

***Error analysis effectiveness in learning***  
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**Abstract:**

Errors mainly grammatical errors are no longer considered as indications of failure. Rather, they form fundamental foundations for improving learning. Thus, teachers should set appropriate tasks that can really engage and reflect pupils' grammatical ability and have a positive effect on learning. EFL learners make errors during the process of developing their language. This seems to be an expected and usual part of language learning. However, what is significant is to know how these errors can be exploited to benefit grammar learning. This can be through Error Analysis. So, what is this method? Have researchers focused on just one model? What are the common sources of such errors? And how can it be an effective means to improve grammatical accuracy.

**Key words:** Error analysis; grammatical errors ; learning; EFL learners ; sources of errors

**ملخص:**

لم تعد تعتبر الأخطاء خاصة النحوية منها أنها مؤشرات على الفشل. بدلا من ذلك، فهي تشكل الأعمدة الأساسية لتحسين التعلم. وبالتالي، يجب على المعلمين وضع واجبات مناسبة التي يمكن لها حقا أن تعكس القدرة النحوية للتلاميذ ويكون لها تأثير إيجابي على التعلم. متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يرتكبون أخطاء أثناء عملية تطوير لغتهم. ويبدو هذا أمرا متوقعا ومعتادا. لكن، ما هو مهم هو أن تعرف كيف يمكن أن تستغل هذه الأخطاء ويستفاد منها لتعلم قواعد اللغة. هذا يمكن أن يكون من خلال تحليل الأخطاء. فما هو هذا الأسلوب، وخلفيته؟ وهل الباحثون ركزوا على نموذج واحد فقط؟ ما هي أسباب ارتكاب مثل هذه الأخطاء؟ وكيف يمكن لهذا المنهج أن يكون وسيلة فعالة لتحسين القدرة النحوية. الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء ؛ الأخطاء النحوية ؛ تعلم ؛ متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية .

**Résumé:**

Les erreurs principalement grammaticales ne sont plus considérées comme des signes d'échec. Elles constituent plutôt des fondements fondamentaux pour améliorer l'apprentissage. Ainsi, les enseignants devraient définir des tâches appropriées qui peuvent réellement s'engager et refléter la capacité grammaticale des élèves et avoir un effet positif sur l'apprentissage. Les apprenants d'EFL font des erreurs pendant le processus de développement de leur langue. Cela semble être une partie attendue et habituelle de l'apprentissage des langues. Cependant, ce qui est important, c'est de savoir comment ces erreurs peuvent être exploitées au profit de l'apprentissage de la grammaire. Cela peut se faire par analyse d'erreur. Alors, quelle est cette méthode et ses antécédents? Les chercheurs se sont concentrés sur un seul modèle? Quelles sont les sources communes de telles erreurs? Et comment peut-il être un moyen efficace d'améliorer la précision grammaticale.

**Introduction:**

Errors mainly grammatical errors are no longer considered as indications of failure. Rather, they form fundamental foundations to target specific points that require specific reinforcement and tailor teaching for the purpose of improving the teaching learning process. Thus, when designing tests, or at least tasks in assignments , it is very important to take into consideration important necessities that a good test should possess. In addition to reliability, construct validity, authenticity, and practicality, good tests should engage pupils' grammatical

ability and have a positive effect on learning. Hence, the choice of the appropriate tasks that can really reflect the learners' grammatical ability may be one the most difficulties that face educators when assessing their pupils' grammatical ability since they ought to provide not only some specific grammar areas but a detailed idea about their general grammar. More importantly, teachers need to decide in advance the construct to be assessed, areas to be focused on and the ways to deal with responses. One of these ways is error analysis as a way to improve learning.

EFL learners make mistakes and errors during the process of developing their language. This seems to be an expected and usual part of language learning as a completely different opinion has occurred to consider learners' errors as an indicator of their learning process and as a device to improve learning (Corder, 1974). What is significant is to know how these errors can be exploited to benefit both grammar teaching and testing.

### 1- The distinction between error and mistake

Before moving to the theoretical background of this method, its models and sources of errors, it is important to make a distinction between the terms mistake and error. Most people consider them as synonyms, but indeed they are different from each other. The distinction between them relies on the ability of self-correction. This is what is called by Corder (1971) and James (1998) as the self- correctability criterion (as cited in AbiSamra, 2003). Mistakes can be self- corrected, but, errors cannot. However, Harmer (2007, p. 96) uses them as a broad term that refers to three categories; slips that are mistakes which learners can correct themselves when noticing them, errors that are mistakes which pupils cannot recognize as errors and cannot correct themselves and attempts that are mistakes which pupils make when they attempt to do something but they do not know how. Thus, error as defined by Ellis (1994) is a systematic and repeated deviation from the norms of the target language.

### 2- Error Analysis

The analysis of errors that language learners make has been one of the most controversial issues in the field of applied linguistics for a long time. According to Keshavarz (1999), there have been two major approaches of studying language learners' errors; Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA). Through CA method, errors that learners make can be predicted by comparing the linguistic differences between the mother tongue and the target language (kim, 2001, as cited in Heydari and Bagheri, 2012). However, studies showed that not all errors resulted from L1 habits transfer, there were many others that appeared during the process of learning which had no relation with L1 (Ellis, 1994). Therefore, by the early 1970's, it was replaced by EA because of its inaccuracy and the high criticism that it received (kim, 2001, as cited in Heydari and Bagheri, 2012).

The shortcoming of CA gave birth to Error Analysis. In this vein, Corder (1984) claims that thanks to CA, the focus shifted from the concern of teaching towards a study of learning (as cited in Tomková, 2013). In this way, it is viewed as a technique that provides evidence of the learner's knowledge of the second language (Ellis, 1994). In fact, its purpose is to find out what learners know and what they do not know (Corder, 1974). Ellis and Barkhuizen describe error analysis as "*a set of procedures for identifying, describing, and explaining learners' errors*" (2005, p. 51). This explanation involves mainly identifying the sources of such errors for the purpose of the adaptation of appropriate teaching strategies to help language learners learn better (Heydari and Bagheri, 2012).

### 3- Why focusing on grammatical errors?

Learning grammar is the most essential part in learning a language. In order to be able to use a language properly, it is necessary to master its grammar. That is why error analysis mainly focuses on grammatical errors (Hasyim, 2002). According to (Brown, 2000, p. 217) an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker. In fact, "*knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused*" (Carter,

1997, p. 35). Thus, knowing more about pupils' grammar knowledge helps a lot in improving their grammar competence. This has been proved by many researches which have confirmed that emphasizing on learners' errors is an effective means to improve grammatical accuracy (White et al, 1991; Carroll and Swain, 1993, as cited in Hourani, 2008). In this respect, "*systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching*" (Mungungu, 2010, p. 12). In fact, it does not seek only to determine areas of difficulties, but it attempts to find out the reasons behind such difficulties for the purpose of identifying strategies which learners use in language learning, identifying the causes of learners errors and obtaining information on common difficulties in language learning as a basis for teaching or preparing teaching materials (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

#### 4- Steps of error analysis

Since error analysis appeared as a systematic study, it was necessary to base it on well-defined procedures. Corder as the founder of this new trend, sets a model to analyze errors. According to Ellis, his model involves the following steps:

- 1- *Collection of a sample of learner language*
- 2- *Identification of errors*
- 3- *Description of errors*
- 4- *Explanation of errors*
- 5- *Evaluating errors* (1994, p. 48)

Ellis (1994, pp. 49-66) clarifies what each step includes. Accordingly, the first step is to decide what learner language sample is useful for the study either samples of a large number of learners, or of a limited number of learners or just one sample of a single learner. Concerning the way of collecting them, they can be collected from natural language use or elicited in some way. The second step is to identify the error through distinguishing between errors and mistakes, and between overt and covert errors and through deciding in advance what errors wanted to be dealt with; either errors of correctness or of appropriateness. The third step is to focus only on the observable features of errors in the learners' idiosyncratic utterances compared with those utterances in the target language. The simplest type of description is based on linguistic categories and subcategories such as the auxiliary system which is subdivided into do, have and be. An alternative to linguistic description is surface strategy taxonomy suggested by Dulay et al (1982), in which four broad categories are suggested; omissions, additions, misformation and misordering. However, it may be sometimes difficult to determine the type of the error. Consequently, it depends on the researcher's reconstruction of the sentence to identify the error type. This stage includes also a quantification of the types of errors. The fourth step refers to establishing the sources of errors. In this vein, Taylor (1986) identifies some error sources that may be psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, epistemic (lack of world knowledge), or in discourse structure (problems in information organization) (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 57).

According to Dodigovic (2005), many researchers were elaborated on Corder's model such as Brown (1994) and Ellis (1995). Some of them provided clear examples of how to conduct the study such as Hubbard et al (1996) and Ellis (1997). However, Gass and Selinker (1994) identified six steps followed in conducting an error analysis; collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing source of error and remediating for errors (as cited in AbiSamra, 2003). Another model was proposed by While Sridhar (1980) that includes six steps. They are collection of data from composition or exam answers, identification of errors with respect to the exact nature of the deviation, classification into error types, statement of relative frequency of error type, identification of areas of difficulty in the target language and finally therapy with remedial drills and lessons (as cited in Hourani, 2008).

The major aim of error analysis is to improve foreign language learning through pointing at the main areas of difficulties. In this respect, Corder (1974) claims that systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in

teaching (as cited in AbiSamra, 2003). However, for setting appropriate remedies, it is essential to identify the main sources of committing errors.

### 5- Sources of errors

An important stage in error analysis procedures is identifying the sources of errors. Several studies have been conducted to suggest different reasons why errors occur, in which the one done by Richards (1971) may be the first and most important (Heydari and Bagheri, 2012). According to them, he differentiated three sources of errors. First, interference errors result from the use of elements from the native language when speaking or writing another. Second, intralingual errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as overgeneralization of rules, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restrictions and false hypothesis. Third, developmental errors occur during the process of building hypothesis about the target language. However, the distinction between intralingual errors and developmental errors seems to be unclear (Schacheter and Celce-Murcia, 1977, as cited in Ellis, 1994). Accordingly, Richards (1974) classifies errors according to their sources into two categories: interlingual errors caused by mother tongue interference and intralingual and developmental errors caused during the process of second language learning or caused because the difficulty of the language itself (as cited in Heydari and Bagheri, 2012).

It is not easy to make differences between interlingual and intralingual errors. Furthermore, it is more difficult to make a difference between the different types of intralingual errors. As a result, other experts proposed other categories of learners' errors (Ellis, 1994). However, most researchers based their classification of categories on Richards' division and they elaborated their own classifications (Heydari and Bagheri, 2012).

However, it is not easy to identify the real sources of errors, but an attempt to understand the errors and to use what is learned from them and from the learners explanations themselves can help to improve language learning since *"if clear explanatory statements about errors are often not possible, the value of EA as a tool for investigating L2 acquisition is thrown into question"* (Ellis, 1994, p. 63). Furthermore, previous studies mainly with similar learners can help a lot to conduct error analysis with particular groups.

### Conclusion

To sum up, error analysis helps in facilitating second language learning through improving language competence since it has been proved that it is an effective means to improve grammatical accuracy. Educators should know the developmental sequences of acquiring some structures so as to expect the possible errors to set appropriate and remedial responses since most of SLA researchers (e.g. Clahsen (1985), Pienemann and Johnson (1987), Ellis (2001b) ) claim that structures seem to be learned in a fixed developmental sequences (as cited in Pupura, 2004). Thus, language teachers should take this into consideration when evaluating grammar responses and avoid to consider them as right or wrong if there are some correct points in their responses. However, testees who have an intermediary knowledge of grammar are being treated as if they have no knowledge at all. That's why, some researchers such as Clahsen (1985) suggest that structures should be measured in a way in which they are selected and graded in terms of their order in developmental sequences in a way such as partial scoring (as cited in Purpura, 2004). In this way and through error analysis, this plays an important role in helping mainly learners to construct self-correction and self-development techniques.

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