

Translational Error Analysis of Pakistani Undergraduate ESL Learners

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the linguistic errors of Pakistani Undergraduate ESL Learners. To achieve this purpose, 30 scripts of English Language Paper at the graduation level of the University of Sargodha were selected through two-stage sampling to analyze the translation question attempted in the scripts. A bundle of 244 scripts was selected through the convenience sampling method. In the second stage, thirty scripts were selected out of the bundle through a systematic sampling method. For the analysis of errors “Corder's” taxonomy was used. The analysis indicated that the errors resulting from the wrong substitution of words or grammatical elements, especially that of incorrect use of tenses were the most frequent errors. It is recommended that college teachers of the English Language may clearly explain the grammatical rules.

Keywords: Translation, Errors, Corder’s Taxonomy, Error Analysis

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Introduction

Translation is a productive skill. It is one of the most important but difficult and therefore frustrating skills to teach particularly in an ESL/EFL program. In the process of second language acquisition, the skill of translation is not only fundamental in conveying meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), but it also has other benefits as well. For the learning of four language skills, this pedagogic method facilitates us and makes a foreign language more comprehensible for its foreign learners. As viewed by Menck (1991), translation is used as a tool in foreign- language teaching with an aim to facilitating the understanding of a text. It can also be used to test how far a learner has been able to acquire certain competences (i.e. grammar, vocabulary) in a foreign language. Pedagogically, the activities involved in translation tasks have proved very practical in developing writing skills i.e. organization of text understanding of cohesion and also language learning itself.

These tasks can induce approximations to target language models to be followed by the learners for extended language use (Hyland, 2003). Hence, translation skill is of paramount significance in foreign- language teaching.

The researcher, in the capacity of an ESL teacher at graduation level for more than a decade, has observed that most of the students cut a sorry figure while transferring a text from L1 to L2. It is an identified phenomena that even those students, who possess, to some extent, the ability of free-composition, are reluctant to translate a text from L1 to L2 and are prone to opt for the alternative free-composition question instead of attempting on translation question in B.A/B. Sc Examination English Language Paper. As ESL learners generally think in L1 and write or express in L2. This problem of translation invariably tells upon their performance in other courses because the ability of translation is required for continuous writing activity in examinations and assignments. This situation is baffling because at graduation level students are supposed to have mastered the basic linguistic and writing skills to allow for a good proficiency level but their performance falls short of all assumptions and calls for diagnostic and remedial measures to be taken by the language teachers. There is a dire need to unearth the areas of translation skill from where difficulty arises for ESL students to help them overcome their weaknesses.

It is the linguistic errors which lie at the heart of translational incompetency. For the first time in the history of language learning process, Corder (1967) highlighted the importance of errors. He held the opinion that the researchers should classify the errors in order to learn what type of practices and tactics are used by language learners while making use of translation skill to understand and express in foreign language. Thanks to Corder (1987) that at present, error analysis is considered to be a scientific method in the sphere of linguistics. As Ellis (1994) cites, "It was not until the 1970s that EA became

recognized part of applied linguistics, a development that owed much to the work of Corder. Prior to Corder, linguists worked on observation of learners' errors and the categorization of errors. They also attempted to see the frequency of errors but they rarely acknowledged the role of errors and their analysis in second language acquisition. Corder exhibited that error analysis can provide a great deal of help to researchers, teachers and students of foreign language. Many key concepts about errors have been introduced by Corder (1987) in his article "The significance of learners' errors" (P.83). The distinction of systematic and non-systematic errors was introduced by him. He informed that non-systematic errors ensue from one's native language and a deficient knowledge of one's native language is exhibited through these errors i.e. deficient linguistic competence. Corder (1987) names them as "mistakes" and holds that they do not play significant role in the language learning process. For the systematic errors which ensue from one's second language, he uses the term "errors". It has been opined by Corder (1987) that learning of second language is facilitated by the knowledge of native language. He is of the view that errors do not inhibit the learning process rather they serve as evidence of one's learning strategies. It is a happy outcome of Corder's work that after realizing the significance of errors in SLA, the researchers in the field of language learning started to examine the errors with a view to knowing how learners acquire L2 while committing and correcting errors.

Later researchers also acknowledged and recognized the advantageous role of errors and their analysis for both learners and teachers. Said (2014) stated that for the identification, description and explanation of errors in learner's language; error analysis has proved to be a useful set of procedures. Various type of inferences about language and language learning can be made through the data produced by translation error analysis. Furthermore, this data can highlight the specific points where language system is vulnerable to disturbances or is difficult to be acquired. However, it has some limitations like the analysis of errors in isolation can't account for all difficulties (Anderson,1977); the classification of errors may be subjective; the points of difficulty in target language may have been identified impressionistically and hence appear to be vague; the sampling procedures may also be biased, focus on single source of error may lead to ignoring other sources. Despite these limitations, error analysis has gained significance in ESL learning and teaching process. Corder (1987) emphasized the importance of error analysis by suggesting that in the first place, it tells the teacher about the level of progress of learner towards the goal, and consequently the teacher also gets knowledge about what remains to be done. Secondly, it furnishes evidence to the researcher about learning and acquisition of language, unfolding before him the strategies or procedures employed by the learner in his process of discovering language system. Thirdly, it informs that errors are indispensable to the learner himself, because they tell him what to learn and how to learn. The learners are forced to use previously unknown vocabulary while working on

translation tasks (Swain,1985). These tasks also enable the learners to ‘notice a gap in their own knowledge when they encounter a problem in trying to produce the L2’ (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). However, error analysis is not an easy and straight forward task as Popović has opined that “human error classification is a difficult and time-consuming task” (Popović, 2011: 59).

The present study has been opted with a view to equip the Pakistani college teachers with a more systematic knowledge of Pakistani undergraduate students’ translational errors by explicating exactly the areas of weaknesses so that they may enhance the level of proficiency of their students.

Objective of the study

Based on the assumption that raising teachers’ awareness of translational errors will be helpful, this project has three objectives:

1. To identify the types of errors in translation from Urdu into English.
2. To determine the most frequent translational errors of Pakistani Undergraduate ESL learners.
3. To guide the teachers to provide better writing correction feedback to L2 learners.

Research methodology

The study followed the content analysis method and delimited to the English Language Paper at graduation level of University of Sargodha. In this study the two-stage sampling was used. At the first stage, a bundle of 244 scripts of English Language Paper at graduation level was selected out of all the bundles containing English Language Paper at graduation level of University of Sargodha through convenience sampling method. At the second stage, thirty scripts were selected out of the bundle through systematic sampling method. For the purpose of analysis of students’ translation errors, Corder’s taxonomy of errors was used.

Significance of the Study

The study on translation errors is beneficial as it not only pinpoints problems students have in translating from Urdu into English, but also indicates the weaknesses students have in English. As a result, the right methods can be used to address those problems, and a better proficiency level might be achieved among our graduation students. The researcher expects that the present study will assist the teachers in the choice of an appropriate pedagogical method and will also serve fresh insight to those who design language learning materials. The purpose of this study is to aid the teachers who teach the skill of translation rather than facilitating professional translators, hence it encompasses only linguistic errors which are a portion of the vast and debating ground of the errors of translation.

Data Analysis and Results

Taking into consideration a quantitative criterion, the researcher tried to find the vast majority of the errors made by students in translation. For the purpose of analysis of students' translation errors, Corder (1973) taxonomy of errors was used. In his taxonomy, he has classified errors with respect to their processes; i.e. the ways in which errors are made or committed by the learners of language. Four main processes are there in Corder's taxonomy:

- 1- Omission: omission of some required element.
- 2- Addition: addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element
- 3- Substitution: selection of an incorrect element)
- 4- Permutation: wrong order of elements.

Errors with Examples

1. Errors of Omission

- 1.1. Omission of the definite article "the"
 - * It is first part of national character to have patriotism.
- 1.2. Omission of the indefinite article "a/an"
 - * . The love of homeland is passion which sacrifices personal interest.
- 1.3. Omission of preposition
 - * We all are aware it.
- 1.4. Omission of plural "s"
 - *Pakistan is surrounded by national and international problem.
- 1.5. Omission of the third singular person "s"
 - *. The love of homeland is a passion which sacrifice personal interest.

1.6. Omission of conjunction

- *. It is the zeal sacrifices personal interest.

2. Errors of Addition

- 2.1. Addition of the definite article "the"
 - * The first element of the national character is the love of one's country.
- 2.2. Addition of indefinite article "a/an"
 - *Patriotism is a such passion which sacrifices personal interest.
- 2.3. Addition of preposition
 - * The second part of national character is to maintain to integrity.

2.4. Addition of copula

*We are needing a sincere and faithful leader.

2.5. Addition of conjunction

* The citizen of an independent country thinks before doing anything that if it will be beneficial or not.

3. Errors of Substitution

3.1. Wrong selection of words

* Pakistan is suffering from many country and international problems.

3.2. Wrong selection of parts of speech

* . We need an honesty and peaceful leader.

3.3. Wrong selection of tenses

*We need a leader who brought us out of destruction.

3.4. Wrong selection of preposition

* Today Pakistan is suffering into many problems.

3.5. Wrong selection of article

*The citizen of a independent country thinks before doing anything.

3.6. Wrong selection of conjunction

* The citizen of an independent country thinks before doing anything that it will be beneficial or not.

3.7. Wrong selection of pronoun

* We need an honest and peaceful leader which can save us.

3.8. Wrong selection of auxiliary verb

* The enemy of Islamic nation are very clever.

4. Errors of Permutation

4.1. Wrong order of elements

* The Islamic republic of enemies are very clever.

Results

The results found after analysis of translation data have been presented as follows:

Table 1

Students' Linguistic Errors

No	Types of Errors	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Errors of Omission	76	29%
2	Errors of Addition	26	9.6%
3	Errors of Substitution	132	50.3%
4	Errors of Permutation	28	10.6%
	Total	262	

Table 1 indicates that there were total 262 errors in the analyzed translation paragraphs. There were 29% (76) omission errors, 9.6% (26) addition errors, 50.3% (132)

substitution errors and 10.6% (28) permutation errors.

Table 2

Errors of Omission

No	Types of Omission	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Definite Article 'the'	02	2.6%
2	Indefinite Article a/an	10	13.15%
3	Preposition	10	13.15%
4	Plural 's'	14	18.4%
5	Third Person Plural 's'	06	7.9%
6	Conjunction	06	7.9%
7	Pronoun	04	5.2%
8	Copula	14	18.4%
	Total	76	

Table 2 reflects the details of omission errors. Among the total 76 omission errors there were 2.6% (2) errors of definite article 'the', 13.15% (10) errors of Indefinite Article a/an, 13.15% (10) errors of Preposition, 18.4% (14) errors of Plural 's', 7.9% (6) errors of Third Person Plural 's', 7.9% (6) errors of Conjunction, 5.2% (4) errors of Pronoun and 18.4% (14) errors of Copula.

Table 3

Errors of Addition

No	Types of Addition	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Definite Article 'the'	14	53.8%
2	Indefinite Article a/an	02	7.6%
3	Preposition	04	15.3%
4	Copula	04	15.3%
5	Conjunction	02	7.6%
	Total	26	

Table 3 reflects the details of Addition errors. Among the total 26 Addition errors there were 53.8% (14) errors of the addition of Definite Article 'the', 7.6% (02) errors of the addition of Indefinite Article a/an, 15.3% (04) errors of using unnecessary Preposition, 15.3% (04) errors of Copula, 7.6% (02) errors of Conjunction.

Table 4*Errors of Substitution*

No	Types of Substitution	Frequencies	Percentage
1	Wrong selection of word	16	12.12%
2	Wrong part of speech	20	15.1%
3	Wrong selection of tense	34	25.7%
4	Wrong selection of preposition	24	18.1%
5	Wrong selection of Article	08	6.6%
6	Wrong selection of conjunction	10	7.6%
7	Wrong selection of pronoun	12	9.09%
8	Wrong auxiliary verb	08	6.06%
	Total=	132	

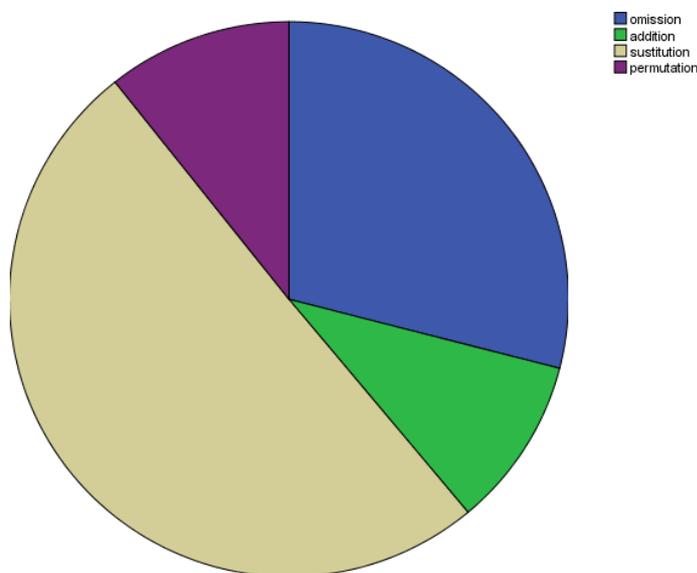
Table 4 reflects the details of Substitution errors. Among the total 132 Substitution errors, there were 12.12% (16) errors of Wrong selection of word, 15.1% (20) errors of the use of Wrong part of speech, 25.7% (34) errors of Wrong selection of tense, 18.1% (24) errors of Wrong selection of preposition, 6.6% (08) errors of Wrong selection of Article, 7.6% (10) errors of Wrong selection of Conjunction, 9.09% (12) errors of Wrong selection of Pronoun and 6.06% (08) errors of wrong use of auxiliary verb.

Table 5*Errors of Permutation*

Errors of Permutation	Frequency
Errors of wrong ordering of elements	28

Table 5 indicates that there were 28 errors of Permutation in total which result from the wrong ordering of syntactic elements.

The following pie graph provides information about these errors at a glance:

Figure 1*Errors of Permutation*

The pie graph drawn above shows that the students committed substitution errors during translating the paragraph from native language to second language in the highest frequency, omission errors in the second highest frequency, addition errors in the third highest frequency and permutation errors in the lowest frequency.

The frequency of errors checked through the analysis of translation data has been exhibited in the tables presented above. According to the results found in these tables, errors of substitution make up the greatest part of the errors (50.3%); errors of omission come next (29%); errors of addition have the third largest share (19.6%); and permutation (wrong order of elements) are the linguistic errors rarely committed by learners (10.6%). As far as the errors of substitution are concerned, it has been observed that the most frequent error is the wrong substitution of tense (25.7%). Wrong selection of preposition is also common among students (18.1%). Errors of omission make up the second largest part of errors and among these the most frequent are the omissions of plural 's' and copula. Errors of addition also constitute a major part (19.6%) of students' errors and the most frequent erroneous additions done on the part of students are that of the definite article 'the' (53.8%). Unnecessary use of preposition and copula is also frequent in students' work. Errors of permutation (wrong ordering of elements) are the least frequent (10.6%) among the under graduate learners. The following pie graph provides information about these errors at a glance:

5. Conclusions and discussion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the types of errors made by the students, while translating a text from L1 to L2, are varied. The types of errors found in this study are in line with Corder's taxonomy (1973). The classification of these errors can be made according to their processes: Omission (omission of some requisite element), Addition (addition of some redundant or incorrect element), Substitution (selection of an incorrect element), and Permutation (wrong order of elements). The errors of substitution make up the greatest part of the errors. It is an indication of interference of native language structures and lack of foreign language knowledge. The most frequent substitution errors are errors in tense substitution which demand a need for more sound knowledge of tenses. In relation to omission errors, plural(s) and copula make up the greatest part of omissions. This might be because of native language interference and lack of foreign language structures on the part of students. A comparatively smaller ratio of permutation errors indicates that at undergraduate level students generally acquire a reasonable proficiency level of foreign language structures. What is needed is to provide them sufficient exposure to foreign language to avoid omissions and substitutions. Among the errors of addition, addition of definite article 'the' has the highest frequency. This again shows a general lacking on students' part.

Recommendations

In the light of conclusions drawn from the study, the researcher furnishes following pedagogical recommendations:

1. The teachers of English Language at college level should give clearer explanations about grammatical rules and parts of speech because the results of this research exhibit that students frequently commit errors in these areas.
 2. The teachers of English Language at college level should pay special attention to the teaching of articles and application-level exercises should be used practice.
- 2.1 Studies on Compliments in Western Asia: The Case of Turkish and Persian Khan and Rustam; ARJASS, 4(1): 1-19, 2017; Article no.ARJASS.34999

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