5.0. Introduction

Syntax in English refers to the unique pattern in which the words are organized in sentences to make meaningful sentences. Many second language learners have difficulty with specific features of English structures, especially when the syntactic conventions of English differ from those of their first language. In English syntax the word order is very important and it is more distinct and rigid than it is in many languages. Word order is usually used to distinguish subject from object, nouns from verbs, adjectives from nouns, and so on. ESL learners change the word orders in a sentence due to ignorance or L1 interference and the meaning of the sentence is changed. Many speakers of other languages may mix up or misinterpret the word orders in English and mar the pattern and meaning of the sentence. As English syntax involves the study of word combinations or sentence patterns, it poses difficulties for the learners. Jacobs (1995: 4) defines syntax as the grammatical principles, units, and relations involved in sentence structure. The grammatical principles determine the kinds of units the language can have, the order in which the units can be placed and the relations they participate in. So, he observes that the three components-syntax, lexis and semantics-necessarily interact. From the lexicon emerge the proper words, suffixes, and prefixes that fit into the slots provided by the syntax. The semantic component determines the range of interpretation associated with each lexically filled syntactic structure.
In linguistics parlance, syntax is the study of the rules that govern the way words combine to form phrases and phrases to form meaningful sentences. The etymology of the word ‘syntax’ suggests the following sense: ‘sequence’, order, or arrangement. Syntactical rule also poses a major problem to the second language learners despite their theoretical familiarity with the grammar of a target language. Inadequate exposure to the nuances of the language causes difficulty in forming sentences. ESL Teachers are often annoyed by the syntactical errors that plague the writings of their students. Their partial knowledge in syntax often causes ambiguities, especially with adverbs. Literature provides plenty of such examples:

1) Only I tested the Labrador for rabies yesterday.
2) I only tested the Labrador for rabies yesterday.
3) I tested the Labrador for rabies yesterday.
4) I tested the Labrador for rabies only yesterday.

This example cited very often in the literature points to the complete change in the meaning of the sentences and the confusion caused due to the placement of adverbs in wrong order. In the current corpus, syntactical errors were found to be both interlingual and intralingual.

5. 1. Syntactical Errors due to Interlingual interference

An investigation of the corpus of errors suggested that generalizations about the target language and drawing of analogy as an inevitable feature of the learning strategy could be responsible for errors. Such errors also revealed direct
interference of the mother tongue. Researchers have identified the following factors which may hinder the process of language acquisition (Kamala, 1992: 163): 1) Defective teachings methods; 2) Learning strategies; 3) Inadequate teaching materials; 4) Lack of motivation.

The learners resort to the mother tongue patterns as a means of economy and an intense compulsion to communicate. Jain (1974: 199) attributes the deviant structures to a particular teaching strategy rooted in the age of bilingualism of a country. He further explains that some kinds of teaching exercises are typical of the English language teaching tradition in India. The learners have been repeatedly exposed to the exercises in direct and indirect pattern in which ‘that’ is projected as a ‘clause marker’. Familiarity with this kind of language data makes the learners assume that ‘that’ is an invariant clause marker for noun clauses. The learner’s restricted generalization about the target language and the direct interference of the mother tongue hinder his learning process. Moreover, the learner develops a partial knowledge about the target language and draws erroneous analogy between the target language and the mother tongue.

The second language learners come to understand that ‘that’ in English is synonymous with ‘enru’ in Tamil. They extend the analogy to everywhere in that context which produces erroneous sentences. The following written productions are examples of such errors:

1) *My father wants to know that what has happened.*
This sentence corresponds with the mother tongue production:

Enna nadanthathu entru en appa ariya virumbinaar.

2) The principal wanted to know that where I had been.

This sentence corresponds with the mother tongue:

Naan engae poirunthen entru muthalvar ariya virumbinaar.

These examples indicate that the dependence on the mother tongue, along with the restricted generalization about the target language rules causes errors in word order and syntax.

5.1.1. Deviant Structures due to Direct Influence of Mother Tongue

Some of the errors in syntax and the word order could be directly attributed to mother tongue interference. Such errors are noticed in the following usage of the Tamil learners:

1) Word order, particularly misplaced determiners influenced by mother tongue structures:

   i. We all stayed in a shed (Naanga ellarum oru shedil thankinoam).

   ii. We both spoke (Naanga iruvarum pesinoam).

   iii. That full day was gone in a minute (Andha naal muluvathum oru nimidam pola poachu).
iv. *Our national father mahatma* (Nammudaiya desa pitha).

v. *A lorry came from there* (anke irunthu oru laary vanthathu).

vi. *The below story implies that* (Keelae ulla kathai antha unmaiayi unarthukirathu). These examples suggest that the written productions of Tamil learners are influenced by the spoken structures of their mother tongue. It implies that the learners do not have adequate practice of the structure of the target language.

2) Split sentence: a sentence is split into two different incoherent units of clauses or phrases as in:

   i. *There is no man without failures who came up in his life.*

   ii. *You will be surprised to hear who he is.*

   iii. *Lincoln was started his business at his age was 20 years old.*

   iv. *Many failures are the base of the building which is the palace of success.*

   v. *We did not done for publicity, but they dedicate for others.*

3) Redundant clause markers or other linking words are connected with mother tongue, e.g.:

   i. *My father treated me very kindly with loving words.*

   ii. *Chinnapillai replied that whether they had done this act for publicity.*
iii. *We helped many poorer peoples on that day.*

iv. *We served sweets to the nearby neighbors.*

v. *We were waiting for our own sister.*

vi. *My parents force me to get up in the early morning, to brush and to bath to take the morning breakfast.*

vii. *A memorable day which cannot be forgotten even I get another birth.*

viii. *Our friendship is based on the ground that which center around the academics.*

ix. *This there was a answer for all his failures.*

x. *Once there was a man who faced a series failures until at last he gained a great victory.*

4) Omission of clause markers and other related words on the mother tongue patterns:

i. *My negative experiences were I was suffered a more of cold in Delhi.*

ii. *I am very enthusiastic and so I run and see.*

iii. *The third one day match (was) turning point of that serious.*

iv. *His wife was on sickbed he had zero money to save her.*
5. 1. 2. Errors Caused due to the Indirect Interference of the Mother Tongue

Generally, the learners seem to be mixing up the two languages which result in wrong word order:

1) *Since he was during the youth period he should him to make achievement (As a young man he wanted to achieve a lot)*

The Tamil equivalent of this statement is: *Avan Vaaliba paruvathil iruntha padiyaavan saathithapatharku aavalai irunthan.*

2) *We both were discussing about our two cultures (Both of us were discussing our cultures).*

The Tamil equivalent of the statement is: *Naangal iruvarum engal irandu kalacharathai patri vivadhithukkondirunthom.* An examination of these two sentences shows that the learner had begun to write in English in the same word order as in his mother tongue. Later, his exposure to English patterns confused him.

5. 2. Syntactical errors due to Intralingual Interference

Learner’s mother tongue negatively influenced his acquisition process. Besides this Interlingual interference, the current corpus offers evidence of errors committed by the learners due to intralingual interference. The following kinds of errors were noticed in the same way: 1) Wrong word order; 2) Deletion of essential words of a sentence; 3) Use of redundant words; 4) Broken sentence or split sentence.
5. 2. 1. Wrong Word Order Causing Faulty Structures

The learner committed errors in the word order due to learners’ ignorance of the structure of TL. He was tempted to place their determiners like ‘some’, ‘all’, ‘our’ corresponding to the mother tongue patterns. The present data also revealed the errors in the word order due to other factors like the wrong placement of adverbials, wrong placement of adjectivals. Such type of errors is caused by the learners’ inadequate understanding of the target language items.

1) Wrong placement of adverbials.

*We have very much enjoying the lunch.*

2) Wrong placement of adjectivals.

*We both were discussing about our two cultures.*

3) Error in maintaining S+V+O order in the sentences:

   i. *There were loss in his business and officials matters.*

   ii. *Every human life contain many sorrows.*

4) Interchanging of nouns and the qualifying phrases:

   i. *If such people of good souls increase in number our country will flourish.*

   ii. *It is the real heroism what they did.*

   iii. *In our society if there were increase inlike minded persons the nation would flourish.*
iv. The flood was carried away the bus.

v. In Chennai was held that incident.

Misplacement of subjects and verbs, interchanging of the nouns in the subject characterize the syntactical errors. The Learner’s insufficient understanding of the rules and pattern of the target language may be one of the reasons for the confusion in the word order.

5. 2. 2. Omission of Principal Elements Causing Confusion

The Learners chose to dispense with the principal items in their writings. There are instances of the omission of subjects, phrasal verbs, and prepositions. It implies that the learners evolve a system for themselves which is quite simpler than the system of TL. Their ignorance about the weak structure causes so much irritation to the readers.

The present data gives plenty of examples of sentences without subjects:

1) But later, keep mingling with all other college mates and friends.

2) A memorable day in my life was visited the place Agra in Delhi,

3) Then led a miserable life without a companion.

Once again, mother tongue influence may be cited as one of the causes for subject less sentences. In the present corpus the subjects are omitted in complex and compound sentences which confuse the ESL learners and the linguistic problems are complicated further. They keep changing the patterns on account of
their inadequate command of language. Learners’ ignorance voices and the non-
personal subjects like ‘it’ ‘one’ ‘that’ results in the production of such erroneous
constructions:

1. Some of the learners presumed that it was perfectly proper to omit
phrasal verbs and other relevant linguistic items:

   i. *Every human life contains many sorrows and happiness*  
      (Life consists of joys and sorrows)

   ii. *My mind is full of a proverb* (I am reminded of a proverb).

   iii. *He thinks to stand on the V.P election but his age was only
        thirty five at that stage.* (He planned to contest the V.P.
        election when he was 35 years old.

2. Tamil learners, according to the corpus, face a lot of problems in the
use of English prepositions. This is quite evident in the learner’s
writings:

   i. *He met a accident* (He met with an accident).

   ii. *He wants to become a President. So he motive in election*
       (He wants to become the President. Hence his motive in
       contesting the election).

   iii. *He had more than problems in his family* (He had a lot of
       problems in his life).
iv. *That problem make a great sorrow in his life* (That problem caused a great sorrow in his life).

3. Deletion of the object or the object clause:

   i. *He give us...* (He gives us what we need).

4. Omission of pronouns, relative adverbs, connectives etc:

   i. *Many meritorious students who were waiting their admission in some management colleges* (Many meritorious students were waiting for their admission into colleges run by the Management).

   ii. *Cinema is the which is good entertainment for the public* (Cinema is the best medium of entertainment for the public).

5. 2. 3. Addition of Words or Phrases which are Redundant

   1) *Now Tamil cinema industry is going to very bad level* (Now Tamil cinema industry is becoming worse).

   2) *We should not have no caste system which is the most powerful weapon which spoils our loyal life* (We should have no caste system which, as the worst weapon, spoils our normal life).

These sentences indicate that ESL writings are notorious for their redundancies. Lack of familiarity with the structures of target language leaves the learners floundering helplessly in forming complex or compound sentences. This
constraint of learners exposes their inadequate command of the target language. It also implies that they are yet to become conversant with the rules of conjoining and embedding sentences. Though they might attempt to produce simple sentences, their partial exposure to complex and compound sentences influence their writings. The phrases, clauses and complex structures would complicate their linguistic problems. Consequently, their written productions are marked for redundancies as evident in the following sentences also:

1)  *I am brought up in a family in which all the conservative and conventional ideals find their abode* (I am brought up in a conservative family).

2)  *It is the festival which joins everybody together once in a year* (It is the festival which unites everyone once in a year).

Further, redundancies characterize even simple sentences as in:

1)  *My father had planned to arrange a trip to Agra* (My father had arranged a trip to Agra).

2)  *I was waiting for my own sister* (I was waiting for my sister).

3)  *He is called as the hero* (He is called a hero).

5. 2. 4. Split Sentences Causing Confusion among Various Sentence Types

Learners tend to shift from one structure to another within a sentence. Such constant shifting of structures produces confused and ambiguous sentences:
1) *We could not as the became the President of USA at 52* (We cannot call his life a failure as he became the President of the USA at 52).

2) *Since he during the youth period he should tempted his to make achievements* (He had been nurturing an ambition to achieve right from his young age).

3) *The people who had dedicated their lives for other, would not do any work which gives them fame or reward.*

4) *Jayaram got into this great waves and dashed into the walls in result of this his leg broken.*

5) *On hearing the news three persons who were belonging to nearby village went.*

6) *Live long people who live for others without expecting any reward and who live with humanity.*

In any successful syntactic representation, the ambiguity should be avoided so that the readers may infer the syntactic structures easily. In English language, in the use of embedded clauses (also known as object clauses or sentential complements), the inclusion of the overt complementizer (**that**) is quite optional:

1) *He said he was coming.*

2) *He said that he was coming.*

3) *She knew the story was true.*

4) *She knew that the story was true.*
It is clear that the omission of *that* might result in a ‘garden path’ effect causing ambiguity. The use of *that* is employed to avoid ambiguities.

Violation of tense agreement is commonly found in Tamil learners of English. Earlier, it was argued that it was the result of *language transfer*, or *language interference*. However, this argument was quashed by a few researchers (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972: 3): “… for we have not found that the majority of syntactical goofs are due to the native language syntax of the learner”. On the other hand they considered the breach of ‘tense continuity across clauses’ as an instance of global error, as it affects the overall organization of a sentence and spoils comprehensibility more seriously than the local errors (Burt & Kiparsky 1974: 73).

Table 3: Error Frequencies of Syntactical Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactical Errors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<td>.00</td>
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</table>
Christopher Candlin, in his preface to Rutherford’s *Second Language Grammar: Learning and Teaching* (1987: 2) discusses certain issues arising out of the relationship between the acquisition of particular languages and their organizing principles. Candlin argues that the development of interlanguage syntax is constrained by three factors: 1) The general organizing principles common to all language; 2) The influence of nature and target languages; 3) The exploratory processes of learners’ cognition.

It is understood from the analysis that the Tamil learners of English language encounter these difficulties while trying to bring out the syntactical properties in their written productions. As the Table 3 does not show any consistency, it indicates that this area poses one of the major problems. However, consistent exposure to the forms and structures of the target language will assist them in overcoming their syntactic constraints.