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**Dissecting Delivery: Speaking Error / Mistake Analysis of
 an Intermediate to Advanced Learner of English as a Second Language**

David Penner, June 22, 2006

Whether because of first language interference, overgeneralization, or an incomplete mastery of grammatical structures, second language learners invariably make mistakes and errors when they speak. Some linguists differentiate between mistakes and errors. Mistakes are random; errors are somewhat systematic. By analyzing those errors and mistakes and understanding why they occur, it becomes possible to fix them. Over a period of three days, I recorded the mistakes of my wife, Ryu Yun Jung (Christine Penner), a Korean with an intermediate to advanced level of English speaking, chose ten mistakes that offered a wide variety of analysis, and presented the results in table form:

Corpora of Spoken Language Errors and Assumed Target Utterances	Linguistic Level and Description of Error	Linguistic Description of Target Construction	Why the Error Occurred Does this Error Indicate Progress in Learning?
Spoken error: Tommy will come 6:30. Assumed Target Utterance: Tommy will come at 6:30.	Syntactic error – omission of position indicating preposition, at.	In English syntax, announcements of time require a preposition, such as <i>at</i> or <i>by</i> .	First language interference Literal translation from Korean to English: <i>Tommy-nun</i> (subject with subject marker) <i>yosotshiban-e</i> (6:30 with postposition marking time) <i>ulkoya</i> (come with

			<p>future inflection)</p> <p>In Korean, time is signaled with a postposition (-e). “Mental gymnastics” are required to not only translate, but also to move the position of the marker from after the mention of time to before it.</p>
<p>Spoken error:</p> <p>We have towel a lot.</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance:</p> <p>We have a lot of towels.</p>	<p>Syntactic errors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mis-ordering - omission of the content indicating preposition, <i>of</i>. <p>Morphological error – no pluralization of the countable object.</p>	<p>In English syntax, modifiers, such as <i>a lot of</i> and <i>soft</i>, go before nouns.</p> <p>To indicate pluralization, countable objects, such as towels or bunches, are suffixed with <i>s</i> or <i>es</i>.</p>	<p>First language interference</p> <p>Literal translation from Korean to English:</p> <p><i>Uri-nun</i> (We with subject marker) <i>sugun-i</i> (object, towels, with object marker) <i>mana</i> (object modifier, a lot)</p> <p>In Korean, the sentence order is Subject (covert), Object, Object Modifier, Verb (covert).</p> <p>In Korean, there are no plural markers – amounts are implied from context. It is difficult to remember to add –s.</p>
<p>Spoken error:</p> <p>He thinks I’m untrustable.</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance:</p> <p>He thinks I’m untrustworthy.</p>	<p>Lexical error – although comprehensible, <i>untrustable</i> is not a word. The wrong derivational suffix has been applied.</p>	<p>The verb to adjective changing derivational suffix, –<i>worthy</i>, is losing its productivity, and is less common than the adjective creating suffix, –<i>able</i>.</p>	<p>Overgeneralization of common adjectival derivational affix.</p> <p>This mistake demonstrates the student’s knowledge of –<i>able</i>’s high productivity. Memorization of less productive affixes, however, is necessary.</p>

<p>Spoken error: I [ont] do that.</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance: I [wont] do that.</p>	<p>Phonetic Error – substitution of non-native L2 sound, [wo], with L1 sound, [o].</p>	<p>To produce [wo], speakers must simultaneously raise the back of the tongue to the velum and round the lips, and then slightly open the mouth and lower the tongue.</p>	<p>Although native speakers of English in the telegraphic stage often substitute liquids with lateral glides, as in [kwo] instead of [kro], to name the bird, the sound combination, [wo], is not used in Korean.</p> <p>Korean speakers have the muscular development to make this sound, since their phonemic base includes the sounds [we], [wa], [wu], and [o]. The sound, [wo], however, is not natural to say or to remember to say.</p>
<p>Spoken error: Every your socks was kind of upside down.</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance: Every one (All) of your socks are inside out.</p>	<p>Syntactic error – omission of preposition, <i>of</i>. Also, <i>Every your</i> seems like a combination of <i>Every one of your</i> and <i>All of your</i>.</p> <p>Morphological error – singular past tense form of the verb, <i>to be</i>, instead of the plural form, <i>were</i>.</p> <p>Lexical error -</p>	<p>The preposition <i>of</i> connects modifiers, such as <i>all</i> and <i>some</i>, with nouns, such as in the sentence, <i>Some of the berries were eaten</i>.</p> <p>When objects are pluralized, there must be proper verb agreement, such as in sentences, <i>The</i></p>	<p>The student is competent with verb agreement, but the rules are still difficult to automatically apply.</p> <p>This strategy of communication demonstrates improvement, as the student is conscious of the existence of the desired word, and is describing it with her available lexical inventory. It is obvious</p>

	substitution of terminology, <i>inside out</i> with explanation of terminology, <i>kind of upside down</i> .	<i>raisins were tasty</i> , or, <i>The boy plays nicely</i> .	that she wants to find out the new word. It is not uncommon to hear students combine two set sentence structures to create one anomalous one.
Spoken error: That is sucks! Assumed Target Utterance: That sucks!	Incomplete mastery - She analyzes <i>sucks</i> as an adjective, not as a third person inflected verb, and therefore, adds the word, <i>is</i> , like she would for the sentence, <i>That is crass</i> .	The student must remember that when verbs are adjectivalized, the derivational suffix, <i>y</i> , is usually added, such as in the word, <i>sucky</i> .	This demonstrates the student's attempt to use slang, and to sound natural in casual situations. It shows her desire to mimic native speakers, not just gaining knowledge through textbooks.
Spoken error: What is "all right" meaning? Assumed Target Utterance: What does "all right" mean?	Substitution error – she uses the copula verb, <i>is</i> , instead of the singular dummy auxiliary verb, <i>does</i> . First Language Interference – the word, <i>is</i> , is used in the Korean version of the question. Contextual error – she assumes that this question should fit the same structure as the sentence, <i>What is he eating?</i>	Conceptions, like all inanimate objects, cannot do many things, however, they can refer to things, so the word, <i>does</i> , should replace the word, <i>is</i> .	Literal translation from Korean to English: <i>Alright-nun</i> (subject with subject marker) <i>musun</i> (what) <i>tushieyo?</i> (meaning with is) Since the <i>-ing</i> inflection was added, she knows that <i>mean</i> is a verb. However, she views the question as if it should have the same structure as the question, <i>What is he doing?</i> Since questions about a word's definition are highly important, it would be useful to learn this question by rote, rather than by trying to learn its contextual

			nuance.
<p>Spoken error: Why did you eat it?</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance: Why did you eat that?</p>	<p>Pragmatic error – mistake in deixis.</p>	<p>Since, at the time of speaking, the student was not in the vicinity of what was eaten, from her perspective, she should say, <i>that</i>.</p>	<p>Literal translation from Korean to English: <i>Wei</i> (Why) <i>gueg-ot</i> (it with past tense inflection) <i>mugut-ni</i> (eat with past tense inflection and interrogative marker).</p> <p><i>It</i> and <i>that</i> are confusing for Korean speakers.</p> <p>In Korean, people only use the word, <i>jugat</i> (that), when they can see the object they are referring to, so it makes sense that the student would say, <i>it</i>, since she cannot see the eaten item.</p>
<p>Spoken error: He took a long time than you.</p> <p>Assumed Target Utterance: He took longer than you.</p>	<p>Morphological error - omission of the comparative inflection, <i>-er</i>.</p> <p>Syntactical error - wrong choice of sentence structure.</p>	<p>To make comparisons, adjectives of one syllable, such as <i>hot</i> and <i>long</i>, generally require a suffixed <i>-er</i> inflection.</p> <p>Intransitive verbs do not require objects, such as in the sentence, <i>He</i></p>	<p>This sentence is difficult because <i>took</i> can also be analyzed as a transitive verb.</p> <p>If she had used the <i>-er</i> inflection, then the sentence structure would have been similar to a sentence like, <i>He ate a bigger piece than you</i>.</p> <p>I believe the student</p>

		<i>grew taller than her.</i>	either assumes that the use of the set expression, <i>a long time</i> , is necessary, or that the word, <i>time</i> , should be mentioned, since the sentence is about time.
Spoken error: Can you give me [pork]?	Syntactical error – omission of the indefinite article, <i>a</i> , before the object.	English requires a determiner before objects, either definite or indefinite.	Koreans have trouble adding determiners before subjects and objects, because it is unnatural to them, since their L1 does not require it. It is much easier for English speakers to remember not to add one when they try to speak Korean.
Assumed Target Utterance: Can you give me a fork?	Phonemic error – substitution of the initial voiceless continuant labiodental fricative, [f], with the voiceless bilabial stop, [p].	To produce [f], speakers must place their top teeth on their slightly tucked in bottom lip, and then voicelessly breath out through their teeth.	Koreans also often substitute the non-existent sound, [f], with [hw] as in the cheer, <i>Fighting!</i> , pronounced, [hwaitin]. Consistently producing sounds that are not part of the L1 lexicon is difficult, and is not indicative of the student's inability to say or comprehend the sound.
Spoken error: Will you write essay?	Syntactic error - omission of the second person possessive attributive adjective, <i>your</i> , before the object.	In English syntax, objects require some sort of determiner, such as <i>a</i> , <i>the</i> , and <i>your</i> .	Literal translation from Korean to English: <i>Tangshinun</i> (You) <i>report-ul</i> (report with an object marker) <i>sulkomnika</i> (write with
Assumed Target			

Utterance: Will you write your essay?			future and interrogative inflections). Unlike L2, the L1 does not require a determiner before objects, since they are known from the context.
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Many of the student's errors and mistakes, including surface (omissions, substitutions, and misorderings), contextual, and phonological, are not indicative of her competence. In many cases, she knows what is correct, except her productive skills are not as good as her receptive skills. Causes of her mistakes include first language interference, overgeneralization, and incomplete mastery. By looking at the Korean to English literal translation of many sentences, it becomes possible to notice why errors have occurred. Not only having to translate, but perhaps even more of a challenge, the student must rearrange the syntax to fit the rules of English. Pluralization, comparative inflections, and verb agreement rules seem to be especially difficult. They must seem quite pointless to a speaker whose language has no need for them. Also, since the student did not study English phonology during the critical period of acquisition, English sounds like [wo] and [f] are difficult to say consistently. One point of relief is that there does not seem to be any evidence of avoidance, the student tries sentences, knowing she will make mistakes. Most, if not, all of the errors are entirely comprehensible by native speakers. Hopefully, this does not induce the student to avoid fixing her mistakes, and lead to fossilization.

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