CHAPTER FIVE
THEORETICAL APPROACH
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Theoretical approach

5.0 Introduction

Language learning is a mental activity. So long as man is a social being he has to acquire a language or languages to fit to live in the society. Therefore, language or languages are formally or informally acquired or learned by people. For teaching a language in a formal situation the language teacher necessarily needs explicit knowledge about the language, i.e., its rules and systems and how it is acquired by the human brain. Encyclopedia Britannica defines language as a system of conventional spoken or written symbols, by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate. Sapir (1921) defines language as a purely human and non instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. In these and other definitions of language the terms human, communicate, symbols, system are used. The scientific and systematic study of language is called linguistics and this study is considered to be empirical and objective. A later offshoot of linguistics is Applied linguistics which the practicing language teachers are familiar with. Mackey (1966) uses this term in an article published by him. Nair (2000) states “The applied linguistics covers various areas of linguistic application such as language teaching, language testing and evaluation, preparation of materials for teaching, lexicography, translation, sign language and artificial languages, computational linguistics, language education, socio linguistics, psycholinguistics, neuro linguistics, speech pathology etc and a hosts of other interdisciplinary subjects, the vistas of which are difficult to define”.

The fields of second language acquisition and error analysis which we are dealing here also come under the applied linguistics. The second language acquisition of English by the speakers of Malayalam and the study of their errors are what we discuss here in this thesis. In this chapter an attempt is made to look
into the theories related to the language acquisition and the errors committed by the learners.

5.1 Different Approaches in Language Learning

Several studies and theories have been produced on language learning and different approaches have been developed. The emphasis of theory and practice of second language learning in the late nineteenth and greater half of twentieth century was mainly on the behaviorist ideas of association between stimulus and response.

The major learning theories dealing with teaching methodology and testing are behaviorist, mentalist and developmental interactionist theories. The famous psychologist Skinner (1957) is the exponent of the behaviorist theory of learning. Behaviorist ideas about language learning are based on a theory of learning in which the focus is mainly on the role of environment both verbal and non-verbal. The basic premise of behaviourism is stimulus-response (SR) theory and it considers learning as an orderly and predictable series of observable behavior patterns with the concept of habit formation. In the behaviorists view, children imitate the language of their environment to a considerable degree and the frequency of the occurrence of words and structures and their imitation would influence the language development of the children.

Skinner’s (1957) “Verbal Behaviour” was reviewed by Chomsky (1959) According to Chomsky a description of a language behavior cannot be merely a matter of stimulus and response, but of the innate ability of human beings to learn language. He postulated the notion of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which enables the child to make hypothesis about the structure of language in general and in particular. For him, the child’s language constantly changes as it develops its rule system, until he/she develops adult like proficiency. This theory gives stress on the cognitive activities of the language learner.

The behaviorist theory and the mentalist theory had their own drawbacks. While the behaviorists ignored the contributions of the child it
self in the learning process, the mentalists have practically denied the role of linguistic input and environment play in this process. As an improvement upon these approaches another approach called Procedural approach was introduced by De Villieres J and De villiers P (1978). In this approach the interaction between internal and external factors becomes much more central. With the child’s mental capacity to discover structure in language, which he is exposed to develops its language. Later Piaget, (1971) the Swiss psychologist expounded the developmental interaction theory related to language acquisition. For him all cognitive acquisition, including language is the outcome of a gradual process of construction. The child gradually would be able to make greater sense of the world and is constantly constructing new levels of cognitive organizations as he or she matures and language is one of the several abilities that results from cognitive maturation. For him, the complex structures of language are neither innate (as Chomsky proposed) nor learned. Instead they emerge as a result of the continuing interaction between the Child’s current level of cognitive functioning and his/her current linguistic and non-linguistic environment. In brief, the Piagetian approach suggests that language is only an expression of a more general set of human cognitive activities which, through the developmental interactions helps the language acquisition. The language teachers are expected to understand these theories. It would enable them to understand the language teaching/learning process.

5.2 Second Language acquisition

Since the second half of twentieth century serious studies and researches have been made in the first language acquisition and second language acquisition. It is the theories of Noam Chomsky that accelerated and revolutionized the field of language acquisition. Following the purpose and methods of these studies from 1970 onwards, second language acquisition (SLA) researches began concerned itself with both explaining and describing the process of acquiring a second language. In this context the term ‘second language’ is used to refer to any additional language either a host or foreign
language. It is found that the process of acquiring second language is partially paralleled to the process of acquiring a first language. The findings of the SLA research have frequently been drawn upon to suggest ways of improving language teaching and learning.

Palmer (1964) says that we are forced to conclude that we have become proficient in the use of our mother tongue by some process other than that of learning by dint of conscious efforts of reasoning and synthesis; the learning of second language needs conscious learning and synthesis as it is not done as naturally as the first language is acquired. Stephen Krashen (1980) speaks of monitor theory of adult second language acquisitions. The adults have two independent systems for developing ability in second language acquisition — the sub conscious language acquisition and the conscious language learning and these systems are inter related in a definite way. In the case of first language learning the learner is in his/her own language environment and he/she gets maximum natural exposure to the language. With the people around him/her use that language and his/her language faculty of the mind is fully and extensively directed towards that language.

Krashen (1980) defines L2 acquisition as “the process of learning another language after the basics of the first, have been acquired starting at about five years of age and thereafter”. Researchers refer to this process as sequential language acquisition and differentiated it from simultaneous or bilingual acquisition. Second language acquisition includes learning a new language in a foreign language context or host language context. This study is concerned about the former context. The Malayalee learners learn English, which is a foreign language, in school level when the learner comes to the age of 4 to 8. In English medium schools the learning of English begins at the Kindergarten level and in mother tongue medium schools learning of English begins from 4th standard onwards. The English acquisitions begins after the learners have acquired the basics of the first language. The environment does not change much while they start learning English. The teachers, parents, friends and relatives around
him/her continue to use mother tongue as their medium of routine communication and the learners are deprived of a target language environment.

Alber and Obler (1978) observe that people who know more than one language make use of more of the brain than monolinguals do. The part of the brain that is used in second language functioning remains underdeveloped in monolingual brains. The psycholinguistic studies further indicate that people who control more than one language are verbally more skillful than monolinguals and they mature earlier with respect to linguistic abstraction skills. Lerea and Laporta (1971) and Palmer (1972) report, for example, that the bilinguals have better auditory memory than monolinguals. Slobin (1968) observes that bilinguals are better at intuiting meaning from unknown words. Learning a second language, especially one which is widely used and learned, is also a means of accessing knowledge, obtaining employment, upward social mobility, ability to interact and socialize at the inter regional levels, prestige etc. There was a widespread belief that bilingualism was a kind of an aberration rather than a normal human condition and it was a hindrance to learning and development. This belief is proven wrong and now it has been accepted that bilingualism is not an obstacle or a burden; it is, rather, an enabling and enriching phenomenon. Knowing two or more languages rather than only one not only enriches a person’s linguistic repertoire, it also makes the bilingual person more versatile in communicative and interactional terms, more open minded and more perspective to varied cultural conventions and customs and usages. It also increases person’s ‘reach’ in terms of information and knowledge. In this way several other studies throw light to the advantage of learning second language or additional languages and becoming bilinguals and it is realized that mental and material abilities are greatly developed by learning more languages. In the present context, the language learned mostly and widely as second language is English and it is rightly placed as the global language. A global language is a language that is learned and used by more number of people and countries as their official or second language or most desired and sought after foreign language.
Language learning ultimately occurs in the mind of learner, where mental structures or mechanisms process and organize the language to which the learner is exposed. Richards (1980) suggests that three internal processing patterns play a substantial role in second language acquisition. They are filter, organizer, and monitor. The filter screens all incoming language based on affective factors: the learners motives-attitudes and emotional states. The learner's emotional states are also part of the filter. The researches have shown that the less anxious and more relaxed the learner is, the better the language acquisition proceeds. The organizer subconsciously processes data which the filter lets in. It is responsible for the learners gradual organization of the new language system. The functioning of the organizer is reflected in three aspects of learner's verbal performance.

i. In the series of transactional constructions learners systematically use before a structure is acquired.
ii. In the errors that most L2 learners regularly make.
iii. In the common order in which L2 learners acquire in the structures of the new language.

The monitor is responsible for conscious linguistic processing. Learners can use the linguistic knowledge they gain through to consciously formulate sentences and to correct or edit their speech and writing. But the use of monitor depends on the ability and personal conditions of the learner.

The age and personality are individual characteristics of individual learner which have been shown to mark effect on second language development. Self confidence of the learner has positive effect on second language acquisition. The age factor also is important in the second language acquisition. The children appear to be much more successful than adults in learning a second language but they are found to be a bit slower than adults in the areas of syntax and morphology. Biological, cognitive and environmental factors may be the reasons for these differences between the child and adult learners. In the present study we are dealing with the learners who started acquiring English as a child at the age of 4 to 8 and they have been continuing their acquisition. Their acquisition in
their higher secondary, i.e., plus 2 level when they are at the age of 15 to 18 is assessed here. The samples of the study are collected from the plus two level students who have been learning English as their second language for about 8 to 12 years.

5.3 The Role of Errors in Language Learning

Making faults or mistakes is quite common with all the learners. Dulay and Burt (1984) rightly said “You can’t learn without goofing”. He does not want to attribute the ‘goofs’ to interference of the mother tongue though they look like one. It is right whether you are learning how to ride bicycle, how to fly a kite or learn a language. A steady effort under proper guidance will enable us to overcome the mistakes or the faults. The terms like, mistake’, errors, faults, deviations, goof etc are used to refer to this phenomenon. Like any other learning, learning a language also involves making faulty utterances or structures or errors. This is true when one is learning the L1 or L2. However the mistakes or errors committed by the learners of a second language present a rather more complex and interesting case. Linguists and teachers have always been interested in finding out why L2 learners make errors. Teacher’s primary interest is in correcting the mistakes and linguists are more interested in identifying and analysing the errors.

Before 1960s, when the behaviorists’ view point of language learning was prevailing, learner errors were considered something undesirable and to be avoided. It is because in behaviorists’ perspectives people learn by responding to external stimuli and receiving proper reinforcement and habit formation. Therefore, mistakes or errors were considered to be wrong responses to the stimuli which should be corrected immediately after they were committed which otherwise affect behavioral pattern. As a result of the great influence of this theory, in the class room teaching of language mimicry and memorization methods were introduced. Making errors was considered to be fatal to proper language learning process.

This viewpoint has interesting implications for second language acquisition. In this situation the learners are those who have already
internalized another language system i.e., L1. The structuralist-behaviorist’s belief was that the already learned system (L1) would interfere with the new language (L2) and create difficulties in the learning process. Since each language represents unique system, the systems of L1 and L2 are bound to be different. Therefore, those features of the systems of L2, different from the features of the system of L1 are responsible for the learners errors or mistakes. This phenomenon was often referred to as ‘interference’ or ‘transfer’.

It means the second language learners tend to carry over certain features of their L1 into the L2 they attempt to learn. Where there are similarities between the features of two languages there is no learning problem and where there are dissimilarities there will arise problems and errors. They regarded the errors of the second language learners as failure on the part of the learners to learn a new set of habits and failure to modify the earlier set of habits. In a nutshell, this view point maintained that:

a) Errors represent a failure to learn a new set of habits.

b) Errors if allowed to continue, would become set habit since language learning is habit formation.

c) Errors are caused by interference whereby features of L1 are carried over to or transferred into the L2 by the learner.

This view point of learning was eventually discarded by the well known radically different perspective proposed by Chomsky (1957). Countering the theory of BF Skinner Chomsky said that human learning, especially language acquisition cannot be explained by simply starting off with a “tabula rasa “ state of mind . He claimed that human beings must have a certain limit of initiate capacity which can guide you through a vast number of sentence generation possibilities and have a child acquire a grammar of that language until the age of five or six with almost no exception. He calls this capacity “universal grammar” and claimed that it is this very human faculty that linguistics aims to pursue. This gave rise to rationalistic cognitive code learning approach discrediting the behavioristic
language learning style. This cognitive psychology and the transformational generative or the post structural thinking in linguistics considered language, a thinking process rather than a set of habits. Here, language learning can be seen as a process of problem solving-one. The learner forms hypotheses about the language system he/she is learning. On the basis of these hypotheses the learner generalizes and forms rules. Some of the generalizations may turn out to be right and the others wrong. The wrong generalizations represent errors. But interestingly, these errors do not represent failure in the learning process but represents the creativity of the learner and become a source of valuable clues to the very working of the learner’s mind.

In the school of applied linguistics, however, this shift towards the innate human capacity raised a growing interest in the learner’s powers of hypothesis formation as the learner moves towards the bilingual competence sufficient for his/her communicative needs and an increasing concern in the monitoring and analysis of learner language and the concepts of ‘interlanguage’, ‘approximative system’, ‘error analysis’ etc. developed.

In 1970s and early 80s a large number of papers on error analysis came out throughout the world. Error analysis using learner corpora is significantly different from the traditional error analysis in quality and quantity. The major works on errors in the second language acquisition and the error analysis are by Corder, Selinker, Richards, Dulay and Burt et al.

All the mistakes or faults found in the performance of L2 learners are not of the same order or the same serious nature. Applied linguistics and teachers have recognized this fact and following this Corder (1967–1971) makes a distinction between three types of faults.

a) Errors: Error is a grammatically incorrect form and is a sure indication that the learner has not mastered the code of the second language. “Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982) The expression *He go to school by bus*, *She waited for his husband*, *He was shocked by the news* etc will tell us that the learner has not learned the correct grammatical forms and the underlying
grammatical rules of English. Such type of deviant and incorrect structure or grammatical faults are called errors.

b) Mistakes: They are socially inappropriate forms. Both L1 and L2 users make such mistakes i.e., social gaffes and the seriousness of such mistakes can vary in degree. Forms which are otherwise grammatically correct may be socially inappropriate and hence unacceptable. Learning a language means learning to use that language in a social context.

c) Lapses: Lapses are faults which can be best described as ‘slips of the tongue or pen’ due to carelessness, sloppiness, fatigue or just inadvertence. If a learner, while writing a composition spells the word receive as *recieve or the word guide as *gaide. Such occurrence will be first treated as a lapse i.e., slip of the pen. But if the same thing is repeatedly used by the learner in the subsequent compositions it would have to be treated as an error, representing an incorrect or faulty learning of the spelling system of English.

Language learning, therefore, includes learning both what is grammatically correct and what is socially appropriate. The learner may not be aware that the fault he made is an error or not or may not know how to amend it when he realizes that it is an error. Identifying, analysing and interpreting such errors are very serious linguistic activities. There are two types of analysis of errors. They are contrastive analysis and error analysis.

5.4 Types of analysis of errors

To major types of analyses of errors are there. They are contrastive analysis (CA) error analysis (EA) in the present study both CA and EA are followed.

5.4.1 Contrastive analysis

The contrastive analysis means the comparison of the linguistic systems of two languages on the basis of the assumptions that the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language and these difficulties can be predicted, especially in those areas where the two languages differ the most. These differences or dissimilarities between the two languages (L1 and L2) would constitute the problem areas or ‘blind spots’ for the
second language learner. If we know the structures of learner’s first language and the target language it is easy to locate these ‘blind spots’.

Before the SLA field, as we know it today, was established from the 1940s to the 1960s contrastive analysis were conducted, in which two languages were systematically compared by the researchers motivated by the prospectus of being able to identify points of similarities and dissimilarities between the native languages and target languages. Fries (1945), one of the leading applied linguists of the day said. ‘The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner’. Lado (1957), Fries’ colleague and friend also expressed the importance of contrastive analysis in language teaching material design:

“Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture- both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practised by natives.”

Lado (1957) went on to say a more controversial position, however, when he claimed that “those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult.”

This conviction that linguistic differences could be used to predict learning difficulty produced the notion of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) Laren Freeman & Long (1991) states: “Where two languages were similar, positive transfer would occur, where they were different, negative transfer, or interference would result”. In his forward to the book ‘Linguistics Across Cultures’ (Lado 1957) Fries (Ibid) categorically states that “A child in learning his native language has not only learned to attend (receptively and productively) to the particular contrast that functions as signals in that language, he has learned to ignore all those features that do not so function.... Learning a second language, therefore, constitutes a very different task from learning the first language” What the advocates of the contrastive analysis claim is that a
learner of L2 has already learned a set of habits and the rules of the system of LI. When the learner comes to the second language he or she has to learn a new set of habits and rules of another system. In the process of learning wherever there are dissimilarities in the system of LI and L2 at the levels of sounds, morphology, syntax or semantics the learner would face difficulties. The difficulties would rise primarily because of the interference of the habits and rules of the first language in the learning process, and the learner would tend to transfer the features of LI into L2. This interference and transfer would take place both receptively and productively. By preparing a systematic contrastive description of the two languages, it would be possible to predict all the problems that the learner would face in learning the new language (L2).

Thus, the contrastive analysis, not only claimed to offer a complete explanation of the causes of the learner's faults in terms of interference and transfer of the features of LI in to the second language, it also claimed to be able to predict the errors that he would be most likely to make, in terms of the dissimilarities between the two languages in question. These differences or dissimilarities, would constitute the problem area or blind spots for the second language learners and it would tell us how they have to be set right.  

5.4.2 Error Analysis

While contrastive analysis has much to offer the second language teacher by way of explicating how certain errors committed by L2 learners are caused by differences and dissimilarities between the first language and the second language of the learner it has its limitations too. Firstly it is based on too mechanistic a view of language learning and treats the process of language learning as nothing more than a matter of imitation, practice and habit formation. Secondly, contrastive analysis has no explanation to offer for those errors of the learners that come about due to reasons other than more structural or systematic differences between the two languages concerned, or the mistakes the learners commit while learning their mother tongue or first language. Thirdly, it is based on rather prescriptive and authoritarian attitude which frowns or looks down upon errors or mistakes as bad habits and need to be nipped in the bud as early as
possible. Finally, contrastive analysis can be of little or no help in teaching situations involving large multi-lingual class rooms, consisting of students coming from diverse mother tongue backgrounds.

Partly, as a challenge to the basic tenets and claims of contrastive analysis and partly in order to provide a fresh approach to learners’ errors the notion of error analysis was first proposed in the late 1960s. It was Corder who first advocated in ELT/ applied linguistics community the significance of errors in language learning process. In Corder (1967) he mentions the paradigm shift in linguistics from a behaviouristic view of language to a more rationalistic view and claims that in language teaching one noticeable effect is to shift the emphasis away from teaching towards a study of learning. He emphasizes great potential for applying new hypotheses about how languages are learned in L1 to the learning of a second language. He says ‘within this context the study of errors takes on a new importance and will, I believe, contribute to a verification or rejection of the new hypothesis’ (in Richards 1974).

As mentioned elsewhere, language learning is a serious mental activity entailed the process of problem solving and intelligent language data processing. The language learner actively uses his/her mental faculties to make sense of the language data provided and making assumptions about the structure leading to intelligent hypotheses which could prove to be correct or wrong when tested. This focus on the mental activity of the learner provided a new prospective on learners errors. While undergoing this mental process the incorrect or erroneous constructions could not be viewed as bad’ or failure to learn. Errors, therefore, have to be looked at as positive signs of mental activity on the part of the learner, as well as the learning process.

Corder again remarks that in L1 acquisition we interpret child’s ‘incorrect’ utterances as being evidence that he is in the process of acquiring language and that for those who attempt to describe his knowledge of the language of any point in its development, it is the errors which provide the important evidence. (Ibid 23) In second language acquisition, Corder proposed as a working hypothesis that some of the strategies adopted by the learner of a second language are
subsequently the same as those by which a first language is acquired irrespective of the cause or sequence of learning. By classifying the errors that learners made, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language acquisition process by inferring the strategies that second language learners were adopting. It is in this Corder’s seminal paper that he discusses the function of errors for the learners themselves. Selinker (1992) supports this idea by telling, that the errors are ‘indispensable’ since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

If a learner of English as second language constructs sentence like *He go to school every day obviously there is an error in this sentence. But this error could be due to the fact that the learner has successfully used the sentences like I go to school every day, We go to school every day, You go to school every day, They go to school every day etc., go without anybody objecting it. So the learner goes ahead and creates the structure *He go to school everyday which turns out to be wrong. The proponents of error analysis would, of course, call this an error, but they would also see this as a positive sign that the learner is mentally active in processing the second language data arriving at some sort of rules according to which the ‘system’ of English works. As such, they would be reluctant to treat it as a ‘failure to learn’ or bad habit formation’. This new attitude to learner’s errors does not imply approval of errors, or absence of corrective or remedial teaching. It does, however, mean looking at errors as ‘attempts at learning’.

A certain preliminary questions need to be asked with respect to error analysis. The question such as :
1. Are the errors random or systematic?
2. Are they trivial or serious and crucially important?
3. Are there any ways of explaining why particular errors occur?
4. What are the best ways to prevent recurrence of errors?

In order to answer these questions the performance of the learners need to be processed through several steps such as identifying, describing, explaining and remedying.
Selinker (1992) pointed out the two highly significant contributions that Corder made: that the errors of a learner, whether adult or child, are not random, but are in fact systematic, and are not 'negative' or interfering in any way with learning, but are on the contrary, a necessary positive factor indicative of testing hypothesis (ibid 151).

It is studied and found out that the errors are regular and systematic and the error analysis is the systematic study of learner's developmental language. Brown and Frazer (1964) pointed out that a child possesses construction rules is the occurrence of systematic errors, since, when a child speaks correctly, it is quite possible that he is only repeating something that he has heard. Corder (1967) remarks, that, in the investigation of the learner's errors the key concept is that the learner is using a definite system of language at every point in his development. The learner's errors are evidences of the system and are themselves systematic. According to David Crystal (1997) 'error' is a term in psycholinguistics referring to mistake in spontaneous speech or writing, attributable to a malfunctioning of neuromuscular commands from the brain. He also speaks about errors analysis as 'the study of learner's language'. In language teaching and learning error analysis is a technique for identifying classifying and systematically interpreting the acceptable forms produced by some one learning a foreign language, Errors systematically reflect the level of competence achieved by a learner. Chomsky (1965) speaks of 'competence' and 'performance'. The lack of competence or the knowledge of the morphological, syntactic and semantic structures of language causes errors, where as mistakes come in the area of performance.

This learners' system of second language acquisition has to be seen as an 'evolving' and developing one, continuously moving towards the system of that target language. This system has been variously referred to by various linguists. Corder calls it ‘idiosyncratic dialect’, Nemser calls it ‘approximative system’. Selinker popularized it as ‘interlanguage’ James coined the term ‘interlingua’ Dulay and Burt prefer using a light hearted slang, ‘goof’ to refer to an error. It is generally accepted that it is ‘learners’ language he develops in the learning
process of language acquisition. The term ‘interlanguage’ has, however, become more popular. The term is a very useful one as it enables us to look at the learners' performance at any given point of time during the learning process, describes systematically in terms of ‘its own’ structure and features and assesses how and where it is different from the standard system of the target language. The notion of ‘interlanguage’ also gives us a more dynamic and positive view of the learner’s learning strategies as he/she perseveringly and steadily move towards the target system.

Errors are regular and systematic as the learner follows a set of rules similar to that of target language and mother tongue. According to Selinker (1972), Learner’s language, which he calls ‘interlanguage’ is a linguistic system created by the learner in the process of learning a foreign language. According to Corder (1981), the spontaneous speech of the second language learner is a special sort of language and has a grammar. The learner’s language is labeled as ‘idiosyncratic’ in the linguistic sense as it shares the same rules of grammar of the mother tongue. Corder (1981) argues that the concept of ungrammaticality and deviance is not applicable to the learner. Everything he utters is by definition, a grammatical utterance in his dialect. It reflects learner's evolving the system of rules that results from variety of processes like influence of the first language, contrastive interference from the target language and over generalization of newly encountered rules.

5.5 The Significance of Error Analysis

Identifying the errors and correcting them in the context of a classroom are not the only purpose of error analysing. Today the application of linguistic and psychological theory to the study of language learning added a new dimension to the discussion of errors (Corder 1967) with regard to the methodology. In respect of learner’s errors he speaks of two schools “firstly the school which maintains that if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method the errors would never be committed .... the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques. The philosophy of the second school is that we live in an imperfect world and consequently errors will
always occur in spite of our best efforts." It indicates that errors are related to both teaching and learning processes.

A learner's errors provide ample evidence of the system of the language that he is learning and using at a particular point in the process. Corder (1967) explains the significance in three ways.

1. As far as teacher is concerned when he undertakes a systematic analysis he can find out how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and to decide what remains for him to learn.

2. They provide to the researcher evidences of how language is learned or acquired by a learner and what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the language learning process.

3. Perhaps, most importantly, they are indispensable to the learner himself, because the making of the errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. In this way learner will be testing his hypothesis about the nature of the language he is learning.

Thus, Corder (1967) says 'the making of errors then is a strategy employed by children acquiring their mother tongue and by those learning a second language'.

Dulay and Burt and Krashen (1982) refer to two major purposes served by errors. "It provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made; and (2) it indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate effectively".

Certain utterances of the learner may appear correct but they cannot be taken as proof that he has learned the system of the language he is learning. That may be reproduction of what he heard from the teacher or native speakers or from elsewhere. Spolky (1966) calls it 'language like behaviour' A superficially non deviant utterance is not an evidence for mastering of the language system. The sample sentence used by Corder (1981) to show this is, I want to know the English It may be an error of addition and selection and at the same time we can
decide on this utterance only from the context. All such problems can be dealt with error analysis. Error analysis will, certainly, help the learners develop their language ability by bringing improvements in the language learning process.

The notion of 'error' is applicable to L2 learning. L1 learners are said to make 'mistakes' or lapses (Corder 1974). Error is a pedagogic notion often becomes the object of instruction in L2 education. The 'learner's language' which Selinker (1969) calls the 'interlanguage' is what is analysed here. It is because error analysis is concerned with the second language acquisition. Consider the statements "error analysis has hither to been 'target language based'. (Corder 1981) Hence error analysis becomes an indispensable part of second language acquisition.

5.6 The Significance of Inter language in error analysis

David Crystal (1997) defines interlanguage as a linguistics system created by someone in the process of (course of) learning foreign language, different from speaker's native or first language or target language being acquired. It reflects learner's evolving system of rules and results from variety of processes. It involves the aspects such as influence of the first language (transfer), contrastive interference from the target language and over generalization of newly encountered rules.

The term 'interlanguage' was first introduced by Selinker (1969) and it was elaborated in 1972 in an influential paper titled 'Interlanguage' to refer to separate linguistics system. Corder (1981) discusses interlanguage as follows: 'The term 'inter language' was originally introduced by Selinker to refer to a language system which he believed was intermediate between the learner's mother tongue and the target language on the grounds that it showed some formal characteristics of both. Inter languages here unstable, i.e, always in the process of complication (except when they become fossilized)". According to David Crystal (1991) it is a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a type of construction which is no longer productive in a language. The usages like 'So be it' 'Long live the king' are examples for this. In the acquisitions of a foreign language, stabilization of a level of achievement in the use of a linguistics form
falls short of the norms of the target language. No further learning takes place and the form becomes a fossilized error in the usage of the learner”. Fossilization in part of inter language. Corder (1981) considers that when the interlanguage grammar reaches that state of elaboration which enables him to communicate adequately for his purposes with native speakers, his motive to improve his knowledge or elaborate his ‘approximative’ system disappears. Hence, probably the ‘phenomenon of fossilization’ occurs. Here the learner’s interlanguage ceases to develop however long he remains exposed to authentic data in the target language. The study of interlanguage is very much a part of language teaching and learning. In other words it is the study of the natural process of language learning. Interlanguage, thus, is similar to the terms, ‘transitional competence’ or ‘idiosyncratic dialect’ (Corder), ‘approximative system’ (Nemser) and ‘learner’s language’, particularly the second language learner’s language and it is a special sort of dialect since language learning is a continuous process. The interlanguage also is considered to be a continuum.

In the present study of errors and the error analysis I wish to refer to the learner’s language, interlanguage and the approximative language. Interlanguage is in fact an extended study of error analysis launched by Corder.

5.7 Classification of errors

“People cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982) As observed earlier all the errors were attributed to influence of the mother tongue and contrastive analysis was practised for the identification and correction of the errors. Though the mother tongue interference and language transfer are there in the process of second language acquisition, error analysis comes up with strange discoveries. It argues that rather than the mother tongue the errors of the second language learners are matched with the errors of the young children as they learn their first language. ‘Researchers have found that like L1 learners’ errors most of the errors L2 learners make indicate they are gradually building an L2 rule system’ (Ibid P 138)
The errors are of different nature and type. A learner uses various devices in approximating the target language. Linguists have attempted to classify the errors. The errors can be grouped according to the areas they occur (Richards Plutt, Weber 1985)

5.7.1 Classification of errors on the basis of areas of language

1. Lexical errors: They occur in the area of vocabulary, including the morphological area.
2. Phonological errors: They occur in the area of pronunciation, accent, modulation etc.
3. Syntactical errors: They are in the area of structure of sentences. This is an area most of the errors occur and for the learners the most difficult area to be tackled.
4. Imperative errors: They happen mostly because of the misunderstanding of learner’s intention of meaning.
5. Pragmatic errors: They are the production of wrong communicative effects, mostly when the learner attempts on communicating what he has learned.

5.7.2 Classification on the basis of nature of errors

Corder (1972, 81) attempts to classify the errors according to the nature of errors occurring in the above mentioned areas.

1. Errors of omission: Learners omit some of the required elements in their sentences.
2. Errors of addition: It is when the learner uses some unnecessary or incorrect elements.
3. Error of selection: The learner makes a wrong choice of the elements.
4. Errors of ordering: The failure in ordering the lexical and syntactic elements.

This categorization is still insufficiently deep or systematic and only a starting point for systematic analysis and evidence of data for analysis. There are utterances still be erroneous and show no outwards and formal signs of errors mentioned above. Purely superficial or formal correctness is no guarantee for
absence of error. Utterances could be acceptable or unacceptable. Corder (1973) speaks of overtly erroneous sentences and covertly erroneous utterances, which are superficially erroneous and apparently acceptable respectively.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) have a similar but slightly different way of classifying the errors. For them the most common errors are as follows.

1. Omitting grammatical morphemes, which are items that do not contribute much to the meaning of sentences as in he hit car
2. Double marking a semantic feature when only one is required, as in *She didn’t went back.
3. Regularizing rules as in *womans for women
4. Using archiforms – one form in place of several such as the use of ‘her’ for both she and her – as in *I see her yesterday. *Her dances with my brother.
5. Using two or more forms in random alternation even though the language requires the use of each only under certain conditions as in the random use of ‘he’ and ‘she’ regardless of gender of the person of interest.
6. Misordering items in constructions that require a reversal of word order rules that had been previously acquired as in *What you are doing? or misplacing items that may be correctly placed in more than one place in the sentence, as in *They are all the time late.

These types of errors are found in learning process of the second language especially the learners of English as second language. The following passage will tell more about the nature of errors.

“Sometimes researchers distinguish between errors caused by factors such as fatigue and inattention (what Chomsky, 1965, called “Performance” factors) and errors resulting from lack of knowledge of the rules of the language (what Chomsky, 1965, called “Competence”) In some of the second language literature performance errors have been called “Mistakes” while the term “errors” was reserved for the systematic deviations due to the learner’s still developing knowledge of the L2 rule system (Corder 1967). The distinction between
performance and competence errors is extremely important, but it is often
difficult to determine the nature of a deviation, without careful analysis. In order
to facilitate reference to deviations that have not yet been classified as
performance or competence errors, we do not restrict the term "error" to
competence based deviations. We use 'error' to refer to any deviations from a
selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or
causes of the deviation might be". (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982)

We are, therefore, dealing with the flaws in the competence part of the
learner and any deviation from the accepted form of the target language. The
errors are accounted on the basis of linguistic items, which occur in the language
components or linguistic constituents. Language components include phonology
pronunciation, syntax and morphology (grammar), semantics and lexicon
(meaning and vocabulary) and discourse (style). Constituents include the
elements that comprise each language component like clause, phrase etc. (ibid.)
In addition to the linguistic category surface level categorization is also possible.
Researchers have noticed that the surface elements of a language are altered in
specific and systematic ways. Omission, addition, misforming and misordering
are commonly found types of errors.

5.7.2.1 Omission errors

"Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must
appear in a well formed utterance" (Ibid P 154). Omission of grammatical
morphemes like auxiliaries, prepositions, articles are noticed as common items
omitted by learners as in *What you like to drink? Here the auxiliary do is
omitted causing an error.
5.7.2.2 Addition errors:

"Addition errors are the opposite of omissions they are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well formed utterance" (Ibid P 156). Addition errors usually occur in the later stages of L2 acquisition when the learner has already acquired some target language rules. When the learner gets familiarized with certain rules they tend to apply it in the construction. These linguists have observed three types of addition errors. they are:

5.7.2.2.1 Double marking:

In certain linguistic constructions some elements are to be deleted especially when auxiliary is used.

eg: 1. * He doesn't likes it.
2. * I didn't saw him.

For the expression of a single feature two items are used in these sentences. In sentence I simple present tense. is used. The subject is a third person singular subject and it takes 's' form of the verb. Another rule related it is that when this sentence is transformed to negative or interrogative an auxiliary is used. When an auxiliary is used with a verb it is placed before the verb and the auxiliary takes the required feature. Here, the 's' form is shifted form the main verb to auxiliary. In the second sentence also similar thing happens. The past marking in shifted to the auxiliary.

5.7.2.2.2 Regularization (Over generalization)

There are rules applicable for a class of linguistic items such as verb or noun. But in certain cases there will be exceptions of the rules. When there are such regular and irregular forms the learners are not properly aware of the exceptions of rules they apply. The learners tend to apply the rules used to produce the regular one to these that are irregular, resulting in error or regularization or over generalization of the rules. Over generalization is more generally used term. For example,

- tooth – plural form -*tooths for teeth
- man----plural form —*mans for men
- sit -- - past form *sited for sat
catch - past form –*catched for caught

5.7.2.3 Simple Addition

Errors of addition but that are neither double marking nor a regularization is called simple addition

eg: 3. * He is going in over there.
   4. * The Ramesh is my neighbor.

In sentence 3 the preposition in is wrongly added and in sentence 4 the definite article ‘the’ is wrongly added before a proper noun.

5.7.2.3 Misformation

“Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong from of the morpheme or structure. When in omission errors the item is not supplied at all, in misformation errors the learner supplies something, although it is incorrect” (Ibid P 158) A good number of errors are of this type. When a learner’s structure is analyzed some part of it go wrong misforming the structure. Three types of misformations have been frequently reported. 1) Regularizations 2) archiforms and 3) alternating forms. The selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class is a common characteristic in second language learning. As the learner’s vocabulary and grammar grow, the use of archi forms often gives way to the alteration form.

that dog archiforms
that dogs
these dog alternating forms
this dogs

5.7.2.4 Misordering

“Misordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance” (ibid P 162) For example,

5. *‘What the child is doing?’

Here, the word order of a declarative sentence is used for an interrogative sentence. This type of misordering is rather creative but misordering errors occur when the learners attempt word to word translations. They think in mother
tongue and the idea formed is translated into the target language in the patterns of the first language.

6. avar patukke naTannu (Malayalam)
   * They slowly walked. (Learner’s English)
      They walked slowly.

The errors are further categorized into four by Dulay Burt and Krashen under the heading ‘comparative taxonomy’. The two major categories of errors are 1) developmental errors and 2) Interlingual errors. Two other sub categories are 3) ambiguous errors and 4) other errors. Although mother tongue influence is obvious, most of the errors that occur are not interlingual but developmental. A general conclusion of the researchers of second language acquisition is that the majority of the errors made by second language learners are not interlingual, but developmental (Dulay Burt and Krashen 1982).

The developmental errors are errors similar to those made by children learning the target language as their first language. For example

7. *He come every week
8. *He eated well.

Simplification, overgeneralization etc are signs of the development of the learners language. The attempt of learner to approximate the target language is a mental process and the resultant language produced by the learner is developmental. Interlingual errors are otherwise labeled as interference or transfer because the learner’s native language somehow automatically interferes with the learning of the L2 or automatically transfers to the learner’s developing L2 system (Ibid p 171) ambiguous errors are those can be described as developmental or interlingual those errors which don’t fit to any other category are listed as ‘unique errors’.

5.7.2.5 Fossilization

Certain deviant linguistic forms remain to be a part of the interlanguage without being corrected at any point. Corder (1981) describes it as phenomenon where a learner’s inter-language ceases to develop. However long he remains exposed to authentic data in the target language. David Crystal (1957) defines

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fossilization as a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a type of construction which is no longer productive in a language and in the acquisition of a foreign language it refers to stabilizations of a level of achievement in the use of a linguistic form which falls short of the norms of the target language. No further learning takes place and the form becomes a fossilized error in the usage of a learner. It is part of learner’s inter-language.

In a later stage of learning development the inter-language of the L2 learners in formal learning situations loses its permeability and becomes somewhat static. Syamala (1993) observes that a complete fossilized state characterizes the system at this stage with no constructive hypothesis formed and the rules formulated at the earlier stages becoming permanently incorporated into their linguistic system. The deviant structures that are fossilized often get interspersed even with the well formed sentences. The fossilization occurs due to various seasons. Syamala (Ibid) refers to Jain and Taylor to explain the reasons. Jain (1974) considers that when the learner feels that he has learnt enough of the target language to carry out his purposes, he stops learning. Taylor (1974) argues that after a stage the learner speaks an inter-language emerged by fossils which are errors firmly entrenched in his inter-language and which distinguish his speech from the native speakers. Syamala (Ibid) argues that the more probable reason is the pronounced paucity of opportunities and necessity for an active use of language coupled with the extremely scanty exposure to English both in and outside the class room. The initial enthusiasm and thrill of learning of a new language is soon put out by the dull routine of mechanical learning practices. The fate of the errors of the learners if go uncorrected would be to become fossilized creating deformity in the target language.

Selinker (1972), from a psychological point of view deals with the problem of errors and suggests that there are five processes contributing to fossilization of certain devious linguistic forms. “fossilizable linguistic phenomena are linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular NL (native language) will lend to keep in their IL (interlanguage) relative to a particular TL (target
language) no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the TL’. He says, it is important to note that fossilizable structures tend to remain as potential performance, re emerging in the productive performance of an IL even when seemingly eradicated’.

1. **Language transfer**- the fossilizable items, rules and subsystems of which occur in IL performance are result of the learners NL. They influence his performance in his TL.

2. **Transfer of training**- The fossilizable items, rules and subsystems are the result of identifiable training procedures.

3. **Strategies of second language learning**: These are the result of the learning approach by the learner to the material to approach by the learner to the material to be learnt. Crothers and Suppes calls it ‘cue copying’.

4. **Strategies of second language communication**: These are the result of the learner’s identifiable approach to communication with native speakers of language or the target language.

5. **Over generalization of the target language linguistic material**: These are the result of the overgeneralization of TL rules and semantic features etc by the learner. Selinker thinks that these five processes are processes which are central to second language learning, and that each process forces fossilizable material upon surface inter language utterances resulting entirely fossilized ‘interlanguage competence.

Besides these five central psycholinguistic processes there exist many processes which affect the second language acquisition. They are:

1) **Spelling pronunciations**: They are the differences in pronouncing the words according the spelling phonetic rules of the target language. For example, The final r is pronounced by the Malayalam learners of English.

2) **Cognate pronunciations.** Whether or not the learner can produce certain sound they don’t attempt. For example, The sound /θ/ in thanks becomes /t/ when Malayalam speaking learners of English pronounce it as [tanks]
3) **Holophrase learning:** (Jain 1969) is a process of applying a phrase for several usages. Jain sites the phrase **half an hour** to show this. The Indian learners of English produce the phrase one and **half an hour** etc.

4) **Hyper-correction:** It is the use of an incorrect form by a speaker trying to avoid ones that are stigmatized as in *[wrait ] for /rait/

The errors in this way can be looked at from different angles. Error analysts have assigned the errors in the second language or foreign language to a number of sources. The influence of the mother tongue is a commonly discussed one. Corder (1974) considers that several errors in the use of second language are **teaching induced errors** and similarly Filipovic (1972) mentions ‘bad teaching as a source of errors’. Several linguists in the field of error analysis have found out that the errors are caused by dissimilarities in patterns, characteristics of the structure of the native language and the target language and it is widely agreed that many of the errors in the second language are on account of **overgeneralization** Richards (1971), Wilkins (1974). Selinker (1972) Exposure of the learners to errors is another source of errors. Tongue (1975) says, “Many of our students encounter more incorrect English than correct English – newspapers public notices, advertisements and official documents of various kinds containing errors at all levels of English from syntax to style” A number of linguistic and extra linguistic factors can contribute to the errors.