English Translation Department

Fourth Year

Comparative Linguistics

Ms. Rana Dakhel

1. Comparative Linguistics

Comparative linguistics (CL) is the scientific study of language from a comparative point of view, which means that it is involved in comparing and classifying languages. To compare languages is to discover whether the languages compared have similarities and differences as well as potential areas of learning or translation problems.

Early proponents of Contrastive linguistics claim that differences between the languages compared (L1=the learner or translator's native language, and L2=the target language) cause difficulties for the learner/translator of L2. They also claim that interference (**negative transfer**) from L1 to L2 is a major source of learning/translation difficulties or errors.

Transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. Transfer from L1 to L2 may be either **positive** or **negative**. Positive transfer occurs when L1 and L2 have similar systems or features. This transfer induces facilitation in learning/translation. On the other hand, negative transfer (**interference**) occurs when L1 and L2 have different systems or features. This transfer induces difficulties in learning/translation.

2. Competence and Performance

Competence in Generative Grammar is the implicit system of rules that constitutes a person's knowledge of language. This includes a person's ability to create and understand sentences, including sentences they have never heard before.

Performance in Generative Grammar is a person's actual use of language.

1

A difference is made between a person's knowledge of a language and how a person uses this knowledge in producing and understanding sentences. For example, people may have the competence to produce infinitely long sentences but when they actually attempt to use this knowledge (to perform), they may restrict the number of adjectives, adverbs and clauses in any one sentence. They may run out of breath, or their listeners may get bored or forget what has been said if the sentence is too long.

3. Errors and Error Analysis

3.1 Introduction

Error Analysis is a branch of applied linguistics which is concerned with identification and analysis of errors made by second language learners by applying a system of formal distinction to differentiate between the learner's first language (L1) and target language (l2).

3.2 Types of Errors

Researchers in the field of applied linguistics usually distinguish between two types of errors: **competence** errors and **performance** errors.

Competence errors reflect inadequate learning; they occur because the learners do not know what is correct.

performance errors reflect usual lapses in performance; they occur if the learners are unable to perform what they know. For example, they may be tired, careless, distracted or hurried. Such types of error are not serious as competence errors that cannot be overcome with little effort by the learners.

It is important to note that researchers distinguish between mistakes and errors. **Errors** are related to the competence of the learner, whereas **mistakes** are related to the performance of learner.

Other researchers distinguish between **local** and **global** errors.

Local errors do not hinder communication and understanding the meaning of utterance. Local errors involve noun and verb inflections, and the use of articles, prepositions and auxiliaries.

2

Global errors, on the other hand, are more serious than local errors because global errors interfere with communication and disrupt the meaning of an utterance. They involve wrong word order in a sentence.

Finally, language learning errors involve all language components: the **phonological**, the **morphological**, the **lexical**, the **semantic**, the **grammatical** and the **syntactic** components. An example of a phonological error is the lack of distinction between the phoneme /p/ and the phoneme /b/ among Arab ESL learners; they say *pird* and *brison*, for example, instead of *bird* and *prison*. An example of a morphological error is the production of errors such as *womans*, *sheeps* and *furnitures*. A lexical error involves inappropriate direct translation from the learner's native language or the use of wrong lexical items in the second language. An example of lexical errors is: *The clock is now ten*. A semantic error is also related to the literal translation such as *I cut a promise on myself to study*, and Finally, examples of syntactic errors are errors in word order, subject-verb agreement, and the use of the resumptive pronoun in English relative clauses produced by Arab ESL learners as illustrated in: *The boy that I saw him is called Ali*.

3.3 Causes of Errors

There are mainly two major sources of errors in second language learning. The first source is **interference** from the native language while the second source can be attributed to **intralingual and developmental** factors.

The native language of learners plays a significant role in learning a second language. Errors due to the influence of the native language are called **interlingual** errors. Interlingual errors are also called **negative transfer or interference** errors.

Intralingual and **developmental** errors are due to the difficulty of the target language, Intralingual and developmental factors include the following:

1. **Simplification:** Errors that result from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those which exist in the target language. An example of simplification might involve the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous.

3

2. **Overgeneralization**: Errors caused by extending target language rules to inappropriate contexts. Examples of overgeneralization include the use of *comed* and *goed* as the past tense forms of *come* and *go* and the omission of the third person singular s under the heavy pressure of all other endless forms as in *he go*.

3. **Hypercorrection**: Those resulting from transfer of training. This type of error is also called **induced errors**. For example, the zealous efforts of teachers in correcting the phoneme /p/ prompts learners to always produce /p/ where the phoneme /b/ is required. Thus, Arab EFL learners say *pird* and *pattle* instead of *bird* and *battle*.

4. **Avoidance**: Errors which result from failing to use certain target language structures because they are considered to be too difficult. Arab EFL learners avoid the passive voice while Japanese learners avoid relativization in English.

5. **False concepts hypothesized**: Many learner's errors can be attributed to wrong hypotheses formed by these learners about the target language. For example, some learners think that *is* is the marker of the present tense. So, they produce: *He is talk to the teacher*. Similarly, they think that *was* is the past tense marker. Hence, they say: *It was happened last night*.

6. **Fossilization**: Some errors persist for long periods and become quite difficult to get rid of. An example of fossilized errors in Arab EFL learners is the lack of distinction between /p/ and /b/.

7. **Communication-based errors**: errors that result from communication strategies. An example of such an error is related to expressing the concept indirectly, by allusion rather than by direct reference.

3.4 Steps in error analysis

According to linguists, the following are steps in any typical error analysis research:

1. identifying the errors.
2. Describing/classifying the errors.
3. explaining the errors.
4. evaluating/correcting the errors.

3.5 Error Identification and Classification

After collecting samples, the next step is describing and classifying errors into classes: **grammatical** (prepositions, articles, reported speech, singular/plural, adjectives, relative clauses, irregular verbs, tenses and possessive case), **syntactic** (coordination, sentence structure, nouns and pronouns, and word order), **lexical** (word choice), **semantic** (literal translation), **morphological** (word forms) and **phonological** (consonants, vowels, stress, rhythm and intonation).

3.5.1 Grammatical Errors

3.5.1.1 Agreement

Arabic verbs agree with their subjects in person, number and gender. Hence, Arab students make few subject-verb agreement errors in their essays except where the subject's number is confusing. However, another kind of agreement error occurs is that of adjectives or adverbs agreeing with the nouns they modify.

In English, few adjectives show agreement in number with the nouns they modify, such as *this-these* and *that-those*. Other adjectives are used to modify singular as well as plural pronouns. In Arabic, however, the situation is different. Adjectives agree in number with the nouns they modify. As a result, agreement errors of this type occur in the English writings of students. For example, students write the following:

*My sister goes to *others* shops.

instead of: My sister goes to other shops.

*The art of *paragraphs* writing is not difficult.

instead of: The art of paragraph writing is not difficult.

The italicized words above take the plural form in Arabic.

3.5.1.2 Articles

In English, abstract words referring to ideas, attributes, or qualities are used without the article *the* to refer to that idea or attribute, etc. which belongs to everybody or everything. In Arabic; however, such abstract words are preceded by a definite article equivalent to *the* in English. Hence, errors pertaining to the misuse of the article *the* occur. For instance, students write the following:

*The marriage is a holy ceremony.

instead of: Marriage is a holy ceremony.

*The persistence is necessary for the success.

instead of: Persistence is necessary for success.

On the other hand, abstract words become specific when they are preceded by the article *the* in English. They become the preposition of a certain person, group, object, etc. The usual way of expressing this possession is by a phrase starting with *of, to,* or *for.* For example, the following sentences are correct in English:

You must study geography.

But: Tom studied the geography of England.

In contrast, Arabic does not make use of an article before an abstract term when it is the possession of a specific person or object. Rather, the abstract word is rendered by the modifying noun that follows it. It is not surprising then that the students wrote the following sentence:

The victims of *the* war are many.

instead of: The victims of war are many.

(war here is general and not specific.)

3.5.1.3 Prepositions

Prepositions pose a great difficulty for an ESL learner since there are various prepositions in English that have the same function. For instance,

the prepositions *in*, *at* and *on* in the following sentences indicate place with subtle differences in usage.

He is in the garden.

He is at home.

He lives on campus.

As a result, when students are not sure which preposition to use in a certain sentence, they often compare that sentence with its Arabic equivalence, giving a literal translation of that Arabic preposition in English. However, prepositions seldom have a one to one correspondence between English and Arabic. An Arabic preposition may be translated by several English prepositions while an English usage may have several Arabic translations. Once again. Such translations are the cause of errors, especially in the case of *in*. Below are such examples:

*I mean *in* this example.

instead of: I mean by this example.

*Driving *in* a high speed.

instead of: Driving at a high speed.

These two examples take the same preposition in Arabic which corresponds to *in* in English. Other preposition errors are the following:

*He is ready *to* the exam.

instead of: He is ready for the exam.

*I am *under* your disposal.

instead of: I am at your disposal.

There are structures that are equivalent in both languages and others that are not likewise.

7

3.5.1.4 Singular vs. Plural Words

An ESL learner is unable to determine whether a certain English word is singular or plural based on its form alone. Some words that end with the plural form *s* are actually singular in number, whereas others indicate a singular or plural number while maintaining the same form. Faced with this complexity of the English number, it is only natural that ESL students resort to literal translation from Arabic when determining whether a certain English word is singular or plural. The following sentences were written by the students:

*Statistics *are* often carried out to determine the increase in population.

instead of: Statistics is often carried out to determine the increase in population.

Here, *statistics* does not only end with the plural form, but is also a plural word in Arabic which explains why students often commit mistakes for a plural word in English.

*We have a lot of *homeworks* for today.

instead of: We have a of homework for today.

The word homework takes the plural form in Arabic is plural in number.

5.3.1.5 Passive Voice Errors

Examples of errors in the use of passive voice are:

*Smoking can be caused man serious diseases. (can cause)

In this example, it can be said the student confuses between active and passive voice. This might be due to the lack of sufficient training and drills on this rule which lead to overgeneralization of the rule.

*It can been said that smoking is bad. (can be said)

8

The misuse of verb <u>to be</u> is peculiar in this example since this verb does not exist in Arabic. This error may be due to intralingual transfer.

3.5.2 Lexical Errors

Due to their limited English vocabulary, ESL learners frequently words from Arabic to express a certain idea in English, unaware of the English collocations (i.e. word 'A' in a certain English sentence coexists with the word 'B' and not with 'C' even though 'B' and 'C' may be synonymous). In other words, one word in Arabic can be translated into English by several words. I t remains for the students to determine which word collocates with the meaning expressed in the sentence.

*Doctors *describe* medications for their patients.

instead of: Doctors prescribe medications for their patients.

*Man and woman *continue* each other.

instead of: Man and woman complete each other.

3.5.3 Semantic errors

Semantic errors occur when students use literal translation to convey in English flowery Arabic expressions, idioms or proverbs. This, they hope, will enrich their essays. The outcome as follows:

*I *cut a promise* on myself.

instead of: I promised myself.

*He *fell in the fault*.

instead of: He made a mistake.

3.5.4 Syntactic Errors

9

Among the frequent syntactic errors are those of word order, coordination and omission of the copula.

3.5.4.1 Word Order

A common syntactic error that students commit as a result of transfer is faulty word order. In English, adjectives usually precede the nouns they modify. However, in Arabic, they generally follow them. As a result, this Arabic grammatical rule leads students to produce the following sentences:

*Here are *three rules* very helpful.

Instead of: Here are three very helpful rules.

A similar mistake occurs with the use of adverbs since an adverb that modifies an adjective or another adverb usually precedes that adjective or adverb. Once again, in Arabic, this is not the case. Hence, students write the following:

*Every person *almost* has a car.

Instead of: Almost every person has a car.

3.5.4.2 Coordination

In English, items in a series are separated by commas, and the conjunction 'and' is used just before the last word. On the other hand, in Arabic, each item in a series is preceded by the conjunction 'wa' which is equivalent to 'and'. Accordingly, the following sentence is perfectly correct in Arabic:

*My favorite fruits are cherries *and* peaches *and* pears and watermelons.

However, it is quite odd in English.

3.5.4.3 Omission of Copula

Since Arabic has no copula, students neglect to use those structures in English. For example, students wrote the following:

10

*You said you not tired.

instead of: You said you are not tired.