

RESEARCHING STUDENTS' ORAL PERFORMANCE: What's wrong with their use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation?

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate errors in oral performance among the third year English Education Department students of UIN Ar-Raniry. It was aimed at two folds of research objectives. First, it sought to investigate the most frequently-committed error of the third year English Education Department students of UINAr-Raniry. Second, it attempted to identify the causes of students' errors in their oral performance. This study employed qualitative research methods. The participants of this study were 20 students registering in Public Speaking Course. To investigate the students' errors, a speaking test was used as a research instrument. The test was in the form of individual speaking performance on a topic of "Do we need native speakers in our Tarbiyah Faculty?" The participants were required to speak about the issue, which lasted for 10 minutes each. 20 oral performances were transcribed to enable the analysis of the errors. To analyze the student's oral performance errors, the content analysis was used. This process was followed by analyzing the different aspects of language: grammar, pronunciation, and categories of error causes in communication. The results revealed that puzzling vowel insertion was the most commonly committed error (316/62.7%) compared to shifts in tense (10/2.0%), word order (19/3.8%), subject verb agreement (14/2.8%), and case of referent (15/3%). These errors were identified to have been caused by interlanguage factor. In an effort to respond to these compelling issues in the students' speaking performance, lecturers who teach English at the University are required to give their maximum attention in order to improve their students' oral performance.

Keywords: *Errors analysis; oral performance errors; causes of errors*

INTRODUCTION

The peak mastery of language learning is characterized by the ability, as most language learners perceive, to successfully communicate in any target language. However, despite knowing grammatical rules and their uses, foreign language learners have a difficulty in making native speakers understand their utterances in real situations; causing these learners to consider themselves fail in oral communication. Therefore, foreign language learners need to make improvement in pronouncing foreign language words to become more confident in using the language orally.

There are many factors that hinder foreign language learners to have a good command of speaking, one of which is first language interference. In the context of English language learning, differences of grammar, structures and sounds between learners' first language and those of English have been recognized to be one of the factors affecting teaching, mastering and the assessing process (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Furthermore, to speak native-like English is difficult to achieve for foreign language learners even though they have lived in English speaking country for many years as "one can wait a life time without achieving a respectable standard; we all know of foreigners living permanently in our country who continue indefinitely to betray the characteristic speech habit of their mother tongue" (MacCarthy, 1978 as cited in Zaghlul, 1987, p. 2).

To speak English well, students need to be able to fully understand its grammar, word stress, and pronunciation. At the same time, they are also required to have a wide range of English vocabulary since one who has a good idea is still unable to express the idea well due to lack of vocabulary. To have a good command of speaking English requires extra efforts and practice, and many foreign students fail to speak English fluently as it takes extra time, efforts, and persistence for one to have a good command of speaking English. Therefore, many linguists and methodologists, while being skeptical about the interference of the first language on the performance of other skills in the second language acknowledge the possibility of the influence of the first language on that of the second language.

In the Acehese context, most university students who have spent their time to study English since secondary education are still struggling to produce error-free structures. Even though they have studied English for six successive years at junior and senior high schools, many students still commit frequent errors in their productive skills (speaking and writing). As a result, some students are unable to meet the demand of the institution that requires them to use productive skills (speaking and writing) and to be communicatively competent. Therefore, one of the universities in Aceh, particularly the department of English Language Education, has attempted to facilitate the students to become effective English communicators through various subjects that can enhance their communicative skills including English Public Speaking.

English Public Speaking is one of the challenging courses for the English Department students of UIN Ar-Raniry. This subject is compulsory for the third year students in English Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry. On improving students' language skill, the public speaking course is aimed at providing students with a high level of language practice in different register of language. Along the course, they were trained and taught how to be proficient English users by tasking to respond to a set of current relevant issues on politics, education, religion, economics and the like. As such, in this course, they are required to read, write, plan and present the language. The reality, however, holds different views that most of them were hardly able to communicate effectively in English. A bimonthly report (UIN English Lectures Forum, 2018) showed that students registering in English public speaking course were not consistent and of basic grammar ability in initiating and maintaining the English conversation. They were unable to satisfy most academic requirements and often found with ineffective use of language such as in terms of the use of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This evidence encourages the head of English Education Department and teaching staff to put every effort to overcome the problem. Even though oral communication skills can be taught, not many studies have been conducted to investigate the linguistic errors made by English Education Department students in their oral communication skills. Subramanian and Saadiyah (2009) state that such an error analysis can help teachers identify specific language

problems which can be used as a guide for more effective teaching. Error analysis of their work will make the students aware of the errors when speaking English and this awareness will make them more proactive in terms of self-correction. Such complexities require further effort to explore and analyze the causes, the type, and frequency of errors students make during their speaking. Hence, this study investigates the errors in the oral performance of the third year of English Education Department students of UIN Ar-Raniry. My ability to identify these errors has enabled me to correct the students' errors and prevent the same errors to occur in the future.

Therefore, investigating student's oral performance would eventually give both the lecturer and students a strong outlook of English learning improvement. Hincks (2003) has stated that students with strong motivation can stretch their productive use of the English language beyond the skills required in every day communication. Having gone through available related literature on Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis, two main research questions are formulated below.

1. What are the most frequently-committed errors in the oral performance of the third-year English Department Students of UIN Ar-Raniry?
2. What are the causes of the errors in the oral performance of the third year English Department students of UIN Ar-Raniry?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error Analysis

Error analysis has enabled teachers to review their students' language mastery such as in speech and writing and provide thorough evidence to address better language teaching strategies. The process of learning a foreign language has been scientifically supposed as that of learners' initial way in mastering their first language. During this process of learning, errors and the mistake in the production of target language are observable such as learners' inner factors or the result of incomplete linguistics learning (Corder, 1967; Mohideen, 1991; Heydari & Bagheri, 2012; Jabeen, Kazemian, & Shabaz, 2015). In addition, it is believed that L2 learners also experience the same process while learning any new languages. That is why there is no much difference between the processes of learning a second or foreign language acquisition. Error analysis is considered important in ESL/EFL

teaching as it can help teachers to provide new ways of teaching by giving the feedback on the errors made by the learners (Mohideen, 1991; Jabeen et al, 2015).

Sources of Errors

The classification of errors is conducted through identifying the possible sources of errors which do not exploit the negative transfer of learners' first language. These frequent errors sourced from inter-lingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer, contact of learning and the communication strategies used by foreign language learners (Brown, 1980; Ainon et al., 2013). Other (James 1980 as cited in Ainon et al., 2013) subsume the sources of errors into two major categories: linguistics and the taxonomy of surface structure. The linguistic category comprises errors in the whole target language system such as of phonology, grammar, lexis, textual discourse. Without knowledge in the target language, language learner would find it difficult to correct them in the language performance such as those of interlanguage which is derived from the learners' mother tongue (Bootchuy, 2008; Ainon et al., 2013). The inter-lingual errors which is supported by the behaviorist theory that it is an influence of the L2 learners; errors, was unable to prove what is happening in a classroom; however, it is known as the errors that initially emerged from learning second/foreign language. These are transfer of phonological, morphological, and the grammatical elements (Keshavarz, 2008; Ebrahim & Majid, 2011). Intra-lingual errors, on the other hand, refer to the errors which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning. This type of error can further be broken down into three types namely, over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules. Meanwhile, developmental errors refer to "errors which appear since learners try to build up hypotheses about the English language from his/her limited experiences of it in the classroom or textbook. Developmental errors frequently occur at the initial stages of language learning and are positively seen as the sign of improvement. Error classification is useful for teachers by allowing them to record data, observe the student progress and plan remedial lessons (Phettomkam, 2013).

Communications Strategies in Second Language Acquisition

The use of certain strategies reflects the capacity of learners' knowledge in communicating their message across the target language skills, most of which is being lack of target language rules and forms. As a result, learners may do circumlocution, literal translation, and topic avoidance and use the incorrect vocabulary. Færch and Kasper (1983) further elaborate the other terms for sources of errors related to strategies in communication. For example, the achievement strategies occur when the communicators do not have sufficient linguistic resources as in the code switching strategies such as seen in foreign language (FL) learning when students often share their L1 with their teacher and switch the code extensively between L2 and L1. The inter-lingual transfer strategies can be characterized by learners' using combination of linguistics features from IL and L1. Furthermore, In the IL based strategies, the learners deal with generalization, paraphrasing, or even coin new words or restructuring with their quest in communication barriers e.g. "we were sitting in the rounding of the stadium". Restructuring strategy is often applied when the learners realize that they cannot finish their previous plan, and develop an alternative constituent plan to ensure the expressing process of their message. At the phonological aspect, some items are indispensable in communication; learners cannot simply communicate by a reduced phonological system. Also, some particular phonemes are restricted to specific words which can still not use a reduced phonological such as topic avoidance (Wei, 2011).

Error Analysis Studies on EFL Speaking Class

Phettomkam (2013) argues that it is not easy to examine linguistic accuracy in spoken language. In this regard, Beattie (1983) as cited in Phettomkam (2013) states that spontaneous speech is unlike written text, in which it contains many mistakes, sentences are usually brief. Rula (2013) conducted a study on spoken English to investigate and analyze ungrammatical sentences uttered by senior Jordanian English students of Princes Alia University of Jordan to explore whether they are errors or mistakes. The participants of this study were 100 senior students majoring in English. The findings were reported that some students commit ungrammatical utterances known as either errors or mistakes which were caused by

L1 interference, overgeneralization, lack of competence and carelessness. Ainon et al. (2013) investigated types of grammatical errors made by Malaysian students in oral presentation in English for academic purposes course taught by one of the researchers. The subjects of the study were 32 by the third and fourth year students of faculty of Reveal Knowledge and Human Sciences, Law and Economics International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The study employed the surface structure taxonomy of Dulay, Burt, and Kreshen (1982) to analyze the data of the student's presentation focusing on four main ways by which the students modify the target forms: misformation, misordering, addition, and omission. The findings of the study reported that the majority of the grammatical errors made by the students was misformation (50.24%), followed by omission (24.21%), and addition (23.96%). This reflects that most students had a problem related to the rules of words formation since they were different from those of their native language. These types of language errors were not only encountered as the area of difficulty for Malaysian learners of English but also for other Asian learners. With regard to the errors made, Ainon et al. (2013) remark that errors are necessary in order to improve their language performance. In addition, this study has provided an important input which can be employed to improve student's oral presentation skills. Since oral presentation in academic setting is structured and requires a good language, Ainon et al. (2013) suggest that peer error analysis be a good exercise in raising the students' awareness and consequently correcting their errors.

Another relevant study was conducted by Hojati (2013) on oral performance errors and was participated by 20 postgraduate students in the field of TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), in Sheikhbahee University in Iran. The results of the study showed that advanced learners made numerous errors in pronunciation and grammar. Pronunciation-associated errors had the highest frequency (60), followed by grammar-related errors (51). In the grammar category, the use of articles had the highest frequency (12), and errors in the use of clauses and prepositions were reported to be the second the third highest frequencies of grammatical errors (11 and 8, respectively). In terms of lexical errors, the students

made more errors in the choice of proper lexical items, and also in near synonyms and collocations.

Further, Ting, Mahdhir, and Chang (2010) examined the grammatical errors in spoken English of Malaysian university students. The sample of this study was 42 students whose English was less proficient. The findings indicated that 126 oral interactions and five common errors were found including in the use of preposition, plural form of nouns, subject-verb agreement, and tenses.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research design was employed in this study. Data were collected from students' oral performance. In qualitative research, using test is thought of an access to gather particular information of the respondents. This test can have many forms such as an open essay, a factual and heavily directed essay and divergent thinking items. In addition, the test is done to diagnose students' strength, weakness and difficulties (Grondlund & Linn, 1990 as cited in Cohen et al, 2007). In terms of oral performance, a speaking test was used based on communicative language teaching. The presentation activity was intended to be a means to later examine the students' oral performance. In the test, the students were asked to give their opinion orally on the topic of "Do we need an English native speaker at Tarbiyah Faculty?". They were given 10 minutes each, making clear their standing's argument upon the given topic. The errors investigated might be related to grammar features, vocabulary, and pronunciation during speaking. Of the above features, the students' works on the oral performance were classified in accordance with the types of the errors they made. Coding and categorizing the students' oral performance were done based on the three aspects: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Meanwhile, the sources of the errors were analyzed against the sources of errors provided by Faerch and Kasper (1983), Mohideen (1991), Keshavarz (2008), and Wei (2011).

Finally, the process of data elicitation of errors was done through content analysis as content analysis is the process of summarizing and reporting written data,

the main contents of data and their messages (Cohen, Manion, & Morisson, 2007). The data were processed by Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA Miner Lite) software.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at English Department Education of UIN (State Islamic University) Ar-Raniry, Darussalam, Banda Aceh, where I have served to my utmost for the teaching and learning English. In particular, the students' performance in English oral task was taken at my public English speaking class. The participants of this study were 20 undergraduate students enrolling in my class. The sample was generated by using the purposive sampling technique. To adjust with qualitative research methods, the number of research participant should not be large (Berg, 2001; Cohen et al, 2007). Yin (2011) affirms that dealing with this issue, purposive sampling should be used in selecting a certain number of participants in accordance with the problem being sought: "The goal or purpose for selecting the specific study units is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study" (p. 88). A classroom of students was chosen as it allowed to gain an entire view of the errors in the oral performance and that it could address proper solutions and recommendations to the investigated-weaknesses.

FINDINGS

Most Commonly Committed Errors

This study revealed significant and remarkable data upon the most commonly committed error and the causes of errors in the oral performance investigated from students' public English speaking course. The data are shown in the following table:

Table 1
Class of Students' Error in Oral Performance

Aspect of Language	Freq.	%	Examples
Error Use of Grammar	139	25.6	Goodly, an department student, learn from native,
Incorrect Use of Vocabulary	36	7.1	Do a mistaken, different with, want distert,
Incorrect Pronunciation	316	62.7	Authentic / au tæntɪk/, Qualified /kw ɒ lɪfɪ:d/,
Total	491	95.4 %	

Table 1 indicates that the incorrect use of pronunciation was the most commonly committed errors in the students' oral performance (62.7%). The puzzling use of pronunciation was mainly in the incorrect use of vowel sounds. As many as 316 cases of wrong vowel sounds were found, such as in the word "Authentic" (/ɑʊtəntɪk/). In relation to wrong vocabulary, some students had less knowledge on appropriate collocations, as shown by some examples "do a mistaken", "different with" and "want distert". The errors in grammar also appeared quite frequent in almost 20 students' oral performance; many were identified to be the incorrect use of adverb, shift in tense, and subject verb agreement.

Sources of Errors

Interlanguage Errors

One of the dominant underlying factors influencing the learners' language performance is their first language. This factor, according to the proponent of the interlanguage errors, occurs when one makes a hypothesis about how the target language is used and based upon his mother tongue language rule (Brown, 2002). In Indonesian, words are generally pronounced unlike those in English, triggering wrong pronunciation of the English words, such as when saying the word "Authentic" (Indonesian = /auténtik/; English = /ɑ:'θen.tɪk/) (see Table 1). Moreover, such intervention is contributed by students' limited coverage of grammatical competence, which is triggered by either individual habit in learning language or by receiving indiscriminate language. Thus students have no excuse but to develop their own structure of language without paying attention to how the rules of target language are actually used.

Intralingual Errors

It is important to reiterate that the term overgeneralization is thought of as a situation in which one form or rule of language is over-generalized over the other forms; a further persistence to extend the certain of language inside another is called a transfer of learning (Jabeen, Kazemian, & Shabaz, 2015). As such, students' overgeneralization in speaking performance found on their language content on "do we need native speakers in our Tarbiyah faculty" can be identified on their relocating certain language rule into another. For example, students under this analysis overuse

the rule of adverb, adding suffix “-ly” in making the adverb of manner and place (see Table 1). In the case of noun use or group of nouns, factor causing the error are also identified in that students have extended the use of one form of grammatical aspect to what they believe is true to another aspect such as in “Ten person”, “much vocabulary”, and so forth. Such overgeneralization and the extending of target language form also come across in the use of subject verb agreement as in among other thing “there is so many vocabulary” and “there is a lot of perceptions”. In addition, the spelling sound of the 8th alphabet “l” in English is “ai” such in “I have a computer with an updated windows icon” overgeneralized into the other beginning “l” word, which is absolutely wrong as in for “idiom/aidiem/”. It revealed that most puzzling vowel sounds had been influenced by learners’ overgeneralization of a certain vowel sound inside another.

DISCUSSION

The investigation of grammatical error in students’ speaking performance has brought about a total sum of 491 items or 95.4 % of errors. These figures are grouped in different aspects of language ranging from the incorrect use of article to the elaborate puzzling vowel sound insertion. Each aspect of language receives its own portion of error. Without unified and well-formed knowledge of target language, students do not hesitate to employ inappropriate phrases embedded in their speaking discourse. Wei (2011) believes that lacking command of English student often certainly insert certain strings of word which do not have any root in the target language (see Table 1). Therefore, the long span of gap between an appropriate language use and students’ lacking amount of knowledge can trigger to avoidance of topic as the concept of language is not known to speaker (Wei, 2011). Pair of students out of 20 selected respondents is seen to have made language avoidance and message abandonment of communication strategies which was done by inserting another topic they have knowledge with, which is different from that of requiring to. The findings of the investigation of students’ errors in the oral performance reveal that a significant insight to the quality of the students’ speaking skill is students’ self-habit to DIY the target language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues in teaching English to students should not be neglected rather it must be handled with a profound investigation to look for the causal hidden factors, which influence students' language competence (Hojati, 2013). The findings of this study indicated that a large number of errors were identified in different aspects of English. The causes of errors came from several factors affecting students' command of oral performance. It was indicated from previous data that the cause of above-mentioned errors were indexed from self-constructing vocabulary, incorrect vocabulary, and appeal for assistance to message abandonment. As such, although it is said that practice makes perfect, the reality is not as "that easy" to practice. Teacher should have a sense of enquiry to quickly spot students' weaknesses and introduce the alternative to cure the students' language condition, removing their language obstacles. If this situation persists, high command of English would absolutely be a figment of students' imagination and causes them fail to communicate effectively in the foreign language as well as in global work place.

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