

The Interlanguage Development of Five Korean English Learners

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Kil, Insook. 2003. **The Interlanguage Development of Five Korean English Learners.** *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 11(4), 247-264. Anyone who has learned English will wonder whether Koreans learning English make common errors and whether the errors are temporary or not. In this study, three types of errors were examined; word-order errors - inversion of the order fixed to Korean structure; the errors of co-occurring articles - juxtaposition of articles and other determiners; and overgeneralization - excessive use of wrong expressions. Five Korean adult immigrants in the U.S. took part in this study. The errors they made were analyzed through their writing samples they submitted. The findings showed that word-order errors decreased little by little, but overgeneralization increased in number. That was partly because the learners tried to apply what they learned in the class to their writing. Interestingly, the errors of co-occurring articles sharply decreased since the students memorized the rule that articles do not exist with other determiners in English. The errors the learners made went through a certain developmental process, which was on the continuum of interlanguage. The main concern of this study is interlanguage development of adult Korean learners of English, and it will cover EFL and ESL situation.

Key words: interlanguage, second language acquisition, language error, and overgeneralization

1. Introduction

Anyone who has ever needed to communicate with a non-native speaker, or has simply heard one speak, must have at some point wondered at the style of speaking they were hearing. What accounts for

those peculiarities? Why do they seem to make the same mistakes over and over even though they know what is correct and are trying their best? In order to understand why learners use the target language in the way they do, we need to understand the concept of interlanguage and the processes by which interlanguages are formed.

As a fruit of the theoretical attacks on a behaviorist view of language acquisition as habit formation (Chomsky, 1957), and the reassessment of errors for a better interpretation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Corder, 1967), 'interlanguage' (Selinker, 1972) has become a key concept in the revised thinking on language learning processes in SLA. SLA has now come to be viewed as a series of developing systems which constitutes the interlanguage continuum. This continuum was initially seen as a restructuring continuum ranging from the learners first language (L1) to the target language.

In this study, brief history about the concept of interlanguage and previous studies were reviewed. Then the concept was examined in a real situation where five adult Koreans learned English in the U.S. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the errors that adult Korean learners of English made had a relationship with the interlanguage process. The research questions were: (1) What kinds of error do adult Korean learners of English make as they acquire English in the beginning level? (2) Whether those errors are temporary or not.

2. The meaning of errors in second language acquisition

2.1. Interlanguage

Before 1970, SLA research was dominated by contrastive analysis research. The purpose of this research was to test the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis that learner's errors could be predicted on the basis of differences between the learner's first language and the target language. Linguists such as Robert Lado (1957) and Charles Fries (1952) compared languages to see what the differences were and then used those data to predict the transfer errors learners would make. It

was hoped that the data from linguists could eventually be used to help design special drills and exercises that would help learners learn the accurate use of second languages but not make any errors while doing so. The prevailing view of errors at that time was that errors were bad habits that must be broken and negative transfer that highlighted interfering elements of native language (L1). Experts felt that errors had to be avoided, even in the course of learning, and for decades SLA researchers worked toward this goal.

By 1970, it was clear that contrastive analysis could not predict the errors learners would make; therefore, researchers concluded that they must be some other processes involved in second language learning besides interference. As researchers discovered many errors that were clearly not due to interference, it is assumed that there must be other sources of errors besides the first language. Researchers then, shifted their focus from predicting errors based on contrasting languages to classifying the various kinds of errors they saw learners making. It was hoped that by studying the various types of errors that learners made at various stages of learning, researchers could get a clearer view of the second language learning process. Thus, error analysis, the study of learner language for the purpose of classifying errors and identifying their sources, emerged as the dominant SLA research.

Whereas contrastive analysis was based only on the assumption that errors were all due to first language interference and were somehow harmful to the learner's development, error analysis was based on the assumption that errors were a natural and healthy part of the language learning process, a natural by-product of the learners, and a step-by-step discovery of the second language rules through a process of trial and error. A number of terms have been made to describe the new concept that stressed the learner's second language systems. The best of these was interlanguage, a term that Selinker (1972) adapted from Weinreichs (1953) 'interlingual'.

Interlanguage is a term that refers to the integrated system of knowledge about the target language that the language learners are constructing in their minds. It is very similar to the concept of

competence in that it is the learner's internalized and systematic knowledge or ability to use the target language to communicate. In fact, it could be considered a kind of competence. It differed from the general concept of competence, however, in the fact that the term, interlanguage, implies that the internal language system is still unfinished. It is a work in progress. Whereas competence could refer to a native speaker, interlanguage is only used to describe a learner's incomplete knowledge in a second language. The learner is trying to construct a system of second language competence but still has not acquired all the target language rules. Interlanguage also implies that the learner's first language is playing a role in this process. Although the interlanguage is a separate system from the first language competence, it still shares certain characteristics of the first language. Likewise, the interlanguage is also not exactly the same system as the second language but shares some of its characteristics too. In that sense, it can be seen to be somewhere between the two languages an interim language system, slowly progressing away from the first language system and moving towards being a closer approximation of the second language system, as Nemser (1971) stressed this process in his term 'approximative system'. This forward movement is made as the learners discover the rules of target language through a process of creative construction.

2.2 Previous research about interlanguage

Many researches regarding interlanguage has been studied. Huang (1970) noted that Paul, a five year-old Chinese child acquiring English, having no articles in his L1, initially employed deictic determiners, usually demonstrative adjectives (e.g. this house), as the first approximation to definite articles in the L2. In contrast, Guero, a three year-old Spanish-speaking child, whose L1 had an article system, used the English definite article as early as the first appearance of deictic (Hernandez-Chavez, 1977). Also, Mizuno (1985) investigated the errors of Japanese in the use of articles. He suggested, in the acquisition of English articles, Japanese adult learners demonstrated the following

constraints: (1) confusion between the concept of zero and nil; (2) ignorance of the concept of the zero article in English; (3) a lack of awareness of the boundary between the discrete and continuous attributes of nouns; (4) limited opportunity for practice and exposure to meaningful expressions in English and the authentic rhythms of English in everyday life; and (5) a complete lack of awareness of deictic factors which constrain the article used. Mizuno (1990) claimed that the process of interlanguage which the adult learners of the same native language background followed regardless of their age, sex, and educational background, was basically the same.

As in the research, L1 - L2 differences did not alter the developmental sequence but delayed passage through it. That is, language learners could not simply acquire every rule that they had been taught in a class or seen in books. Likewise, they didn't simply acquire every form they heard in their input. New forms entered the integrated system in stages. Forms such as grammar, structure and idioms were incorporated piece by piece into the larger integrated system of the interlanguage, until they could be internalized.

3. Methodology

3.1. The participant

Five adult Korean learners took part in this study. Among eleven students at a local Community College, Maryland, U.S.A., five students were Korean. Their ages were between 35 and 45, two were female and three were male. They have been living in the U.S. for 2 to 4 years. They had college level education from Korea prior to immigrating to live in the U.S. They had daily contact with Americans at their workplaces but their English proficiency was not fluent enough to express their full opinions. For that reason they came to study English at their local Community College. Their common goals were to improve their English language skills. Table 1 below shows the summary of the information about the participants.

Table 1. The information about the participants

Name	Age	Gender	Residence in the U.S.	Job in the U.S.	Educational level
Minn	35	female	3 years	cashier	college
Bae	42	male	2 years	mechanic	college
Kyu	45	male	4 years	business	college
Park	42	female	3 years	housekeeper	college
Hyun	41	male	4 years	business	college

3.2. Procedures and Data

I have been teaching English reading and writing to immigrants at the local Community College in Maryland, U.S.A. The class is two hours twice a week. The data were collected during summer semester from May 20 to August 13, 2003. I gave the students writing homework with a topic every week. To examine what kind of common errors they made, I followed Mizuno (1986)'s article study in which he established there were at least five types of errors in the use of articles that Japanese learners are likely to make: the errors of co-occurring articles - juxtaposition of articles and other determiners; word-order - inversion of the order of articles and succeeding adjectives; underextension - omission of articles; overextension - 'the' use of articles instead of 0; and substitution - 'a' used instead of 'the' or vice versa.

However, I chose three types of errors among the five because this study did not focus on articles. The three types of errors used in this study were word-order errors - inversion of the order fixed to Korean structure, the errors of co-occurring articles - juxtaposition of articles and other determiners, and overgeneralization - excessive use of wrong expressions. Also, three writing samples were analyzed, each of which were handed in at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester.

4. Results and Discussion

When the participants came to learn English reading and writing at the Community College, they did not have confidence in English, even though they had contact with Americans on a daily basis at their workplaces. Their common problems in English were their word order and grammatical knowledge of English was not built completely. That is, they needed to establish English competence with which they could use English in an accurate way. For this reason, I guided them to read authentic English materials and to write down their thoughts. Also, I taught them English structure since English structure (SVO) was different from the Korean structure (SOV). I gave feedback by correcting their errors in the writing homework. For this study, I picked out three writing samples of five Korean students through which I tried to examine what errors appeared repeatedly.

4.1. Quantitative analysis of writing samples

I counted how many errors they made in the writing and compared with each other in order to examine whether the number of errors sharply decreased or not, and which error was predominant. The following table shows the errors in the first writing sample which was done at the beginning of the semester.

Table 2. The errors in the first writing sample

	Number of errors				
	Minn	Yun	Kyu	Park	Hyun
Word-order errors	4	5	5	4	4
Errors of co-occurring articles	4	3	3	4	3
Overgeneralization	0	0	2	0	2

In the first writing sample, many of the mistakes involved word-order

errors and the errors of co-occurring articles. In the beginning of the semester, overgeneralization errors were few. Most word-order errors resulted in Korean structure that was different from English. The participants put English words in Korean structures. Also, article and possessive pronouns were coexisted in their sentences.

Table 3. The errors in the second writing sample

	Number of errors				
	Minn	Yun	Kyu	Park	Hyun
Word-order errors	3	1	3	2	0
Errors of co-occurring articles	2	2	2	2	4
Overgeneralization	2	2	2	5	0

The second writing sample was done at the middle of the semester. Word-order errors and article errors decreased in number but they still existed. In Hyun's writing, there were no word-order errors and overgeneralization since he followed my direction that they should make sentences reflected by patterns or structures such as 'give something to somebody'. The number of overgeneralization increased remarkably because the participants learned grammar like gerund and the agreement between the third singular person and its verb and applied the knowledge to their sentences.

Table 4. The errors in the third writing sample

	Number of errors				
	Minn	Yun	Kyu	Park	Hyun
Word-order errors	1	1	4	2	4
Errors of co-occurring articles	3	1	2	1	3
Overgeneralization	1	5	3	1	2

The third writing sample done at the end of the semester showed what difference there was, compared with the first one. Even though the errors still existed, the number decreased except overgeneralization. The following showed the participants writing samples based on the tables above.

4.2. Descriptive analysis of writing samples

The writing samples below show the errors in the first writing sample done at the beginning of the semester. The topic was why they came to the English class.

- Word-order errors are underlined with *
- Overgeneralization is underlined with !
- Errors of co-occurring articles are underlined with &

The first writing samples

- Minn

Because I want study English. I want better English. I wich very will speak English*. I live in the America&. My son do good English*. I want to a very nice& English. I want my son help* his a homework&. I need a your help&. Everybody want good English study*.

- Yun

Because I have to do. I need more bether then talk and read. I went good learn*. When I talk somebody, nice talk*. One day my wife me a& talking* about the English my& study. I think a this& class is good. My hope is good speak English*. I went nice listen* too.

- Kyu

I'd like to study detail grammar! and detail structure!* and detail skill speaking English*. I want make my self in English more detaily. I have a my own& store. I'd like to good speaking English* to the many

customers&. I'd like to well do* in English. So detail grammar need*.
The my& customers are American.

• Park

I won to the my start more English&. I like this class. I am ok. I want speaking more hi*. When I go to the supermaket, I want English talking*. I want do refund*. I need English talk* because I live in America. My a &husband talk the my& study. I want the many friend&.

· Hyun

I want my family with talking. I don't English well* so I want English very well*. I must be good speak to English! and conversation to! my family. The my family& want my good English*. A my friend& talk this class. The my friend& say I am ok here. But I don't English nice*. So I want good English study.

As examples of overgeneralization, Hyun used to-infinitive pattern too often. For example, 'I must be good speak to English' and 'conversation to my family'. Another examples of the overgeneralization were in Kyu's writing. He used the word 'detail' too often. In Park's writing, article 'the' and possessive adjective my coexisted. Many students made mistakes that they used article with possessive adjectives. As Mizuno (1990) claimed adult learners of the same native language background made basically the same errors at the early stage of language learning. Word-order errors were related to Korean word order such as 'I want English hear and speak well', 'good learn', and 'I don't English well'. These word-order errors reflected Korean structure and meaning.

The second writing sample

• Minn

My friend wants go warm spring. His younger brother wants go to

warm spring, too. They both go to warm spring some day. The family want gos to! warm spring. This a map& show direction. We drives! to the there &.

I like shopping and golf on weekend, but my husband doesn't like both. I like sleep and do new style cooking* on holiday. My son do good cooking*. He want help. My daughter like outside play*. She doesn't like inside. I like both.

• Yun

We both play play Station 2 game. I play Play Station 2 game everyday, but she doesn't. We both are going to shopping. My wife spend a lot of money, but I don't. We both likes! fishing. I catches! about 10 fishs, but the my son& doesn't. A my friend& and me like eat fish. We both eat fish, but my wife don't. My wife like money, but me want do game*.

• Kyu

They are breath! by lung in the water. They can long time hold a breath* on the water. They are swim couple, rarely alone and make a group. The those group& swim nice*.

Those are live! around on the trees and in the forest. They are talking each other early in the morning when we sleep in bed. We say that they sing a song, chattering or they are crying. People want the those& music listen* in the morning.

• Park

I will watching! TV and listening radio at the this weekend&. My husband will watching! TV too. My son will playing! video game. At the this& weekend we will playing! to the park*. We will enjoying! watch beautiful mountain. To the park*we have good time.

- Hyun

My brother give a shoes to his friend. It is a black and neat shoes. My friend send some books to me. Those the books& are very interesting and useful. His a friend& son have a new computer. That is a white color and several function computer. I get a car. My a car& is automatic. My friend have a new pen. I like a his new pen&. I send a card to my teacher. She smile.

The second writing sample was done at the middle of the semester. Compared with the first writing samples, word-order errors decreased a little because I assigned the participants some patterns. For instance, I gave them an assignment that they should write their own examples about 'I like(play) but somebody doesn't' or 'give(send) something to somebody', as seen in Hyun's writing. Specifically, the number of overgeneralization increased since they tried to apply what they learned in their writing. For instance, after learning the agreement between the 3rd person singular pronoun and its verb, Yun sometimes wrote sentences like 'We both likes fishing' and 'I catches about 10 fish'. The example of word-order error was 'They can long time hold a breath on the water'. This also was based on Korean structure. In Hyun's writing, the errors of co-occurring articles were observed too often, such as 'My a car is automatic' and 'I like a his new pen'.

The third writing sample

- Minn

This word has seven letters. 1st one is W letter and last one& is E. There are two E letters, one is behind the first letter and second one& position* located at the last letter and center of the word is C.

Last Sunday I went to Virginia. My husband and I enjoyed the Virginia Beach. One of my a friend& came to meet us. Today I will called! to say thank you to her.

• Yun

My wife running! every morning, but I don't. My son watching! TV every night, but we doen't! My mom working! at a her yard& yesterday, but I don't. She help want*, but nobody doen't.

I like action movies. You look like a movie actor. There are many peoples! to like action movies. I want to go Hollywood. I want to see the movie.

• Kyu

Hi teacher. How are you today? It very good today for a talk a walk& with girl or boy classmate.

I think a his wife& has gloomy, because her! want to go for Bible trip to Jerusalem, but her husband disagree about it even though he has enough money. I think her! angry to him*. So I advice to him* you do better go to mission trip with her as soon as possible.

I think most of people can't continue daybreak worship because they think too tirded get up* early birds!, but I think that is not true, as my idea, if someone do it will not be feel tirded get up daybreak*. Anyone can feel the Holy spirit from the Load, your life will be change to hope and hope.

• Park

M is located at before the last word. L is between the E and the center letter C. O is next the middle of the letter. Can you guess the word?

I went playing! in the park. Me and my son played there. Those a park& in here are wonderful. I like Maryland. I live in the middle of Maryland. I am happy because here*. But people missing* is a trouble.

• Hyun

There are seven letters in this a word&. Two E letters, one is before the last letter R, the another& one is behind the 1st letter T. C letter is

located in the middle of the word. H is the between& the C and E. A letter is before the middle of the word.

English makes me hard*. A little time I study English*.

I have five plant at home. They are beautiful. I have fiveeten rings! at drawer. I have six channel on TV. I like TNT channel. I have give! sixteen flowers to my son. I want him liking* flowers.

Teacher, I don't know the grammar right or not. I hope you talk about it why wrong sentence structure*.

The third writing sample was almost at the end of the semester. Although the participants practiced English structures and extended the knowledge that they learned to their real lives, they still made word-order errors, the errors of co-occurring articles, and overgeneralization. Rather, the frequency of overgeneralization appeared much higher than that in the beginning of the semester. The instance of overgeneralization in vocabulary was seen to use plural word 'people' as in 'There is very many peoples'. Takashima (1992) reported an example of a 6 year-old learner of English characterized by the same error: 'There's some more peoples'. The errors of co-occurring articles sharply decreased at this stage as a result of explicit learning. However, in Hyun's writing, he overgeneralized the articles: 'this a word', 'the another one', and 'the between'. Compared to Hyun's, Minn's article use was inconsistent. For example, Minn wrote 1st one, last one, the first letter, second one, and the last letter. That is, she used the article the before nouns and missed it before pronouns.

As seen Yun's writing, another examples of overgeneralization in syntax were 'My wife running every morning, but I don't.' and 'My son watching TV every night'. However, in spite of the writing of the same learner, where the first and the second singular pronoun like 'I' or 'you' were used, he wrote the sentences correctly: 'I like action movies' or 'You look like a movie actor'. Hanania (1974) reported examples of an Arabic adult who was in the early stages of her

acquisition of English: a. He's sleeping. b. She's sleeping. c. It's raining. d. He's eating. e. Hani watch TV (Hani is watching TV). f. Read the paper (He is reading the paper). g. Drink the coffee (He is drinking the coffee). Concerning these examples, Hanania claimed that this learner created a system where the progressive is used only when there was no overt direct object (examples a - d). When the direct object was present, the present tense form was used (examples e - g). This meant that the centrality of the learner was implied in the concept of interlanguage process, rather than the influence of the teacher, textbook, or materials.

The resulting data provides a clear support for the claim by Mizuno (1990) that adult learners of the same native language background made basically the same errors, especially at the beginning level. Word-order errors were usually made since the structures of target language were different from those of L1. Also, the more the number of overgeneralization, the more the learner knew the L2 knowledge. According to the study of Mizuno (1999), overgeneralization persistently remained even at the early intermediate level. However, the errors of co-occurring articles decreased in number at the end of the semester. Conscious learning and repetition were seemed to contribute to decrease the error.

5. Conclusion

The primary goal of the present study was to investigate what errors the five adult Korean learners of English made when they acquired English as a second language. Also, whether the errors that they made were temporary were examined. In this study, I chose three kinds of errors among the five by Mizuno (1986)'s article study: word-order errors - inversion of the order fixed to Korean structure; the errors of co-occurring articles - juxtaposition of articles and other determiners, and overgeneralization - excessive use of wrong expressions. The five Korean learners of English were students of a local Community College, Maryland, U.S.A. from May 20 to August 13, 2003. The writing samples

that they submitted as homework were used for analysis of the errors. Compared with the first writing sample, the second one showed that word-order errors and the errors of co-occurring articles decreased in number, but overgeneralization increased. For the reason, the students tried to apply what they learned in the class to the writing. In the third sample, word-order errors still existed but the number decreased. On the contrary, overgeneralization increased, and the phenomenon persistently remained even at the early of the intermediate level. Interestingly, the errors of co-occurring articles sharply decreased because the students memorized the rule that articles do not exist with other determiners in English. However, as in Minn's writing, she created a system where the article 'the' is used only before nouns; 'the first letter' vs. 'first one'. This phenomenon was implied in the interlanguage process.

Thus, the five Korean learners made common errors in English at the beginning level. The errors they made showed that the learners went through a developmental process. Their acquisition of the target language must be on the continuum of the interlanguage. Foreign language or second language learners, especially adult learners, cannot acquire the principles of the target language that native speakers intuitively grasp until they try to make a logical analysis. Therefore, language teachers should consider what stage the learners are at and help them to go through the process until the learners can internalize the target language rules.

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