

An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Written Narratives of Mentally Retarded Students

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1- INTRODUCTION

The effects of mental retardation on the linguistic performance have been the focus of many studies during past decades. This subject becomes even more attractive and necessary when it comes to those whom we categorize as Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR). In Iran we have specific schools for them studying in different grades. Hopefully, with proper education they can function relatively well in the society. Therefore, studying their weak points or strong points in their linguistic performance and analyzing that can result in better understanding of their linguistic competence, and can be interesting for specialists in psycholinguistics and cognitive studies. More importantly, it can be used in developing more appropriate educational materials according to their needs. Narratives (written or oral) have been proved to be one of the appropriate sources that can reveal linguistic features and have been recently used frequently as linguistic data for studying language in mentally retarded people as well. This study aims at analyzing and categorizing different grammatical errors in written narratives of mentally retarded students in Tehran.

2- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

All the observed grammatical errors in the written narratives of mentally retarded students in different grades were analyzed and categorized based on the structural definitions of different parts of speech. In this article, grammar refers to sentence construction, grammatical structures and the relations between them. The interface between syntax and morphology, i.e. those syntactic features represented on or can be traced in words and modify them like agreement, aspect,

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tense, modality, person and number, are considered as morpho-syntactic features. Syntactic errors refer to those errors concerning the construction of phrases and sentences, for example the word order.

3- Methodology

This research can be categorized as an exploratory research in that there are no presupposed sub-categorizations of the errors. So all the observed syntactic and morpho-syntactic errors even if there is just one occurrence of that error have been analyzed and categorized in either groups. Mentally retarded students' errors in different grades have been compared according to the percentage and ratio of errors to the number of clauses in their writings. Descriptive-Analytic method has been used for analysis. Four picture stories have been used for elicitation of the narratives. The sample consists of 125 students in elementary (3rd, 4th, 5th grades) and 143 students in pre-vocational (1st, 2nd, 3rd grades) levels studying at four schools for mentally retarded students which were chosen according to systematic random sampling.

4- Results and discussion

Number of clauses in the EMR students' narratives in different grades are as follows: third: 68, fourth: 424, fifth: 289, and in prevocational level: first: 338, second: 413, third: 479. The grammatical errors can be classified in two groups. 1. morpho-syntactic errors including wrong tense, mood, and aspect inflections, lack of verb-object agreement, and lack of noun-pronoun agreement while the first is the most frequent one (23%). 2. Syntactic errors are classified into inversion, deletion, insertion, substitution, and ungrammatical scrambling while deletion is the most frequent one (25%).

5- CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

In 2011 clauses, 496 grammatical errors have been classified into syntactic (51%) and morpho-syntactic (49%) categorized and analyzed in six grades (primary and prevocational levels) concerning the frequency and type of the error. Comparison between grammatical errors in primary and prevocational students shows that the frequency of both syntactic and morpho-syntactic errors decreases in prevocational level. Deletion has been the most frequent error in all grades, and in this category, deletion of a preposition is the most frequent one. Errors related to the use of preposition

have also been one of the most frequent ones in other types of errors such as insertion and substitution. Although among 16 types of errors that have been analyzed under 8 categories, only three types are considered as morpho-syntactic, high frequency of occurrence of these types of errors can be interpreted as EMR students' weakness in morpho-syntax.

Keywords: syntactic errors, morpho-syntactic errors, written narratives, EMR students

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