The Analysis of Kurdish EFL Learners' Interlanguage

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Abstract:

This study tackles the content of interlanguage produced by Kurdish EFL learners. This new form of language is created by language learners during the stages of language learning. Interlanguage differs from native and target language because it is characterized by errors and deviations which are the benchmark of learners' progress. The study of interlanguage is crucially important because it discusses the performance of the second and foreign language learning on the one hand; it diagnoses the errors and non-errors on the other. The data of the study have been gathered from two groups of freshman and junior students in two different universities using two different tests; spoken and written tests. The main issue of the study is the investigation of errors found in Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage which can be restricted to morphological and syntactic errors. Thus, the study aims at providing a general account for the interlanguage and identifying the form of errors committed by Kurdish learners. The study concludes that the majority of Kurdish EFL learners frequently make morphological and syntactical errors due to the existence of some factors mainly the interference of Kurdish upon their interlanguage.

Key words: Interlanguage, language learning, English language, error, and fossilization.

Introduction:

The second language learning is more complicated than the first language acquisition because in the former, the learner's mind is influenced by the rules and regulations of two language systems, whereas in the latter, the learner's mind is affected by one language system. Thus, the learners are obliged to pick up a new style of language incorporating the features of both the native language and target language. However, it is definitely different from them; here a new language develops which is known as an interlanguage. The interest in the interlanguage is two-fold because it has been the subject of a research by linguists and researchers on the one hand; the teachers pay a great heed to the learners' errors and try to correct them on the other. Interlanguage is defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 267) as a kind of language produced by the second and foreign language learners who are in the process of language learning, it can be constrained by the same factors as the other languages. This definition obviously shows that interlanguage is a new version of language that results from the interaction of the learner's mother tongue with the target language. However, it is autonomous because it resembles neither of them.

Historically, the concept of interlanguage approximately refers to the middle of the twentieth century. Various terms have been adopted for the interlanguage, such as Interlingual (Weinreich 1953), Transitional competence (Corder 1967), Approximative system (Nemser 1971), Idiosyncratic dialect (Corder 1971), and Interlanguage (Selinker 1972). It is noteworthy that the term interlanguage has been accredited to Selinker; however, it is believed to have been coined by John Reinecke to mean "a non-standard variety of the second language which is a means for intergroup communication" (Rustipa, 2011, p. 17).

The emergence of interlanguage was a good alternative to the contrastive analysis and error analysis because they neither predicted the language learners' difficulties, nor could diagnose the learners' issues, that is why interlanguage prevailed. Interlanguage should work on the learners' utterances which are the raw material of interlanguage analysis. Tarone (2006, p. 749) is of the opinion that original data which can be used in analyzing interlanguage contain these actual utterances expressed by the language learners. These actual utterances incorporate a great deal of information about the nature of interlanguage system, they are different from these utterances uttered by the native speakers of the target language.

The learners' and native speakers' utterances are highly different in many perspectives. The learners' utterances are erroneous because they are influenced by the interlingual and intralingual factors. The former includes linguistic rules, features and structures of the learners' mother tongue whereas the latter incorporates the influence of different linguistic systems, rules and regulations of the target language (Al-Siadat, 2012: 19). Consequently, interlanguage is

constructed through the interference of mother tongue language and generalizations of the target language which is the third language. Here, three sorts of utterances exist:

1-Urrerances in the learners' native language expressed by the learner

2-Utterences of the target language expressed by the native speakers of that language

3-Interlanguage utterances expressed by the learner   (Selinker, 1972, p. 214)

Apparently the language learners' utterances do not resemble those of native speakers because the interlanguage utterances have suffered from errors and imperfect forms. The interlanguage utterances are fragmentary and incomplete since they include the errors of omission, addition, misinformation, and wrong order of the sentence elements (Eliassan, 1979, p. 165) which can be elucidated in the following.

 (1)   *The students very active.

 (2)   *My friend sended me a nice present.

 (3)   *These mans crossed the river in a hurry.

 (4)   *Tom does not know where is the swimming pool.

The above EFL learners' erroneous utterances indicate that the verb *be* has been left out in sentence (1). Sentence (2) includes the wrong addition of the past tense morpheme (-ed) whereas the verb is irregular. In sentence (3), the learner has no information on how to pluralize an irregular noun as *man*. Sentence (4) shows the wrong order of the subject and verb in an indirect question.

The interlanguage has many characteristic features; the following are the most crucially important ones (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 279):

1-The interlanguage production requires the tacit linguistic knowledge of the learners because they are unconscious of the rules and principles that guide the existence of interlanguage.

2-The interlanguage is systematic because the learners are consistent in using the target language rules, so interlanguage is rule-governed in nature. Hinderson (1985, p. 25) posits that "interlanguage evidences an integral consistency in the use of forms at a single point of time; it displays less stylistic variation".

3-The interlanguage is transitional because it is acquired in different stages through which the learners should pass to learn this new language. The learners' development through different learning stages is to move towards the proficiency of the target language. They start with a very simple form of the native language and increase the complexity of the interlanguage by addition, omission and changing rules.

4-The interlanguage is variable on account of the existence of many forms and shapes of the learner language. The variable form of interlanguage depends on the rules and structures used by the learners; they can use the same construction in various forms, some of which can be incorrect.

5-The interlanguage can be permeable because it has no stable form, it is affected by internal and external factors, such as first language interference, overgeneralization, etc. Thus, the learner language is dynamic and changing constantly.

6-The interlanguage development heavily depends on the use of different learning strategies. The type of strategy can be reflected in the production of interlanguage and it can affect even the type of the error committed.

7-The interlanguage can fossilize; this is the most prominent feature of interlanguage. Fossilization is the stabilization of the learner's errors and there will be hardly any possibility of further development. Thus, the forms, rules, and systems of interlanguage can be fossilized and they may not be eradicated. It may be manifested at all levels and stages of language learning.

Literature Review :

The investigation of the language learner's constructed language, namely interlanguage, indicates that this language has resulted from the interaction of the learner's native language with the target language. Thus, it may incorporate the properties of both languages, but it neither resembles the learner's native language, nor the target language. Mizuno (1986, p. 74) states that the interlanguage is recognized by a number of errors committed by the second and foreign language learners in almost all levels of language, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, etc. The interlanguage manifests that the learners have not arrived at an appropriate level of proficiency since their language suffers from many errors and irregularities.

Justifiably, interlanguage has become the topic of a great interest in the field of language learning. According to the idea of Firth (1978), the interlanguage theory assumes that the interlanguage is a new language constructed by learners which contains abundant incorrect forms and irregularities. These incorrect forms done by the language learners are regarded as errors in the target language. However, they are not regarded as errors in the field of interlanguage because these errors show an active performance and practice in learning the target language rather than punishing and penalizing the learners for committing the errors. Some of the errors include the following:

(5)   *Allen go to school every day.

(6)   *John is not knowing that person.

(7)   *The students did not answered the exam questions.

Basically, word order indicates that these sentences are structured well because the sentence elements are arranged well. However, they are ungrammatical due to incomplete uses of some rules. For instance, sentence (5) is an evidence for the omission of the third person singular morpheme {-s}, sentence (6) shows that the learner has not mastered the use of present continuous tense as he generalized using {-ing} to every verb. In sentence (7), the learner has not been acquainting with the negative form of the past simple tense. Thus, the interlanguage theory indicates that the errors are inevitable through which the learners step to approximate the target language.

In their study, Abbasi and Karimnia (2011) discussed the interlanguage including some grammatical errors committed by the Iranian students in translation. The participants were eighty junior and senior students of translation Department forty students from Azadi University and forty students from Payaminoor University. For this purpose, six kinds of different letters were given to the participants to be translated from Persian to English. The results of the study showed that more than 98 % students committed morpho-syntactic and lexico-semantic errors in their

translation of the formal letters. Thus, almost all the junior and senior students committed more than 12 types of various errors in translation.

In his view, Brown (2014) considers the development of the language learner's private language as an erroneous language since the learners commit various types of errors during their progress through the stages of language learning. There exist some stages of second or foreign language learning in the same way as the successive stages of the first language acquisition; they include pre-systematic stage, emergent stage, systematic stage, and post systematic stage. Each stage is recognized by some specific types of errors, such as:

(8)   *Tom prefers to be an engineer since he will studied for four years.

(9)   *The fat man is very difficult.

(10)   * The house is painting.

(11)   *The aroplane is flying on our city.

Variation can be justifiably conceived in the learner's interlanguage progression because some learners develop their interlanguage rapidly whereas some others show a gradual progress. Thus, interlanguage variation draws on the type of context, the type of task, tutored/untutored learning and the degree of exposure to the second language norms.

Fauziati and Maftuhin (2016) dealt with the interlanguage of the verb tense systems of the Indonesian learners of the English language. They analyzed the tense system of the verb to express past, present and future actions and states by the Indonesian EFL learners. The data of the study incorporated four hundred and forty four ungrammatical sentences from a free composition written by the Indonesian Learners. The participants were ninety students from the eleventh grade of a high school who studied English for six years.

The results of the study showed that the Indonesian EFL learners' interlanguage suffered from many deviations in expressing past, present and future. The learners formed their own verb system which was highly different from that of English language because they created many forms for the verbs which were non-existent in English.

Research Questions:

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1-Does the Kurdish EFL learners' first language have influence on their interlanguage? If yes, what type of influence does Kurdish language have on the Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage?

2-What type of errors do the Kurdish EFL learners frequently make while developing and communicating the target language?

Methodology

The methodology includes the participants, the instruments, and data analysis. The importance of methodology is to verify the hypotheses of the paper through identifying the various errors and then describing them efficiently so as to get the results. This is intrinsically both qualitative and quantitative study because the data obtained from the two tests have been analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively.

Participants:

In this study, forty Kurdish EFL learners were selected randomly from two different academic establishments; they were put into two groups of twenty students. The first group included twenty students of the first year in the Department of English \ International University of Erbil and the second group included twenty students of the third year in the Department of English/ College of Education / University of Raparin. The participants' age ranged from nineteen to thirty-five years. They are in academic setting studying for getting a four year bachelor degree in English language education and literature. In addition, there are 15 females and 25 males participated in the current study. Both of the groups were given the written and oral tasks to identify the type and frequency of errors committed by the students in speaking and writing, and the influence of first language in learning the target language.

Instrument:

The instrument consisted of two tasks; they were written and oral task. In the first one, the participants were asked to write an essay about their (likes and dislikes) in English in 20 minutes. The second one was an oral task, which contained some structured interview questions, the participants were asked to answer the questions in 20 minutes, and their answers were recorded to the purpose of analysis.

Instructional Setting :

This action research was conducted in two different departments; they are of the department of English in college of Education\ University of Raparin \ Qalladze Campus, which is a public university and the department of English in the International University of Erbil/ Erbil, which is a non-profit private university in Kurdistan-Iraq. More specifically, both departments follow a four year academic curriculum and the classes meet for five hours on daily basis, but Friday and Saturday.

Data Collection and procedures:

After identifying the task, the participants in the second group were asked to write an essay about their likes and dislikes. They had to do the task in 20 minutes because this amount of time was sufficient to do the task. After finishing the task, the papers were collected from them for checking the frequency, the type and the source of errors. Similarly, the participants in the first group were asked to answer some structured questions for about 20 minutes. Before answering the structured questions, the permission was taken from the participants to record their answers. Once the oral task was done by the second group participants and then the recorded answers were saved and checked by the researchers.

Data Analysis :

To analyze the data collected from the participants, the researchers recorded the resulting data and they identified various types of errors and categorized the errors based on the linguistic taxonomy of errors. Michalove et al. (1998, p. 457) state that linguistic taxonomy is a linguistic method of categorizing language phenomenon and constituents which is based on gathering the linguistic units and investigating their features sequentially, it exhibits the relationship tween language classes and constituents. The linguistic taxonomy classified the errors according to the grammatical categories.

This was to show that the percentage and the frequency of errors committed by Kurdish EFL learners and the first language influence on the Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage from both groups can be available. For this statistical

analysis, the researchers received some advice from two statistical advisors. Then, they used the percentage of each group's errors to make the results understandable as well. After collecting both, written and oral samples, identifying and categorizing the errors, the frequency and percentage of errors were administered so as to know the errors of which categories were committed most frequently by the participants. The percentage of each category was obtained by using the following formula (Keshavarz, 2014, p. 16):

Frequency of errors in each category

$$\overline{\hspace{5cm}} \times 100\%$$

Total number of errors

After conducting the calculation, the highest percentage of a particular category appeared, the linguistic categories have been arranged sequentially. Table 1 shows the identification for linguistic taxonomy of errors in both oral and written tasks. Table 2 demonstrates all the percentage of the committed errors in the written test whereas table 3 shows all the percentage of the errors committed by learners when morphology and syntax were concerned in both tests.

Table 1. The Identification for Linguistic Taxonomy of Errors in the Written and Oral Tasks

Linguistic taxonomy	Description
Errors in the use of articles	Omission of the definite article *the*
Wrong use of tenses.	Simple present tense instead of past continuous
Errors in the use of prepositions	Wrong use of preposition
Errors due to lack of concord	Lack of subject-verb agreement
Typical Kurdish constructions	Kurdish sentence construction in English
Wrong word order	Adjective and adverb wrong order
Errors in the use of third person singular	Omission of the third person singular morpheme

Results and discussion

This research worked over the Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage through the interference of their first language. The results showed that the Kurdish EFL learners' first language has a great influence on the production of interlanguage by investigating errors committed by the Kurdish EFL participants in various aspects of English

language. To clarify that, it is greatly considered that language learning, like acquiring any other learning aspects, takes in the committing of errors. Actually, people cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors. The learners get benefit from their first errors by using them to receive feedback from the environment and in turn use that feedback to test and change their hypothesis about the target language.

Table 2. The Frequency of Morphological and Syntactic Errors in Written Task

Morphological and syntactic errors	Number of errors	Percentage of Errors
Omission of the third person singular –s	14	8.75 %
Wrong use of prepositions	46	28.75%
Wrong use of adjective	15	9.37%
Subject-verb agreement	10	6.25 %
Errors in the use of articles	36	22.5 %
Wrong use of tenses	30	18.75 %
Typical Kurdish construction	9	5.62 %
Total	**160**	

Table 3. The Frequency of Morphological and Syntactic Errors in Oral Task

Morphological and syntactic errors	Number of errors	Percentage of errors
Wrong use of prepositions	25	25.25%
Wrong use of the third person singular-s	17	17.17 %
Wrong use of adjective	10	10.10 %
Subject-verb agreement	8	8.08 %
Errors in the use of articles	27	27.27 %
Wrong use of tenses	18	18.18 %
Typical Kurdish construction	6	6.06 %
Total	**99**	

Based on the analyzed data collected from both groups of participants, the results were surprising, because the interlanguage use by the participants was clear in various aspects of language learning namely in syntax and morphology. Justifiably the conditions that are required for the formation of interlanguage are available in Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage. The results also confirm that most of the committed errors were due to the influence of the Kurdish EFL participants' native language. As it is appeared in **table 2**, most participants in the written test used the prepositions mistakably while least of them committed errors in using the Kurdish constructions. Conversely, as shown in **table 3**, most of the participants in the oral test wrongly used the articles, whereas least of them used wrong Kurdish constructions in English. This can be apparently seen that the prepositions and articles are the most problematic language categories used by the Kurdish EFL learners'. The following are some examples of errors committed by the Kurdish participants.

Errors in the use of article "the"

(12)   a- * I love to see beach.

         b- I love to see the beach.

Errors in the use of prepositions

(13)   a- * I like to go to home when I finish my studying.

          b- I like to go home when I finish my studying.

Wrong use of adjective

(14)   a- ***** The color green is my favorite.

         b- The green color is my favorite.

Wrong use of tenses

(15)   a- * He will help you if you will ask him.

          b- He will help you if you ask him.

Wrong use of the third person singular -s

(16)   a-* But my friend like fish.

         b-But my friend likes fish.

Subject-verb agreement

(17)   a-* The author have many good works.

         b- The author has many good works.

Typical Kurdish construction

(18)   a-*   I like learn English in the courses learning English.

      b- I like to learn English in the English learning courses.

Wrong use of negative construction

(19)   a-***** He don't like playing soccer.

      b- He doesn't like playing soccer.

Furthermore, the findings from both **tables 2 and 3** showed that majority of the errors committed by the participants were because of their first language transfer or interference on the one hand and the Kurdish EFL learners' lack of knowledge about the target language on the other. Credible evidence showing the mother tongue influence is the use of adjective to modify nouns. In Kurdish language, the adjectives should follow the nouns in case of modification whereas in English the adjectives should precede the nouns for modification. The effect of mother tongue is quite clear in (14) because the adjective *green* should pre-modify the noun *color*, but it has post-modified the noun due to the influence of Kurdish, Thus, interlanguage could be produced in both mentioned situations.

To conclude, both **tables 2 and 3** verified that the Kurdish EFL learners are experiencing interlanguage use due to the interference or transfer of their first language. Thus, the research results confirm that the interlanguage use is inevitable in the EFL or ESL learning process by non-native speakers of English. Apparently, the Kurdish EFL learners' interlanguage suffers from various types of errors, such as the error of using articles, prepositions, the third person singular {–s}, wrong use of negation, adjectives, and tenses, as well as lack of agreement.

تحليل اللغة البينية الإنجليزية كاللغة الأجنبية عند طلاب الأكراد

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الملخص:

هذه الدراسة محاولة للبحث عن مكونات اللغة البينية التي تنتج عند طلبة الكرد أثناء محاولتهم تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وتولد هذه النوعية من اللغة الجديدة عندما يمرون بمراحل تعليم اللغة الأجنبية، وتختلف اللغة البينية عن لغة الأم واللغة الأجنبية؛ لأنها تعرف بمجموعة من الأخطاء التي تدل على تقدم المتعلمين، والبحث عن اللغة البينية مهمة جدا؛ لأنها تبحث عن ممارسة اللغة الأجنية من جانب، وتحدد أخطاء المتعلمين عند تعليمهم اللغة الأجنبية من جانب آخر، وأخذ استبىان هذه الدراسة من طلبة مرحلتي الأولى والثانية في جامعتي رابرين و هولير الدولي، وهذا من خلال امتحانين أحدهما شفهي والآخر كتابي، وتكمن مشكلة الدراسة في متابعة الأخطاء التي تقع فيها طلبة الكرد أثناء تعلمهم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الخاصة بالأخطاء الصرفية والنحوية. وهدف الدراسة هو البحث عن اللغة البينية وتحديد أهم الأخطاء التي تقع فيها طلبة الكرد أثناء تعلمهم اللغة الأجنبية. وتوصل البحث إلى أن معظم طلبة الكرد يقعون في الأخطاء الصرفية والنحوية أثناء تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية؛ وهذا لأسباب من بينهما تأثير اللغة الكردية على تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات الدالة : اللغة البينية، تعلم اللغة، اللغة الانجليزية، خطأ .

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