4. 0. Introduction

Two handsome Princes, so the story goes, were seen quarrelling over the honour of putting on the covetable shoes of the most distinguished learned grammarian of the empire. On seeing this, the Caliph, their father remarked that it was the glory and honour of his kingdom that great grammarians were honoured even above kings. True to this tradition, committed teachers and writers have expressed their allegiance to grammatical precepts. Among them Jane Austen followed the norms of grammar meticulously in her writings. She was influenced by the grammar teachings of Lowth in 19th century. That she was much concerned about correctness in grammar is evident from the way she quite often changed her own grammatical structures in the later editions of her novels (Crystal, 1995: 77). She had used “the tables were broke up” in the first edition of Pride and Prejudice, but later she changed it to ‘broken’. Jane Austen was well aware of the social role of grammar. In her time non-standard usage was seen as a mark of vulgarity, and good grammar as a sign of good breeding. In a sharp contrast to this story, Howatt (1984: 35) cites the cynical remark of Cominius: ‘Grammars were either long and tedious or short and confusing, and useless either way. There were by definition imperfect since language was in a state of constant flux and change’. He also mentions the immortal words of Joseph Webbe, who dispensed with grammar teaching altogether (1984: 34): ‘No man can run speeding to the mark of language that is shackled and ingiv’d with grammar precepts’.
4. 1. Teaching of Grammar and the Mixed Response

Generally, teaching of grammar draws mixed response from the teachers and the students. In the early seventies, Widdowson drew attention to the fact that English language was generally taught as an exemplification of the grammatical system and not as communication. He advocated a shift from ‘usage’ to ‘use’ (Agnihotri & Khanna, 1995: 99). These instances cited above imply the epic battle in which the scholars have locked their horns over the years. Another serious concern is that communicative functional approach has become popular, and consequently grammar teaching has been relegated to the margins. This is perhaps one of the reasons as to why the written productions of ESL learners are ridden with grammatical errors. Even the native learners are not exempted from these linguistic problems. Michael Plumbe, Chairman of the Queen’s English society, expressed serious concerns over the deteriorating standards in grammar teaching, while acknowledging its distinct role: “I hated being taught grammar at school, but I now appreciate in later life that it is extremely useful. Lack of grammatical knowledge is also a key reason for the failure to learn a foreign language” (Plumbe, 2005 cited in Takahashi, 2005: 222).

Further, Takahashi cites the observation of Veda Charrow, the author of a leading textbook, on the grammatical errors among the American elementary and high school students (Charrow 2004, cited in Takahashi, 2005): “… I have no doubt that reason for this profusion of grammatical errors is that most American elementary and high school students are not taught English grammar any more…”
Inner Circle (Kachru, 1988), one can imagine the alarming trends in teaching grammar in the Outer and Expanding circles. When Krishnaswamy and Sriraman (1994: 43) describe English Teaching in India, “a tragic tale”, probably they mean that grammar teaching is far from satisfactory. Unfortunately, even the English teachers are not aware of the seriousness of such vital issues. As mentioned earlier, it is the grammatical aspects of the language that continue to pose major problems to the ESL learners. The evidence from the literature also testifies to this problem. Olson (cited in Van Els, 1984: 262) hypotheses that grammatical errors are less detrimental to intelligibility. On the other hand, Hendrickson (1980b: 217) feels that frequent errors are the suitable candidates for correction. The present corpus reveals that the grammatical errors are the most frequent. Hendrickson further feels that (1978: 390-391) two types of errors need to be singled out in the literature: Errors that impede the intelligibility of message and the errors that stigmatize the learners from the native speaker’s perspective. If errors in the present corpus are placed under the scrutiny of the second parameter mentioned above, then all the categories should be stigmatized. However, grammatical errors need to be viewed seriously. Richards, Platt, & Platt, (1992: 127) defines an error in language as given below:

….the use of a linguistic item (e.g. word, a grammatical item or a speech) in a way, which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete, learning. A distinction is sometimes made between an error, which results from incomplete knowledge and a mistake made by a learner when writing or
speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness or some other aspect of performance….

The ungrammatical utterances and writings of L₂ students are known as errors rather than mistakes. The role of a teacher in an L₂ classroom is to deal with errors rather than mistakes. Researchers have assumed a hierarchy of errors (Burt & Kiparsky, cited in Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982:191) and suggested that there is a distinct difference between global and local errors:

Global mistakes are those that violate rules involving the overall structure of a sentence, the relations among constituent clauses, 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.

They claim that global errors are more serious and rank higher in the error hierarchy than local ones. Errors in the use of tense and aspect may be labelled as local errors, as they do not hinder communication. Nevertheless, they are extremely common errors among the second language learners of English. Such errors are very much worth investigating since tense and aspect represent essential parts of English grammar. On the other hand, the researchers consider the breach of “tense continuity across clauses” as a global error, as it affects the overall organization of a sentence and spoils comprehensibility more seriously than the local errors.
4. 2. Features of New Englishes in India

‘I learn English since ten years’. “The story was touching me deeply”. Such grammatical formations are considered part of the Standard English in India, but continue to be dismissed as incorrect in England (Elizabeth, 2002: 8). Some of the features of New Englishes of post-colonial countries like India, Nigeria, and Singapore...share the same features of the English that the second language learners manifest. What intrigues the researcher (p.10) is that these unique features of New Englishes span not only Africa, Asia and the subcontinent of India, but they also appear in many second language classrooms around the world. Among the prototypical features of New Englishes, non-count nouns and tense and aspect continue to pose problems for the second language learners. Following are some features that characterize New Englishes of African, Asian, and South Asian context:

1) The Occasional Loss of Distinctions between Count and Non-count Nouns

   i. I lost all my furnitures.

   ii. She gave me an advice that I’ll never forget.

   (Trudgill & Hannah, 1982: 104)

Crystal (1995: 361) admits that “countability is a tricky area of English grammar, posing a problem, regardless of the learner’s language background”. This explains why the pluralization of words like informations and advices is found in all places where English is used as a second language.
2) Variation in the Usage of Tense and Aspect:

The use of the present tense (instead of present perfect), with phrases indicating a period from past to present (Trudgill & Hannah, 1982: 109):

*I am working here since two years.*

3) The Use of Progressive Aspect with Stative Verbs:

*He is having many problems.*

4) The Use of the Present Perfect instead of the Simple Past, especially with Past time Adverbs:

*I have been there ten years ago.*

In New Englishes, the deviations from Standard English have often been attributed to interference from the mother tongue. The mother tongue has a set of rules which are in conflict with the structures of English and which the second language learners frequently fall back upon (cited in Elizabeth, 2002: 11). But an investigation of the corpus reveals that mother tongue influence is just one of the factors for the erroneous productions.

4.3. Basic Reasons for the Occurrence of Grammatical Errors

Though teachers spend a great deal of time and effort on teaching the distinctions between the simple past, the present perfect, and the perfect continuous and the subtleties of the English system of tense and aspect, the students make little progress. The reason why ESL learners find it difficult to learn these characteristics of English is not because they do not have similar features in
their own languages, but because they are not “communicatively crucial” (Jenkins & Seidlhofer, 2001 cited in Elizabeth, 2002: 11). But an investigation of the corpus reveals that mother tongue influence is just one of the factors for the erroneous productions. Even the advanced learners of English commit errors which are similar to the features of New Englishes. Crystal (1995: 361) observes “there seems to be extensive international overlap between the so called errors that non-native speakers make”. English language is known for certain idiosyncrasies such as ‘non-count nouns’ and the ‘aspect system’-which are likely to pose difficulties to learners. These idiosyncrasies in English pose major problems to the learners, notwithstanding their exposure to English and the language family they come from. Several non-standard grammatical features are widely distributed among second language writings. Researchers observe that these constructions occur because of interference from the mother tongue seems improbable (Elizabeth, 2002: 11). Elizabeth contends that these ‘errors’ have been attributed to mother-tongue influence by a false analysis.

Typical production errors in the writings of the subjects are the distribution of verb groups. This type of errors is quite intriguing since the subjects have been learning it for a few years. However, Richards (1974: 179) cautions about the danger of missing ‘realistic English’ while giving “excessive attention to points of difference….” He sounds a note of caution against a teaching method known as ‘contrastive-based teaching’. One of the major reasons for these errors is the difficulty to familiarize with the structure of the target language. It is largely due to the general characteristics of rote learning such as wrong generalization,
incomplete applicable of rules, and failure to realize the conditions under which rules apply as Richards (1971) suggests. One of the influences on error patterns, in the writings of the second language learners may be traced to the fundamental differences between a learner’s mother tongue (L1) and the target language (L2). Table (1) shows that it is the grammatical errors that disturb the ESL learners very much:

Table 1: Detailed Errors frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>Different Types of Errors</th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>26.13%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Syntactical</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>22.18%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.56%</td>
<td>17.02%</td>
<td>18.56%</td>
<td>17.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9.27%</td>
<td>8.57%</td>
<td>8.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Preposition</td>
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<td>222</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.33%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
<td>8.49%</td>
<td>9.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Morphological</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.59%</td>
<td>7.48%</td>
<td>8.91%</td>
<td>8.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Orthographical</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2836</td>
<td>2619</td>
<td>2613</td>
<td>2429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4. Analysis of Grammatical Errors

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992: 610) defines English as a ‘subject prominent’ language in which the grammatical units of subject and predicate are basic to the structure of sentences. Failure to understand this unique feature of English results in ESL learners committing errors. An examination of the present corpus of errors brings out various grammatical deviations. The researcher has categorized them for a detailed analysis. Richards (1974: 183) mentions about seventeen error types related to the structure of verbs in English. This error category was chosen, because these errors “are more crucial in the process of language learning than errors in prepositions and articles” (Ghadessey, 1985: 264). It is observed that verbs were pivots for all other sentence constituents. So, it was decided to focus on those errors in the use of tense and verb. Before analyzing the scripts in detail, it was decided to concentrate only on those linguistic items and not of the thematic content of the data. Verbal and tense errors that were identified in the scripts were categorized in the following manner.

4.4.1. Absence of Main Verbs or Auxiliaries

“The verb is the heart throb of the sentence. Without a verb, a group of words can never hope to be anything more than a fragment, a hopelessly incomplete sentence, a eunuch or dummy of a grammatical expression”. This observation by Gordon (cited in Anderson, 2005: 117) stresses the key role of a verb in a sentence. Second language learners are assumed to have generalized from their class lessons and book exercises that a sentence should have a verb or
action word. They might have also been instructed to memorize the past and past participle forms of verbs from various grammar books. This kind of rote learning has enabled them to memorize key structures of English language without understanding their usage. Thus the forms like leave-left-left’; ‘catch-caught-caught’; ‘bite-bit-bitten’ are learnt by rote without comprehending the content. Learners are also taught the various contrasts “is-am-was’, are-were; has/have-had ‘does/do-did” by rote learning rather than by exposure to usage. The learners consider these verb forms as individual markers of tense in describing action and used to refer to the time when the action occurred. This explains why the learners have ignored main verbs or auxiliaries.

1) I……..never forgot the match.
2) After the service…….over...
3) Abraham Lincoln…the most successful United States President.
4) After than we……..watching TV.

4. 4. 2. Redundant Use of an Auxiliary

Very often the learners commit errors in their writings due to over application of the rules of target language. Their inadequate understanding of distinctions in the target language makes them believe that the auxiliaries in English language are tense markers and are required to be used with all verbs. This faulty comprehension makes commit errors in their written production as shown in following examples:

1) When I was studied 12th standard......
2) We were celebrated Christmas.
3) *Dravid is come as a runner for Sachin.*

4) *I was got up in the early morning.*

5) *We have went out in the evening.*

6) *Relatives were came to my house.*

Richards (1974: 174) groups these errors under ‘intralingual and developmental errors’ which reflect the general characteristics of rote learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to acquaint with the conditions under which rules apply. These developmental errors, according to Richards, explain the hypotheses that the learners attempt to build up about the target language from his inadequate experience in the classroom.

Kamala (1992: 129) cites ‘the insufficient teaching exercises’ as another reason for the learners’ failure to comprehend distinctions in the target language.

4.4.3. Erroneous Use of Modals

Modal verbs are part of the auxiliaries and they are known as ‘helping’ verbs. They assist the main verbs to bring out a range of meanings: possibility, probability, certainty, permission, requests, instructions, suggestions, offers and invitations, wants and wishes, obligations. The irregular forms and ignorance of nuances of the meaning of modal verbs present many difficulties for learners of English who may produce deviant forms as mentioned below:

1) *I will must go.*

2) *Lincoln could not selected.*
Other language learners use different structures to convey the ideals expressed in English using modals. They are not perhaps aware of the structures that English modals are not followed by ‘to’ infinitives and present or past ‘participles’. The present corpus has the following erroneous constructions as shown below:

1) *The heroes replied, ‘We thought we can to do that action’.*

2) *They could done the job.*

3) *They should coming here at any time.*

Moreover, ESL learners also have difficulties in framing interrogatives sentences. They often go by the common patterns to produce questions such as,’ *Does she must go?’* Learners of other languages may also have problems in sorting out the subtle shades of meaning indicated by specific modal verbs. This problem will result in the production of expressions which may lack etiquette. The errors in the use of modals are caused by learners’ insufficient familiarity with the functions of modals. They may also reflect the teaching strategies adopted by the teachers.

**4.4.4. Use of the Present Tense in Place of the Past or the Future Tense**

The learners assume that the action happened in the past is conveyed lexically through the context, as in ‘last year’, ‘yesterday’ and ‘last month’. So they feel that they do not have to use the past form of the verb. This explains the prevalence of erroneous productions as given below:

1) *We celebrate our send of party in my school in 2002.*

2) *In the temple we saw the snake. It is very long.*
3) Lastly, we arrive that place at 2:30 p.m.

4) My friends and my family go to Ooty on June 14, 2003.

5) My friends wishes me on 8th March, 2006.

The learner may assume that the -ed marker or past form of a verb in narrative context is irrelevant or redundant as the ‘pastness’ of an event could be conveyed lexically in stories or through the use of adverbials. Moreover, the learner feels that the primary concept of coherence in narratives should be expressed only in the present tense. Essays on ‘Cricket match’ and ‘My favourite festival’ illustrate this aspect.

1) We wait for the bus.

2) We wrongly climb up the bus.

3) Villagers receive us.

4) Teaching staffs congratulate us.

5) We clean the temple on the first day.

Analyzing the errors in the writings of Czech learners of English, Duskova (1969) observes that the learners’ use of the present in place of past is a mistake in performance. But Selinker (cited in Richards, 1974: 40) feels that it is the learning strategy of simplification.
4. 4. 5. Use of the Past Tense in Place of the Present Tense

In the present study it is observed that the learners have used the past tense to refer to habitual actions. It seems that their familiarity with the past tense causes confusion:

1) *She is the one who loved me more after my mum.*

2) *Christmas is my favorite festival, Because in that day I was celebrating my birthday.*

3) *In Pongal we wore a new dress.*

These examples indicate that the use of tenses poses a formidable task to the Tamil learners. As mentioned earlier, the factors like rote learning without comprehension, lack of opportunity to practice in the usage for communication are some of the reasons for the occurrence of errors. Further, the analysis also reveals that the errors identified are instances of ‘mixed up tense’ and they are committed due to overgeneralization.

4. 4. 6. Use of the Present Continuous Tense Instead of the Simple Present Tense

The present study also exposes Indian learners’ fascination for the frequent use of the Progressive tense in the place of the Present tense, as shown in the following sentences:

1) *How is your studies going?*

2) *Our generation is always finding ways to become better and faster.*
3) Cinema industry is going to very bad level.

4) We are learning the old process of education.

5) It is still now wondering me.

Once again it is due to the inadequate exposure to the use of tense and the force of generalization that the learners have produced such faulty constructions. Richards (Richards, 1974: 178) attributes these errors to the learners’ exposure to faulty materials. Further, he outlines the general conditions in which the simple present tense is used: “The simple present tense in English is the normal tense used for actions seen as a whole, for events which develop according to a plan, or for sequences of events taking place at the present moment”. But the examples given in some of the textbooks are the ‘progressive forms’ instead of the ‘present tense’. These materials, according to Richards, might negatively influence the learners to assume that the progressive form in English is used for narrating stories and for describing successions of events. Further, he contends that these errors may also have been caused due to excessive attention paid to points of difference at the expense of realistic English. Here he seems to echo the prediction made by another scholar (Richards, 1974: 179): A course that concentrates too much on “the main trouble spots” without due attention to the structure of the foreign language as a whole, will leave the learner with a patch work of unfruitful, partial generalizations…”. It also implies that any attempt to teach English Structures by contrastive analysis misleads the learners. The teaching materials need to be examined in the light of interlingual errors committed quite often by the learners.
4.4.7. Use of the Perfect Tense in the Place of the Simple

The Second language learners are often confused between the simple and the past perfect, the simple past and the present perfect, the progressive and the perfect progressive. It is due to the incomplete learning of rules that causes such confusions and the learners hypothesize false concepts about the forms of tenses hence they produce following sentences:

1) We have depart sharply at 6 O’clock.
2) Since Pak has a strong bowling line up, there was no hope.
3) We have wish all of them on Christmas day.
4) We invite our friends for lunch on that day.

The samples chosen for the study suggest that the learners are referring to past events. As they are not acquainted with the forms of the simple past and the present perfect, they have produced faulty sentences. They have to be exposed to the basic principles of ‘time and aspect’ involved in the use of tenses. The investigation shows that this is the major area where the second language learners continue to struggle despite their parents’ educational background, and instruction in English medium. The teaching strategies employed so far have not yet made a major breakthrough in ‘time and aspect’ area.

4.4.8. The Use of Stative Verbs as Progressive Forms

The findings of the research (Richards, 1974: 196) suggest that the learners tend to overgeneralize the rule that verbs, either transitive or intransitive, take-
‘ing’ for the progressive aspect. Jain (cited in Richards, 1974:197) argues that this overgeneralization results in the formation of following erroneous productions:

1) *I am having a heavy workload this semester.*
2) *We make mistakes because we are not knowing the rules.*

Hence Jain pleads for the need of introducing sub-classification at all syntactic levels. He also admits the challenges of this process of ‘sub-classification’ as some ‘static verbs’ taking the progressive aspect in certain contexts are accepted e.g.:

1) *The sniffer dog was smelling the abandoned suitcase.*
2) *The villagers were not recognizing the help of Heroes.*
3) *Lincoln was feeling lot for his sweet heart’s sudden death.*

ESL learners’ usage is notoriously known for overapplication of-*ing* to statives. It is obviously due to the influence of first language (L1). Studies have tried to establish that ‘an untutored learner overuses –‘ing’ on statives.

4. 4. 9. Erroneous Verb Inflection for Number and Person

The present corpus throws a large number of errors which are classified as subject-verb concord errors. The subjects are prone to inflect the verbs incorrectly for number and person. Subject- verb agreement is a continuing source of difficulty for ESL learners even at the advanced levels. A few learners produce incorrect sentences such as:

1) *The clerk never come on time.*
2) *The delegates is so late.*

The present study also throws similar examples:

*If we goes to the parade very late or the punctuality is not there the officers will punish.* The subject-verb concord or agreement is one of the forms of English syntax that poses a major problem to Tamil learners of English. The learners find it difficult to use in free compositions. A few more examples of subject-verb concord errors are cited below. The correct form is given in brackets after the error:

1) *The youngsters commits (commit) wrong things.*
2) *My friends wishes (wish) me on 8th March.*
3) *Cinema decrease (decreases) the religious second faith.*
4) *I think he know (knows) the story of Robert Bruce.*

In the first two sentences, the learners add –s to the plural subject and in the next two sentences they have chosen to avoid using –s to the singular. Such errors are not uncommon in the present corpus. The concord of 3rd person number between subject and verb is the most important type of concord. As these scholars express, the learners are not aware of an elementary rule: a singular subject takes a singular verb and a plural subject takes a plural verb. Nevertheless, this simple rule is not as easy to follow as it appears.

Why do Tamil learners commit a lot of subject-verb agreement errors? There are many explanations. One of them is that the agreement errors may be attributed to transfer from the learner’s mother tongue. Gass and Selinker (2001:
observe that such errors are committed when the learners transfer the linguistic properties of their mother tongue to the target language. For Tamil learners, the process of isolating the relevant tense morphemes in their L₁ is complicated. According to Jayaraman (1978: 137), the reason is the lexical verb in Tamil is consistently inflected not only for tense and aspect, but also for person, number and gender concord. It influences their SLA negatively. This factor, perhaps, explains the prevalence of grammatical errors in their writings. Further, ESL learners are confused when the pronouns like neither, nor take plural verb in the informal English.

The error corpus of the present study includes:

1) Errors in the use of plural verbs with singular subjects:
   
   i.  
   
   Sachin make half century.
   
   ii.  
   
   My father give me a gift.

2) Errors in the use of singular verbs for plural subjects as in:
   
   i.  
   
   Those days was gone.
   
   ii.  
   
   My friends wishes me on my birth day.

3) Erroneous verbs in the third person used with first Person subject:

   
   I wants to go to college.

The linguistic structures of the target language seem to be the source of errors in the sentence cited above. As Richards (1974: 174) observes, it is overgeneralization that produces one deviant structure in place of two regular structures. It may be the result of learners’ attempt to reduce his linguistic burden.
Richards (175) attributes the occurrence of such ‘hybrid structure’ to certain types of conventional teaching techniques. Several pattern drills and transform exercises interfere with each other and cause the occurrence of errors. The use of “I wants” is perhaps an instance of such interference produced on the analogy of “He wants to go to Delhi”.

Following are the examples of errors that fall under subject-verb agreement:

Omission of ‘-s’ with the third person singular, as in the following examples:

1) If a man get another chance.
2) Lincoln want to overcome.

Addition of ‘-s’ with the third person plural and the first person plural.

1) These incidents in his life makes us to say that.
2) People enjoys this festival.
3) If we goes to the parade late,....

Researchers have assumed that agreement is a rule that ensures the harmonizing of various grammatical units. The present investigation shows that concord errors are common among ESL learners as they tend to generalize the forms and simplify in order to reduce the linguistic burden.
4. 4. 10. Overpassivization of Verbs

The researcher feels that the corpus has a lot of examples which are labelled as ‘overpassivization errors’ (nontargetlike passivization of unaccusative verbs, a subclass of intransitives). They are quite common in the writings of not only Tamil learners but also that of ESL/EFL learners everywhere. The principal hypothesis of overpassivization (Ju, 2000: 85) is that learners are more prone to making such errors in externally caused events (where an agent or cause may form part of the speaker’s mental representation) than in internally caused events (where the agent or the cause is not specific). The present corpus gives a lot of examples:

1) He is suffered a nervous breakdown.

2) Days were passed.

3) He was failed in business.

4) He was entered in business.

5) Many problems was occurred in the life of Abraham.

The frequency of these errors committed by the subjects is high in the second phase of data collection (guided writing). The verbs are generally intransitives and they have non-agent subjects. The examples given above indicate that the learners passivize verbs that ought to be in active voice. Yip (cited in Ju, 2000: 86) defined passivization or non-native like passivization of intransitive verbs by L₂ learners. Researchers observe that these errors are not common to any particular L₁ group. On the other hand, they imply that the errors are language universal rather than language specific. As per the transitivization hypothesis
overpassivization errors may be attributed to the learners’ constraints in mapping relations between lexical semantics and syntax. However, Ju feels that cognitive factors do play a crucial role in these errors. He contends that this vital problem is not addressed. So he seeks to fill this gap in his paper. Investigation done in the 90s with special focus on the acquisition of grammatical properties of verbs (Oshita, 2000: 293) indicates a paradigm shift in research on the grammatical analysis of interlanguage systems. These studies have revealed an interlanguage phenomenon that characterizes ESL writings:

1) *The most memorable experience of my life was happened 15 years ago.*

2) *Most of people are fallen in love and marry with somebody.*

3) *My mother was died when I was just a baby.*

4) *He was arrived early.*

5) *The problem is existed many years.*

(Source Oshita, 294)

4. 4. 10. 1. Factors Causing Overpassivization

The subjects chosen for the present study are no exception to these phenomena. Hubbard (cited in Oshita) observes that more than 90% of his findings in non-native compositions have these errors, which are more common among advanced learners than among low proficiency students. This IL English phenomenon is referred to as the ‘passive’ unaccusatives, as the verbs resemble the English passive construction. Literature (295) identifies the following five factors for the problem of Overpassivization: 1) Transfer of a compound tense/aspect
system in the learner’s first language (L1); 2) Overgeneralization of the adjectival passive formation in English; 3) Nontarget lexical causativization; 4) Identification of the passive morphosyntax with the lack of a logical subject; and 5) Nontarget overt marking of syntactic NP movement. According to Richards (1973: 103-104) ‘passive’ unaccusative errors indicate the learners’ imperfect mastery of the English tense/aspect system. This interpretation seems to be motivated by L1 transfer of a tense/aspect auxiliary verb + a past participle. However, Oshita (2000: 296) questions most of these accounts in the light of the data and observations available in the recent literature. She also observes that L1 is one of the potential factors that may contribute to the prevalence of ‘passive’ unaccusative errors.

In the second language writings, ‘passive’ unaccusative errors such as what was happened are quite common. Researchers have been trying to understand this problem for a long time. They have not yet reached a consensus about the ultimate cause of this distinct interlanguage structure. One of the reasons for this type of errors is perhaps the learners’ ignorance of the distinction between unaccusatives (arrive, fall) and unergatives (e.g., swim, talk, smile). Richards believes that (1974: 103-04), ‘passive’ unaccusative errors were considered as indicators of the learners’ imperfect mastery of the English tense/aspect system. Generally, the unaccusatives take a be-type auxiliary verb while unergatives and transitive require a have type. Researchers (Oshita, 2000: 297) have suspected that the cause of the nontarget be-type structure may be due to the morphosyntactic, properties of the Learner’s L1. The learners may transfer these properties to their target language. Further, these passive ‘unaccusative’ errors are also committed by the
learners whose native languages do not have this kind of compound tense/aspect systems of English. That is why the problem of ‘passive’ unaccusative errors is frequent in the writings of the English learners of Chinese, Japanese and Korean, none of which has a comparable compound tense/aspect system. Secondly, overgeneralization of the adjectival passive formation may be one of the potential factors for passive’ unaccusatives.

4.4.11. Overregularization of Irregular Verbs

ESL learners’ attempt to make use of the past tense in English results in their productions of ‘irregularization errors’. Learning the past tense is an example of generalization in language acquisition. The phenomenon can be explained easily on the teaching that the past tense of regular verbs can be formed by adding –ed to the stem. However, the learners fail to understand that the irregular verbs are highly unsystematic, each word having a unique inflection. The problems occur when the learners begin to make overregualrization errors:

*The baby breaked the flower vase.*

Such errors imply the learners’ attempt to generalize grammar rule as captured by their cognitive system, and in the process resulting in over-application rules. According to Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982: 150) there are four different principal ways in which learners modify the forms of target language: 1) Omission; 2) Addition; 2) Misformation; 4) Misordering. James (1998: 111) adds ‘Blends’ as the fifth one. Of these, ‘addition’ is the result-of-all-too faithful use of grammatical rules (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982: 156). Regularization refers to
the errors which overlooks exceptions and extends the general rules to the contexts where they do not apply. In the present corpus, learners produce the regular runned for ran. Following are the examples from the corpus:

1) *We stayed in the mandapam runned by God belivers and sarey sallers.*

2) *He did not lost his confidence.*

3) *My mother maked sweets.*

4) *He never quitted from his path.*

5) *Wife’s death breaked his heard.*

Errors could yield special insights into learning mechanisms. Of the errors, perhaps the most notorious one is the past tense overregularization. Most of the English verbs take their regular past tense form by adding the suffix –ed, e.g., *visit-visited.* Some of the irregular verbs form past tense idiosyncratically, e.g., *sleep-slep.* Marcus, G.F. (1996: 81) notes that there are about 180 irregular verbs in English language. As the learners lack mechanisms to detect and extend linguistic generalizations, they produce errors of overregularize. Further, Marcus (82) lists the following reasons: 1) Learners’ access to default rule taught in the classroom: to form the past tense, add –ed to the verbs. They tend to generalize the –ed inflection to all verbs: *runned, goed, quitted*; 2) Learners memorize past tense forms of irregular verbs. As memory is fallible, it slips when the learners need it most; 3) The irregular lexicon generally takes precedence over the rule: *Slept becomes slepted. Made becomes maked.* Even the advanced learners might overregularize, as the memory for irregular verbs is taxed. They experience
retrieval failure. Successful retrieval is achieved only through frequent encounters with the forms of Target language.

4. 4. 12. Double Marking

It is an example for the second subtype of oversuppliance. It is defined as ‘failure to delete certain items which are required in some linguistic constructions but not in others’ (156). The English sentences which have two negators or two tense markers instead of one can be cited as typical examples of double marking:

He doesn’t know me. (He does not know me)

Researchers also come across certain errors labelled as ‘over inclusions’ (James, 1998: 155) as in:

Every student in the were participated (Every student participated at the function).

4. 4. 13. Overgeneralization of Verbs

Richards (1974: 174) lists overgeneralization as one of the seven important factors which are assumed to cause intralingual errors in the written productions. It may be defined as ‘the use of previously available strategies in new situations’. Overgeneralization also includes instances where the learners produce deviant structures on the basis of his familiarity with other related structures in the target language. It generally involves the one deviant structure in the place of two regular forms:
Overgeneralizations are a common feature of language development. In learning the English past tense, children typically overgeneralize the ‘-ed’ rule, producing constructions such as:

\[ \text{We helded the baby rabbits.} \]

Richards (1974: 174) feels that overgeneralization covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language:

\[ \text{1) She walked fastly to catch the bus.} \]
\[ \text{2) He leaved the house at 6.00 a.m.} \]

Even after discovering correct rules, the learner may continue to make errors because he has not yet grasped the precise set of categories to which the rule generally applies. So errors of overgeneralization are caused due to the inadequate understanding of the target language rules:

\[ \text{1) He ringed.} \]
\[ \text{2) He cans come.} \]
\[ \text{3) Many mens.} \]
Such errors are not peculiar to the influence or nature of any mother tongue. Learners, irrespective of their mother tongues, continue to make errors. Errors of this kind are also known as analogical errors.

4.4.14. Tense Switching

Although narratives in English are usually done in the past tense, the subjects selected for the study switch back and forth between the past tense and the narrative present. This problem is known as tense switching (from the past to the present) which characterized the narratives of most native speakers of American English. For the Tamil learners, the process of isolating the relevant tense morphemes in their L1 is complicated. According to Jayaraman (1978: 137), the reason is that the lexical verb in Tamil is consistently inflected not only for tense and aspect, but also for person, number and gender concord. It influences their SLA negatively. This factor, perhaps, explains the prevalence of grammatical errors in their writings.

4.4.15. Misuse of Words:

Research has proved that accuracy of the language use could be significantly improved with the competence of the proper use of the vocabulary. Probably, it is in this context that the scholars speak of the grammar of vocabulary. The present corpus of errors gives a substantial number of errors which may be classified as ‘misuse of words’. Examples include:

*We were discussing about our culture.*

(Misuse of verb transitivity)
The volunteers entered into the seminar hall.

(Misuse of Preposition)

On the first day, the teachers gave us lot of advices

(Misuse of Plural form)

The villagers provided us with lot of informations

(Misuse of Uncountable Noun).

4. 4. 16. Simplification

Learners omit plural markers in the written productions. For instance, the subject omits ‘s’ in the following sentence:

I studied English for two year (years)

The omission of the plural marker could be called simplification. Here, it does not block the information conveyed. The cardinal number already signals plurality. The argument holds good. However, it is not a mark of SE. Selinker discusses the strategies employed by a learner for using a target language. Simplification is one such strategy. The learner attempts to reduce the target language to a simpler system:

I am go to the cricket match.
Table 2: Error Frequencies of Grammatical Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical Errors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>6.8017</td>
<td>4.51040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>5.5868</td>
<td>3.79401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>5.6446</td>
<td>3.27582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>4.5372</td>
<td>2.58212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table 2 shows that there is a distinct improvement in the learner’s understanding of grammatical items. They face great difficulties in the correct use of tense. Even those who have been educated in Standard English medium schools and whose parents are educated have produced following ungrammatical sentences:

1) We have went on the evening.
2) We have help many poorer peoples.
3) He give us.
4) We have wish all them elders.
5) We have enjoy the function.

One might tend to conclude that the ‘input’ received in the school and also due to the influence of educated parents does not contribute to the learners’ acquisition of a language. The researchers (cited in Gass & Selinker 1992: 197)
accept that this phenomenon continues to elude them and they are unable to explain the nature of plateaus in learning with adult learners often reported in the literature. The nature of plateaus is complex and consistent and provokes the researchers to raise questions: 1) why do some adult learners continue to struggle with the basic structures of English language despite input and exposure? 2) Could we trace these plateaus to the learners’ low intelligence or their lack of exposure to the essential data base of T. L?

Researchers suggest that such disturbing questions should be addressed in the light of an accepted definition given by The Unabridged Random House Dictionary (2005:755):

Ling. (of a linguistic form, feature, rule, etc) to become permanently established in the interlanguage of a second-language learner in a form that is deviant from the target-language norm and that continues to appear in performance regardless of further exposure to the target language.

Even after so many years of extensive research on SLA, researchers are yet to come out with better explanations for certain linguistic structures that become fossilized, which others do not. An examination of the teaching materials used by an ESL teacher in the class room suggests that the process of teaching is essentially a linear one, a list of linguistic forms in a certain order. This is a sincere attempt with an assumption based on all the evidence we have about the way linguistic knowledge develops spontaneously in the learner. But Corder (1981: 187) emphasizes that the spontaneous development of a grammar in the learner is
organic: ‘... the growth is organic in the way that a flower develops out of a bud’.

One cannot, according to Corder, write a linear programme for the process of
flowering, because everything happens simultaneously. The studies that have been
made of SLA imply that the best language learning is likely to take place when the
teachers focus the learner’s attention on other aspects of what is happening, rather
on language. Language learning can only take place in an appropriate
environment. Obviously, it is the job of an ESL teacher to create such a favourable
learning environment.