Intralingual Errors in the English Writing Produced by Sinhala Speaking Undergraduates: An Error Analysis

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Learner errors are an inseparable part of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) since they serve as the best tool for interpreting the sources of learner errors and the strategies employed by the second language (L2) learner in the learning process. Numerous studies have established the role of first language (L1) interference in the acquisition of an L2 as a major factor for learner errors. Nevertheless, research has forwarded that learner errors do not result only from already acquired L1 knowledge and this category of errors is generally known as 'intralingual' errors: the confusions caused by the complexities of the target language itself. This study identifies the possible sources of intralingual errors in the English writing produced by Sinhala speaking undergraduates in order to identify the nature of such influence in their L2 learning process. The sample comprises of fifty second second year undergraduates studying English as a compulsory subject in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. The data gathered from the three instruments: students' writing, questionnaire and interviews were analyzed using descriptive and contextual methods. Error Analysis Approach (EAA) was used in this research to find learner errors, identify them, and explain their sources. The findings report that a group of errors can be identified as developmental errors and errors due to systematic variation following Larsen-Freeman's classification (1991) of learner errors. Precisely, these errors have been caused by these learners' efforts to build up hypothesis about the target language from their limited classroom experience. The kind of complexities of the language to be acquired seems to cause the L2 learner a considerable difficulty in learning English. This study recommends that it is the responsibility of the language teacher to realize that if such errors are thoroughly analyzed, the learner's language acquisition process can be clearly understood. Further, this will enable students to develop strategies to overcome such errors eventually. This analysis concludes that intralingual errors require much emphasis due to their frequent occurrence in students' writing.

Key words: Error Analysis Approach, First Language, Intralingual Errors, Second Language Acquisition