

## Error Analysis: Avoidance

Based on Schachter, J. (1974). An error in error analysis. *Language Learning*, 24, 205-214.

- Two versions of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis:

Strong  
Predictive  
*A priori*

Weak  
Explanatory  
*A posteriori*

Based on a contrastive analysis of the subsystems of two languages, L1 and L2, one can predict that similarities between L1 and L2 will lead to ease of learning, whereas differences will lead to greater difficulty.

Recurring errors produced by learners are analyzed in order to discover why the errors occur. Contrastive analysis can be used as one way of identifying causes for the errors. This methodology is called error analysis.

Error analysis assumes that errors indicate learning difficulties and that the frequency of a particular error is evidence of the difficulty learners have in learning the particular form.

- Schachter's data: Comparison of relative clause errors produced in free compositions in English (L2) by 50 (25 intermediate, 25 advanced) NSs each of Persian, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese.
- Contrastive analysis of restrictive relative clauses in English and the other languages:

	<b>English</b>	<b>Persian</b>	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Japanese</b>
What is the position of the RC wrt the head noun?	To the right	To the right	To the right	To the left	To the left
How are relative clauses marked?	1. Subordination marker <i>that</i>  2. Pronominal particle <i>who, whose, whom, which</i>	1. <i>Subordination marker</i>	1. <i>Subordination marker</i>	1. <i>Subordination marker</i>	3. <i>Subordinate affixes in the relative clause</i>
Are there pronominal reflexes (resumptive pronouns)?	No	Yes <i>In (S), DO, IO, OPrep, Poss, and OComp</i>	Yes <i>In (S), (DO), IO, OPrep, Poss, and OComp</i>	Yes. <i>In IO, OPrep, Poss, and OComp</i>	Yes. <i>In (OPrep)</i>

4. Translations of “I saw the woman [who speaks English]” in Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, and Persian. Square brackets enclose the relative clause.

## Japanese

私は英語を話す女の人を見ました。

watashi-wa eigo-o hanasu onnanohito-o mimashita

I-subject [English-object talks] woman-object saw.

## Chinese

我看到那个说英语的女人。

wo kandao neige shuo yingyu de nüren

I saw that-classifier [speak Englishrelative-marker] woman.

## Arabic

أنا رأيت المرأة التي تتكلم الانكليزية.

ana raait al-merat allaty tatakalam al-Englizi

I saw the-woman [who speaks the-English.]

## Persian

آن زنی را که انگلیسی حرف می زند دیدم.

an zanri ra ke inglisi harfmizanad didam

That woman [that English speaks] I saw.

5. Examples of relative clauses in English in which the relative pronoun serves six different syntactic functions. *Try to put in resumptive pronouns (pronominal reflexes) in these clauses.*

As subject:	the girl	that	came			
As direct object:	the girl	(that)	Kate	saw		
As indirect object:	the girl	that	I	wrote	a letter	to
As object of a preposition:	the girl	that	I	sat	next to	
As a possessive NP:	the girl	whose	father	died		
As object of comparison:	the girl	that	Kate	is	smarter	than

Thus, *a priori* contrastive analysis predicts that the order of difficulty in learning English relative clauses will be:

Japanese > Chinese > Arabic, Persian

6. An error analysis, however, gives the opposite results:

	Correct	Error	Total	Percent Error
Persian	131	43	174	25%
Arabic	123	31	154	20%
Chinese	67	9	76	12%
Japanese	58	5	63	8%
NSs	173	0	173	0%

7. The apparent accuracy of the Japanese and Chinese is probably due to avoidance of relative clauses in English. *What other explanations can you think of?*

**Schachter's conclusion: Error analysis is untenable because its only data come from learner productions. Avoidance can only be predicted by *a priori* contrastive analysis.**

## **Error Analysis: Pros and Cons**

1. Error analysis focuses on learner production of errors in speech or writing.
2. Error analysis considers only systematic errors, which are supposed to reflect the learner's interlanguage competence. Non-systematic errors are attributed to performance problems and are not investigated.
3. Error analysis is a methodology (not a theory) that uses the “weak” version of the CAH to explain the errors in learner's speech or writing.
4. Other possible explanations for learners' errors can be found in Selinker's five processes which can lead to fossilization of interlanguage: (1) language transfer, (2) transfer of training, (3) strategies of second language learning, (4) strategies of second language communication, and (5) overgeneralization of TL rules.
5. The strength of error analysis lies in the fact that, almost for the first time, researchers began to look at what learners actually said and wrote.
6. The weaknesses of error analysis:
  - One needs to investigate non-errors as well as errors to get the full picture of learners' competence.
  - Because error analysis focuses only on learners' *production*, some important features of learners' competence may not be apparent—e.g., structures they avoid.
  - The investigator may not identify correctly the structure that the learner was actually trying to produce.
  - The cause of errors often appears to be indeterminate: “ambiguous goofs”
  - Is there always one and only one cause for a particular error? Some patterns of learner error seem to be attributable to the L1, some to the L2, and others to the combined effect of both L1 and L2.