6.0. Introduction

SLA research has devoted much less attention to the lexicon than to other parts of language. Even though the lexicon is the most essential component in language acquisition, it has not been given fair deal. Further, evidence from the corpora of errors suggests that ESL compositions are fraught with a lot of lexical errors. Meara (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2001: 372) observes that lexical errors outnumbered grammatical errors by a three to one ratio in a particular corpus. Gass supports the argument put forward by Meara that the native speakers find lexical errors disrupting communication more than grammatical errors. In the educational domain, the strong bond between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension has been identified and it has led to the conclusion that lexical development is also crucially implicated in educational success. It is the lexically oriented L₂ research that has witnessed exponential growth in the early 90s. A study of errors in lexis showed that mother tongue influence and internal confusion within the target language system were the two primary sources of these deviant structures. Based on these findings, errors which were caused by the negative influences of mother tongue were labelled as ‘interlingual’. As the learners attempted to carry over the linguistic structures of mother tongue to the target language, they committed errors in their written productions. And ‘intralingual’ errors were those which resulted from the learners’ internal confusion with the
structures of the target language. Such errors were also caused by the learners’ inadequate control of the target language.

6. 1. Focus of the Study

The objective of this chapter is to examine the key lexical areas of difficulties for the Tamil learners of English. Another focus of this chapter is to classify those lexical deviants on the basis of their type and frequency. This chapter attempts to trace the sources of the errors also. James (1998: 142-154) classifies lexical errors into two types: formal and semantic. Formal errors of lexis include morphology related errors (childrens for children) (fresherman for freshers) and semantic errors in lexis deal with the meanings the learners wish to convey (e.g. smell for scent and nephew for niece). From a sociolinguistic perspective, lexicon may be viewed as the central element in the social system of communication. In the words of psycholinguists, the lexicon may be described as the driving speech production and standing “at the heart” of listening comprehension. The lexicon is believed to open distinct vistas to the process of acquisition of a language as a whole. James (p.150) defines the semantic errors as, “‘conceptual’ errors, where learners use forms that exist in the TL but these forms do not represent the meanings they wish to express”. This study has followed the definition of James for identifying lexical errors in the writings of Tamil learners. Moreover, the study restricted the analysis only to the semantic errors made concerning the content words and their meanings only. Other levels of errors such as orthographical errors, morphological errors are excluded. However, an analysis of orthographical errors is done in a separate chapter.
6. 2. Classification of Lexical Errors

The classification of lexical errors into interlingual and intralingual categories provided a broad framework for investigating the sources and significance of errors. These two broad categories were further sub classified as follows:

1) Interlingual errors covered the Errors caused by the direct interference of the mother tongue and the Errors committed due to indirect interference of the mother tongue.

2) Intralingual errors included the following categories: i) Errors committed due to the learners’ inability to recall; ii) Errors arising from confusion caused by formal similarity between the target language items; iii) Errors arising from an inadequate understanding of the target language items; iv) Errors committed due to confusion between related items.

6. 3. Interlingual Errors

The second language learners are separated from the target language context in terms of cultural, economic, linguistic and social aspects. Naturally, this distance creates confusion in the learners. As they are not familiar with the target language register, they employ a different strategy to communicate. The learner may either employ a direct translation or adopt mother tongue structures in their original shapes. Direct influence of mother tongue may occur on two possible occasions: 1) If the learner’s familiarity with the target language is limited;
2) When the learner refers to certain items and features which are peculiar to his culture, and do not have equivalents in the target language. The lexical and morphological errors testify to the direct interference of the mother tongue. Here, the words are literally adopted from mother tongue and transliterated into English. It shows that the learner’s English equivalents of words are essentially intertwined with culture: 1) Use of collocations influenced by the mother tongue; 2) Use of redundant words modeled on the pattern of the mother tongue:

i. My father treated me very kindly with words.

ii. We were waiting for our own sister.

iii. After the function over finally junior students have sung a song.

6.3.1. Errors Caused by the Indirect Interference of the Mother Tongue

English is the language of social status in Indian context. It is the lingua franca of the elite circle in their social gatherings. People who wish to be accepted into that circle try to learn English. It is known as ‘integrative motivation’. The learners would try to assert their supremacy through the competent use of the target language. A few terminologies, idioms & phrases, words, which are used exclusively by the elite, gradually percolate to even to the uneducated. Such words are slowly assimilated into their mother tongue: Example: bus, ticket, doctor, cycle, scooter. Even the uneducated street hawkers use words like ‘seedless’ ‘town bus’ ‘ration shop’ ‘election’ ‘computer’ T.V., without being aware of their English origin. It is inevitable for the second language learners to pull the forms out of his mother tongue structures and produce them in their communication. Such attempts
of the learners would naturally result in erroneous productions. This process is also known as ‘language mixture’. The influence of ‘language mixture’ on the interlanguage of the learners is caused due to the following factors: 1) Through the bi-directional processes of loan translations, loan rendition, loan blend and loan shift; 2) Through non-symmetric translation equivalence between the mother tongue and the target language.

The bi-directional processes of loan translations and loan shift are caused by the process known as language mixture. The present data provides the researcher with a lot of examples for ‘loan shift’ that occurs on the false assumption that certain words are ‘interchangeable’:

1) *He stood in the legislative election* (He contested the legislative election). It is a loan rendition of Tamil usage: ‘Avar therthalil nindrar’ where ‘nindrar’ means stood’.

2) *All my classmates are sweet personalities* (All my classmates are very kind and affectionate). The usage is based on the analogy of ‘sweet children’ ‘sweet little hotel’.

3) *As it was morning time, the bus was rare* (As it was morning, the frequency of buses was rare). It is also an example of a loan rendition of the Tamil Usage. ‘Kaalai naerama irunthathal’, where naerema means time.

4) *I don’t know how it is ten day’s passed fluently* (we enjoyed ourselves very much that we were not aware of the passage of
time). Patthu naatkal eppadi vegama ponathu enru enakku theriyavillai. Here the learner has used ‘fluency’ to refer to quick passing of time.

6.3.2. Errors Caused due to Non Symmetric Translation Equivalence

The learner fails to understand that each language is unique and even the two related languages have different structures and forms. The learner, who is ignorant of this peculiar aspect of languages, tries hard to strike a similarity between the forms of the two languages. This results in his choice of erroneous alternatives. The errors are attributed to the learner’s incompetence in the use of target language forms. A few learners may be familiar with the target language equivalents of the mother tongue form. Yet, they are unable to distinguish between them and this difficulty causes errors in the use of lexical items. Such errors occur in the written productions because a single form in the mother tongue has several forms with different connotations in the target language. When a learner writes:

‘There are only some who encourages’ he might mean to say,

‘There are only a few friends who encourage me’

A single form like ‘konjam’ in Tamil (a few) has different forms in the target language like, some, a few. He had not enough money to lead the business He did not have enough money to run the business). In Tamil the form ‘tholil nadattha panam’ has more than one equivalent in English:
He did not have sufficient money to run the business.

He did not have sufficient money to do the business.

He did not have sufficient money to operate the business.

Further, the absence of count/mass distinction in the mother tongue of the learners causes errors. The learners were confused in distinguishing voice, sound, noise; see, watch and look; job and employment; too, two, to. This confusion often lead to errors. conversation between an Indian boy and an English girl will explain the ESL learners’ confusion in distinguishing the meanings of certain words:

Indian student: I like you very much.

English girl: I too like you.

Indian student: I like you three times, four times.....

Obviously, the learner infers that numerical meaning of ‘two’ from the sound of ‘to’. A large number of subjects have used ‘back’ and a few of them have used ‘earlier’ in the place of ‘ago’: Two months back (Two months ago). Richards (1974: 180) observes that learners often get confused as they feel words like ‘too’ ‘so’ and ‘very’ are synonymous, despite all attempts to explain that they have contrastive meanings. Learners’ confusion is reflected in their choice of related words like ‘teach’ for ‘learn’ ‘do’ for ‘make’ ‘come’ for ‘go’ ‘bring’ for ‘take’ and ‘before’ for ‘ago’. According to Richards, such confusion is sometimes caused by ‘premature contrastive presentation’. With a view to establishing a contrast between ‘too’ and ‘very’, the course designers introduced courses which baffled the learners. He proposes a safer strategy for instruction in order to
minimize opportunities for confusion through a careful selection of non-synonymous contexts for related words. Richards further suggests that the treatment of those selected contexts at different times, and by carefully avoiding exercises based on contrast and transformation (Richards, 1974: 181).

6. 4. Intralingual Errors

As mentioned earlier, the learner’s inadequate understanding of the forms of the target language resulted in the commission of errors. Such errors have their origin in the target language itself. These errors, which are known as intralingual, are essentially developmental in nature. These type of errors committed by ESL learners could also be observed in the language produced by children learning English as their mother tongue. The learning process and the intralingual errors seem to be universal irrespective of their linguistic background. Generally, an active learner of English language analyses the language data to which he is exposed. From his analysis and observation of the data, the learner hypothesizes rules in framing sentences in the target language. Such hypothesis becomes the basis of his interlanguage: a language which he produces on the basis of his understanding of the target language. This language is the product of a linguistic system that is distinct from both the first and the target languages. James describes the learner’s version of the target language as follows: “a term suggesting the half-way position it holds between knowing and not knowing the target language” (James, 1998: 3).
6. 4. 1. Factors that Caused Lexical Errors

However, the interlanguage of the learners is not static, but continues to fluctuate as the learner’s control of the target language elements increase or cease to improve. Hence the investigation of an interlanguage at any stage indicates only the temporary stage which the learner has reached. An analysis of errors may help us understand the progress the learners are making in their study of target language. The intralingual errors are the distinct indices of the creative rules and peculiar processes that keep working language learning. The corpus of errors indicates that the second language learners commit lexical errors for the following reasons: 1) Errors committed due to the learner’s inability to recall; 2) Errors caused by confusion between formally similar items; 3) Errors committed due to insufficient knowledge of target language items; 4) Sometimes, the second language learners are unable to differentiate various grammatical functions of some items that look similar; 5) A few lexical errors are committed by the learners due to inadequate practice in the use of word formation rules; 6) Lexical errors committed due to confusion between related items.

6. 4. 1. 1. Errors Committed due to the Learner’s Inability to Recall

Learners commit lexical errors when they prefer to use another conceptually related word in their vocabulary which looks like a relevant word to meet their communicative need. For example, when a student writes, ‘we quarrel within us for silly things’ he may be looking for a word which means ‘unimportant’. As he fails to recollect the words like ‘trivial’ he settles down for ‘silly’. When another subject writes, ‘A newpserson had an interview with the three heroes’, probably he
is trying to recall words like ‘journalist’ ‘news reporter’ which probably evade his memory. After a great deal of effort to recall the right word, he chooses newperson as the nearest suitable word. It is quite possible that there would be significant improvement in his use of lexical items if the learners are exposed to sufficient opportunities and relevant contexts to fix the active vocabulary of the learners. The corpus of lexical errors illustrate that these errors are committed not due to the learners’ unfamiliarity with those forms but due to the inadequate experience with the target language. The following examples taken from the present corpus point to the lexical difficulties that the learners face in their written productions:

1) *They diverted the energy of our younger generation for social good* (They channelised the energy of the young generation for social cause).

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

3) *He told another surprise* (He sprang another surprise).

4) *It was a different experience with both positive and negative experience* (It was a different experience with its advantages and disadvantages).

5) *I was a fearful girl* (I was a timid girl).
6. 4. 1. 2. Errors Caused due to Confusion between Formally Similar Items

Lexical errors may also be committed due to words and morphemes which have formal similarity. In other words, confusion is caused by certain words that look similar in form but different in meaning:

1) *India is becoming an industrial country because of the fastest advancement* (development)

2) *India is not at all backward to other countries* (inferior).

3) *It increases the uneducated peoples* (breeds).

4) *Most of the cinema kindle the sexual feelings* (arouse).

5) *Even though there are lot of educational Institutions they are not well educated* (developed).

6) *The life of Lincoln remembers me of a proverb* (reminds).

James (1988: 151) calls these errors ‘semantic errors in lexis’. Learners commit such type of errors when they use a more ‘general term’, instead of a more ‘specific one’ (superonym for hyponym). Consequently, the production of the word is an underspecification of the meaning. According to James semantic errors in lexis also include the following:

1) When learners use too specific a term where general term is sufficient:
   
   i. *The Colonels (officers) live in the castle.*

2) When the learners choose the less of two co-hyponyms.
   
   i. *She is my nephew (niece).*
ii. *It is a disease to exterminate* (eradicate) dialects.

3) When they use a wrong word from a set of near-synonyms:

... *A regretful* (penitent) criminal or sinner.

6. 4. 1. 3. Errors Committed due to Insufficient Knowledge of Target Language Items

1) *Being the welwisher* of India. I must share my dreams (*partriot*).

2) *Nowadays our Indian culture has been collapsed* by cinema (*deteriorated, declined*).

3) *Two months back a bus passing over the bridgeaway was slashed* away (*washed*).

4) *Here is one small story about one great man* (*a, little, a*).

6. 4. 1. 4. Lexical Errors Committed due to Confusion between Related Items

Some of the words look similar either on account of semantic affinity or due to common source or etymology or other common features. They create confusion and uncertainty to the ESL learners. It is quite possible that the learners are not able to bring out inappropriate word formation, inspite of their cognitive understanding of the stem form of a lexical item:

Sometimes, the second language learners are unable to differentiate various grammatical functions of some items that look similar:

1) *And also the british people who ruled us for two centuries also rooted* their culture in India (*rooted for planted*).
2) Whether we have achieved our aim in education or not is a questionable today (questionable for question).

3) Tsunami attached seashores in TN (attached for attacked).

4) Then our society will Cherish (Cherish for flourish).

5) The escaped heroes of those places secured the ones caught in the waves (secured for saved).

6) The bridge was smashed away by the flood (smashed for washed).

7) That time big calm was destroyed the bridge (calm for storm).

8) Another business also went in vein (vain).

6. 4. 1. 5. A few Lexical Errors are committed by the Learners due to Inadequate Practice in the Use of Word Formation Rules

1) One should not stop with the first failure (initial).

2) He started worked (He started working).

3) His wife was died (His wife died).

4) But he did not lost his confidence (lose).

5) Every human life contain many sorrows and happiness (consists of, joys).

6) We have suffered a lot for our nationality (nation).

6. 4. 1. 6. Errors due to the Coinage of New Words

We are not able to become the superpowerful country (a super power).

These errors are called intralingual and developmental, which do not reflect the
influence of the mother tongue. These errors indicate the learners’ competence at certain stage in the process of learning second language. These errors also expose the learners’ inability to distinguish two languages. Intralingual errors illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition. Such errors may be caused by overgeneralization which the learners employ in an attempt to reduce their linguistic burden.

The second language learner observes and analyses the linguistic structures of the target language to which he is exposed. On the basis of his observation of the linguistic data, he develops rules to produce his own utterances in the target language. These rules characterize the second language system which is known as ‘interlanguage’ (Selinker, 1972). IL can be regarded as a distinct language variety, which cannot be condemned as ‘wrong English’. James (1998: 143) identifies five reasons for lexis to take a central role in language study: 1) The boundaries line between lexis and grammar seem to be less clear cut than assumed; 2) Learners equate vocabulary with language learning. They assume that vocabulary is an essential aspect in learning; 3) Lexical errors are the most frequent category in a significant number of learner groups; 4) Native speakers find lexical errors to be more ‘disruptive and irritating than other types’; 5) Vocabulary carries a particularly heavy functional load.

In the context of New Englishes, the multi-dimensional diversity of language in use poses many problems for the linguists to be addressed. Ahulu (1998: 29) seeks to explore the common linguistic problems that exist in the
written language of various postcolonial countries. These deviant structures rarely occur in the British Standard English. Ahulu focuses on some of the interesting lexical features which are discussed in five different categories: 1) archaism; 2) borrowing; 3) coinage; 4) semantic modification; 5) loan translation.

(1) Archaisms

It is quite common to find following expressions in Indian English.

i. *I request you to grant me two days’ leave next week, as I have to go to my native place.*

ii. *The police are yet to arrest the miscreants who damaged public properties.*

iii. *Conveyance is one of the problems in reaching the resort.*

Such expressions are examples of archaism.

(2) Borrowing

The written English in L2 countries such as India has many lexical items which are not accepted as Standard English. The influence of the vernaculars is one of the two major sources that have contributed to the borrowing which are deviant. In the present corpus of errors, learners have used similar forms: *Saree sellers.* Further, the invasion of American English is another source of the learners in India using a few lexical expressions which are non standard: *movie, billions, and teenager.*
The present study does not also to question the correctness of American English, which has been recognized as a mark of Standard English. It supports the argument that American English is one of the sources of borrowing.

3. Coinage

Though the lexical items noticed in the written English in postcolonial countries like India are deviant forms, they also produce productive coinages which result from derivation and compounding:

i. *The upliftment* of women is not in the agenda of politicians.

ii. *Steps should be initiated to channelize the energies of the youth.*

(In British English it is ‘improvement’ and ‘Channel’).

The coinages ‘upliftment’ and ‘channelize’ do not look like non-standard. Hence they are called productive coinages.

6. 4. 1. 7. Errors Committed due to Lexical Simplification

ESL written productions are also characterized by simplification. Lexical simplification implies that the learners try to communicate meaning while avoiding the apt lexical items. In L₂ writing, the learners employ various strategies like ‘avoidance’ in their attempt to communicate to the target readers. Literature throws various possible strategies that the L₂ learners employ as camouflage in an attempt to cope with the deficiency in his interlanguage (Shiela Mani 1997: 58). The present corpus has yielded a lot examples:
i. The remote area people (rural folks) cannot avail the higher education.

ii. Only the capable persons (the rich, the wealthy) can buy good education.

iii. There is no drug addictor (drug addict).

iv. The dream is very tasty (grand, fantastic).

v. Poverty results (breeds) in terrorism and anti social activities.

vi. Cinema (cinefield, an entertainment) line is a amusement.

vii. Most of the people like (enjoy) watching cinema.

viii. Many youngsters will come (enter) to the politics.

ix. It increases the uneducated peoples (illiterates).

x. We expect (antipate) that film very much.

xi. Most of the cinema kindle (arouse) the sexual (vulgar) feelings.

xii. His father died of sugar (diabetics).

xiii. They friends and my relations (relatives) came to my house.

xiv. The Indian audience (spectators) were impressed by Dhony’s performance.

xv. Without (absence) the shining players (star players) our team won the match.

xvi. We used to work out very hardly (hard).

xvii. We cracked (fired) the bombs (crackers).

xviii. This is the biggest (greatest) successful (success) in the life.

xix. Illfortune (misfortune) played a cruel trick in his life.
This festival joins (unites) everyone.

These examples from the present corpus indicate that the learners are not competent to make distinctions between hyponyms. This failure results in the erroneous productions: remote area people (rural people); capable persons (the rich); no drug addictor (drug addict); poverty results (breeds). The words used by the learners are not acceptable. The simplification strategy employed by the subjects is an attempt to avoid difficult words in certain contexts. This lexical simplification may also be called one of the strategies of overgeneralization.

6. 4. 1. 8. Errors caused by a Wrong Use of Approximation

Some of the learners have employed a different strategy known as ‘the use of approximation’. This strategy implies that the use of a single word or structure, which is incorrect, but which shares certain semantic features in common. The learner uses ‘the uneducated people’ instead of ‘the illiterates’, amusement for entertainment, expect instead of anticipate, sugar instead of diabetics as in He died of sugar. The study also implies that the learners’ mental lexicon differs from that of native speakers. This difference may be one of the reasons for a large number of lexical errors. A growing body of research is concerned with the associate relations between these two lexicons. Studies done in the past point to the consensus among the researchers the patterns of lexical connection in the writings of L2 learners are different from those of Native Speakers (Zareva, 2006: 129). However, researchers paid little attention to highlight the nature of differences. The basic differences may be cited as potential factors for the lexical errors.
Studies also prove (130) that comprehensive language proficiency has distinct effect on the L₂ learners’ lexical knowledge.

6. 4. 1. 9. Errors Committed due to Wrong Analogy

The Coacher took the players for the tournament (Coach).

In the sentence cited above the subject chose to write coacher instead of coach as a result of wrong analogy with similar items such as barber, writer, driver, teacher. This is an instance of overgeneralization of rules. Errors of this kind were committed as a result of the subjects’ lack of understanding that synonyms are not interchangeable in all contexts. These interlingual errors (mother tongue interference) produced by the learners are also known as ‘false friend’ errors (James 1998: 25). The learners are confused when an MT word and a TL word look identical or similar form but different in meaning. Such instances of errors are quite amusing as they are caused by these cross-language asymmetries of form and meaning which result in embarrassing and absurd events.

6. 5. Lexical Inferencing

Hussain (2004: 108) defines ‘lexical inferencing’ as making ‘informed guesses’ about the meaning of unknown words based on the available linguistic and non-linguistic cues in the text. It has been closely linked with incidental vocabulary meaning (It also means guessing the meaning of an unfamiliar word using available cues).
Table 4: Error Frequencies of Lexical Errors

<table>
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<th>Lexical Errors</th>
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<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
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<td>Phase 4</td>
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<td>12.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (list wise)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6. Conclusion

The Table 4 indicates that learners’ understanding of the lexical items has not shown any consistency. As late as late seventies teaching on lexis was not considered a major aspect. Critics dismissed it as something peripheral to language teaching, ‘an irritating irregular in an otherwise ordered grammar’. ESL Teachers had an unwritten understanding that lexical teaching was left for the students to come to grips with themselves, while the major thrust was given on the teaching of what was considered much more significant. Even now, lexical teaching does not enjoy popularity. Krashen, with the support of L1 vocabulary research, maintains that deliberate and constant efforts make only insignificant contribute to lexical growth. He makes an emphatic claim on reading: “My suspicion is that reading is not simply a way to develop vocabulary… it is the only way”.

The corpus reveals that the lexical error is the third major problem for the learners, next to grammatical and syntactical. The present analysis of the data reveals insights into the areas of weakness in the learners’ lexical knowledge, the
patterns of lexical errors in writings. Among the various lexical error categories identified in the studies, it is observed that the learners have committed errors due to semantic similarities, followed by errors of lexical misselection and overgeneralization. Further the learners faced greater difficulties with lexical items that share the same semantic origin and formal association. A significant proportion of errors is caused by confusion due to similarity in orthographical aspects. If the learners are provided with clear-cut instructional input with an emphasis on the usage and practice, it will help them reduce the errors.