

AN EXPLORATION OF GRAMMAR TEACHING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM BASED ON
THE ANALYSIS OF USUAL ERRORS MADE BY NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN CET
WRITING

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Patrick Hagen, Ph.D.

English grammar presents a difficult and complex challenge to Chinese learners of ESL. In order to explore the most effective way to teach Chinese students grammar and reduce the errors to a minimum, a review of the literature will be presented. Among the subjects under review are aspects of error analysis, theories of error analysis, mistake and error, error classification, causes of errors, attitudes toward errors, and the implications of error analysis.

Based on a review of the related literature, the author has come to the following conclusions: errors are not evidence of learning or teaching failure but are of great significance to teaching; although erring is inevitable during the course of language learning, the errors made by students could be largely reduced if teachers applied more suitable teaching methods. That is to say that errors made by students are closely related to the teaching methods applied by teachers. And certain kinds of errors are directly caused by inappropriate teaching strategies, such as “redundancy of code” (George, cited from Wang, 2007, p.9); “Unique errors” (Dulay&Burt, cited from Ellis, 1994, p60); “Learning context errors” (Brown, 1994, p.215); and “teaching--induced errors” (Wei, 2003, p.10). The rest can also be decreased on a relative basis if better ways are figured out and applied by teachers. By considering a review of error analysis in conjunction with the teaching methods applied in China, the author will finally put forward her own suggestions about ESL teaching in China.iii

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Chapter One: Introduction

With the globalization process comes the general recognition that English is the world language. The study of English is becoming more and more important to people of non-English-speaking countries.

According to Celce-Murica and Larsen-Freeman (1999), linguists holds that grammar consists of three dimensions, that is, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, not just a collection of forms . To master English, ESL students must master all the three dimensions of grammar. They need to know the rules of making meaning.

There is no doubt that all students can learn grammar as is evident from their mastery of their first language. However, in the eyes of ESL learners, grammar is always a very big obstacle on their way to learning English well.

To error is human. Different languages have different unique construction features, so it is natural that while learning or using a second language, learners, especially adult learners with native language habits already established, will inevitably commit errors of one kind or another. However, appropriate teaching methods applied by the teacher can at least reduce the possibility of error-making. Though the center of the ESL classroom has shifted from the teacher to the student over last twenty years , the teacher still plays the essential role during the teaching and learning process. The teaching methods used by teachers are significant in ESL learning and can greatly affect the students' English level. So one of the most important tasks for language teachers is to find, analyze and correct errors made by students, and then figure out appropriate teaching methods to help students avoid erring as much as possible.

This review of literature provides an exploration on the most effective grammar teaching methods. The focus is on the usual errors made by non-English majors based on previous

research. It will be very useful for ESL teachers, especially for Chinese English teachers to help students improve their language learning in a better way.

The main ideas in the paper include the following:

1) Theory of Analysis: Error Analysis (EA) and Contrastive Analysis (CA) are the most prominent approaches applied to analyze errors;

2) Error classification: including collecting, analyzing and classifying errors usually made by non-English majors;

3) Causes of errors: theoretically speaking, making clear the causes of error occurrence are the key for us to improve our teaching and decrease error making;

4) Attitudes towards errors: figuring out the most appropriate way to deal with errors.

5) EA'S implications for grammar teaching in ESL classroom.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as a question is, “What grammar teaching strategies work best in ESL classroom for non-English majors in CET writing?”

Definition of Terms

Grammar: Grammar is not merely a collection of forms but also involves the three dimensions of what linguists refer to as syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Celce-Murica & Larsen-Freeman , 1999).

Error: error is the incorrect form or unintentional deviation from the norms of “native adult speakers” (Zi, 2003,p.5).

Teaching Strategy: Foreign or second language (L2) teaching strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques teacher use consciously to help students improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2 (Oxford, 1990b).

ESL: Abbreviation for the term English as a second language (Retrieved on January 30 from <http://www.answers.com/topic/esl>).

Delimitations of Research

The research will be conducted in Changsha, Hunan province, China, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics include “error analysis”, “grammar teaching”, and “ESL”.

Method of Approach

A brief review of literature will focus on the analysis of errors usually made by non-English majors. A second review of literature will study effective teaching methods employed by ESL teachers. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Theory of Analysis

Errors of ESL learners have been studied by many researchers. Different researchers deal with errors from different perspectives and for slightly different purposes, however, their work is mainly based on the following two error theories: Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA).

Contrastive Analysis (CA).

In order to identify and predict the areas of difficulties facing L2 learners, Contrastive Analysis (CA) was developed. In CA, two languages are systematically compared. According to James, it was the most favored paradigm for studying FL/SL (first language / second language) learning and organizing its teaching in the 1950s and 1960s (2001, p.4).

CA followers stressed the influence of the mother tongue in learning a second language. They focused on the in phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic levels. The following concept holds, “Where two languages are similar, positive transfer would occur; where they are different, negative transfer, or interference, would result”(Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p.53).

Contrastive Analysis theory reveals that many errors are due to what is called negative transfer. It is necessary, therefore, for a foreign language teacher to be familiar with the learner’s mother tongue when teaching an L2. Consequently, a Contrastive Analysis of the learner’s native language and the target language will help the teacher to predict the difficulties that the learner has, and this in turn determines

what the learner has to learn and what the teacher has to teach. Since language learners have different mother tongues, teaching has to vary accordingly.

Based on Contrastive Analysis, many linguistic phenomena were found out and general linguistic theories were enriched. At the same time, it greatly helped foreign language teaching. Owing to its significant contributions to second language teaching, the contrastive hypothesis once held a dominant position.

However, many empirical studies have shown that not all errors could be predicted by identifying differences between the first and second language. By the early 1970s, some misgivings about the reliability of Contrastive Analysis began to be voiced because it is not necessarily true that difference between the target language and the native language lead to errors through transfer; nor is it true that the native language is the only source of errors. In addition, what is needed for the explanation of the mental process of L2 production is something underlying the process, and the theory of Contrastive Analysis can't fulfill this task. Due to the weakness of Contrastive Analysis, it began to decline and a new approach—Error Analysis became the prominent theory.

Error Analysis (EA).

According to Richards, Platt and Platt (1998), Error Analysis is the study and analysis of the errors committed by second and foreign language learners. Its purposes were to identify learners' strategies, to perceive the causes of errors, and to gain information of learners' common difficulties to help teachers in their instructional

techniques and preparation of teaching materials. EA became the acceptable alternative to CA by the late 1960s and developed rapidly in the 1970s.

According to Hadley (2003), EA assumes it is unavoidable for second language learners to commit different kinds of errors during their learning, however lots of the errors committed by them are systematic. Errors can be collected, identified, classified, explained and evaluated. Errors were no longer seen as just something to be eradicated, but as a guide to the inner workings of the language learning process and as feedback for teachers.

It was Corder who first advocated the importance of errors in language learning process through his article entitled *The Significance of Learners' Errors* (cited from Wang, 2007, p.8). James (2001) draws the following conclusions about errors: they tell the teacher what need to be taught; they tell the researcher how learning proceeds; and they are a means by which learners test their hypotheses about the target language.

Wei sums up the essence of EA like this: "Theoretically, EA reveals to us that most of learners' errors are systematic and can be traced to different sources; these errors are of significance to both teachers and learners; the variety of causes requires different correction and feedback strategies"(2008, p.26).

It becomes clear from the above that Error Analysis, as a research field in applied linguistics, is of great significance to the teaching and learning of a foreign language. However, despite the great insights gained from EA, some constraints and limitations of EA arouse mounting criticisms.

EA reached its peak in the 1970s and the 1980s and then suffered the same fate of CA. As with CA, EA focuses almost exclusively on imperfect aspects of inter-language, ignoring correct teaching and positive learning. Apart from this narrow scope, an equally decisive factor is that EA is mainly a matter of subjectivity. There is little agreement among linguists even on the fundamental terminology defining errors and their subsequent classifications and explanations. However, few people would be so ignorant as to turn a blind eye to the merits of EA thus far. Finally, as Ellis (1994) puts it, “there is a sign of making a come-back” (p.69).

Mistake and error.

For the investigation of errors, EA enthusiasts considered it crucial to distinguish between errors and mistakes. These are “technically two very different phenomena” (Brown, 1993, p.205). According to Corder (1981), error making is a device the learner uses in order to learn, while mistakes are the errors of performance made by a learner in the process of speaking or writing caused by the lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, etc. Norrish (1983) explained the two items as follows: when a learner has not learned something right and consistently ‘gets it wrong’, it is an error; when a learner has learned the correct form and knows the correct form but can’t get it right, it is a mistake.

The following distinction is sometimes made between an error and a mistake: “Error is the grammatically incorrect form; mistake appears when the language is correct grammatically but improper in communicative context” (Hu, 1988, p. 329). According to Ellis (1999) mistakes occurs when learner fail to perform their

competence. An error refers to the systematic errors of the learners resulting from his incomplete knowledge of the target language. In other words, it represents a lack of competence. James (1998) regards an error as “an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and is not self-correctible by its author;” on the contrary, a mistake is “either intentionally or unintentionally deviant and self-correctible.” Brown (2002) put it in another way: A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a “slip” in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. An error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native language, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner.

From the definitions mentioned above, readers can clearly see the difference between errors and mistakes; they are indeed two concepts. In the following part of this paper, mainly the concept of “error” will be mentioned and discussed. However its scope here will include any incorrect form and unintentional deviation from the norms of “native adult speakers” (Zi, 2003, p.5).

Error Classification

In order to have a clear explanation of errors, readers need to consider error classifications and classify errors into groups according to certain criteria. Criteria for error classification vary greatly from person to person, which gives rise to divergent outcomes.

James suggests applying three criteria simultaneously: modality, medium and level (1998, p.129). Modality concerns whether the learners’ activity is productive or receptive, that is, production or understanding while medium concerns what the

learners are operating on, e.g., sound segments or written symbols. Mixing the two criteria, production can be further classified into writing and speaking, while perception into reading and listening. This matches the so-called four skills in language teaching. James takes it a further step and classifies errors in the above four skills on another dimension. In this area, he offers three sublevels: substance, text and discourse. The four skills multiplied by three subcategories of level generate 12 types of error (p. 130). Superficially speaking, James' classification is most extensive.

However, in the actual performance of EA, few analysts will have the patience to provide such an exhaustive list of classifications. Most analysts tend to focus on one criterion alone. The simultaneous presence of multiple criteria will only confuse readers.

Next the author would like to consider some other classifications she has come across in Corder's *Introducing Applied Linguistics* (cited in Zi, 2003, p.11). Some of which she thinks are more revealing than those suggested by James. The author has noticed at least three distinct dichotomies of classification: comprehension/production, overt/covert and normal/redundant.

These classifications are most revealing as they point out forces working behind errors. They will be dealt with in greater detail in the pure linguistic category classification, which enjoys great popularity among teachers, not for its explanatory power for causes, but for its easy application.

James (1998) , for example, adds a fifth subgroup of "blend" to the four ones once suggested by Corder: omission, addition, selection and order (pp.111-113).

Wang (2007) favors error types based on linguistic category and comparative taxonomy (p11). According to Ellis (1994), the simplest type of error is the one based on linguistic categories, which classify errors according to either language components or the particular linguistic constituents the error affects. This is closely associated with traditional EA undertaken for pedagogic purposes.

Traditionally error analysts have classified errors into errors of grammar, vocabulary and sound. They then subdivide grammatical errors into errors relating to the production and distribution of voices, tenses, verb groups, prepositions, and articles. These classifications focus on classroom teaching and linguistic forms; however, they neglect the practical application of language (Zhang &Wang, 2008).

Most researchers have tried comparative taxonomy in classifying errors. This taxonomy is based on comparisons between the structure of the second language errors and certain other types of constructions. These comparisons have yielded two major categories in this taxonomy: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. In addition, there is an extra category described as ambiguous. Interlingual errors are caused by mother-tongue influence. Intralingual errors are also termed as developmental errors in some research. These errors are similar to those made by children in learning their first language.

Intralingual errors are often further subdivided into Overgeneralization Errors, Ignorance of Rule, Incomplete Application of Rules and False Concepts Hypothesized. Zhang & Wang (2008) have in their work subdivided intralingual errors into overgeneralization errors (e.g.: Mr Wang has three knives.); incomplete

rule application errors (e.g.: Nobody knew where was his bag.); and simplification errors (e.g.: These student are very diligent.).

Readers can see that EA traditionally attaches much importance to linguistic errors. However, since the final goal of language teaching is communicative competence, teachers should parallel the linguistic errors and pragmatic failures and classify errors broadly into two types: linguistic errors and pragmatic failure. Linguistic errors refer to grammatical errors. According to Corder (1981), these errors fall into three categories: pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic error (cited in Wei, 2003, p.8). And today these three categories are still commonly accepted by researchers, especially Chinese researchers.

Unlike linguistic errors, which can be described by strict grammar rules, pragmatic failure occurs when speech act strategies are inappropriately transferred from L1 to L2. Compared with linguistic errors, pragmatic failure may reflect badly on the speaker as a person, leading to the judgement that the speaker is behaving badly, uncooperative, dishonest, impolite or even deceitful. Therefore, pragmatic failure should not be neglected during the learning process, but it is not the main concern in the paper.

Wei (2008) points out that besides classifying errors into the above mentioned overt errors or covert errors, interlingual/ transfer errors or intralingual errors/developmental errors, researchers should always classify errors into global errors (that may cause misunderstanding) or local errors (that may not cause misunderstanding).

In current practical research, researchers usually like to talk about errors either based on a linguistic category or in combination it with other classifications. Wang (2007), for instance, in her thesis classifies errors like this: errors in verb usage, in article usage, in pronoun usage, in noun usage, in spelling, in parts of speech, omission, and agreement.

Among researchers, there exists a range of classifications. The classification of errors varies greatly. They overlap a lot or even mean the same thing though they are named differently. Different classifications have different advantages and disadvantages. Few classifications are cover all aspects. For the author's purposes, she would like to discuss the errors as linguistic and pragmatic errors, and then further subdivide the linguistic errors according to " language components or particular linguistic constituents error affects"(Wang, 2007, p.12).

Causes of Errors

Theoretically speaking, making clear the causes of error occurrence is the key for instructors to improve their teaching and decrease erring to the greatest extent. According to George (cited from Wang, 2007, p.9), the three principal causes of learners' foreign language errors are: redundancy of the code, unsuitable presentation in class, and several sorts of interference.

Taylor (1986, cited from Ellis 1994, p.57) puts forward four broad error sources: psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, cognitive and discourse structure, the last three of which are, however, beyond the concern of most analysis. Dulay and Burt (cited from Ellis 1994, p.60) provide a similar version of errors sources: interference,

developmental and unique. There is, however, a minor difference in their actual application of terms from that of Ellis. Brown (1994, p.213-216) suggests another three sources: interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer and context of learning, in which he has drawn a clear line between the two types of transfers.

Zhang Yi (2004) outlined the main causes of error in the following manner: interlingual transfer (e.g.: I very much like English.), intralingual transfer (e.g: foots) and cultural transfer (e.g: "You are very beautiful."—"Not at all".) Among the many causes of errors, Wei (2003) focuses on four main areas: transfer error, analogical error, teaching-induced error and pragmatic failure. As Wei's classification has properly revealed the author's experience and feeling during her practical teaching as an ESL teacher, she would like to illustrate it a little more.

Transfer errors: This kind of error results from the negative transfer of the learner's mother tongue to his organization of the target language data. When a learner is acquiring a new rule of a second language, he always compares this new rule with another similar structure in his mother tongue. Students often write sentences like this: "I very much like English" (the order of Chinese sentence); or "Now is eight o'clock."

Analogical errors: Analogical errors result from the learner using his previous experience to make sense of a new experience. It is reasonable to say that the learner knows some rules of English but applies them in the wrong place. For example, beginners in English often produce sentences like "I am waiting him;" or "He is a good cooker".

Teaching-induced errors. “If a learner is taking part in formal instruction, some errors will be a direct result of a misunderstanding caused by faulty teaching or materials,” (Littlewood, 1984, p.32). This kind of error may be caused by the teachers’ poor handling of the teaching materials. For example, if a teacher overemphasizes the suffix “-ly” to symbolize an adverb, students will write a sentence as “I will work hardly from today on. ”

Pragmatic errors. Cultural factors play an important role in the process of language learning. Unawareness of different cultural backgrounds and customs lead to pragmatic errors. When you say, “You are old, please take my seat”, an utterance showing very good manners in Chinese, you will be offensive to an old lady from Britain or America.

It can be clearly seen from the above examples that the causes of errors are closely related to the classification of errors. Frequently, the classification of errors suggests the cause.

Attitudes towards Error Correction

Developing a good attitude toward errors is one of the most important things that learners can gain from the theory of error analysis. Facing errors before beginning to correct them, there are lots of important things for the student to consider. What is correction? Should one correct errors? To what extent should errors be corrected? How should they be corrected? The answers to these questions will greatly affect the results of correction. Many researchers have conducted studies concerning these questions.

What is correction.

According to James (1998), error correction means providing information or feedback in response to learners' deviant language forms. The aim is to improve or to repair them. Feedback, correction proper, and remedy are the three basic forms of correction. Teachers sometimes suggest to learners that an error has been made with either a slightly disapproving gesture or a rising tone or an extended pause. They don't tell error makers either the location or the way to amend the error, let alone the nature of the error the teacher has in mind. This form of correction is referred to as feedback. Sometimes teachers do tell learners where the error is embedded, what the linguistic nature of the error is, and they may even offer a substitute or some suggestion to revise it. This is the form of correction that teachers perform most frequently. When people speak of error correction, they usually mean this. This is an incidental or surface correction because it attempts only to repair the present error without the intention of laying bare the underlying rules so as to prevent its future occurrence. If teachers do explain to the learners the rule that has been violated, they are carrying out a systematic or deep correction. The revised rule will improve upon the learner's false hypothesis. This will in turn help to eliminate not only the present error but the type of error in similar cases. James (1998, p.237) refers to surface and deep corrections respectively as correction proper and remedy.

Whether to correct.

With the development of applied linguistics, two kinds of attitudes toward learners' errors have developed: the behaviorist's viewpoint and mentalist's

viewpoint. They represent two completely different attitudes toward errors (Wei, 2003).

Behaviorists think that errors occur when the learner fails to respond correctly to a particular stimulus in the second language. In other words, the learner fails to change his old habits so as to acquire the new habits of the second language. Since an error may serve as a negative stimulus, which reinforces “bad habits,” it should not be allowed to occur.

The rationalistic view regards errors as evidence of the learning process. They think errors should not be corrected immediately. They think immediate correction will bring a bad effect on the acquisition of accurate target language. Like foreign language learning, foreign language teaching is also an enthusiastic and creative process.

According to Zhang (2004), linguists’ attitudes toward errors have gone through three stages: intolerant attitude, tolerant attitude, and rational attitude.

In recent years, the value of correction in the language classroom has been questioned by many second-language acquisition theorists and researchers. And studies indicate that error correction feedback was not helpful in either eliminating surface errors or encouraging high-level writing performance (Semke, 1984; Zamel, 1985; Cohen, 1987; Kepner, 1991, cited in Wei, 2008). Truscott (1996) even argues that correcting students’ errors in writing is ineffective and should be abandoned. However , Leki (1991) stated that students expected their teachers to mark their errors in grammar, spelling, vocabulary and punctuation, and 70% of the 100 students

expected all their errors to be corrected. Fathman and Whalley (1990, cited in Wang, 2007) report the compared effects of both correcting and not correcting grammar and content in ESL students' compositions. Correcting grammar errors universally brought about improvement of the grammar of rewrites and at the same time led to 44% improvement in content expression.

As for why errors must be corrected, Zi (2003) also provides us with an array of reasons. To begin with, error prevention is not necessarily better than correction. Secondly, errors are suggestive of a deficiency in competence, which implies that it is impossible for the learner to edit out the deviant forms himself. Without any correction from the teacher, the errors may fossilize. Thirdly, students do hope to be corrected. Finally, correction does work, though teachers must be mild in their expectation and tactful in the actual performance (p.39) .

It is absolutely wrong to go to either extreme with an "intolerant view." Then learners will be afraid of making errors. As a result, their confidence is destroyed, which is a great danger to learning. However, with the "tolerant view," errors need not be corrected, which will bring a bad effect on the accuracy of the target language. Wei (2008) holds the correct attitude should be to apply the variety of causes and adopting different correction and feedback strategies.

How to correct.

So theoretically and empirically, error correction and feedback is by no means a simple "Yes" or "No" question, but a complex decision –making process. Error Analysis also provides language teachers and learners with some basic general

principles and rules to follow. Wei (2008, p.28) stated, when teachers must correct students' errors, they should take the following factors into consideration: 1) When should errors be corrected? Immediately or delayed for a while? 2) Which errors should be corrected and which should be safely ignored? 3) How should errors be corrected? Direct (for example: direct interruption) or indirect (for example: repetition, gesture or cues)? 4) Who corrects? The teacher, peers, oneself or a combination thereof?

According to Wei (2008, p.29), the general correction principles are as follows:

1. Correction of a global error is preferable to a local one. A global error that causes difficulty or misunderstanding, for example, "I like take taxi but my friend said so not that we should be late for school," should be corrected immediately, but a local /minor error like "If I heard from him, I will let you know," ignoring it would be the better way.

2. In a fluency-focused activity, indirect or delayed correction is preferable to direct or immediate correction. Harmer (2000) points out that if the teacher corrects the students' errors while he is involved in a passionate discussion, the effect might be to destroy the conversational flow. Many empirical studies also indicate that constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of speaking and de-motivate students to communicate in English and thus produce a "sorry class" or a "silent class". These are what teachers never want. Krashen (1982) has also discussed the inhibiting effect of correction on communication in the classroom.

3. As far as writing is concerned, lexical correction is preferable to grammar correction. Grammar-based correction is retrospective and rarely works. It enables students to master a particular structure or concept. Lexical correction looks forward. It is content-focused, stressing the communicative aspect of the language. What writing teachers need to do is give priority to meaning and meaning related problems, to make remarks about students' texts instead of just form. Semke (1984) has demonstrated that students who received comments from teachers only on content did much better and spent more time working on their essays than those who received criticism only on grammar. In short, teachers need to train themselves to set aside their red pens and examine ideas and see what students are trying to say instead of simply looking for grammatical errors.

4. Learner-centered correction is preferable to teacher-centered correction. There is general agreement among researchers and practitioners that having the teacher straightforwardly correct every error on students' written work is not the most useful way of providing corrective feedback and that involving students in their own correction is helpful. Moreover, it is thought that the combination of teacher, peer, and self-evaluation might yield the most successful results.

Wang (2007) concludes in her experiment that 80% of the students prefer the students' self-correction. Students' self-correction is more effective than the teacher's correction; students' self-correction training will activate students' linguistic ability more effectively and students will become less dependent on their teacher. (p.48).

Many established theorists also came to the same conclusion based on their own research.

Scholars (Makino, 1993; Ferris, 1995; Lee, 1997), after experimenting with different types of error correction, including direct correction, error feedback, and no feedback, reached the conclusion that error feedback and self-correction are more helpful to facilitate students' writing than direct correction and no correction.

Chandler (2003, p.267) cited Ferris' (2002) finding that "over the course of semester, students who received primarily indirect feedback reduced their error frequency ratios substantially more than the students who received mostly direct feedback. Students learn more from finding their errors or making their own corrections, rather than receiving correction from their teachers."

According to Makino (1993, p.337), self-correction has two advantages: one is that error feedback gives students an opportunity to reflect on their writing and pay more attention to the structural forms they have written"; the other is that "self-correction can activate students' linguistic competence". In other words, teachers' feedback and students' self-correction may develop students' abilities to write more explicitly and accurately in a foreign language.

It is hard to say who the most suitable person is to correct the students' errors. Traditionally, both Chinese teachers and students took it for granted that it was the teacher's responsibility to correct all the students' errors. However recent studies show that if language teachers and learners want to apply error correction more effectively, the student must play an important part. A close look at teachers'

performance of error correction will convince one that the enterprise of correction is a somewhat principled consistent activity. However, the principles consist of variables, such as students age, students character, students English level, students mood and the like.

In China, there are a variety of students in large language classes. There are different students with different characters are at various levels of English proficiency, so teachers should adopt correction methods accordingly. For example, for good language learners, the teacher can have the students do the correction themselves, and if they have questions they can return to the teacher for help. For poor language learners, the teacher can first identify the errors places and make clear explanations if possible. In sum, to attain better results, teachers should apply strategies appropriate to dealing with the student aptitudes and preparations.

Implications for Grammar Teaching in ESL Classroom

It is clear that errors are of great significance to researchers, learners and teachers (Zi, 2003). They tell the teacher what needs to be taught; they tell the researcher how learning proceeds; and they are a means by which learners test their hypotheses about the L2 (James, 2001). Understanding its merits and limitations, what implications can teachers draw from the error analysis? How does error analysis contribute to understanding of the most effective ways to teach ESL? This is the final concern of the thesis.

Wei (2003) summarized the implications of error analysis for grammar teaching in ESL classroom as follows:

Grammar teaching based on extensive reading.

Although errors are inevitable, successful learning and teaching should be conducive to gradual diminishing of errors. For this purpose students should be exposed to a wide range of reading materials from which grammatical rules can be extracted and summarized. Traditional handling of grammatical rules for the sake of grammatical rules should give way to extensive reading accompanied by grammatical analysis. In other words, grammatical analysis is not the end itself but the means to a better understanding of texts. Only in this way can learners achieve a firm and practical knowledge of grammatical rules which then can be applied to writing. (p.37).

Authentic materials for language learning.

Traditional requirements of students to make correct choices in grammar exercises out of context or grammar-translation teacher-centered teaching should be reduced to its minimum and give way to a wider range of reading materials. On the other hand, students who do well in this kind of exercise or test may not write good articles without many errors. The root of the problem is rote memorization of grammatical rules without internalizing them in a natural context. In the final analysis, it is the sense of foreign language that makes a learner speak or write without errors. Therefore, only authentic reading rather than separate grammatical exercises will lead to good speaking or writing without errors. Anyway, grammar should be an aid to communication, not a substitute for it. (p.38).

Correcting errors in a proper way.

Since making errors is only too common in the process of learning a language, correcting errors should be conducted in a way which will be constructive to improving students' speaking and writing competence. By applying EA's attitudes towards errors, we feel that correcting students' errors should be conducted in ways appropriate to the type of students' errors. (p.38-41).

Many of researchers have made numerous studies about students' errors and come to similar conclusions as to the implications teachers can draw from error analysis. According to Wang (2007), while learning, ESL learners are engaged in a process of "hypothesis making-hypothesis testing-hypothesis moderation" (James, 1998, cited in Wang, 2007, p.9). In such a process, adequate exposure to the target language and to the appropriate materials will undoubtedly promote L2 learning. Teachers should try to reduce students' dependence on L1 material and try to use good textbooks and other language material. When teaching the use of words, teachers should also inform students of their uses in actual context. They should play the role of facilitator rather than that of error checker.

What's more, it is evident that researchers totally agree on the implications teachers can draw from error analysis in the following aspects: increase target language input; use authentic reading material, teach words or grammar in context, and adopt appropriate error correction strategies.

Summary

This literature review has presented some important aspects of error analysis. There are theories of error analysis, mistake and error, error classification, causes of errors, attitudes toward errors, and implications of error analysis.

The main methods used by researchers are Contrastive Analysis and Errors Analysis. Contrastive Analysis emphasizes the importance of a systematic comparison between native languages and target languages. This approach believes that the differences can be identified by comparing and analyzing languages and that the conclusions can be applied to help teachers predict the difficulties in second language learning. From this perspective, the differences between the two languages are the only obstacle for language learners. EA emphasizes the importance of learner errors in the process of language learning. Although learners make errors in every stage of their learning and these errors appear to be disorderly, EA finds the systematic features of these errors, which can help teachers and researchers sum up the regularities of errors and contribute a great deal to improve teaching.

Depending on the different criteria, researchers classify errors differently. Different classification systems have different advantages and disadvantages. Few classification systems are all inclusive.

James suggests, for example, applying three criteria simultaneously: modality, medium and level (1998, p129). James' classification is most extensive in the actual performance of EA. Few analysts will, however, have the patience to provide such an exhaustive list of classifications. Corder offers at least three distinct dichotomies of classification (comprehension/ production, overt/covert and normal/redundant) in

Introducing Applied Linguistics(cited in Zi, 2003, p.11). These classifications are most revealing and enjoy great popularity among teachers. This popularity stems not from its explanatory power for causes, but for its ease of application. According to Ellis (1994), the simplest type is one based on linguistic categories, which classify errors according to either language components or particular linguistic constituents the error affects. This is closely associated with traditional EA undertaken for pedagogic purposes.

Traditionally error analysts have classified errors into errors of grammar, vocabulary and sound. They then subdivide grammatical errors into errors relating to the production and distribution of voices, tenses, verb groups, prepositions, articles. These classifications focus on classroom teaching and linguistic forms; however, they neglect the practical application of language (Zhang & Wang, 2008). Most researchers have tried comparative taxonomy and classified errors into interlingual errors and intralingual errors, plus an extra category described as ambiguous. For correction consideration, Wei (2008) points out that besides classifying errors into the above mentioned overt or covert errors, interlingual/transfer errors or intralingual/developmental errors, researchers would always classify errors into Global errors (that may cause misunderstanding) or local errors (that may not cause misunderstanding); and written errors or oral errors. In current practical research, researchers usually like to talk about errors either based on the linguistic category or combine it with other classifications. For instance, Wang (2007) in her thesis, classifies errors like this: errors in verb usage, in article usage,

in pronoun usage, in noun usage, in spelling, in parts of speech, omissions, and agreement.

Theoretically speaking, making clear the causes of error occurrence are the key for us to improve our teaching and decrease erring to the greatest extent. According to George (cited from Wang, 2007, p.9), the three principal causes of learners' foreign language errors are: redundancy of the code, unsuitable presentation in class, and several sorts of interference. Zhang Yi (2004) outlined the main causes of errors as interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer and cultural transfer. Among the many causes of errors, Wei (2003) also focuses on four main areas: transfer errors, analogical errors, teaching-induced errors and pragmatic failures. It can be clearly seen from the above content that most of the time the classification of errors have clearly suggested the causes of the errors at the same time.

As to error correction, the author reviewed the nature of correction, whether to correct, and how to correct in detail and made it clear that to achieve the most desirable results, there are lots of factors to consider before the correction, such as teaching priorities, the student's character, the student's English level, and the student's current state of mind.

Lastly, implications for teaching in ESL classrooms are briefly reviewed. Researchers generally drew the following conclusions: grammar teaching based on extensive reading; authentic materials for language learning; and correcting errors in a proper way.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

In order to explore more effective ways to teach grammar in the ESL classroom, the author made a thorough review of the important aspects concerning error analysis. After finishing the review, the author came to the following conclusions about error analysis:

Although ESL learners make errors in every stage of their learning, it is not a signal of failure in language teaching and learning but a natural phenomenon in the language-learning process. No learner of a foreign language can avoid committing errors in the learning process. Teachers should hold correct and pro-active attitudes towards students' errors. They should allow learners to make errors and then take advantage of the errors to bring learners closer to the target language.

Although error making is an inevitable phenomenon, if teachers apply the most suitable teaching method, errors made by students will be largely reduced. The existing literature review reveals clearly that there are certain kinds of errors that are directly caused by inappropriate teaching strategies, such as "redundancy of code" (George, cited from Wang, 2007, p.9); "Unique errors" (Dulay&Burt, cited from Ellis, 1994, p60); "Learning context errors" (Brown, 1994, p.215); and "teaching--induced errors" (Wei, 2003, p.10). That is to say, errors made by students are closely related to the teaching methods applied by teachers.

What's more, errors made by students can serve as valuable feedback and direction for realistic language teaching. By finding, classifying and analyzing common students' errors, teachers can make understand what the insufficiency of his

or her teaching is and what the common difficulty in student learning is. This will allow teachers to adjust their teaching strategies and teaching materials in a timely fashion. In this sense, errors can contribute greatly in bettering and improving teaching quality.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that in order to improve grammar teaching in the ESL classroom, ESL teachers should adopt a more active attitude and more effective ways to deal with errors made by students. With more and more error analyses being studied, better ways will be determined and applied to teaching in the ESL classroom.

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