LEARNING STRATEGY RESULTING IN INTERLANGUAGE ERRORS USED BY SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MAN 1 SURAKARTA

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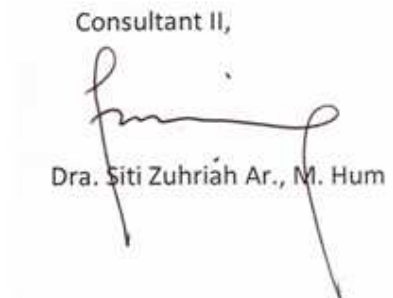
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Abstract

The paper describes the types of learning strategy which result in interlanguage errors used by high school students of MAN 1 Surakarta in writing English composition. Subject of the research consisted of senior high school students of MAN I Surakarta. The data gathering was conducted by elicitation technique and documentation. The data were analyzed qualitatively. The result of the research indicated the dominant learning strategy resulting in interlanguage errors used by the students in writing English composition is the learning strategy of overgeneralization. This implies that the students have been most confronted with the interference of the target language while there are some errors due to native interference too difficult to overcome. As the Interlanguage errors are inevitable process in foreign language learning, the teacher can use interlanguage errors wisely and positively as to investigate their learning and to help them eliminate the errors in order to develop their interlanguage system.

Key words: interlanguage errors, learning strategy

Introduction

In order to master L1 it is not too difficult for a person to do because most of the time he is exposed to natural settings and everywhere he meets native speakers who are ready to be the source people and models. Learning L2,

however is not that easy especially when a person learns the language outside the country where the L2 is used. Indonesian learners of English in Indonesia, for example, will have lot of problems such as not having enough exposure to practice the language, and enough source people to practice with.

While learning a second language, learners commonly build up a system for themselves which is different in some ways from the system of their first language (mother tongue) and second language (or L2 hereafter) or the target language (or TL hereafter), the language that the learners are learning. The system which the language learners build up for themselves has been given various names or terms. The most widely used terminology is that suggested by Selinker (1974). He calls this Interlanguage to emphasize the structurally intermediate status of the learners' language system between his mother tongue and his target language. A further study of interlanguage could help us to better understand the learners' problems and try to provide timely help to learners, so that they can achieve competence in the language they are learning.

Selinker's description of the interlanguage system has a cognitive (psychological) emphasis and a focus on the strategies that learners employ when learning a second language. It is assumed that interlanguage is the result of the learners' attempts to produce the target language norms. That is to say, learner errors (interlanguage errors) are the product of the cognitive process in second language learning or learning strategy.

The observable phenomenon indicates that the English produced by Indonesian senior high school students of MAN I Surakarta also contains a great number of interlanguage errors, covering various linguistic items as well as grammatical elements. Most of the sentences the writer collected contained interlanguage errors. Such a phenomenon give rise to a question as what kinds of cognitive processes or learning strategy used by the learners which results in interlanguage errors. This fundamental question about foreign language learning becomes the focus of the current investigation. This investigation would give an important contribution to the better understanding of the process of foreign language learning.

Research Methodology

The Subjects for this study were senior high school students of MAN I Surakarta who were given instruction to write English composition. They choose one of two kinds of composition namely descriptive text and recount text. The writer collected 317 erroneous sentences from the 90 compositions written by the students. They are listed and used as the data.

The method of this study is descriptive qualitative. The writer uses elicitation technique and documentation technique. Elicitation technique used to lure students to produce the writing, and to give instruction to write English composition. This technique is designed to get a person to actively produce speech or writing, for example asking someone to describe a picture, to tell a

story, or to finish an incomplete sentence. Furthermore, in teaching and second language research, such technique is used to get a better picture of learner abilities or a better understanding of interlanguage than the study of naturally occurring speech or writing can provide. The second technique used to collect the data is documentation. The process is as follows: (1) The students were to write English composition, (2) The compositions were read accurately to identify the erroneous sentences (3) The erroneous sentences of students' English composition were written down into a list and used as data.

The data analysis conducted through several stages. Each erroneous sentence is identified to find the errors. The errors have been accumulated then were classified in terms of linguistic categories. The error analysis was applied to the data to attempt to identify the underlying learning strategies used by the students. The learning strategies were classified into some types and then the total number of each type of errors and the corresponding learning strategy were calculated to find out the dominant learning strategies used by the students.

Results and Discussion

The errors first classified using comparative taxonomy, that is, the comparison between the students' interlanguage errors error and the structure of the students' first language (Indonesian). This comparison yielded two major categories: erroneous sentences which can be traced back to the student first

language (Indonesia) and those which can be traced back to the target language (English). Based on Selinker's (1977) taxonomy, there are three major learning strategies used by the students, namely first language transfer, overgeneralization, and oversimplification.

The analysis indicates that there are three levels of learning strategy of first language transfer, namely first language transfer at the level of vocabulary, first language transfer at the level of phrase, and first language transfer at the level of sentence. The data show a number of errors on vocabulary. The misuse of vocabulary or special expression made by the students can be traced back to the students' first language. The students of MAN 1 Surakarta find difficulty to find English equivalents for certain Indonesian words or phrases. They try to solve the problem by employing word for word translation. It seems that the problem arises due to the gaps in the two languages, the first language (Indonesian) and the target language (English). They turned into the easiest way to bridge the gaps by finding special expression from their first language, that is, the literal translation. To cope with such situation, the students actually can use an explanation or annotation rather than a translation to express such ideas. The following are examples:

1. He lives at ***Perum** Klodran Indah.

2. My sister likes *p**ecel ayam**.

This strategy, as defined here, also refers to second language errors that reflect native language structure, regardless of the internal process or external

conditions that spawned them. Such errors can be traced back to their native language.

The students attempted to cope with the problem in expressing their ideas in English by using literal translation or word-for-word translation. Such strategy has brought about a certain result, that is, interlanguage errors as seen in the examples:

a) Komodo is *seldom animal in the earth.

b) He is *an religion Islamic.

Another, They use Indonesian structure when expressing themselves in English. It is important to point out that there are similarities as well as differences between Indonesian and English structures. On one hand, when similarities exist, the result would be correct and this is called positive transfer as in a sentence "I went to Jogjakarta with my mother" (*saya pergi ke Jogjakarta dengan ibu saya*). And on the other hand, when differences occur between the two languages the result would be errors or often called negative transfer, as seen in the following examples:

a) I went holiday to beach Parangtritis.

b) Deny arrived time 10.00

The analysis indicates that overgeneralization is a fundamental learning strategy employed by students. They have activated their linguistic knowledge of the target language previously learned or acquired (Selinker, 1977 and Corder, 1978). Such strategy is sometimes quite helpful but in other cases it is misleading

or inapplicable due to superficial similarities. There are five types of the learning strategy of overgeneralization employed by the students, namely overgeneralization in using article, overgeneralization in using be, overgeneralization in using pronoun, overgeneralization in using verb form, and overgeneralization in using words with similar meaning.

There are two ways to use a noun group to refer to someone or something: the specific and the general way. Using the specific way means we can refer to someone or something, knowing that the person we are speaking to understand which person or thing we are talking about. *The* is the commonest specific determiner; it is also called the definite article. The second is the general way. It is used when we are talking about people or things in general or indefinite way, without identifying them. *A* and *an* are the commonest general determiners; they are also called the indefinite article (Sinclair, 1991). The usage of article is much more complicated. This is the case that might make the students fail to use them. The following are examples:

a) My **house is a big and clean**.

b) **She is a beautiful**.

The students frequently have difficulties in using BE. Usually a sentence always needs verb, if there is no full verb it can be given linking verb. To be also have function as the linking verb. The students are still confused of using to be. It is students' errors that influenced by target language because illustrate the learner's attempt to build hypothesis about English from the limited experiences

of it in the classroom. They add an unnecessary to be to the verb and noun as in the following sentences:

a) I am go to kuta beach on holiday.

b) She is like strawberry fruit

In English, there are five different types of pronoun based on its function: subjective, objective, adjective, possessive, and reflexive. Thus, for example for pronoun *he*, English has *he, him, his, his, himself*. They are actually not quite problematic in form but the usage is rather difficult for students. They sometimes still have difficulties in using them and as a result they have committed errors on pronoun as in the following sentences:

a) **He eyes** is small and shinning.

b) **She nice name** is Jessica

The students have overgeneralized the use of verb form which results in interlanguage errors. *Have* and *has* are words that have similarity and meaning but have difference function in application. *Have* is used for subject *I, You, We*, and *They* while *Has* is used for subject *he, she,* and *it*. The examples are in the following sentences:

a) **She have** many friends.

b) **Anggita have** a tall and lean body

The students extend certain meanings beyond their vocabulary master. To cope with this problem, they have tried to use their knowledge to extend their ideas and make errors. In English, there are words that are different in form

but similar in meaning. The students have misused some words with similar meaning in their sentences such as in the following examples:

a)   I always give Angelina *eat every morning and evening.

b)   Situation in the beach very *noisy.

The learning strategy of oversimplification can be defined as the strategy reducing structure to a common denominator, to as parts of features as possible. It also can be compared to the strategy of a child's acquisition of its native language; the learners use language that resembles that of very young children. There are two types of learning strategy of oversimplification employed by the students, namely oversimplification by omitting BE and oversimplification by omitting -'s as possessive marker.

A sentence usually needs verb, if there is no full verb it can be given linking verb. To be also have function as the linking verb. The students use the learning strategy of oversimplification by omitting BE as in the following examples:

a) Her home __ beside my home.

b) My house __ pretty big.

In this case, the students forget or do not understand to give to be in the sentence. Errors made because of the confusion of using to be, so the students omitted BE.

In the sentence, -'s has a function as a sign of the owner of something, in this case, the students use the learning strategy of oversimplification by omitting

-'s as possessive marker. They do not understand or forget to give -'s in the sentences. Errors made by the confusion of using -'s as possessive marker, so the students omitted -'s in their sentences as in the following examples:

a) Frida body is small.

b) Munik house is big …

The analysis shows that the highest percentage of errors is the learning strategy of overgeneralization (43.53%). This type includes five different types. First, overgeneralization in using article (2.52%); second, overgeneralization in using Be (10.73%); third, overgeneralization in using pronoun (12.3%); forth, overgeneralization in using verb form (15.77%); and fifth, overgeneralization in using noun with similar meaning (2.21%).

The next most significant proportion number of interlanguage errors is the learning strategy of first language transfer (41.01%). This includes first language transfer at vocabulary level (2.21%), first language transfer at phrase level (11.67%), and first language transfer at sentence level (27.13%).

Finally the number of interlanguage errors which have the lowest percentage is the learning strategy of oversimplification (15.46%). This type includes oversimplification by omitting Be (13.88%) and oversimplification by omitting {S} as possessive marker (1.58%).

From the analysis, it was found that the dominant learning strategy used by the students is the learning strategy of overgeneralization (43.53%). It is greater than the learning strategy of first language transfer used by the students

(41.01%). From this we know that the students have the tendency to activate their linguistic knowledge of the target language (English) previously learned or acquired rather than find recourse to the structure of their mother tongue. It occurs because they have already got a considerable knowledge of the target language. In other words, we can say that they attempted to build up hypothesis about the target language (English) from the limited knowledge or experiences of it in the classroom.

This study is also in agreement with Taylor (1975) who conducted a study to investigate how overgeneralization and first language transfer are used in second language learning, and the relationship between the errors due to these two learning strategies. His study was on adult native Spanish speakers. Taylor hypothesizes that, in the early stages of language learning the learner depends more frequently on his native language and makes a greater proportion of transfer errors than the learner in advanced stages. As the learner's knowledge about the target language increases, he will depend less frequently on native language and the proportion of transfer errors decreases while the proportion of overgeneralization increases.

Taylor (1975: 83) hypothesizes that elementary subjects rely more heavily on their native language and make a greater proportion of transfer errors than intermediate subjects, while "intermediate subjects rely more heavily on an overgeneralization strategy than do elementary subjects, and the relative proportion of transfer errors is decreased." It is appropriate with the findings of

the study since the subjects of this study which are high school students are already in intermediate level. Taylor concludes, "that is, as learner's proficiency increases he will rely less frequently on his native language and on the transfer strategy, and more frequently on what he already knows about the target language and on the overgeneralization strategy" (Taylor, 1975: 84). Thus, the findings lend only limited supported to Taylor's hypothesis.

Taylor (1975) says that direct translation is more efficient than an oral method because it is difficult to compare the errors made by different speakers: some might make fewer errors avoiding some specific structures they are not sure of and others might be more "impulsive." However, he admits that the translation method perhaps "'loads' a study in favour of transfer and interference" (1975: 76). Moreover, direct translation may encourage the use of monitor. This methodological problem might have affected the results of the present study with Indonesian learners as well as Taylor's with Spanish learners.

From the observation, it may be predicted that the proportion of transfer errors continues to decrease and that of overgeneralization continues to increase with progressive levels of proficiency, and that overgeneralization will be the dominant strategy for more advanced Indonesian learners of English. Evidence in favour of this prediction would give greater support to Taylor's hypothesis.

One explanation for first language transfer error may have to do with the tendency of the subject or the students to use word forward translation from

native language Indonesian to target language (English). This has resulted in interlanguage errors. This strategy is sometimes efficient especially when the structure of both languages Indonesian and English are similar, however when the structure of both languages are different, this first language transfer strategy result in interlanguage error.

This study indicates that there are three types of learning strategies used by the students which result in interlanguage errors. Such errors indicate that the students are in learning process since foreign language learning is a creative construction process. With this view, interlanguage errors should be considered as an inevitable and positive part of that process. Teachers should have optimistic attitudes towards interlanguage errors. They should be seen as reflections of learners' stage of interlanguage development. Errors must exist in second language learning process.

When learners produce correct utterances, they may tell us (teachers) little about what is going on in their mind; what kind of cognitive mechanism the learners use in learning. Therefore, errors hold vital clues about the process of second language learning. In this case, we may say that their interlanguage knowledge is faulty and the result is errors. Errors are indispensable to the learners themselves, because we can regard the making of errors as the learners' desire to learn. It is the way the learners test their hypotheses about the nature of the target language. That is why the making of errors (as part learning process) is employed not only by those who learn a second language but also by

children who acquire their mother tongue. Teachers, therefore, should have positive attitude towards interlanguage errors. They can use interlanguage errors wisely and positively as to go deep into the learners' mind to investigate their learning process. Thus, teachers can be certain with the techniques to help them eliminate the errors in order to develop their interlanguage system.

Conclusion

The present study found that 43.53% of the subjects' errors were attributable to overgeneralization, 41.01% were attributable to first language transfer, and 15.46% were attributable to oversimplification. Analysis of the data indicates that learning strategy of overgeneralization is the most dominant learning strategy used by the subjects resulting in interlanguage errors.

The results of this study show that the students have been most confronted with the interference of the target language while there are some errors due to native interference too difficult to overcome. It is very difficult for the language learner to avoid errors because Interlanguage errors are inevitable process in foreign language learning. The learning strategy used by students due to their inability to produce the same pattern of the target language.

With this view, interlanguage errors should be considered as an inevitable and positive part of that process. Teachers should have optimistic attitudes towards interlanguage errors. They should be seen as reflections of learners' stage of interlanguage development. Errors must exist in second

language learning process. Teachers, therefore, can use interlanguage errors wisely and positively as to go deep into the learners' mind to investigate their learning process. Thus, teachers can be certain with the techniques to help them eliminate the errors in order to develop their interlanguage system.

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