

LEARN-IN

SUBSÍDIOS PARA PROFESSORES DE INGLÊS

**TYPES OF ERRORS AND THEIR
ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

apliesp

Merianye Souza

Associação dos Professores de Língua Inglesa do Estado de São Paulo

Editor

Jaime Cará Junior

Autor

Merianye Souza

Revisor

Renata Condi de Souza

Leitor crítico

Renata Condi de Souza

Conselho editorial

Karen Sillig

Karine Guerra

Wendell Dantas

Merianye Souza

Samantha Mesojedovas

Daniela Alencar

Designer

Jaime Cará Junior

Agradecemos a todos aqueles que direta ou indiretamente contribuíram para a realização desta obra, em particular aos membros do conselho editorial, que se empenharam entusiasmadamente.

Todos os direitos reservados. Nenhuma parte desta publicação poderá ser reproduzida ou transmitida por meio eletrônico, mecânico, fotocópia, ou se qualquer outra forma sem a prévia autorização do editor.

Learn-in : Subsídios para professores de inglês – Types of errors and their role in the process of learning a foreign language / organizador Jaime Cará Junior . – São Paulo : APLIESP, 2013.

Merianye Souza.

Bibliografia.

1. Língua estrangeira – Estudo e ensino I. Cará Jr, Jaime.

CDD-407.07

TYPES OF ERRORS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE



Merianye Souza

Abstract: When we have any new experience, we make attempts and, as a consequence, we can commit errors before achieving our goals. These errors are the focus of this text, because they have a role to play in the acquisition of a foreign language. In this work, we will briefly analyze errors, how and why they happen, what categories of errors exist, how effective teaching is, among other considerations.

Key Words: foreign language, error, learning.

Introduction

With the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), errors are no longer regarded as taboo in the learning process, but they are now seen as indicators of progress in interlanguage development, and so allies of both teachers and learners. This is actually one of the main features that set CLT apart from other approaches to teach foreign languages: Tolerant attitude towards students' errors (MA, 2009). According to the same author, CLT treats different errors respectfully, taking into consideration a series of elements in the correction process.

In an English as a Second Language class, students learn and develop a language subsequent to their mother tongue. They develop new skills and knowledge about a language they use for business, research, relationships or even in their free time. Students are willing to speak, write, read, and listen in a language different from the one they learned from their parents. Brown (2002, *apud* Altenaichinger, 2002, p. 9) states that "second language learning is a process in which varying degrees of learning and of acquisition can both be beneficial, depending upon the learner's own styles and strategies".

As matter of fact, when we have any new experience, we make attempts and, as a consequence, we can commit errors before achieving our goals. These errors are the focus of this text, because they interfere in the acquisition of a foreign language. For years, researchers have been analyzing the origin of some errors, how and why they happen, what categories of errors exist, how effective teaching is, among other considerations. During the process of learning a foreign language, we, teachers, need to be aware of some factors which interfere in students' achievements, as for example, their social conditions, age, different learning styles, influence from their mother tongue, and learner's psychological conditions. These factors are some of the reasons for students to commit errors.

Researching about English as a Second Language and Oral errors, I could understand what I am used to hearing from Brazilian students. For example, when I am teaching English, it is common to hear sentences like:

1. “I have fifteen years old”, instead of “I am fifteen years old”.

When talking about age, we use the verb ‘to be’ not the verb ‘to have’. Also, Brazilian students may translate the verb they use in Portuguese into English.

2. “Have someone at the door”, instead of “There is someone at the door”.

Again, the mistake here is related to “flawed” translation. Because in Portuguese the verb ‘ter’ (to have) is widely used meaning the existence of something or somebody.

3. “The Germany is a develop country”, instead of “Germany is a developed country”.

Articles are usually misplaced in sentences when students make connection with their mother tongue.

4. “We still have to buy some furnitures”, instead of “We still have to buy some furniture”.

In English, some words are called ‘uncountable’, like the word ‘furniture’, and they are not written in a plural form with a ‘s’.

It is commonly argued that learning about errors allows us teachers to become more proficient when dealing with daily slips, while helping students develop their communicative competence by addressing more precisely what we need to work on. Throughout the texts and activities that I propose here, you’ll be invited to reflect on different types or errors to try and get ahead of them, becoming better equipped to deal with students most common difficulties.

1. What about you? What are the most common mistakes you see? What do you think might cause them?

How is error typically seen in spoken English?

The word ‘error’, in the 1960s, was related to making corrections. In contrast, after Chomsky’s research, error has started to be associated to ‘learning’ (CARAZZARI & CARNEIRO, 2008). As matter of fact, teachers feel responsible for correcting errors with the objective of improving their students’ learning. Researchers seek more information about what interferes in the acquisition of

the target language, related to learners' mother tongues or to the strategies used by teachers. Karra (2006) states that such research is important not only to study the errors when learning a second language, but to improve language competence as well.

Not only teachers, but also people from other areas might have a very extreme positioning regarding "proper English".

HENRY HIGGINS: A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere – no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon. (SHAW, 1916: 12)

It is important to bear in mind that a native speaker of English might commit mistakes while speaking. But it is even more important to be aware that any given 'error' can only be considered as such in relation to a standardization. That is, an error would be anything that is not in accordance with Standard English (the one established by grammars and canonical books).

Also, many of those so called 'errors' would actually be, in a sociolinguistic perspective, a clash of patters of different language varieties. A language variety is a specific shape of a language or language cluster, including specificities regarding accents, vocabulary, registers, syntax, styles or other sociolinguistic variation. That is to say that language varies socially, in the sense that the social usage of language shapes its proprieties, in a way that a given social variety of a language is characterized by its own phonological, syntactic, and lexical properties (O'Grady et al: 2001).

Again, language varies socially and, according to Sapir (1939: 1), it happens that way "because language is a purely historical heritage of the group". Henry Higgins's speech, above, a character who is a specialist in Phonetics in the book *Pygmalion*, shows how the way we speak label our origins and our status in the society. The character can tell people where they are from just by listening to their speeches. Next, after working hard he helps a girl who sells flowers to become a lady by giving her the necessary support to speak better English (SHAW, 1912). When teaching English, the idea of speaking properly is reinforced. As a result, learners will have a better acceptance when talking to a listener who has English as his/her first language.

2. What is good English after all? How can we draw a line between error and inappropriateness?

What is the role of an error?

Most of the time, students can internalize a correct form of sentences in English by doing it wrong the first time. Feedback from teachers may help students overcome their obstacles when facing a conversational situation. "Correction of errors is as important as identification and description of them. The sources and the sorts of the errors are determiners for the sort of feedback" (ERDOGAN, 2005: 270). Brown (1994) says that learners expect errors to be corrected. In fact, a positive feedback might be provided since it carries an affective and a cognitive effect on students. In

addition, it is important to mention that a single grammar error may occur, but it does not prevent the message of being understood (Brown, 1994).

Also, errors are part of the learning process since they are common even among English speakers. It is a paradox to teach how to speak properly and follow rules, when at a communicative situation some mistakes are acceptable.

Teachers have to make sure the conversation in English in class is effective and that the 'errors' are monitored. Teachers need to understand that students learn also based on their previous knowledge of their own language. In other words, we have to value students' achievements, helping them face obstacles due to the level of their English, when people do not understand their effort to learn a new language.

According to Brown (1994: 255), "one of the major obstacles in learning to speak is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting things out that are wrong, stupid or incomprehensible".

3. Error analysis is really important in the learning environment. What are some positive aspects of dealing with errors when teaching English?

TYPES OF ERRORS

Language teachers are, most of the time, focusing on testing students' writing, speaking, listening, and reading. Within these four abilities, it is common for some teachers to condemn some slips students make. Errors are inevitable. They can show what cognitive strategies the students use to learn. Thus, it is necessary to know what types of errors we can face and how to address them.

According to Corder (1973, *apud* Erdogan, 2005, p. 264), errors are "different between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version. However, his classification is not enough to describe errors" Some characteristics are used to classify and describe the different types of errors. When they are classified, it helps teachers to give a better diagnosis (ERDOGAN, 2005). Muhamad (2013), when investigating errors Malaysian students have made in their oral presentation in an English for Academic Purposes course, gave some examples of common errors and their classification, as follow.

- a) Omission: It can be a morphological or a Syntactical omission.
E.G.:
 1. Let's go ^ the beach.
 2. (...) one who is not entitled to make any claim against ^ government.
 3. It ^ stated in this verse ...
- b) Addition: It can be in morphology, syntax or lexicon.
E.G.:
 1. She will to* see her tomorrow.
 2. (...) children may happen* to see* to* develop behavioral or...
 3. (...) actually article 5 it* mentions about...

- c) Misinformation: It can be in morphology or syntax.
E.G.:
 1. My English classes are at* Sundays.
 2. We cannot guaranteed* that the doctor will limit himself.
 3. (...) just this* issues create chaos in society nowadays.
- d) Misordering: It can be in pronunciation, morphology, syntax or lexicon.
E.G.:
 1. Where is my key car*?
 2. So, you are* really free today?
 3. I just want to ask if is he* ok.

Finally, when dealing with any type of error, teachers need to use their experience and intuition to give feedback reinforcing theory and self-confidence. It is part of their obligations to help students improve their skills, making sure they speak clearly and effectively.

4. Identify the type of error in each sentence and write the correct form.

- a) The cases of violent have been increasing since last year.

- b) I move on to for my argument.

- c) US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on Saturday accused Beijing involvement in cyber espionage against Washington.

- d) I can't understand what she say because of the noise.

- e) They not just will affect you.

- f) They are travelling to the Japan next year.

- g) Some university's students have been exposed to English language.

h) Some opponents of this group has realized the importance of working together.

i) They have always complains about their prices.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This study has focused on how important oral errors are to students and teachers. When they become a medium to improve language and to help teachers to better address the difficulties students face in their classes. Erdogan (2005) believes people learn a second language in a similar way that a child learns his/her first language: committing mistakes and learning from them. In addition, he asks (2005, p. 261): “why do students go on making the same mistakes even when such mistakes have been repeatedly pointed out to them?”. Following this question, he explains that when learning a second language, mistakes are ‘person made’. Indeed, they are necessary to discover how the language is being learned. I believe that when teachers start thinking about errors as a medium for their work, students might feel better when learning a new language, instead of feeling frustrated about grades or bad feedbacks.

Furthermore, Erdogan (2005) states that there is research about errors which can help us to understand their origin. They are not caused because of learners’ native language; in contrast, they can happen because of some learning strategies.

Researchers are focused on why some types of errors occur and how to deal with them. Meanwhile, we stay between the idea of error as a human characteristic and the idea of ‘The Queen’s English Society’ where “Good English Matters”, and they are striving to make sure the standard English is being used, starting from their daily life. We are all talking to each other in English on business, universities, and government; conversely, there are people who believe not everybody is speaking English, because of the considerable variations English has depending on geographic region or who is speaking it.

As we have seen, errors are important because, from them, we can focus on how people are developing the language, what strategies we can use for teaching–learning; meanwhile, students can learn from them, internalizing the correct form. Regardless of that, everybody needs to be aware of the implications of learning a foreign language. They are going to influence not only the learning process itself, but also students’ lives.

c) US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on Saturday accused Beijing involvement in cyber espionage against Washington.

Omission: US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel on Saturday accused Beijing ^ involvement in cyber espionage against Washington.

The student has omitted the preposition 'of' before the word 'involvement'.

d) I can't understand what she say because of the noise.

Misinformation: I can't understand what she say* because of the noise.

This sentence shows students who are not able to understand the situations in which the grammatical form is expected to be used. In this case, in the Present Simple, after the pronoun 'she' the verb receives an 's'.

e) They not just will affect you.

Misordering: They not just will* affect you.

The sentence above shows that the modal verb 'will' was not placed correctly. The correct way is: "They will not just affect you."

f) They are travelling to the Japan next year.

Addition: They are travelling to the* Japan next year.

The addition of articles shows the difficulty learners have when they don't practice situations in which they use articles in the foreign language. If the usage is different in their mother tongue, they'll make the wrong association (Muhamad, 2013).

g) Some university's students have been exposed to English language.

Omission: Some university's students have been exposed to ^ English language.

As in the last exercise, students do not know when they have to use the articles, so they end up adding or omitting them. They should place the article 'the' in front of the word 'English'.

h) Some opponents of this group has realized the importance of working together.

Misinformation: Some opponents of this group has* realized the importance of working together.

Students are confused when other words are placed between the subject and the verb. In this case, the subject is in the plural form, and it should be followed by 'have'.

i) They have always complains about their prices.

Misordering: They have always* complains about their prices.

Adverbs are confusing for a non-native English speaker. They try to place them in a way people can at least understand, even if is not written. The adverb 'always' goes before the verb 'have'.

REFERENCES

- ALTENAICHINGER, A. (2002). Theories of Second Language Acquisition. In: HAMMERL, Martin H. and NEWBY, David. **Second Language Acquisition: The Interface Between Theory and Practice**. Retrieved from: <http://www.ecml.at/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=/oW/wPuvuWs=>
- BROWN, H. D. (2004). **Teaching by Principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy**. Upper Sadle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- CARAZZARI, M. R. P. & CARNEIRO, T. G. (2008). **Um Estudo De Caso Sobre Os Tipos De Erros Oraís De Alunos Novatos De Língua Inglesa—Le**. Retrieved from: <http://www.seer.ufu.br/index.php/dominiosdelinguagem/issue/view/611>.
- ERDOGAN, V. (2005). **Contribution of Error Analysis to Foreign Language Teaching**. Retrieved from: http://efd.mersin.edu.tr/dergi/meuefd_2005_001_002/pdf/meuefd_2005_001_002_0261-0270_erdogan.pdf.
- KARRA, M. (2006). **Second Language Acquisition: Learners' Errors and Error Correction in Language Teaching**. Retrieved from: <http://www.proz.com/translation-articles/articles/633/>.
- MUHAMAD, A. J.; SHAH, M. I. A.; IBRAHIM, E. H. E.; SARUDIN, I.; MALIK, F. A.; GHANI, R. A. (2013). **Oral Presentation Errors of Malaysian Students in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Course**. Retrieved from: [http://idosi.org/wasj/wasj21\(SLTL\)13/3.pdf](http://idosi.org/wasj/wasj21(SLTL)13/3.pdf).
- O'GRADY, W., ARCHIBALD, J., ARONOFF, M. and REES-MILLER, J. Eds. (2001). **Contemporary Linguistics: an introduction**. Boston: Longman.
- SAPIR, E. (1939). **Language, an Introduction to the Study of Speech**. New York: Harcourt, Brace and company.
- SHAW, B. (1916). **Androcles and the lion; Overruled; Pygmalion**. New York: Brentano.