

Terms and Definitions of Errors in SLA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a review of the different terms and definitions of errors encountered when undertaking an analysis or setting up a plan for correction in the English classroom.

To fulfil this objective an attempt is made to systematize error terms and definitions found in the bibliography on Error Analysis and related fields. Thus, in a first section, error is analyzed against the background of Psycholinguistics, Theories of Second Language Learning, as well as in English Language Teaching Methodology. Then, in a second section, the possibility of using the communicative event as a framework to systematize error terms and definitions is explored.

Introduction

Since the forties to date, Error Studies (ES)² related to second and foreign language acquisition (SLA) have held a predominant place in the field of Applied Linguistics. However, in the last two decades, there has been a decline of studies dealing with the collection, description and classification of language learners' errors. Nevertheless, as it is reflected in the great number of publications on the issue through the five past years, both teachers of English and researchers have continued showing interest in related aspects such as error correction and error evaluation, (Bartram & Walton 1991; Schachter 1991), interlanguage and language transfer (Hammerly 1991; Selinker 1992).

The reasons for the popularity of ES lie in their direct connection to the classroom. On one hand, there is a tendency among teachers to regard error correction as part of their responsibility to improve their students' output, no matter the approach or method they use. On the other, teachers and researchers alike still see error analysis as a useful tool either to discover the type of structures of the target language (TL) that cause trouble for second language learners in their interactive communication with native speakers, or to map out the type of strategies used in learning a foreign language.

Within the context of learning and teaching English, *errors* and *mistakes* are terms commonly used to refer to the student's wrong performances in the

² I use the term "Error Studies" in a broad sense to cover Error Analysis and Interlanguage Studies in fashion during the seventies as well as studies on Error Evaluation and Error Correction very popular in the last decade.

language. Nevertheless the popularity of these terms does not imply clarity since in the English language teaching profession a lack of criteria is often noted when correcting errors. Unfortunately the same symptom is detected in not a few research reports. In spite of the copious bibliography on the issue, the absence of definitions is not an exception but a rule. Few studies on learners's errors define the main object of their investigation at the outset. Furthermore, in the uncommon occasions when definitions are given, considerable disparity of criteria can be observed.

The discussion of the problems of ES make up a substantial body of literature in this field. Most of the studies have concentrated on criticizing the theoretical weaknesses of Error Analysis (Corder 1974, Faerch, Haastrup & Phillipson 1984). A great number of articles have criticized aspects of defining and classifying errors (Hammarberg 1974; Schachter, J & M, Celce-Murcia 1977; Lennon 1991). Others have aimed at pointing out methodological weaknesses of error analyses (Etherton 1977; Abbot 1980).

This paper shares with the studies just mentioned the wish to contribute to the improvement of ES; yet, the approach and method used here will differ since I will be concerned not with criticizing partial or theoretical aspects of Error Analysis but with attempting the systematization of the research on ES. With this purpose in mind, I will divide the paper into three different sections. In the first part, I will analyze and compare terms and definitions drawn from different sources. In the second, I will tentatively use the framework of the communicative event to classify terms and definitions of errors. Finally, as an appendix, I will include a glossary of error terms either with their corresponding definitions and sources, or with references to the sections of the paper where they are defined or explained.

In the task of compiling terms for the glossary, several steps were followed: a) I arrange the terms in alphabetical order. b) I relate each term in the compilation with others in the list as well as with the affected element in the communicative event c) I give the source of term, either author or theory, and in some cases, further references. d) I include a definition of the term when this has not appeared explicitly in other sections of the paper; or if necessary, when the definition can serve as a reference for contrasting other terms.

In regard to the procedure for eliciting terms, I have used the following sources: Five of the major journals in the field through the last five years (1989-1994): *Applied Linguistics*, *Language Learning*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *IRAL* and *System*. Classic works have been reviewed and also a revision of Error Studies in the last two decades has been incorporated . I am

aware that in spite of my efforts there will be some gaps due to the productivity of these type of studies.

In my opinion, this systematization is useful in several aspects. In the first place, it allows teachers and researchers to have a list of the number of terms and definitions in use, and to be aware of the relativity of error and the great degree of overlapping. Secondly, it helps them to evaluate how error terms and definitions have been used in the past, how they are being used in the present, and what gaps are left for the future. Particularly, a systematization favours a reflection on the need of being extremely careful in the use of error terminology.

Background

The word 'definition' usually refers to the meaning of a given term, word, or concept determined by its shape, qualities and limits of application.³ However, defining terms is not so a straightforward enterprise as the above statement appears to imply. A first look at the dictionary gives an idea of the complexity of finding an exact definition of the term 'error'. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2.Edic: 896) defines this word as "the action of state of erring", "the condition of erring in opinion", "to hold wrong notions or beliefs", "something what is done wrongly because of ignorance or lack of attention, as for example, an error in calculation, judgement, action, etc."

Dictionary definitions only offer general meanings and, in addition, as was pointed by Edge (1989), they usually connote negative associations linked to moral or absolute truth. In the definitions just quoted, only the reference to "something that is done wrongly because of ignorance or lack of attention" may be, as we will see below, of some use in clarifying errors definitions in SLA.

It is possible to detect at least three main approaches in error definitions in language acquisition. They arise from related disciplines such as: Psycholinguistics, English Language Teaching Methodology and Theories of Second Language Learning. The following is a brief account of how the concept of error is understood in these areas. It has the aim of contextualizing the second section, which discusses how error terms and definitions fit into the communicative event.

In the field of Psycholinguistics, the word *mistake* is used as synonym of *error*. *Mistakes* are made in the spontaneous speech and in writing as a result of a wrong functioning of the neuromuscular commands of the brain. From this view,

³ *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*. (1992:335).

a distinction is usually made between *production mistakes* and *comprehension mistakes*. The former draw attention to alterations in the process of planning and executing the act of speech. The latter refer to difficulties in the processes of decoding which lead to misunderstanding the message. A further subdivision is introduced by Garman (1990:109) to distinguish the skill and modality affected: *speech production errors* from *writing errors* on one hand, and *auditory comprehension errors* from *reading errors* on the other.

It must be noted that this simplicity is rather deceptive inasmuch as the label *production errors* has a range of different connotations according to the differences in the spawning theories. To complicate matters, for each of the terms mentioned several synonyms are used. These two traits: polysemy of meanings and polysemy of terms, are recurrent not only in the discipline of Psycholinguistics but also in others which will be examined below.

In relation to polysemy of terms and restricting the analysis to the context of Psycholinguistics, it is possible to cite at least a dozen of synonyms to stand for production errors: *performance errors*, *mistakes*, *speech errors*, *parapraxis*, *slips of pen*, *slips of the hand*, *slips of tongue*, *tongue slips*, *lapsus linguae*, *slips of brain*, *slip-ups*, *lapses*.

To illustrate the aspect of polysemy of meanings I will use different quotations which attempt at defining *slips of the tongue*:

a) "Slips of the tongue- or brain ? Tongue slips- involuntary departures from the speaker's intended production of a sequence of language units- are very common. Sounds, syllables, morphemes, words, and sometimes larger units of grammar can be affected. Often, the deviant performance is immediately detected by the speaker (though not always consciously) and corrected." (Crystal 1987:262).

b) "Any minor slip-up or error; most typically observed in speech, writing, small accidents, memory lapses, etc. According to Freud, these were no mere innocent gestures but the result of the operations of unconscious wishes or conflicts that could often be used to reveal the functioning of the unconscious in the normal healthy individual. Commonly referred to as Freudian Slip." (Reber 1985:516).

c) "Slip suggests something fleeting, perhaps due to lack of attention, probably without serious consequences and with little suggestion or intention or blame or responsibility..." (Bowen & Marks 1994:45).

d) "This is wrong language caused by tiredness, carelessness, nerves etc. In other words, the kind of mistake that anybody, including native-speakers, could make." (Bartram and Warton 1991:20).

Although apparently very similar, a careful reading of these quotations gives the reader different shades of meaning. Thus, quotations *c* and *d*, focus on the causes of this type of error and do not describe its characteristics; the focus on the causes is also found in quotation *b*, but, compared with *c* and *d*, it is much more biased on its interpretation (Freudian unconscious wishes). For its part, quotation *a* does not refer to causes but to the description of frequency, characteristics, and level affected as a consequence of this error.

In spite of these slight differences, it is possible to define the main shared features by following the procedures of "componential analysis".⁴ *Slips of tongue* are: unintentional, frequent, affect some level of speech somehow, they are instantly corrected by the speaker, and they are evidence of something.

Traditionally, in the field of English Teaching Methodology two different kinds of definitions are found which are based on counter attitudes toward learners' errors. On one hand, there is a negative view which ranges from a very extreme position defended by Brookes in which errors are 'Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome...' (quoted from Ellis 1985:22) to a more moderate position in which errors are 'unwanted forms by the teacher or course designer' (George 1972: 2), or negative influences in the process of learning (Ringbom 1986:71) ; on the other hand there is also a positive attitude which assumes that errors are evidence of learning and hence there will be errors no matter how hard we struggle to eradicate them. As it is well-known, the first position is closely related to the 'AudioLingual Method' while the second is advocated by several currents under the term 'Communicative Approach'.⁵

In turn, these attitudes originate in theories of learning which have been traditionally in opposition: the first one is close to the 'Behaviourist Theory' in which all kinds of learning is understood as the acquisition of habits. Accordingly, when learning a foreign language the established habits of the mother tongue (L1) interfere in the process of acquiring the new language (L2) and as a result, errors occur. In this theory errors are a kind of pathological linguistic behaviour to be eradicated at any cost. They are offspring of negative interference as well as faulty

⁴ Here I follow Kenworthy (1991:8).

⁵ For a description of these methods see Richards & Rogers (1986).

teaching. The first cause has given rise to the term *interference errors*,⁶ the second to the term *induced error* which has been defined by Stenson (1975), Kasper (1982), and Richards (1985) as the product of "the way in which a language item has been presented or practiced" These situations lead the learner to make false inferences which cause errors.⁷ In any case, both *interference errors* and *induced errors* are seen as a proof that learning has not taken place.

As for the second attitude, it has common grounds in the theory of learning based on the 'Creative Construction Hypothesis'. From this view, errors are not only necessary but positive. In the first place, the student learns the language through them; secondly, errors indicate to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate effectively. Thirdly, the researcher has the chance to witness the different processes which the learner has to undergo in order to acquire competence in the language. As followers of this theory have claimed (Corder 1967; Svartvirk 1973; Dulay, Burt & Krashen 1982) errors are an 'open window' to study the processes of learning and the route that learners follow when building up their competence in the target language.

Errors and the Communicative Event

In my opinion, the amazing number of terms and definitions which are found in the literature of ES can be consolidated in order to be better understood by adopting the communicative event as the framework of analysis. In that framework several basic components are usually listed: a setting, participants, activity, channel, code, and message content.⁸ The use of this framework favours the integration of most terms and definitions and offers teachers and researchers an overview of the different options; in addition it shows clearly the great number of overlapping terms currently in use. Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the error terms compiled in the appendix under the communicative event frame. The reader must observe that neither the appendix nor the figure claims to be a complete and final list.

⁶ For convenience, I leave the discussion of *interference errors* as well as its synonyms for a later section in this paper.

⁷ Selinker (1972:37) does not speak about errors but about *fossilizable items* which can be described in terms of five central processes. One of them is transfer of training, defined by Selinker as "the result of training procedures and presentation of items in textbooks in second language learning".

⁸ It is impossible here to give a thorough account of the principles of this theory. The reader may be referred to Dulay & Burt (1974); Dulay, & Krashen (1982), among others.

Figure nº 1 Classification of error terms in the Communicative Event

Adresser	slip, tongue slip, slip-up, slip of tongue, speech error, mistake, verbal lapse, Lapsus linguae, slip of the hand, slip of the pen, slip of the brain, parapraxis, perseveration error, spoonerism, anticipation error, reversal error, unsystematic error, ambiguous, avoidance error, common error, fault, competence error, developmental error, fossilised error, general error, independent error, individual error, infelicity, inherent error, interference error, interlingual error, intralingual error, language specific error, unique goof, persistent error, performance error, writing error, production error, residual error, translation error, Overgeneralization error.
Addressee	Perception error, interpretative error, reading error, slip of ear, slip of the eye, global error, local error.
Code, norm, message	Addition error, covert error, covert mistake, deviation, discourse error, double marking error, fluency error, form error, function error, misformation error, omission error, overt error, overtly erroneous, pragmatic error, surface error.
Setting	Induced error, pedagogical error.

Errors in L2: code, norm and setting

Within the framework of the communicative event, an error is regarded as an infringement or *deviation* of the code of the formal system of communication through which the message is conveyed. Nearly eighty per cent of error definitions in ES have taken the norm of the code of English language as reference, usually, to judge the linguistic level affected. A good example is Dulay, Burt and Krashen 's definition of error (1982:139). They strongly defend the creativeness and systematicity of errors but at the same time they define them as “ the flawed side of learner speech or writing that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance”.

However popular, the choice of the norm of a code as a reference to define errors is not without difficulty. To begin with, there is the problem of selecting from the many existing norms. Also Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:2) have pointed out the existence of many varieties of the English language with distinct norms of their own; such us: regional varieties, educational and status varieties, standard British English as opposed to American, Australian or Indian English.

Secondly, even if a standard norm is adopted, the analyst has to face out the abstract character of the language code full of fuzziness and indeterminacy in some areas of grammar, which make it difficult for him to identify and measure specific examples of deviation even if he has a thorough command of grammar. (Legenhausen 1989:46).

Thirdly, adopting a standard norm as reference does not solve the dilemma of having to choose between correctness, acceptability, and appropriateness. Grammar correctness is established by the educated community of the country where the language is spoken and it is explicitly described in grammar books and dictionaries. As it is connected to prescriptive grammar, the perspective of correctness has an absolute definition: an error is something wrong. It is an offence against the grammar rules which characterize the norm of the language.

From the outlook of the norm and particularly from the criterion of the well-formedness of the sentence, Corder (1980), Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) refer to alterations of the surface of the language as *surface errors*. The types of alterations which may appear are basically of four categories: omission of elements, presence of unnecessary items, wrong selection of a morpheme or tense and wrong order. Then, if the linguistic level where the error has been committed is specified, the category *Surface error* gives rise to a lot of error terms and definitions: *omission error*, *addition error*, *misformation error*, *wrong order*, *spelling error*, *lexical error*, *system error*, and so on.

Also, in regard to form correctness we may place the terms *covert errors* and *overt errors*. The former have been defined (Corder 1973; Faerch 1984; Medges 1989) as errors which do not appear on the surface of the utterance but are present within the message. The structure is well-formed but the message does not convey the addresser's intention. Very frequently these errors are difficult to detect and may pass totally unnoticed. *Overt errors* on the contrary are clearly easily observable in the surface structure of a sentence and judged as either incorrect or inappropriate.

From the approach of the standard norm, errors are alterations of the rules which make up the accepted norm. Then, an utterance will be incorrect or non-grammatical if it does not abide by the rules. For this point of my analysis it is necessary to illustrate with examples the possible degrees of correctness /incorrectness we may encounter in definitions: a) a sentence may be correct and acceptable: He likes opera; b) incorrect but acceptable if it is feasible in the language and understood by native speakers: People is kind with me; c) correct but unacceptable as it is not possible in the language: The wall was arrived before;⁹ d) incorrect and unacceptable: A rivers potatoes sleep.

⁹ For the definition of communicative event I follow Faerch, C; Haastrup, K; & R. Phillipson (1984:23) who define it as: "A communicative event can be characterized as communicative interaction between at least two parties, beginning the moment the parties initiate intentional communication and ending the moment the communicative interaction comes to a stop."

In regard to the distinction and definition of the main elements in the communicative event I

As these examples reveal, the criterion of correctness is not as simple as it would seem. In any case, correctness is not enough to give complete definitions of all error types. Together with correctness the notion of acceptability must be introduced. Corder (1980:39) defines an acceptable utterance as “one which could be produced by a native speaker in some appropriate situation and recognized by another native speaker as being a sentence of his language”. In practice, as it has been noted by Crystal (1980:8), deciding on the acceptability of an utterance may be also fraught with difficulties. Due to variations in regional and social backgrounds as well as differences in individual factors such as, age, sex, personality and personal preferences, native-speakers often disagree as to whether an utterance is normal, or even possible. Thus, a teacher who corrects “I ain’t” or “I be” in favour of “I am”, is ignoring dialectal differences where these forms are correct and acceptable. In the same way, the correction of ‘I will speak to her later’ (for I shall speak...) is showing a prescriptive approach to grammar which does not take into account the frequency of this form in the speech of native speakers.

It follows then, that the criteria of acceptability and correctness do not alone suffice, as a sentence may be acceptable as well as correct but not appropriate to a particular situation. The concept of appropriateness is closely tied to context; the sentence “what do you want ?” does not contain any linguistic error, but, let us imagine it is a shop assistant who is asking this question to a possible customer at the counter of department store. In this case we might judge that the speech act is not being realized by the most appropriate linguistic form; and, that the sentence is well formed but contains a *discourse error* (also *fluency error*, and *pragmatic error*) since it sounds too rough for a native speaker’s taste. Obviously, “May I help you ?” would be one of the appropriate options to this particular situation and its election by a hypothetical shop assistant would imply knowledge of the rules of the context; that is to say, how, when, and where to use the language.

In regard to context, it is worth mentioning the concepts of *error domain* and *error extent* coined by Lennon (1991: 191). He defines the former as “the rank of the linguistic unit which must be taken as context in order for the error to become apparent”. It may range from the morpheme to large units of discourse. As for the latter, Lennon defines it as “the rank of the linguistic unit, from minimally the morpheme to maximally the sentence, which would have to be

follow Crystal (1987:48). I use the term “code” in the sense of the linguistic system or rules, norms and conventions of a language used by the speakers of that language and accepted as standard.

deleted, replaced, reordered, or supplied in order to repair production". In my view, these concepts are a good summary of definitions which adopt the perspective of the standard norm, and setting, and they may be considered as a reference to an overall definition of error.

Finally, the term *induced error* (also *pedagogical error*) fits into a specific type of context: the educational setting. In the first section of this paper, *induced errors* have been defined as the result of the way in which a language has been presented or practised. The type of techniques or material used as well as the way of presenting them may lead a student into making a false analogy. As Stenson (1975) has remarked this type of errors are more frequent in the context of the classroom than in natural settings.

Errors and the addresser

At least one addresser and one addressee must be engaged in the communicative event. In the context of learning English in the classroom, the role of the addresser is swept by the different participants in the interaction: frequently, the teacher addresses the students; sometimes, it is a student who delivers his message to the class, to a group of students or to another student when working in pairs. In natural contexts where the language is spoken for real communication, the role of the addresser may be held randomly in turn by a native speaker or by a learner of the language.

Errors of the second language learner as addresser have been defined from different perspectives and have generated the largest category of terms. First, on the basis of the distinction between competence and performance we find: *competence errors* and *performance errors*. The former denotes the regularity of errors in the learner's interlanguage; the latter show random occurrences which in most cases are the result of inattention, stress, or tiredness. *Competence errors* are also referred to as *systematic errors*, *common errors* and *inherent errors*; while *performance errors* is one of the many synonyms of *mistakes*, *lapses*, *asystematic errors*, *redundant errors*, *individual errors*, *slips*, and, *translation errors*.

In tune with this competence and performance classification, Corder's distinction between *errors* and *mistakes* is well-known. The former are systematic, a real symptom of the learner's transitional competence as they show the different stages the student of a language goes through. On the contrary, *mistakes* are regarded non-systematic, they are frequently addressed as *verbal lapses* and their features coincide totally with those described earlier in the section devoted to Psycholinguistics.

It is important to note that the terminology of errors based on the dichotomy of competence and performance conveys in itself different levels of interpretation. Following Canale and Swain's description of communicative competence, Tarone and Yule (1989:88) distinguish three interrelated dimensions in competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. In their words, grammatical competence implies, 'the ability to produce correct syntactic, lexical, and phonological forms in a language'; sociolinguistic competence means ability to use a language appropriately in sociocultural contexts'; and finally, strategic competence refers to 'ability to effectively transmit information to a listener...'. On the grounds of these three dimensions, *competence errors* should denote ignorance of the linguistic and contextual norm and, consequently, ignorance of what is correct, acceptable and appropriate; while *performance errors* should denote the wrong use of this norm in a particular context. However, it must be observed that in most studies, both competence and performance are used in a restricted way to refer to the grammatical dimension only.

Another perspective has been to label, define, and classify errors according to the processes and strategies used by the learner in order to communicate in a second language. This approach has been one of the most productive evidenced by the long list of terms proposed. At the same time, it has been very controversial because of the lack of precision and overlapping found in the definitions and categories assigned to errors.

The processes category can be clarified if terms and definitions are arranged in two groups: *interlingual errors* and *intralingual errors*. Several synonyms can be traced for each of these titles. Thus, *interlingual errors* are also known as *interference errors*, *transfer errors*, *interlanguage errors*, and *language-specific errors*. While, *intralingual errors* are frequently referred to as *overgeneralization errors*, and *developmental errors*.¹⁰ For Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982: 171) the main difference between these two groups is that errors are similar in structure to a semantically equivalent phrase in the learner's native language (*interlingual errors*), or they reflect the mental mechanisms underlying the learner's general language development, which usually coincides with the type of strategies employed by children learning the target language as their first language (*intralingual errors*).

Also, within the perspective of processes and strategies, the terms *fossilized errors* and *persistent errors* must be framed. The first term was Coined by

¹⁰ Quoted in Crystal (1980:9). The author also gives an example of 'marginally acceptable':
? the wall was arrived before the army sent by the king.

Selinker (1974) to refer to the presence of recurrent errors in the learner's interlanguage which show a decline in further development. A typical example of *fossilised errors* is the so called 'foreign accent' in the pronunciation of some learners with quite successful communicative competence and performance.

Errors and the Addressee

As Pico (1986:50) has remarked it is possible to examine the communicative event from the point of view of the addressee (listener or reader) when decoding the message. So far, in the literature of ES, more attention has been paid to errors made by the addresser (*production errors*) than to errors made by the addressee (*perception errors*).¹¹ However, the taxonomy of *global/ local errors* proposed by Burt & Kiparsky (1972) centres on the breaks that may arise in a communicative interaction, and takes as a criterion for the definition of errors the intelligibility of the message from the point of view of the addressee. The former affect overall organization within the sentence structure and in consequence make comprehension very difficult. The latter define minor errors within clauses which do not usually hinder comprehension significantly. Wrong order of the main constituents, missing, wrong selection, and misplacing of connectors are identified as *global errors* whereas, noun and verb inflections as well as inaccuracies in closed-system items are referred to as *local errors*.

In the last two decades a lot of studies have been conducted to judge the effect of error on the addressee. The rationale of these studies is based on the belief that both the comprehensibility of the message and the relationship between the participants in the communication event can be affected by the addresser's errors, since these can make the listener or the reader feel tired or irritated. Empirical evidence has been found to prove the existence of differences in error evaluation that depend on whether the addressee is a native or non native speaker of the language. Research results show clearly the former to be more tolerant towards learners' errors.

Finally, within the addressee's perspective, it is necessary to contextualize the array of terms and definitions which have been displayed in the section of Psycholinguistics to refer to problems in perception or in interpreting the message: *interpretative error*, *perception error*, *reading error*, *slips of ear*, *slips of the eye*. These terms in themselves point out to the particular sense engaged in the processes of perception and understanding.

¹¹ Exceptions are (Laufer & Sim 1985; Mabbot 1994).

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to systematise error terms and definitions. In this attempt at systematization two features have held constant: on one side, we find the existence of several terms to define apparently the same phenomena; on the other we come across the reverse case, different definitions of the same term which do not seem to imply the same phenomenon.

One of the causes of this imprecision lies in the existence of a great number of terms which seemingly serve to denote the same phenomenon. Concerning the term *error*, other examples of synonyms which the research encounters in a quick incursion of ES are the following: *mistake*, *deviation*, *goof*, *fault*. Obviously, the lack of a superordinate term to comprise all kind of errors makes the task confusing for the analyst and is one of the reasons for the lack of systematicity in some studies.

Broadly speaking, it is possible to find different points of departure in definitions in ES literature: a) a descriptive approach to define errors on the basis of precise observable characteristics; b) a prescriptive one in which errors are judged as being something wrong; c) and the explanatory approach in which errors are explained according to their causes. As Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) put it, the focus of error description is on the product of language acquisition, whereas explanation makes reference to the language acquisition process. In the history of ES researchers have felt more attracted to explain rather than describe, in many cases the explanation was done without a thorough knowledge of psychology which in my opinion, accounts for much of the ambiguity frequently observed in definitions based on causes.

Among the definitions based on the explanation of causes of errors, a distinction between learner-internal and learner-external can be made. The first view considers errors to be a result of internal cognitive procedures such as transfer from the learner's native language or generalization to new contexts of interlanguage rules which the learner already knows. The second view defines errors according to factors external to the learner such as faulty teaching, inappropriate use of materials or ambiguous instructions in the research context which lead to the so called induced errors.

The author of this paper hopes to have contributed to systematization in this chaotic realm of terminology, not by offering a permanent solution in this area but by calling attention to the need of further investigation on this point. In my view, the chapter on ES is not concluded yet as there are important gaps in research. First, there is an urgent need of coming to agreement in the use of error terms by researchers. It is not possible to produce valuable investigations if each works

with terminology of his own. Secondly, in order to help teachers unify criteria, a basic systematization of terms and definitions should be included in methods literature and textbooks, in the same way as linguistic or functional terms are provided. Finally, as it was remarked by Corder (1980:55), most error analysis have concentrated either on phonology or morphology and there remains the need of analyses on unresearched areas such as lexical errors and discourse errors. Corder drew attention to the fact that there is an absence of communicative definitions of errors due to the focus on the linguistic code by teachers and analysts. In this respect it is worth quoting Allwright and Bailey's remark 'we will not be able to say we know very much about error treatment until the treatment of communication errors has also been well studied'. (1991: 85)

In my opinion, the lack of communicative definitions has a close resemblance to the phenomenon of 'avoidance errors'. They are not present in the literature of ES because most analyses are based on compositions or translation tests; few are focused on communicative interaction between learners; and still less frequent are studies which analyse the interaction of learners and native speakers in real life contexts. On the other hand, speech acts, communications strategies and discourse approach are still little introduced in the classrooms. Therefore, I believe that we will not be able to know very much about communication errors until a discourse approach to language teaching is fully introduced into textbooks and ultimately classrooms.

Unfortunately, the way ahead seems to be long. Meanwhile, awareness of the large number of terms and the lack of precision of the different perspectives in defining errors may help both the teacher and the analyst. Necessarily, in order to correct errors or to analyze them, we are bound to choose the terms and definition which serves our purposes best. The choice does not matter as long as we declare it explicitly, and mention from which position we understand errors and also which element exactly within the communicative event we are to analyze, as well as the 'domain and extent' of our analysis.

Appendix: A Compiled List of Terms and Definitions of Error

Addition error: (Norm). "The presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance. May be a regularization, double marking, or simple addition error". (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 277). (See Surface error).

Ambiguous goofs: (Addresser). Errors which could be categorized either as interference goofs or as L1 developmental goofs. (Source: Richards 1974; Dulay and Burt *ibid*).

Anticipation error: (Addresser). "when a sound or word is brought forward in a sentence and used before it is needed. For example: *I'll put your cat in the cupboard instead of I'll put your hat in the cupboard*". (Source: Richards 1985:266). (See Speech error).

Asystematic errors: (Addresser). "Errors which do not exhibit a rule-patterned consistent system: they are not always internally principled; yet they are not totally arbitrary". (Jain 1974: 207). (See systematic and unsystematic errors).

Attempts: (Addresser) "Where students have no real idea how to structure what they want to mean, or where intended meaning and structure are not clear to the teacher". (Source: Edge 1989:10).

Avoidance error: (Addresser). The addresser avoids parts of the language which is not certain of and instead uses other types of strategies to communicate such as approximation, word coinage or circumlocution. (Source: Kleimann 1983).

Common error: (Addresser). Frequent errors shared by speakers of different mother tongues. (Source: French 1949)

Competence error: (Addresser). "Extending Noam Chomsky's distinction between 'competence' and 'performance' we can talk of 'competence mistakes' on the one hand and 'performance mistakes' on the other. This means that a mistake can arise from a genuine failure to understand and master a systemic element in the target language". (Source: Norrish ?)

Covert error: (Message). "This occurs when on the surface of it there is no error, but the utterance does not convey the learner's intention. This happens with "false friends". A learner who says "it is an actual problem" might well mean 'current' or 'topical' rather than 'real'." (Source: Faerch 1985: 283). (Further references: Medgyes 1989:71).

Covert Mistake: (The message). "...These are occasions when the learner says something right by accident. An example would be: We went to some museum and then took the train home. In the student's L1, some is followed by a singular, even when referring to more than one thing- they really mean some museums". (Source: Bartram and Walton 1991: 21).

Deviation: (Norm). A common term used in the literature of Error Studies as synonym of error. It implies a deviation from a reference norm be it a grammar one or a discourse one.

Developmental error: (Addresser). "an error in the language use of a first or second language learner which is the result of a normal pattern of development, and which is common among language learners. For example, in learning English, first and second language learners often produce verb forms such as *comed*, *goed*, and *breaked* instead of came, went, and broke. This is thought to be because they have learned the rule for regular past tense formation and then apply it to all verbs. Later such errors disappear as the learner's language ability increases. These overgeneralizations are a natural or developmental stage in language learning". (Source: Richards 1985:78).

The reader must note that in an early definition, Richards (1974:173) uses the term developmental error as a synonym of intralingual error.

Discourse error: (Norm). "...errors beyond the sentence level. Examples include inappropriate openings and closings of a conversation, inappropriate refusals, incorrect topic nominations or switches, and so on." (Source: Chun, A; et al 1982).

Double marking error: (Norm). "An error in which a concept is expressed twice when the language requires its expression only once, e.g. double negation: *we hardly never go*". (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 277).

Error: A kind of superordinate term which is usually used to cover all kind of errors under all the elements in the communicative event. It has different connotations though, as can be seen along this paper. (See also mistake).

Faults: (Addresser). "Those errors students make when they venture beyond what they have learned". (Source: Hammerly 1991:86).

Fluency error: (Addresser/Norm). (Synonym of *discourse error*). (Source: Heyworth, F & J, Arnold 1989:29).

Form error: (Norm/ Message form). It contrasts with *function error*. (Source: Mac Aogáin 1989:54).

Fossilised error: (Addresser). The term was coined by Selinker (1974:36). He spoke of fossilization items as synonym of errors: "Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL will tend to keep in their IL relative to a particular TL, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL. I have in mind such fossilizable structures as the well-known 'errors', French uvular /r/ in their English IL...".

Function error: (Norm/ Message). As opposed to *form errors*. The term makes reference to the wrong use or wrong selection of discourse norms or variables which comprise the communicative event: language functions, speech act, modality, register. (Source: Mac Aogáin 1989:54).

General error: (Addresser). (Synonym for *developmental/ intralingual and common error*). "General errors are those common to all groups regardless of differences in source language structures...Some possible causes of these errors are common psychological processes, common learning strategies, inherent "universal" difficulties or a common sociocultural situation". (Source: Johansson 1973: 49).

Global error: (Norm/Addressee). This is usually defined as an error in the use of a major element of sentence structure, which makes a sentence or utterance difficult or impossible to understand... It is usually contrasted with a local error, which is an error in the use of an element of sentence structure, but which does not cause problems of comprehension." (Source: Burt & Kiparsky 1972).

Goof: (Addresser) (slang). "1) An error students tend to make in learning English as a second language, for which no blame is implied. 2) A sentence containing one or more goofs". (Source: Burt & Kiparsky 1972). Dulay & Burt 85-123 distinguish between interference goofs, L1 developmental goofs, ambiguous goofs and unique goofs.

Independent error: (Addresser). "with the help of confirming evidence from learners' performance data, the paper highlights what may called L1 independent errors, deliberately excluding from discussion errors uniquely traceable to L1 interference, and thus draws attention to some L1 independent source of errors". (Jain 1974: 189).

Individual error: (Addresser). "Individual error are those referred to elsewhere as mistakes...These errors occur both among native speakers and second language learners,

may be the result of inattention or other distractions during the test situation". (Source: Johansson 1973:48).

Infelicities: (Addresser). Mac Aogain (1989:55) states that the term has been suggested as alternative and refinement of mistake, slips, and transitional competence. He does not define the term and confusion may arise as in his explanation, *infelicity* is placed as a synonym of mistake and slip on one hand (performance errors) and transitional competence on the other (competence errors).

Inherent error: (Addresser). (Synonym for *Competence Error*). To illustrate this type of error Norrish (1980: 15) refers to a hypothetical German learner of English who may place the verb in a subordinate clause at the end of the clause, because he has not yet learnt that in English, unlike German, this is not usually done.

Interference error: (Addresser). "The interference errors are those caused by the influence of the learner's mother tongue on production of the target language in presumably those areas where the languages clearly differ." (Source: Schachter & Celce Murcia: 275).

Interlanguage error: (Addresser). (*Synonym of interference and transfer error*). "...errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue". (Source: Richards 1974:173).

Induced error (Setting). Errors encouraged by the teacher's way of presenting examples to the students. (Source: Stenson 1975; Kasper 1982; McKeating 1981).

Interlingual error: (Addresser). "an error which results from language transfer, that is, which is caused by the learner's active native language." (Source: Richards 1985: 146).

Interpretative error: (Addressee). "misunderstanding of a speaker's intention or meaning" (Source: Richards 1985:95). (See also perception error).

Intralingual error: (Addresser). "...is one which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer. Intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target- language item upon another. For example a learner may produce *He is comes*, based on a blend of the English structures *He is coming*, *He comes*. (Source: Richards 1985: 147). (Further references: McKeating 1981:230).

Language-specific error: (Addresser). (*Synonym of interference error*). "Language-specific errors are those which result from contact between two structural systems. It is these errors which are generally referred to as interference and which are studied by Contrastive Analysis". (Source: Johansson 1973: 48).

Lapse: (Addresser). (*Synonym of Performance/Production error*). (Psycholinguistics), (see page).

Lapsus linguae: (Addresser). (*Synonym of Performance/ Production error*). (Psycholinguistics). (see page)

Local error. (Norm /Addressee). "One that affects single elements (constituents) in a sentence". (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:277). (Further references: Burt & Kiparsky 1972). (see global error).

Mistake: (Addresser), (*Synonym of Performance error*). (Psycholinguistics), (Creative Construction Corder's 1967,1974,1981).

Misformation error: (Norm). "Use of the wrong form of a morpheme". (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:277). See Surface Error.

Omission error: (Norm). "The absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance". (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:277). See Surface Error.

Overgeneralization error: (Addresser). "An error which can be attributed to the application of a rule of English in an inappropriate situation". (Source: Taylor 100).

Overt error: (Addresser, Norm). An error which is easily detectable and obviously present in a given performance. Medgyes (1989:71) sees overt error as a result of the learner's use of achievement strategies in interactive communication to get his meaning across with a limited competence. As this author remarks overt error refers to communication breakdowns and is not to be seen as synonym with Corder's *overtly erroneous*. (see below).

Overtly erroneous: (Norm). Corder (1973:272) makes a distinction between overtly erroneous and covertly erroneous. For Corder, the term implies that the sentence is ungrammatical.

Parapraxis: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*) "Any minor slip-up or error; most typically observed in speech, writing, small accidents, memory lapses, etc. According to Freud, these were no mere innocent gestures but the result of the operations of the unconscious wishes or conflicts that could often be used to reveal the functioning of the unconscious in the normal healthy individual. Commonly referred to as Freudian slip". (Source: Reber 1985:516).

Pedagogical error: (Setting). (Synonym of *induced error*). (Source: Johansson 1973: 110).

Perception error: (Addressee). The term is used in contrast to *production error*. It refers to the absence of comprehension of the speech act in the communication event. See page 5.

Performance error: (Addresser). "Unsystematic errors that occur as the result of such things as memory, lapses, fatigue, confusion, or strong emotion". (Source: Richards "Error Analysis and Second Language Strategies" See competence error and production error. (page 5).

Perseveration error: (Addresser). "When a sound or word which has already been uttered reappears. For example: the president of Prance, instead of the president of France. (Source: Richards 1985:266). (See Speech Error).

Persistent error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *fossilized error*). "errors still being made by advance students". (Quoted in Schachter, J & M, Celce-Murcia 1983: 274).

Pragmatic error: (Norm). (Synonym of *discourse error and fluency error*). "production of the wrong communicative effect e.g. through the faulty use of a speech act or one of the rules of speaking". (Source: Richards 1985:95).

Production error: (Addresser). It has different connotations according to the standpoint from which is analyzed. In the context of Psycholinguistics a lot of synonyms can be found: performance errors, mistakes, parapraxis, slips of pen, tongue slips, lapsus linguae, slips of brain, slip-ups, lapses. (See page).

Reading error: (Addressee). (slips of the eye) (Source: Garman 1990). (see page).

Redundant error: (Addresser). (Quoted in Norrish (1983: 15) who cites Corder as the one who has used redundant error as a synonym of mistake, performance error. "...But if the same student, having learnt this fact of English grammar, then regresses and makes the same error again because he is worrying about some personal problem, his error then be a redundant error". (see also *inherent error*).

Reversal error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *spoonerism*). "When the position of sounds, syllables, or words is reversed. For example: let's have chish and fips, instead of let's have fish and chips". (Source: Richards 1985:266). (See speech error).

Residual error: (Addresser). (Source: Mac Aogain 1989:58). For a definition see *unsystematic error*.

Systematic error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *Competence Error*). "Errors discussed under the category of systematic errors seem to establish that in certain areas of language use the learner possesses construction rules...he is using rules. Because of some kind of limitation in rule schemata, the rules give rise to errors of over-application." (Source Jain 1974:206).

Slips: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*). "This is wrong language caused by tiredness, carelessness, neves etc. In other words, the kind of mistake that anybody, including native-speakers, could make". (Source: Bartram & Walton 1991: 20). (Further reference: Edge 1989:11)

Slips of brain: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*)

Slips of ear: (Addressee). The term points out to problems of auditory comprehension . In Psycholinguistics tradition, Garman 1990: 109), (see page 5). (The term is also quoted as a *modality error* in Eoghan Mac Aogain 1989:54).

Slips of the eye: (Addressee). (A *reading error* in Garman 1990:109), (see page 5).

Slips of the hand: (Addresser). The term covers both *writing* and *typing errors*. (Source: Garman 1990:152).

Slips of pen: (Addresser). "anything from letter-production errors that arise from momentary lapses in manual output, such as writing *-the* at the end of (intended) ...to grammatical and meaning-based errors, including leaving words out or writing the wrong words". (Source: Garman 1990:152).

Slips of tongue: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*). (Source: Garman 1990:152). (See page 5).

Slip-ups: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*). (See page 5).

Speech error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*). "Faults made by speakers during the production of sounds, words and sentences. Both native speakers and non-native speakers of a language make unintended mistakes when speaking". (Source: Richards 1985:266). (Further reference: Garman 1990) (See also anticipation error, perseveration error, reversal error and spoonerism).

Speech Modality error: (Addresser). "...errors caused by learners not knowing which words and structures to use in order to perform a specific speech act appropriately". (Source: Faerch, Haastrup & Phillipson 1984: 57).

Spoonerism: (Addresser). (Synonym of *reversal error*). “named after Dr Spooner, Warden of the New College, Oxford at the turn of the century, who was reputed to have made a good many of these errors...such as *I think he’s had a daw real (raw deal)*.” (quoted from Garman (1990:151).

Surface error: (Norm). “Classification of errors according to the ways the surface structure of the language is altered”. (Source: Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982: 281).

Translation error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*). “...any error which changes the desired response in an insignificant way. Most involve simple substitutions of one syntactically correct structure for another equally syntactically correct, albeit semantically incorrect, alternative. Most can be attributed to simple forgetting or lapses of attention and are, in this respect, comparable to Chomsky’s performance errors”. (Source: Taylor 105).

Transfer error: (Addresser). “Let us define transfer for the present as a psycholinguistic procedure by means of which L2 learners activate their L1 Knowledge in developing or using their interlanguage”. (Source: Faerch & Kasper 1987:112).

Tongue slips: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*), (see page 5).

Unsystematic error (Addresser).(Synonym of *mistake*). “...They are the slips of the tongue or pen caused purely by psychological conditions, such as intense excitement, and/or physiological factors, such as tiredness, which change from moment to moment and from situation to situation”.(Source: Jain 1974) (Further reference: Mac Aogain 1989:58).

Verbal lapses: (Addresser). (Synonym of *mistake*), (see page 8).

Unique goofs. (Addresser). Richards (1974) and Dulay and Burt (1974) define the terms as errors which cannot be categorised neither as *interference goofs* nor as *L1 developmental goofs*.

Writing error: (Addresser). (Synonym of *slips of the pen*). (Source: Garman 1990:152).

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