LITERATURE REVIEW

ERRORS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

ERMIKA KTHUPI HOXHA
Faculty of Education, Foreign Languages Department
“Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durrës, Albania
Email: mirakthupi@yahoo.com

Abstract
The process of learning a foreign language is long and difficult. Besides that, it is unimaginable to pass it through without making any errors. Errors in the foreign languages acquisition are done during both oral and written communication. People make errors not only as learners of a foreign language in the classroom, but also as children during the acquisition of the native language. Learners of a foreign language can make identical or similar errors with children who are learning their native language. The mother tongue learning children correct their errors step by step by means of the self-correction mechanism or by the correction of others. On the other hand, the correction of the errors in the foreign language teaching effort is a very problematic process. During the acquisition of the mother tongue the children perceive positively any help and correction from others, they repeat the correct words while playing and correct themselves continuously. This method is no longer practiced by people during their adulthood. The instinctively positive and effective mechanism of the children is not transferred in their adulthood during the process of learning a foreign language. In foreign language teaching can arise inhibitions just because of errors and error correction and in extreme cases may happen that the desire to learn a foreign language vanishes. As a conclusion, in my opinion the better we know these concepts and the processes and strategies that the foreign language learner goes through, the more effective our didactic interventions as teachers might be.

Keywords: foreign language acquisition, errors.

During the language lessons, instead of communicating, very often the students remain silent in order to avoid committing any error and being corrected. They experience the correction process of their errors during the language lessons as a failure, as a defect or as personal inadequacy. The reasons why language learners experience negatively the corrections during the process of the foreign language teaching are different. There are different reasons why language learners experience in a negative way the corrections during the language learning process in the classroom. In the linguistic and didactic tradition errors are regarded from both learners and teachers as a deficit of the learner. Errors are generally judged negatively. Positive aspects of errors are mostly unknown.

In the learning environment, that is in schools, errors in other subjects are actually seen as nothing else but sign of missing industriousness. Therefore most of the time errors are judged negatively. If students have not prepared properly or did not learn enough, they make mistakes, and then their performance is logically evaluated negatively with corresponding poor grades. Linguistic traditions such as the structuralist approach, which observed errors as sin and believed them to be preventable, dictated and even today dictate the foreign language teaching. It is well known that the structuralists were the first who drew their attention to errors in language acquisition and learning a foreign language, but their negative error assessment has determined to a great extent and in the long run
the foreign language teaching and the language teaching.

The contrastive analysis which was based on the principles of the behaviourist learning theory and on structuralism assumes that language learners transfer different phenomena of their native language to the foreign language that they are learning. The more similar two languages are, the more successful the learning process is and vice versa. If the structures of the foreign languages are identical to the structures of the native language, fewer errors are expected.

By comparison of the languages, errors caused by the negative transfer, can be predicted. Accordingly, were errors evaluated negatively. The effect of the negative assessment of the error in foreign language teaching is still understandable, although the identity theory already in the seventies represented a completely different view regarding the error. According to its main representatives Marina Burt and Heidi Dulay & Burt (1974) the identity of the language acquisition processes consists in the mother tongue and in the foreign languages. Errors are therefore necessary development stages in this process.

The interlanguage hypothesis assumes that errors are necessary components of learning, while the students version of the foreign language develops step by step. Only through research in the field of educational psychology, has been generally accepted the thesis that errors are fundamental components of the learning processes.

Though the communicative didactics presented primarily the development of the four skills, speaking, reading, listening and writing in a foreign language in the foreground, and teachers neglected the development of the grammatical knowledge and the controlling of the grammatical rules knowledge of the learners, but the interpretation of the errors was still perceived as a sin deep in the minds of foreign language learners.

Errors and error correction is a complex problem for language teachers, a problem in which the following steps in the cases of decisions have to be run through. Errors must be identified, arranged, corrected, and in the majority of the cases they must also be evaluated.

**Error identification**

The teacher should first decide what should be considered as an error. What is an error? For the errors in the foreign language learning, the most common definition is "Errors are deviations from the standard or violations of the standard", but it can also raise further questions. Which standard applies in a pluricentric language as the standard for the foreign language teaching?

An attempt to formulate by definition the criteria of the linguistic correctness, appropriateness, comprehensibility, connection to the lessons and learner-oriented ability can be found in Kleppin (1998):

a) "An error is a deviation from the language system.

b) An error is a deviation from the existing linguistic standard.

c) An error is a violation of the way a person within a speech community speaks and acts.

d) An error is what a communication partner does not understand.

e) An error is what a native speaker does not understand.

f) An error is something contrary to rules in textbooks and to grammars.

g) An error is what a teacher refers to as an error.

h) An error is what a native speaker in a particular situation would not say or do.

i) An error is something contrary to the norm in the head of the teacher.

j) Errors are relative. What is considered to be an error in a learning group in a particular teaching phase, is tolerated in another learning group in another phase." (Kleppin, 1998:19-20)

**Problems of error classification**

Rein (1983:99) defines the error analysis as follows: “Error analysis is concerned with the registration (= error statistics) and the genetic analysis (= error analysis) of systematic errors occurring at different stages of language learning with the practical intention to develop objective standards of judgment (= error evaluation) or didactic measures in order to reduce or eliminate such errors (error = therapy)."

Errors are classified according to the linguistic plains where they occur. According to the different linguistic plains there can be distinguished phonetic / phonological, lexical /
semantic, morphological / syntactic and pragmatic errors. Although errors can not always be clearly assigned to one or the other level, the classification of the errors can be well handled according to the different linguistic levels.

The other criterion in the classification of the errors is the cause of the error.

While determining the reasons that could cause the error, there can be distinguished the intra- and the inter-linguistic causes, depending on whether the error was caused due to the influence of the mother tongue or due to the target languages. Interference errors are caused by the influence of the mother tongue. Overgeneralizations occur because of the influence of the target language. Errors are caused also by compensation strategies because learners tend to describe unknown words. Very often the learners have different hypotheses about the nature of the foreign language and therefore they commit really creative errors.

Sometime grammatically and lexically correct sentences can be considered as errors if they are socio-culturally inappropriate. Likewise, a correct statement can be considered as an error when the type of text used, is not appropriate.

The lessons and the teacher can also be the cause of the error, if the explanations cause errors.

A typical example of teaching generates errors is the application of the self-correction of the past tenses in German. The errors signal the lack of the knowledge on the use of the tenses.

Another different distribution of the errors in performance errors and competence errors arises from the level of the knowledge of the language learner.

Competence errors are understood as errors that the learner usually commits because he lacks on knowledge of the respective grammatical rules. Performance errors are caused by fatigue or lack of concentration, possibly stage fright. These are errors, that the learner can identify and correct itself.

**Error correction**

Behind every error correction is the desire that learners make fewer mistakes. To correct written errors is relatively easy because while the teacher is correcting, he has time to think about how and what he should correct. During the oral correction, the procedure is much more complicated.

Factors that dictate the error correction:
- Type of the error depending on the linguistic level,
- Phase of the lesson - in the communicative phase of the lesson the correction is done in a different way as in the practice phase,
- Beginners are corrected in a different way as advanced learners are,
- During the phase of communication, it makes more sense, to correct by the end of the sentence than to interrupt the flow of the speech of the learner,
- Human factors: there are learners who have a correction demand and others who suffer from the correction. There are teachers who use different correction methods and teachers who always use the same method of correction.

Another aspect of the error correction is the question whether the teacher should prefer explicit or implicit correction methods. Explicit correction means that the teacher draws the attention of the learner to the error through open discussions. Implicit error correction means that the teacher only repeats correctly the wrong expression of the learner.

**Conclusions**

From a psycholinguistic point of view, teachers should stress the positive aspects of errors and error correction in the foreign language teaching. On the one hand this means during the phase of the error identification that the learners must be aware of the errors that the native speakers make. According to the different psycholinguistic studies it is characteristic that during the normal oral language production the speakers of the native language make various errors such as pauses, repetitions, and insertions. The learners of a foreign language need even more break-fulfilling empty lexical units. The learners of the foreign languages should be made aware of the language acquisition processes in order for them to be natural to make mistakes. The teachers also should be made aware of the mechanisms of the speech production.
If the learners are aware of the fact that the speaker of the native language makes mistakes in his native language and that the degree of the frequency of these errors in spontaneous conversation is very high, the language learners could free themselves from their inhibitions.

During the error analysis the teacher should emphasize that the error belongs to the typical errors. When the learners know that their concrete error is typical and that also other learners of the foreign language commit that error often or that the error also occurs in native speakers, they are motivated.

The weighting that the error is not such a big mistake, is also very motivating. Positive errors and positive error correction may represent a kind of motivation in the foreign language teaching process.

References