NON-NATIVE SPEAKER REACTIONS TO TYPICAL NON-NATIVE ERRORS IN ENGLISH: A STUDY IN ERROR GRAVITY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Errors are an unavoidable part of language learning. While language teachers strive to move their students toward the goal of fluency in a target language, they are constantly confronted by errors of language learners at every level of learning. Interest in the errors committed by language learners has undergone several shifts in focus over the years. Whereas errors were first believed to be completely undesirable and to be avoided or eliminated, they are now regarded more positively as a natural part of learning. In fact, errors are described and analyzed as indications of language learners' progress toward their goal of fluency in the target language. Piazza speaks of errors as "windows" through which the progress and strategies of learning may be observed (1980:422). Errors, indeed, have even come to be regarded as necessary to language acquisition as the learner progresses through developmental steps of testing hypotheses to discover linguistic systems (Guntermann 1978:249).

It has become increasingly apparent, however, that in addition to the errors themselves, attitudes toward errors are also significant, for in actual life situations individuals do react subjectively to the language being used by others (Chastain 1980:214). Attitudes of native speakers toward errors committed in their own language are considered

significant in that these attitudes about errors are likely to reflect the degree that various errors impede communication.

A goal for second language learners which has become increasingly popular with teachers is that of communicative competence. Opinions vary as to exactly what communicative competence entails, but basically, it may be the ability to communicate easily and well in any specific second language setting and may involve several skills (McGroarty 1984:257). Students do make errors, though, even when their speech is considered fluent. Since one of the main goals of communicative competence is to have communication which is comprehensible to a native speaker, and if communication is comprehensible even with errors, it seems reasonable to assume that at least some errors must not appreciably interfere with communication. Of course, the fact that some errors do affect comprehensibility greatly is also obvious to anyone in contact with second language learners. Thus, it seems that there would also be differences in feelings toward types of errors depending on the amount that they interfere with communication.

In several studies, researchers have tried to determine attitudes toward errors, and have attempted to discover if there is a hierarchy of error types in regards to their perceived degree of seriousness. Most have examined native speakers' reactions to errors. Second language learners, however, do judge language samples for acceptability. Their judgments, moreover, frequently do not match those of the native speakers. According to Arthur, "The errors made by second language learners are not always perceived by them as errors at all, and second language learners may reject constructions that from a native speaker's perspective are acceptable." (1980:178)

It is generally thought that the aim of learning a language cannot be separated from the aim of learning to feel about the target language the way native speakers do (Bailey 1978:234). This feeling about the target language the way native speakers do, in fact, is a characteristic of communicative competence which involves learning cultural feelings and attitudes and not merely acquiring linguistic knowledge of a language. Presumably, this feeling about the target language the way native speakers do would also apply to nonnative speakers judging errors in a similar way to which native speakers judge these errors. Preston (1981:107) states that it is possible for second language learners to be stigmatized as much for their linguistic facility as for their inability if they become too proficient for those of their own language group and speakers of the target language to accept them (1981:107). This stigmatization toward non-native fluency in the target language, however, seems to apply more to speech than to writing, for in written communication, near perfection is more likely to be required and expected.

The question arises then, Do non-native speakers, in reality, become more like native speakers in their feelings about errors in the target language as they become more proficient in the target language?

Hypotheses

One hypothesis of this study is that the non-native speakers' reactions as to the degree of seriousness of types of errors will more closely correspond to the responses of native speakers for the nonnative students at the higher levels of language proficiency than for those at the lower levels.

In addition, it is hypothesized that the hierarchy of gravity of

errors for non-native speakers, on the whole, will differ from that of the native speakers.

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are to determine if

1. there is a greater degree of correspondence between responses of native speakers and non-native speakers for error types at the higher levels of instruction than at the lower levels of instruction
2. there is a hierarchy of error gravity for error types judged by non-native spekaers
3. the hierarchy of error gravity for error types for non-native speakers, on the whole, is different from that of the native speakers
4. other factors, such as first language spoken or sex of the subject appear to have any relationship to the degree of seriousness ratings given to errors by subjects of this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous Theoretical Approaches to Errors

Traditional Approach

The traditional or grammar/translation approach to learning a language was prescriptive, emphasizing correctness and ignoring errors. Emphasis in the traditional approach was placed on translation work with little attention given to the spoken language or the students' spontaneous productions. As a result, little attention was paid to errors, and when errors did occur, no attempt was made to analyze them.

Contrastive Analysis

The theory of Contrastive Analysis, the first systematized theory about errors, was proposed by Charles C. Fries in 1945. Earlier, several linguists such as Henry Sweet, Harold Palmer, and Otto Jespersen had recognized the influence of the "pull of the mother tongue" on a language learner, but it was Fries who established Contrastive Analysis as a component of language teaching (Sridhar 1980:92). The teaching it inspired was the Audio-Lingual Method which stressed correct speech habit formation and avoidance of errors.

The Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, widely followed form 1945 to 1965 and expanded upon by Robert Lado in 1957 with the publication of

Linguistics Across Cultures, is most concerned with language description and prediction of errors. It makes the assumption that errors can be predicted by making a synchronic study of the native language and the target language, noting the differences, and predicting the difficulties. The areas where the two languages contrast are expected to give the most difficulty to the language learner.

This original (or "strong version") of the Contrastive Analysis theory is interpreted to make the following assumptions according to Lee:

> 1. that the prime cause, or even the sole cause, of difficulty and error in foreign-language learning is interference coming from the learners' native language;
>
> 2. that the difficulties are chiefly, or wholly, due to the differences between the two languages;
>
> 3. that the greater the differences are, the more acute the learning difficulties will be;
>
> 4. that the results of a comparision between the two languages are needed to predict the difficulties and errors which will occur in learning the foreign language;
>
> 5. that what there is to teach can best be found by comparing the two languages and then subtracting what is common to them so that 'what the student has to learn equals the sum of the differences established by the contrastive analysis.'
>
> (as cited in Sridhar 1980:94)

The strong version, then, claims as its major function the ability to predict errors.

Oller and Ziahosseiny later proposed a "moderate" version of Contrastive Analysis which theorized that greater difficulties in learning would occur where there are subtle distinctions between two languages, rather than where the contrasts are great. They also proposed

that some errors are due to intra-language difficulties or difficult items in the target language itself. Wardaugh, one critic of the strong Contrastive Analysis theory, claims that the hypothesis has, since its inception, been toned down to "accounting for" a great number of errors that second language learners have actually made, rather than predicting them as was first proposed (Dulay 1974:97).

Error Analysis

Following the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, the theory of Error Analysis made its appearance with the publication of Corder's 1967 article "The Significance of Learners' Errors." In it, Corder claims that errors are systematic and are evidence of the learning process. He also differentiates between mistakes and errors, mistakes being deviations due to performance factors such as memory or fatigue and errors as being systematic and characteristic of the learners' linguistic system (Corder 1967:22).

Corder proposes the term "transitional competence" to refer to the intermediate systems of language learners and likens it to a child's first language learning (Corder 1967:25). He sees similarities in first and second language learning and proposes that like the child who is learning his first language, the second language learner also tests hypotheses about the target language and thus the "errors" or imcomplete/incorrect hypotheses are a necessary and inevitable part of the learning process (Sridhar 1980:105).

Dulay and Burt (1974) report on a number of studies and, like Corder, conclude that many errors made by second language learners in English are "developmental" and are similar to those of a child learning

English natively (Dulay and Burt 1974a).

Interlanguage

The systems constructed by language learners as they work toward the goal of mastery of a target language have been variously referred to as "idiosyncratic dialects" (Corder 1971), "approximative systems" (Nemser 1971), and "interlanguages" (Selinker 1972). Corder, in 1967, when suggesting that learners have a system of strategies for learning a second language that is between the native and the target language, proposed that a study of second language learners' transitional competence would reveal systematic errors resulting not from interference of the native language, but rather as evidence of the learners' "approximate systems." In 1971, he renamed the learners' systems "idiosyncratic dialect" (Corder 1971). Nemser (1971) defined his theory of "approximative system" as "the deviant linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language" (Nemser 1971:115). Such approximative systems vary, in Namser's opinion, according to proficiency levels, learning experience, communication functions, and personal learning characteristics (Nemser 1971:115).

In 1971, however, Selinker coined the term used most frequently for this system: "Interlanguage," a term widely accepted for a system distinct from both the native and target languages. Selinker focuses on the five psycholinguistic processes that contribute to interlanguage:

- language transfer (the influence of the native language);
- transfer of training (the errors that result from identifiable items in training procedures);
- strategies of second language learner (the errors that are the result of an identifiable approach by the learner to

the material to be learned);

- strategies of second language communication (the halt of learning that is a result of the learners feeling that they have learned enough to communicate); and

- overgeneralization of linguistic materials.

(Selinker 1972:216-220)

One of the most crucial aspects of this theory, according to Selinker, is that of fossilization. He defines this psychological phenomena as "linguistic items, rules, and sub-systems" which learners retain in their interlanguage regardless of the amount of instruction (Selinker 1972:215). Another aspect of this theory is that in a given "contact situation" second language learners at the same level of proficiency would reveal similar "approximative" systems (Nemser 1971:116). This view is shared by Corder (1967), Selinker (1972), and Richards (1971).

Later, Spolsky and others critized this view of interlanguage as being too static. They felt that while "a learner's control of a language at a given stage is said to be transitional and considered to be moving toward the target language, the student of interlanguage appears to be more satisfied to accept it in its own right as an object for synchronic study" (Spolsky 1979:254). In addition, Spolsky states that problems arise because learners' transitional systems do not typically turn out to be either completely "stable or widespread" (1979:255).

The problem of discovering if there are, in fact, some errors which occur regularly has been addressed by several studies. Scott and Tucker endeavored to find some degree of regularity in errors (Spolsky 1979:255). Freeman in studying four language groups (Arabic, Spanish, Persian, and Japanese) found a high level of agreement in errors; however, there was still evidence of individual and group variation (Spolsky

1979:255). Dickerson in 1975 proposed that interlanguage should be considered as having variable rules, just as actual languages do (Spolsky 1979:255).

Thus, it is apparent that each of these discussed theories about errors has contributed in some way to the understanding of the role of errors in language, but each theory has also had limitations in explaining the true significance of language learners' errors.

Intuitional Studies

Definition and Purpose

The focus on errors in language learning, then, has shifted several times over the past thirty years. The latest shift in focus has directed attention away from the errors alone to the "learner himself and the learner's entire linguistic system" (Richards & Sampson 1974:5). This emphasis on the learner and his linguistic system has led to the use of intuitional studies.

Intuitional studies can be defined as an area of study within error analysis concerned with degrees of comprehensibility and irritation caused by errors in communication (Ludwig 1982:274). These studies differ from other research exploring linguistic knowledge of native speakers of a language in that intuitional studies utilize judgmental data on speakers' reactions to already produced sentences or discourse (Schachter 1976:67). Other types of error analysis studies, in contrast, use performance data based on actual productions (Schachter 1976:67).

One value of using intuitional data is that a more complete picture of a learner's linguistic knowledge may be obtained in that avoidance of

troublesome areas for the language is eliminated. The avoidance of subjects of problem areas tends to give an incomplete picture of subjects' linguistic knowledge as the subjects can focus on producing samples of only those aspects of language with which they feel confident. In intuitional studies, in contrast, subjects' reactions to various types of errors which might not otherwise be tested can be observed, thereby producing a more complete view of the learners' total knowledge of the language (Schachter 1976:67).

The practical result of this type of study is believed to be that understanding native speakers' attitudes toward errors as indicated by the degree of comprehensibility or irritation will be helpful in establishing priorities for teaching communicative competence in the classroom (Ludwig 1982:274). Indeed, the goal of communicative competence appears to be not whether the language is linguistically correct, but rather, whether the production is comprehensible to native speakers (Chastain 1981:288).

Development of Awareness of Need

Although intuitional studies have only recently become a widely used tool in linguistic research, interest in the difference between grammatical correctness and native speakers' acceptability has developed over the years. Charles Fries in 1945 stressed the need of language learners to have a realistic description of the actual language as used by native speakers in everyday life, implying that the everyday use most likely differs somewhat from strictly grammatically correct language (Anthony & Norris 1969:5). In 1957 in Syntactic Structures, Chomsky addressed the problem of grammaticalness and proposed that a

grammatical error was a form never used by a native speaker (Chomsky 1957:11). Presumably then, as Raig observes, a native speaker could never be corrected, yet in reality a native speaker's speech is not always thought to be acceptable (Raig 1975:286). Chomsky later, in 1964, differentiated between acceptability and grammaticality when he proposed that acceptability would be the favorable subjective responses of native speakers to a language sample, whereas grammaticality would depend on the sample meeting the criteria of a particular theory (Schachter 1976: 70). Chomsky also noted that grammaticality and acceptability might not necessarily agree in all instances (Schachter 1976:70).

Individuals do react subjectively to language samples as noted earlier, but it has been hypothesized, and the theory supported by several studies, that errors in a language sample do not all produce the same effect on the receiver. Some errors are considered more serious than others. Furthermore, studies have shown that native speakers are generally able to understand messages even with errors in them (Chastain 1981:290). Intuitional studies, then, focus on subjects' responses to errors in an effort to discover what effect various errors have and if the degree of effect varies for different errors.

Variations in Intuitional Studies

Although the goals have been quite similar in the intuitional studies and the number of these studies relatively small, a variety of "means of generating, presenting, and evaluating the second language learners' samples" in these studies has been used (Ludwig 1982:274). As a result, the findings of the studies are not easily compared (Zuengler 1978:509).

The differences between the various studies have included differences in generating the subject matter. Galloway (1980) and Tucker and Sarofim (1979) used actual samples of sentences or paragraphs from non-native subjects. In others, such as those of Guntermann (1978), Piazza (1980), and Chastain (1980), artificially created sample sentences were used to illustrate what a learner might say or write. Paragraphs and contextualized samples of language were also used by Guntermann (1978) and Chastain (1981).

Similarily, there are differences in the presentation of the material. Native speaker subjects have been asked to respond to taped oral samples of language (Politzer 1978, Galloway 1980, Albrechtsen et. al, 1980, and Guntermann 1978). In others, the subjects were given written examples to evaluate (Chastain 1980 & 1981). Response to both oral and written samples was required of subjects in both Tucker and Sarofim's 1979 and Piazza's 1980 studies.

In addition, different aspects of the language have been stressed in the various intuitional studies. For example, Burt's 1975 study made comparisons between global and local errors, global errors being defined as those that "significantly hinder communication in affecting overall sentence production" and local errors being those that occur within a sentence and affect single elements such as articles or verb form (Burt 1975:56-57). Other studies have elicited attitude responses to errors in syntax, semantics, or lexical choice. Chastain (1980 & 1981) with native Spanish speakers, Piazza (1980) with native French speakers, and Galloway (1980) with native Spanish speakers looked for responses to semantic errors. Galloway, in the cited study, included lexical errors and Politizer (1978), using German native speakers,

incroporated semantic, lexical, and syntactical errors.

Common Objectives - Effects of Errors and Hierarchies

Despite the fact that the studies are varied in their manner of generating the language samples, manner of presentation of material, language groups used, and linguistic elements studies, certain objectives have recurred. These objectives are the attempt to discover the effect of types of errors and the attempt to determine if there is a hierarchy of gravity of error types in the subjects' responses (Ludwig 1982:275).

The effects of error types have been variously described. One measure of the effect of errors used is comprehensibility or the degree to which the subject understands what is said or written (Guntermann 1978, Piazza 1980, and Chastain 1980 & 1981). Another measure, irritation, is generally considered to result from the form of the message attracting attention to itself rather than the message (Albrechtsen et al., 1980) incorporated the study of the degree of irritation to errors.

Acceptability, another gauge of the effects of errors, is a measure of the perceived degree to which a language sample violates the language rules (Ludwig:277). Closest to the gauge of grammaticality, acceptability is also related to irritation and comprehensibility. Chastain used acceptability along with comprehensibility for subjects to rate their intuitional responses to errors in his 1980 and 1981 studies with Spanish speakers.

The degree of seriousness of error types (or gravity of errors) is yet another method used for rating errors, and it is closely related to

judgments of grammaticality. Again, subjects' intuition about acceptability would seem to play a role when subjects are asked to rank errors according to their seriousness. Several studies have incorporated subjects' judgments of grammaticality about error types in studies utilizing other types of intuition judgments. For example, Tucker and Sarofim (1979) requested ratings of degrees of grammaticality, acceptability, and irritation in their one study. Politizer (1978) had his subjects rank errors according to their seriousness. Ward (1983) elicited judgments of the seriousness of error types in a study of native English speakers rating typical non-native written errors in sentences.

It seems, then, that although slightly different aspects of error judgments have been elicited in these studies, except for comprehensibility, all of these aspects measure basically the same thing. That is, except for comprehensibility, each attempts to measure subjects' intuitions about the seriousness of errors as related to grammaticality.

Another recurrent theme in many of these studies has been the goal of establishing a hierarchy of error types. These studies include Politzer's 1978 study of German native speakers judging non-native speech, Piazza's 1980 study of French native speakers, Chastain's 1980 and 1981 studies using Spanish native speakers, and Ensz's 1982 study of French natives. Tucker and Sarofim in their 1980 study of native Egyptian Arabic speakers employed both native and non-native speakers' samples of English in an attempt to discover a hierarchy of errors. In addition, Arthur (1980), Galloway (1980), and Richards and Sampson (1974) also dealt with the problem of a possible hierarchy of error types.

Results have varied among the studies. This variation is due in part to the different linguistic items and different types of errors

included as well as variety in the design of the studies. Ludwig cautions against taking too seriously the establishment of hierarchy of errors because many of the tasks the subjects were asked to respond to were not real-life situations (1982:276). Albrechtsen et al., (1980) came to the conclusion that all errors are essentially equally frustrating, and, therefore, searching for a hierarchy is useless.

Of those who did establish hierarchies, however, Burt (1975) concluded that global errors were more bothersome than local ones. Guntermann (1978), dealing with Spanish, found that sentences with two errors were considered more serious, and of those with only one error in them, choice of verb followed by verb tense were judged most serious. Politzer's 1978 study of errors in German found that vocabulary errors were thought most serious followed by verb morphology and then word order. Piazza's 1980 study of French errors, in which responses of both comprehensibility and irritation of errors were elicited, revealed that, generally, the more comprehensible an error was, the less irritating it was. In Piazza's study, verb form errors were found most irritating, followed by errors in pronouns and then those of tense usage. Tucker and Sarofim's 1980 study of errors in English, which will be discussed more later, compared hierarchy of error types both with grammaticalness and acceptability with both native and non-native speakers. Errors of word order were found most irritating to the Egyptian subjects in this study, while errors of articles and prepositions were considered the least irritating. In her study, Ward (1983) found that to American native English speakers, verb form was considered the most serious error, followed by number of noun, then errors of articles. Considered least serious by the Americans were "American errors." James (1977) in his

study of native and non-native subjects found verb tense to be second in ranking of seriousness of seven error types following only "transformation". Sheorey (1981) found that native speakers ranked question formation as most serious followed by subject/verb agreement; non-native subjects, on the other hand, ranked tense as most serious followed by subject/verb agreement.

Studies of Non-native Subjects

If the object of studying the effect of second language errors is to determine to what extent they interfere with communication, then it also seems relevant to discover how the second language learners themselves feel about typical errors in the target language. Arthur states that although most intuitional studies have been based on native speakers' reactions to non-native speakers' errors in a target language, learners also make judgments about language samples and evaluate them for acceptability (Arthur 1980:177).

Studies using non-native speakers have been fewer in number, but have also varied. One of the first studies using non-native speaker evaluations of written samples was that of D'Anglejan-Chatillon in 1975 (cited in Arthur 1980:178). This study examined reactions of French speaking adult learners of English to errors in "deviant" sentences mixed with fabricated normal sentences. Learners both at the beginner and advanced levels were included, as well as a group of native speakers for comparison. D'Anglejan-Chatillon noted that the beginning level learners were unable to recognize deviance, but that there was an increased ability to recognize deviance in the advanced group; he inferred that this reflected developing second language competence (in Tucker &

Sarofim 1980:30).

One of the most comprehensive investigations was that of Johansson's 1978 study. He used both English and Swedish native speakers to judge errors in English produced by Swedes (Zuengler 1980: 509). According to Zuengler, Johansson's studies covered a wide range of error types, employed a variety of designs, and used various methods of rating the errors (1980:509). Although Johansson's experiments were well-planned and clearly explained, thus a worthy contribution, his findings were mixed because of the employment of various tasks and methods within these studies (Zuengler 1980:510). The mixed results of Johansson's studies, in addition to the fact that his studies have not been repeated by others, poses problems in comparing the results of these studies with results of others.

In 1976, Schachter, Tyson, and Diffley conducted a study using non-native students of five language groups (Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Spanish) to judge written sentences in English. This study elicited grammaticality judgments concerning relative clauses produced by natives, nonnatives of the same language group, and nonnatives of other groups (1976:72). Four of the language groups (Arabic, Chinese, Persian, and Spanish) responded randomly to sentences containing incorrect relative clauses produced by members of other language groups. Schachter, Tyson, and Diffley felt that the fact that these non-native groups responded randomly was to be expected as the relative clauses produced by members of other language groups would not likely be part of the subjects' own interlanguage (Schachter et al 1976:75). The authors of this same study point out that second language learners make judgments on "strings of words" as to whether or not they are grammatical if they

have internalized rules about them. In other words, there may be some "strings of words" about which learners would not have knowledge to make judgments, and, therefore, the error type in question would be "indeterminate" for them. For second language learners, then, there is not only the aspect of grammaticality vs. ungrammaticality, but also that of "determinate" vs. "indeterminate" (1976:70). The number of "indeterminate" sequences would be expected to decrease as the subjects progress in knowledge of the language, according to the authors.

Arthur's 1980 study used 149 students at four levels at the University of Michigan's English Language Institute in an attempt to discover if learners' judgments do come closer to those of native speakers as they advance in their knowledge of the target language (Arthur 1980:180). Also assumed was that learner judgments of acceptability "are in part a reflection of that learner's competence in the target language" (Arthur 1980:182). The non-native learners were given a passage to edit which contained eighteen typical errors of adult learners of English; they were told to underline and correct the errors they recognized. The assumption that native speakers would agree as to which sequences contained errors and which did not "was tested informally and found to be substantially correct: (1980:187). Agreement among natives was in part credited to the fact that the errors were embedded in coherent discourse" rather than in "semantically unrelated sentences" (Arthur 1980:187). Responses were analyzed for total number of errors for levels and comparison to native judgments of acceptability. A hierarchy of error types was not a part of this study, as subjects' judgments of errors were not analyzed by error types. The results of this study, however, supported the theory that the learners' judgments

would more closely agree with those of native speakers at the higher levels (1980:191). In addition, the results supported the hypothesis that the number of indeterminate sequences would decrease with the more advanced groups (1980:193). An analysis of variance study showed no significant differences due to sex, native language, or age (1980:188).

Tucker and Sarofim in 1979 conducted a complex study using eighteen Egyptian students judging errors in English. This study utilized seven error categories with four examples of each in both written and taped oral samples. Subjects were asked to judge the sentences on grammaticality, acceptability, and for degree of irritation. The study used four separate analyses. For the rating of grammaticality, the analysis revealed that the factors of correctness, background of speaker, and category of error had significant main effects. Interestingly, the subjects rated the native speaker's reading of the deviant sentences as more correct than that of the nonnative. For grammaticality, there was significant variation in the hierarchy of ratings between responses to the native and the non-native taped presentations. For ratings of acceptability, the analysis revealed significant main effects for all of the factors. Again, the native speaker's rendition was judged to be more acceptable, in general, by the subjects. Correlating ratings of grammaticality and acceptability with the native speaker and the non-native speaker, the authors found more leniency in the subjects' responses to the native speaker. Thus, the subjects judged some native-read sentences as ungrammatical, but acceptable. For the ratings of irritability, a significant main effect was found for category, but not for background of speaker. Therefore, there was a more well-defined hierarchy of error types for degree of irritation, and, interestingly, the order was sim-

ilar for responses to both native and non-native speakers. The hierarchy from most irritating to not-irritating was word order, "other," object pronoun deletion, number, tense, preposition, and article. Finally, a comparison was made of reactions for irritability between non-native listeners (the Egyptians) and a group of native English (Canadian) speakers. The hierarchy was quite similar for both groups, with the native speakers being slightly more tolerant than the nonnatives (Tucker & Sarofim 1979:33-35).

James, in his 1977 study, focused on both native and non-native English speakers' reactions to written ESL (English as a second language) errors. He had equal numbers (twenty) of native and non-native speakers evaluate errors for degree of seriousness on a scale of 0 to 5. Similar to what Tucker and Sarofim found, James also found that non-native speakers rated errors more seriously than did the native speakers. The ranking of errors by native speakers in this study was in the following order from most to least serious: transformation, tense, concord, case, negation, word and lexis.

Also examining both native and non-native English speakers' reactions to ESL errors, Sheorey (1981) elicited ratings of errors by teachers of English, ESL, or linguistics. The native teachers were Americans and the nonnative were college teachers of ESL from India. Errors for the questionnaire were gleaned from compositions of ESL students. Again, respondents were asked to rate errors on a scale of 0 to 5. The results from Sheorey's study also revealed non-native respondents rating ESL errors more seriously than did the native English speakers. The rankings for the two groups were not the same. The non-native speakers ranked tense and subject/verb agreement as the most

serious categories; the native speakers, on the other hand, rated question formation and subject/verb agreement as most serious. Thus, although the rankings were not identical, there was some agreement about the relative seriousness of the subject/verb agreement error, and the non-native group did rank tense (a verb error) as most important similar to findings of other studies that verb errors are viewed as serious errors in several different languages (James 1977, Piazza 1980, Chastain 1981, and Ward 1983).

Summary of Literature

Theories about errors in language learning have changed over the years, but the most recent shift has moved from examining the causes of errors to examining their effects. The intuitional studies, themselves, have changed from having subjects judge errors which as primarily native-type errors to studies incorporating errors typically made by second language learners and often a mixture of both.

Studying non-native reactions to the errors is fairly recent, and, therefore, the number of studies smaller. Examining non-native reactions seems relevant in possibly understanding the stages of transitional competence a learner experiences in learning a second language. In addition, this type of study may reveal if second language learners become more like the native speakers of a target language in their attitudes toward errors as they become more proficient in that language.

The need for more consistency in studies and more replications of studies was noted by several authors. These authors feel that consistency in and replication of studies would be beneficial in adding knowledge about interlanguage, the process of learning a second language,

and judicial use of classroom time and effort.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Purpose of Study

In this study, I attempt to determine if subjects become more like native speakers in their feelings about errors in the target language as they advance to higher levels of proficiency in second language learning. If this is true, the responses of non-native subjects at higher levels of instruction should show a closer correspondence with the responses of native speakers than would the responses of lower-level subjects. In addition, I explore the possibility of finding a hierarchy of error types. Finally, I examine whether other factors such as first language spoken and the sex of the subjects have any correspondence with how the non-native subjects view errors.

Since several researchers such as Zuengler (1980), Chastain (1980), Politzer (1978), and Piazza (1980) have noted a lack of consistency in, and replication of, these studies cited, it seems desirable to conduct a study using the same materials previously used in an error gravity study in an attempt to discover answers to these questions. Therefore, a questionnaire designed and used by M. A. Ward in a 1983 study of native English speakers' reactions to typical written errors of ESL students was employed. I used the questionnaire without modification because the correspondence of results would likely be statistically more significant if the subjects were responding to sentences that were exactly the same.

If the sentences had been altered, it would not be clear if the responses were due to the subjects' responses to error types themselves or to differences in vocabulary. The subjects in Ward's study were all instructors of various ranks in technological areas at Oklahoma State University (Ward p.53). The results of the native speakers' responses to error types in Ward's study will be compared to those of the non-native student subjects of this study to ascertain what degree of correspondence the responses reveal.

Method

Materials

Ward's questionnaire was the result of a systematic and involved procedure she followed in developing it. First, she drew a "corpus of stimuli" from fifty written compositions by ESL students of Oklahoma State University. From the upper level students at the English Language Institute, fifteen compositions were chosen, and from the English Composition I classes for foreign students, English 1013, thirty-five compositions were chosen. Represented in this group of compositions by non-native students were ten language groups: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, Malaysian, Spanish, Telugu, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

From these fifty compositions, Ward identified seven hundred seventy-one errors. From this large group, Ward chose errors for her questionnaire using three criteria. The first criterion was that of Corder's (1967) distinction between "mistakes" and "errors," mistakes resulting from temporary lapses in contrast to errors reflecting learners' levels of competence. Second, Ward examined the errors to see

if they were "global" or "local" according to Burt's (1975) distinction. Global errors, according to Burt, are those considered to interfere with communication or overall sentence meaning. The third criterion was one set forth by James (1977) and states that each error must be one that can be recognized in the sentence even when the sentence is taken out of the context of the paragraph or essay.

A second task of Ward's was that of analyzing the errors and classifying them by error components. Following Brown's suggestion that generally errors can be sorted into four categories of omission, addition, substitution, and ordering, Ward set up the following categories of errors: number of noun, verb form, word choice, preposition, article, word form, subject/verb agreement, and subject ommission (Brown 1980: 169).

After deciding on the error components, Ward then selected sentences from those of the compositions to represent each error component. From the sentences chosen, "derived" sentences were composed. That is, Ward kept the main error which was to be representative of an error component and eliminated all other forms of ungrammaticalness in the sentence. Ward also added another component, that of "American error" for the purpose of discovering whether the native speakers would judge these errors different from non-native errors.

After choosing twenty sentences to represent the error components, Ward used these sentences as a pretest questionnaire. The pretest questionnaire was administered to sixty-two native English speaking teachers of English as a second language. These subjects were directed by Ward to underline the error, correct it, and rate it on a scale of 1 to 5.

Following the administration of the pretest, Ward made several modifications in the sentences of the questionnaire, including eliminating the subject ommission error component. The questionnaire was then given in its final form of twenty-five sentences to the native English speakers of Ward's study, the instructors of various rank in the technological fields at Oklahoma State University.

The eight types of typical written errors of ESL students incorporated into the twenty-five sentences of Ward's questionnaire include the following error types: American error, article, number of noun, preposition, subject/verb agreement, word choice, word form, and verb form. American errors are errors which are typical of the types of errors committed by native American English speakers. American errors used in this questionnaire include the use of ain't; the use of could of for could have (the influence of spoken English on the written); the use of the pronoun me, the objective case pronoun, instead of the nominative case I; the use of the adverb badly where the adjective bad is the required form; and the use of the adjective good instead of the adverb well. Except for the subject/verb agreement error which appears in two sentences and the American error which appears in five, each error type is present in three sentences of the questionnaire. An explanation of each error type is shown in Appendix A.

In its final form, then, Ward's questionnaire consists of twenty-five sentences, each containing an error representative of eight categories of recurrent written errors of ESL students. Subjects of this study were instructed to underline the error, correct it, and then to rate how serious they thought the error was. The degree of seriousness ratings range from Number "1" (not serious) to Number "5" (very serious).

Subjects were instructed that if they did not recognize any error to write "no error" in the space below the sentence (Appendix B).

Subjects

The subjects of this present study were either students enrolled in the English Language Institute (ELI) at Oklahoma State University or students enrolled in English classes at the University. Those subjects enrolled in ELI were considered to be in college preparatory work and were classified in three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. These students were placed at these levels after they took a placement test upon enrolling at ELI. This test is one developed by the ELI faculty and includes sections on grammar listening comprehension, and writing. If a student has a TOEFL score, it is also taken into account in the placement of the student. The three levels at Oklahoma State University (OSU) include the two freshman composition classes required of foreign undergraduate students, English 1013 and English 1323, and a remedial English class, 0003, for foreign graduate students who tested deficient in a pre-enrollment written composition test given to all incoming foreign graduate students. For purposes of this study, the graduate student course is considered as the lowest of the three university levels since it is a remedial class, whereas the other two are not. Table I shows the distribution of subjects by their level of instruction.

On the cover sheet of the questionnaire asking for personal information, subjects were asked to indicate their first language. This information was asked in order to determine any possible effect their languages might have on their responses. A total of thirty-six languages were spoken by the subjects. For a particular language to be considered

statistically significant, at least ten percent of the subjects needed to list it as their first language. Consequently, four language groups result. Table II shows the distribution of subjects by first language spoken.

TABLE I

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS BY LEVEL OF INSTRUCTION

Level	Name	Institution	Number of Subjects
I	Beginning	ELI	6
II	Intermediate	ELI	13
III	Advanced	ELI	10
IV	English 0003	OSU	15
V	English 1013	OSU	19
VI	English 1323	OSU	21
TOTAL NUMBER OF SUBJECTS			84

Procedure

The questionnaire was given during the spring semester, 1983. Subjects completed the questionnaire in their classrooms during their normal class periods. I read aloud printed instructions for completing

the section on personal data and instructions for completing the questionnaire itself before the subjects began. I further instructed the students to underline and correct any errors they found and to write "no error" if they found none. Subjects were not specifically told that each sentence contained an error although the directions read, "Given below are twenty-five sentences representing some recurrent types of errors in written English made by students of English as a second language" a statement which would seemingly indicate to the subjects that each sentence did contain an error. (See Appendix A)

TABLE II

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS BY FIRST LANGUAGE SPOKEN

Language	Number
Arabic	14
Chinese	13
Malay (Bhasa Malaysia)	14
Spanish	17

The subjects were given adequate time to complete the questionnaire. At the lower levels of classes at ELI, the entire period was taken by the students to complete the form. On the other hand, the university

classes generally completed the form in less than the full fifty minute period.

Limitations and Problems of the Study

Limitations

This was not a random sample of non-native speakers, as the subjects comprised the entire sample population at the ELI levels. In addition, there was a disportionate number of some language groups, reflecting to some degree the population groupings of foreign students on the OSU campus. Also, the sample groupings were not ideal for statistical purposes because at the time that the questionnaire was given in the spring semester of 1983, the various level classes contained different numbers of students. The beginning level at ELI, for example, consisted of only six students, whereas the two upper levels at OSU, the English 1013 and the English 1323 classes, had proportionately more (nineteen and twenty-one, respectively). Finally, the questionnaire, although chosen to give a more meaningful correspondence of the non-native speakers' attitudes, was designed to be administered to native speakers who would more likely recognize the errors. Because the non-native subjects, especially at the lower levels, did not always recognize errors, the data for this study were less complete, thus requiring a less precise statistical approach.

Problems

There were a few problems with sentences in the questionnaire. No. 3, for example (*He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon)

was designed to be an article problem, but there also emerged a possible singular/plural error with "afternoon." The inserted asterick in front of a language sample here signifies ungrammaticalness. Sentence No. 8 (*Two questions always repeating in my mind) was designed for word choice (always for keep); however, it could also be identified as a problem of verb omission (are always repeating). Sentence No. 23 (*Our country needs are increasing) was somewhat ambiguous. It was intended to be an error of the category "number of noun," but there was also a problem of the noun not showing possession. Also, in Sentence No. 18 (*The civil engineer does an important part in a developing country), the error of "word choice" was intended to apply to the verb "does," but the sentence could also be corrected by substituting "job" for "part," another choice of words.

Choices of Responses

Since the basic objective of this study is to gauge attitudes toward error types, the responses of subjects were counted if errors were recognized by the subjects, even if the errors were not corrected as exptected. If subjects, however, did not correct the intended error, the response was treated as zero. That is, the degree of seriousness rating which a subject indicated for a particular sentence was not included in calculations if the intended error was not recognized. The response was also counted as zero even if the subjects avoided the error by recasting the sentence in a way which made the sentence correct, but did not underline the planned error to indicate that it was recognized as the error in the sentence.

Several sentences illustrate the guidelines I followed in tabulating

responses. For example, in Sentence No. 1,

*"I am very interest in construction."

if subjects corrected "interest" to "interesting," the responses were counted because the subjects recognized that the error was one of word form even though the form they used was not the expected one of "interested." Likewise, in Sentence No. 21,

*"After complete their studies, they will return home."

the substitution of "completion of" instead of the intended "completing" was counted as a response as subjects were reacting to the error of word form which they recognized. (In this case, the subjects' responses were grammatical as well.) Again in Sentence No. 11,

*"This is one reason I was go abroad."

the correction could be made in several ways (was going, went, will be going) if subjects recognize the error of verb form. Another sentence with verb form error, Sentence No. 15,

*"He wants to work after he will be finished his studies."

elicited the response of "after he finish" which was corrected for tense, but was incorrect for the third person singular. This type of response, however, was counted since the verb form error was recognized. Finally, for Sentence No. 3,

*"He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon."

corrections of "He studies in the library at Sunday afternoon" and "on Sundays afternoon' were counted, as both responses indicated that the subjects were aware of the article error even if they did not correct the sentence properly.

Type of Analysis Employed

This is a CASE II study and basically compares the means of the two groups, the native speakers and the non-native speakers, both groups drawn from the population of Oklahoma State University (Hatch & Farhady 1982:111). I also examine differences between the native speakers (the university instructors of Ward's study) and the university level non-native students, as well as the differences between the native speakers and the ELI level students and differences between the non-native groups of OSU students and ELI students.

The t-test is used to see if the null hypothesis that any differences noted between the groups would be within the normal differences found for any two means in the population is valid or if the hypothesis can be rejected. If the hypothesis can be rejected and the differences in the means are great enough so that the t-value of the t-test is high enough, then it can be said that the differences are statistically significant.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter includes the results of the research. The reader will recall from the statement of the problem that the basic objectives of this study are two fold: to see if the non-native speakers' (NNS') perceived degrees of seriousness of errors are significantly different from those of native speakers (NS), and, in addition, to see if the non-native subjects' attitudes about the seriousnes of errors tend to become more like those of native speakers as the non-natives advance to higher levels of English training. Moreover, this study also examines the possible effects of first language spoken and of the sex of the subjects on the attitudes about the seriousness of errors.

With these objectives in mind, I proceeded as follows:

1. Evaluated 2100 elicited responses by the eighty-four subjects to the errors in twenty-five statements.

2. Evaluated responses to the individual statements by the entire non-native subject group.

3. Evaluated their responses by the eight error components, pooling the standard deviation for statistical reliability.

4. Compared the results of response means for the non-native subjects to the response means of the native subjects of Ward's 1983 study.

5. Analyzed the responses by the subjects' levels of training, dividing the subjects into two groups, those in pre-college English training at ELI and those enrolled as full-

time students at OSU and compared both groups to the response means of the native subjects of Ward's study.

6. Compared and evaluated the four largest language groups' mean responses, and

7. Finally, compared the mean responses of the two sexes to the eight error components to determine any possible differences due to subjects' sex.

Fluctuations occur in the number of counted responses for individual statements. These counted responses, as explained earlier, indicate that the subjects identified the intended error. The number of responses ranged from two for statement No. 8 to seventy-seven for statement No. 19. Besides statement No. 8, which was discarded because of the small number of responses, statement No. 6 has the lowest number of responses, nineteen. Statement No. 19, on the other hand, elicited seventy-seven responses, the largest number of responses correctly identifying the error for an individual statement.

This variation in the number of responses to individual statements necessitated the use of particular types of statistical calculations. Because of the small sample population, the t-test is used as it is particularly effective when dealing wtih small samples. The conditioned mean is also used. Using a conditioned mean requires that the calculations be done with the actual number of counted responses rather than with a mean which is adjusted to compensate for the variance in number of responses. Using the conditioned mean, again, is necessary because of the small size of responses for some statements and because an adjusted mean would not leave a large enough base to work with in some instances.

Rankings of NNS Error Gravity Ratings of Individual Statements

Rank positions and mean gravity ratings of the twenty-five individual statements by the NNSs of this study can be seen in Table III. The mean seriousness scores for the individual statements of error type components are somewhat mixed; that is, the individual statements within some error components are not close together in their rankings, but the statements are scattered in the rank position they occupy throughout the rankings. For example, the American error occupies the rank positions of 2, 5, 12, 13, and 17; Word Choice, those of 6 and 12; and Number of Noun, the positions of 8, 16, and 18. The individual statements in the Preposition and the Word Form categories also show divergence with their rank positions being 7, 15, 19, and 7, 9, and 14, respectively. Two error categories whose individual statements are close together, on the other hand, are the error component of Article with positions of 20, 21, and 22, and Subject/Verb Agreement with rank positions of 10 and 11. There is also close agreement for the error component of Verb Form, which occupies the rank positions of 1, 3, and 4.

Rankings of NNS Error Gravity Ratings by Error Components

Observing the gravity ratings of the errors by error components in Table IV, one can see that the errors of Verb Form are considered most serious by this group of NNSs. Verb errors quite consistently appear among the most serious of error types in studies involving other languages as well. In Guntermann's 1978 study of errors in Spanish, the

TABLE III

RANK POSITIONS AND MEAN SERIOUSNESS SCORES BY TYPE OF ERROR AND ERROR STATEMENT NUMBER FOR NON-NATIVE SUBJECTS

Statement Number	Rank Position	Mean Gravity	Error Component Statement
15	1	4.19	Verb Form
4	2	4.16	American Error
11	3	4.03	Verb Form
2	4	3.95	Verb Form
19	5	3.75	American Error
18	6	3.57	Word Choice
7	7.5	3.53	Preposition
1	7.5	3.53	Word Form
23	9	3.47	Number of Noun
21	10	3.46	Word Form
16	11	3.42	Subject/Verb Agreement
14	12	3.40	Subject/Verb Agreement

TABLE III (Continued)

Statement Number	Rank Position	Mean Gravity	Error Component Statement
12	13.5	3.39	American Error
10	13.5	3.39	Word Choice
9	15	3.36	American Error
25	16	3.25	Word Form
6	17	3.21	Preposition
17	18	3.07	Number of Noun
13	19	2.98	American Error
24	20	2.92	Number of Noun
22	21	2.91	Preposition
3	22	2.85	Article
20	23	2.62	Article
5	24	2.31	Article

two highest ranked error types were choice of verb and verb tense. Similarly, Piazza (1980) discovered that verb form was considered the most serious error in her study of errors in French. Only vocabulary errors (or word choice) were ranked above verb form in Politzer's 1980 study of errors in German. Likewise, a similar feeling about the seriousness of verb form errors was discovered by Ward in her study of native speakers of English.

Table IV indicates the ranking of the eight error components by the non-native subjects of this study from most to least serious: Verb Form, American Error, Word Choice, Word Form, Subject/Verb Agreement, Preposition, Number of Noun, and Article. Most striking in their differences of perceived seriousness from the other error types are the components ranked most and least serious. The Verb Form component (ranked most serious) has a mean of perceived seriousness of 4.05 compared to American error which follows with a mean of 3.53. In addition, the Article error component (ranked least serious) with its mean of 2.59 is quite different from the error component rated next to least serious, Number of Noun with a mean of 3.15. Of the six error components between the two deemed most and least serious, the range of seriousness scores is from 3.15 to 3.53, a difference of 0.38 for six error types. In contrast, the difference between the means for perceived seriousness of Verb Form and American Error (ranked 1 and 2) is 0.52. Similarly, a difference of 0.56 exists between the means for Number of Noun and Articles, the components in ranks 7 and 8, respectively. It appears, then, that Verb Form with its mean of 4.05 is regarded as quite a bit more seriously than the other error types, and Article error with its mean of 2.59 is regarded as considerably less serious.

TABLE IV

RANK POSITIONS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF ERROR GRAVITY SCORES FOR ERROR COMPONENT RATINGS BY NON-NATIVE SUBJECTS

Error Component	Rank Position	Mean Error Gravity	Standard Deviations (Pooled) of Statement Error Gravities
Verb Form	1	4.05	1.03
American Error	2	3.53	1.20
Word Choice	3	3.48	1.27
Word Form	4.5	3.41	1.20
Subject/Verb Agreement	4.5	3.41	1.20
Preposition	6	3.22	1.16
Number of Noun	7	3.15	1.18
Article	8	2.59	1.27
Average Mean		3.36	

A further discussion of the error components and their standard deviations follows.

Verb Form - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.03

This component has the highest mean error gravity (4.05) of the eight error components. The pooled standard deviation of the three statements in this error category is 1.03, the lowest of the eight error components, indicating more homogenity in attitudes about the seriousness of this error. Individually, the three statements in the Verb Form category have the following means:

No. 15	*He wants to work after he will be finished his studies.	4.03
No. 11	*This is one reason I was go abroad.	4.19
No. 2	*It hard to compare America with Vietnam.	3.95

In Table III, statement No. 15 is first in the perceived seriousness ratings of individual statements. Statement No. 11 occupies the third rank and statement No. 2 follows in fourth place. Verb Form errors, then, are seen as the most serious type of errors by the non-native subjects of this study. Moreover, the low standard deviation of the responses of this component indicates closer similarity in attitudes among the subjects toward this error type than for any other of the eight types.

American Error - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.20

Less agreement of the non-native subjects toward the American error component compared to the Verb Form component is evident in the pooled

standard deviation. Moreover, this error type is considered noticeably less serious than the Verb Form component with the mean of 3.53 compared to the mean of 4.05 for Verb Form. The five American error statements and their mean error gravities are as follows:

No. 4	*He could of done the work.	4.16
No. 19	*He ain't here now.	3.75
No. 12	*John and me came early.	3.39
No. 9	*I feel very badly about that.	3.36
No. 13	*He did good.	2.98

Of the eight error components, this one showed the most divergence in the mean error gravity ratings, ranging from 2.98 to 4.16, a difference of 1.18. In addition, the individual statements of this error component differ considerably from each other in mean perceived gravity ratings except for sentences Nos. 12 and 9 with means of 3.39 and 3.36, respectively. Error statements Nos. 9 and 13 which both involve inappropriate use of the adverb (badly) for the adjective (bad) and the use of an adjective (good) for an adverb (well) are perhaps more typical of errors observed in second language learners' writing than the other three of this component. The American errors of statements 4 and 19, on the other hand, do not usually seem to be found in non-native's writings unless they have had much close direct contact with Americans. Whether or not the non-native subjects of this study recognized these errors as ones committed primarily by native speakers, or if the errors merely appeared strange and a form which the subjects were not accustomed to can only be speculated. Nevertheless, for the response to be counted in this study, the subject's response indicates that he did recognize the intended error as an error.

Word Choice - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.27

The Word Choice component ranks third in its mean gravity rating, but is one of three components showing the least homogenity with a standard deviation of 1.27. Interestingly, this higher standard deviation occurred even though the mean responses for the component sentences differed only by 0.18. Three statements compose this component, but, because of the subjects not identifying the intended error in statement No. 8, it was discarded, leaving the following two:

No. 18	*The engineer does an important part in a developing country.	3.57
No. 10	*He makes exercise in the gym.	3.39

Error statement No. 18 appears in the sixth rank position of seriousness for individual statements and No. 10 at rank 13.5 (Table IV).

Word Form - Standard Devitation of Error Gravity 1.20

This error component ties with the one of Subject/Verb Agreement for fourth rank position of mean perceived seriousness (Table IV). Gravity ratings for statements of this component are quite homogenous. Sentence No. 25 shows the most difference, differing 0.16 from the mean for the component. The sentences and their means are as follows:

No. 1	*I am very interest in construction.	3.53
No. 21	*After complete their studies, they will return home.	3.46
No. 25	*Their father is so kindly.	3.25

Referring to Table III, one can see that, individually, statement No. 1 ranks at 7.5 with statement No. 7 (a preposition error) while

sentence No. 21 ranks tenth and No. 25, sixteenth. These sentences were also quite homogenous, differing only 0.17 in standard deviation between sentence No. 1 with a standard deviation of 1.31 and sentence No. 25 with one of 1.14.

Subject/Verb Agreement - Standard deviaton of Error Gravity 1.20

With a mean of 3.41 and a pooled standard deviation of 1.20, the Subject/Verb Agreement component ties with the one of Word Form for rank position 4.5 for perceived seriousness. (See Table III.) This component consists of two statements:

No. 16	*Tuition fees is low.	3.42
No. 14	*He always turn up his stereo.	3.40

The smallest difference between statements within a component are found here with a difference of 0.02 in the mean gravity ratings of the two sentences. Likewise, the standard deviations for the two statements differ only by 0.16.

Although the non-native subjects of this study perceive this error component equal to that of the one of Word Form at rank position 4.5 compared to the rank position of 2 which the native subjects give it, the non-native subjects give it a mean seriousness score of 3.41 in contrast to the 2.90 rating of the native subjects. Thus, the non-natives regard this individual error type as more serious than do the native submects even though the error component ranks only at mid-point in the nonnatives' ranking order.

Preposition - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.16

After the Verb Form component, the preposition error component has the lowest standard deviation, 1.16, showing more homogenity among the subjects' responses for this component than for six other components (Table IV). The three error statements of this component are evenly spaced from each other, 0.30, in their differences from the average mean gravity ratings for this component. The three preposition error statements follow with their means:

No. 7	*I may have to speak him in the future.	3.53
No. 6	*My country still lacks of high technology.	3.21
No. 22	*I arrived to Oklahoma City after dark.	2.91

On the gravity rating scale of 1 to 5, the average mean for this component, 3.32, as rated by the non-native subjects, indicates that they consider it more than average in seriousness even though it occupies the rank position of 6.

Number of Noun - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.18

With a mean gravity rating of 3.15, the Number of Noun component ranks next to last in perceived seriousness of error. The standard deviation of 1.18 is very close to the 1.16 of the Preposition component which occupies the next to the lowest standard deviation, the lowest being the Verb Form component with a standard deviation of 1.03.

This component includes the following statements:

No. 23	*Our country needs are increasingly rapidly.	3.47

No. 17 *To master English is my second wishes. 3.07

No. 24 *One thing I don't like is the traffics. 2.92

Overall, the difference in means for the individual statements of this component is 0.55. The standard deviations for the first two sentences are very close, 1.11 and 1.13, with the third statement showing one of 1.26. This indicates a homogenity in the attitudes toward this error type for the first two sentences.

Article - Standard Deviation of Error Gravity 1.27

Considered least serious as an error component, the Article error type has a mean of 2.59 and a pooled standard deviation of 1.27. This average mean of 2.59 is the only one for an error component which the non-native subjects rank below 3 on the gravity scale of 1 to 5 even though it is at the moderately serious rating. The pooled standard deviation ties this component with the Word Choice component as being least homogeneous even though there is only 0.54 difference between the high and the low mean responses. The Article error component includes these sentences:

No. 3 *He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon. 2.85

No.20 *One of them is undergraduate student. 2.62

No. 5 *There are many good universities in U.S.A. 2.31

The mean responses for these individual statements of this component are all well below the 3.36 average mean for all the error components combined and below each of the means for all error components except for the Article component itself. In addition, each of the means for the

three statements in this error component is below the means of any individual statements outside this component.

Non-native students' writing in English often seems to be recognizable in part because of article errors it contains. It is interesting that, in spite of this observable fact, both the nonnatives of this study and the native speakers of Ward's study rank this error type as the least serious. As other studies indicate, even though this type of error is evident, it must not tend to appreciably interfere with understanding the message intended and, therefore, to not be too irritating or considered too serious (Chastain 1981, Guntermann 1978).

Differences in the Error Gravity Ratings of Error Components by Native and Non-Native Subjects

Comparing the means of the non-native subjects of this study (the foreign students at six levels of proficiency) with the native subjects of Ward's study (the instructors of Oklahoma State University) using a two-tailed t-test reveals significant differences for seventeen of the twenty-five statements. The individual statements showing statistically significant differences for the reactions of the non-native student group to the errors can be seen in Table V. This table indicates that there is the possibility that the difference noted could be due to factors other than language differences in one-tenth of one percent, one percent, or five percent of the cases as noted by the probability levels. The statistical differences of the responses of the native and the non-native subjects are significant for all of the individual statements in the Preposition and American Error components, but not for any of the

TABLE V

INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS WITH MEANS
STATISTICALLY DIFFERENT FOR
NS AND NNS RATINGS

Statement Number	Error Type	NS Mean	NNS Mean	Degrees of Freedom	t-value
15	Verb Form	3.40	4.19	72	8.35*
11	Verb Form	3.61	4.03	68	3.48**
2	Verb Form	3.36	3.95	72	4.05**
19	American error	3.24	3.75	76	3.47*
4	American error	2.90	4.16	55	10,67*
12	American error	2.84	3.39	66	3.58**
13	American error	2.26	2.98	46	3.76**
9	American error	1.52	3.36	68	13.77*
10	Word Choice	2.91	3.39	48	2.86**
18	Word Choice	2.16	3.57	27	5.24*
21	Word Form	3.09	3.46	55	2.41***
25	Word Form	2.45	3.25	60	5.28*
7	Preposition	3.23	3.53	59	2.35***
22	Preposition	2.51	2.91	45	2.37***
6	Preposition	2.49	3.21	18	2.31***
3	Article	2.13	2.85	52	4.01*
5	Article	1,86	2.31	35	2.12***

* $p < .001$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .05$

statements in the error components of Number of Noun and Subject/Verb Agreement (Table V). It seems, however, that because the total non-native subject group consistently rate each error type more seriously than do the native subjects, that tendencies in gravity ratings by the non-native subjects can certainly be noted.

The most obvious tendency is the ranking of Verb Form as the most serious error by both the native subjects of Ward's study and the non-native subjects of this study. In addition, both groups rank Article errors as the least serious of the eight error components. The other components are ranked diversely, although Word Choice and Word Form do rank in the middle for both the native and the non-native subjects at third and fourth rankings, respectively, for the non-native subjects, and tie for third place ranking (along with the error component Number of Noun) for the native speakers. The American Error component ranks second in perceived degree of seriousness by the nonnatives; conversely, the native subjects place the same error type next to last, preceeding only the Article error component.

An average of sixty-five of the eighty-four non-native subjects recognize the errors in each statement in the American error component; moreover, their responses in all of the five statements in this error component are statistically significant in their differences from the responses of the native speakers. The non-native speakers' mean for the American Error component gravity rating is 3.53 as opposed to the 2.55 for the native speakers.

Another difference in the two rankings is the placement of the Subject/Verb Agreement error component. The native speakers rank it second in seriousness, following only Verb Form. The non-native speakers,

on the other hand, rank it fourth (or in the middle rank) along with Word Form.

The average mean for all error components for the native speakers is 2.78 while that of the non-native speakers if 3.36, a difference of 0.58 in mean error gravity rating.

Rankings of NNS Error Gravity Ratings
for Error Components
by Subjects' Levels

All six levels of subjects show agreement in ranking the Verb Form error component as the most serious type and the Articles as the least serious. Moreover, all six also show agreement in ranking the American error component in either second or third place. Rankings of the remaining six error components reveal less agreement among the responses of the six proficiency (class) levels. These rankings of error gravity ratings for the eight error components by all six levels can be seen in Tables VI through XI.

Rankings of the Error Components
for University and ELI LEVELS

The greatest difference in attitudes toward errors for NNS levels is obvious when the mean seriousness judgments of the combined ELI levels are contrasted with those of the combined university level classes (Table XII).

The ELI classes consistently rate the eight error types as more serious than do the university level classes. This would seem to indicate that the higher the level of proficiency, the greater the toler-

TABLE VI

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL VI - ENGLISH 1323

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	3.80
Word Form	2	3.56
American Error	3	3.55
Preposition	4	3.54
Number of Noun	5	3.46
Subject/Verb Agreement	6	3.27
Article	7	2.84
Word Choice	8	2.34
	Average Mean	3.30

TABLE VII

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL V - ENGLISH 1013

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	3.83
Word Choice	2	3.27
American error	3	3.18
Number of Noun	4	2.97
Preposition	5	2.96
Subject/Verb Agreement	6	2.95
Word Form	7	2.53
Article	8	1.88
	Average Mean	2.95

TABLE VIII

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL IV - ENGLISH 0003

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	3.83
American error	2	3.33
Subject/Verb Agreement	3	3.31
Word Form	4	3.19
Preposition	5	2.68
Number of Noun	6	2.47
Word Choice	7	2.46
Article	8	2.34
	Average Mean	2.95

TABLE IX

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL III - ELI ADVNACED

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	4.74
American Error	2	4.23
Article	3	4.10
Subject/Verb Agreement	4	3.87
Word Choice	5	3.00
Word Form	6	1.94
Number of Noun	7.5	1.67
Preposition	7.5	1.67
	Average Mean	3.35

TABLE X

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL II - ELI INTERMEDIATE

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	4.82
American error	2	4.22
Word Choice	3	4.00
Subject/Verb Agreement	4	3.75
Number of Noun	5	2.67
Article	6	2.56
Word Form	7	2.21
Preposition	8	1.67
	Average Mean	3.24

TABLE XI

RANKING OF ERROR COMPONENTS
LEVEL I - ELI BEGINNER

Error Component	Rank	Mean
Verb Form	1	4.56
Article	2	4.17
American error	3	3.75
Word Choice	4	3.00
Number of Noun	5	2.67
Subject/Verb Agreement	6	2.58
Word Form	7	2.33
Preposition	8	1.67
	Average Mean	3.09

ance for at least some errors. The average mean for the university group is 3.20 compared to 3.73 for the combined ELI classes, a difference of 0.53. Differences between the means of the two groups for the eight error components range from 0.52 to 0.59 except for two. The Preposition error component shows the least difference, 0.13, and Subject/Verb Agreement shows the most, 0.77. The Article error is the sole error component which had a mean error gravity rating of less than 3 for both levels. At less than midpoint on the scale of 1 to 5 is the 2.46 error gravity rating for the Articles error by the university level. At an almost true minpoint, 2.98 is the rating for the same component by the ELI level. Finally, the difference between the average means of these two levels of non-native subjects, 0.53, us very similar to the difference between the average means of the error components combined for the native subjects and the non-native subjects which is 0.58.

Rankings of Error Gravity Ratings
by University and ELI Levels
for Individual Statements

Comparison of error gravity ratings of individual statements by the university and ELI levels reveal some variations in attitudes toward the errors (Table XIII). With only one exception that of statement No. 22, a Preposition error, (*I arrived to Oklahoma City after dark) with a difference of 0.30, the means for the ELI responses were higher for individual statements. The differences are statistically significant for eight statements at the five percent level of significance (Table XIV).

Three statements were notable for the high ratings they receive. Statement No. 15, a Verb Form error, has a mean gravity rating of 4.75

given to it by the ELI group. This particular Verb Form error is considered most serious by both the ELI and the university levels. Almost identical to the gravity rating given No. 15 (Verb Form error, 4.75) by the ELI level is No. 4, an American error, with 4.73. Following in order for seriousness is No. 2, another Verb Form error, at a rating of 4.55 for the ELI level.

TABLE XII

COMPARISON OF MEANS OF ERROR COMPONENTS FOR UNIVERSITY AND ELI LEVELS

Error Component	Average Mean All University Levels	Average Mean All ELI Levels
Verb Form	3.86	4.41
American error	3.37	3.96
Word Choice	3.32	3.85
Word Form	3.30	3.87
Subject/Verb Agreement	3.19	3.96
Preposition	3.08	3.21
Number of Noun	3.04	3.63
Articles	2.46	2.98
Average Mean	3.20	3.73

Four other statements received gravity ratings of above 4 by the ELI level. These rankings are by error type and the rating received: Number of Noun (No. 23), 4.20; Word Choice (No. 18) and Word Form (No. 21) both at 4.11; and American error (No. 9) at 4.09. (See Table XIII.) All of these ratings are statistically significant in their differences from the university level ratings.

The university level ratings are all below four on the gravity rating scale. Two are very close to the four rating, however. No. 15, the Verb Form error, rated most serious of all individual statement errors, is rated 3.98 and No. 4, an American error is rated at 3.95.

Statement No. 11 (*This is one reason I was go abroad), a Verb Form error, ranks second in order of gravity by the university level and has a mean gravity rating of 3.90. This same statement is given a rating of 3.94 by the ELI level. This is the closest correspondence of ratings for individual statements by the two levels.

Statements showing the greatest difference in ratings between the two levels are scattered among the error components (Table XIII). No. 9, an American error (*I feel very badly about that), shows a difference of 1.09 in rating (ELI = 4.09, university = 3.00). The statement showing the next greatest difference is No. 3, an Article error (*He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon), with a difference of 1.02 (ELI = 3.56, university = 2.54). Statement No. 23, a Number of Noun error (*Our country needs are increasing rapidly), follows with a difference of 0.88 (ELI = 4.20, university = 3.32). Five other statements are almost identical in their differences of 0.78 and 0.77: No. 4 (*He could of done the work), an American error; Nos. 16 and 14 (*Tuition fees is low) and (*He always turn up his stereo), Subject/Verb Agree-

TABLE XIII

COMPARISON OF MEANS OF INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS
FOR NATIVE SPEAKERS, UNIVERSITY,
AND ELI LEVELS

Statement Number	Error Type	Mean Rating Native Speakers	Mean Rating University Level	Mean Rating ELI Level
15	Verb Form	3.40	3.98	4.75
11	Verb Form	3.61	3.90	3.94
2	Verb Form	3.36	3.69	4.55
4	American error	2.90	3.95	4.73
19	American error	3.24	3.67	3.92
12	American error	2.84	3.28	3.62
9	American error	1.52	3.00	4.09
13	American error	2.26	2.94	3.45
10	Word Choice	2.91	3.33	3.60
18	Word Choice	2.16	3.32	4.11
1	Word Form	2.93	3.39	3.94
21	Word Form	3.09	3.34	4.11

TABLE XIII (Continued)

Statement Number	Error Type	Mean Rating Native Speakers	Mean Rating University Level	Mean Rating ELI Level
25	Word Form	2.45	3.17	3.55
16	Subject/Verb Agreement	3.20	3.22	4.00
14	Subject/Verb Agreement	2.60	3.15	3.93
7	Preposition	3.23	3.40	4.00
6	Preposition	2.49	3.11	5.00
22	Preposition	2.51	2.73	2.43
23	Number of Noun	2.71	3.32	4.20
17	Number of Noun	2.97	2.96	3.55
24	Number of Noun	2.76	2.84	3.14
20	Article	2.44	2.56	2,89
3	Article	2.13	2.54	3.56
5	Article	1.86	2.28	2.50

TABLE XIV

INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS SHOWING SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN THE RESPONSES OF UNIVERSITY AND ELI LEVELS

Statement Number	Error Type	t_{obs} value	Degrees of Freedom	Level of Significance
15	Verb Form	-3.89	71	0.001
2	Verb Form	-2.59	71	.05
9	American error	-4.51	67	.001
4	American error	-3.82	55	.001
14	Subject/Verb Agreement	-2.43	46	.05
16	Subject/Verb Agreement	-2.24	60	.05
3	Article	-2.45	51	.05

ment: No. 15 (*He wants to work after he will be finished his studies), Verb Form; and No. 21 (*After complete their studies, they will return home), Word Form.

Comparison of Error Gravity Ratings
by Native Speakers and University
Level Non-native Speakers

Rankings of error components by the native speakers of Ward's study and those of the university level non-native speakers are somewhat similar, but with differences. The error component ranked most serious is the same (Verb Form) for both groups. (See Table XV.) Likewise, both rank the Article component as least serious. Word Form is ranked fourth by both groups; however, this ranking is shared with Word Choice and Number of Noun for the native subjects. One obvious difference in the two group ratings is that while the native subjects rank the American error component seventh, the university level non-native subjects rank the same error type in second place.

Examining the means for the error components for the university level non-native subjects, one can see that most of the means are in the range of the gravity rating of 3. That is, no mean is 4 or more, seven are between 3.04 and 3.86, and only one is below 3 (2.46). The range of the means of all the error components for this group is 1.40. There is a difference of 0.49 between the mean of the error component rated highest, the Verb form component at 3.86, and the one rated second in seriousness, the American error component at 3.37. Between the two error components ranked the lowest, there is a difference of 0.58 (the lowest, Article = 2.46, the next lowest, Number of Noun =

TABLE XV

MEANS AND RANKINGS FOR ERROR COMPONENTS
BY NS, UNIVERSITY LEVEL NNS,
AND ELI NNS

Error Component	Native Speaker Mean and Ranking	University Level Mean and Ranking	ELI Level Mean and Ranking
Verb Form	3.46 (1)	3.86 (1)	4.41 (1)
American error	2.55 (7)	3.37 (2)	3.96 (3)
Word Choice	2.82 (4)	3.33 (3)	3.86 (5)
Word Form	2.82 (4)	3.30 (4)	3.87 (4)
Subject/Verb Agreement	2.90 (2)	3.19 (5)	3.97 (2)
Preposition	2.74 (6)	3.08 (6)	3.81 (6)
Number of Noun	2.82 (4)	3.04 (7)	3.63 (7)
Article	2.14 (8)	2.46 (8)	2.98 (8)
Average Means	2.78	3.20	3.73

3.04).

Thirteen individual statements show significant differences between the native subjects' and the university level non-native subjects' responses. (Table XVI) All of the means for the statements of the American error component are significant in their differences for these two groups, but none of the Preposition component are significant. Four statements are significant at the 0.001 level: No. 15 - Verb Form, Nos. 4 and 9 - American error, and No. 25 - Word Form. Three are significant at the one percent probability level: No. 13 - American error, No. 18 - Word Choice, and No. 23 - Number of Noun. At the five percent level of significance are the means for six statements: Nos. 19 and 12 - American error, No. 10 - Word Choice, No. 1 - Word Form, No. 14 - Subject/Verb Agreement, and No. 3 - Article error. The significance of the difference of the means for the responses of the two groups for these individual statements is considerable, especially for those at the one percent level and even more so for those at the 1/10 of one percent level. This indicates that there is one chance in a hundred or in a thousand, respectively, that the differences noted could be due to chance. The level of probability one will accept will vary, depending on the degree of error that can be allowed for a particular type of study; for most language studies, however, a five percent level of probability is common. (Hatch & Farhady 1982:89)

TABLE XVI

INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS WITH SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT MEANS BETWEEN THE NSs AND THE UNIVERSITY NNSs

Statement Number	Error Type	University Mean	NS Mean	t-value
15	Verb Form	3.98	3.40	3.40*
4	American error	3.95	2.90	7.73*
19	American error	3.67	3.24	2.48***
12	American error	3.28	2.85	2.41***
9	American error	3.00	1.52	9.74*
13	American error	2.94	2.26	3.34**
10	Word Choice	3.33	2.91	2.22***
18	Word Choice	3.32	2.17	3.36**
1	Word Form	3.39	2.93	2.58***
25	Word Form	3.17	2.45	4.14*
14	Subject/Verb Agreement	3.15	2.60	2.70***
23	Number of Noun	3.32	2.71	2.96**
3	Article	2.54	2.13	2.27***

* $p < 0.001$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .05$

Comparison of Error Gravity Ratings by Native Speakers and ELI Non-native Speakers

Again, as with the other groups compared, there is agreement between these two groups for rankings of the most and the least serious error components (Verb Form being ranked most serious and Article error being ranked least serious). (Table XV) Also, both groups agree as to their ranking of the Subject/Verb Agreement error component as second in seriousness, Word Form as fourth (although Word Form shares this ranking with Word Choice and Number of Noun for the native speakers), and Preposition as sixth. The attitude about the seriousness of the American error for these two groups shows the native subjects ranking it seventh, and the ELI group ranking it third.

Examining the error gravity rating means for the error components by the ELI group, one can see that the means are consistently higher for this group than for either of the other groups (native speakers or university level non-native speakers). The range of the means for the ELI group is 1.43, very similar to the 1.40 range of the university NNS group; however, the highest mean for the ELI group, 4.41 for Verb Form, is 0.55 higher the highest rating, 3.86, also for Verb Form, of the university group. There is a difference of 0.95 in the rankings of the Verb Form component between those of the native speakers and the ELI group.

The ELI group alone shows a range of only 0.33 for the middle six error components. The difference between the two highest (Verb Form at 4.41 and Subject/Verb Agreement at 3.97) is 0.46, greater than the

total range of the middle six error component rankings for this group. The difference between the two lowest ranked error component means (Article at 2.98 and Number of Noun at 3.63) is 0.65, an even greater difference than that between the two highest ranked error component means, those of Verb Form and Subject/Verb Agreement. There is, therefore, close agreement in this group's attitudes toward the six errors in the middle rankings. In fact, the ratings are almost identical for some: the ratings of 3.97 for Verb Form and 3.96 for American error, and those of 3.87 for Word Form and 3,86 for Word Choice.

Fifteen individual statements show significant differences between the means of the native subjects and those of the ELI subjects (Table XVII). The differences in the mean responses between the two groups are significant for all of the five American error component statements and both of the Subject/Verb Agreement error component statements. The difference of the means of six statements show significance at the one-tenth of one percent level: Nos. 15 and 2 , Verb Form; Nos. 4 and 9, American error; No. 18, Word Choice; and No. 14, Subject/Verb Agreement. Four showed statistical significance in the difference of the means at the one percent level: Nos. 18 and 25, Word Form; No. 7, Preposition; and No. 3, Article. Finally, the difference of the means of error gravity ratings were significant at the five percent level for five statements: Nos. 12, 19, and 13, American error; No. 16, Subject/Verb Agreement; and No. 23, Number of Noun.

Although the means of the native speakers' responses for individual statements and those of the ELI group are quite different, only fifteen individual statements show statistical significance for the difference in the means of the two groups. This is most likely due to the small

TABLE XVII

INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS WITH SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT MEANS FOR THE NSs AND THE ELI NNSs

Statement Number	Error Type	University Mean	NS Mean	t-value
15	Verb Form	4.75	3.40	11.02*
2	Verb Form	4.55	3.36	4.29*
4	American error	4.73	2.90	11.99*
19	American error	3.92	3.24	2.41***
12	American error	3.62	2,85	2.59***
9	American error	4.09	1.52	13.68*
13	American error	3.45	2.26	3.05***
18	Word Choice	4.11	2.17	4.97*
1	Word Form	3.94	2.93	3.40**
25	Word Form	3.55	2.45	3.86**
16	Subject/Verb Agreement	4.00	3.20	2.67***
14	Subject/Verb Agreement	3.93	2.60	5.37*
7	Preposition	4.00	3.23	2.99**
23	Number of Noun	4.20	2.71	2.97***
3	Article	3.56	2.13	3.81**

* $p < 0.001$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .05$

number of responses at the ELI level for some of the statements, making the differences less significant statistically as the equation for the t-test involves the standard deviation and the number (in this case of responses) in addition to the differences of the means.

Comparison of Error Gravity Ratings by Native Subjects, Non-native University Level, and ELI Level

Examination of Table XV reveals that there are obvious differences in the means of the two levels of non-native subjects and the native subjects and that the ratings of the university level non-native subjects are consistently higher than the means of the native subjects, and that, furthermore, the means of the ELI group are consistently higher than those of the university level non-native subjects. The highest degree of difference, 1.41, exists between the mean error gravity rating for the American error between that of the ELI group, 3.96, and that of the native subject group, 2.55. On the other hand, the closest agreement, 0.22, is shown in the mean gravity rating for Number of Noun between the mean ratings of the university level non-native subjects and the native subjects (3.04 and 2.82, respectively). Between the ELI and the native subject groups, there are three error components with differences in the mean ratings of over 1 point: Subject/Verb Agreement, 1.07; Word Form, 1.05; and Word Choice, 1.04.

Besides these observations, it is obvious upon examination of Table XV that there is a step-wise decreasing of attitudes about the seriousness of errors (or increased tolerance toward errors) for these subjects at increased levels of proficiency. In other words, it appears

from these findings that as the subjects become more proficient in the language, they become more tolerant toward errors. This observation, however, must be tempered with two facts. First, on must bear in mind that the native subject group is a highly literate one (university instructors of various rank). This is in contrast to the opposite level of proficiency, that of beginning learners of a second language. Second, the low number of responses for some statements at the lower levels tends not to give as accurate a picture of these attitudes toward errors as would be desired although it certainly gives indication of their level of proficiency.

Rankings of Non-native Subjects' Error Gravity Ratings by Language Groups

With at least ten percent of the total number of subjects, four language groups are large enough to analyze their responses for any effects their first language might have on their attitudes about the seriousness of errors. These four language groups are Arabic, Chinese, Malay, and Spanish.

Overall, each of these language groups ranks the eight error components as more serious than do the native subjects with the exception of the Chinese, who rank the Subject/Verb Agreement and Word Choice error type components as slightly less serious than do the native subjects. The subjects who speak Spanish as their first language rank four error types (Verb Form, Number of Noun, Articles, and Subject/Verb Agreement) more seriously than do the other three groups. The Arabic-speaking subjects rank Word Form and the American error types as more

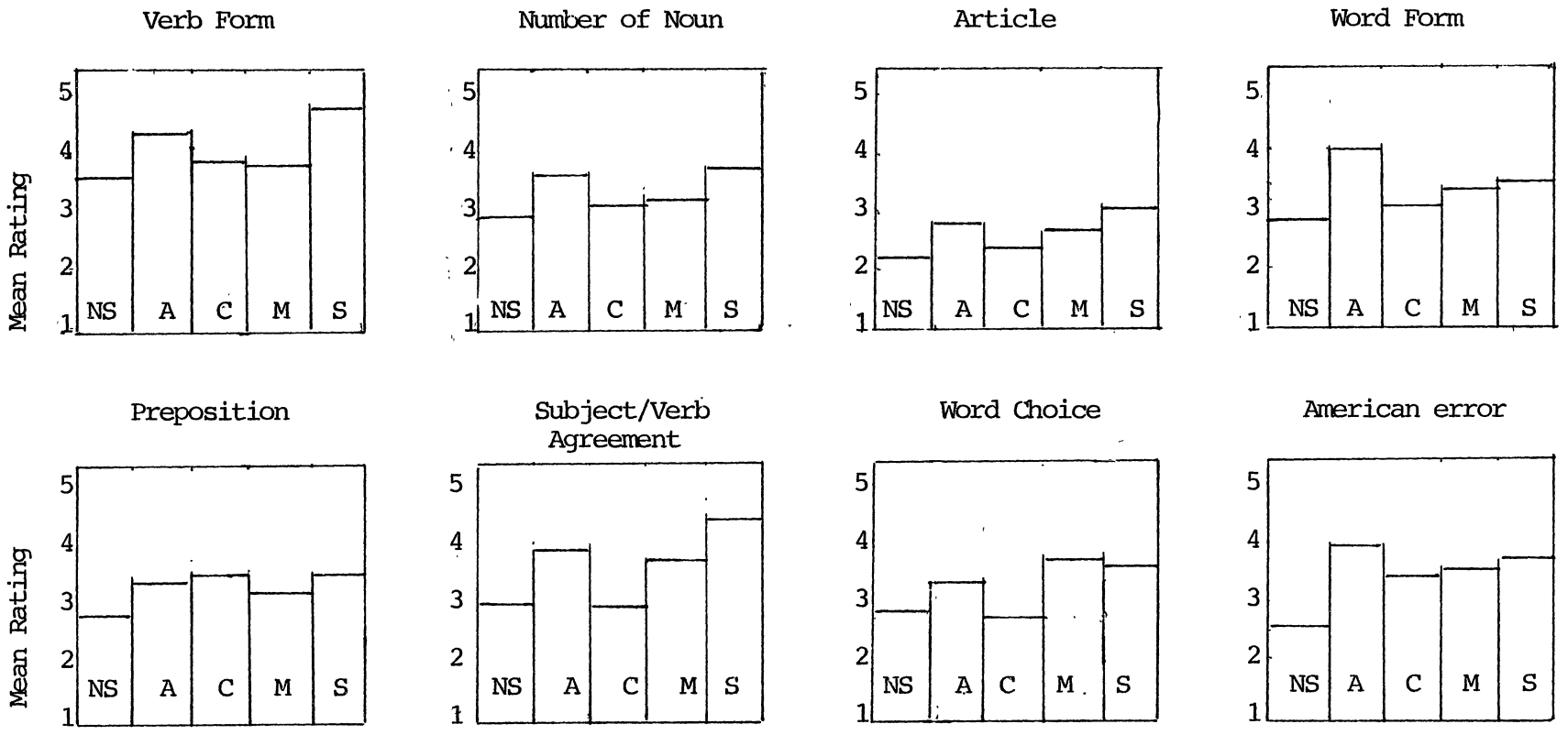
serious than do any of the other language groups. The Preposition error component is ranked most serious by the Chinese subjects of all the groups. The gravity rating for this error component is almost identical to that of the Spanish subjects, however. The Malay group rank the Word Choice component higher than the other language groups (3.63 as compared to the Spanish group's rating of 3.56, for example). Figure I shows the language groups' mean responses to the eight error components compared to that of the native subject group.

The Preposition error component corresponds very closely with the means for each of the Arabic, Chinese, and Spanish language groups (3.28, 3.35, and 3.33, respectively). The largest amount of difference occurs with the subjects' ratings of the Subject/Verb Agreement error. The Chinese group rate the error component at 2.88 and the Spanish at 4.19.

It seems that the subjects of these four language groups tend to rate as more serious the errors with which they have the greatest difficulty. This theory seems to be substantiated, for example, by the Spanish-speaking group's rating of the Subject/Verb Agreement component, a grammar point which gives them a great deal of difficulty.

Rankings of Non-native Subjects' Error Gravity Ratings by Subjects' Sex

The ranking of error components by the subjects' sex is shown in Figure II. It can be clearly seen that the female subjects rank all of the error types more seriously than do the males, although they follow the same general configuration quite closely. The rankings of two of the error types show the largest differences in attitudes, though.



Key: NS = native speakers C = Chinese speakers S = Spanish speakers
A = Arabic speakers M = Malay speakers

Figure 1. Error Gravity Ratings for Native Speakers and Four Non-native Language Groups

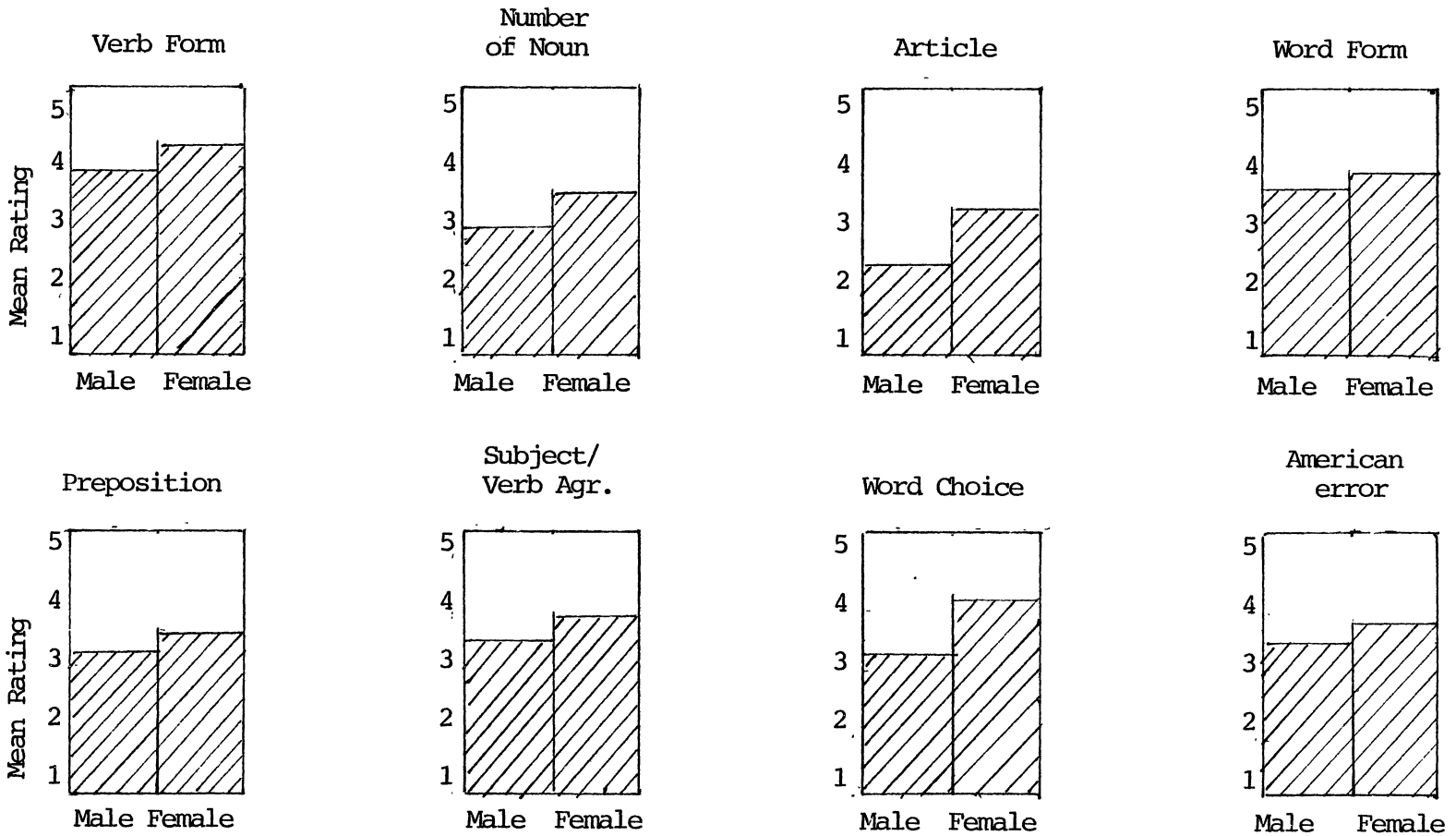


Figure 2. NNS Error Gravity Ratings by Sexes

The mean gravity rating for the Article error component is 2.42 for males and 3.24 for females a difference of 0.82. Similarly, the average mean for males for the Word Choice error component is 3.23 and for females, 4.14, a difference of 0.84.

The difference in the mean for the gravity ratings for the error Number of Noun is 0.47, whereas the males and females' responses for the other error types show even less difference. (See Figure II)

In this study, then, these differences in means for error gravity ratings reveal a more serious attitude on the part of the non-native subject females about errors. Apparently, according to a study conducted by Labov in New York City, this difference in attitudes cuts across cultures and is found in Americans as well. He found that the females of his study centered on New York City also were more conscious of errors and the reaction that they produced in other people. (Labov 1966:310-313) This difference between the sexes in their attitudes toward errors, therefore, might be part of a larger sociological factor.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF STUDY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Study

The Problem

Attitudes toward errors in language learning and their importance have changed over the years. Teachers and researchers now place greater emphasis on errors than previously to better understand how second language learning progresses and at what stage of language acquisition a particular learner may be. The emphasis now, however, is more on the effects of second language learners' (or non-natives') errors on the listener, whether the listener be a native speaker or another non-native speaker. Researchers have focused on the influence of non-native errors on native speakers with the hope that a better understanding of these effects would aid in more judicial use of classroom time. Presumably, if particular errors do not interfere with communication to an appreciable degree, and, thus, do not cause irritation, then classroom time and effort would be better spent in focusing on the errors that do cause greater problems (Raig 1975:289).

Of more recent emphasis is the interest in attitudes or feelings that non-native speakers, themselves, have about errors; consequently, several questions come to mind when one considers these effects. Do

the attitudes of second language learners change as they learn more about the second language? Do they become more like the native speakers in their attitudes toward errors? That is, do their attitudes correspond more closely to those of native speakers as they reach higher levels of instruction? Is there an appreciable difference in attitudes toward errors at different levels of learning as well? Do other factors such as first language spoken and the sex of the non-native speakers also influence subjects' feelings about the seriousness of errors? Can it be said that there is a hierarchy of error types for non-native subjects? The objectives of this study were to answer these questions, or to add information to already obtained information on this subject.

The hypotheses of this study is that non-native speakers' attitudes about errors will more closely correspond to those of native subjects at higher levels of instruction, and that, secondly, their attitudes, on the whole, would differ from those of the native speakers.

Method, Materials, and Subjects

To more accurately compare native and non-native subjects' reactions to errors, the questionnaire Ward (1983) developed for her study of native speakers' attitudes was used in this study. Ward's quesstionnaire of twenty-five sentences containing eight error types was used to measure non-native speakers' attitudes and to measure differences between the responses of Ward's native subjects and the non-native subjects of this study. The questionnaire was given to subjects in their regular classroom during a normal fifty minute class period after printed instructions were read to them by the author of the study.

The subjects of this study consisted of eighty-four non-native

subjects enrolled in six levels of instruction. Twenty-nine subjects were enrolled at the English Language Institute of Oklahoma State University. The ELI group consisted of subjects who were beginning to learn English as a second language up to those who were proficient enough to enter the university. The remaining fifty-five subjects were enrolled either in a remedial graduate level English class for foreign students or in one of the two separate levels of English freshman composition classes at Oklahoma State University.

Summary of Results

Although not all results were statistically significant, this study seems to reveal some tendencies in the error gravity ratings by the non-natives of this study. Non-native English speakers of this study were consistent in ranking errors more seriously than did the American native speakers of Ward's study. While making this comparison, one must keep in mind the fact that the non-native subjects of this study were second language learners in college preparatory English training or in ESL freshman composition classes, whereas the native subjects of Ward's study were university instructors of various ranks. The differences were not significant either for all of the individual statements or for all of the error components; however, seventeen individual statements showed significant differences for the responses of the two groups at the five percent level of significance for the t-test. Differences in responses of the two groups were not significant for any statements in the error categories of Subject/Verb Agreement or Number of Noun.

Differences between the six individual levels are mixed, but the combined subjects of the ELI level rate all of the error components

higher than do the combined university levels. Responses on seven of of the twenty-five individual statements are statistically significant in their differences for these two groups at the five percent level of significance with the t-test. Statements with significant differences between the responses of the two groups are Verb Form (two sentences), American Error (two sentences), Subject/Verb Agreement (two sentences), and Article (one sentence).

The native speakers of Ward's study and the non-native university level subjects of this study show some similarity. They rate identically the following error components: Verb Form (1), Word Form (4), Preposition (6), and Article (8). The highest degree of difference in means for these identical mean rankings of error components occurs with Word Form showing a difference of 0.48. The error component showing the most difference in the order of ranking that these two groups gave it is the American error which is ranked second by the university level and seventh by the native speakers. The differences in the mean gravity ratings of these two groups for thirteen individual statements are statistically significant. These statements are in the error components of Verb Form (1), American error (5), Word Choice (2), Word Form (2), Subject/Verb Agreement (1), Number of Noun (1), and Article (1). The only error component with no individual statements with statistically significant differences in means is the Preposition component.

The native speaker subjects and the ELI level subjects also show some similarities. The ELI group show agreement with the native speakers on the ranking of the same error components as do the university level; the ELI level, in addition, also shows agreement with the native speakers in the ranking of the Subject/Verb Agreement component in second

place. Thus, the ELI level agrees with the native subjects on the rankings of five error components, those of Verb Form (1), Subject/Verb Agreement (2), Word Form (4), Preposition (6), and Article (8).

Fifteen individual statements show significant differences between the means of the native subjects and the ELI subjects. These occur in the indicated frequencies for the following error components: Verb Form, twice; American error, five times; Word Choice, once; Word Form, twice; Subject/Verb Agreement, twice, Preposition, once; Number of Noun, once; and Article, once. Thus, all error components had at least one statement with differences in the means for the two groups which was statistically significant. Examining the differences of the means themselves would cause one to expect more significant differences. The fact that the number of significant differences in the means is not greater is probably due to the small number of responses for some statements, especially at the ELI level. These results could also be influenced by the standard deviations for the statements, though.

It is obvious in examining the means of the three main levels of subjects for comparison in this study (the native subjects, the university level non-native subjects, and the ELI subjects) that the ELI group do rate errors more seriously than do the university level and considerably more serious than do the native subjects. The highest degree of difference, 1.41, exists between the mean error gravity rating for the American error component between the ELI group (3.96) and the native subects (2.55). Other error components showing large differences between these two groups are the Subject/Verb Agreement component with a difference of 1.07, Word Form with one of 1.95, and Word Choice with one of 1.04.

The differences in the responses between language groups show that they vary in their attitudes toward the error components. For five of the error components (Verb Form, Number of Noun, Article, Preposition, and Subject/Verb Agreement) the Spanish speakers rate the errors the highest. Arabic speakers rate the components Word Form and the American error higher than any of the other language groups do. Finally, the Malay speakers rate Word Choice more seriously than do the other groups. The Chinese group's ratings are closer to the native speakers' than are any other group's ratings for five of the error components: Number of Noun, Article, Word Form, Subject/Verb Agreement, and American error. Furthermore, the Chinese speakers rate one error component, Word Choice, lower than the native speakers do. The Malay group's response mean is slightly less than the Chinese speakers' for Verb Form.

Female subjects rate all error components higher than do the males, although the differences are not always great. Both groups, however, rank the errors similarly. The females rank the error components as follows from most to least serious: Verb Form, Word Choice, Word Form, American Error and Subject/Verb tied, Number of Noun, Preposition, and Article. The males rank the error components in the following order: Verb Form,Word Form, American error, Subject/Verb Agreement, Word Choice, Preposition, Number of Noun, and Article. Both groups rank Verb Form most serious, and Article, least. Also, both include the same five errors within the top five rankings, and also the same three in the last three rankings, although not in identical order.

Conclusions

While this study did not conclusively prove its hypotheses statistically, it seems that the results show tendencies which indicate that the hypotheses have some validity. Care must always be taken in interpreting statistics, however, and care must especially be taken in interpreting statistics that apply to hard-to-measure factors such as attitudes. Also, when using the t-test employed here, one must bear in mind that although the t-test is one of the most useful statistical procedures, there may be intervening variables related to general language learning which are not measured (Hatch & Farhady 1982:120). Therefore, any conclusions or implications drawn must be done so with caution.

This study is limited by the small sample size and the unequal sizes of the various levels. In addition to the small size of the sample, the fact that subjects did not correctly identify some errors made the means of the responses less reliable as a gauge of the subjects' feelings about those particular errors. For some subjects, especially at the lower levels, not identifying the error would indicate that for them, this error was indeterminate (Schachter et al. 1976:70). In other words, they had no experience, or, perhaps, understanding of this error, and thus, could not make a judgment about it. The possibility that some errors would be indeterminate for subjects could possibly also be true for the American Error for the lower levels. Did those subjects actually identify the error because they recognized it, or was it merely strange to the, and, therefore, presumed to be the error? For some questions, respondents failed to correctly identify the effor

because they were confused about the sentence itself, as was discussed in Chapter III.

Implications

Several implications from this study seem to be appropriate, and some especially so for the non-native college student. While non-natives are not expected to perform like natives, and, indeed, may be resented by native speakers when they do, according to Preston (1981: 107), they do seem to need to understand what is considered important by the native speakers. In fact, the results of this study seem to substantiate to some degree the theory that non-native speakers acquire a more native-like feeling about errors as they advance in language training. Whether or not they consciously acquire this attitude or not, this study is not designed to determine. Preston further notes that "non-native speakers must select from native speakers those aspects which prove most effective." (Preston 1981:107) This, too, would seem to be a task which teachers and administrators would need to keep in mind while planning classes and curriculum to help students know what aspects are most effective.

Furthermore, it seems that while foreign language learners in their own language settings (countries) might not need to use a language that closely corresponds to the language of native speakers, those studying in the target language setting would need more native-like skills (Richards 1972:184). To achieve language performance closer to that of the native speakers, a non-native subject needs to be integrated into the native speakers' community to some degree according to Richards (1972:184). Again, the fact that the second language learners need to

be integrated into the native speakers' community to effectively learn more native-like skills would seem to have implication for ESL teachers and administrators, particularly at a preparatory level. Students studying a second language in their own cultures might not need preciseness in performance, but subjects preparing for training in the target language setting would need to be able to perform adequately to be understood. This need for preciseness in performance would seemingly include feeling about errors the way native speakers do. Furthermore, if Richards' views are correct, an effective way to develop these attitudes sabout the language would be for the students to be more integrated into the native speakers' community. In addition, it would seem that if students feel more self-confident about which errors are considered serious, this self-confidence would improve their overall performance in classes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research along these lines would be helpful in adding to the information about error judgment attitudes. For another study such as this one, a larger population sample would be advisable, as well as a more evenly divided population on the various levels. If further research is done to more precisely guage the attitude differences between language groups, the number of subjects in the language groups should be equal.

Another study of this type would most likely benefit from a modified questionnaire which would have a balanced number of sentences between the error groups, and, as much as possible, avoid more than one possible error per sentence.

Additional research could examine more closely the differences between native and non-native speaker reactions to errors using Ward's questionnaire. This could be accomplished by employing two groups of students, native and non-native, such as the two corresponding freshman composition courses at Oklahoma State University, English 1013 for foreign students and English 1113 for Americans for the top level groups for comparison. If two such groups were used for the top level of comparison, factors such as age and general education level would be more equal and the study could give a clearer view of differences in attitudes about the seriousness of errors.

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APPENDIX A

EXPLANATION OF ERROR COMPONENTS

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Error Component	Sentences	Explanation of Error
Verb Form	It hard to compare America with Vietnam.	Omission of be verb.
	This is one reason I was go abroad.	Substitution in past tense
	He wants to work after he will be finished his studies.	Substitution in present tense.
American error	He could of done the work.	Substitution of preposition of for verb have
	He ain't here now.	Substitution of colloquial contraction ain't for isn't
	John and me came early.	Substitution of objective pronoun case me for nominative case I
	I feel very badly about that.	Substitution of adverb badly for adjective bad
	He did good.	Substitution of adjective good for adverb well
Word Choice	Two questions always repeating in my mind.	Substitution of always for kept
	He makes exercise in the gym.	Substitution of makes for does
	The engineer does an important part in a developing country.	Verb substitution--does for plays

APPENDIX B (Continued)

Error Component	Sentences	Explanation of Error
Word Form	I am very interest in construction.	Omission of inflection on past participle
	After complete their studies they will return home.	Omission of inflection on present participle
	Their father is so kindly.	Addition of adverbial inflection on adjective
Subject/Verb Agreement	He always turn up his stereo.	Omission of third person singular verb inflection
	Tuition fees is low.	Substitution of singular for plural verb
Preposition	My country still lacks of high technology.	Addition of unneeded preposition
	I may have to speak him in the future.	Omission of preposition
	I arrived to Oklahoma City after dark.	Substitution of preposition--<u>to</u> for <u>in</u>
Number of Noun	To master English is my second wishes.	Addition of plural noun inflection on a countable noun
	Our country needs are increasing.	Omission of possessive inflection
	One thing I don't like is the traffics.	Addition of plural noun inflection to an uncountable noun

APPENDIX B (Continued)

Error Component	Sentences	Explanation of Error
Article	He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon.	Addition of the definite article
	One of them is undergraduate student.	Omission of the indefinite article
	There are many good universities in U.S.A.	Omission of the definite article

APPENDIX B

ERROR JUDGMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Name of the class you are in now _____

II. Language

A. What is your first (native) language? _____

B. Please list any other languages you speak _____

_____

III. Personal Information

A. Age _____

B. Sex

Male _____

Female _____

C. Country where you were born _____

IV. Previous English Instruction

Please check the appropriate boxes (you may need to check more than one). Also, please indicate how many months or years you studied at each of these levels.

1. Elementary school	1. _____months	_____years
2. Secondary (high) school	2. _____months	_____years
3. Intensive English program	3. _____months	_____years
4. University	4. _____months	_____years

Error Judgment Questionnaire

Directions: Given below are 25 sentences representing some recurrent types of errors in written English made by students of English as a second language. After reading each sentence, please do the following:

1. Underline the error.
2. Write a correction in the space provided below the sentence.
3. Circle the number which shows how serious you think the error is. Number "1" indicates that the error is not serious. Number "5" indicates that the error is very serious.
4. If you do not recognize any error, please write "no error" in the space below the sentence.

		Not Serious				Very Serious
1.	I am very interest in construction.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	It hard to compare America with Vietnam.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	He studies in the library on the Sunday afternoon.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	He could of done the work. work.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	There are many good universities in U.S.A.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My country still lacks of high technology.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I may have to speak him in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Two questions always repeating in my mind.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I feel very badly about that.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	He makes exercises in the gym.	1	2	3	4	5

		Not Serious				Very Serious
11.	This is one reason I was go abroad.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	John and me came early.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	He did good.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	He always turn up his stereo.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	He wants to work after he will be finished his studies.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Tuition fees is low.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	To master English is my second wishes.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The civil engineer does an important part in a developing country.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	He ain't here now.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	One of them is undergraduate student.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	After complete their studies, they will return home.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I arrived to Oklahoma City after dark.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	Our country needs are increasing rapidaly.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	One thing I don't like is the traffics.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Their father is so kindly.	1	2	3	4	5

VITA

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