

Beyond the Slip of the Tongue: “Exploring Spoken Errors and Mistakes Among Junior Students at Tafila Technical University

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Abstract

This study investigates the occurrence and nature of errors and mistakes in spoken English among Junior students at Tafila Technical University (TTU). Utilizing a qualitative research approach, data was collected through recordings of student interactions and conversations in English-speaking settings. The analysis focused on identifying various types of errors and mistakes, including grammatical, lexical, phonological, and semantic inaccuracies.

Additionally, factors contributing to the occurrence of these errors, such as linguistic interference and proficiency levels, were examined. The findings reveal common patterns of errors and mistakes among TTU students, shedding light on areas requiring particular attention in English language instruction. The implications of these findings for language teaching and learning practices are discussed, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions and tailored instructional strategies to address specific language challenges faced by TTU junior students. The implications of this research extend beyond TTU, offering insights into effective language teaching practices and strategies for enhancing spoken English proficiency among junior learners in diverse educational settings. By identifying and addressing common errors and mistakes, educators can better support students in their language learning journey and promote effective communication skills essential for academic and professional success.

Keywords: errors; mistakes, correction; feedback, mother-tongue, acquisition

1. Introduction

This paper presents instances of incorrect expressions produced by Jordanian students majoring in English. The incorrect expressions are divided into two categories: errors and mistakes. Generally, Jordanian English students lack familiarity with these concepts, and even if they recognize the distinction, they struggle to apply the grammatical rules in everyday spoken language situations.

Specifically, Tafila Technical English students in Jordan tend to commit grammatical errors by overgeneralizing certain rules. For instance, they may use “gived” instead of “give”, “rices” instead of “rice,” and “brokek” instead of “break.” Additionally, our students produce ungrammatical statements influenced by the interference of their native language (L1).

Language acquisition is a dynamic process characterized by its complexities, and the journey towards linguistic proficiency is often paved with various spoken errors and mistakes. This study embarks on an exploration of the spoken language challenges encountered by junior students at Tafila Technical University, aiming to unravel the intricacies of their language learning experiences. The investigation delves into the diverse facets of spoken errors, encompassing grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, with the overarching goal of providing valuable insights to inform language instruction strategies and curriculum design.

Tafila Technical University, situated at the nexus of academic pursuit and practical expertise, serves as an ideal backdrop for this exploration. The junior students enrolled at the university represent a diverse cohort, each with unique linguistic backgrounds, learning experiences, and cultural influences. Understanding the nature and patterns of spoken language errors within this context is essential for tailoring instructional methods that align with the specific needs and challenges faced by these learners.

This research endeavors to identify common spoken language errors prevalent among junior students, shedding light on the linguistic hurdles that may impede their journey towards oral proficiency. By employing a mixed-methods approach, encompassing error analysis, surveys, interviews, and sociolinguistic investigations, the study aspires to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to spoken errors. Moreover, the research seeks to amplify the voices of the junior students themselves, offering a platform for them to articulate their perspectives on the challenges encountered in expressing themselves orally.

The significance of this exploration lies not only in the academic realm but extends to practical implications for language educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Unraveling the intricacies of spoken language errors at Tafila Technical University holds the potential to inform targeted interventions that foster a supportive and effective language learning environment. As we navigate through the linguistic landscape of junior students at Tafila Technical University, this study aspires to contribute valuable knowledge that transcends linguistic barriers and cultivates an enriching educational experience.

According to Hagege (1996), the impact of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) is noticeable in second language learners. As learners mature, the sway of their native language becomes more pronounced, leading to the solidification of mistakes or errors made

by students. Hagège also contends that the process of learning a second language, such as English, can be challenging and frustrating for certain students, and there exists a risk of excessive correction. When adults, like parents, excessively correct every mistake made by children, it is likely to diminish their motivation and disrupt the natural flow of their thought processes.

During a case study investigating L1 transfer in Vietnamese learners of English, Thanh Ha Nguyen (1995) contends that the utilization of specific language forms in the English past tense is influenced by factors such as age, duration, location, and the purpose of exposure to the English language. Krishnasamy (2015) asserts that grammar holds a primary position in language acquisition among second language learners. Recognizing its significance, grammar is emphasized in English language instruction.

Moreover, in a study examining grammatical errors in paragraph writing, Ma'mu (2016) identified 35 errors in student compositions. Drawing on theories proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, the study categorized errors into types including omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The findings indicated that the majority of errors were related to omission, with misformation also being prominent among students' writing.

In his article, Mahmoud (2005) asserts, following an analysis of 42 essays authored by Arabic-speaking university students majoring in English, that second language learners produce combinations of English sentences that sound 'unnatural' and 'strange.' According to Lakkis and Malak (2000), both positive and negative transfer of Arabic prepositional knowledge to English serves as a tool for students and teachers to pinpoint problematic areas, aiding Arab students in discerning where transfer is beneficial or should be avoided.

As indicated by Langit-Dursin (2008), errors made by second language learners are integral to the normal progression of language acquisition, reflecting the learners' engagement with and understanding of the rules and patterns of the language. Karra (2006) contends that the learner's input is influenced by personal choices, whereas the teacher merely presents linguistic forms, which may not necessarily constitute the true input for the learner.

Freiermuth (1997) maintains that, in the case of exposure, a child invents their own language to convey an idea, utilizing linguistic forms they have not yet acquired. Consequently, learners are likely to make errors that go unnoticed due to their lack of awareness. Lake (2011) examines five prevalent errors occurring among English as a second language learners. He contends that the mistakes made by English learners are common in certain countries, with variations in the most typical errors across different regions. This suggests that English speakers, in general, tend to make errors, and these errors are not specific to particular countries.

2. Discussion

Junior students enrolled in the English Department at Tafila Technical University were selected as the participants for a Conversation course, serving as the focal point of this study. The sample size comprised is fifty students, and the researchers meticulously recorded and analyzed the

data with a focus on both mistakes and errors. The data included straightforward, concise sentences and brief paragraphs, strategically designed to assess the correct application of grammatical rules, specifically the usage of the simple present tense and the plural form of nouns. The decision to use this particular data stemmed from the recurring instances of ungrammatical utterances observed in spoken courses. Upon analysis, the researchers discerned that certain students made mistakes, while others exhibited ungrammatical utterances considered as errors.

While some students generate ungrammatical utterances viewed as errors, learners of English as a second language at Tafila Technical University exhibit grammatical errors and mistakes for various reasons, including overgeneralization, slips of the tongue, lack of competence, and more. For instance, certain students demonstrate errors by applying the regular plural form, adding the -s morpheme to words like “woman” (as “womans”), “children” (as “childrens”), and “foot” (as “foots”). Additionally, they produce errors in the past tense of irregular verbs by appending the final -ed morpheme to the verb base, as seen in expressions like “drink” (as “drinked”), “put” (as “putted”), and “catch” (as “catched”).

The ungrammatical expressions produced by our students are subjects of debate among their instructors. Some argue that teachers should promptly address and correct their students' mistakes or errors to ensure accurate English usage. Learning English as a second language can be challenging for certain students, with the potential risk of overcorrection. On the contrary, others assert that mistakes or errors should not be corrected immediately, as they are inherent and unavoidable aspects of the learning journey. Drawing from their own experiences, the researchers hold the perspective that correcting learners in the classroom is essential, particularly when the mistake or error is significant.

Feedback, both from instructors and peers, plays a crucial role in correcting mistakes and errors for students engaged in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Instructors can provide timely correction to students' mistakes, offering immediate guidance to reinforce correct language usage.

Positive feedback can motivate students, reinforcing correct language production and encouraging them to build on their strengths. Instructors can offer personalized feedback tailored to individual students, addressing their unique language challenges and promoting a more effective learning process. In addition to correction, instructors can provide explanations and clarifications, helping students comprehend the grammatical or lexical rules underlying their mistakes.

Peer feedback enhances self-awareness by allowing students to recognize their own mistakes through the eyes of their peers, promoting a reflective approach to language learning and it fosters a collaborative learning environment, allowing students to help each other and share insights on language usage. Receiving feedback from peers can create a less intimidating environment, reducing anxiety and encouraging students to actively participate in language activities.

The distinction between errors and mistakes in classrooms can have a significant impact on the

teaching and learning processes. Understanding this difference allows educators to tailor their approaches to language instruction and provides valuable insights into students' language development; Errors are seen as systematic deviations from the target language rules.

Recognizing errors helps teachers provide targeted and structured correction, addressing specific aspects of language that require attention, mistakes, on the other hand, are considered more random and are often a result of slips or temporary lapses. Teachers may choose to address mistakes more leniently, allowing students to self-correct.

Understanding the nature of errors allows for individualized feedback. Teachers can tailor their correction strategies based on each student's specific language challenges, promoting personalized learning. Recognizing mistakes as momentary lapses enables teachers to provide constructive feedback without necessarily emphasizing corrective measures, fostering a supportive learning environment.

Teachers can address errors influenced by the students' first language and cultural background, providing insights into the challenges posed by linguistic interference while recognizing mistakes allows educators to differentiate between errors resulting from language transfer and those stemming from other factors, promoting a nuanced understanding of language acquisition.

The teacher might provide explicit instruction on the correct use of verb tenses to help the student overcome the systematic error. For example, a student responded to a question posed by the researchers, detailing her daily schedule at the university. The recorded response is outlined below:

i. I goes to the university at 8 o'clock and have my breakfast with my friends then I starts my lectures. As always after that we drinks our coffee and study at the library.

In the student's response, there are grammatical deviations that can be identified as mistakes and errors.

The use of “goes” and “starts” can be considered as errors, the correct sentence should be; “I go to the university at 8 o'clock and have my breakfast with my friends, then I start my lectures.” Also, the use of “drinks” can be considered an error; this deviation appears to be more systematic, suggesting a lack of awareness of the correct verb form for the first person singular and this is can be considered as an error not a mistake. So, the correct is; “As always, after that we drink our coffee and study at the library.”

Another student responded to a question posed by the researchers, providing details about his friend's daily schedule at the university. The recorded answer is outlined below:

“Salem goes to the university at 8 o'clock and has his breakfast with us. Then, he starts his lectures. As usual, we drinks our coffee and study at the library.”

This seems more likely to be unintentional mistake, perhaps influenced by a momentary lapse in attention or a slip of the tongue.

3. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data uttered by students to check their understanding of the differences between errors and mistakes, the researchers employ the use of asterisks (*) to indicate the ungrammaticality of the statements.

Our junior English students have contributed the following expressions. The identified instances of mistakes and errors have been categorized by the researchers into three groups: subject-verb agreement, plural morpheme, and L1 interference. These categories have undergone thorough analysis as detailed below:

3.1 *Subject-verb agreement:*

Learners face challenges in acquiring subject-verb agreement, particularly due to the morphological differences between English and Arabic, is insightful. Indeed, subject-verb agreement can pose difficulties for learners, and linguistic variations between their native language (L1) and the target language (L2) play a significant role.

English exhibits relatively limited morphological changes for subject-verb agreement. In the present tense, the base form and the -s form are used, and in the past tense, the -ed form is employed. In Arabic, each pronoun in the subject position has a unique verb form. The morphology of the verb changes based on the person, gender, and number of the subject. Hence, this is appeared in the responses of the students as follows:

1. *She work in a bank and she have many abilities that she have to invest in that job.1

The provided sentence contains grammatical errors related to subject-verb agreement and verb tense; “She work” - The verb “work” should be in the third-person singular form to agree with the subject “she”, “she have” - The verb “have” should be in the third-person singular form, which is “has,” to agree with the subject “she.” Similar to the first error, this might result from a lack of awareness or confusion about the correct verb form.

“that she have” - The pronoun “that” refers to “abilities,” and it should be followed by the third-person singular form of the verb, which is “has”. This error could also stem from inconsistency in maintaining the correct pronoun-verb agreement. The sentence lacks consistency in verb tense. “She work” is in the present tense, while “she have” and “that she have” suggest a shift to the present perfect tense. For clarity, the verb tense should be consistent throughout; this inconsistency may result from a lack of attention to maintaining a consistent verb tense.

2. *We goes to my uncle's house and stays there for a few days.

It is noticed that there is a grammatical error in subject-verb agreement. The correct form would be “we go” instead of “we goes.” The possible reasons for this error include lack of Awareness; the learner may not be fully aware of the correct subject-verb agreement rule for the first-person plural pronoun “we” in the present tense. The correct form is “go” for “we”.

Another reason is that the learner may have developed a habit of using “goes” incorrectly through repeated exposure to this form or by mimicking incorrect language usage.

3. *Salma do his homework and checks her task and then she sends it to her teacher.

The statement is grammatically incorrect and qualifies as a mistake since the learner rectifies it. It is evident that this grammatical lapse occurs due to a slip of the tongue, with the learner automatically self-correcting without external assistance. These particular mistakes will not be the primary focus of our research in this paper; however, they are left for potential further investigation.

4. *Does they has to sleeps early?

In statement (4), we can not decide and be sure about if this is a mistake or an error; may be the student misused “does” with “they” and the subsequent use of “has” and “sleeps.” The correct form requires “do” with “they” and the base form of the verb, resulting in “Do they have to sleep early?”

They can be considered as errors they were resulted from a combination of factors, including the influence of the learner's native language, lack of familiarity with English grammar rules, and the need for more practice in forming questions.

5. *Does she reads and write perfectly?

It appears in the previous example the learner's understanding of the grammatical rule, as she appropriately employs the rule; however, she fails to apply it consistently with the verb “reads” This mistake results from a slip of the tongue, as she automatically corrects herself while articulating the second verb in the utterance, “write.”

This statement indicates an awareness of the grammatical rule, suggesting that this mistake may be unintentional or a slip. It's common for learners to demonstrate awareness of certain rules but make occasional mistakes due to factors like haste, distraction, or momentary lapses in attention.

3.2 *Plural morpheme*

A plural morpheme refers to a linguistic element, often a suffix, that is added to a word to indicate plurality, or more than one. In English, the most common plural morpheme is the suffix “-s,” as in “cats,” “dogs,” or “books.” The addition of this morpheme helps distinguish singular nouns from their plural counterparts. The following utterances show the confusion that the learner may face in plural morpheme with the present -s form.

6. *The boys is here.

Utterance (6) contains a grammatical error related to the plural morpheme and subject-verb agreement. “The boys is” - The subject “boys” is a plural noun, and the verb “is” is the third-person singular form. The correct form for subject-verb agreement is “The boys are.”

This highlights a common challenge for language learners, where the rules for pluralization in their native language (L1) differ from those in the target language (L2). In this case, it seems that the learner is applying the singular present tense form “is” instead of the correct plural form “are”.

7. *The fox are killed.

It contains a grammatical mistake. The mistake is related to subject-verb agreement. The noun “fox” is singular, so the correct form of the verb should be the third-person singular “is”

instead of “are”. “The fox are” - The verb “are” is plural, but it should be the singular form “is” to agree with the singular noun “fox.” And this kind of mistake is due to that the learner thinks that the subject NP “the fox” is plural, he felt confused while uttering it.

8. *One of us are sick and walks slowly.

In statement (8) it is considered a grammatical mistake because the learner corrects herself in the second part of the sentence.

“One of us are” - The phrase “one of us” is singular, so the correct form of the verb should be the third-person singular “is” instead of “are.”

As we notice in previous examples, there is a “big gap” between the rules of pluralization in the learner's L1 and L2 emphasizes the importance of understanding and addressing these differences in language instruction. Bridging this gap often requires explicit teaching, practice, and reinforcement of the correct usage of plural morphemes in English.

3.3 *L1 interference*

L1 interference, also known as language transfer, refers to the influence of a learner's native language (L1) on their acquisition and use of a second language (L2). In the context of making errors and mistakes in a second language, L1 interference can play a significant role.

Learners may transfer grammatical structures from their native language to the second language, leading to errors in sentence structure, word order, or verb conjugation. In English, word order may differ from the learner's native language, and this can result in sentences that sound awkward or are grammatically incorrect due to L1 interference.

Pronunciation errors may occur as a result of phonological differences between the native

language and the second language. For example, sounds that exist in one language but not in another may be mispronounced, affecting overall oral communication.

Positive transfer occurs when knowledge or skills from the learner's native language facilitate learning or using the second language; If a learner's native language shares similarities with the second language in terms of vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation, it can enhance the learning process. For instance, recognizing cognates (words with similar meanings and similar forms) can be a result of positive transfer.

Negative transfer, also known as interference, occurs when elements from the native language hinder the correct learning or use of the second language; If a learner's native language has a different word order or grammatical structure, they might incorrectly apply these rules in the second language, leading to errors. For instance, a sentence structure that is acceptable in the native language but not in the second language can be a result of negative transfer.

9. *The girls smart.

In (9) there is a grammatical error, it may be attributed to the learner applying the rule of their mother tongue, which is an instance of negative transfer. “The girls smart” - The article “are” is missing, and the correct form should be “The girls are smart.”

This error likely stems from a difference in subject-verb agreement rules between the learner's mother tongue which is Arabic and English. In some languages, the verb form may not change based on the number of the subject, leading to errors when applying this rule to English.

10. *He a teacher.

Utterance in (10) illustrates an example of L1 interference, where features of the learner's native language (L1) influence their production in the target language (L2), in this case, English. In this example, L1 Influence (Arabic): Arabic often omits the verb “to be” in the present tense when describing occupations or attributes.

This type of interference reflects a pattern where the learner carries over a structure or rule from their native language that is not applicable in the target language. In Arabic, the sentence “معلم هو” (Huwa mu'allim) can be translated to “He (is) a teacher” in English. The omission of “is” in Arabic is a common pattern but results in an ungrammatical sentence when directly transferred to English.

11. *I have two cat.

As it shown above, this is a common type of L1 interference, where features from the learner's native language influence the structure of the sentence in the target language. In this case, the interference may be influenced by the pluralization pattern in Arabic. L1 Influence (Arabic): In Arabic, plurals are often formed through specific patterns, and for certain nouns, the singular

form can be used for the number two.

The interference occurs when the learner applies a pluralization pattern from their native language to English. In English, the plural form of “cat” is “cats,” and when expressing a quantity of two or more, the plural form should be used.

12. *I have a car red.

Utterance (12) contains an example of L1 interference from Arabic to English. In Arabic, the order of adjective and noun is often reversed compared to English. In English, the usual order is for the adjective to come before the noun. Corrected English Structure: “I have a red car.”

In this corrected sentence, the adjective “red” comes before the noun “car” according to English grammar rules. Addressing this type of interference involves providing learners with guidance on adjective-noun order in English and offering practice exercises to reinforce the correct structure.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the distinction between spoken errors and mistakes, particularly among junior second language learners, is a crucial aspect of understanding language acquisition challenges. The confusion between these terms arises from various factors and contributes to the complexity of the learning process.

Junior second language learners often exhibit confusion between errors and mistakes due to their evolving language competence, the influence of their native language, and the intricate nature of grammatical rules. The reasons for this confusion may include a lack of awareness of specific language rules, momentary lapses in attention, and the challenge of transferring knowledge from their first language to the second language.

Educators and researchers play a vital role in addressing this confusion by implementing targeted teaching strategies, providing constructive feedback, and fostering an environment that encourages self-correction. Recognizing errors and mistakes as integral components of language learning helps create a positive and supportive atmosphere, empowering junior learners to navigate linguistic challenges with resilience and a growth mindset.

In essence, the understanding and clarification of spoken errors and mistakes contribute significantly to effective language instruction for junior second language learners, promoting a more nuanced and successful language acquisition journey.

The recommendations from the researcher are as follows:

1. It is crucial for learners to engage in both classroom and extracurricular oral practice to enhance fluency in the language and consistently develop their proficiency in English.
2. Learners should feel empowered to express themselves freely within the classroom

environment, even if they make mistakes. Many students hesitate to speak English due to the fear of criticism for any errors they may commit.

3. Feedback from teachers plays a vital role in the learning process. It should be constructive, positive, and accompanied by a high level of encouragement to foster a supportive learning environment.

4. Learners are encouraged to think and communicate exclusively in English, minimizing the use of their native language (L1).

5. Establishing English clubs in all educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, is recommended to provide opportunities for language practice. These clubs, comprising teachers, students, and English or American native speakers, should involve all English majors at the university level. The Ministry of Education should consider incorporating oral practice in these clubs as a mandatory component of graduation requirements.

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