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

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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

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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 cell-phone. 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

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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

/a:lbart   oru putiya ka:r   va:ngina:n/

     S   O   V

The following eight sentences illustrate that the word order of Tamil gets reflected in the English of the students. In particular the object is posited before the verb.

Speech Errors

1. Apsara eighth standard joined the school. (Student 1)
    Tamil: /Apsara: etta:m vagupp-il ce:r-nt-a:l/
             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 appa:v-um principa:l-ai pa:r-kka po:-n-a:rkal/
             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.

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3. Apsara one day <u>school join</u> to the eighth standrard. (Student 5)
   Tamil: /apsara: <u>palliy-il ce:r-nt-a:l</u>/
           Apsara school-loc join-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara joined the school.

4. Apsara <u>local school join</u> to the class. (Student 5)
   Tamil: /apsara: <u>u:r-il ulla palliy-il-e:ye: ce:r-nt-a:l</u>/
           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 <u>principal meet</u> for room. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /maruna:l <u>pricipa:l-ai pa:r-kka</u> vara:nta:v-il kart-iru-nt-a:rkal/
           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)
   Tamil: /pricipa:l mises ro:su-kka:ka ka:tt-iru-nt-a:l/
           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)
   Tamil: /principa:l-ukka:ka kart-tuk-kond-iru-kkir-a:l/
           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)
   Tamil: /mutal na:l apsara: mu:laiy-il ka:t-tiru-nt-a:l/
           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.

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2. Second day waiting to principal meet.   (Student 6)
   Tamil: /maru na:l prinsipa:l-ai pa:r-kka ka:tt-iru-nt-a:l/
           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   <u>is</u>   Robert.

/en peyar   ø   ra:bart/

But in reality the deep structure of the sentence should have the following form:

/en peyar   ra:bart – <u>a:ga</u>   <u>ullatu</u>/

                         Complement marker   Verb

God   is   great.

/katavul   ø   nallavar/

The sentence deep structure is as follows:

/katavul   nallavar – <u>a:ga</u>   <u>ulla:r</u>/

                        Complement marker   Verb

Speech Errors

1. Principal Mrs. Rose.   (Student 1)
   Tamil: /principa:l Mrs. Rose/
   Correct Sentence: The principal   <u>is</u>   Mrs. Rose.

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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   <u>are</u>   the best friends.

3. Apsara class friend Selvi.   (Student 5)
    Tamil: /apsara:<u>v-in</u> vakuppu to:li Selvi/
            Apsara-gen class friend Selvi
    Correct Sentence: Apsara's class friend   <u>is</u>   Selvi.

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

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

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

7. Apsara happy and sad.   (Student 2)
    Tamil: /apsarav-ukku makilcciy-um tukkam-um/
            Apsara-dat happy-incl sad-incl
    Correct Sentence: Apsara   <u>was</u>   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   <u>is</u>   Selvi.

9. Principal name Mrs. Rose. (Student 4)
    Tamil: /principal peyar Mrs. rose/
            Principal name Mrs.Rose
    Correct Sentence: The principal's name   <u>is</u>   Mrs. Rose.

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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   <u>are</u>   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   <u>is/was</u>   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   <u>is</u>   very beautiful.

3. Principal Mrs. Rose. (Student 2)

    Tamil: /prinsipa:l mrs ro:s/

    Correct Sentence: The principal   <u>is</u>   Mrs. Rose.

4. Tomorrow mother's day. (Student 2)

    Tamil: /na:lai annaiyar tinam/

        Tomorrow mother's day

    Correct Sentence: Tomorrow   <u>is</u>   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   <u>is</u>   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   <u>is</u>   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 <u>is</u>   Selvi.

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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   <u>are</u>   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   <u>is</u>   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   <u>is</u>   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:

/ - udaiya/, /-atu/ and / - in/

/enn - udaiya   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.

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/nanban – in   vaNDi/

/nanban – atu   vaNDi/

/nanban – utaiya   vaNDi/

friend – gen   bike

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.

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Speech Errors

1. Second day waiting in a principal ….. (Student 7)
   Tamil: /iranta:m na:l principa:l aria-aruke: ka:tt-iru – nt - a:l/
         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: prinsipa:l-ai par-tt-a:l/
         Apsara principal-acc meet-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Apsara met the principal.

2. Participated is telivisen compition. (Student 4)
   Tamil: /tv po:ttiy-il pank-etu-tt-a:l/
         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 ma:r-in-a:l/
         New place-0-dat change-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: She shifted to a new neighbourhood.

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

5. Participate in all activities school. (Student 6)
   Tamil: /anaittu nikalcciy-il-um kala-nt-u-kon-t-a:l/
         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 na:l prinsipa:l-ai pa:r-kka ka:tt-iru-nt-a:l/
         Next day principal-acc meet-inf wait-be-past-3p.sg.f
   Correct Sentence: Second day, she was waiting to meet the principal.

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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: selviy-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: selviy-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.

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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.

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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.

Sl.No	Types of Errors	Total No of Errors	
		Spoken	Written
1	Word Order Influence	8	3
2	Copula Omission	10	10
3	Genitive Case Errors	2	0
4	Subject Omission	1	6
5	Correct Sentences	1	22

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

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topic may give more exposure to the text and this may result in the reduction of errors at the final recording.

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