

Error Analysis of English Language Performance of the KKU Freshmen Students

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Introduction

Learning a second language is a process of trial and error. Errors do occur when a learner uses a target language in a real situation. According to the psycholinguistic view-point, a learner develops his own competence in a target language by means of formulating, testing and reformulating his hypotheses of interlanguage grammar. The technique of Error Analysis has revealed that errors from mother-tongue interferences account for only one-third of the total errors (Dulay and Burt 1974 : 106). Most errors are from target language hypotheses that the learner has formulated.

Purposes of the study

This study was undertaken to investigate hypothetical student errors. With the Inter-language and Error Analysis as the conceptual framework, the study aims to :

1. investigate the errors made by the students to identify hypothetical student errors.
2. find a correlation between the most frequent errors and the faculty groups using Chi-square.
3. compare the most frequent errors with the linguistic items taught in the freshmen English courses in order to determine content areas for future courses.

The findings are to be used as relevant information for determining the contents of future courses and extracurricular language activities provided in the Resource Center. Certainly, the findings will help teachers to see the difficulties inherent in the structure of English.

Methodology

The error data were elicited from a written picture-series composition and a translation. The former helps to establish the classification of errors. The latter served as the main data for the investigation. The first data were collected at the beginning of the first semester and the second data at the end of the second semester.

The subjects of the study consisted of 250 randomly selected 1987 KKU freshmen students. The sample size is 18 % of the whole population from 13 faculties. These faculties are divided into three main groups: the medical science group, the science and technology group, and the humanities and social science group.

The error analysis consisted of identifying the types of errors and the most frequent syntactic and lexical errors. In addition, the classification of errors was made to show which errors are interlingual errors and

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which are intralingual and developmental errors. The comparison between the most frequent errors and the linguistic items taught in the freshmen English courses revealed that certain linguistic items need to be inserted into the course contents.

Findings and conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis, the following findings and conclusions were arrived at :

1. The ten most frequent errors from the composition were omission/inappropriate use of vocabularies, third person inflection, articles, spelling, verb forms, no main verb punctuation, past tense, present tense, parts of speech.
2. The most frequent errors from the translation were both of the syntactic and lexical levels. They were tenses, third person inflection, articles, comparative constructions, verb forms, spelling, prepositions, hypothetical: past perfection, relative pronouns (subject and possessive), negation-tag clauses, and object-past-participle complement.
3. Within the errors mentioned above, some errors showed the mother-tongue interference but only in a small proportion.
4. Inadequate lexical knowledge led to the errors of overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and building of false concepts.
5. The correlation test revealed that the faculty groups do not correlate with the following items: tenses, third person inflection, comparative constructions, verb forms, prepositions, hypothetical: past perfection, relative pronouns (subject and possessive), and negation-tag clauses. On the other hand, a correlation appeared in the following items: articles, object-past-participle complement, and spelling.
6. The comparison of the most frequent errors and the faculty groups showed that certain linguistic items need to be added in the course contents. They are subject-verb agreement, negation-tag clauses, comparative constructions, prepositions, object-past-participle complement, articles, and relative pronouns. In addition, we should also be concerned with word order, vocabularies, and spelling. However some linguistic items, such as past tenses, tenses in hypothetical situations, and do-as-auxiliary, which are taught in the course, appeared to be sources of frequent errors. It might be said that these items in Thai, especially tense, do not possess as much complexity of usage as those in English. Thus we might conclude that errors made by KKU freshmen students are both from interlanguage and the mother-tongue interference.