Inter Language Fossilization in the Usage of Grammar in Writing Composition of Students at UG Level

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Abstract: Inter language Fossilization in linguistics is an inevitable phenomenon which is widely seen in second language acquisition. It is a mixed method study in which both Quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Quantitative method is used to know the categories of errors, total number of errors made, the number of fossilized error categories and the qualitative method is used to know whether students written output attributed to the phenomenon of fossilization. The study aimed to discover the inter language fossilization errors, in the written output of 5 Engineering college students studying in Lords Institute of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad by purposive sampling technique. The study highlights that the errors related to the use of verbs, the errors in the use of concord, the errors in the use of prepositions and articles are fossilized as they were again seen in phase II, while the other types of errors diminished within a short period of time i.e in phase II there were no such errors. Analysis shows that there is difficulty in learning and remembering and misuse of grammatical rules due to over generalization of and simplification of the rules and the negative language transfer of L1 of the learners which makes them create their own language system and neglect the basic rules of grammar of foreign language. However by repetition and extensive practice of language items, vocabulary memorization and continuous training of self- monitoring ability of the learners and the effective language learning strategies can help overcome the interlanguage fossilization and make significant improvement in their English language proficiency.

Key words: L1, Interlanguage, Fossilization

Introduction

Creating a coherent and grammatically correct sentence is one of the challenges the second language learners encounter in their learning. This challenge may emerge as the result of prior linguistics capacity of the learners in second language learning. As a result, the learners will subconsciously apply the rules of their first language grammar, including syntactic features. Many times teachers may notice that students learning english may make glaring errors which may not be as a result of mother tongue interference, e.g., *eated, brang, goed,* and so on. This goes in line with what Tarone (2014) claimed as a third language. In her opinion, learners have three languages, the mother tongue, the target language, and the learner language. This type of error indicated that students might try to use their own knowledge and 'create' their own grammatical rules. Therefore, It is no longer a controversy to say that learners play an essential part in the activity of acquiring a second/foreign language. In their endavours to construct knowledge, learners may make errors similar to the above, which may enhance their learning in one way or another. For example, 'eated' shows that students know the rules, but they are confused between regular and irregular verbs.

According to Richards, error (2003) is the use of a linguistic item, such as a word, grammatical item, speech act, etc., in a way that is different from a fluent or native speaker of the language. The learners use erroneous sentences thinking that they are correct. They develop a new language, for Corder (1967),

it is idiosyncratic dialect or a transitional language, and for Selinker(1972), it is interlanguage. So interlanguage works as a unique intermediate language between native language and the target language of the learner. It consists of elements from both native and the target language along with unique elements absent in either which emerge during spontaneous conversations. According to Selinker, a majority of second language learners lag behind in achieving the target language competence due to a substantial disparity between their native and the foreign language which may be because of lack of focus, poor retention, insufficient understanding of the language items resulting in the incoherent and in cohesive syntactic and morphologiccal errors in writing. Tarone (2014) argued that interlanguage is not a theory but a hypothesis. The researchers are of the opinion that interlanguage is a theory because it helps the researchers to explain and illuminate students' errors clearly. Identifying the errors accurately may help teachers to devise remedial programs to encourage students to improve their interlanguage and be competent enough to use the target language properly. The researchers aim to explore these types of errors by implementing the interlanguage theory to find out the real reasons for making these errors and if it is possible to avoid them or benefit from them in the learning and teaching process. There are various definitions of interlanguage fossilization. According to Longman dictionary of Language teaching and Applied Linguistics interlanguage fossilization is a process in which the incorrect linguistic features become permanent in the way the learner uses the language for speaking and writing. The concept of interlanguage was introduced by Selinker in 1972. He defined interlanguage as the learners independent language system separate from their native language and the target language. Interlanguage is the intermediate language or the hybrid language which contains the features of both the first language and the target language. It is considered that in the acquisition of the target language the learner may develop some incorrect linguistic constructions and continue to use them which becomes stabilized errors and fossilized errors in the course of learning process. According to Ellis (2001), the notion of interlanguage draws directly on the cognitive view of first language acquisition. Cook (1996:31) defined interlanguage as "the knowledge of the second language in the learner's mind." Ellis (2001, 349) provided a more specific and detailed definition. He claimed that interlanguage is used "to refer to both the internal system that a learner has constructed at a single point in time ('interlanguage') and to the series of interconnected systems that characterize the learner's process over time ('interlanguage continuum')". Since learners play an important role in the learning process, researchers' data should be based on what learners really attempt to understand or produce in natural contexts. Selinker, who coined the term 'interlanguage' (1985), claimed that the learner activates psychological structures which are latent in the brain when they attempt to learn. During their attempts to learn the target language, these psychological structures predominate, thus producing both correct and incorrect sentences.

Fossilisation is an interesting area of interlanguage. It is a mechanism that is assumed to exist in the latent psychological structure. Ellis (2001:353) defined fossilisation as "the process by which non-target language forms become fixed in interlanguage. Selinker and Lamendella redefined fossilization as the permanent cessation of internal language learning until the learner reaches the norms of the target language at all levels. Selinker says that fossilization represents learners conscious or unconscious choice of using alternative language structures. In his opinion fossilization is an undeletable mental mechanism in interlanguage and it can occur at any stage of language learning. Lamendella says that fossilization is caused by communication difficulties due to lack of knowledge. There are several factors causing the interlanguage fossilization according to Lary Selinker. Learners age, Learners emotions like motivation, self confidence, anxiety, pull of the mother tongue constitute the internal factors of learning opportunity, methods of language learning and teaching, role of the teacher, learning environment constitute the external factors that cause the inter language fossilization.

Classification of Interlanguage Fossilization

There are different ways to classify interlanguage fossilization. According to Selinker in terms of form, it can be divided into two major types. They are 1. Individual fossilization which refers to the stagnation

of individual language development of individual learners. This is mainly two types. (i) Error reappearance type, in which the language phenomena that are repeatedly corrected, occur again. (ii) Language competence fossilization type, in which fossilization occurs in pronunciation, syntactic structures and vocabulary in interlanguage. Ex: cutted, goed etc 2. Group fossilization in which we can see overall stagnation of community language development, which becomes the natural phenomenon of whole society, thus becoming a new dialect. Ex: Indian dialect.

Selinker also divides fossilization into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization. As their name indicates the former is instable and changeable while the latter is stabilized. The temporary fossilization can be improved when the learner accepts the optimal input.

Interlanguage fossilization is a common linguistic phenomenon in second language acquisition. The difference in the syntactic features of the learner may create a language which can be called as interlanguage and this exists for a long time and is difficult for learners to change leading to fossilization. This may occur in any phase of language learning. Thus Interlanguage fossilization has been a major subject discussed by linguists and educationists in the history of English language acquisition. This study is important to investigate because writing is an absolute requirement for students who will graduate with an engineering degree. Therefore, the present study aimed to analyze the different syntactic interlanguage types of temporary, permanent, and fossilized errors in the writing composition of the engineering students in one private engineering college, Hyderabad. The participants were engineering students because these students are required to speak and write perfectly when they enter the job market. They need good communication skills as they work in different national and international companies. We believe that these students have learned all the English language rules and they are good in vocabulary because they learned English right from their childhood. So they are able to write on their own. The main objective of the present study is to know whether these students make interlanguage fossilized errors in the UG level when they use grammar in writing English composition and if they make errors what type of errors they make. Therefore, two research questions are employed,

(1) What categories of errors are found in the engineering students' written output?

(2) Can the errors in the engineering students written output are attributed to the phenomenon of fossilization?

Review of literature

Fossilization is a linguistic phenomenon of linguistic items, rules, and subsystems that natives of other language develop in their interlanguage, no matter what the age of the learner or the amount of learning and instruction he receives in the target Language. Interlanguage theory is one of the most influential theories helping in the second language acquisition research, according to Selinker(1972) and Wei(2008). According to ZHANG Hong-Wu and XIE Jing (April 2014) in their Empirical research on Interlanguage Fossilization of 20 Chinese major students EFL writing the advanced learners are creating their own language system and neglect the basic grammatical rules. They said that the learners focus more on meaning than the form because of the difficulty in the structures of the target language and it is true that attention awareness and the training of self monitoring ability will help destabilize the students erroneous interlanguage system. Another study in 2002 , A study of Interlanguage Fossilization in Second Language Acquisition and its Teaching Implications by Hongping Chen, Bo Zhao finds out the major causes of fossilization and implies some teaching methods to lessen its negative effects. In this paper he put farward many suggestions to prevent interlanguage fossilization on the theoretical note. Another study, A Review of Interlanguage fossilization in English learning by Zishuo Geng and Zikal Ji (2024) emphasizes that the implementation of certain measures like continual upgrading of teachers knowledge base in fundamental English concepts, communicative skills, linguistic understanding and knowledge of Indo-American cultural backgrounds to overcome

interlanguage fossilization and make significant progress in achieving the english language proficiency. However, DeWit (2007) found several fossilization errors in four linguistics elements: morphology, syntax, semantics, and vocabulary. This linguistic element of errors refers to intralingual errors since the learners do not have Interlanguage syntactic temporary, permanent, and fossilized errors sufficient knowledge of L2 (Keshavarz, 2015). In this sense, writing errors might lead to fossilization errors such as wrong categorization, analogy, lack of rules, and overgeneralization of the target language. Consequently, it can lead to the insufficient structure of the target language and deviation of conventional mechanisms from the target language structure (Terzioğlu & Bensen-Bostanci, 2020). In this sense, syntactic fossilization errors may refer to various errors in the construction of the second language learner. Therefore, syntactical fossilization errors were determined as one of the steps in the internalization of the first language toward the second language, and this error contributes to the development of second language acquisition since the errors remain to exist as the result of L1, input, and learning materials (Keshavarz, 2015). Several studies have investigated the issue of syntactic fossilization in second-language writing with different views. Huang (2018) found that the types of syntactical fossilization errors are auxiliary verb systems. Moreover, Onwuta and Ndimele (2015) revealed articles, non-count nouns, passive, pluralization, irregular nouns, and concord. Then Mufid (2017) reported word order, articles, tenses, concord, and voice, and Toyota (2009) found passive verbs. Through these studies, it can be generated that the type of fossilized syntactic errors such as verb, concord, word order, passive voice, verb omission, and article are the major types of errors that contribute to the fossilization errors in the development of second language writing. In 2013, A study by Andi Rustandi, R. Bunga Febriani, Maria Teresa Asistido, Syafryadin employed a linguistics content analysis method using the argumentative essay products taken from the course of Lexicology and Lexicography during one semester. The data were analyzed using the framework of four syntactic fossilization errors: verb omission, subordination, double verb, and passive voice. In addition, inter-rater reliability was used to measure the trustworthiness of fossilized error analysis in students' argumentative essays. The results revealed that the doctoral students made four fossilized errors: subordination, omission, double verb, and passive voice. However, verb omission and sub-ordination emerged as temporary fossilization errors and a double verb and passive voice as permanent syntactic fossilization errors in writing argumentative essays. This result suggests that doctoral students need a bridging course to reduce all kinds of errors in writing an argumentative essay as the requirements before they join the real classroom.

In another study titled "Overcoming error fossilization in academic writing: Strategies for Soudi EFL learners to move beyond the plateau" by Albelihi and Al-Ahdal concluded that effective language learning strategies are essential for mitigating error fossilization and the teachers play a crucial role in raising awareness of common errors, providing targeted feedback and creating opportunities for authentic language exposure. Thus all the above studies highlighted the complexity of interlanguage fossilization in second language acquisition and became the base of the present study.

Methodology

Study design and Data Collection

The study employed a manual textual analysis by conducting a written composition as a sudden surprise test to the 5 Engineering college students from 1st year studying in Lords Institute of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad selected by using purposive sampling technique. It is a mixed method study in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Quantitative method is used to know the categories of errors, total number of errors made, the number of fossilized error categories and the qualitative method is used to know whether students written output attributed to the phenomenon of fossilization. The researcher conducted weekly tests, identified the number of mistakes under different categories ,calculated their percentages from the month of November 2024 as the first year students will join in the month of October and they will be in first semester i.e the first year students will be the

freshers or beginners of the course of English subject in the engineering level. All the students were encouraged to self diagnose the errors after the discussion of the weekly test performance. In the weekly tests the students were asked to write a short paragraph on different forms of writing like narrative writing, letter writing, paragraph writing, précis writing, descriptive writing, diary writing, travel writing. Total 12 tests were conducted in the 12 weeks from November 1st 2024 to January 2nd 2025. The researcher divided the first six tests as phase I and the next six tests as phase II. The researcher took permission from the principal and the head of the department for conducting the test and the discussion after the test on every Saturday afternoon at 3 to 4 pm, half an hour for the test and the next half an hour for the discussion about the question and evaluation manually by the researcher. The students were interviewed about their self diagnosed errors and discussed in the class the correction of those errors.

Analysis

Every week the answer scripts were evaluated, identified the errors and differentiated them into 8 categories. Errors in the spellings, Errors in the use of nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives and Adverbs, Errors in the use of verbs.(Tenses, Modals), Errors in the use of Concord, Errors in the use of prepositions, Errors in the use of Conjunctions, Errors in the use of Articles, and Miscellaneous errors. The students errors were tabulated and calculated the totals and the percentages. The researcher noted down the number of errors in the first phase and the second phase.

Table No.1 : Different categories of errors made by 1st year students and their percentages in phase I and phase II.

S.No.	Type of error	Number of Errors			
		Phase-I	Phase-II	Total	%age
1	errors in spellings	32	13	45	6.6
2	errors in the use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives & adverbs	45	22	67	9.92
3	errors in the use of verbs	56	55	111	16.4
4	errors in the use of concord	58	57	115	17.03
5	errors in the use of prepositions	71	72	143	21.18
6	errors in the use of conjunctions	37	19	56	8.29
7	errors in the use of articles	55	55	110	16.29
8	miscellaneous errors	22	6	28	4.1
Total:		376	299	675	100

The first question in this study sought to determine the different categories of errors by calculating the number of errors in each category and their percentages. Totally eight categories were identified. Errors

in the spellings, Errors in the use of nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives and Adverbs, Errors in the use of verbs.(Tenses, Modals), Errors in the use of Concord, Errors in the use of prepositions, Errors in the use of Conjunctions, Errors in the use of Articles, and Miscellaneous errors. The above statistical results shows that there exist a total of 653 errors in the written output of the 5 engineering students studying in Lord's Institute of Engineering &Technology,Hyderabad. Out of these, the errors in the use of prepositions are the most and prevalent, ranking the highest in number 143(71 in phase I and 72 in phase II) and still remaining same in the number in the phaseII. Same with the case of errors in the use of Articles, errors in the use of concord and the verbs remaining in the second, third and fourth place in the list and were seen stable in both phases as they re-appeared even after taking the corrective measures after every test. The other types of errors i.e errors in spellings, errors in nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions were less stable and decreased in the phase II as the students were given some training of self monitoring ability which helped the learners to destabilize their erroneous interlanguage system. From this results we can infer that there are eight types of errors in the written output of the students. Some of these errors can be corrected easily within a short period of time as learners progress through different stages of cognitive development by the help of their ability to comprehend, memory capacity. Moreover sufficient training by the teachers, adequate teaching materials, suitable curriculum, motivation towards learning foriegn language helps the learner reduce the errors. We also can infer that some errors are stable and occurring repeatedly even after attaining certain age, and maturity. Some examples of interlanguage made by the engineering students are

1. My sister used to having banana daily in her breakfast.(to have, a banana)

2. My house is built in 1999. (was built)

3. I like very much.(I like it)

4. I went to market with the bus.(by bus)

5. Sun is very bright today.(The sun)

6. Raghavan eated too much in the morning.

7 .My uncle is lawyer, but he also teach English sometimes.(a layer,teaches)

8. My birthday is on august.(in August)

9. I like dancing a lot in the weekend.(I like to dance...)

10. More persons attended the party.(More people).

11.They want that I go there.(They want me to go there.)

12. Can you explain me this?(Can you explain this to me?)

13. He asked me where is the bank.(He asked me where the bank is ?)

14. The French food is delicious.(French food..)

15. My friend lives in Italy for fifteen years.(since)

16. She is a teacher, she works in a college level (at, the)

17 .... in this moment I am very busy.(... at this moment I am very busy)

18. I agree you.(I agree with you)

19. He is at canada since May.(He is in Canada since May)

20. I will ask to my mother.....(I will ask my ...)

21. Hyderabad peoples are very friendly.(people are...)

22. It was good party.(It was a good party.)

23. He always arrive office before 8.00.(He always arrives at his office ….)

Table No.2: Can the errors in the engineering students written output is attributed to the phenomenon of fossilization?

Table (i): Errors in Phase I

S.No.	Type of error	Number of Errors						
		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4	Sample 5	Total	%age
1	errors in spellings	5	6	6	7	8	32	8.51
2	errors in the use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives & adverbs	10	9	11	7	8	45	11.96
3	errors in the use of verbs	12	12	11	12	9	56	14.89
4	errors in the use of concord	13	12	12	9	12	58	15.42
5	errors in the use of prepositions	21	9	17	12	12	71	18.88
6	errors in the use of conjunctions	11	5	7	2	12	37	9.84
7	errors in the use of articles	8	12	14	12	9	55	14.62
8	miscellaneous errors	2	5	7	6	2	22	5.85
Total:		82	70	85	67	72	376	100.00

Table(ii): Errors in phase II

S.No.	Type of error	Number of Errors						
		Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4	Sample 5	Total	%age
1	errors in spellings	2	3	4	2	2	13	4.34
2	errors in the use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives & adverbs	4	7	2	4	5	22	7.35
3	errors in the use of verbs	12	11	10	13	9	55	18.39
4	errors in the use of concord	12	13	15	9	8	57	19.06

5	errors in the use of prepositions	22	8	17	12	13	72	24.08
6	errors in the use of conjunctions	5	1	2	5	6	19	6.35
7	errors in the use of articles	8	13	12	12	10	55	18.39
8	miscellaneous errors	2	1	2	1	0	06	2
Total:		72	70	85	67	72	299	100.00

In this table the researcher noted down the frequency of the errors from the weekly tests to determine whether the errors in the written outputs of the engineering students can be attributed to the fossilization phenomenon. The occurrences of eight types of errors were identified from each sample. The errors related to the use of prepositions, the errors in the use of concord, the errors in the use of verbs and articles occurred in all the tests in both phase I and phase II and stood with the same number of with a very minute change and appeared to be fossilized while the other errors diminished/decreased overtime. The occurrence of errors in spellings reduced from 32 to 13, the occurrence of errors in nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs reduced from 45 to 22, the occurrences of errors in the use of conjunctions reduced from 37 to 19 in phase I to Phase II due to the implementation of self correction in class during the discussion of the write ups of the samples. Out of all the types of errors the errors in the use of prepositions were highest(61 in phase I and 60 in phase II). The second highest is the errors in the use of concord (58 in phase I and57 in phase II) and the verbs and articles were in the third place (55 in phase I and 55 in Phase II). The results clearly shows that the errors in use of prepositions, verbs, articles and in the use of concord are fossilized as their number remains same or very minute change is seen. So from this table it is clearly identified that some specific type of errors are stabilized, re-appeared in the next tests and were prone to fossilization among the eight categorized errors observed in the students written output. From this table we can infer that the stabilized errors are due to the challenges in grammar acquisition that could be attributed to the cognitive development. Over generalization of the grammatical rules, poor ability to comprehend and internalize complex grammatical structures leads to fossilization. As learners progress through different stages of cognitive development their ability to understand and internalize the complex grammatical structures may increase and so reduces the stabilization of the errors.

Recommendations

The study recommends that frequent feedback by the teachers and awareness about the rules of grammar and spellings can overcome the interlanguage fossilization. The study suggests that the students should be motivated to observe their language usage, and were encouraged for conscious reading of the language materials. The study also suggests that there must be the organization of language labs right from the childhood in the schools and also in the colleges to overcome the errors. The study paves way for further research in finding the strategies to mitigate the problem of interlanguage fossilization.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is, the number of participants was very few that is only five so the researcher may not claim the generalization of the findings.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the development of learners' interlanguage. The findings revealed that the shortcomings of grammatical knowledge and the lack of exposure to the target language might have a negative impact on students' interlanguage and the production of native-like competence. Some of the errors indicated that the mother tongue interferes, while other errors indicated interlingual and intralingual strategies effect and attempts of simplification and miss-use of grammatical rules.

In this study the researcher tried to answer whether the errors are linked to the phenomenon of fossilization in the writing of engineering students. The results shows that the errors in the use of some grammatical features like nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and spellings are less stable and they can be diminished by the effective teaching and employing the self correcting measures by the students. Errors in the use of prepositions, verbs, concord, articles are stabilized due to the negative language transfer in the learning process and is caused by the learners lack of correct knowledge of the target language as several prepositions has more than one function and the confusion in the plural forms and the past tense forms of the base verbs, with regard to articles the students are lack of knowledge of use of articles, and the tendency to translate mother tongue into English leads to the errors in the formation of sentences, words etc thus creating mistakes while writing. From this study it is evident that effective language learning strategies lie task based language teaching approach, co operative languagelearning approach, language labs and the communicative language teaching approach are essential for mitigating the error fossilization. Teachers play a crucial role in raising awareness of common errors, providing targeted feedback and creating authentic language exposure. Over all this study provides valuable information that by understanding the nature of the errors and the underlying causes educators can develop more tailored approaches to language instruction ultimately enhancing the English language proficiency among the Engineeing level students.

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