Error-Analysis of Spoken English of Sri Lankan ESL Learners and Its Implications for Syllabus Design

K. S. R. Silva

Benedict XVI Catholic Institute of Higher Education (BCI)
sepalikasrsk@gmail.com

Error analysis plays a significant role in language planning and syllabus design. It helps to identify the causes of common errors, and strategies used by language learners, and to obtain information on common difficulties faced by language learners during the learning process. This, in return it would help syllabus designers to devise effective teaching techniques and develop appropriate teaching and test material to cater to the needs of learners of different proficiency levels. However, little research has been carried out in Sri Lanka to thoroughly investigate learner-errors and consequently, teaching and test materials have been developed without paying much attention to the linguistic difficulties faced by the local student population. In this context, this study was developed to investigate and analyse the errors made by Sri Lankan learners when learning English as a second language. Specifically, its aim was to identify and analyze the grammatical errors made by adult learners when speaking in English. The language data were obtained from simulated oral interactions of twenty-five students *participating* in a role-playing language exercise during a twelve-week English course in a tertiary level institute. The students were all proficient learners who had been selected to intermediate level after going through a proficiency test. The oral interactions were recorded, transcribed and classified under the Linguistic Category classification and the Surface Structure Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al (1982). The error analysis of the oral interactions showed that the most common grammar errors were in the use of tenses (46 %) and subject-verb agreement (20%). Other errors fell into the categories of plural forms (8%), prepositions (8%), and articles (12%). The results show that Sri Lankan learners still have difficulty in the use of tenses and subject-verb-agreement, even at the intermediate level, and therefore the need for more emphasis on error-analysis when designing ESL syllabi in Sri Lanka is highlighted.

Key words: Error, Error-Analysis, ESL Learner, Syllabus, Syllabus-Design