

***Error Analysis in Composition of Iranian Lower  
Intermediate Students***

---

*Mehdi Taghavi*

*Guilan University*

*January 2012*

## **Abstract**

Learners make errors during the process of learning languages. This study examines errors in writing task of twenty Iranian lower intermediate male students aged between 13 and 15. A subject was given to the participants was a composition about the seasons of a year. All of the errors were identified and classified. Corder's classification (1967) and Keshaverz's classification (1997) of errors were assumed for analyzing it. The results of the study showed that most common errors were spelling, word choice, verb tense, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order. Sources of errors were examined, too. This study has pointed out that interlingual transfer and interlingual transfer are the sources of errors. Having such an understanding into language learning problems is useful for teachers because it provides information on common problems in process of language learning. Also it can be used to predict and reduce problems of learning English.

**Key words:** errors analysis, interlingual transfer, interlingual transfer

## **Introduction**

It is inevitable that learners make errors in the process of foreign language learning. The question is that why students commit errors and what the sources of errors are. Not all of source of errors are the same; sometimes they due to the interlingual, and source of some are interlingual. Thus, researchers and teachers of foreign language came to realize that not only kind of errors as well as to have a knowledge to know source of errors, too. In the process of learning language is needed to be analyzed carefully, for they possibly held in them some of the keys to the understanding of second language acquisition.

There have been many researches on the field of language learning. Findings about first language acquisition have been borrowed to foreign language learning and it has been concluded that the process works in a similar way. All children learn their language make a lot of mistakes is a natural part of language acquisition process. Through feedback from adults, they learn how to

produce acceptable sentences in their language. It is inevitable that all learners make mistakes and commit errors. However, that process can be impeded through realizing the errors and working on them according to the feedbacks given. The steps that learners follow get the researchers and language teachers realize that if the mistakes and errors of language learners in formation the new language system are analyzed carefully, the process of language learning will be understood. The analysis of errors thus has become an important field of linguistics. This field of language teaching benefit from the findings of linguistics in many cases including error analysis so, the analysis of learner language has become a crucial need to predict and conquer problems of errors in process of learning a foreign language.

Two schools of thought are sited; behavior school and cognate school. The first one is a mechanical approach. Errors seem to be as a big sin and teachers should make a situation that students never commit errors by progressing habitual learning through repetition and reinforcement. In contrast, cognate school tries to emphasis learning as a mental process. Errors are not considered as behaviorist approach. Errors are accepted as a process of mental cognate which learners commit them until they receive feedback from logic reception.

#### Description of Errors

A number of different categories for describing errors have been identified. Firstly, Corder (1973) classifies the errors in terms of the difference between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version. In this way, errors fall into four categories:

- **Omission** of some required element
- **Addition** of some unnecessary or incorrect element
- **Selection** of an incorrect element
- **Misordering** of the elements

Ellis (1997) expresses that “classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time.” this study serves details about errors so it is assumed to utilize Keshavarz' classification(1997):

- Orthographic Errors

- Phonological Errors
- Lexicon- Syntactic Errors
- Morpho- Syntactic Errors

### **This study**

This study concerns the error analysis and its contribution to English language teaching at both linguistic and methodological levels. Keshavarz (1997) suggests that the field of error analysis can be divided into two branches:

- (i) theoretical
- (ii) applied

Theoretical analysis of errors concerns the process and strategies of language learning and its similarities with first language acquisition. Primarily, it investigates what is going on in the minds of language learners. Secondly, it tries to interpret the strategies of learners such as overgeneralization and simplification, and thirdly, to go to a conclusion that regards the universals of language learning process whether there is an internal syllabus for learning a second language. Applied error analysis, on the other hand, concerns organizing corrective courses, and devising appropriate teaching strategies based on the findings of theoretical error analysis. Here the important factor is to identify an error then identifying an error goes beyond explaining what errors are during using language.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study investigated the ability of Iranian lower intermediate students on writing skill so twenty male students aged between 13 and 15 were participated in this activity.

#### **Procedure**

The data are gathered from the participants to write composition entitled “write a composition about the seasons of a year” will be analyzed based on Keshavarz’ classification (1997). Some

errors produced by a foreign language learners in their acquisition process will be analyzed and identifying the possible sources of these errors. Finally, four kinds of errors are classified:

- Orthographic Errors
- Phonological Errors
- Morphological(Lexico- Syntactic) Errors
- Morpho- Syntactic Errors

## Findings

In this investigation, phonological errors are not the case of the study because its nature relates to reading or speaking skills. Totally, the students committed 119 errors across three categories of errors (Orthographic Errors, Lexico- Syntactic Errors, Morpho-Syntactic Errors and). Sources of errors will be investigated, too.

### Category 1: Orthographic Errors

**Table 1:** Samples of Orthographic Errors

<b>Orthographic errors</b>	<b>Typical Example</b>
<i>Sound /Letter Mismatch</i>	<i><b>Wary</b> instead of very</i>
<i>Ignorance of Spelling Rules</i>	<i>Leafs instead of leaves monthes instead of months</i>

### Category 2: Morphological (Lexicon-Semantic) errors

<b>Typical Example</b>
<i><b>Ended</b> season is winter</i>
<i>There are four seasons in the <b>Earth</b></i>
<i>But <b>between</b> all seasons ....</i>

**Category 3: Morpho-Syntactic**

**Table 3-1: Wrong Use of Plural Morpheme**

Wrong Use of Plural Morpheme	<b>Typical Example</b>
	<i>Autumn has 90 day-.</i>
	<i>A year has four season-</i>
	<i>Winter has many fruit-</i>

**Table 3-2: Wrong Use of Tenses**

<b>Typical Example</b>	<b>Typical Example</b>
<i>Simple past instead of simple present</i>	<i>Children <u>went</u> to school in fall. (see the context)</i>
<i>Present continues instead of simple present</i>	<i>People <b>are wearing</b> coat. (see the context)</i>

**Table 3-3: Using Subject Pronoun instead of Possessive Adjective**

<b>Typical Example</b>
<i>I love summer for <b>it</b> holiday</i>
<i>I love spring and summer for <b>they</b> flowers</i>

**Table 3-4: Using Subject Pronoun instead of Determiner Pronoun**

<b>Typical Example</b>
<i>In <b>it</b> season</i>
<i><b>It</b> season is white.....</i>

**Table 3-5: Errors in the Use of Proposition**

<b>Proposition</b>	<b>Typical Example</b>
<i>Omission of proposition</i>	<i>The season * a year</i>
<i>Wrong use of proposition</i>	<i><b>at</b> summer, weather is hot we go to sea <b>at</b> the summer</i>

**Table 3-6:** Errors in the Use of Articles

Articles	Typical Example
<i>Omission of <b>the, a, an</b></i>	<i>Spring has * good weather.</i>
<i>Redundant use of <b>the, a, an</b></i>	<i><b>The</b> summer is a hot season.</i>

**Table 3-7:** Errors Due to lack of Concord or Agreement

	Typical Example
<i>Lack of subject-verb Agreement</i>	<i>A year <b>have</b> four season-.</i>
	<i>...tress <b>has</b> bloom.</i>
	<i>.... fall <b>have</b> three months</i>

**Table 3-8:** Typical Persian construction

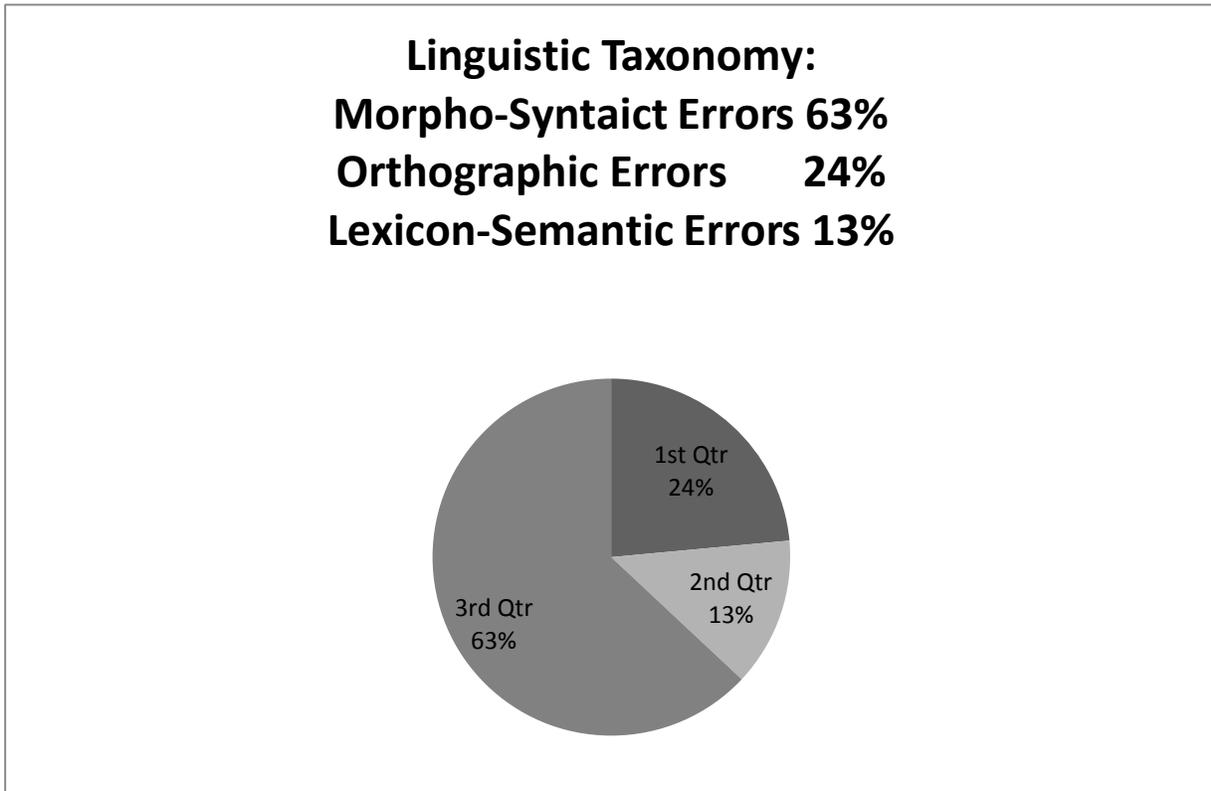
Typical Example
<i>My father born in it</i>
<i>At finish</i>
<i>I like winter because snowing very much in this season.</i>

## Results and Discussion

The gathered information investigates to see in which categories participants' errors are seen and which kind of errors are commonest errors in this study. All the three kinds of errors are shown in the following table (Table A) by considering frequency of them.

**Table A: Linguistic Taxonomy**

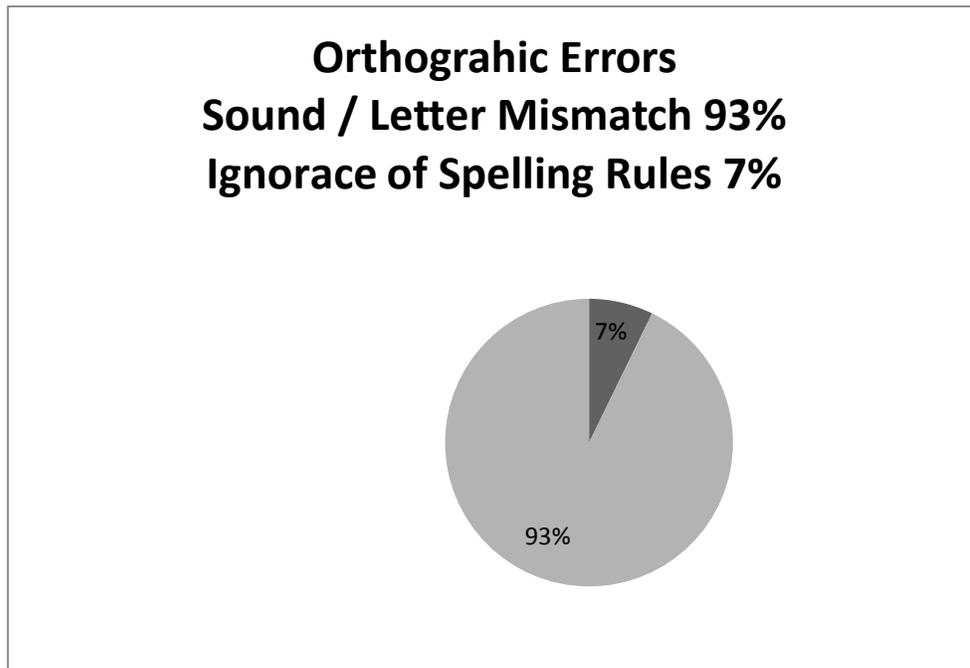
	<i>Linguistic Taxonomy</i>	<i>NO.</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	<i>Orthographic errors</i>	28	24 %
2	<i>Morphological (Lexicon-Semantic) errors</i>	16	13 %
3	<i>Morph-Syntactic Errors</i>	75	63 %
4	<i>Total</i>	119	100 %



**Figure 1**

**Table B: Orthographic errors**

	<b>Orthographic errors</b>	<b>NO.</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>1</b>	<i>Sound /Letter Mismatch</i>	<b>26</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>2</b>	<i>Ignorance of Spelling Rules</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>100%</b>

**Figure 2****Table C: Frequency of Morph-Syntactic Errors**

No.	Morph-Syntactic Errors	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Errors in the Use of Articles	30	40%
2	Wrong Use of Plural Morpheme	14	18/66%
3	Wrong Use of Tenses	8	10/66%
4	Typical Persian construction	7	9/33%
5	Errors in the Use of Proposition	7	9/33%
6	Errors Due to lack of Concord or Agreement	6	8%
7	Using Subject Pronoun instead of Determiner Pronoun	2	2/66%
8	Using Subject Pronoun instead of Possessive Adjective	1	1/33
<b>Total</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Category 1: Orthographic Errors**

It shows errors that students committed in area of orthographic level. It includes 28% of all errors in contracting the whole errors which are taken out from the participants. Another investigation among this category indicates that most students have problem with wrong spelling (93%) rather than ignorance of spelling rules indicates this kind of errors (7%).

### **Category 2: Morphological (Lexico-Semantic) errors**

Learning second language has its problem in some cases. The analysis in category 2, morphological (Lexicon-Semantic) errors shows that 13% of all errors belongs to this part of taxonomy.

### **Category 3: Morpho-Syntactic**

Most students have problems when they intend to express meaning in this category. In this study 63% of errors include Morpho-Syntactic errors based on grammatical problems.

### **Most Common Errors and sources of errors**

Some of the participants did not know agreement of cardinal number does to make plural noun so Iranian student at this level of proficiency have problem as shown in the example below:

*Spring has three **month-**.*

This kind of errors due to **interlingual transfer** that come from first language to the target language. Iranian students usually commit some interlingual errors. They never use plural nouns after cardinal.

Another common error in this study is related to use of articles. There is no article in Iranian language so a foreign language learner has problem in this section. This kind of errors due to **inertalingual transfer**. It means that in process of learning a target language, learner forget or misuse some grammatical rules which are related to nature of the target language. As following examples:

..... *the seasons of ( ) year.*

..... *( ) weather in fall is mild.*

### **Verb Tense:**

Wrong application of verb tense can be seen when the students did not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences. It can be assumed that some of the students are not aware of the different rules for tenses application. This is because some verbs written using different tenses forms are not written in the basic form of the verb. For example, the sentence '*People are wearing coat in winter.*'. This shows that the student has knowledge of 'present continuous tense' form but he was not sure of in which case would be used. The appli. Most errors in this area dues to **interlingual transfer** which is mentioned above.

### **Preposition**

Iranian students at lower intermediate level of proficiency have problem with the use of proposition. In this study, they demonstrated confusion for correct usage of preposition. It is obvious that this kind of errors based on both **interlingual transfer** and **interlingual transfer**. It means that they have their own peroposition in their language in some cases they never use it in some cases they do noy apply it but English speakers apply it See following example:

*At summer the weather is hot.*

Iranian speakers in their language always use ' in ' for expressing preposition for the seasons. It is clear that this kind of error was committed according to **interlingual transfer**.

### **Subject-Verb Agreement**

Another common the students' errors are indicated in section of Subject-Verb Agreement .They have committed this kind of errors in several cases at the result of interlingual transfer. The following example determines subject verb agreement as a source of **interlingual transfer**. See the following example.

*A year **have** four seasons.*

**Conclusion**

The results of the study show that errors which the students committed were both interlingual transfer based and interlingual transfer based. The participants also had a relatively weak vocabulary and their sentences were sometimes incomprehensible so they interfered the parallel form of words from their first language to target language. They committed errors in applying sentence structure rules. Therefore, it can be concluded that these participants have problems in acquiring normal grammatical rules in English. This study has shown that most errors due to both interlingual transfer and transfer errors. It further shows that classification of errors provides information on common problems in process of language learning. Also, by being able to describe and predict errors, teachers can inform their students to know or conquer their errors in process of language learning.

**References**

Brown, D. B. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Third edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Brown, C. (2000). *The interrelation between speech perception and phonological acquisition from infant to adult*. Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers Limited.

Corder, S. P. (1967). *Significance of Learner's Errors*. Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1996). *Second language acquisition research and language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Ferris, D. (2002). *Treatment of error in second language student writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

James, C. (1988). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. London

Keshavarz, M. H. (1997). *Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis*. Tehran, Rahnama Press.