

Taxonomy of Syntactic and Morphological Errors in Task-Based Activity of Urdu-English Translation Based on Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract:

This quantitative study was conducted to find out the frequency of the taxonomy of syntactic-morphological errors in Urdu to English translation. It focuses on the most frequent and least frequent errors in the task-based translation activity of ESL learners. Translation of Urdu to English causes numerous difficulties for Pakistani translators such as phonological, orthographic, lexico-semantic or syntactic-morphological errors. But the main concern of the present study was the investigation of syntactic and morphological errors. The procedure of error analysis as used by the researchers and language instructors involves the collection of the samples of the learners' language, identification, description, and classification of errors by elucidating their seriousness. For the attainment of this object, a translation project was conducted by the researchers on 300 ESL graduate students selected randomly from six public sector colleges. These students were entrusted with the task of translating 20 sentences from Urdu to English. The errors committed by the students were ranked and categorized in accordance with Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. The hypothesis set by the researchers that the errors in tenses are more frequent than plural morphemes proved to be right. This empirical study pinpoints the potential problematic areas of

ESL learners and proposes some pedagogical guidelines for syllabus designers, test constructors and teachers.

Key words: Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Source language, Target Language, ESL learners, syntactic-morphological errors

Introduction

As defined by Oxford (1990), translation is a way of converting target language expression into the native language. To Lin (2008) translation is “expressing the sense of words or text in another language”, from English to Urdu or vice versa. In the light of these two definitions, translation for ESL learners refers to transferring of L1 (first language) to the L2 (second language). A number of researchers have highlighted that translation tasks in second language classrooms prove to be beneficial because they promote learners’ understanding of difficult structures of the target language by drawing a vivid comparison between the two languages and facilitate them in their quicker comprehension in this regard. Translation activities provide an opportunity to the learners to apply their previously acquired syntactic-morphological and lexical knowledge. In translation, the linguistic knowledge of the learners does not consist of information of discrete pieces rather it is a communication tool for the conveyance of message. On the whole, it would be out of place to say that translation impedes the process of second language learning because it first of all helps the learners get away from L1 interference and then enhances their second language learning.

Since a significant amount of L1 is involved in translation, the notion held by some of foreign language instructors is that the errors might occur when the learners carry L1 usages and make efforts for the comprehension and expression of L2. These language instructors opine that the best

strategy to follow for native-like language competence is that the learners should think in the target language instead of translating L1 into that language. Consequently, for the elimination of errors that are the outcome of L1 interference, the learners are encouraged to avoid translation as a means of second language learning. However, a number of researchers such as (Ali, 2011; Baddeley, 1990; Dulay & Burt, 1972; Husain, 1994; Prince, 1996) regard complete non-attributable role to L1 interference in the occurrence of errors in L2 learning. In their investigation into the sources of errors of native Spanish speaking children learning English, it was found by Dulay and Burt (1972) that just 3 % errors resulted from L1 interferences whereas the nature of 85 % of errors was developmental, that is to say, these eighty five percent developmental errors refer to the occurrence of errors in second language learning process instead of Learners' L1 interference. Likewise, Corder (1981) opines that mother tongue is a valuable tool which can be used by the learners during translation activity to compensate their limitations in the learning of second language.

Errors play a significant role in the teaching and learning of foreign language. But majority of teachers are not well familiar with this and their negative behavior regarding error impedes to search out apposite way out. Numerous researches conducted to highlight the importance of errors focus on the process of teaching and learning. To commit errors on the learner's part seems to be natural. However, teachers can operate upon learners properly when they make mistakes. Examiners, teachers and test constructors can get benefit from such type of researches. In Pakistan, studies regarding morphological and syntactic difficulties of ESL learners' compositional process are very few. The learners make a number of Interlingua and intralingua errors when they write something particularly when they translate from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL).

In linguistics, the study of errors and their analysis has been a central field of interest for the researchers and a number of approaches have been viewed which can be bifurcated into two main categories, linguistic and non-linguistic. The approaches towards linguistic field are: contrastive analysis approach and error analysis approach. The nonlinguistic approach is further sub-divided into Sociological approach and Psychological approach. But the current research focuses solely on linguistic approaches rather than non-linguistic approaches. It highlights linguistic taxonomy of frequent syntactic-morphological errors of ESL graduate learners in their translation activity from the source language (Urdu) to the target language (English). Dominantly, this taxonomy helps teachers to make emphasis on more complicated areas than anything else. Moreover, an appropriate and beneficial material can be constructed more effectively which can be appropriate to develop satisfactory test. While conducting this taxonomy, the researcher has focused on the following questions:

- (1) Which error does occur more frequently in syntactic-morphological domain in Urdu (SL) to English (TL) translation?
- (2) Which error does occur less frequently in syntactic-morphological domain in Urdu to English translation?

It is hypothesized by the researchers that errors in tenses occur more frequently than in plural morphemes.

Literature Review

As it discussed above, the study towards errors is mainly divided into two categories: Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. Since 1940s to 1960s, it is said to teachers of second language that errors with the use of methods from structural linguistics can be helpful in solving the student's problems. Fries (1972) illustrated that "the most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the native

language of the learner". The most exciting claim of Lado's book (1957) is that we can systematically describe the patterns of difficulty faced by the learners by making a comparison between the student's native language and his culture with the language and culture to be learned. Such type of claims is an unequivocal reflection of informal observation of student's errors. The differences between the structures of two languages (SL and TL) can be helpful in the prediction of problems regarding foreign language. This type of comparison is called a Contrastive Analysis (C.A).

Contrastive Analysis is emerged for the most part from Behaviorist Psychology and Structural linguistics. B.F Skinner (1957) including other behaviorists believed in repetition, habit formation, reinforcement and response. As for as the first language acquisition is concerned, Skinner (1957) like Behaviorist viewed language as stimulus, response and reinforcement. The principles such as imitation, reinforcement, habit formation and positive and negative transfer is largely borrowed from psychology of learning. Kashavarz (2008) opined that both behaviorist psychology and structural linguists agreed that the native language interferes with the second language which is deemed several times different from the first language. Further, he proceeds his view that native language habit is acquired during early childhood which is considered a maturation period. These school of thoughts claimed that some difficult ways and patterns were prognosticated on the basis of contrastive analysis and they preferred drills.

There are numerous pedagogical values of contrastive analysis. It occupied a central position in teaching foreign language after the World War Second. To commit errors at that time was considered to be a symbol of evil and that is why the language instructors adopted negative attitudes towards learners' part. In 1960s, this indifferent and somewhat negative attitude regarding errors can be seen in Audio-lingual methodology of teaching language. At that time, Brooks (1960)

claimed that although it is tried to avoid errors but their existence cannot be disregarded absolutely.

There are a number of reasons for the unpopularity of contrastive analysis. First of all, it is stated by Keshavarz (2008) that a number of researchers have strongly refuted to substantiate interference as well as it cannot play a significant or dominant role in second language learning. On the other hand, a number of errors have been noticed which are unable to play an attributive part to the mother tongue of a learner (Buteau. 1970; Wolfe, 1967; Wilkins, 1968). Another prominent supporter Hakuta and Cancino (1977) highlighted that a perilous cause is that contrastive analysis fared poorly and anecdotal impressions from classrooms are not appropriate method, therefore, it is supposed to collect data in a quite smooth and systematic way. As to its shortcomings, contrastive analysis can't be built on strong footings (Wardhaugh, 1970). Because the main reason is that it is unable to account for each error in detail. Moreover, it presents an incomplete representation of the second language which is not sufficient for ESL learners.

Irrespective of Contrastive analysis between Urdu and English, Ali (2011) opined that cross translation strengthens the learners' comprehension of English expressions. In an empirical study conducted by Huang (2003), the learners were asked to translate Urdu portion of dual language (Urdu/English) story books into English and make a comparison between their versions with the actual version of the book. By this conscious comparison, the learners noticed their syntactic and semantic disparities. The role of Bilingual dictionaries in the process of translation is of great significance. According to Ali (2011), the learners can translate words related to all parts of speech by using a Bilingual dictionary and thus Urdu-English translation difficulties from word to sentence levels can be eliminated through orderly contrastive

analysis of two languages and Bilingual dictionaries are of great assistance for the learners in this regard.

Error Analysis Approach is considered as a reliable approach towards the study of errors, because it is quite relevant to the student's performance. It can't merely be confined to linguistic interference. The researchers approving of error analysis are mutually agreed that both languages have similar errors. So it is apparent that as far as the contrastive analysis is concerned, such type of errors can't be accounted for. The investigators viewed that primarily the source and target language acquisition both follow the similar process. (Corder, 1967; Dulay & Burt, 1972; Richards, 1971).

Keshavarze (2008) described that both teachers and researchers have dealt with error analysis as a procedure and introduced a collecting sample, detecting the errors, categorizing them by classifying their nature. Error analysis consists of the following assumptions. First of all, every learner is supposed to commit errors which are an unavoidable fact. Secondly, errors enhance student's learning. Thirdly, mother tongue is not always responsible for all errors. Moreover, errors give a right direction towards learning.

Corder (1967) illustrated that the teachers, learners and researchers can get a enormous advantage from errors. Richard (1971) mentioned that errors are of great significance not only for linguists and psycholinguists but also for teachers. Chiag (1981) viewed during a study that error analysis carried out following pedagogical implications: make use of hierarchy of difficulty as well as of contrastive observations, essential remedial programs, and a compositional class that contained a well organized and error based teaching syllabus and material, enforcement for implication individually, prepared the useful strategies for learning and the best implications for teaching methods.

Xie and Jiang (2007) mentioned four related and fruitful aspects of error analysis both in language teaching and

learning. Firstly, in so far as error analysis is concerned, an overall knowledge of a teacher is obligatory about the learner's errors. Occurrence of errors is an unavoidable fact and foreign language learning consists of trials and hypothesis. A teacher should neglect local errors of the students and tolerate them peacefully. Secondly, it is only the hierarchy of errors that can inform a teacher that how far the students are making progress towards their goal and resultantly what remains for them to learn. Their valuable feedback is quite fruitful for teachers. However, a few remedial teaching based programs can help to perk up errors. Thirdly, to commit errors is considered as a device which can be employed to learn, so we should gaze at the errors of learners. Finally, to refute fossilization, some certain type of errors must be handled.

Keshavarz (2008) mentioned that there can be dependable outcomes of the remedial material regarding error analysis. Errors in second language can assist to point out the learner's linguistic problems as well as to highlight the grey areas of the student. The syllabus should be constructed in an appropriate organism which encompasses all the errors. In other words, errors can offer some related clues to syllabus designers for what is appropriate for the learner. Corder (1973) mentions De Saussure's words that language is a 'self contained system' in which every part is interrelated and interdependent systematically. Ashton (2005) described during a study that the raw nature of results regarding contrastive analysis can't be appropriately implemented to classroom but can help the teacher understand the linguistic background of students and provide a useful insight for designing a material. Although, such results of contrastive analysis are not sufficient but for EFL teaching domain these are aimed at monolingual issues. The whole data seems unreliable and unauthentic without the "feedback" of contrastive analysis. Empirical error analysis revealed the accurate and precise details which provide to decide remedial lesson, exercising with sequencing of material,

a pertinent emphasize on particular linguistic component and achievement test with proficiency regarding content (Fisiak, 1981; Richards, 1974).

Already a number of studies about language pairs have been conducted on the learners of English. Light and Warshawsky (1974) observed the errors in Russian English users; Guilford (1998) published an article named “English learner interlanguage”; and Mohamed, Goh and Wan-Rose (2004) made research not only on English errors but also on Chinese learners. Along with these studies, a devoted surveillance is made on syntactic errors which are most usually committed by non native learners. Such mistakes include the mishandling of determiners and agreement and disagreement of subject-verb. Many studies about interlanguage primarily confined their scope to particular grammatical issues of English which contain an influence of the native language. To cite convinced instances, Granger and Tyson (1996) viewed researches about the native and non native EFL English language speaker as well as their use of connector in essay writing; Vessileva (1998) observed an authorial presence of contrastive analysis in certain languages such as: English, German, French, Russian and Bulgarian; Slabakova (2000) investigated the telicity marking of L2 acquisition in English which carries Spanish and Bulgarian native speakers. Yaung and Haung (2004) highlighted the impact of grammatical tense in L1 and tense aspect system in L2. Franck (2002) and Vigliocco, Butterworth and Garret’s (1996) study of the errors in English and French were primarily related to subject-verb agreement.

In this part, the sheer purpose of the researcher is to revisit the sources of errors precisely. Richards (1971) mentioned four main reasons of intralingual errors: (1) incomplete application of rules, (2) overgeneralization (3) false concepts hypothesized (4) ignorance of rule restrictions. Further, he investigated the six sources of errors: (a) marker of

transitional competence (b) teacher induce error (c) interference (d) performance errors (e) overgeneralization (f) strategies of communication and assimilation. Brown (1980) further tried to mention four sources of errors: (1) context of learning (2) interlingual transfer (3) communication strategies (4) intralingual transfer. Keshavarz (2008) five sources of errors are provided: (a) transfer of training (b) language learning strategies (c) interlingua error (d) Communication strategies (e) intralingua and developmental errors.

Methods and Material

The researchers have designed the following methodology in order to answer aforementioned research questions:

(a) Participants

Since this quantitative study focuses on the taxonomy for syntactic and morphological difficulties of ESL learners in Urdu to English translation, the researcher selected 300 participants from six public sector colleges following random sampling technique. The sample consisted of equal number of male and female participants (150 male and 150 female). The public sector colleges from where these participants were taken are:

- 1) Government Millat Degree College , Faisalabad
- 2) Government College of Science Samna Abad, Faisalabad
- 3) Government Islamia College Civil Lines, Faisalabad
- 4) Government College for Women Madina Town, Faisalabad
- 5) Government Islamia College for Women Eidgah Road, Faisalabad
- 6) Government College for Women Karkhana Bazar, Faisalabad

Fifty participants were taken randomly from each of the aforementioned public sector colleges. All of them were Pakistani graduation students from Urdu medium background.

Their ages ranged from 19 to 22 years. Though their fields of study were not similar to one another, but they had been studying English as a compulsory subject from school levels. As to the translation from Urdu to English is concerned, they had been receiving explicit formal instructions with regard to this for the last few years. Therefore it was expected that they possessed hit and bolts of translation skill from source to the target language.

(b) Materials

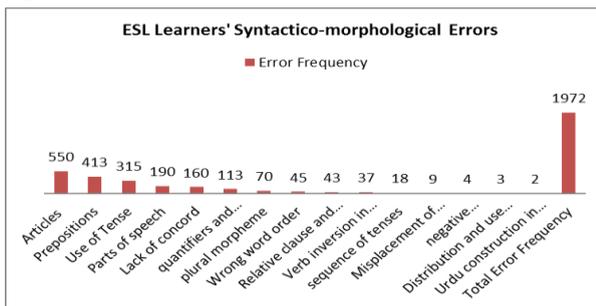
The Urdu translation sheet comprised of 20 sentences which the researchers selected from various sources. Though there is no absolute agreement even on the translation of a single sentence, sentences were chosen from Urdu newspapers, *The Express* and *The Jang* because these newspapers are printed in their mother tongue and generally read by most of the students at college library or at home, from the English grammar books which are generally recommended by the teachers to the graduation students for language learning at this level. The sentences were chosen from the newspapers and English grammar books keeping in view the proficiency level of the learners because the researchers had a lot of teaching experience and observation of English language proficiency of the learners at college level. In data collection procedure, the researchers put the learners under the time pressure of 60 minutes to complete the task of translating Urdu sentences into English. The students were allowed to ask if they find any difficulty regarding vocabulary issues.

The researchers' object behind choosing translation as a task- based activity was due to its numerous advantages such as: (1) it controls the structure under analysis. (2) It assures the learners comprehend the semantics structure which they are supposed to produce (Keshavarz, 2008). These are the reasons that researchers made a choice for written translation.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data analysis of the samples of collected written sheets comprised of error identification, interpretation and classification and a statement of error frequency. Having identified all the errors the researchers classified them in accordance with their frequency rate in order to find out which syntactic-morphological error is the most frequent and least frequent among Pakistani ESL graduate learners in Urdu to English translation. The frequency bar-graph given below summarizes the frequency rate of syntactic-morphological errors. As shown in figure 01, the learners' highest error frequency found in their use of articles is (N: 550), in preposition (N: 413), in use of tense (N: 315), in wrong use of parts of speech (N: 190), in concord (N: 160), in the use of quantifiers and intensifiers (N: 113), in the use of Plural morpheme (N: 70), in wrong word order (N: 45), in the use of relative clause and pronouns (N: 43), in verb inversion in WH-questions (N: 37), in sequence of tenses (N: 18), in misplacement of adverbs (09), in the wrong use of negative constructions (N: 04), in the distribution and use of verb groups (N: 03), in the use of typical Urdu constructions in English (N: 02). Thus the learners made one thousand nine hundred and seventy two errors in all in Syntactic-morphological domain.

Figure: 01



The present study was conducted to find out ESL learners' problems in their translation from Urdu to English in task-based activity to address the following research questions:

- (1) *Which error does occur more frequently in syntactic-morphological domain in Urdu (SL) to English (TL) translation?*
- (2) *Which error does occur less frequently in syntactic-morphological domain in Urdu to English translation?*

As to the first research question, the findings of the study indicated that the learners' most frequent error in syntactic-morphological domain in the process of translation from SL to the TL lies in their use of English article system. So the learners need explicit formal pedagogical instructions in this regard. As regards the second research question, the least frequent error in the written translation task-based activity was found in their use of typical use of their L1 constructions in the L2.

Moreover the researchers hypothesized that errors in the use of tenses occur more frequently than in plural morphemes. The findings of the study support this because the error frequency in the use of tenses as shown above in figure 01is (N: 190) which is far greater than the error frequency in plural morphemes (N: 70) as shown in figure 01given above. Therefore, it is necessary for the teachers and language instructors to focus more on the learning and use of tenses to make the learners efficient L2 writers.

Recommendations

The significance of translation is generally denied by a number of foreign language instructors. Translation method is often opposed in EFL classroom and its basis lies on two points of view. First, translation involves the use of L1 and the students do not find opportunities to obtain ample L2 input. Second,

translation brings about errors in second language learning errors on account of negative interference from L1. Therefore, EFL teachers strongly discouraged the method of translation method. Some of the researchers prefer the monolingual approach in this regard while others put forward translation as assistance to EFL pedagogy. Responding to the idea of inadequate L2 input when translation is employed in the classroom, these researchers are of the view this does not provide enough L2 input to the learners. In contrast, the present study with its empirical findings proposes that translation assists learners in their comprehension of second language because it lays bare their developmental errors. This stands incongruent with the researchers such as (Ali, 2011; Baddeley; 1990; Dulay & Burt, 1972; Husain, 1994; Prince, 1996) who claim that translation enhances the learners' familiarity about the contrasts and similarities between the Source language and the target language and thus, prevents deviation from the target language in utterances. So this study strongly recommends that translation activity is of great help to learn second language and it should be focused by teachers, syllabus designers and test constructors in ESL and EFL classrooms.

The present study focused on Syntactic and morphological errors of ESL learners in task-based translation activity in Urdu to English at graduate level. The upcoming studies can be conducted on different age and grade groups such as at Matriculation and Intermediate level by focusing on the translation of larger prose or poetry texts to assess cohesion and coherence of prose texts or transfer of figurative use of language e.g. symbolism, metonymy, metaphor etc. in the process of translation.

Conclusion

The prime object of the study was the provision of linguistic taxonomy of syntactic and morphological errors frequency in Urdu to English translation and find out the most frequent and less frequent errors in this connection. The findings of the study indicate that the most frequent category in syntactic-morphological errors in Urdu to English translation is the usage of articles system while error in the use of typical Urdu constructions in English is the least one. Moreover, all the features regarding syntactic and morphological errors as “errors occurred in conditional sentences”, “wrong use of negative constructions in null-subject sentences regarding indirect speech” etc. from the collected data were not included in Urdu sentences by the researchers.

Paying heed to the errors that are focused by the researchers in the upcoming researches will be significant for syllabus designers, test constructors and teachers. Such types of researches present dependable outcomes for syllabus designers and recommend important and unimportant items. In returns this assists syllabus designers in deciding which items are to be included and excluded. By identifying linguistic errors of the learners and providing corrective materials is one of the productive aspects of these types of researches.

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