

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF A NIGERIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENT IN A UNITED KINGDOM UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT: *This study presents an error analysis on an adult Nigerian postgraduate student in the United Kingdom. The results reveal that there are a lot of errors which associated with both Interlingua and intralingua. His second language development moves at lower rate. However, in some instances he has been using appropriate aspects of target language; that at certain points he realises inappropriate use of target language and makes self-correction. In terms of teaching implication, some errors can be corrected immediately while others can be delayed because too much negative feedback may hinder the progress of the learner. For example, the omission of /s/ sound can be ignored for immediate correction because it is often unnoticed, whereas errors associated with unmarked verb form can be corrected immediately.*

KEYWORDS: Second Language Acquisition, Inter-language, Error Analysis, Interlingua, Intralingua, Nigeria, Postgraduate Students

INTRODUCTION

In Nigerian context, a number of studies on error analysis have been conducted for example, Oyedokun-Alli (2009) conducted a study on contrastive and error analysis of modification processes in English and Yoruba languages; he (2014) also conducted another study on error analysis of the use of English modifiers among Yoruba bilinguals. Moreover, Uboh (2004) conducted an error analysis study on English complementation patterns among the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) students of the Federal College of Education, Zaria. The former studies were conducted with Yoruba speaking populations in South-western part of Nigeria and are specifically concerned with English modifiers; whereas the latter research is concerned with NCE students' written language. All these studies were conducted with many participants. However, a research on a single person in North-western part of Nigeria has not been established which is specifically concerned with spoken language and postgraduate student in a United Kingdom university. Subsequent upon this, this research seeks to conduct an error analysis of a Nigerian postgraduate student in a United Kingdom university. This study aims to address the following questions:

1. What kinds of errors are recurring in his production of target language?
2. What are the possible causes of such errors?
3. Are there any implications for his second language development?
4. What are the teaching implications?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Second Language Acquisition

Sharwood and Truscott (2005) posit that there are two distinctive aspects in second language acquisition: the developmental perspective and the linguistic perspective. The former perceives second language acquisition as a general process which involves overlapping stages, that it is characterised with the developmental stages, which a learner will acquire the second language in stages, for example, a two-year old child will not have acquired a complex structure of the target language. They also stress that the linguistic perspective is a stepwise movement, which involves movement from one rule system to another. It implies that the acquisition of second language involves movement from one linguistic rule to another, for example, an early learner of the target language may at initial stage acquire one or two words and formulaic utterances before he/she acquires complex linguistic features of the target language. However, it is possible for a language learner at certain points to overlap some developmental stages and a linguistic rule system (Sharwood and Truscott, 2005).

In the same vein, Ellis (2008) stresses that there are two stages of second language acquisition: the early stage and later stage. The former is characterised with a silent period, formulaic sequences, semantic simplification and structure. He claims that at the silent period of first language acquisition child undergoes a lengthy period of listening to people in order to acquire the first language. However, in second language acquisition learners do not require a lengthy period before they begin to talk on the premise that they have already acquired first language. Although a number of studies have been conducted on silent period with the second language learners but different results have emerged; for example, Ellis (2008) reports that study conducted by Seville-Troike reveals that 'many learners particularly classroom learners are obliged to speak from the beginning. But even when production is not required, some learners opt for it'. Moreover, the study of Hanania and Gradman (1917) reveals that an adult learner also undergoes through a silent period. Again, Krashen (1982) argues that the silent period is an opportunity for second language learners to build up competence via listening, thus speaking ability will emerge naturally. This implies that an adult second language learner goes through silent period in an effort to acquire second language.

Lyons (1968) asserts that formulaic sequences are expressions which people learnt as unanalysable whole and employed occasionally in their discourse. This suggests that there are prefabricated utterances that learners must memorise and can be used at appropriate time and context; for example, 'I am sorry, you are welcome, I don't know and thank you' and so on. However, much research reveals that 'formulaic sequences are slowly analysed, releasing constituent elements for use in 'slots' other than those initially occupied (Ellis, 2008); for example, 'I don't know' this formulaic can be built on by combining with the other elements: 'that one I don't know'.

At the structural and semantic simplification stages, Ellis (2008) posits that it involve 'the learner's early creative utterances are typically truncated, which consist of just one or two words with both grammatical factors and content word missing'. This implies that a learner may omit some lexical items and a single or two words may convey his/her meaning. It signifies that the learner simplifies the target language because of his/her limited structure and semantic aspects of the language. For example, Hanania and Gradman (1997) cite an example of an adult subject, Fatima says; 'clean floor (give me something for cleaning floors)'. Moreover, Ellis (1984) finds another instance of simplified speech 'me no blue' (I don't have a blue crayon).

At a later stage, Ellis (2008) asserts that second language is characterised with the acquisition of tense and aspect, syntactic structure, and negatives in English and so on. He states further that a second language learner acquires tense and aspect into two different approaches: the meaning oriented approach and the form oriented approach. The former is concerned with analysis on how learners express temporality at various stages of acquisition; while the latter is concerned with verbal morphology in order to acquire tense and aspect. He also asserts that in the meaning based approach, learners go through three stages: the first stage is learner does not possess any second language linguistic means for expression past time but relies on pragmatic means. In the second stage he/she makes reference to past time explicit by means of different expressions, such as locative adverbials 'in the morning', and 'yesterday' and so on. In the final stage, morphological markers of past tense appear. In contrast, some scholars claim that instructed learners use appropriate morphological markers than naturalistic learners. However, some naturalistic learners are possible to use appropriate morphological markers better than instructional learners on the premise that if they live in the second language environment, whereas instructed learners may have limited time to practise the target language.

Moreover, Krashen (1982) stresses that acquiring negatives in English language involves a series of forms or structures, that at initial stage, negative utterances are featured by external negation, for example, 'no writing here'. In the second stage, internal negation develops, that the particle is moved inside the utterance, for example, 'he no can dance'. At the third stage, the negative involves attachment of modal verbs, for example, 'she won't do', 'he can't swim'. While in the final stage learners acquire the rule of the target language, that they can make negative utterances with tense and number; although some errors may occur such as 'he didn't said it'.

Interlanguage

Second language learners undergo different linguistic stages in the process of learning a target language; this linguistic process is called interlanguage (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). They explain further that the concept was coined by Selinker (1972) which refers to 'a mental grammar that a learner constructs at a specific stage in the learning processes'. This suggests that in the process of learning a target language learner develops and employs his or her own linguistic idiosyncrasies which are peculiar to him/her. Ellis (1990) posits that there are a number of premises which associated with interlanguage: learner language is permeable, that the new linguistic items can easily be penetrated by either internal or external processes, for example overgeneralisation; It constitutes a system which accounts for regularities that are apparent to learner's use of second language; It is also a transitional which a learner must pass through certain developmental stages; as such the learner's interlanguage is variable, that he/she may employ different forms for the same grammatical structure. He further claims that a learner's interlanguage is a kind of learning strategy for mother tongue transfer and intralingua as overgeneralisation and simplification. Again, a learner may supplement his/her interlanguage by means of communication strategies, such as paraphrasing or request for assistance. Moreover, a learner's interlanguage may fossilize, that he/she may stop and fail to achieve native speaker grammar (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005).

A number of research has been conducted on interlanguage development, for example, Klein (1995) conducted a study on form oriented morphology with an Italian learner. The study reveals that the learner develops an order of sequence as follows: the first is the third person 's' and present tense copula. The second is irregular past tense form and verb; the third is present perfect tense; the fourth is regular past tense form; the fifth is future 'shall' or 'will';

and the sixth is past perfect form. Again, Bardovi-Harling (2000) findings corroborate Klein's findings. These findings seem to suggest that second language learners go through similar stages in acquiring tense and aspect.

Error Analysis

Gass and Selinker (2008) define the concept as 'a type of linguistic analysis that focusses on the errors learners make'. This suggests that data of spoken or written language of a learner can be collected and analysed in order to identify certain errors and why these errors occur; and what are the implications for pedagogical purpose and learner's target language development. Moreover, Ellis and Barkhuize (2005) claim that error analysis has three important implications: to serve research purpose, to serve pedagogical purpose, and to act as learning purpose where learners can discover the rules of the target language.

Sources of Error

Gas and Seliker (2005) argue that 'error analysis provides broader range of possible explanations than contrastive analysis for researchers and teachers to use to account for error'. They stress that there are two sources of error: the interlingua error is concerned with transfer from mother tongue or native language interference, for example, in Hausa language the expression 'Kabiru he went to market' 'Kabiru' is personal noun and 'he' is pronoun. While intralingual error is associated with the target language, for example, overgeneralisation, simplification and so on. For example, 'she didn't *wrote* the letter' this error is associated with overgeneralisation. Furthermore, Brown (2007) identifies another source of error, the context of learning on the premise that a learner may make some errors, for example, in a classroom a teacher or textbook may mislead a learner to make faulty hypothesis about language, for example presentation of concepts: *point at and point out*.

METHODOLOGY

The interviewee is a Nigerian postgraduate student in the United Kingdom. He is forty-five year-old. His native language is Hausa, the second largest language spoken on African continent. He lives in a rural area in the northern part of Nigeria. He has not travelled to any country; his first travelling experience is the United Kingdom for his postgraduate study. An informed consent form was given out to him, which clearly stated that the data to be collected is for research purposes only and is anonymous. He filled in the form, which signified his acceptance to participate in the research. A recorded ninety minutes interview was conducted, which divided into three conversations, each with approximate of thirty minutes and focussed on several issues range from his application process for the postgraduate study and Nigerian current affairs. I manually transcribed the data (see appendix A).

Presentation of Data And Analysis

There are a number of errors in the data I collected which cannot be discussed extensively within the scope of this paper. I selected a set of sample of errors to discuss the source of the errors; the implications for my subject's second language development; and well as teaching implications. In terms of phonological aspect, the data indicates that my subject mispronounced a lot of sound symbols and words; for example, in conversation one, line six 'things' he pronounced /th/ sound as /t/ sound. This error is a typical example of interlingual because in

his mother tongue the /th/ sound does not exist. There are also a number of errors which are associated with intralingua, for example, in conversation two, line eight 'monologue' in English pronunciation /g/ sound varies, it depends on a lexical item or which sound proceeds the sound in question. Moreover, in conversation three, line seventeen he mispronounced 'come' because he was influenced by the written form, whereas in English pronunciation /o/ sound in some instances become /ʌ/ sound. Again, such kind of errors can be seen in conversation one, line five 'countries'; in conversation two, line two and four 'subtitle, line eight 'understand and line fourteen 'difficulties', while in conversation three, line nine 'confusing and consensus'.

In terms of grammatical aspect, there are several errors which are associated with both interlingua and intralingua, for example, there are a lot of errors of unmarked verb form, in conversation one, line thirty three 'he finish all the three...' and in conversation two, line two 'I watch...' Moreover, there is the use of overgeneralisation which can be attributed to intralingua, for example, in conversation one, line eighteen 'I didn't succeeded'. Furthermore, there are also several errors on verb phrase agreement, for example, in conversation one, line thirty one 'there are so many...entrance'; while in conversation two, line fourteen 'there is difficulties'. Similarly, there is an omission of 's' in several instances, for example, in conversation one, line eight 'consultation' and in conversation two, line sixteen 'experience'. Moreover, in certain instances he uses a second step of internal negation, for example, in conversation one, line eleven 'wore no using', and in conversation two, line eight 'I no understanding...' This suggests that he demonstrates second stage of acquiring negation. However, in many instances he demonstrates a final stage of acquiring negation, for example, in conversation two, lines five to six 'she didn't know how to dive...'.

In terms of vocabulary usage, he uses appropriate register in most instances; but there are a few instances where he uses inappropriate register, for example, in conversation one line twenty 'passing...', this error is attributed to interlingua. Again, in conversation two, line six 'nearby, line ten 'showing' and line twenty 'in short'; while in conversation three, line ten 'suspicion' and as well as line eleven 'guideline quota'.

In terms of pragmatic, there are several instances he uses the target language which are peculiar to the Nigerian context; such usages may sound inappropriate to native speakers of English; it is possible that there are certain motives behind such usages: he may assume that the interviewer is a Nigerian who shares similar sociocultural background; or he may not have the pragmatic competence to speak appropriately in the target language; for example, in conversation one, line twenty 'in short'. This error is associated with interlingua. Again, in the same line 'passing the document', this expression sounds inappropriate in English if we consider the context, what he is supposed to have said is 'processing the document'; but because of the context I infer what he means. Moreover, in conversation three, line ten 'is leading party...' he uses this expression to mean 'a ruling party'. This may lead to misinterpretation of this expression by native speakers unless they know the context.

Implications for His Second Language Development

Mentalist school of thought claims that second language acquisition is a process, and learners will go through certain linguistic stages in order to acquire the target language, for example, Krashen (1982) argues that there are four stages for acquiring negation. My subject is a middle-aged and at certain instances demonstrates a second stage of acquiring the target language, for example, in conversation one line eleven 'wore no using'. However, in some instances he

demonstrates final stage of negation; for example, in conversation two, line five ‘she didn’t know...’ Ellis (1992) argues that ‘mental grammars of second language learners at certain stages of development appear to allow more than one structural variant for a given construction where the target language has only one form’.

Moreover, in certain instances he uses appropriate aspects of target language, for example, self-correction which indicates mental processing of utterances, in conversation two, line five ‘she doesn’t arh she didn’t ...’ This indicates self-correction. Furthermore, he uses appropriate marked verb form, for example, in conversation one, line eleven ‘the challenges I encountered...’ However, there are several instances which suggest that my subject’s second language development is moving at a lower rate because there are many instances for using unmarked verb form, such as in conversation one, line eight ‘I use the website...’ Again, several instances of missing ‘s’ to complement plural agreement can be seen, for example, in conversation three, line sixteen ‘a lot of experience...’ Again, many instances of overgeneralisation are manifested for example, in conversation one, line eighteen ‘I didn’t succeeded...’

This data indicates that there are several errors which are associated with both interlingua and intralingua. It also reveals that his pattern of second language development is very slow on the premise that at his age is supposed to have spoken English above this level as mentalist argues that ‘all children, where ever and whenever they are born, possess the same blue print for language than it follows that all the world’s language must share important characteristics’. This implies that human beings share important features of language all over the globe; such feature is called ‘universal principle’. Subsequent upon this, a second language learner will pre-set his parameters to the level of the target language in order to acquire the language, yet my subject seems to have not pre-set his parameters efficiently in order to speak the target language fluently.

Furthermore, mentalist argues that environment does not play important role in terms of second language acquisition, but my subject’s inability to progress very rapidly may be associated with the environment, because he lives in a rural area where the predominant language of communication is Hausa, he occasionally speaks English. If my subject lives in a target language environment for a reasonable time, his second language acquisition may have developed better than the present condition.

Teaching Implications

Some scholars argue that grammar correction does not assist learners in second language acquisition and advocates complete abolishing it on the premise that a number of studies have been conducted and reveal that there have been lack of improvement on the various feedback offered to the students (Truscott, 1996, 2007; Truscott and Yi-ping Hu 2008). In contrast, Ferris (2004) argues that feedback offers to students improve their language proficiency on the premise that a number of studies have been conducted such as Ferris and Robert (2001); Lee (1997); Russell and Spada (2006); and Chandler (2003) which indicate that students’ performances have improved based on the feedback they have received from their teachers. However, whether this argument is justifiable or not, my position is offering feedback to student’s speech or writing is important for his/her second language development on the premise that if such errors are ignored students may assume that the language they produced is correct ‘once this happens than fossilisation of errors may take place, as the errors may persistently occur in the learners speech or writing’ (Arege, 2015).

Brown (2007) asserts that 'too much negative feedback and a barrage of interruptions, corrections and over attention to malformations often leads to shut off their attempts at communication'. This suggests that much negative feedback may hinder learners to progress in their attempt to learn second language. In this instance, a teacher may strike a balance that some errors may be ignored and some will be corrected immediately. For example, the omission of 's' can be ignored because this error is often unnoticed and does not significantly change the context of the discourse. It is pertinent to note that this error can be corrected later. On the other hand, errors associated with unmarked verb form will be treated because it will affect the context of the discourse significantly.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this study reveals how my subject's target language acquisition moves at lower rate and the errors which frequently occur in his effort to produce the target language. Although in some instances he produces appropriate target. I offer some teaching implications which may probably assist him towards improving his target language.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was conducted on a single Nigerian postgraduate student in a United Kingdom university. Research which will involve a large number of participants across major Nigerian languages specifically in spoken language may provide valuable insights on their second language acquisition development.

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APPENDIX A**TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW****The interviewer: (S)****The interviewee: (K)****Conversation One**

Line	Person	Transcript
1	S	Hello! How are you?
2	K	Yeah! Fine Mr Sani
3	S	How did you decide to study in England?
4	K	Yeah! I decided to study because of the quality of education (...) of (..) of the
5		nature of education given by the universities of UK are different from other
6		countries... and other things
7	S	How did you process your application?
8	K	Well! I use the websites... first before I made some consultation... my friends
9		studied
9		here before ... as I get the required information
10	S	What challenges did you encounter?
11	K	Ah! The challenges I encountered first (...) the nature ... is different we were no
12		using
12		computers in teaching and learning...
13	S	I'm talking the challenges you encountered during application process
14	M	Yeah! I only fill the application form then I attach my certificate... via email via
15		My via my arh (...) post office... sorry it was hard copies
16	S	I've understood you have offered a scholarship; What challenges did you encounter
17		to secure the scholarship?
18	K	You know anything has to do with fund... I suppose to be here... I didn't succeeded
19		... so there are protocol it has to be through the right channel... the nature of the
20		passing the document... I am not the only one has that problem
21	S	What about visa application?
22	K	(...) I suffered a lot... so my first attempt I didn't succeeded because there was
23		wrong
23		filling ... with some comment
24	S	In Leeds, how did you find learning environment?
25	K	Is quite different from my area... within thirty minutes I have my ID card which
26		I was very surprise
27	S	What about VLE is it a new system to you?
28	K	In short it is the first time... since where I came from... I used to make several
29		consultation...
30	S	What about the use of ID card?
31	K	My first attempt to be in the library...there are so many (...) entrance...
32	S	What learning difficulties did you encounter?
33	K	... the lecturers are very dedicated ... he finish all the three hour lecture...
34	S	How did you solve these difficulties?

35	K	So well the difficulties is now in avoidable wherever you are...I remember even today
36		my friend when we were discussing...
37	S	Thank you very much! we can have a five-minute break
		Conversation two
1	S	Could you tell me any film you have watched recently?
2	K	There are so many film I watch...but le me explain one Indian film which is very ...
3		the title of the film is 'Men phari kya' though I'm not from Indian I'm from Africa
4		... because of the subtitle the film that has I was able to follow the meaning ...
5		what is all about is about... when I watch that film carefully ... she does arh she didn't
6		know how to dive... when the young man came nearby... without wasting time so
7		Just dive arh (...) deep water... she said thank you ... he look at her ... up to now
8		I no understand the statement up to now I'm searching for monologue...
9	S	What do you think is the central message of the film?
10	K	The message of the film is showing generally the message of the film is showing
11		people to live in harmony or to live in peace and harmony...
12	S	What of Hausa Film, which one do you like?
13	K	The one I saw I called 'Komai (...) ya yi tsanani sauki na zuwa' which means one ever
14		there is difficulties sorry in any hardship there must be a relief so I related this
15		statement to this environment
16	S	Can you a little bit describe the film?
17	K	The film is about the survival, young man has no job... he has to eat three square meal
18		... where he was going...seeking for job, seeking for assistance he face so many
19		challenges... that man call his attention assist him to carry him some good...and
20		in short ... because of that they establish...
21	S	Why certain people develop an interest to act in a film?
23	K	To display their skill and culture and tradition
24	S	Thank you very much! We can a have a short break.
		Conversation three
1	S	In Nigeria INEC has rescheduled the general election, do you think INEC is ready to
2		deliver free and fair election?
3	K	Well! So many things have been done so many things have been practising ...from
4		All indications the way I look it now this INEC chairman is a professor from one of the
5		one of the top university in Nigeria... he will not sale his integrity... many people try
6		to see negatively...I have the confidence... they show that their seriousness
7	S	In PDP, the incumbent president was the only candidate presented as its candidate
8		during primary election, do you think PDP will conduct free and fair?
9	K	So a matter of election not only PDP... is more confusing sorry... is highly confusing
10		is must be suspicion... but PDP as I know is a leading party... if you consider the
11		guideline or the quota system... so quota is still on the side of the northern Nigeria...

12	S	What I mean the incumbent president is the leader of the PDP, considering the context
13		of Nigeria, the incumbent president appointed members of the electoral commission,
14		although in theory the commission is independent but in practical isn't independent
16		because federal government finances them. Do think they can deliver?
16	K	... it will not be very easy for them because... a lot of experience has Can (...)
17		been shown that if you have power is not easy for somebody to come and win the
18		election while you are in power you have power... (...) the use of governments'
19		properties the securities all other gadget... if we refer back what happen...
20	S	How do you view the opposition parties' chances of defeating PDP in the election?
21	K	Well it may be easy for the opposition parties to win because of these internal in
22		house problem like you have said the incumbent president arh (...) former...
23	S	How do you view this merger?
24	K	It will be ...to merger to tackle...because for long over sixteen years PDP are ruling
25		Nigeria so even I myself... they met concrete consensus and there is no diversion...
26	S	Thank you very much. This is the end of the interview.