

## Students' Grammatical Errors as Corrected by English Teachers at Secondary Schools in Sudan

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### Abstract

*This study is conducted at White Nile state secondary schools in Sudan to discover the problems of English language grammar. It is inevitable that learners make mistakes in the process of foreign language learning. However what is questioned by the researcher is what are the types of grammatical errors made by the students at this stage? Yet not all mistakes are the same, sometimes they seem to be deeply ingrained but in other times students correct themselves with ease. Thus the researcher and teachers of foreign language at white Nile state came to realize that the mistakes a student made in the process of constructing a new system of language is needed to be analyzed carefully to represent keys for understanding English grammar. So, the aim of this study is to point out the significance of learners errors to provide evidence of how language is learned and what are the strategies or procedures the learners are employing in the discovery of the language grammatical errors.*

### Background:

Error analysis deals with the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes they make use of in recognizing or coding the input they receive from the target language. Therefore, a primary focus of error analysis is on the evidence that learners' errors provide with an understanding of the underlying process of second language acquisition. At this point, Keshavars (1997) suggests that the field of error analysis can be divided into two branches: (i) theoretical, and (ii) applied. Theoretical analysis of errors primarily concerns the process and strategies of language learning and its similarities with first language acquisition. In other words, it tries to investigate what is going on in the minds of language learners. Secondly, it tries to decode the strategies of learners such as overgeneralization and simplification, and thirdly, to go to a conclusion that regards the universals of language learning process whether there is an internal syllabus for learning a second language.

Applied error analysis, on the other hand, concerns organizing remedial courses, and devising appropriate materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of theoretical error analysis. So it is the researcher's intention to bring students grammatical errors into focus and subject them into evaluation for better recognition to solve the students' grammatical errors.

### Classification of errors:

The main problem one faces in the area of classification is that one error can be classified in a number of ways. The following example dealt with by A.K.Sinha (1977) makes clear some of the problems one has to face while analyzing syntactic errors. The example is as under:

- (a) The plane reached Detroit. There it stopped for half an hour.
- (b) The plane reached Detroit and stopped there for half an hour.
- (c) The plane reached Detroit. There stopped for half an hour.

In (C) according to the structuralist the sentence is erroneous because the subject is missing. The proper use of it is made in (a). According to a transformationalist a 'conjoined co reference subject deletion rule' is used in the wrong place in (c). It has been rightly used in (b). Application of a Hindi-knowing speaker of English would say it is the 'the co reference subject deletion rule' in Hindi which permits intersentential deletion of a co referential subject. A number of examples of this type have been cited by many to make the point that differences of opinion exist with regard to classification of errors. But once the choice is made as to which type of classification one wants to employ one can deal with it efficiently. Whatever the approach may be one thing stands out clear.

Learners employ certain strategies to simplify their learning task. This is true whether they are learning their mother tongue or a second language. This fact is clearly seen when one studies their syntactic errors. Hence the study of learners' errors could help us in two ways. Firstly we can understand the processes of language acquisition and secondly we can prepare materials which are suited to the needs of the learner. So far the discussion has focused on how Error Analysis helps us gain a better understanding of the processes of language learning. Looking at it from a different point of view it can be seen how various studies which have been carried out with a view to finding out how language is acquired by children have changed our attitude and approach towards errors.

### **Description of Errors:**

A number of different categories for describing errors have been identified firstly, Corder (1973) classifies errors of the difference between the learners utterance and the reconstructed version. In this way, errors fall into four categories

#### **Omission:**

Morphological omission / A strange thing happened to me yesterday.

Syntactical omission / must say also the name?

#### **Addition:**

In morphology / the book is here.

In syntax / the London

In lexicon / I stayed there during five years ago.

#### **Selection**

In morphology - my friend is older than me.

In syntax - I want that he comes here.

### **Ordering**

In pronunciation insignificant for significant plural for plural?

In morphology – get upping for 'getting up'

In syntax – he is dear to my friend

In lexicon – key ear for 'car key'

An error may vary in magnitude. It can include phoneme, a morpheme, a word, a sentence or even a paragraph. Due to this fact, errors may be also viewed as being either global or local (cited in Brown, 2000) global errors hinder communication.

### **Sources of errors**

There are many descriptions for different kinds of errors, it is inevitable to move further and ask for the sources of errors. It has been indicated in the first part of the study that errors were assumed as being the only result of interference of the first language habits to the learning of second language.

However, with the field of error analysis, it has been understood that the nature of errors implicate the existence of other reasons for errors can be categorized with in two domains (i) interlingual transfer and (ii) intralingual transfer. Interlingual transfer is significant source for language learners. Intralingual transfer the interferences from the students own language is not only reason for committing errors.

### **Pedagogical implications of error analysis.**

The studies regarding errors are carried out in order to (i) identify strategies which learners use in language teaching (ii) identify the cause of learners errors, (iii) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in development in teaching materials. Students errors have always been of interest and significance to teachers, syllabus designers and test developers.

### **Implications for foreign language teachers**

Teacher can benefit from the findings error analysis in many ways, errors tell the teacher how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and what remains for him to learn (Corder, 1987) following the students progress, the teacher able to carry on his studies in accordance with what learners needs to know. Errors are means of feedback for the teacher strategy to change or reconstruct.

### **Implications for syllabus designers**

Syllabus design of an English teaching course is a very important component of teaching-learning process. There are many factors to be considered to decide on what to teach to what level and age group. At this point; errors are significant data for syllabus designers as they show what items are important to be included or which items need to be recycled in the syllabus.

**The Statement of the problem:**

Error analysis enables teachers to find out the sources of errors and take pedagogical precautions towards them. Thus, the analysis of learner language has become an essential need to overcome some questions and propose solutions regarding different aspects. This study concerns the error analysis and its contribution to English language grammar at secondary school in white Nile state in Sudan.

**The Objectives of the Study:**

This study aims out to:

- 1-Find out the grammatical errors that faces the learners at secondary schools at White Nile state in Sudan.
- 2-Correct the grammatical errors at secondary schools.
- 3-Help the students at secondary schools to reduce their grammatical errors.
- 4-Display the problems of the grammatical errors at white Nile secondary schools.

**Hypothesis of the study:**

This study has the following hypotheses:

- Students cause grammatical errors due to the lack of training.
- The students cause grammatical errors due to the careless learning.
- The interference of the first language affects grammatical errors.
- The overgeneralization causes grammatical errors in using foreign language.

**Methodology of the study:**

The population of the study consists of Sudanese pupils at white Nile secondary schools in Sudan. The sample of the study consist of 20 teachers and 40 pupils selected randomly from white Nile state secondary schools to represent the study. The researcher uses an interview for the teachers and test for the pupils to collect the data. The interview has one question " What are the most familiar grammatical errors caused by your pupils?" the researcher uses the logical interpretation to analyze the collected data.

**Procedures:**

When the researcher started his data collection, permission were given by the teachers of the target classes involved to allow half an hour to respond to the composition test to the students about " In not more than 100 words write a composition about any topic of your own". The teachers and their students were co-operative and willing to participate in doing the study. At the same time another interview in one open question for the teachers of English to collect their views and beliefs about their students' different types of grammatical errors according to their correction of their students during their teaching. All the teachers in the targeted classes have great experience in English for at least three years. The collected data was analyzed in relation to the grammatical error analysis.

**Analysis:**

As mentioned, that the main purpose of the study was to explore and analyze the grammatical errors caused by the students' at secondary schools White Nile state in Sudan. In order to illustrate this, the responses in the students' writings studied carefully in addition to the responses of the English teacher's interviews. The researcher found that the sources of errors are mainly interlingual and intralingual. This shows the effect of the first language transfer interference and the major cause for errors in the English grammar as shown in the composition writings of the students. After the analysis of the students' grammatical errors and the teachers' interview, the researcher detect these types of grammatical errors caused by the students:

- a-Noun and pronoun errors as detected in these sentences: "Ahmed and Aziza are married and he has been married for 20 years." Ahmed and Aziza are plural, and he is singular. The sentence should read Ahmed and Aziza are married and they have been married for 20 years." "Everyone forgot their pencil." Everyone is singular (every single individual one) and their is plural. This should read "Everyone forgot his or her pencil." This is one of the most common grammatical errors that exists today.
- b-Sentence fragment: Sentence fragments are bad grammar, and some examples of sentence fragments include the following: " Because I ate banana ." This is a sentence fragment because it doesn't express a complete thought... what happened because you ate banana? Another example is : "Jumped high." This is a sentence fragment because the reader does not know who jumped high.
- c-Passive form as in: " The boy was kicked by the ball "In a passive voice construction, the grammatical subject of the clause receives the action of the verb. So, the ball from the above sentence, which is receiving the action, becomes the subject. The formula: [subject]+[some form of the verb to be]+[past participle of a transitive verb]+[optional prepositional phrase]. So the sentence can be as the following : "The ball was kicked by the boy "

d-Verb tense as in: "I go to the store and I bought milk." Go is a present tense verb. Bought is a past tense verb. Bought should be buy milk since these two events both occur at the same time. "I will eat fish for dinner and drank milk with my dinner" Will eat is a future tense verb but drank is a past tense verb. Since the dinner is going to happen in the future, it is not possible that the milk was drunk already.

e-Subject verb agreement "father work in Kosti" "my friends likes football a lot" father is singular as subject so the verb must be singular " works" the same for my friends are plural so the verb must be plural " like" so the sentence should read father works in Kosti and my friends like football a lot. Another example is " Mona like fish. Mona is singular; like is plural. The sentence should read "Mona likes fish." The above mentioned represent parts of the grammatical problems . of course there are few others in preposition , articles , double negatives and punctuations.

### **Summary:**

This study investigated and analyzed the grammatical errors caused by secondary schools students at White Nile state in Sudan. The aim was to find out the main reasons behind these errors. The responses in the students' composition test and teachers' interviews were carefully studied. The findings of the study are shown in qualitative form. As shown earlier, the sources of errors are mainly interlingual and intralingual. The research showed mother tongue interference as main cause of grammatical errors.

### **Results:**

After the analysis of the students' composition test and the teachers' interview, the study reached these results:

- The study show a strong influence of mother tongue interference on the acquisition of English grammar.
- The results show the tendency of the students to overlap some grammatical structures in first and target languages.
- The most prominent feature of error was in the subject- verb agreement, followed by the use of the correct tense.
- The least recurrent error feature was in the use of articles.
- Most of the grammatical errors occur unconsciously.

### **Recommendations:**

On the light of the findings, the researcher suggests these recommendations to overcome the students' grammatical problems:

- Teachers must be knowledgeable of the student's grammatical errors to help them a lot to focus on their explanation and drilling processes to overcome grammatical problems.
- When the teachers are aware of the students' grammatical weaknesses, they will be capable of consciously addressing them.
- The more the staff are aware of the students' weaknesses, the more they are capable of consciously addressing them.
- The feedback of Errors will tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of their teaching techniques, what parts of the syllabus they have been following have been inadequately leaned or taught, and need further attention.
- Teachers must give more homework to the students in order to make them able to master the grammatical rules and to pin out their weakness easily.
- The students cannot overcome their grammatical weakness unless they become aware of them first.
- Teachers must encourage students' teamwork to make them able to learn from themselves and from peer work as well.

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