

ERROR ANALYSIS AND TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Introduction

It is said that "to err is human, to forgive divine". Since we regard a language as a code, then it is natural for us to make errors in the process of learning English as a foreign language. In other words, it is inevitable for us to make a breach of the code like the use of wrong rules or the misuse of right rules in the process of acquiring control of a language.

Some errors the learner makes in second-language learning can be described as mere failure to memorize a segment of language, or simply as 'performance errors' due to 'memory limitations, lapses, fatigue or confusion'.¹⁾ Some errors may result from teaching materials or procedures. Some errors may reflect the learner's imperfect competence at a particular stage and other errors may reflect the learner's inability to separate two languages. In any case, it is not too much to say that the learner's errors provide evidence of his knowledge of the language at a given stage.

Now we can say that an EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher can understand not only his students' linguistic competence but also the students themselves by recognizing and describing the types of errors they actually make. Therefore, it is natural that an EFL teacher examines errors and seeks

1) Corder, S.P., The Significance of Learners' Errors, in Richards, J.C., ed., *Error Analysis*, London: Longman, 1974a, pp.19-27.

the reasons for errors in order to make the best use of them in his teaching.

In this paper I would like to look at the different stages of error analysis; detection, description and explanation of errors, and application. The main purpose of this paper is, however, to discuss the implications that error analysis provides for language teaching.

1. General Discussion

"All learners make mistakes. This is not confined to language learners, we all make mistakes when we are speaking our mother tongue", writes Corder.²⁾ Native speakers, though, do not normally commit breaches of the code, or errors, which produce unacceptable utterances as a result. The characteristic of native speakers' errors is, as Corder mentions,³⁾ that when noticed by speaker or listener they are usually readily correctable by the speaker.

eg) I'm not going to enter into er a philosophical discourse on that; all I'm saying is that er - I'm not saying that this is a bad law,.....

'false starts'

Ah well, your - they - the - the - the Clay Cross

'slips or false starts'

(source from the handout at UWIST)

These ill-formed utterances mentioned above cannot be the result of an imperfect knowledge of the language or imperfect competence. "Such errors can be classified as transpositions or substitutions or additions of a speech sound or morpheme, word

2) Ditto, *Introducing Applied Linguistics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.256.

3) Ibid., p.256.

or complete phrase, or some sort of blend of these",⁴⁾ and Corder calls these all 'lapses', which are often caused by stress, indecision or fatigue.⁵⁾

Native speakers also produce inappropriate utterances. 'Inappropriate utterances' here are well-formed utterances, but contextually and situationally inappropriate ones; that is, they are failures to match the language to the situation. "The most obvious examples of these failures are 'social gaffes'; but they may be more subtle, the selection of the wrong term in some technical discussion."⁶⁾

Meanwhile, it is said that the majority of learner's errors are linguistically quite different from those made by a native speaker.

eg) We work here in Savonlinna in very small team. We have only four, five men who are making all the most important decisions.

Kokkonen has been thinking about me while he was writing this opera; my voice, maybe also my personality.

(source from the handout at UWIST)

These errors are regarded as 'breaches of the code', which can be the result of an imperfect knowledge of the language.

Since learners are certainly liable to make slips or false starts or confusion of structure, it may not always be easy to distinguish such lapses and mistakes of performance from errors. The important point is, however, that native speakers know how to correct errors which they commit in performance, whereas "learners do not always recognize their own errors, and furthermore, they often cannot correct their errors; he may even commit another error in trying to do so."⁷⁾

4) Ditto, Error Analysis, in Allen, J.P.B. and Corder, S.P., eds., *The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics Vol.3*, London: O.U.P., 1974c, p.123.

5) Ibid., p.123.

6) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, p.259.

7) Ibid., p.256.

Corder writes,⁸⁾ "The code is neutral as between expressive and receptive behaviour. Both require a knowledge of the formation rules. Inadequate knowledge of these rules will therefore show itself in both sorts of behaviour. But it is much easier to detect imperfect knowledge in the case of expressive behaviour".

What is in question here is the teacher's ability to recognize that an error has been made. Some error are more difficult to recognize than others; receptive errors, for example, are more difficult to detect than productive errors. Productive errors may be spoken or written, but, as Corder mentions,⁹⁾ practically it is easier to make a systematic study of written materials. An EFL teacher, however, should notice that there is a different distribution of error or a different set of error types involved in written materials; written work in controlled production involves the problem of the learner's comprehension of the messages of the original texts, or of the learner's ability to memorize the original texts, whereas written work in spontaneous production tends to lead the learner to avoid some linguistic areas in which he feels uncertain. Meanwhile, errors of reception can be detected only indirectly, by inference from the learner's linguistic and non-linguistic reaction. Besides, even if the teacher detects that errors in comprehension occur, it is very difficult to pinpoint the linguistic causes of such errors. In other words, even if the teacher suspects a failure of comprehension, he cannot easily determine which particular linguistic features have been misinterpreted. Consider the following example:

eg) What is her name? → Yes, she is a teacher.

The learner had understood no more than that he was being asked a question, but still we can hardly assign the cause of

8) Ibid., p. 261.

9) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1974c, p. 126.

his misunderstanding to an inadequate knowledge of nonpolar interrogative sentences in English. Receptive errors, therefore, are likely to be passed unobserved, and consequently, error analysis is, perforce, largely confined to the study of productive or expressive errors. It is possible, however, to devise tests and to design comprehension questions in order to examine the learner's receptive behaviour, which require little or no productive performance in doing so, but, as Corder says,¹⁰⁾ "many of these techniques can do little more than establish in general terms that comprehension of a passage or parts of a passage is incomplete."

2. Theoretical consideration of error analysis

"Meaningful speech is systematic, or it is the systematic nature of language which makes communication possible. Learners use spontaneous language with the intention of communicating; whether they succeed or not is another matter. One must assume, therefore, that their language is systematic. The assumption underlying the description of errors is that they are evidence of a system, not the system of the target language, but a system of some 'other' language."¹¹⁾ The learner's language, then, is assumed to be a code which is not necessarily the code of any social group, but has some intermediate status between the codes of the mother tongue and the target language; Corder calls it an 'idiosyncratic' dialect,¹²⁾ and Selinker refers to it as an 'interlanguage'.¹³⁾

"It has long been accepted that the application of a scientific

10) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, p.262.

11) Ibid., p.268.

12) Ibid., pp.268-269.

13) Selinker, L., *Interlanguage*, in Richards, J.C., ed., *Error Analysis*, London: Longman, 1974, pp.31-54.

discipline to the solution of practical problems provides feedback to theory. The applications provide confirmation or disproof of theory. In this respect they are like experiments which test the prediction of the theory. The study of learners' errors is such an application.¹⁴⁾ To describe the learner's language, considered as an 'idiosyncratic' dialect or an 'interlanguage', therefore, is precisely the theoretical objective of error analysis.

Corder considers errors apart from mistakes or lapses like slips of the tongue or occasional ungrammatical utterances such as native speakers also produce, and classifies errors into three different types in connection with the process of learning:¹⁵⁾ 'pre-systematic error', where the learner, being unaware of the existence of a particular system in the target language, is producing random errors; 'systematic errors', where he is following a rule of some sort, but not the correct one in the target language; 'post-systematic error', where he is producing correct forms but inconsistently.

Meanwhile, errors are categorized into 'systematic', 'asystematic' and 'unsystematic' ones by Jain:¹⁶⁾ 'systematic errors' are the ones which seem to fall into definable patterns—they are supposed to have been generated by the learner's internalized hypothetical system of language or grammar; 'unsystematic errors' are the slips of the tongue or pen caused by psychological conditions, such as nervousness, and/or physiological factors, such as fatigue; 'asystematic errors' are systematic-unsystematic errors, which are produced inconsistently by the learner who has seemingly arrived at the system.

14) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, pp.265-266.

15) Ibid., pp. 268-272.

16) Jain, M.P., Error Analysis: Source, Cause and Significance, in Richards, J.C., ed., *Error Analysis*, London: Longman, 1974, pp. 189-215.

Bearing in mind the theoretical interest in studies of error, we can classify the process of analysis into three stages, which are logically dependent upon each other; recognition, description and explanation.

2.1 Recognition of errors

Fairly ungrammatical utterances are easy to detect when they occur, and are plausibly interpretable. For example:

eg) *I gave up to go to the pictures this evening in order to^{a)}
help my brother with his homework.

*We had many toasts for breakfast.

In the first sentence, the learner doesn't know the rules for generating the structure; verbal group *give up* is not followed by to-form but ing-form in phase structure. And in the second sentence, the learner doesn't know the rules for forming plural forms of the uncountable noun, or he doesn't even know the fact that there is a distinction between countable and uncountable nouns in English. These are what Corder calls 'overtly erroneous' utterances.¹⁷⁾

Meanwhile, apparently well-formed utterances may nevertheless be erroneous. For example:

eg) The task is detestable.

Mr. Brown has three families.

These utterances seem to be perfectly acceptable, but it is possible to interpret since the learner has not meant to say what he seems to say; in the first sentence, he may say, 'The task is detestable' with the intention of saying what is meant by saying 'The task is desirable', only because he has been confusing 'detestable' with 'desirable', whereas in the second sentence,

17) Corder, S.P., op.cit., 1973, p.272.

a) Conventionally, an asterisk before an item signifies that it is unacceptable.

he may intend to describe three members in Mr. Brown's family, that is, 'Mr. Brown has three members in his family', and he may not intend to say Mr. Brown has three wives.

The sentences which are erroneous, but not overtly so, Corder calls 'covertly erroneous'.¹⁸⁾ In other words, the covertly erroneous sentences are correct superficially, but they are not appropriate in the context in which they occur. That is why they are quite difficult to identify. "The recognition of error, then, depends crucially upon the analyst making a correct interpretation of the learner's intended meaning in the context."¹⁹⁾

2.2 Description of errors

The stage of description can only begin when the stage of recognition has taken place. "The description of error is essentially a comparative process, the data being the original erroneous utterance and the reconstructed utterance",²⁰⁾ and in this respect it is a special case of contrastive analysis. Superficial description, however, is of little use to teacher or learner, because it is only part of a total descriptive process, that is, since systems and rules are an abstraction from the linguistic data, superficial description is part of the data for making such abstraction. For example:

eg) *I am going to abroad next month.

*From now I will study harder.

Describing these errors just as 'an addition or an omission of a preposition' is of no practical use to teacher or learner, although it is a necessary condition for linguistic explanation.

The description of errors, as Corder mentions,²¹⁾ can be made

18) Ibid., p.272.

19) Corder, S.P., op.cit., 1974c, p.127.

20) Ibid., p.128.

21) Corder, S.P., op.cit., 1973, pp.275-280.

at various degrees of depth, generality or abstraction by assigning the items involved to the different linguistic levels: orthographic/phonological, syntactic and lexico-semantic. Consider the following examples:

eg) *There is no kemist near my house.

The learner has chosen the 'right word' grammatically or semantically, but spelled it incorrectly, then the error is at the orthographical level. But he might not realize the rule at the phonological level either; English phoneme /k/ is fortis spelt k; c; cc+a, o, u; qu; ch.

eg) *She had pride a little.

The 'right word' has been chosen semantically, but hasn't been put in order grammatically. However, the learner who wrote 'She had pride a little' did not just select the wrong word order, but showed that he had not correctly learned the function of each item related to the entire construction of English sentence;

I	can speak	English	a little. ^{b)}
S	P	O	A
She	had	a little pride	
S	P	O	

eg) *This is the first time for me to come here.

This shows that the learner has not learned a part of the lexico-semantic system of English; *time* includes 'an occasion' as well as 'a point of time';

This is the first *time* I have come here. (an occasion)

It is *time* for you to go to bed. (a point of time)

b) Here, the letters S, P, O and A stand for the elements of structure 'subject', 'predicator', 'object' and 'adjunct' respectively.

An incorrect lexical concept, therefore, leads the learner to choose the wrong sentence from a grammatical point of view.

2.3 Explanation of errors

The basic idea here is to ask why the learner makes errors or why he did what he did. It is actually not clear where a line could be drawn between 'description' and 'explanation'. Corder writes,²²⁾ "Whereas description of error is largely a linguistic activity, explanation is the field of psycholinguistics. It is concerned with accounting for why and how errors come about."

While focusing on several types of errors observed in the acquisition of English as a second language, Richards distinguishes the errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue, 'interference errors', from the errors which reflect the learner's inability to separate two languages or reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition, 'intralingual and developmental errors'.²³⁾

As for 'interference errors', contrastive analysis or a knowledge of the learner's mother tongue will help us to identify where the characteristics of one language are being carried over into another. Here are some interference errors by Japanese learners of English:

eg) 1) errors at phonological level

	<u>pronunciation</u>	<u>dictation</u>
they	/ ðei / → */ zei /	/ kləʊð / → *close
think	/ θɪŋk / → */ sɪŋk /	/ maʊθ / → *mouse
path	/ pɑ:θ / → */ pɑ:s /	/ θΔm / → *sum

2) errors at grammatical level

I'm watching TV. → *I'm seeing TV.

22) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1974c, p.128.

23) Richards, J.C., A Noncontrastive Approach to Error Analysis, in Oller J., W., Jr. and Richards, J.C., eds., *Focus on the Learner*, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1973a, pp.96-113.

I am bored. —→ *I am boring.

3) errors at lexical level

I had a dream last night. —→ *I saw a dream last night.

I took the medicine. —→ *I drank the medicine.

These errors cannot be described as those which are common to learners who have quite different mother tongues. Take phonological errors mentioned above, for example; it is possible to explain these errors as being caused by the absence of any /ð/ or /θ/ phonemes in Japanese.

Meanwhile, 'intralingual and developmental errors', as Richards points out, are representative of the sort of errors we might expect from anyone learning English as a second language, but still cannot be described as mere failures to memorize a segment of language, or occasional lapses in performance due to memory limitations, fatigue, and the like. Richards subdivides this kind of error into four classes; (1) overgeneralization, (2) ignorance of rule restriction, (3) incomplete application of rules, and (4) false concepts hypothesized.²⁴⁾ His account of 'intralingual and developmental errors' could be summarized as follows:

- (1) Overgeneralization covers instances where the learner created a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language.

eg) She sings beautifully. —→ *She can sings beautifully.

They worked hard. —→ *They broke the window.

- (2) Ignorance of Rule Restrictions is failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures.

eg) He weighs six pounds. —→ *He is a six pounds baby.

I asked the doctor to come. —→ *I made the child to go home.

These are a type of generalization or transfer, since the

24) Ibid., pp.98-108.

learner is making use of a previously acquired rule in a new situation. Failure to observe restrictions may also derive from analogy, the learner rationalizing a deviant usage from his previous experience of English.

- (3) Redundancy may be an explanatory factor for Incomplete Application of Rules; "The foreign speaker very often can well risk reducing that without running into serious failures of communication."²⁵⁾ A statement form may be used as a question, or a question word may simply be added to the statement form.

eg) Teacher's Question

Student's Response

Ask her how long it takes. —→*How long it takes?

what was she saying? —→*She saying she would ask him.

- (4) "In addition to the wide range of intralingual errors which have to do with faulty rule learning at various levels, there is a class of developmental errors which derive from faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. These are sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items."²⁶⁾

eg) He is driving a lorry this week.

***The learner translated it into a sentence indicating a present action with non-habitual meaning; the progressive form might have been interpreted as a form indicating a present action, so that the learner's faulty comprehension of the distinction led him to the wrong conclusion.

3. Application of error analysis

So far, I have been focusing on 'language learning', that is, what first and second language learners actually do in the process of acquiring control of a language, but now I must treat

25) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, p.269.

26) Richards, J.C., op. cit., 1973a, p.103.

'language teaching', that is, what the teacher can do to help the learning process: so in this section, I will focus on several types of errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue, analyse the source of the errors, and consider how an EFL teacher should react to the errors.

Wherever the systems of the first language differ from those of the second language, we can expect both difficulty in learning and error in performance. Moreover, if the learners are adult, they tend to transfer some habits of their mother tongue into their performances in the target language without any second thoughts. For this reason, when it comes to learning English as a foreign language for the first time after growing up, the matter of learning the rules of English must be serious for every learner. Although mother-tongue interference is now generally recognized to be not by any means the only source of errors, an EFL teacher is required, in this situation, to analyse the errors his students actually make in relation to a contrastive analysis of the target language and the mother tongue.

1) Interference at a phonological/graphological level

In pronunciation, as I have mentioned before, the Japanese learner will have difficulty with the consonant phonemes /θ/ in *thin* and /ð/ in *the*, and he will tend to use the phonemes /s/ for /θ/ and /z/ for /ð/ instead; this is because Japanese does not have the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/, and the learner is influenced by the sounds that exist in Japanese. The Japanese learner will also have difficulty distinguishing between /r/ and /l/; this is because there is no /l/ phoneme in Japanese. Besides, the various [r] allophones in Japanese²⁷⁾ make it dif-

27) International Phonetic Association, *The Principles of the International Phonetic Association*, London, 1949, p.44.

difficult for the learner to discriminate between the two phonemes /r/ and /l/ in English. And the learner will tend to make both productive and receptive errors with these phonemes.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------|--------------------|
| eg) a) bath | /ba:θ/ → */ba:s/ | clothe | /kləʊð/ → */kləʊz/ |
| thick | /θɪk / → */sɪk / | booth | /bu:ð / → */bu:z / |
| b) lace | /leɪs / → */reɪs / | right | /raɪt / → */laɪt / |
| play | /pleɪ / → */preɪ / | wrong | /rɒŋ / → */lɒŋ / |
| c) milk | /mɪlk / → */mɪrɒku / | | |
| glass | /glɑ:s / → */gɒrasu / | | |

Example c) mentioned above reveals the fact that he is not only influenced by the sounds which exist in Japanese, but also influenced by the distribution and phonological status in Japanese.

In Japanese, consonants generally occur before vowels, that is, consonants occur in CV pattern,²⁸⁾ and consonants never occur finally as well as separately. For this reason, the Japanese learner generally feels it difficult to pronounce some English phoneme sequences like *strand*, *squirrel* (CCCVC) and *sixth*, *length* (CVCCC). It is not easy for the learner to write down the correct spelling for the special sequences like *eights* or *clothes* as well as to pronounce them.

As for vowels, Japanese has only five vowel phonemes; / a, e, i, o, u /, therefore, it is very difficult for the students to distinguish between English vowels; especially /æ, ʌ, ɑ:, ɜ:/ and Japanese vowels. They also treat English disphthongs as combinations of two different vowels. For this reason, they often confuse /æ/ with /ʌ/, and /ɑ:/ with /ɜ:/, and /ɔ:/ with /əʊ/ all the time. And again they make both productive and receptive errors with these vowels.

Referring to a correct interpretation, Corder writes,²⁹⁾ "The

28) Umegaki, M., *Nichi-Ei Hikaku Gogaku Nyumon*, Tokyo: Taishukan, 1951, p.160.

29) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, p.293.

technique or correction is not one of simply presenting the data again and going through the same set of drills and exercises to produce the state of 'overlearning'. It requires, on the contrary, that the teacher understand the source of the errors so that he can provide the appropriate data and other information, sometimes comparative, which will resolve the learner's problems and allow him to discover the relevant rules." A lot of practical work in minimal pairs or contrastive units, therefore, may be suitable and helpful for the learner who failed to distinguish between phonemes like those in the examples mentioned above. Through new data of the language presented by the teacher the learner will be able to discover the right system in pronunciation before long.

Examples: minimal pairs

- a) /θ/ and /s/: thin/sin, thigh/sigh, mouth/mouse, path/pass
- b) /ð/ and /z/: breathe/breeze, bathe/bays, clothe/close
- c) /l/ and /r/: law/raw, load/road, fly/fry, glass/grass
- d) /ɜ:/ and /ɑ:/: hurt/heart, dirt/dart, further/father
- e) /ʌ/ and /æ/: luck/lack, hut/hat, cut/cat, suck/sack
- f) /ɔ:/ and /əu/: born/bone, caught/coat, raw/row, ball/bowl

Here we should bear in mind, as Heaton points out,³⁰⁾ that "occasional confusion over selected pairs of phonemes does not matter too greatly because in real-life situations the listener is able to use contextual clues to interpret what he hears." And it is true that carefully prepared material is often more difficult to understand the normal and impromptu speech.

2) Interference at a semantic/syntactical level

If we compare the number systems of Japanese with English, we find no similarity between them. In short, we can say there are no number systems in Japanese.

30) Heaton, J. B., *Writing English Language Tests*, London: Longman. 1975, pp.57-58.

	English	Japanese
plural	books some/no books	hon (=book)
singular	a book no book	

If we want to distinguish the number, we put the numeral before the noun to indicate the number, but we have no morphological system of plural marking with the noun. Only a few nouns can take the suffix *-tachi* to make plurality, but this doesn't occur very often and regularly in the sentence so as to be a rule.³¹⁾ Apart from the number systems, Japanese has no article system either. That is why these systems, which exist in English, constantly confuse the learners and they commit errors in the process of learning English sometimes by over-generalization and sometimes by analogy.

eg) *There is book on the chair.

*There are some book on the table.

*There are books under table.

a loaf of bread → *a pair of scissor

some stamps → *He gave her some good advices.

the peoples of Europe → *There were a lot of peoples on the beach.

There are still many differences between English and Japanese in grammatical points and in the way of thinking; 'word order', 'case' and the way of thinking of 'tense', and so on. Richards refers an aspect of interference,³²⁾ "which has to do with contrasts between styles across languages." This is not

31) Umegaki, M., op. cit., 1951, p.188.

32) Richards, J.C., 'Error Analysis and Second Language Strategies', in Oller, J.W., Jr. and Richards, J.C., eds., *Focus on the Learner*, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1973b, p.124-127.

manifest in the particular samples we have looked at so far, but it is nevertheless quite common in language learning: The Japanese learner, for example, can accept sentences like

I saw a book on the table.

I didn't see a book on the table.

syntactically and semantically with ease rather than sentences like

I saw no books on the table.

This hospital allows no visitors.

This is perhaps because he is used to the Japanese way of negation; that is, he is used to indicating negative quality with verbs—in Japanese, a negative is attached to verbs and not to nouns.

While analysing errors caused by the differences between the systems of Japanese and those of English, an EFL teacher is aware of the fact that his students often have difficulty grasping the meaning in connection with the new sentence structures as well as new vocabulary. A lot of different kinds of tests such as true/false tests, multiple-choice tests and matching tests will be useful and helpful for the learner to get used to some English usage and to discover the underlying rules, categories and systems of choice in English.

Examples: tests of grammar and usage

a) multiple-choice items

I have a lot of _____ to do in the afternoon.

(A. work B. the work C. works D. the works)

This bridge is _____.

(A. made of stone B. Made with the stone
C. made with the stones)

b) constructing completion items

Put *a*, *the*, *some* or *any* in each blank. If you think no word should be placed in the blank, put x mark there.

He is paid _____ fifty pounds _____ week.

Is there _____ tea in the pot?

It was _____ good film from _____ beginning to _____ end.

But we often hesitate between correcting the error so as to give a correct model, and refraining from correcting lest we should destroy the learner's fluency and confidence. The technique of correction, therefore, probably boils down to something like this: Where the learner is groping for a rule, clear presentation of the correct form, followed up by appropriate examples, is indispensable. Meanwhile, occasional slips need not be corrected.

There is one more point we should take into consideration in language teaching; that is, our students tend to avoid the expressions in which they lack confidence. The output, therefore, is not necessarily identifiable with what the learner knows. The teacher should then encourage the learner not to be afraid of making errors and even try to provoke errors from him. Otherwise we cannot know how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and what it is that the learner still has to learn in the first place.

Conclusion

Corder quotes Von Humboldt's statement in the article 'The Significance of Learners' Errors' and says that "we cannot really teach language, we can only create conditions in which it will develop spontaneously in the mind in its own way. We shall never improve our ability to create such favourable conditions until we learn more about the way a learner learns and what his built-in syllabus is."³³⁾ Since the study of learners' errors makes it possible for us to recognize at what stage of learning our students are, and to describe what sort of inter-language they possess, and to explain what it is that they still have to learn, then we should make the best use of the

33) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1974a, p.27.

study in order to promote and extend the language skills of our students. Mere correction of errors, however, has little value to learners. Corder writes,³⁴⁾ "Knowledge of being wrong is only a starting point. Little better is the simple provision of a correct reconstructed form of the learner's erroneous utterance. It is improbable that he will be able to draw any useful conclusions from a comparison of the two forms. More useful might be a comparison of the reconstructed form with its translation equivalent in the mother tongue of the learner." What is required of a teacher is to provide the learner with the evidence he needs to discover the correct concept or rule by himself; so that to provide the learner with mere correction of errors means to supply him with the sort of negative evidence which is necessary to discover the correct system. In order to lead the learner to invent the relevant rules of the language by himself the teacher should, of course, determine in any particular instance what the appropriate data are to give the learner, and what statements, descriptive or comparative, to make about it.

Meanwhile, a close examination of the learner's errors may lead us to reconsider our teaching materials and our teaching techniques to which the learner has been exposed. Since there is a type of error, namely, errors arising from the method or materials used in the teaching, then we should realize the necessity of more careful attention and preparation in our teaching to avoid such teaching-induced errors. The study of the learner's errors also enable us to decide whether we can move on to the next stage or devote more time to the present stage or go back to the previous stage as well as to what parts of the learner's interlanguage, that is to what linguistic level, we should pay more attention.

34) Corder, S.P., op. cit., 1973, p.293.

Bearing in mind the general idea of error analysis and making regular use of the information from the errors, an EFL teacher will be able to improve his ability to create more efficient learning conditions for his students; "we may be able to allow the learner's innate strategies to dictate our practice and determine our syllabus; we may learn to adapt ourselves to his needs rather than impose upon him our preconceptions of how he ought to learn, what he ought to learn and when he ought to learn it."³⁵⁾

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