Error Analysis of Compositions of Selected Probationary Faculty Members of Father Saturnino Urios University

Mark B. Ulla, Father Saturnino Urios University, Philippines

Abstract: The purpose of the study was to determine, identify, classify, describe and analyze the language errors found in the compositions of the faculty respondents of FSUU. The information and insights gained could serve as basis for the action plan—a Language Training Program to be included in the 5-day classroom management training conducted yearly at the start of the academic year by the University.

The descriptive method was applied through the use of the three-step procedure adopted from Corder (1971). The rubrics used are from the taxonomy of errors developed by Burt, Kiparsky and Krashen (1972). Between the global or local errors in the compositions of the respondents, the local errors are more common which registered an overall frequency of 118. Global errors had only a total frequency of 16. Of the local syntactical errors in the local category, preposition was the area that recorded the highest occurrence followed by verb at the local lexical level. Local morphological errors were not a problem since only a few errors, mostly having to do with the subject-verb concord were discovered.

Global errors that were found in the corpora of texts were mostly serious. They needed major revision because they hindered communication of the intended meaning. Of this category, global syntactical errors involving pronouns formed the largest group of errors followed by word order and prepositions. This was followed by global lexical errors which include noun and verb. The least number of errors was global morphological subdivision with plural markers forming the smallest group.

Other types of errors that were found in the compositions of the respondents were mechanical errors which were mostly misuse of punctuation marks, capitalization and misspelling and other language errors involving conjunctions and word choice. For global mechanical errors, punctuation marks got the highest number of errors, followed by capitalization, and conjunction. In the case of local mechanical errors, punctuation marks had the highest number, followed by misspelling and word choice, conjunction, and capitalization.

Most of the local errors discovered in their compositions are believed to be “slips” “lapses” or “careless errors”. Another reason is that most of the participants were not language teachers and their knowledge of the basics of language was limited.

These facts reveal that the probationary faculty members really need a refresher course on the basics of the language so that they could enhance their language ability.

Finally, the most significant product of this study is the hammering out of a language enhancement training for the probationary faculty members to address the problem in the study.

Keywords: Error analysis, Faculty members, Language ability
Introduction

Teaching as a profession is exacting; it requires very demanding skills, personal traits, and qualities. The oft-quoted saying “You cannot give what you do not have” must be every teacher’s mantra, a reminder of the enormous responsibility that each practitioner owes to the charges entrusted to his/her care, to society at large and to humanity. The tutelary tradition in oriental cultures -- i.e. the sacred bond between the sansei (Master) and his student -- is a model worth emulating. The teacher must be many persons to his students: deliverer of instruction, coach, hand holder, director or stage manager, authority, sage or magus, surrogate parent, inspiration and more. Perhaps, the most essential of the numerous roles of the teacher is that of a model. The teacher must model what he/she teaches. He or she does not just foist on his/her students a task or activity. He must first model it. The English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioner must have mastery of the course he teaches; he must be an authority on his field of specialization. Otherwise, he is what is called an “academic phony”. For some time, this kind of teacher might be able to cover up his inadequacy, but he cannot always be on his guard. There are unguarded moments when the rents or chinks in his armor would show. Moreover, in conscience, that same teacher cannot forever live a life of pretense and deception. Sooner or later, he will chafe under the strain and realize the enormity of his guilt. For how much longer can he bear to deceive his students?

Inside the classroom, whatever the teacher does, whether it is a success or a failure, is passed on to his/her students. Students learn by imitation. Although Imitation does not fully account for all learning that occurs (the ideal example of the limited utility of the Imitation theory is revealed in its application to language acquisition), young children’s mimicry of their primary caretaker’s speech is not a subject for dispute. Marohom (2011) in her study, for example, cited how misconceptions in the sciences are perpetuated, in a kind of cycle: teachers unwittingly transmitting their inaccurate assumptions, misunderstanding of certain concepts, or erroneous suppositions to their students, and the latter as practitioners, in turn, relaying the same to their own students. It has also been pointed out in the same study that such misconceptions have a tenacity about them because they are purveyed by “authorities” themselves whose words are accepted as the gospel truth. Considering the role and responsibility of the teacher as respected authority and model, it is very important that qualification standards and merits are strictly upheld in the recruitment of teachers. Only the most fit candidates, the best and the brightest, become part of that noble company headed by Socrates, Confucius, and Anne Sullivan. A combination of proper motivation, carefully thought out teaching strategies, a rich variety of teaching tools or instructional materials, commitment and good command of the English language will gain for the aspirant a sure passage into the noblest profession.

Literature Review

Learning a first or second language always entails, or is attended by errors. Errors and mistakes are usually thought of as a problem. However, authorities in the field have now this area of agreement: errors are a useful or necessary part of language learning. They are the indicators of the stage or progress of one’s language learning. Hence, errors must not be regarded as evils that hinder progress of learning. They in fact reveal the strategies and styles that learners devise and
use to learn in their struggle to master the language system of the target language. Masorong (2010) asserted that mistakes are inevitable since learners try different ways to master the language as a means for a more effective communication. Thus, errors provide valuable insight into the language learning process not just to the learners of the target language, but also to ELT practitioner. It is errors that serve as the basis for a more effective program for the treatment of the errors committed.

Learners who are learning the language always have to deal with errors. Language errors committed by language learners are considered to be an ordinary thing. Although most people consider it as a failure, the behaviorists who viewed language errors as a sign of bad formation which would become a habit eventually did not tolerate the commission of errors. To them, constant language errors would form a habit that is difficult to correct or outgrow later. Different views on how language errors should be treated sprouted and had made a place in issues of language teaching and learning. The fundamental issue is: to correct or not to correct. And there is the problem of how this shall be done, which depends on a number of considerations. In fact, some quarters believe that the teacher’s job is to help the learners improve their English, and sometimes this is done by not correcting. Over-emphasis on correctness can be counterproductive. Paying too much attention to correctness does not seem to be speaking a language at all (Edge, 1989).

Error analysis is based on developmentalism (learning develops in stages as learners interact with the environment). Amato (1996) explained that error analysis looks at the errors made by learners while they are learning positively and consider the errors as necessary to the development of language, be it first or second language.

**Treatment of Errors and Error Correction**

Every effort to learn something is attended by lapses, slips or errors. Without committing errors, learning is incomplete and language learning is no exception. Some people are open to errors and even willing to accept them. Some may even not notice them while learning the target language. However, according to Diaz-Rico and Weed (1996) many teachers typically expend much energy noting, correcting, and designing lessons to address errors when students are learning a second language. To them, often, no allowance is made for the learner’s age, level of fluency, educational background, or risk-taking behavior. These, however, are significant factors to consider in determining how a teacher should regard language errors.

In the early stages of language learning, according to Diaz-Rico and Weed (1996), fluency is more important than accuracy. A teacher who is uncomfortable with less than perfect speech only adds unnecessary anxiety to the developing proficiency of the ELD student. Thus, the teacher, instead of monitoring and correcting, should converse and model the appropriate language. Error correction is not necessary. The teacher focuses on the student’s message and provides correction only when the message or meaning is not clear.

**Related Studies**

The immediate antecedent of the present study is Anonas’ (2008) inquiry on the problem for her masteral thesis “Error Analysis of the Interoffice Correspondence of Selected MSU Offices, 2007-2008.” Error analysis was performed on corpora of texts consisting of Special Orders,
memorandums, cover letters, endorsements, and letters from top-echelon and middle management offices. The offices included the Office of the President, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Graduate School.

The researcher first categorized the errors found in the texts into local and global, then into lexical, syntactic, and morphological. Another class or subdivisions of errors, which did not fall into any of the linguistic error groups or classes, was included under the rubric Mechanical/Others.

The error analysis conducted revealed that most of the errors, a total of one hundred sixty-six (166) comprising 90.36% of the sum collected from the entire body of data, were local errors; the remaining one hundred fifty (150), forming only 9.64%, were global. It was further found out that the causes or sources of the errors were mostly developmental, interlingual (influence of L1 on L2), and ambiguous. Further, that despite this seemingly large number of errors found to mar the compositions, on the whole, clarity of the meaning did not suffer much, thus comprehension of the intended message was not seriously. The communicative purpose of language was achieved, although at a cost, or with some difficulty.

Anonas, in fact, considered it justifiable to conclude, based on the dominant nature of errors analyzed (mostly tiny grammatical points), to attribute these to performance factors, for example, carelessness or the rush with which office correspondence for immediate dissemination is made. This of course should not be read as completely precluding or discounting lack of competence or mastery of the language system (English) as a probable cause.

The study of Masorong, completed in 2010 for her thesis “An Error Analysis Performed on English 230 Students’ ELPT Compositions: A Basis for a Proposed Intensive Grammar Enhancement (2009),” could count among the more recent investigations that lent impetus to the present study. Takers of the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) administered by the Language and Media Center are graduates or professionals spread across the various fields or disciplines – e.g. Medicine, Nursing, Education (School Administration), Public Affairs, Physical Education and Recreation, Philippine Studies, Global Studies, Science Teaching, and more. They are applicants for admission to the program of their choice, who unfortunately obtained scores on the English Proficiency portion of the Qualifying Examination that are below the cut-off score of 75. English 230, a requirement for this group of graduate students, is a remedial course designed to address their language deficiency.

As in the study of Anonas, errors gathered from the Test of Written English (TWE) compositions of the English 230 students who took the ELPT in the SY 2008-2009, were first broadly classified as local or global, then pigeonholed into the three categories, according to the level at which they occurred: morphological, syntactic, and lexical. Another group of errors, Mechanical/Others was treated separately.

Of the six hundred and seventy-eight (678) errors discovered, 83.2% were determined to be local, and the rest comprising 16.8% identified as global. Out of the total of 678 local errors, 154 (27.3%) were classified as syntactic errors, thus the most numerous in terms of frequency. This
category was closely followed by lexical errors (26.4%); morphological errors (20.9%) formed the smallest group.

Summing it up all, Masorong concluded that the errors found in the compositions of English 230 students who are graduates or professionals do not significantly differ from those of undergraduate students. It could be inferred from this finding, that the errors committed by Filipinos in writing, regardless of their status, must be common and persistent or tenacious. There is greater expectancy violation in the case of the English 230 students considering the fact that they are already graduates or even professionals seeking admission to the University’s graduate programs. Frequency or gravity of errors should be minimal. The result did not turn out this way. According to Masorong, however, it was consoling to a certain extent that the bulk of the errors were tolerable since they did not hinder reader’s comprehension. On the other hand, this should not lull the concerned graduate students into complacency. They must never lose sight of the fact that advanced language ability is vital to graduate work; considerable writing is done at this level.

**Research Design**

For this study, a combined quantitative-qualitative design was adopted. That is, it was conducted in a natural setting, Father Saturnino Urios University campus, and made plentiful use of understanding through verbal narratives and observations, and flexible designs as McMillan (1992) put it. It is quantitative-qualitative because it determined the demographic profile of the faculty-respondents of the study through baseline and needs analysis surveys. It also involved the use of frequency count and percentage in analyzing the compositions of the participating faculty respondents of FSUU. Then, analysis proceeded with the tabulation and identification of the errors found in the texts examined. The results and findings yielded by the error analysis was used as the basis for the action plan drawn up by the researcher. Offered at the end of the research, said proposed action plan constitutes as his original contribution not only to the literature on error analysis, but more importantly, to the institution’s academic personnel training or development program.

The data were gathered through documentary or content analysis. The study was conducted in the second semester of academic year 2011-2012 with selected probationary faculty of FSUU as the respondents of the study. The topic developed in the composition written by these faculty member respondents was the implementation of K12 education system in the Philippines’ basic education. It was a broad topic that allowed the participants much latitude in terms of focus or emphasis. The researcher convened the faculty respondents in a lecture-workshop during which, at a designated point in the discourse, the topic was introduced for them to write on. Their compositions were analyzed according to the Error Classification or Taxonomies, as explained by Dulay and Burt (1981), and Krashen (1982). The study made use of the broad linguistic categories of Global and Local errors and their sub-classifications, specifically syntactic, morphological, lexical, and mechanical/other errors.

The researcher, in conducting this research study after collecting the written output of the faculty respondents, sought validation of the results of the classification or grouping done by him. For this purpose, three language experts were asked to rate and to identify the errors found in the
composition. Then, after rating and identifying the errors, the researcher, with the help of a statistician tabulated, analyzed and described the errors, whether global or local. An action plan to address the language problems laid bare by the error analysis was designed by the researcher and offered for implementation as part of the five-day orientation-training for new faculty recruits held at the start of every academic year.

Findings

Data analysis and interpretation yielded the following findings:

1. The result of the study showed that global syntactic errors got the most number of errors with 62.5%. Of this percentage, 10 errors were attributed to pronouns (misuse/omission of pronouns) followed by word order and prepositions (misuse/omission of prepositions). This was followed by global lexical errors with a percentage of 31.25 and a total of 5 errors which include noun (misuse/omission of nouns) and verb (misuse/omission of verb). The least number of error was on global morphological with 6.25% on plural markers (improper use of plural marker) which only had a total of 1 error.

2. On the other hand, local syntactic errors had 47.47% or 56 number of errors- the highest number of errors. These were prepositions (misuse/omission of prepositions), articles (misuse/omission of articles), pronouns (misuse/omission of pronouns), and word order. Local lexical errors ranked next with 40 errors or 33.89%. These were verb (misuse/omission of verb), noun (misuse/omission of nouns), adjective (misuse/omission of adjective), and adverb (misuse/omission of adverb). The least number of errors were on local morphological which only had 22 errors or 18.64% of which 15 errors were on subject-verb agreement followed by plural markers.

3. Other types of errors that were found in the compositions of the faculty-respondents were mechanical errors which were punctuation marks (omission/misuse of punctuation marks), capitalization (misuse/omission of capitalization), and misspelling and other language errors such as conjunction and word choice. For global mechanical errors, punctuation marks got the highest number of errors of 4 or 40%, followed by capitalization, and conjunction. For local mechanical errors, punctuation marks got the highest number of errors of 24 or 23.08%, followed by misspelling and word choice with both had 23 numbers of errors or 22.11%, conjunction with 20 errors or 19.24%, and capitalization with 14 numbers of errors or 13.46%.

4. It was found out based on the salient findings of the study that preposition (misuse/omission of prepositions) was the area that most of the respondents got mistakes. Punctuations (misuse/omission of punctuations) followed with the higher number of errors. Punctuations like comma, apostrophe, dash, and even period were also observed that were used incorrectly in the sentences of the respondents. Verb (misuse/omission of verb) comes next as the most number of errors.

5. Lastly, between local and global errors, the largest numbers of errors found were mostly local. It had an overall frequency of 118. Global errors had only a total frequency of 16.

After looking into the nature of errors that were found in the compositions of the selected probationary faculty members of FSUU and determining whether they are global or local, and based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:

1. The results of the study on error analysis showed that selected probationary faculty members of FSUU lack mastery of the English language system. This may be attributed to the
fact that most of the respondents were not language teachers and their knowledge of the basics of the language was limited. Most of the respondents did not know enough of verb forms and verb structures, thus it is not surprising that they find these problematic.

2. The findings of the study serve as evidence that the respondents have English proficiency problem. Indicators are shown in the gravity of errors committed in the sub areas of word order or syntax and the misuse of prepositions and verbs. These go to show that even mechanical errors, specifically punctuations, no matter how small they are can always affect communication or meaning. Misuse of the mentioned elements can cause misunderstanding.

3. The facts revealed in the study also show that the probationary faculty members who participated in the study cared less about the organization of their composition. They just wrote whatever came to their mind and they did not review and edit their work. Thus, content organization is also a problem.

**Implications**

From the foregoing findings and conclusions, the following implications are drawn:

1. The language problem of the selected probationary faculty members of FSUU can always be remediated through an action program designed to address the problem. The action plan presented in Chapter 4 can be of some help if implemented because it focuses on, or target the problematic areas found in the body of texts subjected to error analysis.

2. With the proficiency problem of the selected probationary faculty of FSUU revealed, something concrete and explicit need to be done. If this language problem is ignored or is not seriously dealt with, these faculty members will remain fossilized or stagnant at their low proficiency level. The negative impact of this on their students is a foregone conclusion. The vicious cycle is set off, with these faculty members transmitting their inadequacies or weaknesses to their students, and the latter handing down the inherited weaknesses to their own students. The perpetuation of this cycle must be stopped or arrested.

3. There is really a need for a refresher course on the basics of the language so that probationary faculty members would learn the correct usage for clear and effective communication.

**References**


Unpublished Materials


Module on ELT 200. Language Acquisition and Development. Mindanao State University, Marawi City.

Module on ELT 220. English Language Teaching. Mindanao State University, Marawi City.

Module on ELT 235. Current Issues, Trends, and Directions in ELT in a Bilingual Setting. Mindanao State University, Marawi City.


On-line Resources
