Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background
1.2. Statement of the Problem
1.3. Research Questions
1.4. Research Hypotheses
1.5. Significance and Purpose of the Study
1.6. Definition of Key Terms
1.7. Procedure
1.8. Overview of Thesis
1.1. Background

Learning a new language is a long voyage to an unknown world which entails a great struggle for departing from the first language and reaching communicative competence in the target language as the final destination. And it is interesting that this long voyage involves learners in getting acquainted with the culture of the people who speak the target language and the way they think, feel and behave.

This long path was first introduced scientifically by Selinker, and it was named interlanguage. Although there are many definitions of interlanguage, Brown defines it more clearly as “a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages” (Principles 203). In other words, interlanguage is a process in which learners construct the language system of the target language. It is also good to know that different terms have been used for this notion by different scholars which should not be the source of confusion. For example, Nemser referred to interlanguage as the “Approximate System” (55). And Corder called this concept “Idiosyncratic Dialect” (“Idiosyncratic” 160).

The destination of this long voyage named communicative competence cannot be attained easily. Communicative competence is attributed usually to Hymes who defines the term as the ability to use target language for communication. Curran added that this goal can be better achieved through whole person learning with the view that “true human learning” is both cognitive and affective (90). In this voyage or better say interlanguage, learners face numerous challenges, but there is nothing to worry about because learners manage them through applying the appropriate learning strategies. In this problem solving struggle known as language learning, learners are engaged in the process of trial and error. When they face a problem, they hypothesize a solution which needs to be tested. The outcome may be positive or negative, and the negative ones are known as errors and mistakes which are going to be dealt with in the present study.

Brown believes that human learning is fundamentally a process that involves making mistakes and they are part of our knowledge. “Mistakes,
misjudgments, miscalculations and erroneous assumptions form an important aspect of learning virtually any skill or acquiring information” (Principles 216). In other words, this can be restated that errors are inevitable in the process of learning. In this point of view, learners develop their language ability step by step which is referred to as the developmental stages of the target language acquisition or interlanguage. In this process, learners make rough guesses and generalizations to internalize new facts about the target language. Some of these generalizations are correct and add to their knowledge and those which are wrong get corrected as the learners move to the higher stages and develop their target language. That is why these errors in the process of learning can also be used as the source of data that provides vital information about the language acquisition process, the language system and learners (Brown, Principles).

Although the words ‘error’ and ‘mistake’ are synonymous, it is better to make a distinction between the two. James maintains that errors cannot be self-corrected while mistakes can be (83). Consequently, it can be concluded that an error reflects the learner’s competence but a mistake which is also called a performance error merely exists in the performance (Brown, Principles). This distinction indicates that learners deal with errors and mistakes differently. Mistakes can be traced by learners, but errors cannot be identified by them. In other words, mistakes which are easily distinguished by learners can be easily self-corrected. However, errors cannot be easily distinguished by learners; therefore, teachers’ corrections play an indispensable role in the process of error correction. In this process, furthermore, learners’ error treatment attitude and their “error orientation” which shows how they react to their own mistakes and teachers’ error corrections may also play an important role in success or failure of those corrections (Rybowiak et al. 527).

Mistakes and errors can happen everywhere. They can be observed in different skills whether receptive (listening or reading) or productive (speaking or writing). They can be traced in the components of language consisting of grammar, vocabulary, phonology, morphology and spelling. Among the main language skills,
the productive ones may be more concerned with errors. And it is the productive nature of these skills that makes the errors open to be traced. This is also true of the grammatical or structural errors. In fact, structural errors are more important because of the essence of grammar. Vivian Cook considers the significance of grammar by calling it “the central area of the language around which other areas such as pronunciation and vocabulary revolve” (19). She also continues that “however important the other components of language may be in themselves, they are connected to each other through grammar” (19).

Jack C. Richards believes that owing to the importance of grammar in the second language communication and the amount of attention currently being given to the role of form-focused instruction in language teaching, the way is paved for new research in this domain (“Addressing” 164). On the other hand, error orientation, which has been barrowed from work psychology by the researcher, is fairly a new variable in the second language acquisition (SLA) or at least it has not been investigated so far as a complete package in the field of language learning. Moreover, error orientation has been proved to be an effective variable in psychology and this has given rise to the idea that it might also have the potential to affect significantly the process of language acquisition in general and the learners’ structural competence in particular. This thought paved the way for this study with the purpose of investigating the relationship between learners’ error orientation as an individual learner difference and their structural competence, which has gained its prominence again in applied linguistics.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Since 1970s, after the rise of CLT, the status of grammar teaching has been unstable. This uncertainty led to a misconception that grammar should be excluded from all curricula. Unfortunately, this view spread among teachers and passed to language learners to the point that wherever a sign of grammar was found they referred to that syllabus as traditional or classical. This misconception had at least two side effects. Swan states that this ignorance of grammar has led to a generation
of teachers many of whom are ignorant of the structure of the language they teach and consequently, that of learners who are seriously weak in grammar. However, this ignorance on the part of learners has been more detrimental. The problem is that students even at the advanced levels, who are expected to be linguistically competent, commit serious errors in their production and are ignorant of their own mistakes. In other words, accuracy is sacrificed for the sake of fluency. Fortunately, this view has come under serious challenges in recent years. Now a positive trend of implementing tasks which require learners to focus on forms has been set. And it is also once again accepted that grammar is an essential resource in using language communicatively (Nunan, Designing 13). Spiewak and Rosinska refer to this as the return of grammar after a period of neglect. In this regard, however, Swan is more cautious and sets a limit for teaching grammar by stating that doing too little grammar is not less damaging than doing it too much. This view asserts the importance of knowing the limits in teaching grammar as a top priority for all teachers.

Unfortunately, now teachers are facing students who suffer from this structural ignorance. And even those who gained fluency in spoken English are somehow ignorant of their own mistakes. Of course, this symptom has different degrees in different students. Much of this may belong to individual learner differences which most scholars and practitioners such as Ellis have recognized the significant impact of this variable on both the rate and the degree of second language learning success (qtd. in Hadley 63). To hold the same idea, Feshbach believes that day by day instructional efforts are turning toward personalizing teaching due to the fact that individuals differ on many dimensions, such as age, sex, race, social class, intelligence, achievement, aspiration level, cognitive approach, differential responsiveness to incentives, anxiety, dependency and more. No doubt, all of these individual differences may affect significantly the cognitive and affective consequences of any particular educational program (1-2).

Although many factors may affect the structural ignorance from which students suffer in their production and comprehension, learners’ error orientation
as an individual difference parameter seems to have the potential to be one of the effective variables. Learners treat their mistakes and errors differently and this reflects the existence of different styles and strategies. Brown defines styles as consistent and rather enduring techniques and preferences within learners. In other words, he addresses styles as those general characteristics of intellectual functioning that pertain to you as an individual and make you different from others. You might be more visually oriented or more reflective in style than someone else and these characterize a general pattern in your thinking or feeling (Principles 113). On the other hand, Brown defines Strategies as “specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operations for achieving a particular end, [or] planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information” (Principles 113). He refers to strategies as “battle plans” that might vary in different situations and timings; moreover, he asserts that they vary individually based on the fact that each person chooses among possible methods of approaching a given problem, and these choices can be unique. To give a clear shot on the distinction between style and strategy, Brown crystallizes this difference by saying “Styles are general characteristics that differentiate one individual from another; strategies are those specific ‘attacks’ that we make on a given problem” (Principles 122).

Error orientation shows how learners cope with and react to their own mistakes and errors. It can be seen as having two main appraisals. One is referred to how negatively learners perceive their own errors and mistakes and to what extent they can anticipate the occurrence of them. The second appraisal is related to how learners cope with and challenge their own errors and mistakes (Rybowiak et al. 529). Based on the studies conducted by Rybowiak and his fellow researchers, eight psychological constructs have been identified and validated for error orientation through a complex factor analysis and a construct validating process. These psychological levels of error orientation are error competence, error learning, error risk-taking, error strain, error anticipation, error covering, error communication and error thinking.
Error orientation as a unique individual difference variable can also be defined in a broader way in the domain of error treatment. It is for decades that error treatment is one of the main concerns of teachers to help learners overcome their weaknesses. Error treatment can be depicted and defined as having three layers in a broader view. It concerns first, how and when teachers should treat learners’ errors and which errors should be treated. Second, what the learners’ and teachers’ attitudes are toward corrections, and third, how learners treat their own mistakes and corrected errors. The first phase has been the main concern of researchers in the past couple of decades and the second phase has been attended to a little. However, the third phase of error treatment has not been investigated directly, and in the researcher’s point of view, this neglected domain calls for serious investigation. This last phase which concerns the learners and their reactions to their own mistakes and errors are known as error orientation. Based on this new definition, error orientation is seen as an inseparable and neglected part of error treatment which is open to further research.

In the present study, the researcher aims to investigate the possible meaningful relationship between the neglected part of error treatment, error orientation, and the language learners’ structural competence to find possible ways to enhance structural healing for those weaknesses based on individual differences.

1.3. Research Questions

In this comparative study, an attempt is going to be made to determine the possible meaningful relationship between error orientation constructs and structural competence in India and Iran. Accordingly, the present study aims to find answers to these questions in these two ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts respectively:

1. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error competence and their structural competence?
2. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error learning and their structural competence?
3. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error risk-taking and their structural competence?
4. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error strain and their structural competence?
5. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error anticipation and their structural competence?
6. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error covering and their structural competence?
7. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error communication and their structural competence?
8. Is there any significant relationship between learners’ error thinking and their structural competence?
9. Is there any significant difference between the correlation coefficients obtained from the Indian and Iranian samples?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the research questions mentioned above, the following hypotheses have been proposed to be investigated in India as an ESL and in Iran as an EFL context:

1. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error competence and their structural competence.
2. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error learning and their structural competence.
3. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error risk-taking and their structural competence.
4. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error strain and their structural competence.
5. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error anticipation and their structural competence.
6. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error covering and their structural competence.

7. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error communication and their structural competence.

8. There is no significant relationship between learners’ error thinking and their structural competence.

9. There is no significant difference between the correlation coefficients obtained from the Indian and Iranian samples.

1.5. Significance and Purpose of the Study

Errors are seen as an important issue in psychology. Perhaps this importance arises from the contradictory influences they have on different individuals in different settings. Like a sword it can cut from the two edges either kills the enemy or even hurts the unprepared soldier. It is believed that any learning progress would not happen at any work without committing errors and they are announced everywhere to be the stairs to the top prosperity when successful people are asked for their achievements, but on the other hand, they are the raw materials which produce stress, anxiety and affective filter any where and any time when they happen. One precious thing which may define these two contradictory influences is the learners’ attitudes and reactions toward their own errors known as ‘error orientation’ (Rybowiak et al. 527).

To the language researchers, errors are even more fruitful in the process of language learning. Corder believes in the significance of learner’s errors as they provide the researchers with the evidence of how language is acquired, and what strategies or procedures learners are employing in the discovery of a new language (“Idiosyncratic” 167). However, the fact that these learning strategies employed by the language learners are somehow unique to them based on their learning styles and individual differences, really adds to the complexity of language learning process. This makes language learning a bit complicated based on the fact that no
uniform teaching method can be prescribed with the claim of serving all language learners well enough.

In today’s pedagogy; therefore, the trend is toward personalizing teaching. No doubt, knowing learners based on their needs and abilities is a must which increasingly lead teachers more toward personalizing and differentiating learners in order to adapt teaching to the pace of learning. Westwood and Arnold refer to differentiation as a tool to personalize learning by attending learner’s level of ability, prior knowledge, strengths, weaknesses, preferences and interests. They argue that differentiation must surely be at the very heart of all effective language teaching, since communicating effectively with different learners requires an adaptive approach (375). In this trend toward personalizing teaching, piles of research have been done and more studies are needed. The past studies on learners’ characteristics and differences have looked at how various kinds of factors might affect “success” with language learning; moreover, they have also focused on learners’ approaches to different language learning tasks and students’ attitudes toward specific learning environments and situations (Hadley 64).

Now in the movement of recent studies, focusing on individual learning differences from the error orientation angle may lead us to better understanding of the advanced learners’ structural weakness which is the main focus of this study. The significance to eradicate this weakness and to develop more accuracy is emphasized by many researchers. Hadley restates this by saying that “the development of accuracy should be encouraged in proficiency-oriented instruction” (83). She also adds that various forms of instruction and evaluative feedback can be useful in facilitating the progression of learners’ skills toward more precise and coherent language use.

In this accuracy developing procedure, knowing learners’ styles and strategies in facing errors and mistakes may help us in designing syllabuses and the right form of instruction through implementing the right techniques and tasks. For instance, if there are positive significant correlations between error orientation constructs and structural competence, the task-based form-focused instruction
(TBFFI) can be designed in a way to encourage learners to react to their own errors properly which can help learners to accelerate their structural competence improvement. These proper learners’ reactions to their own errors can also lead to proper self-corrections and all these can be done through having error strategy training in the task based form-focused instruction.

Jack C. Richards states that the task-based form-focused instruction which has retrieved its position in communicative language teaching is different from the traditional form-focused instruction. It indulges learners in communicative tasks and helps them to use the natural language in real communication while having implicit form-focused input and proper corrective feedback on the part of teachers (“Addressing”). Error strategy training, hence, not only can be used particularly in TBFFI designing to reinforce accuracy in language learning, but can also be used more generally as an effective element in problem solving approaches to language teaching through helping syllabus designers and teachers to design more personalized tasks for learners since different learners may tackle pedagogical tasks and activities differently based on their own error orientation styles.

Along with the use of error orientation in designing course materials and syllabuses, teachers can go along nicely toward accommodating individual learner needs more effectively by helping students to become aware of their own error strategies. Having strategy based instruction can guide learners expertly to become effective and autonomous learners as they approach various learning tasks (Hadley 67). Hence, it might be advisable to have some sort of error strategy training in second and foreign language classes if the findings support the idea that the learner’s error orientation affects the process of learning and particularly structural competence in this research. As mentioned above, this error strategy training can be implemented in syllabuses to help teachers train learners properly in order to develop error management. And this error management might help learners have error competence, and a well-developed anticipation of errors which allows quick error detection, error communication, self-correction and error learning. Frese found error training as a fruitful device to enhance learning in his studies. Harmer
reiterates the same idea that “discussing and justifying one’s own correcting style is challenging and rewarding, and can serve as a reference point for future reflection. For the learner, it provides an opportunity for actively contributing to the way the class works, and can be a useful spring board to learner’s autonomy” (75).

For having effective error strategy training in language classes, syllabus designers should be equipped with in-depth knowledge of errors, error treatment and error strategy training in order to be able to present effective syllabuses to help teachers have proper error management training in their classes. Studies on errors and error orientation can be a good source of knowledge for language syllabus designers. And particularly this study can set the significance and priorities of the eight error orientation constructs to help syllabus designers to use them in syllabus construction. In this study, the degree of prominence of the eight error orientation constructs will be shown based on the significance of their correlations with structural competence. This list of priority can assist syllabus designers to somewhat know how much each psychological levels of error orientation should be focused at or attended to.

Moreover, teachers may benefit from these findings through producing a more positive error culture environment in classes which definitely affects learner’s risk-taking and self-confidence and guarantees more production and negotiation in language classes which is desirable in a communicative atmosphere. However, if we ignore this positive error culture environment in our classes, errors will be concealed or avoided by not having enough learners’ cooperation in learning tasks, and they might also avoid free communication which is the main goal of the communicative approach to language teaching. Rybowiak and his colleagues express the same idea in the field of work psychology that the lack of this positive error culture environment may lead to concealment and avoidance of errors by not having sufficient workers’ cooperation and this may cause little organizational and individual learning from errors at any workplace.
Findings of this research can also help us find out why sometimes the studies conducted on errors come up with contradictory outcomes. In most cases, having these contradictory results makes it difficult to draw conclusions in order to use these findings practically in classes. For instance, Mackey, Gass and McDonough investigated whether learners trace feedback as feedback, and whether they recognize the target of the feedback presented and the relationship between this recognition and the possible occurrence of uptake during interaction. As part of the results of this study, it was observed that recast corrections were mostly perceived by the learners as other ways of saying the same things instead of corrections. This finding strongly rejected the use of recast corrections as a method of corrective feedback because learners did not recognize them as a correction method. And this was simply due to the fact that teachers merely reformulated students’ errors implicitly or provided the correct forms. On the other hand, Doughty and Varela conducted a research to investigate the possible use of recast as an effective tool in second language acquisition to draw learners’ attention to form without diversion from the communicative intent of the class. The result of the study showed that the treatment group who received recast corrections outperformed the control group in their production regarding past and conditional forms. Surprisingly the result of this study strongly supported the use of recast at least concerning past and conditional forms. These contradictions in findings pave the way for searching out new intervening variables which cause these opposite results. Among these intervening variables, individual differences like error orientation might be influential which call for more investigations.

Results of this study may also help us to have a better understanding of the process of learning. Krashen in his acquisition-learning hypothesis claims that language learners can internalize language input in two separate ways. The first approach is the subconscious way of internalizing the target language which Krashen calls “acquisition”, and the second one is the conscious way of internalizing or so called “learning”. According to Krashen, the use of second language learning is merely due to language acquisition, and language learning can
just serve as a "monitor" to "watchdog" output and productions (Second 99). Some other scholars like McLaughlin challenges this innatist view of language learning by their cognitive view that language learners learn the second language through focal attention and peripheral learning. In the focal attention processing, the performance is based on formal conscious rule learning which has led to the form-focused instruction, but in peripheral learning, the performance is based on implicit and subconscious learning through analogy. They believe that these two together are the sources of language use. In other words, they believe in formal teaching and learning of second or foreign languages. On the other hand, although some other scientists called contrastivists do not reject cognitivism, they also believe in intake through interaction (Long, “The Role”). In this view, input and social interaction are required in order to have output in the process of language learning. And the most practical way of internalizing target language input is through having social interaction, and as a way of having this social interaction in the classroom, they advise the task-based instruction to reinforce communication.

Through these theories presented on the process of target language internalization, there has always been a challenge between the supporters of formal instruction and informal instruction. Through this investigation on the possible relationship between error orientation and structural competence as the two variables of the study, the researcher investigates the degree of relationship between the learners’ conscious reactions to their own mistakes/errors which require formal instruction and their structural competence as part of their communicative competence. In other words, if the findings of this study support the existence of significant relationship between these variables, somehow, having conscious error orientation and formal instruction will be supported against merely having exposure to the target language.

Innovation or out performing competence in language learning can also be affected by error orientation. Out performing competence which has been introduced by Chomsky in Aspects of the Theory of Syntax has given rise to his language acquisition device theory (LAD). Out performing competence is not
something obscure, and has been traced by sensitive language learners and sensitive teachers when learners produce utterances which they have never been exposed to. Having active and positive error orientation and also having positive error culture environment in language classes might assist learners to out perform their competence through avoiding affective filters and helping them to be risk-taking and confident enough to be more productive. To cite an example, Language ego as a barrier to language learning, which was first coined by Guiora and defined as cognitive or affective resistance to learning a new language as a new change, is boosted by having more fear of errors.

So far, the implications of error orientation in the learning and teaching process have been partly discussed. Another area which can use the findings of the studies that focus on errors is the domain of aptitude test designing. Brown maintains that one of the perspectives of looking at aptitude is the identification of a number of characteristics of successful language learners (Principles). Presenting the same idea, Cook introduces aptitude tests as the instruments to predict success in L2 academic classrooms. Risk-taking behavior, memory efficiency, intelligent guessing and ambiguity tolerance are a few of the many effective variables which can be named as the characteristics of successful language learners (Brown, Principles). In other words, in an aptitude test, the items are designed in a way to assess the participants based on the variables which can be significantly effective on successful language learning. Along with these known characteristics, error orientation might be another significant aptitude variable which can be implemented in aptitude tests if the findings of this research and future studies show its significant impact on language proficiency in general and on structural/grammatical competence in particular. If so, error orientation can serve as a means of testing grammatical sensitivity which is one of the four standard components of aptitude tests. These four standard components of language aptitude were put forward by Carroll in The Prediction of Success in Intensive Foreign Language Training, including phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability and rote learning activity for foreign language
materials (qtd. in Skehan, Individual 26). Although there are some contradictory views on the use of aptitude tests and their implications in second and foreign language teaching, they can be very fruitful through more personalizing teaching in language classes. Cook supports this by putting forward the teaching implications of aptitude tests as eliminating students without aptitude (if allowable on other grounds), streaming students according to aptitude into fast and slow streams and arranging different types of teaching for learners with different types of aptitude (126).

No doubt, with the introduction of error orientation as a relatively new variable to the field of second and foreign language acquisition, the importance of having a valid and reliable instrument to be able to assess learners’ error orientation is felt. Therefore, in this study a valid and reliable error orientation questionnaire has been designed based on the work of Rybowiak and his colleagues to assess learners’ structural error orientation. Although Structural Error Orientation Questionnaire (SEOQ) has been designed specifically to assess learners’ structural error orientation, it can be easily modified to be used in other fields of second and foreign language acquisition for future investigations.

In the foregoing section, an attempt was made to discuss the significance, importance and possible implications of error orientation. Surely, it should be reminded that in the present study, the purpose of the researcher is to take a little step to find out the role of error orientation on learners’ structural competence, the component which might be more sensitive to errors. And if the findings of this study support the existence of significant relationship between error orientation and structural competence, the way will be far more paved for further research on the possible impact of error orientation, as a relatively new individual learner difference variable, on other language components and language learning skills.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

**EFL (English as a foreign language):** “The teaching and learning of English in communities where it is not widely used for communication” (Nunan,
Second (306). In this comparative study the relationship between learners’ error orientation and their structural competence was under investigation in India and Iran of which Iran represented the EFL context.

**Error anticipation:** Rybowiak and his colleagues define error anticipation as having a general realistic expectancy that errors may happen. They also found that error anticipation has clear positive relationship with error learning, error thinking and error risk-taking.

**Error Communication:** Error communication is a strategy of brave people who can rely on others, consult their problems and ask how to learn from errors (Rybowiak et al.).

**Error Competence:** Error competence is the active knowledge to recover from errors immediately and reduce the error consequences. It is positively related to self-efficacy, action orientation after failure, need for achievement and quite highly related to initiative. In other words, it is the knowledge and capability to deal with errors when they happen, and it is directed at short term goals (Rybowiak et al.).

**Error covering:** Hamilton defines covering up errors as a strategy of anxious people who consider errors as a threat. Rybowiak and his coworkers found that error covering was related to low self-esteem, negative affectivity, high control rejection and a little initiative.

**Error Learning:** “Learning from errors is the ability to prevent errors in the long term by learning from them, planning and changing work processes. There are correlations with self-efficacy, qualification, plan-orientation, need for achievement, readiness to change and initiative” (Rybowiak et al. 543). It can be said that in error learning the focus is on future which makes learning possible for future use.

**Error Orientation:** Rybowiak and his colleagues define error orientation as how learners cope with and how they think about their own errors. To elaborate more on error orientation they continue quoting from Lazarus and Folkman that “Error orientation can be conceptualized within a general coping concept ...
Primary appraisal is related to how negatively errors are perceived and the degree to which one anticipates that errors will happen. Secondary appraisal refers to coping with errors. Coping strategies are to calm oneself in the face of errors, to cover up the fact that one error has occurred, as opposed to communicating about them, and to actively deal with an error or to learn from it” (Rybowiak et al. 529).

**Error Orientation Constructs:** Based on the studies done by Rybowiak and his fellow researchers, eight constructs have been identified and validated for error orientation through a complex factor analysis and a construct validating process. These constructs of error orientation are error competence, error learning, error risk-taking, error strain, error anticipation, error covering, error communication and error thinking.

**Error Risk-Taking:** “Error risk-taking is the result of an achievement-oriented attitude which requires flexibility and taking responsibility. There are positive relations to need for achievement, qualifications, readiness for change and initiative, as well as a negative relation to control rejection” (Rybowiak et al. 543).

**Error Strain:** “Error strain means being strained by errors and therefore fearing the occurrence of errors or reacting to errors with high emotions” (Rybowiak et al. 534). Thus, it is characterized by fearing commission of errors and by negative emotional reactions. Rybowiak and his colleagues found that it was correlated negatively with self-efficacy, self-esteem and initiative, and positively with control rejection, psychosomatic complaints, depression and negative affectivity.

**Error Thinking:** Error thinking is a strategy of precise people who have analytic mind to analyze the factors which result in errors. They consider how errors come about and how they can be prevented. Therefore, there should be a positive relation between error thinking, error learning and error anticipation (Rybowiak et al.).

**ESL (English as a second language):** “The teaching and learning of English in communities where it is widely used for communication by the
population at large” (Nunan, Second 306-7). In this comparative study India has been taken as an ESL context.

**Individual Learner Differences**: Different backgrounds, characteristics, experiences, learning styles and learning strategies that learners bring to language classrooms are known as individual learner differences. And they have been a prominent area of investigation in recent studies (Brown, Principles).

**Structural Competence**: Canale and Swain define grammatical competence as that part of communicative competence which encompasses “knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology” (29). However, in this study, structural competence is that part of the grammatical competence which merely focuses on syntax.

### 1.7. Procedure

In order to cope with the research questions and provide them with reasonable answers, two groups of subjects were invited to take part in this comparative study based on a multistage random sampling. First, a reasonable sample of female Iranian senior English students from Islamic Azad University, and as the second group, a reasonable sample of female Indian senior English students from Panjab University were asked to participate in this research. The whole process of sampling has been elaborated by the researcher in detail in chapter three. In this study, female students were requested to take part due to their very high ratio to male students. Also senior English students were asked to join this study since some students with reasonable English backgrounds were required to satisfy the needs of this investigation. As a matter of fact, the researcher preferred not to differentiate advanced learners because this limitation might have negatively affected the correlation between error orientation and structural competence. Moreover, the samples were preferably from one college or department in each context to have nearly the same course materials and syllabuses to control the intervening variables as much as possible and ensure more validity.
and reliability for the investigation. All the subjects were informed of the sensitivity of the study to cooperate with extensive care, and were rewarded for their efficient participation.

There were two instruments implemented in this research so as to obtain as valid data as possible. First, Structural Error Orientation Questionnaire (SEOQ) was designed based on the eight error orientation constructs to evaluate the EFL and ESL senior English students based on their error competence, error learning, error risk-taking, error strain, error anticipation, error covering, error communication and error thinking. The questionnaire was designed and revised with the help of a group of psychologists and linguists, and piloted to a homogeneous group of learners to enable the researcher to revise the items more practically. Undoubtedly, content validity, criterion related validity and construct validity along with reliability of the questionnaire were taken into consideration in order to have a valid and reliable instrument. Second instrument was a standard TOEFL test out of which the structure section was extracted to be used as an instrument to evaluate the EFL and ESL senior English students’ structural competence. The validity and reliability of the TOEFL test had also been assessed through administering it to a pilot group.

The procedure of the study can be depicted in three steps briefly. First, in order to be equipped with the two valid and reliable instruments of the study, the Structural Error Orientation Questionnaire (SEOQ) was designed, revised and validated, and the structure section of the standard TOEFL test was also examined. In the second phase, a reasonable number of Indian and Iranian senior English students were selected based on a multistage random sampling, and generally four hundred participants, two hundred from each context, were invited to answer the two research instruments in order to gather the required valid data. Finally, in the statistical phase, the scores from the two instruments were correlated in India and Iran separately and in combination to estimate the possible correlation coefficients between error orientation constructs and the learners’ structural competence. And the obtained correlation coefficients from the two EFL and ESL contexts were
compared to see the similarities and differences in India and Iran. Out of this statistical procedure, the researcher got enabled to generalize, draw inferences and decide on the hypotheses proposed.

This comparative study benefits from descriptive correlational design. Actually, this design of study enabled the researcher to find the degree of correlation between the constructs of the learners’ error orientation as the independent variables and the learners’ structural competence as the dependent variable in India and Iran. This also enabled him to compare the findings in the two countries as well.

1.8. Overview of Thesis

The present dissertation consists of several parts to cover the needs of the research in order to depict crystal clearly the plausible conclusions drawn based on the proposed hypotheses. It has been decided by the researcher to have five chapters for this dissertation.

In the first chapter, the researcher tried to focus on the research problem in order to formalize the research questions and hypotheses. Moreover, the significance of the study, definition of key terms and a sketch of the research procedure were also discussed.

In the second chapter, the literature reviewed has described the current state of thinking and research in the areas of individual difference variables and error treatment in order to define error orientation, and specify its possible position in language learning. To identify error orientation as part of error treatment, it was discussed that it could be defined as one of the phases of error treatment in its broad definition. Moreover, error orientation has also been discussed as an individual difference variable. That is why each learner reacts differently to his/her own mistakes and errors.

Chapter three has described the details of the research methodology, and has elaborated on the variables, participants, instruments and the procedure of the
study. This chapter has also shown the steps to develop the valid and reliable SEOQ in detail in compliance with the main goals of the research.

In chapter four, the researcher has dealt with the sample data and statistics, and the findings of the research have been presented. This chapter has paved the way for deciding on the hypotheses and making the results tangible for drawing the right conclusions by plotting, grouping and choosing the proper statistical methods.

Chapter five attempts to draw inferences and discusses the results based on the decisions made on the hypotheses. In this chapter, the researcher has also endeavored to pave the way for future studies on errors and particularly on error orientation in the field of second and foreign language acquisition.

Another important point which should be noted here is the selection of MLA (Modern Language Association of America) style of thesis writing in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Department of English of Panjab University. The two useful implemented sources for writing this thesis were the 5th and 6th editions of MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers written by Joseph Gibaldi.