

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

One way of using mistakes to help in language teaching is to identify the mistakes, then analyse and classify them into categories according to their causes, so that some form of correction to remedy the mistakes can be provided. This whole area of assessing mistakes is known as 'error analysis'.

This chapter gives a brief summary of the historical background of contrastive analysis and error analysis, follow by error analysis, the types and causes of errors, and error analysis in Malaysia.

2.1 Historical Background of Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

In the 1900s, structuralist linguists were systematically comparing two or more languages as a means of restructuring prehistoric stages of the same languages. Later, between 1950s and 1960s came the advent of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). Contrastive Analysis (CA) compares, namely the mother tongue of a group of learners and the language they are learning and gives a description of similarities or differences between this two languages and also predicting the learning difficulties that might arise. Lado in his book *Linguistics across Cultures* (1957) established the theoretical foundations for this hypothesis. He (Lado, 1957: 2) claimed that "*those elements which are similar to [the learner's] native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult*". Although it was not something new, Lado was the first person who not only suggested it but also came up with a comprehensive theoretical treatment and suggested a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. Linguists for applied linguistics, especially in the field

of language teaching used CA to come up with the syllabus and to develop the materials for second- or foreign language teaching. By early 60s, the Center of Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C. sponsored large scale projects to produce CA of English in relation to German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian. In the late 60s, CA projects flourished in Europe forming a major area of linguistics research.

Wardhaugh (1971) says there are two versions of CA: the strong version and the weak version. The strong version which no longer practised in the applied linguistics circle, claims to be able to predict learning difficulty reliably on the basis of a contrasted native language (or first language)/ target language description. The weak version makes a more modest claim of being able to explain a subset of attested errors resulting from native language transfer or also known as crosslinguistic transfer or language transfer. After observing the errors learners actually make, CA can help to explain some of the errors, namely, those which are due to the native language transfer.

However, later there was a shift away from CA. In 1967, Corder advocated learner-language (later known as interlanguage) as a language in its own rights. Learner-language research involves the three 'languages' that meet in the learner: the first language (L1) / mother tongue (MT), the second language (L2) / target language (TL) and the interlanguage (IL). In an attempt to develop a more comprehensive theory of second- and foreign language learning, data were collected and examined for evidence of specific language learning strategies and processes through this learner-language research. Thus this field of Error Analysis (EA) and interlanguage came into prominence (Richards, 1985:62).

2.2 Error Analysis

As mentioned above, error analysis (EA) was advocated by Corder in 1967 and emerged as a reaction to the view of second- and foreign language learning proposed by contrastive analysis theory, which saw language transfer as the central process involved in second- and foreign language learning. James (1998: 2) puts forth the suggestion to provisionally define a language error as an unsuccessful bit of language, thus he defines EA as the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language. He says, although *“the study of human error-making in the domain of language error analysis is a major component of core linguistics; error analysis is a branch not of linguistic theory (or ‘pure’ linguistics) but of applied linguistics”* (James, 1998: 3).

Richards, et al. (1992: 127) defines EA as a study of errors made by second language learners and he agrees with James that EA is a branch of applied linguistics. He also says:

“Error analysis set out to demonstrate that many learner errors were not due to the learner’s mother tongue but reflected universal learning strategies. Error analysis was therefore offered as an alternative to contrastive analysis.”

(Richards, 1992:127)

Corder (1981) points out that EA has two functions: theoretical and practical. For this study, only the later function will be considered because it relates to the practical aspect of language learning and teaching. When mistakes are studied and analyzed by teachers, they served as a teaching strategy. They also aid the teachers in planning appropriate feedback or what remedial action to take. In Corder’s term, this is known as ‘remedial teaching’ and is necessary:

“When we discover a mismatch between a learner’s (or a group of learners’) ‘knowledge of the language’ and the linguistic demands of some situation in

which he finds himself and the degree of mismatch determines whether and how much remedial teaching is necessary.”

(Corder, 1981: 54)

2.2.1 Errors and Mistakes

Corder, in his earlier writing on errors, made a distinction between ‘errors’ and ‘mistakes’. He claims that ‘mistakes’ were ‘the product of chance circumstances’ while ‘errors’ were those that reflected incompetence in a language (Corder, 1967). Errors allow the learner to form and test hypothesis about the nature of the new language that he is learning and errors provide the researchers with information on the progress of the learner in the learning process and evidence of how a second language is acquired. It is not easy to strike at one clear definition of errors because different writers view them differently as shown by the two definitions below:

“An error in spoken English is the use of a linguistic item in a way which, according to fluent users of the language, indicates faulty learning or incomplete learning.”

(Chun et al., 1982: 538)

Edge (1989: 5) defines Corder’s ‘errors’ as ‘linguistic mistakes’. He views ‘mistakes’ as ‘those which affect meaning and communication’ and divides them into three categories, namely:

- i. Slips which learner can identify and self correct
- ii. Errors which learners cannot self-correct because they do not know how to although the language has been taught
- iii. Attempts which learners cannot identify nor self-correct because they have not learnt the language needed to express what they want to say.

For this study, the researcher did not make any distinction between errors and mistakes.

2.2.2 The Scope of Error Analysis

Error Analysis is not a narrow academic pursuit. Its scope is wide and widening. Listed below is the scope of EA (James, 1998; Richards, 1974 and 1985):

- i. In EA, first language (L1) interference is not the sole factor that is affecting the second language (L2) or foreign language learning.
- ii. Errors are not viewed as failure but as evidence of the learner's developing system in EA.
- iii. EA provides insight into how students process language data, i.e. their strategies of second language communication. EA also tries to account for learner performance in terms of the cognitive processes that learners make use of in organizing the input they receive from the target language.
- iv. Influenced by the innatist view of learning, EA looks into how L2 learners are actively constructing data and adapting rules to TL system.
- v. The errors may be classified as:
 - a) interlingual
 - b) intralingual and developmental.

2.2.3 Interlingual Errors

Richards, et al. (1992: 187) defines interlingual error as an error which results from language transfer, that is which is caused by the learner's native language. Learners' L1 provides 'a rather rich set of hypotheses' which learners can use when learning a L2 or a foreign language. For example, Malaysian learners of German who speak English, irrespective of ethnic group, tend to say:

** Ich bin studiere an der Universität von Malaya.*

(Ich studiere an der Universität von Malaya.)

'I'm studying in University of Malaya.'

Continuous tense exist in English but it does not exist in German. The learners transfer the ‘continuous tense’ in the English sentence structure into the German structure. Gass (1983) says that language transfer is no longer viewed as the manifestation of a learner’s inability to resist native language patterns. Instead, it is thought to interact with L2 developmental processes, in ways far from fully understood.

Richards (1985: 66) puts forth that the differences between the L1 and the L2 of the learner may affect second language learning in various ways. It may influence the rate at which the second language is learnt. The higher the number of differences that exist between the two languages, the slower the learner will be able to master the L2.

These differences may also lead to the learner to avoid using certain target language forms. For examples, whenever they could, some Malaysian learners of German tried to avoid using sentences that required them to use ‘*wofür, wovon, dafür, davon, etc.*’;

Wofür hast du eigentlich so viel Geld bezahlt?

(They ask instead: *Für was* hast du eigentlich so viel Geld bezahlt?)

‘What did you pay so much money for?’

Wovon bist du denn so müde?

(They ask instead: *Warum* bist du denn so müde?)

‘What has made you so tired?’ / ‘Why are you so tired?’

Due to the differences between the L1 and L2, learners with a topic-prominent L1 (like the Japanese and Chinese learners) appear to overuse those English structures that have a similar function, such as markers of extra position: ‘It is unfortunate ...’, ‘It is appreciated that’, ‘There is ...’, etc.

Lastly, these differences may also constrain the acquisition process. L1 forms part of the learner’s previous knowledge and thus might constrain the hypothesis that he or she can make about the target language or L2. This knowledge and exposure to L2 shapes their perception of what is language specific and language universal which in turn affects their transfer decision. Kellerman (1978, cited in Richards, 1985:66) found that

learners resist transferring items such as idioms, which were perceived to be L1 specific and nontransferable, even when the two languages share the same idioms. This shows that the phenomenon of language transfer is not a mechanical transference of L1 structures but a cognitive mechanism involving many factors.

2.2.4 Intralingual and Developmental Errors

Intralingual errors are those errors that reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn the conditions under which the rules apply. Developmental errors illustrate the learner's attempt to build hypotheses about the second language from his limited experience. However, it is sometimes quite difficult to distinguish intralingual errors from developmental errors.

The types of errors will be discussed further in the section below together with the causes of errors.

2.3 Types and Causes of Errors

According to Richards (1974: 174), there are four types of intralingual errors. The types of errors and their causes are discussed below.

2.3.1 Overgeneralization

These types of errors cover instances when learners create a deviant structure on the basis of their experience of other structures in the target language (TL). For example, the ending for the third person singular is *-t* in German, hence deviant structures such as *er möchtet, sie möchtet, er kannt, sie kannt*, etc are created. The learners forget that the first person singular and third person singular share the same ending for modal verbs (*Modalverben*). This may be caused by the learners' attempt to reduce their

linguistics burden, thus relieving the learners of considerable effort. Overgeneralization is also associated with redundancy reduction. For example ignoring the tense marker in English: **“Yesterday I visit my sick neighbour at the hospital.”* The –ed marker appears to carry no meaning since the use of ‘yesterday’ indicates pastness lexically. This error can be perpetuated by certain types of teaching techniques, i.e. described as overlearning of the structure (e.g. the third person singular ending for German verbs – *t*).

2.3.2 Ignorance of Rules Restrictions

This type of error results from the application of rules to contexts which they do not apply, or when learners fail to observe the restrictions of existing structures. For example, a learner’s attempt to use the same preposition elsewhere or to produce similar construction of sentence / similar verb which he or she had learnt and memorized (‘He said to me’); *‘She asked to me’ and *‘She told to me’. His or her experience with the Subject – Verb – Object constructions makes the learner feel there is something incomplete with ‘She asked me’ or ‘ She told me’, thus the learner adds the preposition ‘to’ after the pronoun ‘me’. Incorrect rules are often applied through this kind of analogy.

2.3.3 Incomplete Application of Rules

It is often that more than one rule must be applied to produce an acceptable sentence. For example, the changing of an active sentence into a passive form will require the application of the aspect rule, the use of the past participle, the inversion of the subject / object positions and the inclusion / exclusion of the agent. The systematic difficulty in the use of a question is another example. A statement may be used as a question, or a question word may be simply added to a statement, often resulting in a faulty

expressions. For example, the teacher asks: '*Was machst du gern in deiner Freizeit?*' and the student answers: *'*Ich mache gern in meiner Freizeit Fußball spielen.*'. Redundancy may be an explanatory factor especially when the second language learner finds that he / she can achieve more than the elementary rules in question usage. Motivation to achieve communication may exceed motivation to produce grammatically correct sentences.

2.3.4 False Concepts Hypothesised

This type of error is regarded as a semantic error, i.e. errors derived from 'faulty comprehension of distinction in the target language'. For example, the learner has failed to understand that the verb to be 'was' – when interpreted as a marker of past tense: might lead the learner to produce erroneous sentence structure like: * *One day it was happened* (Richards, 1974: 177).

Other errors include those on lexical items which have contrastive meanings, e.g.: *'*Can you borrow me your book?*', instead of '*Can you lend me your book?*', *'*I'll come with you.*', instead of '*I'll go with you.*'

2.4 Error Analysis (EA) in Malaysia

Most institutes of higher learning in Malaysia offer the teaching of foreign languages as their elective courses. There have been quite a few researches done on contrastive analysis between Malay and these foreign languages together with an error analysis. For examples, Alicio (1996) had done a contrastive analysis and error analysis research on the verbal systems on Malay and Spanish, Lim (2001) had done an error analysis research of the use of the past tense in French by Malay students and Teh (2006) had done a research on the learning of French articles by Malay secondary students. There were also various other error analysis researches done on Arabic, on Malay and other

local languages like Chinese and Tamil, and English, the second language in Malaysia. As mentioned before in Chapter 1, Schmitz (1991) was the only one who had done a study on contrastive analysis of German and Malay together with an error analysis, focusing on the problems of source language interference among Malay learners of German, with a small part dedicated to German articles. This study is the only one that has attempted to do a research on error analysis, concentrating on the use of German articles by Malay learners.

2.5 Conclusion

Mistakes or errors should not generate negative reactions and be regarded with apprehension. They are in fact an asset to both the language teachers and the linguistics experts as learners' mistakes is arguably one vital area in understanding how learners learn or acquire a second or foreign language. Teachers as classroom researchers can analyse errors, establish the possible causes and decide on the best way and time to overcome them.

The following chapter will describe the German articles and the Malay determiners.