

Error Analysis: Examination of Grammatical Errors from Students' Written Examinations: The Case Study of Ruaha Catholic University and University of Iringa

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Abstract

This paper analyse errors in students' written examinations. The study was conducted at Ruaha Catholic University and University of Iringa, involving 82 samples of written University examinations scripts. 41 sample scripts from Ruaha Catholic University as well 41 sample scripts from University of Iringa. This paper deals with a very important aspect that may improve second language teaching and learning as it reveals the most common mistake/errors made by University prospective teachers specifically those studying English courses. This means if the findings are interpreted into policy and action, this study would yield a significant role in students' performance rate. The findings revealed that six types of errors are committed by students, these errors include; verb tenses, subject verb agreement, capitalization, punctuation, prepositions and articles. Most errors originate from native language popularly known as mother tongue (L1), thus errors originate from L1 interference. The duty of psycholinguistics especially those trained in non-native language learning is systematic descriptions of learning errors.

Key words: Errors, morph syntax, student teacher, prospective, target language, second language.

Introduction

With the growing interest in analysis of linguistics aspects analysis of errors to second language learners is inevitable. Many educators put under consideration the analysis of errors made by language learners in either speech or in writing. Error Analysis emerged in 1960s as a reaction to the view that language transfer is the central process involved in foreign or second language learning (Corder 1974). Despite that with the introduction of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis prediction a great majority of errors was not achieved. In second language learning, a more prominent attitude developed towards learner's errors compared to what was prevalent in the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. Errors were no longer

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considered as evil signs of failure in teaching and learning process rather were seen as a necessary part of language learning process.

Error Analysis became a common method of getting information about learners' language during early 1970s as an alternative method to contrastive analysis which was based on behaviorist theories. Therefore behaviorists claimed that the difficulties in mastering certain structures in a second language were only based on the differences between learners' mother tongue and the second language. Error analysis has become less used mainly because it has some limitations. First, it focuses on learners' errors and not on what learners can do right. According to Brown (2000), another limitation of Error Analysis (EA) is the fact that it overemphasizes on data production. Despite these drawbacks, error analysis is still considered a useful tool to gather information about learners in which errors were classified into typologies depending on their formations. Firstly, there are linguistics-based classifications placed into four major categories as identified by (Keshavars 2012). The categories are Orthographic Errors, Phonological errors Lexical- semantic errors and Morphosyntactic errors,

Secondly, there are process-based classifications of errors classification of errors which means the processes through which language learners make errors. Brown (2000) has identified four main processes such as:-Omission, Addition, Substitution, replacement and Permutation. Further observation Browns identified types of errors often occurs at a sentence level.

Furthermore, in the field of applied linguistics usually scholars distinguish between two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors (Touchie, 1986). Performance errors are those errors made by learners when they are tired or hurried. Mostly this type of error is not serious and can be solved with little effort by the learner therefore they cannot be termed as error rather than mistakes. Competence errors, on the other hand, are more serious than performance errors since competence errors reflect inadequate learning. Richards (1974), following Corder's classification done in 1967, distinguishes three types of errors with respect to their sources: these types are interlingua errors, intralingua and development errors

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and errors caused by faulty teaching techniques or transfer of training errors.

However, Stenson (1974) states that there are three main reasons for errors, namely incomplete acquisition of the target grammar, exigencies of the learning/teaching situation and errors due to normal problems of language performance. Contrary to Stenson argument on the main reason of especially on his argument on errors due to normal problems of language performance I ascertain that performance of linguistics forms enables us only to identify language errors from the speaker lather than it being the reason for error.

In addition to that, Richards (1974) points out that errors are not only caused by the interference from the mother tongue, but also what he calls overgeneralizations, ignore of the rules restriction, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized and they are often viewed as developmental errors. Moreover, Brown (2000) asserted that, there are two main sources of errors; interlingual error and intralingual errors. Interlingual (interference) errors are those errors which are found to first language interference. These errors are attributable to negative inter language transfer. The term interlingual was first introduced by Selinker (1972) referring to the systematic knowledge of L2 which is independent to both the learner's L1 and the target language.

Sources of Errors

There are mainly two major sources of errors in second language learning. The first source is interference from the native language while the second source can be attributed to intralingual and developmental factors. The native language of learners plays a significant role in learning in learning a second language. Errors due to the influence of the native language are called interlingual errors. Interlingual errors are also called transfer or interference errors. Brown (2000) assert that Intralingual and developmental errors are due to the difficulty of the second or target language resulting into Simplification as learners choose simple forms and constructions instead of more complex ones. An example of simplification involves the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous.

Overgeneralization: this is the use of one form or expression in one context and extending its applications to other context where it should not apply. Examples of overgeneralization include the use of comed and goed as the past tense form of come and go and the omission of the third person singular 's' under the heavy pressure of all other endless form as in I go. It should be noted that simplifications and overgeneralization are used by learners in order to reduce their linguistic burden. Hypercorrection: sometimes the zealous efforts of teachers in correcting their students' errors induce the students to make errors in otherwise correct forms. Faculty teaching: it is obvious that, learners' errors are teacher-induced. This factor is close related to hypercorrection explained above.

It is interesting to note that, some teachers are even influenced by their pupil's errors in the course of long teaching. Avoidance: some systematic structure is difficulty to produce by some learners. Consequently, these learners avoid these structures and use instead simpler structures. Arab ESL learners avoid the passive voice while Japanese learners avoid relativization in English. Improper language learning resulting into failure in learners' acquisition of linguistics rules and grammar restrictions. Learners' errors can also be attributed to wrong hypotheses formed by these learners about the target language. For example, some learners think that "is" is the marker of present tense in sentence *he is talk to the father. Similarly, they think that "was" is the past tense marker in sentence like *it was happened last night.(Touchie 1986).

Methodology

The study employed observation method in collecting required information. The information was collected basing on the objective of the study on analyzing errors on the application Articles,Punctuations, Capitalization, Verb TensesSubject, verb Agreementand Preposition. Data collected are presented on tables and discussed. The data on prior errors were collected from the students' examination scripts from Ruaha Catholic University and University of Iringa. It involved analysis of 82 University Examination scripts of third year teacher student's majoring in English language as their teaching subject. The selection of these English teachers is due to the fact that third year students pursuing

English language as one of their teaching subject are the prospective experts of English language. It is factive that the problem of English proficiency in schools is growing year after the other. The problem of language of instruction is what triggered the researcher to choose the prospective English teachers from Ruaha Catholic University and University of Iringa as a sample of this study. The population, in which the study drew conclusions, falls largely to third year students studying English as their major teaching subject.

Data presentation and Discussion

As introduced in previous page, that data collected are presented in tables whereas table number 1 illustrates the number of error in each item. Table 2, to Table 7 Presents detail description on how errors were committed. An analysis of third year students' examination scripts indicated several grammatical errors. As far as grammatical errors are concerned, six types of grammatical errors identified from students' examination scripts in academic year 2015/2016 which are errors from the application of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, verb forms, capitalizations, punctuations, prepositions and articles. Table .1 illustrates and presents the number of occurrences of each type of error.

Table1: Number of Error in Application of Grammatical Forms

University	Articles	Punctuations	Capitalization	Verb Tenses	Subject Verb Agreement	Preposition
Ruaha Catholic University	18	7	3	7	12	8
University of Iringa	15	19	9	13	14	8
Total	33	26	12	20	26	16

Table 1 above illustrate six types of grammatical forms applied with errors from two Universities, identified based on students' writing examination scripts which are related to verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, verb forms, capitalizations, punctuations, prepositions and articles.

Discussion

All 82 students' scripts were analyzed in order to find out errors committed by students' learners. The results of the study revealed that the graduate students had grammatical errors in English language exam. These errors were caused by misuse and omission of prepositions, articles, auxiliaries, lack of subject-verb agreement. The observation from the scripts analysis native language interference is surely the most immediately noticeable source of error from the application of native language to the target one.

i). Subject- Verb Agreement Error

Subject- verb agreement error was revealed in students scripts as mostly of subject did not agree with the verb in person or number. Subject and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular

or plural). Therefore if a person or thing perform an action in singular, its verb must also be in singular form; if the subject is plural, its verb must be also be plural. However, the existence of linguistics behavior of the two languages that the syntactic elements to both Kiswahili and English language adhere to subject verb agreement, therefore it is an ideal that second language learners do not have the ability to create a well formed syntactic structure resulting from improper second language acquisition. Table 2 below gives some errors on subject-verb agreement.

Table 2

Error Classification	Error Identification	Explanation and correction of errors
a) Disagreement of subject and verb in personit determine the means of the problem.....it <u>determines</u> the means of the problem....
b) Disagreement of subject and verb in personthey is coming from Europe to Africa.....they <u>are</u> coming from Europe to Africa.....
c) Disagreement of subject and verb in person	Since technology change with time.....	Since technology <u>changes</u> with time.....
d) Disagreement of subject and verb in person	Look- it rains.....	Look-it <u>is</u> raining
e) Disagreement of subject and verb in person	My sister has 15 years	My sister <u>is</u> 15 years

Table 2 above identifies some of the errors committed by students' in the disagreement of subject and verbs in person and number. The data shows that, the disagreement of subject and verb in person appears to form the largest category than in number. In data (b) above, the student committed an error of using wrong verb to be "is" which does not collocate with the subject 'they' in number. The subject is in 3rd person plural.

The student was to use 'are' which agree with the plural subject 'they'. Subject verb errors usually occur due to the fact that students have not mastered the use of personal pronouns with their concord or agreements. Mostly I realized that this type of error result from the way teachers teaches in lower lever. The reason behind this linguistic is the reoccurrences of the error in which student across the collected data have repeated the same mistake. Therefore this reflects to what Steinson (1974) referred to as Induced Errors the errors are caused mostly by the teaching and learning process.

ii) Capitalization Errors

This means writing a word with its first letter as a capital letter (upper case letter) and the remaining letters in small letter (lower case letters). Basing on the finding of this paper, two categories of error in capitalization was committed by third year students in both Universities. These are wrong use of upper case and lower case. As shown in table in table 3 below.

Table 3

Error Classification	Error Identification	Explanations and Corrections
Wrong use of lower case letter	there.....	‘there’ is a deictic expression or an adverb which can be used to express point of reference, therefore lower case letter ‘t’ is used in lieu of upper case letter T to signify capital letter at the beginning of a sentence, phrase or clause.
Wrong use of upper case letterdespite the fact that, Schools.....	Schools is a common noun which should be in lower case letter especially the initial letter ‘s’, therefore upper case letter ‘S’ is wrongly used.
Wrong use of lower-case letter	The lecturer was from america....	All proper nouns are to be in upper case letters whether in the beginning of a sentence or at the middle of it. America is a proper noun, it shouldn’t be in lower-case.

The data in table 3 above identify that, students committed errors on the use of lower-case letter than upper-case letter. They use upper-case letters and lower-case letters out of rules as explain in the table3 above. It must be borne into the mind that these errors are committed by English teacher students who are expected to be teaching English courses in future. This means that, it is obvious these errors will be transmitted to students who will be taught by these teacher students. Therefore these errors are likely to exist among learners of English as their second language from one generation to another.

iii) Punctuation

This is the practice or system of inserting various marks in writing in order to facilitate interpretation. In the scripts observed, most students from both Universities commit punctuations errors in writing examinations Table 4 below shows punctuations errors.

Table 4

Error Classification	Error Identification	Explanations and Corrections
Commas	...a lovely long cool refreshing drink....	Before nouns, we normally use commas between adjectives especially in longer sequences which give similar kinds of information. Therefore the sentence was to be.....a lovely, long, cool, refreshing drink...
Spelling of another	...he has bought an other car....	Another is one word, therefore it shouldn't be separated....he has bought another car....
Altogether and all together	My new house isn't all together finished...	Altogether means 'completely' or 'considering everything', therefore the sentence was to read...my new house isn't altogether finished...

iv). Prepositions

The error on the application of preposition resulted into the lack of connection in a noun or pronoun in number of syntactic node, hence lack of relationship between them. Despite of answer the questions of where or when. It links nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence in English language contrary to

Kiswahili where their existence is limited to the verb. As it functions to indicate the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence the student lost it and then

leads to the illogical sentences. As indicated on table 5.

Table 5

Error Classification	Error Identification	Explanations and Corrections
Wrong substitution: wrong use of at, on, and in	*...it is very hot <i>on</i> the centre of the Earth. * hurry up-supper is <i>at</i> the table. * I don't think he is <i>at</i> his room	At is used to talk about position at a point...it is very hot <i>at</i> the centre of the Earth...On is used for position on a surface... hurry up-supper is <i>on</i> the table...In is used for position inside large areas and in three-dimensional spaces... I don't think he is <i>in</i> his room
Wrong substitution: wrong use of " from " instead of " of "	...but teachers are used to make assessment from what has been done in classroom.	Wrong use of the preposition "from" instead of "of". Therefore the preposition 'from' should be substituted with 'of' to indicate relating to. ...but teachers are used to make assessment 'of' what has been done in classroom.
Wrong substitution: wrong use of "in " instead of " into "	...can enter <u>in</u> our country...	Wrong use of "in " instead of " into" ...can enter <u>into</u> our country...

Following Corder's identifications of error types, preposition errors found in the students' work are classified into the following categories; Omission, Unnecessary Insertion and Wrong substitution. It was revealed that, most students committed wrong

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use of prepositions in the category of wrong substitution not as the result of first language interference, that the realization of preposition in learner's language was attributed to the way they were trained. Table 6 above illustrates.

vi). **Articles**

An article is a word that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. English has two articles: 'the' and 'a/an'. 'the' is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; 'a/an' is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. We call 'the' definite article and 'a/an' the indefinite article. Errors regarding to articles are shown in table 6 below

Table 6

Error Classification	Error Identification	Explanations and Corrections
Omission of articles	solar eclipse is... similar phenomenon	solar eclipse is... similar phenomenon
Omission of articlesdoctor who was killed last week...	<u>The</u> doctor who was killed last week...

As it was indicated by Corder (1974), omission of articles is one of the four main categories of error. This study also indicates similar findings of omission of articles in third year students in writing examination. As the concern is on written language, Articles have been identified as error resulting language transfer or the fusion of patterns from the native language into the target language. Therefore the absence of articles first language attributed errors to among learners of a second language.

Conclusions

It is concluded from the findings that, as the trend follow suit; University students commit grammatical errors in the use of verb tenses, subject verb agreement, punctuation, capitalization, article and preposition. Moreover the problem is critical in the use of punctuations, articles and subject verb agreement. It is shown that not only language transfer attributes to grammatical errors but also improper language acquisition has an impact to second language learners. The problem remain critical since it impact is shown up to university lever as to what the study centered. Point to not is; on the way university time table are fixed it is difficult for Ruaha and Iringa Universities to electrify language learning. However, the emphasis of language structure and communication skills should now be seen as a turning point to language learning hence they provide great foundation to second language application.

Furthermore, as there is almost a balance on the errors to both students revealing that student have language problems that resemble resulting from language transfer and it near fossil. However that, there is great problem which need revisit of the mode of teaching and analysis of teachers competences based before attending students. Moreover the study revealed that error caused due to the application of articles, punctuations and verb subject agreement can be termed as “tools” for achieving grammatical competency and proficiency. With the problems on the use of comma, we realize that this is greatest problem that reflects on the lack of academic writing to number of graduate. Writing does not only give students ability to use proper language but only helps student develop the proper use of grammatical forms and marks. Moreover students have build-up unsatisfactory development in the use of preposition and capitalization. Basic English should be introduced and be taught as a compulsory course in Universities to equip students with grammar of the language. However, a communication skill which is a typical application of Basic English language should be undertaken soon after the completion of Basic English Course.

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