CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language is a creation of man’s social needs. It is an integral part of human thought and action. It enables people to express their thoughts, desires, ideas and experiences to other persons. If there has been no language, it would have been difficult for man to communicate his/her views to fellow human beings. There would have come no educational activity into existence, there would have been no law making, no lecturing and nothing like talking, singing, writing and there would have been no book. That is why it is very essential for every man to learn and use a language. Language is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication. Any language can be encoded into secondary media using auditory, visual or tactile stimuli. Thinkers like Rousseau have argued that language originated from emotion while others like Kant have held that it originated from rational and logical thought.

Depending on philosophical perspectives regarding the definition of language, it may refer to the cognitive ability to learn and use systems of complex communication, or to describe the set of rules that makes up these systems, or the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules.

Human language has the properties of productivity, recursion, reflexivity, arbitrariness, duality and displacement, and relies entirely on social
convention and learning. Humans acquire language through social interaction in early childhood. The use of language is deeply entrenched in human culture. Therefore language also has many social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification, as well as social grooming and entertainment.

1.1 LEARNING A LANGUAGE

Learning a language involves the establishment of the links between the language forms and their meanings. The three factors involved in the process are: (i) the form, (ii) the content or meaning and (iii) their association. In speaking, the speaker associates the appropriate form with the meaning that he/she has in mind, and in understanding he/she associates the meaning with the form he/she has heard. The speaker can perform this miraculous task with wonderful ease because the production of the language forms and their association has become a part of his/her habits. That is why language learning is a matter of habit formation and habits are developed through constant practice and use which include listening, speaking, reading and writing.

1.2 LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

The growth of linguistic ability is directly related to the growing need for language. Driven by the urge to express his/her demands, fears and apprehensions, feelings and emotions, a child learns to use his/her mother tongue by observing others speak, assigning meaning to their sounds and gestures, recognising, imitating and storing them in his/her memory and finally using them
to express. Initially, when his/her needs are limited, only a limited part of the language is learnt and used. Gradually, as the child’s activities and experiences grow, the sphere of language at his/her command also grows. Thus, language learning is goal oriented.

1.3 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

It is said that a first language is ‘acquired’, while a second language is learnt. Though the general processes of learning involved in second language learning are not different from those involved in learning the first language, there are a number of features in which the circumstances of first and second language learning differ. This is because of the conditions under which acquisition and learning take place:

i) Language acquisition takes place during the period when the infant is maturing physically and mentally. The second language learner is a different sort of person from the infant. The qualitative changes which have taken place in his/her physiology and psychology at some time in his/her maturation process inhibit him/her from using the same learning strategies he/she used as an infant.

ii) The motivation for learning, in each case, can not be equated. First language acquisition comes naturally and not as a result of the discovery of its practical utility as is the case of second language learning.
iii) The infant is exposed to samples of language on an unorganised basis. He/she is not submitted to a “teaching syllabus”.

iv) Language learning takes place after language acquisition is largely completed.

1.4 LEARNING THE FIRST LANGUAGE AND A SECOND LANGUAGE

When a child acquires his/her first language (L1), he/she begins, as it were, with a clean slate. As he/she acquires the language, its forms, meanings and their associations get impressed on his/her mind, and they become part of reflex actions. Whenever he/she is in need of expressing a meaning, he/she uses the appropriate forms without any conscious thought. Language skills, like any other skills, can be acquired only through practice. In the case of the first language or the mother tongue, the child gets sufficient scope for this practice in his/her daily environment. It is a natural process of language acquisition of both language structures along with content. It involves many complexities but is remarkable for its acquisition and ease without any overt instruction. The child first learns the language that is his/her mother tongue or native language without being taught in formal situation. This language is learnt spontaneously without much strain, since the urge for language in the infant stage is very strong. He/she uses the language at home, in the playground, at school—everywhere from parents, teachers, members of the family, friends, relatives—almost everyone with who he/she comes in contact in day – to – day life. He/she
has also the strongest motivation or urge to learn the language to fulfil the basic needs. Moreover, the child practises the language without being conscious of the fact that he/she is learning a highly complex code. Similarly, his/her ‘teachers’ – parents, playmates and others – teach him/her the language without any deliberate effort: they unconsciously supply him/her with the models for imitation and examples for formulation of his/her *ad hoc* rules about the language.

In case of a second language (L2), particularly when it happens to be a foreign language like English, these natural resources are not available to the learner and stand in contrast to first language acquisition. It is learnt as one's their additional language with much deliberate effort after he/she acquires his/her mother tongue. It takes place when the child is required to learn a new language formally as a part of its education. Second language learning is the acquisition of the other subsequent language structures only to express acquired content of the first language. Learners acquire a second language by making use of existing knowledge of the native language, generally learning strategies or universal properties of the language to internalise knowledge of the second language. These processes serve as a means by which a learner constructs an ‘interlanguage’. (Selinker 1972,p.31)

The process of second language learning, like that of first language acquisition, is very complex. Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others by virtue of their sheer determination, hard work and persistence while some struggle hard to learn the language. It involves many
interrelated factors that affect the performance of learners. These factors may be
categorised into internal and external factors that come forward in the particular
language learning situation. Individual language learner’s age, personality,
motivation, experiences, cognition etc. affect the process of second language
acquisition process. Likewise the external factors such as curriculum,
atmosphere, role of the teachers, individual differences, access to native speakers,
errors also influence on the learning process.

When a child begins to learn a second language, he/she has not
only learnt how this verbal signalling system works but has also acquired a
particular system (i.e., his mother tongue) which he/she can use with ease. Therefore, whenever he/she wants to express something in the second language,
he/she has to keep the habits of the first language in check in order to produce the
new sounds and structures. Further, the child’s ears have become so accustomed
to the mother tongue sounds that he/she does not easily hear the difference
between the sounds of the two languages and as a result cannot produce the
distinctive sounds of the second language. This compels him/her to replace the
sounds of the second language with the similar sounds of his/her mother tongue.
The same is the case with the syntactic structures. His/her conscious attempt at
arranging words into syntactic patterns results in literal translation, and when the
patterning in the two languages differs, he/she produces ungrammatical
structures. This tendency to replace the sounds and structures of the second
language with those of the mother tongue is known as ‘the pull of the mother
tongue’. In psychological terms this phenomenon is known as ‘transfer’. It is
assumed that learner’s first language (L1) interferes in the learning of second language (L2); where there are differences between the patterns of the (L1) and (L2) it functions negatively and negative transfer or ‘interference’ would occur. In the areas of language learning where habits play the predominant role, the force of such interference is maximum. In the case of similarities, learners’ L1 helps the learning of L2, in this situation it functions positively and positive transfer or ‘facilitation’ would occur.

The learner’s L1 is an important determinate of the (SLA). It is not only the determinant, however, and may not be the most important. But it is theoretically unsound to attempt a precise specification of its contribution with that of other factors.¹

1.5 THE ROLE OF ERROR IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

L2 learners do not acquire their second language overnight; they go through several stages. Unlike L1 learners, L2 learners make conscious efforts in second language learning. Learners tend to show that their speech is rule-governed. They construct grammars (interlanguage grammars), which reflect their current understanding of the rules of the target language. For example, when a learner produces utterances such as “no speak” and “no understand”, and if we assume that these are consistent deviations and form a part of learner’s system, then it is possible to think of them only as errors with regard to English, but not with regard to the learner’s system. Despite the conscious efforts of the learners, their second language performance shows a large number of ungrammatical structures. Although a learner may have the knowledge of the second language

rules, he/she makes errors, thereby proving that the knowledge about the language and its use in real life are different.

Second Language Acquisition is a specific domain of the linguistics that concentrates on the lingual transition from one language to another. There are essentially two hypotheses involved in second language to account for the learners’ deviant performance. The first approach is Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. It is based on the behaviourist assumption. The second hypothesis is Error Analysis. It is based on the assumption that all the deviant performance of second language learners is not only the result of mother tongue interference. A detailed description of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Error Analysis has been presented below.

1.5.1 Contrastive Analysis (CA) hypothesis

Contrastive analysis (CA) was developed and came into practice in 1950s and 1960s, as an application of structural linguistics to language teaching. CA is a way of comparing and contrasting learners’ source language (L1) and target language(L2) in order to determine errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second language learning situation. CA prefers to study the second language learners’ performance in comparison with their first language rather than in isolation. Carl James (1980) writes:

Contrastive Analysis... is a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e. contrastive not comparative) two – valued typologies (a
contrastive analysis is always concerned with a pair of languages), and founded on the assumption that language can be compared.²

Carl James (1980) suggests that “there are two kinds of contrastive analysis: theoretical and applied. Theoretical CA looks at the realisation of a universal category X in both A and B. It is a state in nature. Applied CA is preoccupied with the problem of how a universal category X, is realised in language A as ‘y’ and is rendered in language B. It is unidirectional in nature.”³

1.5.1.1 Assumptions of Contrastive Analysis hypothesis

The theoretical assumption of CA is based on two basic assumptions as follows:

i) Behaviourist assumption:

According to Behaviourist view, language learning is a process of habit formation. Such habits can be inculcated by varying contingencies of reinforcement, trial and error, repetition etc. It justifies the use of CA hypothesis. It is felt that by being aware of the structural differences between languages, the teacher can predict the learners’ errors and help overcome them.

ii) Language transfer and language interference assumption:

According to behaviourist theories, the main impediment to learning is interference from prior knowledge. Robert Lado (1957) claimed that:

...the individual 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

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² Carl James, Cross Linguistic Awareness : A New Role for Contrastive Analysis, 1980, p.3
  www.ucp.pt>site>FCH>linguanet.pdf.
³ Ibid, p. 142
receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and
the culture as practised by natives.\textsuperscript{4}

These sets of first language habits tend to interfere in the learning
of second language learning. The L1 can facilitate (positive transfer) the process
of L2 learning when learners’ L1 and L2 patterns have similarities. It leads to
immediate learning of L2 structures. The L1 can interfere (negative transfer) the
process of L2 learning, when learners’ L1 and L2 patterns have dissimilarities. It
leads to deviant constructions or errors in L2 performance. In this connection,
Weinreich (1935) hypothesises that

\textit{... the greater the difference between the system (of two languages), i.e., the more numerous the mutually exclusive forms and patterns in each, the greater is the learning problems and the potential area of interference.}\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{1.5.1.2 Relevance of Contrastive Analysis}

Over the last few decades, controversies have developed over the
relevance of CA hypothesis and its utility in pedagogical purpose. The application
of CA in second language learning and teaching can help to predict and diagnosis
the proportion of L2 errors committed by learners. It also aids in the preparation
of teaching materials, test and supplementary materials in use and diagnosing
students’ difficulties accurately. The ultimate goal of contrastive analysis is to
predict areas that will be either easy or difficult for learners.


\textsuperscript{5} U. Weinerich, \textit{Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems}, New York, 1953, p.1. in \textit{A Linguistic Analysis of the Syntactic Errors in the Use of Verb Phrase Made by the Students of Class 10\textsuperscript{th} at Gonda (U.P.)} by Vinay Kumar Singh, p.11
1.5.1.3 Limitations of Contrastive Analysis

It is a teacher-centred approach, mainly concerned with teaching. It ignores the learning process of learner. In CA, learning is seen to take place inductively through analogy rather than analysis. CA is limited in a particular domain of language transfer and interference. It is unable to see the errors of learners as a whole. CA is inadequate to overlook many errors that are not result of learners’ L1 intrusion. B. Mc Laughlin (1987) professor of psychology in University of California points out the limitations of CA:

Contrastive Analysis, based on linguistics comparisons of languages, both over predicted and under predicted the difficulties of second language learner. It over predict because it identified difficulties that in fact did not arise, and it under predicted because learners made errors that could not be explained on the basis of transfer between languages.6

However, it is accepted that predictions of CA are not reliable to any considerable degree, particularly in syntax, and therefore, errors are best observed as they occur in second language learning situations. Consequent on the unreliability of CA prediction of L2 learners’ errors and the realisation, among applied linguistics of the fact that there are other sources of error besides L1 interference, a wider branch of applied linguistics namely Error Analysis has emerged.

1.5.2 Error Analysis (EA) Hypothesis

Error analysis (EA) supplanted CA and became a recognised part of Applied Linguistics owing the works of Corder (1967) who saw learners’

6 B. McLaughlin, *Theories of Second Language Learning*, p. 1 in *A Linguistic of the Syntactic Errors in the Use of Verb Phrase Made by the Students of Class 10th at Gonda (U.P.)* by Vinay Kumar Singh, p.12
errors as productive outcome of language learning. EA is a type of linguistic analysis that makes the comparison between the errors in learner’s target language and the target language form itself. The research in EA is carried out within the context of the classroom. It collects data from classrooms that serve as input to theoretical discussion and make analysis. After analysis of the data, it provides feedback to design the remedial curricula and pedagogical remediation. It involves recognition, depiction and categorisation of errors according to their hypothesized cause and evaluating their seriousness. The distinction of error and mistake is also important in EA. Mistakes are slips of the tongue. The speaker who makes a mistake is able to recognise it as a mistake and corrects it. An error is systematic. It is likely to occur repeatedly and is not recognised by the learner as an error. The learner has incorporated a particular erroneous form the perspective of the target language into his/her own system. The learner has created a systematic entity called an interlanguage. The presence of errors that minor L1 structures is taken as evidence of transfer (interlingual), while those errors similar to those observed in L1 acquisition are indicative of creative construction (intralingual). Corder (1974) recognises three stages in the process of L2 learning as evidenced by the nature and degree of systematicity:

(i) Pre-systematic stage: This is a stage of random guessing and the learner is vaguely aware of the linguistic system of L2. Most of the time he produces erroneous sentences and occasionally, by chance, produces a correct one.
(ii) Systematic stage: At this stage, the learner has discovered and is operating a rule of some sort, but the wrong one in the linguistic system of L2. His/her errors tend to be regular.

(iii) Post-systematic stage: At this stage, the learner discovers the correct linguistic system of L2 but is not consistent in his application of the rules that he knows. This is also the ‘practice-stage’ of learning, i.e., the learner tries to apply the rules of L2 to the sentences that he produces, though he may not always be right in his application.

1.5.2.1 Assumptions of Error Analysis

The theoretical assumptions of EA are as follows:

i) L2 acquisition= L1 acquisition hypothesis: This hypothesis is based on the theories of Noam Chomsky, Roger Brown, and Dan Slobin et al. Contrary to Behaviourists, they reject language learning as a habit formation and affirm that language learning is an active and creative process. Dulay and Burt (1974) points out:

The L1 = L2 hypothesis holds that children actively organise the L2 speech they hear and make generalisations about its structure as children learning their first language do. Therefore, the goofs expected in any particular L2 production would be similar to those made by children learning the same language as their first language. For example, *Joes want Miss Johns* would be expected, since first language acquisition studies have shown that children generally omit functor, in this case, the –s inflection for third person singular person indicative.⁷

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⁷ H. Dulay and M. Burt, You Can’t Learn without Goofing in Error Analysis : Prospective on Second Language Acquisition (Longman Group Limited, 1974) p. 46
ii) **Interlanguage:** Taking hints from Lenneber’s “latent language structure” and “latent psychological structure” relationship, Selinker (1974) comes with a new concept termed as “Interlanguage” (Selinker 1974, p.31). It refers to a set of second language learners’ utterances that are not identical to the learners’ L1 and L2 in the process of the learners’ attempted meaningful performances in a second language. The interlanguage continuum consists of a series of overlapping grammars. Each grammar shares some rules with the previously constructed grammar, but also contains some new or revised rules. Learner’s utterances are only erroneous with reference to the target language norms, not to the norms of their own grammars. Such utterances show the existence of a separate linguistics system based on the observable output that results from the learners’ attempted production of the target language norm. Interlanguage is an intermediate, in some way, between two languages. As we have so often seen, students of a second language do not make random errors; their language is rule – governed (although the rules do not conform to those of a native speaker of the target language). Cognitive theories of interlanguage claim that with the assistance of learning strategies, learners build mental grammars of the second language. Learners draw the rules they have constructed to interpret and produce utterances. Selinker uses the concept of “fossilisation” to refer to

...linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL (native language) will tend to keep in their IL (interlanguage) relative to a particular TL (target language), no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL.

(Selinker, 1974,p.36)
Fossilisation is not as simple as a barrier to development; an individual may fossilise at different distances from the TL in different syntactic areas.

**iii) Non-contrastive approach:** Richards (1974) acknowledges the influence of the mother tongue on the learners’ L2 performance. He documents a number of other common features of the learners’ interlanguage, often ignored in discussions of learners’ errors. These are referred to as interlingual and developmental errors. Such errors are seen as the outcome of overgeneralisation of target language rules, false concept hypothesised and ignorance of target language rule restriction and incomplete application of target language rules (Richards, 1974, pp. 172-82).

**iv) Approximate system:** It emphasises that language learners’ use of L2 should describe not only by reference of the native and target language of the learner but by reference to the approximative systems of the learners as well. William Nemser (1974:55) proposes “approximative system” that is ‘the deviant linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilise the target language. Such approximative systems vary...in accordance with proficiency level; variation is also introduced by learning experience (including exposure to a target language script system), communication function, personal learning characteristics etc.’

EA is a method of diagnosis that has given a broader view regarding learners’ errors. It is more practical and learner centred approach where learners have many opportunities of learning. Christopher N. Candlin (1973)
proposed in the *Preface of Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*, three objectives of EA:

Firstly, that far from there being a fundamental opposition between Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis, the latter serves as an important source of corroboration to contrastive linguistics analyses in their claims for predictability of error.... Secondly, that the study of learners’ error should permit the formulation of rules for learners’ interlingual systems, thus providing incidentally for the teacher confirmation of what remains to be learned. Thirdly, charting a learner’s language development through error study has psycholinguistics importance in that it submits transfer theory to critical observation and provide data on the nature and significance of the obstacles that lie in the path towards discovery of the target language rules.\(^8\)

### 1.5.2.3 Limitation of Error Analysis

The correctness of methodology of EA is always interrogated. EA is more concerned with the regular and systematic errors and less or not concerned with non-systematic errors. Pit Corder (1967) distinguishes between systematic and non-systematic errors; the EA’s concerned with the latter.

EA is unable to concentrate on the learner who picks up the language very fast. EA’s feedback is useful for the next set of students. Course designers and curriculum planners cannot change their concepts with every set of students, so the job of EA is a job of futility. With the analysis of a limited number of corpuses, error analyst can only derive generalisation. Most of the error

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\(^8\) Christopher N. Candlin, *Preface of Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition in A Linguistic of the Syntactic Errors in the Use of Verb Phrase Made by the Students of Class 10th at Gonda (U.P.)* by Vinay Kumar Singh, p.15
analyst identify and explain the nature of errors but the diagnosis is useless without any suitable remedy.

Both CA and EA have its own limitations. In both the hypotheses the relevance of context in the analysis and interpretation of second language learners’ error is ignored and the utility of errors that can help us to make a better way of teaching and learning. We shall never improve our ability to create such favourable conditions until we learn more about the way a learner learns and what his built-in syllabus is.

It is true that we can only provide an appropriate context that can help in the process of teaching and learning of second language. In the analysis of data it is found that many utterances that are correct in isolation but incorrect in context. Now the question arises: What should be the nature of the analysis of learners’ error? Should learners’ errors be seen in isolation or in context? In the analysis of error, one cannot ignore the context/situation. A contextual analysis of errors is simply an analysis of errors that helps us to access the errors within the context of origination. A contextual analysis of errors combines features of EA and CA. It broadens the horizon of CA and EA.

1.6 NOTION OF ERROR

The question ‘what is an error’ has been differently approached by different investigators in the field. Various terms like ‘slips’, ‘lapses’, ‘mistakes’, ‘goofs’ are currently in use to describe the phenomenon of deviant language items. An error is an unwanted form which a particular course designer or teacher
does not want. Unwanted forms arise because the learner processes the language material in his own way. Errors, therefore, are those forms which the curriculum designer desires to avoid.

Committing error is the most natural part of learning. There are different ways to define the notion of error. What is an error to a layman is a part of learning process within the concept of Inter Language (IL). Errors are a sign of learning processes and are the outcome of the intermediate learning process which are not observable. Errors are not the sign of inability of learners but are the evidences of learners’ strategies of second language learning. Corder (1974) views learner’s error as

It is a way the learner has of testing his hypothesis about the nature of the language he is learning. The making off errors then is a strategy employed both by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language.

(Corder, 1974, p. 25)

Errors demonstrate that language learning is not the assimilation of the target language rules but a process that involves the ability of learner to use that language appropriately with attention of both the content and the structure of the target language. Pit Corder (1967) observes that the learners’ errors in L2 performance are indicative of the state of the learners’ knowledge about L2 and of the ways in which they are learning L2. Corder (1974) writes about the significance of learner’s error:

A learner’s errors, then, provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using at a particular point in the course... They are significant in three different ways. First to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he
undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn. Second, they provide to the researcher evidences of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly...they are indispensable to the learner himself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the uses in order to learn.

(Ibid, p.25)

Similarly, we can say that errors provide us with valuable information about language teaching because they predict the errors of future learners. The teacher and the course constructors therefore, could assist in the development of pedagogic strategies knowing what errors were committed, how and why they were committed.

Thus it is evident that errors, which had been looked upon with suspicion in the past, are now viewed as necessary stages in the gradual acquisition of the target system. In second language learning, errors are the progressive performance of the second language learners in an attempted effort to use second language. It can be the result of conscious or unconscious on the learners’ part. But many a time, there arises confusion between the terms ‘lapses’, ‘mistakes’ and ‘errors’. So it is essential here to make a distinction between these two terms as follows:

**i) Lapses :** Lapses are errors of performance, products of such chance circumstances as memory lapses, fatigue or emotional strain and do not reflect the learner’s knowledge of the language. They are slips of the tongue or slips of the pen, false starts or confusion of structure. He speaker is normally aware of them and can correct them with more or less complete assurance.
ii) **Mistakes** : They are failure to match the language to the situation and result in inappropriate utterances, for example the mistake of referring to a naval ship as a ‘boat’. Such mistakes are made due to selection of an item from a wrong style, dialect or variety. These are the errors in performance and are not the result of any defect in the competence of a speaker. These mistakes are random and unsystematic, and if the speaker is made aware of them, he can immediately correct them with complete assurance. Both lapses and mistakes are breaches in the use of the linguistic code not in the code itself and can be observed in the use of language by native speakers as well as second language learners.

iii) **Errors** : Errors differ from lapses and mistakes in that they are regarded as breaches of the ‘code’ that is they offend against the grammatical rules of the language and result in ‘unacceptable’ utterances. Errors occur because the learner has not internalised the grammar of the second language. They refer to systematic errors of the learner from which we can reconstruct his knowledge of the language to date i. e. his transitional competence. What the second language learner actually produces is a product of the use of wrong rules or the misuse of right rules. The learner is not able to correct his errors even when these are pointed out to him. Since the learner’s errors are the errors of competence, they provide data to the IL system used by him at a particular point of his learning process.

Since our aim in teaching a second language is not simply the teaching of rules of grammar but to enable the learner to use the language appropriately in communication, equal importance must be paid to both errors and mistakes.
1.7 SOURCES OF ERRORS

The most important objective of error analysis is an explanation of sources of errors. The contrastive analysis hypothesis attributes errors to the gravitational pull of the mother tongue. The interference of the learner’s mother tongue is considered to be the major source of difficulty in acquiring a second language. In areas which are found to be common to both the languages – the native and the target language - there is said to be a positive transfer and it is hypothesized that in these areas the learner is not likely to make errors. But in areas which are found to be structurally different, most errors are supposed to occur. The habits and patterns of the first language are supposed to interfere at each level of second language learning – phonological, grammatical and lexical. Broadly, we can divide learners’ errors in two categories as following:

1.7.1 Interlingual errors

Such errors are the result of learners’ L1 interference in his/her L2 performance. It refers to the learners’ inability to separate his/her first language and target language rules presumably; those arise from the entrenched habits of the L1. They show the transfer of the means of realising the structure of their L1 into English.

*A few more people got into the bus and slowly slowly it was completely filled. (Jain, 1969,p.31)

1.7.2 Intralingual errors

To differentiate non-contrastive errors, Richards (1974) used the term intralingual errors. Errors such as I goes to market. What do you doing? etc.
are occurred frequently, regardless of the learners age, language and background etc. Such deviations can not be explained as mere failure to memorise a segment of language, memory lapses, fatigue etc. They reflect the learners’ competence at a particular level. These are developmental errors which are caused because of the learners’ efforts to build up hypothesis about the language from their limited experience in the classroom. Richards has categorised these errors under four categories as follows:

**a. Overgeneralization:** It can be described as over learning of a structure or as the use of previously available strategies in new situations. It also refers to instances where the learner creates deviant structures based on his/her experience of other structures in the target language.

*We are hope.*  
(Richards, 1974,p.174)

**b. Ignorance of the rule restrictions:** It refers to learners’ failure to observe the restriction of language rules where they do not apply. It is closely related to the generalisation.

*The man who I saw him.*  
(ibid,p.175)

The above example violates the limitation on subjects in structures with *who*.

**c. Incomplete application of rules:** In response to teacher’s question, “Ask her what the last film she saw was called.” Learner writes

*What was called the last film you saw?*  
(ibid,p.178)

Here, learner ignored the Subject-Verb agreement.
d. False concept hypothesised: There is a class of development errors, which derive from faulty comprehension of distinctive in the target language. An example of this kind of error is given overleaf:

*He is speaks French.* (ibid. p.178)

Here ‘is’ is misunderstood to be a marker of present imperfect tense. Such kind of errors has close similarity with overgeneralization.

Many scholars proposed different categories for the classification of errors. As Lary Selinker (1974) suggested the existence of a structurally intermediate system between the native and target languages in the learner’s mind. It is learners’ own self-contained linguistic system. This system is not a native language or target language systems, rather it falls between the two. In his Interlanguage Theory, Selinker (1974, p.37) mentions five central processes that exist in the second language learning process. These are as follows:

a. Overgeneralization of target language rules: Many times learners make the utterances as:

*What did he intended to say?* (Selinker, 1974, p.28)

Here the past tense morpheme ‘-ed’ is extended by the learner.

b. Transfer of training: Learners’ error can be the cause of identifiable items in training procedure. For example, the problem of he/she distinction in the case of Serbo-creation speakers producing in their English interlanguage he on almost every occasion wherever he or she would be called for according to any norm of English. (Selinker, 1969, pp. 67-92).

c. Strategies of second language learning: In most of the interlingual situations, learner involves his own strategies for mastering the target language
and tries to reduce it to a simpler system. As Jain (1969) mentions that, the results of this strategy are manifested at all levels of syntax in the IL of Indian speakers of English. For example:

*I am feeling thirsty.*

The speakers of such sentences seem to have adopted the further strategy that the realisation of the aspect in its progressive form on the surface is always with –*ing* marker.

d. Strategies of second language communication: Most of the time, learners have eagerness to communicate. In that eagerness, they overlook grammatical rules of his target language.

e. Language transfer: It is very much similar to interference like goofs. One might mention spelling pronunciations e.g. speakers of many languages pronounce final –*er* in English words as /re/ plus some form of /r/.

Dulay and Burt (1974) have divided errors in the following categories:

a. Interference like goofs: They reflect learners’ native language structures. Such structures do not find L1 acquisition data of the target language. These are the same as the interlingual errors.

b. L1 developmental goofs: These goofs reflect native language structure, but did not find in L1 acquisition data of the target language.

*He took her teeths off.*  
(Dulay and Burt, 1974b,p.115)

c. Ambiguous goofs: These goofs reflect such structures that can not be categorised as either interference or L1 developmental goofs.

*Terina not can go.*  
(ibid.)
d. Unique goofs: Such goofs that do not reflect L1 structure, and are not found in L1 acquisition data of the target language.

* He name is Victor.  

Pit Corder (1974) classifies second language learners’ errors into two broad categories as follows:

a. **Systematic errors:** Those errors, which are predictable in nature, called systematic errors. Errors of such kind occur frequently and regularly.

* We does prayer daily.

*I am eat food.

b. **Unsystematic errors:** Those errors, which are unpredictable in nature, called unsystematic errors. Errors of such kind do not fall in any specific category.

*I am 4 o’clock early in the morning.

* My always class first position.

Burt and Kiparsky (1974) classify second language learners’ errors into two distinct categories which are as follows:

a. **Global errors:** It refers to those errors that cause a listener to misunderstand a message or to consider a sentence incomprehensible. Such errors affect overall sentence organisation (e.g., wrong order, missing, wrong connecters etc.).

*I like take taxi but my friend said so not that we should be late for school.

(Burt and Kiparsky,1974, p.74)
b. **Local errors:** It refers to those errors that do not significantly hinder communication of a sentence’s message.

* *If I heard from him I will let you know.*  
(Ibid.)

Burt and Kiparsky (1974, p.73) stress the importance of a hierarchy of errors: global and local. According to them, “Global mistakes are those that violate rules involving the overall structure of a sentence, the relations among constituent classes, or in a simple sentence, the relations among major constituents. Local mistakes cause trouble in a particular constituent, or in a clause of a complex sentence.”

Many scholars have done many efforts to classify errors in different categories but are unable to make any clear-cut discrimination, as F.G.French (1956,p.13) writes, “Errors defy classification, for one kind merges into another, as gray shades off into blue. There is, however, a grading in complexity which can be utilised to introduce some sort of order into what most teachers will agree, is the most disorderly of all their problems.”

The above classifications are made on the sources of errors and effort to present a linguistic description of errors and their sources. The purpose of all these classification is to explain all the possible reason, ‘why errors arise.’

### 1.8 SYNTACTIC ERRORS

Syntax is one of the major components of grammar. It is the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages. It is syntax that gives the words the power to relate to each other in a
sequence and to carry meaning of whatever kind. It deals with the ways that the elements of a sentence or phrase can be arranged and rearranged to express different meanings. For example, in spoken and written English sentences are often constructed by following a Subject with a Verb and the Direct Object. The positions of the words convey the Sub – Obj relationship. For example, a sentence such as ‘the snake bit the cat’ conveys meaning that is different from ‘the cat bit the snake’, even though they contain exactly the same words. This has been achieved by altering the order of the words in the strings. English relies heavily on the order of the words in a syntactic unit. This is because English is a highly analytic language which uses only a few inflected forms. The breaking down of sentences and phrases in units are known as ‘syntactic atoms’. A syntactic atom might be a single word, or a phrase that communicates one meaning. In the above mentioned example, the word ‘the’ is not a syntactic atom, but ‘the snake’. In a sentence ‘the dog bit the small black cat which lives in our house’, the entire phrase ‘the small black cat which lives in our house’ is a simple syntactic atom.

Syntax in linguistics is closely related to morphology – the study of how words are formed and how formations change within the structure of a language. Syntax allows speakers to communicate complicated thoughts by arranging small, simple units in meaningful ways. In English, for example, a sentence can be a simple as a one word interjection, or it can be lengthy composition with multiple clauses strung together. Human language is unlimited, because even within the rules of syntax, humans can generate new sentences or phrases to express novel ideas or expressions.

Syntax examines how fully formed words fit together to create complete and understandable sentences. Understanding a language’s syntax is important for understanding what makes a sentence grammatically correct. It deals
with a number of elements, all of which help to facilitate being understood through language without rules, there would be no foundation from which to discern meaning from a bunch of words strung together, whereas these rules allow for a virtually infinite number of sentences.

The most important aspect of syntax is how the various parts of speech connect together. Every language has rules that dictate where certain types of words can be used in a sentence and how to interpret the resulting sentence.

Another aspect of syntax covers the various parts of speech that a language uses and separates the words of the language into these groups. Each part of speech in turn has various rules that may be applied to it, and other rules that dictate when it can not be used. English, for example, makes use of nouns, full verbs, adjectives and full adverbs as having any stable meaning, while different languages may not have a separate class for Adjective or make use of classes not found in English.

Through an understanding of proper syntax, teachers and pupils know how sentences should be broken up. When two or more sentences are improperly combined into a single sentence, it usually creates a ‘run on’. Similarly, a sentence that does not contain a full syntactic idea, such as ‘sat quickly under the table’ is considered incomplete. Understanding linguistic rules allows speakers and writers to effectively communicate ideas to others.

Syntactic investigation of a given language has as its goal the construction of a grammar that can be viewed as a device for producing the sentences of the language under analysis. A text is determined legal by the language of syntax and the disagreements with the syntactic rules are called syntax error or syntactic
errors. This judgement can easily be detected by our knowledge of language but one purpose of a theory of syntax is to possess the structural sentence as acceptable or not.

1.9 TITLE OF THE STUDY

The present study is entitled, “A Study of Syntactic Errors in English Committed by the Students of Vernacular Medium Secondary Schools of Dibrugarh District, Assam”

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As English is a foreign language learnt by step-by-step process, errors and mistakes are very commonly expected. But it is a fact to be observed that negligence of students’ difficulties in lower grade develops into a chronic weakness in the subject later on, which ultimately leads to hatred or monotony towards that subject. If the difficulties are found out, right kind of help given in the early stages can prevent weakness and failure in the later stages.

Classes IX and X are the most crucial years of learning that prepare students for higher education. After class X, students will choose different streams of education i.e., Science, Arts and Commerce. As competence in English is crucial whatever streams students may choose for higher learning, it is therefore necessary to know what their standard in English at this stage. If competency in English from this stage is enhanced, i.e., from Class IX, students can concentrate on their study of different subjects efficiently instead of grappling with the comprehension of language of other subjects.
which usually is the case. A proper direction at this stage is important and competence in the English language would be certainly beneficial for their progress in their respective fields of study.

Moreover, the analysis of the learners’ competence in the English language at this stage would be an indicator of the quality of English language teaching at the high school level. In India English is taught as second language and instead of oral communication, written communication is given much more importance. Students are therefore expected that while writing, they should not commit any grammatical errors. In this particular study the investigator tries to find out the errors that students of secondary stage commit while writing English.

Language teaching has its base in empirical findings on which much of its development depends. But at the same time the study of language teaching and learning is a subject that also depends on a variety of factors. An individual’s perception is not always static and may vary depending on his/her emotional state and social, linguistic, cultural etc. conditions which affect the second language learning.

It is, therefore, important to find out the causes of syntactic errors of the Secondary level learners of English. Such a study may help in the planning of suitable teaching strategies where the learners’ natural way of language learning is used. It is for this purpose that the investigator has chosen this topic for present study.
1.11 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted with the following objectives in view:

i. To find out the syntactic errors in writing English committed by Vernacular Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Dibrugarh District.

ii. To make a comparative study of the syntactic errors in English committed by Vernacular Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Dibrugarh District in respect to (a) Medium (Assamese, Bengali, Hindi), (b) Gender (Boys and Girls) and (c) Habitation (Urban and Rural Schools).

iii. To study the causes of the syntactic errors in English committed by Vernacular Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Dibrugarh District.

1.12 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

i) There is no significant difference between the Assamese Medium and Bengali Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Dibrugarh district as far as the percentage (%) of frequency of errors is concerned while writing English.

ii) There is no significant difference between the Assamese Medium and Hindi Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Vernacular Medium of Dibrugarh district as far as the percentage (%) of frequency of errors is concerned while writing English.
iii) There is no significant difference between the Bengali Medium and Hindi Medium Secondary School students of Class IX of Vernacular Medium of Dibrugarh district as far as the percentage (%) of frequency of errors is concerned while writing English.

iv) There is no significant difference between the Boys and Girls students of Class IX of Vernacular Medium Secondary Schools of Dibrugarh district with regard to their syntactic errors in written English.

v) There is no significant difference between the Urban and Rural students of Class IX of Vernacular Medium Secondary Schools of Dibrugarh district with regard to their syntactic errors in written English.

1.13 CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT TERMS USED

1.13.1 Vernacular Medium Schools

The term ‘vernacular’ refers to any one of the national languages recognized by the Constitution of India and which is used for carrying out the teaching learning process.

In this particular study the term Vernacular Medium School refers to the Assamese, Hindi and Bengali Medium Secondary Schools in Dibrugarh district under SEBA.
1.13.2 Secondary School

Secondary School is the intermediary stage between the primary and higher school. It is called the link between these two stages of school. According to the Regulations of Secondary Schools issued by the English Board of Education, “A Secondary School is one which makes provision for pupils between the ages of twelve and sixteen. As a matter of fact, however, many schools retain their pupils to the age of nineteen that is until they are prepared to enter the university.”

In present study the term ‘Secondary School’ refers to all the Assamese, Hindi and Bengali Medium schools providing instructions to students of Class IX & X under SEBA within Dibrugarh district.

1.13.3 Gender

The lexical meaning of the term ‘Gender’ refers to the fact of being male or female. Although the words gender and sex both have the same implication, i. e., ‘the state of being male or female’, they typically used in slightly different ways: sex tends to refer to biological differences while gender refers to cultural or social ones.

In the present study the term ‘gender’ is used to mean the male and female students (boys and girls) studying in Class IX.

1.13.4 Habitation

It means the act of living in a place. In the context of the present study, the term is used to mean the students studying in Class IX in Secondary Schools of urban and rural areas of Dibrugarh district.
1.13.4.1 Urban

The term urban implies an area that is more thickly populated than surrounding areas, symbolize a plenty of man-made structures, group of people living densely in a limited area enjoying all the modern facilities of life. According to New Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, the word ‘urban’ means connected with a town or city. In this study the term is used to mean the Secondary Schools located in Dibrugarh Municipality Board, Naharkatia Town Committee and Chabua Town Committee.

1.13.4.2 Rural

The term rural means connected with or like the countryside or typical of the country as distinguished from the city which contains more free space. In other words it implies relating to, or characteristic of the country or country life, living in or accustomed to the country. Rural refers empirically to population living in areas of low density and to small settlements. In the present study the term is used to mean all the Secondary Schools located in the five blocks viz. Borboruah Block, Lahoal Block, Panitola Block, Joypur Block and Tengakhat Block of Dibrugarh district.

1.14 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

There are some limitations of the study keeping in view the purpose, scope and constraints of time which are as follows

i) The present study comprises of Secondary Schools of Dibrugarh district, Assam.
ii) The present study was restricted to Secondary School students of Dibrugarh district under SEBA (Board of Secondary Education, Assam).

iii) Class IX Assamese, Hindi and Bengali Medium students, both boys and girls were included in the study.

iv) The study was confined to the schools situated in rural and urban area of Dibrugarh district.

v) Keeping in view of the age of the students and the amount of English learnt by them, higher skills of writing, like ‘style’ has been excluded. It is limited to errors of syntax, morphology and mechanics of writing.

1.15 BACKGROUND OF THE AREA UNDER STUDY

Dibrugarh is an administrative district in the state of Assam in India. The district headquarter is located at Dibrugarh city. The district occupies an area of 3,381 square km. The district extends from 27°5′38″N to 27°42′30″N latitude and 94°33′46″E to 95°29′8″E longitude. It is bounded by Dhemaji district on the north, Tinsukia district on the east, Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh on the south east and Sibsagar district on the north and south west. The area stretches from the north bank of the Brahmaputra, which flows for a length of 95km through the northern margin of the district, to the Patkai foothills on the south. The Burhi Dihing, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra, flows through the district from east to west. The name
Dibrugarh is derived from Dibrumukh –the mouth (mukh) of the river Dibru. Dibrugarh became a separate district when it was split from Lakhimpur in 1976. On 1 October 1989 Tinsukia district was split from Dibrugarh.

The district of Dibrugarh has only one sub-division, comprising of 7 blocks (Borbaruah, Joypur, Khowang, Lahoal, Panitola, Tengakhat and Tingkhong), 7 revenue circles, 9 towns and 1348 villages. According to the 2011 census Dibrugarh district has a population of 1,327,748, which gives it a ranking of 367th in India. The district has a population density of 393 inhabitants per square kilometer. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 12.04%. Dibrugarh has a sex ratio of 952 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 76.22%.
As per 2012 statistics, there are total 2098 schools in Dibrugarh district. These include 1973 rural schools and 125 urban schools. When it comes to total no. of school by type, Dibrugarh has about 2067 co-educational schools, 11 Boys schools and 20 Girls schools.

1.16 ORGANISATIONS OF THE CHAPTERS

The findings of the study have been planned to present in the following chapters

Chapter I: Introduction

In this chapter a brief overview has been given with regard to language learning process, Error analysis, significance of the problem, objectives of the study, hypotheses, background of the area under study, operational definitions of terms and concepts used and delimitations of the study etc.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

This chapter aims to present theoretical and empirical evidence on syntactic errors. Hence, some of the previous studies on syntactic errors in India and abroad are presented.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter contains the empirical methodology consisting of the design of the study, the population, selection of the sample, selection of the research tools and techniques, procedure of data collection, details of analysis and interpretation of data.
Chapter IV: Analysis and Interpretation of data

This chapter contains the analysis and interpretation of data as per objectives and hypotheses of the study. The results are summarised in tables and an indication is given to either accept or reject the hypotheses.

Chapter V: Findings and Discussion

This chapter revolves around the findings of the study. The investigator aims to present discussion on the findings of the study followed by other related studies on the area.

Chapter VI: Summary, Suggestions and Recommendations

In this chapter the investigator tries to conclude the study with a summary of the study and put forward a number of suggestions and recommendations for further research.

REFERENCE SECTION: The reference section includes Bibliography and Appendices.

REFERENCES


**Online sources**

www.dibrugarh.nic.in (official website of Dibrugarh district)