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Mother Tongue Interference in Writing English as a Second Language among the Students of Tamil Language

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Abstract: ***This paper investigates and analysis the common interference of mother tongue, were committed by the students who are native of Tamil language, in writing English as a second language. The purpose of this current study is to reveal the common interference of the first language Tamil with its rules and structures in writing ESL. This study was conducted by using the qualitative research method and an essay was taken, from the participants, as a tool of this study. Data were collected from 50 Advanced level students who study at the government schools and these written samples were gathered from the Tamil native students who passed English language in their O/Level examination. The collected data were analyzed and identified the interference of mother tongue,in writing English as a second language, are in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, wrong use of pronoun, word order or sentence structure, preposition, conjunction and adjective. Besides this study will help to our students to develop their writing skills of L2, also to correct them. As well, this article will assist the teachers of ESL to approach the students in learning English as a second language.***

Keywords: English, Mother Tongue Interference, Language, Second Language, Writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a medium which conveys message among the human beings in the world. Each and every living creature has its own language for the purpose of communication. Thus the human being also has a beautiful structured language that is so systematic with the proper sounds and symbol (Farooq, Hassan, & Wahid, 2012). The language is used by human, normally has four skills, they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the American linguist Noam Chomsky, "Language is a process of free creation, its laws and generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and used of words involves a process of free creation."

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So we human start to acquire a language when we are in our mother's sanctuary thus the term of mother tongue (known as first language, native language, parent tongue and L1.) which has been acquired and learned from birth of a person. And the mother tongue of a child is very important when they grow up because they learn their personal, social and cultural identify from their first language (Yadav, 2014). Most probably a child acquires his/her mother tongue copying and imitating others (David Crystal).

However, when we consider about the term of second language (L2) which is not a person's native language and it is learned later. As well, it is not known as the first language which is easy to learn from our environment but the second language should be learned with its rules, grammar, structure and system also it should be taught by someone in a proper way. According to Srilanka, English is our second language (ESL) which is known as Lingua Franka that means a common language for the purpose of communication worldwide (Ozkayran&Yilmaz, 2020). English is an international language which is not easy to learn as a second language for the students of Srilanka especially writing in ESL.

In the sense of writing means, it is a tool to express our ideas and feels in the written mode with symbols. Writing is a critical part of the learning a language and it is an essential skill to share our ideas permanently, as well it preserves our memories for long time. Also it is a complex task to learn with it rules and regulations which are known as the grammar of language (Rana, Owaidh&Harbi, 2019). The process of writing is so strict to follow the grammar of a language to have a meaningful sentence even the native language, especially writing a second language English.

According to Srilanka, English is taught as a second language for the students who are native of both languages: Tamil and Sinhala. Moreover English is one of the subjects which are compulsory to learn in their schools, hence the students should learn ESL with its four skills, especially writing ESL. That is why, they should be very clear about the features of writing the language, such as letters, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling, structure of making sentence, meaning and so on. However the students make mistakes alarmingly, though they learn ESL more than 10years due to the major reason of their mother tongue interference. Therefore this study analysis the interference of mother tongue in writing English as a second language, the special preference for the Tamil native students. As well I could obviously observe their mother tongue interference on punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, pattern of the sentence or word order, preposition, conjunction and adjective in their writing samples.

Objectives

The present research article focuced on following objectives.

- To identify the errors in writing ESL due to the mother tongue interference.
- To explain the categorisation of errors.
- To discuss the interference of mother tongue Tamil.
- To hilight the solutions to reduce the errors in writing ESL.

Research questions

The study proposed to answer the following research questions.

- Are there any mother tongue(Tamil) interference in writing ESL made by the students of government schools?
- What types of errors in writing ESL made by the students of government schools?

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- How can the students'writing be improved without L1 interference?

Literature Review

Considering the four skills of the language, writing is the most critical part to achieve, especially writing English as a second language (Somchai& Usaha, 2013). The making mistakes in writing ESL are natural by the interference of the mother tongue. Somchai& Usaha (2013) observed those Thai EFL students' writing genres, namely narration, description and comparison/contrast. The data were collected from 120 English paragraphs of 40 second year English major students and they found out nearly 16 errors of their mother tongue interference. Also they recommended to the teachers to improve the students' grammatical accuracy to overcome from L1 interference in writing different genres.

Sanmuganathan (2014) investigated the impact of L1 on ESL writings of the undergraduates of University of Jaffna by using qualitative methods to collect the data, which were the written samples to identify the resultI the formation of wrong rules by the impact of L1 (Tamil) on L2 (English). And he suggested to have better linguistic differences between L1 & L2 will help to reduce the impact of L1.

According to the study of Yadav (2014), he stated that the role of mother tongue in second language learning and teaching is indicated both positive and negative. Also he pointed out that the learners' L1 is so important to learn the L2 and first language helps to learn & develop the process of learning a second language. Thyab (2016) explored the mother tongue interference in the acquisition of English articles by L1 Arabic students and he followed a qualitative approach with pre-existing tests and questionnaires to analyze the comparison between Arabic & English article systems.

Similarly Manan et al.(2017) examined the errors in writing English as a second language made by the Malay learners because of L1 interference. The participants of this study were, from University Teknologi Mara Perak, instructed to write essays on a given topic in both languages Malay and English. The result showed that the main reason of errors is their mother tongue interference with three types which are transfer of rules, redundancy reduction and overgeneralization.

In another body of research by Madahvi&Malini (2017) explained that the students from a private Chinese school in Malaysia have to master in English as their second language and they need to master in English as their second language and they need to master the fours skills. They gathered 37 written essays on "The Hero's Journey" of form one students studying in a private Chinese Schools. Also they found out the most common errors made in mechanics, tense, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word choice. Furthermore they said that the students who are the native of Chinese, they only speak English language during the lessons, because of this most of them face difficulties to express them in English written mode. Additionally they advised to the teachers of ESL to realize the nature of the problems faced by students in writing English and prepare effective teaching methods.

As well as Rana et al.(2019) conducted a study to analyze the grammatical errors in English writing from the senior students of English department at Jubali University College. Thirty written assignments of the senior level students were examined to find out the errors. They emphasized that the major reason for their errors in writing ESL is the strong influence of their native language. Also they proposed some explication to overcome from the errors in writing English with sufficient knowledge of grammatical concepts.

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Besides Ozkayran&Yilmaz (2020) who noted the errors of higher education students in English writing tasks. For this case the written paragraphs were collected from fifty seven preparatory class students at a state University in Turkey in 2017-2018 academic years by the qualitative research method. At the same time they observed around 381 errors on those 57 exam paper of malformation, omission, addition and disordering. Especially 50% of the students made the errors of malformation due to their mother tongue interference.

Additionally, Maniam et al.(2020) explored to find out the components of the L1 (Tamil language) grammar that the students of Tamil schools use interchangeable in their daily writing of L2 (English). And he used a mixture of qualitative & quantitative survey research method to point of the influence of mother tongue grammatical features in writing ESL. Also he chose standard 4 students from a selected school as his written samples. As well he clearly indicated that the L1 interfered in writing of L2 among Tamil school students, likewise their national language Malay also influenced in the writing of students' L2.

Apart from this, Kumaran&Krish (2021) clarified that the mother tongue interference in English writing among Tamil school students in Malaysia, due to the difference of structures between Malay and English. The 30 written samples of year 5 students were collected to examine the mother tongue influence in terms of structure, vocabulary usage and spelling. He advised to do higher levels of writing (L2) to minimize the mother tongue interference of Tamil language and he recommended that the students should recognize the difference of the structure between their L1 and English.

All in all, the mother tongue interference plays the major role in the writing of English language especially among the Tamil students. L1 interference is the most important reason to make linguistic errors in writing ESL, because of most of our Tamil students who are the learners of ESL depends on their first language. Also they thinkfirst in their mother tongue then they start to write in L2, thus they automatically transfer their L1 to L2. At the same time they don't realize the differences between Tamil and English.

2. METHODOLOGY

This part explains the research method, procedure, participants and the method of data collection. The research design was qualitative throughout the whole study to analyze the interference of mother tongue in writing ESL and the written essays were used as the primary tool for the data collection.

The participants were selected based on convenience sampling as they were accessible to me. In order to answers the research questions, 50 written essays of 50 participants were analyzed to point out the L1 interference on the linguistic features in writing ESL. This data collection was considered male and female students, who have got through with "s" pass in General English in their O/L examination, were selected from five schools in Batticaloa district.

Also the students were asked to write an essay on the topic which was chosen by them. All the essays were collected and analyzed by the two experts in the field of english language teaching to identify the interference of mother tongue in ESL writing. The interference were revealed in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabulary, wrong use of pronoun, word order, sentence structure, preposition, conjunction and adjective.

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3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This segment leads the findings of the study and the mother tongue interference, in Advanced level students' writing, is analyzed as following examples.

Punctuation

There are nearly 14 punctuation marks in English language but we concern about apostrophe. Because most of our students are very careless to put apostrophe in writing ESL and more that 40 errors were found in the punctuation of apostrophe. There is no apostrophe mark at all in Tamil language so they easily write in ESL without the apostrophe mark and they produce inappropriate sentences due to the interference of their mother tongue.

My father name is Arulappan. (My father's name)
vdJmg;ghngau; mUsg;gd;. (vdJmg;ghtpd;ngau;)

Most probably, when they want to tell the possession or ownership they made mistakes due to the Tamil language interference.

Capitalization

Capitalization is used for the starting of the sentence and for all proper nouns (person, place, thing and organization) in English. However there is no capital or small letter in Tamil language so they start to write in the same way in ESL without capital letter.

myteacher's name is ramani and she lives in kandy.
My teacher's name is Ramani and she lives in Kandy.

Spelling

Spelling is most fundamental feature to have a correct word in any language, in that respect there are many spelling errors were found in the written samples.

She likes to eat sokalate. (Chocolate)
I have a poto of my teacher. (Photo)

I argue that the above spelling mistakes can be due to the mother tongue interference. That means how they pronounce in their native Tamil, they transfer that word into English similarly. Also there are lots of differentiations between spelling and the pronunciation of words in English according to the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).

Vocabulary

We need an adequate knowledge on vocabulary to speak or write the language. That means speak and write the language without correct spelling, rules, tense, pattern and structure because there are possibilities to communicate. However unless there is no vocabulary, there will be no speaking and no writing out knowing the proper vocabulary to use. And I could see some errors in using vocabularies wrongly.

I can put tea.
(Ennaltheneerpodamudium)
I can make tea.
Mother did cake.
(Amma cake seithar)
Mother made cake.

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Most of our students think in L1 before they write in L2, thus they directly replace the words in L2 writing. For instance, "made – make" means in Tamil nra; (sei) and the word "do" also is the same meaning in L1. So it doesn't matter in L1 writing however it is a wrong usage of vocabulary in ESL due to L1 interference.

Pronoun

There were some errors in wrong use of pronoun made by the students, because of their L1 interference.

We teacher is beautiful.
(Engalasiriyaralakanavar.)
Our teacher is beautiful.
School bus will be picked up he.
(Padasalai bus avanaiattrum)
School bus will be picked up him.
Me like football.
(enacku football pidickum.)
I like football.

The students made the mistake of applying the subject pronoun "we" instead of possessive pronoun "our". As well they used the same subject pronoun "he" instead of object pronoun "him", due to their mother tongue interference.

Word order (no subject)

The sentence can be created without the subject of the sentence in Tamil language, like wise they have written sentences without subject in ESL.

Tomorrow going.
(Nalaikupoven)
Tomorrow, I am going.
Yesterday wrote.
(Nettrueluthinavan)
Yesterday, he wrote.

Similarly, they avoid auxiliary verbs while writing in English, because there is no any auxiliary in their mother tongue Tamil. Hence they are not writing auxiliaries in ESL: am, is, are, was, were etc.

English very important.
(Angilammihamuckiyam)
English is very important.

So, the word order of the sentence in English is collapsed by neglecting subject and avoiding auxiliaries of the sentence due to the L1 interference.

Structure of the sentence

One of the most common errors made by the students in their essays is wrong structure of the sentence. The structure or the pattern of the sentence in Tamil is "SOV", however in English; it changes as "SVO". Hence the students of Tamil language automatically transfer the rules of making sentence in their L1, into English (L2). So I could see many malformation sentences in their writing due to L1 interference.

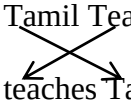
He Tamil teaches.

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(Avar Tamil katpickiravar.)
He teaches Tamil

SOV
He Tamil Teaches. (L1)



He teaches Tamil. (L2)
SVO
We cricket played.
(Nankal cricket vilaiyadinom)
We played cricket.

Tense

The students also committed errors in tense while writing in L2 by following their mother tongue. There are just 3 main tenses in L1 but there are 12 tenses in L2, so they confuse while converting sentences in particular tense from L1 to L2. As well they are confused mostly with sentences, especially simple present tense in English.

Seelannot play
(Seelanvilayadurathillai.)
Seelandoes not play.
We no study maths.
(Nangalkanithampadikirathillai.)
We do not study maths.

Preposition

The students who are the learners of ESL normally construct the wrong sentences by using inappropriate prepositions due to their native language influence.

We went to Colomoin train.
(Nangalpugaiyirathaththilcolombokuponom.)
We went to Colombo by train.

They have used "in" before the transport, instead of using "by". Thus the students produced ungrammatical sentence in English. Likewise, in another example,

My mother cut vegetables by a knife.
(Enathuammakaththiyalmarackarivettinar.)
My mother cut vegetables with a knife.

Adjective

Adjective is a word which describes or modifies a noun. An adjective can be categorized into 3 types of classification in Tamil; therefore they face difficulties while using adjectives in L2. That means they should follow some rules when they compare two or more things.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
big small beautiful	bigger smaller more beautiful	the biggest the smallest the most beautiful

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The above classification chart system is in English but there is no these types of classification in Tamil. So they only use positive adjective in the place where comparative or superlative will be, because of their first language.

Srilanka is small than India.
(SrilankaIndiyavaividasiriyathu.)
Srilanka is smaller than India.

If we clearly consider about this,

Srilanka is small = Srilankasiriryathu
Srilanka is smaller than India = SrilankaIndiyavaividasiriyathu
Srilanka is the smallest in the world = Srilankaulahathileyesiriyathu

There are no any changes in Tamil but it is not like that in English rules and spelling when it changes. That is why most of our students from Tamil native made errors in adjectives.

Conjunction

In the sense of conjunction, I need to explain about "and" which is used to join one thing, especially usage of "and" with "I". There are a few mistakes found on "and" in the written samples

I and Raja did our assignment.
(NanumRajavumengaludaiyaassignmentaiseithom.)
Raja and I did our assignment.

So, "I and Raja" is correct in Tamil but it is not correct in English. Although they use in their L2 writing due to L1 interference.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper concludes that the most of our students face so many difficulties in writing ESL and they have made such grammatical errors in their written samples on punctuation, capitalization, spelling, vocabularies, word order, sentence structure, preposition, pronoun, tense, conjunction and adjective. This is due to the fact of their first language Tamil interference into L2 writing. Because most of our students tend to replace their mother tongue in English.

The students and the teachers, both parties should realize the importance of English language learning as it is known as the common language to communicate around the world. Therefore teaches of ESL should consider to improve the students' writing skill to overcome from their errors of L1 influence. Also the students should move toward the better acquisition of English language. At the same time the students should be motivated to write more in ESL, then there will be a space to identify their errors and they try to correct them without their L1 interference.

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