

Common Interlingual Errors Among the Second Language Learners: A Case Study with Special Focus on the ESL Undergraduates of the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies on error analysis have been carried out with English as a second language (ESL) learners, helping to identify common errors and enhance both learner and teacher awareness for better correction of these errors. This study aims to explore errors caused by L1 interference among undergraduates learning English as a second language, with the goal of increasing error awareness and addressing these issues through targeted feedback. The survey employed error analysis to examine learners' written output and contrastive analysis to identify areas of difficulty and interference. The study focused on written English due to its importance in academic and professional contexts. Emphasizing written English was also pertinent because the participants were Applied Science students in their undergraduate programs. The findings revealed that lexical errors were the most frequent and affected the largest number of participants, followed by mechanics, grammatical and semantic errors. Error Analysis (EA) shows that learners of English as a Second Language often make errors influenced by their L1, a phenomenon referred to as interlanguage. Sinhala/Tamil L2 learners of English frequently make interlingual errors stemming from the differences between their mother tongue and English. This issue has been documented in various studies and will be further explored in this study, which examines writing errors among the new entrants to the faculty of Applied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.

2. Materials and Methods

The error analysis in this study followed Corder's (1974) five steps: (a) collection of a sample, (b) identification of errors, (c) description of errors, (d) explanation of errors, and (e) evaluation of errors. Accordingly, a sample of 60 students was selected from the ESL undergraduates of the Faculty of Applied Sciences upon their entry to the faculty. Two carefully selected writing tasks were given to the target group of students with the aim of identifying and analyzing the errors caused by L1 interference. Samples collected from the learners were carefully examined for both intralingual and interlingual errors and only interlingual errors were considered as materials for the study. Collected data were analyzed using the quantitative data analysis method by describing, summarizing and comparing data and the observations were noted down.

3. Results and Discussion

This study focuses on learner errors caused by L1 interference when learning English as a second language (L2) and the results are based on the writing errors of the participants analyzed according to Corder's Taxonomy model which describes four types of errors, namely: grammatical, lexical, semantic and mechanics errors. The survey investigated several areas of interest like identification and analysis of errors as well as the comparison of results between errors and the number of participants.

The following table shows an analysis of each type of error in detail.

Table 1. Analysis of L1 Interference Errors in ESL Learners' Writing Based on Corder's Taxonomy

Error Type	Error Category	Number of Participants who made the error	Percentage of total participants (out of 60)
Grammatical Errors	Subject verb agreement	08	13.33
	Verb drop	14	23.33
	Verb tense	10	16.66
	Word order	13	21.66
	Negation	24	40.00
	Affixation	18	30.00
Lexical Errors	Prepositions	49	81.66
	Determiners	11	18.33
	Nouns	16	26.66
	Relative clauses	24	40.00
	Conjunctions	09	15.00
Semantic Errors	Word choice	27	45.00
Mechanics Errors	Capitalization	07	11.66
	Spelling	53	88.33
	Punctuation	55	91.66

Classification of errors identified after analyzing the data is illustrated as a percentage of the total number in the following graph.

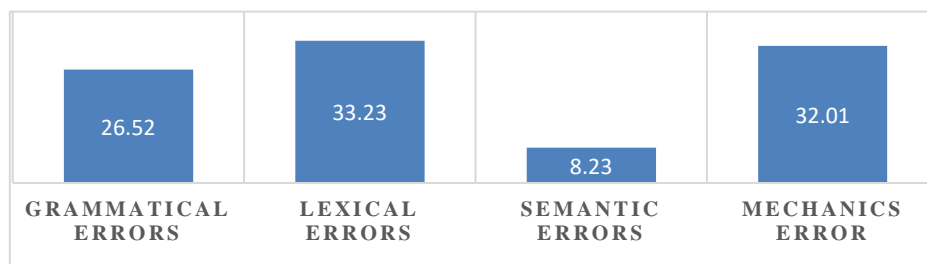


Figure 1. Distribution of Errors Among ESL Learners Due to L1 Interference

According to the findings of the survey, Lexical errors, which account for 33.23 of all, were identified as the linguistic area with the highest number of errors among the participants. Out of the lexical errors, the incorrect use of English prepositions was found to be the highest category of errors among the participants. This is due to the crosslinguistic influence of their

mother tongue on the target language. For instance, most of the participants had used the preposition “to” or “for” with the verb “participate” instead of “in” used in English because according to their mother tongue (Sinhala/Tamil) it is “to” that goes together with “participate. Relative clauses were identified as the second highest category that created problems for ESL learners of Sinhala/ Tamil due to the difference in position of the relative clause in English language and their mother tongue. They tend to use the relative clause in the wrong position owing to crosslinguistic interference. A few of the mass nouns in English are considered to be count nouns in Sinhala. As a result, there is a tendency among the Sinhala speakers to use such nouns in plural sense. For example, the noun “furniture” is pluralized as “furnitures” because the word furniture has a plural noun in Sinhala. Regarding the errors of determiners, the use of inappropriate determiner or omission of it, especially the indefinite article, was common among the participants. The analysis of data revealed that this was mainly caused by L1 interference mostly among the Sinhala speakers than among the Tamil speakers as the article is adjacent to the noun in Sinhala whereas it is not so in the target language. The survey revealed some errors regarding the use of conjunctions as well, mainly due to its position. The position of the conjunction in Sinhala and Tamil is similar, yet it is different in English, the learners whose L1 is Sinhala or Tamil, therefore, tend to use the conjunction at the end of the respective clause even though it should actually be placed at the beginning according to the underlying grammar rules pertaining to English language.

Mechanical errors composed 32.01 percent of the total number of errors identified among the participants. The study revealed that the majority of them were punctuation errors due to the fact that the use of certain punctuation marks is not the same in L1 and L2. Moreover, a few punctuation marks available in English, such as dash and colon, are not commonly used in Sinhala / Tamil. As far as spelling errors are concerned, the findings of the survey revealed that such errors were caused by attempting to make English a phonetic language like Sinhala. As a result, majority of the participants had attempted to spell certain English words in the same way that they are pronounced. Capitalization errors were also found to be common among the participants due to their lack of knowledge of capitalization because the concept of capitalization is not present either in Sinhala or Tamil.

The analysis of the data revealed that grammatical errors among the participants accounted for 26.52 percent of the total. The reason for the high percentage of errors is the variation of underlying rules of grammar among different languages. The findings of the study evident that the errors are common among most of the Sri Lankan ESL learners in such areas as negation, affixation, verb drop, word order, verb tense and subject verb agreement due to crosslinguistic interference. For example, the selection of antonym prefixes creates problems for most of the Sri Lankan ESL learners due to the complexity of choosing such prefixes in English. On the contrary, the two languages: Sinhala and Tamil have a few antonym prefixes for them to choose from. The same is true for the derivation of nouns in English compared to Tamil and Sinhala. Furthermore, the survey disclosed that a considerable number of Sri Lankan ESL learners have a misconception regarding the construction of negative sentences due to L1 interference. Hence, they tend to add the negative inflexion “not” to the main verb in some cases as in their mother tongue instead of adding it to the helping verb, the practice in the English language. The drop of “be” verbs, when used as full verbs, was also found to be common among the participants for they don’t use it at all in their L1. Apart from that it was also observed among the participants of the survey to deviate the word order of an English sentence due to direct translation from L1. It is, for instance, “We yesterday went to temple.” In place of “We went to temple yesterday.” Misuse of verb tenses was the other observation made when analyzing

the writing output of the participants. Most of them used the simple past tense where the present perfect tense is appropriate in English due to crosslinguistic interference.

Semantics deals with meaning, hence, semantic errors by the participants were mostly due to the incorrect choice of words to suit the context. Most of the L2 learners very often attempt to translate utterances from their mother tongue to the target language. This situation can attribute to make semantic errors due to mismatch of certain words. For instance, “do” and “make” may create problems for Sinhala-speaking ESL learners in certain contexts.

4. Conclusion

Both interlingual and intralingual errors are common among ESL learners. Of the two, the former is caused by a phenomenon known as interlanguage which takes place within the learner himself or herself. Interlanguage is one of the stages of L2 learning where the learner is in between L1 and L2. Interlingual errors could be remedied through methodical teaching of underlying grammar rules of the target language before fossilizing them.

5. Acknowledgement

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6. Keywords

Errors, ESL, Interlingual

7. References

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