

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In order to make explicit the context of this study, the researcher will briefly restate its objectives. In general, the researcher is interested in testing the assumption that there is a correlation between the grammatical errors in the English writings of Tamil speakers and the interference from their mother tongue. The researcher also predicts that the learners' lack of knowledge regarding the rules of L2 itself may have contributed to the errors. Furthermore, a secondary consideration to be taken into account would be the socio-economic status of the learners and its influence on L2 acquisition.

Bearing this in mind, the researcher begins this chapter by describing the subjects, the research tools or instrumentation, and procedures used in the analysis of data.

3.1 THE SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were selected from three different secondary schools in the Klang valley. The schools are SMK Subang Utama, SMK

Dato Harun and SMK Taman Sri Muda. All three schools are government-aided schools. All the selected subjects are Malaysian Indians and majority of them have had their primary education in Tamil schools located in Petaling Jaya i.e. SRJK (T) Vivekananda , SRJK (T) Seafield Subang Jaya, SRJK (T) Ladang Emerald. Subjects from SMK Subang Utama were easily accessible as the researcher was teaching there at the time of study. However, at the time of study, as she was unable to get adequate subjects from that school for the purpose of her study, she had to obtain subjects from the other two schools. A total of 50 Tamil students were tested with the The written Task and the Questionnaire.

The subjects selected from these three schools come from low socio economic status which is an important factor under consideration in this study. The information about the SES of the area is based on the report of the Majlis Perbandaran Petaling Jaya Council President Abdul Karim Munisar, who said “priority for development must be given to the urban poor. Even in a developed township like Petaling Jaya, there is poverty and Taman Medan has all the signs. The area has a population of 200,000 people and 7,000 squatter homes”(The Star, 2 June 2004).

The general information of the subjects’ background was obtained from the student’s questionnaire (Appendix 1) completed by the selected subjects. Table 3.1a and 3.1b shows the information gathered.

Table 3.1a
Background of the subjects

Mother Tongue	Sex					
	M	%	F	%	Total	%
Tamil	9	18	34	68	43	86
Malayalam	3	6	-	-	3	6
Telugu	4	8	-	-	4	8
Total	16	32	34	68	59	100

Table 3.1b

Primary Education						
Mother Tongue	SK	%	SRJK(T)	%	Total	%
Tamil	12	24	31	62	43	86
Malayalam	2	4	1	2	3	6
Telugu	4	8	-	-	4	8
Total	18	36	32	64	59	100

Table 3.1a shows the distribution of subjects according to their mother tongue in the male and female category. 43 out of 50 or 86% of subjects have Tamil as their mother tongue. Out of the 43 subjects, 9 are males and 34 are females. 3 or 6 % subjects speak Malayalam and all 3 are males. Similarly 4 subjects or 8% who are all males are Telugus.

Table 3.1b above shows the distribution of subjects according to the type of primary medium education. Out of the 43 Tamil subjects, 12 are from SK (national schools) and 31 are from SRJK(T). 2 Malayalam subjects are from SK and 1 from SRJK(T). The 4 Telugu subjects are from the SK medium. Thus out of the 50 subjects selected 36 % are from SK and 64 from SRJK(T).

The subjects were all 15 years of age and formed a homogeneous group in terms of age, language and social-educational background. The selection of subjects is based on the criteria of homogeneity of learners as described by Corder (1973). Corder claims that the study of group errors may only be meaningful if the group is homogeneous, i.e. the members have the same mother-tongue and they are educationally, socially and intellectually matched.

3.1.1 Educational Background of the Subjects

Students who were average to below average proficiency level were selected for this study. At the time of selection and instrumentation, the subjects were in Form 3 at lower secondary schools. For students from SMK Subang Utama, selection was based on the results of the English paper of the mid-semester examination, where the researcher selected 20 students with 50% marks and below. 15 subjects from SMK Dato Harun and 15 subjects from SMK Taman Sri Muda were also selected based on the same criteria.

Under the KBSR curriculum, English Language is taught 210 minutes a week from Standard One, whereas in national type schools, English Language is taught from Standard Three only. Thus, subjects from Tamil schools have had the exposure to the English Language for the past 6 years only; 3 years in primary and 3 years in secondary.

3.1.2 Socio-economic Status of Subjects

The socio-economic status is an approximate index of one's income and educational level. The SES of students is determined directly by the income and education of their parents, or indirectly by the nature of the school the student attends (Borich, 2000). According to the statistics obtained from the Student's Questionnaire (Appendix 1), approximately 60% of the subjects come from the low income group as their total family income is below RM 1000, and in most families, the fathers have completed only secondary level education, and are the sole breadwinner.s Statistics show that 64% of the mothers of these subjects are unemployed. A detailed analysis of the SES of the subjects is given in Chapter 4.

3.2 RESEARCH TOOLS

The researcher proposed to identify the common grammatical errors in the English writing of ESL Tamil students. The research tools used for this purpose are a written task, a questionnaire and an interview, which are further explained in the following sub-sections.

3.2.1 The Written Task

The written task required students to construct sentences for 5 different contexts. For each context, about 10 clues (helping words) are given. Using the clues, students should be able to construct about 4 to 5 sentences for each context. The sample task sheet is provided in Appendix 2.

The researcher's rationale in devising the task is as follows:

- i. By understanding the contextual clues, which are familiar words or phrases, students can make sense of the situation and relate it to their background knowledge to generate ideas before constructing sentences. Chitravelu (1995) explains the term 'contextual clues' as words or phrases which are familiar that students can use to make sense of the situation or environment.
- ii. This kind of exercise is more focused and it involves the usage of only the main grammar items. Since the vocabulary is given as contextual clues, students should be able to complete the exercise. The researcher predicts there will be a broad usage of verbs, tenses and word forms. Grammatical errors can hence be easily detected.

The selected subjects were gathered in the library and the written task was carried out by the researcher herself in SMK Subang Utama, and in the other two schools by the other English teachers who were personal friends of the researcher. Subjects were given 45 minutes to complete the task.

3.2.2 The Questionnaire

The two-paged questionnaire consists of a brief section on personal information, family background and English language learning. 'Wh' questions were formulated with options given and the subjects were required

to select the most appropriate option. A sample questionnaire is in Appendix 1.

3.2.3 The Interview

An informal interview session was carried out with the selected subjects of SMK Subang Utama when the researcher wanted further clarification of the reasons for the errors. Some subjects were able to give reasons for their errors and the findings are included in the explanation of sources in Chapter 4. Since most of the subjects were unable to give any valid reasons for their errors, similar interview with subjects from the other two schools were abandoned.

3.3 FRAMEWORK

This study limits its scope of examination within a particular framework, which is to analyze the errors in the misuse of 5 word classes of the English grammar. In this section, these word classes are explained as reference in this study and some common similarities and differences between the Tamil Language and English Language are also highlighted.

3.3.1 English Grammar

Grammar is defined as the rules of a language governing the way in which words are put together to convey meaning in different contexts (Chitravelu, 1995). Grammar is the science that classifies the various ways in which

words are used for the conveyance of thought and ideas. In English words are divided into eight classes according to their functions, meaning and uses in sentence structure. In this study the focus will be on verbs, prepositions, pronouns, articles and conjunctions as these are the basic word classes in the English Language.

3.3.1.1 Verb Forms

English verb forms can be described as simple and complex. A simple verb form can consist of auxiliaries but only one full verb. This study limits its scope to simple verbs. The simple verb forms examined are tenses, full verb and auxiliary verbs and are described as follows.

(i) Tense

Tenses show the time of a verb's action or being. There are three inflected forms reflected by changes in the ending of verbs. In simple terms, the present tense indicates that something is happening or being now. 'She is a teacher'; 'She drives a new car'. The simple past tense indicates that something happened in the past. 'She was a teacher.' 'She drove a new car'. The past participle form is combined with an auxiliary verb to indicate that something happened in the past prior to another action. 'She has been a teacher.' 'She has driven a car.'

Unlike most other languages, English does not have the inflected form for the future tense. Instead, future forms are created with the use of auxiliaries, as in 'She will be a teacher'; 'She is going to drive a new car.'

(ii) **Full verb**

A full verb is a lexical verb (Quirk et al 1993). It is either regular or irregular. A full verb can take five forms. The forms for 'drive' are : base form 'drive', singular form 'drives', past tense form 'drove', **-ing** form or present participle form 'driving' and **-en** form or past participle form 'driven'. Most verbs in English form their various tenses consistently. The **-ed** marker is added to the base of the verb to create the simple past or past participle. There are, however, a number of so called irregular verbs. The irregular verbs resemble regular verbs in having regular **-s** and **-ing** forms, but they vary when the past tense form is formed as the irregular verb is not inflected.

(iii) **Auxiliary Verbs**

An auxiliary verb is a full verb that functions as a 'helping' verb. Palmer (1980) categorizes the auxiliary verbs in terms of primary auxiliaries and secondary auxiliaries. The primary auxiliaries are verb 'to be', 'have' and 'do'. The secondary auxiliaries, also known as 'modals' are- 'will', 'shall', 'can', 'may' etc. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the primary auxiliaries.

(iv) Subject – Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement refers to a change in the forms of a verb depending on its subject. The subject of a verb may be singular or plural and it may be first person (I, We) second person (You), or third person (He/She/They). In English, a verb changes form only when its subject is in the third-person singular and only in the present tense. The rule for subject-verb agreement is that in the present tense, a verb with a third-person singular subject must always end in *-s*.

3.3.1.2 Prepositions

A preposition describes a relationship between other words in a sentence. There are two kinds of prepositions - simple prepositions of one word only e.g. **in, on, to, with**, and compound prepositions which we make with more than one word e.g. **because of, in front of, on top of**, and many more. Prepositions appear with nouns of any kind, pronouns in their object forms and in gerund forms. Prepositions are used as complement, and a preposition and its complement make a prepositional phrase (GM Spankie, 1978). A prepositional phrase takes on a modifying role, acting as an adjective or an adverb, locating time and space, modifying a noun telling when and where, or under what condition something happened (<http://webster.comnet.edu/grammar.prepositions.htm>).

Non-native speakers of English face a lot of problems in using the correct prepositions. Most English prepositions have several different functions and these may correspond to several different prepositions in another language. For example the preposition 'at' can express position, point in time, a point in a scale, engagement, or concern, a value, with reference to, etc.

At the same time, different prepositions can have very similar uses. We say 'in the morning', 'on Monday morning', and 'at night'. Many nouns, verbs and adjectives are normally used with particular prepositions: we say 'on a bus', 'arrive at' and 'angry with somebody'. We have to learn and understand the expressions as a whole before selecting the correct preposition (http://www.fortunecity.com/durrus.153/grammar/preposition.html).

3.3.1.3 Articles

Articles in English consist of the indefinite articles, *a/ an*, and the definite article *the*. Articles are words that precede and modify nouns. Articles will tell the readers or listeners whether we're referring to a specific or general things as in 'the house', 'a book'. The choice of the correct article to precede a noun can be an obstacle for many learners if they have not mastered the rules for the use of articles. For many learners from eastern European and Asian countries, where their native language has either no articles or an altogether different system of choosing articles, these 'little

words' can create problems long after every other aspects of English have been mastered ([http// Webster. commnet.edu/grammar/articles.htm](http://Webster.comnet.edu/grammar/articles.htm)).

3.3.1.4 Pronouns

A pronoun is used to take the place of a noun or expression that has been mentioned before. A pronoun must agree in gender and number with the noun or expression it refers to. Pronouns display case according to their function in the sentence. They can be nominatives (they act as the subject), possessive (they show possession of something) and objective (they function as recipients of action or the object of a preposition). In using the correct pronouns, confusion often arises with compound subjects or objects, i.e. two or more persons or things which are the subject or object of a verb. ([http//Webster.comnet.edu/grammar/pronouns,htm](http://Webster.comnet.edu/grammar/pronouns.htm)).

3.3.1.5 Conjunctions

A conjunction is a joiner, a word that connects parts of a sentence. The most common conjunctions are the coordinating conjunctions which are **for, and, nor, but, or, yet** and **so**. Coordinating conjunctions may join single words, or they may join groups of words, but they must always join similar elements: e.g. subject + subject, verb phrase + verb phrase, sentence + sentence. The function of some coordinating conjunctions are as follows:

- a. **for** - is used to introduce the reason for the preceding clause.
- b. **and** – is used to join two similar ideas together.
- c. **but** – is used when joining two contrasting ideas together.

d. *or* - joins two alternative ideas.

e. *so* - shows that the second idea is the result of the first.

3.4 TAMIL GRAMMAR

In Tamil, there are two main varieties – Standard Literary Tamil (LT) and Standard Spoken Tamil (SST). Normally LT is taught in Tamil schools but seldom used in conversation, whether formal or informal. It is only used in very formal situations, for example, formal talks, lectures, political speeches and news broadcasts and also, to a certain extent, by language teachers in the classroom. So SST is more prevalent among the subjects in this study.

Next the researcher gives an explanation about the grammar of the Tamil language which is relevant for this study. From this clarification, the researcher hopes that the readers would be able to recognize the influence of the Tamil language in the written English of Tamil students.

3.4.1 Nouns

In the Tamil language, the noun has an extensive case system. This case system enhances the phenomenon of expressing reciprocal relations of nouns by means of case interminators such as postpositions or auxiliaries. In English, these kinds of relations are accommodated using prepositions such as *in*, *at*, *by*, *with* etc.

e.g. Na:n pa:dasa:laikku vanthein -
 I to school came
 the 'kku' is suffixed to the word 'pa:dasa:lai' to mean 'to school'.

Na:n amnavukku poo: va:nginein -
 I for mother flower buy
 the 'kku' is suffixed to the word amma to mean 'for mother'

Another unusual feature in nouns in Tamil is that it does not make use of 'clitics'. A 'clitic' is a morpheme that has syntactic characteristics of a word, but shows evidence of being phonologically bound to another word. While in English, the clitic 's' is the genitive case for the noun as in 'girl's'. Tamil, however, uses the inflection 'udaiya'. Other clitics in English such as 'm', in I'm, or 'll' in I'll etc do not have equivalent forms in Tamil.

3.4.2 Verbs

Tamil verbs are either full or auxiliary. They also exist in 'finite' and 'non-finite' forms just as in English (Sankaran, 2000). Tamil finite verbs, however, give much more grammatical information than English finite verbs do, in that they mark mood, tense, number, person, gender, case etc. The examples are as follows.

e.g. Avan padi-thaan. - thaam - past tense
 He studied

Avan padi-kkiran - kkiran- present tense
 He is studying

Avan padi-ppaan - ppaan - future tense
 He is going to study

The suffixes ‘thaan, kkiran, and ppaan’ above indicate tense, gender and also number.

Full verbs almost always precede auxiliary verbs in Tamil. In English auxiliaries usually precede full verbs.

e.g. Avanaal oodda mudiyum
 He run can

3.4.3 Word Order

In simple sentence construction, the basic order in Tamil is of Subject-Object-Verb pattern as follows:

e.g. Aval pa:dasa:laikku sen:dral
 S O V
 She school went.

In English, simple sentences are of the Subject- Verb –Object construction.

3.4.4 Pronouns

Tamil has personal pronouns which distinguish first, second and third persons both in singular and plural forms just as in English. However, in Tamil, the second and third person pronouns are shown by case marker in the first person pronoun, as follows.

e.g. he -	avan	she-	aval	they -	avargal
him -	avanukku	her -	avalukku	them -	avargalukku
his -	avanudaya	hers -	avaludaya	theirs-	avargaludaya

Pronouns in the nominative case may often be deleted in a sentence on the condition that the semantic information can be recovered from the agreement marker of the verb.

e.g. Naan pokirein - I'm going.

In the above sentence 'naan' can be omitted because 'pokirein' distinguishes the singular noun form.

In Tamil we can say - Pooittu varukirein – go and come
instead of 'Naan pooittu varukirein'

The noun 'Naan' meaning 'I' is normally omitted .

3.5 METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the following methodology was carried out.

3.5.1 Collection of Data

The task sheets and the questionnaires were distributed to the subjects selected from the three schools and they were collected after the subjects had completed them under the supervision of the respective teachers.

3.5.2 Identification of Errors

The scripts collected were reviewed. First, the number of words and sentences of each script were counted. Most scripts had about 20 to 22 sentences with an average of 120 to 150 words.

The scripts were then corrected. Errors in each script were first labeled as grammatical, lexical or spelling errors. The lexical and spelling errors were not taken into consideration as they were beyond the scope of this study. The grammatical errors were then classified under the word classes - verbs, prepositions, pronouns, articles and conjunctions. The number of errors in each word class was counted. The number of erroneous sentences were also marked and counted.

3.5.3 Classification of Errors

The errors identified were classified according to the five word classes of the English grammar namely verbs, articles, prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions. Then, the errors under each word class were further subdivided as follows:

- i. Verb Errors : Tense, Full verb, Verb 'to be', Subject-verb concord
- ii. Prepositions : Preposition of time and place
- iii. Articles : Definite and Indefinite articles.
- iv. Pronouns : Personal pronouns
- v. Conjunctions : 'and' and 'for'

The errors were then further sub-categorized into error types classified by Corder. According to Corder (1973), errors fall into four main categories: misselection of an incorrect element; omission of some required elements; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect elements and misordering of

elements. The erroneous sentences stated as examples are taken from the data.

(i) Misselection Errors

A misselection error can occur due to the selection of wrong phonemes, morphemes, structures or vocabulary items.

At the phonological level, this phenomenon may be characterized by interlingual transfer, when the learner substitutes a familiar phoneme from the mother tongue or the first language for a target language phoneme that sounds similar or difficult to pronounce. English consonants /o/ and /d/ are often mispronounced as /s/, /t/, /f/ or /z/ respectively, and this often results in misspellings as shown in the following examples:

e.g. My mother went by bas. (bus)

Their my cousins. (They are)

An error can be committed in morphology as a result of a wrong morpheme. In English, however, morphological errors are not frequent because of the relatively small number of inflections and their restricted usage. One example of an error that can be stated here is:

e.g. My grandpa has the bigger orchard there. (biggest)

In syntax, the learners may select a wrong item. This error may be induced by interlingual transfer or generalization.

Examples:

1. Yesterday my mother goed to the market. (went)
2. Sometimes he caught a lot of fish. (catches)
3. My uncle have two sons and a daughter. (has)
4. *She made fish curry and cabbage for lunch. (cooked)

At the lexical level, learners sometimes select words which do not entirely convey their intended meanings. These type of errors may be prompted by strategy of approximation (Tarone, 1972).

- Example:
1. He fishing using the fishing rod. (catches fish)
 2. She back to home by taxi. (came)

(ii) Omission Errors

Certain linguistic forms may be omitted by the learner because of their complexity in production. In pronunciation, consonant clusters often create problems for L2 learners and some of their constituents may be left unpronounced.

Omission also occurs in morphology. Learners often leave out the following morphemes.

- i. the third person singular morpheme-s as in the following sentences.
 - a. He like to go fishing. (likes)
 - b. Sometimes he catch a lot of fish. (catches)

ii. the plural marker –s as in the following sentences.

- a. They are close friend. (friends)
- b. My uncle has two son and a daughter. (sons)

iii. the past tense inflection -ed as in the following sentences.

- a. She cook fish curry and cabbage for lunch yesterday.(cooked)
- b. I use the money to buy a dictionary. (used)

In syntax, learners may omit certain elements which are obligatory. The examples are as follows:

1. Ramli likes to \wedge fishing. (go)
2. He uses \wedge fishing rod to catch fish. (a)
3. Raju and Lim \wedge neighbours. (are)
4. During the school holidays I went \wedge grandfather's house. (to my)
5. My uncle's house \wedge located near Changi Airport. (is)

(iii) Addition Errors

Learners not only omit elements which they regard as redundant but also add redundant elements. In morphology, learners often overuse the third person singular morpheme -s and the plural marker –s. Some examples are as follows:

1. I helps my grandpa sell the fruits. (help)
2. They plays football with the village boys. (play)

3. I help my grandpa to sells the fruits. (sell)

At the syntactic level, the learners often overuse articles, as in the following examples:

1. Yesterday my mother went to the market by the bus.
2. Tomorrow my mother and I are going to the Singapore.
3. Raju and Lim are neighbours and a close friends.

(iv) **Misordering Errors**

Misordering errors occur when learners misorder words in a sentence where constituents of a single noun phrase or verb phrase are split. The following are some examples:

1. I and my grandfather..... (My grandfather and I...)
2. They go to school by cycle. (They cycle to school)
3. She took home a taxi. (She took a taxi home)

3.5.4 **Quantification of Errors**

The score for each script was calculated using the following formula.

$$\frac{\text{Number of erroneous sentences}}{\text{Number of sentences constructed}} \times 100$$

The total number of errors in each word class category was counted and tabulated. Percentage of errors was calculated for each word class and for its subcategories.

The statistical analysis of the errors was calculated using SPSS. The variables were calculated and the graphs were plotted.

3.5.5 Explanation of Errors

The explanatory stage explains the type of errors and the reasons for the occurrence of such errors. When the Tamil translation was equivalent to the erroneous sentences, the causes were considered to be due to interlingual transfer or mother tongue interference. When the erroneous sentences resulted from lack of knowledge of the target language rules, they were considered to be intralingual or developmental errors.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher has given a detailed description of the subjects and the type of instrumentation carried out. The methodology explains how the data was collected, and analyzed. The data collected from the questionnaire was very useful in enabling the researcher to identify the background of the subjects. The task devised yielded the types of errors for the purpose of the study which the researcher will describe in the following chapter.