

A Study of Certain Common Errors in English Sentence Structure as Influenced by the Hiligaynon *

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A number of studies have been done to determine the influence of the native language of a student on his study of a foreign language. The data yielded from those investigations have been of much help to the teachers, the supervisors, the textbook writers, and other researchers.

The grammatical structures of the native language have indeed been found to have influence, either to interfere with the learning of categories in the target language or to facilitate it. The second-language learner's first language is, therefore, of interest to his language teacher.

Structures of the foreign language which are similar in meaning and distribution and formation to some structure in the native

language will be easy to learn because old learning can be transferred. Some structures are difficult because they require the second-language learner to change his old habits, or to reorganize his old habits under a new system.

The results of the investigations have given rise to more fruitful methods of teaching English as a second language. If the English teacher is aware of the trouble spots the students will have in their oral and written work, he will be guided well in the preparation of his lessons and in his choice of devices or techniques to be employed. Conversant with the "do's" and "don't's" of effective language teaching, the English teacher will have more success in his teaching.

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This study was an attempt to pinpoint the trouble spots in English noun-head modifications which were due to the interference of the native language, to classify them, to obtain some indication of the magnitude and persistence of these errors, and to establish the hierarchy of difficulty of these structures.

METHODOLOGY

Since the student's original written work is a good indicator of how much learning has taken place, the written compositions of 800 students from five grade levels, Grade VI to the Fourth Year in high school, served as the corpus of this study. The compositions were selected at random (one out of three) from 2,402 compositions collected from six schools.

Then these compositions were grouped and analyzed by grade levels. During the running tally of the errors, emerging patterns of types of errors in noun-head modifications were noted. Then the errors were classified into categories. Later, some types were reclassified into sub-types. With the errors properly listed and grouped, a frequency count of the occurrence in each year was taken. The percentage equivalent of each

error in relation to the total number of errors was taken for each grade level to derive some measure of the magnitude of the difficulty for each grade and its persistence through the years.

As the third step, a count of both the correct and the incorrect usages under each category found in the compositions of the fourth year cases was done to determine the success of teaching at the end of the period of study. Then the percentage equivalent of the wrong usages in relation to the correct usages was solved for each category. The rank of difficulty of the errors was then determined in terms of the relative mastery of each structure as revealed by these percentages. Another frequency count was taken, this time in terms of the students committing the error, in order to nullify the effect of length in composition work. The error had to be committed twice by a student before he was considered as one who had not mastered that structure and be tallied as a "case in error." The percentage equivalent in relation to the total number of cases was computed to show the ranking difficulty of the errors with this new perspective. All the tables were then studied and interpreted.

The fourth procedure was a contrastive study of comparable English and Hiligaynon sentences. The correct English versions of the sentences used as "key" for each error type under study was given to a native informant to translate into Hiligaynon. An analysis of the structuring of the correct English sentence, the incorrect English sentence, and their Hiligaynon gloss was undertaken. Comparison revealed which types of errors were caused by the interference of the native language.

FINDINGS

The gross count of the frequency of errors and the count of the number of cases committing each error pointed out the relative difficulty of each type of error in five grade levels. The types of errors in the first half of the ranking lists were the same for both. Of special interest is the consistency of the ranking of the difficulty in the use of articles, the observance of number agreement between noun-phrase markers and the noun head, and the construction of modifying clauses, which were first, second, and sixth, respectively, in both. The types of errors which were committed more frequently by the fourth year students are those more

advanced students should be expected to commit when they are trying to express themselves more freely, but the great persistence of the error in the use of the genitive should be a cause for much concern because it is a basic structure. The two other basic structures which have not been mastered even after ten years, as shown by a percentage equivalent that is still high, are the use of articles and number agreement. These types of errors are due to the influence of the Hiligaynon. Error in the use of pronominal modifiers, which is another basic structure, is also due to the interference of the native language. The word-for-word translations of the dialect result in the use of irrelevant expressions, error in position of modifiers, error in word order, error in clause constructions, and error in expression of comparison. When one concept in Hiligaynon equals several concepts in English, errors in choice of vocabulary and word building occur. It has been shown that the eleven types of errors were caused by the interference of Hiligaynon.

CONCLUSIONS

Much of the difficulty in learning a second language is due to

interference from the native language of the learners. The interference found by this study arises from the following differences in the signalling systems involved:

1. One concept in one language is split into several concepts in another;

2. A relatively free word order is translated into a relatively fixed word order;

3. Obligatory word orders which are similar in meaning are opposite in arrangement;

4. The same concept is signalled by different morphological processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are a few recommendations based on the findings of this study;

1. Language teachers can improve their teaching by always trying to spot errors that often occur and making even just an informal contrastive analysis of the native way of expressing the communication situation involved and the foreign language way, to see whether any interference in the new learning is due to former speech habits.

2. Since non-mastery of the basic structures in the early years will compound difficulty later (this

study shows that such errors also tend to be persistent), it is recommended that the basic structures be given much emphasis during the early years of study so that correct use of such structures as the articles, items with special distribution like "little" and "few" and the common "one of . . ." becomes automatic.

3. The child's loyalty to his native language is a strong impediment in learning; therefore, strong motivations must go with foreign language learning, no matter at what age.

4. More studies of the distinctive features of Hiligaynon be conducted. Researches on the following are recommended:

a. The System of Particles — Particles like "sang," "sa," "nga," etc. interfere with the learning of English especially. Although some indication of how they function is given here, a more definitive description of their distribution and function is needed before the full extent of their influence on the learning of a second language by a Hiligaynon speaker can be determined.

b. Word Order — Word order in Hiligaynon is optional and it is obligatory in English. These conflicting features provide a reason for an interesting study in

this area. Some such questions as these seek answers: How free is Hiligaynon word order? Among the possibilities, are some preferred to others so as to be considered "characteristic" of dialect?

c. The Function Words in Hiligaynon – What are the function words in Hiligaynon? What is their distribution? What structural meanings do they signal? How do they compare with English function words?

5. This study is limited to errors in the use of noun-head modifiers. Further studies of the same nature may be on the modification structure of the verb and that of the modifiers themselves.

6. School personnel, including classroom teachers, should study the literature on bilingualism in order to avail themselves of findings of studies on the effect on the child of the study of more than one language. This background should help curriculum makers decide what realistic objectives to set and what accomplishment to expect. Teachers should be helped by their study in (1) providing the appropriate background for language study, (2) providing proper motivations for learning, (3) choosing effective aids, (4) knowing what

achievements a language learner can be capable of, (5) deciding on the nature and sequence of the learning activities.

7. Teachers, English teachers in particular, should know about the basic structures of Hiligaynon. A teacher's adequate knowledge of how the native language words is essential to his comparative study of the two languages. □

Filipino Adolescent's . . .

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In addition, the study has pointed the need for further investigation such as:

1. The case study method be used for the study of individual patterns of response.

2. The relationship between reading and other variables, such as socio-economic class and other personality characteristics, if any, be studied.

3. Negative influence from reading might be further investigated.

4. The relationship of sex to situation in which reading was done be further studied especially in schools where the males are segregated from the females.

5. The relationship between reading and intelligence and reading comprehension be studied. □