CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Phenomenal Growth of English

To write that the English language plays a critical role in trade, commerce, industry and education, it is to state the obvious. There has been an increasing demand in India for the study of English as a means of material advancement and as a status symbol. Some sections of people all over the world driven by linguistic chauvinism opposed the learning of English. Preserving the legacy of their mother tongues may be one of the reasons. However, thanks to the advent of globalization, people in every race, culture and language have great fascination for English. Pennycook (1994: 5) states: “English and English Language Teaching seem ubiquitous in the world, playing a role everywhere from large-scale global politics to the intricacies of people’s lives”. Nearly four centuries ago, the Bard of the Avon was a young man then and English was not in global use. “It was a language of small reach [sic], it stretched no further than this land of our, naie [sic] not there at all” (Rechard Mulcaster, cited in Gautam, 2002: 1). Towards the end of 16th century, English was known exclusively to native speakers who were not more than seven million.

But, today, the language enjoys an unprecedented popularity. Randolph Quirk makes a striking contrast with the position of English in his paper entitled ‘The English Language in a Global Context’: “Now in daily use not by seven million but by seven hundred million—and only half of them native speakers of the
language no longer of ‘Small reatch’ but a language–the language on which the sun does not set, whose users never sleep” (p.1). Even as early as in 1780 John Adam, the future US President, predicted the possibility of English evolving as a global language: “English is destined to be in the next and succeeding centuries more generally the language of the World than Latin was in the last or French is in the present age” (cited in Crystal, 2004: 6). He added further: “English will be the most respectable language in the world and the most universally read and spoken in the next century if not before the close of this one” (cited in Kachru, 1996: 2).

Though John Adams was not a linguistic romanticist, he had an uncanny insight into the bright prospects of the English language. The spread of English across the globe is amazing. English has been made either an official or an associated language in several countries. It enjoys some kind of special administrative status in over seventy countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria and India. According to Crystal, a language becomes the world language for only one reason only – the power of the people who speak it. He attributes the political, technological, economic and cultural power to the phenomenal spread of English (Crystal, 2004: 9).

1.2. English in India

December 31, 1600, is a milestone in the history of English language in India. It was the day when the East India Company landed on the Indian seashore after getting official permission to trade in ‘The East Indies’ as the subcontinent was then referred to. But it was Macaulay’s masterstroke on 2nd February, 1835 that distinctly
outlined the objectives of teaching English in British India: “… We must, at present, do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect...” (cited in Gautam, 2002: 29). And English became the language of the government, education and advancement. Though India’s encounter with English began in 1600, it was accelerated by the historic declaration of Macaulay’s famous minutes and it permeated the fabric of India’s culture. It is now the unifying force of the educated Indians.

Owing to the prolonged contact between English and Indian languages, an inevitable effect of linguistic convergence has been brought about. One of the consequences of this convergence has been the Englishization of Indian languages in as much as certain linguistic features of English have crept in to Indian languages. As the effect is mutual, English has also been ‘indianized’ on account of its use by Indians with varied linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of competence in English. The last two decades of Twentieth century witnessed a widespread interest in English in India. Ravi Sheorey and Baskaran Nayar observe: “In independent India, the continued use of English and the preference for the democratic form of Government have now become part of the national consciousness” (Sheorey, 2002: 13). Gone are the days when Indian politicians dismissed English as a relic of the British colonial rule. At the dawn of new millennium it has become so much intertwined with Indian identity that it can hardly be ignored. Kachru (1986: 32)
endorsed this important role of English and made a strong pronouncement that it enriches India’s growing linguistic repertoire.

1.2.1. Reason for the Passion for English

One of the principal reasons for the unusual passion for English among the youngsters is that proficiency in English promises social accomplishment, well paid placement order, professional credibility. Indian students are quite aware that mastering English has become a fait accompli if they aspire to gain upward mobility. Krishnaswamy and Sriraman (1994: 25) have assessed the attitudes of the students in India who have figured out that knowing English would open up numerous opportunities not only for Pan-Indian mobility, but also for attractive assignment abroad. Agnihotri and Khanna (1997) conducted a survey among several hundred of students. Their empirical evidence reinforces the fact that the students in India have positive attitude towards learning English. Unfortunately, several agencies that parade advertisements like, ‘Learn to speak English in 45 days’ have invaded many strategic places. Their only motive is to cash in on the positive mood among the young learners towards English. Kachru attributes the glamour for the English language to white man’s power. Since English is considered a dominant symbol, second language learners want to learn it somehow. Kachru cites the oft-quoted lines of E. M. Forster in A Passage to India which explain the tremendous popularity of the language (Kachru, 1986: 5): “India likes gods, And English men like posing as gods”.
1.3. Corruption of the Language

As English has spread around the world, it has assumed many different forms. Trudgill and Hannah (1994: 122) explain what generally happens to English in new environments:

In many of the areas, English has become indigenized. This means that these second language Varieties of English, as a result of widespread and frequent use, have acquired or are acquiring relatively consistent, fixed local norms of usage which are adhered to by all speakers. These Varieties of English may differ, often considerably, from the English of native speakers elsewhere in the world, mainly as a result of influence from local languages.

Though English enjoys indisputable stability in its world status, several issues are raised concerning its linguistic character. Ahulu (1994: 10) is perhaps right when he points out that standards of English are ‘suffering progressive deterioration’ wherever it is used for formal education. The future course of English is going to be certainly influenced by those who speak it as a second language or foreign language. Consequently, the linguistic character of English is likely to suffer heavy damage. As second/foreign language speakers grow rapidly, they may perhaps function like the presiding deities of the use of English. Usage such as ‘three person’, ‘he be running’, ‘many informations’, ‘prepone’ and ‘depromote’ were once criticized as monstrous, non-standard; but, now they are part of common usage even among educated Indians. These declining standards have raised several issues. The thin line between confusing
words like ‘less’ and ‘fewer’ begins to blur and the case of disappearing adverbs has begun to worry researchers. The concerns expressed by the scholars are justified in the context of this foreign language’s long association with India. Widdowson (1993: 323) deplores the decline in standards and usage which ‘defile the well of English’. Similarly, Quirk, one of the leading crusaders of Standard English, is very harsh on those who attempt to dilute it: “It is neither liberal nor liberating to permit learners to settle for lower standards than the best, and it is a travesty of liberalism to tolerate low standards which will lock the least fortunate into least rewarding careers” (1990: 9). He is harsh in his comment on the EFL teachers’ attempt to compromise SE. He calls such a teaching ‘half baked quackery’ (p.10). This kind of ‘tolerant pluralism’ does not augur well for the teaching of English.

1. 3. 1. What ails ELT in India?

An evaluation of the methods of teaching English in India would be helpful. Grammar-translation method has been the principal and popular ever since English was introduced in India. An average ESL learner here has already been exposed to at least nine years of English learning when he enters the college. Studies imply that this amount of language learning yields little result. An examination of the nature of education imparted to the learners at the primary and secondary level might explain the problems that confront them when they come to the Tertiary level. English lessons are taught through word by word translation in their mother tongue. Mehrotra, (1998: 9) cites a UNESCO report which places India as the third country in the production of English titles (behind the U.S. and the U.K.). This impressive
statistics leads him to conclude that English in India is still “… the sine qua non to better employment in big business and even government concerns” (p.11).

Despite the ESL learners’ exposure to the teaching of English language for decades, their competence in the use of the language has been criticised by English scholars.” English written by the Indians is utterly unsatisfactory”. This uncharitable comment was made by Stephen Spender (cited in Sarker, 1991: 21), an acknowledged master of the English language. However, his comment on the quality of writing was not substantiated by any examples. Probably, India is the only country where the English language has been in use over two centuries- other than the native speakers. However, this unique feature does not make Indian English flawless. Some Indians do in fact speak and write British English. But they are as rare as ‘Bostonial Brahmins’ in America. The written productions of ESL learners in India are known for glaring deviations from British English. Indian English is not a clone of British English. Driven by jingoistic feeling, some people might justify the deviant structures and assert that they cannot be termed as ‘errors’. In other words, the slips, according to these patriots, are ‘innovations’ enriching English in terms of presenting Indian English with a global appeal. However, if the canons of SE are applied to Indian English, it will not stand the test.

Even though the use of English has been in India for nearly two centuries, English language teaching is bedevilled by its own problems. It is true that a native like proficiency in English is attained by a few sections of people in India. To most of the learners, learning English remains an intellectual, emotional burden and
functional non-starter. Second language learners feel frustrated when they realize that they are not adequately equipped to negotiate the ordinary encounters that demand the use of English. The ability to use English appropriately in social encounters continues to evade them. An acute sense of inadequacy torments the hearts of many second language learners in India. Ironically, it was only in India where the first book written to teach English was produced in 1797 (Howatt, 1984: 77). The book entitled The Tutor was written by John Miller and published in Serampore. It is another testimony to the fact that English teaching in India has had a rich heritage. Paradoxically, it is English subject that becomes a nightmare to most of the second language learners. Even after receiving several years of formal instruction, ESL learners frequently remain deficient in their ability in using it in normal communication whether spoken or written.

Examining the ELT scenario in India, Sunder Rajan (cited in Agni Kotri, 1995: 58) feels that there has been a myth about Indian schools and colleges that teaching English literature texts would impart language skills successfully and comprehensively. English teachers at the college presume that language skills have been imparted to the learners at the school level for a minimum of three and maximum of twelve years. According to Sunder Rajan, university teachers feel that higher education is essentially meant for knowledge-dissemination. Further, he observes that ‘higher education’ in India is characterized by three years course of study, the lecture method, large classes and centralized exam, where as ‘skills pedagogy’ calls for smaller classes, practice oriented courses.
Another major problem of ELT in India is that both ESL teachers and developers of curriculum materials in Tamil nadu generally work with a limited knowledge regarding the areas of difficulty, sources of deviant structures. They are not equipped with teaching materials and strategies to address problem areas. This is another factor that explains why the teaching of English has not made significant impact on the learners. The teaching materials that scarce the learners, the incompetent resource persons, and lack of motivation are some of them. Ill-equipped English teachers cause a heavy damage to the learning process of the learners. The English teachers are not taking conscious efforts to improve their skills in the language. Their career is characterized by incompetence, mediocrity and an unwillingness to improve. Some of the teachers are too conservative to widen their horizons for new techniques and innovations in language teaching. The implications of this alarming situation in the colleges, where the present study is done, are the following: (1) The English teachers in South India fail to provide native-like models for the learners; 2) A lack of motivation, an orthodoxical perspective, unwillingness to learn; 3) As the culture of reading newspapers, books and magazines has been progressively deteriorating among the teachers, they have lost their credentials to inspire the young learners. These alarming trends have serious implications for language learning. It seems to be a universal problem as the literature (Maliwa, 2005: 7) identifies more or less similar reasons for the learner problems in South Africa. The English teachers quite often resort to code-switching by illustrating complex concepts in Tamil language. They would rather
1.4. Mismatch between Learners Expectation and Classroom Reality

The present scenario in tertiary education in the southern parts of India is not entirely different from that of the early 1970s. There seems to be a striking mismatch between the aspirations of the language learners and the harsh realities of the classroom situation. The learners who enter the portals of higher education anticipate fluency and accuracy in two years of attending second language learning (SLL) classes. Sadly, the classroom reality frustrates them. Despite these odds and limitations, English is imparted to students and public on a massive scale in India. It is equally true that the same profession of teaching English has suffered setbacks, disappointments and shocks. Raja Rao’s oft-quoted pronouncement echoes the groaning of ‘English India’ (cited in Krishnaswamy & Sriraman, 1994: 57):

… One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own. One has to convey various shades and omissions of a certain thought – movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien’, yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persia was before – but not of our emotional make up. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians …
This ambivalent attitude characterizes the conflicts of the adults learning English in India.

1.4.1 Teacher-centred English Teaching

Further, in countries like India, where there has been an unquestionable tradition of unconditional reverence for the teachers, English teaching is naturally teacher-centred. In these countries teacher is not viewed as ‘a facilitator’ but as a ‘font of knowledge’. Such traditional attitude of the learners reflects the general response of the second language learners in Asia. Teachers are driven by an absurd notion that they have to deliver their lessons without any concession to students; “English teaching in Asia”, to quote the words of Campbell, “is still dominantly didactic, product oriented, and teacher-centred” (Liu, 1998:7). In his foreword to Enrich Your English: Communication Skills Book (Inthira, 1999), Ram Reddy, the former Chairman, University Grants Communication, New Delhi, points out that there is a yawning gap between the level of competence in English required by the undergraduate students and the one that they possess. Though the beginners at the tertiary level bring with them at least six years of English, they find it extremely difficult to use it in real-life situations. Lack of linguistic and communicative competence makes them feel diffident about handling elementary grammatical structures, basic vocabulary, and communication skills. Communication skills refer to the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The present study is an attempt at investigating errors in the written production.
1.5. Background to the Study

The majority ESL learners do not attain the competence needed even for fundamental communicative needs towards the completion of their graduation. Cummins (1983: 121) attributes this poor performance to the learners reaching a plateau even at the tertiary level where learning a foreign language ceases and fossilizes. Hence they produce fossilized structures in their compositions. Selinker’s observation (1992: 252) on the fossilized structures in the speech of ESL learners may also be relevant to their written productions as well: “… there exist forms which remain in learner speech permanently no matter what the learner does to attempt their eradication” and no matter what “amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language”. English, as a constitutionally recognized associate official language, enjoys a special status in India. It has been taught as a second language in schools and colleges. In a country where there are 1618 languages, 31 states and 6 major religions, English is the link language and the lingua franca in higher education. As L2 learners speak several hundred languages, the forms and structures of their native languages would certainly interfere with their learning of English. Consequently, the written productions in English tend to deviate from the standards set by the educated native speakers.

1.6. Problem of the Study

This research arose out of an intense need to investigate why the undergraduate students in the colleges affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, South India, for whom English is a second language, continue to produce several errors in their compositions. The students are not able to express themselves in
correct English. ESL learners in this part of South India are not adequately taught to handle even the basic forms of the target language. Could they bring out their written productions free from elementary errors, leaving the goal of achieving native like proficiency? The Board of Studies keeps revising the syllabus keeping in pace with the linguistic demands. Remedial measures are initiated periodically to improve the written productions. Notwithstanding all these efforts, the occurrence of errors seems to be inevitable. This brings to our attention of the observation made by Brooks (cited in Van Els 1984: 262) on the frequency of errors in second language learning: “Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence is to be expected”. Countless studies have been done to explain why the second language learners continue to error in their written productions. Yet, the phenomenon of errors continues to baffle language teachers and researchers. However, the reaction of the public and the press towards errors is rather cynical. Their outright comment on the nature of the English used by the ESL learners is due to their ignorance of the nuances of errors. Ravi Sheorey and Bhaskaran Nayar observe (Sheorey, 2002: 23): “Deconstructing English language teaching, faulting the teachers of English, and bemoaning the deteriorating standards of English are a favourite sport of the Indian Press”.

Though a substantial research has been done on EA in other parts of the world, literature has few studies on the nature and significance of the errors produced by Tamil learners of English in South India. The corpus of errors reveals certain principal areas of weakness of the learners in Tense/Verb, lexicon, syntax and Articles. The errors stress the need for a theoretical understanding of the nature
and pattern of the deviant forms, to be followed by the interpretations and the linguistic explanations. An investigation into the errors would facilitate the course designers, material producers and clear the way for pedagogical implications to address the problematic areas at various stages. In second language learning, Tense, Lexicon, Syntax, Articles and orthography are fundamental aspects of learning in spoken and written communication. Hence the researcher has chosen to analyze the corpus in terms of the areas specified.

1.6.1. The Pedagogical relevance of E.A

Error analysis, as an application of linguistics, has pedagogical relevance to the study of second language learning. E.A., as a linguistic technique, has a unique place in the study of language disorders. It attempts to answer: What does a child still know of his mother tongue? As a technique, it provides information, which can yield differential diagnosis of the disorders and suggest appropriate treatments. Studies done in the 1950s and 1960s (pre-SLA) were influenced by behavioural psychology and structural linguistics. Language teaching was greatly influenced by Bloomfieldian views of language acquisition as habit formation, which culminated in the development of Audio-Lingual Method. This method involved drilling language patterns until proper language ‘habits’ were formed.

Researchers such as Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) claimed that by analyzing contrasts between native and target languages, the grey areas might be identified. Such prediction of possible problem areas may very well be predicted. Further, Lado (1957: 2) claimed that learners tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native
language to the target language. Though subsequent research supported the claims of Lado (1957), ‘Contrastive Analysis’ proved to be less predictive.

1.6.2. Corder on E.A

Corder (1967) based his argument on Chomsky’s famous distinction between competence and performance. He observed that learner’s errors provide a window into the learner’s linguistic knowledge. Corder sought to carefully distinguish unsystematic performance problems from the systematic errors. This approach treated errors as clear markers of developmental stages of the language learner, not as the result of bad habits. His application of linguistic theory to the issues of second language acquisition introduced a practice which has made an impact even today.

Selinker (1972) introduced the concept of “interlanguage” to the fore of SLA studies and identified a number of processes that make language acquisition difficult: language transfer, over generalization, transfer of training and L2 learning and communication strategies. During the two decades following Selinker (1972) SLA researchers moved away from earlier ties and focused on language pedagogy. It is edifying to read the hierarchical distinction made by Burt and Kiparsky (1972) between what is known as ‘global’ and ‘local’ ‘errors’. Errors, which involve deviance in overall sentence structures, are classified as ‘global’ errors and the ones, which affect the structure of constituents, are known as ‘local’ errors.

Ellis (1985) observes that investigation of the psycholinguistic causes of error was scanty as behaviourist learning theory accounted for errors in terms of
interference. It was Corder’s (1967) seminal work, *The Significance of Learner’s Errors* which focused attention on error from a language processing and language acquisition perspective. Corder initiated the proposal that errors were a necessary part of linguistic development, and that errors were of significance because they might represent the discrepancy between the grammar of the learner’s ‘transitional competence’ and that of the target language.

It was also Corder who observed that learners might have an ‘inbuilt syllabus’ which obviously decides the order in which the grammar is acquired, and that analyzing learner error might throw some light on this order. He felt it absolutely necessary to make a distinction, between those errors, which are the product of chance circumstances, and those, which reveal his underlying knowledge of the language. Later, he calls the errors of performance ‘mistakes’ and the errors of competence ‘errors’ (1981: 10). The ‘mistakes’ are the product of chance circumstances, analogous to native speaker’s slips of the tongue. Corder (1971) also maintained the need for widening the scope of error analysis including not only formal ‘overt’ error but also ‘covert’ error in well-constructed sentence that might be semantically or stylistically inappropriate.

1. 6. 3. Procedure for E.A.

Corder (1974) outlined the procedure for EA distinguishing five stages as mentioned below: 1) Selection of a corpus of language; 2) Identification of errors in the corpus; 3) Classification of the errors identified; 4) Explanation of the psycholinguistic causes of the errors; 5) Evaluation or error gravity ranking of the
errors. This elaborate procedure for EA has set the right framework for the research on the errors in the written production done in the subsequent years.

1.7. Limitations of Error Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) had been the two acknowledged paradigms in SLA research till the late 80s. After keeping the brains critically engaged the brains of the Applied Linguistics for over two decades, they were presumed to become unpopular. Some of the critics even questioned the efficacy of EA (Bell, Brown, 1987. Ellis, 1994) raising valid objections. Among the charges levelled against E.A, the most serious of them is the lack of objectivity in its procedures of analysis. However, they have been resurrected with the publication of remarkable works by James (1998), Gass and Selinker (2001). Quynh Na (2005:8) discusses the limitations of EA. He observes that the detractors of EA are highly critical of it on two grounds: “The analysis of errors is based either on the subjective judgment of the researcher or on the error taxonomy of the previous researchers”. The findings can only be used by teachers whose native language is the language being taught, since non native teachers cannot understand the non-error cases to see the whole picture of the idiosyncratic system of the learners. Researchers have problems in deciding whether the learners have produced the forms by chance or by design. Corder admits (1981: 42) that only a thorough familiarity with their interlanguage will enable the researchers to decide. Since the corpus offers only plausible interpretations to work on, the problems become much more complex. Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) identified three major
conceptual weakness of EA: 1) the confusion of description of errors with errors explanation (the process and product aspects of error analysis); 2) the lack of precision and specificity in the definition of error categories, and 3) simplistic categorisation of the causes of learners’ errors. Hence avoidance behaviour serves as a manifestation of learning problems, and its results should be definitely investigated. As EA fails to explain the avoidance phenomenon, it cannot be considered as an adequate approach for assisting the teachers and researchers with learning materials (Gluth, 2003: 1).

Further, Ellis (Ellis, 1994: 50-68) charges EA with its methodological procedures and scope such as the method of data collection, the distinction between errors and mistakes. Then he contends that the scope of EA has three glaring limitations: 1) It cannot provide a clear picture of both sides of learner language; 2) As most of the EA studies are essentially cross sectional in nature, they can afford to present only a static view of L2 acquisition; 3) EA has its focus only on what learners do and it has not attempted to explain the cause of ‘avoidance’ phenomenon. Even Corder’s distinction between ‘errors of competence’ and ‘errors of performance’ has only a limited use as the following examples suggest:

I felt much *revealed* when I found my keys again (intended relieved).

He *induced* me to Mr. Bradley (intended: introduced).
The dog *swimmed* against the stream (intended: swam)

(Source: Van Els, 1984: 60).

According to Van Els, Corder’s operational criterion for distinguishing errors of performance could only be used if the L₂ learner is present. Researchers shifted their focus from CA to EA as the former (CA) could not serve as an adequate tool for identifying the areas of difficulty for learners of a second language. However, EA does not claim as a model tool for spotting out the areas of difficulties for language learners. It came under vehement criticism. Das was known for making virulent attack on EA (1977: 57).

The infuriating thing about it is the almost clinical detachment which it affects an issue which is so very vital to the teacher: it puts up an elaborate show of diagnosis, but shirks therapy. To me there is something morally reprehensible in saying that errors should be analyzed because they reveal the workings of the learner’s mind; it is like saying that a cancer is interesting because it reveals the physiology of the cell.

One of the charges levelled against EA is that it is not able to explain the avoidance phenomenon. Avoidance behaviour represents a strategy of a learner of a second language by which the learner prefers a simple form to the target language element due to the reasons of difficulties which the target features pose.
1.8. Justifications of E.A.

As Pit Corder (1981: 1) mentioned in his introduction to *Error Analysis and Inter Language* there have been two justifications for the study of learners’ errors. Of the two, the pedagogical justification throws more light on the nature of errors and facilitates the researchers to eradicate them. The theoretical justification claims that an analysis of errors enables the researchers and teachers to gain insights into second language acquisition. A profound knowledge of learners’ errors is mandatory if the researchers have to make any “well-founded proposals for the development and improvement of the materials and techniques of language teaching” (p.1). As errors are integral, they manifest the learner’s “transitional competence” by providing “evidence of the system of the language that he is using at a particular point in the course” (Corder 1967: 167). A systematic analysis of learners’ errors would substantially reflect in course designing and preparation of teaching materials. Error based analyses are not only productive but also necessary to work out and test hypotheses concerning factors that set degrees of difficulty in second language learning at the intermediate level”.

The prospects of research in the field of SLA look bright as research activity moves in the linear direction. Yet, the definite answer to explain the process of either first or second language acquisition continues to evade. It remains an issue, a real conundrum for the experts. While the research has been progressing linearly, each work becomes a new wave adding a little to the corpus. Ellis (1988) observes that SLA is a complex phenomenon. It is not so easy to predict its mysterious functions. Learners in different ages in various places acquire a second language in peculiar
ways. Further, second language learners’ errors, as Ellis (1988) assumes, are not systematic and they vary according to learners and contexts. However, certain forms of errors are uniform and it is quite possible to assume how second language learners will perform in specific situations. Such uniform pattern, according to Ellis, may be based on variable rules, i.e. “if X conditions apply, then Y language forms will occur” (1988: 9). EA is a systematic investigation of the language, i.e. the inter-language of the second language learner. Corder (1981: 29) calls it a “clinical approach to the study of the learner’s language”. There are quite a few practical aspects of error analysis. One such dimension is its unique role in guiding the researcher to analyze the psychological processes involved in language learning (35).

1. 9. Need for the Study

As discussed earlier, the study arose out of a need to investigate why second language learners struggle with the basic structures of the target language despite the following factors that could assist them: the unprecedented exposure to the English language, plenty of opportunities to learn it, availability of easy-to-learn books, materials, and easy access to user friendly soft wares. The students who are at the tertiary level in the cities have been exposed to various kinds of electronic gadgets like Television, Computer, which are supposed to facilitate their learning English language. The access to an inexhaustible mine of information is only at a mouse click away. These resources should make language learning process easier. However, the ESL teachers are puzzled to come across numerous deviant structures in the compositions of learners. Errors continue to pose major problems to the students who have enrolled themselves for Higher Education. Second language teachers are also
baffled by this phenomenon known as error fossilization. The students cannot outgrow these fossilized structures despite several years of exposure to English in various forms across the curriculum and explicit language teaching in the classroom.

This study seeks to explore the constant occurrence of certain types of errors in the written productions of the students at the tertiary level in the colleges affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University, South India where English has been taught as a compulsory second language. The learners’ motive in their enthusiasm for learning English is both ‘incremental’ and ‘integrative’. If the learners achieve competence in the use of English language, it will guarantee educational and employment opportunities. Students who have better command of English will have an edge over others. Multi National Companies (MNC) throngs the campuses with an aim of recruiting the deserving candidates. In this context the need for acquiring skills in English is increasing every day. As Kachru (1986: 1) points out, “English lends mobility in culturally and linguistically complex and pluralistic societies”. Further, several leading universities from the west have relaxed their admission norms with a view to targeting Indian students. And the students are required to produce considerable amount of writing for assessment criteria, written accuracy, besides fluency is an essential factor for admission. Ferris sounds a note of caution for such aspirants. A lack of written accuracy, the author warns, “may interfere with the comprehensibility of their message (or ideas) and mark them as inadequate users of the language” (Ferris, 2005: 9). The findings from the previous studies lead researchers like Ferris conclude that the ESL errors in the written production may
stigmatize learners and they may have negative bearing on their grades. Improving written accuracy is a crucial area of concern.

In this scenario the competence in written communication is equally important for employment opportunities. Further, as English language has been taught as associate language, for several decades, the demand for accurate production is justifiable. The widespread expectation does not match with the performance of L2 learners. Several investigations have been initiated in the past to study why learners continue to commit errors. As L2 learners are not adequately conversant with the forms of target language, they cannot express their thoughts in passable English. It is a sad commentary on the quality of teaching in the L2 classes. Their errors seem to be impervious to treatment and correction. Even the researchers who have long span of experience in examining the errors are at a loss to explain these persistent deviant structures. Hamilton tries to attribute these errors to fossilization (2001: 73):

Even with the strongest motivation and the most effective teaching, many learners reach a plateau. Errors which should have been eradicated re-emerge with dispiriting regularity. What is puzzling about this phenomenon is not so much that learners make errors, this is inescapable. It is that errors occur in areas where students should be proficient.
1. 10. Purpose of the Study

The study will investigate the learner language in ESL, focussing on production errors. The thrust will be on problem areas like grammar, syntax, lexis, article, and orthography. The study seeks to offer relevant linguistic explanations about the nature of the high frequency errors found in the compositions of Tamil learners and proposes pedagogical strategies to effectively deal with them, by attempting: 1) To categorize linguistically the areas of difficulty (i.e. errors) in terms of their type frequency and to compare the findings by the learner groups and levels; 2) To provide possible interpretations for the cause of those problematic areas by utilizing descriptive and contrastive linguistic techniques; 3) To undertake an in depth examination of some key ‘common errors’ that carry language specific common features; 4) To validate the hypotheses by administering statistical tools; 5) To examine the pedagogical implications of the analysis of the corpus.

1. 11. Basic Assumption

The behaviour of students at various stages of language study is systematic and predictable, and that a majority of errors are attributable to intralingual interference rather than mother tongue interference. Though the learners share the same linguistic, cultural and economic background, the errors differ significantly according to the intelligence, motivation and attitude of the learners. SL learners continue to commit the same errors despite consistent instruction and exposure. Errors in the written productions are assumed to have been caused due to the
interference of the mother tongue habits. Learner’s strategies may also cause deviant structures.

1.12. Significance of the Study

Ever since Applied Linguistics became popular the term ‘learner language’ has fascinated the attention of researchers. Errors made by the ESL learners in India have been investigated by researchers in the past (Saraswathi, 1978). Though their research has given relatively better understanding of the problematic areas, learner language continues to post a major problem to the ESL teachers and researchers. As English language plays a critical role in getting better academic grades and brighten the prospects, both speaking and writing skills assume greater importance. Of these two skills, writing skill deserves a special attention, as competence in the production of written language is challenging. There is a growing need to investigate into the areas of problems in grammar, lexis, syntax, article and spelling, as these linguistic domains are fundamental aspects of learning in written communication, particularly in ESL settings. Further, familiarity with the nature and pattern of the errors will form the basis for linguistic explanations and also initiate pedagogical measures to deal with the problematic areas in SLA. Through the investigation of high frequency errors, the studies may offer insights to the teachers and researchers. Moreover, such studies will enable the experts to bring out need based study materials.
1.13. Scope of Error Analysis

As Corder points out rightly, the errors of individual learners are investigated in this study for theoretical reasons: ‘the study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning’ (1974: 125). Such an investigation provides the researchers with insights into the linguistic development of a learner. It may also throw light on the learning strategies adopted by the learners. So, EA proves to be one of the central activities in the psycholinguistic study of language learning. The study would also enable the researchers to recommend remedial measures to be incorporated while designing syllabuses for teaching English language. Moreover, Corder (1981: 52) stresses the theoretical and practical rationale of EA: “… it yields insights into the language learning process which will eventually have direct relevance in the improvement of language teaching materials and methods, not only in remedial teaching but also in ordinary teaching”.

1.14. Organization of the Study

The present study is organized into the following chapters. Chapter 1 traces the origin of the teaching of English in India, ELT scenario, the problems that plague the performance of ESL learners. It also discusses the purpose, scope and significance of the study. Chapter 2 attempts to review major works on EA. It also traces the origin and the development of EA. It also examines the research studies initiated in the relevant area and explains the rationale behind embarking one more study. Chapter 3 brings out the research design, methodology adopted in the dissertation. It discusses the testing tools used and the longitudinal approach.
followed. It proposes to test four hypotheses which encompass six research questions raised. It also presents Standard English as model for the present study. A detailed analysis and interpretations for grammatical, lexical, syntactical, article and orthographical errors are done in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. These chapters also discuss linguistic explanations of the errors. Chapter 9 discusses the statistical interpretations and findings of Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA, Friedman and Mann Whitney Tests. Chapter 10 summarises the findings of the investigation and examines the pedagogical strategies to be employed as remedial measures in order to improve the written English. The scope of further research is discussed in this final chapter.