

Mistake, error and correction in Language Sciences

Using the terms “mistake”, “error” and “correction” within the framework of Language Sciences brings to mind, at first, a close link between linguistics and normativity. Moreover, the problem of the norm is complex in several ways, and must be analyzed. One can distinguish (a) a descriptive norm, determining the *normality* through statistics (Canguilhem, 1966), and (b) a prescriptive norm, defining the *correct* form in use. Thus, the notions of mistake, error and correction appear to have diverse aspects that all the disciplines of linguistics can deal with.

On the other hand, the semantic boundary between *mistake* and *error* can be discussed. Following a conventional distinction, *mistake* is described as a deviation in the speakers’ language that occurs when the speakers, although familiar with the rule, fail to perform according to their competence, whereas *error* is defined as a deviation resulting from ignorance of the rule. With this in mind, making *errors* can be regarded as an inherent phenomenon in language production, since it results from complicated cognitive and motor activity, while *correcting* could then restore the faulty utterance. Distinguished from *mistake*, the meaning of *error* does not entail spontaneous self-correction, since it results from the speaker’s ignorance and, therefore, could not be emended without confrontation with a still unknown and yet broken rule (Auroux, 1998).

These notions can be dealt with in different ways: the nature of mistakes or errors, as well as the potential formulation of corrections by the speaker himself or by someone else, could concern many fields of Language Sciences (first and second language acquisition, languages teaching, phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, psycholinguistics, etc.)

However, if we approach *mistake* and *error* independently, both words can have very different meanings. In philology for instance, a scribe’s *error* should be analyzed in another way when it results from an initiative in *correcting* a mistake in the copied manuscript. This editing is regarded as an *error*, because it shows a difference in relation to the original text, but it can also be regarded as a *correction*, in so far as it restores a “correct” form after identifying an initial mistake. Hence identifying an error or a mistake and verbalizing a correction are not actions which are peculiar to teachers or grammarians. However, their works are still especially studied from the viewpoint of the history of linguistic theories. Indeed, discussions among linguists often bring about corrections which affect both linguistic and metalinguistic discourses. Mistakes, errors and corrections can therefore be thought of as essential parts of grammatical discourse itself.

The diverse relations between the three terms which we would like to consider from a linguistic point of view offer many possibilities of scientific investigation in all fields of Language Sciences. The RJC 2014 invite the participants to think about the notions of “mistake”, “error” and “correction” and their present relevance: the participants can study the relations between these three terms, describe their treatment and look into the methodological questions and historical issues that they raise in Language Sciences. We will particularly welcome presentations in the following fields:

- first and second language acquisition
- linguistic anthropology
- textual genetics
- psycholinguistics
- general linguistics
- morphology
- phonetics
- pragmatics
- semantics
- syntax
- translation studies
- discourse analysis
- language and culture pedagogy
- history of linguistic ideas
- linguistic typology
- historical and comparative linguistic
- philology
- phonology
- rhetoric
- sociolinguistics
- NLP