

Deciphering Inflectional Complexities: Analyzing Error Patterns in ESL Learners

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In second language learning, learners often commit mistakes in various forms and for different reasons. To comprehend this, Error Analysis studies, which is an allied part of applied linguistics that supplanted Contrastive Analysis due to the work of Corder (1967), come into play in language teaching. In the process of second or foreign language learning, Error Analysis underlines and analyzes the errors committed by learners. According to the different processes leading to the occurrence of errors, various classifications have been developed, resulting in the distinction between intralingual and interlingual errors. Intralingual errors are further categorized into overgeneralizations, simplifications, developmental errors, communication-based errors, induced errors, errors of avoidance, errors of overproduction, etc. This discourse was ultimately negated by N. Chomsky, a linguist who proposed a radically different perspective. Defying B.F. Skinner, he asserted that human language acquisition cannot be explained by simply starting off with a "tabula rasa" state of mind.

S.P. Corder pioneered the importance of errors in the language learning process as a study in ELT/applied linguistics. He underlined the paradigm shift in linguistics from a behavioristic view of language to a more rationalistic view and asserted that a noticeable effect in language teaching would be shifting the emphasis from teaching to the study of learning.

Methodology: This study is a cross-sectional analysis of 16 students from Class V of Kendriya Vidyalaya, J.N.U., New Delhi. The sample is evenly split between genders, including 8 girls and 8 boys, all aged between 8 and 9 years. In this research, gender is the only variable being considered. All participants belong to middle-class families, ensuring a degree of socioeconomic consistency within the sample group.

To collect the necessary data for our research, we utilized the questionnaire method. Each student was given a structured questionnaire designed to gather specific information relevant to the study's objectives. The students were engaged in this process to ensure they understood and accurately completed the questionnaires. This approach was chosen for its efficiency in obtaining quantitative data that could be systematically analyzed to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the influence of gender within this demographic.

Aim and Scope of Our Study: The primary aim of this term paper is the analysis of errors. We seek to identify errors related to inflections in students of the same age group learning English as a second language. The goal of the study is to describe the types of errors made by learners of English as a second language. Inflection is one of the key linguistic phenomena in English that triggers errors in these learners. Since inflection overlaps both syntax and morphology, it is important to consider the errors that occur while learning English as a second language.

Discussion of Data

Intralingual errors reflect the operation of learning strategies that are universal, i.e., evident in all learners irrespective of their L1, as suggested by James (originally proposed by Krashen et al., but Carl James extended and refined it to its present form). There are five general types of ways in which learners modify the target forms.

- (1) False analogy (a kind of 'over-generalization'). An example is--- boys; child---childs
- (2) Misanalysis (for examples, the learner wrongly assumes that the singular possessive pronoun it is plural because of the ---s).
- (3) Incomplete rule application (a kind of 'under-generalization'). An example, will the failure to utilize indicative word order in nobody knew where was Barbie.

(4) Exploiting redundancy (i.e. omitting grammatical futures that do not contribute to the meaning of an utterance). A good example is 3rd person-s (for example, Martyn like Tennis).

(5) Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions (for example, failing to recognize that all though quick and fast are synonyms, quick food is not a possible collocation).

(6) System-simplification (i.e. simplifying the burden of learning by substituting a single form where the target language uses two or more). An example is the use of that as a ubiquitous relative pronoun.

However, the problem with such a list is that it is not always clear which strategies is responsible for a particular error.

Inflectional morphemes can be divided into these following categories:

1. Noun inflections:

(a) for plurality: book/books; man/men

(b) for possession: Ade's car; men's world

2. Verbal inflections

(a) for subject-verbal concord: "He dances everyday"

(b) for present participle: "I am reading"

(c) for past tense kill/killed; come/came.

(d) -en/-ed for past participle: eat/eaten; go/gone; rob/robbed;

come/came

3. Adjectival inflections

(a) -er (for comparative): big/bigger; thin/thinner

(b) -est (for superlative): biggest, tallest, and youngest.

Followings are the inflectional errors that we are going to talk about with the presentation of our collected data.

- (a) Plural markers (b) Past tense marker (c) Present participle marker (d) Comparative marker
(e) Superlative marker

(1) Plural Markers

There are plenty of errors related to plural markers. Generally, the child knows the plural forms but when it comes to words with irregular forms the frequency of errors spirals up. The errors occur because of overgeneralization and avoidance of rules. We can see some of the examples from the data below: -

- (a) **he got five fishes.* (Overgeneralization)
(b) **i have ten flowers and Sita has five leafs.* (Avoidance)
(c) **there were ten sheeps in the forest.* (Overgeneralization)& (avoidance)

(2) Past Tense Marker

The reason for errors in past tense markers are due to two reasons (1) problem with agreement (2) overgeneralization of the rules. Here are examples from the data that I collected.

- (a) **he cutted the tree.* (Overgeneralization)
(b) **he goed there.* (Overgeneralization)
(c) **i could not slept last night.* (system simplification)

(3) Present Participial

Errors in present participle form were quite less. I could find errors which will come under errors in spellings. But it does not mean that there were no errors. Here are a few examples:

- (a)* he is run fast.
(b)* they are go to the school

(4) Comparative Marker

The problem occurs with forms with –er. The subjects did not know where the comparative form more will come and where the comparative suffix morpheme –er will come. Some of

the subjects used both of the form simultaneously, which was showing ignorance of rules and rule-redundancy as well. Here are a few examples:

(a) **my teacher is more smart.* (ignorance of rules)

(b) **he is bader boy than Chinu.*

(c) **he is more good than Shyam.*

(5) Superlative Marker

The subjects were facing comparatively fewer problems in superlative markers. But it does not mean that there were no errors in superlative morphemes. There are clear instances of overgeneralization which adds to the errors. Here are examples from the data.

(a) *ram is the most good boy in this class.* (Overgeneralization)

(b) *she is the badest boy in the class.* (Overgeneralization)

(c) *I have got the littlest pencil in the whole class.*

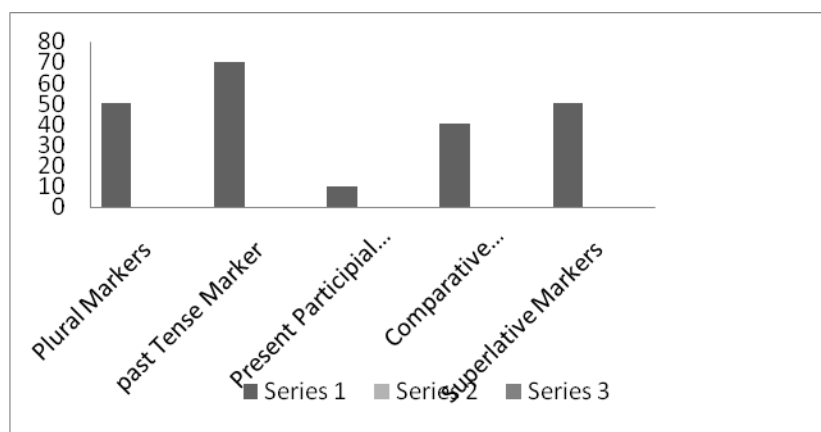
Total numbers of errors committed by the subjects: 190

Total numbers of mistakes committed by boys: 100

Total numbers of mistakes committed by girls: 90

Error Categories	Frequency of the Errors	% of Total Errors
(1) Plural marker	50	26.31
(2) Past tense marker	70	36.8
(3) Present participial marker	10	5.2
(4) Comparative marker	40	21.05
(5) Superlative	20	10.52
TOTAL	190	100.00

As from the data and its study it is clear that the frequency of errors is highest in errors related to Past Tense Markers. The second position is occupied by Errors in Plural Markers. Errors in Comparative Markers come after errors in plural Markers. Superlative Markers and Present Participial Markers occupy fourth and fifth slot respectively. The column chart shows it more clearly.



The statistics presents that the subjects are yet to acquire past tense markers. The reasons behind this can be that there are many irregular forms which are to be memorized. The subjects committed errors because of overgeneralization and ignorance of rules. As we have put earlier also that Inflection overlaps both morphology and syntax it is a bit tough for subjects to acquire this form. The frequency of errors is least in Present Participial markers. There were some subjects who missed this form completely. We could find out that some of the subjects missed the phenomenon of consonant doubling too. For example:

Running was written as runing

Putting was written as puting

Some of the subjects doubled the consonant when it was unnecessary. For examples:

Walking was written as wallking

We have kept these errors out of inflectional errors because our emphasis is more on the correct form rather than spellings. This work is valuable in understanding and analyzing errors made by language learners by systematically identifying common mistakes in

inflections. By recognizing these patterns, educators can develop targeted teaching strategies to address specific areas of difficulty, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of language instruction. Additionally, the analysis can inform the creation of customized learning materials and activities that cater to the needs of learners, ultimately enhancing their language acquisition process. Understanding these errors also helps in refining assessment methods to better evaluate and support learner progress.

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