



A COMPARISON OF THE ERRORS MADE BY MALE AND FEMALE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE WHILE USING VERB PARTICLES IN MASHHAD

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, while using a brief introduction to the importance of applied linguistics in practical fields especially learning second language teaching, factors that influence learning process will be examined. Then, the differences between learners in terms of learning abilities and similarities between learners of the first and second language will be considered. Later on, linguistic errors by a group of Iranian students in the use of prepositions which accompany verbs will be studied and analyzed. Next, the possible impact of gender on the difference on their performance in the relevant test will be compared. Findings show the very little difference between the two groups. After presenting the research results, a set of practical suggestions for the purpose of improving the quality of English language education in Iran will be mentioned.

INTRODUCTION

Using finding of linguistic knowledge in learning and also teaching of foreign languages is one of its applicable aspects. Indeed, Applicable linguistics is using linguistic theories in practicable contexts, especially in learning and teaching second language. In fact, learning and teaching second language are the most important issues that applied linguistics deal with. It is obvious that in this field one of favorite issues for linguists is dealing with quality and procedure of various learning language stages and studying and analyzing errors. They are trying to find complicated processes of human's mind in this field by studying the procedure of learning language in children. According to some similarities between learning first language and second one, it, findings of researchers will be so useful in this field regarding examining second language's learning methods. In this paper, at first we investigate effective factors in learning second language and analyzing errors in using preposition with verb by Persian language learners.

Since teaching and learning of preposition is often difficult to both teachers and learners and as well as existing problem such as a relatively large number and various functions of them, this field is one of the most difficult field in learning second language. It may be because of

special complication and extensiveness of this subject that grammarians have also paid less attention to this subject in compilation of their grammar's book and they often had a superficial look at it. It is obvious that Iranian teachers and language learners were not exceptions in this case i.e., they face same problems. It is clear that examining and analyzing of all problems and issues regarding such an extensive subject needs more work than it is not simple, but this research can help us to clarify quality of this aspect of second languages learning process and disclose existing problems to some extent.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Learning is a process in which making a mistake is inevitable. Mistakes, judgments, false calculations and wrong thoughts are important parts of learning any skill or information. Language learning is also a kind of learning, which probably looks like learning first languages by a child. In learning process, learners face inescapable mistakes but they use the various types of feedback they receive in connection with the errors to increase their knowledge. Language learner errors are important because they show researcher quality of learning or learning language and also give evidence about strategies and methods, which learners use to discover language. The main purpose of this paper is to consider and explain some of the language and non-linguistic factors involved in learning English, to describe some of the learners' errors in learning of "verb + preposition's".

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identifying and analyzing the interactions of the languages that have a lot in common, since the earliest times, has been the main element of the bilingual study. Entering features of a language to another one, in speech of bilingual people, has been studied in terms of syntax. In some cases, linguistic systems are confronted with collisions. The important result of comparative studies is to obtain the possibility of anticipation of existing problems in learning second language. It is probably easy for learners to learn the elements of languages that are similar to their mother tongue, but learning various cases is often problematic. Regarding learning second languages, conducted studies indicate that the most ability to predict contrastive analysis is in phonology and the least one is in syntax (Islamic Research Foundation, 1986). So far, it has been tried so much to use the ability of linguists to predict language mistakes and comparing mother tongue to second language in practice. One of the principles of applicable language has been relating all the mistakes of language learner to the difference between their mother tongue structure and second one through contrastive study of languages (The Islamic Research, 2005). It is because many mistakes that language learners make do not have any equivalence in their mother tongue. In fact, they make this mistake because of generalization of extensive learned pattern from second language to other field that this pattern isn't applicable to them. As a result, it is totally obvious that contrastive analysis isn't effective in justifying learners' mistakes.

Contrastive analysis has been one of the old methods to examine and predict mistakes of learners in learning process. This hypothesis emphasizes on Interference effects of a first language (Brown, 1939).

When language learners making mistakes in process of learning language, teacher can find the reason and source of their mistakes by using his/her knowledge about target languages and mother tongue and also predict errors in future cases. However, linguists discovered insufficiency in this method, so because of negative results of contrastive analysis that emphasizes on grammar, after 1957 they engaged in another factor in learning, error analysis, which could solve the problem (Richards, 1974, p. 4).

Earlier in 1911 as well as experts of language teaching especially Lado(1986) and Fries(1945) decided to enter teaching second language -which earlier relied on teachers' experiences - into empirical science territory. Their goal was that the reasons of the problems in second languages teaching would be found, and their cause will be cleared in order to eliminate those problems, (Moshfeqi, 1973, Fries, 1945).

Some linguists also suggested paying attention to linguistic action and studying it closer. For example, Corder (1969) states that linguists should study the language learning process and various adopted strategies by the learner. Then, Strevens(1973) suggests that linguistic errors should not be dominant in studies, but they must be considered as inevitable features of particular methods of learning language. In his opinion, if there were seen any mistakes in the learners who were also in progress, it should be understood that this mistake goes in right direction rather than a lack of learning direction.

This theory is also true about child's language learning. Nowadays, the child's speech is not considered as an adult's false speech but as a system with its own special basis and can be described in terms of its specific construction. The child, with his active role in making rules, gradually expands the linguistic rules in direction of adult linguistic system i.e., makes his/her special linguistic system like adults.

There are similar attitudes toward speech of second language learners. Until the late 1960s, most people considered learners' speech as a wrong form of target language. The interference concept has given power to this idea in the way that the existing habits prevent from constructing right speech, and the errors are signs of unsuccessful learning which they are annoying. However, new proposed method about mother tongues of the child also involves changing method in the way of facing the context of second language. The new idea expanded in this way so that second language learner can be considered as individuals who actively extract rules from linguistic data and retrieve them and gradually matched these rules in terms of the target language. In other words, second language learners have active role and process the rules

of second language in learning process. Then, gradually use that language system. Many interferences of mother tongue are predictable. The teacher who compare between mother tongue and second language of learner will be understand that those class of factors which similar to their mother tongue are more difficult to learn (BemaniNaeni, 2008). Therefore, second language learner speech also can be analyzed like children speech. This means that errors of language learners isn't recognized as signs of learning disability. But these are considered as evidences to learning and second language's development, and based on this, outlooks about how they will process the linguistic data can be obtained.

Finally, it should be noted that teachers can better teach their learners through analyzing errors that they do, so analyzing and recognizing of this these errors is necessary.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

One of the most important problems in understanding linguistic systems of first and second language learner' is that such linguistic system can't be observed directly. It should be deduced from the analysis of data from language generation. Yet, what makes our task more difficult is instability of those systems which they are constantly changing. When a teacher or a researcher takes the responsibility of analyzing an action, he/she should deduce consistence and discipline in learners' unstable language system (Douglas Brown, 1984). It seems that complexity and unsuccessfulness in learning some special field of English language is more than others. In many English language learning centers fields of errors in English as a second language presents as follows: articles, prepositions, and tense system. The main problem is that second language system in these fields consists of a set of various syntactic rules. Educational techniques, general grammar, along with teacher and learner, none of these present any systematic rules in these fields. However, it is hoped that learning will be done through learners' practice and experience of second language, which unfortunately it is unlikely because of problems in this field. This study has been conducted with consideration of effective linguistic and non-linguistic factors in learning. To do so, a test has been taken by over one hundred and fifty students of third and fourth grade in high school. To examine and analyze learners' errors, among the test sheets, 70 sheets that belonged to female learners and 50 sheets that belonged to male learners have been chosen. After preliminary examination, 60 question to examine and analyze, has been chosen from the questions of the test sheet. The questions are chosen according to their capacity to gain more accurate evaluation and expressive results and the defected and illegible sheets were not evaluated. At first, selected questions classified in 4 categories according to preposition type.

First category: the preposition that indicates location.

Second category: the preposition that indicates time.

Third category: the preposition with various adverbial concepts.

Forth category: the preposition that comes after verb.

After this stage, each category and also each question has been analyzed and examined separately. Also, the number of correct answers and errors were counted separately. Therefore, observed errors were classified into interlingual and intralingual errors according to errors type. After counting errors, the obtained figures calculated in percentage as:

$$\text{Error percentage} = \frac{100 * \text{error number}}{\text{Total Learner number}}$$

It should be reminded that this formula has been used for correct answers and unanswered cases. At the end of each section, the average of observed errors percentage has been written in table separately as intralingual error, interlingual errors, correct answers and also unanswered cases. To analyze each sentence of linguistic data, the following method has been applied:

Trough comparing the grammar construction of given sentences to Persian language, interference cases from mother tongue have been specified. Then this matter that interference from mother tongue has positive and negative results has been examined. For any structures from English language that we examining, whether there is a structure similar to that in Persian language or not should be surveyed. If there is such a similar structure how much conformity is between them? This point is also has been examined if there was similarity between analogy structures of two languages, whether the transition was necessarily positive or it also had negative result. The answer is that if there was a full coincidence between two structures, it was necessarily positive transfer, but if there was just relative coincidence, there was also possibility of negative transfer. However, based on much evidence that we will bring and results of examining them, we can state that in some cases in the time of learning and using foreign language, structure of mother tongue transfers to foreign language. The learner transfers word order and use of prepositions and the structure of him/her mother tongue to foreign language. It is obvious that transferring occurs in an unconscious way in a way that if the learner's attention is not drawn to some special cases, s/he is not aware of it. Regarding intralingual errors, it should be said that most of the cases, which learner uses the learned structure incorrectly in the second language, is the generalization of incorrect samples that has learned before, which we called them "primary sample" of course interlingual errors are not limited to wrong generalizing of primary samples but there are many mistakes which any of them has a particular reason. In this part, limited samples of errors are to be shown and examined. The goal is that, through systematic comparison between foreign language and culture with mother language and culture, we will be able to identify the problematic structures in learning second language, which slow down the learning process. Also, the structures that do not lead to any mistakes will be predicted and described. As a result, their finding can be used in preparation of foreign language teaching

materials. As Charles Friszman says that the most effective teaching materials are those that are based on the scientific description of the target language and carefully compared with the same description of the native language of the learners” (1945, p. 9). Besides, Lado (1973) believes that teacher of foreign language may not know that why she/he should deal with difficult task of comparing two languages. Isn't his/her task just teaching foreign language? Isn't enough that he/she know foreign language? The answer to this question is negative. The learner who is in touch with a foreign language finds that learning some of its features are totally easy and some are too difficult. Those elements that are similar to his/ her mother tongue probably are easy for him/her and the different ones are difficult (Lado, 1973). This fact is thoroughly observable and irrefutable in analysis of the errors. As a result, the teacher who knows sufficiently the real problems of learning can teach them better. He/she becomes aware of the language problems and the way to eradicate them. So he/she knows that whether linguistic and cultural structure that learner should learn are presented in class or not? Whether the book which he/she teaches emphasize sufficiently those structures that are problematic due to mismatch between it and mother tongue structure, or not? And the most important one: whether learner is exposed sufficiently to second language or not? However, because of varied and extent use of preposition, it is evident that error cases also are as various as using ways. In studying prepositions after verbs, we examined numbers of preposition. This prepositions which selected from tests questions are: about, off, up, of, to, out, over, for, from, aside, after, against, in, on, round. The reason they were selected were that they are the most frequent prepositions and language learners mostly deal with them.

ARGUMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Some structures of English language that are similar to Persian language not only does not make mistake in learning, but also will they be learned very soon and easily due to readiness for "positive transfer". Of course, the extent of similarity is different, but characteristics that are common in both languages lead to no mistake for teacher or learner, because in this case learning new item is not happening, but we can mention that interference from first language occurs. Like the structure of "listen to" which matches its Persian equivalence.

2. Some features of English language are almost similar to Persian language. This approximate similarity often causes interlingual mistakes in which a learner uses his/her mother tongue features that are similar to English language features rather than English ones. Although these types of similarity sometimes make learning easier, but as we have seen there is not always the same. In other words, some similarities sometimes cause negative results and slowing down the learning process, but ultimately they don't make significant errors. This is because sooner or later learner will find the correct form of second languages rules. Most observed interlingual

interference errors belong to this type, i.e., there is similarity between English and Persian structure, but the prepositions that should be used don't match totally. Consequently it leads to interlingual errors. Like "write in ink" structure that does not match with its Persian equivalent regarding the preposition.

3. Some structures in foreign language do not have any equivalence in Persian including idioms in which we have preposition as well as the verb loses its main meaning and acquires a new meaning. In regard to such idioms, intralingual interference is much and interlingual interference is negligible or does not exist at all. Of course, when there is perfect learning, number of correct answers is high, but with imperfect learning, intralingual interference has often been observed like incorrect generalization of primary sample. In some cases, intralingual interference errors occur when learners are learning a structure that there is no equivalence for that in their mother tongue. In fact, the whole forms of learning originate from this difference. For example the verb "put on", meaning dressing or "keep on" which means continuing. Some interlingual errors indicate that learning process is incomplete and still learner is in wandering and challenging state with other primary samples which has learned already. In this situation he/she still couldn't create a fixed imagination of given structure in his/her mind.

Table of percentage of error frequency in using preposition

Preposition +verb	Itralanguage error			Intralanguage error			Correct answer			No answer		
	mal e	female	Average	mal e	female	averag e	male	female	averag e	mal e	female	aver age
Call on	33	43	38	42	20	31	25	37	31	-	-	-
Put on	34	47	35.5	-	-	-	66	63	64.5	-	-	-
Keep on	26	23	24.5	-	-	-	74	77	75.5	-	-	-
Turn on	32	47	39.5	-	1.5	.75	68	51.5	5.75	-	-	-
Get on	34	37	35.5	58	40	49	8	23	15.5	-	-	-
Based on	31	30	30.5	14	14.5	14.25	50	44.5	47.25	5	11	8
Insist on	31	30	30.5	14	14.5	14.25	50	44.5	47.25	5	11	8
Be in a hurry	26	19	22.5	24	18	21	48	60	54	2	3	2.5
Be successful on	34	19	26.5	22	13	17.5	44	68	56	-	-	-
Write in ink	40	47	43.5	30	14	22	27	34	30.5	3	5	4
Write in his notebook	34	27	30.5	12	17	14.5	54	56	55	-	-	-
Look up	57	54	55.5	13	29	21	30	17	23.5	-	-	-
Call up	36	40	38	12	-	6	52	60	56	-	-	-
Get up	30	16	23	4	14	9	66	70	68	-	-	-
Go up	24	19	21.5	66	63	64.5	10	18	14	-	-	-
Grow up	42	33	37.5	-	-	-	44	44	44	14	23	18.5
Put out his coat	84	69	76.5	-	-	-	16	31	23.5	-	-	-
Put out the fire	82	84	83	-	-	-	18	16	17	-	-	-
Pick out	90	86	88	-	-	-	10	14	12	-	-	-

Leave out	50	42	46	-	-	-	40	44	42	10	14	12
Turn off	50	49	49.5	-	-	-	50	51	50.5	-	-	-
Call off	62	60	61	6	16	11	32	24	28	-	-	-
Get off	42	32	37	2	6	4	34	33	33.5	22	29	25.5
put off	76	58	67	-	-	-	24	42	33	-	-	-
lead to	34	27	30.5	20	20	20	32	32	32	14	21	17.5
listen to	30	21	25.5	-	-	-	70	79	74.5	-	-	-
polite to	36	10	23	28	22	25	32	62	47	-	6	5
used to	38	39	38.5	-	-	-	62	61	61.5	-	-	-
tired of	34	19	26.5	25	34	29.5	41	47	44	-	-	-
ashamed of	34	19	26.5	25	34	29.5	41	47	44	-	-	-
look over	66	63	64.5	30	30	30	4	7	5.5	-	-	-
get over	75	60	67.5	-	-	-	18	31	24.5	7	9	8
be responsible for	14	13	13.5	52	40	46	26	41	33.5	8	6	7
fight against	40	32	36	32	49	40.5	28	19	23.5	-	-	-
be careful about	18	17	17.5	30	30	30	46	48	47	6	5	5.5
look after	70	50	60	20	13	16.5	2	27	14.5	8	10	9
move round	46	49	47.5	32	8	20	12	21	16.5	10	22	16
put aside	86	76	81	-	4	2	14	20	17	-	-	-
be different from	52	43	47.5	28	23	25.5	20	34	27	-	-	-

50 male and 70 female language learner

4. In structures, that learning process is not complete or the learner doesn't expose to them sufficiently, in addition to errors frequency, some unanswered cases can also be seen. This means that the learning continuity and sufficient emphasis on learning and more important one, exposing to foreign language and speaking it, which has to occur in an artificial environment, are so important and effective. One of the structures that learners cannot learn completely is "put aside", because learners do not have enough familiarity with it, there are high percentage of intralingual error in form of incorrect generalization of primary samples. In general, the low-frequency structures and those that are not learnt completely for any reasons result in maximum number of errors. In this case, the number of correct answer is very low, but interlingual and intralingual errors can be observed a lot. As we mentioned that in these cases, learners try to generalize primary samples according to their previous findings of the second language or by using their mother tongue knowledge or apply mother tongue rules to second language. Now, occurrence of more errors depends on construction of the discussed structure in whatever fields which is to what extent similar to learner mother tongue. As we said the more the extent of compliance, the less error and on the contrary the more the difference, the more percentage of errors will be observed. Take "look after" as an example, which means "take care of" is more different from Persian construction. "Fight against" structure which although in some extent is similar to Persian construction, but because in Persian language it applies with "with" and "to", the learner mostly uses them.

5. Not knowing the meaning of some words and especially misreading of group's verbal base (verb + preposition) causes that interlingual and intralingual errors appear in various forms.

Misreading of verb meaning and disability in deducing the meaning of sentence is one of the most important mistakes of Persian learner in learning English language. As in the survey that conducted during the test, most learners point out that they failed to understand word meanings. One of the cases that error has occurred due to not knowing the meaning of the verb is “interested in” structure. Some learners meant it quiet opposite of its true meaning, i.e., “hate”.

6. Although all second language learners do not learn similarly and do not acquire a skill equally in it, but in examining errors it is turned out that in most cases the percentage of errors and well as correct answers between female and male learner is so close or even equal. This indicated that gender cannot per se have effect on learning process of second language. In other words the process of learning second language is equal between male and female. Only because of more effort in learning or educational factors, learning especial condition, and social condition and so on, the correct answers of female learners are more than male learners. For example, we can mention the statistic of usage of “about” and well as “from”.

7. How to provide educational materials or how to set up exam questions can sometimes cause errors, so it is very necessary for the teachers to provide tests questions with enough accuracy and to avoid designing complicated and difficult structures. For example, one of the cases where the construction of a sentence causes an error is "return in two years." which is due to similarity of verb “return” to “turn”.

8. In some cases, the cause of the error cannot be determined precisely. In other word, it cannot be claimed that the error precisely is interlingual or intralingual. For example in using preposition “in”, in preposition phrase of “in November 7th” it cannot be said certainly that learner has used “in” because of “November” month and they have not paid attention to the day nor they generalize Persian preposition to English language in form of “in”. This is where we face these kinds of problems and cannot make a clear distinction between interlingual and intralingual errors due to the fact that we cannot directly observe a learner’s mental learning process.

9. Learning motivation is so important and it is very effective in learning amount and acquiring skill. Learners’ personal attitude towards English language is one of the very important factors in the quality of second language learning. The motivation of articulating correct sentences to show similarity with English languages speakers or imitating teacher is an effective factor for successfulness. Those learners who gained achievement in learning English language not only found that so useful, but also are they always interested in continuing to study this major in university. They try to articulate language better and similar to native English speakers. Those who have a such attitude towards English language as a foreign language become more

successful. On the other hand, there are always a number of learners in various situations as well as in present survey who consider learning English as a useless course. Some of them, in hope of using 8th grade exam laws, put it aside completely. Obviously, such an attitude will have much negative effect on learning quality. Unfortunately the number of mentioned individuals isn't low and most of those learners who have not succeeded for any reasons have such a negative attitude. This issue, in turn, should be considered deeply.

SUGGESTIONS

To improve the quality of learning English language, as a language teacher, the following are suggested:

A) Although there is many people who believe that children learn second language better and are more talented in learning second language, and some have radical opinions that learning language especially after puberty is impossible or at least so difficult. But today most scientists and researchers hold different view and believe that learners can learn second language at any ages. However, they don't deny this fact that there is more possibility to succeed for children in learning second language, especially in pronunciation of second language. Researchers believe that regarding children, the possibility of emerging obstacles such as negative transfer or creating negative attitude to second language is lower (Littlewood, 1985, p. 34). Especially children's phonetics mechanism is more prepared to learn phonetics of second language. That's why they are more successful in learning pronunciation. As a result, it is better that learning second language will begin in early age, for example, teaching sounds should start in later years of elementary education.

B) The numbers of weekly hours of learning language is very low (4 to 9 hours) with a lack of efficiency. Unfortunately, in recent years, not only it has not been added to learning hours but also is there a decrease in hours. Reducing lessons and reducing the volume of textbooks is one of the factors influencing the decline in education and the decline in the quality of language teaching.

C) The unavailability of textbooks in beginning of each educational years and shortage of educational assistance books cause that teachers have to full class time with other things about one month or more of each educational years. Furthermore, because passing the exam is one of most important criteria for evaluating as well as original goal of education, the teachers prefer to focus on and emphasize grammatical points so that learners can easily get passing score. Obviously, in this case, English language education is of secondary importance. In other words, language is not taught but what is taught is about language. Therefore, most of the main texts of

the lesson are neglected and more emphasis is placed on the grammatical points. On the other hand, to compensate missing time, teachers have to accelerate teaching and sometimes they fail to finish the book. These cases itself are major issues in language learning.

D) Facilities and teaching aids such as visual and audio instructional equipment are close to zero. Although private institutes in the major cities try to attract learners with a lot of advertising on their educational facilities, they may not be successful in utilizing their facilities because they are not of the appropriate quality and standard, and their cost is very high and sometimes. As a result, their work has little effect on language teaching. It's good to be more serious in providing training tools.

E) The teaching methods of teacher should be changed. Due to ever- increasing grow of student number and insufficient number of teachers, teachers are forced to teach longer hours as overtime. This is because of extreme need to language teachers and their financial problems. So that, in this case, the quality of teaching reduces greatly. Although linguistic textbooks have been changed in recent years, and new books to be taught based on the "reading method" are available to learners. It should be noted that comparative analysis has provided teachers with an effective way to help them choose the best method among the teaching ones. Through analysis of common errors, the teacher would find out which materials in her/his teaching, what to rely on, which side exercises he/she should use and consequently how correct learners errors (BemaniNaeni, 2008). However, due to a lack of familiarity to new method and opportunity to study about it, teachers sometimes continue their old method. That is in conflict with the current language educational goal. In general, teaching methods is a way that prepare student only for final exam. As mentioned before, the focus is only on grammatical points and answering questions similar to exams ones. Consequently, the main goal which is learning second language is neglected.

F) Unfortunately, non-educational criteria such as passing percentage are of great importance. It is not necessary to refer to such criteria for selection and promotion of teachers because those are doubtful due to the problems encountered in the correctness of these criteria. Therefore, it is necessary not to apply such criteria in order to select and promote teachers.

G) Given the importance of the role of the mother tongue and the fact that learning a second language is in fact the acquisition of rules that differ from learner's mother tongue, then must have a book that has been compiled regarding the various problems and issues he/she encounters. For example, books that can respond to the specific problems of Iranian language learners in learning English should be compiled based on a comparative study of two languages and consciously rely on the points of English language construction which have fundamental difference with Persian language. Exams and tests also should be designed based on comparative

study and includes no common points between mother tongue and second language. This means that the level of skill in using problematic constructions of second language is measured.

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