

Syntactic and Morphological Error Analysis in English Language among Secondary School Students of Kerala

Dr. P Usha¹, Noora Abdul Kader²

¹Associate Professor Department of Education University of Calicut

²Junior Research Fellow Department of Education University of Calicut

Abstract: Error analysis is an applied linguistics approach used to identify areas of great difficulty for second language learners. Survey method was conducted to find out the syntactic and morphological errors in English language among secondary school students and also the causes of these errors in the perception of secondary school English language teachers. The investigators selected 280 secondary school students randomly from the three districts of Kerala to find out the syntactic and morphological errors. 30 secondary school English language teachers were selected randomly from the two districts of Kerala to find out the causes of errors. Language acquisition test and questionnaire were the tools used in the study and the result was analysed using the statistical technique of percentage analysis. Result of the study revealed that concord in auxiliaries, SVO pattern, articles, prepositions and tenses are the major types of syntactic errors, where as affixation and compound related errors, failure to use the marker (-er) and conversion related errors are the major types of morphological errors. Attitude of students, intra lingual and interlingual interference, method of teaching and teacher factor are the major causes of errors as revealed from the perception of teachers. The investigators also pinpointed certain suggestions to overcome the syntactic and morphological errors among secondary school students.

I. Introduction

Error analysis is an applied linguistics approach used to identify areas of great difficulty for second language learners by applying a system of formal distinction to differentiate between the learner's first language (L1) and target language (L2; Corder, 1967; Dulay, 1982). Such analysis is based on the understanding that both intralingual and interlingual factors determine the type of errors. Whereas the former involves difficulties faced by the learner due to distinctive linguistic features of the L2 itself, the latter involves the direct interference of negative transfer of structures and other features from the L1 to the L2. As use of error analysis has led to discovery that learners' errors reflect a gap in their competence, order of acquisition and accuracy in order of learning, it has become an important instrument in first and second language learning research.

According to Odlin (1989), L1 syntactic, phonetic and morphological features exert powerful influences on production of L2 structures and pronunciation. Selinker (1992) clarified that transfer of L1 structure to L2 performance is negative and errors are inevitable when L1 and L2 structures differ but positive when the structures are similar. A particular challenge identified by Cook (1992) is that regardless of the teacher's efforts, L1 knowledge remains present in the minds of L2 learners, who connect it with L2 knowledge. He therefore warned not to treat the L2 in isolation from the L1. In contrast, Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) found that most errors were related to tense due to lack of time sequence.

II. Objectives Of The Study

- To identify the type of syntactic errors made by secondary school students
- To identify the type of morphological errors made by secondary school students
- To trace out the causes of syntactic and morphological errors in English language among secondary school students.
- To provide suggestions for reducing syntactic and morphological errors in English language among secondary school students

III. Methodology

Sample

The study was conducted on a random sample of 280 secondary school students selected from the districts of Malappuram, Thrissur and Kozhikode to identify the syntactic and morphological errors through survey method. 30 secondary school English teachers were selected from the districts of Malappuram and

Thrissur in the state of Kerala to identify the causes of syntactic and morphological errors through survey method.

Tools Employed For Data Collection

- Language acquisition test (Noora & Usha)

Language acquisition test with five descriptive questions was given to the students. First question was some pictures telling the story of the crow that was fooled by the fox. The second question was to write another story using the hints given in the test. That was the familiar story of the hare and the tortoise. The third question asked the students to describe the process of preparing a tea. The intention of the investigator while putting this question in the question paper was to focus on prepositions, conjunctions and articles. This was followed by another question which asked the learners to describe how they spent their vacation. The final question was a passage to edit.

- Questionnaire (Noora & Usha)

The questionnaire included four major dimensions like attitude of students, present method of teaching, negative interference of mother tongue, teacher factor and intralingual interference.

Statistical Techniques Used

Percentage analysis was the statistical techniques used in the study.

IV. Results And Discussion

Syntactic Error Analysis In English Language Among Secondary School Students

TABLE I Result of syntactic error analysis in English language

SL NO	Areas of syntactic errors	Percentage
1	Concord in using auxiliaries	93
2	Errors in using SVO Pattern	88
3	Errors in using articles	88
4	Errors in using Preposition	94
5	Errors in using correct form of tense	92
6	Errors in using conjunctions	89

From the table it is revealed that learners are making syntactic errors in English language to a large extent in almost all the major areas of syntax of English grammar.

- **Concord in using auxiliaries:** Learners are making too many errors in using correct form of concord in primary auxiliaries like am, do, does, did, was, were, has, have and had. The errors are far more in using modal auxiliaries like could, would, should, shall and might compared to primary auxiliaries. Most of the students are considering 'does' as the plural form of 'do'. And students are always using 'am' while writing the first person pronoun 'I'; whatever the tense form is. Students are not using the auxiliary 'had'. It seems that students do not know when and where to use it. In the case of auxiliaries also there is no clear distinction of primary and modal auxiliaries of English language and the learners often makes the mistakes like "I has the book with me".
- **Errors in using SVO (subject verb object) Pattern:** Secondary school students are following the sentence pattern of mother tongue in most of the situations. Students are using the SOV pattern instead of SVO. In Malayalam, there can be the use of both SVO and SOV pattern depending on the situations but in English language this is not possible. The difference in the structural arrangement of the sentences between the languages produces syntactic errors. In Malayalam the sentence usually have a subject – object – verb pattern, but in English it is subject – verb – object.
- **Errors In Using Articles:** Most of the students in secondary schools are in appropriately using the definite article 'The'. The investigator analysed the over use of this article in the formation of major and the subordinate clauses. Learners are finding this article as a supporting word that could be used anywhere in the sentence when they find themselves confused with the indefinite articles, prepositions or conjunctions.
- **Errors In Using Preposition:** Prepositional errors have also been potentially identified by investigator. There is no clear wise distinction like 'since' and 'for', 'to' and 'for' etc. of English in Malayalam and so, the students fail to observe it. Learners are either omitting prepositions or there is addition of prepositions in certain situations. But majority of students are using incorrect prepositions while constructing sentences.
- **Errors In Using Correct Form Of Tense:** A sensible look at the errors made by the learners lead the investigator to identify that almost most of the verbal errors are due to the interference of mother tongue. The major structural difference in Malayalam and English language like the use of linking verb, difference among simple past, present perfect and perfect tenses lead to major errors by the learners.

- **Errors In Using Conjunctions:** Learners are making mistakes in using conjunctions especially in coordinating conjunctions such as For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet and So. Learners are omitting the use of subordinating conjunctions such as if, since, than that, because etc. wherever necessary. The investigator analysed the fact that secondary school students were completely un aware of where to use correlative conjunctions like not only but also, neither or etc. Learners are not omitting correlative conjunctions in sentence formation but over use of correlative conjunctions are seen in their descriptions.

Morphological Error Analysis In English Language Among Secondary School Students

TABLE II Result of morphological error analysis in English language

S.NO:	Morphological Errors	Percentage
1	Affixation related errors	70
2	Compound related errors	63
3	Failure to use the marker (-er)	88
4	Conversion related errors	83
5	Using of plural in noun phrases	73

From table II it is revealed that students of secondary schools are making morphological errors in English language in specific areas.

- **Affixation-Related Errors:** Affixation-related errors arise as a result of misuse of either prefixes or suffixes. Thus, in order to present a clear picture of the errors, it can be grouped into:
 - a. **Errors arising from the wrong use of prefixes:** Secondary school students do make use of prefixes incorrectly while trying to create new words or give antonyms of particular words. Some of the errors found in the English usage of secondary school student are like “You are diskind” (unkind), “It is unsignificant” (insignificant).
 - b. **Errors arising from wrong use of suffixes:** Errors of this kind are numerous in the respondents’ scripts. These errors can be divided into:
 - Morphological errors arising as a result of wrong insertion of past tense marker as in the sentence “the crow putted the cake down”
 - Errors made as a result of analogous use of certain suffixes as in the statement “ the tortoise ran speedly”
 - **Compound Related Errors:** Compounding is a morphological process which consists in the combination of at least two free morphemes such as book + shop (bookshop).
 - **Failure to use the marker (-er):** Secondary school students made mistakes in the use of the marker (-er) in the transcripts like “my mother is the cooker of the tea”.
 - **Conversion-Related Errors:** There were also conversion-related errors in the written responses of the subjects. The errors are seen in sentences like, “ the crow will feeling hungry”
 - **Using of plural in noun phrases:** There were a lot of errors in using the noun phrases in the sentences among secondary school students. To quote an example, “ the tea powders was put in the cup”.

Analyzing The Causes Of Syntactic Errors Among Secondary School Students

Table IV. Results showing the causes of syntactic errors in the perception of teachers

SL NO	Major causes	Percentage
1	Attitude of students	97
2	Interlingual interference	96
3	Intra Present method of teaching	91
4	Intralingual interference	80
5	Inadequate exposure to English language	75
6	Teacher factor	59
7	Lack of planning to remediate problem	51

It is revealed from the perception of the teachers that a number of factors are contributing to the causes of errors in constructing syntactic elements of English language. According to their opinion inter lingual interference is one among the major factors. The difference in the syntactic arrangement of grammatical structures between the two languages is the major cause of errors in the perception of teachers. Attitude of students that there is no need of creating grammatically correct sentences to pass the examination is effecting negatively. Teachers also mentioned about the intra lingual interference of the language. The irregularity in spelling, exceptions in grammatical rules, and no proper rules concerned in the use of prepositions and conjunctions are some of the factors which makes the learners confused and leading to make errors while constructing sentences. More over the present methods of teaching is not focusing on any of the forms or structures of English language which further makes the condition worse. Teachers are helpless as revealed from

their opinions that they are not getting enough time to focus on any errors of the learners or to rectify those errors. They even do not get enough time to give exposure to the target language.

Analyzing the Causes of Morphological Errors among Secondary School Students

Table III. Results showing the causes of morphological errors in the perception of teachers

S.NO:	CAUSES	PERCENTAGE
1	In consistency in language	63
2	Over generalisation and misapplication of rules	65
3	Lack of morphology related topics	93
4	Mother tongue interference	97

- **Inconsistency in English language:** The first important factor which compounds most ESL learners' problems in the acquisition of English morphology is the inconsistency inherent in the language (Babalola and Akande, 2002). As per the perception of teachers, this inconsistency, that there are no fixed rules in the grammatical constructions lead to morphological errors like, the plural form of knife is knives and wife is wives, but the plural form of chief is not chieives. These inconsistencies are always problem creators for secondary school students as per the opinion of teachers.
- **Lack of Morphology Related Topics:** Morphological-related topics are not taught at all in most schools. Unfortunately, the topics in most English textbooks normally reflect the syllabus to be covered by students. As per the perception of teachers, the teaching of morphology is not deemed important by whoever is in charge of drawing the syllabus. Teachers also opined that, if English morphology is systematically taught in schools, the pupils may be in a position to master most of the rules and their exceptions; and this will go a long way in minimizing the morphological errors in their English language.
- **Over Generalisation and Misapplication of Rules:** Another important cause is the overgeneralization and the misapplication of rules as far as secondary school English language teachers are concerned. In most cases, students do over generalise or misapply certain morphological rules. Overgeneralization and misapplication of rules are usually the aftermath of the ignorance of certain restrictions in the opinion of teachers.
- **Mother tongue interference:** mother tongue interference is also major cause of morphological errors. Most errors especially the ones that have to do with suffixation, conversion and pronunciation are made as a result of the influence of the first language of the students on English.

How to Reduce Syntactic and Morphological Errors among Secondary School Students

The syntactic and morphological errors in the English of secondary school students could be reduced drastically if the following suggestions are made use of. The suggestions are:

- a) In the teaching of English in secondary schools, syntax and morphology should be given its rightful place. By this it is meant that the outrageous imbalance in the English syllabi as well as in the English textbooks their use should be properly addressed. In order words, enough morphology-related topics should be incorporated into the English syllabi and textbooks.
- b) It is not enough for students to be taught the English syntax and morphology, it is very important for its teaching to be done systematically and in order of complexity. This is the only way effective teaching and learning could be achieved. Thus, it can be agreed here with Akande (2001) that "morphological processes be introduced and taught at different stages in line with the learners' acquaintance with them as revealed in database."
- c) For ESL learners to be taught effectively and systematically, the teacher factor is crucial. There is a need to make sure that those who are entrusted with the teaching of English Language in secondary schools are those specialists in English who are capable of doing the job effectively. Apart from having a minimum of Bachelor's degree in English or in a related discipline, they should always be made, with the assistance of government, to attend seminars and conferences on the teaching of English. It is through this English language teachers can improve in their teaching.
- d) Lastly, it is important to say that the writers of English textbooks for secondary schools should make sure that they make use of a contrastive technique in the writing of the English textbooks. If this is done, the errors caused through L1 transfer will be reduced.

V. Conclusion

Regarding syntactic errors, it arise from negative L1 interference on L2 structures, attitude of students, present method of teaching, lack of exposure to English language and intra language interference. Whereas morphological errors results from failure to use or a tendency to misuse certain morphemes arises from lack of

knowledge of English morphemes, whereas The findings of this study demonstrate the utility of employing systematic strategies for teaching syntactic and morphological structures of English language.

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