

# PERFORMANCE

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**Error Analysis in Speaking Performance of the Indonesian University Students**



English Department  
Faculty of Language and Literature  
State University of Makassar



# **PERFORMANCE**

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# **ERROR ANALYSIS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE OF THE INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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## **Abstract**

Errors are of significance to the process of language learning. Therefore, errors made by second or foreign language learners need more attention. Errors in speaking found dealt with grammatical matters and the rest with pronunciation and diction. The most predominant source of the errors can be said to be the interference of the target language. The learners have difficulty to fully internalize the systematical rules due to the uniqueness of the target language system, and their ineffective learning strategies. This study was based on the "controlled" speeches by the fourth semester students of the English Education Study Program at the faculty of Language and Literature State University of Makassar in the academic year of 2008/2009.

Key Words: Grammatical error, interference, pronunciation

## **INTRODUCTION**

The terms mistakes and errors are meant to be the distinctive in some literature as the mistakes is considered not so serious, unsystematic or irregular, and self corrected while the errors is more serious because it deals with linguistic competence rather than performance, systematic or regular because their occurrence is predictable, and not self-corrected because the learners have not fully internalized the rule of the target language they are learning (see Conder, 1981; Littlewood, 1984). Errors are of significance to the process of language learning but not mistakes (Corder, 1981:10) therefore,

errors made by second or foreign language learners need more attention and study than the mistakes.

In this paper, however, the two terms are not significantly differentiated for the sake of convenience in discussing the ill-formed utterances and/or sentences made by the learners under investigation. Besides, the writer supports to some extent what Littlewood (1984:32) asserts that "any attempt to draw a strict borderline between errors and mistakes is unlikely to be successful since it seems unlikely that they are clearly distinct in their psychological reality." Errors are significant not only to researchers but



also, more importantly, to teachers and learners (Corder, 1981:10-11). To researchers, errors (hence including mistakes) are a means of knowing how language is learned or acquired by the learners in that, by analyzing the errors, they can possibly postulate new methods or modes of language teaching. To teachers, errors are even more crucial in that, if they really care for and are interested in teaching and learning issues, they can analyze the sources of the errors and then figure out a possible solution. To learners, errors can function as reminders for them not to repeat the same incorrect forms again and again, if they really wish to improve themselves.

Speaking and writing skills as language production demand a lot of practice from the learners if they want to acquire those skills as no skills can be perfectly mastered without sufficient practice. Nevertheless, doing practice is not enough to cultivate the speaking and writing command of English without learner's high motivation and encouraging feedback from the teacher. In spite of the fact that there is a very common saying confirming that practice make perfect, there are other factors that may determine one's success in language learning. Sadtono (1987: 16-33) has summarized some factors that influence language teaching and learning, especially dealing with the teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. The factor can be divided into linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. The

former includes the uniqueness of the target language being learned in terms of its sound system, spelling system, lexical or morphological system, and syntactical system. The relationship between the target and the source language-whether they belong to the same family or not, and the learner's previous experience in learning other foreign languages are also important factors that should be taken into account.

The later or non linguistic factors include the learners, teachers, teaching strategies, materials, objectives, time allocation, big or small classes, facilities, and social-cultural factors. Of all of the factors, the most important one is the learners because they are the main key to their success as they involves many other factors including their language aptitude, motivation, attitude, dignity, memory span, emotion, age, and sex.

In the process of acquiring the skill, speaking, the learners normally commit errors which are inevitable. For example they make errors on pronunciation and intonation in speaking, on diction (the choice of lexical items) and grammatical aspects in both. There are some reasons for this. Two of the very common ones are that a matter of regular practice and a matter of patience. Errors are very likely to occur if the learners do not practice regularly and they do not have enough patience to keep trying correcting their incorrect expressions and utterances.

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Some people believe that if a learner can speak in English remarkably well, there is a tendency that s/he is also able to write well. Why? It is because when a learner is writing, her/his language awareness is much higher compared with when s/he is speaking. S/He has much more time and less frustrated when s/he is writing compared with when s/he is speaking.

#### **THE FOCUS OF THIS PAPER**

This paper is intended to describe and analyze the speaking error made by the fourth semester students of the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Language and Literature, in the academic year of 2008/2009 in other words, there were two things done in this study: describing the errors in speaking and analyzing it in terms of their possible sources.

Sako (1980: 496-497) claims that in a speaking test aspects like pronunciation, vocabulary knowledge, grammatical control, and fluency should be the focus. In speaking, the speaker faces them so that non-verbal signals might help a lot in transmitting the messages to the listener.

There are some hints given by experts to help teachers evaluate and grade their students' oral performance rather objectively (Little wood, 1984; Sadtono, 1987) and score their writing performance (Palmer and Kinball,

1981), but there are still a lot of inevitable holes that make the evaluation quite subjective.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

##### **The Subjects and Nature of Data**

The subjects for this study were twenty students of the fourth semester at the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Language and Literature, who were taking the course Speaking IV in the academic year of 2008/2009. These subjects represent the sample for this study taken from 125 students as the population.

From the twenty students, two kinds of data were collected. The data of speaking consisted of 316 sentences collected from the twenty students' brief or mini talks (2-3 minutes) on the given topic How to deliver a good speech. The twenty speeches were audio-tape recorded, transcribed, observed to identify the errors made, analyzed, and discussed. The students were given one week to prepare their speech before delivering it in class.

The data on speaking can be considered "controlled" to reflect the students Indonesian-English interlanguage. Ellis (1985) calls this type of data "a careful style," assuming that the subjects or the samples pay much attention to the language form in addition to meaning. This term is quite relevant applied to the present data since the subjects were



given a certain period of time to prepare their speeches.

### **Approaches Used in the Study**

Two approaches are employed in the study: description and analysis. There is, the study describes the kinds of errors found in spoken. Errors may deal with phonology (pronunciation), morphology (diction), and syntax (word order, agreement). Then, it analyzes the sources of the errors.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has the following limitations: (1) it merely tries to describe the kinds of errors (focusing on grammar) made by the twenty sample students found in their speaking given by the writer and to analyze some possible causes of sources of them, (2) it deals only with data from the fourth semester students and the results may not extend to other levels of students within different study programs and, (3) since the data were based on the given title for speaking and topic for writing, it does not cover the errors that might occur in impromptu speeches.

### **AN OVERVIEW ON ERRORS**

Errors are seen and treated differently by two opposing groups of teachers who believe in two distinct approaches and philosophies. Corder (1981: &) calls these two different things as 'two schools of thought.' The

first school believes that in learning and teaching process errors should not be tolerated and therefore learners should keep quiet until they are very sure what to say and how to say it correctly. People in this group see the occurrence of errors as a sign of inadequacy of teacher's teaching strategy. Littlewood (1984: 22) in this matter considers errors as a sign of learning failure. This kind of attitude towards errors was popular until late 1960s. On the other hand, the second school believes that the occurrence of errors is inevitable by anybody as long as he or she is living in this imperfect world (Corder, 1981). Teachers are encouraged to concentrate on their teaching strategies for dealing with the errors that have been committed by the learners. Errors are "clearest evidence for the learner's developing system" (Littlewood, 1984: 22).

There have been many studies on errors done by English teachers across the world focusing on various linguistic aspects. For example, Kharma (1981), Agnihorti, et al. (1984), and Ihsan and Ahmad (1990) studied the errors on the use of articles a, an, and the made by English department students with Arabic, Hindi, and Indonesian as their first language backgrounds, respectively. Other studies dealing with interlanguage analysis focusing on other linguistic aspects also have also been conducted by other experts. These studies indicated that errors do occur in learning and teaching process.

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Then, why do students make or do not make errors in speaking? There are many possible answers to this. Following Krashen (1980), one's ability in using correctly the target language he is learning is the result of his acquisition rather than his learning. Therefore, learning only functions as the 'monitor'. Krashen's 'monitor model' predicts that performance error (in speaking) depends on whether monitoring is in operation. In other words, if a student is very aware and careful in his speech, he tends to make less or no error. Krashen and Pon (1975) cited in Sridhar (1980:217) have said that "in slow speech", a learner can utilize her/his monitor" so that a second language learner can avoid errors, yet in ungoverned or spontaneous speech s/he cannot use her/his learning to monitor her/his acquisition; therefore, they mix up things and make errors. Their study dealt with the subject of a woman in her forties who had been living in the United States for many years and who began to learn English as an adult.

Experts in applied linguistics have discussed kinds of errors that also reflect various possible causes of them. For example, errors can be caused by the influence or interference of the learner's first or native language. Which are called interlingual errors or L1 interference errors (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1973, 1981; Richards, 1973; Taylor, 1975; and Littlewood 1984). Errors caused by the influence of the different system of the target language itself like overgeneralization are called

intralingual errors or L2 interference errors (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1973, 1983; Richards, 1973; Taylor, 1975; and Littlewood, 1984), and others by inappropriate translation from the source language to the target language (Taylor, 1975), still others by learning strategies (Selinker, 1972), and some others by fossilization (Littlewood, 1984), and the rest by unknown factors (Taylor, 1975) Sridhar (1980) sees errors from three angles, that is, from the eyes of Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, and Interlanguage Analysis. Sridhar sees these three kinds of analysis as three phases of one goal in that they hold the same mission, that is, to facilitate target language learning and teaching by providing insights in the nature of the learner's performance, regardless their differences and weaknesses.

In their study, Zakaria and Ihsan (1994) claim that the most prominent cause of errors is the learning strategies of the learners in addition to the unique system of the target language which is difficult for the learners to grasp. Among the three areas of errors studied, the errors on the grammatical aspect are the most problematic compared to spelling and lexical items.

## **ERRORS: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Error Description**

As the title suggests, errors found in the data will be described in





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terms of speaking which will be presented in the following pages in turn. In speaking, out of 316 sentences taken from twenty mini talks on the same given title, there were 42 errors or about 7%. The errors can be classified into some categories. First, some errors deal with the use of parts of speech such as the misuse of adverbs, nouns, prepositions, and articles. Among these errors, there are six errors dealing with omission of verbs and subjects. Look at the following examples representing each kind.

1. \*We real make the audience bored. (adverb)  
---> We **really** make the audience bored.
2. \* We ask to ourselves what is the purpose of our speaking. (preposition)  
---> We ask ourselves what the purpose of our speaking is.
3. \*We have to limited our speaking too. (verb tense)  
---> We have to **limit** our speech too.
4. \*Beside that there are many other steps to make good speech. (prep., article a)  
---> **Besides** that there are many other steps to make **a** good speech.
5. \*They get nervous and forget what to say that stumble over words. (missing subject)  
---> They get nervous and forget what to say that **they** stumble over words.
6. \*But one thing they should know the purpose of this speech. (missing verb)

---> But one thing they should know **is** the purpose of this speech.

Second, there are fourteen errors dealing with syntactical matters like word order, parallelism, and agreement. Look the three examples below each of which represents one kind of syntactical errors.

7. \*You must know the audience, who are they. (word order)  
---> You must know the audience, who **they are**.
8. \*Maybe you want them to bring new candidates or offering a new imported drug. (parallelisms)  
---> Maybe you want them to bring new candidates or **offer** a new imported drug.
9. \*There are some possible way that can take the pain out of speech making. (agreement)  
---> There are some possible **ways** that can take the pain out of speech making.

Third, real errors on diction or the choice of lexical items are very few. Other errors that can be grouped in this category are the ones dealing with incorrect use of word forms in that the speaker used noun instead verb, cardinal instead ordinal number, adjective instead of verb, noun with -ion ending instead of noun with -ing (gerund). Observe the following examples.



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10. \*After reading this article, I can get some steps on how to give a good speech. (choice of word)

---> After reading this article, I can **learn (know)** some steps on how to give a good speech.

11. \*If you have been asked to speech in front of people sometimes you get trouble. (noun used as verb)

---> If you have been asked to **speak** in front of people sometimes you get trouble.

12. \*The five step that I have arranged also for other students who want to know to make a good speech. (cardinal used as ordinal number)

---> The **fifth** step that I have arranged also for other students who want to know to make a good speech.

13. \*We just remember that we have to brave and self confident. (adjective use as verb)

---> We just remember that we have to **be** brave and self confident.

14. \*They can use simple vocabulary and expression in order to help them avoid confusing. (ING-ending noun used instead of ION ending noun)

---> They can use simple vocabulary and expression in order to help them avoid **confusion**.

Fourth, other errors deal with relative pronouns, conditionals and passive forms. Errors in this group are very few in number. This might not be because the students have mastered those syntactical matters but because those patterns are seldom used by them. They are assumed to have used avoidance strategy (see Schachter, 1974) in learning in that in order not to commit errors on those grammatical points they just avoid using them in their speech. Observe the three examples below representing each kind.

15. \*The most important one is we have to be brief. (missing relative pronoun)

---> The most important one is **that** we have to be brief.

16. \*We asked to give a lecture or a point about an idea. (missing verb-passive voice)

---> We **are** asked to give a lecture or a point about an idea

17. \*Don't talk too much because we are as the moderator. (conditional)

---> Don't talk too much **if you** are the moderator.

The syntactical errors include errors dealing with parts of speech, agreement, passive construction, tense, redundancy, diction, word order, and parallelism. The following are



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examples of errors representing those grammatical aspects.

18. \*The aim of teaching English should be enable our learners to communicate in that language. (verb used as adjective)

---> The aim of teaching English should **enable** our learners to communicate in that language.

19. \*This speech usually taken in the formal situation. (Missing verb, diction)

---> This speech is usually **delivered** in the formal situation.

20. \*Once you clearly identify why is you need to speak, you can better prepare yourself. (verb addition)

---> Once you clearly identify why you need to speak, you can better prepare yourself.

21. \*Public speaking is a vihicle for conveying a message to an audience. (article with mass noun)

---> Public speaking is a **vehicle** for conveying a message to **audience**.

22. \*As a teacher or student of ESL should aware that language is a tool to convey and communicate ideas. (missing subject, missing be)

---> As a teacher or student of ESL, **one** should **be aware** that

language is tool to convey and communicate ideas.

23. \*The listener farthest from we can hear we clearly. (word order, pronoun)

---> The **farthest listener** from **us** can hear **us** clearly.

24. \*In either to speech to inform or the speech to convince, it is necessary for the speaker to hold the listener's attention. (noun used as verb)

---> In either to **speak** to inform or the **speak** to convince, it is necessary for the speaker to hold the listener's attention.

25. \*The picture by using video tape recorder can be held still. (preposition added)

---> The picture using video tape recorder can be held still.

26. \*When the teacher occasionally have students return to material from earlier stage of their language program. (S-V agreement)

---> When the teacher occasionally **has** students return to material from earlier stage of their language program.

27. \*A recorded message is more difficult to understand than a face



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to face message for several reason.  
(pluralization)

---> A recorder message is more difficult to understand than a face to face message for several **reasons**.

28. \*Students are expected to present the material given by the teacher or chosen by the students themselves. (passive)

---> Students are expected to present the material given by the teacher or **chosen** by the students themselves.

29. \*What is it technique?  
(redundancy ---> double subjects)

---> What is technique?

30. \*It happens because the teacher and the students are different individual characteristics, English abilities and need. (diction)

---> It happens because the teacher and the students **have** different individual characteristics, English abilities and need.

31. \*At the same time employees must to speak to in from customers and suppliers of credit policies, store hours dates and discounts. (modal)

---> At the same time employees **must speak** to in from customers

and suppliers of credit policies, store hours dates and discounts.

32. \*The teacher should carefully direct each activity, giving the students enough format for direction, and enough room for creativity. (parallelism)

---> The teacher should carefully direct each activity, **give** the students enough format for direction, and enough room for creativity.

33. \*Notice the exchanges possible in talking about an article of clothing. (word order)

---> Notice the **possible exchanges** in talking about an article of clothing.

34. \*It's important to know what use the person who asks you for information. (untraceable, meaning problem)

---> It's important to know what **for a person asks you** for information (??)

### **Error Analysis**

Now that the errors found in speaking have been described, some discussion and interpretation dealing with the possible causes or sources of those errors can be presented.

Based on various possible sources of errors in foreign language

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learning as well as in second language acquisition mentioned previously, the intralingual errors are predominant compared to the interlingual errors. Based on the examples of errors made in speaking described earlier, over 75% of the errors can be said to be caused by the interference of the target language systems. This error sources to some extent covers or implies other sources involving some psychological factors like students' low motivation to learning and their bad learning strategies, and consequently, their monitoring does not work. In addition, the students tend to use a short cut to solve their problems, for example, by translating the source language to the target language without consultation with anyone else. The rest of the errors may be caused by influence of their first language background, for instance, errors dealing with subject-verb agreement, pluralization, tense, and word order.

Other errors on pronunciation can be caused by the interference of their various native languages or by the system of Indonesian as their second language. It is generally assumed that one's first language is highly influential to his target language pronunciation. The same thing might be true that most Indonesians tend to use their knowledge of Indonesian system in expressing themselves in another language.

Errors on orthography are certainly not caused by the influence

of first language, especially between Indonesian and English regardless more and more cognates appear in Indonesian vocabulary. Misspelled words are generally caused by one's carelessness and negative attitude toward learning as they even feel reluctant if not lazy to look them up in dictionary.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Although this study is not deep enough due to a limited time to think it over, some conclusions and possible implications can be drawn for the sake of teaching of English, especially to the English major students. First, the fourth semester students of the English Education Study Programs at the Faculty of Language and Literature of UNM, in the academic year of 2008/2009 are not too bad as their errors do not exceed 10% in terms of the total sentences they made in speaking. However, if the data had been collected using impromptu speeches, the quantity of errors could have been larger. Why? Because in uncontrolled speeches, monitoring tends to be not in operation (see Krashen, 1980).

Second, generally, in terms of speaking, the students could be in scale 3 either by using NAFSA (National Association for Foreign Student Affairs) or the RELC of Singapore evaluating scale (cited in Sadtono, 1987:81-82) in that the students have been able to participate



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actively in the class or discussion even though they still have some problems in grammar (Sadtono, 1987:81-82). Errors seldom obscure meaning" (Sako, 1980: 498)

Third, English teachers or lectures need to pay more attention to the common forms of errors the students make. Errors dealing with the use of open as well closed words (parts of speech), agreement, tenses, passive constructions, conditionals, and parallelism, and word order are still the problems faced by the English major students.

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