

The Analysis of Errors Made by Iraqi Students in Writing

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Writing plays an effective role in developing one's thinking and enhancing Learning. It is, in fact, a means of widening one's own views about the world for the numerous uses that it can serve (Samuel, 1988:28).

In regard to the unquestionable significance of writing in the teaching – Learning process, the traditional approach seems to be far from being able to put such significance into practice. Traditionalists give priority to formulating students' ideas before using prescribed rhetorical framework and then submitting the written product for grading. Emphasis is, therefore, limited to the prewriting stage where a certain topic is explored, and the role of the teacher is confined to assigning the topic and correcting the final version of student's writing (ibid.).

Writing composition is one of the many skills that the student should develop when Learning a foreign Language. Moreover, it is the most complicated one, since all the other skills from punctuation to the organizing of the content of writing interact when writing takes place.

Teachers of English often face the problem of finding the written composition of their students nothing more than a string of errors in word formation, spelling, punctuation etc. Most teachers bewildered because they often are incapable of identifying the factors behind the errors. There will be a need for an investigation which would help to identify the areas of difficulties, so that, one could attack them scientifically and efficiently.

1.1- The Hypothesis

It is hypothesized, in this study, that some EFL students are unaware of the patterning of discourse strategies and their use in structuring and organizing texts. Experience with EFL written compositions points to certain deficiencies and inaccuracies in sustaining effective progression and achieving coherent organization.

It is expected that analysis of the students' written texts can help in distinguishing the most problematic rhetorical issues in writing and the reasons of producing poor / non – effective written texts.

1.2- Procedures of the Study

The procedures followed in this study include the following:

- 1- Presenting an outline of the study.
- 2- Presenting a theoretical study on the subject.
- 3- After establishing the theoretical framework, steps will be taken to conduct the experimental work. A test will be carried out on the first year students of the College of Arts / Department of English.
- 4- The data will be examined and analyzed to specify the sources of problems that students encounter in writing and that are responsible for producing poorly organized and ineffective texts.
- 5- Summing up findings arrived at through the study.

1.4-The Aim of the Study

The objective of this research is to study and then to classify, describe and explain the causes for the most common errors found in the English writing of the students, with a view to recommending effective remedial measures.

1.5-Limitation of the Study

This study is restricted to investigating EFL student's composition on the morphological level.

Chapter Two

2- Error Analysis

In the process of Learning a new Language, every Learner makes mistakes. These mistakes have attracted the attention of many linguists and foreign Language teachers. They have debated on the difficulties the Learners encounter while Learning a new Language, and about the process of Learning and the circumstances that hinder this process. In fact, Error Analysis is a new approach to know what is involved in the process of Learning a new Language. The identification of the errors made by a learner and their analysis has become a common practice in Language teaching and Learning (Hartmann and Stork, 1972: 78).

Falk (1978: 360) states that " the study of errors made by foreign Language Learners reveals much about the process of Language Learning and the factors that affect this process. One of the chief contributions of Linguistics to the field of foreign Language Learning, therefore, is the area of error analysis ".

This field can be described as one dealing with the differences between the way Learners of a new Language speak or write and the way in which the native speakers of that particular Language speak or write. It is also a technique of measuring progress by recording and classifying the mistakes made by the individuals and groups of students (Hartmann and Stork, 1972: 78).

2.1- Errors and Mistakes

Linguistically speaking, there is no difference between errors and mistakes since they can be used interchangeably. But some linguists have tried to distinguish between mistakes made by the native speakers and those made by the learners of foreign Languages (Corder, 1978 : 63).

Native speakers are supposed to have a complete mastery of their Language; yet they commit mistakes when they use their Language, but when their attention is drawn to these mistakes, they can easily recognize and correct them. These sorts of mistakes made by the native speakers are called mistakes. They are random deviations (unsystematic) and are not caused by the ignorance of the system of the mother tongue. On the other hand, learners of a foreign Language are not aware of their errors. They commit these errors because they do not have an adequate knowledge of the system of the Language they are learning. These sorts of mistakes made by the learners of a foreign language are called errors. They are systematic deviation from the norms of the Language being learnt and are caused by ignorance of the system of the target Language (ibid: 260).

2.2- Error Analysis Why

Error analysis tries to describe and explain errors committed by Learners of a foreign Language while speaking or writing the Language. This analysis is important for foreign Language teachers, textbook writers, course designers and above all the learners themselves. For the teachers, it is important to know the difficulties and problems faced by their students in the course of their learning a new Language. Error analysis reveals the areas of difficulties where the

learners need more careful explanation and guidance. It helps teachers to determine the importance of items included in the syllabus and shows the adequacy or inadequacy of the textbooks and the syllabuses the teachers are following (Etherton, 1977:68).

Error analysis is indispensable to textbook writers and course designers. Many textbooks used for the teaching of English as a foreign Language are written by people who do not know anything about the learners' mother tongues nor have they ever been exposed to the difficulties of the learners. It is in this field that error analysis is most useful. In many cases, it is the only practical way in which a conscientious teacher can find out what words or usages confuse his pupils. In fact, error analysis provides good materials on which courses are designed. The size of the course and the sequence of items are also determined by the results obtained from the analysis of errors. On the basis of the data obtained from the analysis of errors, remedial work can be carried out to help the students to overcome their difficulties (ibid: 69).

Students, too, derive immense benefit from such an error analysis because the teacher will look for better methods of teaching and devise the best ways of helping the students to overcome their difficulties in learning the new Language.

2.3- Causes of Errors

An analysis of errors reveals many causes of their occurrence. Sometimes, more than one of these causes interact, so it is not easy to predict a single cause for a certain kind of error. The most important and obvious cause of errors is the difference between the Learners' mother tongue and the foreign Language which they are Learning. Robert Lado, in his book Linguistics Across Culture (1957 : 2), emphasizes the influence of the mother tongue interference in the process of foreign Language Learning. He states that " when

the Learners are exposed to the Language, they find that some features are easy to them to grasp and others are difficult. Those elements that are similar to their native Language will be simple for them, and those elements that are different will be difficult "(ibid.).

Another cause of errors is overgeneralization of a pattern or a rule, i.e., ' analogy '. The irregularity of the English Language makes the students overgeneralize and as a result produce incorrect forms. Sometimes, textbooks of syllabuses are set in a way that does not meet the actual needs of the students. This will result in an inadequate knowledge of the foreign Language leading to the commitment of many errors by the Learners (Falk, 1978: 360).

Poor teaching and carelessness of the students also play an important role in the appearance of many errors.

Chapter Three

3- The Importance of Writing

According to early audio – lingual methods of teaching Language, it has been believed that speaking a foreign Language is more important than writing it. It is to be asserted that writing, as compared with speech, occupies no less important role than speech in the teaching – Learning process, since both are creative activities, that is, they create Language. Both are effective means of communication. But despite this fundamental similarity, there are many differences between these two modes of communication that make writing worth studying (Raimes, 1987: 36 – 41).

Writing plays an effective role in developing students' mental abilities, for example, in telling a story; students seek to know their world by classifying, categorizing, and using other processes of logic. They can explore their own thinking as they struggle to compose by discriminating among the various feelings and ideas swirling around in their minds. Teachers also benefit more from students' activities in writing. They gain unattainable insights into their students. In fact, students' writings can tell the teachers much about what is happening in the mind of their students (Arapoff 1979: 200). Thus, writing represents a thinking process. It is not a means of merely picturing speech in written symbols. It is much more than an orthographic symbolization of speech, it is a purposeful selection and organization of experience, thoughts, facts, opinions, or ideas (ibid.).

3.1- Reading and Writing Frequency

Researchers, in the field of writing, assert that regular reading has an influence on improving writing. Applebee (1978: 340), for instance, states that "successful writers are also regular readers ". That is, the more one reads, the better his writing will be. According to Krashen (1978: 173), good writers have 'high' competence in reading, while poor ones have 'Low' reading competence. This means that the acquisition of the written competence is made through extensive reading. Krashen (ibid: 175) adds that "good writers do a lot of pleasure readings at all ages, especially during the high school years. This leads to mastery of structure and vocabulary which are essential for writing effectively and correctly ".

Other researchers have proved that writing frequency has an influence on improving writing. Woodward and Philips (1967: 41 – 53) indicate that poor writers have done no writing in high school. Similarly, Krashen (1984: 10) states that "practice in writing, particularly in writing expository prose, leads to improvement in writing ability ".

3.2- The Teaching of Writing

It has often been remarked that writing is the most difficult of the Language abilities to acquire. In fact, there are different stages of writing and we may distinguish three corresponding stages in the production of written Language:

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1- Recognition | Manipulation |
| 2- Structuring | Structuring |
| 3- Interpretation | Communication |

At the first stage, second Language learners, whose first Language employs a different writing system, will have difficulty in manipulating the shapes of English letters and if the first Language system is right-to-left or top-

to-bottom, they will have difficulty with the Left-to-right ordering of English, but this will only be at the initial stage of Learning. With second Language learners, whose first Language makes use of Roman Script, there will be no difficulty at the manipulative stage at all (Allen and Corder : 1974 : 177).

It seems more likely that difficulties occur at the structuring stage. This appears to be the most common assumption judging by the number of books that are available on composition at the sentence level. The difficulty with this assumption is that intensive pattern practice and structural drills do not seem to make it much easier for the learner to write anything except sentence patterns (ibid: 155 – 165).

In fact, the real difficulty associated with writing is to be traced to the communication stage. The circumstances in which a written communication takes place and the social purposes which this written communication serves are not the same as those of spoken communication. This difference between the two modes of communication is crucial for the Language learners (ibid.).

Chapter Four

Morphological Errors

4.1- Parts of Speech

Traditionally, parts of speech are defined according to their meaning or function. In modern descriptions of English, parts of speech are defined in terms of distribution, i.e., the class to which a form belongs is determined by the places in which it occurs. Accordingly, parts of speech can be established in three ways:

- 1- A form may be classified according to the inflectional endings which it takes.
- 2- A form may be classified according to its possible prefixes or derivational suffixes.
- 3- A form may be classified according to its position in a construction larger than one word.

Classes of the first and second types are called ‘morphological’ since they are only words having either derivational or inflectional affixes. Classes of the third type are called ‘syntactic’ or ‘positional’ classes.

They include both words and larger forms (Sledd, 1959: 70– 73).

The types that have been chosen in this part are the first and the second, i.e., morphological. We shall begin our definitions of the parts of speech with the noun.

4.1.1- Nouns

Traditionally, a noun has been defined as the name of a person, a place or a thing. But this definition does not involve those words which stand in the position of other classes, for example, the word ‘red’ is considered an adjective in the sentence; the red book is clean. But, it is a noun in the sentence; Red is not a beautiful color. Thus a noun is defined in modern linguistics as any word belonging to an inflectional series which is built on either or both of the contrasts between singular and plural numbers and between common and possessive or genitive cases, but on no other contrast (ibid.). Nouns have many subclasses. These subclasses are:

- 1- Proper Nouns: These occur only in the singular number, take no determiner and are always definite, e.g., ‘John’, ‘Chicago’ ... etc.
- 2- Common Nouns: These occur in both categories, definite and indefinite. The determiner ‘the’ is used with the plural number to signify definiteness, e.g., the

houses. No determiner is required to express indefiniteness, e.g., houses, corresponding, to the singular form a house.

3- Bounded Nouns: These nouns require a determiner in the singular number, e.g., the house, a house.

4- Unbounded Nouns: These nouns require a determiner only to show definiteness, e.g., the milk, milk (ibid.).

4.1.2- Verbs

A verb is defined as any word belonging to an inflectional series which marks the difference between present and past tense and whose members will fit into a pattern like sing, sings, singing (Hockett, 1958:185).

4.1.3- Adjectives

An adjective is defined as a compared word. Any word that fits into inflectional series like tall, taller, tallest. Adjectives are of two kinds, ‘ limiting’ and ‘ descriptive’, and in the same sentence the former precedes the latter. Thus, the word ‘ useful’ in the phrase useful book is a ‘ descriptive adjective’ which must follow the word this, which is a ‘ limiting adjective’ in the phrase this useful book (Bloomfield, 1935: 202).

4.1.4 – Adverbs

Adverbs, like adjectives, are modifiers. They modify or add to the meaning of verbs, adjectives or adverbs (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1966: 251). Some adverbs are single words like, ‘yet’, ‘then’, etc. Others are obviously formed from an adjective by the addition of suffix such as, ‘quickly’, ‘ clearly’, etc. Others are composed of two words like, ‘ anyway’, ‘sometimes’, etc. (ibid.).

In fact, the adverb is the most heterogeneous of all word classes in English grammar. It contains words which perform a wide variety of functions within the sentence (Crystal, 1985: 150).

4.2- Experimental Procedure

A group of thirty subjects from the first class, Department of English, College of Arts, was chosen. The subjects are non- native speakers of the Language. They take English as a foreign language. Those students are asked to write their own compositions and after examining and analyzing the data, the following errors are found in the use of various items concerning nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

4.2.1- Errors Concerning Genitive Case of Nouns.

(4-1) ... mothers Ali.

(4-2) The doors bell.

4.2.2- Errors Concerning Number

(4-3) Some country outside of Iraq.

(4-4) ... different subject.

(4-5) ... and made these from steels.

(4-6) ... and told me every things.

4.2.3- Errors Concerning Verb Inflection

(4-7) He need.

(4-8) She always help.

(4-9) My best friend who teach me.

4.2.4- Errors Concerning Preterite Forms

(4-10) He begun to help me.

(4-11) She teached it.

(4-12) I did not saw him.

(4-13) He would told him.

4.2.5- Errors Concerning Past Participle Forms

(4-14) He had choose.

(4-15) everybody must be prepare.

(4-16) The child who was name Ali.

(4-17) and I have began to take.

4.2.6- Errors Concerning (-ING) Form of the Verb

(4-18) In Iraq we have many poor people live in it.

(4-19) after finished my work.

(4-20) They saw a man stood beside.

4.2.7- Errors Concerning Adjectives

(4-21) I know much friend.

(4-22) The friends are kinds.

4.2.8- Errors Concerning Adverbs

(4-23) We live in it very good.

(4-24) People come inside the school quiet.

(4-25) the others live very happy.

4.3-Conclusion

The analysis of the students' writings reveal that these students have got a poor command of the English Language. They have made all kinds of errors. It is true that errors are inevitable in the process of learning, but the number and the types of these errors make us think the causes behind their occurrence.

The investigation of the causes of these errors reveals that the students have made most of them because of the interference of their mother tongue (Arabic Language). It was also found that a large number of the errors were due to the difficulties and irregularities of the English Language itself. The method of teaching was also found to be responsible to a great extent for the weakness of the students in English. There were some other factors like inadequacy of time devoted to the teaching, lack of motivation on the part of the students, and the inefficiency of some of the teachers entrusted with the responsibility of teaching the Language.

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خلاصة البحث الموسوم

"تحليل الاخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلبة العراقيون في الكتابة"

تلعب الكتابة دوراً اساسياً في تطوير المعرفة وتعزيزها. وتعد كتابة الانشاء من المهارات المهمة التي ينبغي تطويرها لدى متعلمي اللغة الاجنبية. وغالباً ما يعاني مدرسو اللغة الانكليزية من كثرة الاخطاء التي ترتكب في هذا المجال لاسيما في ما يتعلق بتكوين الجملة، الاخطاء الاملائية، والترقيم... الخ. الامر الذي يستوجب التشخيص والتحديد الصحيح لهذه الصعوبات من اجل الشروع في ايجاد الحلول المناسبة لها.

تتضمن هذه الدراسة اربعة فصول. يحدد الفصل الاول طبيعة المشكلة التي يدور حولها البحث ويبين الاجراءات المتبعة في انجازه، وفرضية البحث.

اما الفصل الثاني فيحتوي على دراسة نظرية للموضوع. حيث يتناول وصفاً وتحليلاً لابرز الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطالب خلال عملية تعلم اللغة الاجنبية فضلاً عن وصف الاخطاء التي يرتكبها متعلمو اللغة والكشف عن اسباب حدوثها.

وقد كرس الفصل الثالث لدراسة اهمية ممارسة مهارة الكتابة نظراً للدور الذي تؤديه في تطوير القدرات الذهنية للطلبة، كما انه يسلط الضوء في المراحل الاساسية لتعلم ويبين تأثير القراءة المنتظمة في تطوير مهارة الكتابة.

وخصص الفصل الرابع والآخر في هذه الدراسة لعرض المكونات الاساسية للجملة واعطاء نبذة عن الاختبار الذي اجري لعينة من طلبة المرحلة الاولى في قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية الاداب/ جامعة بغداد والنتائج المستخلصة من الاختبار.