Errors in Second Language English -
A Study of Errors Committed by Students with Tamil as Their Mother Tongue

R. Ashok Kumar, M.A, M.Phil. (Linguistics), M.A. (English), B.Ed.

Influence of Mother Tongue in Using English

The influence of mother tongue on the second language (here, the mother tongue is Tamil and the second language is English) is felt in almost every second language learner, especially on those who are less fluent in English. This phenomenon is called ‘Negative Transfer’ (Yule, George 1997; p 194) or ‘The gravitational pull of the mother tongue’ (Krishnaswamy, et.al., 2008; p 93). The rules of Tamil language which they have imbibed first and which they keep on using for their day-to-day communications interfere with the system of English. This influence is felt in every level of the language: phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantic, pragmatic and cultural levels.

This paper studies the influence of Tamil grammar on the English grammatical system of some eighth standard Tamil medium students.

Motivation for the Study
Having studied the book *Contrastive Linguistics and Language Teaching* (1973) by Deivanantham Pillai, I wanted to study the phenomenon of the influence of mother tongue over English. Contrastive analysis, as Verma. S.K and et.al 2011; p. 349 put, is not only predictive in nature but also is easily noticed in real language production of the learners. The teachers of Second Language can elicit data from the students and can analyse them to find out the influence of the mother tongue or first language. Based on the real data thus obtained, the remedial measures can be designed.

**Research Questions**

What are the major grammatical interferences found in the production of utterances in English in the speech of eighth standard Tamil medium students?

The students have enough time in writing during which they can avoid nervousness, false start and other similar drawbacks inherent in speech. Time is an influential factor in second language learning process. Does this time gap help them rectify their errors or make them prone to more errors?

**Source of Data**

The data is obtained from the students of eighth standard at a Government Higher Secondary School in Thiruvallur District. The mother tongue of these students is Tamil. Almost all of them are of the same age (from 13 to 14 years old). They are the beginners in learning English. They have certain exposure to reading and writing. But, they always hesitate to speak. To obtain the data, they were taught a portion of the lesson “A Mother’s Day Gift” from the present Samacheer Kalvi eighth standard textbook and their understanding was tested through several questions-answer series. Then, they were encouraged to narrate the story in their own language. Their narrations were recorded on cellphone. They were then asked to write the same on paper. For that they were given enough time (that is, they were asked to present their papers the next day).

The students who participated in the narration were given serial numbers from 1 to 7. The names of the students are not given for the sake of confidentiality. The first four are female children and the last three are male children.

**Method of Analysis**

During the analysis of the data, care was taken to quote only the errors which are the results of mother tongue influence and hence others such as ‘intra-lingual errors’ were not considered. The errors of the spoken language and those of written language are kept in different axis and compared. The reasons for the errors are dealt with through proper explanation and their equivalence in written mode is also considered. Orthographic Errors
and Pronunciation Errors are not considered for this study. The spelling errors of the students are given as they have written.

The negative influence is considered as per the guidance of J.P.B. Allen and S. Pit Coder (1975; p. 129). That is, the Target Language sentences are translated into First Language and again translation is done from First Language into Target Language. These errors are seen clearly from the data.

Uses of the Study

This study will be very useful to the teachers of schools. Based on these facts they can design their method of teaching. During teaching they can insist on these errors and thus encourage the students to get rid of them. This is also useful to the syllabus designers and textbook writers.

Analysis of Data

Word Order Influence

Tamil is an SOV language whereas English is an SVO language.

Example:

Albert bought a new car.

S V O

/əˈlbart əru putiya kaːr vaːnɪːn/

Correct Sentence: Apsara joined eight standard.

Speech Errors

1. Apsara eighth standard joined the school. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /Apsara: ettaːm vagupp-il ceːːr-nt-aːl/
   Apsara eighth standard-loc join-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara joined eight standard.

2. Apsara to father going a principal meeting. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /apsara: v-um aval-0 appaː-v-um principaːl ai paːr-kkā poːː-ːnt-aːːrkal/
   Apsara-incl her-gen father-incl principal-acc meet-inf go-past-3p.pl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara and her father went to meet the principal.
3. Apsara one day school join to the eighth standard. (Student 5)
   Tamil: /apsara: palliy-il ce:r-nt-a:l/
   Apsara school-loc join-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara joined the school.

4. Apsara local school join to the class. (Student 5)
   Apsara village-loc be school-loc-voc join-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara joined a local school.

5. Second day in corridor waiting in principal meet for room. (Student 6)
   next day principa-acc meet-inf corridor-loc wait-be-past-3p.pl
   Correct Sentence: Next day, Apsara is waiting to meet the principal.

6. Principal Mrs. Rose wait. (Student 2)
   Principal Mrs. Rose-dat wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is waiting for the principal Mrs. Rose.

7. Principal waiting in a school…. (Student 3)
   Principal-dat wait-pp asp-con asp-be-pre-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is waiting for the principal.

8. First day of Apsara’s corner waiting… (Student 7)
   First day Apsara corner-loc wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: First day Apsara was waiting in the corner of the corridor.

Writing Errors

1. Apsara mother school come. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-in amma: palli-kku va-nt-a:r/
   Apsara-gen mother school-dat come-past-3p.hon
   Correct Sentence: apsara’s mother came / comes school.
2. Second day waiting to principal meet. (Student 6)
   Next day principal-acc meet-inf wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Second day Apsara was waiting to meet the principal.

3. Apsara and mother school come. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /apsara:v um amma:v um palli-kku va-nt-anar/
   Apsara-incl mother-incl school-dat come-past-3p.pl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara and her mother came school.

Copula Omission

Tamil forms sentences without copula (i.e.) ‘BE FORM OF VERBS’. Copula is understood in these sentences. This feature is carried on unconsciously to the second language English. The following sentences may be seen for the result.

My name is Robert.
/en peyar ø ra:bart/

But in reality the deep structure of the sentence should have the following form:
/en peyar ra:bart – a:ga ullatu/
Complement marker Verb

God is great.
/katavul ø nallavar/

The sentence deep structure is as follows:
/katavul nallavar – a:ga ullar:/
Complement marker Verb

Speech Errors

1. Principal Mrs. Rose. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /principa:l Mrs. Rose/
   Correct Sentence: The principal is Mrs. Rose.
2. Apsara is Selvi the best friend.  (Student 1)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-um selviy-um nalla nanbar-kal/
   Apsara-incl Selvi-incl good friend-pl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara and Selvi are the best friends.

3. Apsara class friend Selvi.  (Student 5)
   Tamil: /apsara:y-in vakuppu to:li Selvi/
   Apsara-gen class friend Selvi
   Correct Sentence: Apsara’s class friend is Selvi.

4. Principal name Mrs. Rose.  (Student 5)
   Tamil: /pricipa:l peyar Mrs.Rose/
   Principal name Mrs.Rose
   Correct Sentence: The Principal’s name is Mrs. Rose.

5. Tomorrow mothers’ day.  (Student 6)
   Tamil: /na:lai annai-yar tinam/
   Tomorrow mother-pl day
   Correct Sentence: Tomorrow is mothers’ day.

6. Tomorrow…tomorrow…mothers’ day. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /na:lai annai-yar tinam/
   Tomorrow mother-pl day
   Correct Sentence: Tomorrow is mothers’ day.

7. Apsara happy and sad.  (Student 2)
   Tamil: /apsarav-ukku makilcci-um tukkam-um/
   Apsara-dat happy-incl sad-incl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara was happy and as well as sad.

8. Apsara’s best friend Selvi. (Student 3)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-in nerunkiya nanban selvi/
   Apsara-gen close friend Selvi
   Correct Sentence: Apsara’s best friend is Selvi.

9. Principal name Mrs. Rose. (Student 4)
   Tamil: /principal peyar Mrs. rose/
   Principal name Mrs.Rose
   Correct Sentence: The principal’s name is Mrs. Rose.
10. Apsara Selvi best friends. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /apsarav-um selviy-um nalla nanpar-kal/
   Apsara-incl Selvi-incl good friend-pl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara and Selvi are the best friends.

Writing Errors

1. Pasara vare affsat. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /apsara: mikavum tuyarap-pat-t:a:l/
   Apsara very sad-feel-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is/was very upset.

2. Mi mother vere putifull. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /en amma: mikavum alak-a-na-v-al/
   My mother very beauty-be-fut-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: My mother is very beautiful.

3. Principal Mrs. Rose. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /prinsipa:l mrs ro:s/
   Correct Sentence: The principal is Mrs. Rose.

4. Tomorrow mother’s day. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /na:lai annaiyar tinam/
   Tomorrow mother’s day
   Correct Sentence: Tomorrow is mother’s day.

5. Apsara very sad. (Student 2)
   Tamil: /apsara: mikavum varuntu-kir-a:l/
   Apsara very feel sorry-pre-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is very sad.

6. Apsara best friend Selvi. (Student 3)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-in nerunkiya nanban selvi/
   Apsara-gen close friend Selvi
   Correct Sentence: Apsara’s best friend is Selvi.

7. Apsara very best friend Selvi. (Student 5)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-in mika nerungiya nanban selvi/
   Apsara-gen very close friend Selvi
   Correct Sentence: Apsara’s very best friend is Selvi.
8. Apsara and Selvi best friend. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /apsara:v-um selviy-um nalla nanbar-kal/
   Apsara-incl Selvi-incl good friend-pl
   Correct Sentence: Apsara and Selvi are the best friends.

9. Half examination over. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /araiy-a:ndu te:rvu muti-nt-atu/
   Half-Yearly exam complete-past-3p.sg.n
   Correct Sentence: Half yearly examination is over.

10. Apsara mother very butiful. (Student 6)
    Tamil: /apsara:v-in amma: mikavum alak-a:na-v-al/
    Apsara-gen mother very beauty-be-pre-3p.sg.f
    Correct Sentence: Apsara’s mother is very beautiful.

**Genitive Case Errors**

The relationship between the possessor and the possessed is complicated in English seen from the point of view of a Tamil speaker. Tamil has the simplified syntactic arrangement for this. The arrangement can be explained as:

‘Possessor – possessive marker + possessed’

The genitive is marked by a variety of cases and postpositions including a zero marker /-en/.

There are three possessive markers:

/ - u daiya/, /-atu/ and / - in/

/enn - u daiya vi:du/
/en - ø vi:du/
1p sg obl case – gen House

My house.

/avan- atu kai/
   /avan - ø kai/
3p sg gen case hand.

His hand.
In case of pronouns, the genitive marker is optional. When nouns are used as possessors, the genitive case markers are obligatory. English forms possessive case using /-s/ or by the prepositions.

The following examples make the influence of Tamil clear. Here, the students have opted for the Tamil structure ‘possessor + possessed’. In example 1, the roundabout arrangement is compulsory.

**Speech Errors**

1. Principal Mrs. Rose announcement. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /Principa:l misas ro:s-in arivippu/
   Principal Mrs. Rose-gen announcement
   Correct Sentence: The announcement of Mrs. Rose

2. Apsara is Selvi in the best friend. (Student 4)
   Tamil: /apsara: selviy-in nerunkiya nanban/
   Apsara Selvi-gen close friend
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is Selvi’s best friend. (or) Apsara is the best friend of Selvi.

**Writing Errors**

Written document of the students do not show any genitive case error. One such error can be noted under the heading ‘Correct Sentence’. That shows the mastery of the circumlocution normally used in English.

**Subject Omission**

Tamil arranges the pronominal marker after verb and tense. The parametric variation is between Tamil and English is that the former allows the omission of Subject while the later does not. Hence, these sentences may be taken as examples.
Speech Errors

1. Second day waiting in a principal ..... (Student 7)
   Tamil: /irantaːm naːl principaːl aria-aruːke: kaːtt-iru – nt - aːl/
   Second day Principal room-dat wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: The second day, Apsara was waiting near the principal’s room.

Writing Errors

1. Metiehin a prinsipall. (Student 1)
   Tamil: /apsara: prinsipaːl ai par-tt-aːl/
   Apsara principal-acc meet-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara met the principal.

2. Participated is telivisen compition. (Student 4)
   Tamil: /tv poːttiː-il pank-etu-tt-aːl/
   TV box-loc part-take-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: She participated in the television competition.

3. Shifted a new neibourhood. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /putiya ita-ttir-kku maːr-in-aːl/
   New place-0-dat change-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: She shifted to a new neighbourhood.

4. Enjoyed in playing. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /vilaiyaːt-i makil-nt-aːl/
   paly-inf enjoy-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: She enjoyed playing.

5. Participate in all activities school. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /anaittu nikalcciːy-il-um kala-nt-u-kon-t-ːaːl/
   All activity-loc-incl participate-past-asp-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: She participated in all activities of the school.

6. Second day waiting to principal meet. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /maru naːl prinsipaːl ai paːr-kka kaːtt-iru-nt-aːl/
   Next day principal-acc meet-inf wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Second day, she was waiting to meet the principal.
Correct Sentences

These sentences are error free or these contain some minor errors and so convey the intended meaning to the hearers or the readers. They are not the result of negative influence of Tamil. Such sentences are also called ‘Global Errors’.

Speech

1. Apsara’s best friend of … best friend is Selvi. (Student 7)
   Tamil: /apsara: selvi-y-in nerunkiya nanban/
   Apsara Selvi-gen close friend (or)
   /apsara:v-in nerunkiya nanban selvi/
   Apsara-gen close friend Selvi
   Correct Sentence: Apsara’s best friend is Selvi. (or) Apsara is the best friend of Selvi.

Writing

The written story contains the following grammatically correct sentences.

1. The mother day announcement of Principal (Student 4)
   Tamil: /prinsipa:l-in annaiyar tina arivippu/
   Principal-gen mother’s day announcement
   Correct Sentence: The mothers’ day announcement of the Principal

2. Apsara to meet the principal. (Student 7)
   Tamil: /apsara: prinsipa:l-ai pa:r-kir-a:l (or) par-tt-a:l/
   Apsara principal-acc meet-pre-3p.sg.f (or) meet-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara meets / met the principal.

3. Apsara is best friend Selvi. (Student 7)
   Tamil: /apsara: selvi-y-in nerunkiya nanban/
   Apsara Selvi-gen close friend
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is the best friend of Selvi.

4. Pasara is a sonemall. (Student 1)
   Correct Sentence: Apsara is a small girl.

5. Apsara sifted a house. (Student 2)
   Correct Sentence: Apsara shifted the house.
6. Salivi past frands paripates and all activities. (Student 2)
   Correct Sentence: Selvi’s best friends participated in all activities.

7. Apsara shifted a new nembueled. (Student 3)
   Correct Sentence: Apsara shifted to a new neighbourhood.

8. The principal name is Mrs. Rose. (Student 3)
   Correct Sentence: The principal’s name is Mrs. Rose.

9. Apsara is a girl. (Student 3)

10. Grandmother participated in a television compitoionon. (Student 3)
    Correct Sentence: Grandmother participated in a television competition.

11. Apsara is a girl. (Student 4)

12. Principal name is Mrs. Rose. (Student 4)
    Correct Sentence: The Principal name is Mrs. Rose.

13. Apsara participed activits to school. (Student 4)
    Correct Sentence: Apsara participated in all the activities of the school.

14. The teacher swich the TV on. (Student 4)
    Correct Sentence: The teacher switches / switched the TV on.

15. Apsara go to the class room. (Student 5)
    Correct Sentence: Apsara goes to the class room.

16. A principal name is Mrs. Rose. (Student 6)
    Correct Sentence: The principal name is Mrs. Rose.

17. The principal Mrs. Rose annoused tomorrow mothers day. (Student 6)
    Correct Sentence: The principal Mrs. Rose announced tomorrow as mothers’ day.

18. My mother participate in television programme. (Student 6)
    Correct Sentence: My mother participates / participated in a television programme.
19. The teacher switched TV on. (Student 6)

20. A student watched a movie with interest. (Student 6)

21. Apsara was a VIII std student. (Student 7)

22. Principal name is Mr. Rose. (Student 7)

The analysis of speech and writing is shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No</th>
<th>Types of Errors</th>
<th>Total No of Errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Word Order Influence</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Copula Omission</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Genitive Case Errors</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Subject Omission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Correct Sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

Time plays a crucial role in framing grammatically correct sentences and that is evident from the more number of grammatically well-formed sentences written by the students. So, students may be allowed to write their compositions and tests at their own pace.

The data obtained shows that narration as a strategy has proved somewhat useful to encourage the students to speak out their mind. Simple stories can be provided and the most complicated concepts can be averted to this level of students.

**Scope for Future Studies**

Similar studies can be conducted with other levels of students and the data obtained thus may reveal errors of other grammatical levels.

Teachers can find out the real difficulties of the students instead of depending upon past scholastic studies.

Longitudinal research of a particular group of students will prove to be more effective in describing and remedying errors.

Teaching the same lesson again and again for a particular period of time, encouraging the students to read the same lesson and repeated questioning and answering on the same
topic may give more exposure to the text and this may result in the reduction of errors at the final recording.

References


Colophon:

I am very grateful to

1. Dr. S. Raja, Professor, Department of Linguistics, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India.
2. Dr. G. Radha Krishna, Professor, Department of Linguistics and Foreign Culture, S.V. University, Tirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, India.

for their valuable guidance in preparing this paper. I alone am responsible for any content or grammatical errors found in this paper.