# CHAPTER TWO

# REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

## 2.1 Introduction

The methodology used in this study is Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis as both of these approaches complement each other. Contrastive Analysis is used to identify the similarities and differences between English and Malay whereas Error Analysis helps to analyse the prepositional errors made by Malay students when learning English. The review of literature includes Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, recent studies on error analysis, and current views on errors in prepositions.

## 2.2 Contrastive Analysis (CA)

There are two types of CA: Theoretical CA and Applied CA. Theoretical CA describes the similarities and differences between linguistic features in detail based on certain theory. The description in turn is sufficient to be used for contrasting different language elements in question.

Applied CA is an approach employed to compare linguistic features of two or more languages systematically. For this study, Applied CA is used to compare two languages – English learnt as a second language and Malay as the learners' mother tongue. Such comparison would bring light to problematic areas faced by learners in the teaching-learning of English. As Hammer and Rice (1965, cited in Jackson, 1981:185) posit

> "a systematic comparison of selected linguistic features of two or more languages, the intent of which is ... to provide teachers and textbook writers with a body of information which can be of service in the preparation of instructional materials, the planning of courses, and the development of classroom techniques."

It is hoped the findings of this study would provide information on which prepositions may pose problems to the second language learners to English language teachers and textbook writers in Malaysia.

The review of literature on CA reveals that there are different conceptions of CA and its benefits. For linguists like Lado (1957), Weinreich (1968), Fries (1957), and Selinker (1966), CA can be used to predict the possible learning problems faced by L2 learners. On the other hand, linguists like Stockwell (1968) and Catford (1968), suggest that CA can be used as a means to explain errors made by L2 learners. Others like DiPetro (1971) see it as a tool for the exploration of linguistic universals.

## 2.2.1 Historical Development of CA

CA came into scenario of language teaching and learning in 1950s when Fries (1945) published his book entitled "Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language". In the 1960s, CA became more popular when structural linguistics and behaviouristic psychology were dominant in the study of language learning. CA supporters such as Fries (1945), Weinrich (1953) and Lado (1957) contended that when similarities and differences between L1 and L2 are taken into consideration, teaching and learning of the L2 would be more effective and useful. Others proponents like Banathy, Trager and Waddle (1966) believed that better L2 teaching materials could be prepared after having predicted the learners' behaviour and difficulties by comparing the two languages.

One of the CA supporters who contended that interference of the mother tongue causes error and difficulties in foreign language learning is Lado (1957:2) who states that "... individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture ...". Upon such arguments, Contrastive Analysis

Hypothesis (CAH) was introduced. According to this hypothesis, L1 transfer affects L2 acquisition. Lado (1957:2) posits that "those elements that are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him, and those areas that are different will be difficult."

However, in the 1970s, CA was no longer claiming as much pedagogic attention as it once had. According to Abbas (1995:196), this was due to the fact that CA's basic weakness lies in its sole emphasis on one type of error, i.e. "interference". Yet many researchers believe that CA's shortcoming lies in its inability to predict effectively a host of other errors commonly made by L2 learners. Klein (1986) observed that Turkish learners put the verb in the final position when learning German based on the grammatical structure of their native language (NL). On the other hand, Spanish and Italian learners do the same too despite the fact that verbs are not in the final position in their own languages. Therefore, it is obvious that interference of the learner's NL is not the sole factor in committing errors.

There are two versions of CA namely the strong version of CA and the weak version of CA. The strong version of CA or also known as *CA a priori* compares native language (NL) and the target language (TL). The two languages are compared to identify the similarities and differences of linguistics structures. According to Choi (1996:87), "*CA a priori,* that is the strong version enables us to foresee the difficulties the students may encounter." In other words, *CA a priori* helps to predict the difficulties faced by students who are learning a foreign language. The strong version of CA is seen as a preventive measure whereas the weak version of CA is a curative measure.

### 2.2.2 Strong Version of CA

The strong version of CA lies on the following assumptions:

i.   The prime cause of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference from the learners' NL.

ii.  The difficulties are mainly due to the differences between the two languages.

iii. The greater the differences are, the more serious the learning difficulties will be.

iv.  The results of a comparison between the two languages are needed to predict the difficulties and errors that will occur in foreign language learning.

v.   What to teach is best found in the comparison of the two languages and then removing the common features so that what the learners learn are the differences established by CA. (Lado, 1957)

**2.2.3 Weak Version of CA**

Wardhaugh (1970:15) proposed the weak version of CA which diagnoses and explains errors, as soon as he realized that the strong version of CA was beyond the reach of contrastive grammarians. It begins with the errors made by L2 learners and explanations are given based on a CA of those areas in question to explain why the errors have occurred. Here, the weak version recognizes the significance of interference across languages and that linguistic difficulties can be explained more profitably after they have been observed.

Schumann & Stenson (1975:152) suggested "... there is relatively small difference between EA and the weak version of CA ..." and further explained that " ... if we compare the weak form of CA to EA, we find that in fact they both make their departure from the same point: the target language as the students speaks it."  When we compare the weak version of CA and Error Analysis (EA), there are hardly any significant differences. a with

## 2.3 Error Analysis (EA)

Arising from the shortcomings of CA to account for second language learners' errors, Error Analysis (EA) was suggested as an alternative. Errors made by native speakers and second language learners were seen as evidence of the processes and strategies of first and second language acquisition. Researchers on first language acquisition like Menyuk (1971) claimed the study of errors made by native speakers reveals the type of cognitive and linguistic processes that are involved in the language learning process. Furthermore, a more positive attitude was developed towards learners' errors in second language learning than what was prevalent in the CA tradition.

EA accounts for the learners' performance in terms of the cognitive processes learners make use of when they reorganize the input they have received from the target language (TL).  Now, it is widely believed that learners benefit from their errors by using them to gain feedback from the environment and in turn, use that feedback to test and modify their hypothesis about the TL. In other words, from EA we are able to get some insights on the nature of the learners' knowledge of the TL at a given point of time in their learning and discover what they still have to learn.

According to Corder (1967:167), EA is based on three assumptions:

i.   Errors are inevitable as we cannot learn a language without making errors.

ii.   Errors are significant in different ways.

iii.   Not all errors are attributable to the learner's NL.

However, both CA and EA have their merits and shortcomings. "Both these theories (CA and EA) have had their moment at the centre of the applied linguistics stage and, although neither  continues to hold that position, neither has yet made its final exit" ( cited in Shizuka, 2003).

**2.4 Interference (Negative Transfer) and Overgeneralization**

Extensive research has been carried out on the interference of the mother tongue in the learning of L2. Ellis (1997:51) defines interference as "transfer" which he refers to as "the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2". Furthermore, Beardsmore (1982) claims that many of the difficulties faced by an L2 learner in phonology, vocabulary and grammar, are due to the interference of habits from the learner's L1, thus resulting in errors in the use of the L2 as the structures of L1 and L2 are different. Studies that have been carried out locally by Khazriyati et al (2006) and Shaari (1987) found a major difficulty faced by Malay learners of L2 English is the learning of English grammar.

Diab (1996) found evidence of interference of the mother tongue, Arabic, in the English writings of EFL students at the American University of Beirut. Similarly, Okuma (1999) identified L1 transfer in the EFL writings of Japanese students. Research on overgeneralization errors were carried out by Richards (1974, pp. 174-188), Jain (in Richards, 1974, pp. 208 -214) and Taylor (1975). In an EFL context, Farooq (1998) analyzed the written texts of upper-basic Japanese learners and identified two error patterns namely, transfer and overgeneralization errors. Habash (1982) discovered that common errors in the use of English prepositions in the written work of UNRWA students at the end of the preparatory term were attributed to the interference of Arabic than to other learning problems.

**2.5 Studies on Differences between English and Malay**

Numerous studies have been carried out on the standard of English among students in Malaysia. Studies by Hamidah, Melor and Nor Zaini (2002), Noreiny Maarof et. al

(2003) and Hanita Azman (2006) reveal that the students' weakness in English could be attributed to attitude, geographical location and ethnicity. There are also other studies that focus on structural differences between Malay and English. They found that the structural differences between the two languages is the source of interference in the learning of English grammar. Marlyna, Khazriyati and Tan Kim Hua (2005) studied the occurrence of errors in 'subject-verb agreement' (SVA) and the copula 'be'. The findings of their research showed that 46.83% of the errors are SVA. In SVA, errors occurred when the verb has to be inflected in the present tense to agree with the subject. The researchers concluded that this was due to the fact that SVA is not required in the Malay language.

Another study by Nor Hashimah, Norsimah and Kesumawati (2008) indicated that 60% of the total errors made by students are attributed to the morphological and syntactical differences between the Malay language and English. The most obvious weaknesses of students lay in the area of affixes, adverbs, adjectives, plural forms, copula and SVA. They contended that the different grammatical structures in Malay language and English resulted in the students' inability to successfully acquire English.

Based on another study conducted in Singapore by Charlene Tan (2005), errors were due to the overt syntactic influences of Singapore students' mother tongues which affected the learning of English in the classroom.

## 2.6 Studies on Prepositions

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999:401) contend that prepositions are generally difficult for language learners who learn English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL). Likewise, Boers and Demecheleer (1998:197) argue that prepositions are difficult to master for ESL/EFL learners because they have literal as well as figurative

meanings. Catalan (1996:174) claims that Spanish students have difficulty with mastering English prepositions. Similarly, Jabbour-Lagocki (1990:162) believes that English prepositions are difficult for ESL/EFL learners to master because of L1 interference. For native speakers, prepositions present little difficulty, but for a foreign/second language learner they are confusing and largely problematic as prepositions have strong collocation relations with other elements of language. For example, we say, *we are at the hospital*; or *we visit a friend who is in the hospital. We lie in bed but on the couch. We watch a film at the theatre but on television.*

Obeidat (1986) in his doctoral dissertation, "An investigation of syntactic and semantic errors in the written compositions of Arab EFL learners" found that Arabic L1 learners of English made interlingual (LI influenced) errors in the use of determiners and prepositions, retaining resumptive pronouns in relative clauses, word order, missing subjects and the copula, and verb and preposition idioms. Likewise, Cronnell (1985) found that 27% of errors made by the third-grade cohort, and 36% of the errors made by the sixth-grade cohort were errors attributed to influence from Spanish, Chicano English, and interlanguage.

Holtzknecht and Smithies (1980) conducted an error analysis on the English texts of 451 Pacific Islander students. They found that the prepositional errors were frequent. Besides that, the influence of the mother tongue on the students' pronunciation of English as well as the lack of proofreading or carelessness also caused the majority of the errors.

LoCoco (1975) compared errors made by English L1 learners' writing in Spanish L2 and German L2 over a four month period. The subjects selected their own topics and errors were classified according to their source (native and/or target language influence). Error type and frequency were found to change over time, and were different for German

and Spanish L2 learners. Almost all intralingual errors were found to be morphological which is the largest problem area. Interlingual errors were more common in German due to the tendency to use the English word order. Translation errors in Spanish increased over time. German learners tended to make mistakes in verb forms for which English and German rules coincided, while Spanish language learners made similar errors with articles. Spanish language learners also tended to omit conjunctions and prepositions which are not required in English but are compulsory in Spanish. Spanish learners, possibly due to instructional influence, were more daring in attempting forms they had not been taught.

Stenstrom (1975) analyzed errors in summaries written by forty-two learners of English as second language and found errors were also common in the selection of articles and prepositions besides other areas. The author also noted problems particularly the inability to separate mistakes for which subjects know a rule but forget it and those caused by a lack of proficiency or familiarity. Also, avoidance strategies and the stimuli used in the task may have influenced error production. The author estimated that approximately 55% of the errors were caused by intralingual (L2) interference while 20% were caused by interlingual (L1) interference. An evaluation of the errors by native speakers of English showed that the majority of errors did not affect comprehensibility.

Bhatia (1974) analyzed errors made in the compositions of ten students enrolled in an Indian university. Verb tense and sequence, and use of articles, were found to be the largest areas of grammatical error. These were followed in frequency by subject-verb agreement, prepositional, and modifier or quantifier errors.

In Aguas' doctoral dissertation (University of California, (1964), he studied the English compositions of 300 native Tagalog speakers ranging from second grade to high school who learned English as a second language. He found that errors in preposition

usage were the next most frequent, followed by article usage and noun usage. The author asserted that errors had two main sources, transfer from Tagalog to English, and false analogy between one aspect of English grammar and another non-comparable one. He noted that grammatical but not lexical transfer can be predicted by contrastive analysis.

## 2.7 Conclusion

From the review of literature, we can conclude the differences between the L1 and the L2 resulted in the students' inability to successfully acquire the L2. Transfer and overgeneralization are common errors found in students' writing and speech in L2 learning. Errors made by L2 learners using English prepositions are also significant. Various studies have been conducted and researchers found that the errors were caused by both intralingual and interlingual factors.