CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

As language teachers, we are inevitably faced with the task of analyzing our students' errors. No matter how much we may dislike the focus traditionally placed on errors, and no matter how much we may dread the act of correction, we ultimately find ourselves with a red pen in hand, diligently scanning students' writing in search of errors. These errors may range from word level to sentence-level to development of ideas. Immense literature on second language learning has focused on two major approaches to the analysis of a second language learner's errors: Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis. The first is based on behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics; the second, on the cognitive code theory of language learning. These two approaches which form the basis to this study will be discussed in this chapter. The researcher also discusses the stages of error analysis and the sources of errors. This chapter also presents findings of some studies in error analysis and socio-economic status.
2.1 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS (CA)

Bloomfield's (1942) theory was the underlying theory in Contrastive Analysis. Proponents of Contrastive Analysis (Fries, 1945; Weinrich, 1953; Lado, 1957; Politzer, 1965) see language as a conditioned response, and believe that errors produced by a second language learner result from the interference of the native language.

In CA theory, the prime cause of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference from the learner's native language. Difficulties in the target language are chiefly due to grammatical differences between the native language and the target language. The greater the differences between the two, the more acute the learning difficulties will be for the learner. A structural comparison between the two languages is needed to predict the difficulties and errors which will occur in learning the second language. What needs to be taught is discovered by comparing the languages and subtracting what is common to them.

Based on the principles stated above, it is believed that a comparison of a learner's first and target language should reveal areas of difficulty for the second language learner thereby, providing teachers and developers of L2 materials with specific guidelines for lesson planning (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Thus, second language teachers ought to be aware of some basic language differences between the L2 and L1, and anticipate and
recognize errors that frequently result from native language interference or, at least, consider native language interference as a possibility. For example, Tamil students will have great difficulty with the indefinite and definite articles since they are not used regularly in the Tamil language. Malay and Tamil speaking students may compose sentences without verbs since their languages tolerate such structures. In addition, they often have problems with the *-ed* inflection because their language has no comparable indicator of past tense. The teacher should be prepared for problems such as these and be willing to patiently provide instruction accordingly.

Contrastive Analysis is more useful for the teacher in understanding the underlying cause of the errors. The teacher has the opportunity of working closely with the individual student and can ask if the error reflects a native language pattern rather than a target language pattern. Through questioning, the teacher can help the student discover why he or she has produced the error. Sometimes the student is aware of the native language interference; sometimes not. But in either case, the teacher should enable the student to recognize and understand the interference. Once made aware of this particular dependence and shown how to form the correct expression, the student is more likely to watch for and eventually correct the error in the future.
Contrastive Analysis generally influenced the treatment of errors in the 60s. It was later found that this approach was unable to trace all types of errors in the target language. This paved the way for Error Analysis which was able to provide more explanation to second language learners' errors.

2.2 ERROR ANALYSIS (EA)

Error Analysis is the examination of errors committed by students in both the spoken and written medium. Corder (1975), who has contributed enormously to Error Analysis thus writes:

"The study of errors is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. In this respect it resembles methodologically the study of the acquisition of the mother tongue. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indication as to the learning process" (http://www.melta.org.my/ET%201996/main4.html).

EA has developed out of the belief that errors indicate the student's stage of language learning and acquisition. The student is seen as an active participant in the development of hypotheses regarding the rules of the target language just as a young child learning the first language. Errors are considered to be evidence of the learner's strategy as he or she builds competence in the target language. These errors are defined as global - those which inhibit understanding, and local - those which do not interfere with communication (Shaughnessy, 1977). Various categorizations of these error systems have been developed by error analysis theorists, two of which can
be helpful for the teachers. The first categorization focuses on systems of language acquisition (Corder, 1974:131) as described below.

i. pre-systematic errors - occur before the language learner has realized any system for classifying items being learned. At this stage the learner can neither correct nor explain this type of error.

ii. systematic errors - occur after the learner has noticed a system, and the errors occur consistently. At this stage the learner can explain but not correct the errors.

iii. post systematic errors - occur when the learner is consistent in his or her recognition of systems; the learner can explain and correct the error.

The second categorization also relies on three major groups: (i) interference errors, (ii) intra-lingual errors, or (iii) developmental errors (Richards, 1995:67). Interference errors are caused by the influence of the native language, in presumably those areas where the languages differ markedly. Intra-lingual errors originate with the structure of English itself. The complexity of the language encourages over-generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions for rule application. Developmental errors reflect the student's attempt to make hypotheses about the language - often independently from the native language.
Error analysis can benefit the teachers in several ways (Corder, 1981:10). First, it accounts for many errors which Contrastive Analysis does not. Second, because it emphasizes the student’s recognition of language systems - the fact that the student is learning rules and applying them - the teacher can approach the student with a more positive attitude. Instead of seeing the student as simply an individual who has not or cannot learn proper usage, the teacher can understand the student as someone practising cognitive skills - analyzing, inducing, classifying, etc. From this perspective, the student becomes an active thinker – not merely a passive receptacle, waiting only to receive instruction. Third, the teacher can use error analysis to classify the errors according to a system and correct it by teaching proper target language examples. For instance, if the student consistently forms the past tense by adding -ed to all verbs but can identify and correct them when editing, the teacher may conclude that the student is over-extending the rule during the composition of the first draft simply because he or she is concentrating on the ideas expressed, rather than on spelling. Instead of reviewing past tense rules, the teacher might opt to stress the need to edit and proof read. If, however, the learner consistently makes an error which he/she can correct but not identify, such as question formation, as in the following examples - "Did he talked with you"; Does he talked with you", the teacher might decide that it is an intra-lingual error, and will then need to review the syntax which has been incompletely learned.
2.2.1 Stages of Error Analysis

As mentioned by Corder (1973), Error Analysis is carried out in various stages. These are as follows:

2.2.1.1 Recognition of Errors

To recognise an error, one should first of all know what is meant by the term 'error'. Corder (1973) uses the term 'erroneous' to mean those utterances which are either superficially deviant or inappropriate in terms of the target language grammar. He distinguishes between errors and mistakes. Errors are systematic, likely to have repeated occurrences and are also known as competence errors. They reveal the learner's underlying knowledge of the linguistic system of the L2. Mistakes are unsystematic, and occur occasionally or at random. Mistakes can also be due to factors such as lapses of memory, fatigue, emotional strain and carelessness.

Corder (1967:127) points out, "Recognition of error is thus crucially dependent upon correct interpretation of the learners' intentions". He makes claims to the occurrence of two types of utterances:

(i) Overtly erroneous – utterances which are superficially deviant in terms of the rules of the target language; and

(ii) Covertly erroneous – utterances which are superficially well formed but not meaning what the learner intended to mean.
Corder (1967) further contends that in order to arrive at the knowledge of what the learner intended to say, one can ask the learner to explain in his mother tongue what he intended to say. An interpretation based on this is called ‘authoritative interpretation’. Then the utterances are reconstructed keeping in mind what the native speaker would have said to convey that message in that context. This is called an ‘authoritative reconstruction’.

In cases where one does not have access to the learner, what is called a ‘plausible interpretation’ and a ‘plausible reconstruction’ could be made. This is done by studying the surface structure of the text-sentence in conjunction with the information derived from its context. Then the utterances are reconstructed to convey what the learner could possibly have intended to mean. To identify errors, the original utterances are compared with their plausible or authoritative reconstructions. Once the recognition has taken place, description can begin.

2.2.1.2 Description of errors

In this stage, one tries to show the learners how they have failed to realize the intended message. There are problems, which prevent proper description as the teacher needs an extremely good insight into the learners’ mind.

Regarding the description of errors, Corder (1967:128) relates that “our objective in error analysis is to explain errors linguistically and
psychologically in order to help the learner to learn”. He suggests that we should look for errors that occur repeatedly so that we can observe the rule that the learner may be using and try to describe it.

The systematic errors are taken into consideration in this way. This is a difficult task because individual learners may be highly inconsistent in their errors. Corder agrees that inconsistency is more characteristic of errors than systematicity. Once the errors are described, explanation of errors can begin.

2.2.1.3 Explanation of errors

Explanation is still largely speculative because of our limited knowledge of the psychological and neurological process involved in language learning. Therefore, an error that occurs could be due to several reasons. For example, a learner’s mother tongue, Tamil, has only one way of referring to future time, while the target language, i.e. English, has three ways of referring to the same. When an ESL Tamil student commits an error in the use of the English future tense, it would be difficult to decide whether the error is caused by mother tongue interference or confusion of the rules of the target language.

According to David Lott (1983), mother tongue does not actually interfere, though it does not give any guide to the learner. Nickel (1978) takes a wider view and considers the example stated above as an interference error. But he
says in such cases, we should distinguish between direct and indirect interference. Dulay and Burt (1974a) define interference as the automatic transfer of the structure of the target language due to habit.

Corder (1967:130-131) refers to three types of errors. These are: (i) transfer errors; (ii) analogical errors and (iii) teaching induced errors. Selinker cited in Richards (1974) five processes which are more or less similar to that suggested by Corder (1967), but also includes second language learning strategies and second language communication methods to explain the nature of errors. Once we have identified the errors and provide an explanation from a particular point of view, errors can then be classified.

2.2.1.4 Classification of errors

In the Error Analysis approach, errors are classified as errors of omission where some elements which should be present are omitted; errors of addition where some elements which should not be there are present; errors of selection where the wrong item has been chosen in place of the right one; and errors of ordering where the elements presented are correct but wrongly sequenced. According to Corder (1973), teachers go a bit further in their classification. They usually state at what linguistic level the errors have been committed; whether the errors are spelling, grammatical or lexico-semantic.
2.3 SOURCES OF ERRORS

One of the most significant contributions of Error Analysis is its success in presenting a wide range of possible explanation to account for L2 errors. Explanation of errors, however, is largely speculative by nature, as mentioned earlier, and it is difficult to pinpoint the exact source of the errors. This is due to the fact that several reasons may be responsible for an error (Svartvik, 1973; Richards, 1974b). Interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of errors. Many errors also derive from the strategies employed by the learner in language acquisition, and from interference of items within the target language (Richards, 1974b). Thus in this section, the researcher describes the learner's strategies and the associated causes of errors.

2.3.1 Learner's Strategies of Learning

When the learner tries to create new knowledge about the target language, he or she tries to make some hypothesis by using prior knowledge of L1, L2 or another foreign language. When relying on prior knowledge, he or she mainly uses two strategies - transfer of rules from the first language, and generalisation of second language rules. Transfer and generalisation can be seen as a form of simplification. Simplification strategies consist of attempts by the learner to ease the burden of learning and facilitate communication (http://lifc.univfcomte.fr/RECHERCHE/P7/pub/washing.htm). Strategies
used by learners in order to simplify the task of learning may generate errors.

2.3.1.1 Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are attributed to the native language. There are interlingual errors when the learner’s mother tongue habits, in terms of patterns, system or rules, interfere or prevent him or her, to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language.

Wilkins (1968:99) states, “When learning a foreign language an individual already knows his mother tongue, and it is this which he attempts to transfer. The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages is similar - in that case we get 'positive transfer' or 'facilitation'. We may get 'negative transfer' or 'interference' when the structure of the two languages is different.

Here is a sentence constructed by a Tamil speaker:

‘Naan puttagam padikiren’

I book read

When translated it says ‘I read book’. In this example, the learner uses her knowledge of her mother tongue as a means to organise the second language. In the Tamil language, the sentence pattern follows: Subject+Object+Verb, unlike English which follows Subject+Verb+Object.
2.3.1.2 **Intralingual/ Developmental Errors**

Intralingual errors are those due to the language being learned, independent of the native language. According to Richards (1974a:48), intralingual errors are "items produced by the learner which reflect not the mother tongue, but generalisation based on the partial exposure to the target language. The learner tries to derive the rules he has been exposed to and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language." Richards (1971b) classifies errors according to their sources. He gives a number of reasons as to why learners commit those errors. His classification and explanations are as follows:

(i) **Overgeneralization**

The errors that are committed by the learner because of the influence of certain other structures which are similar to the ones used by the learner are said to be errors of overgeneralization.

For example: 'He can sings', 'we are hope', 'it is occurs', 'he come from' – here deviant structures are formed by combining two regular structures. The example 'he can sings' is formed by combining 'he sings' and 'he can sing'. In other cases like, 'he come from', the learners may be trying to reduce his linguistic burden by simplifying his task in the deletion of the plural marker 's' in the verb *come*. Another reason could be the generalization formed by
the learner based on all other grammatical persons, except the third person singular, which takes zero verbal ending in the present tense.

The other cause of overgeneralization may be what is called redundancy reduction. There are certain items "which are contrasted in the grammar of the language but which do not carry significant and obvious contrast for the learners" (Richards, 1974:48). In the following example: 'Yesterday my mother go to the market and buy some vegetables.' Since past tense is already indicated by the word 'yesterday', the learner does not think it is necessary to use the past tense forms of 'go' and 'buy'. This type of simplification of the tasks involved in sentence production is found both in second language learners as well as children acquiring their mother tongue.

Another cause of over-generalized structures could be traced back to certain types of teaching techniques. According to Richards (1974a:48), many pattern drills and transformation exercises interfere with each other to produce an erroneous utterance. For example, if a student is asked to transform 'he walks quickly' in the continuous form, he is likely to produce 'he is walks quickly'. This is called over learning of a structure.

Jacobovits (1969) says generalization is using the previously learnt strategies in new situations. Some of these strategies help the learners to organize the facts about the second language, but certain others, because of
superficial similarities, mislead the learner and are the causes of many errors.

(ii) Ignorance of rule restrictions

Here the learner fails to observe the restrictions of existing structures and applies them in contexts where they do not apply, and thereby commits errors. In the example, ‘I make him to do it’, the learner ignores the restrictions on the distribution of ‘make’. This could also be called a type of over-generalization since the learner is using a previously acquired rule in a new situation.

Errors caused by ignorance of rule restrictions may occur because of analogy or rote learning of the rules. If a learner encounters a particular type of verb with a particular preposition, he attempts to use the same preposition with similar verbs on the basis of analogy. For example, ‘he said to me’ leads to ‘he asked to me’ or ‘go with him’ may lead to ‘follow with him’. Richards thinks that these errors are caused by certain pattern practice drills, where contrasting elements are put together.

Another cause of failure to observe rule restrictions may be what is known as rational analogy. F.G. French (1949) cites the following example to show how the learner rationalizes a deviant usage from his previous learning experience. In English we say ‘The sparrow is a small bird’ and ‘Sparrows
are small birds'. A learner whose native language is Burmese will find the exact equivalent in his mother tongue to the statement 'The sparrow is a small bird', as 'The sparrow small bird is'. In the plural form, it would be 'The sparrows small birds are'. Hence, the Burmese learner is likely to say 'The sparrows are small bird' instead of 'Sparrows are small birds'. Here he does not follow the word order of his mother tongue. His previous learning experience has shown him the difference in word order between his mother tongue and English. Moreover, he commits an error in the use of the article because of the analogy made.

(iii) Incomplete application of rules

Incomplete application of rules results in errors due to the application of a rule in English in an inappropriate situation (Richards, 1974b:50) contends that "Under this category we may note the occurrence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances". Many learners, for example, find it very difficult to acquire the question forms in English. These learners, in their mother tongue, use a sentence in the statement form with or without a question word to ask a question. Some of these learners use a statement form as a question, or omit one of the transformations in a series, or simply add a question word to the statement form. One reason for this simplification may be reduction of redundancy, or learners may think they need not use accurate question forms to communicate effectively.
Yet another reason for confusion in question formation is the way it is treated in the classroom. It is commonly used as a teaching device. In the classroom, questions are not asked to find out something, but are asked merely to elicit answers in the form of statements. When a learner tries to match his answer to suit the form of the question, he commits errors. Richards (1974b:51) gives the following examples: When a question, ‘What does she tell him?’ is asked, the response will be: ‘She tell him to hurry’.

Similarly, to the question, ‘What does he have to do?’ ‘He have to do write the address’ is given as an answer.

(iv) False concepts hypothesized

According to Richards (1974b:51) ‘faulty rule learning’ takes place at various levels because of ‘faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language’. He says these are caused by poor gradation of teaching items and unnatural use of language presented in the textbooks. For example, in most places where English is taught as a second language, the present continuous form is unduly emphasized, if it is not presented in the learners’ mother tongue. In the textbooks, a sequence of events is usually cited in the present continuous whereas in normal use, the simple present will be employed.

Many textbooks are prepared on the basis of a contrastive approach to language teaching. These books over-emphasize those items, which might cause trouble to the learner, because they are not present in the learners’
mother tongue. In so doing, they fail to provide the learners an exposure to English used in normal communications in English. The learner generalizes on the basis of the language he encounters in these textbooks and produces a number of deviant structures. As Ritchie (1967:129) rightly points out, "A course that concentrates too much on 'the main trouble spots' without due attention to the structure of the foreign language as whole will leave the learner with a patchwork of unfruitful, partial generalizations..."

Another important cause of errors can be traced back to the presentation of contrasting elements together in some course books. These books are based on the assumption that if two elements contrast each other, it will be easy for the learner to learn it if they are presented together. But this often confuses the learner and he commits errors as a result of it. For example, the elements 'too' and 'very' are presented as follows:

It's too big and it's dangerous.

The fire is dangerous. It's very big.

Combining these two, learners will likely form an erroneous utterance like:

This is a too big house.

Richards (1974a:174-175) suggests that care must be taken in presenting the various elements when teaching. Learners should be able to generalize to their advantage. If teaching materials and teaching devices are used to confuse the learner instead of trying to help him, learners may cease to learn
and their transitional competence will then become their final grammatical competence. To avoid this, after a systematic study of the learners’ errors, if the teacher finds some elements are likely to be causing confusion, he should try to make appropriate alterations either in the course materials or in the order of presentation.

In the present study, learners’ errors are systematically studied, their probable causes are considered and remedial measures are suggested for those items which are considered serious because they occur frequently and persist over a long period of time.

2.3.2. Learner’s Strategies of Production

Strategies of production relate to the unproblematic use of L2 knowledge, i.e. the learner relies on acquired knowledge to communicate. In the process of planning strategies to create new utterances, the learner tries to simplify the task, and thus, errors may be generated, even if the learner has the correct knowledge. Two basic planning strategies can be identified: semantic simplification and linguistic simplification. (http://lifc.univfcomte.fr/RECHERCHEP7/pub/washing.htm). For example, a learner can simplify a sentence by reducing the number of semantic cases and presupposing that the listener will infer the gaps as in:

‘Hitting me’ instead of ‘He is hitting me.’
2.3.3 Learner's Strategies of Communication

A communication strategy is defined as "a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulties because of his inadequate command of the language used in interaction" (Corder, 1981:103). Strategies in communication occur when the learner has a gap in his knowledge and has to fill it or by-pass it in order to achieve the communication. This kind of strategy is also called 'avoidance'. The learner uses reduction or avoidance strategy to achieve the goal. As an example, in the following sentence 'He plays.....' the learner cannot find the name of the specific sport, he may do away with the problem by formulating another sentence thus producing 'He plays sports'.

2.3.4 Limitations in CA and EA

While these approaches to error analysis are, without doubt, valuable teaching tools, the teacher should handle them cautiously and with the awareness that all have their faults. One of the major complaints leveled against this analysis is that it focuses primarily on errors which are made in writing, while ignoring the errors which do not appear in the student's work. The teacher must be wary of falling into the same trap. A good teacher must sensitize himself or herself to what the student does not do since some students may avoid using a particular sentence structure for fear they will use it incorrectly (Schachter 1974; Kleinmann 1977). Tamil students, for example, may likely avoid the use of past participles, while some may shy
away from the passive voice because these are not present in the Tamil language. The teacher is obligated to discover these problems and then employ exercises to teach proper usage while building the student's confidence and willingness to experiment with the language.

Researchers and teachers have also validly criticized CA and EA because both tend to ignore the student's performance in writing. Again, the teacher must make sure that the focus of the analysis does not become so narrow that correct writing is forgotten. Allowing the student to concentrate to some extent on structures which he or she has composed correctly can help the student gain confidence to work with the language, thus increasing his or her ability to produce more complex and varied sentence patterns. Analysis of correct writing might also lead to the discovery of the source of errors which do appear in the student's writing.

2.4 STUDIES ON ERROR ANALYSIS

A number of studies on errors have been carried out using the Error Analysis approach. Since this study investigates the grammatical errors made by non-native speakers, it is relevant to review related studies to find out the difficulties encountered by second language learners in the use of grammar.
Much research has also been done locally using both the Contrastive Analysis or the Error Analysis Hypothesis. These studies deal with the learning problems encountered by second language learners. Some of the findings of local related studies are presented in this section.

Wee (1995) identified verb-form errors found in the past, present and future tenses made by fifty Sarawakian Malay ESL students from the MARA Institute of Technology of Sarawak. The students were asked to write three types of compositions – narrative, descriptive and expository of about 150 words each. The errors were classified under four categories – omissions, additions, misformations and orderings. The study showed that errors in misformations were common (63.5%), followed by omissions (29%), additions (7.6%) and orderings (0.1%). With regard to the tenses, the highest percentage of errors was in the past tense (37.6%), followed by the present tense (33.7%) and the future tense (21.5%). Other errors in verb-forms amounted to 7.3%. This study concluded that the English tense-aspect system and subject-verb agreement were the most difficult for the Malay students.

Raja Zarina (1997) studied the verb tense and lexical errors in the written English of 80 first year university students of International Islamic University. Students were asked to write two compositions of about 350 words. The data gathered showed that 63.7% of errors were verb tense
errors. Her findings showed that the students had greater difficulty with the perfect tenses compared to the present and past tenses. They tend to lapse from one tense to another i.e. from present to past and past to present when writing. This is due to mother tongue interference and inherent difficulty of the target language.

Sheena Kaur (1996) conducted a study and analyzed errors in verb phrase made by 42 Malay undergraduate students from the Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya. She categorized the errors into three categories namely selections, omissions and additions. The analysis showed that the verb phrase errors made up of 32.8% of the total number of errors. The breakdown results showed that 59.9% of the verb phrase errors were misselections, 33.6% omission errors and 6.5% addition errors. The study revealed that students found difficulty selecting the correct verbs in the verb phrases which included the choice of verb tense, subject-verb concord and verb forms.

Haded (1997) carried out a study on twenty students enrolled in an Arabic school, based in Kuala Lumpur. The students were required to answer four items for each of the six English tenses excluding the future tense. A total of twenty-five items were tested: four on the simple present, four on the simple past, four on the present progressive, four on the past progressive, four on the past perfect and five on the present perfect. Overall, all findings showed
that the students’ performance was below 58%. The highest percentage of errors was found in the past perfect 66.25%, followed by the past progressive 63.75%. The third was the present perfect amounting to 63% and finally the present progressive with errors of 61.25%. The smallest percentage of errors was found in the simple present tense 42.5%. The test produced different types of errors. The omission of the auxiliary in the progressive and perfect structures, wrong formation of the participle part in perfect structures, and the unmarking of the third person singular verbs were the areas that troubled students the most. He concluded that the possible causes of errors were interference of mother tongue, overgeneralization and ignorance of rule-restrictions on tense-sequence.

In another study done by Koh (2000), investigation on the written subject-verb agreement errors in the interlanguage of 50 Form One students was made. A total of 2454 errors (61.4%) from a total 4000 responses were elicited. The errors were analyzed according to five categories of singular and plural subject-verb agreement errors of the Present Tense Form. The study concluded that the causes of the errors were mainly intralingual.

Kam (2001) made a study on the errors made by 40 Form Four Chinese students in 40 compositions and structured tests. Her focus was on the incorrect use of simple past and past progressive tenses and the errors were categorized into selections, omissions and additions. Based on the analysis,
selection errors accounted for the highest percentage which was 74%, followed by additions, 18.1%, and omissions, 7.9%, of the total number of simple past tense errors. For the use of past progressive tense, the highest percentage of errors was omission errors 71%, and selection errors, 29%. In the structured test, Kam found that all errors of simple past were of selections and in the past progressive tense most of the errors were selections and omissions. She concluded that the possible causes of errors made could be due to interference of L1 and overgeneralization.

2.5 STUDIES ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES)

An important fundamental factor that should be taken into consideration in this study of grammatical errors among Tamil learners is their incompetence of the English Language. After six years of primary education with the learning of English as a second language, there still exists a clear disparity in the level of competence of English.

An important aspect that influences the competence of learners in the acquisition of English language is their SES (Socio-economic Status) and SLS (Socio-linguistic Status).

"Socio-economic factors have traditionally included variables such as family income, education and occupational level. Socio-linguistic status is an index of language richness and includes home literacy, exposure to L1 and L2, multi-context of use of L1 and L2 and identity and affect regarding language use and diversity. These linguistic factors are not directly related to cognitive processing, but are hypothesized to serve as a protective
factor against the known risk associated with low socio-economic status. Research has demonstrated that children from lower socio-economic status background are more likely to have difficulty in reading and writing when compared to children of a higher status. Poorer home literacy, including limited access to reading materials has been cited as a main causal variable leading to reduced academic performance in writing.”

(Arob @se, www.arobase.to, Volume 1-2, 2003:22-29)

Conant (1961) observed the role of the family in relation to students’ reading ability. It was found that a higher number of students who came from sub-urban and whose families were from the high SES were able to read and had better command of the language as compared to their friends who came from the slum areas. Various factors were cited for differences in language development between the high SES and low SES group. One reason was the availability of reading materials such as books and magazines in the homes of the high SES students.

Juriah (1977), Habibah (1978), and Nambiar (1984) found that SES influenced language achievement. This is because children who come from the low SES group had a different way of life compared to their counterparts in the average and low SES groups. They had different sets of values and attitudes which hindered or promoted their progress in school. However, there are studies that refute the importance of SES in language achievement of children.
Pillay (1998) did a case study of students from five different schools and he claims that there is disparity in the level of competence in the English language among students based on the lines of socio-economic status and sociolinguistic level, and between urban and rural students. Students who have high level competence in English tend to come from English speaking homes, have greater exposure to English outside the classroom and tend to come from higher socio-economic status group. Those with lower level competence come from rural schools where exposure to English is limited or from low socio-economic groups in urban areas (http://jolt-publications.org/ltl/files/98 nov/pillay.html). Thus the researcher feels that it is also important to trace how the socio-economic status and sociolinguistic level of students affect their competence of the English language, and whether it is relevant in the study of grammatical errors.

Sathiadevi (1996) carried out a survey on the proficiency in ESL among 120 Indian students of Form 4 from the rural and urban schools. She reported that there is no significant correlation between the proficiency levels of the students and their attitudes towards the language.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Constructive Analysis and Error Analysis as well as the socio-economic status of the students have shed some valuable information on the possible
causes of learner's errors and this information will be used as a guide to analyze and investigate the data gathered for the present study.