

**An analysis of the errors in
grammar made by Xhosa learners
of English Second Language**

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem defined

Many Xhosa learners of English Second Language in the Eastern Cape experience difficulty with English. Their use of English is characterised by many grammatical errors in their writing. Personal observation has shown that Xhosa learners seem to experience problems with concord, articles, pronouns, prepositions, the use of the plural, and spelling. The task of the teacher is to develop learners' competence, and this involves the eradication of their errors. The elimination of errors can, however, be tackled only if teachers possess enough information on the nature of the grammatical errors that occur. An analysis of the errors made by specifically Xhosa learners has not been done previously, and there is a need to do this so that pedagogical measures can be taken to address these in teaching.

The technique of error analysis is usually used to analyse learners' errors. According to Ellis (1994:48), it consists of the following stages: collection of a sample of learner language; identification of errors; description of errors and explanation of errors.

The explanation of errors is important, because once the cause of an error is known, measures can be taken to eliminate it. Various explanations for the causes of errors have been advanced (e.g. Ellis, 1994:57; Richards, 1971; Dulay & Burt, 1974). The following causes are often mentioned:

Transfer from the mother tongue (i.e. those errors that reflect the structure of the L1) (Odlin, 1989; Richards, 1971; Dulay & Burt, 1974).

Natural language development (i.e. errors that are similar to L1 acquisition) (Ellis, 1994).

Unique errors (i.e. those errors that are neither transfer nor developmental ones) (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982).

Of these, transfer errors are most readily recognisable, as they reflect the structure of the first language grammar in the use of the second language. Transfer errors are often very difficult to eradicate and persist for a long time. Ellis (1985:40), points out that the first language is an important determinant of second language acquisition (SLA). He suggests that it can be used positively in SLA, in the sense that it can be used as a learner strategy in communication. But in order to accommodate this positive view in teaching, transfer errors first need to be identified. Only then can teaching and learning strategies be advanced which aim at the eradication of these errors.

The problem questions to be addressed in this study can be summarised as follows:

- What are the errors in grammar that occur in the writing of Xhosa learners of English?
- Which of these errors can be ascribed to transfer from the L1?
- How can these errors be addressed in the teaching-learning situation?

1.2 **Aims of the study**

The aims of this study are to:

- determine the errors made in writing by Xhosa learners in selected grammatical categories.
- determine which of these errors can be ascribed to transfer from the L1.
- suggest methods and techniques of addressing these errors in the teaching-learning situation.

1.3 **Method of research**

The literature on error analysis (e.g. Corder, 1967, 1973, 1974, 1981), the causes and eradication of errors and the grammars of English and Xhosa have been surveyed.

Twenty-four Grade 9 students from a rural school in the Eastern Cape wrote two essays each which were analysed for errors in this study. Norrish's (1983) taxonomy for error classification is used in the error analysis and the following six categories of errors are investigated: concord, articles, personal pronouns, plural, prepositions and spelling. Descriptive statistics, in particular frequency counts and averages, are used in the study. The frequency of errors in each category is determined in order to establish which of the errors are the most important for teaching purposes. Following this, transfer errors are identified by comparing the errors with the grammar of Xhosa.

1.4 **Outline of the study**

Chapter 2 discusses learners and their errors.

Chapter 3 looks at the theoretical orientation of error analysis and discusses in some depth the kinds of errors that learners make when learning a second language.

In Chapter 4, there is a contrastive analysis between Xhosa and English for the categories discussed in this study, i.e. concord, articles, pronouns, prepositions, plurals and spelling.

Chapter 5 discusses the research methods used for data collection and analysis and Chapter 6 looks at the results of the study.

Chapter 7 discusses implications for language teaching and provides suggestions for exercises which may help to practise the grammatical problem areas.

Chapter 8 summarises the findings of the study and suggests areas which need further research.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNERS AND THEIR ERRORS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses a variety of possible causes of errors identified in the second language acquisition literature. Fanselow (1997:591) states that errors are a necessary part of linguistic development, and that errors are significant because they may represent the discrepancy between the grammar of the learner's 'transitional competence' and that of the target language.

In order to be able to utilise the learner's errors in the process of second acquisition, a basic knowledge of their errors is necessary. The teacher should be familiar with both the nature and causes of the errors produced by learners in order to make maximal use of error analysis in the classroom.

2.2 Causes of errors

What are the causes of target language errors? What, in other words, are the strategies that language learners use to produce target language utterances - strategies that often give rise to incorrect use of target language? There are a number of different explanations that have been put forward for different types of errors.

Different theorists have used different classificatory systems when discussing the causes of errors. For example, Brown (1987:177-185) identifies four major causes or sources of errors: interlanguage transfer; intralingual transfer; context of learning; and communication strategies.

Ellis (1994) identifies the following sources of errors: interference errors; intralingual errors and developmental errors. Richards (1971:53) groups three sources of errors, namely: interference, intralingual and developmental errors. Abbot (1980:124) shows the sources of errors in a schematic diagram (figure 2.1).

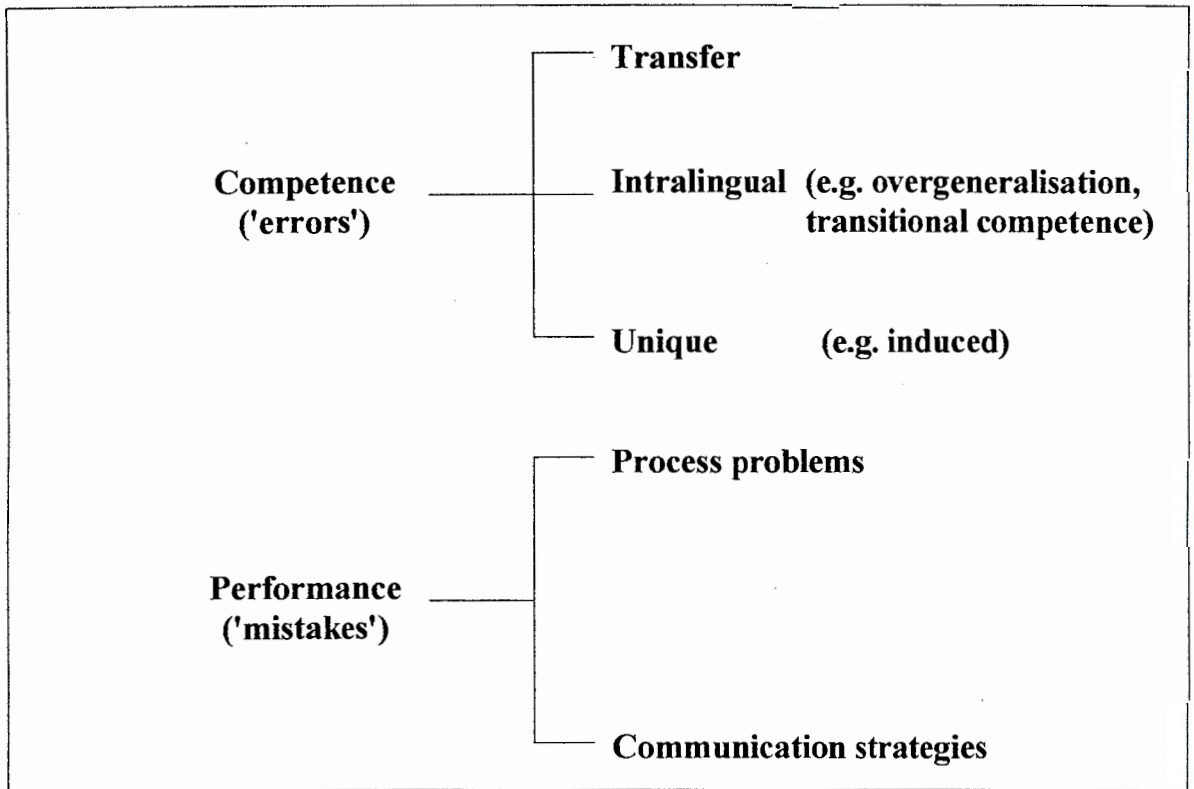


Figure 2.1 Sources of errors (Abbot, 1980:124)

In order to properly describe and analyse the data presented later in this study, a single system of classification needs to be chosen. As Abbot's (1980) system seems to include most of the causes of errors discussed by other theorists and best describes the data collected for the study, this system will be used as a framework to discuss the causes of learner errors.

2.2.1 Transfer

Unlike the baby learning its mother-tongue, the learner of an L2 has already developed a linguistic competence, i.e. he has mastered the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems of his native language prior to commencing his new task. This mother-tongue competence is at the same time a tremendous advantage to the second language learner and a source of many difficulties which are quite unlike those with which the L1 learner has to contend: the L2 learner cannot simply put his L1 behind him, put his mind into neutral and then start learning his chosen L2 from scratch. His L1 competence influences his L2 learning both positively and negatively. This influence is known as transfer.

Gundel and Tarone (1992:87) regard the term 'language transfer' as misleading as it implies the transfer of only L1 surface 'patterns' to the L2, while it actually involves a complex interaction between the two language systems.

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1989:31) define transfer as the construction of hypothetical rules for the L2 after the transfer of L1 knowledge onto the developing L2 and, like other theorists, they distinguish between positive and negative transfer. (It should be noted that Van Els et al. (1984:57) claim that the disadvantage of the term 'positive' transfer is that it implies a value judgement, rather than being purely descriptive.)

The construction of hypothetical rules can have two outcomes: It can result in either correct or incorrect forms of the L2. Positive transfer will lead to correct performance as there is no difference between the old and new behaviour (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982:101), but it will only happen when an L1 pattern is identical to a target language pattern (Ellis, 1985:305). On the other hand, the learner's hypothesis may be incorrect, which leads to transfer of wrong elements from the mother-tongue. This phenomenon is called negative transfer or interference (Odlin, 1989:26). Kellerman (1995:125) and Odlin (1989:31) agree that negative transfer is the cause of transfer errors and that interference from the L1 can be seen as a direct cause of erroneous performance.

Marton (1988:112) defines interference as the 'automatic retrieval of planning procedure of the native language' after a L2 learner has been forced to premature production of the target language, before he or she has succeeded in processing operations related to the L2. According to Weinreich (1953:106) such a phenomenon is an unsuitable result of languages in contact and will occur in the writing of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. Mother-tongue interference refers to instances where syntactic structures in the second language exhibit interference from the mother-tongue (Richards, 1984:4). These errors occur because the L2 learner has mastered structures in his L1 before the L2 and as such finds himself falling back on his L1 in cases of difficulty (Brown, 1980:173). There can be interference at the level of vocabulary as well, as the following example illustrates:

I sit at Engcobo.

In this example the learner obviously lacks the appropriate vocabulary in English, i.e. stay or live, and has used the words 'sit' inappropriately. The reason is that in Xhosa the English words sit, stay, live, reside and remain (as, for example, in remain standing) are all represented lexically by the word hlala. The word hlala will therefore be used erroneously to translate any of the five English words listed above. This is a good example of the phenomenon of mother-tongue interference in L2 learning.

Transfer of this kind is particularly prevalent where the learner is translating directly from the L1. Translation is the process of changing speech or writing from one language (the source language) into another (the target language), or the target language version that results from this process.

Norrish (1983:26) notes that direct translation of idiomatic expressions in the L1 is the most common cause of errors in the learners' use of L2. A popular example is:

Mag ek jou boek leen?

translated as

*May I lend your book?

Possible reasons why the learner employs translation when using his L2 are stated by Norrish (1983:27). When the learner reaches a stage where the message he wants to express is the focus of his concentration, the code or language used becomes less important. According to Norrish (ibid.) this type of error may occur frequently if translation is employed in class as a teaching or learning activity. Similarly, errors due to translation may occur during a discussion, where students have reached the stage of concentrating more on the message (what they want to express) than on the code they are using to express it (i.e. the language) (Norrish, 1983:27).

2.2.2 Intralingual errors

2.2.2.1 Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization covers instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in either the target language or the source language. Overgeneralization may occur as a result of the learner relieving himself of the linguistic burden of having to master two sets of linguistic or syntactic rules (see for example Ellis, 1994:174). Note the following example:

*Childrens like playing.

This error is made by the ESL learner most probably because he has overgeneralized the rule of pluralization, namely '-es' or '-s' is added to the word which is in the singular form. He, therefore, without heeding exceptions to the rule, applies the rule to every word in the singular form.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:157) explain that the term 'overgeneralization' refers to almost all developmental errors, and they prefer the use of the term 'regularization'. This is the application of a rule for producing regular forms, e.g. adding an -s to a singular noun to form its plural, to an irregular form, e.g. 'mouse' becomes 'mouses' instead of 'mice'. In other words, the L2 learner fails to apply the exception to the rule.

Ellis (1994:59) claims that overgeneralization errors arise when the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of other structures in the target language. It generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two target language structures, for example, 'He can sings', where English allows 'He can sing' and 'He sings'.

Allwright and Bailey (1991:87) claim that the process of acquiring the L2 depends on 'gradual accumulation of both data and rules'. L2 learners do not simply memorise sentences from the input they are exposed to or rely on adults to correct their erroneous utterances, but instead, they process new language in their minds, producing rules for its production, based on what they know where they experience a lack of appropriate data.

According to Odlin (1989:18) overgeneralization often appears because of inappropriate application of a target language rule and Ellis (1990:197) appropriately refers to such errors as 'examples of obliterate subsumption'.

Jakobovits (1969:56) defines overgeneralization as 'the use of previously available strategies in new situations . . . In second language learning . . . some of these strategies will prove helpful in organising the facts about the second language, but others, perhaps due to superficial similarities, will be misleading and inapplicable'. Ervin-Tripp (1969:33) suggests that 'possibly the morphological and syntactic simplification of second-language learners corresponds to some simplification common among children (i.e. mother-tongue speakers) learning the same language'.

Possible factors giving rise to overgeneralization are the manner or order in which the teacher presents language items, the manner or order in which the teacher presents language items, as well as the exercises the learner is expected to do, for example, she goes (must) may lead to a response such as she must goes. Norrish (1983:32) cautions the teacher never to 'teach together what can be confused'. If he sings and he is singing are taught within a relatively short span of time, the result may be he is sings.

2.2.2.2 Incomplete application of rules

This type of intralingual error corresponds to what is often referred to as an error of transitional competence (Richards 1979a). The L2 learner who is interested mainly in communication can achieve quite efficient communication without the need for mastering the grammatical rules. Motivation to master communication may exceed motivation to produce grammatically correct sentences (Richards, 1984:175). In the example:

*I told you how stubborn is he

instead of

I told you how stubborn he is

the learner can be understood even though the sentence is not grammatically correct. The learner has most probably thought the last part is he because of the question word how, disregarding the fact that the sentence (because of its beginning) is a statement.

According to Ellis (1994:59), incomplete application of rules involves a failure to fully develop a structure. In contrast to overgeneralization, where a certain rule is applied excessively, learners of the L2 also often fail to apply a rule consistently. That is why Norrish (1983:32) regards this particular cause of errors as 'the reverse side of the coin'.

Two possible reasons why L2 learners fail to apply the rules of the target language consistently are usually suggested. Firstly, questions are often used in the classroom and the learner is expected to repeat the question or part of it in the answer.

An example is:

Teacher: Ask her where she lives.

Learner: *Where you she lives?

Secondly, learners may discover that deviant forms do not necessarily hamper communication, as they can communicate perfectly adequately in spite of incorrect application of the target language rules (Norrish, 1983:32).

2.2.2.3 Ignorance of rule restriction

Failure to observe the restrictions of the existing structures or the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply may also lead to errors (Richards, 1984:175). In the example:

*I made him to do it

instead of

I made him do it

The learner ignores restrictions on the distribution of 'make' (Richards, 1984:175).

Some rule restriction errors may be explained in terms of analogy. Consider the following example:

He showed me the book

may lead to

*He explained me the book (Richards, 1984:177).

Ellis (1994:59) states that ignorance of rule restriction involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. Ellis (1994) gives the following example:

*He made me to rest.

This error occurs through extension of the pattern found with the majority of verbs that take infinitival complements, for example:

He asked/wanted/invited me to go.

2.2.2.4 Error as part of language creativity

Learners of the L2 often need to create new utterances. In an attempt to create these utterances, they commit errors because of their limited experience of the target language (Norrish, 1983:34). Examples of such errors are frequently found in ESL classrooms when learners experience difficulty in forming nouns from adjectives or fail to understand that most nouns have related adjectives, for example, the noun poverty related to the adjective poor.

2.2.3 Induced errors

Ellis (1994:60) defines induced errors as the errors occurring when learners are led to make errors by the nature of instruction they have received. Whether a learner is learning a language in the classroom or acquiring it naturally by way of day-to-day interaction with members of the target language community, his specific learning situation or learning context will be the cause of certain errors. Induced errors can also include any of the transfer and intralingual errors discussed above.

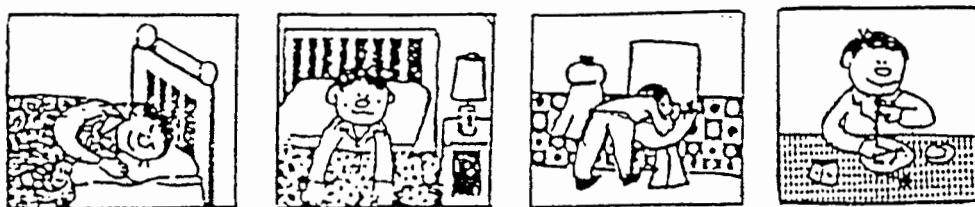
In the classroom learning situation the teacher is sometimes responsible for causing students to produce errors. The teacher might, for instance, inadvertently mislead students because of the way in which the teacher explains a lexical item. Stenson (1974:54) notes that when students were told that the word worship was 'just a more general word for pray', many of them subsequently used worship as though it behaved syntactically in exactly the same way as pray, producing utterances such as:

*They are worshipping to God.

Teaching materials induce errors either by promoting false concepts or by fostering ignorance of rule restrictions (Norrish, 1983:33). An example of this is the series of pictures in Figure 2.2, illustrating a sequence of actions, with the caption in the present indefinite tense. However, the introductory sentence is in the present continuous tense. The present indefinite tense would be more appropriate, because the title creates the context of this person's habits every morning. As learners use the data presented to them as a basis for their hypotheses about the target language, it is vital that teachers give learners an indication of the context within which to apply the data sensibly.

Figure 2.2: An example of teaching materials which may induce errors

HOW TOM STARTS HIS DAY



Tom is still sleeping

Sometimes the problem is a structural drill which is presented in such a way that the students pay attention only to the form of their responses and not to their meaning. Stenson (1974:58-59) gives examples of a drill which was triggered by yes-no questions such as, Do you want to study?, Do you understand French?, etc. The students were told they should choose any response from the following selection:

No, but I hope to
 ought to
 must
 expect to
 have to

Because of a lack of attention to meaning, unacceptable responses were often made, for example:

Do you want to study tonight? No, but I hope to.

Brown (1987:180) points out that inappropriately formal or 'bookish' language is often typical of the classroom learner. Thus, the learner might use uncontracted forms and expressions characteristic of a formal register in an informal situation.

According to Ellis (1990:74), teachers can actually induce errors as a result of the way a question or grammatical rule is explained. The teacher may, for instance, say the word any is used in a negative construction. The L2 learner may understand that he has to substitute the negative no with any. The following utterance may be the result:

*In this class there are any speakers of Swaziland.

There are two different views about the influence of teaching materials and methods on the errors that learners produce. Theorists who base teaching materials and methods on behaviourist approaches to teaching language attribute language errors to teaching strategies that do not make sufficient provision for habit formation in the language structures of the target language. Behaviourists believe that if language teachers have recourse to appropriate language drills in the target language, chances for error will be minimised and eventually eliminated. Theorists who base teaching materials and methods on mentalist approaches, on the other hand, believe that language errors should not be regarded as a sign of failure of methodology or language materials used, but rather as evidence that the student is working mentally towards the correct rules of the target language (Hubbard, 1984:142-144). The incorrect construction:

*I'm go to school everyday (ibid: 142)

will probably be ascribed by behaviourists to insufficient drill-work in the SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE, i.e. the 'habit' tense, while the mentalists will probably ascribe the error to learner state which is working towards the correct construction.

2.2.3.1 Possible additional causes of induced errors in South African schools

Three possible additional causes for induced errors were identified in this study. Firstly, incompetent teachers are particularly prevalent in South Africa and they may be the cause of many ESL errors. Some teachers are poorly qualified and they have limited knowledge of both English itself and ESL teaching methods. Owing to the shortage of qualified teachers, they are forced by their principals to teach ESL.

Secondly, the problem of unqualified teachers has repercussions for the kind of language learners are exposed to in the classroom. Those teachers whose English is poor often resort to switching from English to the vernacular and back again, with possible negative effects on the learners' own communicative competence in English.

Thirdly, in-service training is potentially one of the most effective ways of upgrading teachers in terms of subject content and newer, more effective teaching strategies. Courses do not take place on a regular basis, chiefly because of financial constraints.

2.2.4 Other causes of second language learners' errors

Nunan (1984:44) contends that there are many other possible causes of second language learners' errors, such as inefficient learning strategies, poor attention in class, irregular attendance, particular macro-skill problems and difficulty with discrete language points.

Richards (1974:283) claims that 'Errors are a result of partial knowledge because the teaching-learning process extends over time'. According to Norrish (1983:21) carelessness on the part of the learner because of a lack of motivation is another possible cause of errors. Inappropriate teaching materials or styles of presentation may be blamed for learners' carelessness.

Different settings for language use result in different degrees and types of language learning (Richards, 1974:121). Many learners do not use English in their immediate environment, but prefer to speak their mother-tongue, as this is the language of the majority in the area. English is only used at school. Theoretically, teacher-pupil communication on the school ground, offices, staff-room and classroom should be conducted primarily in English, but in reality the vernacular tends to predominate, especially in rural areas. Although this may be undesirable for the development of communicative competence in English, it is nonetheless understandable since the overall rural environment is not supportive of the use of English in lieu of the vernacular.

2.2.4.1 Interlanguage theory and its explanation of learner errors

According to Nemser (cited in Ellis, 1985:46), interlanguage, sometimes referred to as 'approximative systems' or 'transitional competence/idiosyncratic dialects' (Corder as cited in Ellis, 1985:46), was closely associated with Error Analysis, a critical and systematic way of looking at learner errors, which proposed a positive view of error. Error analysis broke new ground in the study of learner errors by postulating that there are sources of error other than first language interference. For the learner, error was seen as a key to 'creative construction' which provided a means whereby linguistic hypotheses can be tested. Interlanguage was defined as 'the structured system which the learner constructs at any given stage in his/her development'. According to Ellis (1985:47), the term refers to the series of interlocking systems which form the 'built-in syllabus' of the interlanguage continuum.

Corder (1981:146) claims that interlanguage and error analysis are both concerned with the development of the language learner's language, and errors are seen as indications of the learner's position on the interlanguage continuum.

Nemser (cited in Ellis, 1985:47) identifies the following assumptions underlying Interlanguage:

1. At any given time the approximative system is distinct from the L1 or L2.
2. The approximate systems form an evolving series.
3. In any given contact situation, the approximative systems of learners at the same stage roughly coincides.

Selinker (cited in Ellis, 1985:48) identifies five processes that operate in interlanguage, and these are:

1. L1 transfer, which is associated with interlingual errors.
2. Overgeneralization of target language rules, which gives rise to intralingual errors.
3. Transfer of training, i.e. when a rule enters the learner's system as a result of instruction.
4. Strategies of L2 learning, i.e. the learner's identifiable approach to the material to be learned. Developmental errors are associated with this strategy.

5. Strategies of L2 communication, i.e. an identifiable approach by the learner to communicate with L1 speakers. Communication-based errors are associated with strategies of L2 communication.

The five processes mentioned above constitute ways in which the L2 speaker tries to internalise the L2 system. These processes are similar to those discussed earlier, and result in errors made by the learner.

Interlanguage proponents maintain that L2 learners formulate rules through hypothesis-testing, a strategy that is used to make sense of the target language as they move along the interlanguage continuum. They do not jump from one stage to the next; instead they revise the interim systems to accommodate new hypotheses and rules about the target language system. They do not simply imitate habitually statements that they have heard before but they creatively re-organise input. They abstract rules and constantly restructure their hypotheses about the target language. The feedback they receive from other speakers, whether implicit or explicit, provides them with an opportunity to update their hypotheses. After an L2 speaker has internalised a new rule, its coverage is transferred and it gradually extends to other linguistic contexts.

According to interlanguage theorists very few L2 speakers reach the end of the interlanguage continuum because of fossilisation. Fossilisation occurs when L2 learners 'do not make use of feedback and as a result do not alter their output. They then get stuck with a fixed system of linguistic forms that do not match the target language method' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). Brown (cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991) defines fossilisation as "the internalisation of incorrect forms which takes place by means of the same learning processes as the internalisation of correct forms, but we refer to the latter . . . as 'learning' while the former is called 'fossilisation'". Vigil and Oller (cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991:62) are of the opinion that the type of feedback that learners receive could be responsible for fossilisation. The pupils' exposure to incorrect forms in the classroom may therefore contribute to fossilisation.

According to Ellis (1985), interlanguage is a transitional language that is permeable, dynamic and systematic. This means that the rules of interlanguage are not fixed, they are open to amendment, and that interlanguage is constantly changing to accommodate new hypotheses.

2.3 **Conclusion**

This chapter is an attempt to cover all the causes of errors. The discussion may lead to examine learner output for evidence of the language-learning processes that underlie them. This chapter has set the stage for a detailed discussion of the application of Error Analysis in dealing with errors made by Xhosa-speaking children learning English at secondary level.

CHAPTER 3

ERROR ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

An examination of literature on error analysis in second language (L2) classrooms reveals that this is an area which has challenged many a researcher and language specialist. Error analysis has its roots in contrastive analysis which developed in the 1960's. During this period language specialists concerned themselves with a contrastive analysis of languages which generated predictions of errors that an L2 speaker would be likely to make in the L2, based on comparisons between the mother-tongue and the second language. Contrastive analysis, however, left many kinds of errors unaccounted for, and this led to a shift in emphasis from contrastive analysis to error analysis in the 1970's (Ellis, 1985:71; Allwright & Bailey, 1991:93).

The basic difference between the two types of analysis is that error analysis studies the errors committed by learners rather than trying to predict them, as was the case with contrastive analysis. The study of error analysis gave rise to a number of issues which came to be of major interest to those involved in language teaching and research. This chapter is primarily concerned with error analysis.

3.2 What is error analysis?

What constitutes an error in language learning has been defined in different ways by different researchers. According to Allwright and Bailey (1991:84) 'typical definitions of error include some reference to the production of a linguistic form which deviates from the correct form'. They refer to this conception of error as 'the correct version' or 'the native speaker norm.' This means that utterances that would not be acceptable to fluent native speakers would be labelled incorrect. An example of 'the native speaker norm' definition of error is the one provided by Broughton et al., (1980) who view error as a systematic infringement of the normal rules of language.

Another definition of error is the one advanced by George (cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991:85), in which he states that 'error is a form unwanted by the teacher.' The above definition of error is problematic because pupils are known for providing responses that are different from those expected by their teachers. Allwright and Bailey highlight the inadequacy of such a definition of error by pointing out that a close look at transcripts of classroom discourse reveals that the learners' responses are sometimes rejected by the teacher, not because they are wrong but because they are unexpected. For example, the teacher's insistence on the use of full sentences when a shorter factually correct version would have sufficed can be seen as 'an error of classroom discourse' (Fanselow cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991:107). The problem of defining error has been associated with the teacher's refusal to accept variation in the manner in which pupils phrase their answers (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:68). Such definitions of error do not take into account the existence of other varieties that the learners and teachers are exposed to, and these may necessarily be standard varieties. Furthermore, the teacher's variety could be different from that of his/her learners.

Chaudron (cited in Allwright & Bailey, 1991:86) discusses various ways of looking at errors. Chaudron's definition of error can be regarded as a comprehensive one, because it takes into account both the 'native speaker norm' definitions and the manner in which teachers view errors. He defines errors as:

- i. 'linguistic forms or content that differ from the native speaker norms or facts, and
- ii. any behaviour signalled sent out by the teacher as needing improvement.

Chaudron refers to the signals sent out by the teacher to the learner as 'corrective reactions'. He defines 'corrective reactions' as 'any reaction by the teacher that transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of a student's behaviour or utterance'.

According to Allwright & Bailey (1991), the problem that arises when attempts are made to define error, stems from the fact that teachers' attitudes towards errors have shifted with the change in teaching methods and this in some cases has influenced the manner in which they define and respond to errors. They mention the arrival of the communicative approach as an example of a teaching method that has shifted emphasis in language classrooms from a focus on accuracy to a preoccupation with communicative effectiveness, i.e. the meaningful delivery of ideas and information. They argue that such changes in pedagogy are likely to influence the way in which teachers define errors and respond to the pupils' output.

Porte (1993), McArthur (1983), and Corder (1967) have advanced definitions of error from a mentalist perspective. Porte (1993:42) maintains that 'an error demonstrates a fault at a deeper level, something that has not been learned or assimilated or whose correct version is unknown'. This definition seems to concern itself with the source of errors and not what constitutes an error.

McArthur (1983:7) identifies two levels at which errors occur. These are the 'competence' and 'performance' levels. Competence errors arise from the inability to understand and master the rules of the target language while 'performance mistakes' arise from the language user's inability to use or effectively apply those rules in actual communication. Such mistakes come about as a result of nervousness, tiredness, performance pressure, the effect of inner translation, and at times one simply forgets what to say for a moment. According to Corder (1967:118), errors reveal the learner's underlying competence. One major requirement of any process vigorous enough to be called an analysis is that its results should be verifiable by other scholars using the same procedure. In order to be able to do this, they must of course have access to each other's blueprints; but no information on these is given in papers on the subject as a rule, and where procedural matters are mentioned they are usually incomplete.

Corder (1973: 256 ff) deals generally with some of the inevitable problems that are encountered, but does not specify a workable procedure. It is not surprising that a number of analysts, e.g. Duskova (1969), Grauberg (1971) and Olsson (1972), have reported that they failed to arrive at any satisfactory system of classification.

A second requirement of any procedure claiming to be an analysis is that its procedure should not be prejudiced by casual considerations. Such lack of objectivity was noted more than half a century ago by Mendenhall (1930:7), commenting on analyses of negative transfer spelling errors: A serious criticism of this classification rests in the subjective judgement required of analysts: in defining some of the categories the writers have used 'inferred cause of error' as a basis for their groupings. It is, of course, this failing that accounts for the fact that even recent so-called analyses have yielded the evidence that their designers expected to find.

3.3 **Why is error analysis done?**

The above question refers to the importance of error analysis. Corder (1981:10-11) points out that errors are significant for three reasons. Firstly, they tell us the progress of the learner. Secondly, they give the researcher information about how language is learnt or acquired. Thirdly, they serve as a device which the learner uses in language learning.

Etherton (1977:68-69) maintains that error analysis leads to improved teaching methods. He also maintains that error analysis can provide valuable information for the preparation of teaching materials, textbooks and examinations. It can also provide valuable material when carrying out research in language learning teaching.

Many textbooks are written by authors who do not know the learners' mother tongue or who have never made a contrastive analysis of the learners' L1 and L2. The authors then tend to concentrate on what they regard as the universal core of English, without looking at the local problems and needs. This research project attempts to overcome this shortcoming by studying Xhosa ESL learners and teachers in their classrooms. The researcher is a Xhosa ESL teacher and thus has an understanding of local problems and needs, and although the research will benefit the subjects of the study and those in fairly comparable situations, general trends may emerge which could benefit other learners.

In his report on an error analysis, Chandler (1979:267) cites an example of a research project conducted by Wyatt in Uganda in 1973. Wyatt arrived at the conclusion that with the results of error analysis the teacher could determine his teaching priorities on the basis of frequency of errors. This implies that errors which appear most frequently are more serious than those that appear less frequently. Basing his argument on the results of his research, Chandler (1979) suggests that the teacher should start by teaching spelling, sentence construction, concord, verbs, tense, nouns and articles. These totalled 66,4 % of all errors recorded. The teacher should not start with the confusion or misuse of words or idioms, repetition and circumlocution, clumsy or virtually meaningless expressions, which together accounted for only 10,8 % of all errors recorded.

Taking Wyatt's advice as a basis, the teacher would first single out the errors with the highest frequency and place them first in his/her teaching programme and proceed from there, gradually dealing with errors which occur less frequently.

3.4 **How error analysis is done**

Corder (1974) elaborates the procedure for error analysis, distinguishing five stages, as follows:

1. Selection of a corpus of language;
2. Identification of errors in the corpus;
3. Classification of the errors identified;
4. Explanation of the psycholinguistic causes of the errors;
5. Evaluation of error gravity or ranking of the errors.

These areas are discussed more fully in the sections which follow.

3.4.1 Selection of a corpus of language

Corder (1967) mentions the selection of a corpus of language as an initial step. The present study is based on a specific sample collected from a number of Xhosa learners of ESL. Tribble and Hones (1990:116) define 'corpus' as a collection of materials that has been made for a particular purpose, such as a set of textbooks that are being analysed and compared or a sample of sentences or utterances that is being analysed for their linguistic features. The starting point in error analysis is deciding what samples of learner language to use for the analysis and how to collect these samples (Ellis, 1994:49). Ellis (1994) mentions three types of error analysis, according to the size of the sample. The first one is a massive sample that involves collecting several samples of language uses from a large number of learners to compile a comprehensive list of errors, representative of the entire population. The second one is a specific sample that consists of one sample of language use collected from a limited number of learners. The last one is an incidental sample that involves only one sample of language use produced by a single learner.

In error analysis, it should be noted that the errors that learners make can be influenced by a variety of factors, e.g. learners make errors in speaking, but not in writing, as a result of the different processing conditions involved. Ellis (1994:49) lists some of the factors that need to be considered (Table 3.1).

Factors	Description
A: Language	
Medium Genre Content	Learner production can be oral or written. Learner production may take the form of a conversation, a lecture, an essay, a letter, etc. The topic the learner is communicating about.
B: Learner	
Level Mother Tongue Language learning experience	Elementary, intermediate, or advanced. The learner's L1. This may be a classroom or naturalistic or mixture of the two.

Table 3.1 Factors to consider collecting samples of learner's language (Ellis, 1994:49)

Ellis (1994:50) also cites two examples of elicitation methods which can be used for the collection of a corpus in language. The first one is clinical elicitation, which involves getting the informant to produce data of any sort, for example, by means of a general interview or by asking learner to write a composition. The second one is the experimental method, which involves the use of special instruments designed to elicit data containing the linguistic feature that the researcher wishes to investigate. Clinical elicitation procedures are used for data collection in this study.

3.4.2 Identification of errors

A major concern is the identification of errors. There are two problems that need to be addressed. Firstly, the difference between error and mistake, and secondly, the difference between covert and overt errors.

3.4.2.1 Error

In this study, the term 'error' is used in the sense of the definition provided by Corder (cited in Fisiak, 1981:224-225):

. . . systematic consistent deviances characteristic of the learner's linguistic system at a given stage of learning. 'The key point' (Fisiak 1981) asserts, is that the learner is using a definite system of language at every point in his development, although it is not . . . that of the second language . . . The learner's errors are evidence of this system and are themselves systematic.

Corder's idea that errors are 'themselves systematic' is important for this study, because if the errors were not systematic, it would not be possible to classify and account for their occurrences in any logical and scientific manner and generalisations which could be used in teaching practice could not be made.

Brown (1987:168-174) states that L2 learners sometimes produce incorrect utterances that should be regarded as reflecting a faulty underlying system, i.e. as reflecting differences between the learner's interlanguage and the target language system. Any utterance of this type is called an error. An error occurs where the speaker fails to follow the pattern or manner of speech of educated people in English speaking countries today (Liski & Puntanen, 1983:227). However, using this definition to identify errors may result in ambiguous findings.

3.4.2.2 Mistakes

Many people regard 'error' and 'mistake' as synonyms, but in the content of language learning the word 'error' cannot be used interchangeably with 'mistake'. Mistakes are committed when the learner breaks the rules of the language as a result of non-linguistic factors like slips of the tongue, losing attention, carelessness, boredom, fatigue, writing very quickly or thinking ahead, etc. If a pupil uses an item correctly many times and then gets it wrong once, he has made a mistake (Ellis & Tomlinson, 1980:259). A mistake is therefore a seldom occurring incorrect form which is performance-based rather than competence-based.

3.4.2.3 Overt and covert errors

Apart from the problems of deciding on whether the research is dealing with an error or a mistake, there is also a need to look for overt errors. An overt error is the one that is obvious, for instance:

*Beatrice love puppies (an overt grammatical error).

*My uncle belled me last night (an overt lexical error).

An overt error is easier to identify because there is a clear deviation in form (Ellis, 1994:52).

A covert error is one that is obvious only if we know the context of the relevant utterance. A covert error occurs in utterances that are superficially well formed but which do not mean what the learner intended them to mean. For example, the utterance (from Corder, 1971a)

*It was stopped.

is apparently grammatical until it becomes clear that 'it' refers to 'the wind'. Furthermore, a superficially correct utterance may only be correct by chance. For example, the learner may manifest target-like control of negative constructions in ready-made chunks such as 'I don't know', but fail to do so in 'created' utterances (i.e. utterances that are constructed on the basis of rules the learner has internalised) (Ellis, 1994:52).

If, for instance, we say that the error in the following sentence is the omission of a word,

*I was told there is bus stop,

then we have in a sense described the error, but only partially. The omission of the article (in this case) is only the surface evidence of what may be an erroneous or idiosyncratic linguistic system. Ellis (1994:52) concludes that linguistic explanations need to be based on an interpretation of the utterance, and that these interpretations can be divided into three types. The first one is a normal interpretation that occurs when the analyst is able to assign a meaning to an utterance on the basis of rules of the target language. The second one is an authoritative interpretation that involves the learner (if available) to say what the utterance means and, by doing so, to make an 'authoritative reconstruction'. The third one is a plausible interpretation that can be obtained by referring to the context in which the utterance was produced or by translating the sentence figuratively into the learner's L1.

3.4.3 Description of errors

After errors have been identified they need to be described. This means that the erroneous form must first be set against the correct form and then the difference between the two must be classified in some kind of framework. Even reconstructing the correct form that was intended by the speaker can sometimes be problematic. If one can ask the learner what he/she meant, it is usually more certain that the deconstruction is correct - this is called authoritative reconstruction. However, sometimes learners are unable to provide this information, perhaps because they have forgotten or they do not have the language skills or the metalinguistic skills to explain their utterances. If the teacher has access to the learner, he/she can try to work out by inference what the learner meant, and give the correct form, and he/she can then set up a plausible reconstruction. In some instances it is impossible to arrive at a plausible reconstruction because one just cannot work out what the learner was trying to say or write and he has to abandon the classification of that particular error.

Brown (1987:175-177) discusses two different kinds of classificatory frameworks, viz. classification by operation and classification by linguistic level.

3.4.3.1 Classification by operation

When erroneous forms are compared with reconstructions, the differences may be described in terms of the operation that caused the difference, where operation is understood in the mathematical sense. According to Richards (1974:277) differences of this sort can be classified into four categories: omission of some required element; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; selection of an incorrect element; misordering of elements (cf. Table 3.2).

	Phonological	Grammatical	Lexical
Omission			
Addition			
Selection			
Ordering			

Table 3.2 Matrix for classification of errors (Richards, 1974:278)

Ellis (1994:35) provides a taxonomy of errors together with examples of the categories cf. Table 3.3). He mentions omission, additions, misinformation and misordering as error types.

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Omissions	The absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance.	She sleeping.
Additions	The presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed utterance.	We didn't went there.
Misinformation	The use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.	The dog ated the chicken.
Misordering	The incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.	What daddy doing?

Table 3.3 A surface strategy taxonomy of errors (categories and examples taken from Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982)

Ellis (1994:56) criticises this approach by saying that, although linguistic and surface strategy taxonomies of errors may have a pedagogic application (for example, demonstrating which errors are the most frequent and, therefore, most in need of attention), in general they shed little light on how learners learn an L2 (Ellis, 1994:56).

Corder's (cited in Ellis, 1994:56) framework for describing errors is more promising in this respect. He distinguishes three types of errors, according to their systematicity:

1. Presystematic errors occur when the learner is unaware of the existence of a particular rule in the target language. These errors are thus random.
2. Systematic errors occur when the learner has discovered a rule but it is the wrong one.
3. Postsystematic errors occur when the learner knows the correct target language rule but uses it consistently (i.e. makes a mistake).

3.4.3.2 Classification by linguistic level

In this classificatory framework, errors are grouped according to their linguistic level, i.e. as orthographic (i.e. spelling), phonological (pronunciation), lexical, grammatical (morphological or syntactic) or discourse errors. It must be noted that it is difficult to decide on the linguistic level of an error. Thus for example, in

*He watch the soccer all afternoon.

the error could be essentially phonological or essentially grammatical. If the teacher finds that the learner consistently uses the correct third person singular form, i.e. if he says he runs, she plays, he eats, except with verbs ending in sibilants, where the learner says, for example, he wash, she judge, he kiss, then the assumption is that the learner's problem is a phonological rather than a grammatical one. If, on the other hand, the learner seems to omit the third person singular -s on all verbs, then one can assume that the problem is a grammatical one.

3.4.4 Evaluation of errors or error gravity

Judgements about the seriousness of errors are vulnerable to the charge of subjectivity. Nevertheless, they need to be made, because of their relevance to the context in which error analyses are undertaken: since errors are related to learner assessment, they are inevitably evaluated by the teacher. Various attempts have been made to define the criteria by which an error may be judged (Johansson, 1973; Nickel, 1973; Olsson, 1973; James, 1974; Burt & Kiparsky, 1975). None of these attempts has been entirely satisfactory, but they have highlighted one key consideration: the effect of the error. There are various ways of judging this. In structural terms, an error which affects the whole of a complex sentence must be considered more seriously than one which affects a simple sentence or a subordinate clause. As far as communication is concerned, errors are judged in terms of their effect on comprehensibility and on the image which the learner projects. A prescriptive view would lay more emphasis on grammatical accuracy.

It can be argued that judgements on error gravity can best be made by the teacher, since errors inevitably relate to his/her own view of error and to the dictates of the examination system which he/she knows.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the theory of error analysis and looked at various components such as a definition of error analysis, reasons for doing error analysis and procedures used during error analysis. It has become clear that error analysis is not a simple task. It requires the adoption of a definition which is suitable for the context of the research. There also should be very careful procedures, for identification and description of errors are far from unambiguous. The research using error analysis techniques should be read with careful attention to finding possible alternatives to explanations provided by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPARISON OF ASPECTS OF XHOSA AND ENGLISH GRAMMAR

4.1 Introduction

This chapter compares the realisation of the grammatical categories in Xhosa and English which are investigated in this study. These grammatical categories are:

- (i) Concord
- (ii) Articles
- (iii) Personal Pronouns
- (iv) Plural
- (v) Prepositions
- (vi) Spelling

4.1.1 Typological classification of Xhosa and English

Xhosa belongs to the Nguni cluster of languages which is part of the larger Bantu family of languages (Crystal 1996:316). Xhosa is an agglutinative language where 'words are built up out of a long sequence of units, with each unit expressing a particular grammatical meaning, in a clear one-to-one way' (Crystal 1996:295).

From a typological point of view, English is a mixture of an isolating language where 'all the words are invariable' and 'grammatical relationships are shown through the use of word order', an inflecting language where 'grammatical relationships are expressed by changing the internal structure of the words' usually by using inflectional endings, and an agglutinating language (Crystal 1996:295).

4.2 Concord

Sweet (cited in Poutsma, 1976:277) defines concord in the following way:

The way in which certain elements of a sentence, or a complex of clauses, are related, causes a certain analogy or agreement in number, person, gender and case.

There are substantial differences between the surface realisations of the concord in Xhosa and English, as will be discussed in more detail below.

4.2.1 Concord in Xhosa

In Xhosa grammar, all nouns have grammatical gender which manifests itself in a class system, where every noun is assigned to a class and given a class prefix (du Plessis 1978:1). The noun prefix is of the utmost importance, for all words which may stand in a special relation to a substantive are brought to agreement or concord with it by anaphoric class concord. Such a word has a prefixal formative, the concord from the class prefix of the substantive to which the word refers, or is specially related. Several such concords are found, viz.

- subject concord
- object concord
- adjectival concord
- relative concord
- enumerative concord, and
- possessive concord

(Gough et al., 1989:43)

4.2.1.1 Subject concord in Xhosa

In Xhosa, the subject concord indicates the relation between that subject, a substantive, and the predicative. The subject concord is derived from the prefixes of the noun class of the substantive referred to. If the formation of the subject concord from the noun prefix is to be explained in a practical manner, it may be said that when the basic prefix i.e. the prefix without the pre-prefix has no nasal, it is similar to the subject concord in form, but when the basic prefix includes a nasal, such a nasal must be elided.

Subject ConCORDS

	Singular	Plural
1st person	ndi-	si-
2nd person	u-	ni-
3rd person	Class 1 um → u 1(a) u- → u	class 2 → ba- 2(a) oo-
(Classes 1(a) and 2(a) have no concords of their own and make use of class 1 and 2 concords).		
	3 (u) m- > u-	4 (i) mi- > i-

(Satyo, 1985:69)

The verbal form in Xhosa will always stay the same, with meaning differences shown by the use of concordial markers, viz.

<u>Ndithi</u>	(singular, first person)
<u>Sithi</u>	(plural, first person)
<u>Uthi</u>	(singular, second person)
<u>Nithi</u>	(plural, second person)
<u>Uthi</u>	(singular, third person)
<u>Bathi</u>	(plural, third person)

(Du Plessis, 1978:5)

4.2.1.2 Object concord

Object concords in Xhosa have similar forms to subject concords (Ntshinga, 1989:107). Both Givon (1976:156) and Ponelis (1976:58) maintain that object agreement developed along the lines of subject agreement, although object agreement has not yet completed all the stages of development in any African language, and therefore it is not yet compulsory in all cases.

In Xhosa, the complete process of development of object agreement would be as follows:

- (i) Neutral Ndabona umfana (I saw a boy)

(ii) Topicalization Umfana ndambona (the boy, I saw him)

At this stage of development, the agreement phenomenon is not object agreement but topic agreement.

(iii) Re-analysed Ndambona umfana (I saw the boy).

(Givon, 1976:157)

At present, Xhosa finds itself in this stage of development. According to Wilkes (1997:106), it is a well known fact that object concords may be used as markers of definiteness, either where the object noun is present in the sentence or the object noun has been mentioned previously in the text. In this case, the object concord is used in a pronominal way. The following sentences illustrate these two uses:

(i) Ndathenga ingubo (I bought the blanket)

(ii) Ndayithenga. (I bought it)

It is not yet, however, compulsory that the object concord be used when the object is present in the sentence, e.g.

Ndathenga ingubo (I bought a blanket)

At this stage of development, the object concord is following in the footsteps of the subject concord, which is already a compulsory marker of subject noun representing old information, i.e. definite subject nouns.

(Gough et al., 1989:56)

4.2.1.3 Possessive concord

Xhosa also has possessive concords which are prefixed to nouns or pronouns. The prefix denotes the owner, so forming what is called the "possessive form". The possessive form always corresponds to the prefixes of the nouns denoting the things owned. According to Satyo (1986:77), there are two possessive concords: (i) the special concords used with the singular forms of proper names of persons and of certain other nouns grouped with them as class 1(a); and (ii) the general concord, used with the plural forms of those nouns and with the singular and plural of all others.

- (i) The special concords of class 1(a) consist of the prepositional particle ka-, preceded, in the case of strong prefixes, by the plain prefix of the noun to which the concord refers:

class	1	ka-	2	ba-
	3	ka-	4	ya-
	5	lika-	6	a-
	7	sika-	8	za-
	9	yika-	10	za-
	11	luka-	14	buka
	15	kuka		

(Gough et al., 1989:219)

- (ii) The general concord consists of the particle -a-, preceded by the consonantal form of the prefix, giving the forms:

class	1	wa-	2	ba-
	3	wa-	4	ya-
	5	la-	6	a-
	7	sa-	8	za-
	9	ya-	10	za-
	11	lwa-	14	ba-
	15	kwa		

(Gough et al., 1989:215)

4.2.1.4 Adjective and relative concord

The adjective concords for various classes are as follows:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Full prefix</u>	<u>Adjective concord</u>	<u>Qualificative</u>	<u>Basic prefix</u>
1	um-	om-	a-	+ m(u)
2	aba-	aba-	a-	+ ba
3	um-	om-	a-	+ m(u)
4	imi-	emi-	a-	+ mi
5	ili-	eli-	a-	+ li
6	ama-	ama-	a-	+ ma
7	isi-	esi-	a-	+ si
8	izi-	ezi-	a-	+ zi
9	iN-	en-	a-	+ ni
10	IziN-	ezin-	a-	+ zin
11	ulu-	olu-	a-	+ lu
10	IziN-	ezin-	a-	+ zin
14	ubu-	obu-	a-	+ bu
15	uku-	oku-	a-	+ ku

(Satyo, 1985:56)

In Xhosa, the adjective is brought into concordial agreement with the substantive it qualifies by means of the adjective concord.

In the case of relative concord, the relative is brought into concordial agreement with the substantive it qualifies by means of the relative concord.

This concord indicates the noun or pronoun which the relative qualifies (Satyo, 1986:106).

Through phonological conditioning the qualificative formative a- assimilates or coalesces with the concordial element to form the relative concord, i.e.

- (a) Where concordial element is a vowel:

2nd person singular a- + u- > o-

3rd person:

class	1	a- + u- > o-
	3	a- + u- > o-
	4	a- + i- > e-
	6	a- + a- > a-
	9	a- + i- > e-

(Pahl, 1980:102)

- (b) In the 1st person singular and plural, the second person singular, the second person plural and the class concords of those classes whose subject concord has an initial consonant, the same basic formula applies, viz:

qualificative formative a- + class concord

However, instead of coalescence there is partial assimilation of the qualificative a- to the vowel of the subject concord following, i.e. where the vowel of the class concord is i, the a coalesces and forms e; where the vowel of the class concord is a, it remains a e.g.

1st person singular a- + ndi > endi-

1st person plural a- + si- > esi-

2nd person plural a- + ni- > eni-

3rd person:

class	2	a- + ba- > aba
	5	a- + li- > eli-
	7	a- + si- > esi-
	8	a- + zi- > ezi-
	10	a- + zi- > ezi-
	11	a- + lu- > olu-
	10	a- + zi- > ezi-
	14	a- + bu- > obu-
	15	a- + ku- > oku-

(Pahl, 1980:67)

4.2.2 English concord

In English, concord/agreement is relatively limited. It is realised on the surface level in the agreement between the subject of the clause and the present tense form of the verb, so that, for example, with the third person singular subject (e.g. John), the verb must have the -s agreement suffix. Thus,

John drinks a lot.

is grammatical, but

*John drink a lot.

is ungrammatical because the verb does not carry the third person agreement suffix which it requires because of the subject, John.

Agreement also occurs in English between demonstratives and nouns. A demonstrative has to agree in number with the noun. So, with a plural noun such as books, one has to use a plural form of the demonstrative, e.g.

*these book

*those book

would be ungrammatical because the number of the demonstrative does not agree with the number of the noun (Greenbaum, 1991:168).

According to Stimie (1986:211), in English a singular subject must have a singular verb and a plural subject must have a plural verb, e.g.

One person: is, was, has, does, walks, plays, laughs, etc.

Two or more persons: are, were, have, do, walk, play, laugh, etc.

In English, only third person present tense agreement is realised as a different form of the verb, e.g.

I say

We say

You say

He/she says

They say

The differences between the Xhosa and English concord systems need special attention in the classroom since the Xhosa learner must not only learn the primary differences in the concordial systems (i.e. that pronominal subject-verb agreement is not shown in Xhosa, but that it may be shown by the use of a suffix in English), but also the limited places in which concordial agreement is realised at the surface level in English.

In addition, the forms of the verb "to be" in English show changes in form when they agree with the pronominal subject (Pahl, 1980:115), whereas the Xhosa verb remains consistent in form, viz.

He was afraid

is

Waye soyika

and

They were afraid

is

Babe soyika

4.3 Articles

Richards et al. (1992:21) define article as words which are used with a noun, and which show whether the noun refers to something definite or indefinite. The article systems of Xhosa and English are realised in different ways.

4.3.1 Xhosa articles

As discussed in section 4.2.1.2 in the discussion of the object concord, definiteness can be shown by using an object concord. Also, Von Staden (1973:42) has suggested that the inclusion of the pre-prefix in the noun following the negative verb may also indicate the definite article in Zulu, which is a very similar structure to Xhosa, e.g.

Angiboni ihhashi. (I don't see the horse.)

Angiboni hhashi. (I don't see a horse.)

In Xhosa, the article is prefixed to its noun and the prefix is determined by the group that the noun belongs to, e.g.

Ndipheka inyama, amaqanda, isipeki ne(i)papa.

Direct translation: I cook the meat, the eggs, the bacon and porridge.

Correct English translation: I cook meat, eggs, bacon and porridge.

4.3.2 English articles

English has two types of articles which are realised as separate words used with the noun, i.e. the definite article the and the indefinite article a or an (Richards et al., 1992:21). The main use of the definite article in English is to show that the noun refers to a particular example of something, e.g.

- (a) by referring to something which is known to both the speaker and the hearer:

She is in the garden.

He is at the post office.

- (b) by referring anaphorically to something already mentioned:

There is a man waiting outside. Ask the man to come in.

- (c) by referring forward to something:

The chair in the living room is broken

- (d) by referring to something as a group or class:

The lion is a dangerous animal.

The main use of the indefinite article in English is to show that the noun refers to something general or to something which has not been identified by the speaker, e.g.

- (a) by referring to one example of a group or class:

Pass me a pencil, please.

- (b) by referring to something as an example of a group or class

A dog is a friendly animal.

A zero article is used when the noun denotes a class or a non-count noun, e.g.

Cats like sleeping.

Silver is a precious metal.

(Greenbaum, 1991:153)

4.4 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns, like all pronouns, are typically words that can stand in place of noun phrases and they are used to refer anaphorically to specific people or things which have been mentioned in the discourse (Richards et al., 1992:271).

4.4.1 Xhosa pronouns

Satyo (1986:86) classifies Xhosa pronouns into the following categories:

- | | | | |
|-------|---------------------------|------|---|
| (i) | Absolute pronouns | e.g. | Indoda <u>yona</u> iyathetha.
(He is speaking) |
| (ii) | Demonstrative pronouns | e.g. | <u>Lo</u> mntu uyathetha.
(<u>This</u> person is speaking)
Umfazi <u>lowo</u> uyeza.
(<u>That</u> woman is coming) |
| (iii) | Quantitative pronoun | e.g. | <u>Bonke</u> abantu balapha.
(<u>All</u> the people are here) |
| (iv) | Emphatic absolute pronoun | e.g. | <u>Oyena</u> mntu usebenza kakuhle.
(<u>The very man</u> who works well)
<u>Elona</u> hashe ndilifunayo
(<u>The very horse</u> I want) |

In Xhosa, personal pronouns are realised as absolute pronouns. According to Pahl (1981:21), "an absolute pronoun stands in the place of a noun." Its relation to the noun for which it stands is indicated by some form of concordial agreement in the pronouns of the third person.

The following table gives the forms of the various absolute pronouns:

		Singular		Plural	
	1st person	mna		thina	
	2nd person	wena		nina	
	3rd person	yena		bona	
class	1	yena	class	2	bona
	3	wona		4	yona
	4	lona		6	wona
	5	sona		8	zona
	9	yona		10	zona
	11	lona		14	bona
	15	kona			

4.4.2 English pronouns

The English personal pronouns are I, me, you, he, him, she, her, it, we, us, they and them (Richards et al., 1992:271). Personal pronouns can stand in place of whole pronoun phrases. That is, just as a noun phrase consisting of an article, an adjective and a noun such as the last bus, can act as subject or direct or indirect object in a clause, a personal pronoun can also act as any of these in a clause. According to Greenbaum (1991:84), all personal pronouns have distinctions in person (first, second, third). Most have distinctions in number (singular, plural) and in case (subjective/nominative, objective/accusative, genitive).

	Nominative case	Accusative case
First person singular	I	me
First person plural	we	us
Second person singular/plural	you	you
third person singular	he	him
masculine	she	her
feminine	it	it
non-personal	they	they
Plural	they	they

(Greenbaum, 1991:167)

Stimie (1986:237) states that the nominative case applies when the pronoun is the subject of a finite clause, e.g.

I know that she lives in East London and that he lives in Port Elizabeth.

In all other instances, the accusative case is used, e.g.

She knows me well

He has told her about me

You must go with him.

Masculine and feminine genders apply to human beings and also to animate items which have biological sex, such as pets and some animals. The distinction between the two genders is made on the basis of biological distinctions in sex (Greenbaum, 1991:166).

There are at least three major differences between the use of the personal pronoun in Xhosa and English.

Firstly, a systematic difference occurs in the form of it is, where a formative ku is used to indicate it is, e.g.

Kunzima ukufumana umsebenzi. (It is difficult to find a job.)

Secondly, in Xhosa it is structurally correct to say

Thina nabo sisebenza njengezihlobo.

which, when literally translated into English, leads to the aberrant form

*We and them act more like relatives.

Thirdly, in Xhosa the noun-subject is always followed by a subject concord which agrees with the noun class of the subject, e.g.

Ikati yam I . . .

This structure, when translated directly into English, results in

My cat it . . .

The concord in Xhosa is realised as a pronoun in English.

4.5 Plural

Richards et al. (1992:281) defines plural as the form referring to more than one item. Xhosa plurals are based on noun class prefixes, whereas in English, plurals are a result of the addition of suffixes or a new form of the word.

4.5.1 Plurals in Xhosa

Traditionally, singular and plural classes in Xhosa were grouped together so that the odd-numbered classes are gender/singular and the even-numbered classes are gender/plural, for example, class 1 has gender/singular and class 2 has gender/plural, etc. However, many nouns do not fit this pattern. For example, while the plural of a word in class 1 is usually in class 2, e.g.

Class 1	umntu (man)	class 2	abantu (I men)
---------	-------------	---------	----------------

Pahl (1980:326) states that in Xhosa the following classes show plurality in their prefixes, e.g.

Class	2	abantu (people)
	2(a)	oomamcisa (clans)
	4	imilomo (mouths)
	6	amazwe (countries)
	8	izikhali (weapons)
	10	izinto (things)
	11	iilwandle (oceans)

According to Satyo (1986:171), it should also be noted that in Xhosa there are no plural forms for nouns which denote mass nouns or abstract concepts, e.g.

Amanzi (water)

Ububi (ugliness)

4.5.2 Plurals in English

Stimie (1986:202) gives four different principles of forming English plurals, viz.

1 Concrete nouns have plural forms, formed as follows:

(a) by adding -s, e.g.

- (i) dogs, bats, socks, bags, jackets, etc.
- (ii) pianos, commandos, radios, studios, etc.
- (iii) boys, keys, valleys, storeys, bays, etc.
- (iv) cliffs, floors, dwarfs, chicks, chefs, etc.

(b) by adding -es, e.g.

- (i) boxes, patches, glasses, ostriches, lasses
- (ii) echoes, mosquitoes, potatoes, torpedoes

(c) by changing -f or -fe into -ves, e.g.

(i) shelves, knives, wives, lives, sheaves

(ii) wharves (or wharfs), hooves (or hoofs), scarves (or scarfs)

(d) by changing -y into -ies, e.g.

(i) babies, puppies, stories

(e) by adding unusual endings, e.g.

oxen, children, radii, syllabi, crises, etc.

2 Compound nouns add the plural form to the most important part, e.g.

mother-in-law, secretaries-general, mousetraps, members of parliament

3 Some nouns have the same form for the singular and the plural, e.g.

series, snoek, trout, buck, deer, sheep

4 (a) Some nouns have only a plural form, but with a singular verb, e.g.

news, mumps, measles, mathematics, innings, gallons, etc.

(b) Some nouns have only a plural form, with a plural verb, e.g. thanks,

pants, trousers, pincers, goods, politics

Xhosa learners of English may encounter difficulties in plural formation as English plurals are formed through suffixes and infixes. As the use of the -s suffix is most common, this may be overgeneralised by these learners.

4.6 Prepositions

According to Richards et al. (1992:286), a preposition is "a word used with nouns, pronouns and gerunds to link them grammatically to other words. The phrase so formed, consisting of a preposition and its complement, is a prepositional phrase."

4.6.1 Xhosa prepositions

In Xhosa, the preposition is determined by the prefix of the noun and it is joined to the noun, e.g.

Ndibona isitovu. (I see the stove)

Ndipheka esitovini. (I cook on the stove)

Both the prefix and the suffix might have to change to denote the prepositional relationship. According to Du Plessis (1986:20), there are few prepositions in Xhosa. The most common of these is na-, the development of whose meanings is interesting. McLaren (1973:35) discusses seven prepositions, viz.

<u>ka-</u>	(of)
<u>kwa-</u>	(at the place of)
<u>ku-</u>	(to, at, from)
<u>na-</u>	(with, along, with, and, also)
<u>nga-</u>	(by means of, with, through)
<u>nganga</u>	(as great as)
<u>njenga-</u>	(like, as)

ka- is a possessive in force. It takes the place of the ordinary possessive concord with proper names of class 1(a) and certain other nouns of this class. With many of the nouns in this class the use of the special or the general concord of possession is optional.

kwa- combines possession and place, and denotes "at the place belonging to"; with the names of tribes it is equivalent to "among", e.g. kwamalume, kwaMona, kwaXhosa. It may be the locative preposition ku- with the particle relation -a- and in any case is quite distinct from the adverb kwa in kwayena (at this place) or in a sentence like ikwanguye.

ku- is primarily locative, and takes the place of the locative form with pronouns, nouns of class 1(a) and nouns preceded by a demonstrative: e.g. kumaa, kulaa mlambo. It is often used as an alternative to the locative form with other nouns; we may say, enkosini or kwinkosi, kumzi or emzini kaMtuzula. Indeed, with nouns denoting persons, the tendency is to use ku-: it would be unusual to say, emfazini. Ku- may also be used of time, in the sense of "up to", as in kude kuye kwimini yokumka kwethu (Up to the day of our leaving), and occasionally it denotes point of time, as in, bafike kwiveki ephelileyo (They arrived last week).

Na- means properly "with", i.e. "along with", as ndiyokuhamba namadoda (I shall go with men), but it is also used in the sense of "and" and "also" as in indoda nomfazi (a man and a woman), izulu nomhlaba (heaven and earth). Pahl (1980:181) adds that na never loses its character as a preposition, however, inasmuch as it does not join sentences but only words. Na- is also used to denote the idea of possession, expressed in English by "have" as ndinehashe, (I have a horse. Literally: I with a horse).

Nga- denotes instrumental relationship, that is, it is placed before the noun by means of, "through" or "with", which something is done, as ndambetha ngentonga (I struck him with a stick): umlambo uzele ngamanzi (the river filled with i.e. full of water). It also expresses general relationships such as we express in English by "about" or "concerning" and distribution "by" as well as the period "about" which. It does not express the agent "by" whom a thing is done.

4.6.2 English prepositions

In English, prepositions are separate words which may express such meanings as possession (e.g. the leg of the table), direction (e.g. to the bank), place (at the corner), and time (e.g. before now). They can also mark the cases discussed in case grammar, e.g.

Smith killed the policeman with a revolver.

The preposition with shows that a revolver is in the instrumental case.

In English, too, there are groups of words (e.g. in front of, owing to, next to) that can function like single-word prepositions. In English, a prepositional phrase may be "discontinuous", as in:

Who(m) did you speak to?

4.7 Spelling

According to the Universal Standard Encyclopaedia (1958:7966), spelling is defined as:

The art of using the alphabet for forming words according to a method which is conventionally recognised as correct. The alphabet whatever its origin, comes to be the means of expressing by slangs of the spoken language.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1970:752) provides the following definition of spelling:

The action, practice, or art of naming letters or words, of reading letter by letter, or of expressing words by letters.

(Greenbaum, 1991:171)

4.7.1 **Xhosa spelling**

There is a close correspondence between phonemes and graphemes as the Xhosa orthography was developed fairly recently. The seven-vowel system is realised in spelling as five vowels and this may also contribute to the relative simplicity of Xhosa spelling (Crystal, 1996:169).

4.7.2 **English spelling**

English spelling is difficult because the pronunciation of a word is not always an accurate guide to its spelling. English has borrowed words and their spellings from numerous languages since the Anglo-Saxon period and together with the influence of the Great Vowel Shift, this has led to a poor correspondence between phoneme and grapheme (Crystal, 1996:216).

To some extent, spelling takes account of meaning in English. Sometimes what is lost in the spelling-sound relationship is gained in the spelling-meaning relationship. In the first place, learners often distinguish different words pronounced in the same way (homophones) by spelling them differently, e.g.

son - sun

peace - piece

sent - cent - scent

right - write

Add the element of absent pronunciation that normally accompanies a second language teaching and learning situation and the magnitude of the problem is appreciated in all its seriousness. In this subsection, the attention is focused on errors of spelling that seem to be directly related to the English spelling system versus its orthography for Xhosa speaking learners learning writing skills in English as a second language.

Greenbaum (1991:190) states that although an English dictionary will provide the spelling of any word the student may need, there are reasons why it will not always be of help:

- (i) Not all students have a good dictionary
- (ii) Sometimes a student does not know what the first section of the word is made up of, so he/she cannot look up the word.
- (iii) If the student uses a Xhosa/English dictionary, the learner might be given two or three possible words to choose from. In many cases the learner chooses the wrong word.

The English spelling system is said to be arbitrary, that is, it does not follow the rule at all times (Mantatha 1991:86).

4.8 **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to compare the Xhosa and English realisations of the categories investigated in the study. This contrastive analysis can help teachers and learners to identify possible areas of interference from the Xhosa system in the language produced by Xhosa learners of English.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the research methodology of this study and the main areas that are covered include:

- Design
- Subjects
- Instrumentation
- Procedure
- Analysis

This chapter shows how the data collection has been done and also reflects the difficulties that have been encountered by the researcher.

5.2 Design

This study is based on a survey of some grammatical errors made by Xhosa learners of English in the writing of compositions. It is primarily quantitative in nature as it seeks to discover the frequency of a pre-determined set of errors. Qualitative elements are also included in the discussion of possible sources of errors.

5.3 Subjects

In preparation for the study, the intended subjects (i.e. twenty-five students from the Grade 9 class of a junior secondary school in Butterworth) were observed for ten days. This enabled the researcher to gain insight into the classroom activities and the English abilities of the students as well as to select grammatical categories with which students have problems. This school was selected because the researcher felt that it is fairly representative of schools for black children in the area, e.g. it has no electricity, laboratories or libraries. Both the teachers and the pupils come from the surrounding area where the first language is Xhosa. Only a very small group of the children come from homes with professional parents. The bulk of the class has parents who work as labourers and either housemaids or cleaners at the University of Transkei branch, or at the local hospital. Some of the parents are self-employed, with local businesses, both big and small.

Most of these students thus have little or no exposure to English other than at school, as they come from a home background where the parents are either semi-literate or illiterate. Those that come from a home background which could afford them some exposure to English through reading or the media often do not get the parental support that is necessary to give them practice in English.

The use of English at school is also limited. Although officially the medium of instruction is English, in practice teachers and pupils do not have sufficient proficiency to carry out all tasks and lessons in English. As a result, Xhosa is often used. Teachers tend to be poorly qualified with only two of the twelve at the school holding university degrees.

The combination of parents who are mainly blue-collar workers, lack of access to English via media and poorly qualified teachers results in few practice opportunities for these learners of English.

The gender distribution of the subjects is indicated in Table 5.1

Table 5.1 **Distribution of subjects according to gender**

Males	22
Females	13
Total	25

The ratio of males to females is fairly representative of the entire school according to the principal, who claims that many female students between the ages of 14 and 17 leave school to marry according to traditional Xhosa practices.

5.4 **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used in the study consistent of a framework for recording grammatical errors (Norris, 1983:43). The following taxonomy was used:

- Concord
- Articles
- Personal Pronouns
- Plurals
- Prepositions, and
- Spelling

These categories were selected because they seemed to present difficulties for Xhosa learners of English when observation was carried out.

5.5 **Procedure**

The students were asked to write one-page essays on the following topics:

1. A tour to East London
2. Town life is better than country life

The first topic requires a narrative type essay and the second topic requires an argumentative type essay. The two different types were selected because they require different tenses, e.g. in a narrative the learners use the past tense while in the argumentative essay they use the present tense. When doing an error analysis, this may be important as third person agreement is shown in the present tense and not in the past tense. For this reason, the number of errors in each category was tabulated separately depending on the essay type.

5.6 Analysis

The essays were analysed according to the 'pre-selected' category approach (Norrish 1983:81). According to Norrish (1983:80), this is a common approach for setting up categories of errors which is based on a set of preconception about the learners' most common errors. One limitation of this approach is that the issue is prejudged; errors will be found to fill categories and the investigation takes on a certain circularity since errors can only be classified according to pre-determined error types (Norrish, 1983:44). However, as Norrish (1983) points out, in terms of administrative efficiency, this type of survey is easier and quicker to carry out, since errors are simply indicated as ticks on a list of categories and reliability between markers can be assessed fairly easily.

The researcher marked the essay according to the pre-selected categories indicated above. Errors in each category were then counted and the occurrence of errors was expressed in percentage form to relate express frequency of errors. Errors were described and examples were noted to illustrate deviant usage. Possible sources of errors were then traced.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter describes the collection of data and the characteristics of a sample in the sampled school. Details of the analytical procedure employed are also included, and in the next chapter, the data are analysed.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the results of the error analysis of the data in the 50 essay scripts used in this study. As mentioned in chapter 5, the researcher marked the respondents' essays and identified errors which fell into the preselected categories. Examples of errors in each category are discussed together with possible explanations for the occurrence of the errors. Since these errors occurred in almost every piece of work produced by the pupils, the analysis should be beneficial to both teachers and pupils.

6.2 Summary of error frequencies

Table 6.1 sets out the frequency of error types as a percentage of the total obligatory uses of each category.

Table 6.1 Frequency of error types

Error Category	Total occurrences	Number of Errors	% Error of Total
1. Concord	1566	159	10,2
2. Article - definite	774	155	20,0
- indefinite	234	119	50,8
3. Personal Pronouns	1085	110	10,1
4. Plural	1124	338	30,0
5. Prepositions	1548	450	29,0
Total		1773	

Each category of error and some explanations for the errors will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

6.2.1 Concord

In terms of the percentage of concord errors in relation to the total number of occurrences, there is a fairly low number of 10,2 %. Six error types were identified in the data, viz.

- Singular noun with plural verb and vice-versa
- Dummy subject
- Non-count noun and plural verb
- Complex noun phrase
- Relative clause
- Demonstrative pronoun and noun

Table 6.2 indicates the frequency of these different groups of errors in the two essays.

Table 6.2 Frequency of concord errors

	Argumentative essay	%	Narrative essay	%	Total %
Singular noun with plural verb and vice-versa	28	45,2	34	54,8	62
Dummy subject	39	88,6	5	11,4	44
Non-count noun and plural verb	6	100,0	0	-	6
Complex noun phrase	7	100,0	0	-	7
Relative clause	11	44,0	14	56,0	25
Demonstrative pronoun and noun	6	0,0	9	60,0	15
Total	97		62		

The singular noun with plural verb (and vice-versa) error is most common as it makes up 39 % of the concord errors in the data. Many of these errors can be attributed to the lack of the third person agreement marker (-s), as discussed in more detail in 6.2.1.1 below.

Sixty-one per cent of the concord errors occurred in the argumentative essay, and this may have been a result of the extensive use of the present tense where the third person agreement marker (-s) was omitted. The narrative essays were written mainly in the past tense where third person agreement marker is not necessary, which resulted in fewer errors in this category.

Each of these concord error types is exemplified and discussed below.

6.2.1.1 Singular noun with plural verb

This kind of error occurs when a singular noun is paired with the plural form of the verb or vice-versa, e.g.

- * The bus go to the school.
- * The bus arrive at ten o'clock.
- * . . . and other were afraid to swim.
- * . . . because they wants a food which have vitamins.
- * The teachers says that all the children must go to the bus.

This type of error may be the result of lack of learning of the correct form of the verb for the noun it is paired with, but another possible explanation is the fact that in Xhosa the verb is not inflected for number or person suffixing or omitting the concordial marker -s in the third person. So, for example, the English forms:

They live here (plural)

and

He lives here (singular)

are both represented lexically by hlala in Xhosa. The translation of the sentences is respectively:

Bahlala

and

uhlala

The prefixes ba and u represent "they" and "he" respectively.

Another possible explanation for concord errors where the student adds an -s to the verb when the subject is plural is that the student may see the -s on a verb as a plural marker, e.g.

* We gets so many thing.

The learner may be overgeneralising the rules of pluralisation in English, showing the plural form on the verb as well as on the noun. This may be the result of transfer from Xhosa where both the noun and the verb are inflected for the plural form, e.g.

* Abantwana bathenga iilekese. (The children buy sweets).

Here the prefix aba (abantwana) shows the plural form of the noun "children" and the subject concord ba on the verb (bathenga) shows agreement with the plural noun.

6.2.1.2 Dummy subject

The second type of error is found when the subject of the sentence is displaced by a dummy subject, e.g.

* There is no children in the school.

* There is many teacher and mistress.

The noun phrase with which the verb must agree follows the verb and concord may thus be more difficult to determine for the learner. Alternatively, "there is" may have been learnt as a prefabricated whole which the learner has not yet analysed for agreement. It is merely a way to start a sentence and the rest of the message is added to this unanalysed structure.

6.2.1.3 Non-count noun and plural verb

The third type of concord error occurs when a non-count requires a singular form of the verb for agreement, e.g.

- * Water in a country are scarce.
- * At the time of drought the veld are burned.

There is not always a correspondence between languages with regard to count and non-count nouns. For example, the Xhosa equivalent of "water" is amanzi which is a plural form, and transfer may have occurred here.

6.2.1.4 Complex noun phrase

A fourth type of error occurs when the subject of the sentence is a complex noun phrase. This error is particularly prevalent when the second noun of the complex does not agree in number with the first, e.g.

- * . . . because people of town is clearly and people of country is not clearly.

In this example, the first noun of the complex noun phrase (people) is plural, but the second noun of the complex noun phrase (town and country) is singular. The student may thus look at the noun which is closest to the verb in order to decide on the number agreement of the verb.

6.2.1.5 Relative clause

A fifth concord error type results from the inclusion of a relative clause in the sentence, e.g.

* My teachers who was going was six.

* The teachers was going is Mr Sityata, Mr Xokozela.

Here the intervention of the relative pronoun or the inclusion of two verb forms in the sentence may cause confusion about the correct form of the verb required.

6.2.1.6 Demonstrative pronoun and noun

The final concord error type identified in the data relates to the agreement between the demonstrative pronoun and its noun, e.g.

* Students were unhappy for these tour.

* Then, this two buses left.

The singular or plural form is marked twice in these structures (i.e. on the demonstrative pronoun and on the noun). Learners may regard this as redundant for expressing meaning and mark only one of these constituents to reduce the processing load (Young, 1988:290).

6.2.2 Articles

For the purpose of this study, errors of articles are divided into three broad categories, viz.

- omission of articles
- inclusion of unnecessary articles
- indefinite article used with plural or non-count noun

- definite article used with general category
- incorrect uses of articles
- definite article replaces indefinite article
- indefinite article replaces definite article
- incorrect indefinite article used

Table 6.3 indicates the frequency of errors in the two essays of each of the specific categories shown above.

Table 6.3 Frequency of article errors in the two essays

	Argumentative essay	%	Narrative essay	%	Total %
Article omitted	63	53,8	54	46,2	117
Indefinite article used with plural non-count Noun	26	34,6	49	65,4	75
Definite article used with general category	12	30,0	28	70,0	40
Definite article replaces indefinite article	5	45,5	6	54,5	11
Indefinite article replaces definite article	15	50,0	15	50,0	30
Incorrect indefinite article used	0	-	1	100,0	1
Total	121		153		

The omitted article accounts for 42,7 % of the article errors in the data and this may be traced to transfer of the article system as discussed in more detail in 6.2.2.1 below.

The narrative essay contains 55,8 % of the article errors and the frequency of errors in the categories for indefinite article used with plural or non-count nouns and definite article used with a general category is higher (65,3 % and 70 % respectively) than in the argumentative essay. This may be a result of the subject matter of the narrative essay where students tended to include lists of plural items and included articles incorrectly in their sentences.

6.2.2.1 Omission of articles

Articles are often omitted where they should have been included in a sentence. Such sentences are regarded as deviant.

- * Because in ϕ country there are no important things.
- * There is ϕ difference between them.
- * People for towns are living ϕ better life than country people.
- * Because we have ϕ lack of water for swimming.
- * We stay in ϕ hotel.

Xhosa does not use articles in the same way as English and the English rule of using a separate word to denote definiteness or indefinites is not found in Xhosa. For example, there is no equivalent Xhosa word for the definite article omitted in the following sentence:

- * We were at ϕ bus stop.

Thus, the cause of errors is likely to be transfer from the first language.

6.2.2.2 Inclusion of unnecessary articles

The inclusion of unnecessary articles is regarded as deviant usage. Two types of errors are evident here.

Firstly, an indefinite article is used with a plural or non-count noun e.g.

- * Teachers bought a many foods.
- * I saw a white people swimming.
- * In country life you need a transport.
- * I want to see a soccer.
- * All the towns have the electricity.

Secondly, a definite article is used when definiteness is not appropriate because a general category is indicated, e.g.

- * And we have the three cookers.
- * We took tour to the East London.
- * Education is important in the town life.
- * All must have the taps and the swimming pools.

The reasons for both types of errors are unclear, but there may be a misunderstanding about the correct use of the article which may have resulted from poor teaching strategies. Xhosa interference may be the reason as the Xhosa has no equivalent article system, as noted above. Although Xhosa does mark definiteness with an object concord, it is used optionally for all nouns without the same restrictions as in English, e.g.

Ndibona ikati (indefinite)

Ndiyayibona ikati (definite)

6.2.2.3 Other incorrect uses of articles

Other incorrect uses of articles occur when the student uses an article in the correct place in the sentence but substitutes an incorrect article for the correct one, e.g. replacing a definite article with an indefinite article, or replacing an indefinite article with an indefinite article.

- * Teachers like a tour.
- * People in country life live an miserable life.
- * These tour is the good thing.
- * I saw a aeroplane.

Errors in the use of the definite article totalled 10,2 % with indefinite articles being used erroneously 50,8 % of the time. The disparity between the figures may be accounted for by the way in which articles are taught. Definite articles are usually taught first because they are conceptually easier to grasp and they do not have alternatives (i.e. indefinite alternatives are a and an). The indefinite article, on the other hand, involves indefiniteness, a conceptually more difficult idea and it is perceptually less salient in its pronunciation. The non-equivalence of the article systems of Xhosa and English also plays a role here. As definiteness can be marked by the use of an object concord in Xhosa, this can be transferred to English. As indefiniteness is not marked in Xhosa by a grammatical morpheme, this cannot be positively transferred to English.

6.2.3 Personal Pronouns

In order to illustrate different kinds of personal pronoun errors, ten categories are exemplified, viz.

- omission of personal pronouns
- omission of personal pronouns
- omission of "it is"
- inclusion of unnecessary personal pronouns
- emphatic pronouns
- double pronouns
- incorrect use of personal pronouns
- incorrect case
- mixing pronouns
- incorrect pronoun used

Table 6.4 indicates the frequency of pronoun error types in the two essays.

Table 6.4 Frequency of pronoun error types

	Argumentative essay	%	Narrative essay	%	Total %
Omission of pronouns	21	52,5	19	47,5	40
Omission of "it is"	4	66,6	2	33,3	6
Emphatic pronouns	8	42,1	11	57,8	19
Double pronouns	2	50,0	2	50,0	4
Incorrect case	5	55,6	4	44,4	9
Mixing pronouns	7	63,6	4	34,4	11
Incorrect pronoun used	12	57,1	9	42,9	21
Total	59		51		

The category of omitted pronouns shows the highest number of errors (40 %). Possible reasons for this are discussed below in 6.2.3.1. The number of pronoun errors is slightly higher in the argumentative essay (53,6 %), perhaps because a greater variety of pronouns tended to be used. In the narrative essay, most students used only the two first person pronouns.

Examples and a more detailed discussion of the pronoun error categories found in the data follow below.

6.2.3.1 Omission of Personal Pronouns

Examples where personal pronouns are omitted include the following:

- * In town there are many houses where ϕ is better than country life.
- * The reason why ϕ were wearing a uniform is just because we do not want a disgrace.
- * In East London ϕ arrive at 1 o'clock.
- * In East London ϕ see a zoo.
- * I promise that next year ϕ will be touring to Cape Town.

Some of the above examples are complex or compound sentences where the personal pronoun is omitted in the subordinate clause or one of the co-ordinate clauses. This problem cannot be explained with reference to Xhosa, as Xhosa uses a personal pronoun in the same places as it occurs in English. Perhaps the complexity of these sentences leads to cognitive overload and these students are concentrating on conveying the new information rather than repeating information in the sentence.

Another possible explanation for some of the above examples can be found in the omission of it, e.g.

* If I am in town I am feeling alright because in town ϕ is very nice than country life.

This error could be ascribed to transfer, as in Xhosa the equivalent of the English it is represented by a single lexical item ku, e.g.

* Kunzima ukufumana umsebenzi. (It is difficult to find a job).

6.2.3.2 Inclusion of unnecessary Personal Pronouns

A pronoun is often included where it should be left out. Such a pronoun is redundant and exemplifies an error of personal pronoun use:

- * In country life children they are not become matured.
- * Because me I want a town life where can I study my books.
- * There are many things, they I can talk about.
- * People who are living in town, she they know everything.
- * They play in the pool, others they play the ice kates.
- * The man he ate meat.
- * Children they were happy into town.
- * I saw a man that was singing and that man he was a blind man.

Many of the above sentences are characterised by an over-usage of the emphatic pronoun. In English the use of the noun plus a pronoun referring to this preceding noun is used very rarely and when it is used it has a very strong emphasising role (Master, 1996:199). However, the combination of emphatic pronoun and subject concord referring to the same entity is a fairly common construction in Xhosa and its function is not as marked as in English. A different error (double pronoun) is evidenced in the following example:

* We and them we went by bus.

The above error can be traced to first language transfer, as the Xhosa equivalent is:

* Thina nabo sahamba ngebhasi. (We and them we went by bus).

Literal translation of the Xhosa form has thus occurred here. In English such a construction would be marked and only used to show great emphasis, whereas in Xhosa it is not a marked form.

6.2.3.3 Incorrect use of Personal Pronouns

Errors in pronoun usage often result from a lack of agreement between the referent and the pronoun.

Some of these errors are the result of incorrect case, e.g.

* Parents were there because there are the members of the school committee.
(Parents were there because they are the members of the school committee).

* In town you are able to buy those thing that you cannot make with your hands.

* They need the water to wash them face. (They need the water to wash their faces).

Some errors are the result of using different pronouns to refer to the same referent, e.g.

* I like my school teachers because they love the learners and he did not like the silly learners. (I like my school teachers because they love the learners and they didn't like the silly learners).

* When she go to cinema I see many things. (When I go to cinema I see many things).

* When she lived in a country you don't understand many things. (When you lived in the country you don't understand many things).

Some errors result from the use of the incorrect pronouns e.g.

* Some of it were beautiful. (Some of them were beautiful).

* During the tour to East London, it was the first time to go to East London.
(During the tour to East London was the first time I went to East London).

None of these errors can be explained satisfactorily with reference to Xhosa interference as the Xhosa pronoun system operates in a similar way to the English pronoun system in terms of requiring agreement in number and case. Possibly, the learners have not analysed the pronouns properly for case, number and gender or do not recognise which position requires which form of the pronoun. The complexity of some of the sentences may also promote errors because of cognitive overload.

However, overall pronoun errors are fairly low (10,1 %) in relation to the total occurrences. One way in which learners may avoid this error is to use a full noun phrase rather than a pronoun where normal English usage would require a pronoun.

6.2.4 Plural

The plural errors made in the data collected for this study include errors in the formation of the plural, errors where the singular form is used instead of the singular form:

- * And there are many dirty thing because there is no place to put them.
- * There is a big differences between town life and country life.
- * Peoples of the town are not suffering to get water.
- * In town life childrens like girls.
- * In country life there are so many disease.
- * Many interesting thing we haven't got them in rural areas.
- * The student went to East London for a tour.
- * We ate different kind of food.
- * We saw big clothing shop like Edgars, Truworths.
- * All student wear full uniform

Errors in the formation of the plural occurred when the English plural required an irregular form, but students overgeneralised the regular plural form, e.g.

- * geoses (geese)

In addition, students did not always recognise that the word was already pluralised when an irregular plural form occurred. They then added a regular plural -s, e.g.

There was a high frequency of plural errors in the data, i.e. 30 %. The main reason for these errors may be because the plural in Xhosa is formed with prefixes (refer to chapter 4), whereas the plural in English is generally formed with suffixes, e.g.

umfundi - learner (singular)

abafundi - learners (plural)

6.2.5 Prepositions

The erroneous use of prepositions can be divided into two categories, viz.

- omission of prepositions
- use of incorrect prepositions

Table 6.5 indicates the frequency of preposition error types in the two essays.

Table 6.5 Frequency of preposition errors in the two essays

	Argumentative essay	%	Narrative essay	%	Total %
Omission of preposition	52	55,9	41	44,1	93
Incorrect preposition used	231	58,1	167	41,9	398
Total	283		208		

The use of an incorrect preposition is by far the most common error (81 %) in the data and these errors predominate in the argumentative essay (58 %). The majority of preposition errors (57,6 %) occur in the argumentative essay. Reasons for the higher frequency of errors in the argumentative essay are unclear, but more errors may have occurred because of the comparisons which were made in the essays.

A more detailed discussion of the preposition error types is included below.

6.2.5.1 Examples of errors involving omission of the preposition

Numerous examples of the omission of prepositions occurred in the data, e.g.

* In my school four teachers went to East London ϕ grilled two sheep.

- * The driver ϕ a bus drove to East London.
- * The principal hired a house ϕ learners.
- * It was a very nice tour ϕ East London.
- * I a giving ϕ many teachers.
- * A tour to East London was ϕ a Friday.
- * Children are not afraid ϕ robots.
- * Schools ϕ country do not have many pupils.
- * And no dirty things ϕ front of their houses.

6.2.5.2 Examples of the use of incorrect prepositions

- * In town there are no cattle like fetching water on rivers.
- * When you stay at the town.
- * At town children grow so quickly.
- * People of town are not suffering by the water.
- * On the country there are no roads.
- * We swim at the sea.
- * There were seven teachers went to us.
- * Boys were sleeping with their room.
- * At the bus we saw the television.

Prepositions tend to be idiosyncratic within a language and are not always directly translatable. Another complicating factor for the Xhosa learner is that prepositions do not occur independently of nouns in Xhosa as they do in English. Instead, the form of the noun is changed by substituting e and making sound changes to the end of the noun stem, e.g.

indlu (noun "house")

becomes

endlwini (prepositional form)

As all prepositional relationships are shown in this way, specific relations cannot always be indicated but are derived from the context, e.g.

Abantu bahlala endlwini

could mean

The people live at house.

Similarly, the following error may be a result of transfer from Xhosa:

* We were swimming on the sea.

In Xhosa, on the sea and in the sea would be represented by the single form:

elwandle

6.2.6 Spelling

For the purposes of this study correct spelling simply means the standard way of writing words. As most languages have orthographic representations for words which must be adhered to, failure to observe the conventions of how words are written in a particular language leads to spelling errors. In this study, spelling errors are grouped into two categories, viz.

- spelling errors affected by pronunciation
- other errors

There were 442 spelling errors in the essays. This means that each pupil made an average of about 17 spelling errors.

6.2.6.1 Examples of errors affected by pronunciation of Black South African English

The following examples illustrate errors which may be the result of the influence of Black South African English (BSAE) pronunciation, e.g.

- * twelf (twelve)
- * zu (zoo)
- * parants (parents)
- * cussetts (cassettes)
- * creple (cripple)
- * taar (tar)
- * were (wear)
- * amaized (amazed)
- * musium (museum)
- * see (sea)
- * bry (braai)

Black South African English pronunciation is based to some extent on the pronunciation of vowels and consonants in the mother tongue. As Xhosa has a five vowel system and English a twenty-two vowel system, there are bound to be a number of pronunciation errors in terms of the vowel system. Examples such as * 'creple', * 'parants' and * 'cussetts' can all be explained by reference to the pronunciation of Black South African English (BSAE) (Katamba, 1989:149).

Spelling errors may also result from the way in which the learner (or teacher) pronounces the word as these learners may have little exposure to English mother tongue speakers and thus have few models for their pronunciation. All the teachers at the school they attend are English second language speakers and the model they have is thus probably Black South African English pronunciation.

6.2.6.2 Other errors

Other spelling errors which cannot be traced back to the influence of BSAE pronunciation were found in the data, e.g.

- * Wensday (Wednesday)
- * afriad (afraid)
- * accompanied (accompanied)
- * no body (nobody)
- * your self (yourself)

English pronunciation does not always correspond to English spelling and examples such as * 'Wensday' and * 'wich' may be caused by this non-correspondence or by a lack of knowledge of spelling and the English spelling system in particular. Other examples which may fall into this category are errors which result from a lack of consonant doubling, e.g.

- * accompanied
- * pilow

This consonant doubling is not evident in the pronunciation of the word.

In addition, Xhosa orthography and pronunciation are quite closely linked and there are few cases of double letters with a single phonetic pronunciation.

Many of the spelling errors may be a result of a lack of exposure to reading. Reading resources at the school studied were severely lacking and most children did not read extensively for pleasure (cf. chapter 5).

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented six categories of errors found in the data and attempted to analyse and find reasons for the errors.

It can be concluded that Xhosa transfer may be responsible for some of the errors which are discussed in this chapter, but it cannot account for all errors. Transfer can operate both negatively (leading to interference) and positively (leading to correct forms), with the latter obviously more difficult to discover in a study such as this. (In addition, there may be some transfer from other languages which are known or being learnt, for example, Afrikaans in this case.) From this discussion, it may be concluded that interference from Xhosa occurs to a large extent in concord errors, article errors, preposition errors and plural errors as these syntactic structures are formed quite differently in Xhosa. Personal pronouns are used fairly similarly in both languages and negative transfer is only evident in the overuse of the emphatic pronoun. Spelling errors can sometimes be traced to the common pronunciation of English words in Black South African English and a non-correspondence between orthography and spelling to a large extent.

Other possible explanations may include poor tuition, poor learning methods and strategies, a lack of access to English models and materials although these are difficult to pinpoint.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the implications of the study for language teaching. Suggestions for the teaching of the six categories investigated in this study are made, as there is often much theorising about error correction but few practical guidelines have been given on what to do about errors once they have been identified and classified. Even less has been published on how to deal with so-called 'fossilised' errors that seem to have become part of the learners' output. This chapter discusses some methods that might contribute to the prevention and remediation of errors in L2 learners' writing.

7.2 Suggestions for teachers in the classroom situation

This section provides suggestions for practical classroom activities which offer alternatives to the traditional textbook focussed way of teaching the grammatical categories discussed in this study. The exercises are designed to make minimal use of outside resources as these are difficult to come by in the type of school which was studied.

7.2.1 Concord

Ur (1988:167) suggests that students be asked to describe a picture. A large picture can be used for a whole class activity or small pictures could be used for group activities. The teacher invites the students to say as much as they can about the picture, using there is or there are. In order to prevent boredom and too much repetition, the teacher should have a defined objective, e.g. 20 sentences in all, or as many as the class can manage in three minutes. Alternatively, if the teacher wanted to teach the past tense forms there was or there were, he/she could show a picture to the class for two minutes, then cover it up and ask the students to recall the content using the appropriate sentence frames.

For variation, the same can be done in writing or the writing can be done as a follow up. It is sometimes a good idea to give the students two or three minutes before the spoken brainstorm to jot down some ideas so that when the speaking does start, there are plenty of contributions ready. One variation is to display two pictures of roughly similar subjects and to ask students to suggest similarities, or differences, or both. This exercise could encourage students to produce complex or compound sentences where agreement in the second clause may be difficult for the students, e.g. in the first picture the men are working but they is not working in the second picture. It is also possible to ask questions instead of making statements about the picture. According to Ur (1988:165), it is better if the answers to the questions are not too obvious, but require the student to think imaginatively about alternatives.

In another exercise, students can be given sets of alternate pairs of sentences where one sentence has correct agreement and the other has incorrect agreement, e.g.

The children are singing.

*The children is singing.

The students have to choose the sentence with the correct form of the verb. Their answers can be linked to game where a correct answer gains the student one move forward and an incorrect answer leaves the students on the same place. An explanation of the choice could be required for another forward move and groups of students could compete in the class.

7.2.2 Articles

Ur (1988:53) suggests that the teacher should provide a pile of English-language newspapers or headlines cut from them. The teacher asks the students to go through the headlines they have, inserting *a/an/the* or leaving no article, where they feel it is appropriate. The teacher may help individuals with comprehension occasionally and also check answers. Ur (1988) also suggests variations where the teacher may ask students to insert not only missing articles, but also auxiliary verbs that are often omitted (*is/are/do/does/did*) or any other items necessary to form complete sentences.

Sometimes there are cases where two, or any, of the three alternative articles are possible. It could be interesting to discuss what difference these variations make to the sense, or implications, of the headline.

Another exercise is to ask groups of students to decide amongst themselves on a list of items that they want to borrow from a neighbouring group. Each person in the group gets a turn to go and ask another group for the item. The group that is approached evaluates the question used by the person who wants to borrow the item and if the question has been asked correctly, the student returns to the group with the item. As the group decides on the form of the initial question, individual embarrassment can be avoided (adapted from Turkington, 1991:35).

Initial teaching of articles could include a game where two students are given pictures of similar objects, e.g. a selection of cars, etc. One student asks for particular items, e.g. I want the blue car with a roof or I want a blue car. The other student can then discuss how he/she decided which picture to hand over.

Finally, a consciousness-raising exercise could be to ask students to underline all the articles in a text and explain why each article is used, e.g. A man ran along the road and noticed a blue car. The man saw the blue car turn into a side road. The students could discuss why the man and the car are initially paired with an indefinite article and later with a definite article.

7.2.3 Personal pronouns

According to Seely (1988:32), most pronouns are introduced early in the English course, because they are heavily used in the language. Seely (1988) suggests that the teacher should use two or three learners as well as some objects. The teacher must have some flash cards with he, she, it, we, them, they written on them. The teacher teaches the lesson first and thereafter, he/she must give learners the flash cards to place where they fit, e.g. a learner who is a boy will be given he; a girl will be given she; the whole class including the chosen learners will be we, etc.

In another exercise, Ur (1988:205) suggests an exercise called reverse guessing where one student is sent out of the room, and the rest of the class choose an object or person to be guessed. When the student comes back, he/she is told if the item to be guessed is masculine, feminine or neuter gender, and whether it is a singular or plural. The 'knowers' then give hints as to what the item is, using the appropriate pronouns, until the student guesses the answer. For example, if the answer is a (female) hairdresser, the class may say things like:

She uses scissors.

She works inside.

She needs special training.

Another suggestion for teachers is to make use of demonstrations. The teacher should put the boys on one side and the girls on the other side of the class. From each group, the teacher takes a boy and a girl to stand alone, and takes three boys as well as three girls alone. The next step is to take an object such as a pen or book. Then in the case of one boy, s/he will tell the learners that the boy is he and the girl standing alone is she and the groups of three belong to they and the book is it. The teacher gathers them again in one place, including the teacher. The teacher can refer to the group as we. For other pronouns, the teacher can use the same procedure.

7.2.4 Plurals

The teacher can make up a crossword puzzle that includes homophones and plurals as answers to the clues (Bushman & Bushman, 1994:162), e.g. 'the smallest coin' (cent), another word for 'perfume' (scent), 'more than one child' (children).

In another exercise, the teacher can demonstrate plurals by pointing to items in the classroom and then move on to items not found in the classroom. The students provide plurals for the items that the teacher lists, e.g.

pencil . . . (pencils)

desk . . . (desks)

child . . . (children)

tomato . . . (tomatoes)

The above exercises can also help in the spelling tasks, as the teacher can point out regular rules and exceptions.

7.2.5 Prepositions

Seely (1988:32) suggests that as English is very rich in prepositions, the teacher can read a short story in English and thereafter, s/he can choose another learner to read. After all the learners have had a chance to narrate/read, and they shall draw their attention to all the prepositions. Then the teacher also asks the learners to write some stories and he/she can correct the prepositions that are wrong.

In another exercise, Ur (1988:230) suggests an exercise that involves finding twins. The teacher needs individual copies of three-by-three grids, showing alternative versions of a sentence that include definitions of time and place. Each student marks the particular alternatives he or she prefers, and tries to find other students with the same choices, by asking simple questions based on the text of the grid, e.g.

Are you going to be in town?

Are you going to be in town at six o'clock?

Are you going to be in town on Saturday?

Another suggestion is that the teacher can use flash cards and write some prepositions on them. The teacher must first teach the learners about prepositions, and then ask each student to take the flash card and put it in the right place, for example, if the ball is under the table, the student must take under flash card or if the book is on the table the learner must take the on flash card.

These exercises would work very well for the more concrete spatial meanings of the prepositions, but cannot be easily used when more metaphorical senses are being conveyed. Boers and Demecheller (1998:198) suggest that the metaphorical sense be taught by making reference to the more concrete spatial sense via a conceptual metaphor HIGH STATUS IS UP, LOW STATUS IS DOWN which can in turn be linked to the spatial sense of above and under.

7.2.6 Spelling

According to McPherson (1992:123), the teacher can introduce new spelling that pupils will need for compositions by actively teaching selected words and phrases that the students would find useful when writing these.

The words should be taken from the textbooks, poems and newspapers read in class so that the pupil has seen each word actually used in a written context. The teacher writes the words on flashcards and goes through the following steps in teaching the pupils to spell the word:

- 1 Pupils look at the word

The teacher encourages pupils to take a mental 'photograph' of the word. It is important for pupils to lock the visual image of the word into their minds.

- 2 Pupils say the word

The teacher says the word and pupils repeat the word a few times, while looking at the word on the flashcard.

- 3 Pupils use the word orally in a sentence

The teacher and pupils discuss the meaning of the word and use it in a variety of sentences.

4 Pupils identify the parts of the word

The teacher points out the number of syllables in the word, for example, the word 'escape' has two syllables. Pupils should be encouraged to find the root/base word and the prefix or suffix.

At this stage, when the structure of the word is being closely scrutinised, the teacher should point out spelling generalisations, for example, 'sit' + 'ing' = sitting but 'hate + 'ing' = hating and phonic generalisations, for example 'ph' is for 'f'.

5 Pupils spell the word

While saying the letter of the word the pupils write the word. They write the word with a finger in the air with big sweeps. Pupils can also spell the word as they hop from block to block in which the letters of the alphabet are written. (Both these activities involve movement in the learning of spelling). The students write the word in a block. The exercises should be done regularly to increase vocabulary and improve spelling.

7.3 The effect of exercises on second language development

The exercises described above can aid in the development of grammatical competence. They function as grammatical consciousness-raising exercise.

Rutherford (1987:189) defines grammatical consciousness-raising as the drawing of the learners' attention to features of the target language, but which does not imply that the learner is able to verbalise the rules he/she has learnt. Ellis (1985:246) believes that it could form a valuable part of a programme that is designed to remediate errors. Rutherford (1987:20) states that it could be used to:

bridge the gap between the learners' prior knowledge of how major constituents may be properly ordered for effective communication (the 'familiar') and the learners' ignorance of the special grammatical devices that English requires for the correct rendering of that order (the "unfamiliar").

Although consciousness-raising is usually classified as 'formal instruction', it is not the same as traditional grammar teaching. The most important distinction is that consciousness-raising is "a means to attainment of grammatical competence in another language . . .", whereas grammar teaching typically represents "an attempt to instil that competence directly" (Rutherford, 1987:24). Traditional grammar teaching sees grammar as necessary and sufficient while the learner does not contribute much to the teaching and learning situation. Consciousness-raising, on the other hand, approaches grammar as a necessary but not sufficient part of L2 learning and teaching with the learners playing an active part in the SLA process.

Sharwood-Smith (1981) sees this type of grammar teaching as a facilitator of communicative ability. Similarly, Ellis (1985:244) believes that when the learner's attention has been drawn to features of the L2 code, he/she "can practise these both in and out of the classroom, until he/she can use them subconsciously in fluent communicative speech". The important issue, it seems, is not whether grammar should be taught, but in what way it should be taught.

Teachers should realise that accuracy and fluency in use are not mutually exclusive ends (Brumfit, 1980:106), but there can be no justification for assisting students to develop functional proficiency while allowing them to make serious errors in grammar. Eckersley (1983:322) asserts that teachers cannot go on accepting inaccurate language simply because it communicates something that a native speaker or L2 teacher 'can somehow' understand.

Eckersley (1983) is of the opinion that grammar teaching has an important role to play in SLA and the remediation of learners' errors. Positive cognitive feedback is necessary for the internalisation of correct forms while negative cognitive feedback in the form of error awareness is necessary to prevent the fossilisation of incorrect forms. The results of Lalande's (1982) study of L2 learners indicates that a combination of error awareness and problem-solving techniques also has a significant beneficial effect on the development of writing skills.

Eckersley (1983:165) notes that sociolinguistic competence and fluency should not be ignored and that teachers should not take only a strictly structural grammar approach, as many traditional methods which stress grammar and error correction do not produce learners who are proficient in the language. Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985:130) state that teachers should rather approach ESL teaching as a combination of grammar and function teaching. They also report that recent evidence suggests that using function-based and grammar-based approaches together is more effective in producing grammatical accuracy than strictly grammar-based approaches.

Pedagogical grammar should not have as its main focus the order in which structures and functions should be taught, but rather how to facilitate their acquisition by learners. Bourkes (1989:21) stresses that grammar teaching should not try to mirror inter-language but rather to replicate in the classroom the process of grammatical acquisition. Grammar teaching which fosters the development of hypothesis-testing skills should be encouraged to help the learner progress from the processing of semantic notions with limited grammatical means to more complex choices that imply manifold grammatical and semantic consequences.

The active involvement of students, problem-solving exercises and the use of resources can aid in the development of grammatical competence and fluency because students are participating in the learning process and producing oral and written language to a greater extent than with more traditional teaching methods such as the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the implications of this study for language teachers and made suggestions for teachers on how to remediate errors in the six categories discussed in the study. Formal instruction is shown to have a place in the second language classroom situation, as it can aid in the development of grammatical competence and raise consciousness about grammatical constructions. Ideally, both fluency and accuracy should be developed and learners should be actively involved in the learning process in the classroom.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of the research and makes recommendations for further research emanating from this study.

8.2 The teacher's role in error remediation

As this study has shown, errors occur during the transition to communicative competence in the second language. Teachers need to note the possible reasons for the occurrence of the errors so that they can be better prepared to administer remedial exercises for these errors. Brown (1987:166) feels that errors in second language learning can be better understood if a comparison is made between the learner's source language and the target language so that linguistic interference can be identified. In this view, learners make the errors and their sources are identified after the fact.

However, a different view is taken by Richards (cited in Oller & Richards, 1973:129) who suggests that teachers should be able to tackle errors from their sources rather than at the surface level, i.e. they should try to find out why the error occurs in the first place rather than correcting it when it manifests itself in the performance of the learner. In this regard, Richards (cited in Oller & Richards, 1973:129-130) quotes two schools of thought to the effect that:

... if we were to achieve perfect teaching methods the errors would never be committed in the first place, and that therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our technique.

In this view, sources of potential errors should be identified before teaching begins, and teaching should aim to prevent these potential errors from occurring.

8.3 Summary of the findings

This study has attempted to establish empirically the types of errors commonly made in the writing of Xhosa speaking ESL learners in a junior secondary school and to catalogue them. The results can be used both by ESL teachers and teacher trainers who want to address the particular problems of this ESL community.

With regard to concord errors, it was found that the differences between the Xhosa and English concord systems created difficulties for the learners as they could not transfer positively from Xhosa to English. Common errors made by the learners include a lack of agreement between nouns and verbs, non-count nouns which require singular forms of the verb, agreement with complex noun phrases, agreement between demonstrative pronouns and nouns and problems when the subject of the sentence is displaced by a dummy subject and relative clauses occur between the subject and the verb with which it should agree.

English article errors can be traced back largely to the lack of an equivalent article system in Xhosa. Three types of errors were identified here: the omission of articles, the inclusion of unnecessary articles and the choice of an incorrect article.

Some pronoun errors can be attributed to different uses of pronouns in the two languages. Common errors include the omission of personal pronouns, the incorrect choice of pronouns and the inclusion of unnecessary personal pronouns where the use of the absolute pronoun is transferred directly into English.

The preposition systems in the two languages are quite different as Xhosa relies on affixes to show most prepositional relationships and English uses a wide range of separate words to show these relationships. This range of choices resulted in a large number of incorrect preposition choices in the sample with a smaller percentage of omitted prepositions.

Plural errors seem to relate mainly to irregular plurals and a lack of plural marking on nouns where plural may be redundantly marked in the sentence. The Xhosa plural system is predominantly regular and based on the class system, whereas English has a number of irregular plurals.

The Xhosa spelling system is fairly regular with a good phoneme-to-grapheme correspondence. English, on the other hand, has a very irregular phoneme-to-grapheme correspondence and causes great difficulties for the Xhosa learner.

A teacher who has knowledge of both the source language and the target language grammatical systems may be in a better position to help these students learn English as he/she can point out the differences in the systems to the students. Teachers may choose to explicitly teach the differences between the two systems in the classroom or they may choose to structure lessons and exercises in such a way that potential errors are avoided or decreased by spending more time or focusing on the areas where errors can be expected to occur.

8.4 Suggestions for further Research

As this study was based on a fairly small sample in a particular rural situation, the results are not necessarily generalisable to other teaching situations in South Africa. Further research is needed in other situations to add to the data collected for this study so that broader generalisations can be made.

In addition, this study was based on written compositions. It would be interesting to see whether similar errors are made in oral and other written work as different tasks may result in different errors.

This study was a cross-sectional one and there is a need for longitudinal studies which could show the development of grammatical categories over time for Xhosa ESL learners.

Other grammatical categories could be researched, e.g. use of modals, different tenses and relative clauses.

A comparative study could be done between speakers of different Nguni languages who are learning English, to establish whether isiZulu and siSwati ESL learners make similar errors to those made by Xhosa learners.

8.5 Conclusion

This mini-dissertation has studied the errors made by Xhosa ESL learners in a rural school in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. Six grammatical categories were analysed and it was found that many errors could be attributed to both negative transfer and a lack of positive transfer from Xhosa.

It is suggested that it is important that teachers of these students be made aware of the sources of these errors so that they can teach in a more effective manner. It would be beneficial to English teachers in South Africa to know about the structure of the mother-tongues of their students so that they can point out differences and similarities and attempt to prevent some of the errors before they become entrenched in the English of their students.

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SUMMARY

The primary aim of this study is to identify and explain the errors of Xhosa students learning English as a second language. The study sets out to determine the kinds of errors made in selected grammatical categories, i.e. concord, personal pronouns, articles, prepositions, plurals and spelling. In an effort to determine which of the errors can be ascribed to transfer from the first language, a contrastive analysis is carried out between Xhosa and English. Many of the errors that pupils make can be attributed to the different ways in which the two languages encode each of the categories that are investigated.

The data consist of essays written by twenty-five Grade 9 Xhosa pupils who are learning English as a second language in a rural school in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Each pupil wrote an argumentative and a narrative essay, and these essays were analysed for errors in the six categories mentioned above. Finally, methods and techniques of addressing transfer errors in a poorly resourced teaching situation are suggested so that teachers can provide remedial assistance even under difficult teaching conditions.

Key words: errors, identification/description/explanation of errors, transfer, interference, Xhosa grammar, English grammar, English Second Language.

OPSOMMING

Die primêre doelwit van hierdie studie is om die foute van Xhosa studente wat Engels as tweede taal aanleer te identifiseer en te verduidelik. Die studie probeer om vas te stel watter soorte foute in ses spesifieke grammatikale kategorieë gemaak word, nl. kongruensie, persoonlike voornaamwoorde, lidwoorde, voorsetsels, meervoude en spelwyse. Om te bepaal watter van die foute aan oordrag van die eerste taal na Engels toegeskryf kan word, is 'n vergelyking tussen Xhosa en Engels uitgevoer. Baie van die foute wat leerlinge maak kan toegeskryf word aan die verskillende maniere waarop Xhosa en Engels die ses kategorieë enkodeer.

Die data bestaan uit opstelle geskryf deur vyf-en-twintig Graad 9 Xhosa leerlinge wat Engels as tweede taal op 'n plattelandse skool in die Oos-Kaap-provinsie in Suid-Afrika aanleer. Elke leerling het 'n betogende en 'n beskrywende opstel geskryf en hierdie opstelle is ontleed vir foute in die ses kategorieë soos hierbo uiteengesit. Ten slotte is metodes en tegnieke om oordragfoute te verminder in 'n skool met swak hulpbronne voorgestel, sodat leerkragte remediêrende hulp selfs onder moeilike onderrigtoestande kan gee.

Sleuteltermes: foute, identifikasie/beskrywing/verduideliking van foute, oordrag, interferensie, Xhosa grammatika, Engelse grammatika, Engels Tweede taal.