

# **LANGUAGE IN INDIA**

**Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow**

**Volume 10 : 4 April 2010**

**ISSN 1930-2940**

**Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.**

**Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.**

**Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.**

**B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.**

**A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.**

**Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.**

**K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.**

**Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.**

**S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.**

## **The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia**

**Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)**

---

### **Contents**

<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>
<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b>

### **Bibliography**

### **Appendices**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of  
Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the interference of L1 grammatical rules in the writing of L2 with specific reference to the interference of Tamil (L1) in English (L2). This study seeks to find out the components of the L1 grammar that the students of Tamil schools use interchangeably in their daily writing of L2, namely English. It further seeks to find out which grammatical components dominate the inter-language grammar. The research hopes to seek further understanding regarding the theoretical debate on inter-language grammar influence.

I decided to embark on this study when I was teaching English to some Tamil school students, a few years ago. I found that these students always had the tendency to answer English questions in Tamil. When they really tried to answer in English, they usually resorted to using the direct translation method. I observed that whenever they did this, their answers were heavily influenced by their mother tongue, both phonologically and grammatically. This observation is based on my intuition as a multilingual speaker who has had experience, in terms of mother tongue interference, while studying English in college. A lot of research has been conducted regarding the phonological interference

of inter-languages, for example, (Keys, 2002). A much relevant research that was done pertaining to writing was in 1999 which was published in the International Educational Journal. “*Native Language Interference in Learning a Second Language: Exploratory Case Studies of Native Language interference with Target Language Usage.*” (Baljit Bhela, 1999). I would like to explore the grammatical interference of L2 learners further, particularly among children. How does a child create the mental construct that is language? Children do not wake up one morning with a fully formed grammar in their heads or with all the ‘rules’ of social and communicative intercourse. Linguistic knowledge develops in stages. Chomsky (1950) first resorted to this concept of Universal Grammar because he believes that children can not learn their first language so quickly and effortlessly without the help of some inborn talents.

In terms of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), learners are faced with the same logical problems faced in the process of acquiring the first language. Furthermore, this learning is also influenced, either positively or negatively, by the first language. However, to what extent does the interference (if any) really affect the learners? These are the questions that always concern me whenever I teach children in vernacular schools. Since the 1960s researchers like Nabakov (1960) have pointed unequivocally to the advantages of bilingualism. Children who know a second language are better at separating semantic from phonetic aspects of words, at tasks involving classification, and at tests of creativity. They are said to have sharper awareness of language.

Knowledge of a second language is a normal part of human existence, therefore it may well be unusual to know only one language. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is not a

uniform and predictable phenomenon. There is no single way in which learners acquire knowledge of a second language (L2). There are many factors that contribute to SLA. Different learners in different situations learn L2 in different ways. Second language acquisition refers to all the aspects of language that the language learner needs to master. However, the focus, for example has been on how L2 learners acquire grammatical sub-systems, such as the syntactical rules, subject-verb agreement and tenses. It is a strong belief among scholars in language studies that SLA is influenced by the learners' first language (L1) to varying degrees. The clear support for this belief comes from 'foreign' accents in the L2 speech of learners. When an Indian of Tamil or Hindi background in the subcontinent speaks English, his/her English sounds Tamil or Hindi (popular languages among the Indians).

Although human languages have a great deal in common, which enables us to translate from one language to another without much difficulty, they are also very different from one another in many aspects. These differences are explicitly depicted in our disability and struggle to learn a new language. Second language acquisition has both similarities and dissimilarities with those of the first language. It is the study of how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their native tongue. The key issue in this matter would be to what extent SLA and L1 acquisition are similar or different processes.

It is a popular belief that SLA is strongly influenced by the learner's first language. It is also a popular belief that the role of the first language is a negative one.

That is, the L1 gets in the way or interferes with the learning of the L2, such that the

features of the L1 are transferred onto L2. (Bolton and Kachru, 2006) L1 interference occurs in certain contexts, but not in others. The task facing SLA research is to specify precisely what the similarities are in order to predict, or explain precisely, when and where interference takes place.

### **English as a Second Language in Malaysia**

The English language in Malaysia, a country in South-East Asia, a member of the Commonwealth and Asean has undergone dynamic changes in the last few decades. It has, for more than a century, played an important role in the lives of Malaysians. This is clearly evident in the Razak Report 1956 that made English a compulsory second language in Malaysian schools. Before the 70's English was the medium of instruction in a number of public schools. The transformation in 1971, due to the implementation of the Education Enactment Bill in 1971 by the Malaysian government replaced English with Bahasa Melayu (BM) the National Language throughout the public sector and the education system.

The name *Anglo-Malay* has been used to describe the language that emerged during colonial times among expatriates and a local élite, serving as the vehicle through which such words as *compound/kampong*, *durian*, *orang utan*, and *sarong* have entered general English. Some English-medium schools were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in Penang in 1816, Singapore 1823, Malacca 1826, and Kuala Lumpur 1894), at the same time as BM or Malay, Chinese, and Tamil schools were encouraged. Those members of the various ethnic groups who were educated in the English-medium schools came to use English increasingly in their occupations and their daily life; the 1957 census reported

400,000 people (some 6% of the population then) as claiming to be literate in the language. When the British began to withdraw in the late 1950s, English had become the dominant language of the non-European élite, and with independence became with Malay the 'alternate official language'. However, the National Language Act of 1967 established Malay (renamed Bahasa Malaysia in 1963) as the sole official language, with some exceptions in such areas as medicine, law, banking, and business.

English-medium education expanded after independence; there were close to 400,000 students in such schools when, in 1969, the Ministry of Education decided that all English-medium schools would become Malay-medium. By the early 80s, the process through which Bahasa Malaysia became the national language of education was virtually complete, but the shift prompted widespread concern that general proficiency in English would decline. The language conversion programme was completed in 1980 at the form 5 level. However the conversion of the medium of language from English to Malay brought about a change in the status of English. The change resulted in unfavourable side effects. Deterioration in the standard of English was observed in the 70 s and early 80 s. The fact that English has been taught only as a subject also indirectly undermined its role. This system produced students who learned English for 11 years and yet were unable to communicate effectively in English. Taking these factors into consideration, five years ago, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, after a thorough study, ordered the Ministry of Education, to revamp the teaching and learning of science and mathematics. Mathematics and science are being taught in English now.

Paradoxically, there are still nationalists who are not in favour of the change and demanding the government to go back to the old system.

To prevent this, English has been retained as the compulsory second language in primary and secondary schools. Some 20% of the present population understand English and some 25% of city dwellers use it for specific purposes in their every day life. It is widely used in the media and as a reference language in higher education.

There are seven English-language daily newspapers (with a combined circulation of over 500,000) and three newspapers in Sabah published partly in English (circulation over 60,000). English is essentially an urban middle-class language, virtually all its users are bilingual, and code-switching is commonplace.

Comparatively, Malaysian English and Singapore English have much in common, with the main exception that English in Malaysia is more subject to influence from Malay. Pronunciation is marked by a strong tendency to syllable-timed rhythm, and a simplification of word-final consonant clusters, as in /Iv/ for *lived*. Syntactic characteristics include: the countable use of some usually uncountable nouns (*Pick up your chalks; A consideration for others is important*); innovations in phrasal verbs (such as *cope up with* rather than *cope with*); the use of reflexive pronouns to form emphatic pronouns (*Myself sick. I am sick; Himself funny He is funny*); and the multi-purpose particle *lah*, a token especially of informal intimacy (*Sorry, can't come lah*). Local vocabulary includes such borrowings from Malay as *bumiputera* (originally Sanskrit, son

of the soil) a Malay or other indigenous person, *dadah* illegal drugs, *rakyat* the people, citizens, *Majlis* (from Arabic) Parliament, *makan* food; such special usages as *banana leaf restaurant* a South Indian restaurant where food is served on banana leaves, *chop* a rubber stamp or seal, *crocodile* a womanizer, *girlie barber shop* a hairdressing salon that doubles as a massage parlour or brothel, *sensitive issues* (as defined in the Constitution) issues that must not be raised in public, such as the status of the various languages used in Malaysia and the rights and privileges of the different communities; such colloquialisms as *bes* (from *best*) great, fantastic, *relac* (from *relax*) take it easy; and such hybrids as *bumiputera status* indigenous status, and *dadah addict* drug addict.

### **Features of Standard Malaysian English (SME)**

- Standard Malaysian English is generally non-rhotic.
- Standard Malaysian English originates from British English as a result of the colonial experience.
- It has also components of American English, Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other languages in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.
- Like South-Eastern British English, Standard Malaysian English employs a broad An accent, as such words like bath and chance appear with /ɑː/ and not /æ/.
- The /t/ phoneme in words like ‘butter’ is usually not flapped (as in most forms of American English) or realised as a glottal stop (as in some other forms of British English, including Cockney).
- There is no h-dropping in words like ‘head’.



- Standard Malaysian English does not have yod-dropping after /n/, /t/ and /d/. Hence, for example, ‘new’, ‘tune’ and ‘dune’ are pronounced /nju:/, /tju:n/ and /dju:n/ rather than /nu:/, /tu:n/ and /du:n/. This contrasts with many East Anglian and East Midland varieties of British English and with most forms of American English.

### **Varieties of English in Malaysia**

According to *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: Languages & Literature* (2004), English in Malaysia has been categorized into three levels: the acrolect, mesolect and basilect. The acrolect is near-native, and not many Malaysians fall into this category - only those educated in core English-speaking countries from early schooling up to university may be found to speak the acrolect variety, so only a small percentage of Malaysians are proficient in it. As with other similar situations, a continuum exists between these three varieties and speakers may code-switch between them depending on context.

### **Standard Malaysian English and British English**

In the first half of the 20th century, Standard Malaysian English was nearly similar to British English (BrE) (albeit spoken with a Malaysian accent). However in the post-colonial era (after 1957), the influx of American TV programmes has influenced the usage of Standard Malaysian English. There is no official language board, council or organisation to ensure the correct and standard usage of Malaysian English, because after independence, Malay replaced English as the official language. The University of

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

9

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate continues, however, to set and mark the GCE O-Level English Language 1119 paper which is a compulsory subject for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (the English Language paper set by the Malaysian Ministry of Education which is the same as the English Language 1119 paper for GCE O-Level).

### **Words Only Used in British English**

To a large extent, Standard Malaysian English is derived from British English, largely due to the country's colonisation by Britain beginning from the 18th century. But because of influence from the American mass media, particularly in the form of television programmes and movies, Malaysians are also usually familiar with many American English words. For instance, both "lift/elevator" and "lorry/truck" are understood, although the British form is preferred. Only in some very limited cases is the American English form more widespread, e.g. "chips" instead of "crisps", "fries" instead of "chips".

### **Words or phrases only used in Standard Malaysian English**

Standard Malaysian English has also created its own vocabulary just like in any other former British colonies such as Australia and New Zealand and these words come from a variety of influences. Typically, for words or phrases that are based on other English words, the rural Malaysian English speaker may be unaware that the word or phrase is not present in British or American English.

Malaysian	British / American
Handphone (often abbreviated to HP)	Mobile phone or Cell phone
Malaysian Chinese / Malaysian Indian	Chinese Malaysian / Indian Malaysian
KIV (keep in view)	Kept on file, held for further consideration
Slippers	Flip-flop
Outstation	Means both 'out of town' and/or 'overseas/abroad'.
MC (medical certificate). Often used in this context, e.g. 'He is on MC today'	Sick note

Photostat	Photocopy, Xerox
Mee	Noodles
Aircon	Air-conditioner
Remisier	Broker

### **Difference in Meanings between Standard British English and Standard Malaysian English**

This is a list of words and phrases that have one meaning in British English and another in Malaysian English

Word / Phrase	Malaysian meaning	American / British meaning
last time	previously	on the previous occasion
a parking lot	a parking space, e.g. a parking garage (from	

	"That new shopping mall has five hundred parking lots."	US English)
an alphabet	a letter of the alphabet, e.g. "The word 'table' has five alphabets."	a set of letters used in a language
Bungalow	A mansion for the rich and/or famous; or a fully detached house, regardless of the number of floors it has. Lately, some housing developers have taken the abuse of this word further and we now see terms like "a semi-detached bungalow".	A small house or cottage usually having a single storey and sometimes an additional attic storey that is free standing, i.e. not conjoined with another unit.

to follow	to accompany, e.g. "Can I follow you?" meaning "Can I come with you?"	to go after or behind, e.g. "The police car was following me"
to keep	to put away or store, e.g. a parent tells a child "Keep your toys!"	to retain as one's own, e.g. "I must decide which to throw away and which to keep."
to revert	to get back to someone, e.g. in an email: "I will investigate this and revert to you by tomorrow."	to return to a previous edit or state
to send	to take someone somewhere, e.g. "Can you send me to the airport?"	to cause something to go somewhere without accompanying it, e.g. "I sent this letter to my grandma."

## Vocabulary

Many Malay and Malaysian words or phrases that describe Malaysian culture are used in Malaysian English. Some of these are:

- Cik: Ms
- Dadah: Drugs (As in narcotics, etc)
- Encik: Mr
- kampung : a village
- lepak: loiter
- Mat Salleh : a white male
- Puan: Madam

There are also many non-Malaysian words used in Malaysian English that are not in standard English.

The following are shared with Australia, New Zealand or other countries:

- chips — "hot chips" US "french fries" and UK "chips".
- having-in/having here — eat-in at a restaurant
- takeaway — take-out food.
- apartment — a medium-cost and high-cost flat
- flat — a low-cost flat.

The following words are either unique to Malaysia or used in a peculiar Malaysian context:

- bungalow — a villa or any semi-detached house regardless of the size or number of storeys
- blur — confused
- chop — to stamp (with a rubber stamp), as well as the stamp itself.
- condominium — a high-cost flat usually with common facilities.
- la(h)! — the prominent trademark in Manglish, the colloquial variety of Malaysian English, it is used among other things, for emphasis at the end of a sentence, la(h)! (see note above on Malaysian influence. It originates from Chinese influence although the 'lah' is of the Malay language). E.g: “Are you coming over to the party tonight?” — “Yes, of course lah.”
- pass up — to hand in as in "Pass up your assignments".
- rubber — meaning eraser as in "Can I borrow your rubber?" (This is also a sense given to the word in British English.)
- send — to take somebody somewhere - "I'll send you to the airport."
- slippers — in the US and UK "flip-flops", Australia "thongs"
- spoil — to be damaged "This one, spoil, lah."



## Syntax

Many syntactical features of Malaysian English may or may not be found in other forms of English, for example:

"There is"/"there are" and "has"/"have" are both expressed using "got", so that sentences can be translated in either way back into British / American English. This is equivalent to the Chinese - yǒu (to have):

- *Got question?* — Is there a question? / Do you have a question?
- *Yesterday ar, East Coast Park got so many people!* — There were so many people at East Coast Park yesterday. / East Coast Park had so many people [there] yesterday.
- *This bus got air-con or not?* — Is there air-conditioning on this bus? / Does this bus have air-conditioning?
- *Where got!?* — lit. Where is there [this]?, also more loosely, What are you talking about? or Where did you get that idea?; generic response to any accusation.

"Can" is used extensively as both a question particle and an answer particle. The negative is "cannot":

- *Gimme lah, ok or not?* — (Give it to me, OK?)
- *Can!* — (Sure!)
- *Cannot.* — (No way.)

Officially, Malaysian English uses the same pronunciation system as British English. However, most Malaysians speak with a distinctive accent. The accent has recently evolved to become more American, due to the influx of American TV programmes and the large number of Malaysians pursuing higher education in the United States. For example, this increased the emphasis on "r" in words such as "referring" and "world".

### **Role of Standard Malaysian English in Independent Malaysia**

Even though Malaysian English is no longer a dominant language of Malaysia, it is still used among Malaysians and is recognised as the language of business and tertiary education for example. About 80% of urban businesses in Malaysia conduct their transactions in English (both standard Malaysian English and Manglish). American English has quite a strong foothold in international businesses in Malaysia.

There are several English language newspapers in Malaysia namely *The Star*, *The Sun*, *New Straits Times* and *Malay Mail*. There are also many English radio stations such as *Hitz.fm*, *Mix FM*, *Light & Easy*, *Fly fm*, *Traxx FM* and *Red FM*. However, Malaysia does not have any television station which broadcasts purely in English. The Government National Language policy requires local TV stations to air at least 25% Malaysian-made programmes (either Malay or English). Some privately owned TV stations (such as *TV3*, *NTV7*, *8TV* and *Astro Hitz.TV*) do air some Malaysian-made programmes in English. A few Malaysian-made TV programmes in Malay carry English subtitles and vice-versa.

English is regarded as the ‘lingua franca’, understood by people around the world. This is because British English was introduced in the British Empire during the colonization era. After the many colonies gained independence, one ‘standard’ English has evolved into many different localized dialects; namely Singapore English (SE), Malaysian English (ME) and Indian English among others. Such local varieties have caused fear among educators and professionals, especially the native speakers, that English has turned into a corrupt language. With relevance to Clyne’s(1992) discussion on ‘pluricentric’ languages, this paper shall highlight the nature of local variations in the context of Standard Malaysian English as well as justify the needs for having standard non-native varieties of the English language used within the confines of the Malaysian socio-cultural context. Suggestions for realizing this matter as means of encouraging more public acceptance and bridging proficiency gaps in the target language will also be featured. English is officially described as a strong second language. It is the language officially considered, only second in importance to the Malay language and regarded as a vital link with the rest of the world.

### **Tamil Schools in Malaysia**

According to the Social Strategic Foundation, a social development network for the Malaysian Indian Community, the first Tamil medium classes were set up as a branch school of the Penang Free School in 1816. In 1850, a bilingual English – Tamil school was set up in Malacca. From 1870, small schools sprang up on estates in Province Wellesly, Malacca, North Johore and later set up in other parts of the country. In 1923, the Labour Code was passed in the Federated Malay States, making it compulsory for

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

19

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

rubber estates to provide primary schools as long as there were ten plantation children of school age. Many Tamil schools were built after the code was legislated, mostly in rubber estates. The main reason for setting up the Tamil schools was to ensure a steady supply of labour to the rubber plantations. The setting up of Tamil schools, gave more confidence to the Indian labours to stay put in Malaysia.

Later, the estate management and the British government opened more Tamil primary schools when the rubber estates grew in numbers by the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, by 1905 there were 13 government and Christian Mission Tamil schools in Malaya. The British regarded this as a good method to sustain the labour supply in the estates. This also ensured that the children of the plantation workers would stay on in the estates and contribute to the labour pool. The construction of more and more Tamil schools in the newly opened estates attracted many labourers from India, especially from South India, to migrate to the then Malaya. But the pathetic aspect was that the importance given to the building of the Tamil schools was not given to the designing of its curriculum and selection of quality teachers. Therefore, the beauty and literary richness of the language was compromised.

In the beginning, most of the schools did not last long due to lack of support and commitment from the estate management and there was no continuous effort from the Indian or Tamil community itself to sustain these schools. The number of Tamil schools in Malaya had been increasing since thousands from India, especially from the Southern part of India came to Malaya as labourers to work in the rubber, tea, coffee and sugar

plantations. In order to attract more labourers and make them stay longer, the labour ordinance 1912 ensured that the estate management had to set up Tamil schools if there were more than 10 school going children in the estates.

However many estate owners refused to build Tamil schools for estate children and it caused the children to study in dilapidated buildings and former smoke houses. Furthermore, the government in those days had not allocated funds to build Tamil schools. Between 1930 and 1937, there were some developments in Tamil education when the Indian government was concerned about the mistreatment of Indian labourers in Malaya. As a result, the Malayan Government set up a special committee to provide financial assistance to Tamil schools, appointed inspectors for Tamil schools and also started teachers training programmes. The number of Tamil schools increased tremendously. By 1938, there were 13 government, 511 estate and 23 mission Tamil primary schools in Malaya.

Before independence, the Tamil schools curriculum did not include the teaching of Malay and English languages. Emphasis was given only to reading, writing and arithmetic skills in the lower primary level. Writing composition and geography were taught in the higher primary level. After World War II, the British government started to give serious attention to vernacular education by enforcing Education Law 1946. This Law emphasised on free mother tongue education and increased the grant provided to Tamil schools. This move paved the way for the increase in the number of students in

Tamil schools. The number of students increased gradually from 29,800 in 1946 to 38,700 in 1949.

The Barnes Report 1951, with reference to the Malay education, proposed the National Education Policy. It questioned the existence of Tamil and Chinese schools. As a reaction to this report, the Indian community set up a committee to protest the Barnes Report, which ignored mother tongue education. In 1951, the Indian Education Committee reviewed Tamil school education and proposed the teaching of English in standard Four and Malay language in standard Five. The children, on leaving the Tamil primary school, were absorbed into the working milieu of the estate. Parents themselves, mostly illiterate, did not see the value or purpose of seeking out a secondary education in Tamil, nor was it there. Apparently, most of them in the estates were able to lead fairly comfortable lives compared to their poorer counterparts left behind in India.

Tamil schools are a matter of pride, identity and dignity for more than half of Indian Malaysians. To them, the need for an unpolarised system of education bridging the gap of unity and racial understanding is rhetoric. It is also not possible to dismantle mother tongue education, without disrupting the cultural and religious fabric that has provided identity and a sense of some belonging. Background information is in order here as to what languages are used in the education system in Malaysia.

In National Schools Malay is the medium of elementary education; Tamil and/or Chinese may be taught as pupils' own language if there are fifteen students who petition

for it. Otherwise, Tamil and Chinese medium National-type Schools may exist, and they receive varying degrees of government support; Chinese schools tend to reject total subvention, in order to maintain more control. At the secondary level, Malay medium is the only publicly-supported schooling available. Again, at the secondary level, Tamil and Chinese may be taught as a subject if a minimum of fifteen students request it.

### **A Brief History and Comparison of the Tamil Language and English Language**

Tamil is a Dravidian<sup>1</sup> language spoken by more than 65 million people. It is the official language of Tamil Nadu state in India and one of the official languages of Sri Lanka. Large Tamil-speaking communities also reside in Malaysia and Singapore, South Africa, and the Indian Ocean islands of Réunion and Mauritius. The earliest Tamil inscriptions date from *c.* 200 BC; literature in the language has a 2,000-year history. Unlike the English language that has 26 letters, there are 247 letters in the Tamil alphabet (Refer to Appendix D). Like the existence of vowels and consonants in English, the Tamil language too has these components.

Ironically, a language that has 247 letters is quite limited in terms of vocabulary volume compared to the English language that has only 26 letters with more than a

---

<sup>1</sup> Family of 23 languages indigenous to and spoken principally in South Asia by more than 210 million people. The four major Dravidian languages of southern India — Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam — have independent scripts and long documented histories. They account for the overwhelming majority of all Dravidian-speakers, and they form the basis of the linguistic states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. All have borrowed liberally from Sanskrit. The only Dravidian language spoken entirely outside of India is Brahui, with fewer than two million speakers mainly in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Of the Dravidian languages, Tamil has the greatest geographical extension and the richest and most ancient literature, which is paralleled in India only by that of Sanskrit

million words. According to *The Hindu* (2006), an English language newspaper, The Department of Tamil Language in the University of Madras is now in the process of revising, enlarging and updating the Tamil lexicon. The work is going on in a large scale for the first time in 66 years. During 1924-39, the University of Madras had published the Tamil lexicon in seven volumes comprising 124,405 entries. Such a dictionary was a pioneering venture in the pre-independence period. Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai had played a huge role in the compilation and publication. There have been persistent demands for updating and expanding the lexicon.

The many social, political and technological changes in the six-decade period have a direct bearing on the Tamil language. It is in this background that the Department of Tamil Language of the Madras University had put forth its plan to revise, enlarge and update the lexicon. The present Tamil lexicon, under preparation, will come out in 10 volumes, comprising at least 500,000 entries, will be bilingual in nature and at the same time render the meaning chronologically.

The 247 letters in the Tamil alphabet can be divided into 12 vowels, 18 consonants, 216 vowel consonants and 1 special letter. The vowel-consonants are formed by combining the vowel letters and consonant letters. The vowel-consonant letters also have long and short sounds. On top of the vast difference in the number of letters in their alphabet, the Tamil language also differs in many grammatical items compared to the English language. Much of Tamil grammar is extensively described in the oldest known



grammar book for Tamil, the *Tolkāppiyam*. Modern Tamil writing is largely based on the 13th century grammar *Nannūl* which restated and clarified the rules of the *Tolkāppiyam*, with some modifications. Traditional Tamil grammar consists of five parts, namely *eluttu*, *sol*, *porul*, *yāppu*, and *ani*. Of these, the last two are mostly applied in poetry.

Similar to other Dravidian languages, Tamil is an agglutinative language. Tamil is characterised by its use of retroflex consonants, like the other Dravidian languages namely Telugu, Malayalam and Kannadam. It also uses a liquid l (𑌧) (example Tamil), which is also found in Malayalam (for example Kozhikode), but disappeared from Kannada at around 1000 AD (but present in Unicode), and was never present in Telugu. Tamil words consist of a lexical root to which one or more affixes are attached. Most Tamil affixes are suffixes. Tamil suffixes can be *derivational suffixes*, which either change the part of speech of the word or its meaning, or *inflectional suffixes*, which mark categories such as person, number, mood, tense, etc. There is no absolute limit on the length and extent of agglutination, which can lead to long words with a large number of suffixes.

## **Morphology**

Tamil nouns (and pronouns) are classified into two super-classes (*tinai*)—the "rational" (*uyartinai*), and the "irrational" (*agrinai*)—which include a total of five classes (*pāl*, which literally means 'gender'). Humans and deities are classified as "rational", and all other nouns (animals, objects, abstract nouns) are classified as "irrational". The "rational"

nouns and pronouns belong to one of three classes (*pāl*)—masculine singular, feminine singular, and rational plural. The "irrational" nouns and pronouns belong to one of two classes - irrational singular and irrational plural. The *pāl* is often indicated through suffixes.

Examples of Tamil verbs indicating the gender of the doer.

1. **He** danced yesterday.

The verb (**ஆடினான்**) in bold indicates the gender of the doer.

அவன் நேற்று நடனம் **ஆடினான்**.

2. **She** danced yesterday.

The verb (**ஆடினாள்**) in bold indicates the gender of the doer.

அவள் நேற்று நடனம் **ஆடினாள்**.

The letter 'ன்' - indicates male and, '-ள்' indicates female gender

The plural form for rational nouns may be used as an honorific, gender-neutral, singular form. Suffixes are used to perform the functions of cases or postpositions. Traditional grammarians tried to group the various suffixes into eight cases corresponding to the cases used in Sanskrit. These were the nominative, accusative, dative, sociative, genitive, instrumental, locative, and ablative. Modern grammarians, for example, argue that this classification is artificial, and that Tamil usage is best understood Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 26

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

if each suffix or combination of suffixes is seen as marking a separate case Tamil nouns can take one of four prefixes, *i*, *a*, *u* and *e* which are functionally equivalent to the demonstratives in English.

Tamil verbs are also inflected through the use of suffixes. A typical Tamil verb form will have a number of suffixes, which show person, number, mood, tense and voice.

- Person and number are indicated by suffixing the oblique case of the relevant pronoun. The suffixes to indicate tense and voice are formed from grammatical particles, which are added to the stem.
- Tamil has two voices. The first indicates that the subject of the sentence *undergoes* or *is the object of* the action named by the verb stem, and the second indicates that the subject of the sentence *directs* the action referred to by the verb stem.
- Tamil has three simple tenses—past, present, and future—indicated by the suffixes, as well as a series of perfects indicated by compound suffixes. Mood is implicit in Tamil, and is normally reflected by the same morphemes which mark tense categories. Tamil verbs also mark evidentiality, through the addition of the hearsay clitic *ām*. Traditional grammars of Tamil do not distinguish between adjectives and adverbs, including both of them under the category *uriccol*, although modern grammarians tend to distinguish between them on morphological and syntactical grounds. Tamil has a large number of ideophones

that act as adverbs indicating the way the object in a given state "says" or "sounds".

- Examples of forms of tense in Tamil language

1. He ate two plates of rice. (*past tense*)

அவன் இரண்டு தட்டு சோறு சாப்பிட்டான்.

2. He usually eats two plates of rice. (*present tense*)

அவன் வழக்கமாக இரண்டு தட்டு சோறு சாப்பிடுவான்.

3. He is going to eat two plates of rice. (*future time expression*)

அவன் இரண்டு தட்டு சோறு சாப்பிடப் போகிறான்.

The verb in Tamil takes different forms to indicate the tense in a sentence. The Tamil language has no articles. Definiteness and indefiniteness are either indicated by special grammatical devices, such as using the number "one" as an indefinite article, or by the context. In the first person plural, Tamil makes a distinction between inclusive pronouns *nām* (we), *namatu* (our) that include the addressee and exclusive pronouns *nāngkal* (we), *ematu* (our) that do not. The singular 'you' is 'nee', and the plural equivalent is *neengal* or *neenga* which is more formal and polite. The former is used to address those who are younger, lower in status as well as people who are very familiar with.

## Syntax

Tamil is a consistently head-final language. The verb comes at the end of the clause, with typical word order Subject Object Verb (SOV). However, Tamil also exhibits extensive *scrambling* (word order variation), so that surface permutations of the SOV order are possible with different pragmatic effects. Tamil has postpositions rather than prepositions. Demonstratives and modifiers precede the noun within the noun phrase.

Tamil is a null subject language. In linguistic typology, a null subject language is a language whose grammar permits an independent clause to lack an explicit subject. Such a clause is then said to have a null subject. Typically, null subject languages express person, number, and/or gender agreement with the referent on the verb, rendering a subject noun phrase redundant.

Not all Tamil sentences have subject, verb and object. It is possible to construct valid sentences that have only a verb—such as *mudhiintuvittatu* {முடிந்துவிட்டது.} ("completed")—or only a subject and object, without a verb such as *atu en vīdu* ("That, my house"). The Tamil language does not have a copula (a linking verb equivalent to the word *is*) akin to BM.

The most obvious linguistic differences are like capitalization, syntactical order, the verb to be and tenses. There's no capitalization in the Tamil language writing. The word order in the Tamil language also differs compared to the English language. A brief illustration is given below:

Examples: (syntactical differences)

1. Ali (subject) kicks (verbs) the ball.(object) ( English)

அலி பந்தை உதைக்கிறான் .

*Ali (subject) ball (object) kicks. (verb) (Tamil)*

2. Where (interrog. adv.) is (to be) my (possessive det.) book (noun)? (English)

என்னுடைய புத்தகம் எங்கே ?

*My (possessive det.) book (noun) where (interrog. Adv.)? (Tamil)*

Examples: (verb to be -missing in Tamil)

1. John is a boy.

ஜோன் ஒரு பையன் .

*John – a – boy (word order in Tamil)*

2. Peter is doing his homework.

பீட்டர் வீட்டுப்பாடம் செய்கின்றான் .

*Peter – homework- doing (word order in Tamil)*

3. Michael is a football player.

மைக்கல் ஒரு காற்பந்து விளையாட்டாளர் .

*Michael- a- football- player (word order in Tamil)*

4. Who is the fat boy?

யார் அந்த பருமனானச் சிறுவன்?

*Who- that- fat- boy (word order in Tamil)*

## Vocabulary

A strong sense of linguistic purism is found in Modern Tamil. Much of the modern vocabulary derives from classical Tamil, as well as governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as the Tamil Virtual University, and Annamalai University in Tamil Nadu, India.

These institutions have generated technical dictionaries for Tamil containing neologisms and words derived from Tamil roots to replace loan words from English and other languages. Since mediaeval times, there has been a strong resistance to the use of Sanskrit words in Tamil. As a result, the Prakrit and Sanskrit loan words used in modern Tamil are, unlike in some other Dravidian languages, restricted mainly to some spiritual terminology and abstract nouns. Besides Sanskrit, there are a few loan words from Persian and Arabic implying there were trade ties in ancient times. Many loan words from Portuguese and Dutch and English were introduced into colloquial and written Tamil during the colonial period. But these have been gradually replaced by Tamil words.

Words of Tamil origin occur in other languages. Popular examples in English are cash (*kaasu* - காசு , meaning "money"), cheroot (*curuttu* - சுருட்டு meaning "rolled up"), mango (from *mangai* - மாங்காய்), mulligatawny (from *milaku tanneer* - மிளகுத் தண்ணீர் meaning pepper water), pariah (from *paraiyar* - பரையர்), ginger (from *ingi* - இஞ்சி), curry (from *kari* - கறி), rice (from *arici* - அரிசி) and catamaran (from *kattu*

*maram* - கட்டி மரம், meaning "bundled logs"), *pandal* (shed, shelter, booth), *tyer* (curd), *coir* (rope).

### **Aims and Objectives of the English Language Syllabus in Primary Schools**

The English Language Syllabus for primary school aims to equip pupils with basic skills and knowledge of the English language so as to enable them to communicate both orally and writing, in and out of school.

By the end of primary school, pupils should be able to achieve the following:

1. to listen to and understand simple spoken English in certain given contexts;
2. to speak and respond clearly and appropriately in familiar situations using simple languages:
3. to read and understand different kinds of texts for enjoyment and information:
4. to write for different purposes and in different forms using simple language.

According to the Ministry of Education of Malaysia's, Curriculum Development Centre's English language syllabus (2001) for vernacular primary school or better known as (KBSR- Integrated Primary School Syllabus), English is taught in all primary and secondary schools in the country in keeping with its status as a second language in the country. The Cabinet Committee Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy 1979 states that the teaching of English is to enable learners to use English in everyday situations and work situations as well as to pursue higher education. At present, English is still taught for the purposes of higher education and the workplace. English is the language of Information Communications Technology (ICT) as well as the language for establishing international relations in a borderless world.



In order to enable our learners to access information on the Internet and other electronic media as well as to network with students in other parts of the country and abroad, it is important that they are proficient in the language. Such proficiency will also help learners to read and listen to academic, professional and recreational materials and to speak in seminars and conferences. The English curriculum for primary schools is designed to provide learners with a strong foundation in the English language. Learners will then be able to build upon this foundation and use the language for various purposes. The development of learners' linguistic ability is in keeping with the goals of the National Education Philosophy and the Education Act of 1996 which seek to optimise the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical potential of all students. In learning the English language, learners are taught the fundamentals of English grammar and how to use it correctly in both speech and in writing. Learners are also taught the English sound system to enable them to pronounce words correctly and to speak fluently with the correct stress and intonation so that from these early stages, pupils learn to speak internationally intelligible English.

Learners differ from each other in their individual strengths, abilities and learning styles and preferences. In teaching the curriculum, these differences are taken into account so that the aims and aspirations of the curriculum are fulfilled and the potential of the child is maximized. This document is the English Syllabus for primary schools. It gives an overview of the English language curriculum to be taught from Year 1 through to Year 6. This syllabus is for use in both the national primary schools (*SK*) and the national type primary schools (*SJK*). To help teachers teach this curriculum in the

classroom, supporting documents known as syllabus specifications or *Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran* are made available. In these documents, the curriculum is explained in greater detail for each year of schooling. There is one set of specifications for each primary level schooling. The syllabus outlines the Aims, Objectives, and Learning Outcomes to be achieved. The Language Content to be taught has also been given and this includes the sound system, the grammar of the English language, and the word list. The contents of the syllabus can be expanded upon if learners have the ability and are proficient in the language.

### AIMS

The English language syllabus for primary schools aims to equip learners with basic skills and knowledge of the English language so as to enable them to communicate, both orally and in writing, in and out of school.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of the primary school, learners should be able to

- i. listen to and understand simple spoken English in certain given contexts;
- ii. ask and answer questions, speak and express themselves clearly to others using simple language;
- iii. acquire good reading habits to understand, enjoy and extract information from a variety of texts;
- iv. write legibly and express ideas in simple language; and
- v. show an awareness and appreciation of moral values as well as love for the nation.

## CURRICULUM ORGANISATION

The English language curriculum is developed in line with the way English is used in society in everyday life when interacting with people, getting information, and when enjoying a good book or film. This is reflected in the learning outcomes of the curriculum. The learning outcomes are based on the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. These four language skills in turn also incorporate the use of good grammar, the English sound system, and the use of appropriate vocabulary. In addition, the curriculum also takes into account other educational emphases such as thinking skills, ICT skills, values and citizenship education.

### Language Skills

The language skills of listening, reading and writing form the core of the primary English curriculum. Learners use these skills to talk to and write to people, to obtain information from various sources, and to enjoy a poem or story read or heard. The skill of Listening is taught to enable learners to listen carefully to what is spoken so that they are able to obtain as much and as accurately as possible the information or ideas heard. Oral skills are taught to enable learners to express their ideas confidently and clearly. For this purpose, learners are taught to pronounce words correctly and to speak with correct stress, intonation and sentence rhythm. The skill of Reading is taught to enable learners not only to read independently a variety of texts but also to read with understanding so that they are able to extract information efficiently. The skill of Writing is taught to

enable learners to express their ideas clearly on paper in legible handwriting or to communicate via the electronic media if facilities are available in school.

### Language Content

The Language Content of the curriculum comprises the grammar of the English language, the English sound system and a Word List to guide teachers.

### Educational Emphases

In addition, current developments in education are included. These comprise Thinking Skills, skills of Learning How to Learn, and other educational emphases such as Values and Citizenship Education. Language teaching also takes into account learners' multiple intelligences and emphasizes the importance of using real life examples to prepare learners for the real world.

### Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements to guide teachers in teaching and are derived from the objectives. Learning outcomes incorporate the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, grammar, the sound system and words from the word list. More details on the learning outcomes and the language content are given in the Syllabus Specifications documents from Year 1 through to Year 6.

## CURRICULUM CONTENT

### 1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

In acquiring the four language skills, learners are required to perform tasks so that the following outcomes can be achieved.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

## 1.0 The Skill of LISTENING

The listening component aims at developing learners' ability to listen to and understand the spoken language better. The sub-skills of listening range from the basic level of sound, word and phrase recognition to an understanding of the whole text. Learners are encouraged to listen to various text types so that they will become familiar with the sounds, intonation and stress patterns of the English language as well as to get to know the correct pronunciation of words and the use of certain expressions. Learners are also encouraged to respond to the information or message heard in a variety of ways including verbal and non-verbal forms. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to listen to and understand various text types such as announcements, instructions, and message. (Refer Appendix XYZ for all the sub-skills)

## 2.0 The Skill of SPEAKING

As speaking is linked closely to listening, learners are taught to listen carefully to what is spoken and give an appropriate response. In the development of oral skills, learners are taught how to ask questions politely when seeking information or clarification and to reply giving relevant information. Learners are also taught to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas simply when talking to friends and older people. To this end, learners are taught to use appropriate words, phrases and expressions that do not offend others which can occur with the lack of proficiency. In making their utterances understood by others, learners are taught to pronounce words correctly and to speak clearly with the right stress and intonation. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to talk to friends, relatives, teachers and other people confidently

using simple language and with an acceptable level of grammar. (Refer Appendix XYZ for the skills)

### 3.0 The Skill of READING

The component on Reading emphasizes the teaching of the skills of reading to enable learners to become independent readers. The teaching of reading in the early stages begins at the word and phrase levels before progressing to sentence recognition and reading at the paragraph level. In this early stage of reading, a combination of phonics and the whole text approach will benefit young readers. Gradually, learners are also taught to extract specific information from a text and to also respond to a text with their own ideas and opinions. Information skills and study skills are also taught through the use of dictionaries and encyclopaedias. For those who have the facilities, accessing the Internet and other electronic media for information is also encouraged. Pupils are also taught to obtain information from maps, plans, graphs and timetables at a level suited to their ability. The use of a variety of texts for the teaching of reading skills will not only provide the opportunity for learners to learn new words but also enables them to see how grammar is used correctly. At the same time, reading a variety of texts will also help learners develop their reading skills for different purposes.

Learners are also encouraged to read extensively outside the classroom for enjoyment and information. This will not only improve their proficiency in the language but will also help them to become independent and efficient readers. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to read a variety of texts both in print and in the electronic media for information and enjoyment such as notices, warnings,

instructions, directions, recipes, messages, simple passages, letters, advertisements, poems, stories, descriptions, recounts; and maps, charts, graphs, time-tables. (Refer Appendix XYZ for the skills)

#### 4.0 The Skill of WRITING

In this component, the focus is on developing learners' writing ability beginning at the word and phrase levels and progress to the sentence and paragraph levels. For those who are able and capable, they must be encouraged to write simple compositions comprising several paragraphs. Attention is also paid to penmanship so that even from a young age, learners are taught to write clearly and legibly both in print and cursive writing. In writing simple compositions, learners are taught the various steps involved in writing such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing. In the process, they are also taught to use appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar to get their meaning across clearly. Although much of the writing at this level is guided, the amount of control is relaxed for learners who are able and proficient in the language. All learners are encouraged to write for different purposes and for different audiences. Spelling and dictation are also given emphasis. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to write lists, messages, letters, instructions, directions, simple poems and stories, descriptions, simple recounts and simple reports for various purposes. (Refer Appendix XYZ for the skills)

## II LANGUAGE CONTENT

### 1.0 The Sound System

The sound system forms part of the Language content in the syllabus. To enable learners to become familiar with the different patterns of sound and the different spelling of words

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

39

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

that have the same sound, teachers are encouraged to give a wide range of examples.  
(Refer to Appendix XYZ for other skills to be taught)

## 2.0 Grammar

Grammar also forms part of the language contents of the syllabus. These grammar items need to be taught in context and in a meaningful way so that they can be used both in speech and in writing. The grammar items can be reinforced and consolidated if learners encounter the items often enough through the various tasks set. The grammar items should not be taught in isolation but rather in the context of a topic. (Refer to Appendix XYZ for other skills that need to be taught)

## 3.0 Word List

The word list forms part of the language contents in the curriculum. The words in the list below are some key words that must be mastered by all learners according to their stages of development. More words have been listed in the Curriculum Specifications or *Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran* for each year and these words are listed under various topics. These are the minimum words to be taught and teachers may expand upon the list according to the level and ability of their learners as well as the topic under study.

### STAGE 1

I, up, look, we, like, and, on, at, for, he, is, said, go, you, are

### STAGE 2

about, after, again, an, another, as, back, ball, be, because, bed, been, boy, brother, but, by, call(ed), came, can't, could, did, do, don't, dig, door, down, first, from, girl, this, going, they, away, play, a, am, cat, to, come, day, the, dog, big, my, mother, good, got,

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

40

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*



had, half, has, have, help, her, here ,him, his, home, house, how, if, jump, just, last, laugh, little, live (d), love, made, make, man, many, may, more, much, must, no, father, all, get, in, went, was, of, me, she, see, it, yes, can, name, new, next, night, not, now, off, old, once, one, or, our, out, over, people, push, pull, put, ran, saw, school, seen, should, sister, so, some, take, than, that, their, them, then, there, these, three, time, to, us, very, want, water

### STAGE 3

Above, across, almost, along, also, always, animals, any, around, asked, baby, balloon, before, began, being, below, better, between, birthday, both, brother, brought, can't, change, children, clothes, coming, didn't, different, does, don't, during, earth, every, eyes, first, follow (ing) found way, were, what, when, where, who, will, with, would, your, friends, garden, goes, gone, great, half, happy, head, heard, high, I'm, important, inside, jumped, knew, know, lady, leave, light, money, morning, much, near, never, number, often, only, opened, other, outside, own, paper, place, right, round, second, show, sister plus:

days of the week; months of the year; numbers to twenty; common colour pupil's, name, and address; name and address of school; Small, something, sometimes, sound, started, still, stopped, such, suddenly, sure, swimming, think, those, thought, through, today, together, told, turn(ed), under, until, upon, used, walk(ed,) (ing), watch, wear, while, white, why ,window ,without, woke, word, work, world, write, year, young

### III EDUCATIONAL EMPHASES

These outline current developments in education that will help learners prepare for the real world. In this respect, moral education, citizenship education, patriotism and thinking skills will contribute towards the building of a modern and progressive society.

### 1.0 Thinking Skills

Critical and creative thinking skills are incorporated in the learning outcomes to enable learners to solve simple problems, make decisions, and express themselves creatively in simple language.

### 2.0 Learning How to Learn Skills

These skills are integrated in the learning outcomes and aim to enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning. These skills incorporate study skills and information skills to equip them to become independent life-long learners.

### 3.0 Information and Communication Technology Skills (ICT)

In this age of globalisation and ICT, skills relating to ICT are incorporated in the learning outcomes. These skills include the use of multimedia resources such as TV documentaries and the Internet as well as the use of computer-related activities such as e-mail activities, networking and interacting with electronic courseware.

### 4.0 Values and Citizenship

The values contained in the KBSR moral syllabus have been incorporated in the learning outcomes and include patriotism and citizenship.

### Multiple Intelligences

The learning outcomes also reflect the incorporation of the theory of Multiple Intelligences. For example, interpersonal intelligence is reflected when learners are taught

the polite forms of language expression so as not to offend the people they communicate with. In getting learners to role play or dramatise sections of a text, their kinaesthetic intelligence is nurtured. When learners sing songs, recite poems and chant *jazz chants* either individually or in chorus, their musical intelligence is developed.

### Knowledge Acquisition

In teaching the language, content is drawn from subject disciplines such as science, geography, and environmental studies. Content is also drawn from daily news items as well as current affairs.

### Preparation for the Real World

The learning outcomes prepare learners to meet the challenges of the real world by focusing on language use in society. In developing learners' ability to listen carefully, speak confidently, read widely and write effectively in the English language, they will be equipped with the requisite skills that will enable them to achieve the long-term goals of pursuing higher education, of being more effective in the workplace, and of becoming a contributing member to the betterment of society and the world at large.

(Refer to Appendix XYZ for a complete curriculum content)

## **The English Language Syllabus in Tamil Schools**

Mother tongue influence interference in L 2 has always been a problem among Tamil school students in Malaysia. Many students beginning to learn writing in L 2 always jumble up the grammatical rules of the two languages as the latter differ in many aspects.

Furthermore, Malaysian vernacular school students tend to be confused by the

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

43

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

grammatical rules of the national language, Bahasa Melayu which is the main medium of instruction and the dominant language in the country. This has been found to be so from the researcher's experience. The main aim of this study is to detect, analyze and classify the influence of L1 Tamil on the writing of L2 English.

Tamil school students have to learn and be proficient in three languages, namely, Tamil, Bahasa Melayu and English. Prominence is given to the mother tongue language – Tamil, followed by the National Language, Bahasa Melayu, and finally the second language –English in Tamil schools. The English Language was only formally introduced to Tamil school students when they were in standard 3. This had been the practice for many years. But since 2003, English has been taught in Year 1 for an hour a week.

In terms of writing, The Curriculum Specification for English Year 5 Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK) specifies that at the level of Year 5, Tamil school students would have acquired the mechanics of writing and should be writing simple paragraphs of several sentences to make writing enjoyable. Teachers should make sure that pupils write in response to a variety of stimuli including stories, classroom activities and personal experiences. At this stage, teachers should encourage pupils to write independently, but when this is not possible, teachers need to set guided writing exercises relaxing the amount of control gradually as pupils show greater confidence.

### **Research Questions**

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L1 to L2?
2. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L2 to L1?

3. Which linguistic items have been transferred positively?
4. Which linguistic items have been transferred negatively?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The teaching and learning of the English Language has been the talk of the teaching fraternity of late. There have been many debates on the performance of students in all types of school in Malaysia. But the problems of Tamil school students have not been addressed adequately. Their failure of learning the language to the expected level needs to be studied thoroughly. Areas like cross- linguistics and teaching methodologies have to be given special attention. Since students of Tamil schools have to study more than two languages in a go, the chances of mother tongue interferences occurring in the learning is highly likely to take place. Therefore a thorough study in this area is pivotal. This study is hoped to address the issues stated above.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study is to identify the interference of L1 grammatical rules in the writing of L2 with specific reference to the interference of Tamil (L1) in English (L2). The identified interference will be used by the L2 teachers to help the students to learn L2, better without the cross linguistic problems.

### **Significance of the Study**

There is a consensus of opinion among Malaysians of all walks of life on the need to improve the standard of English in Malaysia. Efforts are being made to improve the

teaching and learning of the English language in schools. Furthermore L2 learning provides valuable insights into teaching that will help teachers, whatever their methodological slant. This inter-language study seeks to find out the components of L1 grammar that students of Tamil schools use frequently in their daily writing of L2. It further seeks to find out which grammatical component or components dominate the inter-language grammar. This research hopes to seek further understanding regarding the theoretical debate on inter-language grammar influence. The study will be significant for English teachers of Tamil schools as they will be able to understand the influence of L1 knowledge in the writing of L2 and change their approach in correcting grammatical errors. Curriculum planners will be able to get a clearer picture of the scenario that takes place in the teaching of L2 in Tamil schools and adapt the curriculum accordingly.

### **Definition of Terms**

First Language (L1)

*First Language is one's native language.*

Influence

”The power to affect the way someone or something develops, behaves or thinks without using direct force or orders” (Longman, 2003) p.833

Second Language (L2)

Second language is defined as the learning of any language to any level, provided only that the learning of the ‘second’ language takes place sometime later than the acquisition of the first language ( Mitchell & Myles, 1996).

## Negative Transfer

Negative transfer is defined as the use of first language rules in the learning of L2 although such rules do not exist in the latter ( Nunan, 2000 ).

## Positive Transfer

Positive Transfer is defined as the use of the rules that coincide in both L1 and L2 and the learners using the L1 rules to benefit from the learning of L2. ( Nunan , 2000 )

## **Limitation of the Study**

This study has been designed to cater for Tamil primary school students in Malaysia, whose language background differs, in the sense that they have to learn Bahasa Malaysia and English as school subjects, which is different from students studying Tamil in other parts of the world. The pupils are restricted to one area in the state of Selangor. But its findings are relevant to other cases where similar or identical factors, which were operative in this study are also encountered. This study, though limited in scope to investigating grammatical influences on L2 and vice versa, by and large, is quite valuable and should provide insights to both classroom teachers of English language in Tamil schools and curricular planners of primary school English language syllabus.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the background to the studies, English as a Second Language in Malaysia, Tamil schools and the basic similarities and differences between the two languages. This chapter has also explained the aims and objectives of Year 5 English in Tamil schools as prescribed by the relevant education authorities. Finally the chapter has

also identified some benefits that the findings would offer to the main stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning of the English Language in Tamil schools.

The next chapter represents the literature review of the topic under investigation.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will explore all the sub areas related to SLA in general and language transfer in particular. This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the field of second language acquisition. This chapter also provides background information on related areas such as first language acquisition as well as provides an historical overview of the field.

Extensive research has already been done in the area of native language interference on the target language. Dulay and Burt (1982) defines interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Lott (1983: 256) defines interference as 'errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue'. Ellis (1997: 51) refers to interference as 'transfer', which he says is 'the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2'. He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules (Selinker, 1972, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible. .Ellis (1997) raises the need to

distinguish between errors and mistakes and makes an important distinction between the two. According to Pit Corder (1971), one of the pioneers in the field, errors are deviations from correct usage resulting because a learner does not know the relevant language rule yet. It is essential here to make a distinction between mistake and error; both Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1980) reveal a criterion that helps us to do so: it is the self-correctability criterion. A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are 'systematic,' i.e. likely to occur repeatedly and not recognized by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would locate them, the learner wouldn't (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Several models describing the relationship, the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 acquisition have been outlined in SLA research (for example, Krashen, 1981; White, 1989; Gass & Selinker, 1994). Recent findings suggest that L1 or a previously learned language transfer can occur in all linguistic subsystems of both comprehension and production in the target language, and can have a facilitating/inhibiting/ modifying effect on L2 acquisition. The likelihood of native language influence is affected by the typological distance between the languages involved and by several interacting non-structural, extra-linguistic factors such as different social and psychological conditions. (Ellis, 1997, Kilborn, 1994).

In other words, there is an interdependence between the first and second languages because acquiring one's first language gives one a certain "routine" or experience, strategies and metacognitive skills, which can be generalised to subsequent

languages, but there are also language-specific constraints in L2 perception and comprehension (McLaughlin, 1990).

Transfer is a psychological term that is used to describe a situation where one learned event influences the learning of a subsequent learning event. Transfer can be positive or negative. That is, a previously learned event can either facilitate (positive transfer) or inhibit (negative transfer) the learning of a second event. Language transfer refers to a situation where the learning of a skill in one language transfers to a second language. For example, learning to read in Spanish will facilitate the ability to learn to read in English in an individual who speaks Spanish and is learning English (Gass and Selinker 1994). In his book, *Linguistics across cultures*, Robert Lado asserted that “individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives” (1957:2)

In his article, ‘A Role for the Mother Tongue’ in *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, Professor Corder (1981) reinvestigated the phenomenon and questions the term ‘transfer’. He suggests that mother tongue influence as a neutral and broader term to refer to what has most commonly been called transfer. Corder says that since most studies of error were made on the basis of the performance of learners in formal situations where it appears that errors related to mother tongue are more frequent, it was natural that an explanation of the phenomenon was of considerable concern to the applied

linguist. It was out of this concern that the whole industry of contrastive studies arose. He also claims that as far as the acquisition of syntactic knowledge is concerned, no process appropriately called interference takes place, if by that we mean that the mother tongue actually inhibits, prevents, or makes more difficult the acquisition of some feature of the target language. The term ‘interference’ is now most often used to mean what is no more than the presence in the learner’s performance in the target language of mother-tongue-like features which are incorrect according to the rules of the target language.

Corder, however, is concerned primarily with the process of language transfer (rather than the milieu). He argues that the ‘mother tongue, *facilitates* acquisition. He refers specifically to what he calls ‘performance phenomenon’—‘borrowing.’ When a second language learner is under pressure, the learner will ‘borrow’ or substitute words from the mother tongue (p. 26). He further says that borrowing occurs because communication is the learner's primary goal, rather than obedience to grammar rules. “This was true when I took French literature in college. After four years of high school French, I could read French fairly well but could not (and still cannot) speak it without serious embarrassment. During class, the professor wanted us to use French to discuss the day's assigned reading. Inevitably, I would start out, "Je connais . . . " but within moments, I would fall back into English. I was *reverting*, not borrowing. Borrowers retrieve words and structures from the mother tongue to help their developing sense of the second language (Corder, 26). In both cases, however, being understood is the primary goal.

Corder's article is helpful to any teacher of English Language Learners (ELL) students. Since grammar courses are designed to be "cumulative"—to borrow Corder's term—such courses contain strong expectations that students will learn a concept and then move on. It is always disconcerting when students, both native and non-native speakers, continue to make errors covered in earlier lessons. An individual's internal understanding of a language is not nearly as systematic as grammar workbooks would have teachers believe.

Corder also makes clear that language transfer is not an equation. Many times, L1 does not contain forms or concepts that can be transferred to L2. It is hopeless to search for feminine and masculine articles (le/la) in English. English capital letters have no equivalent in Arabic. Learning a language does not mean forcing the mother tongue to conform to a new set of rules. A new language is its own entity.

Arabic and English, for example, have many differences. The differences are ingrained, not superficial. Arabic has no modal verbs (can, could, may, might, will, would) and also no form of "to be" in the present tense (am, is, are) (Swan & Smith, 2001, pp. 201, 203-204). Sudanese students tend to write, "[T]he demon didn't like my mother because she Christian." The same student combined a modal verb with a noun: "getting marriage" and "could get marriage" Another student produced a similar error, writing, "[I]t had never been snow."

There is considerable controversy over the extent to which interference (negative transfer) accounts for the numerous mistakes made by anyone learning a new language.

Some researchers claim that most mistakes are consistent with the learner's developing

rule system, called an interlanguage, and are due to faulty inferences about the target language rather than the interference from the first.

There are alternative theories regarding the acquisition of L2. Stephen Krashen has proposed a distinction between acquisition and learning. Acquisition is the process by which children unconsciously or subconsciously acquire their native language. He defines learning as “conscious knowledge of the second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them.” (Krashen .S 1982). Let us evaluate Krashen’s theory of SLA in the following section.

### **Description of Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition**

Krashen's theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses:

- \* the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis,
- \* the Monitor hypothesis,
- \* the Natural Order hypothesis,
- \* the Input hypothesis, and
- \* the Affective Filter hypothesis.

The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. According to Krashen (1982) there are two independent systems of second language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful

interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition' because the acquisition-learning distinction has had a significant influence on the way teachers in American schools thought an L2 should be taught (de Bot et al, 2005)

The Monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the 'monitor' or the 'editor'. The 'monitor' acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met: that is, the second language learner has sufficient time at his/her disposal, he/she focuses on form or thinks about correctness, and he/she knows the rule.

It appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. According to Krashen, the role of the monitor is - or should be - minor, being used only to correct deviations from 'normal' speech and to give speech a more 'polished' appearance. Krashen also suggests that there is individual variation among language learners with regard to 'monitor' use. He distinguishes those learners that use the 'monitor' all the time (over-users); those learners who have not learned or who

prefer not to use their conscious knowledge (under-users); and those learners that use the 'monitor' appropriately (optimal users). An evaluation of the person's psychological profile can help to determine to what group they belong. Usually extroverts are under-users, while introverts and perfectionists are over-users. Lack of self-confidence is frequently related to the over-use of the 'monitor'.

The Natural Order hypothesis is based on research findings (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Fathman, 1975; Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987) which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. Although there are individual differences, the similarities among learners are very strong (de Bot, Lowie and Verspor, 2005)

This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, conditions of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in the studies, there were statistically significant similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition. Krashen however points out that the implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language program syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition.

The Input hypothesis is only concerned with 'acquisition', not 'learning'. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses along the 'natural order' when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then



acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to 'Comprehensible Input' that belongs to level 'i + 1'. Since not all of the learners can be at the same level of linguistic competence at the same time, Krashen suggests that natural communicative input is the key to designing a syllabus, ensuring in this way that each learner will receive some 'i + 1' input that is appropriate for his/her current stage of linguistic competence. Input that may be characterized as 'I + 2' may not be acquired meaningfully.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis, the Affective Filter hypothesis, embodies Krashen's view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place.

Krashen has also been strongly criticized by both professional educators and educational theorists for failing to conduct any research to substantiate his claims. Gregg (1984) first notes that Krashen's use of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) gives it a much wider scope of operation than even Chomsky himself. He intended it simply as a construct to describe the child's initial state, which would therefore mean that it cannot

apply to adult learners. Drawing on his own experience of learning Japanese, Gregg contends that Krashen's dogmatic insistence that "learning" can never become "acquisition" is quickly refuted by the experience of anyone who has internalized some of the grammar they have consciously memorized. However, although it is not explicitly stated, Krashen's emphasis seems to be that classroom learning does not lead to fluent, native-like speech. Gregg's account that his memorization of a verb conjugation chart was "error-free after a couple of days" (p.81) seems to go against this spirit. The reader is left to speculate whether his proficiency in Japanese at the time was sufficient enough for him to engage in error-free conversations with the verbs from his chart.

### **The Role of Grammar in Krashen's View**

According to Krashen, the study of the structure of the language can have general educational advantages and values that high schools and colleges may want to include in their language programs. It should be clear, however, that examining irregularity, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching, but rather is language appreciation or linguistics.

The only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition (and proficiency) is when the students are interested in the subject and the target language is used as a medium of instruction. Very often, when this occurs, both teachers and students are convinced that the study of formal grammar is essential for second language acquisition, and the teacher is skillful enough to present explanations in the target language so that the students understand. In other words, the teacher talk meets the requirements for comprehensible input and perhaps with the students' participation

the classroom becomes an environment suitable for acquisition. Also, the filter is low with regard to the language of explanation, as the students' conscious efforts are usually on the subject matter, on what is being talked about, and not the medium.

This is a subtle point. In effect, both teachers and students are deceiving themselves. They believe that it is the subject matter itself, the study of grammar, that is responsible for the students' progress, but in reality their progress is coming from the medium and not the message. Any subject matter that held their interest would do just as well.

Asmah Haji Omar, a prominent linguist, has not opposed bilingual education in principle but opposes its practice in Malaysia. She says that in a “truly bilingual system of education, equality of the languages concerned cannot be attained. One language is certainly going to be more equal than the other.” (1979:55). In the case of Malaysia, this would be seen as a threat to Bahasa Melayu, the national language. While L2 acquisition by major communities has been widely studied, interference of the Tamil Language in the writing of English (L2) has rarely been done patchily and is hardly referred to in most standard introduction to L2 learning research.

Mohideen, H (1996) agrees that mother tongue interference as one of the main causes of errors in writing among Malaysian students. He says that there is mother tongue interference in the areas of syntax, grammar, lexis and pronunciation. Teachers of English in Malaysia are very familiar with erroneous constructions which have a strong influence of Bahasa Melayu (hereafter BM), for example:

*Walaupun Ahmad malas, tetapi dia pandai.*

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

When a weak student attempts to transfer this construction to English he may write it as

\* Although Ahmad is lazy, but he is clever.

The above sentence is an instance of negative transfer in grammar. When someone says

\* I'll spend you

there could be mother tongue interference in the area of lexis.

*Saya akan belanja awak.*

An example of how mother tongue interference could affect the pronunciation of certain words in English is the way some Malay students pronounce 'film'. They pronounce it as 'filem' - the BM equivalent. Some students speak English with a strong vernacular accent, for example, as in India, Hong Kong, Ghana, etc.

\* An asterisk indicates an erroneous item.

### **Language Universals**

According to Chomsky, one aspect of the study of natural language is the quest for a universal grammar, a system that would explain conclusively the way all languages are organized and function. Noam Chomsky postulated the argument that the human brain contains a limited set of rules for organizing language. In turn, there is an assumption that all languages have a common structural basis. This set of rules is known as *universal grammar*. The Chomskyan view of Universal Grammar is that the language properties inherent in the human mind make up 'Universal Grammar', which consists not of particular rules or of a particular language, but a set of general principles that apply to all languages. Ellis (1985), states that Universal Grammar constrains the form which the

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

60

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

grammars of individual language can take. However, it does not do this directly by providing the child with ready-made rules which he can incorporate into his grammar. Rather it sets parameters which must then be fixed according to the particular input data the child obtains. In other words, formal and substantive universals constitute constraints the kind of grammar that the child can develop. They delimit the number of options which the child needs to explore. The child, however, still has to discover which of the various options pertain to the target language. This is where the environment comes in: the child needs input data to fix the parameters by selecting the appropriate option. The theory does not attempt to claim that all human languages have the same grammar, or that all humans are 'programmed' with a structure that underlies all surface expressions of human language. Rather, universal grammar proposes that there exists underlying rules that help children to acquire their particular language.

According to Chomsky, Universal grammar is the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages. Cook (1997) gives a few examples of rules that supposedly belong to this universal grammar:

- Structure dependency. All operations on sentences are defined in terms of phrase structure, rather than e.g. linear sequence. This is probably the least controversial of all the proposed rules of universal grammar, being strongly supported both by all available data, and by most people's linguistic intuition.
- The Head parameter. Each phrase contains a 'head' (main word), and all phrases in a given language have the head in the same position. The head position is, however, different from language to language, which introduces the important concept of a

parameter-governed rule. Unfortunately it is not too difficult to find exceptions to this rule — for example, the two English noun phrases ‘high court’ and ‘court martial’ have the heads at opposite ends — weakening the case for including it in a universal grammar.

- The Projection principle. Properties of lexical entries project onto the structure of the phrases of which they are the head. This rule ensures e.g. that a verb gets the appropriate number and type of objects. The universality of this rule is far from self-evident — it is strongly dependent upon a particular grammatical theory, in which the lexicon carries much of the linguistic information that could otherwise be expressed as phrase structure rules. Some equivalent of the projection principle may be needed, but it might look completely different if another theory of grammar were used. There are several more universal-grammar rules proposed by Chomsky, and presumably the full set of rules required by the innateness hypothesis is rather large. But it would take us too far to go into more detail here.

Children are hypothesized to have an innate knowledge of the basic grammatical structure common to all human languages (i.e. they assume that any language which they encounter is of a certain restricted kind). This innate knowledge is often referred to as universal grammar. It is argued that modeling knowledge of language using a formal grammar accounts for the "productivity" of language: with a limited set of grammar rules and a finite set of terms, humans are able to produce an infinite number of sentences, including sentences no one has previously said.

The Chomskyan approach towards syntax, often termed generative grammar, studies grammar as a body of knowledge possessed by language users. Since the 1960s, Chomsky has maintained that much of this knowledge is innate, implying that children need only learn certain parochial features of their native languages. The innate body of linguistic knowledge is often termed Universal Grammar. From Chomsky's perspective, the strongest evidence for the existence of Universal Grammar is simply the fact that children successfully acquire their native languages in a short and almost effortlessly.

Some students of universal grammar study a variety of grammars to abstract generalizations called linguistic universals, often in the form of "If X holds true, then Y occurs." These have been extended to a range of traits, from the phonemes found in languages, to what word orders languages choose, to why children exhibit certain linguistic behaviors. as they considered issues of the argument from poverty of the stimulus to arise from the constructivist approach to linguistic theory.

The contrasting school of thought is known as functionalism. The idea can be traced to Roger Bacon's observation that all languages are built upon a common grammar, substantially the same in all languages, even though it may undergo in them accidental variations, and the 13th century speculative grammarians who, following Bacon, postulated universal rules underlying all grammars. The concept of a universal grammar or language was at the core of the 17th century projects for philosophical languages. Charles Darwin described language as an instinct in humans, like the upright posture. The idea rose to notability in modern linguistics with theorists such as Noam

Chomsky and Richard Montague, developed in the 1950s to 1970s, as part of the "Linguistics Wars".

Speakers proficient in a language know what expressions are acceptable in their language and what expressions are unacceptable. The key puzzle is how speakers should come to know the restrictions of their language, since expressions which violate those restrictions are not present in the input, indicated as such. This absence of negative evidence -- that is, absence of evidence that an expression is part of a class of the ungrammatical sentences in one's language -- is the core of poverty of stimulus argument. For example, in English one cannot relate a question word like 'what' to a predicate within a relative clause:

What did John meet a man who sold?

Such expressions are not available to the language learners, because they are, by hypothesis, ungrammatical for speakers of their native language. The speakers do not utter such expressions and note that they are unacceptable to language learners. Universal grammar offers a solution to the poverty of the stimulus problem by making certain restrictions on universal characteristics of human languages. Language learners are consequently never tempted to generalize in an illicit fashion.

The presence of creole languages is cited as further support for this phenomenon. These languages were developed and formed when different societies came together and devised their own system of language. Originally these languages were



pidgins and later became more mature languages that developed some sense of rules and native speakers. The idea of universal grammar which refers to “the innate principle and properties that pertain to the grammar of all human languages” (Fromkin et al, 2003: 598) is supported by the creole languages by virtue of the fact that such languages all share certain features.

However, there are many scholars who are opposed to Chomsky’s universal grammar theory; it is outspokenly opposed by Geoffrey Sampson (2005), who maintains that universal grammar theories are not falsifiable, arguing that the grammatical generalizations made are simply observations about existing languages and not predictions about what is possible in a language. Some feel that the basic assumptions of Universal Grammar are unfounded. Another way of defusing the poverty of the stimulus argument is if language learners notice the absence of classes of expressions in the input and, on this basis, they hypothesize a restriction. This solution is closely related to Bayesian reasoning. Elman et al. (1996) argue that the unlearnability of languages assumed by UG is based on a too-strict, "worst-case" model of grammar.

### **Better Understanding of SLA**

Improved knowledge in the area of SLA is interesting in itself, and can also contribute to a more general understanding about the nature of language, of human learning, and of intercultural communication, and thus about the human mind itself, as

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

65

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

well as how all these are interrelated and affect each other. The knowledge will be useful. If we become better at explaining the learning process, and are better able to account for both success and failure in L2 learning, it will be a boon for innumerable teachers and learners who are struggling with the second language learning task.

Various researchers have concentrated on those errors which demonstrate the influence of one's native language on second language acquisition. Before Corder's work, interference errors were regarded as inhibitory; it was Corder who pointed out that they can be facilitative and provide information about one's learning strategies (point 7, listed above). Claude Hagège (1999) is a supporter of this concept and he mentions it in his book "The child between two languages", dedicated to children's language education. According to Hagège, interference between L1 and L2 is observed in children as well as in adults. In adults it is more obvious and increases continuously, as a monolingual person gets older and the structures of his first language get stronger and impose themselves more and more on any other language the adult wishes to learn.

In contrast, as regards children, interference features will not become permanent unless the child does not have sufficient exposure to L2. If there is sufficient exposure, then instead of reaching a point where they can no longer be corrected (as often happens with phonetics features), interference features can be easily eliminated. Hagège stresses that there is no reason for worry if interference persists more than expected. The teacher should know that a child that is in the process of acquiring a second language will subconsciously invent structures influenced by knowledge she already possesses. These

hypotheses she forms may constitute errors. These errors, though, are completely natural; we should not expect the child to acquire L2 structures immediately.

In addition to studies of L1 transfer in general, there have been numerous studies for specific language pairs. Thanh Ha Nguyen (1995) conducted a case study to demonstrate first language transfer in Vietnamese learners of English. He examined a particular language form, namely oral competence in English past tense making. He tried to determine the role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of this English linguistic feature as *a function of age, time of exposure to English, and place and purpose of learning English*.

The influence of L1 on L2 was also examined by Lakkis and Malak (2000) who concentrated on the transfer of Arabic prepositional knowledge to English (by Arab students). Both positive and negative transfer were examined in order to help teachers identify problematic areas for Arab students and help them understand where transfer should be encouraged or avoided. In particular, they concluded that a teacher of English, whose native language is Arabic, can use the students' L1 for structures that use equivalent prepositions in both languages. On the other hand, whenever there are verbs or expressions in the L1 and L2 that have different structures, that take prepositions, or that have no equivalent in one of the languages, instructors should point out these differences to their students.

Not only was L1 influence examined according to language pairs, but also according to the type of speech produced (written vs. oral). Hagège (p. 33) discusses the influence of L1 on accent; he notes that the ear acts like a filter, and after a critical age

(which Hagège claims is 11 years), it only accepts sounds that belong to one's native language. Hagège discusses L1 transfer in order to convince readers that there is indeed a critical age for language acquisition, and in particular the acquisition of a native-like accent. He uses the example of the French language, which includes complex vowel sounds, to demonstrate that after a critical age, the acquisition of these sounds is not possible; thus, learners of a foreign language will only use the sounds existing in their native language when producing L2 sounds, which may often obstruct communication. We look at the critical period hypothesis (CPH) in more detail in the following section.

### **Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis**

Is there a single key issue in the field of second language acquisition/learning, an as yet unresolved matter on which all else depends? A good case could be made for the question of whether or not there is a critical period for second language learning. Lenneberg (1967) was the first to discuss the critical period for language acquisition, which proposes that the most effective learning of a second language takes place during early childhood and ends around puberty (as cited in Newport, 1991; Bernicot 1989). The CPH, also known as critical age hypothesis, “states that there is a window of time between early childhood and puberty for learning a first language, and beyond which first language acquisition is almost always incomplete” (Fomkin et al, 2003: 579). There are two schools of thought on the cognitive changes occurring during the critical period as described by Newport (1991). The first school asserts that targeted domains (such as language acquisition) are at their peak of learning at certain ages (at childhood for

language acquisition), after which the ability for the domain to be mastered diminishes over time. The second school contends that when one is in the early stages of cognitive development, innumerable domains are ready to be conquered. As one focuses on one domain, however, the mechanism for learning increases in that domain while other domains remain stagnant and undeveloped. Given that adults begin studying a foreign language and gain proficiency and even fluency, the second theory seems more adequate in explaining the critical period of language acquisition.

Another factor contributing to the critical period involves differences in learning strategies between children and adults. In the Less is More Hypothesis proposed by Newport (1991), children achieve a better morphology for the language because they process language in small pieces and gradually increase cognitively and in the amount of material to which they are exposed as they mature. Adults, however, extract at a word or sentence level and then find that they have difficulty putting it together in a foreign language (Newport, 1991).

Recognizing that adults and children approach language learning differently, Chen and Leung (1989) classified them among three groups based on their experimental studies. The first group, based upon a word-association hypothesis, is a direct word-to-word association from the native language to the foreign language, which is typical of adults learning a new language. The second is a concept-mediation hypothesis, where the two languages are created as separate systems in the mind and are linked through a conceptual system, common to children being raised with two languages. The third

hypothesis is a mixture of the first two hypotheses. Here one begins with the word-to-word, but gradually, as a distinct system develops for the second language, the learner converts to the concept-mediation approach. More specifically, as one reaches a certain level of mastery of a foreign language, the individual essentially establishes an independent system of the second language and no longer depends upon the first language for clarification of the second. This is represented by the novice fluent in one language learning a second, but who ultimately gains fluency parallel to a bilingual native to the two languages.

This is all somewhat confusing, and the only conclusion that, we can come to is that there are no easy answers on the CPH. What is clear is that the old notion that the nature of L2 acquisition changes suddenly and dramatically at around the age of 12-13 because of changes in the brain is much too simplistic (as has been generally recognized for some time). If there is any truth in the CPH, then there may be different critical periods for different language skills, different types of change at different ages. If, on the other hand, there is no physical change in the brain which can be directly related to language learning, other powerful explanations are needed to account for the dramatic decline in ultimate achievement generally seen in later second language learners compared to young children -- and such explanations are no more than tentative guesses at present. None of this is of much immediate help to the practicing language teacher; it may even be in the long run that the exact age of first L2 exposure and the CPH will not turn out to be such a central issue after all, at least not in a formal learning context. But

whether it is itself a key field, or whether it simply takes us into other areas which are key fields, further research into the relationship between age and language learning is likely to help us delve deeper into the mysteries of the mechanisms of second language acquisition.

In other words, does the nature of second language acquisition change if the first exposure to the new language comes after a certain age? This question is closely linked to the question of whether first language (L1) acquisition and second language (L2) acquisition are essentially the same process, or very similar processes, and if so whether this is the case for some learners, or for all. In practical terms, it could be central not only to such issues as the optimal age at which children should start learning foreign languages, but also to the best teaching/learning approach for adults. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) is totally undermined if a critical period does indeed exist, since the hypothesis assumes not only that L2 acquisition is similar in nature to L1 acquisition, but also that this is the case for learners of any age.

Although many would claim that Krashen's theories are seriously flawed in any case, their influence in the field of second language teaching can hardly be denied. Issues such as the relative importance of lexis and syntax in teaching materials must ultimately link back to the way in which second language knowledge is organised in the brain. If that organisation is different in learners who have first been exposed to L2 after a certain age, then this has a bearing on choice of teaching approach. I believe there is a strong *prima facie* case for regarding the debate over the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) as a

central issue. Very often, we can attribute “the imperfect language learning of persons exposed to language” after the so called critical period to CPH (Fromkin et al, 2003)

The concept of a critical period is well known in nature. One example is imprinting in ducks and geese, where it is claimed that ducklings and goslings can be induced to adopt chickens, people, or even mechanical objects as their mothers if they encounter them within a certain short period after hatching. (Note, however, that the exact nature of even this apparently well-documented instance of a critical period is now coming under fire; see Hoffmann, 1996). According to Fromkin et al even some songbirds “appear to have a critical period for the acquisition calls and songs” (2003:62) In humans, on the basis of extant evidence, it seems that there is a critical period for *first* language acquisition; those unfortunate persons who are not exposed to any language before puberty seem unable to properly acquire the syntax of their first language later in life. (Inevitably, our knowledge in this area is sketchy and unreliable, being based solely on a very few documented cases.

Provided that a person learns a first language in the normal way, the question is then whether there is a certain biologically-determined critical period *during* which that person can acquire further languages using one’s mental mechanism, probably resulting in a high level of achievement if learning continues, and *after* which the learning process for new languages changes, so that the learning outcome will not be as good. Note that we are not talking here about the commonly-observed and widely-accepted generalisation that learning gets harder as one gets older; nor is the question one of whether changes in



attitudes or situation alter the learning process as one gets older. The issue is whether a fundamental change in the learning process and thus in potential learning outcomes related to second languages occurs in the brain at a fairly fixed age, closing a biological "window of opportunity".

### **Contrastive Analysis**

In the words of Lado: "The view of grammar as grammatical structure opens the way to a comparison of the grammatical structure of the foreign language with that of the native language to discover the problems of the students in learning the foreign language. The result of such a comparison tells us what we should test and what we should not test. It helps us devise test items and techniques that also look quite acceptable from a common sense point of view, and this is the important consideration- we can test the control of the language on the part of the student." (Lado, 1961:19)

A systematic comparative study analyzing according to their differences and similarities among languages was clearly recognized towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term Contrastive Linguistics was suggested by Whorff (1941), for a comparative study which emphasized on linguistic differences. The publication of Robert Lado's book, *Linguistic Across Cultures*, in 1957 marked the real beginning of modern applied linguistics. Contrastive Analysis was rooted in the practical need to teach an L2 in the most efficient way possible. As Lado (1957), one of the prime movers of CA, made it clear, "The teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the students will know better what the problems are

and can provide for teaching them.” The origin of CA therefore was pedagogic. This was reflected in comparisons of several pairs of languages by scholars in the United States, all directed at establishing the areas of learning difficulty that were likely to be experienced by native speakers, .the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis stated that learning difficulty was the result of interference from old habits in the learning of new habits. The greater the differences between the two languages the greater the difficulty and more errors will be made. This is the strong version of the CA hypothesis.

It was not until the late 1960s that the CA hypothesis was submitted to empirical investigation. The findings of researchers like Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974a) raised grave doubts about negative transfer as a major factor in the process of SLA. As a result of such studies, CA lost its attraction and became less fashionable. Anyhow, this research still seeks to utilize the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, as the current researcher believes to his knowledge that there has been no such research done involving the Tamil Language and its interference in the learning of the English Language, in a multilingual country like Malaysia.

Contrastive Analysis, popularly, is a method of analyzing the structure of any two languages with a view to estimate the differential aspects of their systems, irrespective of their genetic affinity or level of development. Contrastive analysis of two languages becomes useful, when it, for instance, adequately describes the sound structure and grammatical structure of two languages, with comparative statements, giving due emphasis to the compatible items in the two systems.

It is assumed that learning a second language is facilitated whenever there are

similarities between that language and the native tongue. Learning may be interfered with when there are marked contrasts between the mother tongue and second language (Nickle, 1971) The CA analysis emphasizes the influence of the mother tongue in learning a second language at phonological, morphological and syntactic levels. An examination of the differences between the first and the second language helps to predict the possible errors that can be made by L2 learners. CA is really not particularly relevant for second language teaching, but it can make useful contributions to linguistic typology. It is relevant to the designing of teaching material for use in all age groups. Chaturvedi (1973) suggests the following guiding principles for contrastive studies:

1. To analyze mother tongue and the target language systematically and completely
2. To compare target items of the two languages item-wise-item at all levels of their structure
3. To arrive at the categories of:
  - Similar features
  - Partially similar features
  - Dissimilar features- for the target language, and
  - Principles of text preparation, test framing and target language in general

This type of study will provide an objective and scientific base for second language teaching. While learning a second language, if the mother tongue of the learner and the target language both have significantly similar linguistic features at all the levels of their structures there will be not much difficulty in learning the new language in a

prescribed time. In order to know the similarities in both languages, the first step to be adopted is that both languages should be analyzed systematically. After the systematic analysis, to sort out the different features of the two languages, a comparison of the two languages is necessary. From this analysis it will be easy for a researcher to figure out the similarities and dissimilarities.

### **Interlanguage Fossilization**

In the process of mastering a target language (TL), second language learners (L2) develop a linguistic system that is self-contained and different from both the learner's first language (L1) and the TL (Nemser, 1971). This linguistic system has been variously called interlanguage (IL) (Selinker, 1972), approximative system (Nemser, 1971), idiosyncratic dialects or transitional dialects (Corder, 1971), etc. According to Corder (1981), this temporary and changing grammatical system, IL, which is constructed by the learner, approximates to the grammatical system of the TL. IL is an intermediate language that learners create on their quest to acquiring the more or less complete grammar of the TL (Fromkin et al, 2003). In the process of L2 acquisition, IL continually evolves into an ever-closer approximation of the TL, and ideally, a learner's IL should continue to advance gradually until it becomes equivalent, or nearly equivalent, to the TL. However, it has been observed that somewhere in the L2 learning process, such an IL may reach one or more temporary restricting phases during which the development of the IL appears to be detained (Nemser, 1971; Selinker, 1972; Schumann, 1975). A permanent cessation of progress toward the TL has been referred to as

fossilization (Selinker, 1972). This linguistic phenomenon, IL fossilization, occurs when progress in the acquisition of L2 becomes stable, despite all reasonable attempts at learning (Selinker, 1972). Fossilization includes those items, rules, and sub-systems that L2 learners tend to retain in their IL while in the process of acquiring a particular TL, i.e., fossilization encompasses those aspects of IL that become entrenched and permanent, and that will only be eliminated with considerable effort, for the majority of L2 learners, regardless of explanation or instruction (Omaggio, 2001). Moreover, it has also been noticed that adult L2 learners' IL systems, in particular, have a tendency, or propensity, to become stagnated or solidified (Nemser, 1971; Selinker, 1972, Selinker & Lamendella, 1980.), i.e., the language learners make no further progress in IL development toward the TL, and become permanently fossilized, in spite of the amount of exposure to the L2. de Bot et al contend that “for many L2 learners many sub-systems become stabilized before they have reached the target forms, especially in pronunciation (2005:17).

Selinker (1972) suggests that the most important distinguishing factor related to L2 acquisition is the phenomenon of fossilization. However, both his explanation that “fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their interlanguage relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation or instruction he receives in the target language” (Selinker, 1972, p. 215) and his hypotheses on IL fossilization are fascinating in that they contradict our basic understanding of the human capacity to learn. How is it that some learners can overcome IL fossilization, even if they only constitute, according to Selinker, “a mere 5%” (1972,

p. 212), while the majority of L2 learners cannot, ‘no matter what the age or amount of explanation or instruction’? Or is it perhaps not that they cannot overcome fossilization, but that they will not? Does complacency set in after L2 learners begin to communicate, as far as they are concerned, effectively enough, in the TL, and as a result does motivation to achieve native-like competence diminish? The concept of fossilization in SLA research is so intrinsically related to IL that Selinker (1972) considers it to be a fundamental phenomenon of all SLA and not just to adult learners. Selinker’s concept of fossilization is similar to that of, Nemser (1971), who attempted to explore the causes of fossilization in L2 learners’ IL.

Fossilization has attracted considerable interest among researchers and has engendered significant differences of opinion. The term, borrowed from the field of paleontology, and actually a misnomer, is effective because it conjures up an image of dinosaurs being enclosed in residue and becoming a set of hardened remains encased in sediment. The metaphor, as used in SLA literature, is appropriate because it refers to earlier language forms that become encased in a learner’s IL and that, theoretically, cannot be changed by special attention or practice of the TL. Despite debate over the degree of permanence, fossilization is generally accepted as a fact of life in the process of SLA.

One factor that has obvious relevance to fossilization is motivation and various studies have been conducted regarding motivation to learning L2 (Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Smythe, 1976; Schumann. 1976, 1978a, 1978b), and the relationship of

fossilization to the learner's communicative needs (Corder, 1978; Nickel, 1998; Ushioda, 1993). Arguments have particularly emerged regarding adult learners' general lack of empathy with TL native speakers and culture. According to Guiora et al. (1972), adults do not have the motivation to change their accent and to acquire native-like pronunciation. Unlike children, who are generally more open to TL culture, adults have more rigid language ego boundaries. It is hypothesized that adults may therefore be inclined to establishing their cultural and ethnic identity, and this they do by maintaining their stereotypical accent (Guiora et al., 1972).

Notwithstanding this, there is a lack of needed research, particularly regarding achievement motivation, especially in view of the fact that fossilization can be considered the most distinctive characteristic of adult SLA. To date, fossilization continues to remain something of a mystery in SLA. According to Gass and Selinker (1993) historically, the question about language transfer raised by Selinker (1966) were obscured for a decade by the important research trend linking first and second language acquisition. The works of Dulay and Burt(1974) have been influential in the field of second language acquisition, especially concerning language transfer. Dulay and Burt were greatly influenced by first language studies, and attempted to make an analogy between the processes of first language acquisition and those of second language acquisition. In order to show that the L1=L2 hypothesis was correct, it was necessary to first show that language transfer was not and could not be a significant factor in second language learning. Gass and Selinker, feel that it is indeed

possible and not incompatible to view second language acquisition as both a process of hypothesis testing in which learners create bodies of knowledge from the second language data they have available to them, while at the same time viewing it as a process of utilizing first language knowledge as well as knowledge of other languages known to learners in the creation of a learner language. Thus it is clearly possible to accept some version of assumptions underlying the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis mentioned in this chapter.

Gass and Selinker (1993) , further say that there is overwhelming evidence that language transfer is indeed a real and central phenomenon that must be considered in any full account of the second language acquisition process. According to them in the face of increasing quantities of L2 data, researchers have begun to once gain focus their attention on language transfer , realizing that the baby has been mercilessly thrown out with the bathwater. The pendulum in recent years has begun to settle with language transfer being investigated as a phenomenon of importance in and of itself. Gass(1979) asks the same questions that were once asked by Selinker(1969): what evidence is necessary in order to attribute a form(s) to influence of the native language? And what is the relationship of transfer to language universals? Her work clearly shows that transfer does indeed take place but, importantly, that some aspects of the language are more likely to be transferred than others. Xiaofei Lu (2004), for instance, has found that Chinese learners of English are much involved with lexical and syntactic transfer errors.

### **Motivation as a Contributing Factor in Second Language Acquisition**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

00

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*



Transfer and motivation play important roles in learning. Transfer, the application of prior knowledge to new learning situations (McKeough, 1995), is often seen as a learning goal, and thus the extent to which transfer occurs is a measure of learning success (Pea, 1987; Perkins, 1991). Motivation, defined as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts (Ames & Ames, 1989), is important because it determines the extent of the learner's active involvement and attitude toward learning.

Motivation is one of the keys to successful language learning. Maintaining a high level of motivation during a period of language learning is one of the best ways to make the whole process more successful. As each individual is motivated in different ways, we have to find the right balance of incentives to succeed and disincentives to fail encouragement, and the right environment in which to learn. Research studies have shown that language acquisition is the result of an interplay between cognitive mechanism and environmental conditions (Spolsky, 1985; Sivert & Egbert, 1995). Understanding and creating optimal language learning environments thus becomes a primary concern of the language teacher. Teachers can observe circumstances under which learners acquire language and can make adjustments toward creating optimal learning conditions.

According to Gardner (1972), motivation is defined as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. Motivation is divided into two basic types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is characterised by the

learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community.

The work conducted by Gardner in the area of motivation was largely influenced by Mowrer (1950, cited in Larson-Freeman and Long 1994), whose focus was on first language acquisition. Mowrer proposed that a child's success when learning a first language could be attributed to the desire to gain identity within the family unit and then the wider language community. Using this as the basis for his research Gardner went on to investigate motivation as an influencing factor in L2 acquisition.

Unlike other research carried out in the area, Gardner's model looks specifically at second language acquisition in a structured classroom setting rather than a natural environment. His work focuses on the foreign language classroom. The model attempts to interrelate four features of second language acquisition. These include the social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting or context in which learning takes place and linguistic outcomes (Gardner 1982).

The social or cultural milieu refers to the environment in which an individual is situated, thus determining their beliefs about other cultures and language. It is these beliefs which have a significant impact on second language acquisition. An example of this can be seen in the largely monocultural setting of Britain, where many believe it is not necessary to learn another language and that minority groups should assimilate and become proficient in the dominant language of the country. The same can be said of many other predominantly monocultural communities throughout the world. However, in

countries such as Canada, bilingualism and biculturalism, are often encouraged within society (Ellis 1997). Gardner (1979, cited in Skehan 1993) suggests that expectations regarding bilingualism, combined with attitudes towards the target language and its culture, form the basis of an individual's attitude towards language learning.

The second phase of Gardner's model introduces the four individual differences which are believed to be the most influential in second language acquisition. These include the variables of intelligence, language aptitude, motivation and situational anxiety (Giles and Coupland 1991). Closely interrelated with these variables is the next phase of the model, referred to as the setting or context in which learning takes place. Two contexts are identified, namely formal instruction within the classroom and unstructured language acquisition in a natural setting. Depending upon the context, the impact of the individual difference variables alters. For example, in a formal setting intelligence and aptitude play a dominant role in learning, while exerting a weaker influence in an informal setting. The variables of situational anxiety and motivation are thought to influence both settings equally.

The final phase of the model identifies linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of the learning experience. Linguistic outcomes refer to actual language knowledge and language skills. It includes test indices such as course grades or general proficiency tests. Non-linguistic outcomes reflect an individual's attitudes concerning cultural values and beliefs, usually towards the target language community. Ellis (1997) reasons that individuals who are motivated to integrate both linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of

the learning experience will attain a higher degree of L2 proficiency and more desirable attitudes.

Within the model, motivation is perceived to be composed of three elements. These include effort, desire and affect. Effort refers to the time spent studying the language and the drive of the learner. Desire indicates how much the learner wants to become proficient in the language, and affect illustrates the learner's emotional reactions with regard to language study (Gardner 1982).

In order to make the language learning process a more motivating experience teachers need to put a great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain student interest and have obtainable short and long term and goals.

### **Code Switching as a Countenance of Language Interference**

Interference may be viewed as the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical (Berthold, Mangubhai & Batorowicz, 1997). Berthold et al (1997) define phonological interference as items including foreign accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another. Given

this definition of interference, code-switching will now be defined and considered in terms of its relationship to this concept.

Crystal (1987) suggests that code, or language, switching occurs when an individual who is bilingual alternates between two languages during his/her speech with another bilingual person. A person who is bilingual may be said to be one who is able to communicate, to varying extents, in a second language. This includes those who make irregular use of a second language, are able to use a second language but have not for some time (dormant bilingualism) or those who have considerable skill in a second language (Crystal, 1987). This type of alteration, or code switching, between languages occurs commonly amongst bilinguals and may take a number of different forms, including alteration of sentences, phrases from both languages succeeding each other and switching in a long narrative. Berthold, Mangubhai and Bartorowicz (1997, pg 2.13) supplement the definition of code switching thus far with the notion that it occurs where 'speakers change from one language to another in the midst of their conversations'. An example of code switching, from Russian to French, is "Chustvovali, chto le vin est tiré et qu'il faut le boire" meaning 'They felt that the wine is uncorked and it should be drunk' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). Further, Cook (1991) puts the extent of code switching in normal conversations amongst bilinguals into perspective by outlining that code switching consists of 84% single word switches, 10% phrase switches and 6% clause switching.

There are a number of possible reasons for the switching from one language to another and these will now be considered, as presented by Crystal (1987). The first of these is the

notion that a speaker may not be able to express him/herself in one language so switches to the other to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. This type of code switching tends to occur when the speaker is upset, tired or distracted in some manner. Secondly, switching commonly occurs when an individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group. Rapport is established between the speaker and the listener when the listener responds with a similar switch. This type of switching may also be used to exclude others from a conversation who do not speak the second language. An example of such a situation may be two people in an elevator in a language other than English. Others in the elevator who do not speak the same language would be excluded from the conversation and a degree of comfort would exist amongst the speakers in the knowledge that not all those present in the elevator are listening to their conversation.

The final reason for the switching behavior presented by Crystal (1987) is the alteration that occurs when the speaker wishes to convey his/her attitude to the listener. Where monolingual speakers can communicate these attitudes by means of variation in the level of formality in their speech, bilingual speakers can convey the same by code switching. Crystal (1987) suggests that where two bilingual speakers are accustomed to conversing in a particular language, switching to the other is bound to create a special effect. These notions suggest that code switching may be used as a socio-linguistic tool by bilingual speakers.

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that code switching is not a language interference on the basis that it supplements speech. Where it is used due to an inability of expression, code switching provides a continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language. The socio-linguistic benefits have also been identified as a means of communicating solidarity, or affiliation to a particular social group, whereby code switching should be viewed from the perspective of providing a linguistic advantage rather than an obstruction to communication. Further, code switching allows a speaker to convey attitude and other emotives using a method available to those who are bilingual and again serves to advantage the speaker, much like bolding or underlining in a text document to emphasise points. Utilising the second language, then, allows speakers to increase the impact of their speech and use it in an effective manner.

To ensure the effective use of code switching there are however two main restrictions, as developed by Poplack (1980), cited in Cook (1991). The first of these is the free morpheme constraint. This constraint suggests that a 'speaker may not switch language between a word and its endings unless the word is pronounced as if it were in the language of the ending' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). The example given by Cook (1991) to illustrate this constraint is creation of the word "runeando" in an English/Spanish switch. Cook suggests that this is impossible because "run" is a distinctively English sound. The word "flipeando", on the other hand, is possible since "flip" could be a Spanish word. The second constraint is referred to as the equivalence constraint. This constraint is characterised by the notion that 'the switch can come at a point in the sentence where it

does not violate the grammar of either language' (Cook, 1991, pg 65). The example Cook uses to illustrate the equivalence constraint is a French/English switch with the suggestion that switches such as "a car americaine" or "une American voiture" are both unlikely as they are wrong in both languages. A switch "J'ai acheté an American car" (I bought an American car) is possible as both English and French share the construction in which the verb is followed by the object.

Other researchers (Di Sciullo, Muysken & Singh, 1986; Berk-Seligson, 1986; Sankoff & Poplack, 1981) have also worked on generating similar specific linguistic constraints on patterns of code switching, with a general view to contribute to the work on language universals. On this basis, constraints provide a mechanism whereby two languages may be integrated together without causing interference in the conversation between two bilingual speakers.

A varying degree of code switching may also be used between bilingual conversationalists depending on the person being addressed, such as family, friends, officials and superiors and depending on the location, such as church, home or place of work (Crystal, 1987). The implication here is that there are patterns which are followed reflecting when it is appropriate to code switch with regard to addressee and location. These patterns are the established norm for that particular social group and serve to ensure appropriate language use. Milroy (1987) is a further proponent of this proposal with the observation that bilingual speakers attribute different social values to different codes, or languages. Since a different social value is associated with each code, the



speaker considers use of one code more appropriate than the other with different interlocutors. Milroy (1987, pg 185) presents an example of perceived appropriate use of a given language over another with regard to the conversational participant, by stating:

.. in the West of Ireland, Irish/English bilinguals will switch to English not only in addressing an English-speaking monolingual, but in the presence of such a person who in Bell's terms is an auditor - that is, a person ratified as a participant in the interaction (Bell 1984b:172)

A similar study was carried out by Gal (1979), as cited in Milroy (1987), who concluded that the participant in the conversation is the variable to which the others were subservient in a study of code switching. The notions of Gal (1979), Bell (1984) and Milroy (1987) suggest that code switching occurs naturally and unobtrusively such that it is not an interference to language but rather a verbal mechanism of presenting an individuals' social standing with regard to a particular conversational participant. As such, code switching performs a socio-linguistic function.

Code switching may also be considered in relation to language acquisition. A number of theories have been postulated as to how an individual attains language and these will now be outlined. The first to be considered is that of Chomsky (1972; 1975; 1979) where he suggests that language acquisition takes place as the brain matures and exposure to the appropriate language is obtained. Chomsky also suggests that people are aided by innate universal language structures and as children learn, they realise how to express the

underlying universal structure according to their particular culture, as described by Bootzin, Bower, Zajonc and Hall (1986). From this point of view, addressees in conversations serve as facilitators of language development by means of exposing students to cultural elements required to express the universal structure appropriate to the cultural and social requirements of the individual. This biological theory is not accepted by behaviourists who suggest that language acquisition is a verbal behaviour which is an example of operant conditioning, as advocated by Skinner (1957). Behaviourists argue that individuals are reinforced by their own speech which matches the reinforcement of providers of affection during childhood. Further, grammatically correct constructions get desired results so the individual tends to repeat them. A point to note here is that the theories rely on exposure to appropriate samples of the language. The same is true when acquiring a second language.

Although switching languages during a conversation may be disruptive to the listener when the speaker switches due to an inability to express her/himself, it does provide an opportunity for language development. As may be derived from discussion above, language development takes place through samples of language which are appropriate and code switching may be signalling the need for provision of appropriate samples. The listener, in this case, is able to provide translation into the second language thus providing a learning and developing activity. This, in turn, will allow for a reduced amount of switching and less subsequent interference as time progresses. These principles may also be applied in the second language classroom.

Cook (1991) asserts that code switching may be integrated into the activities used for the teaching of a second language.

Code switching may be viewed as an extension to language for bilingual speakers rather than an interference and from other perspectives it may be viewed as interference, depending on the situation and context in which it occurs. This conclusion is drawn from the notions that switching occurs when a speaker: needs to compensate for some difficulty, express solidarity, convey an attitude or show social respect (Crystal, 1987; Berthold, Mangubhai and Bartorowicz, 1997). The switching also occurs within postulated universal constraints such that it may be integrated into conversations in a particular manner (Poplack, 1980; Cook, 1991). On this basis, given that it occurs within a particular pattern, potential for code switching to interfere into a language exists. It has also been outlined above that code switching may facilitate language development as a mechanism for providing language samples and may also be utilised as a teaching method for teaching second languages (Cook, 1989; 1991). Again, scope for code switching to cause interference in a language exists if it is not utilised carefully as a teaching method. It may be concluded then, that when code switching is to compensate for a language difficulty it may be viewed as interference and when it is used as a socio-linguistic tool it should not.

## Writing in ESL Classroom

According to Thirumalai (2002), writing is an individual effort. Individuals compose their thoughts often in privacy and then reduce their thoughts to writing, using the strict conventions followed in the language. Writing is an individual effort or work, but it must follow the rules laid down. The development of writing even in native English speaking children is conscious and is thus non-spontaneous. The acquisition of writing is a step further and the learner must now transfer the symbolization he/she acquired in the process of speech acquisition to written language. In writing, the discrete nature of linguistic signs should be appreciated consciously. The learner must recognize the sound structure of each word, dissect it and reproduce it in alphabetical symbols, which he must have studied and memorized before. This same deliberate preparedness is needed to put words in a certain sequence to form a sentence (Vygotsky 1962; Thirumalai 1977).

Thirumalai (2002) asserts that teaching writing to native speakers of English has always been a major concern of education. More often than not, most students, both native speakers and second language learners of English, feel inadequate in the face of the writing task. Modern world demands some efficiency in writing skills.

“Writing is more an individual effort than speaking, while at the same time more rule-bound and therefore more error-prone. . . The speaker does not have to pronounce each word exactly according to one standard of pronunciation or one model of structure, while the writer is expected to produce according to one model of spelling, and usually a

reduced range of structures, with 100 percent accuracy” (Bowen et al. 1985:252). Everyone will agree with Bowen et al (1985:253) when they declare that “writing is more rule-bound than speaking. Considering the control of the orthographic system, the careful organization, and the linguistic conservatism required, writing is the most demanding of the language skills.”

Thirumalai (2002) asserts that the writing classes have the potential to help consolidate and improve the students’ speaking and reading skills. However, it is important for teachers to remember that writing is an important skill which can be taught as an end in itself, although none of the language skills is far removed from the other language skills. Focusing on writing as an independent skill helps teachers to identify the specific problems faced by the learners, and to identify the specific needs of the learners relating to writing. Mechanics of writing are distinct from the mechanics of other skills such as speaking and reading. While reading involves seeing and pronouncing, writing involves association of sounds with mental composition of thoughts and their orderly presentation, and hand movements.

Raimes classifies approaches to teaching writing into five types: controlled to free, free writing, paragraph pattern, grammar-syntax-organization, communicative, and process approaches. In the controlled to free approach, “students are first given sentence exercises, then paragraphs to copy or manipulate grammatically by, for instance, changing questions to statements, present to past, or plural to singular. They might also change words or clauses or combine sentences” (Raimes 1983:6).

In the free writing approach, students are asked to “write freely on any topic without worrying about grammar and spelling for five or ten minutes. . . . The teachers do not correct these short pieces of free writing; they simply read them and perhaps comment on the ideas the writer expressed” (Raimes 1983:7). In the paragraph pattern approach, “students copy paragraphs, analyze the form of model paragraphs, and imitate model passages. They put scrambled sentences into paragraph order, they identify general specific statements, they choose or invent an appropriate topic sentence, they insert or delete sentences” (Raimes 1983:8). In the communicative approach to writing, students are asked to assume the role of a writer who is writing for an audience to read. Whatever is written by a student is modified in some way by other students for better communicative effect. In the process approach to writing, students “move away from a concentration on the written product to an emphasis on the process of writing” (Raimes 1983:10). They ask ‘not only questions about purpose and audience, but also the crucial questions: How do I write this? How do I get started?’ (Raimes 1983:10).

## **Conclusion**

An understanding of second language acquisition can improve the ability of mainstream teachers to serve the culturally and linguistically diverse students in their classrooms (Fillmore & Snow, 2002). While significant professional development is necessary to gain a full understanding of second language acquisition theory, some key concepts can be quickly understood and applied in the classroom. Understanding these theories can help teachers develop appropriate instructional strategies and assessments that guide

students along a continuum of language development. A basic knowledge of language acquisition theories is extremely useful for mainstream classroom teachers and directly influences their ability to provide appropriate content-area instruction to ELL students. It is especially important in those schools or districts where limited resources result in little or no instructional support in a student's native language. In these "sink-or-swim" situations, a committed mainstream teacher with a clear understanding of language acquisition can make all the difference.

The next chapter represents the methodology of the topic under investigation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This section describes the sampling procedure, instruments, data collection and analysis procedures to fulfil the objectives of this research. The main objective of this study is to study the grammatical influence of mother tongue, in this case Tamil, in the writing of L2 and whether the influence (if any) is a ‘negative transfer’ or a ‘positive transfer’. The study further seeks to identify the implications of the influence and interference of Tamil in the teaching and learning of the English language in Tamil schools.

Brown (1994) and Ellis (1995) elaborated on how to identify and analyze learners’ errors. Ellis (1997) and Hubbard et al. (1996) gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners’ errors. The initial step requires the selection of a corpus of language followed by the identification of errors. The errors are then classified. The next step, after giving a grammatical analysis of each error, provides a plausible explanation of different types of errors. S. Pit Corder’s article “A Role for the Mother Tongue” can help the teacher recognize language transfer in the classroom as natural and even necessary. Corder (1992) argues that with the original model of language transfer whereby the mother tongue interferes or inhibits the learner from grasping rules of the new language. Learning a language, Corder contends, is not like memorizing a list of structures. “This notion”, he says, “is ..... reinforced by the nature of the structural syllabus upon which our teaching programmes have been for so



long based” (pp 21-22). Corder’s article is more than ten years old, but his comments are still applicable today. The process of learning a language is more complex than accumulating drills. Grammar rules in L1 cannot be transferred directly to the grammar of L2. People do not always learn languages progressively. Consider the difference between a second language learner who learns from textbook (linearly) and the second language learner who lives amongst speakers of the second language. As common knowledge (and language students) testifies, the latter group learns the language more rapidly and more idiomatically.

## **Research Design**

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Interaction between variables is important. Detailed data is gathered through open ended questions that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation (Jacob, 1988). This differs from quantitative research which attempts to gather data by objective methods to provide information about relations, comparisons, and predictions and attempts to remove the investigator from the investigation (Smith, 1983). Qualitative research seeks out the ‘why’, not the ‘how’ of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information – things like interview transcripts and recordings,

emails, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It doesn't just rely on statistics or numbers, which are the domain of quantitative researchers.

When conducting qualitative research, the investigator seeks to gain a total or complete picture. According to Stainback and Stainback (1988), a holistic description of events, procedures, and philosophies occurring in natural settings is often needed to make accurate situational decisions. This differs from quantitative research in which selected, pre-defined variables are studied.

### Corroboration

The purpose of corroboration is not to confirm whether people's perceptions are accurate or true reflections of a situation but rather to ensure that the research findings accurately reflect people's perceptions, whatever they may be. The purpose of corroboration is to help researchers increase their understanding of the probability that their findings will be seen as credible or worthy of consideration by others (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

### Triangulation

One process involved in corroboration is triangulation. Denzin (1978) has identified several types of triangulation. One type involves the convergence of multiple data sources. Another type is methodological triangulation, which involves the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources. A third triangulation

procedure is investigator triangulation, in which multiple researchers are involved in an investigation. Related to investigator triangulation is researcher-participant corroboration, which has also been referred to as cross-examination.

Other procedures can be used to improve understanding and/or the credibility of a study. These include research or inquiry audit, peer debriefing, and the seeking of negative cases in the field that might disconfirm interpretations.

### **Quantitative Research**

According to Ann L Casebeer and Marja J Verhoef (1997), quantitative research is defined as "the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect," and qualitative research is described as "the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships." Reviewing these definitions of what is meant by quantitative versus qualitative research helps identify the reasons for the primarily separate use of each method and the continuing debate among researchers concerning the relative value of each approach. The arguments can be complicated and often are philosophical; however, they essentially make the following kinds of distinctions.

*The word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of*

*reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry ... In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework.*

While it may be somewhat naive to delineate the differences between qualitative and quantitative research so definitively, it is helpful to begin to understand the nature of the debate by understanding commonly held divisions and basic definitions. The basic constructs for viewing what "scientific" research is too often divide researchers in the health field, where the clinical trial remains the gold standard against which all other research is bench-marked. Unfortunately, these definitions tend to establish two separate and contrary schools of research, emphasizing the arguments commonly engaged in to justify the use of one or the other technique, rather than simply stating the varying positions and perspectives contained within qualitative and quantitative research paradigms.

On the other hand quantitative and qualitative research methods are most often associated with deductive and inductive approaches, respectively. Deductive research begins with known theory and tests it, usually by attempting to provide evidence for or against a pre-specified hypothesis. Inductive research begins by making observations, usually in order to develop a new hypothesis or contribute to new theory. Quantitative research is usually linked to the notion of science as objective truth or fact, whereas qualitative research is more often identified with the view that science is lived experience

and therefore subjectively determined. Quantitative research usually begins with pre-specified objectives focused on testing preconceived outcomes. Qualitative research usually begins with open-ended observation and analysis, most often looking for patterns and processes that explain "how and why" questions.

This study will follow a mixture of qualitative and quantitative survey research design, the purpose of which is to find out the influence of mother tongue linguistic items in the writing of English (L2), among the standard 5 students of a selected school. It further seeks to uncover the types of 'transfer' that takes place in the process of writing, whether negative or positive.

### **Instruments**

The instruments utilized in this research are questionnaires with the sample, analysis of pupils' writings from exercise books and workbooks. Data were also collected from interview questions from teachers of L1 & L2 and the sample.

### **Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are used for a number of reasons, not all obvious, for using questionnaires, and a number of different bodies that might want to use them. Questionnaires might be used to obtain information and views, or to attempt to justify/quantify impressions. Reasons for wanting such information include:

- statistical information, perhaps to meet an external requirement, or to inform e.g. admissions policy

- research - finding out what students think or do, possibly for academic publication, but not intending change at present
- feedback - to help you change the way you do things
- information to help you argue for change in your department or elsewhere

A further kind of purpose is to aim to change the students' perceptions by

- making the teacher more approachable
- making the student more aware and critical of the teaching/learning process

An experienced interviewer knows how to begin and conduct an interview to obtain the information desired. A questionnaire is also a form of interview, and therefore the perception of the student when answering the questions may be significant in determining their responses, and may also influence their attitude to future surveys.

However, if the first few questions asked address the student's own input and attitude (e.g. what proportion of classes did you attend?, how many hours per week ...?, how much did you use textbooks?, etc.) then, apart from the information you gain, which may be correlated with their other responses (e.g. how difficult?, how interesting?), you may influence their attitude in commenting on your presentation or on the content of the course. The widely-used standard questionnaire form QQQ0102 uses this approach.

It is possible that the regular use of questionnaires also has a significant effect on the respondents' attitudes and perception in other contexts, such as in lectures and

tutorials. Apart from the influence on questionnaire responses themselves (see previous paragraph), we could be unwittingly reinforcing the belief that 'if we were perfect teachers, they'd be perfect learners'. If we wish to avoid this possibility, then how we present questionnaires, as well as the type and order of questions asked, may need to be considered.

Assessment may be worth considering. A slight change of wording can make an exam question (answered under pressure) very much more difficult or easier. A *change* in assessment pattern can cause havoc - expectations on both sides must be clear. Coursework assignments may cause confusion, partly because they are used for several purposes: to encourage regular work, to help students pass exams, to assess skills or material not covered in exams. The organizational skills required of students to manage several overlapping assignments, and to balance them against lectures, tutorial examples, etc. may in some cases detract from the intellectual effort they should devote to their course.

Questions may be specific or general, aimed at obtaining information or feedback as described above. However, they may also be used to orient the respondent to the next question, or to the whole remainder. Using two questions that are likely to be closely correlated (e.g. 'Pace of lectures' and 'Difficulty' or 'Amount of material') *may* be a waste of a question. However, it is also possible that asking several overlapping questions may encourage the student to think harder about the issue, so that the second answer is more

reliable than it would have been. Some psychometric questionnaires ask many questions, but ignore some responses in forming their final assessment, presumably for this reason.

Clearly a good question is unambiguous and easy to interpret (unless, conceivably, it is designed to make the student think - see previous paragraph). (For example, a researcher should not ask a question like: 'Did the course emphasise thought and discussion, or recall of facts? Yes /No'). There are also questions that the student finds rather difficult to answer accurately (e.g. 'how many hours per week do you spend on this module?', which may be very variable, and will certainly be unrecorded!).

A good question is also one that elicits a *range* of responses. Two or three (realistic) options may be appropriate, but four, five or six will usually produce a more interesting result, especially as many students avoid the extremes. It's best to label the extreme responses in a 'mild' way for this reason. Use 'poor' rather than 'bad' and 'very good' rather than 'excellent'. Open-ended questions (which can be added to the back of Formats 1 and 2, etc.) can be very illuminating, but may be best asked after some set-response questions which firstly deal with predictable, routine comments, and secondly may clarify for the student what they wish to say. In order to reduce the time and effort for the student, and produce some constructive feedback, questions like 'Suggest *one* feature of this module that could be improved', and 'Which topic did you find most difficult?' can be useful.



The questionnaire for this research (refer to Appendix C) contains a list of questions in Tamil (L1) pertaining to the selected students' perception in the writing of English. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify the kind of cognition that takes place in the students' thinking before they start writing. This questionnaire contains 3 questions in Tamil and all the questions were explained by the researcher to the students. This was to ensure that any limitation of their reading ability did not mask the answers. Students were asked to write the answers in Tamil in order to obtain good and genuine responses. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher and the class teacher. This questionnaire was the first to be given to the students, followed by the worksheets the following week. The students were given approximately 30 minutes to answer all the questions. The class teacher and the researcher went around the classroom, assisting students who had problems in answering the questions in the questionnaire.

### **Interviews**

Frankel and Norman, (1996) believe that “Interviewing is an important way for a researcher to check the accuracy of-to verify or refute- the impressions he or she has gained through observation. Fetterman, in fact, describes interviewing as the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses. We interview people to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe.”

The present researcher conducted three semi-structured interviews with selected subjects to identify the development of fluency in learners, and how learners improve access to their linguistic system with time and practice. The respective school teachers of L1 and L2 were also interviewed to identify the kinds of grammatical errors that the students

make in their daily writing. The interview also aimed to find out the influence of the learners' L1 on their written English.

#### Interview 1

This interview was conducted with one L2 teacher of the sample. This interview was conducted to collect more data about the background of teaching and learning English in a Tamil school. The researcher also wanted to obtain more info pertaining to methods of teaching L2 in this school.

#### Interview 2

This interview was conducted with 5 selected students of the school to identify the problems that they face in the learning of English language.

#### Interview 3

The interview was conducted with one L1 teacher. The purpose of the interview was to identify the kind of problems the students face in the writing of L1. The interview also provided valuable insights pertaining to the students' social and cultural background.

### **Analysis of Sample's Exercise Books**

The researcher read and analyzed the written exercises of the samples to identify the errors made by the samples in their daily writing activities. The source of the written work will be from the students' classroom exercise book, workbooks and worksheets given by their L1 teacher. The results of the errors made were tabulated and categorized according to linguistic items. The sample's exercise books and worksheets used in the classroom are sure to provide valuable information (provided the written work

was not directly copied from the teacher's notes) pertaining to students' L1 interference in the L2 writing. Therefore, the researcher only analyzed written materials that were done by the students without the L2 teacher's help or guide. The written materials were thoroughly analyzed in order to obtain the required valuable information. The tabulated linguistic items were later compared and corroborated to substantiate the theoretical arguments in the field of language transfer.

### **Sample**

The sample for this study comprises 96 Year 5 students from one selected Tamil school Klang Valley, Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Tamil Serdang, hereafter known as SRK(T) Serdang. The school is strategically located in the campus of Universiti Putra, Malaysia. The total population of the school is 800 with 50 teaching staff and 5 non academic staff. Most of the students of the school are children of local residents who are mainly from the average income group and a small number from above average group. The school has two sessions, namely morning session and afternoon session. Four students from the selected 100 students did not have any exercise books with them and therefore the researcher failed to get any analysis. 52.1% of the samples are male and 47.9% are females, (refer to Table 1). The majority of the samples are eleven year olds and most of them are of Tamil speaking parents. The class Mutiara has the highest number of students (41 students), 42.7%, followed by Intan (36 students), 37.5% and Rubi (19 students)19.8% This is due to the fact that Rubi is weakest class in terms of academic

achievements (refer to Table 2). They are streamed into three classes according to their competency in science and mathematics in previous year examinations.

Table 1: Distribution of Students According to Gender

		Number	Percent
Valid	Male	50	52.1
	Female	46	47.9
	Total	96	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of Students According to Classes

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Intan	36	37.5
	Mutiara	41	42.7
	Rubi	19	19.8
	Total	96	100.0

Though they use Bahasa Malaysia and English interchangeably every now and then, Tamil, being the mother tongue dominates their daily communication, both at home and at school. Most of the sample have high proficiency in their mother tongue.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher spent a total of fourteen days (five hours each day) in SRK(T) Serdang to collect all data required for this research. The sample's writings were carefully and thoroughly analyzed to detect the errors made and were tabulated accordingly to form a

corpus (please refer to Appendix XY). The researcher collected (with the L2 teacher's Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 108

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

permission) read all the English exercise books and worksheets and underlined the transfers (positive/negative) and tabulated them according to their linguistic categories.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is a process of gathering, modeling, and transforming data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making.

Brenda Power (1996), Susan and William Stainback (1988) and Marion MacLean and Marian Mohr (1999) recommend several ways teacher researchers can analyze the data that they have collected. They should:

1. Triangulate. Study the research question from at least three separate pieces of data and three points of view. For example, those three pieces of data might be the teacher researcher's observations in the research log, recorded comments by a student or students (such as the tape recorded comments or quotes the teacher researcher has noted in the research log) and examples of student work. Does the research question still fit the data that is emerging from the study?

2. Compare constantly. Look through the data and keep comparing the data that was collected earlier in the study with data collected later in the study. Use different bases for comparison. For example, if the teacher researcher has compared what the students did in October with what they did in January, the teacher researcher may try comparing the students' written work with their oral work.

3. Categorize and sort. Set up charts, columns, outlines, and ways of counting occurrences. The teacher researcher can make up different categories that fits the teaching situation(s) or use categories developed by another researcher. Watch for ways that the data develops into categories different from other researchers and explore those differences. Coding your findings will help categorize the data.
4. Order. Decide on a way to order the data findings such as data chronologically, by importance and by frequency (how often an occurrence occurs, for example).
5. Contrast. Look for what doesn't fit the assumptions or theories of other researchers and note what sticks out, goes against the grain.
6. Speculate. Try out different hunches about what the data means. Make an educated guess and then see if it's supported by the data. Don't stick rigidly to an assumption or hypothesis that was originally held.
7. Restate the question. Rewrite the question many times, changing it when necessary to fit what's important from the data that has been collected. What is it that the teacher researcher really wants to figure out? Sometimes the teacher researcher will want to make the question more global, sometimes the question may become more tightly focused.
8. Visualize. Create a visual representation for what you have collected. Map out your data; draw it all on one page. Sketch the metaphors that come to mind when thinking of the data and what it all means. Use colors and shapes to separate ideas. Use diagrams,

sketches of things, people, happenings to show different ideas and groupings. Inspiration software can help map your data by making connections through webs.

9. Abstract and distill. State the essence of your findings as if you had to explain them in 50 words or less. What matters most in this data? Write the findings as an abstract such as one that would be part of conference program.

10. Talk and validate. Talk with others about your research. Explain the data interpretations to others; see if they can see the same things. Consider their different interpretations and use them to clarify, broaden and otherwise validate the findings.

11. Confer with students. Ask your students what they think about what you are observing and writing about in your log. They may offer new ideas about their learning or validate what you are finding. Students may become co-researchers, but be careful of compromising confidentiality.

12. Take a break. Sometimes it helps to step back from the research process in order to clear your mind and give yourself a rest. Coming back to the process with a refreshed outlook will often lead to new understandings and perspectives.

13. State your theories. You build your ideas about teaching as you try out new strategies. Theories come from and are grounded in practice. Your research group should help you look at your data from multiple data sources and help you interpret your findings and draw conclusions and implications for future teaching.

Having administered the instruments for this research, the responses were collected and interpreted. The data from all the writing sources were analyzed using frequency count and percentage based on the errors made and presented accordingly in table form. The data were analyzed using the SPSS analysis method. All the three interviews were transcribed and used to strengthen the data collected. The questionnaire was analyzed and used to understand the thinking that took place in the students' mind before they started to write in L2.

The next chapter deals with the data analysis of the research topic.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The main objective of this study is to examine the types of mother tongue transfer in the writing of L2 among the Year 3 students of a vernacular school. This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected using the three instruments:

- a. Questionnaire
- b. Interviews
- c. Students exercise books, workbooks and worksheets

The data collected were aimed at answering the following research questions:

#### Research Questions:

1. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L1 to L2?
2. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L2 to L1?
3. Which linguistic items have been transferred positively from L1 to L2 and vice versa?
4. Which linguistic items have been transferred negatively from L1 to L2 and vice versa?

#### Questionnaire

A questionnaire consisting of 3 questions was administered to 36 randomly selected students involved in this research (please refer to appendix C. This was to assess their perception in the writing of L2 and the kind of cognition that took place in the students' brain before they started writing. Due to the students' inability to understand the needs of the questions the researcher explained the questions orally. This was also done so that the answers did not mask the intended findings.

The answers to the questions clearly showed that the students thought and visualized things in their mother tongue before they started writing in L2. (Refer to Appendix C) For every Tamil word, they then translated to English. This kind of perception and thinking contributed to the syntactical disorder in the L2 writing as there were significance differences between the Tamil language syntactical order and the English language syntactical order as elaborated earlier in the first chapter.

Examples of questions and answers given by the selected students.

1. ஆங்கிலத்தில் எழுதும் முன், நீ உன் மனதில் என்ன நினைப்பாய் ?

*(What do you think in your mind, before writing in English?)*

நான் தமிழில் நினைத்து பின் ஆங்கிலத்தில் எழுதுவேன்.

*( I think in Tamil, then I write in English)*

**Table 3: Breakdown of answers for Question 1**

Answers	No. of Students	Percentage
I think in Tamil and then write in English	30	83.3%
I think in English without thinking in Tamil	6	16.7%

2. ஒவ்வொரு வார்த்தையாக நினைப்பாயா அல்லது ஒரு முழு வாக்கியமாக நினைப்பாயா ?

*(Do you think word by word, or as a whole sentence, before writing?)*

நான் ஒவ்வொரு சொல்லாக தமிழில் நினைத்து, பிறகு ஆங்கிலத்தில் எழுதுவேன்

*(I will think one word by one word in Tamil and then write in English)*

**Table 4: Breakdown of answers for Question 2**

Answers	No. of Students	Percentage
I will think one word by one word in Tamil and then write in English	32	88.8%
I will think as a whole sentence in English and write in English	4	21.2%

3. நீ வேறேதும் மொழியில் சிந்திப்பாயா ?

*(Do you think in any other language?)*

இல்லை.

(No.)

**Table 5: Breakdown of answers for Question 3**

Answer	No. of Students	Percentage
Yes	33	91.6%
No	3	8.4%

Therefore, from the questionnaire answers given we can conclude that the learning of L2 in Tamil schools is seriously influenced and affected by the students' mother tongue. By and large, most of the sample gave the same answers. However there are students who come from families whose parents are bilingual and the influence of the mother tongue is minimized. Among the L1 grammatical influences in the writing of L2, the following linguistic items seem to be the strongest.

**Analysis of Linguistic Items**

**Table 6: Overall Statistics of Data Collected**

		Punctuation	Missing verb to be	The use of Tamil syntax	Wrong spelling of plural nouns
N	Valid	96	96	96	96
Mean		.96	.76	.28	.09
Std. Deviation		1.968	1.074	.593	.327

Data collected from the students' writing were tabulated and analyzed. It is quite obvious, from the statistics obtained and tabulated that native tongue interference did take place in the writing of these Tamil school students. Many linguistic items were transferred

negatively as evident from the students' written work. From the chart above we can observe that four linguistic items were mainly transferred negatively, namely, (arranged according to the mean obtained).

1. Punctuation.
2. Missing verb to be.
3. The use of Tamil Word Order
4. Wrong Spelling of Plural Nouns

Below is the item by item elaboration of the study.

**Table 7: Punctuation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	66	68.8	68.8
	1	7	7.3	76.0
	2	7	7.3	83.3
	3	6	6.3	89.6
	4	6	6.3	95.8
	5	3	3.1	99.0
	14	1	1.0	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

Missing upper case in the writing of L2 is another clear evidence of mother tongue influence in the writing of L2.

Capital letters or majuscules (in the Roman alphabet *A, B, C, D, . . .*) are also called capitals, or caps. Upper case, upper-case, or uppercase is also often used in this context as synonym of capital. Manual typesetters kept them in the upper drawers of a

desk or in the upper type case, while keeping the more frequently used minuscule letters in the lower type case. This practice might date back to Johannes Gutenberg.

In English, capital letters are used as the first letter of a sentence, a proper noun, or a proper adjective, and for initials or abbreviations. The first person pronoun 'I' and the interjection 'O' are also capitalised. Lower-case letters are normally used for all other purposes. There are however situations where further capitalisation may be used to give added emphasis, for example in headings and titles or to pick out certain words (often using small capitals). There are also a few pairs of words of different meanings whose only difference is capitalization of the first letter. Other languages vary in their use of capitals. For example, in German the first letter of all nouns is capitalised, while in Romance languages the names of days of the week, months of the year, and adjectives of nationality, religion, etc., begin with a lower-case letter.

If an alphabetic system has case, all or nearly all letters have both a majuscule and minuscule form. Both forms in each pair are considered to be the same letter: they have the same name, same pronunciation, and will be treated identically when sorting in alphabetical order. Languages have capitalisation rules to determine whether majuscules or minuscules are to be used in a given context. Capital and small letters are differentiated in the Roman, Greek, and Cyrillic alphabets. Most writing systems (such as those used in Arabic, and Devanagari) make no distinction between capital and lowercase letters (and, of course, logographic writing systems such as Mandarin have no "letters" at all). Indeed, even European languages did not make this distinction before about 1300;

both majuscule and minuscule letters existed, but a given text would use either one or the other.

In letters with a case distinction, capitals are used for:

1. Capitalization,
2. Acronyms,
3. Supposed better legibility, for example on signs and in labeling, and
4. Emphasis (in some languages).

Capital letters were sometimes used for typographical emphasis in text made on a typewriter. However, long spans of Latin-alphabet text in all upper-case are harder to read because of the absence of the ascenders and descenders found in lower-case letters, which can aid recognition. With the advent of modern computer editing technology and the Internet, emphasis is usually indicated by use of a single word Capital, italic, or bold font, similar to what has long been common practice in print. In typesetting, when an acronym or initialism requires a string of upper-case letters, it is frequently set in small capitals, to avoid overemphasizing the word in mostly lower-case running text. In electronic communications, it is often considered very poor "netiquette" to type in all capitals, because it can be harder to read and because it is seen as tantamount to shouting. Indeed, this is the oft-used name for the practice.

Capitalization is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase. Capitalization rules vary by language and are often quite

complex, but in most modern languages that have capitalization, the first word of every sentence is capitalized, as are all proper nouns. Some languages, such as German, capitalize the first letter of all nouns; this was previously common in English as well.

The researcher analyzed all the sentences in the students' writing materials and almost half of the sample's books have missing capital letters. They failed to start the sentences with a capital letter. It was as if the capital letter did not exist in the language. (Refer to Appendix 1). The researcher listed the number of errors in this grammatical item and tabulated them. From the SPSS analysis we can observe that 31.1% or 30 students did not use upper case to start the sentences. The 30 students made a total of 92 errors in this grammar component.. Even the word 'I' is written as 'i' by many students. This statistics is also supported by the literature of the Tamil language pattern and transcripts of interviews (Refer to Appendix Z) conducted with L1 and L2 teachers. The L2 teacher too agreed that Tamil is not an easy subject compared to English. All the English sentences written by the students were carefully analyzed and the researcher found that most of the sentences constructed by the students did not begin with a capital letter. Neither did they wrote the first person pronoun, 'I' in capital. Most of the proper nouns too were not capitalized. Their writing (mostly from the poor class) seemed to be as if capitalization did exist in the English language.

Below are some of the examples from the students' books:

1. music radio computer in the English.
2. listen music very long.



3. sitting next music doing.
4. next raman (proper noun) open the door.
5. the children are very happy
6. menu (proper noun) and sonu (proper noun)sang and read to the blind pupils.

The researcher strongly believes that this is a classic example of mother tongue interference in L2 writing. The researcher’s random observation on the writing of other students from different levels also shows that these students tend to miss the capital letters in their writing very frequently.

**Table 8: Missing Verb to Be**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	57	59.4	59.4	59.4
	1	15	15.6	15.6	75.0
	2	16	16.7	16.7	91.7
	3	6	6.3	6.3	97.9
	4	2	2.1	2.1	100.0
	Total	96	100.0	100.0	

The verb ‘To be’ most frequently works in conjunction with another verb: “He is playing the piano,” “She will be arriving this afternoon.” Occasionally, though, the verb will stand by itself, alone, in a sentence. This is especially true in simple, brief answers to questions.

“Who's coming with me?”

“I am”

“Who's responsible for this tragedy?”

“She is.”

In sentences such as these, the subject usually receives the intonation stress and the voice falls off on the verb.

An auxiliary can be combined with the base form of ‘To be’ to provide simple answers to questions that use forms of “to be.”

“Is Rama in class this morning?”

“Well, he might be.”

“Is anyone helping Rama with his homework?”

“I'm not sure. Seetha could be.”

The verb ‘To be’ also acts as a linking verb, joining the sentence subject with a subject complement or adjective complement. A linking verb provides no action to a sentence: the subject complement re-identifies the subject; the adjective complement modifies it (For further information and additional vocabulary in dealing with linking verbs, visit the hyperlinks in this paragraph.).

- Professor Herald is the Director of Online Learning.
- Our trip to Michigan was fantastic!

A form of the verb ‘To be’ is combined with a past participle to form the passive. Passive verb constructions are useful when the subject of an action is not as important as what the subject did (the action of the sentence) or when the subject is unknown. For

instance, the police might report that “The professor was assaulted in the hallways”

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

122

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

because they do not know the perpetrator of this heinous crime. In technical writing, where the process is more important than who is doing the activity, we might report that “Three liters of fluid is filtered through porous glass beads.” Regardless of the verb's purpose, only the auxiliary form of ‘To be’ changes; the participle stays the same. The ‘To be’ will change form to indicate whether the subject is singular or plural:

- The foundation is supported by enormous floating caissons that keep it from sinking into the swamp.
- They were constructed by workers half submerged in the murky waters.

Notice how the information about who did the action is frequently found in a prepositional phrase beginning with ‘by.’ Passive constructions do not always include this information:

- Wooden caissons were used until fiberglass structures were developed in the 1950s.
- Caissons were also designed to function under water in the construction of bridges.

The ‘To be’ will also change to indicate the time of the action and the aspect of the verb (simple, progressive, perfect).

- Water is pumped out of the caisson to create an underwater work chamber.  
(simple present)

- Some caissons were moved to other construction sites. (simple past)
- While the water was being pumped out, workers would enter the top of the waterproof chamber. (past progressive)
- Many other uses of caisson construction have been explored. (present perfect)
- Caissons had been used by the ancient Romans. (past perfect)
- Other uses will be found. (future)

The 'To be' verb can be combined with other modal forms (along with the past participle of the main verb) to convey other kinds of information. See the section on modals for the various kinds of information conveyed by modals (advisability, predictability, guessing, necessity, possibility, etc.).

- The wall joints may be weakened if the caissons can't be rebuilt.
- Perhaps the caissons should be replaced; I think they ought to be.
- These ancient, sturdy structures might have been rotted by constant exposure to water.

When 'To be' verbs are combined with modal forms in this manner, the construction is called a phrasal modal. Here are some more examples:

- Rosario was able to finish her degree by taking online courses.
- She wasn't supposed to graduate until next year.
- She will be allowed to participate in commencement, though.

- She is about to apply to several graduate programs.
- She is going to attend the state university next fall.

Sometimes it is difficult to say whether a ‘To be’ verb is linking a subject to a participle or if the verb and participle are part of a passive construction. In “Certain behaviors are allowed,” is "are” linking “behaviors” to "allowed" (a participle acting as a predicate adjective) or is “are allowed” a passive verb? In the final analysis, it probably doesn't matter, but the distinction leads to some interesting variations. Consider the difference between

- The jurists were welcomed.  
and
- The jurists were welcome.

In the first sentence, the participle “welcomed” (in this passive construction) emphasizes the action of welcoming: the smiles, the hearty greetings, the slaps on the back. In the second sentence, the predicate adjective “welcome” describes the feeling that the jurists must have had upon being so welcomed.

Progressive forms include a form of ‘To be’ plus a present participle (an *-ing* ending). Frodesen and Eyring (1997) categorize progressive verbs according to the following functions:

- to describe actions already in progress at the moment "in focus" within the sentence, as in “I was doing my homework when my brother broke into my

room, crying.” or “I will be graduating from college about the same time that you enter high school.”

- to describe actions at the moment of focus in contrast to habitual actions, as in “We usually buy the most inexpensive car we can find, but this time we're buying a luxury sedan.”
- to express repeated actions, as in “My grandfather is forever retelling the same story about his adventures in Rangoon.”
- to describe temporary situations in contrast to permanent states, as in “Jeffrey goes to the University of Connecticut, but this summer he is taking courses at the community college.”
- to express uncompleted actions, as in “Harvey and Mark are working on their deck.”

The researcher too finds that the missing verb ‘to be’ is another glaring evidence of L1 influence in the writing of L2 in this research. From the chart we can observe that 40.7% or approximately 39 samples’ writing analysis indicated such influence. The 39 sample made a total of 73 errors in this linguistic item. This influence is also supported by the literature and the interviews conducted with teachers and the samples. This clearly shows the existence of L1 grammatical influence in the writing of L2. This is because the Tamil language does not have a copula (a linking verb equivalent to the word *is/are*). The examples below clearly contrast the differences between the two languages in terms of the use of verb ‘to be’. (Refer to Appendix 2)

“This is my bag.” (English) is written as “This my bag.”

(இது என் பை.)

“I am a boy.” (English) is written as “I a boy.”

(நான் ஒரு பையன்.)

“He is sleeping.” (English) is written as “He sleeping.”

அவன் உறங்கினான்.

Ramu is doing his English homework in the computer (English) is written as

“Ramu doing the English homework a computer.”

இராமு அவன் ஆங்கில வீட்டு பாடத்தை கணினியில் செய்துக்கொண்டுயிருக்கிறான்..

The elaboration and examples above clearly support and answer the first research question, that components such as: failure to use proper punctuation to start a sentence, syntactical structure similar to L1 and wrong use of verb to be’ all from L1, dominate the writing of L2 of the Tamil school students. This is a clear evidence for the occurrence of negative transfer in the writings of Tamil school students.

**Table 9: The Use of Tamil Word Order**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	75	78.1	78.1	78.1
1	16	16.7	16.7	94.8
2	4	4.2	4.2	99.0
3	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

In linguistics, syntax is the study of the principles and rules for constructing sentences in natural languages. In addition to referring to the discipline, the term *syntax* is also used to refer directly to the rules and principles that govern the sentence structure of any individual language, as in ‘the syntax of Modern Irish’. Modern research in syntax attempts to describe languages in terms of such rules. Many professionals in this discipline attempt to find general rules that apply to all natural languages. The term *syntax* is also sometimes used to refer to the rules governing the behavior of mathematical systems, such as logic, artificial formal languages, and computer programming languages.

There are a number of theoretical approaches to the discipline of syntax. Many linguists (e.g. Noam Chomsky) see syntax as a branch of biology, since they conceive of syntax as the study of linguistic knowledge as embodied in the human mind. Others (e.g. Gerald Gazdar) take a more Platonistic view, since they regard syntax to be the study of an abstract formal system. Syntax is the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence. It concerns both word order and agreement in the relationship between words. Syntax is primarily concerned with structure of sentences.

### Examples

The following statements follow normal English word order:

- The cat sat on the mat.
- My old brown leather suitcase.

The following statements do not follow normal English word order:



- The cat on the mat sat.
- My brown leather old suitcase.

Word order is very important in English. Changes to conventional syntax are often used to create dramatic, poetic, or comic effect. A normal sentence in English usually contains at least three elements: subject, verb, and object.

Subject	Verb	Object
The cat	ate	the goldfish
John	likes	Football
Mary	chose	the wallpaper

Every language has rules of syntax, and to the linguist the essential rules are descriptive. They are the rules which underpin the life of the language and which are extremely slow to change. These are not to be confused with the prescriptive 'rules' of traditional grammar [For instance, 'Never end a sentence with a preposition'].

An example of a descriptive rule of English syntax is that in the imperative in English, the verb takes the initial position in the sentence, usually directly before the noun which is the object.

- Put those books on the table.
- Take the lid off after half an hour.
- Remove all packaging before heating the soup.
- Isolate the switch in case of fault.

It is important to make a distinction between grammar and syntax, and to realize that syntax is a component of grammar. The term 'grammar' refers to the whole structure

of the language including the naming of its parts, its rules of tense, and its sound system. It is a comprehensive term. Syntax only refers to the relationship between the grammatical components of language in use. In other words it is the nature, quality or type of relationship between terms in any given statement which is the province of syntax. The construction of the passive voice is a syntactic issue, as it involves word order. The following statement is in the passive voice:

- A woman was run over in central London today by a vehicle traveling at high speed.

If we transfer this to the active voice, we have:

- A vehicle traveling at high speed ran over a woman in central London today.

The semantic content is similar in the two statements, but the emphasis is changed according to whether it is expressed as active or passive. The difference between the two versions is dependent on the positioning of the subject and the object in the sentence. In the passive version, the object takes the initial position. This is a syntactic principle. The use of wrong syntactical order was also quite obvious in the analysis of the samples' writing. It has been stated in the Literature of this study that the Tamil language and the English language have different syntactical order. From the data collected we can observe that 21.9% or approximately 21 subjects have used the syntactical structure of the Tamil language in their L2 writing. The 21 students made a total of 27 errors in this linguistic

item. Some of the examples picked from the sample's writings are as follows: (Refer to Appendix 3)

“John kicks the ball.”(English) is written as “John the ball kicks.” (ஜான் பந்தை உதைத்தான்.) in Tamil. This type of error is quite glaring in the writing samples. (Refer to Appendix 3) “Where is my book?” is written as, “My book where?”(என் புத்தகம் எங்கே?) (as in the Tamil language structure)

More examples from the sample's writings.

அவள் வானொலி கேட்டாள்.

*She radio listen.*

இராமு, கணிதம் மற்றும் ஆங்கிலம் பாடம் செய்துக்கொண்டுயிருக்கிறான்.

*Ramu is mathematics and English lesson doing.*

குமார் கணினியில் பாடம் செய்துக்கொண்டுயிருக்கிறான்.

*Kumar in computer lesson doing.*

This is also strongly supported by the word order of the L1 (Tamil), whereby Tamil is a consistently head-final language. The verb comes at the end of the clause, with typical word order Subject Object Verb (SOV). However, Tamil also exhibits extensive scrambling (word order variation), so that, surface permutations of the SOV order are possible with different pragmatic effects.

Tamil is a null subject language. Not all Tamil sentences have subject, verb and object. It is possible to construct valid sentences that have only a verb—such as mudhiintuvittatu

(முடிந்துவிட்டது) ("completed")—or only a subject and object, without a verb, primary or auxiliary such as *atu en vīdu* (அது என் வீடு) ("That, my house"). Tamil does not have a copula (equivalent to the word *is*).

Students who answered the interview questions have clearly said that they do direct translation from Tamil to English without looking at the sentence as ‘whole’ in English. This ‘practice’ is supported by the questionnaire answered by the selected students, (refer to Appendix W) This statement is further strengthened in the interview with the students (refer to Appendix Y),

Therefore, we do understand the reason for the failure of the use of proper verb-to-be in their writing of L2

**Table 10: Wrong Spelling of Plural Nouns**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	88	91.7	91.7	91.7
1	7	7.3	7.3	99.0
2	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	96	100.0	100.0	

Forming the plural in English is very easy. Add '-s' to any singular word Example: *apple - apples* and you have made the plural! Some words are formed differently:

- Words ending in '-y'. Add '-ies' if '-y' is followed by a consonant

Example: *candy - candies, jelly - jellies*

- Words ending in '-ch'. Add '-es'

Example: *watch - watches, peach - peaches*

- Words ending in '-s'. Add '-es'

Example: *grass - grasses, glass - glasses*

Some important exceptions to the plural rule include:

- man - men
- woman - women
- person - people
- child - children

### Spelling Rules for Adding the Plural S to Singular Nouns

- The general plurals rule: Usually add the letter *s* to the end of a singular noun to make it plural.

I'll take this book; you can use those books over there.

We have one bedroom on the first floor and three more bedrooms on the second.

- In compound nouns, add *s* only to the main noun.

This family uses one air- conditioner and one washing machine . Their neighbors use three air- conditioners and two washing machines .

I have one son-in-law; my friend Frieda has three sons-in-law.

- Add *es* to a noun ending with a whistling sound ( *s,sh,ch,x,z*) to make it plural.

- one bus – three buses, a church – many churches, a box – boxes, a buzz – buzzes

- If the singular noun ends with a consonant + *y*, drop the *y*, replace with an *i* and add *es*.

- Don't drop the *y*, if the *y* is preceded by a vowel.

- Yes: one city – two cities, a baby – babies, a country – countries

- No: a toy – toys, a day – days

Note: If the noun ending with a y represents a person or a country, add only *s* in any case.  
John F. Kennedy was the most famous of the Kennedys. In 1963, he didn't visit the two Germanys after giving his speech in West-Berlin.

• If the singular noun ends with a consonant + *o*, add *es*. If the *o* is preceded by a vowel, only add *s* to make the plural form.

Yes: a potato – five potatoes, a hero – heroes, an echo – echoes

No: a radio – radios, a studio – studios, a kangaroo – kangaroos

### Irregular Noun Plurals

#### 1. Singular Nouns Ending with f/fe

• Some nouns ending with *f*, *fe*, drop this ending and add *ves* to make the plural form.

There may be alternative spelling.

- Yes : a knife – knives, one half – two halves, my life – their lives, a wolf – wolves.

- No : one roof – roofs, a cliff – many cliffs, a safe – safes

- Both : a dwarf – the seven dwarfs/ dwarves, one wharf – a few wharfs/ wharves

#### 2. Unique Old English Plural Nouns

• These nouns have unique plural forms that survived from Old English. Learn them well according to the following groups, as they are in common use.

a man – men a woman – women (Plural pronounced /wimen/) a person -- people	a foot – feet a goose – geese a tooth – teeth
a child – children an ox – oxen (castrated bulls) a brother – brethren (in church orders), brothers (in a family)	a mouse – mice a louse – lice a die – dice (for playing games)

### 3. One Form for Singular & Plural

- Many nouns have identical forms for both singular and plural.
  - a sheep – sheep, a deer – deer, a moose – moose
  - a fish – fish (fishes, if used for different species of fish)
  - a dozen – two dozen roses, a hundred – several hundred men  
( but: dozens of roses, hundreds of people)

#### Special Singular - Plural Cases

##### 1. Plural-Only Nouns

- Some nouns only have a plural form, ending with *s* or without.
  - The police are looking for the robbers.
  - I like these pants / jeans / shorts.
  - Use either scissors or nail clippers.
  - Binoculars are stronger than any glasses.
- Other nouns ending with *s* only have a plural form only with certain meanings.
  - customs (at the airport, not practices), guts (courage, not intestines)
  - quarters (lodgings, not 1/4s), clothes (garments, not fabrics)
  - goods (merchandise, not the opposite of bad), arms (weapons, not limb)

##### 2. Singular Nouns with an S Ending

- Some nouns end with *s* but are usually singular. They take a singular verb with an *s* ending in the Present Simple.
  - diseases: measles, rabies.
  - fields of study and occupation: economics, ethics, linguistics, politics, physics, gymnastics.
  - games: dominoes, darts, cards

- I study mathematics, which is very difficult. Dominoes is my favorite pastime.
  - Some nouns have an identical form for singular and plural that both end with s.
- barracks, means, headquarters, crossroads,
- a TV series – many TV series,
  - Money is a means to an end.
  - Newspapers and TV are means of mass-communication.
  - There is one species of humans but many species of cats.

According to Bhadriraju. K (2001), there are only two grammatical numbers in Tamil- singular and plural. An entity which is one in number is singular, and those which are more than one are plural. The singular items are unmarked in the sense that they are taken to be the basic forms from which the plural forms are derived. Plural forms of nouns are derived by suffixation process in which plural suffixes are added to various stems which are semantically and formally singular in number.

The plural suffix ‘kal’ – ‘கள்’, is added to a noun to form the plural word.

Examples of Tamil singular nouns derived to plural nouns:

பிள்ளை - பிள்ளைகள்	-----	child - children
முட்டை - முட்டைகள்	-----	egg - eggs
கை - கைகள்	-----	hand - hands
பூ - பூக்கள்	-----	flower - flowers
புத்தகம் - புத்தகங்கள்	-----	book - books
ஆசிரியர் - ஆசிரியர்கள்	-----	teacher - teachers



பழம் - பழங்கள்	-----	fruit - fruits
வீடு- வீடுக்கள்	-----	house - houses
ஆண் - ஆண்கள்	-----	man - men
பெண் - பெண்கள்	-----	woman - women
மரம் - மரங்கள்	-----	tree - trees
மேசை - மேசைகள்	-----	table - tables
யானை - யானைகள்	-----	elephant - elephants

The underlying morphological structure for a Tamil noun is as follows:

Noun stem Or + [ plural suffix ] + [ the euphonic suffix ] + [ the case suffix ]

Oblique stem

While generating the noun derivatives from the roots, linguistic rules determining the form of a plural suffix has to be considered. The attachment of case suffixes to nouns is an important part of the morphological generator for nouns. In addition, this has to take into consideration the fact that certain nouns can take case suffixes only in oblique form. The euphonic suffix sometimes comes along with oblique suffixes or with plural suffixes. This has also to be considered. During the combination of the root noun with the above mentioned suffixes, "sandhi rules" have to be taken in to account. Some nouns in Tamil take case only when it is converted to an oblique stem form. Oblique is a meaningless word stem which can come between two morphemes. An example of the rule for this conversion are root "maram" when converted to oblique becomes "marattu". Noun stems ending with "-m" when converted to oblique would have "m' replaced be "ththu".

Similarly root "vidu" when converted to oblique becomes "vitt". Hence separate rules to check endings of noun and converting them to oblique form if necessary is an important part of the morphological generator of nouns.

Many students in this research wrote the plural forms of English nouns that require special spelling change by just adding –‘s’ to the root word as they were under the impression that all plural nouns must end with-‘s’ as in the Tamil language whereby the plural nouns end with the suffix- ‘கள்’. A total of 8 students or 8.3% of them made a total of 8 errors in this linguistic item. This was a clear example of mother tongue influence in their writing (Refer to Appendix 4). Some of the examples in the students writing:

e.g.

Child- **childs**

The **childs** are playing in the field.

Man-**mans**

The **mans** are going to work.

Woman-**womans**

There are many **womans** teacher in my school.

Tooth – **tooths** (was written as the plural for teeth)

Apart from the grammatical influences mentioned above, the researcher also identified other L2 linguistic items that influenced the students L1 writing.

### **Doubling of Letters- Missing in L2**

Doubling of consonants in the English language takes place for a myriad of reasons. Some of the reasons are as stated below:

Words that end in a single vowel plus a single consonant usually double the final consonant before adding a suffix that begins with a vowel: stop can become stopped, stopping, stopper, and unstoppable. Thus snip becomes sniper, but snipe becomes sniper. Most words that end in two consonants do not ordinarily double the final consonant before a suffix: print becomes printed, printing, and printer. If the suffix begins with a consonant instead of a vowel, the final consonant of the base word stays single: ship becomes shipment and clap becomes claptrap. Words of two and more syllables that are stressed on the final syllable normally double the final consonant before adding a suffix: infer becomes inferred and inferring.

But two-syllable words stressed on the final syllable do not double the final consonant when the suffix begins with a consonant: regret becomes regretting but regretful. And words stressed on the final syllable but ending with two consonants or with a vowel do not double the consonant: predict becomes predicting and predicted; reduce becomes reducer and reduced. Words that end in -c usually add a k before the suffix: panic becomes panicking; picnic, picnicked. In words of more than one syllable ending in a consonant, especially -l, the British generally (but not always) double the

final consonant, and Americans generally do not, although American dictionaries frequently report divided usage. But these genre of rulings are never used in the writing of the Tamil language.

In this research, approximately 10 students or 10.3% missed the doubling of consonants in their writing. Doubling of consonants in the English language is quite common in writing. But this is a complete contrast to the writing of Tamil language. There are hardly many words in the Tamil language whereby the letters in the alphabet are repeated except for a few words like, மமதை (mamathai)- arrogance, and கட்டடம் (kattedam)- building. Therefore when Tamil school students engage themselves in the writing of L2, they tend to miss or omit the repetition of letters in words like swimming and running. The analysis of the exercise books revealed that they write the above words as, 'swiming' and 'runing'

This is due to the fact that they assume that (in the flow of writing or copying from a text) the same letter will never be doubled in a word. The analysis of the exercise books clearly revealed that although the L2 teacher had given the correct spelling on the blackboard, students still end up copying minus the doubling of the letters. This further strengthens the theoretical argument that the L2 writing is indeed influenced by the L1 knowledge.

### **The Use of Bahasa Malaysia (BM) in L2 Writing**

The researcher strongly believes that, not only the L2 learning is interfered and influenced by the L1, but also the national language. Malaysia is a unique country with many languages and races. A student in a vernacular school has to master their L1 (Chinese/ Tamil), L2 (English Language) and also the national language, the Malay language.

The Malay language, also known locally as *Bahasa Melayu* or *Bahasa Malaysia*, is an Austronesian language spoken variously by the Malay people who reside in the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, central eastern Sumatra, the Riau islands, and parts of the coast of Borneo. It is an official language of Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore. It is very similar to the Indonesian language, known locally as *Bahasa Indonesia*, the official language of Indonesia.

In Malaysia, the language is officially known as *Bahasa Malaysia*, which translates as the "Malaysian language". The term, which was introduced by the National Language Act 1967, was predominant until the 1990s, after most academics and government officials reverted to "*Bahasa Melayu*," which is used in the Malay version of the Federal Constitution. According to Article 152 of the Federal Constitution, *Bahasa Melayu* is the official language of Malaysia. "*Bahasa Kebangsaan*" (National language) was also used at one point during the 1970s. As of late, however, the name has been reverted back to "*Bahasa Malaysia*". In spoken Malay and Malaysian English, the language is also referred to by the initialism BM.

Malay is normally written using the Roman alphabet, although a modified Arabic script called Jawi also exists. It is an agglutinative language, meaning that the meaning of the word can be changed by adding the necessary prefixes or suffixes. According to Kamus Tatabahasa Dewan Bahasa, root words are either nouns or verbs, e.g. *masak* (to cook) yields *memasak* (cooks, is cooking, etc.), *memasakkan* (cooks, is cooking for etc.), *dimasak* (cooked - passive) as well as *pemasak* (cook - person), *masakan* (cooking, cookery). Many initial consonants undergo mutation when prefixes are added: e.g. *sapu* (sweep) becomes *penyapu* (broom); *panggil* (to call) becomes *memanggil* (calls, is calling, etc.), *tapis* (sieve) becomes *menapis* (sieves, is sieving, etc.)

In this research we can see that 3.1% of the students involved in the research prefer to use the Malay language whenever their vocabulary command in L2 is exhausted. Other grammatical items of the Malay language do not affect the writing of L2 because most linguistic items in the Malay language are similar to the English language. According to the students these words were used when they have exhausted their limited vocabulary and therefore they resorted to the use of the national language. (refer to Appendix Y, interview with the selected students)

Mohideen. H (1996) too agrees that mother tongue interference as the main cause of errors in writing among Malaysian students. He says that there is mother tongue interference in the areas of syntax, grammar, lexis and pronunciation. Teachers of English in Malaysia are very familiar with erroneous constructions such as using

"although" and "but" in the same sentence. This is in fact a direct influence of Bahasa Malaysia.

### Use of Tamil- Speech Style in Writing

Students who are very Tamil oriented prefer to use the L1 speaking pattern in the writing of L2. Though this is very limited in this research, as only 2.1% of the students did this, it should not be sidelined or overlooked as the researcher believes that such a pattern may occur more frequently if more of their writings are analyzed. One frequently used speech expression in Tamil is to express the degree of the quality of a thing or a person, whereby Tamil speakers are very fond of repeating the word ‘very’ a couple of times to express their depth of the quality of the item they are describing. Therefore such a speech pattern has clearly influenced the writing of L2 by the Tamil school students. This statement is also supported by the interview the researcher had with the L2 teacher. (Refer to Appendix X).

**Table 11: Group Statistics**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Punctuation	Male	50	1.20	2.399	.339
	Female	46	.70	1.331	.196
Missing verb to be	Male	50	.70	1.035	.146
	Female	46	.83	1.122	.165
The use of Tamil word order	Male	50	.36	.631	.089
	Female	46	.20	.542	.080
Wrong Spelling for Plural Nouns	Male	50	.08	.274	.039
	Female	46	.11	.379	.056
	Female	46	.02	.147	.022

The group statistics clearly shows that there is no clear evidence to support if there is a relationship between the L1 influence in L2 and the gender of the sample as the standard error mean in all the influences identified are below one. Therefore we can conclude that gender does not play a role in the L1 influence of L2 writing. Hence we can conclude that in the writing of L1, any student who learns more than a language is influenced by his/her native language.

The following is the class by class description of linguistic items that interfered the samples' writing.

**Table 12: CLASS 1: 5 Intan**

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Punctuation	36	17	.47	.971
Missing verbs to be	36	31	.86	1.073
The use of Tamil word order	36	8	.22	.540
Wrong spelling for plural nouns	36	3	.08	.368
Valid N (listwise)	36			

From the tabulated data we can conclude that there were 17 errors in punctuation followed by 31 in missing verb to be, 8 in the use of Tamil word order and 3 in wrong spelling for plural nouns. These students in this class come from a more educated family



and are better in their studies. Therefore, by and large, the linguistic items did not interfere heavily with their writing as much as other classes.

**Table 13: CLASS 2: 5 Mutiara**

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Punctuation	41	37	.90	1.609
Missing verb to be	41	34	.83	1.160
The use of Tamil word order	41	11	.27	.633
Wrong spelling for plural nouns	41	5	.12	.331
Valid N (listwise)	41			

This is a class with the largest number of students. The students are average performers. The data and analysis from this class clearly shows that the interference of L1 was quite obvious in, punctuation and missing verb to be being more evident than the other linguistic components. A total of 37 punctuation errors were made by the 41 students in this class.

**Table 14: CLASS 3: 5 Ruby**

	N	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Punctuation	19	38	2.00	3.350
Missing verbs to be	19	8	.42	.838
The use of Tamil word order	19	8	.42	.607
Wrong spelling for plural nouns	19	1	.05	.229
Valid N (listwise)	19			

Ruby, being the lowest class (in terms of academic performance), made many mistakes in their writing. Many L1 linguistic items interfered with their L2 writing. Since

there are only 19 students in this class the means for the interference are quite high. Punctuation was the highest (38), followed by missing verb to be (8), the use of Tamil word order (8), and wrong spelling for plural nouns (1). The use of Tamil word order among the students of this class is quite high as they are more Tamil oriented students with weak command of the English language. Therefore we can conclude that the students' educational and home background and L2 command more or less determines the degree of L1 interference in L2. The reason for the interference of missing verb to be is comparatively lower compared to the other better classes is not because they are better than other students in this area.

## **Interviews**

The analyses of exercise books, the questionnaire and the transcription of the interviews were used to seek answers for all the research question.

“The research interview has been defined as ‘two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation,” (Cannell and Kahn, 1968)

The researcher in this survey employed this tool to obtain further data to answer the research questions. It was felt that an interview would allow the respondents to give clearer input on their opinion and attitude towards writing in L2. 5 students, one L1

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

146

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

teacher and one L2 teacher participated in the interview that was conducted during school hours. The researcher conducted one to one interview with the teachers and group interview with the randomly selected students.

The interview data was transcribed from the recordings and analyzed based on the:

- a. The common grammatical errors that the L1 teacher always came across.
- b. The common grammatical errors that the L2 teacher always came across.
- c. The kinds of thinking/perception that the students experienced when they were writing in L2.

### **Interview with the L1 Teacher**

This interview was conducted with the L1 teacher of standard 5 Ruby. From the interview it was quite clear that the chances of mother tongue interference in the writing of L2 were high. The students came from a 100% Tamil educated and speaking parents. Therefore it was quite obvious for the students to master the mother tongue better and faster than the L2. And it was quite likely that these students with high proficiency level of the mother tongue were influenced by the grammatical rules that exist in Tamil in the writing of L2. (Refer to Appendix Z)

Furthermore, from the interview and the literature review we know that the Tamil language has 247 letters in its alphabet compared to the English language, with only 26 letters. Therefore, the chances of people claiming that the Tamil language were an easier subject to master was quite slim. Anyhow, students in a Tamil school still managed to

excel in the language because of the extended teaching hours of the language (Tamil) and it being the medium of instruction in school. According to the L1 teacher, it was highly unlikely that the knowledge of English grammatical rules could interfere or influence the writing of L1. Therefore we could conclude that most of the ‘transfer’ that took place in the students’ writing was “Negative Transfer”, whereby the rules of L1 that are not found in L2, used wrongly in the writing of L2. The researcher did not come across any positive transfer in the data collected. Therefore, the answer to research question No. 2 is, there was no transfer of linguistic items from L2 to L1. Similarly, no linguistic items were transferred positively from L1 to L2 and vice versa. This answers research question No. 3.

### **Interview with the L2 Teacher**

The interview with the L2 teacher of 5 Mutiara shed a lot of doubts for the researcher. As she was a Tamil trained teacher with a Bachelor’s degree in TESL, she understood my research questions and problems better than the other teachers. According to this L2 teacher the students hardly spoke in English in class (Refer to Appendix X).

Researcher:	How do they perform in the English language?
Sumathi:	Well, they perform moderately in their examination but they hardly speak in English in class.

The L2 teacher also stressed that the 60 minutes of teaching hours a week for the English language is definitely insufficient if compared to other language subjects like Bahasa Malaysia. This was also agreed upon by the L1 teacher in her interview. (Refer to Appendix Z)

Researcher: Being a senior teacher in this school, what do you think is the major stumbling block in the students learning of the English language ?  
Karpaham: I think, more time should be allocated for the learning of English, starting from Year 1 ? (like what they've started now for the Year 1)

And this would have seriously contributed to the low proficiency level of L2.

(Refer to Appendix X)

Sumathi : I teach them four periods of 30 minutes each.  
Researcher: Do you think this is enough?  
Sumathi : Definitely not. You know they are already learning their mother tongue and the national language for longer hours compared to English. The complications and interference they have between Tamil and BM are already so great. And with the limited time given to teach English, we the English teachers could hardly explain the differences between these languages to them. Therefore I strongly suggest that ..... and by the way with the introduction of the teaching of science and mathematics in English, more time should be allocated for the teaching of English. I'm very serious about this, you know.

According to the L2 teacher, the students are already having many linguistic problems with their L1 and the Malay language. Therefore learning L2 with limited teaching hours is sure to limit their learning.

The L2 teacher also admitted that at times she had to resort to code-switching in her teaching to consolidate the understanding of certain topics among the students. The students had very limited vocabulary command in L2 and therefore sometimes resorted to the use of national language (Bahasa Malaysia).

### **Interview with the Selected Students**

The interview with the students was conducted to get a clearer picture of the problems they faced in the writing of L2 and to understand their language background. When the students were asked to rank their language competency level, all the students placed their

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

149

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

mother tongue first, followed by the national language and lastly the English language.

(refer to Appendix Y)

Researcher: Could you tell me which language you are very good at, followed by the not so good ? (ranking of language competence )  
All: Tamil, Malay and English.

The L2 teacher in her interview said that the students in her class (5 Mutiara) were poor in English. (Refer to Appendix X)

Researcher: What are the kinds of mistakes they make in their writing?  
Sumathi : Well, to be honest, I don't really analyse their writing. But one thing for sure. They have a very poor command of vocabulary. They really have to learn a lot of new English words. Sometimes they use Malay and Romanized Tamil in their writing.

In contrast the students said that they found the English language easy but their limited vocabulary stopped them from using the language freely. (Refer to Appendix Y)

Researcher: How do you find learning English?  
Menaka & Ganesha: Easy, we understand the language. We always get good marks in English but sometimes we do not know what word to use.  
Puvarasan & Mehnaka: We had so much problems when we were in standard 4 but we are okay now.

To a question on how they found the questionnaire, all the 36 (5 Intan) students answered that the questions were quite difficult and they used the direct translation method to answer the questions. The interview also gave a clear picture that the students hardly used English outside the classroom. And therefore it was quite reasonable to find their writing in L2 being influenced and interfered with by the L1. To a question why they must think in Tamil before they start writing in L2, all the students answered that

they were better in their L1 and this kind of thinking ‘just comes’ automatically to them (they are so used to it) (Refer to Appendix Y).

The discussion and elaboration clearly indicates that the kind of transfer involved is the ‘Negative Transfer’ whereby the grammatical rules in L1 that are not found in L2 were used wrongly in the writing of L2.

### **Summary of Findings and their Implications**

Based on the data collected from the writing analysis, questionnaire and Interviews, it is possible to draw up the following conclusions about the influence of L1 grammatical rules in the writing of L2:

1. The linguistic items such as syntactical rulings, doubling of consonants, Tamil speech pattern, capitalization and failure to use the verb-to-be are influenced by the L1 in the writing of L2 among the Tamil school students.
2. The kind of transfer that dominates the influence is the ‘Negative Transfer’ – whereby the grammatical rules of L1 that are not found in L2 are used wrongly in the writing of L2.
3. Students of Tamil schools should be exposed to some kind of contrastive studies in order to help them understand the differences between L1 and L2.
4. When the limited L2 vocabulary command is exhausted the students have the tendency to use Bahasa Melayu as an alternative in their writing of L2.
5. In order to improve the standard of L2 in Tamil schools, longer teaching hours for the subject should be seriously considered.

6. Students in the Tamil schools should be directly or indirectly taught about the differences of the linguistic items (some, if not all) between the L1 and L2.
7. The research results clearly shows that there is no evidence of positive transfer from the L1 in the writing of L2 among the Tamil school students.

The next chapter is the concluding chapter of this study.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

The main objective of this study was to study the grammatical influence of the mother tongue in the writing of L2, and whether the influence (if any) is a 'Negative Transfer' or a 'Positive Transfer'. The study further seeks to identify the implications of the positive influence and interference in the teaching and learning of the English language in Tamil schools.

In this chapter, the researcher aims to conclude the findings of this study. The various insights that have emerged in the course of this study will be dealt with in the light of the research questions that are:

1. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L1 to L2?
2. What are the linguistic items that have been transferred from L2 to L1?
3. Which linguistic items have been transferred positively from L1 to L2 and vice versa?
4. Which linguistic items have been transferred negatively from L1 to L2 and vice versa?

In recent years, English language teaching in a developing country like Malaysia has taken a new character. A need has arisen to specify the aims of English language learning more precisely in terms of the learning of formal grammar as English is expected to play an important role in our society. Through out the world, students at different

levels of education find it a struggle to learn English. In most countries English has taken a unique position whereby students or scholars are pushed to a situation where they cannot have better career or higher education without the knowledge of English. The students remain in a compulsory situation to learn English in order to remain competitive. In Malaysia English, naturally, was given an important place before independence. In most of the institutions English had been the medium of instruction. The students were happy to learn the language because highly proficient non-native and native speakers of English taught it. The study of English was considered to be superior, not only status wise but also for career. A child was expected to interact through English with its family members, neighbours in various types of interaction.

One common and accepted approach to language teaching is through contrastive method. In other words, the language specific features of both the mother tongue of the learner and the second language are studied thoroughly and an attempt is made to teach the second language and also to prepare instructional materials for second language teaching. There are, of course, many other influences at play when we learn a second language, but the influence that the mother tongue has on the language we produce when we use a second language has become a very important area of study for people interested in second language acquisition, language teaching, ELT publishing, and language in general and is usually referred to as ‘Language Interference’, ‘Transfer’, or ‘Cross-linguistic influence’. It is suggested that the language produced by foreign learners is so unavoidably influenced, and even distorted, by the mother tongue of the

learner that it should rather be termed an ‘Interlanguage’, since it has features of both the target language and the mother tongue. The better the learner is at overcoming language interference, the more diluted that blend will be.

The reliance on similarities between the language being learnt and the mother tongue can be both a help and a hindrance, similarities are expected to lead to positive transfer. This would help the learner to get things right. This is a rich area of study.

While discussing the influence of first language over the second language, it is appropriate to mention what Lado (1971:2) who had said that “those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult.” In this context, it is evident that the language teacher and language learners should ideally know the structures of both the mother tongue and the second languages. Because such knowledge can help the language teacher to identify the areas of influence of mother tongue on the second language and also to develop some teaching techniques to rectify the interference.

Language teaching practice often assumes that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English (a contrastive analysis approach). A native speaker of Tamil language, for example, might face many more difficulties than a native speaker of German, because German is closely related to English, whereas Tamil is not. However it

must be emphasized that not all similarities result in ease of learning and differences in difficulties.

Language learners often produce errors of syntax and pronunciation thought to result from the influence of their L1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the L2, pronouncing certain sounds incorrectly or with difficulty, and confusing items of vocabulary known as false friends. This is known as L1 transfer or "language interference". However, these transfer effects are typically stronger in beginners' language production. SLA research has highlighted many errors which cannot be attributed to the L1, as they are present in learners of many language backgrounds (for example, failure to apply 3rd person present singular -s to verbs, as in 'he make'). Teachers of vernacular primary schools believe that English should only be introduced to the Tamil pupils at a much later stage after the students have had a good grasp of their mother tongue. They believe that the L2 should follow L1, the L2 should be taught in secondary schools

However, Akinbote and Ogunsanwo (2003) have a different view on the use of English language in the early years of the primary school. They opined that the use of mother tongue in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps, not only to preserve and value one's culture but also to develop it lexically. According to the authors the use of English language in the early primary school makes the average primary school child unable to be sufficiently literate in either the mother tongue or English language.

They felt that to use English language at that level will lead to the children having a

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 156  
10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

mental translation of all concepts presented in English language to their mother tongue in order to gain sufficient meaning of the concepts presented. These researchers believe that a citizen that is literate even only in the mother tongue will be sufficiently equipped to live a useful life in the fast changing world. So if permanent literacy is to be promoted in the primary schools the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in schools ought to be encouraged. It is therefore generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child's environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him, as well as to any society.

The learning of English is no more complex than other languages, it has several features which may create difficulties for learners.

Some of the complexities in English Grammar

- Tense and Perfect - English has a relatively large sequence of tenses with some quite subtle differences, such as the difference between the simple past "I ate" and the present perfect "I have eaten." Progressive and perfect progressive forms add complexity. (See English verbs.)
- Functions of auxiliaries - Learners of English tend to find it difficult to manipulate the various ways in which English uses the first auxiliary verb of a tense. These include negation (eg *He hasn't been drinking.*), inversion with the subject to form a question (eg *Has he been drinking?*), short answers (eg *Yes, he*

*has.*) and tag questions (*has he?*). A further complication is that the dummy auxiliary verb *do /does /did* is added to fulfil these functions in the simple present and simple past, but not for the verb *to be*.

- Modal verbs - English also has a significant number of modal auxiliary verbs which each have a number of uses. For example, the opposite of "You must be here at 8" (obligation) is usually "You don't have to be here at 8" (lack of obligation, choice), while "must" in "You must not drink the water" (prohibition) has a different meaning from "must" in "You must not be a native speaker" (deduction). This complexity takes considerable work for most learners to master.
- Idiomatic usage - English is reputed to have a relatively high degree of idiomatic usage. For example, the use of different main verb forms in such apparently parallel constructions as "try to learn", "help learn", and "avoid learning" pose difficulty for learners. Another example is the idiomatic distinction between "make" and "do": "make a mistake", not "do a mistake"; and "do a favour", not "make a favour".
- Articles - English has an appreciable number of articles, including the definite article *the* and the indefinite article *a, an*. At times English nouns can or indeed must be used without an article; this is called the zero article. Some of the differences between definite, indefinite and zero article are fairly easy to learn, but others are not, particularly since a learner's native language may lack articles or use them in different ways than English does. Although the information conveyed by articles is rarely essential for communication, English uses them

frequently (several times in the average sentence), so that they require some effort from the learner.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data collected for this study were obtained by using 3 instruments:

- Questionnaire
- Interviews
- Students' exercise books, workbooks and worksheets

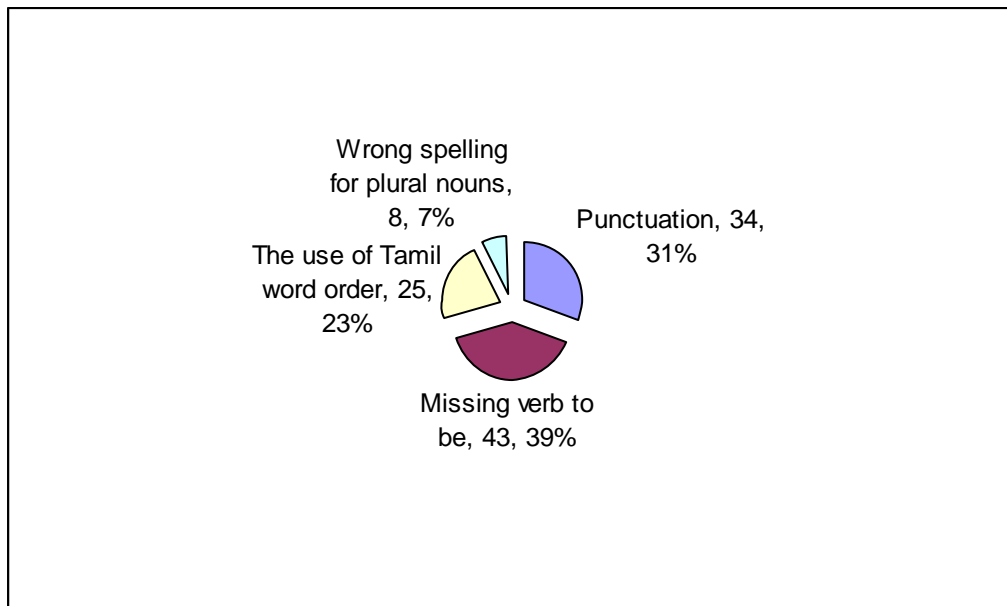
The findings in the data showed that there was interference and negative influence of mother tongue in the writing of L2. The writing analysis clearly showed that majority of the sentences constructed in the writings were to the grammatical patterns of the mother tongue.

The interviews with L2 teachers, selected sample and the literature review clearly showed that the failure to use the capital letter which was 31.3% was due to the non-existence of such requirement in the Tamil writing script. A total 23% of the sentences constructed in the writing analysis had syntactical disorders that are similar to the pupils' mother tongue. Furthermore, a total of 39% of the sentences constructed in the writing analysis were without the use of verb to be that does not exist in the Tamil language.

The use of wrong spelling for the L2 plural nouns were also from the negative transfer from L1. This consisted 7% of the total students in the research. All this was classic evidence for the occurrence of negative transfer.

Apart from the grammatical influence, the students also constructed sentences using one or two Bahasa Melayu words. The interviews clearly showed that the use of Malay words were due to the insufficient vocabulary command in L2. In addition to this, some of the sample used the Tamil speech style pattern in their L2 writing. This further reinforces us to believe that the Tamil linguistic items heavily influenced the writing of L2 among the Tamil school students. Refer to the pie chart below for the illustration of the breakdown of the grammatical items that were negatively transferred.

Breakdown of the Linguistic Items -Interference in L2 Writing





The data also clearly showed that the grammar items that existed in L1 and that did not exist in L2 clearly played an important role in the influence and therefore we can conclude that the kind of non-positive transfer that took place here was 'Negative Transfer'.

The interview with the L1 and L2 teachers also strengthened this data. When the data went through triangulation there's also clear and comprehensive evidence that there was negative influence of mother tongue in the writing of L2. The researcher failed to identify any evidence of positive transfer in this research.

### **Personal insights and Implications of the Findings**

Learning a new language can be a stressful event. Even the best-prepared teacher will encounter problems unconnected, on the surface, to grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. In their introduction to *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, editors Susan Gass and Larry Selinker (1992) list various factors in learning a new language: "age . . . motivation, loyalty to a language, language aptitude, and attitude" (p. 4). Teachers cannot cancel out these factors, but they can, hopefully, lessen the uneasiness or fear felt by most language learning students. Teachers need to be alert to "transfers" and "borrowings" that students may make as they acquire the new language.

By and large, the study explicitly shows that there is a considerable amount of influence of mother tongue in the writing of L2 among the standard 5 students of the said Tamil school. Therefore students of Tamil schools who have to face the challenges of

learning three language subjects, namely, Tamil, English and Malay, should be offered equal teaching hours with equal effort so that one language does not interfere with the other, especially in our Malaysian context. Because of this kind of complications in the early stage of language learning, Tamil school students are at a disadvantaged position in L2 learning and mastery.

It is to be hoped, however, that SLA research will soon provide some fairly more definitive answers to this question. The optimal pedagogical methodology to help the students to gradually eradicate mistakes clearly depends to a large extent on why he or she makes them.

### **Recommendation for Further Studies**

This study looked at the mother tongue influence in the writing of L2 that was carried out with a writing corpus and interviews. It would have yielded more comprehensive and interesting results if there had been more time to study the L1 writing of the sample over a longer period of time.

A similar research programme involving various schools may be conducted with a larger sample to study the L1 influence in the writing of L2 and vice versa. This study was conducted in a big (A Category) Tamil school in an urban area. Thus the results of this study cannot be generalized and applied to all types of Tamil schools in Malaysia. A greater influence and interference could be expected, if this research were to be conducted in a rural school. Researchers with the knowledge of Mandarin language

should carry out such research in Chinese vernacular schools in Malaysia to study the influence of Mandarin on their L2 output, for our purpose, English.

This study only focused on the writing component. Additional research could take the study a step further by including the influence of the speaking (phonological) component. A longitudinal study on the development of phonological skills among Tamil school students would give an additional insights into the influence of L1 on L2 is the speaking component.

There have been very few studies done on the phonological influence between the Tamil language and the English language. Anyhow, there is a common belief that the process of the acquisition of phonological skills in a second language is more influenced by ‘Negative Transfer’ from the learners’ L1 than it is by their inter language grammar.

Poor vocabulary command has been identified as one of the reasons for the standard 5 students not being able to perform well in L2. Therefore more vocabulary building activities should be included in the syllabus.

## **Conclusion**

Small amount of data, carefully analyzed, can be very productive in terms of interpretation. Although in the beginning of the primary school life, these Tamil school students faced a lot of stumbling blocks in the learning of L2, paradoxically they seem to improve by leaps and bounds when they reach the secondary school. The researcher conducted a random survey with ten secondary school students of Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sultan Abdul Samad, Petaling Jaya, who came from Tamil primary school.

The researcher analyzed their essay exercise book and found out that there was not even a single influence of L1 found in their L2 writing. When, where and how they improve their language competency level is still a question that needs to be answered. This could be due to their attitude, motivation, exposure, socialization and the benefit of instruction.

The pupils need both implicit instruction and explicit instruction to improve their grammatical output. In implicit instruction, such as the communicative approach, students are exposed to examples of writing that use certain grammar rules. The communicative approach rests on the idea that grammar structures occur in context, not in the "ordered lists" criticized by Corder. Certainly, the communicative approach has a place in grammar curriculums. Yet Fotos cites research where "learners benefit from formal instruction prior to meaning-focused activities because such instruction promotes their attention to the forms they will encounter" (p. 137). Learners need explicit instruction to help them focus.

The grammar-translation method could benefit the pupils in Tamil schools to understand the L2 better since both languages can be used actively in classrooms. According to Davis and Pearce (2000), translation is regarded as a very good technique to practise the application of rules and for transformation exercise. In order to improve their grammatical performance "Limited response questions which ask students to perform certain tasks, multiple choice completion, simple completion of sentences and cloze tests" may be provided (Thirumalai, 2002:127).

The mother tongue is the child's environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built, children learn through communicating in a language, which

they understand. These recommendations are made in order to solve some of the problems militating against students' competence in English language in a Tamil school. Having discovered that the use of mother tongue in school interferes with students performance in English, the English language should also be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom. Both teachers and students should endeavour to improve their proficiency level of the language. Teachers need to do more than teaching theories in class. Proper method of teaching and appropriate instructional materials should be adopted to complement teacher's knowledge.

This goes a long way in influencing the teaching and learning process in the English language. Materials selected should be commensurable with the grade or maturity level of students. Good reading habit and library study should also be developed in the students. Students should be encouraged to approach reading with alertness and a critical mind. They should be made to develop a taste for books which is significant in the achievement of good results in English language in the Primary School Assessment also known as UPSR. The relevant authorities should organize debates and essay competitions among students within and outside their schools. Students should also be given the opportunity to explain points and express views in class discussion and any error made should be corrected by the teacher without any intimidation as these will enhance a proper evaluation of learners' performance or progress in the English language. The pupils need to be encouraged to use English at home with their school-going siblings, alongside their native language.

Provision of a well-equipped library should be made in all the vernacular schools and community. Textbooks and workbooks that are useful in English language should be made available in the library to augment the teachers' and students' efforts. The majority of the students lack relevant reading materials because of their poor socio-economic background. Teachers must continually update their knowledge within their discipline. They must acquire information about new methods and materials that will make their teaching more effective. These can be achieved by participating in in-service courses, workshops, participating in and attending professional meetings and embarking on postgraduate programmes which can extend their present knowledge as well as expose them to areas within which they had no previous or little contact. Above all, if all the recommendations are strictly adhered to, there will be great improvement on students' performance in English language in the Tamil schools of Malaysia.

By and large the findings reveal that mother tongue negatively influences the students written output and results in poor performance in the English language at primary school level and that there are also other factors contributing to students' poor performance in the language. These other factors are inadequate exposure to good models of language use, lack of textbooks, home language background and lack of opportunities for professional growth and development of teachers. On the whole, the performance of students in English is poor, and if the discovered factors are not tackled on time, it will cause a drastic decline in the standard of English education. Finally, I think students of vernacular schools are capable of learning all the three languages efficiently if equal teaching hours are invested on them.

It is hoped that this study would contribute to the understanding of Tamil school pupils' acquisition of English as an L2 and efforts will be made to upgrade their English language proficiency to prepare them for secondary education which includes more learning hours in English.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. H. Arden, (1942). *A progressive grammar of the Tamil language*, 5th edition,.
- Akinbote, O.E., E. Odolown T, Ogunsanuvo (2003). *The use of indigenous language in promoting permanent literacy and numeracy in the UBE programme*. In Ayodele Bamisaye, Wusa Zuoke, I.A. and Okediran A. (Eds) *Education this Millenium. Innovative in theory and Practise Ibadan, Macmilan* pp 415-422
- Allwright, R. (1983). 'Classroom centered research on language teaching and learning. A brief historical overview' *TESOL Quarterly* 17: 191-204
- Ames, C., & Ames, R. (1989). *Research in motivation in education*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Ann L Casebeer and Marja J Verhoef. (1997). *Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research Method. Considering the possibilities for enhancing the study of chronic diseases*. *Chronic Diseases in Canada* Volume 18, N0 3
- Bhadriraju. K (2001). *The Dravidian Languages* Cambridge University Press
- Bernicot, J. (1998). *Communication and language development*. In A. Demetriou, W.
- Bolton Kingsley and Kachru Braj B.(2006). *World Englishes, Critical Concepts in Linguistic* Volume 5, Routledge London and New York
- Bowen, J. Donald, Harold Madsen, and Ann Hilferty. (1985). *TESOL Techniques and Procedures*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Brown, H. D. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: interactive language teaching methodology*. New York: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Cannel, C. F., & Kahn, R. L. (1968). Interviewing. In E. Aronson (Ed.), *The handbook of social psychology* (2 ed., Vol. II Research methods, pp. 526-595). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.



Chaturvedi, M.G. 1973. *A Contrastive Study of Hindi-English Phonology*, National publishing House, Delhi.

Chen, H. & Leung, Y. (1989). *Patterns of lexical processing in a nonnative language*. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 15, 316-325.

Chomsky, N. (1959). *Review of "verbal behaviour" (skinner 1957)*. *Language* 35:26-58, 1959.

Chomsky, N. (1972). *Language and Mind*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York.

Chomsky, N. (1975). *Reflections on Language*. Pantheon: New York.

Chomsky N. (1979). *Language and Responsibility*. Pantheon: New York.

Chomsky, Noam, (1986). *Knowledge of language: its nature, origin and use*. Praeger, New York.

Clark , H. H. & Clark, E. V. (1977). *Psychology and Language*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York.

Cook, V. (1989). '*Reciprocal Language Teaching: Another Alternative*'. *Modern English Teacher*, 16, 3\4, 48-53.

Cook, V. (1991). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. Edward Arnold/Hodder Headline Group: Melbourne.

Clyne, Michael G. (Ed.). (1992). *Pluricentric languages: Differing norms in different nations*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Clyne, Michael G.; & Kipp, Sandra. (1999). *Pluricentric languages in an immigrant context: Spanish, Arabic and Chinese*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Cook, V J, (1988). *Chomsky's universal grammar. An introduction*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

Cohen. L and Manion. L ,(1994). 4<sup>th</sup> ed. *Research methods in education*, London. Routledge

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

Cook, V. (1997). 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*: Arnold, London

Corder, P. (1971). The significance of learners' errors [C]. In J. Richards (ed.). *Error Analysis* [A]. London: Longman,

Corder, S. P. (1971). *Idiosyncratic dialects and error analysis*. *IRAL*, 9, (2), 147-160.

Corder, S. P. (1978). Language-learner language. In J. C. Richards (Ed), *Understanding second and foreign language learning* (pp. 71-92). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error analysis and interlanguage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Daries, P and Pearse, E (2000) *Success in English Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

de Bot, Kees; lowie, Wander and Vespoor, Marjolijn. (2005) *Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Routledge.

Denzin, K. (1978). *The research act*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Dosie & C.F.M. van Lieshout (Eds.) *Life-Span Developmental Psychology* (pp. 137-178). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Dulay, H. & Burt, M. (1974). Natural sequences in child language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 24, 37-53.

Dulay, H and M. Burt (1977). "Remarks on Creativity in Language Acquisition." New York: Regents

Ellis, R (1985). *Understanding Second language Acquisition*: London, Oxford University Press

Ellis, R. (1996). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language research and language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (Ed.). (2001). *Form-focused instruction and second language learning*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Ellis, R. (2002). The place of grammar instruction in the second/foreign language curriculum. In Hinkel, E. & S. Fotos (Eds.), *New perspectives on grammar teaching in second language classrooms*, (pp. 17-34). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Elman, J., Bates, E. et al. (1996). *Rethinking innateness*. MIT Press.

Fillmore, L. W., & Snow, C. E. (2002). What teachers need to know about language. In C. A. Adger, C. E. Snow, & D. Christian (Eds.), *What teachers need to know about language* (pp. 7-54). McHenry, IL and Washington, DC: Delta Systems, and Center for Applied Linguistics.

Fotos, S. (2002). Structure-based interactive tasks for the EFL grammar learner. In E. Hinkel & S. Fotos (Eds.), *New perspectives on grammar teaching in second language classrooms* (pp. 135-154). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Frankel, R and Wallen, Norman, (1996). 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*. McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Frodesen. J and Eyring, J, (1997) *Grammar Dimensions: Form, Meaning, and Use*, 2nd Ed. Heinle & Heinle: Boston.

Freeman, D. (1996). *Doing Teacher Research: From Inquiry to Understanding*: Heinle & Heinle Publishers

Fromkin, Victoria; Robert Rodman, Robert and Nina Hyams (2003). *An Introduction to Language*. Boston: Thomson

Gardner, R.C. (1996), Motivation and second language acquisition: perspectives, *Journal of the CAAL*, 18(2): 19-42.

Gardner, R.C. (1985), *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*, London: Edward Arnold.

Gardner, R.C. (1980), On the validity of affective variables in second language acquisition: conceptual, contextual and statistical considerations, *Language Learning*, 30, 255-270.

- Gardner, R.C. (1979), Social psychological aspects of second language acquisition, In Giles and St. Clair.
- Gardner, R.C., Ginsberg, R., and Smythe, P. (1976), Attitudes and motivation in second language learning: course related changes, *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 32: 243-66.
- Gardner, R.C., Lalonde, R.N. and Moorcroft, R. (1985), The role of attitudes and motivation in Second Language Learning: Correlational and Experimental Considerations, *Language Learning: A Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 35/2: 207-227.
- Gardner, R.C. and Lambert, E. (1972), *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R.C. and MacIntyre, P.D. (1993), A student's contributions to second language learning: Part II: Affective variables, *Language Teaching*, 26/1: 1-11.
- Gardner, R.C. and MacIntyre, P.D. (1992), A student's contributions to second language learning: Part I: Cognitive variables, *Language Teaching*, 25/1: 211-20.
- Gardner, R.C. and MacIntyre, P.D. (1991), An instrumental motivation in language study: who says it isn't effective? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13: 57-72.
- Gardner, R.C. and Smythe, P.C. (1981), On the development of the attitude/motivation test battery, *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 37, 510-525.
- Gass, S. & Selinker, L.(1994). *Second language acquisition: an introductory course*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gardner, R.C. (1982). *Language attitudes and language learning*. In E. Bouchard Ryan & H. Giles, Attitudes towards language variation (pp. 132-147). Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R.C., & Lambert, W.E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation : Second language learning*. Newbury House.
- Giles, H., & Coupland, N. (1991). *Language : Contexts and consequences*. Open University Press.
- Gregg, K. (1984). Krashen's monitor and Occam's razor. *Applied Linguistics*, 5, 79-100.
- Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) 172  
10 : 4 April 2010
- Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)  
*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

Harmer, Jeremy (2001). *The Practices of English Language Teaching*. Pearson Education Limited.

Hagège, C. (1999). *The child between two languages*, Polis editions, Athens. Editions Odile Jacob,

Hoffmann, H. S. (1997). Imprinting: A brief description. Available: <http://www.animatedsoftware.com/family/howardsh/imprint.htm>

Hubbard, P., Jones, H., Thornton, B. and Wheeler, R. (1996). *A Training Course for TEFL*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hudson, G. (2000). *Essential introductory linguistics*. Blackwell Publishers.

Hyacinth Gaudart (1992). *Bilingual Education in Malaysia*: James Cook University of North Queensland

James C. (1980). *Contrastive Analysis*: London, Longman

Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (2000). *KBSR BI SJK (C/T) T 3*: Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

Keys, K (2002). "First Language Influence on the Spoken English of Brazilian Students of EFL", *ELT Journal* 56(1):41-46; doi:10.1093/elt/56.1.41  
[Oxford University Press](#)

Kilborn, K. (1994). Learning a language late: Second language acquisition in adults. In M. A. Gernsbacher (ed.), *Handbook of psycholinguistics*. San Diego: Academic Press

Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. London & New York: Longman.

Krishnamurti, B (2003). *The Dravidian Languages*, Cambridge Language Surveys, [Cambridge University Press](#), ISBN 0521771110

Kua Kia Soong (1998). *Mother Tongue Education of Malaysian Ethnic Minorities*: Dong Jiao Zong higher Learning Centre

- Krashen, D. Stephen (1982). *Practice and Principles in SLA*: Oxford, Pergamon
- Krashen, Stephen D (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Prentice-Hall International,.
- Krashen, Stephen D. (1988). *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Prentice-Hall International,.
- Lado.R (1957)..*Linguistics across cultures*: University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor
- Lado, R. (1964). *Language teaching: a scientific approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nemser, W. (1971). Approximate systems of foreign language learners. *IRAL*, 9, 115- 123.
- Lakkis, K. and Malak, *Understanding the Transfer of Prepositions. FORUM, Vol 38, No 3, July-September 2000.* (Online edition: <http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/vols/vol38/no3/p26.htm>)
- Larson-Freeman, D., & Long, M.H. (1994). *An introduction to second language acquisition research*. Longman.
- Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). *The biological foundations of language*. New York: Wiley
- Lott, D. (1983), Analysing and counteracting interference errors, *ELT Journal*, vol.37/3, pp 256- 261.
- MacLean, Marion S. & Mohr, Marian M. (1999). [Teacher- researchers at work](#). Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project, p. 56-66.
- McKeough, A. (1995). *Teaching for transfer: Fostering generalization in learning*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- McLaughlin, B. (1984-1985). *Second language acquisition in childhood (Vols. 1-2)*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Mitchel, R and Myles, F *Second language learning theories*: Arnold, London

Mohideen, H. (1991). *An Error Analysis in the Written English of Malay Students at Pre-University Level with Special Reference to Students at the Matriculation Centre, International Islamic University, Malaysia*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. University of Wales.

Mohideen, H.(1993). *Towards Effective Error Correction of Written Grammatical Errors*. H. Gaudart and M.K. David, (eds). *Towards More Effective Learning and Teaching of English*. Petaling Jaya. Malaysian English Language Teaching Association.

Mohideen, H (1996). *Error Analysis - Contributory Factors to Students' Errors, with Special Reference to Errors in Written English* The English Teacher Vol XXV October 1996

Morrow, P.R. (1987). The users and uses of English in Japan. *World Englishes*, 6(1), 49-62.

Nayak, H., Hansen, N., Krueger, N., & McLaughlin, B. (1990). *Language-learning strategies in monolingual and multilingual adults*. *Language Learning*, 40, 221–244.

Nemser, W. (1971). *Approximative systems of foreign language learners*. *IRAL*, 9, (2), 115-124.

Newport, E. (1990). Maturational constraints on language learning. *Cognitive Science*, 14, 11-28.

Nguyen, Thanh Ha. (1995) “*First Language Transfer and Vietnamese Learners' Oral Competence in English Past Tense Marking: A Case Study.*”, *Master of Education (TESOL) Research Essay, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia*.

Nickel, G. ( 1971). *Papers in Contrastive Linguistics*. CUP, Cambridge.

Oxford, R., & Shearin, J. (1994). Language learning motivation: Expanding the theoretical framework. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 12-28.

Nunan, D (2000). *Language Teaching Methodology*: Pearson Education Limited. Edinburg.

- Paranthamanar A.K. (1988). '*Nalle Tamil Elluthevenduma*' Pari Nilaiyam, Chennai
- Patton, M.Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA Sage.
- Pea, R. D. (1987). Socializing the knowledge transfer problem. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 11, 639-663.
- Pea, R. D. (1988). Putting knowledge to use. In Raymond S. Nickerson & Philip R. Zoghbiates (Eds.), *Technology in education: Looking toward 2020*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Percy, K., & Ramsden, P. (1980). *Independent Study: Two Examples from English Higher Education*. The Society for Research into Higher Education, University of Surrey: Guildford, Surrey.
- Perkins, D. (1991). Educating for insight. *Educational Leadership*, 49, 4-8. [EJ 432 771]
- Perkins, D., Jay, E., & Tishman, S. (1993). New conceptions of thinking: From ontology to education. *Educational Psychologist*, 28, 67-85.
- Poplack, S. (1980). '*Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English y termino en espanol*', *Linguistics*, 18, 581-616.
- Power, Brenda Miller (1996). What to Do With What You've Written. [Taking note: Improving your observational notetaking](#). York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Prucha, J. (1983). '*Using Language: A Sociofunctional Approach*', in Bain, B. (Ed.) (1983). *The Sociogenesis of Language and Human Conduct*. Plenum Press: New York.
- Processes, Trans. & Ed. by Cole, M., John-Steiner, J., Scribner, S., & Souberman, E. (1978). Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA.
- Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum ( 2001). *Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran*: Dewan bahasa dan Pustaka
- Raimes, Ann. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sampson, G. (2005). *The "Language Instinct" Debate*. Continuum International Publishing Group.



Schumann, J. H. (1975). Affective factors and the problem of age in second language acquisition. *Language Learning* 25, 205-235.

Schumann, J. H. (1976a). Second language acquisition research: Getting a more global look at the learner. In Brown, H. (Ed.), *Papers in second language acquisition, language learning*. Special Issue 4. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan State University.

Schumann, J. H. (1976b). Second language acquisition: the [pidginization](#) hypothesis. *Language Learning*, 26, (2), 391-408.

Schumann, J. H. (1978a). Social and psychological factors in second language acquisition. In J. C. Richards (Ed.), *Understanding second & foreign language learning* (pp. 163-178). Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Schumann, J. H. (1978b). *The pidginization process: A model for second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Schumann, J. H. (1990). *Extending the scope of the [acculturation](#)/pidginization model to include [cognition](#)*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 24, 667-684.

Schumann, J. and Stenson, J. (1976). *New Frontiers in second Language Learning*: University of California, San Diego

Schütz, Ricardo. (2005). "Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition." *English Made in Brazil* <<http://www.sk.com.br/sk-krash.html>>. Online. 28 de março de

Selinker, L. (1972). *Interlanguage*. *IRAL*, 10, (3), 209-231.

Selinker, L., & Lakshamanan, U. (1992). [Language transfer](#) and fossilization: The "Multiple Effects Principle". In S. M. Gass, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Language transfer in language learning* (pp. 197-216). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Selinker, L., & Lamendella, J. T. (1980). *Fossilization in interlanguage*

Sivert, S., & Egbert, J. (1995). Using a language learning environment framework to build a computer-enhanced classroom. *College ESL*, 5, 53-66. [EJ 519 984]

Skehan, P. (1993). *Individual differences in second-language learning*. Edward Arnold.

Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal Behaviour*. *Appleton-Century-Crofts*: New York.

Spolsky, B. (1985). Formulating a theory of second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 7, 269-288. [EJ 334 501]

Steinberg, D (1993). *An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*: Longman London and N. York

Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001). *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Interference and Other Problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thirumalai, M. S. (1977). *Language, Thought, and Disorder*. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

Thirumalai, M.S. (2002). *An Introduction to TESOL. Language in India* [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) Vol.2: April 2002

Towell, R and Hawkins. R (1994). *Approaches to second language acquisition*

Vygotsky, L. S.(1962). *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological*

White,L. (1989a). *Universal Grammar and second language acquisition* (Rev. ed.) Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Winner, L. (1977). *Autonomous Technology: Technics-Out-Of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Boston.

Wode, H (1984). 'Some theoretical implications of L2 acquisition research and the grammar of interlanguages.' In Davies and Cripser.

Xiaofei Lu (2004) "Promoting Learner Awareness of Language Transfer Errors in ICALL" in Proceeding of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching, pp. 521-530. Beijing, August 8-12, 2004.

Young. R (1991). *Variation in Inter-language Morphology*: Peter Lang.NY

## APPENDICES

### Appendix C

1. ஆங்கிலத்தில் எழுதும் முன், நீ உன் மனதில் என்ன நினைப்பாய் ?

.....  
.....

2. ஒவ்வொரு வார்த்தையாக நினைப்பாயா அல்லது ஒரு முழு வாக்கியமாக நினைப்பாயா ?

.....  
.....

3. நீ வேறேதும் மொழியில் சிந்திப்பாயா ?

.....  
.....

## Appendix D

	அ	ஆ	இ	ஈ	ஊ	ஊ	எ	ஏ	ஐ	ஓ	ஔ	ஔ
க்	க	கா	கி	கீ	கு	கூ	கெ	கே	கை	கொ	கோ	கௌ
ங்	ங	நா	நி	நீ	நு	நூ	நெ	நே	நை	நொ	நோ	நௌ
ச்	ச	சா	சி	சீ	சு	சூ	செ	சே	சை	சொ	சோ	சௌ
ஞ்	ஞ	ஞா	ஞி	ஞீ	ஞு	ஞூ	ஞெ	ஞே	ஞை	ஞொ	ஞோ	ஞௌ
ட்	ட	டா	டி	டீ	டு	டூ	டெ	டே	டை	டொ	டோ	டௌ
ண்	ண்	ணா	ணி	ணீ	ணு	ணூ	ணெ	ணே	ணை	ணொ	ணோ	ணௌ
த்	த	தா	தி	தீ	து	தூ	தெ	தே	தை	தொ	தோ	தௌ
ந்	ந	நா	நி	நீ	நு	நூ	நெ	நே	நை	நொ	நோ	நௌ
ப்	ப	பா	பி	பீ	பு	பூ	பெ	பே	பை	பொ	போ	பௌ
ம்	ம	மா	மி	மீ	மு	மூ	மெ	மே	மை	மொ	மோ	மௌ
ய்	ய	யா	யி	யீ	யு	யூ	யெ	யே	யை	யொ	யோ	யௌ
ர்	ர	ரா	ரி	ரீ	ரு	ரூ	ரெ	ரே	ரை	ரொ	ரோ	ரௌ
ல்	ல	லா	லி	லீ	லு	லூ	லெ	லே	லை	லொ	லோ	லௌ
வ்	வ	வா	வி	வீ	வு	வூ	வெ	வே	வை	வொ	வோ	வௌ
ழ்	ழ	ழா	ழி	ழீ	ழு	ழூ	ழெ	ழே	ழை	ழொ	ழோ	ழௌ
ள்	ள	ளா	ளி	ளீ	ளு	ளூ	ளெ	ளே	ளை	ளொ	ளோ	ளௌ
ற்	ற	றா	றி	றீ	று	றூ	றெ	றே	றை	றொ	றோ	றௌ
ன்	ன	னா	னி	னீ	னு	னூ	னெ	னே	னை	னொ	னோ	னௌ

## Appendix X

### Interview 1 (Transcript of Interview with L2 Teacher )

Researcher : Hi, Sumathi. Thank you for sparing your free time for this interview.

Sumathi : It's okay.

Researcher : How long have you been in this school Sumathi?

Sumathi : Approximately fourteen years. I've been teaching here ever since I got my first posting after college.

Researcher : How do you find teaching in the afternoon?

Sumathi : I find it quite boring. I hope I get my new posting soon, ..... by the way actually I'm a TESL graduate .... And move on to a secondary school.

Researcher : What did you specialize in teachers training college?

Sumathi : Actually, I was trained to teach Tamil. I obtained good results in STPM Tamil papers and I was offered this course in 1987 in Maktab Perguruan Seri Kota. But later in 1999 I furthered my studies via the distance learning programme in TESL in UPM. And after my graduation I was asked to teach English by my evening supervisor.

- Researcher : That means you are equally good in English and Tamil.
- Sumathi : I don't know. Maybe.
- Researcher : Do you enjoy teaching English?
- Sumathi : Sure. Definitely.
- Researcher : What classes do you teach?
- Sumathi : I teach all the four standard 5 classes. And I'm also the class teacher of 5 Intan.
- Researcher : What is the yardstick used to separate the students according to their classes ? Are they streamed? And, the names of the classes sound familiar .....
- Sumathi : The students are actually streamed based on their final examination performances in the previous year. And the classes are named after great gemstones.
- Researcher : Could you please tell me more about the students in your class ?
- Sumathi : Sure. There are 34 students in Intan. This class is considered as one of the best classes among the standard five classes. Most of the students in this class are prefects and are highly motivated students. They are very impulsive but responsible. But the poor ones are fairly poor and the rich ones are really rich. There is big social gap between the students in the class. Anyhow, their parents are not really keen on spending big money for the children's

education. The parents come to school only once, in the beginning of the year and after that you can hardly see them in school.

Researcher : Do you find any differences in the academic achievements of the students based on the social status ?

Sumathi : No. Not actually. There are children from poor family who excel better in their studies compared to the rich ones. Therefore I would not say that financial status of a child determines his / her performance in school.

Researcher : How do they perform in the English language?

Sumathi : Well, they perform moderately in their examination but they hardly speak in English in class.

Researcher : How many periods of English do they have in a week?

Sumathi : I teach them four periods of 30 minutes each.

Researcher : Do you think this is enough?

Sumathi : Definitely not. You know they are already learning their mother tongue and the national language for longer hours compared to English. The complications and interference they have between Tamil and BM are already so great. And with the limited time given to teach English, we the English teachers could hardly explain the differences between these languages to them. Therefore

I strongly suggest that ..... and by the way with the introduction

of the teaching of science and mathematics in English, more time should be allocated for the teaching of English. I'm very serious about this, you know.

Researcher : Do they answer / speak in English in the classroom? Does teaching and learning really take place in English ? Or you have to do a lot of translation for them?

Sumathi : Of course, I teach in English. But then, there are times where you have to explain to them in Tamil. But I try not to make it a routine. And I really have to pressure them to make them answer in English.

Researcher : What are the kinds of mistakes they make in their writing?

Sumathi : Well, to be honest, I don't really analyse their writing. But one thing for sure. They have a very poor command of vocabulary. They really have to learn a lot of new English words. Sometimes they use Malay and Romanized Tamil in their writing. In terms of mother tongue interference, I'm not very sure as I've not made any serious attempt to check if there was such interference in their writing. Maybe with your inter-language studies I can learn some new things. Anyhow I've brought some of the students' English exercise books for you to see



Researcher : Thank you very much.

*(The researcher goes through all the five exercise books brought by Madam Sumathi. The researcher could not detect any glaring mistakes as most of the exercises by the students are copied from the blackboard. The students haven't really constructed their own sentences or composed a composition without the teacher's help. Therefore the researcher could not postulate that there have not been any errors in their writing. Therefore the researcher decided to give worksheets to be done in the classroom in the presence of the researcher. )*

Finally, what do you think should be done to improve the standard of the English Language in Tamil schools? And does the school management offer any kinds of assistance to the English teachers?

Sumathi : I think, the teaching hours should be extended and equated with the number of teaching periods of Bahasa Melayu.. In terms of assistance from the management, I think they've been very helpful in assisting the English teachers to carry out all the projects planned by the English Department.

Researcher : One more question Sumathi, among the three languages that they learn in school, could you please rank them according to their level of competency.

Sumathi : Sure. Obviously the mother tongue comes first, followed by the

national language and last but not least the English language.

Researcher : Thank you for being so helpful Sumathi.

Sumathi : You are welcome.

## Appendix Y

Interview 2 (Transcript of Interview with 5 students selected by the researcher)

Researcher : Could you please tell me your names?

Juliana : I'm Juliana.

Nanthini : I'm Nanthini.

Puvarasan : I'm Puvarasan.

Mehnaka : I'm Mehnaka.

Ganesha : I'm Ganesha.

Researcher : How old are you guys?

All : We are eleven years old.

Researcher : How long have you been in this school?

All : We have been here for almost five years.

Researcher : What language do you speak at home?

Juliana & Nanthini: Tamil and Bahasa Melayu.

The others : Tamil and English.

Researcher : Could you tell me which language you are very good at, followed

by the not so good ? (ranking of language competence )

All : Tamil, Malay and English.

Researcher : How do you find learning English?

Menaka & Ganesha : Easy, we understand the language. We always get good marks in English but sometimes we do not know what word to use.

Puvarasan & Mehnaka: We had so much problems when we were in standard 4 but we are okay now.

Researcher : Why did you have so much problems in standard 4?

Juliana: : I didn't understand the words at all.

Ganasha: I always make a lot of spelling mistakes.

Researcher : Do you still make the spelling mistakes?

Kumar : Yes, I still have problems in writing in English.

Researcher : Why do you think you are weak in English spelling?

Shamila : Because we don't use English all the times like Tamil and Malay.

Kumar : We don't do spelling in the classroom.

Researcher : Do you all read any English books other than the books used in the classroom?

Arun : No, my father doesn't buy any English books at home.

Lechumanan : No, I don't understand the English stories, therefore I don't read anything in English.

Shamila : Sometimes I read easy to understand English storybooks in the school library.

- Nisha : No, I don't really understand the books in the library.
- Kumar : Yes, sometimes my father buys English newspapers at home and whenever he's free he teaches me to read.
- Researcher : How do you find the translation tests that you did in the classroom?
- All : Quite difficult but we answered all the questions.
- Researcher : How did you actually answer all the questions?
- Arun : I think in Tamil and then I write in English.
- Lechumanan : I translated one by one (word) in English.
- Shamila : I think in Tamil and then write in English one by one word.
- Nisha : I also think in Tamil first and then translate them in English.
- Kumar : I read the whole Tamil sentence and then translate them in English.
- Researcher : Does that mean that for every Tamil word that you write down in English word?
- All : Yes.
- Researcher : Other than your English teacher speaking to you in the classroom in English, do you speak or listen to any other English words in school ?
- All : No.
- Researcher : Do you sometimes mix Tamil when you are speaking English with your friends ?
- All : Yes, sometimes.

- Researcher : Do you sometimes mix Tamil when you are writing in English?
- All : No, sir.
- Researcher : What do you do when you do not know an English word when you are writing in English?
- Kumar : I use BM.
- Nisha : I also use BM.
- Arun : I don't write anything.
- Researcher : Do you think what you've learnt in Tamil sometimes disturbs you when you are speaking or writing in English ?
- Kumar : Yes. Sometimes when I write the English sentences, I always write after thinking about the sentences in Tamil first, and then I translate in English.
- Lechumanan : Before I speak and write, I imagine the sentence in Tamil and then say them in English.
- Researcher : Why do you have to think in Tamil first?
- Arun : Because we know Tamil better than any other languages and it just comes to us.
- Shamila : Because we always speak and think in Tamil most of the time.
- Researcher : Okay kids. That's all for today. Thank you very much.

## Appendix Z

### Interview 3 (Transcript of Interview with L1 Teacher)

- Researcher : Thank you Ms Karpaham, for making yourself free for the interview.
- Karpaham : It's okay.
- Researcher : What are you trained to teach? Could you please tell me about your teaching experience ?
- Karpaham : I am trained to teach Tamil. I'm a college-trained teacher. I've been teaching for the past 20 years ..... About 15 years in this school. And currently teaching the Year 5 students.
- Researcher : How do you find the competency level of Tamil among your students?
- Karpaham : Good. Most of the standard 3 students come from a Tamil speaking home and they are well versed in the language.
- Researcher : What do you think contributed to their proficiency?
- Karpaham : Oh ..... There are many factors. Firstly Tamil is their L1. I also think that their parents are playing an important role as most of the students' parents are Tamil educated and therefore they are able to teach the students at home. And the students are weak in other language subjects because they do not get proper guide at home.

The parents are also very dependent on the school when it comes to the teaching of BM and English. They can't afford to send their kids to tuition centres. The students read Tamil newspapers and watch a lot of Tamil movies. They made up a lot of language skills from these activities.

Researcher : Do you think that Tamil is an easier subject compared to English?

Karpaham : No, I don't think so because there are 247 letters in the Tamil alphabet compared to 26 in English.

Researcher : Do you know any major differences between these two languages?

Karpaham : Not actually. My English is not that good. But I know that in Tamil we do not have capital letters ..... like in the English Language. And we use all other punctuation that exists in English.

Researcher : How do the students fare in the examination, particularly in Tamil language?

Karpaham : By and large they are good except for the 'very poor' cases.

Researcher : Do you think that they do well in Tamil because of the extended teaching hours compared to other language subjects ?

Karpaham : Of course, that is one of the reasons. Furthermore they also learn other subjects in Tamil.

Researcher : When they write in Tamil, have you ever come across students' writing being influenced by the English language ?

Karpaham : Could you elaborate? I don't really understand.

- Researcher : Like, have you ever come across a sentence like, “*Ali utheithan (kicked ) panthei ( the ball )*” instead of “ *Ali panthei ( ball ) utheithan ( kicked ) { Romanized Tamil }*”
- Karpaham : Not actually. I don’t think the students’ L1 writing is influenced by English or by BM.
- Researcher : Do the students often speak in other languages during your class?
- Karpaham : No. They speak strictly Tamil. Once in a blue moon some smart students use either English or BM in their speaking but not in their writing.
- Researcher : Being a senior teacher in this school, what do you think is the major stumbling block in the students learning of the English language ?
- Karpaham : I think, more time should be allocated for the learning of English, starting from Year 1 ? (like what they’ve started now for the Year 1)
- Researcher : Do you think if more time is allocated for English, the learning of mother tongue will be affected ?
- Karpaham : No, because the medium of instruction in school and home is Tamil and therefore Tamil language will sustain its supremacy in Tamil schools.
- Researcher : That’s very confident answer. Thank you very much, Ms Karpaham.



## Appendix XYZ

### CURRICULUM CONTENT

#### 1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

In acquiring the four language skills, learners are required to perform tasks so that the following outcomes can be achieved.

##### 1.0 The Skill of LISTENING

The listening component aims at developing learners' ability to listen to and understand the spoken language better. The sub-skills of listening range from the basic level of sound, word and phrase recognition to an understanding of the whole text. Learners are encouraged to listen to various text types so that they will become familiar with the sounds, intonation and stress patterns of the English language as well as to get to know the correct pronunciation of words and the use of certain expressions. Learners are also encouraged to respond to the information or message heard in a variety of ways including verbal and non-verbal forms. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to listen to and understand various text types such as announcements, instructions, and message. They should be able to:

1.1 Listen to and discriminate similar and different sounds of the English language;

1.2 Listen to and repeat accurately the correct pronunciation of words, and the correct intonation and word stress when uttering phrases, expressions and sentences;

1.3 Acquire vocabulary and understand the meaning of words and phrases in context;

1.4 Listen to and follow simple instructions and directions accurately;

1.5 Obtain information from texts listened to in relation to:

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

193

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

- main ideas
- specific details
- sequence
- cause and effect relationships

1.6 Listen to and enjoy the rhyme, rhythm and sounds of poetry, jazz chants and songs; and

1.7 Listen to and enjoy stories, fables and other tales of imagination and fantasy and predict outcomes, and draw conclusions at a level suited to their ability.

## 2.0 The Skill of SPEAKING

As speaking is linked closely to listening, learners are taught to listen carefully to what is spoken and give an appropriate response. In the development of oral skills, learners are taught how to ask questions politely when seeking information or clarification and to reply giving relevant information. Learners are also taught to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas simply when talking to friends and older people. To this end, learners are taught to use appropriate words, phrases and expressions that do not offend others which can occur with the lack of proficiency. In making their utterances understood by others, learners are taught to pronounce words correctly and to speak clearly with the right stress and intonation. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to talk to friends, relatives, teachers and other people confidently using simple language and with an acceptable level of grammar. They should be able to:

2.1 Speak clearly by pronouncing words accurately, and speaking with the correct stress, intonation and sentence rhythm;

- 2.2. Talk confidently on topics of interest in simple language;
- 2.3 Express thoughts and feelings and talk about things heard, read, seen, and viewed in simple language;
- 2.4 Ask questions politely to obtain information and clarification;
- 2.5 Give relevant information politely in response to enquiries made:
- to state
  - to identify
  - to disagree
  - to make comparisons
- 2.6 Take simple messages and convey them accurately;
- 2.7 Make and receive telephone calls using polite speech forms;
- 2.8 Tell stories based on pictures and other stimuli, and recite simple poems;
- 2.9 Talk about the people, places and moral values of the stories heard, read and viewed using simple language;
- 2.10 Perform a variety of functions in a social context such as exchanging greetings, making introductions, inviting people, etc.;
- giving simple instructions and directions;
- 2.11 Respond to audio-visual materials such as cartoons on TV and suitable films by
- giving opinions, and
  - relating the material to personal experiences and previous knowledge.

### 3.0 The Skill of READING

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

195

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

The component on Reading emphasizes the teaching of the skills of reading to enable learners to become independent readers. The teaching of reading in the early stages begins at the word and phrase levels before progressing to sentence recognition and reading at the paragraph level. In this early stage of reading, a combination of phonics and the whole text approach will benefit young readers. Gradually, learners are also taught to extract specific information from a text and to also respond to a text with their own ideas and opinions. Information skills and study skills are also taught through the use of dictionaries and encyclopaedias. For those who have the facilities, accessing the Internet and other electronic media for information is also encouraged. Pupils are also taught to obtain information from maps, plans, graphs and timetables at a level suited to their ability. The use of a variety of texts for the teaching of reading skills will not only provide the opportunity for learners to learn new words but also enables them to see how grammar is used correctly. At the same time, reading a variety of texts will also help learners develop their reading skills for different purposes.

Learners are also encouraged to read extensively outside the classroom for enjoyment and information. This will not only improve their proficiency in the language but will also help them to become independent and efficient readers. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to read a variety of texts both in print and in the electronic media for information and enjoyment such as notices, warnings, instructions, directions, recipes, messages, simple passages, letters, advertisements, poems, stories, descriptions, recounts; and maps, charts, graphs, time-tables. Learners should be able to:

3.1 Acquire word recognition and word attack skills so that they are able to recognise sight words.

3.2 Acquire key words at various stages of development.

3.3 Read and understand phrases, sentences, paragraphs and whole texts based on the key words suitable to their level of development.

3.4 Read aloud expressively and fluently pronouncing words correctly and observing correct stress, intonation and sentence rhythm;

3.4 Understand the meaning of words by guessing their meaning through the use of

- base words

- prefixes

- suffixes

- contextual clues;

3.5 Use the dictionary to get the appropriate meaning of words and phrases;

3.6 Acquire additional vocabulary including

- synonyms and antonyms

- homographs and homophones

- compound words and collective nouns

- common proverbs and similes.

3.7 Skim and scan texts for the gist and specific information;

3.8 Read and understand simple factual texts for

- main ideas

- supporting details

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

197

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

- sequence
- cause and effect relationships;

3.9 Read and enjoy simple stories and poems and respond to them

by

- talking about the people, animals and moral values in the story or poem, and
- relating the story or poem to one's life;

3.10 Read simple texts and predict outcomes at a level suited to learners' ability;

3.11 Read simple texts and make inferences, and draw conclusions;

3.12 Acquire problem-solving skills;

3.13 Read and obtain information from non-linear texts such as timetables, maps, graphs, and diagrams at a level suited to learners' ability; and

3.14 Read widely and independently.

#### 4.0 The Skill of WRITING

In this component, the focus is on developing learners' writing ability beginning at the word and phrase levels and progress to the sentence and paragraph levels. For those who are able and capable, they must be encouraged to write simple compositions comprising several paragraphs. Attention is also paid to penmanship so that even from a young age, learners are taught to write clearly and legibly both in print and cursive writing. In writing simple compositions, learners are taught the various steps involved in writing such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing. In the process, they are also taught to use appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar to get their meaning across clearly.

Although much of the writing at this level is guided, the amount of control is relaxed for

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

198

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

learners who are able and proficient in the language. All learners are encouraged to write for different purposes and for different audiences. Spelling and dictation are also given emphasis. By the end of their primary schooling, learners should be able to write lists, messages, letters, instructions, directions, simple poems and stories, descriptions, simple recounts and simple reports for various purposes. They should be able to:

4.1 Copy correctly;

4.2 Match words to linear and non-linear texts:

- match word to word
- match word to phrase
- match word to picture or symbol;

4.3 Complete texts with the missing word, phrase, or sentence;

4.4 Write at word, phrase, sentence and paragraph level in clear legible print and cursive writing;

4.5 Construct simple and compound sentences with guidance and independently;

4.6 Write longer texts in the form of paragraphs

- using simple and compound sentences
- in guided and /or free writing;

4.7 Spell correctly and take dictation accurately;

4.8 Punctuate appropriately;

4.9 Give accurate information when writing messages, instructions, simple reports, and when filling in forms;

4.10 Write simple informal letters to friends, parents and other family members, and to pen-pals in a social context;

4.11 Write short simple descriptions of things, events, scenes and what one did and saw;

4.12 Write to express one's feelings and exercise one's creativity such as when writing a diary, composing simple poems and stories, creating greeting cards, posters, etc.;

4.13 Plan, draft, revise, and proof-read one's written work; and

4.14 Communicate with people on the Internet and other electronic media by writing letters, messages, sending birthday greetings, etc.

## II LANGUAGE CONTENT

### 1.0 The Sound System

The sound system forms part of the Language content in the syllabus. To enable learners to become familiar with the different patterns of sound and the different spelling of words that have the same sound, teachers are encouraged to give a wide range of examples. The list below must be taught.

#### 1.1 Consonants, Vowels, and Diphthongs

Consonants – initial, medial, final positions Vowels – long and short sounds

#### 1.2 Consonant clusters

#### 1.3 Stresses in two- three- and four syllable words.

#### 1.4 Stresses in compound words

#### 1.5 Sentence stress and intonation

#### 1.6 Homographs and homophones

#### 1.7 Contractions

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

200

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*



## 2.0 Grammar

Grammar also forms part of the language contents of the syllabus. These grammar items need to be taught in context and in a meaningful way so that they can be used both in speech and in writing. The grammar items can be reinforced and consolidated if learners encounter the items often enough through the various tasks set. The grammar items should not be taught in isolation but rather in the context of a topic. The listing below must be taught.

### 2.1 Word Order

#### 2.1.1 Positive and negative statements

#### 2.1.2 Positive and negative questions and response

#### 2.1.3 'Wh' questions and responses – *What Where When Why Who Which How Whose*

#### 2.1.4 Requests, imperatives, commands, responses

#### 2.1.5 Sentence type: simple, compound

### 2.2 Connectors

#### 2.2.1 Conjunctions – *and but or so although therefore*

#### 2.2.2 Sequence connectors – first next then finally before after

### 2.3 Verbs

#### 2.3.1 Simple present tense

#### 2.3.2 Simple past tense

#### 2.3.3 Simple future tense

#### 2.3.4 Present continuous tense

#### 2.3.5 Past continuous tense

2.3.6 Future continuous tense

2.3.7 Simple perfect: *has have*

2.3.8 Modals: *can may might must could will would shall should*

2.3.9 Conditional: *If*

2.3.10 Subject-verb agreement

2.4 Articles

2.4.1 Articles with singular and plural countable nouns, and zero article: *a an the*

2.4.2 Articles with non-countable nouns

2.4.3 Articles with proper nouns

2.5 Prepositions

*In, out, on, under, by, next, to, near, behind, over, at, between, among, through, above, around, across, from, since, of, off, to, against, in front of, at the back of*

2.6 Nouns and Pronouns

2.6.1 Noun forms: countable uncountable collective

2.6.2 Possessives: *his hers theirs ours mine*

2.6.3 Pronoun forms:

Personal – *I he she it they we our us their* Interrogative – *who which what whose where when how why*

2.6.4 Gender: masculine feminine neuter

2.7 Modifiers

2.7.1 Adjectives, Adverbs

2.7.2 Comparative and superlative forms

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

202

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

### 3.0 Word List

The word list forms part of the language contents in the curriculum. The words in the list below are some key words that must be mastered by all learners according to their stages of development. More words have been listed in the Curriculum Specifications or *Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran* for each year and these words are listed under various topics. These are the minimum words to be taught and teachers may expand upon the list according to the level and ability of their learners as well as the topic under study.

#### STAGE 1

I, up, look, we, like, and, on, at, for, he, is, said, go, you, are

#### STAGE 2

about, after, again, an, another, as, back, ball, be, because, bed, been, boy, brother, but, by, call(ed), came, can't, could, did, do, don't, dig, door, down, first, from, girl, this, going, they, away, play, a, am, cat, to, come, day, the, dog, big, my, mother, good, got, had, half, has, have, help, her, here, him, his, home, house, how, if, jump, just, last, laugh, little, live (d), love, made, make, man, many, may, more, much, must, no, father, all, get, in, went, was, of, me, she, see, it, yes, can, name, new, next, night, not, now, off, old, once, one, or, our, out, over, people, push, pull, put, ran, saw, school, seen, should, sister, so, some, take, than, that, their, them, then, there, these, three, time, to, us, very, want, water

#### STAGE 3

Above, across, almost, along, also, always, animals, any, around, asked, baby, balloon, before, began, being, below, better, between, birthday, both, brother, brought, can't,

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

203

10 : 4 April 2010

Mahendran Maniam, Ph.D. (ESL)

*The Influence of First Language Grammar (L1) on the English Language (L2) Writing of Tamil School Students: A Case Study from Malaysia*

change, children, clothes, coming, didn't, different, does, don't, during, earth, every, eyes, first, follow (ing) found way, were, what, when, where, who, will, with, would, your, friends, garden, goes, gone, great, half, happy, head, heard, high, I'm, important, inside, jumped, knew, know, lady, leave, light, money, morning, much, near, never, number, often, only, opened, other, outside, own, paper, place, right, round, second, show, sister plus:

Ø days of the week; Ø months of the year; Ø numbers to twenty; Ø common colour Ø pupil's, name, and address; Ø name and address of school; Small, something, sometimes, sound, started, still, stopped, such, suddenly, sure, swimming, think, those, thought, through, today, together, told, turn(ed), under, until, upon, used, walk(ed,) (ing), watch, wear, while, white, why ,window ,without, woke, word, work, world, write, year, young

### III EDUCATIONAL EMPHASES

These outline current developments in education that will help learners prepare for the real world. In this respect, moral education, citizenship education, patriotism and thinking skills will contribute towards the building of a modern and progressive society.

#### 1.0 Thinking Skills

Critical and creative thinking skills are incorporated in the learning outcomes to enable learners to solve simple problems, make decisions, and express themselves creatively in simple language.

#### 2.0 Learning How to Learn Skills

These skills are integrated in the learning outcomes and aim to enable learners to take responsibility for their own learning. These skills incorporate study skills and information skills to equip them to become independent life-long learners.

### 3.0 Information and Communication Technology Skills (ICT)

In this age of globalisation and ICT, skills relating to ICT are incorporated in the learning outcomes. These skills include the use of multimedia resources such as TV documentaries and the Internet as well as the use of computer-related activities such as e-mail activities, networking and interacting with electronic courseware.

### 4.0 Values and Citizenship

The values contained in the KBSR moral syllabus have been incorporated in the learning outcomes and include patriotism and citizenship.

### Multiple Intelligences

The learning outcomes also reflect the incorporation of the theory of Multiple Intelligences. For example, interpersonal intelligence is reflected when learners are taught the polite forms of language expression so as not to offend the people they communicate with. In getting learners to role play or dramatise sections of a text, their kinaesthetic intelligence is nurtured. When learners sing songs, recite poems and chant *jazz chants* either individually or in chorus, their musical intelligence is developed.

### Knowledge Acquisition

In teaching the language, content is drawn from subject disciplines such as science, geography, and environmental studies. Content is also drawn from daily news items as well as current affairs.

### Preparation for the Real World

The learning outcomes prepare learners to meet the challenges of the real world by focusing on language use in society. In developing learners' ability to listen carefully, speak confidently, read widely and write effectively in the English language, they will be equipped with the requisite skills that will enable them to achieve the long-term goals of pursuing higher education, of being more effective in the workplace, and of becoming a contributing member to the betterment of society and the world at large.

## Appendix XY

### Tabulated Data of Sample's Writing

f	mutiara	3	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	2	0	0
f	Intan	0	1	0	0
m	mutiara	4	1	0	0
f	mutiara	0	3	0	0
f	mutiara	0	3	0	0
m	mutiara	0	1	0	0
m	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	2	0	2	0
m	Intan	1	0	2	0
m	Rubi	3	0	2	0
f	Rubi	0	1	0	0
f	Rubi	4	0	0	0
m	Rubi	0	0	0	0
m	Rubi	5	0	0	0
f	Rubi	0	0	0	0
f	Rubi	1	2	0	0
m	Rubi	0	3	0	0
m	Rubi	14	0	1	0
f	Rubi	0	1	0	0
f	Rubi	0	0	1	0
m	Rubi	2	0	0	0
m	mutiara	1	0	1	0
f	Rubi	0	0	0	0
m	Rubi	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	5	0	0	0
f	Rubi	3	0	0	0
m	Rubi	3	0	1	1
f	mutiara	4	0	0	0
m	Rubi	0	0	1	0
m	Rubi	0	1	1	0
m	mutiara	0	0	1	0
m	Rubi	3	0	1	0
m	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	0	2	0	0
m	Intan	0	2	0	0
m	Intan	1	1	0	0
f	Intan	0	2	0	0
f	Intan	0	2	1	0
f	Intan	0	2	0	0

f	Intan	1	0	1	0
m	Intan	2	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	4	0	0	0
m	mutiara	2	0	0	0
m	mutiara	0	1	0	0
m	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	2	0	0
m	mutiara	0	4	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	0	2	0	0
m	mutiara	0	1	1	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	0	0	1	1
m	mutiara	1	0	0	1
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	2	2	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	0	3	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	1	1	0
m	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	Intan	1	4	0	1
m	Intan	0	2	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	2	0
m	Intan	4	0	0	0
m	Intan	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	5	2	0	0
m	mutiara	0	1	0	1
m	mutiara	0	3	0	0
f	mutiara	4	1	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	3	0
f	mutiara	0	2	0	0
f	mutiara	0	2	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	0	0
m	mutiara	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	0	0	1	1
m	Intan	0	2	0	0
m	Intan	0	1	0	0
m	Intan	0	1	0	0



f	Intan	0	0	1	2
f	Intan	0	1	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	Intan	3	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	mutiara	2	2	1	1
f	Intan	2	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	0	0	0
f	Intan	0	3	0	0

A- sex

B- class

C- Punctuation

D- Missing verb to be

E- The use of Tamil  
word order

F- Wrong spelling of plural nouns

---

Mahendran Maniam, Dip. (TESL), B.Ed. (TESL), M.Ed. (TESL), Ph.D. (ESL)  
 Language Faculty  
 Sultan Idris Educat Ion University  
 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak  
 Malaysia  
[mahendran.maniam@yahoo.com](mailto:mahendran.maniam@yahoo.com)