

# **An Experimental Analysis of Errors in Light of Language Learning and Language Use and the Role of Executing Involvement to Increase Motivation in the English Language Classroom**

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## **ABSTRACT**

People are very likely to make mistakes during language learning. FL learners are no exception. We want in this paper to make an experimental effort to describe and pinpoint learners' errors in language learning and language use hoping it will pave the ground for FL learners' to have a better understanding of the errors they make. And yet all researches are empirical until present day show a correlation between students' motivation and learning outcomes in the teaching of English in ESL and EFL contexts. Notwithstanding of a sound theoretical framework, there are few studies which bring about strategies intended to increase motivation and report findings.

This paper also endeavors to enlighten the factors which put students' motivation in jeopardy and act as hindrance in efficient foreign language learning. It equips teachers with a tool for assessing students' motivation so that they put into practice effective motivation strategies in the English classroom. The strategies and involvements suggested can be used by teachers in copious teaching situations after of course considering and adjusting their own teaching contexts under advisement.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Human beings are to make mistakes. Speaking and making mistakes are exclusive features of humans, thus these features must emphasize how unique humans really are. The simplest definition of Error Analysis would be language error as an unsuccessful bit of language. Error Analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language. The uniqueness of Error Analysis, differentiating it from Contrastive Analysis, was that the mother tongue was not supposed to enter the picture. Errors could be fully described in terms of the Target Language, without the need to refer to the L1 of the learners. The Error Analyst's end of enquiry is the Foreign Language Learner's ignorance of the Target Language. This ignorance can be shown in two ways. First in silence, then in the way they compensate for their ignorance, i.e. substitutive language. We need to distinguish two sorts of silence: cultural silence and avoidance. Cultural silence caused by EL2 learners from 'silent cultures' while avoidance is induced by ignorance. But learners usually prefer to try to express themselves in the TL by alternative means: such as borrowing or stealing.

### **1.1. Error Recognition**

In EA we assemble a line-up of utterances produced or processed by a learner and ask the 'witness' or knower to pick out the one or ones that look out of the ordinary, that is, those which are potentially wrong. One may think error detection is simple, but in fact it is just the opposite. It is interesting to find out that spotting an error in spoken, informal language is far harder than in written, formal texts. In addition, spotting one's own errors is more difficult than spotting others'. Even the native speakers sometimes have trouble detecting errors correctly.

### 1.2. Errors Pinpointing

Error location is not always so vivid; some errors are dispersed all around the sentence or larger units also known as global errors. Burt and Kiparsky (1972) suggest that we should identify errors by reference to the TL. And there is a reasonable suggestion: the learners first need to stop making the error, and then start to produce the TL form. Gathbonton (1983) adopts the gradual dispersion model of language change, which suggests that learning involves two stages: the first is the learning stage and the second involves uprooting all the old and wrong learning so only the good ones are left.

### 1.3. Characterizing Errors

There are two reasons why the standard EA practice of describing the learner's errors should be in terms of the TL: First of all, learner's language and TL are co-dialects of the same language, so they should be describable in terms of the same grammar. Secondly, EA is TL-oriented. According to Corder (1981), the system used for the description of learner's errors must be one having two essential characteristics: 1) the system must be well-developed and highly elaborated, since many errors made by even beginners are remarkably complex. 2) The system should be as simple, self-explanatory and easily learnable as possible. Because of the above characteristics James (1990) points out that Chomsky's Universal Grammar has little use for describing learner errors.

## 2. STAGES OF ERROR

In this part, we investigate three stages of language: the level of substance, text and discourse. If the learner was operating the phonological or the graphological substance systems, that is spelling or pronouncing, we say he or she has produced an encoding or decoding error. If he or she was operating the lexico-grammatical systems of the TL to produce or process text, we refer to errors on this level as composing or understanding errors. If he or she was operating on the discourse level, we label the errors occurring misformation or misprocessing errors.

### 2.1. Misspellings

There are four types of misspellings. The first one is punctuation errors, among which the most frequent are overuse of the exclamation mark by some writers; misordering of closing inverted commas; under or overuse of capitals; over inclusion of a comma between an antecedent and a restrictive relative clause; and misselection of the colon instead of the comma after the salutation in letters. The second one is typographic errors. People who are normally good spellers might be poor typists. Their problems lie in automating the required temporal and spatial mechanisms that underlie skilled fingering on the typewriter, or keystrokes on the word-processor.

### 2.2. Lexical Errors

According to Chomsky (1980) lexis is sharply different from grammar. Grammar is said to be organized in closed systems, to be systematic and regular. Lexis is, by contrast, said to consist of open systems, to be irregular and unsystematic. Recently, lexis has begun to take a central role in language study. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the boundaries between lexis and grammar are now seen to be less clear-cut than was assumed. Morphological aspects of words, which used to be treated as part of grammar, can just as well be viewed as part of the word: e.g. words of different form classes can be derived from the same root. Secondly, learners themselves believe that vocabulary is very important in language learning. Though this view may not be correct, it is likely to influence learning. Thirdly, for some learner groups, lexical errors are the most frequent category of error. Finally, vocabulary carries a particularly heavy functional load. We classify lexical errors from two perspectives: formal errors and semantic errors. Formal errors of lexis include formal misselection, misformations and distortions. Semantic errors in lexis refer to confusion of sense relations and collocational errors.

### 2.3. Pragmatic Errors.

Pragmatic errors involve putting linguistic knowledge into practice, so we may call them pragmalinguistic deviations. They arise when ever speakers misencode a message, not to the detriment of its meaning but to the detriment of its pragmatic force, that is, what speech act it is intended to perform or what rhetorical force it should carry. Thomas (1983) calls it *sociopragmatic failure*. Sociopragmatic failures result from culture-clashes, from cultural differences of view concerning what is the appropriate social behavior in certain settings.

### 2.4. Detecting Errors

James (1990) once commented on the desirability of distinguishing between error description and error diagnosis. There is widespread acceptance of this principle: Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) clearly state that ‘the accurate description of errors is a separate activity from the task of inferring the sources of those errors. The ultimate cause of error is ignorance of the TL item aimed at. It is worth noting that any formal deviance can have either declarative or procedural causes. When the required TL item is unknown and the learner borrows an L1 substitute, the consequence is an L1 transfer error, but when the learner knows the TL item but fails to access it, and instead accesses an L1 substitute, we have a case of an L1 interference mistake’.

### 2.5. Motivation

It is unanimously accepted in the related literature that motivation is positively linked to foreign language acquisition (Gardner, 1985). Motivation is the second most important determinant of educational success, with the first being aptitude, a learner’s cognitive capacity (Skehan, 1989: 38). Contemporary views recognize that motivation is a complex phenomenon, and that many personal, social, and contextual parameters exist. Many definitions of motivation have been recommended in the relevant literature. According to some researchers, motivation refers to the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and control of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior (Maehr and Meyer, 1997). Brophy (2004) defines student motivation as “the degree to which students invest attention and effort”. Dörnyei (2001) suggests that motivation includes three elements: why people, how hard and how long people are eager to engage in an activity. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that there is a strong literature on motivation and many resources available to tutors that provide strategies to nurture motivation, there is lack of studies which, apart from suggesting practical strategies to increase student motivation, implement theoretical principles in the classroom and assess the efficiency of these classroom involvements. The purpose of this paper is to bridge this research gap between theory and practice, and in so doing to provide teachers with real world suggestions which they can use after taking into account their specific teaching situation and students’ demands. The following motivation theories reflect research in both educational psychology and foreign language. According to the social cognitive expectancy-value model of achievement motivation, learners’ “achievement outcomes”, including effort, task or course persistence and performance (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000:107), are dependent on a) the degree to which learners are confident that they will experience success with reasonable effort, and b) the degree to which they value and appreciate success and subsequent benefits. Central to the social cognitive theory is the concept of self-efficacy. Learners’ perceived self-efficacy of their capabilities to accomplish “designated types of performances” affects effort, confidence, and persistence Bandura (1986:391). Attribution theory of motivation claims that the perceived causes of educational outcomes, called attributions, impact heavily on achievement behavior and on expectations for success. Attributions are categorized along three elements: stability, locus, and control (Weiner, 1986). Stability refers to how stable the attribution is over time. In relation to locus and control, when learners attribute unsuccessful performance to factors outside their control, or external to them (e.g. ability, or an easy task), rather than to controllable, or internal causes (e.g. effort, or preparation), they develop low expectancies for success, showing little effort and persistence. Self-determination theory claims that people have a need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Students with intrinsic motivation participate in learning activities in which “the

sole rewards are the spontaneous feelings of interest and enjoyment” (Deci and Moller, 2005:582). Intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to attain higher levels of achievement than extrinsically motivated students, who are motivated from rewards associated with success (Gardner, 1988: 106). Goal orientation theory incorporates both cultural parameters of behavior and cognitive processes (Thrash and Elliot, 2001). It challenges that students who adopt mastery goal orientations engage in educational activities with a focus on acquiring knowledge or skills, believe in the relationship between effort and outcome, and are oriented toward “improving their level of competence” (Ames, 1992). Mastery goals are associated with an intrinsic interest in learning, and positive attitudes towards learning. In contrast, students who adopt performance goals are principally concerned with self-worth (Covington, 1984), and recognition as good students. They often avoid challenging tasks, give up easily and lack confidence in their ability. According to Covington’s (1992) self-worth theory, the need for self-worth is a basic human need, so students often behave in ways to protect their self-worth. For example, they may procrastinate studying for an exam, so that they can attribute failure to lack of effort, rather than lack of ability, since this could damage their self-image. Students may also adopt reputation-saving strategies, such as setting unrealistically high learning goals, or simply choosing not to participate. Gardner’s (1985) social psychological approach highlights the role of attitudes towards L2 as a determinant of motivation to learn. It stresses the link between language and culture, and conceptualizes the “integrative motive” in terms of: a) integrativeness (disposition toward L2 community), b) attitude toward the learning situation, and c) motivation.

## 2.6. Classroom Involvement

The following motivational strategies were implemented:

### A. Establishing a Learning Community and a Supportive Classroom Atmosphere

It is a central point in all motivation theories that creating a learning community that provides the environment for “optimal motivation” (Alderman, 2004) is important. For example, we should try to foster the belief that the teacher is there to provide all students with help in their learning efforts, and not to ignore, rebuke, or sneer them. This is achieved through negotiating with the students a set of classroom rules. Making fun of a wrong answer is not accepted, and a standard of “mistake tolerance” is endorsed. Errors are considered a natural part of learning a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2001: 42).

### B. Providing Indirect, rather than Direct Correction

In order to make writing feedback less threatening to students’ self-esteem and reduce anxiety, in writing tasks it is better to prompt students about the location and the nature of errors by means of a correction code (Lee 1997:466). Students should be prompted about the nature of their mistake by means of symbols (Byrnes, 1988). Similarly, in speaking tasks teachers should avoid over detailed, constant immediate correction since it can undermine their confidence, and it discourages learners who are too conscious about seeming alliterated to experiment with new language (Lightbown and Spada, 1999:20).

### C. Making Use of Students’ Experiences and Lives

In order to upgrade learning goals rather than work-avoidant goals or passive participation, there should be designed tasks, or altered course book activities so that students are provided with genuine chances to use the target language and engage in purposeful communication, using their experiences and opinions.

### D. Providing Opportunities for Group Work

The incorporation of short-term projects in the classroom is of importance, because with projects students are more personally involved in the learning process, are less concerned with self-worth protection, and are motivated by a solid intent product. Project work encourages autonomy, imagination and creativity (Hedge, 2000), and students realize that they can be successful if they put effort, cooperation, or persistence in their work.

### *E. Using Individual Criterion-referenced Grading Standards*

The students' progression should be measured rather than their performance in relation to their classmates, while portfolios are used for the evaluation of students' progress. Face threatening activities, such as comparison of ability is to be avoided, because such practices can negatively influence low achievers in a number of ways, such as "avoidance of risk taking, use of less effective or superficial learning strategies, and negative affect directed toward the self" (Ames, 1992: 264). In order to promote effort, rather than ability attributions, Students are to be provided with effort feedback, showing to them that they can perform better if they try harder (Dörnyei, 2001: 121).

### *G. Personalizing the Curriculum and Supplementing the Teaching Material*

Apart from the course book students have, they should be provided with tasks with assignments and activities that are at a challenging level of difficulty, but could be successfully completed with reasonable effort (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). Students' parents are to be informed that supplementary materials are designed to help, and not to punish their children for their low performance. According to Brophy (2004) engaging parents in their children's progress is a characteristic of successful teachers.

### *H. Increasing Expectancies of Success*

This involves "consciously arranging the conditions" (Dörnyei, 2001: 3) for success. Pre-task activities provide students with enough assistance, and potential obstacles to completing tasks are removed by addressing them in advance (e.g. modeling effective strategies). To reduce test anxiety, students should be given sufficient advance warning and be informed about test specifications and assessment criteria. Of course, the above involvements overlap. For example, both communicative activities and participation in projects increase autonomy and involvement, while most of the above involvements reduce language fear. Executing involvement to nurture student motivation is not a straightforward process. First, educators are faced with unimaginable resources that provide recommendations to boost learning motivation. The problem lies in determining the suitable classroom involvements for a specific teaching context, education system and curriculum. Second, the results of involvements are time consuming, so teachers need to show tenacity and solidity. English teachers should also be flexible enough so that they constantly evaluate the effectiveness of involvements, come up with workarounds, and incorporate changes in their motivation strategies.

## 3. CONCLUSION

Error analysts claim that learners' errors, to a large degree, are not caused by the influence of their L1; instead, their errors reflect some common learning strategies. EA tries to find out the regular things in the process of foreign language learning through the study of learners' errors. In the case of motivation, the scholastic implications are cloudless. First, although all motivational theories incorporate useful elements, motivation is such a complex phenomenon, that no single theory is adequate. Educators need to make a synthesis, incorporating elements from many theoretical approaches in their everyday classroom practice. The second implication is that theory and action go together, so before employing strategies to nurture motivation, teachers should get to know their students, their families, their social and cultural background, the value they attach to knowledge of the English language, in order to enlighten the reasons that underlie their willingness to engage in learning activities. English teachers should be aware that what motivates students in one setting may prove to be ineffective in a different one (Schunk et al, 2008:40).

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