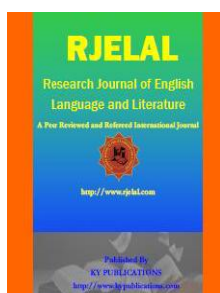




NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This is an empirical investigation on learners' native language interference errors, where the data were collected from 20 students of tertiary level of a private university in Bangladesh. The students were asked to write 10 paragraphs on different topics. Free paragraph writing was given, so that the students could write without inhibition. It was expected that a general picture of interference problems would occur. The findings of the study indicate that tertiary level students have some difficulties in using correct English grammar in their writing and native language interference can be held responsible for a number of writing errors. This paper has the potential to provide the English Language Teachers and educators an opportunity to have an insight in understanding the nature of errors learners make for their native language interference.

Keyword: Native Language Interference, Contrastive analysis, Error analysis, Interlanguage, Language transfer, Interlingual and Intralingual errors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of native language interference errors made by the second language learners has always been one of the major concerns in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Extensive research has already been done in the area of native language interference on the target language. Though the opinions of linguists vary regarding the impact of the native language on second language acquisition, researches have consistently shown that learners' knowledge of the syntactic structure of native language causes difficulty for second language learners. Learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response in second language (Bhela, 1999). If the structure of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in target language (L2), thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2 (Dechert, 1983; Ellis, 1997).

This study aims at finding out the level of native language interference in Bangladeshi tertiary level students' written errors.

2. Literature Review

Linguists have also introduced a large number of competing terms concerning learners' interference errors which are used in the discussions. Such terms include **Contrastive analysis**, **Error analysis**, **Language Transfer** (positive and negative transfer) and **Interlanguage**. For the demand of the case study, in this section I am going to discuss these terms in detail and present researchers views concerning native language interference.

2.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is systematic study of two or more languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities between them. Extensively used in 1960s and early 1970s, CA was the first approach which elucidated the

problems of interference of the native language of second language (L2) learners.

Robert Lado, the prime movers of Contrastive Analysis, provided a comprehensive theoretical treatment and suggested a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. In his book, *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957), Lado claimed that "the elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those elements which are different will be difficult". Ferguson (1965) pointed out that one of the major problems in the learning of a second language is the interference caused by the structural differences between the native language of the learner and the second language. The supporters of CA claimed that the similarities and differences between various languages was enough to deal with the problem of teaching these languages (Ghadessy 1980). Wardhough (1970) pointed out the two forms of CA: the **strong form** which claims that all L2 errors can be predicted by identifying the differences between the target language and the learner's first language and the **weak form** claims that CA can be used to identify which errors are the result of interference.

The Objectives of CA are summarized in Theovan Els, et al (1984:38) as follows: 1) providing insight into similarities and differences between languages specially between the mother tongue and foreign languages, 2) explaining and predicting problems in L2 learning, 3) Developing course materials for language teaching.

However, CA was also criticized by the proponents of error analysis, they argued that CA focuses on differences between L1 and L2, overlooks the factors which may affect the second language performance such as his/her learning and communication strategies, training-procedures, overgeneralization etc.

2.2 Error Analysis

Error analysis (EA) is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It was developed when linguists began to question the validity of Contrastive Analysis (CA). CA looked at only the learner's native language and the target language (i.e. fully formed languages), EA provided a methodology for investigating learner language

(Ellis, 2001, 48). The field of EA in SLA was established by Corder and his colleagues became a recognized part of Applied Linguistics in 1970s.

EA consists of a comparison between the errors made in target language and target language itself (Khansir, 2012). (Brown (2012) defined error analysis as "the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of second languages and then to reveal the systems operated by learner. Researches show that all the errors are not due to the make up of mother tongue, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesized, deriving from faulty comprehension of distinctions of the target language are also the reasons that learners make the errors in acquisition of English as a second or target language, classified by Richards (1971).

Corder (1967) notes that errors could be significant in three ways: 1) For teachers: it provides the teachers with the information about how much the learner had learnt, 2) for researchers it provides evidence of how much the language is learnt or acquired 3) for learners themselves: it provides as devices by which the learner discover the rules of the target language. According to Sharma (1980s) "error analysis can thus provide a strong support to remedial teaching", he added that during the teaching program, it can reveal both successes and failures of the program. Duley et al (1982) mentioned that the term "error" to refer to a systematic deviation from a selected norm or set of norms. Corder (1974) suggests the following steps in EA research: 1) Collection of a sample of learner language 2) Identification of errors 3) Description of errors 4) Explanation 4) Evolution of errors.

Explaining the explanation errors, Ellis (2001, 57-59) claims that errors can be categorized according to psycholinguistics process, into two types:

1. Interlingual errors
2. Intra lingual errors

Inter-lingual errors are those errors which can be ascribed to learners' native language influence that is also described as "Transfer Errors". The mother tongue interference occurs in the areas of Syntax, grammar, lexis and pronunciation. On the other hand, **Intra-lingual errors** are errors those are caused as a result of interference from within the

target language itself. These errors are also termed as “Developmental Errors” (Hossain,2015).

EA was also criticized for misdiagnosing student learning problems due to their avoidance of certain difficult elements but EA is useful in SLA because this will reveal to us (teachers, areas, syllabus designers and textbook writers) the problems and can also design remedial exercise and focus more attention on the trouble spots.

2.3 Interlanguage

In late 1972, EA was superseded by Interlanguage (IL). Larry Selinker, an American linguist, coined the term “*Interlanguage*”. It is a kind of language, created by the second and foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a new language. This is neither a system of native language nor system of the target language, but instead falls between two. Corder (1971) used the term “*idiosyncratic dialect*” to suggest that the learner’s language is unique to a particular individual, and that the rules of the learner’s language are peculiar to the language of that individual alone. The concept of interlanguage might be better understood if it is thought of as a continuum between the L1 and L2 along which all learners traverse (Larsen, et al (1990:60).

Selinker (1972) suggested that five principal processes which operated in interlanguage. These are:

1. Language Transfer (some but not all, items, rules and subsystems of a learner’s interlanguage may be transferred from the first language.
2. Overgeneralization of target language rules;
3. Transfer of training(a rule enters the learner’s system as a result of instruction)
4. Strategies of L2 learning (an identifiable approach by the learners to the material to be learned)
5. Strategies of second language communication (an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with the native speakers of the target language.

2.4 Language Transfer

According to the Behaviorist theory interference is the result of **Proactive Inhibition** (the way in which previous learning prevents or inhibits the learning of

new habits). In SLA it works as follows, where the L1 influences L2 learning. Ellis (1997,57) refers to interference as “**transfer**” which he says ‘the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2’. He argues that transfer is governed by learners’ perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. Odlin (1989) offers the “working definition” of transfer as a basis for his own thoughtful treatment of such phenomena:

“Transfer is the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and imperfectly) acquired (1989:27).”

Transfer is of two kinds: **Positive** and **Negative**. Transfer will be positive when the L1 and L2 habits are same. In contrast Negative transfer refers to those instances of transfer which results in errors because habitual behavior is different from that to be learned (Dulay et al 1982:101). Thus the differences between the first and second language create difficulty which results in errors, while the similarities between the first and second language facilitate rapid and easy learning.

2.5 Review of Previous Studies

A number of researches have been conducted to determine the common errors of Bangladeshi students’ writing. Researchers have identified that native language interference is one of the sources for which students have done the errors. “..... it requires particular efforts on the part of the learners from the very beginning of their acquiring the target language (TL). Again, while learning second or foreign language the habit of one’s native language often interferes. This is the reason why Bengali learners are very much liable in making errors in spoken and written English.” (Hossain, D & Uddin, T, 2015)

Pointing out the influence of native language in Bangladeshi tertiary level students’ writing, Fahmida (2010) claimed that, “*The interference errors in syntax and vocabulary show that the students already have learned the sentence structure and use of words in their first language but now the new structure of L2 (second language) are being hindered by the L1 (first language). These errors show that the students’ knowledge of Bangla acted as a resource*

which they used when they display the TL (target language) in their writing.” The findings of the researches showed that the results suggested that most of the students transferred their native language rule patterns into their English writings.

3. Research Questions

The case study addresses the following research questions:

3.1 Does native language interfere in Bengali students’ written English?

3.2 What percentage of learners written errors are responsible for their mother tongue interference?

4. Data Collection:

The objective of this investigation is to find out the native language interference in Bengali students’ English writing in tertiary level. The main source of data used to find answer to the research questions is written paragraph of 20 students (age 18-21) of a chosen private university. The students were from Department of English 2) Computer Science & Engineering, 3) Bachelor in Business & Administration 4) Electrical Electronic Engineering, whose one of the fundamental courses was English, titled “The Four Skills of Communication”. Students were asked to write 10 paragraph on different topics. Most

common issues had been as topics in which students were interested. The students were asked to write approximately 200 to 300 words within a period of one hour. Free writing was given and the students were unaware that their writings are going to be under investigation.

5. Data analysis

At the time of analyzing the samples of students’ writing, 13 types of grammatical items were identified. The errors were divided into two groups, the **Interference** Errors and **Non-Interference** or Developmental errors. Total number of errors was 199 and among them 104 errors were considered as Interference errors and 95 errors as Non-interference.

5.1 Interference Errors

When the students’ paragraphs were analyzed, among 13 types of grammatical items, 8 types of items were marked as Interference errors. These are: Subject verb agreement, Tense, Preposition, Number, Use of Auxiliary verb, Article, Capitalization and Apostrophe related errors. Total 104 were found, with average 10.4 per paragraph and total 52.44 %. Table 1 shows the interference errors.

Table 1: Interference Errors

| | Types of Errors | Number of Errors | Average | Percentage of total no of errors |
|---|------------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Subject verb agreement | 20 | 2.0 | 10.4 |
| 2 | Tense | 18 | 1.8 | 9.04 |
| 3 | Preposition | 16 | 1.6 | 8 |
| 4 | Number | 15 | 1.5 | 7.5 |
| 5 | Use of Auxiliary verb | 13 | 1.3 | 6.5 |
| 6 | Article | 12 | 1.2 | 6 |
| 7 | Capitalization | 5 | 0.5 | 2.5 |
| 8 | Apostrophe | 5 | 0.5 | 2.5 |
| | Total | 104 | 10.4 | 52.44 |

5.1.1 Subject verb agreement

Table 1, indicates that the first common type of interference error committed by the students was **subject verb agreement**, specially use of **s/es** for third person singular number after main verb. In Bangla, the variation of **subject verb agreement** according to person is not like the variation of

English. So the Bengali learners usually have tendency to drop the **s/es** while using third person singular number. In this study, total 20 errors were found in this part, with an average 2 errors per paragraph. The examples are given below:

Example: 1. Everyman want to be special in his life.

2. English **help** us to get good jobs.

3.If the modern technology **reach** in the every farthest corner of the village, their life may come in the light of modernism.

Here examples (1),(2) and (3) show the errors where the students dropped 's/es' after main verbs.

5.1.2 Verb tense

As the Table1 points out, **tense** related errors is second most recurrent type of errors the students produced in their writing. Total 18 errors were identified, with an average 1.8 per paragraph. Though in Bangla language, there is Tense (Past, present and future) like English, but "*Bengali Learners fret over the tenses most and it is here that they spend most of their energy.*"(Rashid,49). Generally, at the time of writing, the L2 learners of Bangladesh have an affinity to translate any line word by word. They also try to follow the structure of the grammar. The learners are not aware of the culture of the target language, though sometimes the grammatical structures do not follow the native situations. As a result, they use the wrong tense in a certain sentence when they follow the grammatical structures without following the native situations where the situation and the structures of grammar are totally different from their culture.

Example: 1. If our government **tried** to give emphasis on English learning, people **will** not suffer for a job.

2. A large number of people all over the world are **speak** in English.

3. E-commerce **included** email, internet etc.

In example (1) shows that the student mixed up the past and future tense. In example (2), we can see that the student wanted to follow the present situation but became confused between simple present and present continuous tense, as result made an error in grammatical structure. Example (3) shows the wrong use of simple present tense.

5.1.3 Preposition

The incorrect use of **Preposition** is the third type of error committed by the Bengali learners. "What the native English learn by instinct has got to be learned by sheer practice and memorization." (Rashid,81). There is no use of preposition in Bangla language, so proper use of preposition is difficult for the Bangladeshi learners due to native language

influence. The majority of the participants in this study demonstrated confusion for the right usage of preposition. The total number of preposition errors committed by the students was 16 with an average 1.6 errors per essay.

Example:

1.Internet controls **of** our government.

2. Every man wants to be special in his life **of** society.

3. .E-commerce is a popular business system in modern time which is possible **between** internet.

4. We can use in internet____ communicate the world.

Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the use of redundant preposition example (3) demonstrates the inappropriate preposition and (4) shows the sentence with a missing preposition.

5.1.4 Number

Another common error is using Number. Although, in Bangla there are two numbers- "the Singular and the Plural", but Bangla has a typical way of using the singular to denote class or species. These words look singular, but have all the force of plurality. They may be called "*Deceptive Singular*" (Rashid,23). Bengali learners this distinction is not easily understood, as a result errors occur. In this study total 15 errors are identified, on average 1.5 per paragraph and total percentage7.5.

Example: 1.If the modern technology reaches in the every farthest corner of the village, their **life** may come in the light of modernism.

2. Internet solves our many **problem**.

In example(1) use of singular verb is observed and example (2),also shows the use of singular verb,which would be plural's'.

5.1.5Use of auxiliary verb

As the Table 1 indicates, the fifth category of error is related to use of auxiliary verb which is considered as mostregular type of error, the students make for the influence of mother tongue. Bengali language has regular verb but there is no use of auxiliary verbs. English language has 8 auxiliary verbs (be, am, are, is, was, were, been, being) and also has modal auxiliary verbs each have two distinct forms. Use of auxiliary verb is a problem for the Bengali students. The students always have a tendency to omit *Be* verb or use wrong be verb form in the sentences

.Total 13 errors were found, with an average 1.3 per writing in this investigation.

Example:

1. It ___ very important to know English language besides mother language.
2. Online shopping ___ a website. People specially young generation are very interested in online shopping
3. E-commerce means electronic commerce. It---- related to electronic communication.

Examples (1),(2) and (3) illustrates that the students dropped the auxiliary verb in the sentences.

5.1.6 Article related:

Use of Article is another difficult area where the Bangladeshi English Learners make errors. Rashid, in his book *English For Bengali Learners* says, “a Bengali learners stumbles on articles, because in his mind there is an unconscious process of translation and this unconscious translation instinct is called **the gravitational pull of a native language** which we may call L1”(Rashid,2).The Bengali learners mix up the indefinite article (a/an) before vowels in their writing. Total 12 errors had been identified, with an average of 1.2 per paragraph. The examples of article related errors are presented below.

Example:

- 1.The English is a international language.
2. It is used in the every country.
- 3.It’s ___ modern business system.

Example (1) shows the error where the student mixed up the indefinite article,(2) shows the miss

use of definite article(the), and in example (3) the indefinite article is omitted.

5.1.7 Capitalization

Capitalization means writing a word with its first letter as a capital letter and the remaining letter in small letters. In Bangla language, use of capitalization cannot be seen. Few errors were identified in this category. Total 5, with an average 0.5 per writing.

Example

1. english is a language of power.
2. city life is a complicated life.

In example (1)Student used small letter for the name of a language and example (2) shows student used small letter in the beginning of a sentence instead of Capital letter.

5.1.8Apostrophe

Though Bangla language has the use of punctuation but Bengali learners make errors in using possessive apostrophe. Total 5 errors were found in this kind,with an average 0.5.Examples are given below:

- Example:** 1. Now its very famous in our country.
 2. Our student’s like me.

In both examples, wrong use of possessive apostrophe is observed.

5.2 Non- interference Errors:

According to my analysis, Spelling, lexis, Parts of speech, Word order and sentence fragment related errors were considered as non interference or developmental errors made by the students. In Table 2, it can be seen that total number of errors are 95,with an average 9.5 and total 47.65 %.

Table 2: Non Interference Errors

| | Types of Errors | Number of Errors | Average | Percentage of total no of errors |
|---|-------------------|------------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Spelling | 53 | 5.3 | 26.63 |
| 2 | Lexis related | 14 | 1.4 | 7 |
| 3 | Parts of Speech | 12 | 1.2 | 6 |
| 4 | Word order | 10 | 1 | 5.02 |
| 5 | Sentence Fragment | 6 | 0.6 | 3 |
| | Total | 95 | 9.5 | 47.65 |

5.2.1Spelling

Spelling means the act or process of writing words by using the letters conventionally accepted for their formation. I have observed that the most frequent type of errors in learners’ essay was **Spelling** which

was a non-interference error. The total number of errors of this kind was 53, with an average 5.3 per essay and the total percentage was 26.63. Most of the students made this type of errors in their writing.

Example: 1.City life is a very complicated life, where people spend their time with busyness.

2.English is the most important language in the hole world.

3.Interned has negative sector also.

The examples (1),(2) and (3) show the spelling errors.

5.2.2. Lexis related

Lexis related errors comprise inappropriate, missing or redundant words. For the lack of knowledge in vocabulary, students use inappropriate words or miss one or more words in their writing as a result **Lexis related** errors happen. In this case study, this type of errors was observed. Total 14 errors had been located, with average 1.4 and total percentage was 7.

Example: 1.Student politics is a great and faithful political system in our country.

2. An online shopping is the physical analogy of buying products or services at shopping center.

In both examples we can see the inappropriate use of adjectives in the sentences.

5.2.3. Parts of speech

Parts of speech is a developmental errors where the students become confused about noun, adjective and adverb. Total 12 errors is found in Parts of Speech, with an average 6 per paragraph.

Example: 1. People, specially, young generation is very interest in online shopping.

2. They did not get proper chance to get proper educated.

In example (1) the student used noun instead of adjective (interested) and example (2) adjective was used instead of noun (education).

5.2.4. Word Order

Word order is another type of developmental errors where the students do not write the right structure of the grammar. When the students cannot master the rules of the target language, they make disorder in the syntactic arrangements of words, clause or phrase. There are few students who made this kind of errors. Total 10 errors were identified, with an average 1 and total percentage was 5.

Example:1. Most women lives remained centered on their traditional roles.

2. Now minimum 70% people internet use.

We can see that the syntactic arrangement of words is not maintained in the sentences. In example (1), student used two verbs which are incorrect, and example (2) shows the wrong placement of verbs which would be "use internet".

5.2.5 .Sentence fragments

Usually sentence fragment is the pieces of sentence that become disconnected from the main clauses and does not express a complete thought. In this case study I also got this type of error made by the learners that some sentences were incomplete. Total 6 errors were marked, with an average 0.6 per writing and total percentage was 3.

Example: 1.Without internet we cannot, the internet system well know.

2. Women's rights to education, a pillar for realizing one's own rights suffers.

In both examples (1) and (2), the sentences are incomplete because the second clauses are disconnected from the main clause.

6.Findings

The aim of this case study was to find out the errors made by the Bangladeshi learners for their native language interference and the percentage of interference errors. It is really very difficult to establish whether the students had made the errors for their native language influence or the students do not master the rules of their second language. 20 students of a private university were given 10 paragraphs.13 grammatical items were identified where the students had made the errors. Total number of errors was 199.104 errors were considered as Interference errors, with average 10.4 , total 52.44% and 95 errors were Non –interference errors, with an average 9.5 per writing and total 47.65%.According to the demand of this study, at first I wanted to find out the Interference errors and concentrated on the following areas: **preposition, use of auxiliary verb, capitalization** which are not used in Bangla language and **Subject verb agreement** (use of s/es),**article** (a/an),**tense, number, apostrophe(possessive)** which are used differently in Bangla Language. As the students always have a tendency to transfer the rules of the native language in the target language, in this study I observed that the students made the errors in those items which are not used in Bangali language or

which are used differently in target language. I also wanted to find out the non interference errors as all the errors were not due to the influence of the learners' native language .In my investigation I observed **Spelling, Parts of speech,Word order, Lexis related,Sentence fragments related** errors were Non-interference errors. These are learners' developmental errors as the learners could not adopt the rules of the grammar of target language properly. I think if the students were careful enough and could revise their writing before submitting then they could avoid these types of errors. When I had compared the total number of errors I found that Interference errors were higher than the Non-interference errors. Finally the findings show that the interference errors occurred due to the language transfer tendency of the students.

7. Conclusion

Finally, it is very difficult to decide whether a particular error was caused by the interference or is it a developmental error. As the aim of this case study was to identify the errors made by the second language learners for their native language interference in tertiary level, after the discussion of the findings and given examples, it has been clearly specified that the Tertiary level students of Bangladesh make errors in their writing for the influence of native language. As the learners rely on their native language structures to produce sentences, they at all times have a tendency to transfer the rules of their own language in their English writing which is shown and the reason is also clearly discussed in this study.

This study is not out of limitations. The findings would be more generalizable if the study were conducted with more participants and the students could get more time to write the paragraph.

There is a hope that this case study can assist the teaching process of the English language teachers and learners. The teachers will be able to predict the interference or non-interference errors and can also make a plan and implement their teaching techniques which will help the learners.

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