfer of grammatical elements	After class I am going to home	3	
Transfer of lexico-semantic elements	Cross-associational	I <u>look</u> the movie at the home	4
	False-cognates	I hope to buy a <u>machine</u> for my mommy	2
Transfer of stylistic and cultural elements	Our <u>Mrs. teacher</u> teach us English lessons	3	
Intralingual errors	Overgeneralization	My friend <u>say</u> about future: that is very nonsense	12
	Ignorance of rule restriction	In the USA <u>peoples</u> read everywhere	3
	False analogy	I like math so much but I'm not sure, I want to <u>get</u> my family idea	14
		I am from <u>Iranian</u>	5
Language learning strategies	Hyper extention	I have a only one sister	5
	Hypercorrection	Without aim we <u>can't living</u> very easy and good	12
	Faulty categorization	I like to be a police, because is a active job	6
	Simplification	My aim is I must go to the Tehran's university	6
	Overgeneralization		0
Communication strategies	Transfer of rules		0
	Avoidance strategy		0
	Message abandonment	I like help to everybody but if I want to be doctor or police	2
	Language switch	I like to work in Mashhad in to the <u>Haram Emam Reza</u>	9

Table 4: Observe frequency of sources of errors

Category	No.	(%)
Transfer of morphological elements	13	13.13
Transfer of grammatical elements	3	3.03
Transfer of lexico-semantic elements	6	6.06
Transfer of stylistic and cultural elements	3	3.03
Intralingual errors	51	51.50
Language learning strategies	12	12.12
Communication strategies	11	11.11
	99	

According to Corder (1967) the learner's errors have different significance:

- L2 acquisition should not be looked at from a purely pedagogical perspective.
- Errors in L2 are interesting because they reflect underlying linguistic rules.
- The study of L2 can be seen as a subfield of general linguistics or cognitive science.

Now, here is a classification of sources of errors which is presented by Keshavarz (2006) and that is the base of this study:

- Transfer of Morphological elements
- Transfer of Grammatical elements
- Transfer of Lexico-semantic elements
 - Cross-associational
 - False-cognates
- Transfer of Stylistic and Cultural elements
 - Overgeneralization
 - Ignorance of rule restriction
 - Hyperextension
 - Hypercorrection
 - Faulty categorization
- Language Learning Strategies
 - Simplification
 - Overgeneralization
 - Transfer of rules
- Communication Strategies

- Prefabricate pattern
- Language switch
- Appeal to authority
- Avoidance strategy
- Topic avoidance
- Message abandonment

DISCUSSION

In this part, as a look to the previously published works, we will make a comparison of their findings and the recent research findings. Richards (1971) found four major errors in his research: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete applications of rules and false concepts hypothesized. Brown (1980) also mentioned to the four sources of errors: interlingual, context of learning and communication strategies. More recently, Darus (2009), tried to investigate an error analysis research in Malaysia and the results of the study show that six most common errors committed by the participants were singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, subject-verb agreement and word order. As you see, the sources of the errors are more or less identical but their maximum and minimum are various that can be the consequence of lots of variables, like different contexts, levels, maybe the first language of the contributors and so on; We suggest that the door is now open and there is a scope for the development of future research in this area with regard to speech perception of learners and other sample variables that mentioned above and have significant influence on pronunciation accuracy.

RESULTS

In a comparison in the Table 1 that is related to the frequency of the Morpho-syntactical errors, it is clear that the maximum errors of students is in errors related

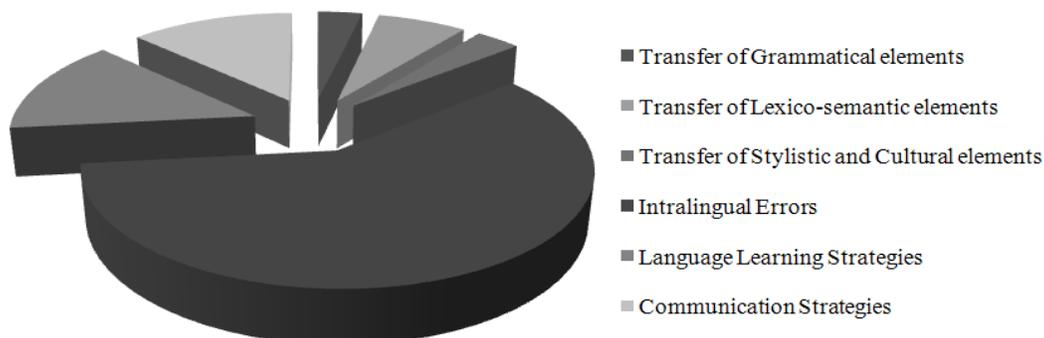


Fig. 3: Pie-chart of sources of errors

to the use of prepositions and after that in errors in the use of articles and the minimum frequency is related to errors in the use of relative clauses and relative pronouns and wrong use of verbs. According to the second analysis, the maximum frequency belongs to the main category of interlingual errors and the minimum frequency belongs to the transfer of stylistic and cultural elements and transfer of grammatical elements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for their detailed, fair-minded and constructive suggestions during the reviewing process on earlier drafts of this article. Last but not least, I express my gratitude to all of the contributors, without whom this project would not have been possible.

REFERENCES

Brown, H.D., 1980. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 4th Edn., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliff, ISBN: 0137092954.

- Corder, S.P., 1967. The significance of learners' errors. *Int. Rev. Appl. Linguist.*, 5: 161-169.
- Corder, S.P., 1971. *Idiosyncratic Dialects and Error Analysis*. Groos, Heidelberg, pp: 14.
- Corder, S.P., 1974. *Error Analysis*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp: 15.
- Darus, S., 2009. Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study. *Eur. J. Soc. Sci.*, 8(3): 483-495.
- James, C., 1998. *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis*. 4th Edn., Longman, London, pp: 304, ISBN: 0582257638.
- Keshavarz, M.H., 2006. *Error Analysis: A Practical Course for English Students and Teachers*. SAMT, Tehran.
- Richards, J.C., 1971. A noun-contrastive approach to error analysis. *English Language Teach.*, 25(3).