

# Errors and English Language Teaching

<sup>1</sup>Dr Mandvi Singh, <sup>2</sup>Rashmi Kaushik

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, <sup>2</sup>Research Scholar,

<sup>1,2</sup>Dept. of English and Humanities, Banasthali Vidyapith Rajasthan, India

E-mail Ids: <sup>1</sup>mandvi.chauhan2008@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>kaushikrashmi88@gmail.com

**Abstract:** When we read literature on English language teaching we find that errors have always been considered as an undesirable product of learning. But they are the score cards which tell us about our requirements, improvements etc. The present paper is concerned with elucidating the role of errors in English language teaching especially in a second language setting for teachers, students and researchers as well. It gives us a brief idea of CA (Contrastive Error Analysis) and EA (Error Analysis). It also discusses different types and causes of errors according to Dulay and Burt and Brooks. In this paper a detail discussion of errors as an aid for teachers, scholars and researchers has also been included. It also explains us certain preventions for the commitment of few errors.

**Keywords:** Language learning, Second language, Errors and English Language Teaching.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

In Applied Linguistics various schools have defined errors in a different way. Behaviouristic school of language learning considers errors as undesired product of learning, a kind of sin that has to be avoided. The lack of knowledge of the corrected rules of the target language is the cause of these errors. Brown has defined linguistic error as “noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker reflecting the inter language competence of the learner”. There are very important differences between error and mistake from the linguistics point of view. Where error results from the lack of the proper grammatical knowledge of the learner, mistake is only a failure to utilize the correct rules by the learner. Corder differentiates between errors and defines mistakes as lapses of performance and errors as lapses of competence.

When we look at the reason for committing errors behaviouristic learning theory attempts to provide explanation by stating that errors are committed because of transfer from the first language to second language. “Transfer will be negative when there is proactive inhibition ( this is concerned with the ways in which previous learning prevent or inhibits the learning of new habits)” ( Ellis, 1986 p.22). In behaviouristic school, errors have been considered evidence of non-learning, or the failure to overcome proactive inhibition. Brooks (1960) wrote “Like sin error is to be avoided and its influence overcome” (Brooks as cited in Ellis, 1986 p.22). For this reason attempts were made to predict errors and Contrastive Analysis (CA, here after) came into existence during 1960s .

CA had its root in pedagogy, as it attempted to predict the difficult areas of learning a language. It claimed that most of the errors committed while learning a second language could be the result of interference from the first language. In CA a systematic study of two languages were made to find out the similarities and differences and to predict difficult areas of learning. However it failed to predict all the learning difficulties and was criticized on account of theoretical, practical and empirical investigations, but it proved to be useful in the retrospective explanation of errors.

As an alternative to CA, Corder’s Error Analysis (EA, here after) came into existence. The various studies in the field of applied linguistics like inter language, approximate system and Corder’s error analysis helped researchers to understand that learning a language is seen as a creative process of constructing a system in which learners are constructing hypothesis about the target language from a number of possible resources. Corder was probably the first one to point out and discuss the importance of errors. He divided errors into three types: 1) modality errors which he defined as the errors of level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing 2) he defined the errors of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and style as Linguistic errors, 3) errors of omission, insertion, substitution were defined as errors of Form.

He was of the view that there are mainly two causes of error. (i) Interference of L1 and (ii) inter language. Larry Selinker coined the term inter language in the year 1972. It is a type of language used by L2 and target language learners who are in process of learning a target language.

Apart from Corder, Brooks (1960) gave four causes of error

- (i) “The learner does not know the structural pattern and so makes a random response.
- (ii) The correct model has been insufficiently practiced.
- (iii) Distortion may be induced by the first language.
- (iv) The student may follow a general rule which is not applicable in a particular instance” (Ellis, 1985: p.28).

Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974) defined errors according to their psycholinguistic origins and referred to them as goofs:

“Interference-like goofs, i.e. those errors that reflect native language structure and are not found in first language acquisition data. First language developmental goofs, i.e. those that do not reflect native language structure but are found in first language acquisition data. Ambiguous goofs, i.e. those that cannot be categorized as either interference-like or developmental. Unique goofs, i.e. those that do not reflect first language structure and also are not found in first language acquisition data (Dulay and Burt as cited in Richards, 1974: p.115).”

Corder's (1974) article “The significance of Learner's Errors” provided a positive perspective on errors and they came to be considered as “ inevitable product of learning a language about which the teacher should make as little fuss as possible” ( Corder, 1974 : p.9)

## 2. IMPORTANCE OF ERRORS:

Errors also became important from research point of view as by doing their systematic study one can come to know the process of acquisition or learning of a language. They may help us in understanding the order in which language is processed in the brain of learner and may help us in understanding the learner's in-built syllabus. ( Brown, 1968; Klima and Bellugi 1966; Dulay and Burt 1974, Butterworth and Hatch 1978; Singh 2014)

- From teacher's point of view, they also become important as they can be a kind of aid as “they may provide information about how much language has been learned and how much is left for learning.” ( Stevens, 1969 as cited in Richards, 1974: p.4) Errors can help the teachers in knowing the areas of difficulties “so that they might devote special care and emphasis in their teaching to the overcoming, or even avoiding of the difficulties” (Richards, 1967: p.19).
- The types of error can be helpful in choosing the techniques of teaching to avoid it and also methodology.
- “To the teacher error tell him/her, if he/she undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and consequently what remains for him/her to learn” (Richards, 1967: p.25).
- Errors give an idea of the learner's needs in planning syllabuses. “Errors provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language: going in correct way or wrong way” (Richards, 1967: p.25).
- “Errors are indispensable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn” (Richards, 1967: p.25).
- “Errors by the learners give idea to improve the ability of teachers to create such favorable conditions until we learn more about the way a learner learns and what his built-in- syllabus is for we cannot really teach language. We can only create condition in which it will help develop simultaneously in the mind in its own way” (Richards, 1967: p.27).
- With the help of errors “teachers learn to adapt to learner's need rather than impose upon him /her their preconceptions of how he/her ought to learn, what and when he/she ought to learn it” (Richards, 1967: p.27). They can also inform us about the learner's attempt to internalize the grammar of language s/he is learning and learning strategies s/he adapts for learning a language.

## 3. CONCLUSION:

So we can say that errors can be an important aid for language teaching and error analysis can be made a part of teacher training programme as it can familiarize the teacher student with the type of errors and they can come to know why they keep on recurring.

## REFERENCES:

1. Brown, R.(1968). *The development of wh questions in child speech*. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Behavior*. 7, 279-290.
2. Burt, M., & Kiparsky, C. (1978). Global and local mistakes, in J. Schumann & N. Stenson (Eds.). *New frontiers in second language learning*. Rowley. Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishing, Inc.
3. Butterworth, C., and Hatch, E. ( 1978). *A Spanish-speaking adolescent's acquisition of English syntax*. In E.M. Hatch (Ed.), *Second Language Acquisition: A book of Reading*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers
4. Corder, S. P (1974). *The Significance of learner's Errors*. In J. Richards (ed) *Error Analysis: perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*. England: Longman
5. Ellis, R.(1986) *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.1985. Print.
6. Klima,E.S., and Bellugi,U. ( 1966). *Syntactic regularities in the speech of the children*. In J. Lyons and R. J. Wales (Eds.), *Psycholinguistic Papers: The Proceedings of the 1966 Edinburgh Conference*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
7. Richards, J.C. (1974). *Error Analysis: perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*. England: Longman.