CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Language Learning Acquisition

Learners' difficulties in learning second languages have long attracted the interest of applied linguists, teachers, researchers, and course designers. Many studies have been carried out to investigate the sources and problems faced by the learners. Three significant approaches, which have been extensively used to account for learners' difficulties are Interlanguage Hypothesis, Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA).

2.2 Interlanguage Hypothesis

Interlanguage Hypothesis refers to the language produced by learners when they use their own version of the foreign language. Corder (1971) refers to 'Interlanguage Hypothesis' as 'idiosyncratic' dialect. He maintains that a learner's language is a separate system that is created by the learner as essentially a dialect of one individual. Selinker (1972), in his attempt to describe the process of attempted learning of a second language has found out that the set of utterances for most of a second language learner is not identical to the hypothesized corresponding set of utterances which would have been produced by a native speaker of the target language had he attempted to express the

same meaning as the learner. This led him to hypothesize the existence of a separate linguistic system based on observable output, which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL norm. He called this system (1974: 15) 'Interlanguage'. He proposed that this system exists somewhere between the native language and the target language. He suggested that there are five central processes or strategies in the 'latent psychological structure' of humans which are language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of target language material.

In the early seventies, error analysis was the most important methodology within interlanguage studies. Error analysis methodology focused on the elements of the learner's interlanguage that are considered to be erroneous in relation to the target language norm. A primary objective of the error analysis methodology was to decide what psycholinguistic processes might be responsible for the errors. A second aim was to describe the relationship between these processes and the social context in which interlanguage has been learned or produced.

Selinker, Swain and Dumas (1975) suggested four characteristics associated with interlanguage. They are as follows:

1. The stability over time of certain errors in the learner system.

2. The mutual intelligibility among speakers of the same interlanguage.

3. The regular appearance of fossilized errors that were thought to be

eradicated.

4) The systematicity of interlanguage at one particular point in time.

2.3 Contrastive Analysis (CA)

The Contrastive Analysis hypothesis dates back to the late nineteenth century. At that time, many rhetoricians maintained that there is a relationship between the native language and the target language. As an example, Boaz (1889, cited in Richards: 1974), suggested that learners perceived sounds in new languages in terms of their native language or other languages which they had earlier been exposed to. With the emergence of the notion of language as a system, however, the question of second language acquisition was viewed as the juxtaposition of two systems.

The contrastive hypothesis claims that the acquisition of the second language is largely determined by the structure of the mother tongue. Those structures that coincide with the corresponding structures of the first language are assimilated with great ease as a result of positive transfer. Contrastive structures on the other hand present considerable difficulty and give rise to errors as a result of negative transfer or interference between the two contrasting languages.

James(1980) defines CA as a linguistic enterprise, aimed at producing inverted (contrastive) two-valued typologies and is founded on the assumption that languages can be compared. By making a comparison between the phonology, grammar and lexicon of

the target language and the learner's mother tongue, it is possible to establish the differences and similarities between the compared items. It is due to the differences between L1 and L2 that difficulties in learning are expected to occur (Tran ,1975).

2.3.1 The Rationale for Contrastive Analysis

According to Sridhar (1981), the rationale for undertaking contrastive studies comes mainly from three sources: (a) practical experience of foreign language teachers; (b) studies of language contact in bilingual situations, and (c) theory of learning. He further elaborates that every experienced foreign language teacher knows that a substantial number of persistent errors made by his students can be traced to the 'pull of the mother tongue'. Students of language contact have also noted that the phenomenon of 'interference', which Fisiak (1981) defines as those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.

The third source that has been considered to support the contrastive analysis hypothesis is learning theory, in particular the theory of transfer. It refers to the hypothesis that the learning of a task is either facilitated ('positive' transfer) or impeded ('negative' transfer). Those elements that are similar to the learner's native language will be easier for him and those elements that are not similar to his native language will be difficult for him to learn.

In other words, when the mother language and the target language share the same rules, the learner finds it easy to apply these rules to the target language. In contrast, students are likely to make mistakes when the rules of the mother language and the target language are contrastive. For example, the French language and English language both have the noun before the verb in sentences.

In English: Ahmed goes to school.

 In French: Ahmed va a l'ecole

So, a French student should have no problem in writing the correct syntax in English. He will just apply the syntactic rule that he has learned in French to English. In contrast, this is not the case for an Arabic student. In Arabic, the verb comes before the noun.

In English: Ahmed goes to school

In Arabic: dahaba ahmed ila al madrasa (goes Ahmed to school).

Therefore, if the Arabic student applies the syntactic rule in Arabic language of which the verb must come before the noun in his attempt to make an English sentence, this will result in the formation of a deviant structure.

Lee (1968:32) states that contrastive analysis is based on the following assumptions.

1) The prime cause or even the sole cause, of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference coming from the learners' native language.

2) The difficulties are chiefly, or wholly , due to the differences between the target language and the native language.

3) The greater these differences are, the more acute the learning difficulties.

4) The results of a comparison between the two languages are needed to predict the difficulties and errors, which will occur in learning the foreign language.

5) What there is to teach can best be found by comparing the two languages. And then subtracting what is common to them, so that what the student has to learn equals the sum of the differences established by the contrastive analysis.

Wardhaugh (1970) suggests that CA Hypothesis exists in two versions, a strong version and a weak version. While the two versions are equally based on the assumption of L1 interference, they differ in that the strong version claims predictive power while the weak version, less ambitiously, claims merely to have the power to diagnose errors that have been committed.

2.3.2 Critics of Contrastive Analysis

However, the predictive power of CA has been seriously questioned and challenged in recent years. Language teachers who have made some informal observations in the classroom noted that a learner's difficulties often do not correspond to those predicted by CA. Richards (1974) states that it is most predictive at the phonological level and is least predictive at the level of syntax.

Tran-Thi-Chau (1975) poses the following question: "What is the degree of adequacy of CA in predicting and explaining learners' difficulties?" She counted learners' errors and confirmed that low correlations were found to exist between CA predictions and incidence of error. In a similar way, Jackson and Whitman (1971)

looked for correlations between CA predictions, difficulty and error incidence. Their findings are embodied in a report which concludes that CA has hardly any predictive power at all.

2.4 Interlanguage Hypothesis versus Contrastive Analysis.

Sridhar (1981) states that while contrastive analysis is concerned exclusively with that aspect of the learner's performance, which can be correlated, with the characteristics of his native language, interlanguage avoids this limitation. Native language interference is only one of the explanatory tools in the repertoire of the interlanguage investigator. Thus, interlanguage is explanatorily more powerful in as much as it includes the explanatory power of contrastive analysis and extends beyond it.

Sridhar (1981) further elaborates that methodologically, interlanguage may be said to incorporate the assumptions of both contrastive analysis and error analysis. While contrastive analysis contrasts the learner's native language and the target language, and conventional error analysis involves contrast between the learner's performance and the target language, interlanguage takes all three systems into account, explicitly incorporating the contrastive analysis of the learner's interlanguage with both his native language and the target language. The difference is that, in Interlanguage, the contrastive analysis is an initial filtering device, making way for the testing of hypotheses about the other determinants of the learner's language.

2.5 Error Analysis

When doubts about the status and applicability of contrastive linguistic studies to language teaching became more apparent, a search for a more efficient method of identifying and analyzing the area of language learning difficulties was taken by a few language scholars (e.g. Corder ,1967 ;Richards,1974 ; Selinker, 1972) who were inclined towards a psycholinguistic orientation in explaining second language acquisition.

These scholars have had access to the products of the learning processes where the most observable manifestations are the errors made by the learner. To diagnose difficulties, errors are systematically collected, analyzed and categorized. This approach, often known as Error Analysis (EA), maintains that in order to identify language difficulties, the focus must be on the errors made by the learner. This will make it possible to trace the causes of the errors and the source of information about language difficulties.

Jain (1974) also pointed out that error analysis was believed to be a more accurate source of information about difficulties in foreign language learning by some investigators. This is because negative transfer is not exclusively related to difference across languages and that the results of contrastive analysis can be used only to a fairly limited extent in the prediction of errors.

According to Corder (1978:72), the analysis of errors made by language learners represents " the most significant data on which a reconstruction of his knowledge of the target language could be made". Through EA, a list of common errors can provide the basis for the selection of materials essential to the needs of the learners to be incorporated into the language syllabus.

2.5.1 Critics of Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) too has its limitation as pointed out by several linguists. The most serious handicap as stated by Tran (1975) is the lack of objectivity in its procedures of analysis. The handicap centered around two main questions: 'How does one define error? and 'How are errors categorized?'

Errors have been customarily determined by tests of acceptability, or non-acceptability by native speakers. However, Strevens (1965) acknowledges the fact that the identification of errors is essentially subjective. It is possible for the educated native speakers to differ as to whether items are acceptable or not acceptable and hence as to whether they should be counted as errors.

As for the problem of categorization of errors, Ghadessy (1989:154) notes that there have been problems in assigning errors into categories due to "a lack of precise criteria for classification, overlapping of some categories and the possibility of multiple explanations". As a result, it is therefore, not surprising that Ghadessy (1989) and

another analyst, Duskova (1969) have reported that they have failed to arrive at any satisfactory system of classification.

EA deals only with errors committed by learners and neglects the careful description of non-errors. This, according to Hammarberg (1974) is arbitrary and inadequate for the purpose that EA is commonly said to have. Hammarberg maintains that non-errors are essential too, in the effort to detect and examine the difficulties encountered by second language learners.

2.6 Contrastive Analysis Versus Error Analysis

Contrastive and error analysis have been widely employed by applied linguists and language teachers to facilitate the teaching or learning of the target language. They can be used to indicate the specific language problems that need to be overcome in order that effective language learning takes place.

Though both methods have the same target, there seems to be a difficulty in trying to reconcile EA to CA. Fisiak (1981) claims that EA as part of applied linguistics cannot replace contrastive studies but can only supplement them, and adds that contrastive studies predicts errors, error analysis verifies contrastive predictions, a posteriori, explaining deviations from the predictions. Tran (1975) shares his views when he states that EA provides the necessary empirical data to verify and supplement contrastive studies.

There are of course some who disagree with such a postulation. As put by Hendrickson (1981:107)

> "Error analysis offered an aid in the methodological crisis of contrastive studies, it was considered either as a replacement for contrastive analysis or as a primary level of analysis to which contrastive was to subordinate."

Interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of difficulty in second language learning and CA has proven valuable in locating areas of interlanguage interference. Many errors however, occur from the strategies employed by the learner in language acquisition and from the mutual interference of terms within the target language. These errors according to Richards (1974) cannot be accounted for by CA. Therefore, in order to get an in-depth knowledge of the underlying causes of errors in second language learning, both methods of analysis are necessary and beneficial.

It can be said that the role of EA is specified to the identification of language difficulties and CA to the explanation on why the errors occurred. Certainly, EA will not be a substitute for CA but it is a practical alternative to consider (Strevens, 1965).

2.7 Interlingual Errors Versus Intralingual Errors

Research on errors made by second language learners of different language backgrounds has been carried out by some scholars, including: Corder (1967), Richards (1974), Selinker (1969), George (1972) and Duskova (1969). They have attempted to

identify some of the causes of the errors made by these learners. The two principal causes of errors in second language are:

1) Interlingual Errors

2.) Intralingual Errors

2.7.1 Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are attributed to the phenomenon of language transfer. This refers to errors, which deviate from the norms of the target language as a result of transferring features or patterns peculiar in one language to another language. When a certain feature or pattern of the two languages agrees exactly, there is a positive transfer from the native language to the target language. When it does not correspond exactly, there is a negative transfer, that is, interference. Contrastive analysis (CA) can only predict some of the errors a learner may make but it fails to predict some of the errors, which occurr. This implies that the data provided by CA needs to be used with great care. This is because many factors play a part in causing transfer errors; the prominent ones being the age of the learner, the formality of the learning situation and the method adopted for learning.

2.7.2 Intralingual Errors

Another different class of errors observed in the process of acquiring English as a second language proposed by Richards (1974), is intralingual errors. Intralingual errors

arise because learners base their grammatical judgments on what they know about the L2 system. Oller and Streiff (1975) propose that there is a projection on the part of the language user, based on what he has already understood earlier, on what is to come. This projection is grammar-based. When a learner makes errors in his choice of grammatical items and forms, he may be employing simplification or overgeneralization strategies naturally in attempting to reduce the redundancy in the L2 in order to reduce his learning load.

Richards (1974) expresses similar ideas by asserting that these errors occur frequently regardless of the learner's language background. Richards also contends that these errors do not necessarily reflect the learner's inability to separate two languages but that such errors reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage in his effort to study the language. The origins of these errors, according to Richards are found:

    1) within the structure of the English language itself.

    2) through reference to the strategy by which a second language is acquired and taught.

Intralingual errors can be further sub-categorized into the following categories:

    1) Overgeneralizations

    2) Ignorance of Rule Restriction

    3) Incomplete Application of Rules

    4) False Concept Hypothesized

2.7.2.1 Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization or faulty generalization refers to instances where a learner creates deviant structures based on his experience of other structures in the target language. In most cases, the learner generalizes a newly learned rule and applies it in a new context without realizing how the language is distorted.

Richards (1974) assumes that overgeneralization may be the result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden, as it is the most effective way to reduce the TL structures and forms to a simpler system. Richards (1974) clarifies further that overgeneralization may occur with items which are contrasted in the grammar of the language but which do not carry significant and obvious content for them. For instance, the past tense marker -*ed* does not carry any real meaning to the learner because the concept of the past can be indicated by adjuncts of time such as, 'yesterday', 'a few minutes ago', 'last week' and etc.

Therefore, the learner thinks that since he adds an adjunct of time such as ' yesterday', he does not have to make any changes in the verb to indicate the past action. He may think that the past is indicated by the adjuncts of time and thus, the past tense marker may seem redundant to him. For example, a Malay learner who assumes that the English grammatical rule for past time is similar to that of the Malay language may think that the past tense in English language can be referred to by the word 'yesterday' and not by changing the verb or adding a suffix to the verb. The change in verbs and addition of

suffixes do not occur in the Malay language when signifying the past but they do in English. For example,

Bahasa Melayu	**English**
Mereka **pergi** ke Langkawi hari ini.	They **go** to Langkawi today.
Mereka **pergi** ke Langkawi semalam.	They **went** to Langkawi yesterday.

2.7.2.2 Ignorance of Rules Restriction

Jain (1974) asserts that the restriction of existing structures or the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply is another category of intralingual and developmental Errors. In most cases of these types of errors, the learner is making use of a previously acquired rule in a new situation or context.

Richards (1974) holds the view that some rule restriction errors may be accounted for in terms of analogy while others may be a result of the rote learning of rules. Richards identifies the major cause of misuse or errors in preposition to analogy. They occur because the learner, after encountering a particular preposition with one type of verb, attempts by analogy to use the same preposition with similar words.

2.7.2.3 Incomplete Application of Rules

Incomplete Application of Rules refers to the student's neglect of certain rules. While the student applies some rules, he neglects others. This gives rise to deviant

structures. For this category of errors, the deviant structures indicate the degree of development of the rules to produce acceptable utterances. Richards (1974) observes that one of the causes of this type of errors is due to the use of questions as a teaching technique. A grammatical question form is a common source of errors among ESL learners as this can be seen from the following examples:

Teacher's Questions   **Learner's Responses**

1. Where do you live?   I **live** in Puchong.

2. Where does she live?   She *live in Kajang. **(lives)**

3. How much does it cost?   It *cost two ringgit. **(costs)**

The learner's responses for examples 2 and 3 are erroneous as he fails to apply the '-s' morpheme to the verb form of the third person singular pronoun in the present tense. The occurrence of such errors could be due to the interrogative structures where the stem verbs do not require the '-s' morpheme after the auxiliary. Learners normally tend to follow and generate their own answers based on the question structures.

Richards (1974) explains that errors of this type occur when an ESL learner is primarily interested in communication, that is, the learner can achieve quite efficient communication without the need for mastering more than the elementary rules of question usage. As a consequence, the motivation to achieve communication may exceed the motivation to produce grammatically correct sentences.

2.7.2.4 False Concepts Hypothesized

By False Concepts Hypothesized, it is meant that the students, in his learning process, get to form some concepts of the target language. For example, a learner may hypothesize the form 'was' as a past tense marker and as a result he produces this erroneous construction: "One day it ***was happened**". Similarly, the form is probably understood as the corresponding marker for the present tense, giving the sentence " He* **is speaks** Japanese". Richards (1974) explains that the origin of false concepts hypothesized errors could be due to poor grading of teaching items and faulty teaching.

It can be concluded that different methodologies are used to make the study of the second language an easier task. All these methodologies agree that the analysis of error is a necessary step in an attempt to account for the learner's mistakes.

As mentioned above, these errors are of two types: interlingual and intralingual errors. The following study investigates the intralingual and interlingual mistakes committed by Malay learners of English language as a second language. The study will try to identify prepositional errors and explain them in terms of Richards' explanatory model, that is, in terms of the following elements: overgeneralization, false concepts hypothesized, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules in addition to language transfer. Also this study will investigate the influence of the native language upon the prepositional errors made in the target language. This influence is termed as 'language transfer'.

2.8 Prepositions

A preposition can be defined as a word that shows a relationship between its object and some other word in the sentence. Every preposition must have an object to complete the phrase. The object will be either a noun or a pronoun. Some examples of prepositions are: before, about, above, beneath, between beyond and etc. According to Collins (1990), a preposition is a word such as ' by', 'with' or 'from' which is always followed by a noun group or an '*ing*' form. In the words of Leech and Svartvik (1979:37), prepositions are " words which, as their name implies, are placed before a noun phrase." Prepositions constitute only a small class of words in English but they play an important role in speaking and writing. Not only are different shades of meaning conveyed by prepositions but most importantly a preposition often expresses "a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement." (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 125)

Bennet (1975) identifies several common prepositional meanings, which include locative, directional, comitative, dative, benefactive, instrumental, genetive, causal and manner. Thus, they can be grouped as prepositions of place or position, prepositions of direction, preposition of time, prepositions of purpose, prepositions of association, prepositions of similarity, prepositions used with means of transport, prepositions of agent/source, prepositions of accompaniment 'with' and prepositions with comparative forms. Collins (1990) gives some examples of such prepositions. They are as follows:

Prepositions of Place

1. He is sitting **beside** me.

2. The committee members sat **around** the table.

3. The little boy leant **against** the tree.

4. Despite the rain, the boy swam **across** the channel.

5. The post office is **opposite** our school.

6. Some people hide their valuables **underneath** their mattresses.

7. Although the flood level is **below** danger level, evacuation has begun.

Prepositions of Direction

1. The girl skates **along** the school corridor.

2. They have been warned to stay **from** the drug addicts.

3. The children ran **out of** the burning room.

4. The shows fell **into** the river.

5. The dog ran **towards** its master.

6. James fell **off** the tree and broke his leg.

7. We lifted the big box **on to** the table.

8. The cat climbed **up** the tree to avoid the dog.

9. The man ran **forward** to meet his wife.

10. I instinctively turned **around** and saw a man running away.

Prepositions of Time

1. The salesman came here **at** 3 p.m.

2. We completed the project **within** an hour.

3. They went home **after** the show.

4. **Before** the guest came, we decorated the hall.

5. He fell asleep **during** the boring speech.

6. The stranger has been here **since** yesterday.

7. Wait here **until** the bus comes.

8. We have been working **for** two hours.

9. The men are supposed to work **from** 9 a.m. **to** 5 p.m.

Prepositions of Purpose

1. I sent my father to the hospital **for** a checkup.

2. We went together **so that** we could have a group discussion.

3. I trained hard **in order to** represent the school.

Prepositions of Association

1. Please divide equally **between** the two of you.

2. The children get on well **among** themselves.

Prepositions of Similarity

1. Borhan is **as** good **as** you in painting.
2. You look **like** a monster when you are angry.

Prepositions Used with Means of Transport

1. We go to school **by** bus.
2. The villagers arrived at the clinic **on** foot.

Prepositions of Agent/Source

1. The book was written **by** the famous author.
2. I bought the chewing gum **from** the store.

Prepositions of Accompaniment 'with'

1. She goes to school **with** her brother.
2. The television set comes **with** a one-year warranty.
3. I like to travel **with** my friends.

Prepositions with Comparative Forms

1. Venus is much nearer **to** the Sun than the Earth.
2. The judge's bench was closer **to** me than Rochelle's chair.

According to Collins (1991), the most basic use of most prepositions is to indicate position and direction. Most prepositions are single words, although there is some that consist of more than one word, such as, 'out of' and 'in between'. Here are lists of common one-word and more-than-one-word prepositions, which indicate place or destination.

One-Word Prepositions

about	before	down
opposite	towards	above
behind	from	outside
under	across	below
in	over	along
beneath	round	by

More-Than-One-Word Prepositions

ahead of	close by
in front of	on top of
all over	close to
near to	out of
away from	in between
next to	

Prepositions have **an object**, which comes after the preposition. For example, "The switch is by **the door**." Prepositions can also combine with **complex noun groups** to describe places in some detail. For example, "I stood alone in **the middle of the yard**." Some prepositions can only be used with a restricted group of nouns. For example, 'aboard' is used with a noun referring to a form of transport, such as 'ship', 'plane', 'train', or 'bus', or with the name of a particular ship, the flight number for a particular plane journey, and so on. For example,

There's something terribly wrong **aboard** this ship, Dr. Marlowe.

He's not **aboard** the Morning Rose.

He climbed **aboard** a truck.

Collins (1990) also noted that prepositional phrases are most commonly used after verbs. They are used after verbs which indicate position in order to specify where

something is, to indicate movement, and activities. Some examples of these prepositional phrases are given. (Collin, 1990:297-306). They are as follows:

After Verbs Indicating Position

She lives **in Newcastle**.

An old piano stood **in the corner of the room**.

You ought to stay **out of the sun**.

After Verbs Indicating Movement

I went **into the kitchen** and began to make the dinner.

Mrs. Kaul was leading him **to his seat**.

The others burst **from their tents**.

After Verbs Indicating Activities

The meeting was being held **in Logan Heights at a community center**.

He was practicing high jumps **in the garden**.

They watch the children playing **in the street**.

Prepositional Phrases are also placed at the beginning of a clause for emphasis or contrast and for the inversion of subject and verb.

At Beginning of Clause: for Emphasis or Contrast

In the garden everything was peaceful.

Through the glass of the frontage she could see a waiter bending attentively over a woman of about her own age.

At Beginning of clause: Inversion of Subject and Verb

On the ceiling hung dustpans and brushes.

Inside the box lie the group's US mining assets.

Behind them stand the guards.

Beyond them lay the field.

2.9 Review of Past Studies and Implications

In most past research on error analysis, the researchers' aims were to identify the errors and categorize them and do frequency counts of those errors. Some researchers have also attempted to detect the underlying sources of those errors so as to gain an insight into the ESL learning problems. In most of these EA studies, attempts were made to find out different types of errors.

Gill (1974) carried out a study of English noun and verb phrases by using an error analysis approach. His subjects were 320 Malay students learning English in Form One and Form Two in Malaysia. Each student had to write two essays, one being a narrative and the other, a descriptive piece. He analyzed errors involving nouns and pronouns. All these errors were classified according to a description of forms. They were Total Omission of Forms, Total Wrong Forms, Total Insertion of Forms and Wrong Word Order.

In another study, Yap (1973) examined the errors that occurred in the essays of standard four, five and six pupils in a primary school in Kuala Lumpur. He categorized the errors under the main headings of punctuation, capitalization, word form, structure and spelling.

Noor Zainab(1986) carried out a study on the errors due to native language interference . Her subjects were Malay students from the Science and Islamic Faculties in U.K.M. She elicited data from examination scripts. Her study shows that interference errors occurred mainly in the areas of prepositions, variable nouns, articles, genitives, spelling and tenses.

A review of three other studies on Error Analysis done by different researchers revealed that prepositional errors rank among the top three most frequent errors done by ESL learners, indicating that prepositions can be one of the main problematic aspect of grammar faced by the ESL learners.

Mennon (1983) administered a study entitled " An Error Analysis in English of Social Science Students in a Malaysian University" to investigate the errors made by eighty first year Malay students from University Malaya in their written work. In her analysis of errors, prepositional errors accounted for 13.25% of the total number of errors. She deduced that interference from the mother tongue was the major cause of errors.

In another study, Wong (1987) investigated the errors in the written English essays in a Malaysian school. He identified, classified and explained the errors made by forty Form Two Chinese-educated students. In his analysis, prepositional errors formed the third largest group of word class errors (11.8%). Wrong selection of prepositions accounted for more than half the errors. This was followed by unnecessary insertion of prepositions and omission of prepositions. Wong postulated that errors in the usage of prepositions among the Chinese-educated learners were the result of applying features peculiar to Chinese prepositions to English prepositions, mother tongue interference and the different functions of the English prepositions, which are not similar to the Chinese prepositions.

The above studies show that many learners had problems in learning prepositions. Subsequently, prepositional usage had been found to be worthy of its study. Thus, research was carried out to investigate prepositional errors although the

number is relatively small compared to the studies done on common errors in the written work of ESL learners.

In a research administered by Phon Khampang (1974) entitled" Thai Difficulties in Using English Prepositions, a study of errors was carried out on the written work of his 169 subjects which consisted of forty Thais, forty-eight Japanese, thirty-eight Spanish and forty-three others. There were two main research questions for his study. Firstly," Do Thai students have greater difficulty in learning English prepositions compared to the others?" Secondly, "Is the learning of certain prepositions more difficult than others depending on the students' L1?" Phon Khampang carried out a diagnostic test with three parts to investigate these two questions. The results showed no significant differences in the groups on total, that is, all the four groups had difficulty with English prepositions. There was no item which was only problem of the Thai learners. Rather, the problem with prepositions was shared by all the groups.

In a study entitled " Moroccan English Errors: A Pilot Study ", Ahmad Meziani (1984) established that errors in the use of prepositions accounted for 95 errors or almost 18% of subjects' work. Meziani categorized the errors as follows: place and position, destination, time, cause and purpose, recipient/target, manner and others.

As a conclusion, it can be said that various studies were carried out to investigate common errors in the written work of ESL students based on error analysis approach. This approach has helped to uncover the errors made by students and their causes were

discussed. Within the Malaysian context, most EA studies have attempted to find out different types of errors made in the written work of the ESL students. However, there is still lack of research on errors related to prepositional errors. This thesis is concerned mainly with filling this gap. It intends at using error analysis approach as a tool to investigate the prepositions which pose the most difficulty for the Malay ESL students and hence the study, to find out why such errors occur.