

Interlanguage Strategy of Overgeneralisation used by Primary School Learners of English in Meru West Division Meru County.

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ABSTRACT: English is used as a second language by many people in the world. In Kenya English plays a key role in the Country's educational system as a subject and also as a medium of instruction. But even though English has been accorded a prestigious position of being the official language and language of instruction, learners take time to learn it. A second language learner takes a linguistic journey from his/her mother-tongue to the target language and naturally constructs a personal linguistic system in the interim time which is different from the first language and also the target language called interlanguage. This paper examines the linguistic structures resulting from the interlanguage rule of overgeneralization of the English language features by the respondents. The study was carried out in Meru West Division Meru County. The study employed descriptive survey method of research. The target population comprised of class five pupils totaling to 720 and a sample size of 72 pupils was selected by the use of simple random sampling. Data was analyzed within the tenets of interlanguage theory. The study established that pupils develop a system for themselves in the process of learning English known as Interlanguage. This language is yet to conform to the English language and it has its own rules its phonological morphological and syntactic structures. The study, recommend improvement of quality of teacher competence in language teaching to equip the teachers of English with pedagogical linguistic principles for guiding the learners to organize the TL input logically. The study contributes to the scholarly, literature on interlanguage of second language English learners.

Key words: Interlanguage, overgeneralization, linguistic structures, target language, first language.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Interlanguage is the linguistic stage second language learners go through during the process of mastering a target language (Selinker 1972). In this research the target language is English. According to Selinker (1972) interlanguage is a temporary grammar which is systematic and composed of rules. These rules are the product of five central processes namely; overgeneralization, strategies of second language communication, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning and language transfer. English is increasingly being used in many countries as a second language while in others it is used as a foreign language (Cheshire, 1991). In Kenya English and Kiswahili are the official languages.

English is learnt and taught as a second language (ESL) in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic setting in Kenya where indigenous language show great linguistic diversity (Cheshire 1991). Odlin (1989) pointed out that feature, of syntactic problems among second language learners show wide variations from different ethnic communities. This observation is relevant in Kenya as learners of generate varieties of linguistic constructions which do not conform with the TL rules. A second language learner of English takes a linguistic journey from his/her mother tongue to the target language and naturally constructs a personal linguistic in the interim time.

The learners employ different second language learning strategies and processes relative to their respective first languages. This study examines overgeneralization as ones of the interlanguage strategies employed by the respondents and the linguistic structures developed as they apply this rule.

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization is the phenomenon when one overextends one rule to cover instances to which that rule does not apply; the learner shows evidence of having mastered a general rule but does not yet know all the

exceptions to that rule. Some of the rules of the Interlanguage system may be the result of the overgeneralization of specific rules and features of the target language. This phenomenon may appear in different aspects such as semantic, syntactic or morphological. The researcher picked the structures of the English language that primary school pupils in MiiirigaMieru West Division have over generalized and examine them. For example, learners may use the past-tense marker-ed for all verbs, regular and irregular alike: walked, wanted, hugged, laughed,*drinked,*hitted,*goed or extend the ``s'' morpheme for forming noun plurals to nouns which it does not apply (e.g. *sheeps).At the lexical level learners tend to use the base terms and to stretch them, thus a `goose' might be referred to a `chicken' or a teaspoon may be a `small spoon'.

Overgeneralization of I2 rules

Selinker (1972) identifies overgeneralization as one of the strategies used by second language learners in an attempt to gain confidence in the target language.

Tense Marking of Irregular Verbs

In constructing a sentence in English either written or spoken, tense plays a very important role. In English, each sentence is marked for tense. Tense is a verb form or verb phrase used to express a time relationship. The difference between a regular and an irregular verb is the formation of the simple past and past participle. Regular verbs are dependably consistent—the simple past ends in -ed as does the past participle. In contrast, the simple past and past participle of irregular verbs can end in a variety of ways, with absolutely no consistent pattern. The respondents used the past-tense marker-ed for regular and also for some irregular verbs alike. Where they were not aware of the past tense of irregular verbs, they overgeneralized the rule for the past tense formation in regular verbs, for example the addition of pastness morpheme (-ed) to the base verb. A number of examples can be cited in the respondents' narratives. In data presentation abbreviations OS,P and CF have been used. OS represents overgeneralized structures, P represents pupil and CF represents the correct form of the interlanguage structures.

OS Number 1

P. `*I waked up in the morning and weared my clothes.'

CF. I woke in the morning and wore my clothes.

OS Number 2

P. `*I taked my breakfast.'

CF. I took my breakfast.'

Verbs wake, wear and take fall in the category of irregular verbs that do not add -ed to form their past tense but instead undergo a vowel change. These verbs undergo internal morphological changes such that their pastness is not as predictable as in case of the regular verbs which take the past-tense morpheme (-ed). Thus the past tense of the irregular verbs wake, wear and take, is woke, wore and took, but the respondents marked the tense wrongly by adding -ed to the irregular verbs. Pupils extend the grammatical rule of tense marking of the regular verbs to the irregular verbs where the rule does not apply.

Some irregular verbs do not undergo any change to form their past but some respondents changed the irregular verbs as in the example below;

OS Number 3

P. `*I putted my things in my bag.'

C.F. I put his things in my bag.'

Put is an irregular verb that does not undergo any change to form the past. However in an attempt to learn English, the respondents wrongly formed the past tense of the verb by adding -ed.

Plural Marking of Nouns

Overgeneralised structures relating to the number system were identified in the respondents' use of the plural of invariable nouns. Some consistently added the plural morpheme (-s) to nouns that invariably occur in the plural. This resulted in incorrect plurals as shown in the following examples.

OS Number 4

P. `*Many peoples came for the wedding.'

CF. Many people came for the wedding.

In this sentence, the use of plural morpheme (-s) is a clear instance of zero form of pluralization makes the construction erroneous and unacceptable in English. In grammar, the zero plural is a plural form of a count noun that is identical to the singular form. Also called zero morphemes.

There was omission of plural marker (-s) where Interlanguage structures relating to the number system were also observed in the inflection of variable nouns for plurality. In many cases respondents failed to pluralize the singular noun. Examples from the data are as follows:

OS Number 5

P. *I saw two boy.

Instead of;

I saw two boys

In OS number 9, the plural form of the noun was substituted for the singular form.

Below is another example from the data of addition of the plural morpheme (-s) to an irregular noun with an unpredictable mode of plural formation from the recorded narratives.

OS Number 6

P.* I met two mens who asked me where the wedding was.

Instead of;

I met two men who asked me where the wedding was.

In overgeneralized structure 10 'men' is already in plural such that addition of (-s) is superfluous. Most of the overgeneralization structures in plural noun formation show that respondents apply the regular rules for forming plurals to uncountable nouns which in English do not have a plural form. The presented examples above of the role of overgeneralization as a strategy for the acquisition of noun morphology of the category of number in interlanguage of the respondents suggests that they follow the constraints of the target language and tend to apply the already acquired rules of grammar when they learn English. Tsevetchna (2011) explained that overgeneralization errors give the evidence of the fact that children L2 acquisition is governed by the rule types of the foreign language. The existence of incorrect plurals such as *tooths for teeth, *feets for feet, shows that the children have a command of the regular plural rule in English. Tsevhetchna further explained that the acquisition of noun morphology of the category of number in the L1 and L2 inter-languages of Bulgarian children, suggests that children follow the constraints of the language and tend to apply the already acquired rules of grammar when they form new plural forms of noun. His findings are related to the findings of this study.

Plurals for reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are pronouns that refer back to the subject of the sentence or clause. They either end in –self as in the singular form, or –selves as in the plural form. A reflexive pronoun is normally used when the object of a sentence is the same as the subject. Each personal pronoun (such as you and she) has its own reflexive form. Interlanguage structures produced related to the number system as observed in the data, was the overt inability by pupils to form plurals of the reflexive pronouns. As a result the following structures were produced:

OS Number 7 .

Instead of;

They cooked food themselves

OS Number 8

P.* After we had finished dressing ourself

Instead of;

After we dressed ourselves.

In the overgeneralized structures 11&12 the pupil did not apply the rule of formation of plurals for reflexive pronouns correctly. That is the reflexive pronouns should match with the subject of the sentence or clause in terms of either taking the singular form or the plural form.

Noun Formation

Word formation is the process of creating new words. Morphologically derivational suffix-er can be added to many verbs stems to create a noun with the meaning of a person or thing that performs the relevant action. For example, swim (m)+er, and run(n)+er. the respondents overgeneralized the derivational suffixes, applied the rule wrongly and produced the innovative words like:*cookers.

OS Number 9

*The cookers had prepared very good food

This pupil used *cookers to refer to people that cooked at the wedding.

Yusuf (2011) explained that learners come up with these new forms to enable communication of similar meanings when vocabulary is limited. He further explained that such overgeneralizations may indicate either a lack of understanding of restrictions on where forms can occur or a lack of knowledge of the morphemes needed in the context. In order to communicate the learners use what they already know based on a common function.

Respondents also added prefix un- to many verbs to denote the reversal of an action. For example;

OS Number 10

The vehicles *unappeared from the road... *to unappear is used here to mean that the vehicles left.

OS Number 11

The *talkers told them to cut the cake..... *talkers were used instead of the speakers.

According to the interlanguage theory this overgeneralization of word formation is used as a strategy by the pupils to come up with their own innovative words in order to overcome communication difficulty.

Grammatical Concord

In English grammar concord is another term for grammatical agreement between two words in a sentence. It means that certain grammatical items agree with each other in number or person. Lyons (1968) states that in many languages, the constituents of a particular syntactic construction are said to 'agree' or be in 'concord' with respect to such features as gender, number, case and person. It is important to note that this linguistic phenomenon applies to many languages, English included. In case of number concord in English the subject and the verb must agree in number. Person is marked by the subject of the sentence, while number is marked by the first verb in a complex verb group. Despite this concordal requirement in English it was observed in the data that some pupils failed to match the verb and the subject in terms of number. They failed to observe the principal of grammatical concord.

For example

OS Number 12

P. *The women was cooking food.'

C.F. The women were cooking food.

OS Number 13

P. 'The bride and the groom was happy.'

C.F. The bride and the groom were happy.

In OS Number 18 the plural subject 'The women, does not agree with the 'singular' past tense auxiliary verb 'was'. In OS Number 19 also the plural subject 'The bride and groom does not agree with the 'singular' past tense auxiliary verb 'was'. There is lack of subject-verb agreement in the learner's interlanguage and Hung (2012) explains that the lack of subject-verb agreement in the learner's interlanguage is exacerbated not only by the lack of subject-verb agreement in the learner's L1, but by the limited manifestation of S-V agreement in English (which occurs only with verbs in the present tense with singular 3p subjects, except the verb 'be'). Failure to observe this concordal requirement constitutes to the development of interlanguage structures. Hung's findings are similar to what was found out in this study as respondents generalized structures on the basis of a single rule of the target language, where there should be agreement in number between the subject and the verb in a sentence.

II. CONCLUSION

This study has established that learners use overgeneralization as a strategy of communication particularly in enabling them to participate in classroom discourse and when the learners were required to make spontaneous speech during academic lessons

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