



# ERROR ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS-A CASE STUDY OF MAGAHI SPEAKERS LEARNING ENGLISH IN A COACHING INSTITUTE IN DANAPUR

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## ABSTRACT

*The speaking skill in non-native language has been the subject of investigations in recent years. The present study examines errors in the speech of less proficient speakers of English in their speech. 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 analyzed 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 are identified in verb inflection and word formation to be the most frequent types of errors committed by speakers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Errors, Speaking Skill, Mother Tongue Interference, Linguistic Analysis, Language Learning

## 1. 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 Coder (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. 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 in which alteration on surface structure can cause errors and this includes misformation, misordering, addition and omission" (Corder, 1973).

Analysis of errors in spoken discourse is considered paramount for similar reason of identifying errors in written discourse. In the context of learners

who are from Magahi language background, despite being exposed to English from their primary years, students often fail to present error-free language skills when they get into universities. 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 problem for them.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The present study is set to examine errors in oral speech production of less proficient learners of English language. Specifically, it looks 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.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The subjects for this study were students whose mother tongue is Magahi in Foundation English class taught by an English language teacher. Foundation English class is meant to provide remedy for less proficient speakers of English. They are the first year students from different fields and their first language is Magahi. The number of students is eight and the



Subjects were selected based on convenience sampling due to availability and willingness in participation.

As a part of the daily class work students were given to perform a speech, therefore they were given a particular topic that is 'Experience of Your Xth Board Examination'.

They were asked to write 10- 15 lines on this topic and then they were supposed to speak in front of the class. The data was later transcribed and analyzed following categories based on surface structure taxonomy; i.e. misformation, misordering, addition and omission. Table 1 provides examples for each of the category.

As Ellis (1985:297) says that error analysis is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers. It involves collecting samples of learner's language, identifying the errors in sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their hypothesized causes, and evaluating their seriousness. In relation to kinds of errors, Ellis (1997:15) classifies four kinds of errors through explaining three steps of analyzing the errors, they are

1). **Identifying Errors:** In this step, we have to compare the sentences produced by the subjects with what seem to be the normal or 'correct' sentences in the target language which correspond with them. But it is, in fact, easier said than done. Sometimes, it is difficult to make the reconstruction when we collide with the learner means to say.

2). **Describing Errors:** This next step is the step where the errors are described and classified into kinds. This step can be done by several ways. According to Rod Ellis, there are two ways to classify errors, they are:

a. The first way is classifying the errors through grammatical categories i.e. to classify the errors according to their word classes and other grammatical aspects such as tense, aspect, mood etc. For example:

Original sentence: The girl sings with beautiful.

Reconstruction: The girl sings beautifully.

b. The second way of classifying the errors is to try and identify general ways in which the learners' utterances differ from the reconstructed target-language utterances.

Further, the errors are classified into four types:

- I. **Omission:** Omission is the error of leaving out an item that is required for an utterance to be considered grammatical, for example: There is picture on the wall. This sentence leaves out an article *a* that must be added before the word *picture*.
- II. **Misformation:** Misinformation is the error of using one grammatical form in place of

another grammatical form, example: I *see* her yesterday. This sentence contains misinformation in using irregular verb which marked by the using the wrong form *see* to replace *saw*.

III. **Misordering:** Misordering is the error of putting the words in utterance in the wrong order. For example: She will come *evening tomorrow*. This sentence has the wrong order of adverb of time *evening tomorrow*. It must be changed becomes: She will come *tomorrow evening*.

IV. **Overgeneralization:** Overgeneralization is the error of using over grammatical form in an utterance. For example: Sita *eated* the carrot. This sentence uses -ed to signal past tense but it is an over grammatical form because the word eat is an irregular verb so its past form should be *ate* not *eated*.

3) **Explaining Errors:** This is the last step of error analysis. In this step, the errors are explained in linguistic terms and also why those sentences are called to be erroneous.

#### 4. FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the findings on the analysis of errors in speech production of less proficient speakers. The following Analysis is based on what Ellis(1997) suggested a three step method. 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 part of the results the errors are presented statistically according to categories proposed by surface structure taxonomy while in the second part of discussion the errors are analyzed linguistically.

##### 4.1 Categories of errors according to surface structure taxonomy

Analysis of the errors according to surface structure taxonomy shows that almost 60 phrases from the speech production of the learners containing errors. Of all these errors, misformation (n= 30) is the most common type of errors found in the subjects. This is followed by omission (n=13) and addition (n=6) while misordering is the least to be observed (n=4) and overgeneralization is also (n=4). This finding is similar to what Muhamad et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010) had claimed in their research that misformation to be the most common type of error found in oral speech production of English language learners. Table 1 provides percentage analysis of the findings.



Types of errors	Total	Percentage
Misformation	30	52.64 (approx)
Misordering	4	7.1 (approx)
Addition	6	10.53(approx)
Omission	13	22.80 (approx)
Overgeneralization	4	7.1 (approx)
Total	57	100

**Table 1: Total errors based on surface structure taxonomy.**

Looking at the above given table it can be claimed that less proficient learners of English have problems in the category of misformation. Errors of misformation are made when other grammatical elements such as tense, aspect, mood or agreement or any other grammatical elements or inflections are used incorrectly. Examples of misformation errors produced by students are as follow:

- 1) \* there is a board exam  
Correct form: there used to be aboard exam
- 2) \*I missing my friends birthday  
Correct form: I missed my friend’s birthday
- 3) \*I have expectation from me.  
Correct form: I had expectations from me.

The 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 7.1% of total errors. Misordering is observed when speakers wrongly sequenced the elements in the structures. Examples:

- 1) \* so, finally at the end I prayed to god.  
Correct form: so, at the end I prayed to god.

One of the common errors in surface structure error is addition. Errors of addition are identified by looking at words or phrases that contains unnecessary addition such as plural –s when the noun should be singular (Example: *a books*). From the data set, the total percentage of addition is 10.53%. Following examples taken from the data

- 1) \*I was very much sick.  
Correct form: I was very sick.
- 2) \*my parents supported me so very much.  
Correct form: my parents supported me very much.

The second most common type of error is Omission.

We can see from the table that 22.80% of the errors are 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:

- 1) \* I was not well that time  
correct form: I was not well at that time
- 2) \* I had to study till twelve night  
Correct form: I had to study till twelve in the night.

Overgeneralization is also one of the common type of error in learner’s speech production. which is the error of applying any common type of grammatical rule in anywhere in the sentences overly in an utterance. For example:

- 1) \*I prayed to god to gives me blessings  
Correct form: I prayed to god to give me blessings.
- 2) I thanks to my parents for this.  
Correct form: I thank to my parents for this.

The overall results have ranked misformation to be the most common type in surface structure taxonomy error which is followed by omission, addition, misordering and overgeneralization. In the next section of this study, the errors is analyzed based on linguistic categories.

#### 4.2 Linguistic description of errors

In any error analysis research it is important to know what linguistic categories are affected in the learner’s speech. So that the teachers can work on the correction of those linguistic features. Table 2 presents the frequency of errors based on identified linguistic categories.

CATEGORIES	ADDI TION	OMISSION	MISORDERING	OVERGENERALIZ ATION	MISINFORMATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENT AGE(%)
SVA <sup>1</sup>		1			4	5	8.8
Verb Inflection	1			2	20	23	40.3
Word Formation	1	4			1	6	10.5
Preposition	1	6			4	11	19.3
Conjunction		1				1	1.8
Sentence Fragment	3	1	4	2	1	11	19.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	6	13	4	4	30	57	100%

<sup>1</sup> SVA: Subject Verb Agreement



**Table 2: Linguistic description of errors**

Category	Addition	Omission	Misordering	Overgeneralization	Misformation
SVA (subject-verb agreement)	-	I ( <b>*used to</b> ) play by myself	-	-	there <b>is a</b> ( <b>*used to be a</b> )board exam
Verb Form	-	-	-	I prayed to god to <b>gives</b> ( <b>*give</b> ) me	I <b>work</b> ( <b>*worked</b> )hard
Word Form	It <b>bring</b> harm	supported( <b>*me</b> ) very much	-	-	-
Preposition	Thank <b>to</b> god	express( <b>*about</b> ) my board examination	-	-	experience <b>on</b> ( <b>*of</b> ) my board...
conjunction	-	I decided ( <b>*that</b> ) I will	-	-	-
Sentence Fragment	<b>So finally</b> , in the end	Share ( <b>*my</b> ) experience	I scored <b>*very much well</b>	I worked hard <b>at this moment</b> and I miss birthday party	-

**Table 3: Examples illustrating the Linguistic errors.**

The above table illustrates the categories of linguistic errors with its examples. The table shows that the Magahi speakers commit different kinds of errors related to verb forms, word formations, prepositions, conjunctions, plural as well as tense agreement where Verb inflection is the most common error.

### 5. SUGGESTIONS

1. The English Language Teachers should be trained specifically as Second Language trainers and they can linguistically understand the types of struggles that the students face while learning.
2. Generally, in English coaching institutes students are given tasks to perform. But, teachers should also record all the performances of the students and discuss the errors thoroughly with students instead of just assessing it.
3. Sometimes, Students get overly pressurized by the society and the institutes claiming that English could be a mark of intelligence. Therefore, it is important to introduce them with the social perspective of language and linguistics that every language is equal and every language is just a medium of communication. Language learning should be fun rather than learning it in pressure.
4. As social media has become very popular for entertainment, therefore it would be better if the teachers encourage the students to use it as a learning platform too.
5. Students should watch English movies and English TV channels to make their capability of understanding and perceiving the language better.

6. Students should read newspaper and write summaries of articles as it really helps in adding many relevance features of English in their repertoire.

### 6. CONCLUSION

In learning a second language the students as learners produce many forms which would not be produced by a native of the standard form of the target language. The realization that the second language learner's errors analysis is potentially important to understand the process of second language acquisition that focuses on modern teaching. The study of error is a part of investigation of the process of language learning. This present study has examined errors in the speech of less proficient learners of English language during their classroom speech. The errors have been coded according to the framework of surface structure taxonomy. In addition, this study has also analyzed the errors according to linguistic categories of errors in order to provide wider overview on such errors in oral speech production of students learning English in coaching center of Danapur, Bihar.

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