CHAPTER 2 : REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Research on Second language Acquisition

Learning a second language can be exciting and productive or painful and useless. One's effort can end in the acquisition of native-like fluency or a stumbling repertoire of sentences soon forgotten. The difference often lies in how one goes about learning the new language and how a teacher goes about teaching it. To be successful, a learner need not have a special inborn talent for learning languages. The learner and teacher simply need to 'do it right'.

Sometimes researchers refer to this process as sequential language acquisition to differentiate it from simultaneous or bilingual acquisition. Second language acquisition, henceforth (SLA), includes learning a new language in a foreign language context (for example English in Mexico) as well as learning a new language in a host language environment (for example German in Germany). The term 'second language' refers to both foreign and host language and the learning principles discussed apply to the acquisition of both. Target language refers to the language being learned or taught.

People can learn more than one language and individual differences occur in such learning. Some individuals are more successful than others in mastering the languages. For some individuals, some aspects of language learning are mastered more easily than others. Research suggests that three internal processing factors play a substantial role in second language acquisition: the filter, the organizer and the monitor.

The filter appears to be the first major hurdle of the incoming language. The learner's emotional state is also part of the filter. Affective factors such as the learner's motives, attitudes and emotional state play an important role. Research has shown that the less anxious and more relaxed the learner, the better the language acquisition.

Filtering determines

i.   which target language models the learner selects.

ii.   which parts of the new language the learner attends to first.

iii.   When language efforts cease and

iv.   How fast a learner can acquire a language.

The organizer subconsciously processes data which the filter lets in. The monitor is responsible for conscious linguistic processing. The degree to which the monitor is used depends on a number of factors:-

i.   The learner's age or level of cognitive development.

ii.   The verbal task being performed.

iii.   The learner's personality

It is widely believed that young children are the fastest acquirers of a second language. Language researchers dispute this common assumption but continue to debate on the optimal age for beginning second language acquisition.

The popular belief that younger acquirers are better at SLA has led to certain research reports to counter this early hypothesis. This is because the literature on age and language acquisition is inconsistent, some showing older, others showing younger performers to be superior. In a recent paper, Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979) presented evidence for three generalizations concerning the effect of age on rate and eventual attainment in SLA.

They are:-

I. Acquirers who begin natural exposure to second
    language during childhood, generally achieve second
    language proficiency than those beginning as adults.

ii. Older children acquire the second language faster than
    younger children, in the early stages of syntactic and
    morphological development where time and exposure
    are held constant.

iii. Adults proceed through the early stages of syntactic and
     morphological development faster than children where
     time and exposure are held constant.

McLaughlin questions the availability of evidence to show that
adults and children acquire or learn a second language differently. It
is often argued that the child has a superior biological predisposition
for language acquisition i.e. the second or third language as well as
first language. Hence the young child is thought to acquire a second
language easily and quickly. However, studies by Ervin-Tripp (1974)
and Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle (1975) suggest than older children and
adolescents do better than younger children in acquiring a second

language in a natural environment.

Nonetheless, direct comparison between young children and adolescents or adults acquiring a second language is difficult, since the criteria for success is vastly different for the child as compared to the adult.

Children are considered fluent when they can communicate at a level appropriate for their age. An adult has to communicate with other adults about much more complicated issues, where deficiencies in vocabulary and syntax show up more readily.

Rosansky believes that SL development takes place in two different ways, according to whether or not the learner is aware of what he is doing. The young child sees only similarities, lacks flexible thinking and is self-centered. These are the prerequisites of automatic language acquisition, because associated with them is an absence of meta- awareness. The young child is unaware that he is acquiring a language. The young child has no developmental social attitudes towards the use of one language as opposed to another. For these reasons the young child is cognitively 'open' to another language.

Curan (1961) feels that " children acquire the second language more easily than adults because they are less threatened by the sounds of the new language and because they are willing to depend on the others for support in learning." Certain personality factors are also associated with success in SLA and these factors appear to be related to self-confidence for example lack of anxiety, an outgoing personality and self esteem.

The researcher's study is based on 13 year old children and the above studies seem to indicate that if these 13 year old children are given proper guidance by teachers they can acquire a second language i.e. the English language.

2.2.   Research on Errors.

In Malaysia, the learning of English as a second language can best be characterized as the learning of a target language in a non-target language environment. In the Malaysian educational scene, especially at the primary and secondary level, the teachers' main concern is in correcting errors made by students. A great deal of time and energy are spent in the meticulous checking of errors made by students. The teacher has hardly the time or energy to analyze or to find out the cause of such errors.

A study of Constrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis may provide some useful information. CA stresses the theory of mother tongue interference as the underlying cause of errors in second language learning. Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) claim that a comparative study of the students' mother tongue (MT) and the target language (TL), can predict the areas of difficulties and the errors, learners of a target language are likely to make.

However, Corder (1971) Richards (1971) and Jain (1971) made a claim for Error Analysis (EA) to explain second language (L2) acquisition. Their theory maintains that the majority of errors made by second language learners were in fact the result of interference from the target language itself rather than the mother tongue. EA advocates that in the process of learning the new language, the learner formulates his own rules and tests and re-tests them, by using new structures unheard of in MT. When an error is corrected, the learner reorganizes his structures and finally internalizes the correct rules of the TL. Thus both Corder and Richards strongly favour EA in the learning of errors. However, both accept that MT interference as one of the factors that pose problems in second language acquisition but not the sole factor.

It would be appropriate to say that errors made by second language learners are the combined results of CA and EA factors. This study, only identifies the errors made and does not attempt to give a cause or reason for the existence of errors in second language learners.

2.3   Research on Error Analysis

Wheeler (1940) did a comparison of errors in children of Grade 3 in certain rural and urban schools in Kentucky. He found that frequent errors were made in capitalization, punctuation and spelling. In studies done by Anderson and Staiger (1957), Storm (1960), Patty and Burns (1964) it was reported that punctuation errors and run-on sentences were the most common errors. O'Brien (1948) found that students in his study made frequent errors in capitalization, paragraphing, sentence structures and punctuation.

In the Malaysian context, various analysis of written English errors have been done. Ho Wah Kam (1973), in his analysis of errors made by Chinese medium students, concluded that the failure of the usage of verb and verbal phrases in sentences accounted for most of the errors. Tran Thi Chan (1973) showed that while 'interlingual interference' accounted for 51% of the total errors made by the

subjects in his study, 'intralingual errors' accounted for only 27 % of the total errors.

Yap Soon Hock's (1973) findings showed that word forms and spelling errors stood out predominantly in the English and Malay medium classes. Errors in capitalization decreased as grade level advanced in the English medium. In the English medium, generally, girls committed fewer errors than boys. The girls made fewer errors in capitalization and spelling. Angela Lee 's (1984) analysis showed that 35.7 % of the errors involved nouns, 21.1% verbs and 15 % adjectives. The study also showed that the passive voice and the use of the possessive case in nouns presented difficulties to the subjects.

Some researchers are of the opinion that there is convincing proof that a real sex difference in language development exists in favour of girls. Kaulers (1931) concluded that: '..... girl in general, achieve more consistently in accordance with their ability than boys and that intelligence as a factor in success is more significant among girls than among boys.' Davies (1937) has also revealed that sex differences exist in favour of girls.

The researcher, in her study will seek to find out whether the errors mentioned, are consistent with the findings of her research.

2.4   The Role of Writing in Malaysian schools.

Writing is considered the most difficult skill to master compared to listening speaking or reading. The process of writing involves both a knowledge of linguistics and sociolinguistics. Writing differs from speaking because writing is a one-sided communication unlike speaking and the writer is deprived of receiving immediate feedback from the reader. Unlike speaking, which is a spontaneous activity, writing is normally deliberate, performed only on certain occasions and in many circumstances, writing is imposed on the writer. Finally, in writing, emphasis is placed on accuracy and appropriateness.

Why is writing important in the language class? Some of the reasons why writing has become an important part in the teaching-learning process are:

i.   writing helps learners to remember to write new vocabulary, grammar rules, and language examples.

ii.   writing helps learners to revise, review and reinforce language learning. Students practise other language skills like listening, speaking or reading and these lead to the final skill in writing.

iii. writing not only brings variety into the classroom but also develops other language skills.

iv   learners and teachers can see a written record of their language development and are able to evaluate their individual progress.

v.   More important, is the fact that writing is frequently an administratively more efficient method of testing.

What are the reasons for writing? Naturally, the students' response would be 'the teacher asked me to.' However reasons for writing should go beyond the confines of the classroom. We write to make a written record of some information we want to remember; we write to communicate: to inform and to ask; to advise and request and to recommend and warn.

In the Malaysian schools, for the lower proficiency level, the following classroom techniques for teaching writing are carried out;

i. practicing letter formation, spelling, punctuation and grammatical structures.

ii. Copying exercises, grammar transformation exercises, spelling and dictation exercises form part of the writing lessons.

These highly controlled techniques control the writing process and minimize error formation as the learner has minimal freedom over what is written.

Many teachers feel that the students should first learn to write correctly from a grammatical point of view before they are allowed to develop their writing skills. Others feel that over emphasis on correctness of language form will slow down development. However, as students approach Form Three and move on to Upper Secondary, teachers begin to practise the 'free-writing approach' where students are allowed to pen their thoughts on paper, regardless of possibilities of error. The reason behind this is that, once students overcome the psychological reluctance of writing, both writing

fluency and grammatical accuracy will develop with practice.

There are quite a number of approaches in the teaching of writing. Let us look at four of the common approaches:

i.   The Prose Models Approach.

ii.   The Process Approach.

iii.   The Integrated Approach.

iv.   The Interactional Approach.

i.   The Prose Models Approach.

Students are exposed to samples of compositions from different sources for example samples in revision books. Students are then asked to imitate the style of these works. This approach emphasizes on the end -product, i.e. the written composition.

ii.   The Process Approach.

Students are taught to be aware of their purpose, audience and the need to communicate meaning through a long process of writing which includes planning, revising, writing and rewriting numerous drafts. This approach is a student-oriented approach i.e. it allows the students to re-examine their work.

iv.   The Integrated Approach.

Students are given specific topics and then exposed to samples of related texts. They are then encouraged to use syntactic and rhetorical patterns from these texts in their own work.

v.   The Interactional Approach.

This approach prescribes extensive writing and feedback, as essentials in the writing programme. Samples of students' own work are also used for stimulating hypotheses about the target language. In this approach, feedback is seen as a constructive tool which helps the students in the revision draft. The students receive feedback from the teacher and peers. The students' own work can be used as a focus for hypotheses testing, error correction and revision.

Research into the writing has lead more course-book writers to suggest that the teachers should help in the process of writing rather than concentrate on the end - product. Thus writing of a composition basically includes pre-writing, while writing and post-writing skills. In teaching second language learners, each step must

be reviewed in the light of the special needs of learners.

Even when integrated with the teaching of listening, speaking or reading, problems of writing remain obvious. Writing is a problem even when the writer uses his native language. It is a special skill that does not arise naturally from an ability to speak a language (Palmer,1985).

Widdowson (1983) says:

'…In my experience, writing is usually an irksome activity and an ordeal to be avoided whenever possible. It seems to require an expanse of effort disproportionate to the actual task….most of us seems to have difficulty in getting our thoughts down on paper…' (pg 34).

Good writing is defined as that which shows an absence of error (Fargley, 1985). However, when students are plagued with problems of writing, good writing can never materialize.

What are the problems encountered by students? Byrne (1979) classified them as cognitive problems, linguistic problems and psychological problems. Students face problems because of :-

i.   cognitive problems, as they lack ideas and unable to
       express   themselves in writing.

ii.   linguistic problems as they lack mastery of the language
       for example in terms of sentence construction, use of
       tenses, use of connectors and subject-verb agreement.

iii.   psychological problems as students have a fear of
       making errors and are discouraged by numerous
       remarks they see in the books.

Pica (1986) sums up the hardship faced by learners and
teachers alike:

'….The writing classroom can be a source of frustration to
both language learners and teachers. Required by the
conventions of written English to express themselves at a more
precise level of grammatical accuracy and rhetorical
organization in their written expressions than in their spoken
language, many students become confused, distressed and
even bored with the demands of their writing assignment.'

These are the problems found in the Malaysian schools, when faced with a writing assignment.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research on second language acquisition. The researcher touched on the research on errors and on error analysis. The researcher also discussed on the role of writing in Malaysian schools and the common approaches to the teaching of writing. Bases on this background, the researcher would conduct her study on error analysis on 13 year old students.