Error analysis is a systematic process for studying the errors made by second-language learners. Its main goal is to understand how learners acquire a new language by examining the mistakes they make, which are seen not as simple failures but as important clues to the underlying learning process.

This approach was a major shift from **Contrastive Analysis**, which had predicted errors based on the differences between a learner's first and second language. Error analysis showed that many errors are actually similar across learners of different language backgrounds and are a natural part of language development.

The process of error analysis typically involves four key steps:

1. **Collection of Data:** Gathering a body of learner language, such as written essays, spoken transcripts, or tests.
2. **Identification of Errors:** Highlighting and identifying every error found in the data.
3. **Classification of Errors:** Categorizing the errors based on their type, such as grammatical (e.g., incorrect verb tense), lexical (e.g., wrong word choice), or phonological (e.g., pronunciation mistakes).
4. **Explanation of Errors:** Attempting to determine the source of the errors.

Types of Errors

Errors are commonly explained as coming from two main sources:

- **Interlingual Errors:** These errors are caused by the learner's first language interfering with the new language. For example, a Spanish speaker might say, "I am with cold," directly translating the Spanish phrase *Estoy con frío*.
- **Intralingual Errors:** These errors are caused by the learner's overgeneralization of rules within the new language itself. For example, a learner who says "I goed home" is correctly applying the regular past tense rule to an irregular verb, an error similar to what a native-speaking child would make. These are also known as **developmental errors**.

Error analysis highlights that many errors are a natural and necessary part of the learning process, providing valuable insights into the strategies learners use to build a new language system.