

Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language: Revisited

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Abstract—In the process of language teaching and learning, there are many problems faced by second language learners, especially in achieving basic language skills. Even though many more issues crop up while teaching language and also various teaching methods are employed in classroom situations, the problems are not yet fully rectified. So, an attempt has been made to study the existing problems and solutions while learning and teaching language. Besides, for providing linguistic remedial measures and suggestions based on the study have been found so that the problems faced by these language learners can be rectified. There are many sub-categories under the process of language learning. It is very difficult to cover the entire spectrum that related to this area. Therefore, some of the issues have been identified and then the remedies have been suggested.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, motivation, second language

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching and Learning English as a second language has always been on top priority, especially as a second language. There is a necessity of English language teaching and learning so that the best of the knowledge and communication can be extended to all human beings. To make the students aware of the outside world in a broader sense, the English language plays an important role. When teaching English to get the desired outcome is a Global problem, teaching English as a second language in the world remains a greater problem. The language teaching task is difficult due to the diversity of the students' socio-cultural backgrounds, motivations and interests, learning styles, differing personalities and behaviour patterns, the teachers' attitudes and long-kept practice and various methods.

This variable is into linguistic levels as subvariables, which are the constituent components or layers of language, as listed below:

1. phonemic level
2. grapheme level
3. lexemic level
4. syntactic level

An attempt is made to assess the linguistic performance of students by breaking down their target language output in speech and writing levels. The distribution of errors among these levels will help understand which of these levels pose more difficulty for students, to what extent, and which of these levels correlate with the linguistic variables taken into consideration, and to what extent. Thus, in this study, an attempt is made to explore which of these variables are correlated and to find what type of correlations exist among them. For the convenience of statistical analysis, the variable for performance was quantified in terms of the percentage of errors made in each level, and not the performance or marks; this means that the higher this variable (error percentage) is, the poorer will be the language skill of the learner in that level.

II. GROUND ASSUMPTIONS

Hypotheses are presumptive research propositions that are put forward in given research based on the research problem and objectives of the research; these propositions are further tested using appropriate research tools, methods, and analysis and are concluded to be either true or false. Before framing a study's hypothesis or a set of them, certain ground presumptions are made. For instance, these ground assumptions may be acceptance or acknowledgement of the "existence" of the variables included in the hypotheses. In other words, hypotheses are built based on certain ground assumptions. This implies that ground assumptions form the basis of the hypotheses or the entire research framework. Therefore, if the ground assumptions are proved to be invalid, the hypotheses of a research work would collapse. The following are the ground assumptions of the present investigation:

- Individuals form their worldview, which includes subjective constituents of entities is part of the worldview of individuals.

- Individuals have a preferred or dominant way of interacting with the world and perform well in their dominant or preferred style. This aspect is a segment of personality concerning learning and processing stimuli from the environment or surroundings.
- Language performance can be measured and quantified.
- Speaking and writing are productive skills in language learning and usage.
- Language can be broken down into different levels such as phonemic, lexemic, syntactic, etc.
- Errors made in speech and writing can be used as a source to understand the individual's competence in a given language. In other words, language competence, which is an internal component, can be measured by measuring language performance, which is the manifestation of one's language skills and mastery.
- Language performance–competence is influenced by various language factors.

III. VARIABLES IN THE STUDY

Variables in a study are the elements that are studied as an individualistic unit. That is, a variable can be a factor that influences something or an element that is influenced by something. Thus, in a quantitative approach, variables taken into consideration for the study are the main focus and the relationships between and among them are explored. In order to study the various correlations that exist not only between the variables but also with the subvariables, the variable “errors” (ET) is categorized into the subvariables EO and EW, which were further narrowed down into four and five subvariables, respectively. The main variables and subvariables are presented here.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

Apart from the objective of validating the above-listed hypothesis, the present study also tries to answer the following question as part of its findings:

1. What are the difficulties faced by learners of English in speaking?
2. What are the difficulties faced by learners of English in writing?

The methodology used to find an answer to this research question is to assess the language outputs of learners of Thai who learn it as a foreign/second language. By analyzing the writing and speech of these learners, their language performance–competence can be quantified. In addition, an analysis of errors in their speech and writing can provide data on the difficulties or problematic areas. Using this approach, which aspects of the Thai language pose more challenges for the learners of Thai as a second/foreign language can be identified?

IV. RESEARCH TOOLS

Research tools are the means by which the raw data for research are collected. Two main research tools were used for this study: (i) assessment test and (ii) questionnaire.

V. ASSESSMENT TEST

An assessment test that the research participants took was used to collect data on their language output, and it was limited to assessing their speaking and writing.

VI. QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The responses collected by administering the questionnaire were interpreted. After recording the interpretations of the responses collected through the questionnaire, data analysis was performed.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through the assessment test and questionnaires were subjected to quantitative analysis. That is, the data collected were analyzed to deduce the variables of interest quantitatively, which are required for the analysis made to meet the objectives of the research. Depending on the nature of the data and the variables, appropriate statistical techniques were used.

Statistical analyses were done using MS Excel. Graphs were generated using an online platform, Scatterplot Online (available at <https://scatterplot.online/>).

VIII. ERRORS IN ORAL AND WRITTEN ASSESSMENT—ERROR ANALYSIS

The answers given by the learners in the assessment test were evaluated using linguistic methods. The errors made by the learners were initially analyzed to find the types of errors made.

IX. CATEGORIZATION OF ERRORS INTO DIFFERENT LINGUISTIC LEVELS

The errors made in the **written** assessment were analyzed and categorized into the following groups based on the level under which the error falls:

1. Graphemic level
2. Lexemic level
3. Syntactic level

Similarly, the answers (language output) in the **oral** assessment were checked for errors, and the errors were categorized into the following groups based on the level under which of the following levels the error falls:

1. Phonemic level
2. Lexemic level
3. Syntactic level

The errors presented in the previous section were then converted into systematic categories for the purpose of quantitative and statistical analysis. As shown above, the data comprise of two parts: (i) errors made in the oral task and (ii) errors made in the writing task. For both tasks, the total number of words was noted to calculate the percentage of error. The error count cannot be taken as such for calculation because the length or number of words of the language output by each learner is different. This is due to the fact that objective tests were not used; instead, open-ended questions like essay writing and speech on a topic were used to collect data.

Thus, the percentage of errors was calculated for total as well as for different linguistic levels, namely, graphemic, lexemic, and syntactic in the writing task and phonemic, lexemic, and syntactic in the oral task.

X. POSSIBLE CAUSES OF ERRORS

Every error does not necessarily reflect the competence of the individual in producing language. It can be due to different factors, which may include the following:

XI. PHONEMIC LEVEL

The phonemic level represents the segmental sounds of a language. Thus, errors categorized as falling under this level will indicate that the error is in the phoneme. This would mean that the following are the main possibilities that cause this type of error:

1. Lack of knowledge of the phoneme—the root cause is lack of *competence* with regard to that instance
2. Inability to produce the phoneme—the root cause is *articulatory difficulty* with regard to that instance
3. Slip of the tongue—the root cause is neither competence nor a persistent articulatory difficulty (ie, other causes).

XII. GRAPHEMIC LEVEL

The graphemic level represents the writing system of a language. Thus, errors categorized as falling under this level will indicate that the error is in the grapheme. This would mean that the following are the main possibilities that cause this type of error:

1. Error resulting from lack of competence with regard to that instance
2. Error caused by a mistake done during performance

XIII. LEXEMIC LEVEL

The lexemic level represents the words in a language. Thus, errors categorized as falling under this level will indicate that the error is in the lexeme. Thai is an isolating language, which means that inflections are very less and many words are made up of one morpheme. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the lexemic level is taken into consideration instead of a morphemic level, which would involve morphological analysis. Thus, errors in this level are categorized in the word-level and not morpheme-level. This would mean that the following are the main possibilities that cause this type of errors reported in the study:

1. Error resulting from lack of competence with regard to that instance—error due to lack of competence, that is, the learner does not know the (right) word
2. Error caused by a mistake done during performance—performance-related mistake, that is, the learner knows the right word but has made a mistake

XIV. SYNTACTIC LEVEL

The syntactic level represents the syntax and grammar in a language. Thus, errors categorized as falling under this level will indicate that the error is in the syntax and grammar. This would mean that the following are the main possibilities that cause this type of errors reported in the study:

1. Error resulting from lack of competence with regard to that instance—error due to lack of competence, that is, the learner does not know the grammar rule
2. Error caused by a mistake done during performance—performance-related mistake, that is, the learner knows the grammar rule but has failed to apply it by mistake.

XV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA ON ERROR CATEGORIES AND INFERENCES

On comparing the total errors made in the oral task versus the writing task, more errors were found to be made in the oral task. This implies that the learners make more errors in speaking compared with writing.

The ranking of the levels based on the highest percentage of errors to the lowest percentage of errors is as follows:

1. Phonemic level in the oral task
2. Graphemic level in the writing task
3. Lexemic level in the oral task
4. Lexemic level in the writing task
5. Syntactic level in the oral task
6. Syntactic level in the writing task

The above data indicate that as far as the English language is concerned, syntax is easiest and learners make the fewest syntactic or grammatical errors. This was followed by the lexemic level. That is, next to syntax, errors in vocabulary are relatively less. Thus, it can be considered that the syntactic and lexemic levels are pretty easy. This can be attributed to the typology of English. The lack of inflection makes it unlikely to have a challenging grammar for second language learners.

The next level was found to be the graphemic level. This can be attributed to the fairly complicated writing system of English.

The phonemic level falls on the extreme with the maximum percentage of errors. There can be different reasons for this. The main reasons are listed as follows:

- The difference in the phonemic inventory of the individual's first language vs target language
- The difference in the syllable structure of the individual's first language vs target language, eg, certain consonant clusters being absent in the individual's first language.
- Lack of practice or drill required mastering the knack or swiftness in making articulatory movements specific to the language. This is stated here considering the fact that production of speech involves articulatory movements including phonation and other physical aspects involved in speech production.

XVI. RANKING OF DIFFICULTY

A higher percentage of error in a category indicates that the learners find some difficulties in that category. The rationale behind this postulation is that learners would make fewer mistakes in areas that they find difficult. Thus, the variable percentage of error can be considered as a measure of difficulty. Considering the percentage of errors in oral task and writing task separately, the ranking of levels based on the highest percentage of errors to the lowest percentage of errors.

XVII. CONCLUSION

Productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (listening and reading) are the basic skills that are required to not only learn a language but also to use it. The study focused on productive skills (speaking and writing) and made an attempt to assess the performance in speaking and writing in a selected group of students of English as a second language. Their performance was assessed in terms of the percentage of errors they made in an oral task and a writing task. Thus, the percentage of errors the learners made was used as a measure of their language performance involving productive skills. Different categories of errors were analyzed for correlations that exist among them. Based on the ranking of errors, the levels or areas of difficulty in learning English were concluded.

Performance (which was quantified on the basis of the percentage of errors) was correlated with the following linguistic factors: self-assessment in terms of how good the learner is in (a) language learning in general, (b) writing skills, and (c) speaking skills. Language attitude with respect to perceived difficulty of the target language at different levels—namely, (a) overall difficulty, (b) phonemic level, (c) graphemic level, (d) lexical level, and (e) syntactic level.

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