REVIEW

Errors as Indications of the Development of Interlanguage. Janusz Arabski. Katowice: Uniwersytet Slaski, 1979. 122 pp.

In the past ten to twenty years, the field of second language acquisition has undergone many changes. In *Errors as Indications of the Development of Interlanguage,* Arabski provides the reader with an excellent and comprehensive review of recent developments in the field. In addition, he presents data from 169 Polish students acquiring English in an EFL setting, establishing a detailed typology of errors produced by these students.

One of the major strong points of this book is the wealth of data presented, particularly since the data are from a language (Polish) which is only rarely cited in the second language acquisition literature. To gather the data, Arabski examined compositions of 169 Polish students learning English. There were approximately equal numbers of low, intermediate, and advanced students as determined by teachers' grades and the researcher's judgment. Students wrote two sets of compositions on the same topic, one in Polish and one in English. Additionally, after a time lapse of one week, the students translated their Polish compositions into English. Interestingly, there were no more transfer errors in the translated set than in the compositions written directly in English. This is particularly noteworthy since it has generally been felt that a translation task is more likely to produce transfer errors than other types of data gathering tasks. However, one explanation for the lack of difference in transfer errors might lie in the ordering of the composition writing. Since the English compositions were written immediately after the Polish compositions and on the same topic, it is likely that there was some residual effect of what had been written in Polish on the writing of the English compositions. Hence, the effect of the native language was similar in both the translated and the nontranslated compositions, the difference being that in the former it was direct and in the latter indirect.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter alone is enough to justify the inclusion of this book in every serious applied linguistics collection. This chapter is an excellent summary of past discussions on interlanguage, transfer, and errors. It should prove especially valuable to a student seeking to become familiar with the field. The bibliography is extensive. However, one could wish for more citations of studies concerned with a language other than English as the target language.

Chapters 2 through 7 present the results of Arabski's analysis of errors of the Polish students. The error types considered are: lexical errors (Chapter 2), prepositional errors (Chapter 3), article and pronoun errors (Chapter 4), verbal errors in tense, mood and their forms (Chapter 5), word order errors (Chapter 6), and morphological errors (Chapter 7). Since the source of data was compositions, phonological data were not included although mention is made throughout the book of spelling errors which reflect phonological problems. In Chapter 8 Arabski presents his general conclusions. An appendix is given with examples of compositions (in Polish, in English, and translated from Polish) of students of all three proficiency levels.

One of the most impressive aspects of these chapters is the thoroughness of analysis and the wide range of data presented. The presentation itself is concise and well laid out. There are a number of tables, charts, and summaries which make the discussion easy to follow.

As an example of the type of data given, consider the results presented in Chapter 4 concerning pronouns, genitive and demonstrative article errors:

1.   omission of genitive and demonstrative articles

     I would like to finish *studies* (p. 58)

2.   underdifferentiation between definite, genitive and demonstrative articles

     I cannot find time for *the* private life. (p. 59)

3.   using L1 constructions with primary counterparts and primary grammatical forms

     Mine way is to get a university education (p. 61)

4.   overusing genitive and demonstrative articles

     I do not reject *my* family life as it is also very important for me (p. 60)

For each error type, numerous examples are given with a discussion and subsequent justification of the probable source of the error. Additionally, Arabski provides detailed descriptions of relevant aspects of Polish to enable the reader to easily follow his discussion. Following the discussion are summary tables of all error types with percentages given for each of the three proficiency levels. Thus, the reader is given easy-to-read charts showing which errors increase or decrease as a function of proficiency. These results should be especially important in the rapidly growing area of developmental analyses of transfer.

The native speaker judgments with regard to acceptability of English sentences seem somewhat conservative. The sentences cited as examples of error types are cited in isolation so that readers are unable to determine for themselves the possible acceptability of the sentences in a discourse context. As an example, a student wrote, "I love my girl and my girl loves me" (p. 63) which was claimed to be unacceptable with the correct form being "I love my girl and she loves me." There is no reason to believe, however, that the conservative nature of these judgments skews the results in any meaningful way since most errors given in the book were unquestionably infelicitous regardless of context.

There are some areas in which it would be useful to extend the results. First, there are no statistical analyses. The author talks of the tendency of errors to increase or decrease, but in the absence of rigorous statistical analyses it is not possible to determine the significance of these trends. Second, in the absence of similar data from learners of other languages, it is impossible to *prove* that the errors Arabski considers as transfer from Polish really are (see Gass, forthcoming). It must be demonstrated that other learners, such as Japanese, for example, do not make equivalent errors in the same distribution. A third extension involves Arabski's notion of a primary variant. He noted that where there are many target language translations for a native language item, one target language item, the primary variant, is most commonly used in rendering the functions of the native language item. He suggests that primary variants can be determined on a statistical basis, identifying as primary variants those variants which occur most frequently. One problem with this, which he also recognizes, is that what is most frequent for the language as a whole is not necessarily the most frequent in the limited corpus of the language a learner has been (actively) exposed to. This is of course particularly true in acquisition in a foreign language setting. Moreover, we suggest that there is a deeper explanation for the statistical distribution: the primary variant corresponds to the semantically most basic variant. We suggest that it is this semantic basis that leads learners to choose primary variants. We consider these remarks to represent potential extensions of this research in the future, not objections to it as it stands.

In conclusion, this book is valuable in several ways. ESL teachers could benefit from the examples of errors and the general discussions. Anyone interested in second language acquisition research could benefit from the extensive review of the literature and the thorough, concise, easily readable data presentation.

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REFERENCE

Gass, Susan. Forthcoming. An investigation of syntactic transfer in adult L2 learners. In Scarcella and Krashen (eds.), *Research in Second Language Acquisition.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.