

LEARNER ERRORS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND EFFECTIVE CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

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Summary

Error correction is an essential component of English language teaching and plays an important role in second language acquisition. This article discusses the nature of learner errors, their causes, and the significance of corrective feedback in the process of language learning. The present study is based on the analysis and synthesis of the existing research in the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and English Language Teaching (ELT). Three broad groups of learner errors, grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation errors, are given special attention since they are frequently met with in classroom practice and may affect both accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

The article also examines the main reasons for error production, namely, first language interference, overgeneralization of language rules, developmental processes, and performance-based slips. The analysis demonstrates that learner errors are not simply indicators of failure, but rather indicators of the ongoing language expansion and development of interlanguage competence. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate correction strategies based on the type and origin of the error and the objectives of a given learning activity.

The results suggest that successful error correction requires a balanced approach that considers both accuracy and fluency. Appropriate corrective feedback supports language development, promotes communicative competence, and fosters a positive learning environment that encourages active learner participation.

Key words: second language acquisition, learner language, interlanguage development, corrective feedback, error analysis, L1 transfer, language teaching methodology.

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1. Introduction

Committing mistakes is an inevitable stage of foreign language acquisition. Contemporary approaches to the instruction of English treat students' mistakes not only as indicators of their inability to apply knowledge but also as evidence of successful language development. They reflect the development that occurs during this process and help understand where students stand. Rather than preventing them, one can learn from errors. Error correction is a central aspect of English teaching methods, as learners' errors allow the teacher to identify students' difficulties, evaluate their teaching effectiveness, and make appropriate decisions about future teaching techniques. Errors committed while applying newly learned vocabulary, grammar, or speaking skills naturally reflect a process of language acquisition.

While pointing out students' mistakes is not enough, teachers should also determine when and how to correct them properly. Appropriate correction may positively influence language development, increase accuracy, and raise learners' awareness of particular language forms. Conversely, ineffective error correction may damage the learner's self-esteem and make

them avoid speaking. Hence, providing feedback on mistakes is a critical part of teaching English. The importance of this study comes from the ongoing discussion about corrective feedback in the classroom. Teachers need to use error-correction strategies that support both language growth and student motivation. Many correction methods have been proposed, but we still need to organize the different types of learner errors and identify effective ways to address them in English language teaching.

This research is unique because it thoroughly looks at common learner errors in English language learning. It also examines practical correction methods for use in today's classrooms. The goal of the study is to explore the main types of learner errors in English language learning and to analyze effective error-correction methods used in teaching. The research employs analysis and synthesis of scientific and methodological literature on second-language learning, error analysis, and corrective feedback. It also employs comparative and descriptive methods to study different approaches to error correction and their practical use in English language teaching.

2. Classification of Learner Errors in English as a Second Language

Before analyzing the types of learner errors, it is important to differentiate between "error" and "mistake". According to Koni and Leka, "it is inevitable that all language learners make mistakes while acquiring a language," and the identification of such deviations provides teachers with "feedback and useful information so that learners can have an effective acquisition of the language" (Koni & Leka, 2015). "Errors are generally seen as consistent mistakes that show gaps in learners' language skills. In contrast, "mistakes" are random slips that learners can usually fix once they recognize them. This difference matters in teaching English. It affects a teacher's choice about whether to provide corrective feedback and what kind of correction strategy to use. Systematic errors need teaching support and targeted practice. Mistakes, however, might not always need direct correction, especially during fluency-focused activities.

From a pedagogical perspective, making mistakes is an essential part of language development. The Cambridge TKT framework states that errors are a normal part of learning because learners experiment with language to develop their skills. This shows that mistakes are not just failures; they are proof of active testing in language learning (Cambridge English, 2015).

Modern approaches also highlight that learner errors result from several interacting factors. Research on error analysis suggests these include first language interference, overgeneralization of rules, and developmental processes within the target language system. Additionally, cognitive overload during real-time communication may contribute to errors, particularly during speaking activities.

Building on this understanding, it is useful to categorize learner errors by linguistic domains. This allows for a more systematic examination and helps identify suitable teaching responses. One key category in both second language acquisition (SLA) research and language teaching is grammatical errors. These errors directly affect the accuracy of what learners produce. Research on instructed second language acquisition shows that grammatical errors persist due to the complex interaction among input, cognitive processing, and output practice. Gass and Mackey point out that language development depends on how learners process and adjust linguistic input (Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A., 2015).

Grammatical errors are usually found in the basic areas of language, such as verb tense, subject-verb agreement, the article system, prepositions, and word order. For example, learners may say, "She go to school every day" (instead of "She goes to school every day"). This shows a misunderstanding of the subject-verb agreement rules. Another common mistake is

saying "I saw movie yesterday" instead of "I saw a movie yesterday". This shows the missing indefinite article.

In the teaching context, grammatical errors matter because they can affect clarity and create confusion. "Corrective feedback is considered a crucial mechanism through which learners become aware of the gap between their interlanguage and the target language (Nassaji, 2016)". Systematic grammatical errors are also important cues for teachers to identify gaps in learners' language skills and to provide useful feedback, as suggested by second-language acquisition research.

However, grammatical errors do not always need to be corrected right away. Modern language teaching emphasizes that decisions about whether to correct an error depend on the activity's main purpose. Over-correction in fluency activities can disrupt communication, lower learners' confidence, and limit the use of spontaneous language. On the other hand, accuracy activities require greater focus on grammar and are corrected more often. As Scrivener notes, teachers should maintain a balance between fluency and accuracy in their practice. They choose correction techniques appropriate to the lesson's aims. Effective error correction, therefore, means not only being able to detect errors, but also knowing when it is advantageous to correct them and when it is better to let communication continue without interruption (Scrivener, J., 2019).

Another common type of learner errors is lexical errors. These happen when students use words and expressions incorrectly in the target language. Learners make these mistakes by choosing the wrong word, using a word in the wrong context, or applying meanings and combinations from their first language. According to Loewen, lexical development is a complicated process that requires learners to acquire individual words and understand their meanings, usage patterns, and collocation restrictions (Loewen, S., 2020).

Lexical errors often arise from the influence of the first language and overgeneralization. Learners frequently think that words in their native language have direct equivalents in English. This can lead them to make incorrect lexical choices. As Schmitt notes, "knowing a word involves much more than knowing its meaning (Schmitt, N., 2020)." Learners also need to understand its grammatical behavior, collocations, register, and frequency of use. This helps explain why lexical errors can continue to occur even among fairly advanced learners.

For example, a learner might say "I made my homework" instead of "I did my homework" by taking a phrase from their first language. Another common mistake is saying "I am boring" when what they mean is "I am bored." The learner is confusing two similar adjectives. Similarly, a learner may say "big rain" instead of "heavy rain", suggesting the lack of knowledge of English phrases. Lexical errors are important because they can affect both clarity and understanding. Vocabulary knowledge is important for effective communication because words convey the main meaning of a message (Nation I. S. P., 2018).

Correction of lexical errors should not focus solely on the wrong word but also help learners better understand meaning, context, and phrases. Asking for clarifications, paraphrasing, and exposing learners to natural language can be effective in helping vocabulary grow. As with grammatical errors, teachers should consider the purpose of an activity before intervening. In fluency activities, over-correction may disrupt communication.

Another important type of learner error is pronunciation errors. These happen when learners produce sounds, stress patterns, rhythm, or intonation that differ from the norms of the target language. Unlike grammatical or vocabulary errors, pronunciation errors mainly impact spoken communication. They can cause misunderstandings even when the words and grammar are correct. Pronunciation errors are often shaped by the phonological system of the learner's first language. According to Derwing and Munro, learners usually transfer familiar sound

patterns from their native language to the target language. This can lead to ongoing pronunciation challenges. The authors point out that “accent and intelligibility are not the same thing” (Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J., 2015). A foreign accent does not necessarily stop successful communication. Therefore, the main goal of pronunciation instruction should be to improve intelligibility rather than to remove the accent.

The pronunciation errors are relevant because they directly affect comprehensibility. As Levis says, good communication is not about having a native-like pronunciation, but about being understood by the listeners. Therefore, pronunciation training should focus on features that have the greatest effect on intelligibility, such as problematic sounds, word stress, and rhythm (Levis, J. M., 2018). Teachers need to provide clear models, opportunities for repetition, and focused feedback in correcting pronunciation errors. Drilling, phonemic awareness activities, minimal pairs, and guided speaking practice are some techniques that can help learners improve their pronunciation. But correction, like other types of errors, must be balanced against the goals of communication, especially in fluency-oriented speaking activities where over-interruption may get in the way of communication.

3. Causes of Learner Errors

Causes of learner errors are important for effective language teaching and error correction. Though grammatical, lexical and pronunciation errors differ in their linguistic characteristics, they are often generated by similar underlying processes. The present research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has identified several main sources of learner errors, including first-language interference, overgeneralization, developmental processes, and performance factors.

One of the most well-known causes of learner error is first-language interference, i.e., L1 interference. This happens when learners transfer linguistic features of their native language to the target language. Loewen argues that prior linguistic knowledge will inevitably affect the acquisition of a new language and may lead to both positive and negative transfer. Negative transfer happens when the structures of the first language are very different from the structures of the target language (Loewen, S., 2020). For example, learners may produce sentences like “I have 20 years” instead of “I am 20 years old” because the structure reflects patterns in their native language. Such errors reveal the influence of existing linguistic systems on second-language production.

Overgeneralization is another common source of errors by learners. That is when students generalize a language rule to situations where it does not apply. Language learners actively hypothesize about grammatical rules and test them through communication (Ellis, R., 2015). As a consequence, learners might say things like “goed” instead of “went” or “childs” instead of “children”. These forms are incorrect but they show that learners have noticed a pattern and are trying to apply it in a systematic way. So it may be argued that overgeneralization is evidence of active language learning, not simply of failure.

Errors can also occur from developmental processes taking place when interlanguage is being formed. Interlanguage is the growing language system which the learner builds as he progresses to higher levels of proficiency in the target language. As Loewen notes, second language development is gradual and non-linear, and therefore, learners are constantly modifying and restructuring their linguistic knowledge. Thus, developmental errors are likely to occur even in the absence of interference from the first language and can be viewed as a natural phenomenon in language acquisition (Loewen, S., 2020).

Finally, there are some learner errors due to performance factors, often called slips. In contrast to systematic errors, slips occur when the learner knows the correct form, but is

unable to produce it accurately due to fatigue, anxiety, lack of concentration, or time pressure. Such errors are often self-correctable when learners become aware of them (Scrivener, 2019). This distinction is pedagogically significant because slips generally call for less corrective intervention than errors, which reflect incomplete linguistic competence.

4. Conclusion

Learner errors are an inherent and unavoidable aspect of second language acquisition. They do not indicate failure but give useful information about the stage of language development learners are at and help teachers to identify areas for further attention. The analysis of the learners' errors in this study identified errors in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and suggested that these errors can originate from a variety of sources, including L1 interference, overgeneralization, developmental processes, and performance slips.

The study has also revealed the importance of effective error correction in English language teaching. Corrective feedback should be targeted to the kind of error, the source of the error, and the goals of the learning task. Moreover, teachers should strike a balance between accuracy and fluency in their decisions about whether to correct learner errors and how to correct them.

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