

Error Analysis in Role-play Presentations among Less Proficient L2 Malaysian Learners

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***Abstract:** The speaking skill in non-native language has been the subject of investigations in recent years (Hojati, 2013). The present study examines errors in the speech of less proficient speakers of English during their role-play presentations. The samples were obtained during their enrolment in Foundation English class, a class where those who scored low during English Placement Test registered. The errors in their speech were analysed by following surface structure taxonomy that specifies four types of errors namely misformation, misordering, addition and omission. Findings indicate that omission accounted for the majority of errors identified and this is followed by misformation, addition and misordering. In addition, linguistic descriptions of errors identified verb form and word form to be the most frequent types of errors committed by speakers.*

***Key Words:** Error analysis, role-play presentations, surface structure taxonomy, grammatical accuracy*

Introduction

Error analysis in second language acquisition has become popular since its appearance in 1970s due to benefits offered to language practitioners. Error analysis is assumed to be an alternative approach to contrastive analysis that differentiates learners' first and second language in error prediction. According to Corder (1974), knowledge on errors produced by learners can help to provide picture on linguistic development of the learners. It can lead to creating and designing more effective language learning materials. Therefore, the analysis of errors made by learners has become an important aspect of language learning process (Muhamad et al, 2013).

James (1998) classified errors into two types, viz., linguistic category classification and surface structure taxonomy. Linguistic category classification identifies errors in the aspect of linguistic categories such as phonological, grammatical and lexical (James, 1998). Correcting errors on this category requires knowledge in which without knowledge, learners may fail to provide correction to errors made. Surface structure taxonomy on the other hand is descriptive

taxonomy (Muhamad et al, 2013) in which alteration on surface structure can cause errors and this includes misformation, misordering, addition and omission (Corder, 1973).

There have been many studies concerning error analysis in different contexts over the past years. In a recent study, Sawalmeh (2013) examined errors in written texts produced by pre-university students in Saudi Arabia. 32 Arabic-speaking students were asked to produce an argumentative essay that serves as the data corpus. Findings from this study revealed that students committed errors mostly related to verb tense, subject-verb agreement, spelling, sentence fragment and the use of article. Other errors such as pronoun, capitalization and word order were also observed but the occurrence was in smaller percentage.

Findings by Sawalmeh (2013) were in agreement with error analysis study conducted by Shamsudin and Mahady (2010). In their study, errors made by first year university students majoring in engineering in their writing were analysed through corpus linguistics software, Monoconc. It was found that the majority of errors produced by students were related to verb tenses, word order, word choice and spelling. This study also managed to highlight students' awareness on errors produced. It was surprising that students realised the errors being committed but having inadequate knowledge and lack of confidence in correcting such errors have caused errors to remain errors. Marzuki and Zainal (2004) also have analysed errors in students' written texts. Findings indicate similar errors where students mostly produced errors in grammar and vocabulary.

Many other studies were conducted to analyse errors produced by second language learners such as Stapa and Izahar (2010), Darus and Subramaniam (2009) and AbiSamra (2003). However, most of these studies were concerned with errors in written texts. In addition to composition, learners are also expected to make errors in oral production (Vasquez, 2008). A search of literature has indicated that very few studies focused on error analysis of spoken form. According to Thompson (2004), conducting error analysis on spoken text is highly complicated and complex. Muhamad et al (2013) stated that error analysis on speech production requires a corpus of spoken language and it is difficult to analyse due to differences in regional dialect, slang and idiosyncrasies (Pillay, 2004 and Brown, 2003). The dearth of literature vis-à-vis error analysis on spoken language may be contributed to the abandonment of errors in spoken discourse as long as meaning could be comprehended (Muhamad et al, 2013).

Ting et al (2010) in their attempt to analyse errors in spoken language examined grammatical errors in 126 oral interactions of 42 university students. This study highlighted five common grammar errors made by the speakers namely, preposition, question, article, plural form of nouns, subject-verb agreement and tense. Moreover, this study pointed that misinformation and omission are the main ways in changing the target forms when surface structure taxonomy was referred. Another recent study on error analysis of spoken discourse was by Muhamad et al (2013). In their study, errors made by students of English for Academic Purposes during their

oral presentations were examined. 32 oral presentations were observed and findings indicated that misformation accounted for majority of errors. In addition to misformation, omission and addition were also observed while verb form, word form and article were the frequent types of errors made by students.

In another study, Hojati (2013) further examined the errors in speaking skills of advanced learners of EFL in Iran. Thesis defense presentation from 20 graduate students majoring in TEFL served as the source of data. Data were examined for errors related to grammar, pronunciation and lexical. Findings revealed numerous errors were observed especially related to grammar and pronunciation even though the speakers are advanced learners of English. This study managed to highlight errors are still to be present even the learners are considered to be excellent in the target language.

Analysis of errors in spoken discourse is considered paramount for similar reason of identifying errors in written discourse. In Malaysian context, despite being exposed to English from their primary years, students often fail to present error-free language skills when they get to university. Oral presentation allows L2 learners to widen their productive use of target language beyond daily use as according to Ngui (2005), the lack of communication skills among graduates have been the major concern of employers.

Purpose of Study

The present study is set to examine errors in oral speech production of less proficient learners of English language. Specifically, it will look at the types of errors that mostly committed by learners following the surface structure taxonomy namely misformation, misordering, addition and omission (Dulay et al, 1982). In addition, this study will also classify errors based on linguistic descriptions of errors.

Methodology

The subjects for this study were 15 Malaysian students in Foundation English class taught by one of the researchers. Foundation English class is meant to provide remedy for less proficient learners of English upon enrolling at the university. They were first year students majoring in engineering and their first language is Malay. The Subjects were selected based on convenience sampling due to availability and willingness in participation.

As part of the course syllabus, students were required to perform role-play presentations. They were first grouped into a group of three and were given 20-minute time for preparation based on situations provided prior to oral presentation in front of the class. For this assessment, students were assessed based on language, content and creativity. Each group's presentation lasted in between 10 to 15 minutes and therefore, total recording amounted to 67 minutes. The data was later transcribed and analysed following categories based on surface structure

taxonomy; misformation, misordering, addition and omission. Table 1 provides examples for each of the category.

Table: 1

Examples of errors based on surface structure taxonomy

Category	Error	Correct form
Misformation	I <i>see</i> him yesterday	I <i>saw</i> him yesterday
Misordering	He will come <i>evening tomorrow</i>	He will come <i>tomorrow evening</i>
Addition	He can <i>tells</i> you	He can <i>tell</i> you
Omission	He <i>our</i> friend	He <i>is</i> our friend

In addition to categorizing the errors based on surface structure taxonomy, a linguistic description of grammatical errors was also performed. The categories were gathered from literatures that include verb tense, subject-verb agreement, preposition, article and pronoun.

Findings

This section of the study is meant to present the findings on the analysis of errors in role-play presentations of less proficient learners. The data obtained were orthographically transcribed and in the course of discussion, underline is used to indicate errors while symbol ^ is used to mark missing elements. First of part of discussion will statistically group errors according to categories proposed by surface structure taxonomy while second part of discussion will linguistically analyse the errors.

Categories of errors according to surface structure taxonomy

Analysis of errors according to surface structure taxonomy revealed a total of 96 phrases containing errors. Of all these errors, omission (n=40) is the most common type of errors found in students' speech. This is followed by misformation (n=30) and addition (n=21) while misordering is the least to be observed (n=5). This finding is found to be different with findings by other studies like Muhamad et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010) that identified misformation to be the most type of errors found in oral speech production. Table 2 provides statistical analysis of the findings.

Table: 2

Total errors based on surface structure taxonomy

Type of errors	Total	Percentage (%)
Misformation	29	31.3

Misordering	5	5.2
Addition	21	41.6
Omission	41	21.9
Total	96	100.0

It can generally be claimed that less proficient learners of English have problems in the category of omission. Errors of omission are made when compulsory elements such as tense markers are omitted. Examples of omission errors produced by students are as follow:

Omission 1: *I want ^ hang out with my friend tomorrow*

In the above-mentioned example, the infinitive marker *to* is omitted when it is supposed to be in between verbs *want* and *hang out*. Error omission can also be observed in question remark as depicted in Omission 2.

Omission 2: *Why ^ you want to stay here?*

The speaker in this sentence has omitted auxiliary verb *do* when it is needed to be combined with main verb *want* in order to correctly produce the question. Finally, error of omission can be noted even in short yet common phrase as highlighted in omission 3.

Omission 3: *That^ all from us*

In this remark, *that's all* is considered as very common phrase. However, the speaker failed to produce it correctly by dropping *-s* that needs to be attached to *that*.

Misformation is the second type or surface structure error committed by speakers during their role-play presentations. Misformation is usually concerned with the rules of word formation that differs from their native language. Below are some examples of misinformation errors produced by students:

Misformation 1: *Mum, I just complete^ driving test*

The speaker in this sentence intended to inform his/her mother that he/she has completed driving test. It is clear that the verb in this sentence must be in past tense as it describes recently completed event. The student is missing the past form for *complete* which is *completed* when uttering this sentence.

Misformation 2: *Your grandfather want^ to come tomorrow*

This sentence indicates the error in subject-verb agreement where the speaker (not to his/her knowledge) left out the singular *-s* for the verb *want* as the subject which is *grandfather* is in

singular form. The correct version which is *your grandfather wants to come tomorrow* is produced inaccurately.

Misinformation 3: *I have the right to sued this shop*

Misinformation 3 is another example of error that can be categorised as misinformation produced by students. In this sentence, the speaker has pronounced the verb *sued* as past tense while contradicting to linguistic rule that the verb must be in root form when it is followed by infinitive marker *to*.

The third most common surface structure error is addition. Errors of addition are identified by looking at words or phrases that contained unnecessary addition such as plural *-s* when the noun should be singular (Example: *a books*). From the data set, the total percentage of addition errors amounted to almost 18%. Below are several examples taken from the corpus of data.

Addition 1: *Do you want to celebrate its?*

In this example, the speaker has added unrequired *-s* to pronoun *it*. *It* and *its* are two different words that carry different meanings. This may have confused the speaker that resulted in such error. In this sentence, the *its* should be replaced with *it*.

Addition 2: *So lucky la you.*

Addition 2 highlighted interlanguage error where the word *la* which is a Malay word is applied in this sentence. One of the functions for the word *la* is to give emphasis value in; however it is not required in this sentence as the word *so* has given the same value as *la* in Malay to indicate the level of luckiness.

Addition 3: *But it got on sock, shirt and even in on shoes.*

Finally, the speaker in example above has added unnecessary preposition *in* to the structures. This addition might result from uncertainty of which preposition is correct to be used in this particular context.

Error of misordering on the other hand is the least found errors in students' utterances. It only amounted to a total of 4 errors or 4.4% of total errors. Misordering is observed when speakers wrongly sequenced the elements in the structures.

Misordering 1: *What I can do for you?*

In the above example, the noun *I* and auxiliary verb *can* are wrongly sequenced resulted from interlanguage rules. The speaker has misordered the sentence which should be what can I do *for you*. Even though it is comprehensible, it has violated the linguistic rule of target language.

Misordering 2: *Our is situation number five.*

In this example, the speaker has broken the noun phrase *our situation* by placing verb *is* in between. The correct version is *our situation is number five*.

In general, the overall results have ranked misformation to be the most common type of surface structure error in speech of less proficient students. This is followed by omission, addition and misordering. In the next section of this study, the errors will be analysed based on linguistic categories.

Linguistic description of errors

In addition to analysing the errors based on categories proposed by surface structure taxonomy, this study will also examine the errors according to linguistic categories. For this study, linguistic categories are adapted from previous literatures such as Sawalmeh (2013) and Muhamad et al (2013). Table 2 presents the frequency of errors based on identified linguistic categories.

Table: 3

Linguistic categorisation of errors

	Omission	Misformation	Addition	Misordering	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SVA	6	7	1	0	14	14.6
Verb form	15	14	2	0	31	32.3
Word form	3	8	15	5	31	32.3
Preposition	4	0	2	0	6	6.3
Conjunction	1	0	1	0	2	2.1
Plural	4	0	0	0	4	4.1
Sentence fragment	8	0	0	0	8	8.3
TOTAL	41	29	21	5	96	100.0

From Table 2, the errors can be categorised into seven linguistic descriptions of errors. It can be seen that the majority of errors are related to verb form and word form. This is followed by errors related to subject-verb agreement (SVA), sentence fragment, preposition, plural and conjunction.

Table 3 on the other hand provides examples of utterances that contain errors as listed in Table 2.

Table: 4

Examples of errors according to linguistic descriptions

	Omission	Misformation	Addition	Misordering
SVA	<i>My grandfather want[^] to come.</i>	<i><u>This is the terms and conditions</u></i>	<i>My socks and t-shirts <u>becomes</u>...</i>	-
Verb form	<i>It [^] adhan Maghreb now</i>	<i>The shop <u>did not told</u> me that.</i>	<i>I want <u>to sued</u> this shop</i>	-
Word form	<i>That[^] all from us</i>	<i><u>Your</u> ask your dad</i>	<i>Do you want to celebrate its?</i>	<i>What I can do for you?</i>
Preposition	<i>I want [^] hang out with my friend</i>	-	<i>But it got on sock, shirt and even <u>in on</u> shoes</i>	-
Conjunction	<i>Assalamu'alaikum [^] good morning to everyone</i>	-	<i>It has to be done in 24 hours <u>but</u> early</i>	-
Plural	<i>We come here two day[^] ago</i>	-	-	-
Sentence fragment	<i>I want to[^]</i>	-	-	-

A cursory look at the above table reveals that the Malaysian speakers commit different kinds of errors related to verb forms, word forms, prepositions, conjunctions, plural as well as sentence fragment. For example, when it comes to subject-verb agreement errors, some speakers tend to omit the singular –s for the verb as in my grandfather want[^] to come. As for the word form errors, some speakers has misordered some sentences as in what I can do for you?. As far as the plural is concerned, some speakers don't add the plural – s as in we come here two day[^] ago. Therefore, it could be argued that one way to highlight such errors is to collect them and ask the speakers to analyze them and then correct them with the help of the teacher.

Conclusion

This study has examined errors in the speech of less proficient learners of English language during their role-play presentations. The errors have been coded according framework proposed by surface structure taxonomy. In addition, this study also has recognised the errors according to linguistic descriptions of errors in order to provide wider overview on such errors in oral speech production.

Findings from this study have found to be slightly different from studies on errors in oral speech such as Muhamad et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010). While these studies have identified misformation to be the most committed error by speakers, this study on the other hand has identified omission to be the most type of errors found. This is followed by misformation. However, addition and misordering were found to be the least types of errors and this is consistent with findings from Muhamad et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010).

Types of errors were further analysed according to linguistic description of errors. It was found that verb form and word form are the largest set of errors of where the combined percentage is nearly 65% of total errors. Subject-verb agreement was also found to be the source of error and this was followed by sentence fragment, preposition, plural and conjunction. Findings as such were found to be unsurprising as according to Lightfoot (1998), these types of linguistic errors are common to take place among Asian learners.

Errors are found to be indicators of students' learning background. By knowing the errors, it can help teachers to provide suitable remedy in order to improve language acquisition and performance. This study is believed to be significant as not only it added to body of knowledge on errors in oral speech but also helped teachers or syllabus developer in designing suitable learning activities. As this study does not include longer period of recording, the findings however may be limited in its generalisability. Future intended studies should consider this in order to acquire more accurate findings.

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