

## **Bringing the Learner and Context into Error Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Despite its limitations in capturing the entirety of any given language learning situation, a traditional error analysis informed by a more socially sensitive view of second language acquisition can still prove to be an effective tool for language teachers. Taking this combined approach, this paper aims to highlight the significance of errors in context by looking at both spoken and written language data produced by the same learner to different audiences and for different purposes. The data were collected from a Korean language learner studying abroad in the U.S. and consist of a written narrative essay for an undergraduate writing class and a spoken version of the same narrative shared orally with a friend. The results bring to light the significance of social context in the errors or mistakes made by language learners, and further highlight the importance of a social approach to understanding learners' language.

### **Introduction**

Ever since the idea of error analysis was introduced, there has been a debate as to how useful such an analysis can be for looking at second language learner data, especially when considering the full complexity of any given learning situation. However, if one asked second language learners what their weaknesses are in their particular target language(s), many might be hard pressed to give a comprehensive and systematic analysis of their own errors. At the same time, one would be hard pressed to find many second language learners who would not be interested in knowing their weaknesses in their target language(s). Most language teachers would also agree with the benefits of having what Gass and Selinker (2008) considered "windows onto a system – that is, evidence of the state of a learner's knowledge of the L2" (p. 102).

Therefore, despite the weaknesses and limitations of error analysis with regard to the whole picture of second language acquisition and second language learner data, it can still give us extremely important insights as to the nature of

language learners' weaknesses in their target language. This can especially be the case when proper attention is paid to the context of the second language sample. In this paper, I hope to reassert the notion that Corder (1967) first introduced in his paper, "The Significance of Learners' Errors," and highlight the possible benefits of an error analysis informed by more recent social approaches to second language acquisition promoted by Block (2003) and others.

### **Early Error Analysis**

Error analysis really came to the forefront in the 1960s, following the article published by Corder in 1967 mentioned above. The approach was related to, but also different from, contrastive analysis in that it focused more on the learner than on the differences between the target language and the learner's native language. "Unlike the typical view held by teachers at the time, errors, in Corder's view, were not just to be seen as something to be eradicated, but rather can be important in and of themselves" (Gass and Selinker, 2008, p. 102). It is through examining

these errors that error analysis attempts to shed light on the internal rule-governed system of the language learner. However, error analysis (EA) is not without its limitations. Specifically, Dagneaux, Denness, and Granger (1998) pointed out the following limitations:

- Limitation 1: EA is based on heterogeneous learner data;
- Limitation 2: EA categories are fuzzy;
- Limitation 3: EA cannot account for phenomena such as avoidance;
- Limitation 4: EA is restricted to what the learner cannot do;
- Limitation 5: EA gives a static picture of L2 learning. (p. 164)

Despite its limitations, error analysis can still be used effectively alongside further methods of analysis in order to get a better understanding of a particular learning situation.

### **Error Analysis Informed by Recent Developments in SLA**

In combining a social approach with a traditional error analysis, one can hope to benefit from its strengths and overcome some of its weaknesses. Being that “learner differences occur in part because of the image they want to present and the kinds of contexts they interact in,” a social approach to language learning is essential in obtaining a better understanding of what is really going on in the learner’s language (Siegal, 1995, p. 225). The idea of context, and the social implications it has for an understanding of language use (and learning), was eloquently expressed by Luria (1987), as cited in Lantolf (2000):

Explanation of any human condition is so bound to

context, so complexly interpretive at so many levels, that it cannot be achieved by considering isolated segments of life in vitro, and it can never be, even at its best, brought to a final conclusion beyond the shadow of human doubt. (pp. 18-19)

Such an approach, promoted by Block (2003), is grounded in the ideas that language is both linguistic and social, and a focus on communicative competence, in addition to linguistic competence, is needed. According to Matsuoka and Evans (2004), “language in use is social because human beings socially interact via language” and for this reason, they urged that “SLA must deal with language in use” (p. 9). This means adopting a “socially constituted linguistics in SLA” and showing concern “not only with referential communication at the service of information exchange, but also with interactional and interpersonal communication at the service of the social construction of self-identity, group membership, solidarity, support, trust and so on” (Block, 2003, p. 64).

In this paper, I aim to conduct an error analysis of two language samples produced by the same learner, but at different times and in two different modes: written and spoken. The mode of production is part of the context that Luria (1987) discussed. It is therefore important to recognize and appreciate the inherent differences between written and spoken language.

### **Spoken vs. Written Discourse**

As discourse analysts Brown and Yule (1983) pointed out, the demands on the producer of language are quite different in

written and spoken contexts. The uses for spoken and written language are also generally distinct, where “we use speech largely for the establishment and maintenance of human relationships (primarily interactional use)” and “use written language largely for the working out of and transference of information (primarily transactional use)” (Brown &

Yule, 1983, p. 13). Although a fully encompassing discussion on the differences between written and spoken language would require much more explanation than is possible here, Table 1 is an adapted summary of the main differences between written and spoken language, according to Brown and Yule (1983, pp. 4-17):

Table 1

*Summary of the Main Differences between Written and Spoken Discourse*

Spoken language	Written language
Processing of language production is more demanding	Processing of language production is less demanding
More time pressure during production	(Normally) less time pressure during production
“Repair” must be done actively and publicly	“Repair” can be done privately
Can observe interlocutor and modify speech based on observations	No access to immediate feedback from reader
Much less structured syntax (use of more simple structures)	More structured syntax (use of more complex structures)
Infrequent passive constructions	Use of passive constructions
Replacement/ refinement of expressions is common ( <i>this man + this guy...</i> )	Use of heavily modified noun phrases
Frequent repetition of similar syntactical forms	Use of rhetorical organizers ( <i>firstly, more importantly, in conclusion</i> )
Use of prefabricated ‘fillers’ ( <i>well, I think, you know, um, so</i> )	
Use of generalized vocabulary ( <i>a lot of, got, do, thing, nice, stuff, things like that</i> )	

Based on the general differences and that of “use” highlighted above, it becomes clear that context, including the channel of communication (i.e., written or spoken), must also be considered when taking a more socially grounded approach to error analysis.

## Research Questions

The focus of this analysis was guided by the following specific questions:

1. Does a learner make more errors in a written or spoken version of the same narrative?
2. What types of errors may the learner make in a written and spoken version of the same narrative?
3. Do social factors affect the output of the learner in different contexts with a different audience (writing a paper for a professor vs. interview/conversation with a peer)?
4. Can the learner recognize her own errors after long-term and short-term exposure to the target language?
5. What types of errors are recognized, and what types are not recognized by the learner?

## Methodology

### *Subject*

One female native Korean speaker who is a graduate student in a study abroad context participated in the study. She is twenty-seven years old. She has an outgoing and talkative personality both in Korean and English, and definitely feels comfortable having conversations in English. Her language background consists of formal English instruction in middle school and high school as well as a study abroad program in the U.S. for

about six months, a five month Teaching English as a Second Language certificate program in Korea, and a year and a half enrollment in a once-a-week listening practice course in Korea. She had been in her current graduate program in the U.S. for nearly one year at the time of this study. Based on her enrollment and performance as a graduate student in a study abroad context, her language proficiency level is considered advanced in this study. For confidentiality, she has been given the pseudonym Tina.

### *Data Collection*

There were three main types of data collected for this study: written data, spoken data, and a feedback session with the subject.

*Written Data:* This was a paper that was written by Tina for an undergraduate writing class that she was taking concurrently with her graduate studies. The topic was something memorable in her life. In the paper, Tina wrote about two and a half pages about how she used to be a tomboy and a certain experience that started her on the path of being more lady-like, or, as she put it in the title of the paper, *Entering into a Girl Era*. The audience for this written narration was her professor. It consisted of 985 words.

*Spoken Data:* This was a recorded interview conducted with Tina roughly ten months after she wrote the story above. The researcher, who was also Tina’s peer and friend, conducted the interview, in which he asked her about the same story that she had written about in her paper. Prior to the interview, the researcher had analyzed her written story and prepared some questions to elicit similar details as in the story. The purpose of these questions was to elicit a spoken sample of

a story as similar to the written one as possible. Although such efforts were made, the spoken sample was still quite different from the written essay: it was a dialogue and not a monologue, and it was guided by questions rather than being fully controlled by its author. For practical purposes, I will refer to the written essay and the oral story as “the same narrative.” The oral narration was around ten minutes in length and consisted of 1050 words. It was transcribed by the author of this paper.

*Feedback Session:* The feedback session was conducted about one week after the spoken data were collected, and it consisted of showing Tina certain parts of the original text (paper and interview transcript) and asking her if there are any mistakes in these samples, and if so, how she would correct them. Short extracts from the written essay and the spoken narration containing both correct and incorrect language were shown randomly, so that Tina would not know if she had to change something every time or not. It is worth noting here that there were occurrences where Tina could recognize an error but could not provide a correct form. There was also at least one occurrence of Tina providing an incorrect form for something that was already correct. However, for the purpose of this paper these occurrences will not be focused on directly.

### *Analytical Procedures*

The basic steps of error analysis were employed with both the written and spoken data from Tina. After collecting the two main data samples, errors were first identified in context and highlighted in red. Then the errors were listed in chronological order. In the column next to each error, the error category, notes

about the error, and correct form or rule was added. The errors were then sorted by category and quantified based on their categories as well as the total number of errors for both the written and spoken data. In cases of multiple errors in the same string of discourse, each error was classified separately in their respective categories. This procedure was done to find answers to research questions 1 and 2. The data were further analyzed in the following ways:

Data from the written and spoken versions were compared to see if and how Tina narrated the same parts of the story in different ways in the different contexts of writing a paper for a professor and speaking to a friend and peer. Social factors (audience, goals, identities) will be considered as possible explanations for any differences in language use and errors between the written and spoken versions. This was done to address research question 3.

The data from the feedback session were analyzed to determine the degree of error recognition by Tina, ten months after writing the paper and roughly one week after the recorded interview, respectively. This was done to find answers to research question 4.

The error recognition data were further analyzed by category, showing the ratio and percent of errors recognized in any given category for both the written and spoken versions. This was done to find answers to research question 5.

## **Findings**

The findings of this study will be presented in the order that the research questions were presented above.

### *Research Question 1*

“Does a learner make more errors in a written or spoken version of the same

narrative?” To answer this question, I compared the total number of errors made in each of the two data samples (Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Overall Error Rate in the Written and Spoken Data*

Written	Spoken
8.8%	7.5%
(n = 87 errors, N= 985 words)	(n= 79 errors, N= 1050 words)

It was originally expected that there would be more errors in the spoken data, based on the issue of time and lack of preparation vs. the written data that allowed for preparation and plenty of time to write and self correct during the process. Interestingly enough, based on the data shown in Table 2, there were actually slightly more errors in the written narrative by Tina. Technically there were an additional 16 errors in the written data (15 punctuation and 1 spelling), but because they are unique to the written channel, they were omitted from the comparison here. Pronunciation errors in the spoken discourse were also omitted for the same reason.

For insights into the possible reasons for more errors in the written data, it is worth noting the fact that the spoken version was recorded ten months after the written version was completed. Had the spoken data been taken at the same time as the written, there could have been comparatively more mistakes in the spoken data. In essence, it is possible that the extra ten months of exposure to the target language helped balance out the extra errors we might expect to see in the spoken discourse vs. written discourse by the same learner. However, this spec-

ulation needs to be confirmed by further research.

Also, supported by Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres, and Fernandez-Garcia’s (1999) study (as cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008); it is possible that because this narrative was something that Tina had talked about and written about before the interview (meaning she did not need to focus much on meaning in the interview), the ability to free up the cognitive burden of focusing both on form and meaning allowed her to perform better overall. On the other hand, there was, most likely, a 10-month lapse between the first telling and the second telling of this story (assuming that Tina did not tell this story during these 10 months), so it was unlikely that Tina remembered much of her first telling and therefore the second telling might not have benefited from a lightened cognitive load.

Another possible explanation is that Tina is more comfortable in an oral environment when she was speaking with a friend and peer, versus writing a formal paper for a professor. In fact, Tina pointed out that the paper was the first formal paper she had to write since she came to the U.S. for graduate school. Her competence at the point of the written version might have been quite different

from the point when the oral story was told, given her experiences in an English-speaking environment (mentioned above), the extra 10 months of exposure to the target language, her current enrollment in graduate school, and the countless experiences interacting and talking with friends and peers during that time. When considering these sociolinguistic factors, it starts to become very clear how the error rate in her spoken version is comparably less than that of her written version, despite the fact that in the oral narrative,

Tina did not have time to prepare for the talk in advance.

*Research Question 2*

“What types of errors does the learner make in a written and spoken version of the same narrative?” Analysis of the types of errors in the written and spoken versions of the same narrative started by first comparing Tina’s total errors in each of the different error categories in Table 3 below:

Table 3

*Comparison of Error Type in Written and Spoken Data*

Categories	Written	Spoken
	Total errors	Total errors
Active/passive	<b>1</b>	0
Article	10	<b>15</b>
Conjunction	0	<b>2</b>
Lexical Selection	<b>25</b>	18
Number	0	<b>3</b>
Preposition	<b>15</b>	2
Pronoun	1	<b>4</b>
Structure	<b>20</b>	11
Tense	15	<b>24</b>
Total	<b>87</b>	79

*Note.* Higher numbers are in bold type.

Based on the data presented above, Tina made notably (a difference of 5 or more) more *structure*, *preposition*, and *lexical selection* errors in the written data, and notably more errors in *tense* and *articles* in the spoken data. More errors in the categories of structure, preposition, and lexical selection (written data) are most likely due to not only the inherent

difference between the written and spoken register, especially with regard to the complexity of syntax and vocabulary, but also the fact that Tina had more time to write her paper and thus may have tried to incorporate more complicated structures, sentences, and vocabulary than she would normally use in the spoken register. Here are some examples of errors

in the written and spoken versions of the narrative (a series of periods in the spoken data indicates silence):

Written Data:

- I agreed to follow her even though I kind of knew that I would not be going to like the play (STRUCTURE)
- I could tell she's kind of girls who are like Ji-young (STRUCTURE)
- sitting on the table in the living room having coffee (PREPOSITION)
- she introduced me — her daughter who's the same age as me (PREPOSITION)
- In spite of the fact that I didn't like the event I had in Seoul (LEXICAL SELECTION)
- I could see big screens hanging outside of the buildings (LEXICAL SELECTION)
- It looked so good nevertheless I had never (LEXICAL SELECTION)

Spoken Data:

- so I spin like...'shung shung shung' (TENSE)
- not me cause I'm tomboy (TENSE)
- so if someone is like.....against me or (TENSE)
- kids from...\_small town (ARTICLE)
- I...did the revenge for my brother (ARTICLE)
- pink dress with the beads and lace (ARTICLE)

Tina's producing 'I could tell she's kind of girls who are like Ji-young' might be explained by the general difficulty Korean speakers have with relative clauses. The source of their difficulty is the different word order and constructions of relative clauses in Korean and in English, as shown in the following examples (Table 4) from Swan and Smith (2001, p. 335):

Table 4

*Relative Clause Construction in English and Korean*

English	Korean
The dog, which was chained up, barked.	Chained-up dog barked.
Students who study in the library as well as in class do better.	Library-in-study-student + plural suffix class-in-student + plural suffix better do.

In regards to errors of preposition, this is most likely due to the natural difficulties Korean speakers can have in using English prepositions. As Kim (1987) explained one postpositional particle in Korean can have multiple prepositional

renderings in English. For example, according to Tina, Korean *eb* can be translated as *in*, *on*, and *at* in English, depending on the context. The seemingly arbitrariness or complexity of the English prepositional system can cause problems



for many learners of English, no matter what their linguistic background. This is not to mention the inherent difficulty in learning such a system that Richard-Amato (2003) described as a part of language that “cannot be reduced to teachable rules” (p. 64).

Based on the inherent nature of written and spoken texts, where in spoken discourse, and especially amongst peers (an interactional context), it is very likely that Tina was more focused on using simpler structures, generalized vocabulary, and sentences that fit that particular register. This would explain the fact that there were fewer errors in structure and lexical selection, and might also explain the fact that there were only two errors in the category of preposition in the spoken data. It is also possible that the ten months of further exposure to the target language allowed Tina to become more familiar with proper use of English prepositions and lexical items. And yet, another factor that may explain the differences or similarities in the errors in Tina’s written and spoken versions is avoidance. Unfortunately, an inherent limitation of error analysis prevents the analysis of usage or possible avoidance in the data which might be useful in determining this possibility for certain.

The same idea as mentioned above also helps account for the higher number errors in the categories of tense and articles in the spoken data. Tina’s focusing more on content and being in a more relaxed and interactional atmosphere with a friend is most likely the cause of many errors in her spoken story, such as:

- I should be queen even though I don’t wanna play (TENSE)
- so everything has to be under my control (TENSE)

- and she miss Seoul so much (TENSE)
- mm..\_\_\_Next day... (ARTICLE)
- which is \_\_\_capital city of Korea (ARTICLE)
- so my mom used to get a phone calls (ARTICLE)

The errors of tense might be caused by the overgeneralization of present tense usage in a relaxed interactional environment amongst friends or peers and a lack of experience in giving a fairly long narrative face to face. Also, use of proper tense in the spoken register is a much more demanding production process as it requires the speaker to process the entire sentences and discourse at one time. On the other hand, in the written register, Tina would have had enough time to go back and take a look at sentences as a whole, monitoring her use of tenses to a larger extent. It makes sense that Tina is less focused on correct article use and especially tense in a spoken environment with a friend and peer, because in such a social setting, the content is much more important than keeping all the tenses straight or watching out for those pesky articles, which according to Swan and Smith (2001), do not exist in Korean.

### *Research Question 3*

“Do social factors affect the output of the learner in different contexts with a different audience (writing a paper for a professor vs. interview/conversation with a peer)?” As Block (2003) pointed out, language is social interaction and socially constituted, meaning function often comes over form, especially in spoken discourse. Based on the following examples, it seems that the context and

audience, and thus social factors, did, in fact, affect the output of Tina's linguistic forms to express similar content in the two versions of her story:

- Written: I never played with dolls like most girls do
- Spoken: Like don't care about....girly stuff
- Written: This situation was not acceptable to me
- Spoken: I was so pissed off
- Written: I spinned like a ballerina so that my dress would spread like a flower petals
- Spoken: like really round is flatter you know.. like in the cartoon (haha). Animation
- Written: I was not sure if she was upset
- Spoken: I could see tha- she was really jealous and I was really happy

In the first and second examples, Tina is obviously comfortable enough in the spoken context to use colloquial expressions such as *I was so pissed off* and this is in total contrast to the way she worded the same idea in the written version. In the third example, Tina really takes a kind of poetic and aesthetic approach to describing how she showed off her new dress in the written version as compared to the very direct and self-effacing approach she took in the spoken version. In these examples, we can see a clear difference in the language Tina selects to use in the different contexts,

with the spoken versions being much more vague (Examples 1 and 3) and yet in parts more animated and emotional (Examples 2, 3, 4). Tannen (2007) found comparable patterns when she compared conversational and written accounts of the same event by a female writer in Greece. Tannen (2007) found that "her conversational accounts of her experience were typically more 'involving' (or, as I sometimes put it, more 'poetic') than her fictional accounts of the same events" (p. 20). Tina's language production in the two channels of communication was no exception to this pattern, and this shows that she was clearly being influenced by the social factors that underlay the different contexts that she was operating in. Her linguistic competence was not the sole factor that influenced her language output.

Finally, and especially in the last example, we can see two very contradictory versions given by Tina. It seems Tina felt more comfortable in the spoken context, opening up and admitting that she was purposely trying to make her friend jealous and was enjoying doing so, where as in the written version, Tina really seems to downplay this aspect, most likely to preserve face with her professor and maintain some degree of innocence. Overall, it seems there was clear and concrete influence from social factors on the language that Tina utilized in the written and spoken forms of her story, and that her language "output" had strong ties to the kind of identity she was trying to construct in the different contexts. Toward the professor (an older female), she tended to construct a more refined, detailed, and formal identity that fit into the discourse of a written essay and her social position as a student in relation to the professor. It was almost as

if she was trying to impress or earn her praise. However, toward a friend and peer (male, of the same age) Tina tended to construct a much more lively, honest, and animated identity, more in line with not only spoken discourse, but with someone in the same age group and social status. Tina tends to keep complex structures or vocabulary to a minimum and focuses more on the content, all the while distancing her current self from her past self, most likely to save what Brown and Levinson (1978) considered positive face, or “the need to be accepted, even liked by others, to be treated as a member of the same group” (as cited in Block, 2003, p. 77). Had Tina chosen to construct these different identities in the different contexts, perception of her by the

interlocutors would have surely been quite different. This highlights the significant role social context plays as people construct different identities depending on who they are communicating with. Focusing too much on the errors thus runs the risk of losing sight of the learners themselves, a weakness of traditional error analysis from the very beginning.

#### *Research Question 4*

“Can the learner recognize her own errors after long-term and short-term exposure to the target language?” Indeed Tina could recognize and correct some of her own written and spoken errors after long-term and short-term exposure to the target language, based on data from the feedback session (see Table 5).

Table 5

#### *Errors Recognized in the Written Data and Spoken Data*

Written (N = 87 errors)	Spoken (N = 79 errors)
47.1%	73.4%
(n = 41)	(n = 58)

Tina was able to correctly recognize far more errors in her spoken narrative compared to the written version (73.4% vs. 47.1%), even though the feedback session was conducted just one week after the spoken version was recorded (short-term exposure to the target language). This is further evidence for the significance of context and the sociolinguistic factors at work summarized in Table 1. The fact that she would make more self-recognizable errors in spoken discourse with a friend and peer is also supported by what Tarone (1988) illustrated as the Interlanguage Capability Continuum, which highlights the different levels of attention to language form,

ranging from ‘careful’ style to ‘vernacular’ style (as cited in Towell and Hawkins, 1994, p. 34). Even though the written data were collected about 10 months prior to the spoken data, and she had far longer exposure to the target language before the feedback session, Tina was still able to recognize more errors in the spoken data taken 10 months later. This means that in the spoken context that these data were collected in, Tina was most likely operating in the vernacular style of Tarone’s Interlanguage Capability Continuum (unattended speech data), which would lead to more careless and thus self-recognizable errors (Towell and Hawkins, 1994). More are recognizable in

the spoken discourse because they could be considered to be “mistakes,” not “errors,” according to Corder (1967) (as cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008, p. 102).

*Research Question 5*

“What types of errors are recognized, and what types are not recognized by the learner?” According to the data shown

below, Tina was able to correctly recognize a fairly high percentage of tense (86.6% and 91.7%) and preposition (60% and 100%) errors in both the written and spoken data. The lowest percentages of errors recognized by Tina were in the category of structure (30% and 36.3%) in both sets of data, and lexical selection (38.5%) in the written data (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Types of Errors Recognized in Written Data and Spoken Data.*

Error categories	Written	Spoken
Active/passive voice	0% (n = 0, N = 1)	0% (n = 0, N = 0)
Articles	30% (n = 3, N = 10)	<b>66.7%</b> (n = 10, N = 15)
Conjunctions	0% (n = 0, N = 0)	<b>50%</b> (n = 1, N = 2)
Lexical Selection	38.5% (n = 10, N = 26)	<b>72.2%</b> (n = 13, N = 18)
Number agreement	0% (n = 0, N = 0)	<b>66.7%</b> (n = 2, N = 3)
Prepositions	60% (n = 9, N = 15)	<b>100%</b> (n = 2, N = 2)
Pronouns	0% (n = 0, N = 1)	<b>100%</b> (n = 4, N = 4)
Structure	30% (n = 6, N = 20)	<b>36.3%</b> (n = 4, N = 11)
Tense	86.6% (n = 13, N = 15)	<b>91.7%</b> (n = 22, N = 24)
Total	47.1% (n = 41, N = 87)	<b>73.4%</b> (n = 58, N = 79)

These data provide possible insight as to what a learner may be more apt to improve on in 10 months, as well as what a learner tends not to monitor as much in spoken discourse. It can also shed some light on just what constitute, in Corder’s terms, ‘errors’ instead of ‘mistakes.’ Since mistakes are simply “slips of the tongue,” the learner could probably correct herself,

and since errors are beyond the learner’s competence, she may not have been able to correct herself. According to this distinction, most of Tina’s “mistakes” were prepositions, pronouns, tenses, and lexical selections (in the spoken language). Or, it is quite possible that the further 10 months of exposure to the target language allowed her to recognize these errors or

mistakes to a higher degree. On the other hand, in both the written and spoken data, whether or not Tina was careful or focusing more on form, she recognized a much lower percentage of structural errors, even after 10 months of further exposure to the target language (in the case of the written narrative). It then seems that in both sets of data, the categories of structure, and lexical selection (in the written data) were the biggest source of what Corder considered 'errors' and might possibly require more explicit instruction or further exposure to the target language to learn fully.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### *Limitations*

Beyond the inherent limitations of an error analysis as highlighted in the literature review, there were also other limitations to this study that need mentioning. Being that this study not only focused on a traditional error analysis, but also the social aspect of language and language use, more time to conduct further feedback sessions with the subject to get more insights into specific errors would have been useful. A better grasp of the factors that may have contributed to certain errors would have been useful in getting a much clearer understanding of the system at work and how it was influenced by sociolinguistic factors. A further limitation, due to limited time and space was that Tina's revision of her original written paper had to be omitted from this study. It could have also provided some interesting and significant insight into the development of Tina's interlanguage as a whole in the past 10 months. Finally, related to the limitation just mentioned, the fact that the written and spoken data were collected about 10 months apart made it difficult to arrive at

any generalizations about Tina's development in the target language over the last 10 months difficult. It is through these limitations that new questions for further research must be raised.

### *Contributions*

This study nonetheless provides an extended procedure for error analysis in which the mode of communication (oral vs. written), the audience, the purpose, and the learner's identity construction are part of the analysis (see also, for example, Takahashi, 1989). All these factors, together with linguistic factors, help to explain the source of errors. In addition, this study also brings the learner's perspective into error analysis and thus, can help to handle the "sticky" question of whether a particular utterance is an "error" or a "mistake." Regarding the first point, as a teacher, one needs to keep in mind that when students use a second language, they are not just producing "linguistic output" according to what their linguistic competence allows them to, but are constantly affected by social factors, and thus an appreciation for what Hymes called communicative competence is needed in pedagogical practice (Block 2003). I have shown that an extended error analysis informed by a social approach can not only help us get a clearer picture of a particular learner's possible weaknesses in the target language, but it can also help us understand what really might be going on in second language use, and how linguistic forms (both accurate and inaccurate) are embedded in social contexts. Regarding the second point, by determining what are more likely "mistakes" and what are the actual "errors" through a feedback session like the one conducted in this study, a teacher can determine what factors are

important to consider in terms of pedagogical remediation. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory states that the mental process is intertwined with the social, historical, and institutional context (Block, 2003). This study shows that putting the learner at the center of error analysis can both shed light on learners' language use as well as keep language teaching in line with a sensible understanding about how language works and how language is learned.

### *Question for Future Study*

In a perfect world, both written and spoken versions of the narrative from 10 months ago compared to written and

spoken versions taken recently would have provided a much clearer picture of not only Tina's English language system as it is today, but also how she has developed over the past 10 months. Based on this, I would raise the following questions for future study:

- How will Tina develop in the target language in the next 10 months?
- What social factors might be at work with regard to her development over the next 10 months?
- Are the kinds of differences and changes by Tina similar to those by other learners of English?

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