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English Language Teaching in Developing Countries – Error Analysis and Remedial Teaching  
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# English Language Teaching in Developing Countries Error Analysis and Remedial Teaching Methods – An Overview

**K. A. Krishnalalitha, M.A., M.Phil.**

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This paper analyses the common errors committed by the ESL learners. It also focuses on the remedial teaching methodology.

## **English as a Second language in India**

English is a second language in many countries. If a language is used for limited purposes like International trade and commerce, travel etc., it is considered to be a foreign language. If it is used for many other purposes than these such as education, media etc., it is a second language in a country.

However, linguistically speaking, the terms such as second language and foreign language are defined based upon the reinforcement possibilities outside the classroom. Thirumalai 2002 reports:

**L2** refers to the language or languages acquired or learned subsequent to the first language. The term *Second Language* also refers to the language or languages acquired or learned subsequent to the first language. It is generally assumed that the first language of a person comes to influence the quality of learning and use of the second language. ...

The term **Foreign language** refers to that language for the use of which there is no immediate reinforcement outside the classroom. For example, if English is learned by a Japanese student from Japan in the United States, the status of such learning is treated as second language learning, because he has abundant opportunities to use that language outside his classroom. On the other hand, if the same student learns English in his country, he may not have equally abundant opportunity to use English outside his classroom. Under this condition, the student is deemed to be learning English as a foreign language. It is important that we keep this distinction in mind when we teach English to speakers of other languages, because each teaching/learning situation will require different materials, strategies, and goals.

(<http://www.languageinindia.com/april2002/tesolbook.html#chapter1>)

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Learners, especially in a developing country like India, face a lot of trouble in learning a second language.

### **Some Positions Relating to Acquisition and Learning**

Most linguists take the position that the first language is acquired and the second language is learnt. There are others who argue that the process of learning the L1 and L2 are same.

There is a natural, biological and social need to learn one's first language. When a child learns its mother tongue, its mind is clear, as it is learning a language for the first time. Whereas, when a learner starts learning a second language, there is a clash between the system of the first language and that of the second language which in turn will affect his/her learning speed. When one language system becomes more or less a habit, the learning of the second language becomes rather difficult.

ELT has become a challenging activity, when standards set in relation to fluency and appropriate use. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen an immense amount of activity in language teaching methodology. The trend continues in this century as well.

### **Common Errors Committed by ESL learners**

One of the most troubling aspects of learning English as a second language in India is the number and kinds of errors committed by Indian students, in spite of the fact that English is learned for more than 150 years in Indian schools.

The word *error* is derived from the Latin word 'errere' meaning 'to wander'. Some writers say that we need to avoid errors just as we try to avoid committing sins. Nelson Brooks writes in his book *Language and Language learning*,

Like sin, error has to be avoided and its influence overcomes;  
But its presence is to be expected. (58)

### **Partial Knowledge as the Basis of Errors**

Errors are the result of partial knowledge of the system that is learned over a period of time. Pit Corder in *Introducing Applied Linguistics* says,

... Can be so regarded in exactly the same way that an infant learning his mother tongue can be counted to possess a

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language of his own at each successive stage of his learning career. A learner's so called errors are systematic and is precisely following a set of rules. These rules are not those of the target language, but a 'transitional' form of language, similar in many respects to the target language, but also similar to his mother tongue or indeed any other language he may already command (149)

## **Types of Errors**

Learner's errors are classified mainly into two types: Errors of competence and Errors of performance.

**Errors of competence** are caused by the application of the rules of the target language wrongly, and the errors of performance are the result of repeatedly committed mistakes while using a language. In addition to this, there is another problem for the learners of English which is the lack of correspondence between the spelling and the sound. This problem results in committing errors in pronunciation.

**Errors in pronunciation** occur mainly due to the interference of the mother tongue. This is also called as the negative transfer. This happens when the target language and the learner's mother tongue are different from each other. Learners use the sounds of the mother tongue instead of those of the language they learn. Internal analogy and over generalization will make learners commit errors. (e.g.: childrens, equipments etc.)

## **The Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses (CAH)**

The Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses (CAH) emphasizes the gravitational pull of the mother tongue, while learning a second language. This method is nothing but comparing learners L1 and L2 to analyse possible difficulties that the learner might encounter in L2 learning situation. This is mainly because of the difference in the linguistic structures of these two languages. Hindi does not have word-initial consonant characters like sk, st, and sn, as a result, ESL learners who have Hindi as their mother tongue make mistakes in learning such clusters. That is why they say 'mishtake' instead of the word 'mistake' and they pronounce the word 'school' as 'iskuul'.

According to CAH, an analysis of the differences between the L1 and the L2 should help us to predict the errors made by the learners. This may also give a solution to this problem.

Even the native speakers make "mistakes." These mistakes are very common. For e.g.: a native speaker of English may use certain words like 'the', 'well', 'then', etc., repeatedly. There are many lapses and slips in a native speaker's speech and writing.

These mistakes are not a part of the native speaker's linguistic habit.

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## Remedial Teaching

Remedial treatment is necessary to avoid the learner's errors, but not all the errors need the same remedial treatment. The errors due to carelessness should be tackled with individual care. The best way to correct the learner's errors is to let him correct his own errors with the teachers help and the second best way is to let one of his class mates correct his error. The teacher can supervise and observe the learners who are correcting the errors. Self-correction, Peer-correction and then the teacher-correction is the best method of evaluation.

A teacher can plan remedial teaching after he/she corrects the written composition of the learners. It is a teacher's daily duty to collect these common errors in a note book. The teacher can do this regularly so that he /she may have an idea of the learner's errors. A common practice among most of the teachers is to use some set of symbols in the student's notebook to denote the type of error, for e.g. *Sp* for denoting spelling error; *w* for wrong word; *gr* for grammatical error; *p* for error in punctuation and, *?* for something is missing. A teacher can use as many symbols as possible, which should be understood by the students and the teacher has to use them consistently. Learners make very few errors in grammar in the early classes because most of the time they imitate the teacher's sentences.

There are many words in English (e.g. Chord, Cord; Stationary, Stationery) which look alike or sound alike, but have quite different meanings. Such words are very easy to confuse and the teacher has to explain the difference between these words and should make the students pronounce these words, so that the students can understand the difference. Errors in pronunciation can be rectified easily. A good pronunciation dictionary can be prescribed. Tongue twister sentences like 'She sells sea shells in the sea shore' ; 'Purple, Paper, People' etc., can be given for the students, to improve their pronunciation.

Remedial teaching often becomes re-teaching. Remedial classes often bore the learners because of the repetition of what is done already. So, various techniques like playing language games, conducting quiz programmes can be followed. Work sheets on grammar and reading comprehension can be given to keep the students busy. Various class room activities like turn coat, just a minute, and one- minute speech should be given to improve their speaking skills, these activities will also help the learners get rid of their nervousness. The learners should be made to interact in the class rooms. This will encourage them. Learners, who especially come from rural areas, think that learning English is a difficult process. It is the duty of a teacher to encourage the learners; they should counsel them to bring a change in their attitude.

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