

Study on Classifications of Error in English Teaching

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Abstract: In today's English teaching, there are many problems students' study, which directly affects the formation of students' English communicative ability. Therefore, errors frequently made by students have become the hot issue many teachers want to solve. With the appearance of error analysis in 1970s, which provides a new perspective for us to study the error itself. In the thesis, the author mainly gives a general explanation about the classifications of error.

Keywords: error, mistake, inter-language, classification

1. ERROR AND MISTAKE

It is inevitably to mention about another term "mistake" when talking about error. Those are the two concepts that easily cause confusing when distinguishing them. People tend to equal error to mistake; however, they are technically two different concepts.

Corder (1967) distinguished an error from a mistake as: a mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc. and therefore can be readily self-corrected, while an error is a systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the L2 (second language). A learner cannot self-correct an error because it is a product reflecting his or her current stage of L2 development, or underlying competence. Rather than being seen as something to be prevented, then, errors were signs that learners were actively engaged in hypothesis testing which would ultimately result in the acquisition of TL (target language) rules.

James (2001:78) refines the definition of error as being an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and is not self-correctible by the learner while a mistake is either intentionally or unintentionally deviant, or self-correctible. That is to say, if the learner is inclined and able to correct a fault in his or her output, it is assumed that the form he or she selected was not the one intended, and we shall say that the fault is a mistake; if, on the other hand, the learner is unable or in any way disinclined to make the correction, we assume that the form the learner used was the one intended, and that it is an error.

All learners make mistakes, in both native and second language situations. Native speakers make mistakes are not because of the deficiency in competence of their mother tongue, but the result of some sort of breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech and

writing, thus they may be capable of recognizing and correcting such mistakes. However, an error is as James (2001) puts it: "an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and that is not self-correctible by its author". Errors are committed by those who have not yet fully command the target language; that is to say, Error is committed by L2 learners only.

Brown (2002) distinguished them as: A mistake is more like a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip" caused by L2 learners incorrectly use of a known system; while an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native language, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner.

2. CLASSIFICATIONS OF ERROR

As the researchers' studies deepen, they realize that the causes of language errors are very complicated, so in order to deal with these errors early and quickly, many researchers have classified errors, but so far, there is no unified classification of errors.

The original dichotomy classified the causes of errors into two types, namely, interlanguage error and intralanguage error (Brown, 2001). Interlanguage error mainly means language errors caused by mother tongue interfering with the target language, which means learners have already mastered mother tongue when they study target language, their learning is affected by the mother tongue they have mastered, and then result in error. Selinker (1972) thought structural transfer was the main cause of interlanguage error. Structural transfer refers to the errors caused by learners using target language with the help of the grammar characteristics of their mother tongue. Intralanguage error mainly refers to errors that occur when learners study target language rules. For example, after learning a grammar rule, learners mistakenly apply it to another aspects, or learners can not completely put into use or make full sense of the rule and lead to errors.

Corder (1971) divided errors into explicit error and implicit error. Explicit error primarily refers to the grammar errors occurring in sentence, but implicit error means correct in sentence, but wrong in the communication.

Selinker (1972) classified errors into five types, that is, transfer error, oversummarization error of target language rules, language learning strategy error, teaching transfer error and communication strategy error.

Brown (2001), according to the source of error, classified into four kinds: interlanguage error, intralanguage error, context error and communication strategy error. As for interlanguage error, beginners' errors are primarily due to the negative transfer between interlanguages. This is because at the beginning of language acquisition, target language system was not be set up, learners only depended on their mother tongue knowledge system. For intralanguage error, with the further study, more and more intralanguage errors occur. This kind of error can also be categorized as oversummarization, rule ignorance, misuse of rule and wrong concept hypothesis. The third is context error. Context can be divided into teaching context and social context, and both of them can result in language error. The last is

communication strategy error, which can be explained in this way: in the communication, when learners' interlanguage resource is not enough, they may continue their communication by means of some communication strategies, such as evading some embarrassing topics, paraphrasing, etc. to cope with the shortage of vocabulary and grammar to make each other understand the talking words. Learners cause this kind of error on purpose, aiming to make their communication go on.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), according to the scope of influence of error, divided errors into global errors and local errors. Global error means the rules among the whole sentence structure, the relation between sentence and sentence and the relationship between the components in a sentence are broken and lead to errors, such as misusing or missing conjunction, turning the main phrase order upside down, over summarizing the syntactic rules. Local error refers to the error in a certain component or a complex sentence, such as misusing or missing a certain verb or noun form, misusing or missing articles or auxiliary. From what have mentioned, we can see the distinction between both of them is just relative, because some global errors in a sentence may become the local errors when put the sentence into a complex sentence. At the same time, it points out that global errors have influence on regular communication and make understanding difficult, so they should be corrected. As for local errors, sometimes it is unnecessary to correct.

According to the cause of errors, Richards(1974) classified error into interlingual error, intralingual error and developmental error. Interlingual error is caused by language transfer, that is, the rules or forms of mother tongue are used in the output of interlanguage. Intralingual error roots in target language structure itself, which means it is caused by the interference of target language rules. Learning some complicated rules usually results in this kind of error, such as overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, no mastery of the restrictions of the rules application, which are not influenced by learners' background of native language, and it is similar for learners to occur this kind of error (Richards, Platt, J.&Platt, H, 2000). Developmental errors are the results of language developing normally, and they show learners' strategy that they used to acquire language. Learners, affected by their native language, make a wrong hypothesis according to their limited language input. For example, when they study verb past simple form, there will cause these problems---*taked, plaied*, etc.

According to the characteristic of interlanguage development, Corder (1971) divided errors into three types: pre-systematic errors, systematic errors and post-systematic errors. Pre-systematic errors are often caused by learners who tend to communicate with others without mastering the expression rules and forms of target language, and have to use the knowledge they have learned previously to convey their ideas and make their communication continue. They are errors beyond learners' language development phrase, and learners do not know they have made a mistake and will not correct their errors. Systematic errors are generated by learners who already learnt some language rules doing the wrong induction or hypothesis for the rules in their process of internalizing the target language rules, or understanding the rules inexactly or incompletely. Post-systematic errors occur because

learners who have already learned the complete and systematic knowledge do not form an expression habit in their application. They have already mastered a certain language rule and can use it correctly, and an error occurring is because they may forget the rule at that time. Nevertheless, learners know their own language errors and can correct by themselves.

After that, Corder(1971)also categorized error as error of competence and error of performance. Learners can correct the error of performance by themselves but not correct the error of competence. From above classifications, we can see learners themselves can not correct pre-systematic and systematic errors which are the errors of competence. However, for post-systematic errors, learners can realize and correct them on their own, which belong to the error of performance, so they are also called mistakes. These classifications are helpful for teachers to judge the errors' types of students and to correct them.

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