Linguistics

A Linguistic Investigation of Grammatical Errors by Maithili ESL Learners Through Error Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to present how the interference of an individual's mother tongue hinders in acquiring a second language, which leads to Interlingual errors. It is an observation that the speakers also commit those errors which have no influence of the mother tongue but are a result of the target language which are called Intralingual errors. This paper particularly focuses on how the Maithili language (L1) acts as a hindrance for the Maithili ESL learners to acquire the target language, that is, the English language (L2). The survey also displays the traces of Intralingual errors in the responses of the speakers, who are committing grammatical errors in speaking the English language (L2). The analysis and evaluation of the results that have been procured through the digital questionnaire survey conducted has been displayed in this paper. The general survey shows that people admitted making grammatical errors while speaking both native and second language and it can be inferred from the specific survey that the same respondents have committed errors in more than half of the questions given to them. The objective of the paper is not only to show the various reasons which lead the Maithili ESL speakers to commit errors while speaking or writing the English language but also to profuse remedies to overcome these barriers. It can be concluded from the entire research that the hypothesis is justified and there is a scope for remedial measures to correct the situation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the principal method of human communication. A language employs a set or combination of words that are used by a particular community or country in a structured and conventional way and is conveyed by speech, or writing. When we talk about a native language, it is often known as the 'mother tongue'. The origin of the latter term associates itself with the notion that the linguistic skills of a child are honed by the mother, therefore, making the language of the mother, the primary medium through which one can share one's ideas and emotions. Although, sticking solely to one's mother tongue cannot help a person communicate with the majority that speaks another language.

Maithili is the mother tongue (L1) in the study undertaken. It is considered a New Indo-Aryan (NIA) language that follows the Devanagari

Scan the QR Code for a YouTube video on Introduction to the Maithili language, given by school kids.
Source: *kv colaba, YouTube.*

Scan the QR Code for an audio of a poem- Mithila Varnan recited by Sriya Jha in the Maithili language.

Sources: *SpeakUp Mithila, YouTube.*

script. It is widely spoken in the Northern and Eastern regions of the state of Bihar and in Southern parts of Nepal known as Terai. The Maithili language has always carried a religious and holy connotation being the language of 'Mithila', the renowned name of the birthplace of the pious lady 'Sita', daughter of the king 'Janaka', who had ruled the place, in the Hindu mythology. In fact, 'Sita' has been famously known as 'Maithili'. It has traveled a long and commendable journey from being regarded or debated to be a dialect of the Hindi/Bengali/Nepali languages respectively, to emerge as a separate and distinct language consisting of all the attributes of the medium of communication. However, in the modernizing era, the English language has been gaining prominence as a second or target language. Naturally, various Maithili speakers learn English (the language of the majority) as their second language. The whole process of acquisition on the part of novice ESL learners though is prone to imperfections as there is usually an unintentional interference or transference of the mother tongue, into the process. This transfer, psychologists refer to as, the process of automatic, uncontrolled, and subconscious use of the past learned behavior, to produce new responses. The learner tends to manipulate the grammatical structure of the target language, which is the L2, in the form of Interlingual and Intralingual errors. These are the results of faulty teaching, ignorance of proper grammatical rules, overgeneralization, simplification, etc. These errors committed by the speaker, are usually ignored by the listeners in daily communication, as the transfer of L1 into L2 might not be hindering comprehension but this out-of-order activity, does violate the accuracy of the target language and is a clear sign of the inadequate knowledge of the rules of the English language on the part of the Maithili speaker, under consideration. This further accounts for an alarming need for the correction of faulty teaching and learning methods so that errors are minimized in future learning processes.

Literature Review

A review of authentic and scholarly sources either in the form of print or electronic material is an important procedure to be followed in research. The present paper roots its ideas on various questions and issues raised in previously published research papers and journals. "Does Mother Tongue Interfere in Second Language Learning?", for instance, keeps forth a valid question for the readers to ponder:

"Regarding the mother tongue, language is learned through input and reciprocal interaction, but it's also believed that kids are born with an innate and special ability to discover the underlying rules of a language system. This was named Universal Grammar by Noam Chomsky. When second language learning is taught, it can be said that input, feedback, aptitude, motivation, instruction, and social interaction have a big effect; but what about the mother tongue? Does it interfere or help the learners to make the language clear?" (Denizer 39-40).

"Maithili Language and Linguistics: Some Background Notes" states Maithili as a language of the New Indo Aryan Family, spanning "the eastern and northern regions of the Bihar state of north India and the southeastern plains, known as the Tarai, of Nepal" (Yadav 71), which has long been considered a dialect of Eastern Hindi, Bengali, and sometimes one of the three dialects of a spurious language referred to as 'Bihari'.

The prominence of imperialistic ideals during colonialism in India introduced English into the realm of languages. The foreign language though has taken over in comparison to the popularity of other languages, it still is the second language in the acquisition of which Maithili speakers commit linguistic errors. Touchie's "Second Language Learning Errors their Types, Causes, and Treatment" and Jha's "Errors in the Use of Prepositions by Maithili Learners of English and Their Remedies", are journals that have dealt with the errors- Interlingual and Intralingual, giving recommendations for the correction of those.

Al-Khresheh's article "A Review Study of Error Analysis Theory" and Corder's book "Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition" give this paper a base for the analysis of the errors by Maithili ESL learners. Al-Khresheh's "A Review Study of Error Analysis Theory" states that "The task of EA is to explain and analyze why one aspect of the target grammar has not been adequately acquired whilst a second is learned without difficulty" (Schaumann and Stenson 4).

The use of the term 'Fractured English' in Jha's 'Errors in the Use of Prepositions by Maithili Learners of English and Their Remedies' suggests a kind of English that is often a 'mish-mash of half-

learned English' (49). It mainly deals with the errors in the use of prepositions by Maithili ESL learners, while speaking and learning English as their second language. There are various parts of speech in the English language in which the speakers commit errors apart from prepositions. There is a need to group a few of them after research and analysis so that the present paper serves as a one-stop reference portal for future researchers.

Objective

The present study aims to undertake the Error Analysis Approach to find the varied grammatical errors that are made by the Maithili ESL learners as L1 gets transferred into the process of learning L2, that is, the interference of the mother tongue during the process of second language acquisition and how incomplete understanding of the rules of the target language creates hindrance in the process. The objective of the paper under study is to further analyze the sources and the nature of these errors. The present study even attempts to examine the ways in which these errors hinder the learner's performance in the target language and to formulate suitable solutions for the correction and the elimination of these errors.

Research Hypothesis

This research paper proposes the following hypotheses:
Primary Hypothesis: Interlanguage interference and Intralanguage interference are mainly two sources of learners' errors.
Ancillary Hypothesis: The pull of mother tongue is responsible for the learners' errors.

II. METHODS

The methodological approach of this research paper is qualitative in nature wherein 50-55 Maithili speakers of the age group 18-45 including males and females have been surveyed through interviews, to find out the grammatical errors they commit while speaking English. This method has also been used to find out the problem these speakers face when the interference of the mother tongue or the interference of the target language takes place. A digital survey was conducted wherein Maithili speakers from different regions of Bihar were asked to respond to a set of general questions and similarly some specific questions too. The questionnaire contained a set of questions relevant to the aim and objective of the topic of research, so

that the received responses may provide the reasons why the Maithili speakers commit grammatical errors. Six QR Codes have been generated out of audio recordings, telephonic conversation, and a YouTube video to aid the data.

Data

Data has been collected from two sources, Primary and Secondary. Data for primary source has been collected from various people through surveys to comprehend and analyze the study. To make primary data collection more authentic, secondary data has been collected through previous research papers, journals, articles, other web sources and references have been taken from books on the respective topic to get the substantial result. Six QR Codes have been generated out of audio recordings, telephonic conversations, and a YouTube video. The data collected has been analyzed and results have been presented accordingly. The data collected from the above sources has been added as references at the end of the research paper.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Theory

Second Language Acquisition is the scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first language during childhood or adulthood, once the first language or languages have been acquired. A wide variety of complex influences and phenomena regarding second language learning is studied under Second Language Acquisition. SLA marks its beginning in the late 1960s and from then onwards it became an integrative activity that acquired the field of language teaching, linguistics, child language acquisition, and psychology. SLA has continuously seen stupendous growth. Stephen Krashen conferred the Second Language Acquisition theory which is primarily based on 5 hypotheses: The acquisition learning hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis, Natural order hypothesis. According to this theory, there is no need of using the grammatical rules broadly in the process of learning the target language. Communication filled with messages is more important than grammar and the rules of speech.

Error Analysis

Error analysis was first developed by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the field of SLA in the late 1970s, and quickly gained popularity as a method of explaining L2 mistakes. Corder is the founder of this theory. He first marked this theory in his article "The Significance of Language Errors" in 1967 in which he acknowledges that errors are interesting because errors can reflect some unexpected linguistic codes. These errors reflect the struggles that are associated with second language learning. By using this method teachers can draw their attention toward the arena in which learners are encountering the problems. Error Analysis is the linguistic analysis that targets the errors committed by learners. It dwells upon the errors committed in the target language. The thing that needs to be emphasized is that mother tongue interference is not the sole reason for committing errors, according to error analysis. A language learner forms or estimates a set of rules from the first language to which he or she is familiar, and the same set of rules tends to apply in the learning of the target language.

Steps for Error Analysis
Collection of a sample of learner language
Identification of Errors
Description of Errors
Explanation of Errors

Types of Errors

Stephen Corder distinguished EFL learners' errors based on differences between the utterance and the reconstructed version. These are divided into 4 categories- omission, selection, addition, and mis-ordering a few elements. Apart from these errors, there are local and global errors also. A more acceptable or we can say the minor error is local and another is a global error which falls into the category of major errors because it can create hindrance in the understanding of the intended meaning. Interlingual and Intralingual interference are the two linguistic factors that can be considered the major source of errors.

1. Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors, often known as Transfer errors, are once made that are attributed to the first language (L1). These errors hinder or outright prevent language learners from learning the patterns and rules of the target language. Interlingual errors are frequently made by L2 learners because they use their L1 as a tool to study L2. To learn the L2 they transfer some structures from their L1. Due to their inability to distinguish between L1 and L2 second language learners often made mistakes when translating word structure. However, interlingual errors are not thought to be the outcome of ingrained behaviour in Error Analysis theory; rather they are seen as a sign that the learner is in the process of learning the new system and the code of the target language.

2. Intralingual Errors

As discussed earlier, those errors that are caused due to the influence of the mother tongue are Interlingual errors still there are some errors whose causes are not traced in the structure of learners' mother tongue. So, there is a possibility that the source of these errors might be the target language of the learner. These errors are termed Intralingual errors, which are caused by the target language itself. These errors are considered to be a kind of hindrance in second language acquisition. These errors have no connection with the learner's mother tongue. Hence, we can properly define it as the hindrance that is caused by the target language of the learner. Interlingual interference is not the only left-alone cause of the errors. These are also caused due to the negative transfer of the application of general codes and rules that is traced in the L1 acquisition.

Following are the elements that are included in Intralingual Errors:

a. Overgeneralization

In the study of language development and acquisition, the idea of overgeneralization is not new. It is one of the main root reasons that causes Intralingual errors. It just alludes to the application of a particular norm in the process of learning a language and that one norm is applied by the learner in multiple circumstances. It is "the application of formerly effective methods in an eminent environment" (Richard 174). Overgeneralization occurs "when a learner creates a distorted structure based on another structure in the target language." (Ellis 59).

b. Incomplete Application of Rule

One of the main reasons for Intralingual errors is the Incomplete application of Rules. A learner who speaks a foreign language, generates some structure, whose generation can indicate a clear level of grammatical rule development that can be acquired to create an acceptable utterance. In other words, incomplete implementation of rules

can also be referred to as a failure of the complete understanding of L2. When a language learner discovers that they can communicate effectively by employing basic grammar principles rather than more complex ones, errors can be generated. To make learning easier for themselves, foreign language (FL) learners frequently implement some rules and continue to create deviant forms. Question formation of FL learners is an excellent illustration of these forms of Intralingual errors.

c. Ignorance of Rules

The third cause of Intralingual errors is the Ignorance of rules and restrictions. It is partially related to overgeneralization. The ignorance of rules is the lack of uphold on the border of present formation, specifically, applying rules to inappropriate situations.

d. False Concept Hypothesized

As a result of an inadequate understanding of distinction in the L2, EFL learners can commit errors. These errors occur as a result of poor collection of reading materials. The learners could make hypotheses based on a few grammatical norms of L2.

Errors in the Application of Parts of Speech by Maithili Learners of English

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the parts of speech as 'the classes into which words are divided according to their grammar, such as noun, verb, adjective, etc.' Parts of speech have a function in a sentence.

The parts of speech that account for the subject of the research paper are as follows: Prepositions, Phrasal Verbs, Pronouns, Articles, Verb tenses and apart from this, the word order.

a. Prepositions of English and the Postpositions of Maithili

A Preposition is a word that precedes or positions itself before a noun or pronoun, expressing a relation to another word or element in the clause.

Maithili ESL learners tend to make errors in the application of prepositions. A comparison and contrast between Maithili postpositions and the English prepositions show the fundamental differences between them. Considering the quantity, the postpositions in Maithili are fewer than the prepositions in English. An obvious implication is that for the expression of the same kind of relational meaning, one Maithili postposition would serve the purpose while the English language would use numerous prepositions. This can be explained with the following example: To denote the same relational meaning, the Maithili postposition 'me' can be referred to, while four English prepositions, 'at', 'in' 'on' and 'during' are supposed to be referred to. Complexity arises as the four prepositions of time exhibit different shades of relational meaning of time, that is, they are valid in different contexts. Considering just the prepositions of time there are seventeen prepositions, represented by only eight postpositions in the Maithili language.

Prepositions of time, of position and of direction in English and those Maithili postpositions that denote them are dealt with in this paper. The table for the same is given in the Appendices section.

Types of Errors Related to the Use of Prepositions

Evaluation of the writings of Maithili ESL speakers shows that they commit three types of errors regarding the use of prepositions in English-

- Omission of Preposition: In this, the learners omit or drop the step of the inclusion of a preposition in the sentence where it is needed.
- Insertion of Preposition: In this case, the speakers apply an extra preposition, which is undesired in the formation of a sentence.
- Selection of an Incorrect Preposition: In places where a sentence requires a preposition the speaker tends to supply a proposition which is not appropriate for that sentence.

Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are compound verbs that include a combination of a verb and a prepositional adverb also known as an adverbial particle. Phrasal verbs are parts of speech that are only present in the English language and are absent in the language so, in the process of translation the speakers being unaware of the English grammatical rules tend to omit the adverbial particle after the verb in sentences where it is required. For example, the Phrasal verb 'put off' has a verb 'put' and an adverbial particle 'off'.

Articles

Articles are those parts of speech that are mostly omnipresent in the sentences as these are defined as 'words that define nouns as specific or unspecific'. The English articles are 'a', 'an' and 'the'.

Articles are absent in the Maithili language so during the translation, the speakers tend to omit them in places where they are required in the English sentences. They may also add incorrect articles to

the sentences making those ungrammatical.

Verbs and Tenses of the Verbs

Verbs simply put are action words that describe the state of the subject. Verb tenses play a significant role in the formation of a sentence. There are tenses of verbs in both the English as well as the Maithili languages, which show the time of the event or action. Maithili learners of English are prone to committing errors in the tenses of the verbs if they are not aware of the different verb forms of English which denote the same tenses or verb forms of their native language.

Word Order

The word order denotes the structure in which the parts of speech are placed in a sentence of a language. Two languages can have different word orders in which a sentence is written, the latter implying the same meaning in both languages. So, direct translation often creates grammatical errors as a result. The Maithili learners of English tend to make errors by attributing prepositions to a word other than the word after which it is needed in the sentence along with the shuffling and exploitation in the placement of other parts of speech of the English language.

Pronouns

Pronouns refer to those words which take the place of nouns to avoid repetition of the latter in a sentence. English pronouns are divided into various categories such as Personal, Objective, and Demonstrative pronouns respectively, etc. In the Maithili language, 'o'' is a neutral pronoun which can be used to denote both 'he' and 'she' for instance. In such cases, the variation in the verbs is denotative of the gender that is the subject of the Maithili sentence. The Maithili ESL learners tend to commit errors sometimes, in distinguishing the form of the verb and translating the sentences to English using the wrong pronouns.

Research Findings

The research surveys show that Maithili language is widely spoken by most of the informants in their day-to-day conversation. They are inclined toward their mother tongue because it creates a sense of belongingness. They feel more comfortable in articulating their thoughts and feelings in Maithili. Most of the informants have agreed that they commit grammatical mistakes while speaking in Maithili and the probable reason behind this can be the ignorance of grammatical structure of mother tongue and more focus on conveying the meanings to others. The mother tongue is acquired unconsciously so there is less attention on the grammatical structure by the informants. The survey also reflects that there are some informants who commit errors in English also and the reason behind that is the Intralingual interference. Informants face difficulty while talking in English because most of the time they do not find other people in their locality to be also comfortable in having conversation in English. The survey throws light on the environment, cultural and educational background the informants are

Scan the QR Code for a recorded audio on a bilingual account in the Maithili and English languages.

Sources: *Ms. Rishu Mishra, PWC Graduate, native of Supaul, Bihar.*

grown up in. A certain age group of informants have not received proper English education in their primary schooling days, so they find it difficult to adapt the grammatical structure of English. Due to limited collection of vocabulary of English as well as limited direct translation of words from Maithili to English, the informants end up giving rise to the phenomena of Code Mixing and Code Switching.

A survey had also been conducted to assess the errors that the Maithili ESL speakers commit in the form of both Interlingual and Intralingual errors during the translation from L1 to L2. The primary data collected through this method echoes the hypothesis more specifically for it is collected directly from a group of people, the population, whose responses give the exact information needed to analyze and draw out conclusions.

Scan the QR Code for a recorded audio of an informal conversation in the Maithili language.

Sources: *i) Mr. Sampurnanand Thakur, Ret. Engineer, Darbhanga, Bihar.*
ii) Mr. Somnath Mahadev, Student, Patna, Bihar.
iii) Mr. Dwarkanath Krishna, Student (Tamil Nadu), native of Darbhanga, Bihar.

A digital form consisting of fifteen (15) questions divided into three sections gave a series of Maithili questions, followed by their translations in the English language. The respondents in the first section, comprising five (5) questions, were directed to choose among the options

whether the English sentence claimed to be the translation of the Maithili sentence written above it, was a correct or an incorrect translation. An analysis of the first section shows that 83.3% of the 48 respondents (total number of informants for this survey), in the first question, 66.7% of them, in the second question, 93.8% in the third question and 87.5 % of the total in the fourth question, committed prepositional errors by adding an unwanted preposition to the English sentence.

In the second section, those questions were given that concerned the use of phrasal verbs and prepositions. Of the three (3) questions given to them to fill in the blanks with the correct options, the result shows that 70.8% of the total have made an error in the omission of the adverbial particle. It can be implied their concepts remain unclear regarding the use of phrasal verbs.

The third section comprising seven (7) questions written in the Maithili language, directed the respondents to fill the space with the correct English-translated sentences. In the first, third, fourth and fifth questions, the influence of their mother tongue can be traced in the translations as the majority of them, that is, 68.6% (in the first question), 93.75% (in the third question), 64.6% (in the fourth question) and 74.9% (in the fifth question) committed errors in the field of tenses of verbs, pronouns, prepositions, and articles.

It was observed that the respondents even formed grammatically incorrect sentences in the English language, exploiting the parts of speech, which points at the occurrence of Intralingual errors in the process as well. The result drawn out highlights that the respondents made grammatical errors in more than half of the questions that were present in the form, which positively justifies both the Primary and the Ancillary hypothesis of the research paper.

Conclusion

Error Analysis, as a pedagogical technique, helps in pointing out the errors committed by L2 learners and the reasons behind committing those errors as well. It plays a crucial role in the comprehension of knowledge about the process of Second Language Acquisition. It also claims its validity in the field of EFL learning.

Language learning, like any other human learning, involves committing errors. The proposed study is significant because it leads us to know whether the L1 creates hindrance in learning L2. The Maithili speakers of Bihar have followed different grammatical rules while uttering a sentence and that makes it different from the grammatical rules that have been followed by them in English.

This research has focused on the source of learners' errors that is Intralingual interference and Interlingual interference. This paper has also put forward a few remedies to avoid these errors. For undertaking this research, questionnaires were circulated among a group of informants which included both general and specific forms regarding the topic.

Based on the data gathered from the survey questionnaire, conclusions were drawn based on the results obtained: Some people have not committed any errors at all but most of the informants, at an individual level, are observed to be facing hindrances when it comes to the acquisition of the second language (L2). The obvious reason behind this was found out to be the influence of their mother tongue in their day-to-day conversation.

The paper also reflects that people faced problems while translating sentences from Maithili to English. They adopted the same grammatical structure as that of Maithili while uttering sentences in English. People are observed to be not able to find certain words that have a direct translation in the English language, and this broke their fluency in communication.

This research paper has also revealed that certain errors are caused due to target language(L2). Reports have stated that they do not find it easy to communicate in English because they find English a very tough language to learn. This has happened because of the culture and environment they are grown up in. They do not have any exposure to languages such as English and another reason is that they do not receive proper education in English in primary schooling days which leads to a lack of confidence in them. They felt most comfortable when they communicated in their mother tongue. These issues lead people to commit Intralingual errors as well as Interlingual errors.

Based on the research results, the following recommendations can be put forth: Well-learned and proficient teachers should be appointed in the schools so that they could make the students aware of proper grammatical structures of English. Teaching Aids should be introduced to make the process of learning easy. Significant changes can be made in the curriculum of the academic institutions. Apart from this, learners can be involved in giving more

'practice tests' to polish their understanding. They can even be encouraged to communicate more with the proficient speakers to aid their process of acquisition of the language.

While conducting the research, some limitations were faced: Translation results in loss of real essence of the languages. It was observed that digital forms are not always filled up by informants due to formal and informal reasons.

With globalization, the demand for English speakers is increasing day by day in every field whether it is the educational, administrative, or corporate sector. English is not just a demand, but it has become a need if one wants to develop in rhythm with this developing world. The research will be useful from the teachers' point of view as well in eliminating learners' errors. This research also preserves sufficient data for the future researchers and thus desires to create awareness among the new language learners, thereby contributing to the society.

Scan the QR Code for a recorded audio of a telephonic conversation, on the contrasting popularity of the English and the Maithili languages.

Source: *Mr. Kedarnath Thakur, Ret. Govt. teacher (secondary classes).*

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